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# The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The sovereignty of God and related ideas have had a prominent place in Islamist discourses. Key figures like Mawdudi of Pakistan and Qutb of Egypt have argued that anything less than exclusive submission to God's law, and all that it necessitates in religious and political terms, is idolatry. Yet the idea of the sovereignty of God has been invoked by many more people than the Islamists, and it has meant quite different things in different quarters. Focusing on South Asia, this paper seeks to shed some new light on the provenance of this idea, on how and to what purpose it has been deployed in religious and political argument, and what the debates on it might tell us about rival conceptions of Islam.*

The Qur'an speaks repeatedly of the power, the authority, and the majesty of God. As the Qur'anic Joseph reminds his fellow inmates, "Authority (*al-hukm*) belongs to God alone" (Q 12.40), and we are told elsewhere that it is God's prerogative to give authority (*al-mulk*) to whom He will and to take it away at His pleasure (cf. Q 3.26).<sup>2</sup> From passages to this effect, it is not a big leap to the idea of the sovereignty of God. Some translators have, indeed, rendered the Qur'anic term *al-mulk* as sovereignty. A notable example of this is Marmaduke Pickthall (d. 1936), the English convert to Islam who published his translation of the Qur'an while in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, one of the many Indian princes recognised as quasi-independent by the British colonial regime.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is no mere quibbling to observe that the idea of sovereignty has a very particular history in European political thought and that it emerged in tandem with the rise of the modern state. Whatever terms like *al-hukm* and *al-mulk* meant to medieval commentators of the Qur'an, they could not have meant what "sovereignty" meant to, say, Jean Bodin (d. 1596) or Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679).<sup>4</sup> To many

<sup>1</sup>An earlier, much condensed, version of this paper was presented at a conference in honour of Michael Cook in Bergen, Norway, in June 2014 on the occasion of his receiving the Holberg Prize. I thank Said Amir Arjomand, Eric Gregory, M. Şükrü Hanioglu, and Hossein Modarressi for answering my queries on particular points in this paper, and Michael Cook for his comments.

<sup>2</sup>With modifications, as needed, I follow the translation of M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford, 2004). The term authority is broad and evocative enough to serve as a convenient rendering of both Arabic terms here.

<sup>3</sup>Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (New York, 1930), p. 598 (rendering the title of Q 67 as "The Sovereignty"). The translation was dedicated to the Nizam.

<sup>4</sup>Needless to say, Bodin and Hobbes had quite different conceptions of sovereignty and both differed from other early modern theorists writing on this matter. For a brief survey, to which I am indebted here, see Quentin Skinner, "The Sovereign State: A Genealogy" in Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 26–46.

Muslims of the twentieth century, writing under the threat or the promise of the modern state, the idea of sovereignty does, however, conjure up precisely the sort of things that a Bodin or a Hobbes had theorised about, and the question for them has often been whether such sovereignty can belong to a mere human being, a collectivity of people, the “artificial person” of the state, or whether it properly belongs only to God.<sup>5</sup> In influential formulations, twentieth-century Islamist ideologues like Sayyid Abul-A`la Mawdudi (d. 1979) of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) of Egypt have argued, for instance, that anything less than exclusive submission to God’s law and all that it entails in religious and political terms is idolatry—the most heinous of sins in a monotheist’s universe.

How did this idea become such a crucial part of Islamist discourses? As will be observed, the Islamists are not the only Muslims with whom this idea has resonated, and it is worth also asking what it has meant in other Muslim quarters. How, and to what purpose, has it been invoked in religious and political argument, and what might the contestations over it tell us about competing conceptions of law and ethics, and of Islam itself, in the modern world? Before turning to an examination of such questions, it seems necessary to take a quick measure of the sort of things pre-modern commentators discussed when they explained passages that Islamist ideologues take as central to the idea of the sovereignty of God.<sup>6</sup>

### The Medieval Tradition

Pre-modern exegetes understand the *mulk* of Q 3.26 and other such passages in a variety of ways. It refers, according to some, to God’s response to the Prophet Muhammad’s prayer that dominion over Persia and Byzantium be given to his people.<sup>7</sup> Others understood it as the faith and the ability to submit to God (*al-islam*) that He grants to whom He wills, or as prophetic authority,<sup>8</sup> whereby God honours those who follow the prophet and debases those who do not.<sup>9</sup> Some commentators report, in discussing Q 3.26, that the `Abbasid caliph Ma`mun (r. 813–33) had seen an inscription in a Byzantine palace which read, in Arabic translation: “In the name of God: With the alternation of the day and night and the rotation of the celestial bodies in the heavenly sphere, felicity (*al-na`im*) passes from a king whose rule has ended to another king. But the king possessing the [real] throne is everlasting; He does not die and has no partner”.<sup>10</sup> As the hadith scholar and Qur’an commentator Baghawi (d. 1122) notes in explicating this verse: “God has said in one of His books: ‘I am God, the king of kings and the master of kings. The hearts of kings and their forelocks are in my hand. If my servants obey me, I make the kings a mercy for them; and if they disobey me, I make the kings a punishment for them. So do not concern yourself with reviling the kings

<sup>5</sup>On the idea of the “Artificial person” as Hobbes articulated it, see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (ed.) Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1996), Chapter 16, pp. 111–115; Skinner, “The Sovereign State,” pp. 35–37.

<sup>6</sup>The pre-modern exegetical tradition is of course vast, as is the corpus of the modern commentaries. The examples I adduce here are illustrative of some broad trends in this literature on the questions under consideration, though no such sample can claim to represent the full range of the relevant opinions.

<sup>7</sup>al-Tabari, *Jami` al-bayan*, 30 vols. (Cairo, 1954–68), iii, p. 222; al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami` li-ahkam al-Qur’an*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-katib al-`Arabi, 1967), iv, pp. 52, 54; al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-kabir*, 32 vols. (Tehran, n.d.), viii, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Tabari, *Jami`*, iii, p. 222; Razi, *al-Tafsir*, viii, pp. 5–6; Qurtubi, *al-Jami`*, iv, p. 55; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-`azim*, ed. Mustafa al-Sayyid Muhammad *et al.*, 15 vols. (Giza, 2000), iii, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup>Qurtubi, *al-Jami`*, xviii, p. 206 (commentary on Q 67.1).

<sup>10</sup>Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, iii, p. 42 (commentary on Q. 3.26).

but turn instead towards me and I will dispose them favourably towards you”.<sup>11</sup> Though God’s granting of political authority might be foregrounded, as it was in these instances, *al-mulk*, at its broadest, could be construed to mean possession and control of all kinds of desirable things that God bestows upon select people: “the endowment of prophethood, the possession of knowledge, intellect, health and praiseworthy dispositions, power and the ability to implement [things], the power of love, and the possession of wealth”.<sup>12</sup> Yet other things could be, and were often, added to this already expansive list, for instance, the mystical powers that God grants to His saintly “friends”.<sup>13</sup>

As will be seen, the Qur’an’s affirmation that “authority (*al-hukm*) belongs to God alone” (Q 12.40 & 67)<sup>14</sup> receives keen attention from modern Islamists, but the medieval exegetes are not equally excited by the idea. The influential tenth-century historian and Qur’an commentator Tabari (d. 923) understands it to mean simply that God alone is to be worshipped;<sup>15</sup> and the noted Andalusian exegete Qurtubi (d. 1273) offers a gloss—God “is the creator of everything”—and quickly moves on.<sup>16</sup> The phrase reappears again in the same chapter, and this time Tabari glosses *al-hukm* as “judgment” and Qurtubi likewise explains it as “command and judgment” (*al-amr wal-qada*) but neither takes more interest in it than he did earlier.<sup>17</sup> The historian and Qur’an commentator Ibn Kathir (d. 1373), for his part, explains *al-hukm* as “the power of disposal, will, and authority (*al-tasarruf wal-mashi’a wal-mulk*), all of which belongs to God”.<sup>18</sup>

For some exegetes, Qur’anic passages such as the foregoing also raise important theological questions. The aforementioned Baghawi has already shown us a glimpse of this. The theologian Fakhr al-din al-Razi (d. 1210) understands the Qur’an’s affirmation that “authority belongs to God alone” to argue against the idea of free will and to affirm that all possibilities are determined exclusively by God rather than by human agency.<sup>19</sup> He argues likewise that it is not because of a person’s merit that God grants him royal authority but rather that all authority comes from God, irrespective of the virtue of the one holding it.<sup>20</sup>

Theological issues are also foregrounded in medieval juridical discussions of the idea that “there is no authority (*al-hakim*) other than God, the exalted, and that there is no command other than what God has commanded”. To the jurist Amidi (d. 1232), this entails that “the intellect cannot characterise anything as good or bad nor does [the intellect suffice to] demonstrate the necessity of showing gratitude towards a benefactor. There is no command

<sup>11</sup> al-Baghawi, *Tafsir al-Baghawi, Ma’alim al-tanzil*, (ed.) Muhammad `Abdallah al-Nimr *et al.* 8 vols. (Riyadh, 1993), ii, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Razi, *al-Tafsir*, viii, p. 7 (commentary on Q 3.26).

<sup>13</sup> Ruzbihan al-Baqli, *Ara’is al-bayan*, (ed.) Ahmad Farid al-Mizyadi, 3 vols. (Beirut, 2008), i, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase also occurs in Q 6.57.

<sup>15</sup> Tabari, *Jami`*, xii, p. 220. Also see Thana Allah Panipati (d. 1810), *Tafsir-i mazhari*, translated from Persian into Urdu by Sayyid `Abd al-Da’im al-Jalali, 6 vols. (Delhi, 1962), vi, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Qurtubi, *al-Jami`*, ix, p. 192. Cf. *ibid.*, vi, p. 439, where, commenting on Q 6.57, he understands it to mean that God alone decides whether to delay or hasten punishment for the wrongdoers.

<sup>17</sup> Tabari, *Jami`*, xiii, p. 14; Qurtubi, *al-Jami`*, ix, p. 228.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, viii, p. 43 (commentary on Q 12.40).

<sup>19</sup> Razi, *al-Tafsir*, xviii, p. 175 (commentary on Q 12.67).

<sup>20</sup> Razi, *al-Tafsir*, viii, pp. 7–8 (commentary on Q 3.26). This was also the view of the proponents of the divine right of kings in English constitutional history. See Skinner, “The Sovereign State,” p. 30 (citing Sir John Hayward, *An Answer to the First Part of a Certain Conference, Concerning Succession* [1603]).

prior to the advent of the divine law”.<sup>21</sup> The eighteenth-century Indian scholar Muhibb Allah Bihari (d. 1708) brings out the theological stakes of the idea that “there is no command (*al-hukm*) except from God” more clearly. He writes:

There is no disagreement on whether an act is rationally good or bad in the sense of its having perfection or deficiency or of its being suited or unsuited to a worldly matter. The disagreement is only on whether the intellect can tell us if an act deserves God’s praise and reward or if only the divine law can do so. According to the Ash`aris, it is only through the divine law that one knows this. What God commands is good, what He forbids is bad. If the situation were reversed, so would the values in question. To us [Maturidis] and to the Mu`tazila, this can be known through the intellect, that is, it does not depend on the divine law. Our difference with the Mu`tazila, the Imamiyya [and others] . . . is that we do not consider it necessary for God to command what the intellect points to; rather we believe that what the intellect prefers is what deserves to be commanded by the wise God, for He does not prefer the less desirable. Yet there is no command unless God commands it.<sup>22</sup>

In short, God’s authority and power, as the medieval exegetes, jurists, and theologians understood them, could mean a whole range of things. As should be clear from the foregoing illustrations, the point is not that kings and rulers were outside the purview of this authority, but rather that God was often seen to be the source of everything and, by that token, of political power as well. This range continues to be well-represented in the work of many traditionally-educated scholars, the ulama, of early modern and modern times. For instance, the early twentieth-century Urdu commentary of the Indian scholar Amir `Ali Malihabadi (d. 1919) gives pride of place to Sufi understandings of Q 3.26 without, however, neglecting varied other ways of understanding this passage, including God’s statement “in one of His books” that he is “the king of kings and the master of kings”.<sup>23</sup>

Yet there are signs of change too, and this is illustrated by the Cairo-based Syrian journalist and scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) in his unfinished but influential commentary on the Qur’an. Rida interprets Q 3.26 in a manner that foregrounds the political in speaking of God, “the wielder of supreme power and [enjoying] unrestricted action” (*sahib al-sultan al-a`la wal-tasarruf al-mutlaq*).<sup>24</sup> God gives power to people as He wishes—by way of descent from a prophetic lineage, as in case of the descendants of Abraham, or, Rida says in evoking Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), through the working of sociological laws. And God takes it away from people when they begin to violate the principles of good rulership.<sup>25</sup> Like many of

<sup>21</sup> al-Amidi, *al-Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1347 AH [1929]), i, p. 41; quoted in Urdu translation in Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi, “Hakim-i haqiqi sirf Allah ta`ala hai” in idem, *Maqalat-i Sulayman*, ed. Shah Mu`in al-din Nadwi (A`zamgarh, 1971), iii, p. 366–388, at 381. Mawdudi also quotes Amidi, whom he takes to say that “Allah is the Sovereign and no command is worthy of obedience except that which is given by Him”. Sayyid Abul A`la Mawdudi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Lahore, 1960), p. 275.

