
CONFIRMATION OF SHĪ'ISM IN AMERICA AN ANALYSIS OF SERMONS IN THE DEARBORN MOSQUES

Once under . . . a bush (Ali) saw the war of the ants. He instantly knew the cause of the war and the nature of the parties. The red ants, whose bite (he had been told) was slightly poisonous, were Sunnis, the party among the Muslims that rejected the claim of the descendants of Ali, and they were attacking the black ants, who were obviously Shiah, since black as well as green was the color worn by people like Ali Hashemi's father who claimed descent from (the Imam) Ali. He remembers admiring the black ants for the justness of their cause and their individual heroism; but as the battle continued he began to admire the orderliness and steadfastness of the slower-moving red ants. As far as he could tell, neither side won.

An account of a cleric as a young boy¹

The centerpiece of any mosque event in Dearborn, Michigan, whether spiritual or purely social, is the sermon. Frequently, more than one sermon is delivered at a single event. In Islam it is customary to think of the sermon as being associated with Friday prayers. However, in Dearborn, to neglect the sermons of other occasions would be to deny the importance of the experience of the majority of mosque goers in the community. For more people attend Sunday services at the Islamic Center of America (known to the community as the *Jāmi'*) than they do the Friday prayer service at any of the Shī'ite Lebanese mosques in the Detroit area. Furthermore, men, women and children are present for the Sunday sermons while Friday prayers at the mosques still draw only men. (However, it should be pointed out that the Friday sermons from the Islamic Institute, the *Majma'*, are televised.) Aside from these regular occasions, there are also sermons delivered at memorials, engagements, commemorative occasions, etc.

Necessarily, then, this paper will be only an overview of the types of subjects addressed in the sermons and the different styles used to convey messages.

¹ Roy Mottehedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 30.

A Brief History of the Lebanese Shī'a in Dearborn

Dearborn, Michigan, is home to the largest population of Arab Muslims in America and a majority of these are Lebanese Shī'a. Most come directly from either southern Lebanon, often from areas now under Israeli occupation, or from the Beka'a, although some have lived for varying periods of time in Beirut. The Lebanese Shī'a who came to Dearborn from 1918 through the 1950s to work in the Ford Motor plants shared a mosque and social and religious activities with their Sunni neighbors. But largely due to the efforts of Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Chirri, a Lebanese-born *ʿālim* who had received some funding from Egyptian President Gamal ʿAbd al-Nāsir, and to the sacrifices of the fledgling community, a Shī'ite mosque was built and its doors opened in 1963. Like other Muslim communities in America, its members were relatively well assimilated into their new culture.

After the onset of the Lebanese Civil War, thousands of refugees flowed into Dearborn. Many of them, affected by Middle Eastern events, particularly the Iranian Revolution, found the Dearborn Muslims to be too accommodating to American society. They wished for a stricter interpretation of Islam and some for a politicized version of it. As a consequence, the Islamic Institute (the Majma'), with Shaykh Abdul Latif Berry as its imam, came into being. A third mosque, the Islamic Council, or the Majlis, was opened in 1989. Its leader, Shaykh Mohammad Ali Burro, has close ties with Iran which are reflected in the Majlis' activities.² As Shaykh Chirri became old and quite feeble during the late 1980s, there were attempts to find a successor for him. Shaykhs Berri and Burro both started their careers in America in this capacity; however, both found themselves in disagreement with the *Jāmi'* leadership and left. In 1990 an *ʿālim* from the Beka'a, Shaykh Sa'il Attat, was brought to Dearborn. Although earlier immigrants and their offspring complain about his lack of English, he has thus far been more successful in maintaining good relations than his predecessors. To meet the needs of the non-Arabic speaking members of the Islamic Center of America (almost all of whom are of Lebanese descent), a layman generally delivers a sermon in English.

The following discussion of mosque sermons is based on my anthropological fieldwork conducted between 1987 and 1990. During that time I attended mosque functions, watched televised mosque events and interviewed the members of the Lebanese Shī'i community.

