



CHAPTER 2

The Life of the Mosques

The History

Sheikh Chirri and the Development of the Islamic Center of America

IN 1988, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the Islamic Center of America, a booklet was distributed to the Shi'i Muslims of the Detroit and Dearborn area recounting the tale of how the Islamic Center, the Jami', came into being. It is a tale of frustration, fortitude, and sacrifice. The story says that because of the guidance of "the ever present, beloved Imam, Muhammad Jawad Chirri, the community united for the most part." It further states that "the people contributed to the new Center with a humble zeal reminiscent of the first Muslims." The community underwent a "metamorphosis."

In the 1940s, Shi'ism in Dearborn needed a heroic figure if it was to survive as an independent faith and not be subsumed by Sunnism, something it has resisted in the rest of the world for centuries. Before the arrival of Sheikh Chirri, there was no "real imam" in the area.

A true sheikh in Shi'i terms is one who has been trained at one or more of the holy cities such as Najaf in Iraq or Qom in Iran. Aside from the Koran and the Traditions of the Prophet, he will study such subjects as Islamic law, theology, logic, and Koran commen-

taries. It will be his main teacher at the theological school who decides when the man's studies should be concluded. He will then either go off to a village in need of a preacher or find a more prestigious appointment. Each sheikh tends to function quite independently. A hierarchy like that found in Catholicism, with its bishops, archbishops, monsignors, and so on, is not found in Islam. The word *imam* (from the Arabic root *amm*, "to be in front") is used in a variety of ways. The twelve "rightful successors" (those descendants of Fatima and 'Ali who were the religious leaders of the Shi'a in the early centuries of Islam) are always referred to as imams. There is also the term *imam jum'a*, which means "leader of the Friday prayers," and a person hired to lead the prayers could then be called an imam. However, some Muslims feel it is not appropriate for their local clerics to refer to themselves with this title, as it indicates a sense of self-importance. Regardless of this sentiment, the clerics in this community are frequently called imams. I will generally refer to the clerics as sheikhs to lessen the confusion between the Twelve Imams, (the great religious leaders of early Shi'ism) and the local preachers. However, if one is a *sayyid* (a descendant of the Prophet) and a sheikh as well, he prefers to be called by the former term, and I will refer to him as Sayyid So-and-so.

Returning to the discussion of Dearborn, in the 1940s, this community that had "grown large" consisted of about two hundred Muslim families. These were mostly Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians. They were both Shi'a and Sunni. At least for the Shi'a, ceremonial and spiritual needs were met by a Shi'i Lebanese from the village of Bint Jubeil, Sheikh Khalil Bezzi. But informants tell me that Sheikh Bezzi took care of the religious needs for all Muslims, "not only in Dearborn but all over the country and regardless of whether they were Shi'ites, not Shi'ites, or whatever." Illiterate when he came to the United States, he went briefly to Najaf to study Arabic and the Koran, then returned to America to serve as religious leader, but not in a full-time capacity. My informants describe Bezzi in saintly and heroic terms, although he is a far different kind of hero from Chirri. Rather than being revered for his learning and ambitions for the community, it is his humble and almost anticlerical behavior that distinguishes him. Shi'i clergy in Lebanon are in a class apart from the rest of society. They do not labor but simply perform clerical duties: preaching, giving eulogies, contracting weddings and divorces, and so on. But Bezzi did something no self-respecting sheikh in Dearborn would do today: he made a living driving a truck from store to store selling vegetables. He refused payment for his religious services. In the 1950s, one of my infor-

mants and a small group of other believers pooled their money to buy him a car and left it in front of his home, giving the keys to his wife. When he arrived home and found the car, Bezzi telephoned one of the men responsible and told him that he had half an hour to come get the car. If he did not come by then, Bezzi said he would divorce his wife for having accepted the gift. The car was picked up and returned to the dealer.

Michael Gilsenen, writing about the *'ulama* of south Lebanon in the 1950s, presents a picture of the clerics as being "the local socially prominent group."¹ Landowners with a monopoly on knowledge and literacy, they formed an elite group that did not question the status quo and did not fight for the rights of the Shi'a. In the 1960s, Musa Sadr, the founder of Harakat Amal, found himself at odds with this style of cleric and helped to revolutionize the role of the *'ulama* in Lebanon. Sheikh Bezzi was no revolutionary, but neither was he a quiescent religious leader content to make a living by performing ritual services. From all accounts, he seems to have been an idealistic missionary out not to convert new souls to Islam but to save those already in the flock.

The early Shi'a in this area like to stress that there was a lack of Shi'i/Sunni division in the community, and there is actually strong resistance to discussing this topic. But, obviously, there was a distinction being made between the two sects even in the earliest days. I find it interesting, for example, that it is Sheikh Bezzi who is seen as the religious leader of this community, even though Sunni preachers were also active in the area. The development of mosques and communities in the Detroit area is complicated, but always there has existed some distinction between the Shi'a and other Islamic sects.²

In fact, the earliest accounts of Islamic activity in the Detroit area are of Sunni-dominated activities. Muslims gravitated to the highly industrialized area of Highland Park, where Ford Motor Company had a plant, and it is there, according to historian Alixa Naff, that the first mosque in America seems to have been built.³ A *Detroit News* article dated July 29, 1927, recounts the history of this first mosque, which opened in June 1921 under the direction of a Sunni Lebanese preacher, Muhammad Karoub. The mosque was short-lived, though it apparently had support from a variety of Muslim countries. The article reports that there was a difference of opinion regarding the failure of the mosque. Karoub had brought a religious leader, a mufti, from Lebanon whose ideas were too progressive for the Muslims, who were far from being a homogeneous group. The article says that they were from Persia, Turkey, Spain,

Morocco, Siberia, Arabia and Syria. Others, apparently, were not happy with Karoub's financing of the mosque. The greatest controversy came when a coffeehouse proprietor who had usurped Karoub's leadership and popularity was killed. While Karoub was acquitted of any wrongdoing, his name was tarnished. But, contrary to the expectations of the journalist, Islamic aspirations did not die in the area. Sunnis and Shi'a both continued to rent buildings and meet in homes for religious and social functions. All my sources state that members of both sects would attend each other's events.

The real growth of Islam in this area actually coincides with the growth of the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn. It was to the crowded southeast side of the town, where the Rouge plant dominates the landscape, that large numbers of Muslims, primarily Arab Muslims, migrated and continue to migrate to this day. On the major street of this quarter of Dearborn stands what is now the Yemeni Zaydi Dearborn Mosque. Opened in the 1930s, it was dominated by Sunnis until recently. A year or so after the establishment of this mosque, the Shi'a rented a hall only a few blocks away. They named it the Hashimite Hall, in honor of the family of the Prophet. It was to the Hashimite Club that Sheikh Chirri came to teach. He states that he also was involved with the Sunni mosque, which at that time had a large Lebanese congregation, when he arrived in Dearborn in 1949. He, too, resists discussing Sunni/Shi'i differences, at least with outsiders.

In 1966, Abdo Elkholy wrote a book comparing the histories of the Detroit-Dearborn and the Toledo Muslim communities. He describes the situation in Dearborn in far different terms from the Shi'i version quoted above:

He [Chirri] came to America . . . where he found the sectarian conflict dying in the Detroit community. He decided to revive it, chiefly, according to several respondents, as a means of increasing his own power. He encouraged the physical as well as the spiritual separation between the two sects in the Detroit community. Now the community has two separate religious institutions, the mosque for the Sunnis and the Arabian Hashimite Club for the Shi'ahs. The Shi'ahs in Detroit have ceased to participate in any religious activities with the Sunnis. . . . The division has almost resulted in two separate denominations with completely distinct religious and social activities.⁴

Elkholy's information is not entirely correct. The Hashimite Club existed before Chirri's arrival. The earliest history of Islam in

the Detroit area reflects that there was always a consciousness that the Shi'a had to remain somewhat distinct, though obviously the line between these two major sects had grown fuzzy in comparison to what one finds in the Middle East. Asked if the early believers in the Hashimite Club celebrated such Shi'i holidays as the birthdays of the imams (the line of successors after the Prophet) and that of the Prophet's daughter, my informants who were there at the time report that these holidays were not celebrated. There were parties and dances and classes for children. But the very fact that there was an institution that took the name of the Prophet's family suggests that this community grasped the significance of keeping their separateness alive. Elkholy remarks that he found the Shi'a in the Detroit area in the 1950s far more zealous about their religion than the Sunnis, whom he describes as being resentful of Shi'a success. The Sunnis, Elkholy reports, accused the Shi'a of having caused a rift between the two sects.

What is most significant about Elkholy's account is that he tells the story of the community from a Sunni perspective. His history of the community is only one history. And one might even go so far as to say it is a dead history. The Lebanese Shi'a—those refugees from the impoverished regions of Jabal 'Amil and the Bekaa—have prevailed in Dearborn. They are the most numerous group of Muslims in the area and the most conspicuous. They have, at this writing, one mosque in the fullest sense of the word and two institutes that for all intents and purposes serve as mosques. The Shi'a are on the way to building an elementary school in Dearborn and have expanded their properties and goals outside the Detroit-Dearborn limits. In the meantime, the Sunnis, organizing themselves as the Bekaa League, have been displaced by the Yemeni Zaydis at the mosque in the south end and now occupy a small building in East Dearborn. What is more, the Shi'a tend to be the most prosperous group of Muslims in the area. For the victorious Shi'a of Dearborn, Sheikh Chirri was not a man of selfish designs. He was a self-sacrificing hero who braved all odds to establish Islam (in its Shi'i form) in America. It is this image that prevails and probably will continue to do so.

When Chirri arrived in America, he found an immigrant community of primarily Ford factory workers who clung to their Islamic identity, perhaps praying, avoiding pork if possible, and asking for the services of a sheikh on ceremonial occasions. This is a community whose gatherings were more of a social than a religious nature. He also found a community that was not book-oriented and that had given in to many of the easier paths offered by American life.

Women felt pressured to give up the scarf so as not to look strange in their new setting. The temptations of alcohol also drove some to compromise their principles. Certainly, the intricacies of Imami Shi'ism eluded this group. Chirri, with his scholarly credentials, taught his people reverence for the saints and the symbols of Shi'ism. "Without Sheikh Chirri, there would be no Islam in America" is a commonly heard expression of gratitude toward this man who is now quite aged. As for the Shi'i/Sunni split, Chirri is not considered to blame at all. One informant told me that it was visiting sheikhs from Lebanon who encouraged this division, not Chirri. Before this interference, she said, there were Sunnis who attended the Jami's services.

My informants tell me that from the beginning, it was Chirri's aim to build a mosque. He ran into resistance in the community and left for Michigan City, Indiana. The story is now recounted in religious terms. Just as the Prophet Muhammad was hounded out of Mecca, so, too, was Chirri forced to leave the city in which he had placed so much hope. But, just as there had been with the Prophet, there was also with Chirri a small band of loyalists who stood by him and believed in his mission from the beginning. They must have given him sufficient encouragement; Chirri returned to Lebanon, befriended someone who had access to President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and solicited from Nasser enough money to motivate the fledgling band of Shi'i to begin the task of actually constructing a mosque.

