Editorial

Reading the Leader Khamenei (QS) as Thinker

Editor –in– chief

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In every era, the human thought poses again the question of religion. Even as the face of the world shifts and the tools and methodologies of inquiry evolve, this question remains at the forefront: What is religion? What is its place in human life, knowledge, and destiny? A question has accompanied humanity since its dawn. It becomes more pressing whenever the contemporary era assumes it has moved past it, relegating it to the recesses of the past.

In this context, the thought of Imam Khamenei (QS) stands in a distinguished position. The responsibility of leadership brought him to the forefront of events, and people came to know him through his political presence and his position in the equations of the region and the world. Behind this presence lies a religious vision that is coherent in structure and deeply rooted, which is broad enough to be read as a philosophy, and carries an integrated vision of the position of religion in relation to man, the world, and history.

Discussing the philosophy of religion as held by a man who is an active participant in history, and a shaper of its events, invites deep reflection. While the philosophy demands systematic structure, foundational grounding, and abstract reflection, leadership requires action, decision-making, and initiative in the field. For Khamenei (QS), the integration of these two elements lies at the very core of

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his project; he views religion as a comprehensive worldview from which he derives a practical stance toward life, society, and civilization. Consequently, exploring his religious philosophy becomes a legitimate endeavor, one whose contours can be discerned throughout his writings, speeches, lessons, and addresses delivered over the course of several decades.

These pages open a horizon for exploring the philosophy of religion as conceived by Imam Khamenei (QS). They confront the reader with the profound questions posed by his intellectual project, a project that positions religion as the central axis of existence, knowledge, and action. What is religion within this framework? What is the role of reason in relation to it? How is its meaning generated? Moreover, what is its stake for humanity and civilization? The purpose here is to raise and organize these issues, preparing the mind for the detailed discussions that follow, grounded in the conviction that asking the right question is half the journey toward finding the right answer.

Khamenei (QS) as Thinker: Why Should Approach Religion from His Perspective?

In the public consciousness, Imam Khamenei (QS) is perceived as a political leader with defined stances on regional and global affairs, a valid image, yet one that obscures deeper dimensions. He is a product of the Islamic seminary [hawza], having been raised in a household steeped in scholarship and religious authority. He has engaged in research and inquiry at the highest levels; the [bahth al-kharij] (advanced seminary) lessons he delivers bear witness to the depth of his scholarly tools and the firm grounding of his capacity for "ijtihad" (independent legal reasoning).[1] It is from this foundation that his stances should be understood; for reflection precedes action, and a coherent vision takes precedence over decision-making. A leader who operates from such depth transforms his words into well-

1 - Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: The Book of Retribution, [bahth al-kharij] (advanced seminary), p. 1.

grounded thought, thought that merits careful contemplation. This synthesis of scholarship and leadership represents a continuation of a long-standing tradition that links the intellectual to responsibility, ensuring that one who possesses a clear vision also possesses a firm stance.

The body of work produced by Imam Khamenei (QS) spans a wide array of fields, revealing the breadth of his intellectual interests. It encompasses lessons and lectures on the Qur'an and its underlying thought; in-depth inquiries into jurisprudence [fiqh]; and speeches and addresses, delivered over the course of decades, which explore issues of thought, civilization, and society. This diverse body of work portrays a thinker who engages with religion across all its dimensions, from scripture to legal rulings, and from doctrine to ways of life. The temporal span of this output reflects both a steadfast adherence to foundational principles and an organic development in their practical applications; over time, the thinker's positions coalesce around core, enduring themes that reveal themselves to the attentive reader. Consequently, a researcher gathering this material is confronted with an intellectual structure that demands organization and grounding, a system whose underlying logic awaits discovery and articulation.

