

Intellectual Exchange between Shiite Scholars and Al-Azhar Scholars in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract: Intellectual exchange is a fundamental pillar of communication between different cultures. It aims to understand the other, exchange ideas, and reduce misunderstandings. This concept is reflected in our research on the art of scholarly exchange between Shiite and Al-Azhar scholars. It aims to promote Islamic unity and resolve doctrinal and jurisprudential differences between them, finding solutions to all differences through meaningful dialogue.

On the other hand, the twentieth century witnessed significant intellectual, political, and social transformations at the Islamic and global levels. These transformations significantly impacted the relationship between Islamic sects, particularly between Shiite and Sunni sects. Despite their differences, which extended over various periods, this century witnessed significant intellectual and activism efforts to unite the two sects through dialogue and exchange of views to achieve Islamic unity and enhance rapprochement and understanding between them. In addition to what has been mentioned, there were significant efforts to overcome the differences between the two parties and unify efforts to confront external threats that pose a danger to all Muslims, regardless of sectarianism. The most prominent challenges are colonialism and internal conflicts, which posed a real challenge to the Islamic nation. There were many manifestations of rapprochement between the two sides, the most prominent of which was the House of Rapprochement between Islamic Schools of Thought, which played a role in stimulating intellectual dialogue between Shiite and Sunni scholars and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood between them. Within the framework of our topic (The Intellectual Convergence between Sunni and Shiite Sects), we have clarified the most critical points of convergence between the two sects throughout history, the points of convergence between Shiite and Sunni thought, the rejection of all aspects of their differences, the encouragement of Islamic unity, and the rejection of sedition and intellectual extremism between the two sects. Through our research, we can see the efforts of scholars and leaders to bring the two sects closer together and strive for Islamic unity. These efforts were not limited to the clergy but extended to the efforts of some rulers, starting with Nader Shah's efforts to initiate unity between the two sects, refrain from insulting the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, and lead prayers in Mecca under Imam Ja'fari. This is in addition to other attempts by scholars, including Zanjani, Sheikh Salim al-Bishri, and Sheikh al-Shaltut. From the Shiite side, Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani, Muhammad Husayn Kashif al-Ghita', al-Hurr al-'Amili, and many others sought to bring the two sects closer together, explore their differences, and address critical legal issues for the sake of Islamic unity and to resolve their differences. The research covers an introduction to the history of intellectual rapprochement between Shiite and Sunni thought, the most important figures who sought rapprochement between the two sects, and the differences between them, as well as the most important religious figures who sought rapprochement between Sunni and Shiite, thought. The research aims to shed light on these efforts, review the most important figures and institutions that led the rapprochement movement, and study the impact of this rapprochement on Islamic societies in the twentieth century and the lessons that can be learned from it.

Introduction:

The twentieth century witnessed a remarkable interaction between Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and Shiite thought. This interaction had a significant impact, given its role in achieving intellectual and religious goals that influenced the consolidation of unity among Muslims through joint dialogue to find solutions to intellectual, cultural, and other problems. The goal of intellectual exchange is to strive for unity among Muslims based on the principle of monotheism, which Islam seeks. This is stated in the Holy Quran, where God Almighty says: "Indeed, this nation of yours is one nation, and I am your Lord, so fear Me." This emphasizes the Holy Quran's emphasis on Islamic unity and the rejection of differences through constructive dialogue. We note attempts at rapprochement, as many efforts to achieve rapprochement and mutual understanding between Sunni and Shiite jurisprudence emerged from the beginning of these attempts. Intellectual exchange emerged as a manifestation of cultural and social transformations. Historical and political events formed the background for this relationship, as both sides sought to find common ground between Sunni and Shiite jurisprudence despite political and sectarian tensions. Some efforts demonstrated efforts to achieve mutual understanding and enhance dialogue between these two. The two Islamic factions require a deep understanding of the historical and cultural context to analyze how this intellectual interaction has shaped and developed over the decades. These attempts to bring Sunni and Shiite thought together during the Safavid era in the seventeenth century were a source of renewed interest, revealing various dimensions of the effort to promote dialogue and Islamic understanding (1). Attempts at intellectual rapprochement and exchange also took place in the eighteenth century, with an official dialogue being established in 1722 AD between scholars. However, political events and the rise of the Afghans and Qajars to power in 1796 led to widespread chaos (2). On the other hand, Nader Shah played an important role in the rapprochement between Sunni and Shiite thought in 1743 AD. Due to Nader Shah's military nature and lack of inclination toward either sect, he did not want to clash with either party to avoid obstructing political and military relations. Therefore, he strove to bring the two sects closer together and worked hard to hold a conference between the two schools of thought. Indeed, a conference was held between Sunni and Shiite scholars in Najaf, attended by seventy scholars, including scholars from Afghanistan and Transoxiana. This conference resulted in the signing of a written treaty pledging that Sunni and Shiite scholars would not harm each other or criticize the Companions. It emphasized the "art of intellectual restraint," as the Najaf Conference was one of the most important