The history of the building of the Islamic Center of America is replete with stories of sacrificial giving. Each fund-raising dinner reaped greater rewards, and I am told these funds sometimes came from remortgaging of individuals' homes. Finally, in 1963, the center at 15571 Joy Road in Detroit was completed and its doors opened. While its domed exterior and minaret give it a mosquelike appearance, its interior is lacking in the lushness and mystery that one associates with Middle Eastern mosques. It is plain in the extreme, with its arid rectangles of rooms filled with folding chairs and Formica-topped tables. In the receiving area is a receptionist's desk in front of the sheikh's office. And on either side of the room are bookshelves. Among the books are those written over the years by its director, Imam Muhammad Jawad Chirri, books entitled *The Shiites under Attack* and *The Brother of the Prophet*. There is no mistaking this for a Sunni mosque.

In *The Shiites under Attack*, in which he makes distinctions between Shi'i and Sunni attitudes and beliefs, he also calls for the "unity of the Muslims" and reports on his own "humble efforts" in

this endeavor: "In 1959, I attempted to begin a campaign in this direction [overcoming Sunni/Shi'i differences]. I visited Egypt and met the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser. I discussed with him and separately with the late Sheikh Al Azhar⁵ . . . the matter of reconciliation between the Sunnite and the Shi'ite schools. I spoke to each of the two leaders about the necessity of solving the problem and about the way through which it can be solved."⁶ He continues by saying that it was his goal to persuade Sheikh Al Azhar to issue a "verdict of equality between the Jaafari Math-hab [the school of thought of the Shi'i Imam Jaafar as-Sadeq] and the four Math-habs [the four schools accepted in Sunni Islam]." Chirri was successful: "The Grand Sheikh responded to this suggestion immediately. On the following day his son-in-law and secretary . . . visited me and brought the good tidings; the Grand Sheikh had responded to my suggestion and issued a verdict about the subject. I went with him to the Grand Sheikh, thanking him for his historical achievement. The Sheikh read to me the text of the verdict before publishing it."⁷

A picture of Chirri with Sheikh Al Azhar appears in another of Chirri's texts, *Inquiries about Islam*. Such an achievement helped ensure Chirri's success among his American Muslim constituents.

The Jami' over the Years

If the mosque has changed over the years, it is primarily in terms of the appearance and behaviors of those who frequent it. A photograph of a children's class in 1965 shows a group of school-aged children dressed in their "Sunday best." The girls, sitting among the boys, wear crisp, frilly dresses and, except for one little girl in an "Easter bonnet," no head coverings at all.

The older members of this community now laugh at themselves when they look back to this earlier era. "The women used to wear curlers in their hair to the mosque!" one woman told me. Such a thing would be inconceivable today. The earlier community did not think about wearing Islamic dress. Even simple traditional scarves were a rarity. Furthermore, a photograph of Chirri dating from the 1960s shows him in a business suit rather than clerical robes, though he was wearing a turban. However, I am told that he would even forgo the turban at times when in public.

Styles of clothing are not the only things to have changed. One informant who was still a young girl when the Jami' opened remembers going there for parties and dances. It was common to hold weddings at the Jami', traditional Lebanese weddings with music and singing and dancing. Apparently, the Islamic Center was

not the only mosque in North America to experience such events. Orfalea reports that the mosque in Michigan City, Indiana, was also "misused."⁸ The son of one of the mosque's founders complained that the people would remove the carpets for weddings and funerals, asserting that it should have been used only for prayer.

Traditional-type weddings occur today in rented halls, certainly not in the local Shi'i mosques. A woman who came here from Jabal 'Amil in the 1950s said that a few people had even started sneaking alcohol "under the table" at the weddings. That she should have told me such a thing horrified her thirty-year-old son. I had to assure him that I realized this had occurred in the distant past, that only a few people would have done such a thing, and that I knew things had changed drastically since then. Indeed they have. Chirri is responsible for some of these changes. He reportedly weaned people slowly to the ways of Islam. "He never pushed us too hard," said one of his admiring early followers, who went on to say that Chirri did not want to scare away the youth by being too strict. He feared that if they appeared to look and behave too differently from the larger society, it would make them uncomfortable and would drive them away from Islam.

Once the Islamic Center of America was built and open, it appears that the Shi'i community developed in a fairly predictable fashion. The membership became largely assimilated into American society. Small in numbers, they found it necessary to learn English as soon as possible. Their children may have grown up speaking Arabic, but few received instruction in reading and writing the language.

Certainly the leadership, hand-chosen by Sheikh Chirri himself, became quite prosperous. The community appeared to be concerned with remaining distinctively Muslim but in a way that also fit with American society. Sheikh Chirri became known among his constituents as someone who understood America and Christianity. Members of this community who remember the Sunday school programs at the Hashimite Club and later at the Islamic Center have told me that they learned a great deal about Christianity from Chirri. One man said that on Christian holidays, there would be lessons at the mosque explaining these religious occasions to the Muslim children, although they would not celebrate the holidays themselves (at least not at the mosque).

Chirri, throughout the years, was interested in teaching Islam to Americans. The books he wrote in English testify to this. Indeed, during the first few moments of an interview I had with him, he insisted on explaining the station of Christ to me. The lecture proba-

bly would have continued had I not been able to interject some words that showed him that I had some knowledge of Shi'ism. Those he led expected such missionary activities from him. The earlier immigrants and their children wanted to be understood. They wanted someone who could speak to Christians. However, one gets a strong sense from talking to Sheikh Chirri, and to non-Muslim Americans who have been acquainted with him, that he never did truly grasp American culture. Perhaps he confused "Christian theology" with American viewpoints on religion. This impression is substantiated by his sermons (see "Sermons and Speakers" in this chapter). It is also true, though, that by the time I had spoken to him, he was a very elderly gentlemen facing problems that had more to do with Middle Eastern politics than with American society.

Over the years, Sheikh Chirri has been the spokesman for the Shi'a of Dearborn and Detroit. On the radio and in newspapers, his opinion has been sought on current events involving the Arab world and Islam. According to his secretary, he feels he has not always been represented fairly by the press and has become more reluctant to speak to outsiders.

The issues that Chirri has addressed to his followers and in public reflect how strongly he has been affected by world events. Having grown up in the south end in the 1950s when Chirri was preaching there, one man recalls that Chirri did not advocate a political struggle for Palestine. He told his listeners, some of whom were Palestinian, that they must resign themselves to the reality of Israel. No doubt, this message was meant to encourage the immigrants to get on with their lives in America. But it also suggests that he was very sensitive to Islam's image in this country. I believe he did not want Islam to be seen as anti-American.

In spite of America's anti-Nasser stance, however, Chirri obviously remained grateful to the Egyptian leader for his support of the building of the Jami'. Nasser's death in 1970 evoked the following words from Chirri, quoted in the *Garden City Guide-Journal* on October 1, 1970: "Every person in our community is deeply saddened. The Arab nation will survive, and perhaps the relations of Arab countries will actually improve because of the tragedy, but the American people will find the west has lost the last big chance for peace there. He was a barrier between communism and the Arab people. And now that barrier is gone." The anti-Communist sentiments again reflect his pro-American stance.

Within a decade after the death of Nasser, the Middle East and Imam Chirri's world had changed profoundly. A revolution, a civil war, hijackings, and kidnappings were daily news, and Chirri's

opinions were sought by the press. After the hijacking of a TWA plane in Beirut, on June 23, 1985, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that Chirri "does not condone the hijacking but that it did not surprise him." Chirri was further quoted as saying, "It is like the cat that is sleeping. If you tread on it, should you be amazed that it bites you? If two or three people hijack an airplane because Israel is holding their brothers, should you be amazed?" By the 1980s, Israel could be counted openly as an enemy. Politically speaking, it is the "safest" enemy, as Israel is universally scorned by Arab Muslims. By the 1980s, the number of Muslims in Dearborn was so great that consideration of their feelings was paramount in the mind of any cleric.

But what to say about the Iranians? This was and is an obvious problem. Iran and the Lebanese kidnappings and bombings obviously have been a thorn in the side of Imam Chirri and those closest to him. There is a lengthy article in the *Dearborn Times-Herald* of July 25, 1985, relating to the kidnapping of Americans in Lebanon. Chirri's comment on this issue: "The Shiites are good people who should not be judged for the actions of a few." Although not directly quoted regarding his opinions about Iran, Chirri seems to have left the interviewer with the message he wanted heard. The journalist wrote that the Shi'a of Dearborn "should not be confused with Iranian Moslems who advocate fiery revolution in the name of Islam. On the contrary, most Shiite sects are moderate and seek only an improved lot in life."

The press wanted Chirri's views again when the *Satanic Verses* issue erupted. Interviewed on television, Chirri felt the need to condemn novelist Salman Rushdie as "a dog that should be killed."

Thus, Chirri found that the challenges facing him and his community had grown and intensified. Old and new immigrants had differing views of what it meant to be Muslims or Shi'a, on whether they were Lebanese or Americans. Questions such as whether Khomeini was a villain or a hero have the potential of splitting the community as well. By and large, however, the Jami' has remained a house of worship large enough for a variety of viewpoints. In spite of points of contention, the people who frequent this mosque mostly wish to leave behind divisive politics.



"In New Haven, Connecticut, the Irish had built a small church in the 1830s; in 1848 it was destroyed by fire. Within six months the community of Irish laborers had raised thirteen thousand dollars to buy and furnish a former Congregational church. Such commitment to the church was not uncommon. In the poorest of Irish neighbor-

hoods, the people invariably found the means to build the parish church and support it through both good and bad times."⁹

Church building was of the highest priority among the majority of ethnic Catholic groups entering America during the century of massive immigration. Simple, plain structures at first, they bore no resemblance to their fine monuments in the old country or to the grand churches and cathedrals that would become part of the urban American landscape later. But who would take the initiative to build the churches? Among the Germans, it was the lay people who built and ran the churches; the priests served in their ritual capacity only. Among the Irish, clerics reigned supreme, which is the way the Irish wanted it. For them, clergy and church were completely intertwined, and they begged for more and more priests from abroad. The Irish were shocked by the anticlericalism of the Italian Catholics who saw the papacy as exploitative and who, back home, experienced the village priest as a "money-grasping intruder."¹⁰ They were also perplexed by the Poles' demands for lay ownership of church property.

Immigrant groups rarely had to share their churches with one another. If they did, it was usually only a temporary arrangement. Quarrels over language and clergy and dislike of each other's customs and ritual styles drove wedges between ethnic groups. People preferred to worship in their own ways and in their own languages. Dolan quotes a Ukrainian immigrant as saying, "We are not entirely the same as we were in our country because we are missing something. What we miss is God Whom we could understand, Whom we could adore in our own way."¹¹ Thus, each Catholic ethnic group was driven to build its own churches and its own parishes reminiscent of their old countries.

The people of Dearborn, being both Lebanese and Shi'a, faced the same dilemma. Unaccustomed though they may have been back home to building their own mosques, they recognized that if Shi'ism were to survive in America, they had to act. Under the leadership of Chirri, many of them made significant financial sacrifices to build a structure, not grand and elegant by any means, but one that met the needs of the community at the time and sent the message that Shi'ism had been established in America.