The Martyr Khamenei (QS) places thought at the very pinnacle of his priorities, asserting that the "production of thought" is both more significant and more arduous than the "production of scientific knowledge."[1] The thinker faces challenges far more severe than those encountered by the practitioner of empirical science do. He posits that the construction of civilization rests upon such intellectual production and the formulation of knowledge frameworks, without which, the development of a society is impossible. His deep pride in philosophy reflects this perspective; he maintains "philosophy belongs to us, and its cradle is our land,"[2] asserting that the tradition established within his school is closer to the true essence of philosophy than what has become prevalent in the

1 - Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: 'Speech of the Guardian' (2010), p. 317.

2 - Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: 'Speech of the Guardian' (2010), p. 317.

West. This elevation of the status of thought renders his project a fertile subject for philosophical inquiry, inviting the researcher to uncover an organized, coherent knowledge structure whose elements are interconnected within a unified horizon.

This call to engage in critical thought becomes clear when examining his conception of religion. He views religion as something that addresses and stimulates the intellect; the prophets, he argues, were sent "to stir the hidden treasures of the human mind" and to awaken within the human being the faculty of reason and the capacity for thought.[1] He asserts that religion "was not intended to replace or supersede the intellect, but rather to guide and assist it."[2] He goes even further, stating: "Anyone who exercises their reason and understands religion knows full well that reason cannot possibly come into conflict with religion."[3] This perspective, grounded in rational inquiry and positing the intellect as a prerequisite for understanding, naturally invites a philosophical reading that uncovers its underlying foundations and delineates the role of reason within it.

This perspective transcends the confines of purely discursive reason; Khamenei (QS) posits that insight and awareness are "essential prerequisites for faith".[4] His own vibrant faith is rooted in "rationality and reflection, far removed from dogmatic rigidity or blind fanaticism".[5] He likens stagnant faith to still, lifeless water, advocating instead for a faith that is constantly renewed through contemplation and deep reflection. In his view, awareness is a condition for sincere faith, while insight serves as a guiding light during turbulent times, preventing one's understanding from becoming trapped by mere outward appearances. Thus, a faith grounded in awareness and insight allows for a philosophical interpretation, one that functions as an extension of the faith's very spirit and an unveiling of its

1 - Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: 'Speech of the Guardian' (2012), p. 215.

2 - Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: 'An Outline of Islamic Thought in the Quran.' p. 139.

3 -Ali al-Hosseini al-Khamenei: 'An Outline of Islamic Thought in the Quran.' p. 138.

4 -Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: The Project of Islamic Thought in the Qur)an, p. 202.

5 -Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: (The Project of Islamic Thought in the Qur)an), p. 11.

profound, underlying structure.

This perspective on "ijtihad" (independent legal reasoning) extends beyond the confines of "fiqh" (Islamic jurisprudence) to become a dynamic movement encompassing the rational sciences. It posits that "'ijtihad' is not limited to "fiqh"; rather, it is essential within the rational sciences, philosophy, and theology, without it, we would become a stagnant pool."[1] Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity for "Al-hawza" to play an active role globally across the fields of philosophy, "fiqh", and "theology", as the questions posed today await answers from such a source. It maintains that a renewed mode of thought is a prerequisite for religious knowledge to remain effective and capable of addressing contemporary challenges, all while upholding immutable foundational principles. In this light, the project presents itself as an evolving, growing intellectual framework, whose components continuously engage with the unfolding realities of life.

His perspective is rooted in the integration of two dimensions that schools of thought often keep separate; he maintains "Islam is a religion of both spirituality and knowledge."[2] This synthesis, nurturing the soul while pursuing knowledge, opens up expansive horizons, revealing a vision of the human being that balances reason and the heart, the temporal world and the hereafter, and the individual and society. Regarding the elite, he describes them as "people of intellect, possessing a perspective grounded in reflection and deep insight,"[3] and entrusts them with the responsibility of guiding society. In his view, intellectual endeavor is a sacred trust, a position of responsibility and a starting point for the reform of both the individual and the nation.

The interpretation of religion from the perspective of Imam Khamenei (may his secret be sanctified) combines the authenticity of a learned jurist (mujtahid)

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Speech of the Guardian' (2010), p. 402.