² For further discussion of the Dearborn mosques, see my "Shī'i Islam in an American Community," 1991, an unpublished doctoral dissertation.

Those Delivering the Sermons

It is not possible to separate the sermon from its deliverer. The majority of sermons heard in the mosques in Dearborn are delivered by men who have undergone training in one or more of the holy cities of Shi'ism. All have received some training at Najaf in Iraq, and two of them also trained in Qum in Iran. According to Michael Fischer³ a man receives his training to become a member of the *'ulamā'* by selecting a teacher, a *mujtahid*, with whom he wishes to study. Some of these teachers are grand ayatollahs such as Golpayegani, Mar'ashi and others whose names became familiar during the early days of the Iranian Revolution. The teacher uses a dialectical style of argument and counterargument in this teaching, and those students who are able to participate in such arguments are encouraged to do so. A topic, such as one's intention when proceeding to pray, will continue for a period of several days. The teacher will illustrate the fine points of the theological debate and the various ways the argument can be approached. In these theological schools there is a refusal to deal with any possible scriptural symbolism. The approach to the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet is completely literal.

At the end of his training the student is qualified to be a teacher of other Muslims himself. His position may be that of a lowly village *mulla* (the Iranian term for shaykh) or he may become a specialist on one area of Islamic learning, depending on his talents, capacities and interests.

In anthropological terms, these men are trained to become "priests" in the fullest sense of the term. As Turner says, "the priest is concerned with the conservation and maintenance of a deposit of beliefs and practices handed down as a sacred trust from the founders of the social and religious system."⁴ His power is derived from the knowledge he has received from his elders and he thereby transmits this knowledge in as "pure" a form as possible in order to preserve the entire religious heritage. He is a preserver of culture. It should be noted that Muslims are often opposed to using the terms priest and clergy when referring to the *'ulamā'* because these men are not ordained and do not administer sacraments as they do in Christianity. However, as we shall see, the term priest as defined as a transmitter and preserver of knowledge is very suitable.

³ Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁴ Victor W. Turner, "Religious Specialists," in Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers, eds, *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*. 2nd ed. (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1989), pp. 85-92.

Styles of Presentation

One of the predominant roles of the shaykhs in the Dearborn area is to deliver sermons in the mosques and, as mentioned earlier, the shaykhs are called upon to deliver sermons for a great variety of occasions. To determine the message that is being delivered in these sermons, it is necessary to examine not only content but also the style and language used to deliver the message. When referring to "language" I am not only referring to the actual tongue used; i.e., Arabic vs. English (although this is certainly an important consideration), but also the formality of the language. In the case of Arabic, this means a choice between the standard form, *al-fuṣḥā*, the language of the Qurʾān (also known as classical Arabic), and the colloquial form. Since *al-fuṣḥā* is the language of the sacred scripture, it is therefore deemed the only form of Arabic suitable for conveying religious ideas. A shaykh giving a sermon in Arabic is not expected to speak the everyday language of the people while delivering a sermon. To do so would be totally inappropriate and tantamount to admitting his ignorance and unsuitability for his position. It is his knowledge of the sacred texts that qualifies him to be a shaykh and knowledge of the Arabic language is the primary requirement upon which all else is built.

The three shaykhs mentioned above have arrived from Lebanon in the past ten years; they all preach exclusively in standard Arabic. Their style of speech conforms to what Bloch⁵ refers to as formalized speech acts. Limitations on loudness, intonation, vocabulary, and sources for illustrations are all apparent and the speakers all conform to certain stylistic rules. The question arises as to whether or not the use of such formalized speech affects the message that is being conveyed. Bloch argues that it does. Formalized speech, he claims, prevents the speaker from tackling specific issues or dealing with divisive actions. It conveys less information about the world than ordinary speech, but it enhances its "illocutionary" potential; i.e., its ability to influence people. What the speaker says is predictable. The constraints of the speaking style make it so. The predictability of the speech is what makes it "coercive." As Boyer puts it, "the actors are 'caught' in a discursive pattern which makes it impossible to disagree or contradict, since the series of utterances is predetermined from the outset. Ritual language can thus serve an ideological purpose in that it is a 'hidden' yet powerful mechanism which reduces drastically the possibility of dissent."⁶