The Islamic Institute (the Majma')

By the mid-1980s, Sheikh Chirri could no longer claim to speak for all Shi'a in America. This fact was underscored by the establishment in 1985 of the Islamic Institute of Knowledge under the direc-

tion of Sheikh 'Abd al-Latif Berri, a relatively young, soft-spoken sheikh from Tibnin in south Lebanon. Situated on Warren Avenue, in the very heart of Dearborn's Shi'i Lebanese community, the Islamic Institute was not built as a mosque but was converted from a business building and revamped so that various social, educational, and spiritual needs of the community could be met. The interior of the Majma', as it is known, is lacking in visual reminders of Middle Eastern mosques, as is the Jami'. The main meeting room, the *husayniya*, is generally lined with collapsible tables and folding chairs. During social occasions where food is to be served, the tables bear paper tablecloths, Styrofoam cups, and plastic utensils. For various occasions, the walls will be adorned with plaques of locally produced calligraphy, and occasionally one finds a large photograph of Khomeini dominating the room. But during Ramadan and holy day observances, the aura of the building changes. At those times, the *husayniya* will be strewn with prayer rugs. While some of the believers (the brothers and sisters, as members of the core group call themselves at this mosque) will be engaged in prayer, others, clusters of both men and heavily veiled women, usually with toddlers and infants in tow, will be visiting among themselves in various corners of the room. This room is not where *salat* (obligatory prayer) is performed. Sheikh Berri leads *salat* upstairs in a room that faces the main street.

Sheikh Berri told me, during my first meeting with him, that the Majma' was not a mosque per se but was meant for more educational purposes. He did not want me to think that it had begun as an open breach with the Jami'. Yet it is common knowledge that its opening was in reaction to the Jami'. As one well-informed woman stated, "Sheikh Berri was divorced from Sheikh Chirri." She states that Berri started out as a preacher in the Jami' but left after a short time because of disagreements with Chirri and the Jami's board of directors. Unpleasant relations between the two sheikhs has not abated. When Wafa, who contributes financially to both the Jami' and the Majma', telephoned Chirri to make an appointment for me to speak with him, he expressed to her his annoyance that I had already spoken to Berri. She told me quite bluntly that the two men dislike each other. Yet it is apparent that there is communication between the two mosques and that there is at least no public animosity. However, toward the end of my stay in Dearborn, an attempt to unify the clerics during a fund-raising event for the Iraqi Shi'a led to public embarrassment. Sheikh Chirri had been led into the Majma' but was quite disoriented, as senility was rapidly advancing. When he realized where he was, he immediately demanded to be taken away.

The Muslims who supported Berri's establishment of the Majma' were a people who had been deeply affected by the revolutionary form of Islam advocated by the Islamic Republic of Iran. For this group, the Jami', which had been established nearly twenty-five years ago, had become too tolerant of Western ways. Several people have told me that the Jami' has become "like a church."

During my first days in Dearborn, in 1987, I was given a tour of the eastern part of the city, the part that a short while later would become my neighborhood. My guide was a young Lebanese man whose family I had befriended quickly since I had known some of their relatives when I lived in Lebanon. He drove me by the Majma' but did not want me to walk by it. He was afraid that if I looked too interested, the people inside would think I was "FBI." How shocked he was to learn somewhat later that I had visited the Majma' on several occasions and was on friendly terms with a number of the people who regularly attended it. Sometime after that, he and his brother, who both attend the Jami', conceded that they had heard "some good things" about the Majma' but would not go there themselves.

While it is commonly said that the Jami' is more sympathetic to Harakat Amal, the Majma' is seen as being closely linked with the Hizb Allah movement. People such as my young friend have frequently seen the Majma' only in political terms. However, in the five years or so that it has been open, the Majma' has obviously undergone some changes. When one goes for events such as Ramadan, Id al-Fitr, and 'Ashura and for purely social occasions, a broad spectrum of the community appears in full force. It is only at times when things Iranian become the centerpiece of the occasion—the death of Khomeini or even the Iranian earthquake—or for special educational programs that one becomes very conscious of the Hizb Allah approach to Islam.

Most people in this community are not actively involved in either Harakat Amal or Hizb Allah. They will say that they came here to escape the fighting which they do not understand. More than a few people have told me that they did not attend any regular services at the mosques because both were too political, yet I also found people who actively shunned the Amal/Hizb Allah dispute, attending both the Jami' and the Majma' to show that they are not "prejudiced."

The Islamic Council of America (the Majlis)

The Islamic Council of America, the Majlis, is another story. After it opened in the winter of 1989, some months went by before

it was even noticed by some members of the community. Situated in a row of two-story brick commercial buildings, the structure served as a store before its recent transformation to a house of worship and study. Immediately off the street on the north side of this rather narrow structure is a room used for *salat* and for preaching. The south side, again with a door entering from the street, is the *husayniya* where one might go for *iftar* (suppers during Ramadan) or for a general type of meeting. During Ramadan, this room is for the women and children, while the men congregate in the prayer room to hear Sheikh Muhammad Ali Burro, the director of the Majlis, speak. It does not differ from the Jami' or the Majma' in its simplicity.

But there are certain features that do differentiate it from the other two institutions, the most striking being that no one attends it who is not in strict conformity with the rules of Islam, at least in their outward appearance. This is a mosque not only for the type of *hijab* that has lately become so prevalent in Arab cities but also for the Iranian *chador* and the '*abaya*' worn by Iraqi women from Najaf and Karbala. The *chador* or '*abaya*' may also be seen at the Majma', but usually there will be some lacy scarves to counteract the effect. Not so at the Majlis. One does not find a trace of women's hair (or arms or legs) showing here. The men are often bearded, dress in open-collared shirts, and maintain a serious demeanor. Again, one finds this same sort of men in the halls and prayer room of the Majma', but they may be sitting next to persons whose approach to Islam differs significantly from theirs. The other striking feature about the Majlis is the office of the director, Sheikh Burro. It is not only the new carpeting and long, sumptuous sofa that is remarkable but also the fact that before entering this room, one must remove one's shoes, as I did when I interviewed Sheikh Burro. This is an Iranian custom, not Lebanese. Indeed, this is not the only aspect of Iranian life that Burro brought back from Iran, specifically Qom, where he lived for about seventeen years. His obvious pleasure in speaking Persian and his *chador*-covered wife's taste for Persian food suggest how favorably disposed he is toward Iranian culture. Far more important, however, is the extent to which his approach to Islam has been marked by the '*ulama*' of Qom.

Burro had begun his work in this community at the Jami', but he found it lacking. He disapproved of women who tied scarves on their heads, much as Catholic women did before the 1960s, and sat at tables with men. Men could be seen greeting women with a handshake, something that an observant Muslim, concerned with following the letter of the law, should not do. I am told that he expressed

his astonishment that even men who had made their *hajj*, their pilgrimage to Mecca, would do such a thing. His final break with the Jami' came, though, over a more substantial issue, which will be discussed later.



"The Catholic church must fit herself to a constantly changing environment, to the character of every people, and to the wants of each age."¹² These sentiments, stated by John L. Spalding (appointed first bishop of the diocese of Peoria, Illinois, in 1876), were shared by a handful of U.S. bishops, but certainly they had many opponents, including the pope. The bitter dispute over whether to unite church and age or to view the church as incompatible with modern culture was fought among all strata of Catholic society in America over many decades. In the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, the major question was: "Is there 'American Catholicity'?" By the 1930s, Catholics in America tended to agree that there was, but it was not until Vatican II that the question could truly be put to rest. (Or could it?)

Sheikh Chirri, though determined to sustain Shi'ism in America, was obviously affected by the trends occurring in the larger society. He saw the necessity of Americanizing his religion. In the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, a person could reasonably ask how else a religion could be sustained in America. This was a time when barriers among previously contentious religious groups and nationalities were breaking down. Catholics were mingling increasingly with non-Catholics. Committees were formed to combat prejudice. A diffuse set of values based on Protestantism were inculcated in school-children, and, to use Will Herberg's term, "an American way of life" was developing that transcended confessional barriers. Sheikh Chirri could not have helped but be influenced by these social trends.¹³

But new Shi'i clerics from the Middle East had experienced a different religious and political history from that of Sheikh Chirri. Religion, in their view, should define society, not the other way around. And they could bring evidence to prove that religion in its most absolute and uncompromising form could be viable in today's world; witness the situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. And so the old dispute, the one that Catholics had fought over with such bitterness decades earlier, would be played out again in Dearborn: whether to fit religion to a changing environment or to take a defensive posture and isolate it from social forces.

Differences in Style among the Mosques

As indicated above, there are some apparent differences among the congregations of the three institutions. When I have visited the Jami', I have never seen a *chador*, although I have seen women in *hijab*. But just as frequently, I will see women with gauzy, almost doily-like cloths on their heads, not even tied under the chin. There is also the occasional broad-brimmed hat complementing a stylish, perhaps even tightly fitting, dress. One finds a wide range of fashion at the Jami'.

It is not possible for me to say exactly what would happen if a woman appeared at the Majlis in fashionable Western-style clothes and a hat. I cannot imagine a woman attempting such a thing. I have never seen a woman, except for myself, at the Majlis who does not normally wear a *chador*, an *'abaya*, or *hijab*. Nor have I seen more than twenty or thirty women there at a time (with approximately an equal number of men). I have been told of an occasion when Sheikh Burro (currently of the Majlis but at the time of this incident at the Jami') publicly and emphatically reprimanded a woman for not wearing a head covering at a memorial service. She was a Lebanese Christian friend of the deceased. The people who told me about this incident obviously disapproved of Burro's behavior.

As for the Majma', while originally it may have appealed to those with a strict notion of how a Muslim must appear in public, the doors have been opened more widely so that for social occasions and major holidays, there will be as great a variety of participants as one finds at the Jami'—actually, even greater, since a *chador*-covered woman or two and her male equivalent can almost always be found at the Majma'. Still, the core membership, those who are very active at the Majma', tend to be very observant in following the laws of Islam. My scholarly Najafi woman friend approvingly calls the Majma' the most balanced and moderate of the mosques.

These differences reflect tensions between "activist" and "traditional" approaches to Islam. How to categorize and name such approaches has been the subject of much discussion recently. Terms such as *modernist*, *Islamist*, *Islamicist*, *fundamentalist*, *neo-fundamentalist*, *political*, and the like have been used to describe various activist approaches to Islam. The categories proposed by John Bowen and Olivier Roy illustrate the difficulties.¹⁴

Bowen, who studied Muslims in the Gayo Highlands of Sumatra, defines modernists as those who believe that only the Koran and *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) have absolute authority. For them, commentaries on scripture are useful only for clarification

and cannot add or subtract from scripture. But for the Shi'i leadership in the Islamic Republic of Iran, who also see themselves taking a modernist position, the guidance given beyond the Koran and *hadith* is essential. This continuous and legitimate guidance is based on the reasoned opinions of the *'ulama*.

In his critique of political Islam, Olivier Roy has developed various categories. For him, the Islamists are anticlerical and believe themselves capable of interpreting scripture for themselves. In Egypt, some of these Islamists, often recruited from the overcrowded schools and universities of Cairo, have even set up their own political and social organizations.¹⁵ Such Muslims are strongly attracted to the technological advances of modern society. The leading modern-day Islamists that Roy and others describe are often engineers and computer scientists, or are students in such fields. Women, while covered and kept separate from men, are expected to be socially and politically involved in the world. In contrast with the Islamists, Roy's neo-fundamentalists are more concerned with implementing religious law and purifying morals than they are with igniting revolution. Neo-fundamentalists, according to Roy, do not involve themselves with economic and political restructuring but focus on issues such as removing women from the public sphere.

Such classifications do not fit the Shi'a of Dearborn. More important, the Dearborn Shi'a do not draw distinctions corresponding to classifications such as Roy's. I have chosen, therefore, to use the term *Shari'a-minded*, which was coined by Marshall Hodgson in the 1970s; it is a more neutral term and seems better fitted to the circumstances I am describing. In using this term, Hodgson was referring to the program for private and public living centered on religious law (the Shari'a) that had been worked out over the centuries by both Sunni and Shi'i *'ulama*.¹⁶ I believe this term is applicable to the Shi'a because the greatest gap in the community tends to be between those who are attempting to apply the law in their lives very carefully and those whose religiosity is less tied to the Shari'a.