attempts to bring Sunni and Shiite thought closer together. This period is known as the "Dawn of Understanding." In addition to what has been mentioned, Nader Shah emphasized rapprochement between Sunnis and Shiites and proposed a project to bring them together and resolve all their cultural and intellectual problems, but he faced rejection from the Ottomans. It is noteworthy that This rapprochement project, despite the government's vested interests and the ruler's ignorance, was largely successful in uniting Sunni and Shiite scholars for the first time in history around a common document that consolidated the foundations of sectarian rapprochement between them, thus establishing a basis upon which to build upon later (3). In the nineteenth century, attempts at rapprochement and intellectual exchange occurred during the Ottoman Empire in 1884 AD by numerous Muslim scholars, most notably Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. This figure played a pivotal and important role in the pursuit of Islamic unity in general and in Egypt and Sudan during the reign of Abdul Hamid II in particular. He emphasized this in most of his articles and his opposition to European occupation and colonialism through articles he published in the magazine Al-Urwat al-Wuthqa (4). He considered European occupation to be one of the most prominent challenges facing the Islamic nation and threatening its unity and cohesion. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had a great impact in deepening the cultural, intellectual, and scientific ties between Najaf and Egypt through the intellectual, scientific, and cultural exchange between the Shiites, who were represented by the religious seminary in Najaf, and Al-Azhar Mosque, which represented the Sunnis. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was able to transfer his scientific experience from Najaf to Al-Azhar Mosque, which was reflected in his students. There was also a similarity between Najaf and Al-Azhar Mosque, as they were the center of all sciences and knowledge, including the Holy Quran and its sciences, the Arabic language and its literature, and other sciences. Najaf was also a camp for intellectual and cultural resistance to colonialism, and Najaf was a destination for those seeking it from all over the world. Najaf was full of sciences and scholars in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Al-Azhar scholars were not ignorant of the status of this great city, which produced the personality of Sayyid al-Afghani, whose great influence in steering the rudder of the literary, intellectual, and political movement in Egypt they later came to know well. Al-Afghani was influenced by the cognitive, political, and cultural environment prevailing in Najaf then. He witnessed many political and social events that affected him, which were reflected in his speeches and ideas (5).

Scholars who played a role in the intellectual

rapprochement between the two schools of thought (Sunni and Shiite thought)

1- The role of Muhammad Rashid Rida (6) in intellectual rapprochement:

Muhammad Rashid Rida is considered one of the most prominent advocates of reform and Islamic unity. He called for unifying beliefs, literary teachings, and judicial rulings. Unifying beliefs were to refine and purify religion from corrupt teachings and heresies. He believed that the reason for the backwardness and decline of Muslims was their deviation from the teachings of the true faith and religious laws, as he thought that the glory of Muslims would only return through their religion (7). Within the framework of unifying the ranks of Muslims, in 1898 AD, he called for reconciliation between Islamic law and contemporary needs, interpreting Islamic jurisprudence with a modern interpretation, or issuing fatwas and opening the door to *ijtihad*. He published articles in which he affirmed the marriage of a Shiite man to a Sunni woman, defended the imamate, and called for Islamic unity (8).

