

## Testing the Revolution and the Regime with Ethical Criticisms

Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani,  
Slander and Marja'iyat

آیت‌الله سید محمد روحانی (۱۳۷۶-۱۲۹۹) شاخص‌ترین مخالف آیت‌الله خمینی و نهضت اسلامی در بین سال‌های ۱۳۴۴ تا ۱۳۵۶ در حوزه علمی نجف بوده است. روحانیون مبارز نجف معتقدند وی در مخالفت، تضعیف و ایزاء سید روح‌الله موسوی خمینی به دلیل سیاسی و انقلابی بودنش چیزی فروگذار نکرد. برخی اطرافیان آیت‌الله خمینی هم در مرداد ۱۳۴۹ و خرداد ۱۳۵۰ سه بهتان و افترای زشت به شخص آیت‌الله روحانی به شکل وسیعی منتشر کردند، که باعث شد سید روحانی از حیز انتفاع ساقط شود. متأسفانه از سوی آیت‌الله خمینی نه تنها برخورد تنبیهی مناسبی با مفتریان و جاعلان و بهتان‌زندگان صورت نگرفت، بلکه برخی از آنها مسئول تدوین تاریخ انقلاب شدند. یکی از اوراق سیاه پرونده جمهوری اسلامی در حوزه مرجعیت اعمال فشار و ممانعت از مرجعیت مرحوم آیت‌الله سید محمد روحانی است. مطابق ضوابط سنتی حوزه‌های شیعی، آن مرحوم در دهه هفتاد شمسی در مظان اعلیت بوده است. اینکه یک مجتهد نهایتاً متجزی به زور قدرت سیاسی اعلام مرجعیت کند و مانع از مرجعیت رسمی مجتهد مطلق که در مظان اعلیت است بشود از بدعت‌های جمهوری اسلامی است. با ممانعت نظام از عمل به وصیتش، جنازه وی به اعتراض در منزل مسکونیش دفن شد. این کتاب شرح قضایای آیت‌الله روحانی با انقلاب و جمهوری اسلامی در دو محور مباحثه و مرجعیت از منظر دینی و اخلاقی است.







The Dissident Ayatollahs and the Islamic Republic of Iran Series (3)

# **Testing the Revolution and the Regime with Ethical Criticisms**

Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani, Slander, and *Marja'iyat*

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Mohsen Kadivar (1959- )  
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## Introduction

Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani was one of the best-known opponents of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic movement between 1965-1977 at the Najaf Seminary. In the first five years in Najaf, he was the main force in imposing pressure and restrictions on the exiled *marja'* and the combatant clergies around him.

During the next seven years at Najaf, Ayatollah Rouhani and his companions continued to harass Ayatollah Khomeini, his son Seyyed Mostafa, and revolutionary clergies. Unfortunately, in August 1970 and June 1971, some of Ayatollah Khomeini's companions also defamed Ayatollah Rouhani with three unsettling fabrications, stripping Ayatollah Rouhani away from his position of service.

Two young revolutionary clergymen forged a check from the Rafidian Bank in Iraq, signed from the Iranian government to Ayatollah Rouhani in August 1970. They claimed that the mailman had mistakenly delivered the check to one of these two clergies. However, they had written the amount in Iranian currency (*Rials*), instead of the Iraqi *Dinar*, revealing the scam. In June 1971, two Iranian publications for college students in Europe claimed that Ayatollah Rouhani Qomi was "one of the mercenaries for Iran's spying agency in Najaf" at the center of "a network in charge of assassinating Ayatollah Khomeini" and was discovered by the government of Iraq. The sources of this information were the combatant clergy of Najaf. All three accusations were untrue and purely fabricated lies. After these defamatory accusations from Ayatollah Khomeini's circle, Ayatollah Rouhani's companions reacted by calling Ayatollah Khomeini's circle communists, members of the *Tudeh* party (the Iranian communist party), liberals, and supporters of Mosaddeq.

Ayatollah Rouhani and a group of other Ulama were deported by Iraq's government in the winter of 1976 and were forced to reside in Qom. Although he continued to oppose Ayatollah Khomeini and the Revolution, no opinions or political activities from him have been recorded in the last twenty years of his life.

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### Ayatollah Rouhani's Scientific Authority

Ayatollah Rouhani's family was one of the oldest and most respected families of Qom. He was a descendant of Ayatollah Seyyed Sadegh Rouhani, who was one of the best-known and most-loved *marja's* of Qom. His father, Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud Rouhani, was involved in inviting Ayatollah Abdolkarim Ha'eri Yazdi and founding the seminary in Qom. He wrote an open letter to Ayatollah Kashani in supporting the nationalization of the Iranian Oil Industry in 1950. Seyyed Mahmoud left three sons behind: Mohammad, Mohammad Sadegh, and Mahdi, in order of age.

Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani is the subject of this book. Sayyed Sadegh Rouhani was a revolutionary *marja'* until 1985 and later lived under house arrest for 14 years by the order of the Islamic Republic! He is now an ultra-traditionalist, heavily self-published *marja'* in Qom.

Mahdi was one of the clergies who worked for the Shah's security forces. He was related to the royal family and from 1958 was the editor of a journal titled "Islam's Insight" in Paris as the religious representative of Shi'is in Europe. Supposedly, he passed away in Paris in 2000. The three brothers had three very different and independent approaches to the Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani (1920-1997) was one of the stars of jurisprudential methodology (*'usul al-fiqh*) in Ja'fari Shi'ism in the twentieth century. He also trained some of the *marja'-e taqlids* (Shi'ite authorities), including Seyyed Mohammad Baghir al-Sadr, Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, and Bashir Hussein al-Najafi. He also trained some of the contemporary senior *faqihs*, such as Seyyed Abdulsahib al-Hakim, Mohammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, and Mohammad Sadiq al-Jafari. His innovative contemplations in *fiqh* and its methods have been published by his students in two books, *Muntaqa al-'Usul (Selected 'Usul)* (7 Volumes) and *al-Murtaqa fi al-Fiqh al-Arqa (Ascent to Advanced Fiqh)* (8 volumes until now).

Ayatollah Rouhani was born in 1920 in Qom and moved to Najaf in 1936. In 1977, he was deported from Iraq along with some other scholars. He lived in Qom for the last twenty years of his life and, eventually, was buried there as well. He began his education in Qom and finished his intermediate (*sath*) courses in Karbala. From 1938, he began his pupillage in advanced courses at the Najaf Seminary under

Ayatollas Mohammad Hussein Gharawi Isfahani (Kumpani), Mohammad Ali Kazemini, Mohammad Reza Aal Yaseen, Mohammad Kazim Shirazi, and Seyyed Abulqasim Musawi Khoie. He began to teach advanced courses in *fiqh* and *'usul* in the 1950's in Najaf, with *mujatahid* students numbering in the hundreds.

*Montaqa al-'Usul (Selected 'Usul)*, which was edited by his distinguished student Seyyed Abdulsahib al-Hakim (the son of Seyyed Mohsen al-Hakim, martyred by Saddam Hussein), is the most important book on *'Usul al-fiqh* in Shi'ism in the recent century. His students have published the following expositions based on his collection on demonstrative *fiqh*, *al-Murtaqa fi al-Fiqh al-Arqai: al-Zakat*, written by Mohammad Sadiq al-Jafari (3 volumes); *al-Khums* (1 volume), *al-Hajj* (2 volumes), and *Khiyarat al-Makasib* (two volumes), all written by Seyyed Abdulsahib al-Hakim.

Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani was one of the highest ranking of Shi'i *'Usuli faqih* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the most learned among the students of Ayatollah Khoie, who passed away five years after death of his mentor.

### **The Islamic Republic's Interference in the matter of *Marja'iyat***

In retaliation with Ayatollah Rouhani, the Islamic Republic created an unpleasant atmosphere for him in Qom. With Ayatollah Khoie's passing in August 1992 and especially after Ayatollah Sabzevari's passing in August 1993, Ayatollah Rouhani had the best chance of *marja'iyat* among Khoie's students. The office of Ayatollah Sistani believes that, during Ayatollah Mustanbit's passing, he was chosen as Khoie's successor 7 years before the mentor's death. The most important obstacle for Ayatollah Rouhani's *marja'iyat*, despite his superior knowledge, was increasing pressure from the Islamic Republic.

After announcing *Hojjatol-Eslam wa al-Moslemin* Seyyed Ali Khamenei's *marja'iyat* from two state formations in the Association of the Instructors at the Qom Seminary and the Association of Combatant Clergy of Tehran in December 1994, restrictions and pressures on independent *marja's* increased in an apparent manner. The Ministry of Intelligence's Division of Monitoring Shi'ite Authorities banned the publication and distribution of catechisms (*Resaleye Tozih al-Massa'il*) written by Ayatollahs Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani, Sayyed Sadegh Rouhani, and Seyyed



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Mohammad Shirazi and attacked Ayatollah Montazeri's *hosseyniye* and office. At this time, Ayatollah Seyyed Hassan Tabatabayi Qomi in Mashhad and Ayatollah Seyyed Sadeq Rouhani in Qom were under house arrest for criticizing the state, which was against the law.