If Bloch's theory is correct, one should find that the topics of sermons are of a purely traditional nature and that subjects reaching outside the realm of

⁵ Maurice Bloch, "Introduction," in Maurice Bloch, ed, *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (London: Academic Press, 1975).

⁶ Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 83.

conservative Shi'ism are not addressed. Antoun found that the preacher in the Jordanian village which he studied also conformed to formalized speech, yet was able to handle local and divisive issues in his sermons.⁷ Since the sermons from Dearborn are delivered by several speakers and the circumstances under which they are made are more complex than in the Jordanian village, as we shall see, it is not possible to draw simple conclusions about sermons in Dearborn.

Furthermore, not all sermons are delivered in Arabic. Many are in English. So it is important to compare the messages of the English and Arabic sermons.

The Speeches

The theme most commonly dwelt on in the sermons from the mosques (whether given in Arabic or English) is undoubtedly that of Shi'ism itself. That is, those signs and symbols that are peculiar to Shi'ism are what are stressed during sermons. The Imams 'Alī, Ḥusayn and the other Imams and the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima and granddaughter Zaynab are either the main theme or are alluded to regularly in a sermon. These heroes and heroines are the models for one's life. The following are some examples of the types of statements made:

Imam 'Alī was born in the *Ka'aba* itself and this was a wonderful sign.

'Alī is an example to the Weak.

'Alī is a mystery and a miracle.

Muḥammad called Ḥusayn a nation among nations.

Anybody who wants to do revolution must learn in the school of Ḥusayn.

If you want to be saved, you must believe in Ḥassan and Ḥusayn.

Fāṭima Zahrā' was the best creature, the best lady. You find women today who have learned from her. The [Muslim] women today are proof of the greatness of Fāṭima.

No other theme is repeated as often as this. There is the continual reminder that these central figures serve as models for the Shi'a of today as they have for hundreds of years.

Interestingly, there is never any "interpreting" of their characters into modern day situations. Their attributes are listed, legends about them retold. But never have I heard a shaykh or any other speaker suggest trying to see,

⁷ Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 83.

say, Imam Ḥusayn in the light of a 20th Century dilemma. Interestingly, Ḥusayn is both portrayed as a model of "patience" and "of revolution." It is left to the listener to interpret what Ḥusayn means in modern life for himself. The same holds for Fāṭima or Zaynab. These are good and virtuous women. They are both models of womanhood as they displayed courage and also stood behind their men through adversity. They are portrayed as multi-faceted: they are both mothers and wives and women who have stepped outside of their family role to do heroic acts. It is left up to the listener to decide which aspect of the heroine's life to emulate.

Reverence for and belief in, the Qurʾān, the Prophet and the family of the Prophet (the *ahl al-bayt*) are common threads that weave together this community. All three mosques reinforce this common identity. There is no distinction or dispute at this level. Whether a sermon is delivered in Arabic or English, the theme of the *ahl al-bayt* prevails.

Furthermore, the "oppressors" of the Shīʿa continue to be the Umayyads. Only rarely does a speaker venture out of the historical realm of the early days of Islam to make his point. Occasionally Israel is mentioned as being an enemy of Islam. But it is usually not railed against as the main theme of a speech.

There are references made to the Sunnis on occasion as well. These differ from other topics that are discussed in that they are in response to perceived recent attacks on the Shīʿa. The killing of Shīʿites in Mecca and a negative article in an Egyptian magazine regarding Shīʿism provoked two of these sermons. But these are rare occurrences.