Muhammad Rashid Rida, the owner of *Al-Manar* magazine, is considered one of the pioneers of the call for Islamic unity among Sunnis. He had good relations and shared concerns with Shiite scholars. The call in this magazine was based on eliminating heretical divisions, reviving the *Sunnah*, guiding and directing rulers, especially those with different sects, and calling them to unite and not to use differences in some Islamic rulings as an excuse to divide the ranks of Muslims. His call was reformist, extending beyond reform at the individual level. His call was reformist for Islamic governments because, from his point of view, reform begins with governments. It is evident from this that the essence of his reformist appeals is establishing Islamic unity far removed from sectarian division and rejecting differences among Muslims (9). 2- The role of Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani in intellectual rapprochement:

Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani (10) was essential and influential in Muslim rapprochement. Most of his articles fell within the concept of unity and rejecting differences. Most of his publications in *Al-Ilm* magazine and other publications fell within this framework, especially after the convening of the Constitutional Union in Istanbul. The goal was to bring Shiite and Sunni thought closer, as they referred to the five Islamic sects and emphasized Islamic unity. Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani was well-versed in the sciences and doctrines. This familiarity and knowledge led to communication with the sheiks of Al-Azhar, including Muhammad Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida, and other scholars from other Islamic countries. He united Egypt and Syria, and his

efforts to reform outdated ideas in the service of religion and science and to unify ranks were clear (11). In the context of his efforts to preserve Muslims' unity and the Islamic community's boundaries, he issued the magazine "*Al-Ilm*", published in Najaf and the language of reform and unity. During that period, the missionary movement carried out by Christians spread throughout the Islamic countries. In the context of the efforts, initiatives appeared to bring together Islamic sects. The correspondence between Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani and Muhammad Rashid Rida was a good step in establishing a constructive dialogue that paved the way for more understanding and cooperation between Muslims. The correspondence was around 1911 AD (12). He was awaiting his visit to Iraq and was welcomed by going to Basra and thanking him for publishing an article against proselytizing, saying, "Yes, this is what is hoped for from you, the greatest reformers of Islam and the oldest fighters against heresies and renewed superstitions." However, Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani protested against him and responded to this article, stating his original intention, saying, "In summary, this paragraph in your brilliant commentary is one of the things our superstitious enemies use as a pretext to brag about. Even if you issued it merely to protest against the fanatics of the Christian Book and to cite the tolerance of the Muslim Book, then the criticism is not your intention, as it is sacred to me and is known." (14) In concluding our discussion of Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani, we must draw inspiration from his reformist path and the constant pursuit of unity, that he loved all Muslims regardless of their affiliations. He was concerned about Muslims and believed that the nation's well-being lies with the well-being of those who lead it. From here, we see the importance of Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani's reformist and intellectual role in bringing about rapprochement and intellectual exchange (15).

3- The Role of Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Kashf al-Ghita' in Intellectual Rapprochement:

One of the figures who played a prominent role in the issue of rapprochement among Muslims was Muhammad Hussein Kashf al-Ghita'. He played a prominent role in strengthening communication and understanding between Al-Azhar University and the religious seminary in Najaf. He sought to build bridges of dialogue between the two parties and promote intellectual exchange. He led campaigns to promote mutual understanding and rapprochement between Sunni and Shiite jurisprudence. His role is part of broader efforts to enhance solidarity and understanding between various Islamic movements. His visit to Cairo followed Mohsen al-Amin's visit in 1904, three years later. Al-Amin discussed with the

head of the Ashrafs the curricula and learning methods used at Al-Azhar. Muhammad Hussein Kashf al-Ghita' then traveled to Cairo, Egypt, and met with Salim al-Bishri and Muhammad Bakhit, who was appointed Grand Mufti of Egypt shortly thereafter. Muhammad Kashf al-Ghita' delivered lectures to crowds of Al-Azhar students (16).