In observing the mosques, I have looked at how much emphasis is placed on the careful application of the Shari'a. All of the Shi'i sheikhs in Dearborn would say that the Shari'a is important, yet there are variations to their approach to following the law. The approach will differ depending on whether they feel it is appropriate to consider the cultural context in which people currently live. In this case, the cultural context is not just American but also Lebanese. The Lebanese Shi'a, far away from Najaf and other centers of learning and frequently sharing their environment with Christians,

inevitably developed a religious identity uniquely their own. The Lebanese, while maintaining the central elements of Shi'i Islam, adapted the religion to their special surroundings, which, as we have seen, have been in the process of drastic change during the latter part of this century.

The Lebanese Shi'a living in Dearborn are at an interesting crossroads. Those who are Shari'a-minded, whether of the political or nonpolitical variety, would like to see a "pure Islam" established in America. They wish to deny that the society in which they live has any bearing on the religion they practice. In other words, they seek to deculturalize Islam. Those with a more traditional approach would like to see their Lebanese culture, including their approach to Islam, maintained, often recognizing that some accommodations have to be made to American society. However, the situation is more complex than this, as reflected in the dynamics of the Jami'.

For the most part, the leadership at the Jami' has been very conscious of cultural context, which, up until the large influx of recent immigration, has meant making accommodations to American society. The earlier immigrants were very concerned that they not be viewed as oddities in the new society. They saw the value of mastering English, they took on American dress, and they assimilated many American values. The later immigrants, on the other hand, who are far more numerous, have been able to maintain many of the traditions and attitudes brought with them from Lebanon. A struggle exists at the Jami' between those who have been thoroughly Americanized and those who see their religion tied to the village and the family dynamics with which they grew up. Religion for this latter group was simply embedded in their whole way of life, not something that it was necessary to examine and analyze. One question I asked people was "How is it different being a Muslim here and being a Muslim back in Lebanon?" An overwhelming majority said that it was much more difficult here because here one has to work at being a Muslim. Back home, everyone was Muslim and no one had to do anything special. For these people, religion was culture. These same people said that it was not possible to do everything religion demanded; some compromises had to be made. These tended to be people either affiliated with the Jami' or affiliated with no mosque at all.

The Majlis presents a very different view. According to Sheikh Burro, there should be no compromise at all with society. Societal norms should play no role in deciding how to live one's life as a Muslim. Burro insisted that I make a distinction between Islam and the way Muslims behave, whether here or in the Middle East. He

said there were two types of Muslims: the ones who are very strict and those who call themselves Muslims but do not observe the rules. He stated that he felt there was no reason for Muslims not to follow all the teachings of Islam.

The Majma' also officially teaches a rigorous form of Islam. Classes held at the Majma' teach that one must follow an exemplar, a *marji' taqlid* (see "The Role of the *Marji' Taqlid* in a New Shi'i Community" later in this chapter), and precisely follow what he prescribes in his writings. Those who regularly attend the Majma' (there is no formal membership as there is in churches) are keenly concerned with knowing and following the laws of religion. Strict interpretation and application of religious law are paramount. Sheikh Berri does advocate this approach. Yet he also shows some flexibility, recognizing that not all the Muslims in his flock are going to be so rigorous in their application of the law. A case in point involves my friend Wafa, who grew up in Beirut and developed a taste for Italian clothing. Never one to leave her house without wearing makeup and jewelry, she told me that she asked Sheikh Berri if makeup were permissible for women. According to her account of the interview, he told her that she must remove her makeup for prayer. Apparently knowing full well that it was hopeless to ask this woman to throw away her mascara and eyeliner, he instead opted to encourage her to pray and to follow the rules regarding prayer. In this way, he did not alienate her, yet gave her religious advice. The leadership at the Majma' has appeared to come to terms with the fact that too rigid an insistence on strict Islamic behavior would alienate too many of the Lebanese Muslims in the area.

The Majma' is beginning to shed its image of being an exclusively "Hizb Allahi" mosque, that is, a mosque with the aim of forming the Lebanese Shi'a of Dearborn in the Khomeini mold. But it now faces the difficult challenge of being strict enough for the core congregation and flexible enough for those who simply want a mosque that will meet their ceremonial and spiritual needs.

Effects of Village Ties

Because loyalties in Lebanon are often strongly drawn along village lines, I had at first anticipated that the mosques would have drawn their congregations according to village or region.

Indeed, when I have asked people what they cared for more, their village or their country, they have said they valued their village more. But the mosques in the Dearborn area draw people from

all regions and villages and cities. No mosque can be termed a Bint Jubeili mosque or a Beirut mosque, for example. Region of origin simply seems to play no role in determining which mosque a person will select.

Elections versus Appointments on the Boards of the Mosques

When the Jami' was first established, Sheikh Chirri asked Mr. B., a prominent and prosperous member of the community and a person who had spent most of his life in the United States, to serve on the board of directors, whose decisions the sheikh had the power to veto. Mr. B refused on the grounds that such an arrangement was totally undemocratic. Chirri, though, found other men in the community willing to serve on his board. These were mostly men who were being rewarded for their loyalty to him in the early days of his struggle to build the mosque. When there is a resignation or a death of a member, the board, which consists of about twenty-five members, selects a replacement. Chirri justifies the appointments on the grounds that general elections would be "too chaotic" for the community.

When Sheikh Burro, now the director of the Majlis, departed from the Jami', one of the complaints he expressed concerned the lack of democratic elections for the board of directors. He saw that it was hopeless to change the direction of the Jami' so long as it consisted of men with a different agenda for the mosque from his own. Burro is not the only one to complain about this matter. The board and the selection process at the Jami' are common targets of criticism. One woman said disgustedly that only rich people could be on the board. (I thought it interesting that she and her husband are far more prosperous than some of the board members I have met.) Another criticism was that the board members were all *hajjis* (pilgrims to Mecca) and therefore expected to be treated as though they were very important.

The situation at the Majma' is quite different. In December 1989, a notice was posted inviting the community members to "elect twenty new members to the administration of the Islamic Institute of Knowledge for the next two years." Those who could vote had to be at least eighteen years old and show "devotion to the great Prophet Muhammad and to his blessed descendants and companions." This indicates that the person must be a Shi'a. Candidates had to be twenty-five years of age, "not affiliated with any movement or ideology that contradicts the principles of Islam" and an

active participant in the Majma's activities. The aspiring candidate was asked to submit a written application that would need the approval of the "religious head at the Institute." The notice included the following statement: "Elections and Consultative Councils are a modern Islamic phenomenon that helps to determine the general trend and will of the society, and not meant to score personal victories and create divisive factions. Therefore, it behooves every Moslem to maintain a spirit of calmness and propriety, and to show an attitude of nobleness—away from the recriminations, disputes and divisions that contradict the true spirit of brotherhood and high character of Islam."

The statement that elections and consultative councils are a "modern Islamic phenomenon" shows the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Very early in the establishment of the republic, elections were held, with Khomeini deciding, as does the Majma's director, who was eligible to run for political positions. The consultative council is, quite obviously, modeled after the Iranian Majlis. For the Shi'a of Dearborn who align themselves with this modern Iranian model of Shi'ism, the lack of elections at the Jami' is considered both "non-democratic and non-Islamic."

Admonitions to maintain "an attitude of nobleness" and to avoid divisions in the community are apparently a matter of great concern to Berri. While the case can be made that he broke away from the Jami', thereby causing a rift in the community, it can also be argued that he has attempted to draw the Muslims to his more elevated approach to Islam, rather than simply exclude those who don't already share his philosophy. In other words, while he believes that the Shi'a should conform to the Shari'a and objects to a popular interpretation of Islam, he realizes that it is his job to educate the masses to bring them to this "higher understanding." There is far more outreach to the community by the Majma' than there is by the Majlis, which is very much "the home" of those whom Burro has dubbed "true Muslims," that is, those who follow the rules.

The elections at the Majma' do not totally escape criticism. One of my informants complained that the election process was arranged so that the "moderates" were forced out and replaced by "Hizb Allah types." This may be true. A younger man with a more activist approach to Islam replaced as chairman a middle-aged physician known for his moderate tendencies. However, since the December 1989 elections, I have detected no exclusionist trends at the Majma'. It remains a place that draws the ardent, serious student of Shari'a while it leaves room for those who desire to have their traditional social and spiritual needs met.



Early on the cold morning of Wednesday, December 2, 1885, a crowd began to gather in the forecourt of a handsome brick church on the outskirts of Detroit. The church, only recently blessed, was the Polish Roman Catholic church of Saint Albertus; the crowd, eventually numbering perhaps eight hundred, were Polish immigrants. Most of them were women. Shortly after 6:00, seven policemen marched into the convent opposite the church and soon emerged escorting two Polish priests. The group moved toward the church, but at the church steps the crowd—"the women," according to witnesses—began to jeer at and jostle the priests, and even pelted them with gravel. The police responded vigorously, but they and the priests were pushed from the door several times before they were finally able to enter.

There were too few officers to bar the crowd from the church; the pews filled rapidly with agitated parishioners. And when a priest vested for mass appeared at the altar, the sanctuary rang with cries of anger and denunciation. The mass proceeded, but as the police began to remove the loudest protesters, the din intensified. Women clung to the pews and to each other and even struck policemen in their efforts to remain in the church. The service was hurried to its conclusion, at which most of the crowd left to mill outside. Then at 7:30, the two priests reappeared at the altar to say a second scheduled mass.¹⁷

Leslie Woodcock Tentler, who has written about the conflict in St. Albertus parish, goes on to say that the scuffle did not end with that mass. It continued through the next mass until the priests were forced to abandon the altar, after which a woman ascended the altar stairs and called for a prayer of redress against the bishop who had removed the well-loved (though controversial) priest who had built St. Albertus.

I recount this story because it allows us to compare and contrast the situation prevailing among the Shi'a in Dearborn with what occurred among these earlier Catholic immigrants. The immediate concern of the Catholics of St. Albertus was to reestablish the priest of their choice as pastor of the parish. It was not as if they were accustomed to appointing their own priests back home in Poland. However, in making this demand, they were, unknowingly, following the pattern of Protestant communities in America. Though poor and not socially powerful, they had a sense that their traditions and old forms of patriarchal control were weakening. Life

in America had given many of them the belief that they were free to assert themselves and to demand more say in who would lead them and how they would be led.

The Shi'a appear to have embarked on a similar journey. While they do not have a bishop or his equivalent to impose a cleric on a mosque, they do have the Jami's board of trustees. The board members are typically assimilated into American society and are very different from the more recent immigrants. Several times, a group under the leadership of a disgruntled sheikh has broken with the Jami' and its board and has founded a new mosque following principles more to its members' liking. Such schisms have resulted in turmoil but have not caused divisions in the community since most people feel no need to support a single mosque exclusively.

Conflict between lay leadership and clergy has been an important feature of American religion, among both Protestants and Catholics. In an essay on popular religion, Robert Wuthnow notes that a secularized society poses particular problems for clergy because they don't have great opportunities for advancement except through clerical hierarchies.¹⁸ They therefore develop such measures as high professional standards of merit to distance and protect themselves from encroachment by the laity. The laity, on the other hand, has tended to be successful in gaining control by demanding representation on church boards and by promoting the employment of lay preachers. In Dearborn, the people want erudite, formally trained sheikhs, while they also want a greater voice in mosque affairs. Clergy/laity tensions are therefore inevitable.