Differences Among Arabic Speakers

The differences that occur in sermons among the three Arabic speaking preachers of the mosques are generally quite subtle. As stated before, all three use highly stylized presentations, never deviating from the use of standard Arabic. However, even within the narrow range allowed, there are variations in style of speech.

It is commonplace in this community to hear people speak of one mosque being aligned with a certain Lebanese militia and another with an opposing militia. Yet, one would be hard pressed to prove this by the "surface" content of the speeches. Shaykhs do not refer to political groups during their sermons. Particular political figures are not mentioned. However, religious leaders who may also be considered political leaders may be alluded to but always in the context in which there is general agreement. For example, Khomeini is seen as a hero to the Shīʿa because he strengthened the identity of the believers and gave them a new sense of pride. He is not spoken of as the proponent of *Hizb Allah*. Mūsa Ṣadr is also one who brought people "out of materialism and

taught them the true Islam." His role as creator of *Amal* for a general audience, will be ignored.

Only when a political group has organized an event at the mosques and that event is known to be a political one, will there be references to the appropriate political organization. For example, at the Islamic Center there was a memorial for the disappearance of Mūsa Ṣadr. It was held in the evening and announced well in advance. At this event posters and flags associated with the *Amal* movement were displayed throughout the mosque and only those sympathetic to *Amal* were in attendance. Posters and other insignia of *Amal* would not appear at the Sunday service even if the topic of a sermon was Mūsa Ṣadr. Instead, there would have been a sermon that most could agree on: Mūsa Ṣadr attempted to help the Shī'a improve their material and spiritual condition.

During sermons the preachers are not denigrating one another. Each mosque functions quite separately. The leadership of one mosque might heartily disapprove of the actions of another, but each mosque is quite cautious about causing open splits in the community.

Still there are differences in the sermons of the preachers that are well worth examining. The most extreme differences can be found when comparing the speeches of Shaykh Attat (who is known to sympathize with *Amal*) at the *Jāmi'* and Shaykh Burro (a *Hizb Allah* sympathizer) at the *Majlis*. Again, these two shaykhs speak only in Arabic.

Both Attat and Burro have given sermons on Islamic ethics. Shaykh Burro begins his talks with rhymed prose and then launches into a highly abstract, intellectual speech on the different levels of ethical systems. It is a speech that would appeal to a college educated, religiously studious sort of audience. Shaykh Attat's handling of the subject is quite different in terms of its intellectual level. Not so abstract and learned, he uses simpler ideas. His is less the seminary lecture and more the "Sunday church sermon."

While such differences may of course reflect basic personality styles, they also reflect different views of Islam and how it should be applied. In other words, political views.

Shaykh Burro follows the style of the great *madrassas* of the Shī'i world. He aspires to be learned and noted for his learnedness. He expects the people to come to him. The fact that only those who wish to emulate this very learned approach to Islam would do so, does not seem to concern him. Shaykh Burro has even introduced the concept of *ʿirfān* in his sermons. *ʿirfān* is part of mystical philosophy. It is a system that gives an esoteric explanation of the exoteric features of Islam.

Mottehede states that *ʿirfān* was instrumental in creating the political style of Ayatollah Khomeini,

the very heart of *erfan* (*ʿirfān*) is the destruction of the distinction between subject and object—an experience of this world in which seer and seen are one. And teachers of *erfan* (*ʿirfān*) seek to impart to their students a sense of the fearlessness toward everything external, including all the seemingly coercive political powers of the world, which true masters of *ʿirfān* should have.⁸

A young scholarly Iraqi friend of mine has sat through many hours of Shaykh Burro's sermons. He rejects the idea that there is a political aspect to his sermons on *ʿirfān*, but on the other hand, believes that such sermons in this community are inappropriate because the Lebanese do not have the proper religious training to understand such concepts. He expressed irritation, in fact, that the ideas of *ʿirfān* were being totally misunderstood by the Lebanese youth. He claimed they were thinking of themselves as enlightened mystics after a couple of lectures on the subject.