Muhammad Hussein Kashf al-Ghita's efforts began to appear clearly after the Jewish attack on Jerusalem, and also to the spread of knowledge, thought, and newspapers among intellectual circles, which helped him travel to Al-Azhar in the year (1912 AD). He stayed there and met Salim al-Bishri and stayed more with the Mufti of Haqqania, Sheikh (Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti'i). His Eminence Muhammad al-Husayn Kashf al-Ghita' transmits (I went down to Egypt and stayed for about three months. My goal in going to it and the delegations to it was to meet its senior men and the most prominent scholars from the scholars of Al-Azhar and others). He met Sheikh Bakhit al-Muti'i and enjoyed his lessons, and described his lessons with high descriptions (17). He dedicated a long eulogy to his son, full of lavish praise, to the point where he said at the end, "Islam has lost that precious treasure, and that impregnable fortress has collapsed." The sheikh's spirituality was one that called for and worked toward Islamic religious unity, a sentiment that was inherited among scholars. However, the closed atmosphere in the seminary meant no one could break down the barriers, as he called for rapprochement between the two schools of thought with the phrase "Islamic unity" to avoid hatred and enmity between the two brothers (18). Sheikh Muhammad Kashf al-Ghita' corresponded with Muhammad Rashid Rida, the owner of al-Manar magazine, following the Jerusalem Conference, where he said, "However, it must be certain that the purpose of rapprochement between the Islamic schools of thought is not to eliminate the root cause of disagreement between them. Rather, the ultimate purpose and overriding goal is to eliminate the possibility of this disagreement being a cause of enmity and hatred, with the goal of replacing estrangement and conflict with brotherhood and rapprochement" (19). 4- Sharaf al-Din's Role in Intellectual Rapprochement: Sharaf al-Din is considered one of the most prominent Shiite scholars who played a role in bringing Muslims closer together. He visited Iraq and the holy shrines and was one of those who confronted European colonialism and the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Sharaf al-Din is considered a disciple of the Akhund. Sharaf al-Din established an essential basis for rapprochement among Muslims through his dialogues with the hardline thinkers on the other side. Through his approach, he was able to win them over and resolve the contentious issues between Sunnis and Shiites. He

tried to bring them together and believed that politics divided them and that what unites the two parties is greater than what divides them. He visited many Arab countries, including Cairo, the Hijaz, Syria, and Lebanon (20). These visits played an essential role in communication and exchanging ideas among Muslim scholars, whether Sunni or Shiite. Sharaf al-Din's visit was one of the most controversial visits in 1911 when Salim al-Bishri was still the Sheikh of Al-Azhar. Correspondence occurred between Sharaf al-Din and Salim al-Bishri, as the first letter was on the sixth of Dhu al-Qi'dah 1329 AH, corresponding to the twenty-ninth of October 1911. Contact between them continued for five months until Sharaf al-Din left Cairo (21).

Sharaf al-Din succeeded in attempts to bring about rapprochement through his visit to Egypt with his uncle Muhammad Hussein al-Sadr. The discussions and meetings were individual between the two sects. The first step and initiative took place after the fall of the Ottoman Empire with the Caliphate Conference held by al-Azhar at the invitation of Sheikh Muhammad Abu al-Fadl al-Jizawi () in the year (1926). An invitation was sent to Iran, Iraq, and Qom, but Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani apologized. He mentioned his apology in the magazine al-Murshid in its first year, issue six (1926): "We received an invitation to attend the Caliphate Conference from His Eminence the President of the Conference, the Sheikh of al-Azhar in Egypt. We learned from the contents of the invitation that its purpose was to participate with the rest of the honorable members in deliberating opinion and consultation to finalize the matter of the great Islamic Caliphate and appointing the most deserving people to follow it in our present era. We thank the Sheikh of al-Azhar and appreciate above all this sublime Islamic feeling demonstrated by a living people like our Egyptian brothers and their good interest in a vital mission, but we apologize for not attending."

Among the Egyptian scholars who expressed their opinion on the writings of Sheikh Sharaf al-Din Ahmad Amin al-Antaki and his return to the Shiite sect was through reading the book "Al-Muraja'at" and his interaction with several scholars and mutual dialogues, including Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani, Mohsen al-Hakim, and Muhammad Hussein Kashf al-Ghita. Sharaf al-Din visited Iraq in 1936 to renew his pledge to the holy shrines where the Imams received him. Most of the discussions between Salim al-Bishri and Sheikh Sharaf al-Din were about the issue of the legal evidence that imposes the doctrine of the Ahl al-Bayt and the importance of ijtihaad and respect for the Ahl al-Bayt. Most reviews and intellectual exchanges about the Hadith of the Two Weighty Things and their representation of Noah's Ark and the Gate of Forgiveness are about the safety of an imbalance in