In February 1994, the authorities threatened Ayatollah Rouhani that he was not allowed any activity related to *marja'iyat*. The officers were not able to get a written agreement from him and were convinced by his verbal agreement.

Ayatollah Rouhani fell from his position of service in the following ways:

1. A decline in the number of his students to one-twentieth of the average number of students in similar courses, due to pressures and defamation.
2. Prohibition on publishing and distributing his catechisms.
3. Banning receipts for payments received from his office and attorneys for *Shari'a* funds received.
4. Refusing to pay stipends to his seminarians, despite the availability of funds.
5. Canceling his unofficial mission to *hajj*
6. Prohibiting the media from publishing material about him.

Even though he was able to travel to England when he became ill in the summer of 1996, he passed away in Qom in August 1997 from internal bleeding at 77.

His political imitations continued even after his death. The regime did not allow his will to be executed and did not allow him to be buried next to his father. According to his secondary will, he was then buried in his home in Qom. Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani was present at his burial. Ayatollahs Bahjat, Montazeri, and Makarem hurried to offer their condolences to his family and Ayatollah Sistani sent a telegram.

The only thing that was cleared for publications in the history of the Islamic Republic about him was the announcement of his death in the obituaries section! Fifty-five of the best-known clergy in Tehran, including Seyyed Zia' al-Din AstarAbadi, Seyyed Razi Shirazi, and Mohammad Baqer Lavasani published an ad in which they strongly admired him in their message of condolence.

### Research Questions

In this book, based on existing evidence, I have tried to examine:

1. The mutual interactions between Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Rouhani and Seyyed Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini's offices during the 1960s and 1970s in Najaf.
2. The Islamic Republic's confrontation with Ayatollah Rouhani from 1978 to 1992.
3. Factors that contributed to the prohibition placed on Ayatollah Rouhani's *marja'iyat* in the 1990s (1992-1997).

My main question concerns the relationship of morality and religion with politics and corporate competition among the top-ranked, contemporary Shi'i jurists. This research, in continuation of earlier work on Seyyed Kazem Shari'atmadari and Ahmad Azari Qomi, hopes to answer the following key question: What has the Islamic Republic, and more specifically its leaders, done with its opponents and critics?

Based on existing sources, Ayatollah Rouhani did everything he could to weaken, oppose, and harass Ayatollah Khomeini because of his political and revolutionary tendencies. Based on this evidence, there is no doubt about Ayatollah Rouhani's cruelty toward Ayatollah Khomeini. However, Ayatollah Khomeini's circle accused Ayatollah Rouhani of three defamatory and fabricated crimes. I ask the following questions: How did the movement's leader, who was a teacher of morality, mysticism, and jurisprudence, deal with his slandering companions and with their fabrications, which destroyed his opponent's position of service? When did the revolutionary clergy realize their mistake and did they try to restore the reputation they had destroyed? Did they ever confess to the wrong they had done and seek forgiveness? Were the liars ever punished or were they applauded and promoted? Were fabrication and defamation for the sake of the Revolution exceptions or did they turn into norms? Is considering the advancement of the movement and maintenance of the regime to be priorities give them the right to fabricate defamatory slanders and act in immoral and un-Islamic ways? Is defaming the critics of the Leadership and the regime now have left the regime or is it still the style of the Islamic Republic?

In the first section, I conclude that the Najaf Seminary did not receive satisfactory grades in the level of *marja'iyat* in practical morality between 1965 and 1977. Ayatollah Rouhani and his companions failed to "promote good and prevent evil" concerning the

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Shah's oppressive regime and were unjust towards combatants, especially Ayatollah Khomeini. Because of this, some of Ayatollah Khomeini's companions tried to defeat Ayatollah Khomeini's opponent with defamatory fabrications. Unfortunately, not only was no punishment determined for the slanderers from Ayatollah Khomeini, but they assumed important roles in compiling the history of the Revolution as well. The Revolution was not honored in this ethical testing.

In the second section, I ask the following questions: According to what Islamic principles did the Islamic Republic announce the *marj'ayat* of a junior clergy (*al-mujtahid al-mutijazz'i*) and prevented the *marja'iyyat* of a senior clergy (*al-mujtahid al-mutlaq*) who was among the most learned *mujtahids*? Are there any precedents for prohibiting the publication and distribution of a *mujtahid's* book of *fatwa*, preventing the distribution of clergy stipends, and banning the issuance of a receipt for *shari'a* funds received from a *mujtahid* or his representatives in the history of Shi'ism? Do these innovations have precedents in the history of Shi'ism?