I will refer again to the case of St. Albertus. It is not that the violent demonstration was typical of the American Catholic experience—or of the experience of the Shi'i Lebanese in America—but the issues at stake were very much in the forefront of Catholic debate in America during the immigrant period and are similar to those being debated today among Dearborn's Shi'a.

The Role of the *Marji' Taqlid* in a New Shi'i Community

In the summer of 1989, Sayyid Imam Abu'l Kasim Khu'i, a *marji' taqlid* residing in Najaf, made an offer of several million dollars to the Islamic Center of America, the Jami', to build an Islamic school in the greater Detroit area. The offer was delivered by Sheikh Burro, the Lebanese preacher who had been employed at the Jami' for a year or so. The school was to be under the jurisdiction of the

Khu'i Foundation. The Jami' turned down the offer on the grounds that any school it built would be controlled locally by the board of trustees of the Jami'.

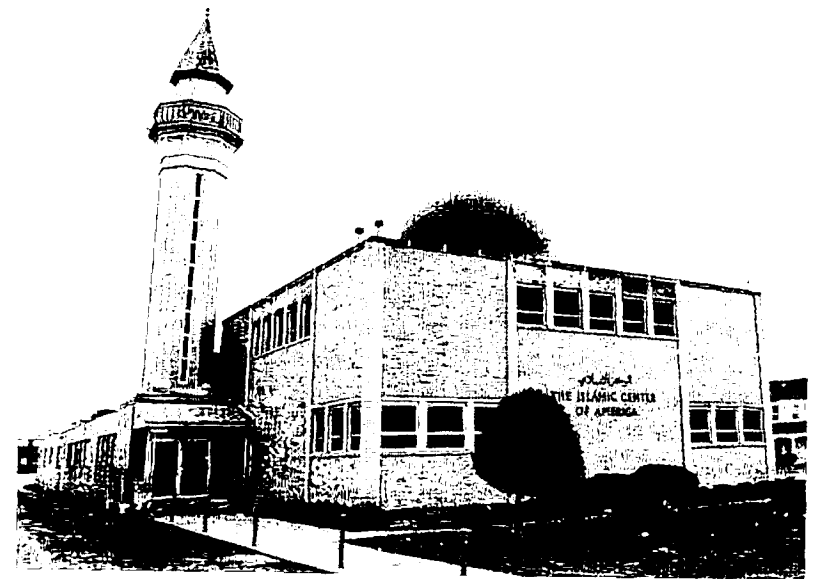
Burro, who had received much of his religious training in Qom, expressed his outrage at the refusal and left his employment at the Jami', eventually starting his own mosque, the Islamic Council (the Majlis). First, though, he took Khu'i's offer to the Islamic Institute in Dearborn (the Majma'). They accepted the offer and began the process of negotiating the purchase of a piece of land with the city of Dearborn.

That the Majma' would accept such an offer and the Jami' would not underscores some of the basic differences between these two mosques and demonstrates the diversity of viewpoints that exists among this Shi'i community. (At this writing, the Majlis is new and not yet well established; therefore, it will not be included in this discussion.)

As mentioned earlier, the Majma' became essentially a home for new immigrants who objected to the lack of rigor found at the Jami' in such matters as women's dress and sexual segregation. Innovations such as Sunday services also drew criticism.

The core membership of the Majma' opts for a strict interpretation of Islamic law: women's hair, arms, and legs must be covered; men and women should not shake hands (there are even some young men who would prefer not to shake hands with *kafir*, unbelievers); men and women should not sit together at the services; women are not to join men during *salat*; men and women should not wear gold jewelry; women should save their makeup only for their husbands' eyes; and *mut'a* (pleasure) marriage, a temporary type of marriage sanctioned only by Shi'ism, should at least be considered an acceptable practice.

These strict attitudes are not totally lacking at the Jami', but there are more people attending the Majma' who believe in such a conservative interpretation. These Shari'a-minded individuals almost invariably will admit to liking the Majma' more because it is stricter than the Jami'. Some are reluctant to admit this at first because they want to give the impression of being a unified community, but usually in the course of a conversation or interview, there will be an admission of preference. At the same time, there are those who are far more liberal in their approach who find the obvious camaraderie and enthusiasm of the Majma' appealing. Frequent dinners during Ramadan, regular classes and lectures, and an atmosphere of "a meeting place" draw the devout together, giving them a refuge from a society that often seems very sinful.



The Islamic Center of America (the Jami') on Warren Avenue was founded in 1962 under the leadership of the late Sheikh Mohammad Jawad Chirri. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)



The Islamic Institute of Knowledge (the Majma') on the corner of Warren and Jonathan Avenues in Dearborn was opened in 1985 under the direction of Sheikh Abdu'l Latif Berri. Commonly in the U.S. commercial buildings are transformed into religious centers, as was the case with the Majma'. (1995, photograph by author.)



Amidst the buildings on Warren Avenue being converted into Islamic centers is the complex of St. Alphonsis Church, with its school, rectory, convent and cemetery. The cemetery, shown in this picture, contains the remains of many of the people after whom streets in Dearborn had been named, such as Reuter, Theisen, and Schaeffer. These German Catholics were replaced by Poles and Italians. (1995, photograph by author.)



Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power, the holiest night during Ramadan, at the Islamic Center of America. (1995, photograph courtesy of Bruce Harkness.)



At the Islamic Mosque of America, Muslims attend mosque to pray all night long on Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power, during Ramadan. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)



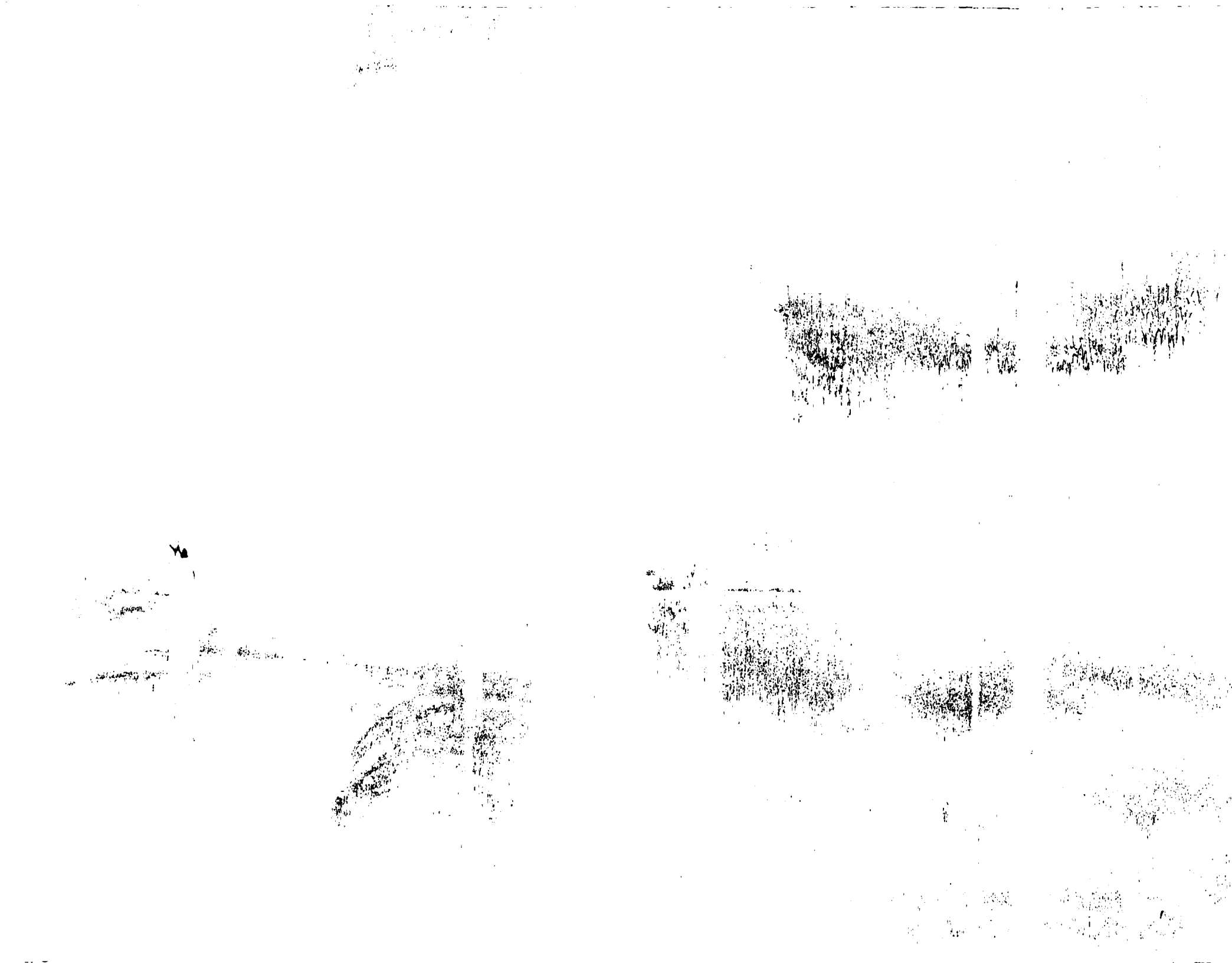
Praying at the Islamic Mosque of America on Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power, during Ramadan. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)



During the holy month of Ramadan, people attend mosque to listen to nightly lectures at the Islamic Center of America. (1995, photograph courtesy of Bruce Harkness.)



As a young Muslim recites poetry about the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the audience expresses emotion as they remember the suffering and sacrifice of Imam Hussein. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)





At the newest Islamic center in Dearborn, Dar al Hikmat (House of Wisdom), youth listen to the recitation of the story of Imam Hussein at Karbala. This picture, in which some of the young men are weeping, shows the emotional intensity of this event. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)



The Islamic Mosque of America on Warren Avenue is another example of a commercial building transformed into an Islamic Center. (1995, photograph by author.)



These young Muslim men practice Latmiah, a tradition of beating the chest to express emotion and sorrow, while special poetry is recited about Imam Hussein. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)



Buying sweets at Shatila Food Products one evening during Ramadan. Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter are the busiest times of the year for Shatila, which ships pastries nationwide. (1995, photograph courtesy of Bruce Harkness.)



Women and men sit in groups, side by side, at Dar al Hikmat as they listen to Sheikh Elahi lecture about the Prince of Martyrs, Imam Hussein. (1996, photograph courtesy of Haajar Mitchell.)

At the Majma', Arabic is by far the preferred language, although the need for Sheikh Berri to learn English has not escaped him and his progress in the language has been impressive. But there is not the linguistic tension at the Majma' that one finds at the Jami', where lengthy speeches are given in both English and Arabic.

Unlike the Jami', the Majma' has not experienced in its brief history a period of assimilation into mainstream society. Therefore, there is not the American/Lebanese divide as is found at the Jami'. Assimilated Muslims hoping for a dialogue with Christian Americans are lacking at the Majma'. Keeping the Lebanese Muslims on the straight path is the main emphasis for both the Majma' and the Jami'. Yet for the Jami' there is still a longing among some members to continue what had been started before the refugees descended on them: the building of a community that was at once truly Islamic and truly American.

I believe that one of the factors influencing the directions the two mosques take will be the role of the *marji' taqlid*.