2 -Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: ‹Speech of the Guardian› (2010), p. 116.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address at a meeting with the Air Force and Air Defense Forces', February 5, 2024.

with the ambition of a visionary architect of a civilizational project, a conception of religion that weds reason to life. This perspective derives its legitimacy from the fact that its proponent is a scholar equipped with the tools of inquiry, an active practitioner who tests his ideas in the field, and a visionary who places religion at the core of his project. From this intersection, one can distill a philosophy of religion, the contours of which are evident in his writings and tested through the lens of his philosophical school. On this basis, subsequent studies can take these contours as a starting point to elaborate upon the foundations and sources of religious knowledge, the mechanisms for understanding it, and the relationship between reason and the text in the production of religious meaning.

Religion as Worldview, Manager of Life

The question of religion begins with defining its nature. A common understanding restricts religion to rituals performed by individuals and beliefs held in their hearts, thereby confining it to a private sphere of life, distant from the fields of social interaction and work. Imam Khamenei (QS) broadens this understanding and opens it up to a wider horizon. Religion encompasses life as a whole and extends its scope to human beings, the world, and their ultimate destiny. This broad definition serves as the starting point for his conception of the role of religion in knowledge and action, and it underlies all the issues that follow from it. Understanding this definition is an essential starting point for any examination of his religious philosophy, as it establishes the boundaries of the concept before addressing its details.

Imam Khamenei (QS) states that religion is «first and foremost a worldview and a system of knowledge: knowledge of this world, the human being, the journey, the path, and the goal… [and]… the totality of this knowledge constitutes the foundation of religion.»[1] In this definition, religion is a body of knowledge upon which all its other rulings are based. It provides human beings with an

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2013), p. 15.

understanding of the origin and purpose of existence, their place within it, and the path they must follow to attain perfection. Values and rulings derive from this understanding. The worldview is the foundation, while conduct is its fruit, growing from its roots. A researcher who understands this order interprets religious rulings in light of the overall worldview and traces particular principles back to their underlying foundations.

This definition also extends to the function of religion in life. Religion is a comprehensive source of knowledge intended to guide human life, revealed by Allah to ensure perfection and happiness in both this world and the hereafter.[1] This world, he states, "is the principal arena for the function, responsibilities, and mission of religion." Accordingly, he describes religion as "the manager of human life, that is, a comprehensive plan… [that goes beyond]… the purely personal, devotional, and individual spheres."[2] Religion, as the manager of life, addresses individuals and society alike, encompassing worship, economics, politics, and ethics within a single system. In this way, religion becomes present in the details of everyday human life, guiding it towards its highest purpose and bringing its various dimensions together under a unified aim.

This conception adds a spiritual dimension to life. In Imam Khamenei's view, without religion, life remains «devoid of spirituality, truth, love, and spirit.»[3] Religion provides human beings with security and tranquility in the arena of life and opens up opportunities for transcendence and spiritual growth. When life is guided by religion, human capacities are directed towards a purpose that transcends immediate interests. Religion thus becomes the spirit and foundation of life, as well as the source of its depth and elevation.

The structure of this conception becomes clearer when its constituent elements

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2018).

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: Address on 'the blessed Mab'ath' (the Prophet's divine mission), March 11, 2021.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2013), p. 15.

are examined in detail. Religion represents a body of knowledge, legal rulings, and ethical principles. It «is founded on intellectual principles expressed through the worldview… [and includes]… practical principles that derive from that worldview.»[1]

Therefore, we are dealing with three interconnected elements: a worldview as the foundation, knowledge and rulings built upon it, and practical principles that translate it into conduct. This arrangement makes religion an integrated system in which knowledge is connected to action and particular principles derive from their foundations in an orderly sequence. Those who approach religion in this way find it to be a living unity whose components are interconnected within a single structure, with each element occupying its own place and performing its specific function.