religion. Most of the Sharaf al-Din relied on the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah. May Allah's prayers and peace be upon him and his family. (I am leaving among you the two weighty things, the Book of Allah, the Almighty, and my family and household. The ninth review (No. 17) was in Dhul-Qi'dah 1329 AH. Salim al-Bishri asked for more proof, as he said (Unleash the pen and do not fear Sam, for my ear is attentive to you and my chest is spacious, and I take knowledge from you on the reins of my soul and release from myself the shackles of Sam. Zalakh and it is more moist to my heart than clear water, so increase me from it for Allah or your father, increase me, and peace).

The role of Sheikh al-Zanjani in rapprochement:

Al-Zanjani brought Al-Azhar closer to the Ahl al-Bayt school of thought. He traveled to Al-Azhar in 1936, where he benefited from spreading newspapers and magazines and the Ahl al-Bayt school of thought. He visited Salafi organizations, including the Islamic Guidance Society, and went to the Egyptian University, where he delivered a resonant speech that impressed many scholars and writers. Sheikh al-Zanjani was warmly received at an official ceremony by al-Maraghi, the Sheikh of al-Azhar. Al-Maraghi emphasized that this reception and welcome from Sunni al-Azhar extended to the Shiites as a whole, and it was agreed to establish a scientific complex that would include the five schools of thought. Sheikh al-Zanjani continued in this regard and established the scientific complex in Najaf, as stated in the Al-Bilad newspaper (1356 AH), which said, "The Scientific Council of Najaf Ashraf Scholars approved our decisions with the Sheikhdom of al-Azhar" (22). It is worth mentioning that to receive and welcome Sheikh Al-Zanjani from various Arab countries, a celebration and honoring was held for him in any country he entered, such as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and all the countries of the Islamic and Arab East. This was due to their admiration for his great reformist call, their conviction in his message to unify the nation, and their recognition of his significant influence. His call in every country was not without mentioning Islamic unity (23), citing the noble Qur'anic verses, the Almighty's saying: "The believers are but brothers" (24), and the Almighty's saying: "And hold fast to the rope of Allah all together and do not be divided" (25). The other matter he called for was religious unity and human unity, pointing to the Almighty's saying: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam" (26) to remind everyone that they are children of one person, our father, Adam. Al-Zanjani's point of view on Islamic unity was based on two matters. The first matter was that all Muslims did not differ in the three principles of Islam, which are monotheism, resurrection, and prophethood, and because the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not

charge Muslims with belief. Al-Zanjani believed that if the matter were one of the fundamentals of Islam, he would have charged Muslims with it. Another matter that Al-Zanjani proposed was the establishment of a "scientific Islamic legislative council" whose purpose was to unify the sectarian branches by presenting these sectarian branches to the basic sources of Islamic legislation, namely the Holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah, which is an explanation of the Holy Quran. His vision was clear that the unification of the sects would be through adherence to the rulings of the Islamic religion, and this is the spirit of Shi'ism, which is the pillar of the stages of unity and its goal, deriving this from the hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "The example of my family is like that of Noah's Ark. Whoever boards it will be saved, and whoever stays behind will drown." We see that Al-Zanjani's influence through his call was evident and was accepted by Al-Azhar, as evidenced by the statement of the Sheikhdom of Al-Azhar at that time. There were mutual visits between Al-Zanjani and the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Muhammad Mustafa Al-Maraghi, in Cairo, to the point that these visits were published in the Egyptian newspapers, and each visit resulted in reaching methods for achieving Islamic unity and how to adapt it to human circumstances and psychology. However, these discussed points were not implemented due to the discontent of the colonizers. At that time, and their attempts to sow discord among Muslims, despite this, Al-Zanjani and Al-Maraghi were keen to put forward their reform plan for intellectual and religious rapprochement between the sects and to reject division among them because the focus of these differences only produced strife. The more the sects diverge, the greater the opportunity for those who support division among the sects to spread lies about each sect, spreading myths about them, which incites hatred and grudges among the sects, reaching the point of murder. The truth is that the principles of Islam are fixed among all Muslims, regardless of their sects, and the difference between the Shiite and Sunni sects is like the difference between the Sunni sects, i.e., a difference in the branches of religion, not in its principles (27). Initiatives towards Islamic unity continued in Lebanon and Syria, and he participated in a conference of scholars in 1983, and he was the sole representative of the Shiites. The conference resolved to strive for Islamic unity (28).