It is almost inconceivable that Shaykh Attat would address his audience about mysticism. In his speeches and his demeanor he is a man of the people. Not at all esoteric in his approach to religion, he is very much the proletariat shaykh. More dramatic and less intellectual in his approach, he indicates a concern to appeal to the majority of the Muslims, rather than to a select group. His is not the seminary approach. His behavior is most definitely modeled after the activist Mūsa Ṣadr who presented himself as a man of the people. Shaykh Attat is also the only preacher who differentiates the Sunday (or regular) sermon from that given at a social occasion. For example, at wedding engagements at the *Jāmiʿ* he interjects humor, and both he and the audience laugh quite heartily. At such an occasion, he persuaded a few of the women who had not covered their hair to do so by speaking in a joking manner about the subject.

Shaykh Berri is seen as someone "in between" the other two. Eloquent and poetical, he speaks with invariable calm. He is remote without being aloof. His sermons, while completely within the world of Shīʿi topics and ideology, address issues that concern the every day lives of a majority of Muslims: prayer, marriage, pilgrimage. Rarely are concrete examples or personal references given, something lacking in sermons from all the *ʿulamāʾ*. But on one occasion he did allude to his own pilgrimage and how he happened to be able to become a *ḥajj*. This was alluded to, not dwelt upon. The spiritual significance of the *ḥajj* was what was important. Shaykh Berri is very culturally oriented. He loves poetry and language and is a bit more open to seeing Shīʿism as a contribution to world culture than is normally found in this community. As Fischer would put it, he is at least partially post-Hegelian. In Dearborn he appears to stand alone in this respect.

⁸ Mottehedeh, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

Analysis of the Speeches Given in Arabic

The purpose of the Arabic sermons delivered in the local mosques is to convey the truth. It is not to challenge the people's thinking about the role of Islam in America. It is not to attempt to modernize Islam for a new and different environment. It is not to make Islam "relevant." The purpose is to remind people of the essential verities of Islam: Muḥammad was the Messenger of the One True God, Imam ʿAlī was his rightful successor, the Imam Ḥusayn suffered cruelly at the hands of the Umayyad oppressors, and other designated members of the *ahl al-bayt* are to be emulated and revered. Thus far, the results corroborate Bloch's theory.

However, even within the very narrow constraints offered by the formalized speeches given in Arabic, one can find significant variations in the message that is conveyed. Generally speaking, the message from the three mosques is essentially the same, but the listener is being compelled to respond in a different manner, depending on which shaykh is conveying the message. None of the shaykhs are coming up with new or innovative approaches to Islam. They are all reiterating what they have learned from their teachers at the *madrassas*. Yet, Burro's highly intellectualized speech on ethics conveys a different message than Shaykh Attat's more homely variation on the same theme. And by introducing a topic such as *ʿirfān*, Shaykh Burro is subtly making the statement that the people should approach Islam in such a way as to drastically differentiate themselves from the rest of society.

All three shaykhs stay within "pure" Shīʿi theology. All utilize formalized speech acts to convey their message. Yet, through emphasis on particular subjects and through demeanor, they are quite capable of imparting messages so different that they could cause major rifts in the community should that community allow them to do so.

The Audience's Reaction

Bloch claims that the formalized speech act reinforces the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, ". . . ultimately the power of formalized oratory does not simply spring from its form, it springs from the forces of social power."⁹ The relationship between clergy and laymen in the Middle East is very complex. The clergy are an inextricable part of life and indeed have had power throughout the ages. Among the Shīʿa this power has either generated from the State as it did in, say, Safavid times, or from the people as in the 1979 Iranian Revolution. But the Shīʿa rank and file have generally shown a certain independent-mindedness about their clergy,

⁹ Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

who are commonly the butt of jokes and derisive stories. Of course, they can also be devoutly revered. In this community the feelings towards the clergy run the entire gamut.