<sup>22</sup> Muhibb Allah al-Bihari, *Musallam al-thubut* (Cairo, 1908), pp. 16–17 (al-maqala al-thaniya fi`l-ahkam); quoted in Urdu translation in Sulayman Nadwi, “Hakim-i haqiqi”, pp. 385–386.

<sup>23</sup> Amir Ali Malihabadi, *Tafsir mawahib al-Rahman*, 30 vols. (Lucknow, 1926–31), iii, pp. 146–151. For some other examples, see Panipati, *Tafsir*, ii, pp. 208–212; al-Alusi (d. 1854), *Ruh al-ma`ani*, 30 vols. (Beirut, 1970), iii, pp. 112–114; Siddiq Hasan Khan (d. 1890), *Fath al-bayan fi maqasid al-Qur’an*, (ed.) `Abdallah ibn Ibrahim al-Ansari, 15 vols. (Beirut, 1992), ii, p. 211.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-hakim, al-shahir bi-Tafsir al-manar*, 12 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cairo, 1947–54), iii, p. 270 (commenting on Q 3.26).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270–271.

his predecessors, Rida notes that *al-mulk* can also refer to prophetic authority, but he adds that, when it does, the authority in question is superior to others since it involves power not merely over bodies but also over souls.<sup>26</sup> In a biting swipe at the many Muslim rulers propped up in his time by their colonial masters, Rida notes furthermore that there is no necessary correlation between authority and glory (*al-'izz*), for it is possible for one to pretend to be a king while being at the mercy of others—rather like those assuming such roles in a theatrical performance.<sup>27</sup> All this could be rephrased to say that real sovereignty and mere pretensions to power are very different things and that true sovereignty belongs only to God. Rida does not, however, use that language, which indeed is “completely absent in [the] *Tafsir al-Manar*”.<sup>28</sup> But it was not long before the Islamists began to use it, and to spell out the implications of God’s authority and what was entailed by the imperative to submit to it.<sup>29</sup>

### Islamist Discourses

With Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), it is indeed possible to speak of God’s power and authority in terms of sovereignty and Qutb does so with great rhetorical effect. Commenting on Q 12.40, which he takes to be of key significance in elucidating the Qur’anic conception of God, Qutb writes:

Authority belongs to the exalted God exclusively by virtue of His divinity. For sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*) is among the characteristic features of divinity. Whoever lays a claim to sovereignty—whether it is an individual, a class, a party, an institution, a community or humanity at large in the form of an international organisation—disputes the primary characteristic of His divinity. And whoever does so is guilty of unbelief in the most blatant manner. . . . Laying claim to this right [to sovereignty] does not necessarily take a particular form, which alone might be deemed to remove the claimant from the fold of ‘the true faith’ (*al-din al-qayyim* [Q 12.40]) . . . . Rather, one lays claim to it . . . simply by . . . deriving laws from a source other than [God] . . . . In the Islamic system, it is the community that chooses the ruler, thereby giving him the legal right to exercise authority according to God’s law. But [this community] is not the source of sovereignty which gives the law its legality. God alone is the source of sovereignty. Many people, including Muslim scholars, tend to confuse the exercise of power and the source of power. Even the aggregate of humanity does not have the right to sovereignty, which God alone possesses.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270; cf. *ibid.*, p. 271. Rida here follows his mentor, the modernist scholar Muhammad ‘Abduh, whose influence pervades this commentary.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271, again following ‘Abduh.

<sup>28</sup> Olivier Carré, *Mysticism and Politics: A Critical Reading of Fi Zilal al-Qur’an by Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966)*, trans. Carol Artigues (Leiden, 2003), p. 202.

<sup>29</sup> A noteworthy earlier discussion of the idea of the sovereignty of God in the context of Pakistani constitutional debates is Manzooruddin Ahmed, *Pakistan: The Emerging Islamic State* (Karachi, 1966). This book is based on the author’s PhD dissertation titled “The Concept of Divine Sovereignty in Pakistan,” Columbia University, Department of Political Science, 1960. The study, written from a Muslim liberal perspective, is useful in showing how the idea of divine sovereignty figured in the early constitutional history of Pakistan, but it does not do much towards putting the development of this idea in an historical context. Instead, it examines it as a way of showing how Pakistan’s first constitution, of 1956, “was successful in bringing about the synthesis between Islamic principles and the Western institutions” (*ibid.*, p. 244). For other discussions of divine sovereignty, see Carré, *Mysticism*, 192–194 and passim; Sayed Khatab, *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Qutb* (London, 2006), esp. pp. 7–46; Andrew F. March, “Genealogies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Theology”, *Social Research*, LXXX (2013), pp. 293–321; and Jan-Peter Hartung, *A System of Life: Mawdudi and the Ideologisation of Islam* (New York, 2014), pp. 100–110, 205–209. Also see n. 33, below.

People only [have the right to] implement what God has laid down with His authority. As for what He has not laid down, it has neither authority nor legality.<sup>30</sup>

This is a decidedly modern view of God's supreme power and authority. For one thing, the very term Qutb uses for sovereignty—*hakimiyya*—is a neologism, though it is derived from the aforementioned Qur'anic term *hukm*, which is usually rendered as authority or judgment. Second, as the passage just quoted makes clear, Qutb really does have sovereignty as a political concept in mind when he speaks of God as the exclusive locus and source of all power. This idea of the sovereignty of God lies at the heart of Islamist conceptions of the state, of the law, and of Islam itself. Thus an Islamic state is one that is based on the recognition of God's sovereignty; this recognition entails that no law other than God's is to have any claim on people, that any failure to submit to this conception of the sovereignty of God is unbelief. The Qur'an does say that "those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are unbelievers" (Q 5.44), "wrongdoers" (Q 5.45) and "ungodly" (Q 5.47). But medieval scholars have been far from clear on precisely what it means not to judge or rule according to God's law. And in the first years of the twentieth century, Rashid Rida had been of the view that it was legitimate for a Muslim judge to rule according to *British* colonial laws. In other words, even if Rida had some hazy notion of the sovereignty of God, he did not think that it entailed the illegitimacy of all "man-made laws". The query to which Rida was responding in this instance had come from India. In his answer, Rida had invoked the idea of the common good (*maslaha*) to argue that a Muslim judge could advance the interests of his co-religionists better by serving under the British than by refusing to do so, and that working in this capacity was not covered by the Qur'anic prohibition in the aforementioned verses.<sup>31</sup> Sayyid Qutb and other Islamists clearly had a very different view of the matter.<sup>32</sup>

It has often been observed that Qutb's ideas on the sovereignty of God are much indebted to those of Sayyid Abul-A'la Mawdudi (d. 1979), the founder of the Jama'at-i Islami and one of the most influential Islamist ideologues of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Mawdudi had begun his career as a journalist and religious intellectual in colonial India, and he had started speaking of the sovereignty of God from the late 1930s. In a work on "the political concept of Islam" first published in 1939, Mawdudi adduced passages like Q 12.40 and Q 5.44 to argue that "sovereignty (*hakimiyyat*) rests only with God. God alone is the law-giver. No

<sup>30</sup>Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an*, 6 vols. (Beirut, 1974), iv, p. 1990 (commentary on Q 12.40). On his sense of the significance of Q 12.40, see *ibid.*, pp. 1989, 1991. For another rendering of the passage quoted here, see Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, translated by M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis, 18 vols. (Leicester, 1999–), x, pp. 76–77.

<sup>31</sup>See *al-Manar* (Cairo, 1904), vii, pp. 577–580; reprinted in Rida, *Tafsir al-manar*, vi, pp. 405–409 (commenting on Q 5. 44ff.). The request for the fatwa had come from Mawlawi Nur al-din of the Punjab, whom I take to be the person who came to lead the Ahmadi community after the death of its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908). On Nur al-din (d. 1914), see Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 13–14.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Qutb, *Zilal*, ii, p. 898 (commenting on Q 5. 44).

<sup>33</sup>For instance in Leonard Binder's, *Islamic Liberalism* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 174–177; Carré, *Mysticism*, 25; Hartung, *A System of Life*, pp. 100–105, 205–209. Also see Hasan al-Hudaybi, *Du'at la qudat* (Cairo, Dar al-tiba' wal-nashr al-Islamiyya, n.d. [1977]), pp. 16ff., 63–65, 72–73. Putatively written by the leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (1951–73), this work is highly critical of Qutb (who is not mentioned by name), though rather less so of Mawdudi, who is mentioned and some of whose ideas Hudaybi takes to have been misinterpreted by others (*ibid.*, pp. 72–73). On Hudaybi and this work, see Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London, 2009).



human being, not even a prophet, has the right to command and prohibit on his own".<sup>34</sup> To leave no doubt about exactly what he meant, but also perhaps to flaunt his familiarity with Western political thought, Mawdudi here gave the words "sovereignty" and "law-giver" in the original English. In a work published two years later, Mawdudi developed the idea of the sovereignty of God further. He argued that "power (*iqtidar*) is the true spirit of divinity",<sup>35</sup> that this power is indivisible,<sup>36</sup> that its "indivisibility entails that all forms of sovereignty and rule (*hakimiyyat wa farmanrawa'i*) should be concentrated in one supreme being",<sup>37</sup> and that no one can have any say in His "kingdom's organisation" (*intizam-i sultanat*).<sup>38</sup> Mawdudi continued:

If a person considers anyone's command to be binding without its carrying the support of God's command, then that person is guilty of associating partners with God in the very same manner as does someone who directs his prayers to other than God. If anyone claims in a political sense to be 'the holder of all control' [(*malik al-mulk*) Q 3.26], the sovereign (*muqtadir-i a'la*) and the absolute ruler (*hakim `alal-ittlaq*), then his is a claim to divinity in just the same manner as the claim of someone, in metaphysical terms, that he is that person's [ultimate] master, deity (*karsaz*), support, and protector.<sup>39</sup>

This was well before Qutb had begun speaking in this vein. How Mawdudi's ideas were transmitted to the Arab world is a point I will take up later. First, however, it is worth examining how Mawdudi may have come upon this idea of the sovereignty of God. This is a question that seems not to have been asked either by scholars of Islamism or by those who have studied Mawdudi's thought. Most scholars have taken it for granted that the idea had originated with Mawdudi himself. In posing this question, my concern here is not with trying to determine who may have been the very first to begin speaking of the sovereignty of God in modern Islam. Rida, as has been seen, comes close to it. A case could also be made that the Young Ottoman `Ali Suavi (d. 1878), who had had a traditional Islamic education but also substantial exposure to Western ideas, was one of the first to invoke this idea. In an article in the *Ulum Gazetesi* published in 1869, he had sought to refute the idea of the sovereignty of the people, a view popular with the Young Ottomans, and argued that God was the true sovereign.<sup>40</sup> Suavi was in exile in Paris at the time, and this short-lived journal was itself published from Paris. The traditional resources he had drawn upon in trying to

<sup>34</sup>Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi* (Lahore, 1955; first published in 1939), pp. 22–23. In his translation of the Qur'an and commentary on it, Mawdudi renders the relevant part of Q 12.40 as follows: "The authority of rulership (*farmanrawa'i ka iqtidar*) belongs to none other than God". He does not however use the term *hakimiyyat* in discussing this verse. See Sayyid Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, second edition (Lahore, 1958), pp. 402–404.

<sup>35</sup>Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *Qur'an ki char bunyadi istilahun* (Delhi, 1981; first published in 1941), p. 20.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 28–29. Mawdudi evoked the Qur'anic phrase *malik al-mulk* (Q 3.36) often in his discourses. It also occurs in the constitution of the Jama'at-i Islami. For the original version, see "Dustur-i Jama'at-i Islami" in Mawdudi, *Musalman aur maujuda siyasi kashmakash*, vol. 3 (Pathankot, n.d.), pp. 208–220, at p. 209. For a later iteration of the constitution, see *Dustur-i Jama'at-i Islami Pakistan* (Lahore, 1952), p. 11 (Article 3).