The Institution of the *Marji'iyat*

In Shi'i Islam, there is a hierarchy of clerical leadership based on superiority of learning. By the eighteenth century, there was a religious elite referred to as *mujtahids* who could practice *ijtihad*, that is, make religious decisions based on reason. Eventually, a hierarchy of *mujtahids* was instituted, which, as Juan Cole suggests, could have been a means of controlling rebellious lower-level 'ulama, many of whom had become members of the messianic Babi movement of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Whatever the reason, the concept of *Marji'iyat taqlid tamm* (complete authority of one *mujtahid* over the entire community) became institutionalized at that time.²⁰ Superiority in learning is generally held to be the primary prerequisite for the selection of a *marji'*, though there is no clear-cut set of criteria that governs the choice. Ultimately, it is the followers (those who are *muqallid* to the *marji'*) who decide which *marji'* to follow.²¹

In the nineteenth century, Mortaza Ansari, who was responsible for much of the institutional and ideological elaboration of the concept of *marji' taqlid*, stated that it was not permissible to change from one living *marji'* to another except on the grounds that a second one is more learned than the first one. He further stated that if two were found to be equally knowledgeable, it was permissible to emulate either one. However, once a follower has elected to follow a particular ruling, he should remain with that ruling and not change

at will. Also, it is necessary for a person to follow a living *marji'*; this issue became important when Khomeini died in 1989.

The relationship between a *marji'* and a sheikh is complex. While there is a hierarchical nature to this relationship, it is not such that a *mujtahid* can demand the obedience of the sheikhs, as the Pope or a bishop can do. Rather, the *marji'* and the lower-ranking clerics tend to give credence to one another's position in the eyes of the people. The *marji'* can patronize the sheikh and provide him with financial backing, much like what is occurring in Dearborn regarding the school. The sheikh can serve as the *marji'*'s representative and through his sermons reinforce the position of the *marji'*. By giving recognition to the *marji'*'s position, the sheikh is also elevating his own rank; through his relationship with this religious elite, he gains a kind of charisma.

Several clerics were recognized as *marji'* when the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Iran, including Khomeini himself. After his rise to political leadership, he rapidly established himself as the leader of all the other *marji' iya*. Those who resisted his authority, such as the well-known ayatollahs Shariatmadari and Telegani, came to unpleasant ends. Khomeini saw himself as both political and spiritual leader of the people, and, in that capacity (i.e., as the *wilayat al-faqih*), he took unprecedented measures in exercising his power. The vast majority of *'ulama* who reach the rank of *mujtahid*, including those who are recognized as *marji'*, live their lives far from the centers of political power and are far more concerned with issues relating to, say, ritual purity than the national debt.

Ayatollah Khu'i in Iraq is an example of the latter type of *marji'*. Khu'i, whose objections to Khomeini's political activities were well known, continues to have the largest following, his influence extending to Pakistan, India, and East Africa,²² and, as I have found, to some extent in Lebanon and now in America.

Khomeini's rise to power in revolutionary Iran is a major watershed in Shi'i history. He made it respectable to be a religious Muslim after years of what Iranians call *gharbzadegi*, literally "West-toxication."²³ Yet the effect he had on the actual lives of people is extremely varied. For some, he became the catalyst and guide for a total change of life, a life in which only religion sets the standard. Others saw him primarily as a political leader who taught the West that the Islamic world has to be taken into account. Some hate him or consider him to be an embarrassment to Islam, but, judging from the Lebanese community in Dearborn, these are a minority. Most feel that Khomeini is deserving of respect, if not absolute and com-

plete obedience. The Lebanese I interviewed reflect this wide range of attitudes, as will be shown below.

Musa Sadr also must be taken into account. He is for the Lebanese Shi'a a major heroic figure. This heroic dimension has a role in shaping the Lebanese attitude toward the *marji'*. As stated earlier, Musa Sadr was the spokesman of the "oppressed" in Lebanon, whom the political establishment, on both a national and a village level, considered a threat to the status quo. Although he actively sought to bridge gaps among sectarian groups, he ultimately saw that the Shi'a would need to fight on their own. He eventually established Harakat Amal (the Movement of Hope), which began as a social movement but in 1974 became an armed militia. Musa Sadr "vanished" in 1978 on a trip to Libya. Because disappearance or occultation is a major theme in Shi'ism, this only added to his prestige. His memory and his militia live on. Harakat Amal's greatest foe at the present time is the Hizb Allah movement, whose members look to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a model of what they hope to achieve. Norton has summarized the difference between the two groups: Amal has a "commitment to Lebanon as a distinct and definite homeland. This position clearly distinguishes Amal from its radical Shi'i opponents, who have viewed Lebanon as a compartment in the Islamic *umma* that they seek to transform into an Islamic republic."²⁴ Sympathizers of both groups are found in Dearborn. However, among this community, an admirer of Musa Sadr is not necessarily a detractor of Khomeini, and vice versa. It is not unusual to find portraits of both men in a home or mosque.

Claims that Musa Sadr was truly a *mujtahid* and, therefore, eligible to be a *marji'* are currently being made by adherents of the Amal movement both here and in Lebanon, though this did not appear to be an issue in his lifetime. The new American representative of Amal gave a speech at the Jami' one evening in which he argued for Sadr's *mujtahid* position quite strenuously. This can be viewed as Amal's attempt to present itself as "religiously legitimate," as Hizb Allah members often accuse Amal members of being lax in their religious duties. But, at best, this situation is ambiguous, and, as we shall see, very few view Musa Sadr as a *marji'*.

One of the questions that arose in the process of this research was whether one's political-ideological position affected, first, one's decision to emulate a *marji'* and, second, one's selection of a *marji'*. I found that the Lebanese chose to be as unpredictable in this matter as they were in so many others.

Teachings of the *Marji'*

Scholars agree that the *maraji'* do not significantly differ with one another in their opinions. Khu'i does teach that women should cover their faces as well as the rest of their bodies, while Khomeini is more liberal and has decreed that the oval of the woman's face may show. But even in this instance, Khu'i has left open the possibility for a woman to seek the opinion of another *marji'* as this is considered an "area of doubt." The most significant difference between the two *marji'* is in the area of politics, as mentioned above.

As a brief example of Khu'i's opinions, I have chosen the issue of *mut'a* (temporary marriage or, more correctly, pleasure marriage), because this is a topic on which people of this community are very divided and because it is of relevance to other aspects of this study.

Temporary marriage is, according to Haeri, "a contract between a man and an unmarried woman, be she a virgin, divorced, or widowed, in which both the period the marriage shall last and the amount of money to be exchanged must be specified."²⁵ Witnesses are not required for such a union, nor is the union usually registered. A Shi'i man may contract as many temporary marriages as he wishes; there is no limit whatsoever. The unions can be formed consecutively or simultaneously. For a woman, however, the rules are quite different. She may form only one union at a time and after each marriage must abstain sexually for a period of time to ascertain whether or not she is pregnant.

In Khu'i's book, *Minhaj al-Salihin (The Way of the Righteous)*, he gives the following instructions for a temporary marriage:

The contract of temporary marriage has as a necessary condition that the woman say, "I myself take you in marriage of pleasure," or "I wed you," or "I marry you." The acceptance on his part is of the form "I accept." The contract is conditioned on specifying the dowry and also by custom on specifying a set period no longer than the lifetimes of the two parties, since otherwise the contract would manifestly be a contract of permanent marriage. If no dowry is mentioned, the contract is invalid. . . .

Just as in the case of concubines, there is no set limit to the number of women whom a man may choose to take as temporary wives. The dowry may be as large or small as desired.²⁶

Haeri states that Khomeini, after the revolution, issued a *fatwa* stating that a virgin must have her father's permission for a first

marriage, be it permanent or temporary. Issues such as parental consent for a virgin to enter into a *mut'a* marriage might be under dispute among the Shi'i 'ulama, but the legitimacy of *mut'a* is not. While Khomeini may have encouraged the practice more strongly than Khu'i has, both men are in favor of this kind of marriage. It should hold that a person who is attempting to follow the teachings of a *marji'* will, at least in principle, believe in the practice of *mut'a*.

Marji' as a New Idea among the Lebanese

Through formal interviews and less formal conversations, I found certain trends arising. It is apparent that the issue of the *marji'* did not loom large in the lives of the Lebanese Shi'a before the Iranian revolution, and for many it still does not. Several people I spoke with, some of whom considered themselves very religious, did not recognize the term *marji'* and needed to have it explained. They understood the concept if I explained that the *marji'* was one of the "big imams in Najaf or Iran." One highly educated man from Baalbek who is around forty years of age said that he had never known anyone who followed a *marji'*. In fact, he had not become aware of this concept until he lived in Dearborn. As I interviewed a young college student from the Bekaa, his sister, who was visiting from Saudi Arabia, interjected that it was only in the past year that she had learned that the people were supposed to follow a *marji'*. Her husband had come back from his pilgrimage to Mecca with this piece of information. Another immigrant from the Bekaa said in a derogatory manner that "this business with the *marji'* is Hizb Allah stuff," implying that it is a recent innovation imported from Iran.

The perception of the *marji'* as an outside interference is illustrated by the following example. Throughout the Muslim world, there is always some question about the exact day that the Id al-Fitr (the holiday following Ramadan) falls on since it is supposed to occur the day after the new moon is spotted. In this community, however, the sheikhs announce the day ahead of time, no doubt to help people plan work and school schedules. During Ramadan in 1988, letters went out to the Shi'i families in the area from the Jami' and the Majma' stating when the Id would be that year. The two mosques disagreed. The Jami's date coincided with that of Iran, and the Majma's date conformed to the rest of the Muslim world's calculations. (This was extremely interesting since the Majma' is the mosque that is supposed to be so highly influenced by Iran.) I asked both sheikhs, Chirri and Berri, why there was this discrepancy, and they simply said that the experts they consulted had given them

these dates. However, at a community level, there was great consternation about the matter, and at least some people were convinced that politics was at the root of the problem. A friend from southern Lebanon who has considerable contact with people through her business expressed the anger of many when she said that the Jami' was letting Khomeini dictate to them when the Id would be. "We are Lebanese," she said. "We respect Khomeini, but we don't want him telling us what to do." Her comment reflects both the Arab/Iranian tension that is found among Shi'a and the fact that she has limits on how much influence she believes anyone outside the community, even a *marji' taqlid*, should be permitted to have.

People from the south of Lebanon are more likely to have at least heard of the *marji'* than those from the Bekaa, although they are not necessarily more likely to follow one. This finding is not surprising in view of the religious history of Lebanon's south in comparison to that of the Bekaa. From the fifteenth century, the south (Jabal 'Amil) was the cite of the most important teaching work in Lebanon. It was to Jabal 'Amil that the Iranian Safavids looked when they needed to import scholars to teach the people of Iran, who had been mostly Sunnis, about Shi'ism.

Chibli Mallat documents the activities in Jabal 'Amil of Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya, who in 1948 was appointed judge in the Shari'a court in Beirut and throughout his career had close contact with the major figures in the Shi'i world.²⁷ An activist who wrote several books on Shi'ism as well as on the deplorable conditions of the south, he was ultimately overshadowed by the charismatic Imam Musa Sadr, whose leadership was more strongly felt in the south than in the Bekaa.²⁸ It was also in Jabal 'Amil that the scholarly Shi'i journal *Al-'Irfan* had been published since 1909. Mallat states that this journal, "protected by the Lebanese freedom of the press, became the point of convergence of Arabic speaking Shi'i writers throughout the century."²⁹ Nothing comparable came from the Bekaa region. My informants and respondents from the Bekaa generally mention the fact that they shared their villages with Christians, and a few have said that they even went to their churches. A young neighbor from a village in the Bekaa went to a Christian school and said that when her father found her and her sister as young schoolgirls praying in the Christian style, he decided that it was time to teach them to do *salat* (obligatory prayer). However, he evidently was not a very effective teacher; she came to my husband (a scholar of Islam but not a Muslim) for a book to help teach her how to pray.