5- The Role of Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Qummi in Rapprochement

The late Imam Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Qummi was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1908 AD to a well-off family that relied on agriculture on their private property. His family had a deep connection to religion. He was the grandson of seven grandfathers, each a religious

scholar. His father, the late Hujjat al-Islam (the highest spiritual title at the time), Agha Ahmad al-Qummi, was the chief religious judge in Tehran. He was raised religiously in his father's home, where he would sit in the forefront, issuing his fatwas to his disciples and followers, resolving their religious and worldly problems. Everyone would listen with awe and respect. The boy grew up and went to elementary school, memorizing the Holy Quran and becoming fascinated by its literary and artistic aspects. He decided to study the Arabic language and literature. Upon completing high school, he enrolled in the Higher School of Arts. He continued his religious studies with the help of specialized teachers, studying the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and other Islamic sciences (29). After graduating, he found himself preoccupied with the internal dispute between Muslims, where there was a complete rift between Sunnis and Shiites. The Shiites knew nothing about the Sunnis, and the Sunnis knew nothing about the Shiites. The matter was left to each side's ignorance of the other, and each group attributed everything bad and untrue to the other. This is why there was discord, estrangement, and estrangement between them. It was not a rift between two sects of one religion, but it was like they were two different religions. This broke his heart, and he decided to do something to expose to both sides the extent of the errors and illusions imposed by non-religious forces for reasons mainly related to politics and ignorance. He believed that the correct idea for a true Muslim, and a cleric in particular, is a trust that all people must fulfill. He decided to go forth to uncover this truth, so he left Iran in 1937 and began his long journey against fanaticism, backwardness, and attachment to false myths embedded in both Shiite and Sunni jurisprudence. Islam, as he knows, calls all people to a common word... the word of justice and truth. Its book is the Quran, in which Sunnis and Shiites do not differ over a single surah, verse, or even a single letter. On his way to Egypt, he consulted with Shiite scholars in Iraq and Lebanon, which he chose as a launching pad for spreading his idea and his struggle to unite Islamic sects. Egypt is the heart of the Islamic world and contains Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the most crucial university that protects Islam, and the most prominent Sunni scholars. It has always had a mutual love between it and the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's household). It is also the natural homeland for every sincere Islamic call, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and dozens of other defenders of truth and right came to it. Upon his arrival in Egypt, he met with the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, the eminent Imam Sheikh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi (30), who supported the call and welcomed the idea. He allowed him to connect with Muslim scholars such as Sheikh Abdul Majeed Salim, Sheikh Mustafa Abdul Raziq, and

others, who later formed the nucleus of the call for rapprochement and the House of Rapprochement. He also invited him to give lectures at Al-Azhar Al-Sharif to create an opportunity for psychological and intellectual rapprochement between him and other Sunni scholars. However, World War II broke out, and he was forced to return to Iran to preach his call there. Grand Ayatollah Imam al-Burujirdi had settled there. In Qom in 1945 AD, he met him and gained his support and backing for the call for rapprochement. Thus, the call gained the support of the most excellent Sunni and Shiite leaders (and this support was one of the most essential elements for the success of the call).