<sup>40</sup>Ali Suavi, "al-Hakim huwa Allah," *Ulum Gazetesi*, Rebiulahir 1286/August 1, 1869, pp. 18–31. I am grateful to M. Şükri Hanioglu for drawing my attention to this article and for translating portions of it for me. On Suavi, see Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 360–384; on the question of sovereignty, *ibid.*, pp. 366–367, 373–374.

refute his opponents had little to do with the sovereignty of either God or the people. Instead, the jurists and theologians he had fleetingly referred to spoke of God as the ruler, by which they meant that God was the source of the commands that human beings had to submit to.<sup>41</sup> Suavi's innovation, if that is what it was, consisted in placing this idea in a political context, that is, to deny that human beings could be considered to possess sovereign power.

Leaving Suavi and Rida aside, my concern here is to draw attention to some overlapping ways in which ideas related to the sovereignty of God had come to find expression in early twentieth-century India, at a time when Mawdudi (b. 1903) was coming of age. A new awareness that the large Muslim population in India was nonetheless an increasingly disadvantaged minority in relation to the Hindus, memories of centuries of Muslim rule, and deep anxieties about the future of Islam not just at home but in the world at large had combined to make colonial India a particularly fertile soil for reflections on the sovereignty of God.

### The Indian Background

A key figure to articulate this idea in the early twentieth century was Abul-Kalam Azad (d. 1958). A firebrand journalist, Azad was the editor of the Urdu weekly *al-Hilal*, which had begun publication from Calcutta in mid-1912. It brought him national attention, but its uncompromising hostility to colonial rule and its stridently pan-Islamic tone and content also spelled its end within less than three years. These were years of great turmoil in the Muslim world: Morocco was brought under French colonial rule in 1912 and Italy soon came to rule Libya. Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro had joined hands against the Ottoman Empire, which fared poorly in these Balkan wars. The Muslims of India were keenly attuned to events in the wider Muslim world, and it was Azad who had taken it upon himself to articulate the interpretive framework in which such events were to be understood. An article entitled "Authority belongs to God alone", published in *al-Hilal* in July 1913, made the clearest case for the irreconcilable claims upon Muslims of British rule, on the one hand, and of "God's government", on the other. Azad wrote:

Today, an intense war is taking place between the government of God (*khuda ki hukumat*) and human kingdoms (*insani padshahaten*). Satan's throne has been placed over the largest portion of the earth. The inheritance of Satan's household has been distributed among his worshippers and the army of the "great deceiver" (*dajjal*) has spread everywhere. These satanic kingdoms seek to utterly destroy God's government. On their right side is the bewitching paradise of worldly pleasure and honour, and on their left rages the clearly visible hell of hardship and corporeal punishment. These unbelieving and dark deceivers open the doors of their sorcerous paradise for any son of Adam who denies the kingdom of God (*khuda ki padshahat*) . . . and they

<sup>41</sup>Suavi refers, *inter alia*, to Muhammad A'la ibn 'Ali al-Tahanawi's [Thanawi] *Kashshaf istilahat al-funun*, an encyclopedic work explicating the meaning of theological, juridical, and other technical terms. Thanawi was an eighteenth-century scholar from northern India. For the relevant passage, see al-Tahanawi, *Mawsu'at istilahat al-'ulum al-Islamiyya*, 6 vols. (Beirut, 1966), ii, p. 380, s.v. "al-hakim".



push anyone who affirms God's kingdom into the hell of their satanic torments and corporeal punishments . . .<sup>42</sup>

Azad's government or kingdom of God is not yet the sovereignty of God that we find in Mawdudi, though it is hardly a big leap from the one to the other. It is significant, too, that Azad naturalises the idea of God's government by reading it directly into the Qur'an. For instance, in the same article, he translates the Qur'an's reference to the Day of Judgment in Q 82.17–18 as "the day of God's kingdom" (*khuda ki padshahat*).<sup>43</sup>

Such renderings were not peculiar to him. For instance, Shah `Abd al-Qadir (d. 1813), one of the first translators of the Qur'an into Urdu, had rendered the key portion of Q 12.40 to mean that "*hukumat* does not belong to anyone but God".<sup>44</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, Nadhir Ahmad (d. 1912), an influential modernist intellectual who took the Urdu novel as his medium for disseminating ideas of social reform and who also translated the Qur'an into Urdu, likewise translated the passage in question as "*hukumat* belongs only to the one God".<sup>45</sup> Significantly, *hukumat*, the standard term for government in Urdu and commonly also in Persian, had been rendered, *inter alia*, as "sovereignty" in John Richardson's highly influential *Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English*, which had been prepared for the benefit of overseas British officials and merchants of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.<sup>46</sup> Readers of `Abd al-Qadir and later of Azad and Nadhir Ahmad could have understood *hukumat* as authority or government, but they could also have begun to understand it as sovereignty in the modern sense of the term.<sup>47</sup> Unlike Azad, Nadhir Ahmad was no rebel, however. He was an official in the colonial bureaucracy, had translated an English work on the law of evidence into Urdu, and was awarded an honorary DLitt. by the University of Edinburgh.

One of the readers of Nadhir Ahmad's translation of the Qur'an was Azad's contemporary and fellow journalist, Muhammad `Ali (d. 1931), who would emerge as the single most prominent leader of the Indian Khilafat Movement in the aftermath of World War I. This movement, usually reckoned as the first major instance of mass mobilisation in colonial India, sought to prevent the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the victorious Allied Powers and to ensure that the holy cities of the Hijaz, which housed the most sacred sites of Islam and which had long been under Ottoman protection, remained safe from colonial encroachment. What made this a massive movement was not only the degree of emotion that it was able to stir in Muslim India in the name of the caliphate, but also the fact that Gandhi and the secular but Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress had decided to join hands with the Khilafat leaders in challenging British colonial rule.

<sup>42</sup>"Inil-hukm illa lillah," *al-Hilal* (July 1, 1913), pp. 5–8, at p. 7.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup>See *Qur'an-i majid mutarjam bil-tarajim al-thalath* (Delhi, 1872), p. 263.

<sup>45</sup>Nadhir Ahmad, *Chiragh-i hidayat*, ed. Muhammad Isma`il Afzal (Lahore, n.d.), p. 288; idem, *Matalib al-Qur'an* (Lucknow: Nadhir Press, n.d.), p. 130.

<sup>46</sup>John Richardson, *A Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English*, new edition by Charles Wilkins (London, 1806), pp. 379–80. The work was first published in 1777.

<sup>47</sup>In his Persian translation of the Qur'an, the 18<sup>th</sup> century north Indian scholar and Sufi Shah Wali Allah, the father of Shah `Abd al-Qadir, had rendered *al-hukm* in Q 12.40 as *farmarawa'i*. *Qur'an-i majid mutarjam bil-tarajim al-thalath*, 263. The 1829 edition of Richardson's *Dictionary* translates a cognate term, *farmanguzari*, as sovereignty (and empire). That Persian term does not occur in the 1806 edition.

Muhammad `Ali and his brother, Shaukat `Ali (d. 1938), were active in pan-Islamic causes and in anti-colonial politics in India before the Great War, and the government had seen them to be enough of a threat to limit their movements to a small town, Chhindwara, in the Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh) for much of the duration of the war. Unlike Azad, who had native fluency in Arabic (his mother was an Arab woman and he was born in Mecca) and had received a traditional religious education, the `Ali brothers were educated at the westernising Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh. Neither Muhammad `Ali, who would later obtain a BA from Oxford, nor his brother Shaukat had had much exposure to Islamic learning, and it was during their confinement that, as Muhammad `Ali would later write, they “discovered” the Qur’an. It was in the translation of Nadhir Ahmad that they did so.<sup>48</sup>

As Muhammad `Ali came to see it, “the main theme of the Qur’an and . . . of the sayings of the Prophet as perceived in authentic Traditions is the Kingdom of God and the Service of Man as His Agent and vicegerent . . .”<sup>49</sup> He may have been aided in this understanding by some of the language used in an English translation of the Qur’an which had been published in 1917 and which Muhammad `Ali had also been reading while in confinement. This was the work of his namesake Maulana Muhammad `Ali (d. 1951), a Lahore-based scholar who was a prominent figure in the Ahmadi community. (Though both are often referred to as “Maulana” Muhammad `Ali, I will use the honorific only for the Qur’an translator in order to distinguish him from the Khilafat leader.) The Ahmadis are a heterodox community who view their founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908) as either a prophet or as a divinely inspired reformer. The generality of Muslims consider the Prophet Muhammad to have been the last of God’s prophets, of course, and the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad are therefore anathema to them. Though the Lahore-based Ahmadis viewed him only as a reformer, the fact that they revered him at all made them, too, the object of suspicion on the part of other Muslims. Both Ahmadi groups would come to be formally excluded from the fold of the Muslim community through an amendment to the Pakistani constitution in 1974. Attitudes towards the Ahmadis were not so stringent in the early decades of the twentieth century however, particularly in the case of the Lahore-based Ahmadis. The future leader of the Khilafat Movement would not have had to make any apology for consulting Maulana Muhammad `Ali’s translation.

The Ahmadis have always been keen proselytes for Islam, and a good deal of their missionary effort has long been directed towards Western societies. To this end, but also to refute Western Orientalist and missionary criticisms of Islam, Maulana Muhammad `Ali had been especially attentive to explaining the Qur’an in light of Christian scriptures. For instance, he translates Q 3.26–7 as follows: “Say: O Allah, Owner of the Kingdom, Thou givest the kingdom to whom Thou pleasest, and takest away the kingdom from whom Thou pleasest . . . Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night; and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living . . .” More illustrative for our purposes is the explanatory note he added to this passage. These verses, he wrote, “apparently refer to the fact that kingdom and

<sup>48</sup>Mohamed Ali, *My Life: A Fragment*, ed. Afzal Iqbal (Lahore, 1946), p. 108.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 205.

honour shall be given now to another nation, whose night shall be made to pass into a day of triumph . . . The Jews had already been warned by Jesus that ‘the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof’ (Matt. 21: 43). A living nation of Muslims was brought forth from among the dead Arabs, and the living nation of Israelites was represented now by a people who were spiritually dead”.<sup>50</sup> Echoes of the New Testament are even more explicit in his rendering of Q 67, whose title, al-Mulk, he translates as “The Kingdom” and to whose first batch of verses he gives the subtitle “The Kingdom of God”.<sup>51</sup>

By his own acknowledgment, the poetry of the modernist philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) also exercised some influence on Muhammad `Ali during his confinement in Chhindwara.<sup>52</sup> He read two of Iqbal’s long Persian poems, *The Secrets of the Self* (1915) and the *Mysteries of Selflessness* (1918) during this time and found Iqbal to be confirming what he, Muhammad Ali, had begun to discover about Islam: “. . . it was a commonplace of Muslim religious literature that Islam meant submission to God’s Will and that He was Supreme Ruler of the Universe, but this truth had been allowed by the theologians to sink into the insignificance of a truism, so that we all passed it by, thinking we were fully familiar with it, when in fact, we were entirely ignorant of its true valuation”. Much to Muhammad Ali’s satisfaction, Iqbal was once again making people aware of the implications of this truth.<sup>53</sup>

A more surprising influence on Muhammad Ali came from the English novelist H. G. Wells (d. 1946). He had met Wells some years before, and he read Wells’ wartime novel, *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*, while in confinement. First published in 1916, this novel is an extended meditation on the senseless death and destruction that the war had brought to all sides. Mr. Britling lost a son to the war, but he was also pained by the death of a young German whom he and his family had come to know before the war and to whose father he addresses some of his reflections towards the end of the book. The novel concludes with the discovery by Mr. Britling of the presence of God in and around himself, which helps him deal with his anguish even as it points towards the emergence of a “world republic”:

God was with him indeed, and he was with God. The King was coming to his own. Amidst the darkness and confusions, the nightmare cruelties and the hideous stupidities of the great war, God, the Captain of the World Republic, fought his way to empire . . . [God] is the only King . . . And before the coming of the true King, the inevitable King, the King who is present whenever just men foregather, this blood-stained rubbish of the ancient world, these puny kings and tawdry emperors, these wily politicians and artful lawyers, these men who claim and grab and trick and compel, these war-makers and oppressors, will presently shrivel and pass—like paper thrust into a flame.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary* (Lahore, 1973), p. 136 and n. 406.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1079–1080. Also see his preface to this chapter (*ibid.*, p. 1079) and n. 2526.

<sup>52</sup>Mohamed Ali, *My Life*, pp. 165–169.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 168–169; quotation at p. 168.

<sup>54</sup>H. G. Wells, *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* (New York, 1916), pp. 439, 442; the words in single quotation marks are from a letter Mr. Britling was trying to write to the father of the slain German youth. Part of this text is also quoted in Mohamed Ali, *My Life*, p.149.