This conception also shapes Imam Khamenei's understanding of this world itself. In his view, the world is a means for human growth and perfection, through its blessings, beauty, and good things, as well as its hardships and afflictions.[2] From this perspective, worldly life is a field of testing and advancement, and religion guides human beings along their journey towards their ultimate goal. The joys of life and the blessings spread throughout the world are taken into account by religion and occupy a place within its overall plan. Religion, while caring for the hereafter, also cares for this world, connecting the two within a single path that leads human beings towards perfection. In this way, the supposed opposition between religion and life is overcome. However, an integrated relationship between the two realms of existence also replaced it.

This conception reaches its fullest expression in the claim that religion is universal to the human experience. Every human community manages its life through a set of teachings, and this form of life is called a religion or a sharia

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Discussion on Patience', p. 12.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2013), p. 15.

(religious law)[1]. The divine religion originates from Allah, people create human religion, and taghut [tyrannical or false authorities] creates taghuti religion. In every case, human beings adhere to some form of religion; the question concerns its source and authority. This broad understanding gives the concept of religion a scope that makes it central to understanding human society and its development, while also providing a basis for distinguishing true religion from other forms.

This conception leads to a particular position on the separation of religion from life. For Imam Khamenei (QS), separating religion from worldly life means stripping life, politics, and economics of spirituality and undermining justice and values.[2] Religion, as the manager of life, cannot be confined to the temple or the private corners of the conscience. Its presence in society is a natural extension of its understanding as both a worldview and a comprehensive plan. Thus, his conception of religion is connected to his view of civilization and social development. Religion becomes a constructive force in the development of society and a spirit that permeates its institutions and laws.

Religion in Face of Secularization, Western Model

The project of Imam Khamenei (QS) confronts a fundamental challenge facing religion in the modern era: the secularist call to exclude religion from public life and confine it solely to the individual conscience. In Khamenei's view, this is merely an old idea repackaged; those who demand the separation of religion from the public sphere are, in his estimation, echoing, "A new ruse employed by hegemonic and colonialist media against the sovereignty of Islam", a notion that, in fact, "has been put forward for centuries."[3] Consequently, he proposes a vision of a dynamic religion, one that remains active and present at the very heart of life, as a counter to efforts aimed at marginalizing it. Grasping the nature of this

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Explanation of Surah Bara'ah', p. 213.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2013), p. 15.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2013), p. 16.

challenge is key to understanding his entire project, as it delineates the essential characteristics of the adversary that his religious thought seeks to confront.

His critique of secularism rests on an argument concerning the very essence of meaning. Separating religion from politics leads to an even more serious separation: "If [politics] is separated from religion, it will also be separated from morality and spirituality."[1] A system that excludes religion loses its moral compass, leaving politics without a guiding principle and society without its spiritual foundation. Religion, in this view, brings values into practice, and its presence in public life safeguards the moral character of that life. Secularism thus becomes a means of emptying life of its meaning and separating power from value.

Imam Khamenei (QS) counters secularism with a positive thesis affirming the unity of religion and politics. He recalls the statement of Sayyid Hasan Modarres: «Our religion is our politics, and our politics is our religion,» presenting this principle as one of the foundations of the country›s strength.[2] Religious knowledge, in this context, entails a connection between religion and governance, as well as between governance and religion. Religion thus becomes present in the administration of society, just as it is present in the governance of the self. This thesis reverses the logic of secularism: rather than removing religion from life, it makes religion the standard by which life is guided and sustained.

Imam Khamenei (QS) also identifies a hidden form of secularism that presents itself in religious terms. Some religious people call for the separation of religion from politics in order to protect its sanctity. He describes them as «religious secularists … religious in appearance, but in reality secularists.»[3] In his view, secularism can also operate within the discourse of religious believers when they restrict religion to worship and exclude it from the broader sphere of

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2009), p. 429.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian', (2017), p. 27.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address on the 32nd anniversary of the passing of Imam Khomeini, June 4', 2021.

life. In contrast, he states categorically: "There is no secularism in Islam."[1] The conception of religion that he advances does not allow a division between a private, sacred sphere and a separate, worldly sphere. Religion must therefore be present in both domains.