After the war ended, he returned to Egypt and met with his surviving fellow scholars. The House of Rapprochement between Islamic Schools of Thought was established in Cairo in February 1947. Among its founding members were the late Sheikh Abdul Majeed Salim, Sheikh Mustafa Abdul Razek, Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltut, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Issa, Sheikh Hassan al-Banna, Sheikh Muhammad al-Hussein al-Kashf al-Ghita, Sayyid Abdul Hussein Sharaf al-Din al-Musawi, Muhammad Ali Alawiyya Pasha, and others. Imam al-Qummi was its general secretary and first founder (Article 6 of the Statute). The first session in modern Islamic history was held with them, attended by representatives of the various Islamic schools of thought. Muslim scholars accepted the invitation from its inception and opened their hearts and minds to it. Those who later joined it were the late Sheikh Ahmed Hassan al-Baqouri, Muhammad al-Ghazali, and Sheikh Muhammad Metwally al-Shaarawy. The group published the magazine (Risalat al-Islam) in January 1949, under the management of the late His Eminence Sheikh Muhammad al-Madani and His Eminence Sheikh Abdul Aziz Issa, and it continued to be published for nearly fourteen years. Its issues included the pens of leading scholars of the Islamic world and the interpretation of the Holy Quran by Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout in successive chapters until it was completed as a single book. Then, in April 1960, His Eminence issued his historic fatwa permitting worship according to Islamic schools of thought, including the Twelver Shia school. Perhaps the most crucial thing that embodies Imam al-Qummi's personality is what the late Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout mentioned in his introduction to the story of rapprochement: "I wish someone other than my brother, the reformist Imam Muhammad Taqi al-Qummi, had written the story of rapprochement, so that he could speak about that struggling scholar who does not speak about himself or what he encountered in the path of his call. He was the first to call for this call and migrated for its sake to this country. the country of al-Azhar al-Sharif. He lived with it and beside it since he planted it as a hoped-for seed, with God's blessing. He

continued to water and nurture it with the genius, sincerity, abundant knowledge, strong character, patience with others, and steadfastness that God had given him." Through the vicissitudes of time, he saw it as a tree with lofty roots and towering branches, bearing fruit at all times - by the permission of its Lord. Imams, scholars, and thinkers in this country and elsewhere seek shelter under its shade.

Imam al-Qummi continued to work until his last days to unify the ranks of Muslims and unite their word until he passed away to God's mercy in August 1990 AD as a result of a painful accident in Paris. He was buried next to his father in the family cemetery in Tehran - may God have mercy on them both (31).

5- The Role of Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout in Rapprochement

Sheikh Muhammad Shaltout () was one of the twentieth-century scholars of Al-Azhar who played a prominent role in facilitating communication between Al-Azhar and the Shiites. The sheik sought to promote religious dialogue and mutual understanding between the two parties, emphasizing the importance of peaceful coexistence and Islamic unity. His views were influenced by the concept of Islamic unity, which contributed to mitigating sectarian tensions and promoting coexistence among various Islamic sects.

He was the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar from 1958 until his death. He was an icon of reform who dedicated his life and writings to breaking out of the cocoon of belief and healing sectarian fanaticism. He was the first to shatter the monopoly on absolute truth held by each Islamic sect, and he was a pioneer in his call for the permissibility of worshipping according to any established Islamic sect in the modern era (32). Al-Shaltut stated that Shiite thought is among those who opposed American policies (and the restrictions on not wearing the hijab). The Shiite thought does not have its own Quran, as is said, the Mushaf of Fatima, and this is an incorrect understanding. Muhammad al-Ghazali supported and endorsed this and issued a fatwa (worshipping the Shiite and Twelver schools of thought is permissible according to Islamic law, like all Sunni schools of thought. Muslims must know this, get rid of fanaticism, adhere to the religion of God Almighty, and that the religion of God and His law are not limited to a school of thought. All are mujtahids accepted by God Almighty, and it is permissible for those not qualified to mujtahid to imitate them and act according to what they approve in their jurisprudence. There is no difference in this between worship and transactions (33). However, it must be noted that relations were not at a uniform pace but rather fluctuated, especially in the 1950s. (34) It is considered that after 1956 AD, that is, from the Egyptian revolution to the 1960s, relations became between acceptance and rejection, and this is

due to the relationship between Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Saudi state. (35) The group of rapprochement and Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the step that was welcomed by Shiite circles during this period, that is, between the years (1959 AD to 1963 AD) (36), was the issuance of a fatwa by Sheikh Al-Shaltut to recognize the Jaafari school of thought. Still, after a period of stagnation in the relationship with the Najaf seminary, (37) these relations began to return after the fall of Abdul Karim Qasim, and the relationship with Egypt started to return to normal.