Results from questions I posed to people regarding the clergy suggests that the vast majority see these men purely as religious specialists who have expertise in theological matters, much the same way as any other professional specialists. Most said that they would turn to the shaykh for a purely religious matter such as prayer or fasting but would not bring other matters to him. The shaykh is seen as a person with a job and that is to remind the people of the truths of Shīʿism and assist them with following the correct spiritual path.

Actually, there is much inattentiveness to speeches at the mosques. At the *Majmaʿ* and the *Jāmiʿ* there is nearly as much visiting among the audience during sermons as there is during a dinner. At the *Majlis*, the situation is a bit different. There the room is usually arranged so that chairs are lined up side by side so that less visiting can occur. However, even at the *Majlis*, when the people, particularly the women, are sitting at tables, they are likely to talk among themselves during sermons.

In general, it is not expected that the shaykh will say something revolutionary. What he says the audience has, in one form or another, heard before. There are no interchanges between speaker and hearer except when the audience reiterates the blessing of the Prophet and his family. On some occasions, when the shaykh is addressing a small group of men, at the end of the speech, he will allow questions to which he gives lengthy answers. This is commonly found at the *Majmaʿ* and the *Majlis*. But this is again very formalized and the questions are expected to be concise and non-challenging.

The audience does not complain, nor do they suggest that the speeches be shorter or that the format be changed to allow more participation. The shaykh is doing what he is hired to do: remind people of the fundamentals of their religion. Consequently, subtle differences of style are generally of little consequence. Nor does it matter particularly that the sermon is delivered in a form of Arabic that may not be totally comprehensible to the listeners.¹⁰ The general idea is grasped and that is sufficient.

Not all clergy can, of course, accept this attitude from their audience. Shaykh Burro, who began his career in America at the *Jāmiʿ*, was obviously not content with what he would have seen as fulfilling a functionary's role. He resorted to opening the doors of a new mosque in which he could have complete control, albeit one with a very small and narrow congregation. Shaykh Berri also opened a new mosque but has attempted to appeal to a larger number

¹⁰ For a discussion of the use of Arabic in the mosques, see my article "Arabic in the Dearborn Mosques" in Aleya Rouchdy, in *The Arabic Language in America*. (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1992).

of his countrymen and has been quite successful. I believe it is because he has been more willing to accept his people as they are than has Shaykh Burro.

The majority of people in Dearborn are not willing to allow the shaykhs to play a divisive role. They do not want a community split along strong ideological lines. It is as if, then, that the aspects of sermons that could be divisive are simply not heard by the majority of people in the community.

Sermons Presented in English: Shaykh Chirri's Sermons

Shaykh Chirri came to America long before the other shaykhs currently residing in Dearborn. Consequently, he found a totally different community with a different set of needs than Shaykhs Attat, Berri and Burro found upon their arrivals. A shaykh was needed in Chirri's time who was knowledgeable in Islam but able to relate to the problems of a people for whom the Arabic language and Middle Eastern traditions were rapidly being supplanted by all things American, including the English language for Arabic. The people wanted a preacher who could communicate in their new language. It is important to understand the significance of this. Some clergy would have flatly refused to relinquish the use of the Qur'anic language to discuss religion. Indeed, today some clergy in the United States (though not in Dearborn) have rejected the idea of learning English as it is considered the language of the *Kuffār* (the infidel). Shaykh Chirri realized that if Islam was to flourish (or even remain alive at all) it was incumbent upon him to speak the vernacular.

It is only possible to determine the types of speeches given by Shaykh Chirri during the last two or three years before his retirement, which may have been affected by the changes occurring in the Middle East and the arrival of the new clergy. However, according to informants, there are certain topics that have always been dear to his heart and it is unlikely that the general pattern of speech has changed over time.