His critique extends beyond secularism to the very foundations of Western civilization. As Imam Khamenei (QS) explains, Western civilization is founded on humanism and a vision of political power that places the human being at the center while leaving no room for a divine horizon. In contrast, he presents an Islamic model based on "four pillars: thought, knowledge, spirituality, and life,» emphasizing, "the pillar of thought is more important than the other pillars.»[2] The critique thus reaches the root of the problem: the conception of the human being, the world, and the ultimate purpose of existence. From this fundamental difference emerges a contrast between two models of civilization, each based on a distinct understanding of the human being.

Imam Khamenei (QS) identifies the central weakness of the Western experience while acknowledging that the West «achieved a qualitative leap in the material sphere.» He describes this leap as one that «was separate from and in conflict with moral development,» characterizing it as «a one-hundred-percent material leap.»[3] In his view, the present crisis of Western civilization stems from its "lack of spiritual dimensions and divine values," as reflected in "the breakdown of the family structure, increasing violence, and moral corruption."[4] Material progress detached from meaning may reach its peak only to reveal its inner emptiness. This diagnosis prepares the ground for his understanding of the relationship between religion and civilization and clarifies the alternative he proposes.

Imam Khamenei (QS) argues that the brilliance of Western civilization is

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2016), p. 523.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2013), p. 101.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2014), p. 205.

4 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2017), p. 16.

beginning to fade. «The brilliance it displayed in the nineteenth century … no longer exists today.» «The Western civilization, he maintains, has been exposed through colonialism and the imposition of its will on other peoples.»[1] He links this exposure to an inability to generate new ideas, arguing that the West has offered humanity no new intellectual contributions or original thought beyond humanism and the schools of thought that developed from it.[2] The decline of the Western model thus creates an opportunity for an alternative civilization, one capable of providing the meaning that the former lacks. His diagnosis of the crisis consequently leads to a call for constructive action.

This vision is translated into an explicit call to build a new civilization. He declares that the time has come for Muslims and Islam to take their turn, urging Muslims to devote their efforts to «building a new Islamic civilization» while drawing on «the world›s sciences and available tools.»[3] In his view, this civilizational model draws inspiration from the historical experience of Muslims, who once offered the world their scientific and philosophical contributions, while seeking to develop a new model that integrates knowledge with spirituality. Within this vision, religion becomes a driving force for renewal, restoring the Muslim community's role in shaping civilization and opening a path toward progress on its own foundations.

Imam Khamenei›s (QS) position toward the West is therefore based on the principle of integration and synthesis. He advocates drawing on the world›s sciences, tools, and experiences while connecting them to spirituality and divine values. For him, the orientation toward spirituality and divine morality represents a «middle path» between the excesses of the Church and the deficiencies

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address during the Ramadan meeting with state officials', March 8, 2025.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2012), p. 313.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2015), p. 735.

of materialism.[1] The model he proposes is a civilization that combines material progress with spiritual and moral dimensions, grounding its development in meaning. Within this model, religion is a vital force that permeates knowledge and action, connecting material achievement to its human purpose. His critique of the West thus becomes a positive project for building a civilization that unites scientific and material advancement with spiritual depth and moral values.

Imam Khamenei's Position Regarding Tradition: Continuity, Ijtihad

Imam Khamenei's (QS) thought emerges from his intellectual heritage through both continuity and renewal. He was educated in the Islamic seminary, grew up in a family associated with religious scholarship and religious authority, studied under prominent scholars, and acquired the methods of jurisprudential, philosophical, and mystical inquiry. This background provides the starting point for understanding his view of religion: a framework that extends the intellectual tradition of his school while renewing it in ways that remain faithful to its foundations. For him, tradition is a living resource that connects the present to the past and provides the principles and standards that guide intellectual inquiry. Understanding his relationship with this tradition is therefore essential to identifying the sources and authorities that inform his project and to determining his position within the school from which he emerged.

