

Meeting on “Imamate and Leadership”: A Comparative Elucidation of the Continuity of Leadership in Islamic Thought

Organized by the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, the specialized session titled “**Imamate and Leadership: A Historical-Theoretical Elucidation of the Continuity of Leadership in Islamic Political Thought**” was held on Friday, April 24, 2026, in the Avicenna Hall of the Iranian House of Wisdom.

This program, held in commemoration of the late Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the second deceased Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, examined the historical and theoretical dimensions of the concepts of leadership and imamate in Islamic political thought, emphasizing the continuity of this concept throughout Islamic intellectual history.

Three main speakers presented their views at the session:

- **Dr. Amir Horr** (Prof. Dr. Amir Horr), a researcher in Islamic history and a senior expert in artificial intelligence, who serves as a Senior Scientist at the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT - LKR).
- **Prof. Dr. Salim A. Hadžić**, born in 1953 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He completed his early education at the Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa in Sarajevo and was appointed in 1973 as the first official imam dispatched by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria. He studied Oriental Studies, Philosophy, Slavic Studies, and Education at the University of Vienna, and received his doctorate in Religious Studies with a focus on the concept of jihad. From 1982 to 2019, he worked as a teacher of Islamic religious education in Vienna, Austria, and continues to engage in academic and research activities.
- **Dr. Reza Gholami**, Cultural Counselor of Iran in Austria and a faculty member of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies.

Imamate: A Model for Future Governance

Prof. Amir Horr, a historian and university professor in Austria, was the first speaker. While outlining the coordinates, objectives, and horizons of the new Islamic civilization, he emphasized that Islamic civilization bears no resemblance to an empire and has never sought to impose itself on others. Rather, the driving force behind its growth and expansion in the world is invitation (*da'wah*) based on rationality, dialogue, and free thinking.

To better understand this distinction, he explained that what is referred to as “Islamic civilization” can theoretically be analyzed within the framework of two theories: the theory of Caliphate and the theory of Imamate. In his view, apart from the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the subsequent caliphates—such as the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates—were not necessarily based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. They were largely administered as political systems with

structures resembling empires. In contrast, the theory of Imamate is founded upon the principles of justice, spirituality, and the spiritual elevation of human beings. From this perspective, politics and governance must serve the realization of justice and the spiritual advancement of humanity.

This theoretical distinction can be better understood in the context of the history of human governance. He explained that systems of governance began with simple and local structures, then expanded into empires, and in the modern era have taken the form of democracies. According to him, this trajectory shows that humanity has been on a path of evolving methods of governance, yet it still faces serious global crises.

For this reason, he stressed that in the current situation, we need to rethink the concept of governance in a way that allows it to be formulated within the idea of “global governance,” drawing inspiration from the concept of Imamate. The question that must be asked is: What is the next step on humanity’s agenda? And how can we achieve a system that does not merely manage today’s problems, but actually eradicates them at their roots?

His answer to this question lay in the definition he offered of Islamic civilization: a civilization that is, in essence, a free, ethics-centered, and justice-oriented civil society, seeking to remedy the sufferings that humanity has endured due to the absence of a “line of transcendence” and disconnection from spirituality.

Continuity of Guidance and Empathy with the Oppressed; Dr. Hadžić: Martyr Khamenei Is an Enduring Model for Us

Prof. Dr. Salim Ahmad Hadžić delivered the second speech.

At the beginning of his address, while explaining the importance of the continuity of guidance for Muslims after the passing of the Noble Prophet (PBUH), he discussed various opinions on the subject of caliphate and succession in the Islamic world. Dr. Hadžić added that it is very important for Muslims to consider themselves committed to the Holy Qur’an, the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH), and his Ahl al-Bayt, and to organize their individual and social lives accordingly.

He then paid tribute to the character of the late Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, emphasizing that he played a major and unique role in enlightening the Islamic world and assisting the oppressed, especially in the Muslim world.

Dr. Hadžić described his presence at the session as a moral duty and said:

“I am one of the Bosnians living in Austria. One of the most prominent points of the era of the leadership of the late Ayatollah Khamenei for me was when he called on everyone to help my people in Bosnia.”