Ajami characterizes the people of the south as "patient, subdued peasants, their villages within the reach of authority. The Shi'a of the Bekaa Valley were wild and assertive clansmen who resisted the encroachment of outside power. A few gendarmes could terrorize entire villages in the south; the Bekaa was a place into which government troops ventured with great reluctance. The beys of the south lorded it over cowed men. The beys of the Bekaa operated in a more egalitarian world."³⁰

The Jabal 'Amil/Bekaa difference was weaker but still apparent even among the assimilated Muslims. Men and women who had originated from Bint Jubeil and who regularly attend mosque services were generally likely to say that they followed a *marji'* and always had.

For these earlier immigrants, though, it is usually their reactions to current Middle Eastern events that determine their feelings about the *marji'*. Certainly there was a great deal of ambivalence expressed among this group about the role of the *marji'*. One man who is second-generation American but spent some of his school years in the south of Lebanon was at first not sure of the term, but when I clarified it, he leaned over the desk in his enormous, plush business office and burst out, "I hate Khomeini." He added that his loyalty was to America, about which he could find no fault. An active member of the Jami', Hajj C., also second-generation but whose father originated from the Bekaa, said that he was "theoretically in agreement with the concept of *marji' iya*" but does not know who his *marji'* should be. An admirer of Khomeini's achievements, he still is ardently opposed to any sort of outside control of Islam in America. This is not the case for Layla, a woman in her thirties who refers to herself as "born again." Born in America, though she also lived for some years in the Bekaa, she only recently learned of the principle of following a *marji'* but has embraced the idea wholeheartedly as her Islamic duty. Khomeini was her choice.

Those Who Follow a *Marji'*

When a devout and learned young Iraqi, a descendent of several ayatollahs, heard that I was interested in the role of the *marji'* in Dearborn, his sarcastic reply was "What role?" In his eyes, the Lebanese are so thoroughly independent, so very casual and unorthodox about their religion, that they could not possibly be affected by the teachings of the *marji'*.

Yet about half of my respondents did claim to follow a *marji'*, so I was not able to dismiss the matter as easily as my young friend.

The following case studies exemplify the sort, or sorts, of new immigrant Lebanese who follow a *marji'*.

Issa

Issa, a young man with a serious demeanor, is an engineering student at a local college. Originally from the Jabal 'Amil, he lived most of his life in one of the southern Beirut suburbs to which many Shi'a gravitated during the 1970s.

Issa became "very religious" about seven years ago when he started reading Islamic books. He now deplores a traditional attitude toward religion and is irritated that members of his family have been content to take a less serious view toward religion. He believes a person should not take religion for granted: "He must search for the truth. After one has decided on that truth, then he must follow the rules exactly." When asked what he would do if there were a rule he objected to, he responded that he would follow it anyway, because it is the devil who tempts him to go against his religion.

Issa fasts, prays, and is so often at the Majma' that his family teases him about it being his home. He will eat only *halal* meat, believes women should wear the full *hijab* and not wear makeup in public, and will not shake hands with women. In fact, when I first spoke with him on the telephone to set up an interview, he warned me by saying, "I don't shake hands." He prefers the Majma' over the Jami' because "true Muslims" are more often found there. By this, he meant those aligned with Hizb Allah. He will not go to weddings outside the mosque because he is convinced (incorrectly, from my experience) that there is alcohol at the wedding receptions in the reception halls.

Following the orthodox line, he thinks *mut'a* is "the perfect solution for a social problem" but that *mut'is* should be only divorced or widowed women, not virgins. When I replied that Khomeini permitted virgins to be *mut'is*, he corrected himself by saying that it was all right for virgins but they needed their fathers' consent. He added that since no father would consent to such a thing, a virgin *mut'i* isn't a possibility. He qualified this statement by saying that *mut'a* is occurring with virgins in Lebanon because people don't understand the rules properly.

He turns to Khu'i for his *fatwas* or legal opinions on religious matters, but since Khu'i "cannot speak out on political subjects" because of the oppression of the Iraqi government which had Khu'i under house arrest, he turns to Khomeini (whom he calls his greatest hero) for political answers.

Issa expressed a desire to live in Iran, but should he stay here and have children, he would send them to the Khu'i school.

Husayn

The same age as Issa, Husayn presents a strikingly different image. A supporter of Amal and a dapper dresser who wears expensive suits and drives a flashy sports car, Husayn reflects the influence of the free-wheeling life of Beirut. He was born in Bint Jubail in Jabal 'Amil, the village that has provided a majority of immigrants to America from Lebanon. He and his family also lived in the Beirut area. He has a high school education and has been trying to set up his own business as a tailor.

It was at the Jami' that I met Husayn, who was attending Sunday services. He goes there more often than to the Majma' because that is where his friends go.

Husayn prays and has fasted since he was a young child. He does not wear jewelry, eats only *halal* meat, and reads the Koran. He will shake hands with women, and, in fact, he likes to go to nightclubs to dance. He never said directly that he drinks, but he did say that "if a person drinks a little, this is not harmful."

Mut'a is "better than committing adultery," he feels. He approves of it for widows and divorced women and for any man, whether married or not.

Husayn says that he follows Imam Khu'i and always has. He does not keep referring to Khu'i's writings but stated, "I know his way." He added that his family followed Ayatollah Hakim before he passed away in 1970. Husayn said that it was necessary to follow the *marji'* "for important things" but added that everything the *marji'* teaches is not relevant to all times and places: "In America, we can't do everything the *marji'* says. For example, in America, men and women sit together at weddings. Islam must adapt to the surroundings."

Husayn believes that when he has children, he will send them to the Khu'i school.

Fatme

A young wife expecting her first child, Fatme looks older than her years dressed in a modest loose-fitting dress with a scarf that reveals only the slightest trace of hair and is fastened, not tied, under her chin. She has worn the scarf since she was eight years old and wears it in the manner of Shi'i heroines Sitt Zahra and Sitt Zeinab.

From a village in the Bekaa, she attended school through the ninth grade before coming to the United States, where she married. To Fatme, being religious means wearing *hijab*, doing *salat*, fasting, and following all the rules of religion, which she believes she does.

Fatme said that she knew that according to the Shari'a it was all right to practice *mut'a*, but she still does not approve of it. (At this point in the interview, a neighbor whom I knew slightly came into the house. This woman is quite serious about religion and argued with Fatme that *mut'a* is against religion and that "a regular marriage is the only kind of marriage allowed." Fatme tentatively repeated what she knew about the Shari'a but did not argue forcefully, obviously because she hated the institution so much.)

Khomeini is her *marji'*, and she believes he should be followed in everything. She said that he has a special position, "not like one of the Twelve Imams but something close. He paved the road for Imam Mahdi [the messianic figure in Islam] to come."

She, too, hopes to send her children to the Khu'i school.

Ghalia

About the same age as Fatme, Ghalia is young and vivacious in her short-sleeve blouses and flared skirts. Her pretty hair, of which she is proud, is worn long or tied up on her head, never covered by a scarf. The mother of a toddler and an infant, she came from the same village as Fatme about five years ago, attended Fordson High School, and worked in her brother's store. Her marriage to her first cousin was arranged by her brother.

Ghalia considers herself to be religious but had difficulty defining what a religious person is. She knows a Muslim is supposed to follow rules, and during Ramadan she fasted and began to try to pray regularly, something she doesn't do the rest of the year. She occasionally eats hamburgers from fast-food restaurants but usually eats *halal* meat. She shakes hands only with men she knows.

She likes the Jami' better than the Majma' because she feels "more comfortable" there. Even so, she does not go to the Jami' for the regular services but mostly for engagements, weddings, and 'Ashura commemorations. She finds memorials too upsetting.

Her response to *mut'a*: "I don't like it." She thinks it should never be allowed.

She claims to follow Khomeini as her *marji'*. She explained that she tries to understand what he has to say, though she does not actually consult his works. Parts of the Koran are the only religious text she has read at all.

She does not think she will be sending her children to the Khu'i school.

The Meaning of the *Marji'* in This Community

While the cases presented give some indication of the variety of opinions found among the Shi'a in this area, they should not be interpreted as being representative of the total community's viewpoints. Consistency of opinion is most likely to be found among a minority who have aligned themselves with the Hizb Allah movement; these individuals are extremely concerned with following the *fatwas* of the *marji'* and "following the rules exactly," as they often say. Among this group are those who felt insecure about their religious education and expressed concern that they might give me "a wrong opinion." Samira, a young woman who had gone from blue jeans and rock music to full *hijab* within the last few years, emphatically stated that she did not have any opinions about religion. Everything that I needed to know was "written in the books," which she kept in front of her for reference during the interview. Samira, like Issa, believes that Iran is a model the world should follow and leaves no room for any other interpretation of Islam.

Among the Lebanese, the Samiras and the Issas are a new breed. Prior to the Iranian Revolution, the Islam of the books was primarily the domain of those relatively few men who went off to Najaf to study at the feet of the learned *'ulama*. Most of these men returned to their villages to minister to the needs of the people, who relied on these preachers for their religious knowledge. As mentioned above, if one was raised in Jabal 'Amil, one was more likely to be exposed to these teachings. Exposed to, but little else. This is essentially not a community of readers.

In the vast majority of homes I have visited, there have been few, if any, books. There is a respect for books—at least religious ones—but books are perceived as being for the sheikhs. In fact, my husband, with his Ph.D. in Islamic studies and his innumerable Arabic books, is sometimes referred to, only half-jokingly, as Sheikh John.

The poverty and deplorable conditions of the Shi'a of Lebanon are now well documented. For the most part, people's education has been limited to a few years of schooling in the villages. Reading all but the most elementary Arabic is very difficult for them. In my sample, virtually all who were attending or had attended college were of the first generation in their families to have done so.

It is interesting to examine the books read in this community. A majority of people said that they had read parts of the Koran, sev-

eral said they had read "some *hadith*" (sayings attributed to the Prophet) and "some *tafsir*" (commentaries on the Koran). Of all the books, the one mentioned most, after the Koran, was *Nahjul Balagha* (*Peak of Eloquence*), a work of the Imam 'Ali ibn abi Taleb, whom the Shi'a believe to be the Prophet's rightful successor. I mentioned this fact to the wife of the owner of a local bookstore who often tends the shop. She smiled and shook her head. She confirmed that the Lebanese of Dearborn bought few books and that *Nahjul Balagha* was the one they asked for the most. But she did not believe they read it. "It is very difficult," she said. The store carries a reference book to assist the reader who wishes to understand the points Imam 'Ali is making. She suggested to one customer that he purchase this text, but he seemed to have taken the suggestion as an insult. "We all know what Imam 'Ali says," he retorted.

The Issas, Samiras, and others I interviewed who believed that one must follow the rules exactly place great emphasis on "the books." Often fairly young with some college education (but not always), these serious-minded Muslims like to refer to texts they have read. A few actually brought out books during interviews to read to me an official position on a given subject. But even with this group, the type and degree of reading they are doing are limited. Avoiding philosophical works and anything that might be at all controversial in Islam, they are concerned mainly with learning the laws. However, what is important to this discussion is that they are generally referring to the opinions of a *marji*'.