Imam Khamenei (QS) places great importance on philosophy within the Islamic seminary [al-Hawza], considering it a fundamental component of religious scholarship. He maintains that «the importance and greatness of jurisprudence» must remain connected to «the importance of studying philosophy and its branches.» He also argues that the banner of Islamic philosophy has been held by the Islamic seminaries and «should continue to be held by them and remain in their

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2012), p. 77.

hands.»[1] In his view, philosophy occupies a central place in religious knowledge and carries major responsibilities alongside jurisprudence. By affirming the value of rational inquiry in this way, he treats philosophy as part of his living intellectual heritage and as a means of understanding religion through reason. This provides a basis for identifying a philosophy of religion within the intellectual tradition of his school.

His thought is rooted in an established center of scholarship that connects him to a long line of prominent scholars. He describes Qom as «the center of knowledge for the Islamic world,» an active and dynamic heart that distributes «knowledge, insight, vigilance, and awareness throughout the body of the Islamic community.»[2] From this intellectual tradition, Imam Khamenei draws his foundational principles and connects the present to the school's past. Tradition, in his view, is a living resource that provides thought with its methods and standards while linking contemporary inquiry to centuries of scholarly investigation. This grounding gives his intellectual project both historical depth and stability in its foundations.

Imam Khamenei (QS) combines adherence to foundational principles with a rejection of intellectual stagnation. He states: «On the one hand, we adhere to the principles and reject rigidity and stagnation … There is a principled approach» that does not entail rigidity or extremism. At the same time, he rejects «innovations and calls to reconsider [established principles] under the pretext of independent reasoning and change.»[3] His position reflects caution toward two opposing extremes: a rigidity that suppresses intellectual vitality and an unrestricted approach that dissolves religious identity. For him, tradition provides the foundation upon which new ideas can be developed, while independent reasoning enables growth without rupture or disorder. In this way, he preserves the authority

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2010), p. 406.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2010), p. 394.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'The Leader's Call', p 32.

of foundational principles while allowing room for renewed understanding.

His approach rests on a careful distinction between what is fixed and what is subject to change. According to him, Islam «is based on both fixed and changing rulings,» while (ijtihad) is a «distinctive feature» that enables the system to apply its established principles through different methods that change according to circumstances.[1] The fixed elements preserve identity and direction, while the changing elements accommodate the needs of different times and places. Ijtihad serves as the bridge between the two. Through this distinction, Imam Khamenei seeks to combine fidelity to tradition with the capacity to respond to the contemporary world, preserving foundational principles while allowing their practical applications to take different forms.

For him, authentic renewal means presenting religion in its true form through a language suited to the present. He praises the martyr Morteza Motahhari for having «presented authentic religious concepts» in forms appropriate to the needs of young people, without «presenting ideas foreign to the logic and content of religion under a religious guise.»[2] The renewal, in this view, involves bringing the treasures of tradition into contemporary forms while protecting religious content from distortion. This principle distinguishes genuine renewal from an artificial combination of incompatible ideas, allowing the intellectual project to preserve its authenticity while engaging with the modern world. In this way, fidelity to tradition is connected to openness to contemporary realities.

Imam Khamenei (QS) also connects the scholarly tradition to a broader civilizational responsibility. He argues that the Islamic seminary must address the interconnected triad of «government, society, and Islamic civilization.»[3] Tradition thus becomes a starting point for practical engagement with society and a resource for a broader civilizational project, rather than merely a repository of knowledge

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'The Leader's Call', p. 31.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2010), p. 180.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2019), p. 297.

to be preserved. This connection between scholarship and responsibility positions his thought as an active intellectual project rather than an exercise in abstract reflection.

This position has important methodological implications for the study of his thought. Anyone examining his philosophy of religion must relate his writings to the intellectual school in which he was formed, interpret his views within the broader tradition from which they emerged, and distinguish elements of continuity from those reflecting his own independent reasoning. Connecting the thinker to his school helps reveal the structure and sources of his thought and situates each of his positions within its wider intellectual heritage.