The God that Mr. Britling finds, and of whom Wells also spoke in some of his other writings, is very much a personal and immanent God, rather than one who is absolute and “comprehensive”.<sup>55</sup> Commenting on Wells’ *God the Invisible King*, Muhammad `Ali observed that “there is much in . . . [it that one] would have to outgrow before he could become a Muslim”. Yet he felt that there was a basic affinity between what Wells was describing and what he, Muhammad `Ali, understood to be true Islam.<sup>56</sup>

Some of what Muhammad `Ali had imbibed during his confinement in Chhindwara, from the translations of the Qur’an available to him and from Wells, would find powerful articulation at his trial in the port city of Karachi. The `Ali brothers had been released from Chhindwara in June 1919 but they were arrested once again in September 1921 and charged this time with inciting Muslim soldiers against serving in the colonial military. Greece, supported by the British, was then at war with Turkey and, anticipating the possibility that Indian Muslim troops might be called upon to participate in the war, a *fatwa* had been issued that prohibited Muslims from fighting fellow believers. Muhammad `Ali and other Khilafat leaders had made their own statements to similar effect, and this is what had led to the new charges against them.<sup>57</sup> At the hearings in Karachi, first in the court of the city magistrate and then in that of the judicial commissioner of the province of Sind, Muhammad `Ali expounded at great length on what he took to be the teachings of Islam that had required him to take the position he had.<sup>58</sup>

Much like Azad, Muhammad `Ali argued that the king’s law and God’s law were in manifest conflict. The colonial administration expected its Muslim soldiers to serve wherever they were needed but Islam forbade them from fighting other Muslims. They could obey their worldly rulers, but only if such obedience did not conflict with obedience to God. As Muhammad `Ali told the city magistrate, speaking in English, “Islam recognises one sovereignty alone, the sovereignty of God, which is supreme and unconditional, indivisible and inalienable”. He then proceeded to quote the famous passage, Q 12.40, in which Joseph tells his fellow inmates that “there is no Government but God’s”.<sup>59</sup> The English translation is presumably his own, though he clearly draws here on Nadhir’s Ahmad’s Urdu rendering (“*hukumat* belongs only to the one God”).<sup>60</sup> Addressing the jury in the court of the judicial commissioner of Sind, he also invoked *Mr. Britling* to make the point that one’s “only allegiance—his only duty—is to God”.<sup>61</sup>

Upon assuming her position as the Empress of India in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857, Queen Victoria had proclaimed that her Indian subjects would enjoy complete freedom of religion. The British, Muhammad `Ali said, now had a choice to make. They

<sup>55</sup>H. G. Wells, *God the Invisible King* (New York, 1917), xiii. This, too, was a book Muhammad `Ali had read during his confinement, along with Wells’ *The Soul of a Bishop* (1917). See Mohamed Ali, *My Life*, pp. 148–153.

<sup>56</sup>Mohamed Ali, *My Life*, p. 153.

<sup>57</sup>Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement* (New York, 1982), pp. 139–140, 169–172.

<sup>58</sup>For the full proceedings of the two trials, see R. V. Thadani, compiler, *The Historic State Trial of the Ali Brothers and Five Others* (Karachi, 1921). For brief comments on this trial, see Minault, *Khilafat Movement*, pp. 172–174. For a contemporary Urdu version of the proceedings, see `Abd al-`Aziz Siddiqi, ed., *Muwazana-i madhhab wa qanun* (Delhi, 1922), cited in M. N. Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics* (Leiden, 1999), p. 299 n. 378. I have not been able to consult this Urdu work.

<sup>59</sup>*Historic State Trial*, pp. 69–70.

<sup>60</sup>For his part, Maulana Muhammad Ali had translated the key sentence as “Judgment is only Allah’s.”

<sup>61</sup>*Historic State Trial*, p. 283.

could either allow Muslims to follow the dictates of their faith, which meant the refusal by Muslim soldiers to fight fellow Muslims, or they could admit that there was, in fact, no freedom of religion in India and, indeed, declare that people serving in the military should be ready to violate the most basic dictates of their faith.<sup>62</sup> The British could not have it both ways. He concluded, sounding very much like Mr. Britling: “You pray now ‘Thy Kingdom come.’ But gentlemen, His Kingdom *has* come. God’s Kingdom has come. God’s Kingdom is here even today. It is not the kingdom of king George, but God’s and you must decide on that basis and I must act on that assumption. That is why I say I will follow the law of king George so long as he does not force me to go against the law of God”.<sup>63</sup>

Muhammad `Ali and his co-accused were sentenced to a two-year imprisonment at the conclusion of this trial. In prison, he embarked upon writing a book that was to introduce Islam to a Western readership. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the book was to be called “Islam: Kingdom of God”. It was never completed.<sup>64</sup>

Mawdudi had participated in the Khilafat Movement and had apparently come to know Muhammad `Ali.<sup>65</sup> He had even written a biography of Gandhi, a rather remarkable fact in view of Mawdudi’s later politics. According to Mawdudi’s own account, this biography was confiscated by the police prior to publication.<sup>66</sup> It was around the time of the Khilafat Movement that Mawdudi also learnt English,<sup>67</sup> which may have given him access, in the original English, to Muhammad `Ali’s powerful rhetoric on the occasion of his trial. There is good reason to think that Mawdudi’s idea of the sovereignty of God was at least influenced by Muhammad `Ali’s. Mawdudi never acknowledged this for, to him, this idea had come to be the most natural way in which to think about God. Anyone who did not think in those terms could scarcely be a believer.

Even Jesus, Mawdudi later wrote, was committed to the idea of the sovereignty of God, and in this and other respects, there is no difference between his “mission” and that of Moses, Muhammad, and the other prophets. That Jesus had affirmed the sovereignty of God would have come as no surprise to John Calvin—for all that he never used the phrase himself<sup>68</sup>—and to generations of Christian theologians. Mawdudi’s point was, however, that this was no mere religious or spiritual sovereignty but one that governed all aspects of life. The present versions of the Gospels, having been corrupted by later Christians, were less clear on this score than was the Qur’an, but various indications to this effect could still be retrieved from them. Quoting, among others passages, Matthew 6.10: “Your kingdom come – Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, as Muhammad Ali had done at

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314–315.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324, citing Matthew 6.10. The “k” in king George is in lowercase in the original.

<sup>64</sup> On the proposed title of the book, see the introduction, by Afzal Iqbal, to Mohamed Ali, *My Life*, vii–viii. A section of that incomplete book was published by the editor under the title *My Life: A Fragment*. See *ibid.*, pp. viii–ix.

<sup>65</sup> See Abul-A`la Mawdudi, “Khud niwisht” in Muhammad Yusuf Bhutta, ed., *Mawlana Mawdudi apni and dusron ki nazar main*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Lahore, 1984), pp. 23–39, at pp. 32–5. This is a brief autobiographical essay that Mawdudi had written in 1932.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion in John Calvin: Works and Correspondence* (Charlottesville, 1995), electronic edition, note 1 to book 1, chapter 13 (<http://libwebprod.princeton.edu/resolve/lookup?url=http://pm.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=calvin/calvin.01.xml>), accessed March 23, 2014.

his trial, Mawdudi observed: “The Messiah has made his goal very clear in [this] last verse. It contradicts the widespread misconception that, by the Kingdom of God, he had meant merely a spiritual kingdom. His goal clearly was that the law of God, His legal decrees (*hukm-i sharʿi*), be implemented in the world just as God’s laws of nature (*qanun-i tabiʿi*) are in effect in the universe”.<sup>69</sup> The idea of the sovereignty of God comes full circle here: from its putative New Testament origins to the leading Islamist ideologue of the twentieth century via an anti-colonial agitator, and then back not merely to the Qur’an but to what the Gospels themselves preserve of the teachings of Jesus on this crucial matter.

The sovereignty of God is not the only idea that may have carried over from Muhammad ʿAli to Mawdudi. Mawdudi’s stark contrast between God’s law and man-made law is also reminiscent of the Khilafat leader’s discourse,<sup>70</sup> though the vivid image of worshipping God rather than mere slaves of God has deep roots in the tradition.<sup>71</sup> And even Muhammad ʿAli’s challenge to the British to make a choice between either allowing Muslims to live by the commands of their faith or acknowledging that they had no freedom of religion in India is echoed in Mawdudi’s powerful challenge to the Muslim modernists of Pakistan’s first years. They needed to decide, Mawdudi had told them, what their “moral values” were. If they wanted to live by Islamic values, then they had to follow all that Islamic law demanded of them. But if it were Western values that were to continue guiding them, then they ought to stop calling themselves Muslims.<sup>72</sup>

I have focused principally here on the likely and hitherto neglected influence of Muhammad ʿAli on Mawdudi, but the latter had encountered other influential voices as well in the crowded public sphere of colonial India. I have already mentioned Iqbal in connection with Muhammad ʿAli, but his influence on Mawdudi is also worth considering. The two men knew each other, and Iqbal was associated with a plan to set up an educational institution in Pathankot, in eastern Punjab, which is what had brought Mawdudi to the Punjab shortly before Iqbal’s death. The extent of their relationship is a matter of disagreement among people who have written on it; given Iqbal’s subsequent stature in Pakistan, the Jamaʿat-i Islami has had an interest in magnifying the poet-philosopher’s high regard for Mawdudi.<sup>73</sup> In any case, Iqbal does seem to have left a mark on Mawdudi. One illustration of this is relevant to our discussion here.

<sup>69</sup>Mawdudi, *Tahrik-i azadi-i Hind aur Musalman*, ii (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1973), pp. 190–199, at pp. 191–192. Cf. *idem*, *Tafhim al-Qurʿan*, 6 vols. (Lahore, 2008), i, pp. 254–255 n. 48 (commenting on Q 3.51). Qutb, too, spoke of the Kingdom of God (*mamlakat Allah*), though without invoking the Bible. See *Zilal*, iii, pp. 1433–1434; Carré, *Mysticism*, pp. 297–299.

<sup>70</sup>*Historic State Trial*, p. 283. For Mawdudi’s insistence that God alone is the source of law, see *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi*, pp. 21ff.

<sup>71</sup>This language appears, for instance, in a letter the Prophet Muhammad is said to have written to the Christians of Najran. See al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʿrikh*, (ed.) M. T. Houtsma, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1883), ii, p. 89. Quoted in Michael Cook, “Is Political Freedom an Islamic Value?” in Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, (eds.), *Freedom and the Construction of Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2013), ii, pp. 283–310, pp. 289–290, n. 26. The letter also has Muhammad call the Christians “to the authority (*wilaya*) of God and away from that of [His] slaves.” Yaʿqubi, *Taʿrikh*, ii, p. 89.

<sup>72</sup>Mawdudi, “Pakistan main Islami qanun kyun nahin nafidh ho-sakta?” in *idem*, *Tahrik-i azadi-i Hind*, 2, 335–364, at 360. This was a speech Mawdudi had delivered at the Lahore Law College in January 1948. For an English translation, see Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, pp. 39–72, at p. 67.

<sup>73</sup>For a cautious discussion of the relationship of Iqbal and Mawdudi, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York, 1996), pp. 34–39.

In a significant departure from conventional Muslim discourses on the caliphate, Mawdudi argues that the caliphate the Qur'an speaks of belongs to all believers. It is, he says in supplying the English terms, "popular vicegerency" (*'umumi khilafat*). "Every believer is a caliph of God in his particular place. As caliph, he is individually answerable to God".<sup>74</sup> To Mawdudi, since the Qur'an reserves sovereignty exclusively for God, it can only speak of vicegerency when it comes to human beings.<sup>75</sup>

Iqbal, too, had spoken of the vicegerency of God (*niyyat-i Ilahi*) in some of his verse.<sup>76</sup> This does not sound promising at first, for Iqbal seemed to evoke the Nietzschean Superman in describing this vicegerent. Yet he had also suggested elsewhere that the sort of qualities he had in mind were potentially available to *everyone*: "The Democracy of Islam . . . is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Out of the plebian material Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power. Is not, then, the Democracy of early Islam an experimental refutation of the ideas of Nietzsche?"<sup>77</sup> Though Iqbal did not specifically speak of the sovereignty of God, so far as I am aware, Mawdudi's conception of popular vicegerency is closer to Iqbal's than either is to medieval discussions of the caliphate.<sup>78</sup> And for Mawdudi, at least, this popular vicegerency is inextricably tied to divine sovereignty.