Referring to Ayatollah Khamenei’s deep empathy with the people of Bosnia during the years of war (1992), he added that the martyred Iranian leader repeatedly emphasized in his Friday prayer sermons the importance of supporting the people of Bosnia against aggression and continually stressed this support.

Prof. Hadžić, citing the Prophetic hadith “Man lam yashkur an-nās lam yashkur Allāh” (Whoever does not thank people has not thanked God), stressed that expressing gratitude for the services rendered by the late Ayatollah Khamenei to the Bosnian nation—which has made him an unparalleled role model—is a religious and moral duty.

At the end of his speech, Dr. Hadžić thanked Almighty God and the organizers of the session (the Iranian House of Wisdom and the Iranian Cultural Representation in Austria) for providing this opportunity to fulfill this duty and express gratitude.

From Caliphate to Imamate: Elucidating the Theological Foundations of Leadership in Abrahamic Religions

Dr. Reza Gholami, Head of the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna and a senior lecturer in political philosophy, cultural and civilizational studies at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies in Tehran, delivered a speech titled “**Leadership and Succession in Abrahamic Religions: A Comparative Study between Christianity and Islam.**”

He conducted a deep and comparative examination of the theological foundations of leadership theories and demonstrated that this issue remains one of the most vital religious and political questions in the contemporary world.

Dr. Gholami began by posing fundamental questions—Where does leadership originate? What grants it legitimacy? And how is it transferred from one generation to another?—and compared the two major Abrahamic traditions. Emphasizing the internal diversity within both religions, he outlined the main streams of Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and Islam (Sunni and Shia).

In the Christian section, the speaker focused on the “rock and keys” covenant in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 16:18), which presents Peter as the foundation of the Church and the representative of Christ, forming the chain of apostolic succession in Catholicism. He referred to the conciliar approach in Orthodoxy and the revolutionary principle of “the priesthood of all believers” in Protestantism. He concluded that leadership in Christianity is primarily spiritual, institutional, and collective in nature, rather than individual with direct divine appointment.

In the Islamic section, Dr. Gholami contrasted the two main theories: the Caliphate in the Sunni tradition, whose legitimacy is derived from below (through consultation and the people’s pledge of allegiance), viewing the caliph as lacking infallibility and direct divine appointment; and the Imamate in Twelver Shia Islam, which is transferred based on explicit divine designation (*naṣṣ*) from the Prophet (PBUH) to Imam Ali (peace be upon him) and the eleven Imams after him. The Imam possesses characteristics such as infallibility, affiliation with the Ahl al-Bayt, and the station of the “Perfect Human.” He cited key Qur’anic verses on *wilayah* (guardianship), *tabligh* (propagation), *ikmal* (perfection of religion), *uli al-amr* (those in authority), and *tat-hir* (purification) as the theological foundations of this theory.

The speaker then addressed the historical evolution of these theories: the rise and fall of the Caliphate from the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs to the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in

1924, and in contrast, the development of Imamate from the Greater Occultation to the theory of general deputyship of the jurists (*niyābat-e ʿāmmeh-ye foqahā*) and ultimately to the theory of *Wilayat al-Faqih* in the contemporary era. He emphasized the dynamism of *ijtihad* in Shia Islam—which, unlike the Sunni tradition, has always kept the gate of *ijtihad* open—and the condition of individual justice for the deputy of the Imam, which can prevent deviation and misuse.

In the final section, Dr. Gholami referred to the emerging phenomenon of “trans-sectarian leadership” and noted that in today’s world, even some Sunni currents regard the leadership of Imam Khomeini (may God have mercy on him) and the late Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei not necessarily from a Shia theological perspective, but from the viewpoint of political efficacy, independence, and cohesion. He concluded that both Christian and Islamic traditions, despite their different theological answers, share a common concern for preserving religion and guiding society. Only the tradition that does not lose its capacity for dynamic engagement with the questions of the time will endure.

The Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna, as a center for cultural, philosophical, and scientific dialogue between the Iranian-Islamic tradition and contemporary thought, hosted this event, which was warmly welcomed by researchers and enthusiasts of Islamic and Iranian studies.

This session is only a small part of the cultural activities of the Iranian Representation in Austria in the intellectual and cultural fields.

[The full video of the speeches is available on the YouTube channel of the Iranian House of Wisdom in Vienna.](#)