According to what Islamic principles did the jurist rulers of Iran deny the right to be buried according to their wills to the dissident Ayatollahs Shari'atmadari, Mohammad Rouhani, Mohammad Shirazi and Taheri Isfahani in violation of their wills?

### Sources and Limitations of this Research

There has not yet been any work done on this topic, as far as I know. Ayatollah Rouhani and other critics are supposed to remain overlooked in the recent history of Iran. Silence and political inactivity in the last two decades of Ayatollah Rouhani's life and his students' unwillingness to comment on political matters, in addition to their lack of security, might aid this oversight. The only things left are the collection of books on the history of the Islamic Revolution and the memoirs of Ayatollah Khomeini's companions from that time. These books are largely published by the *Markaz-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Athr-e Emam Khomeini* (The Center for the Collection and Publication of Emam Khomeini's Works) and *Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (the Center for the Islamic Republic's Documents) in Tehran.

I am aware of the shortcomings of such memoirs, but their critical comparison produce important and undeniable points. None of the

sources have been mentioned without a critical examination. All of these sources belong to Ayatollah Khomeini's school. Nothing has been published from the opponent's side, and those who align with that side are neither safe nor willing to speak freely about this issue. A handful of sources from Ayatollah Rouhani's school are often oral and, unfortunately, most are anonymous. Some sources also lie between the two schools.

If I were able to travel to Qom and Najaf, and to speak with those who were present at the time, this research would be a little bit richer. Either way, I have refrained from relying on speculations and unsupported hearsay and share my sources with any interested readers. In case I did not find a reliable source, I have refrained from storytelling and have highlighted matters that are in need of further research. Considering the serious insufficiency of published sources on this topic, we should be thankful for this first, albeit limited, step. I hope that other researchers will complete this work. Paying attention to the Islamic Republic's investment and organization for distorting the recent history of Iran and Shi'ism, reserving and distorting the truth, and omitting critics and opponents from the pages of history, I ask knowledgeable readers to address the shortcomings of this research and shed light on the truth with their comments and criticisms.

Fortunately, many of the combatant clergymen in Najaf, some members of the office of referendum office of Ayatollah Khomeini, other companions of Ayatollah Khomeini on one hand and the companions of Ayatollah Rouhani on the other, and witnesses of those time are still alive. I ask them to publish their own knowledge and work in relation to this research.

### **The Immediacy of this Research**

There is no need to justify the importance of shedding light on a truth that has been so foundational to the lives of Iranians. Many of the Islamic Republic's current problems are rooted in its past endeavors. Many aspects of this regime's history are ambiguous. This ambiguity has resulted in many misunderstandings.

The Islamic Republic has suffered from big deviations in some areas. It has been intolerant and impatient with critics and opponents, even non-militants. But was morality a priority for the revolutionaries and combatants before coming to power? This is an important

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question. It is evident that I do not mean writing and teaching morality. If we are witness to immorality, defamation, and slander toward well-intentioned critics and opponents of the Islamic republic, have we not the right to ask when this improper behavior started? When the revolutionaries came to power, even during the genesis of the Islamic Republic, were they not so dedicated to moral behavior?

The discussions in “The Dissident Ayatollahs and the Islamic Republic of Iran Series” are about the genealogy of the Revolution and the Islamic Republic from the perspective of its political ethics.

The Revolution of 1978-1979 is a part of my life and I have the right to know on what I have spent my youth. Ayatollah Khomeini was my *marja'-e taqlid* during my youth. It is my right to know how he has observed practical and moral behavior toward his opponents and critics. A critical interpretation of moral and political relations, especially at the highest levels of Shi'i *marja'iyat*, whether from the righteous revolutionaries or righteous anti-revolutionaries, is a difficult task.

It might be said that it is better not to publish these wrongdoings. I do not agree. Especially when these wrongdoings have become the dominant procedures of our time and are introduced as models of Islam and Shi'ism, we have no choice but to review them honestly. What is damaged with such research is definitely not the truth, religion, or morality.

Politics has been the steersman in recent Islam, especially Shi'ism. Rereading these important pages from our recent history answer another important question for me. Have Islam and Shi'ism benefited or been damaged from becoming political? To what extent have political relations and interests determined our understanding of religion?

This research has many marginal epistemic benefits. My generation needs to contemplate and study this path. I know that some will be upset by this research. But I know that a truth more dear than them will be clarified. Undoubtedly, time will reveal its harsh judgment of the coming to power of the clergy in Iran and the process of this change. It would be better if we, before others, were to review and interpret our times fairly.

**Mohsen Kadivar**

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