### Debating the Implications of the Sovereignty of God

Having examined at some length the antecedents to Mawdudi's idea of the sovereignty of God, it is now worth asking how this and related ideas figure in the discourses of some of his other contemporaries. In addressing this question, my concern is not to trace a genealogy of this idea in each of the instances I discuss here, but to show rather that it was very much in the air in late colonial India *and* that it could mean quite different things in different quarters. I begin with a posthumous and incomplete work, *Divine Government (Hukumat-i Ilahi)*, by Abul-Mahasin Muhammad Sajjad (d. 1940), a traditionally educated religious scholar from Bihar in eastern India.

Sajjad was a founding member of the Jam'iyyat al-'Ulama-i Hind, an organisation of Indian 'ulama with a largely Deobandi orientation that was founded in 1919 and that played a prominent role in the Khilafat Movement. He is best known, however, for spearheading an initiative towards establishing non-governmental courts that would rule according to the

<sup>74</sup>Mawdudi, *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi*, pp. 38–39; Cook, "Political Freedom," p. 302.

<sup>75</sup>Mawdudi, *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi*, p. 38.

<sup>76</sup>Muhammad Iqbal, *Rumuz-i bekhudi*, in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal, Farsi* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 44–46; R. A. Nicholson, trans., *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi): A Philosophical Poem* (Lahore, 1944), pp. 78–84.

<sup>77</sup>Mohammad Iqbal, "Muslim Democracy," *The New Age* (1916), p. 251, quoted in Nicholson, "Introduction," *Secrets of the Self*, xxix n. 1.

<sup>78</sup>Iqbal did, however, speak of "the Kingdom of God on earth," which, as he explained in a letter to Nicholson, "means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth." Nicholson, "Introduction," *Secrets of the Self*, xxviii–xxix. Compare Mawdudi, *Islam ka nazariyya-i siyasi*, pp. 43–44: "The position of the imam, *amir*, or head of the government in an Islamic state consists in this alone: that ordinary Muslims, to whom the caliphate belongs, choose the best amongst them and entrust the powers [of their caliphate] to him. That the term caliph is used for him does not mean that he alone is the caliph; it means rather that the caliphate of ordinary Muslims has become concentrated in his person". (The term "concentrate[d]" is Mawdudi's own.)



shari`a in colonial India. As many `ulama saw it, Islamic law could be administered only by Muslim judges schooled in that law; it was not good enough, as was often the practice in the British colonial administration, to have non-Muslim judges rule according to what they took to be the shari`a. In the absence of shari`a judges, even such basic matters as a Muslim woman's ability to seek a judicial divorce could not be legitimately administered, creating great hardship in devout Muslim circles. In part, at least, it was in response to this situation that Sajjad had sought to establish informal Islamic courts. These courts were envisioned as comprising a network presided over by an "amir", to whom all would defer on questions relating to Islamic law. This idea of "shari`a governance" (*imarat-i shar`iyya*) was also a response to the demise of the Ottoman caliphate, to which the Muslims of India had looked as the religious and political symbol of Islam and of the global Muslim community. At least at the level of India, the *imarat-i shar`iyya* would now stand in for the defunct caliphate, and there was more than one Muslim leader—the aforementioned Azad among them—who had entertained hopes of being recognised as the head of some such institution.

Sajjad's *Divine Government* seeks to offer an intellectual justification for this structure of judicial and religious authority. He argues that the proper fulfillment of basic human needs—material welfare and the safeguarding of life, progeny, and honour—requires the existence of an institutionalised and collective system (*jama`ati nizam*).<sup>79</sup> Muslims exposed to Western education did not dispute the need for such a system, but, he says, they looked exclusively to the West for its prototypes. It is such people that Sajjad seeks primarily to convince that the teachings of Islam provide the only system for collective human existence that is truly workable. The fundamental reason why other systems are inadequate is that they are based on man-made laws. People have to be bribed or coerced to obey laws that are made by their fellow humans and even then they break such laws at the first opportunity. And precisely because some people make them for others, such laws cannot be said to uniformly secure everyone's interests; some people would always be at the losing end of this bargain. God, however, is a disinterested party, so that everyone can be on the same plane vis-à-vis His law. He is also omniscient, which means that the law would genuinely cater to people's interests in a way that no mere human laws can. It is through a prophet that God's law comes to be known, and the institutional structure Sajjad envisions is meant to continue what the Prophet had instituted.<sup>80</sup>

Sajjad does not speak explicitly of the sovereignty of God here, though the idea of divine government seems to come close to it. The provenance of this idea is difficult to determine in this case, though Muhammad `Ali's rhetoric may have had some role here, too. Sajjad's argument also rests on the strong contrast between God's law and human laws, which likewise is well-represented in Muhammad `Ali's rhetoric. The latter had little interest in affirming the authority of the `ulama, however.<sup>81</sup> Sajjad's project, on the other hand, was nothing if not an initiative towards giving institutional shape to the `ulama's authority. Irrespective of

<sup>79</sup> Abul-Mahasin Sajjad, *Hukumat-i Ilahiyya*, (ed.) Mujahid al-Islam Qasimi (Phulwari Sharif, 1999), p. 42 and *passim*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>81</sup> Wells, too, was anything but friendly to clerical authority, which makes it ironic that *Mr. Britling* was read at a school for chaplains during the Great War. See David C. Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven, 1986), p. 224.

whether Mawdudi may have been influenced by Sajjad and Sajjad by Muhammad `Ali, the sovereignty of God and related ideas were being harnessed in each case to quite different ends.

The preface to the first edition of Sajjad's *Divine Government*, published in 1941, is further illustrative of the different purposes to which such ideas could be put in late colonial India. It was written by Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi (d. 1962), a leader of the Jam`iyat al-`Ulama-i Hind, which was firmly allied with the Indian National Congress and, in the years leading up to the end of colonial rule, was a strong critic of the demand for Pakistan. In keeping with Sajjad's views, Seoharwi underlines the inadequacy of man-made political systems, but he then goes on to make the distinctive point that the universal values of peace and equality can only flourish when they come from a divine rather than a merely human source.<sup>82</sup> This is what "divine government" seems to mean to him. Writing during the Second World War, Seoharwi does not need to call up all his rhetorical powers to highlight the inadequacies, the vacuous moral authority, and the interminable conflicts of man-made systems. But that is only part of the context. Another part surely is his support for the secular Congress, which claimed, unlike the communalist Muslim League, to represent the interests of all Indian people. He acknowledges that some leaders of the Khilafat Movement had retained the goal of establishing "Islamic sovereignty or divine government" (*Islami iqtidar-i a'la [hukumat-i Ilahiyya]*), but, he says, they had amended that goal to first focus on bringing together different Indian communities on the shared platform of anti-colonial struggle.<sup>83</sup> It is on this shared platform that much of Seoharwi's own political career would play out. Though he writes, like Sajjad, in an unabashedly Islamic idiom, his larger point is not about the political supremacy of Islam but rather about the universally applicable moral foundations that religion, and specifically Islam, can provide to politics.

To Seoharwi, Islam also had some very specific teachings on economic matters, and one of his earliest books, first published in 1939, was devoted to a detailed explication of these matters. This book falls outside our purview here, except on one crucial point. In its second edition, published in 1942, Seoharwi invokes Q 12.40 ("authority belongs to God alone") to observe that God is not only the creator of the universe but also its ruler and that no individual or community can lay claim to sovereignty (*hakimiyyat*). A caliph or an *amir* is merely a deputy of this divine government on earth; accordingly, it is not for him or the community to legislate, for that prerogative belongs only to God. This much would seem to be in line with Sajjad. In an explanatory note, Seoharwi clarifies however, that for legislative authority to belong to God does not mean that the caliph and his associates—those who loosen and bind the public affairs of Muslims, in the language of medieval constitutional theory—cannot adapt the law to changing needs. For otherwise, he says, the door to the articulation of new legal norms (*ijtihad*) would be barred, which can hardly be the case if the law is to remain receptive to changing needs. But the laws that are to be devised by human beings, he says, are to be framed in light of the fundamentals of God's law and of their underlying principles, which admit of no change.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi, "Muqaddima," in Sajjad, *Hukumat-i Ilahiyya*, pp. 17–32, esp. pp. 22–24, 26–30.

<sup>83</sup>Seoharwi, "Muqaddima," pp. 19–20.

<sup>84</sup>Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi, *Islam ka iqtisadi nizam* (Delhi, 1942), pp. 110–111 and n. 1. For a discussion of Seoharwi and of this book, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 234–239.

The next edition of this book, published in 1946, repeats all this, but another note is now added to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding the implications of Q 12.40. Here Seoharwi writes: “This does not mean that the *amir* or caliph is not a ruler (*hakim*) and that his command (*hukm*) is not a command. That is a false doctrine, a product of the Kharijis. What it means is [only] that the basic and fundamental devising of the laws is in the hands only of God”,<sup>85</sup> which is to say, as the next note again clarifies, that human beings can continue to adapt God’s law to evolving circumstances. Though Mawdudi is nowhere mentioned in this book, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it is some of the implications Mawdudi was at the time busy deriving from the sovereignty of God that Seoharwi seeks to correct here.

Mawdudi had founded his Jama`at-i Islami in 1941 and the party’s constitution has remained explicit ever since in its affirmation of the sovereignty of God. According to the Jama`at’s creedal statement, one is to “accept no one other than God as the king, the holder of all authority (*malik al-mulk*) and the supreme power (*muqtadir-i a`la*), nor see anyone as capable of commanding, forbidding, and legislating on his own, independent authority . . . For no one except God has the right to ownership and sovereignty (*malikiyyat aur hakimiyyat*)”.<sup>86</sup> Unsurprisingly, the first goal of the party is to strive for “the instituting of religion” which, we are told, is synonymous with “divine government” (*hukumat-i Ilahiyya*) and “the Islamic system of life”.<sup>87</sup>

By the 1940s, many more voices were appealing to the sovereignty of God in South Asia. In a letter to Mohammad Ali Jinnah (d. 1948), who was about to embark upon his campaign for Pakistan, the Chishti Sufi master Sayyid Muhammad Zauqi Shah (d. 1951) wrote in January 1940 that “fundamentally, there can only be two conceptions about forms of government: 1) sovereignty of God, [and] 2) sovereignty of man”. He went on to remark on the inadequacy of “man-made constitutions” and to assert that Muslims are “the only true exponents of the sovereignty of God and . . . alone . . . capable of giving to the world that peaceful atmosphere which [is] the crying need of the hour”.<sup>88</sup> Though the language is similar to Mawdudi’s, a more likely source of inspiration here is again the Khilafat leader Muhammad `Ali, with whom Zauqi Shah shared his modernist alma mater, Aligarh College.<sup>89</sup> Zauqi Shah wrote this letter just two months before Jinnah formally articulated the demand for a separate Muslim homeland at the annual session of the Muslim League in Lahore. The immediate context of this letter was, however, the conduct of the Congress-led ministries in a number of British Indian provinces, which had tended to exclude the Muslim League from a share in the government. When these ministries resigned at the onset of World War II, the Muslim League had organised a Day of Deliverance. In speaking of the dangers of man-made systems, including majoritarian democracy, Zauqi Shah’s point was not to affirm

<sup>85</sup>Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi, *Islam ka iqtisadi nizam* (Lahore, n.d.), p. 126 n. 1. This fourth and final edition of the book was published in 1951. As Seoharwi notes in his preface to this edition, it represents no change over the previous edition, which was published in 1946 (*ibid.*, pp. 17–18).

<sup>86</sup>*Dustur-i Jama`at-i Islami Pakistan* (Lahore, 1952), pp. 11–12.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup>S. M. Zauqi to M. A. Jinnah, January 12, 1940, in Z. H. Zaidi *et al.*, (ed.), *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers* (Islamabad, 1993–2009), 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., xv, pp. 41–45; quotations at pp. 42–43.

<sup>89</sup>On the life and career of Zauqi Shah, see Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-first Century Pakistan* (New York, 2007), pp. 46–59.

Mawdudi's Islamist ideology—to which he was hostile<sup>90</sup>—but rather to sound the alarm against Hindu political domination of India.