There is another category of people who emphasize the importance of knowing and following the rules and reading the religious literature. Hajj Youssef represents this group. Meticulous in his obedience to the laws of Islam and a follower of Khomeini until his death, he nevertheless did not approve of *mut'a* except perhaps for very special circumstances, but certainly not for married men. His even more bookish wife came down far more strongly against the practice. Upon meeting Hajj Youssef and his wife, I had made the assumption that these were Hizb Allah supporters. Certainly their dress and demeanor lent themselves to this interpretation (though later I came to realize that Hajj Youssef's wife's style of dress was actually not completely in conformity to Hizb Allah). An hour or so into the interview, I realized that Hajj Youssef could not be easily pigeonholed and that the dynamics of the community were even more complex than I had thought.

His rejection of *mut'a* and an offhand remark about the "Hizb Allahis at the Majma' who want to talk to me all the time" suggested that Hajj Youssef and his wife may be "modern," as he put it, but

they are not political. Hajj Youssef also commented that in following the laws, one must do so from the heart. Issa, Samira, and others who aligned themselves with Hizb Allah are concerned with following the *fatwas* of their *marji* regardless of any other consideration. Hajj Youssef, on the other hand, is willing to temper his *marji*'s opinions, at least in some matters, with his own judgment. In this respect, Hajj Youssef is more representative of the community than are the "Hizb Allah" types.

I see the difference in attitudes between these two types as the distinction between religious devotion and religious fanaticism. The difference can be ever so subtle. Two women discuss proper Islamic attire. Both are immersed in the life of the 'ulama, through birth or marriage or both. They both follow the teachings of the *marja*' carefully. Yet one insists that the only proper Islamic dress is the *chador* or 'abaya (the all-encompassing black gown that leaves only the eyes, nose, and mouth revealed). The other woman feels that the 'abaya is far too extreme to wear in America. Her coatlike dress reaching just above the ankle (and usually worn over slacks) and her scarf hiding her neck, her hair, and part of her forehead are modest enough under the circumstances. She believes that Americans would not understand the 'abaya and that it would cause a negative reaction. (Indeed, a woman's 'abaya swishing through the aisles of stores at the shopping mall is quite a spectacle, even for one who lives in multiethnic Dearborn.) The woman in the 'abaya is simply interested in the most "careful" interpretation of the law. One woman is capable of seeing another point of view and reacting to it in a reasonable fashion; the other is not.

But what about Ghalia in her short-sleeved blouses and flowing hair? And Husayn spending his Saturday evenings in nightclubs? What does it mean to people like them to follow a *marji*'?

There is probably not a single answer to this question. Husayn is from Bint Jubeil. He claims that his family follows Khu'i and before Khu'i they followed Hakim. Husayn's father came to the United States some years before the rest of the family. Husayn, who has been fasting since he was eight years old, was raised by a mother who wears a scarf and for whom prayer and fasting are part of life. Life alone in America caused his father, on the other hand, to be less observant of the rules. The rest of the family continued to fast and pray after arriving three years ago, and now Husayn's father has begun fasting again. For Husayn, following the *marji*' is part of the tradition learned from his mother and his Muslim surroundings in Lebanon. Yet his father's more cavalier response to religion has

opened the way for Husayn's "compromises" with American life. It should be noted, though, that Husayn justifies these compromises on the grounds that Islam is an adaptable religion. He never suggests that his forays into American nightlife are the result of a lack of concern about his religion. Furthermore, he uses a religiously sanctioned means of having relations with women, relations that would otherwise be forbidden.

Ghalia, on the other hand, grew up in a village in the Bekaa and attended a Christian school before coming to Dearborn, where she went to the public schools. She, too, follows a more traditional religious path. Her parents are both *hajjis* (pilgrims), and her mother, on a recent visit, was chagrined to find that most of her daughters and daughters-in-law had stopped wearing the scarf. While Ghalia lives a relatively isolated life with her children and husband, she has been affected by the world to some extent. She may not conform to standards of Islamic dress, but she is aware of the influence of the Hizb Allah movement, which now dominates her village, on her countrymen. And she is very ambivalent about this. One evening, she joined me and some other women on a neighbor's porch. She called my attention to some sheikhs who were going inside another neighbor's house. "Linda," she said, "look, Hizb Allah," and, of all things, she made a sign of the cross and laughed. On the other hand, Khomeini, the ultimate leader of the Hizb Allah movement, is, even to someone like Ghalia, someone to be admired. He has forced the world, particularly the West, to take heed of the Shi'a as no one else has ever done. While she pays no attention to Khomeini's *fatwas* and carries out only the most basic of Islamic obligations, she does, as she says, "like to hear what he says." In other words, Ghalia doesn't really have a *marji'*, she simply has a hero.

And what of young Fatme from the Bekaa, who reads religious books, rigorously follows all the laws as she understands them, and claims to follow Khomeini as her *marji'*? She does not fall into the exact category of any of the other individuals presented here. Her religiosity is very much the result of the Lebanese civil war and the impact of Hizb Allah in her village. Like Samira, she claims to follow Khomeini as her *marji'* in spite of the fact that, properly speaking, she should have transferred her allegiance to a living *marji'* after Khomeini's death. Like Hajj Youssef and unlike Samira, she expresses some misgivings about the practice of *mut'a* in spite of the fact that her *marji'* was an avid supporter of this type of marriage. Some of the differences are, of course, just the result of different personalities, but I found that each of these individuals repre-

sents a certain type of Shi'a. For Fatme, as for Issa and Samira, Khomeini is both a charismatic leader and her *marji'*. On the other hand, Fatme did not feel obliged to consult books throughout the interview, nor did she share Issa's or Samira's sense of obligation to convince me of the perfection of Islam. While Fatme may be sympathetic to Hizb Allah, she lacks the politicization found with those who identify with this movement.

Which *Marji'* to Follow

One of the Dearborn sheikhs claimed that 95 percent of the local Shi'a follow Khu'i as their *marji'*. This should probably be amended to state that 95 percent of those who claim to follow a *marji'* follow Imam Khu'i." This is not surprising in view of the fact that Khu'i's influence has extended farther afield than any other *maraji'* in the history of the institution.

At the Majma', Sheikh Berri instructs the people that they may choose between Khomeini and Khu'i, as these were the two most learned *maraji'* in the world. Perhaps, again, it should come as no surprise that the only other *marji'* mentioned during the course of my interviewing was Khomeini, although certainly not everyone in this community is following the instructions of Sheikh Berri, or any other sheikh, for that matter. A few people did mention being followers of Musa Sadr. One elderly woman explained that she chose Musa Sadr as her *marji'* because he was a sayyid (a descendent of the Prophet) like herself. Another person, a young student, claimed Musa Sadr as his *marji'* because he was the founder of Harakat Amal which his family supported. But in most cases, people who had any concept of what the *marji' taqlid* was believed they had a choice between Khomeini and Khu'i and either accepted or rejected such leadership.

In the Persian Gulf, evidently, choosing between these two men was a weighty matter. Several of my contacts have lived in the Gulf region and have told me that fighting broke out on occasion between those who followed Khomeini and those who followed Khu'i. One young man told me that the Khu'i followers were being called *kuffar* (infidels) by the followers of Khomeini.

I expected that in Dearborn, too, one would find a clear-cut distinction between those who followed Khu'i and those who chose Khomeini as their *marji'* and that there might be tensions between the two factions. However, Khomeini's death during the course of this research made predictions more difficult. Had Khomeini survived, I would have predicted that only those who believed in the

establishment of an Islamic government with a member of the clergy as the guardian of that government would look to him as their leader. This essentially constitutes those who align themselves with Hizb Allah. On the other hand, I predicted that Amal supporters, if they followed a *marji'* at all, would follow Khu'i, if only as a response against the Iranian-backed Hizb Allah. I initially expected that, aside from avowed Amal supporters, strictly religious but apolitical types would follow Khu'i. However, as I have shown, one does not have to be very strict about following the decrees of a *marji'* to claim to be a follower of one.

Predictions about the pro-Amal faction following Khu'i generally received some support. Khalil, well known in the community for his efforts in behalf of Harakat Amal, claims always to have followed Khu'i, yet he also states that it has only been in the past several years (since coming to America) that he has become more religious. A man who despises Hizb Allah, he rejects Khomeini for his political views. On the other hand, Muhammad, a young student who claims that he and his family are Amal supporters, also mentioned that he saw Khomeini as one of his leaders. Wafa, a cousin of Harakat Amal leader Nabih Berri, believes, at least sometimes, that Berri and Amal are a major part of the solution to Lebanon's problems, while she also believes, at least sometimes, that Khomeini's *fatwas* should be followed.

How can these seemingly opposing points of view exist simultaneously? There may be multiple answers. In listening to people speak, I came to realize that Khomeini was viewed as "the Teflon ayatollah." A majority of people either believed that the Western media distorted his image or that, if they believed injustices and atrocities had been committed by his regime, these were the doings of his followers unbeknownst to him. They simply denied that he had any responsibility for kidnappings, murders of dissidents, or, for that matter, the formation and support of the Hizb Allah movement. The other answer, again, is that Khomeini, regardless of what else he has done, stood up to the West, made the world take notice of Islam, and carried out a war against the "Yazid of the Age," Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Norton states that even Nabih Berri, the current leader of Amal, speaks respectfully of the ayatollah in public, though he is ardently opposed to Lebanon becoming another Islamic republic modeled on Iran.³¹

I expected politically militant Shi'a to claim Khomeini as their *marji'* for as long as Khomeini lived. After a *marji'* dies, a person is supposed to turn to another learned person. Whom would this group follow now? In November 1989, I met some Iranian students

who were active in asserting the righteousness of the Islamic Republic. I asked whom they followed now that Khomeini was dead. They told me that their *marji'* was the Ayatollah Araki, who was in charge of issuing opinions on Islamic law for the Islamic Republic during the time of Khomeini. There were other, higher-ranking *maraji'* in Iran, but Araki had endorsed Khomeini's program and thus became the leader of this young, activist set. I assumed that at least some of the more militant Lebanese would follow suit.

My predictions were completely mistaken. No one volunteered the name of Araki. During conversations with two local sheikhs, I inquired about this man. Both men politely and in veiled terms led me to believe that they considered him merely a government functionary. My learned young Iraqi friend (who is looked up to by the young, ardent Lebanese set) frankly said that Araki merely rubber-stamps the *fatwas* of Khomeini and makes no new decisions. He characterized him as weak and senile. Some of the Lebanese may have opted to make Khomeini their leader, but they are not going to follow blindly the Islamic Republic come what may. As far as this Shi'i community is concerned, the past ten years or so have presented the world with two *maraji'* they could potentially follow: Khu'i or Khomeini.

Did those who aligned themselves with Hizb Allah, or at least with the movement's interpretation of Islam, transfer their allegiance from Khomeini to Khu'i when Khomeini died? First, did they consistently agree that Khomeini was their *marji'* and, second, did they follow the admonition that they must turn to a living *marji'* after the death of the *marji'* they had been following?

My data can only provide the range one finds in attitudes in this community. Suad, whose attire (all-covering black gown, scarf draped under the chin so as to hide the neck and then fastened with a pin near the ear) identifies her as an advocate of Hizb Allah, claims she has always followed Khu'i. Muhsin, a middle-aged man who has become serious about religion since the Iranian Revolution, was a follower of Khomeini but now follows Khu'i. However, he still believes in the doctrine of *wilayat al faqih*, Khomeini's highly controversial doctrine of guardianship by the highest-ranking *'ulama*.

Muhsin's comment (similar to Issa's reported above) brings up one of the most controversial aspects of the concept of the *marji' taqlid* that I have encountered. There is a minority, but a vocal and active one, that advocates following Khu'i religiously but following Khomeini politically. This decision is justified on the grounds that