Civilizational Project Stake: Religion, Human and Civilizational Development

At its core, the project's stake of Imam Khamenei (QS) represents a civilizational stake. In his view, religion is not confined to rectifying doctrine or regulating acts of worship; rather, it extends to the cultivation of the individual and society, and the establishment of the foundations of a civilization. Consequently, his project should be understood as a religious vision that seeks to leave a tangible impact on reality, a vision that tests its own veracity through the flourishing of life. Understanding this stake reveals the ultimate objective of his thought, linking his intellectual inquiries to their practical fruition in the lives of both the individual and the nation.

The stake begins with the human being; in the view of Imam Khamenei (QS), the true essence of a human being lies in "knowing and worshipping the Lord, and subsequently attaining the station of nearness and vicegerency of Allah." One's innate, primordial nature (fiṭrah) serves as the "source of one's intrinsic dignity," encompassing an "inclination toward perfection, a quest for truth, a pursuit of goodness and justice, and a striving for freedom."[1] According to this perspective, the human being is a dignified creature whose very nature harbors predispositions

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2018).

toward goodness and perfection. Religion, in turn, addresses this innate nature, assisting it in reaching its ultimate purpose; thus, the cultivation of the human being serves as the fundamental gateway to building everything else.

Khamenei (QS) summarizes the objectives of the prophetic mission in a comprehensive statement: the prophets were sent to purify human beings, elevate their level of knowledge, establish justice so that society might be governed equitably, and foster a "good life."[1] These objectives link the purification of the soul with the education of the intellect, and the establishment of justice with the realization of a good life. In his view, religion is a project for the advancement of the human being, both individually and collectively. When one interprets the goals of the prophetic mission through this lens, religion emerges as a constructive force for both the individual and the community.

Khamenei (QS) posits an ultimate end for this endeavor: while he considers justice an "intermediate goal," the supreme objective is "human flourishing", the attainment of one's full perfection.[2]

The stake extends to society itself. The society envisioned by Khamenei (QS) rests upon three pillars: justice, development, and spirituality.[3] He views society as the manifestation of religion within the social realm, organizing its relationships based on justice and imbuing its development with a dimension of values. In this way, religion is transformed from a purely individual matter into an active force in the construction of society.

This stake reaches its culmination in the building of a civilization founded on well-being and public wealth, the establishment of justice, the rejection of interest-based and accumulation-driven economic systems, the defense of the oppressed,

1 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: Address on the blessed Prophetic Mission (Eid al-Mab'ath), March 11, 2021.

2 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2010), p. 476.

3 - Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2013), p. 417.

and the adoption of an ijtihad-based and scientific approach across various fields.[1] From this perspective, civilization is an all-encompassing project that connects economics with ethics, science with justice, and power with values. Religion thus becomes the animating spirit of this civilization and the standard by which its ends are measured. The civilizational stake, in turn, emerges as the natural outcome of this comprehensive conception of religion.

Khamenei (QS) establishes civilization as both a foundation and a criterion, identifying faith as the most vital element in its construction; he states, "Building a new Islamic civilization requires faith."[2] Ethics serve as both the basis and the ultimate objective of this civilization; indeed, the prophetic mission was intended to perfect noble character, and the primary concern of the prophets was the refinement of morality.[3] The faith provides civilization with its spirit, while ethics safeguard its trajectory. Thus, the civilization envisioned by Khamenei integrates power with faith, and knowledge with ethics, guiding humanity toward its ultimate perfection in both this world and the hereafter.

The coherence of the entire project is evident in this stake: the individual shaped by religion is the very same person who establishes a just society, and a society rooted in spirituality is what gives rise to civilization. These elements are interconnected within a single path, governed by religion, extending from the individual to the social sphere, and ultimately to the development of a civilization. This interconnectedness renders his vision a cohesive whole, linking its beginning to its end and tracing all grand objectives back to a single origin. Anyone examining this civilizational stake will find it to be the natural outcome of a perspective that views religion as a comprehensive worldview and a framework for managing life.