Zauqi Shah's usage was also influenced by Marmaduke Pickthall, the English convert from Hyderabad. In letters to him in 1932–3, which were subsequently published under the title “Divine Sovereignty and Divine Messengership”, Zauqi Shah had sought to correct Pickthall's understanding of Islam on some crucial issues.<sup>91</sup> Pickthall had argued elsewhere that one's salvation depended exclusively on belief in God and the Day of Judgment and, further, that religion meant “the full and glad submission to the will of Allah *as present in men's consciences*”. Both claims seemed to Zauqi Shah to undercut the role of prophethood in guiding people in righteousness and he was deeply disturbed at this prospect. “Everybody's conscience is not a safe guide”, he wrote to Pickthall. “If it is a safe and reliable guide, why did God keep on sending messenger after messenger for the guidance of all sorts of people?”<sup>92</sup> Zauqi Shah could not distinguish any shades of grey between the two fundamental and mutually exclusive categories of the believer and the unbeliever.<sup>93</sup> Unbelievers were those who did not submit to Muhammad even though God had commanded them to do so. “How can you be consistent with yourself if you profess belief in Allah but refuse to obey Him? How can you be loyal to the King-Emperor if you reject his viceroy, governors and other petty officials? Defy a petty policeman in the street and you defy the king”.<sup>94</sup> He continued in a similar vein in a subsequent letter to Pickthall: “There can be no surrender without obedience, and there can be no obedience without obeying, in a true Muslim spirit, all the commandments of Allah which have come to us through the ‘proper official channel’”.<sup>95</sup> Leaving aside the language of the colonial bureaucracy that Zauqi Shah had imbibed, the implications of his argument go beyond an assertion of the authority of Muhammad. They include as well the mediatory role of the saints, as one might expect from a Sufi master. They also underline the superiority of Islam over everything else. To properly affirm the sovereignty of God was to recognise this superiority. Unsurprisingly, as Zauqi Shah would put it to Jinnah in 1940, Muslims were “the only true exponents” of this idea.

The sovereignty of God was not an unusual idea by the 1940s; and there is nothing in Zauqi Shah's usage to suggest otherwise. By the end of that decade, it had received, what remains to this day, its most important modernist articulation. This is found in a resolution the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan passed in March 1949 which enunciates the principles that were to underlie the constitution for the new state. Moved before the house by Liaquat Ali Khan (d. 1951), the country's first prime minister, the Objectives Resolution laid down that “sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone and the authority

<sup>90</sup>See Muhammad Zauqi Shah, “Tahrik-i Abul-A'la” in Wahid Bakhsh, (ed.), *Madamin-i Zauqi* (Karachi, n.d.), pp. 279–302; for a criticism of Mawdudi's goal of establishing a “divine government” (*hukumat-i Ilahi*), see *ibid.*, pp. 292–294. For other direct and indirect criticism of Mawdudi, see *ibid.*, pp. 303–305. An English collection of Zauqi Shah's articles (see the following note) also bears the same title as the Urdu collection. My transliteration of the Urdu title serves to distinguish it from the English one.

<sup>91</sup>This correspondence is reproduced in Wahid Bakhsh, (ed.), *Mazamin-e-Zauqi* (Karachi, 1948), pp. 47–64. The letters are undated, but one of Zauqi Shah's letters gives December 26, 1932 as the date of his previous letter to Pickthall (*ibid.*, p. 59).

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust".<sup>96</sup> Almost in the same breath, the state, too, is characterised as sovereign. The language here might betray some incoherence in the idea of sovereignty, though it is better seen, perhaps, as expressive of the modernist assumption that the state would determine the parameters of the sovereignty of God rather than the other way round. The affirmation of the modernist ethical ideals of "democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice" suggests, for its part, that the sovereignty of God is meant not to curb man-made laws but rather to anchor legislation in ethical considerations, again as the modernists understood them.

Though the `ulama have often tried to take credit for the Islamic sentiments enshrined in the Objectives Resolution, as indeed did Mawdudi, they could not have warmed to what the sovereignty of God seemed to mean to the modernists. Despite the nod to the "limits" set down by God, it was not news to anyone that the modernists wanted a more or less free hand to legislate under the *imprimatur* of God's delegated sovereignty. And to the extent that the limits in question mattered, they did so in ethical rather than strictly legal terms. Significantly, the `ulama had begun to express their concerns on this score already before the establishment of Pakistan.

In an essay published in 1946 and titled "The true ruler is God alone," Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi (d. 1953), one of the most distinguished of the South Asian `ulama of his generation, had affirmed once again that, as the ruler of the universe, God is the source of the law.<sup>97</sup> The real interest of this essay lies, however, in two "doubts" that Nadwi addresses in concluding this short piece. The first of these has to do with the question of how a law revealed a very long time ago could properly meet the needs of people at later times and places. This, of course, is a familiar modernist objection to `ulama and Islamist demands for the implementation of Islamic law in the modern world. Sulayman Nadwi argues in response that the fundamentals of God's law are timeless and that changing circumstances do not have any bearing on the applicability of these core fundamentals.<sup>98</sup> Elsewhere in the essay, he does however grant that while the core principles are eternal, legal scholars can continue to derive subsidiary rules from them in accordance with changing needs.<sup>99</sup> In other words, given that this law is from an omniscient God, its antiquity is irrelevant to the question of its applicability. And it is not enough to be guided by the ethical principles of Islam, as the modernists would have it; the law itself needs to be implemented.

The second doubt he addresses also relates to the modernists, though he does not say so explicitly in this instance either. The question here is about the *mujtahid*, the master-jurist, articulating the law in changing conditions: should such activity not be seen as new legislation and, if so, what does that mean for the claim that God is the sole legislator? Sulayman Nadwi responds that *ijtihad* is not a matter of making new laws but rather of demonstrating how God's existing law can be extended to encompass new situations.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, *Debates*, 16 vols. (Karachi, 1947–1954), v/i (March 7, 1949): p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi, "Hakim-i haqiqi." The article was first published in *Ma'arif* (A`zamgarh), a monthly journal of which Sulayman Nadwi was the longtime editor.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 386–387.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 387–388.

This again keeps the law responsive to change while preserving its core principles intact. While modernist conceptions of *ijtihad* envisage both the setting aside of older laws and the making of new ones, all in the light of the putative spirit of the Qur'an, Nadwi's view of *ijtihad* is one that is decidedly constrained and conservative. Further, his goal, unannounced but unmistakable, is not merely to set forth this view but to also caution the modernists against their legislative excesses. There could be no better framework in which to strike this cautionary note than that of the sovereignty of God. Sulayman Nadwi does not use this English phrase, though that is what the readers of his essay would have understood by it. And it is hardly surprising that the English translation of this essay, first published in 1948 and reprinted in 1953, is indeed titled "the sovereignty of Allah".<sup>101</sup>

For all their misgivings about the sovereignty of God being put to the wrong use, the idea was now finding its way into the discourses of the Pakistani `ulama. In January 1951, the `ulama had convened a conference to set forth the principles that should serve as the foundation of an Islamic state and they have always pointed to the statement they produced on this occasion as a testament to the clarity of their thinking on this matter and to their ability—much doubted by their critics—to come to an agreement on key issues. The conference was presided over by Sulayman Nadwi, and the "ultimate sovereignty" of God "over all nature and all law" was the first of the twenty-two principles enunciated on this occasion.<sup>102</sup> Or so, at least, according to the English translation of this document—a point to which I will return.

Two years later, in 1953, Mufti Muhammad Shafi` (d. 1976), an influential religious scholar and a member of the Islamic Teachings Board that the Constituent Assembly had established to advise it on religious matters, published *Qur'anic Constitution*, a tract setting out the teachings of the Islamic foundational text in the form of mock articles of the constitution. Article 2 states that "the true ruler" (*hakim-i haqiqi*) is God, and the tract later affirms that the "highest authority (*iqtidar-i a'la*) in the state belongs exclusively to God".<sup>103</sup>

For their part, the modernists would continue to use the language of the sovereignty of God, but with particular inflections that seemed calculated to challenge the `ulama and the Islamists. Two examples are worth noting, both from the 1960s and both from men closely aligned with the government of General Ayub Khan, who ruled Pakistan during most of that decade.

Ghulam Ahmad Parwez (d. 1985), a low-ranking official in the colonial bureaucracy and leading light of the Ahl al-Qur'an, a doctrinal orientation whose members denied the authority of hadith in favour of an exclusive reliance on the Qur'an, had been recruited by Ayub Khan to help cut Mawdudi and the `ulama down to size. Writing less than two years after Ayub Khan had brought Pakistan's first experiment with democratic governance to an end, Parwez argued that divine sovereignty consisted in the unified authority (*wahdat-i iqtidar*) that belonged only to God,<sup>104</sup> with the palpable though unstated implication that

<sup>101</sup>Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, *Sovereignty of Allah*, trans. Syed Abu Asim (Karachi, 1953).

<sup>102</sup>*Fundamental Principles of an Islamic State, formulated by a gathering of ulama of various Muslim schools of thought* (Karachi, n.d. [1951]), p. 3.

<sup>103</sup>Muhammad Shafi`, *Dustur-i Qur'ani* (Karachi, 1953), pp. 6, 12. Twelve thousand copies of this tract, in both Urdu and English, were distributed free of charge (see *ibid.*, front matter).

<sup>104</sup>Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, *Qur'an ka siyasi nizam* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 37–38. This booklet is based on an article first published in Parwez's monthly, *Tulu`-i Islam*, in March 1960. My references here are to the booklet.

such authority was best exemplified in the real world by a strong government. One of the implications that Parwez did explicitly draw here was that sovereign power did not belong to the people any more than it did to a king or a dictator.<sup>105</sup> (He obviously did not consider Ayub Khan to be an instance of the latter.) Taking his cue from the Qur'an's instruction to "return things entrusted to you to their rightful owners" (Q 4.58), he argued further that the affairs of government should be entrusted only to those who are *capable* of running them.<sup>106</sup> But if the sovereignty of God allowed no room for kings and dictators, or for an uncontrolled democracy, it did not have any space for a theocracy either, which is to say that "religious leaders can have no existence in such a dispensation".<sup>107</sup>

It is, Parwez said, through a recognition of God's sovereignty, and the ethical values best articulated in the Qur'an, that all humanity could come together on a shared platform. The ethical values in question—human dignity, justice, benevolence, individual responsibility, right to livelihood, and patriotism, among others<sup>108</sup>—were timeless, but the community enjoyed "complete freedom" to operate, and to enact laws, within the boundaries demarcated by them.<sup>109</sup> Pakistan, Parwez thought, could lead the way towards the goal of establishing this ethically-grounded universal brotherhood. It would thereby put its own house in order but it would also help rescue the world from the destructive divisions that threatened its very existence. Among the `ulama, Seoharwi would have agreed with bringing Islam's ethical ideals into the foreground. But leaving aside the fact that he had been a bitter opponent of Pakistan, he, no less than other `ulama, would have been deeply suspicious of anyone having a free hand within the playing field demarcated by the Qur'an's ethical signposts.<sup>110</sup>

My second example relates to Fazlur Rahman, the Oxford-educated Muslim modernist who served as the director of the constitutionally mandated Central Institute of Islamic Research during much of the Ayub Khan era. Where Mawdudi had affirmed that God is not merely the object of worship (*ma`bud*) in a religious sense but also the sovereign in the legal and political sense,<sup>111</sup> Rahman saw it as "the greatest mischief . . . to confuse the religious-moral and political issues". Taking issue explicitly with Mawdudi, Rahman continued: "Any student of political history knows that the term 'sovereign' as a political term is of a relatively recent coinage and denotes that definite and defined factor (or factors) in a society to which rightfully belongs *coercive force* in order to obtain obedience to its will. It is absolutely obvious that God is not sovereign in this sense and that only people can be and are sovereign, since only to them belongs ultimate coercive force, i.e., only their 'Word is law' in the politically ultimate sense".<sup>112</sup> Yet even Rahman did not dispute the very idea of the sovereignty of God. But what it means, he said, is that the Qur'an's moral principles "are objective and do

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29; cf. p. 27.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31ff.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>110</sup> For this metaphorical image, see *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> Mawdudi, "Islam main qanun-sazi ka da'ira-i `amal" in idem, *Tafhimat*, 3 vols. (Lahore, 1965), iii, pp. 7–14, at p. 7. This is the text of a paper Mawdudi had read at the International Islamic Colloquium, held in Lahore in December–January, 1957–8. Also see Mawdudi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*, ii (1958 ed.), p. 37 n. 41 (commenting on Q 7.54).

<sup>112</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu", *Islamic Studies* VI (1967), pp. 205–223, at pp. 208–209. Emphasis in the original.



not depend on or even necessarily conform to the subjective wishes of a people".<sup>113</sup> Once this element of subjectivity is curtailed, through a proper understanding of the Qur'an and presumably under the tutelage of a resolute ruler like Ayub Khan, the community at large decides what expression to give to the Qur'an's moral norms: "the Muslim Legislature is the supreme body unencumbered by any limitations except such as are accepted by the Muslim community, viz., the principles of justice as enunciated in the Qur'an and as illustrated in the life of the Prophet. God neither acts as political Sovereign nor as a law-maker. The Muslim people themselves are the Sovereign and the law-maker".<sup>114</sup>

It is at points like these that the differences between Mawdudi and the modernists stand in sharpest relief. As will be observed in the following section, Mawdudi, unlike many other Islamists, had come to allow considerable scope for human legislation. But the idea that the Muslim community was itself the arbiter of what limitations to impose upon itself was, to him, the very negation of the sovereignty of God. It was tantamount to the cardinal sin of setting up partners with the one God.