Shaykh Chirri begins his sermons with the first *sūra* of the Qur'ān in Arabic, then proceeds to address the "ladies and gentlemen" of the audience in English. His English is unpolished. He drops the final consonant of a word, giving his speech an uneducated quality. It is apparent that he learned English principally to communicate with a second and third generation Arabic community, though he also has written religious texts explaining Islam and Shī'ism to a non-Muslim audience. Still, the utilitarian approach to language appears even in his writing style. For Shaykh Chirri, it is the message, not its means of conveyance, that is of greatest import. There is nothing poetical in his presentations. He wants his listeners to know that there is "only one Almighty God who is the Creator of the universe." He tells the Muslims that they should be grateful to have been blessed with eyes and ears and to be the ones chosen to follow God's message for this day. He admonishes

the people to follow the teachings of Islam, using the Imams and Fāṭima as exemplars to emulate. He is also fond of referring to the Patriarch Abraham who "was not like other Jews" and obeyed the Almighty God. But it is through the message of Islam that one receives salvation. Certainly, one of his favorite topics is that of the return of the Imam Mahdi. This subject stirs him to some excitement and I have heard him insist that the congregation, noisily chattering at their tables, listen to him because he feels strongly that they will have to recognize the Mahdi when he appears in the not too distant future. They must be prepared.

In comparison with the sermons of the other shaykhs, Shaykh Chirri's speeches do not qualify as "formal" speeches. There is not the rigor of style. There is more variation in volume and intonation. Yet little else is truly different from the other shaykhs. The scriptures are essentially the only thing invoked. The truths of Shi'ism are reiterated. Even in the forceful and direct appeals to the people to heed his word, there is never any variation from the standard discourse on Islam. It is all within the bounds of Shi'i theology and never deviates from that level.

The greatest difference between the sermons of Chirri and the three Arabic speaking shaykhs concerns the issue of teaching the faith to non-Muslims. Proselytizing for Islam is not a common theme of any of their sermons, yet Shaykh Chirri is more inclined to refer to this topic than are the other *ʿālim*. In one sermon he instructed his audience on how to teach Islam. "Be friendly, say good morning," he advised. Then, he urged them, "turn the conversation to religion." They are to tell the Christians that there is only one God, that Jesus and Mary are not gods. Mary, he said, was a great lady, but not a god.

What is so striking about such a sermon is that Shaykh Chirri has continued to see America throughout these years only in theological terms. To him America is Christian and the major difference, then, between Christian and Muslim perspective lies in the question of Christ. Shaykh Chirri does not discuss the fact that Americans may see that Islam's forbidding of drugs and alcohol could have beneficial effects for a society suffering from the ills of substance abuse. Steps are not taken to begin a teaching campaign based on the social principles of Islam. (The fact that the other shaykhs are not stressing the teaching of Islam to non-Muslims suggests that they perceive Islam as being so tied to Middle Eastern culture that it would be nearly impossible to bridge the gulf that exists between East and West.)

How does this relate to Bloch's theory about the effects of formal speech? As stated previously, there is limited use of formality in Chirri's speeches, yet, he still seems to operate under the constraints of formalized speech in that he avoids divisive or controversial ideas and maintains his distinct and hierarchical role *vis-à-vis* his audience.

What this suggests, then, is that it is not the style of speech *per se* that sets the limits and the type of relationship that exists between speaker and hearer. It is rather the entire tradition of clerical training that most defines what message will be conveyed. The Shī'ī *ʿālim* is trained in a certain school of thought. His traditional education in law, logic, philosophy, etc. 'compels' him to think in a certain way. The style of speech used only reinforces the message. It does not define it.

A Layman's Approach

Even before Shaykh Chirri's retirement, it became increasingly difficult for him to make sermons. For the most part, it has fallen on one of the members of the Center's Board of Directors, Hajj C., to deliver the English sermon, as Shaykh Attat has not mastered English. The *Jāmi'* does not wish to cater only to new immigrants but to also include those who have grown up in America and who are more comfortable in English. To someone like Hajj C., and to others as well, English should be spoken in the mosque as this is an American mosque.