The civilizational project stake defines the objective pursued by the following

1 Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2013), p. 198.

2 Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Address of The Guardian' (2012), p. 500.

3 Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: 'Explanation of Surah Bara'ah', p. 644.

studies. Since Imam Khamenei (QS) views religion as a potent force for the development of the individual, society, and civilization, the question of the foundations of religious knowledge becomes the cornerstone of this entire edifice. How does an individual come to know their religion? From where are its standards derived? In addition, how are its texts to be understood? These questions constitute the essence of the "civilizational project stake," which these studies address, each within its own specific context.

These pages converge on a single idea: that the thought of Imam Khamenei (may his secret be sanctified) encompasses a religious vision worthy of being studied as a philosophy. While he is known to the public as a leader, behind this leadership lies a thinker rooted in a traditional seminary (hawza) and a profound philosophical heritage. He presents religion as a comprehensive worldview and a framework for organizing life, a lens through which he engages with secularism and the Western paradigm, while anchoring it in his own intellectual tradition through both continuity and independent legal/philosophical reasoning (ijtihad), all with the ultimate aim of cultivating the human being and building a civilization. Together, these elements delineate a coherent project, which the studies in this issue explore from their respective perspectives.

It remains to be said that the philosophy of religion in the thought of Imam Khamenei (QS) is a fertile field that deserves scholarly attention. Its materials are scattered throughout his speeches, lectures, and writings, awaiting someone to collect, organize, and systematically ground them in light of his philosophical school. This issue is a step in that direction: it opens the door and lays the first stone. Its achievement lies in awakening the question, preparing the intellectual horizon, and inviting researchers to carry forward the work it has begun, until the full contours of this project emerge through a coherent and sustained inquiry worthy of its significance.

This issue contained a collection of research in which we tried to collect some threads of the theory of Imam Khamenei (QS) in some topics of the philosophy

of religion. The research came in the following form:

*In "Focus" section:

-Sheikh (Dr. Mohammad Baqir Kajk - Lebanon) wrote the first paper, which is titled: "Cognitive Foundations of Religion Philosophy in Imam Khamenei (QS) Thought."

-The second paper, by (Dr. Khodr Mohammad Nabha - Lebanon), is titled: "Theological, Monotheistic Perspective in Imam Khamenei (QS) Thought: Cognitive Reading of Worldview System."

-The third paper, by (Dr. Sameer Kheir al-Din - Lebanon), is titled: "Religion, Meaning: Questions of Existence, Purpose in Imam Khamenei (QS) Thought."

-The fourth paper, which I took on personally after another researcher was unable to complete it due to urgent family circumstances, is titled: "Religion and Wilayah (Guardianship): Conceptual Structure of Spiritual, Religious Leadership in Imam Khamenei (QS) Thought."

-The fifth and final paper in this section, by (Sheikh Shadi Ali - Egypt), is titled: "Imam Khamenei (QS), Modernity: Analytical Reading from Philosophical Perspective."

*In the "Studies and Research" section, we have selected a paper by (Dr. Asmaa Nower - Egypt), titled: "Ethics of Religious Robots: Toward New Understanding of Religious Rituals in Artificial Intelligence Age."

We pray to Allah, Almighty, blessed the martyred Imam (Khamenei) (QS) with His vast mercy, to accept him in the best possible manner, to elevate him to the highest ranks, among the prophets, the saints, and the righteous, and to grant us his intercession on the Day of Judgment. He is, indeed, the Guardian who answers prayers.

Praise be to Allah, first and last.

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- Ali al-Husseini al-Khamenei: Address during a meeting with the Air Force and Air Defense Forces, February 5, 2024.
- Ali al-Husseini Khamenei: Address at a meeting with state officials and ambassadors of Islamic countries, February 8, 2024.
- Ali al-Husseini Khamenei: Address at a Ramadan meeting with state officials, March 8, 2025.