### The Sovereignty of God in Practice

While the importance of the idea of God's sovereignty as a theoretical principle should be clear so far as the ideology of Mawdudi and his Jama`at-i Islami are concerned, how has it worked in practice? What has it *enabled* the Jama`at to do in Pakistan's political life? And what has it *prevented* the party from doing?

What it has done for the Jama`at is, quite simply, to justify its participation in the political process. In late colonial India, Mawdudi had been bitterly opposed to Muslims standing for election and entering legislative assemblies. In arrogating to themselves the authority to make laws, such assemblies trespassed on a privilege that, he believed, belonged to God alone.<sup>115</sup> By the same logic, he could see the colonial judicial system as nothing but illegitimate on Islamic grounds. His response to a juridical query he had received sometime in the last years of colonial rule is instructive here. The questioner had asked whether the decision of a non-Muslim judge on matters of divorce had any religious validity if the judge had been following prescriptions of Islamic law. Mawdudi argued in response that the question was poorly formulated, for the decision even of a *Muslim* judge acting under man-made laws had no Islamic legitimacy and that those serving in such courts were themselves criminals.<sup>116</sup> By way of context, it should be recalled that the colonial judicial system was based on the idea that any judge—British, Hindu, Zoroastrian, or Muslim—trained in the English common law could rule according to the shari`a as encapsulated in a small number of Islamic legal texts that had come to be officially recognised. It was about the legitimacy of this judicial practice that Rashid Rida had been asked early in the twentieth century, and he had endorsed it with much enthusiasm. Many among the Indian `ulama took a different view, however, arguing that the legal verdicts only of a shari`a-based *Muslim* judge could have any validity from an

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>115</sup>See, for instance, Mawdudi, "Majalis-i qanun-saz ki rukniyyat shar`i haythiyyat se" in idem, *Tahrik-i azadi-i Hind*, ii, pp.233–325 (this piece is dated December 1945).

<sup>116</sup>Sayyid Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *Aik nihayat ahamm istifta* (Lahore, n.d.).

Islamic standpoint. Mawdudi, for his part, had no time either for Rida's view or for that of these Indian `ulama. But he would also have been disdainful of Abul-Mahasin Sajjad's effort to create an informal sector of shari`a courts, for the overall political system at whose pleasure such courts existed was still one based on something other than a recognition of the sovereignty of God.

In his response to the aforementioned query to him, Mawdudi had also directed his readers' attention to the proceedings of a trial in 1945–6, in which three officers of the British Indian Army had been prosecuted for joining the anti-colonial Indian National Army during World War II. The officers had been serving in Burma when it fell to the Japanese forces, and it was under Japanese patronage that this nationalist army had been created. Upon being recaptured by the British, the Indian officers were charged, inter alia, with "waging war against the King"; they and their attorney argued to no avail that they were a legitimate force seeking to secure the freedom of their homeland and that they were acting under the authority of the Indian National Army Act that their government in exile had enacted. As the Advocate General of India put it in his opening remarks, "[n]o authority purporting to be given under that Act can be recognised by this Court or indeed by any court of this country. The assumption of any such authority was illegal from the beginning. Any tribunal or authority purporting to be established under that Act would be in repudiation of the allegiance which is inherent in a court of the country. Those who instituted or took part in the proceedings were themselves liable to be punished for offences against the State". The Auditor General's speech was "worth reading carefully", Mawdudi wrote, "for what it describes as the legal position of the Government of India vis-à-vis these so-called 'rebels' is exactly the position of the kingdom of the Lord of the universe vis-à-vis all genuine 'rebels'".<sup>117</sup>

Westernised Muslims might be rebels against God too, but Mawdudi's position on the matter of legislation would become considerably more nuanced once he had moved to the new state of Pakistan that was governed by such Muslims. Already in January 1948, he had told his law school audience in Lahore that Islamic law had its eternal rulings, as enunciated in the Qur'an and the Sunna, and its unchangeable principles, but it also had mechanisms for interpreting this law, for adapting it to changing needs, and for devising subsidiary new laws.<sup>118</sup> The Jama`at had split into a Pakistani and an Indian organisation upon the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, and it would take the latter decades before its leadership agreed, under intense grassroots pressure, to enter electoral politics.<sup>119</sup> This, too, was in marked contrast with the case in Pakistan, where the Jama`at entered electoral politics, albeit indirectly at first, from the early 1950s.<sup>120</sup> As Mawdudi saw it, the Jama`at could not enter electoral politics so long as the people rather than God were recognised as sovereign. But

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6, n. 1. For the quotation from the opening address of the Advocate General, see Moti Ram, ed., *Two Historic Trials in the Red Fort* (Delhi: n.d. [1946]), p. 19. On the Indian National Army and the movement associated with it, see Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011).

<sup>118</sup> Mawdudi, "Pakistan main Islami qanun," in idem, *Tahrir-i azadi-i Hind awr Musalman*, ii, pp. 354–357.

<sup>119</sup> Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: the Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton, 2009).

<sup>120</sup> Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 127–131.

once the sovereignty of God was affirmed, as it was by the Objectives Resolution in 1949, it became possible for the party to join the electoral fray.<sup>121</sup>

To turn to the second question posed at the beginning of this section, what has the idea of the sovereignty of God *prevented* the party from being able to do in Pakistani politics? Critics of the Jama`at, as well as other observers, have long pointed out that its political practice has tended to be far more pragmatic than its ideology would seem to allow. Thus the Objectives Resolution was embraced by the Jama`at even though the resolution had affirmed the sovereignty not only of God but also of the people of Pakistan. The Jama`at also accepted the constitution that was promulgated in 1956, and Mawdudi applauded it for recognising the sovereignty of God. The Objectives Resolution formed the preamble of this foundational document and it contained a number of provisions signalling the state's Islamic orientation. For the most part, however, it was a document that had built on the colonial-era Government of India Act of 1935 and it was guided by the example of western, liberal constitutions.<sup>122</sup> After it was abrogated by the martial law regime in 1958, the Islamists would continue to refer to it as an Islamic constitution and to call for its restoration. When the country received new constitutions, in 1962 and then in 1973, these too were accepted by Mawdudi and his followers, though they were no closer to Mawdudi's vision of an Islamic state than had been the case with the first constitution.

Furthermore, for all of Mawdudi's strictures against the false assumptions underlying western political systems, his organisation has participated in most of the elections that have been held in Pakistan's checkered electoral history. This required forging alliances with parties that are far from godly, and accepting the legitimacy of a political system many of whose premises, Mawdudi thought, contravened core Islamic principles. The General-Secretary of the Jama`at, Mian Tufayl Muhammad, had even praised General Yahya Khan (r. 1969–71), while he was in power following the end of the Ayub Khan regime, as the “champion of Islam”. This was presumably on account of hopes that the Jama`at would be a major winner once the military ruler had successfully combated the leftists represented by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's People's Party and the separatists led by East Pakistan's Awami League.<sup>123</sup> But it made no allowance for the fact that General Yahya Khan had a lifestyle that was fundamentally at odds with the sort of ideas that the Jama`at represented. As the official inquiry into the causes of the separation of East Pakistan under Yahya Khan would observe, “there is evidence to show that the General was addicted to heavy drinking, and was extremely friendly with a number of ladies of indifferent repute who took a lot of his time even during the critical days of the war [with India]”.<sup>124</sup> The party would later enter into an alliance with the military regime of General Zia

<sup>121</sup>Mawdudi, *Tahrir-i azadi-i Hind*, ii, 228 n. 1. Cf. Nasr, *Vanguard*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>122</sup>For a hard-hitting criticism of Mawdudi and his Jama`at for their acceptance of the Objectives Resolution and the 1956 constitution, see Muhammad Sarwar, *Jama`at-i Islami aur Islami dustur* (Lahore, 1956), esp. pp. 38–138. For Mawdudi's statement on the occasion of the promulgation of the constitution on March 23, 1956, see *ibid.*, p. 128. Sarwar's concern in this book is not to show the inadequacy of these foundational documents, of course, but rather to argue that Mawdudi's acceptance of them was hypocritical. They represented not a victory for him but rather a humiliating defeat, Sarwar said, since many of his demands regarding the place of Islam in Pakistan's public life were rejected by the modernist framers of these documents.

<sup>123</sup>Nasr, *Vanguard*, p. 162.

<sup>124</sup>*The Report of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission of Inquiry into the 1971 War (as declassified by the Government of Pakistan)* (Lahore, 2000), p. 289.

al-Haqq, who had the merit of cultivating a devout persona and who oversaw the most vigorous campaign of Islamisation that the country had seen thus far. Yet the Jama`at would have had to be extremely indulgent towards Zia al-Haqq's policies to see them as a realisation of divine sovereignty. Are the sovereignty of God, and ideas anchored in it, merely a strategic means, then, to maximise gains in the political marketplace and to find allies who have travelled at least some distance towards the positions the Islamists purport to represent?

As might be expected, the Jama`at-i Islami of Pakistan has had its share of ideological conflicts within its ranks, and the question of ideological purity vs. political pragmatism has often simmered under the surface of such conflicts.<sup>125</sup> The most important of these took place in 1957. Some influential members of the organisation were convinced that the time was not right for it to enter the political arena: this was a corrupt, and corrupting field, and the sort of work Mawdudi had initially envisioned towards forming cadres of righteous believers who would take the lead in bringing about a moral and political revolution had just begun. To become part of the political process in such circumstances was to legitimate the very structures the Jama`at had made it its mission to replace with a godly order. Mawdudi, however, took a strong position against this view. In a marathon six hour address to the party members in February 1957, he argued that there was no neat division of labour between moral formation and political participation, between ideas and practice:

The virtues (*akhlāq*) needed for a particular task are only acquired by embarking upon that task. The virtues required for preaching are developed only *through* preaching; those needed in trade will only come about in the shop and the market. You can do [theoretical] exercises in your cells for a full decade, but the moment you actually enter the field of preaching or of trade, you would realize that, in moral terms, you are a mere novice in the face of the [real] challenges you face. The case of politics and of elections is similar. In view of their moral problems, their perils and their drawbacks, you may well decide that you should remove yourself from this field for ever. But to aspire to eventually return to this arena and yet move away from it now on grounds that you will train yourself for some years in the virtues that are needed for proper participation in it is sheer immaturity. . . . The moral force that is needed in this arena cannot be brought to it upon being manufactured somewhere else. It can only develop within this field, through contestation with its satanic forces.<sup>126</sup>

Ideas were a necessary complement to political change, but this did not mean, as Mawdudi saw it, that an "intellectual revolution" needed to precede one in politics. The two could occur in tandem, as long as a committed body of people was at hand to work towards both. The career of the Prophet Muhammad showed this, but there were other illustrations of it, too. After attaining political power in Egypt, the prophet Joseph had used it in the service of his religious ends.<sup>127</sup> "In our own country, the British had first taken over power through purely political stratagems, and *then*, utilising the country's own resources, they had

<sup>125</sup>The question has received rather different assessments from observers of the Jama`at. See, for instance, Nasr, *Vanguard*, pp. 40–41; Hartung, *System of Life*, p. 232.

<sup>126</sup>Sayyid Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *Tahrik-i Islami ka a'inda la'iha-i `amal*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lahore, 1966), pp. 178–179. For a useful account of the crisis the Jama`at faced in 1957, see Nasr, *Vanguard*, pp. 31–43.

<sup>127</sup>Mawdudi, *Tahrik-i Islami*, p. 195. For the reference to the career of the Prophet Muhammad, see *ibid.*, pp. 194–195.

transformed its thought, morality, customs, culture and civilisation according to their own conceptions of life".<sup>128</sup>

Given that moral and political ideas are inextricably intertwined in Mawdudi's thought, as are ideology and political action, the question of what the sovereignty of God has meant in the Jama'at's political *practice* may not be the best one to ask. As a moral-political idea, at least some of the significance of divine sovereignty lies in its undergirding *all* action, which is to say that even the compromises that are routinely made in politics are made with the intention to change the political system in the desired direction.<sup>129</sup> By this logic, though Mawdudi did not put it this way, until a righteous political order is in place, the practices of an organisation like the Jama'at-i Islami cannot be properly judged in terms of its guiding principles any more than the shari'a itself can be judged before it has had the opportunity to govern all facets of peoples' lives.<sup>130</sup> Needless to say, such a position leaves people dissatisfied on all sides. There are those who remain suspicious that the Islamists' willingness to work with the constituted political system is insincere and that their goal is ultimately to change it in accord with their longstanding ideological commitments. For their part, many among the Islamists would lament, as they did in 1957, that their organisation was going too far in making compromises with an iniquitous world. Yet others have argued that there is no compromise that one cannot try to justify with a religious veneer, and that Mawdudi has had a masterful ability to do precisely that.<sup>131</sup> For all that, the sovereignty of God is not an ineffective way of claiming the moral high ground while putting others on the defensive for *their* failure to live up to its imperatives.