Conclusion

The research has demonstrated, beyond any doubt, the intellectual exchange between the Shiite and Sunni sects and that attempts have existed throughout history, from the time of Nader Shah to the Ottoman Empire under Abdul Hamid II, to resolve and eliminate differences between the two sects for the sake of Islamic unity, the rejection of division and strife, the defense of colonialism, and the prevention of the division of the country and the Arab world. The reformist endeavor between both sects was to hold debates and dialogue sessions, reject insults to the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, allow the adoption of the doctrine of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, and return to authentic and reliable narrations, adopt them, and discuss them to resolve matters between the two sects. In addition, it was not possible to adopt unreliable narrations and attribute them to both the Shiite and Sunni sects to distort the true Islamic religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him and his family). The emergence of differences between the two sides in thought, the emergence of extremism and sectarian strife, and the breach of the unity of Muhammadan Islam became fertile ground for colonialism and the spread of wars based on sects. Through previous efforts, we notice the emergence of positive aspects, including the removal of many misconceptions and the tireless work of scholars to strengthen commonalities among Muslims, strengthening the bonds of trust and mutual respect. The continuation of these initiatives is due to the belief of each sect in the diversity of visions that diligence is a factor of strength and not the opposite, that the principle of intellectual exchange is based on strengthening this exchange and dialogue between the parties, and that this dialogue is the responsibility of both parties to achieve the message of Islam, which is based on the principle of unity and peace.

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Muhammad Rashid Rida: Born on October 18, 1865, in the village of Qalamoun, located on the seashore, a few kilometers south of Tripoli, Syria, he grew up far from the concerns of his peers, loving seclusion. He received

his education at his village school and then enrolled in a state-run elementary school, but soon left because all the classes were in Turkish. He then enrolled in the national school run by Sayyid Hasan al-Jisr. For more information, see: Salah al-Din al-Munjid, Yusuf Khoury, Fatwas of Imam Muhammad Rashid Rida, (n.d., n.d., n.d.), Vol. 1, pp. 9-10.

Ibid., pp. 29-30.

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Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani: Sayyid al-Shahristani was born in the city of Samarra in Rajab 1884 CE. His upbringing was religious on both his mother's and father's side. His father strove with all his might to expand his son's cultural knowledge, paving the way for him to learn and cultivate, and taking him to the gatherings of scholars and notables. For more, see: Muhammad Mahdi al-Alawi, Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahristani, (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Adab, 1929 CE), pp. 6-7.

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Al-Gizawi: His Eminence grew up in the town of Warraq al-Khidr, the center of the city of Imbaba, Giza Governorate, in 1264 AH, the year in which the census of Egypt was conducted. He entered the office designated for memorizing the Holy Qur'an in that town in 1269 AH, and memorized the entire Qur'an in late 1272 AH. He then entered Al-Azhar Al-Sharif in late 1273 AH, when he was ten years old. He first worked on the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, memorizing texts, and receiving some lessons. For more, see Zaki Fahmy, Safwat al-Asr fi Tarikh wa-Durus Mushahir Rijal Misr (Egypt: Hindawi Foundation, 2013), p. 505.

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Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi: He was the Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mosque and the former Chief Justice of Sudan.

He was born in the town of Maragha, Egypt, in 1881. He studied at Al-Azhar and was a close associate of Sheikh Muhammad Abduh in the lessons he gave there. He rose through the ranks of Al-Azhar until he assumed the position of Sheikh twice, in 1928 and 1935. He was a seasoned politician and a learned jurist. See: Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi, Ijtihad fi al-Islam, edited by Muhammad Abdullah al-Samman (Cairo: 1959), p. 5.

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Muhammad Ali Azarshab, Iran and the Arabs, previous source.

Mahmoud Al-Shaltout: Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Shaltout was born in the town of Minyat Bani Mansour, Itay Al-Baroud District, Beheira Governorate, Egypt. After memorizing the Quran, he enrolled in the Alexandria Religious Institute. For more information, see Ayman Muhammad Mustafa, The Grand Imam Mahmoud Shaltout and His Differences with Contemporary Salafism, Language and Literature Magazine, p. 322.

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