Hajj C. is a second generation immigrant and a man who might be described as a Muslim evangelist. His messages are direct. He admonishes his audience to be good Muslims, not by habit, but by conscious decision. He wants the Muslims to set a good example for the larger community. Rather than accepting the socializing that goes on during sermons, he tells his audience to observe silence when the words of the Qur'ān are being read. In other words, he wishes them not to take the words for granted, or treat them like they are magical (my concept), but listen to them for the content and live by them. He refers to the scriptures but also will refer to actual, recent happenings to make his points. He grapples with the Sunni/Shī'ī split, explaining that there are political, not religious, differences between the two sects. More importantly, he gives a specific example of how the split could be down played. He alluded to an occasion when Sunnis came to visit the *Jāmi'*. The call for prayer being sounded, the men went to pray in the prayer chamber. One of the Shī'ī men present began to pass out prayer stones (the pieces of clay from *Karbala'*) and Hajj C. asked that this not be done so as to avoid offending their Sunni guests. Avoiding the use of the prayer stone for many Shī'a would be a controversial act, discussion of which would not normally be included in a sermon. But this lay teacher, although not trained in Najaf, is a man with a message that goes beyond the usual Shī'ī theological subjects.

Hajj C. does not conform to the formal speech acts of the highly stylized sermons of the Arabic speaking shaykhs. He goes outside the usual domain of what is usually considered an appropriate subject matter and an appropriate

style for a mosque sermon (his English is quite correct and he is a very articulate and fine speaker).

That being said, however, the deviation, when scrutinized, is really not so very great. Ḥajj C. ultimately gives the same message that the other shaykhs do: that Shī'ism contains the truth. He expands this to include the need to find ways to share this truth with others. For him, conservative, card-carrying Republican that he is, the ultimate goal is that as many people as possible be prepared for the return of the Imam Mahdi and the Judgment Day. He does not advocate any relaxation in the practice of Islamic law to fit American society. His ventures into ecumenism are still limited. It is one thing not to display prayer stones in the presence of Sunnis. It is quite another not to hold observances for the anniversaries of the family of the Prophet. While Ḥajj C. is not grounded in the traditional education of Najaf, he is firmly grounded in the teachings of Shī'ism and, as such, any controversy his speeches might generate will be fairly mild. Though the sermons he delivers do not have the highly stylized form of the Arabic speaking shaykhs or reflect the style of *madrassa* education, Ḥajj C. still operates within the confines of his religious tradition, something that has not been greatly affected by his American upbringing.

Summary and Conclusions

The shaykhs, particularly the Arabic speaking ones, use a highly stylized way to deliver their ideas. While they do not differ greatly in their messages, the subtleties in deliverance and emphasis do make for distinctive differences in their approaches to the practice of Islam.

On the surface, Shaykh Chirri in his English sermons, and particularly Ḥajj C., a layman, present quite different types of sermons. Shaykh Chirri's sermons are not as stylized and he does on occasion make emotional appeals to the people to listen to his message and be prepared for the final days. Ḥajj C. even ventures outside of the use of scriptures and introduces mildly controversial topics in his sermons.

The differences in style and message could have enormous effects on this community if the community allowed this to occur. For the most part, however, the audience downplays the differences of the various speakers (although there are certainly exceptions). Partially this is accomplished by simply ignoring much of what is said. It is also done by a conscious decision made by many of the people in this community not to have major divisions. Thus, for many the choice is either to attend no mosque functions or to attend those at more than one mosque.

Yet, for all the differences found, the sermons, whether delivered by Arabic speaking shaykhs, by an English speaking shaykh, or a lay speaker, contain the same essential message: Shī'ism is the true religion and it is through

Shi'ism and its heroes that one shall be saved in the last days. It is this message that the people hear.

*Middle East Institute
Columbia University
New York, New York*

LINDA S. WALBRIDGE