### Why Mawdudi?

Given that the sovereignty of God is not an idea that has been invoked exclusively by the Islamists and, indeed, that it did not even originate among them, it is worth asking why it should have become so intimately associated with the Islamists and specifically with Mawdudi. Three factors seem to have played a role in cementing this association. First, while many among the 'ulama have adopted the language of the sovereignty of God, as observed, there has always been a certain awkwardness to their embrace of it. This has had much to do with the fact that it is not a concept indigenous to the Islamic tradition, though their adoption of it does provide an illustration of the 'ulama's ability to work with concepts previously foreign to them. Seoharwi had used it in the 1942 edition of his book, and it is invoked in a work composed around the same time by a religious scholar tasked by the Muslim League

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>129</sup>Thus, despite Mawdudi's earlier opposition to women running for public office, his organisation supported the candidacy of Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, against Ayub Khan in the 1965 presidential elections. Mawdudi explained this as an instance of having to opt for the lesser evil. Nasr, *Vanguard*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>130</sup>What he did say in his famous 1957 speech was that the whole party could not be judged by the ethical lapses of some of its members, that the party's moral fiber was stronger than that of its competitors in the political arena, and that the right response to a corrupt political field was not to flee it but rather to enter it with the resolve to change things for the better. See Mawdudi, *Tahrir-i Islami*, pp. 222–224; also pp. 210–219 for Mawdudi's response to worries that the party would go "morally bankrupt" in the existing political arena. The point about the working of the shari'a is more unambiguously his. See Mawdudi, "Pakistan main Islami qanun" in *idem*, *Tahrir-i azadi-Hind*, ii, pp. 348–351; Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, pp. 53–57.

<sup>131</sup>See Sarwar, *Jama'at-i Islami*.

with creating a blueprint for an Islamic government.<sup>132</sup> The contemporary religious scholar Muhammad Taqi `Uthmani also uses it in the lectures he delivered on comparative political theory for the benefit of madrasa students in 1995.<sup>133</sup> Yet when Sulayman Nadwi had sought to offer some correctives to modernist views on legislation and its scope, the phrase he had used referred to God as “the true ruler” (*hakim-i haqiqi*). Similar phrases appear in the Urdu and Arabic texts of the 1951 resolution adopted by the `ulama on the principles of an Islamic state.<sup>134</sup> The official Urdu translation of the Objectives Resolution itself refers to God as “the absolute ruler of the universe, without any partner” which is not quite the sovereignty of God that the English version affirms.<sup>135</sup>

In contrast with the `ulama, Mawdudi’s eclectic formation, which included a substantial amount of traditional Islamic education but also a knowledge of English—rare among the `ulama of his generation—and his readings in western thought meant that this concept could be integrated into his thinking in a quite seamless manner.<sup>136</sup> There is little awkwardness or ambiguity to it when Mawdudi uses it. When he refers to *hakimiyyat*, there is no mistaking that he means sovereignty, and sometimes he even glosses the Urdu neologism with the English word.<sup>137</sup> This has made for a clearer identification of this idea with him than with anyone else.

Second, unlike the vague ethical commitments that the modernists sought to anchor in the sovereignty of God, Mawdudi had some very concrete ideas about what it entailed. These ideas might be mischievous, as Fazlur Rahman saw it, but they did not lack appeal, as he acknowledged himself.<sup>138</sup> Further, if the sovereignty of God required a strong state to uphold it, then a state that promised to implement nothing but God’s immutable law was presumably more attractive to greater numbers of people than one that justified its authoritarianism with self-serving appeals to justice.

<sup>132</sup>Muhammad Ishaq Sandelawi Nadwi, *Islam ka siyasi nizam* (A`zamgarh, 1957), pp. 12–14 (God as *muqtadir-i a`la*, which is glossed in English as “sovereign”). Sandelawi Nadwi had written this book on behalf of a committee of religious scholars constituted by the United Provinces Muslim League. Mawdudi and Sulayman Nadwi were among the other members of the committee, as was the journalist and religious intellectual `Abd al-Majid Daryabadi (sometime associate and longstanding admirer of the Khilafat leader Muhammad `Ali) and one Azad Subhani. The committee was able to meet only once, for an inaugural session, but Mawdudi’s influence is palpable on what this book says about God’s sovereignty and on the “political polytheism” (*siyasi shirk*) involved in failing to recognize it (pp. 14–15). This work does not really count therefore as a case of the `ulama’s independent articulation of such matters. On the appointment of the committee (circa 1940) and its composition, see the preface by Daryabadi in *ibid.*, pp. 1–3 (independent pagination).

<sup>133</sup>Muhammad Taqi `Uthmani, *Islam aur siyasi nazariyyat* (Karachi, 2010), pp. 173–177. By this point, it was possible for Taqi `Uthmani to straightforwardly translate *al-hukm* in Q 6.57 and 12.40 as sovereignty (*hakimiyyat*). Thus his Urdu rendering of the relevant portion of these verses translates as “sovereignty belongs to God alone”.

<sup>134</sup>For the Urdu text (*asl hakim, tashri`i aur takwini haythiyyat se*), see Muhammad Taqi `Uthmani, *Nifadh-i shari`at aur us-ke masa`il* (Karachi, 1992), p. 19. For the Arabic version (“al-hakim al-haqiqi . . .”), produced and published by the Jama`at-i Islami, see *al-Mabadi al-asiyya lil-dawla al-Islamiyya* (Karachi, n.d.), p. 3.

<sup>135</sup>For the Urdu version, see *Pakistan ka manshur-i azadi* (Karachi, n.d. [1950]), unpaginated front matter. The difference between the connotations of the English and the Urdu versions was noted long ago by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Pakistan: A Preliminary Draft* (Lahore, 1951), pp. 78–79.

<sup>136</sup>In his *System of Life*, Hartung has provided the most detailed investigation so far of how some modern Western intellectual trends shaped Mawdudi’s thought. He does not, however, explore the provenance of the sovereignty of God in this study.

<sup>137</sup>Besides examples already noted (see n. 34, above), see *Tafhim al-Qur`an*, ii, p. 37 n. 41 (commenting on Q 7.54).

<sup>138</sup>Rahman, “Implementation,” p. 208.

We can scarcely neglect, finally, the significance of Mawdudi's ability to introduce his ideas into the Arab world. In 1951, the Jama'at-i Islami had established an office to translate Mawdudi's writings and other party literature into Arabic and to disseminate this material in the Arab and the wider Muslim world.<sup>139</sup> Soon Mawdudi's books were being published in several Arab countries, notably Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, including early works in which he had expounded on the sovereignty of God and related ideas. Some of Mawdudi's works were also serialised in the Islamic press in the Middle East during these years; and associates of the Jama'at-i Islami such as Mas'ud 'Alam Nadwi (d. 1954) were regular contributors to Arab periodicals. It was through such channels that Islamists like Sayyid Qutb were introduced to Mawdudi's thought.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the relative newness of the idea of God's sovereignty in Qutb's thought is provided by the sixth and last edition of his *Social Justice in Islam* (1964). The idea is ubiquitous in this edition; the phrase was entirely absent in the previous five editions, published between 1949 and 1958.<sup>140</sup> It would have been self-defeating to acknowledge a specific debt to Mawdudi for this idea, but it is his influence that looms large here. And some of the Jama'at's literature itself credits Mawdudi with having introduced Qutb, and the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, to the sovereignty of God.<sup>141</sup> The writings of Qutb, and of Mawdudi, served in turn to popularise the idea in other circles. Its simplicity and power also helped it cross sectarian boundaries. Though Mawdudi and Qutb were both Sunnis, it has come to resonate in Shi'i circles, too, and it features, as articles 2 and 56, in the constitution framed in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1979.

To return to Pakistan, it is worth noting that Mawdudi's recognition abroad served also to enhance his influence at home. A grudging acknowledgement of this is provided by the aforementioned Ghulam Ahmad Parwez in a letter that he wrote to President Ayub Khan in January 1968. Fazlur Rahman's Institute of Islamic Research was then busy organising an international conference on the Qur'an to which Mawdudi had been invited. Parwez was worried that Mawdudi's ties with the 'ulama—a term he uses broadly, to refer to conservatives of different stripes—from abroad would enable him to dominate the proceedings and to shape them in directions detrimental to the government's interests. The same thing had happened, Parwez cautioned Ayub Khan, on the occasion of the International Colloquium on Islam convened by the University of the Punjab in 1957–8: "Mawdoodi had full grip on this group [of religious intellectuals from abroad] and he made them all to express his own views on every subject. This gave him a good handle to propagate that all the Ulema of Islamic world supported him in his views. Mawdoodi is sure to play the same game this time as well".<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that the paper Mawdudi had given at the 1957–8 colloquium was on the scope of legislation in Islam, and it had begun by affirming that God's sovereignty was

<sup>139</sup>I draw here on the account of the early activities of this office—the Dar al-'uruba lil-da'wa al-Islamiyya—in *Rudad-i Jama'at-i Islami* (Lahore, 1989), vii, pp. 163–178.

<sup>140</sup>See William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden, 1996), pp. xx, 8, 43, 105–106. On the various editions of this book, see *ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>141</sup>For instance, see Khalil Ahmad Hamidi, *Tahrik-i Islami ke atharat* (Lahore, 1976), p. 13.

<sup>142</sup>Ghulam Ahmad Parwez to Ayub Khan, January 12, 1968. Ghulam Ahmad Parwez Papers, Parwez Memorial Research Scholars Library, Lahore.



not just a religious matter but extended equally to law and politics.<sup>143</sup> But he had allowed some room for human legislation as well.<sup>144</sup> Other Islamists had a much stricter view of the implications of God's sovereignty. Yet such concessions may have made Mawdudi's position not less but even more influential. They served to reassure people that a recognition of God's legal sovereignty did not preclude adapting His law to changing circumstances, but they also made the point that this was to be a far more disciplined exercise in legal change than the sort of blanket mandate for legislation that the modernists seemed to want.<sup>145</sup>

That Mawdudi was not the originator of the idea of the sovereignty of God should not obscure the stamp that he was able to put on it. His formulation also had the virtues of simplicity and comprehensiveness: it made much better sense for an omnipotent God to have a sovereignty that extended to all areas of life, including the political; even Jesus had preached the same gospel. Rival conceptions of divine sovereignty—undergirding, as some Muslim modernists had it, a global community that would be united on a platform of shared ethical norms—were too idealistic and too abstract. They also seemed to be too closely tied to modernist visions of an authoritarian state that was not above bending Islam to its westernising will. Once Mawdudi's formulation of the sovereignty of God had gained traction, inside and outside Pakistan, it was very difficult to argue against it. It is remarkable that few have even tried to do so. To many others, it has seemed the most natural thing to read it in the Qur'an. Indeed, its strength may lie precisely in the fact that one does not need to be an Islamist in order to agree that sovereignty, in all its fullness, does indeed belong to God. [mzaman@Princeton.EDU](mailto:mzaman@Princeton.EDU)

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<sup>143</sup>Mawdudi, "Islam main qanun-sazi ka da'ira-i `amal" in idem, *Tafhimat*, iii, pp. 7–14, at pp. 7–8. Also published in *International Islamic Colloquium Papers, December 29, 1957-January 8, 1958* (Lahore, 1960), pp. 21–28 (of the Urdu section of this volume). What may have irritated Parwez even more about Mawdudi's prominence at this event (he was on its organising committee) is that a number of leading western scholars of Islam were also in attendance at it. These included: Alessandro Bausani, G. E. von Grunebaum, Louis Massignon, Bernard Lewis, A. K. S. Lambton, Steven Runciman, and W. C. Smith. Some among them may well have been sympathetic to Mawdudi's view of what the sovereignty of God meant in an Islamic context.

<sup>144</sup>Mawdudi, "Islam main qanun-sazi" in idem, *Tafhimat*, iii, pp. 9ff.

<sup>145</sup>"Even if an *ijtihad* that is undertaken without the various precautions [that Mawdudi had elucidated] and according to one's capricious interpretations is given the force of law on the basis of political power, it would not be accepted by the collective conscience of Muslims. Nor can it properly become part of an Islamic legal system. The moment the political power that has enforced it leaves the scene, its law would be tossed into the trash can." *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 13–14.