

Who Is \223An Enemy of God?\224
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There is some very strange language coming out of Iran today. Unarmed Demonstrators) are being arrested, summarily tried, and executed. Their crime: they are \223Enemies of God.\224 This now accompanies the earlier stupid crime designation: \223a polluter of earth.\224 No, this is not an ecological crime; it is a crime against the government that considers any backtalk pollution. But enemy of God implies that the great ayatollah and the country\222s illegitimately-elected president are either Gods themselves, or God\222s people.

We cannot understand what is going on in Iran without understanding its religious underpinnings. Iran is a predominantly Shiite Muslim country, a minority sect of Islam that goes back to the beginnings of Islam as a religion. A large segment of the population is now secular and has no real interest in Shi\222a Islam. Others are Christian, Baha\222I, and even some tribes (such as the Kurds) are Sunni (the majority Muslim sect). But the Shiite government is in charge.

Origins of Shia. Who are they and what is their belief system? It all goes back to the time of the Prophet Mohammad, who died without naming a successor. In most cultures, the leadership would devolve to a son\227usually the eldest son. But Mohammad had no living sons when he died. Instead, he had a daughter (Fatima) and a son-in-law, Ali, who was also Mohammad\222s cousin. Ali and his friends thought that he should be the logical successor, but there were other founding fathers who thought otherwise.

The elders met and hammered out a consensus\227an election, of sorts\227that another more distant relative of the Prophet who had been a tough general should be successor. When he died, another was chosen, and another after him. Finally, after much internal furor, Ali was finally elected\227and was assassination a year later. His followers were outraged, and they urged his sons to contest the selection of the 5th caliph, which the younger son, Hossein, did. He and his followers challenged the elected caliph in battle on the plains of Iraq\227and lost.

You would think that would be the end of it, but it wasn\222t. The followers of Ali\222s family decided that the elected calphs were illegitimate and instead honored descendants of Fatima and Ali right down to the 8th century, when the last such descendant \223disappeared.\224 They claim that this \223hidden\224 saint was just \223oc culting\224 himself and that in time, he would reappear and lead the world into a great Shiite golden age.

Conflicting Analyses.

\225 True Shiite believers will say that only the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad should lead the faithful. This could be seen as a belief in bloodline rule (monarchy) versus election by elders (rough democracy).

\225 Shiites will also say that a Messiah (the Mahdi), the 8th century descendant who \223disappeared,\224 will come back to rule the world. The Sunni Muslims can find no justification for this in Muslim texts.

\225 The majority of Shiites are not Arabs, but are Persian (Iranian) and because most cannot read Arabic, their religion is interpreted for them by mullahs (clerics), unlike Sunni Islam, which depends more upon direct reading of the Koran and other sacred texts.

\225 The current president of Iran, Ahmadinejad, seems to be a true believer in the missing Mahdi cult and is thus a believer in apocalypse. This is a dangerous view in a world with nuclear weapons. Believers in apocalypse think that this is the quickest way to bring back the Mahdi and hence rule the world.

\225 Shiite doctrine emphasizes outrage and disappointment. They see their anger as a quest for justice; others see it as people who lost an election and cannot get over it. They keep the anger going in an annual self-flagellating and bloody procession, mourning the death of Mohammad\222s grandsons.

So\227if demonstrators (or historians such as I) do not believe that the Islamic Iranian government speaks for God, we are, in their eyes, enemies of God.

656 words

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