

## Imam Mahdi in Sunni Tradition: Differences in Beliefs and Interpretations

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### Abstract

The concept of Imam Mahdi holds a special place, but differences in beliefs and interpretations regarding Imam Mahdi within the Sunni community have led to confusion and even disputes among Muslims. To gain a deeper understanding of how Imam Mahdi is viewed from the perspective of Sunni tradition and the differences in beliefs and interpretations, this research will delve into the complexities of these views and identify different frameworks of understanding. This will help us appreciate the diversity of Islamic thought and how these understandings impact religious practices and the perspectives of Muslim communities. Furthermore, it will underscore the importance of inter-sectarian dialogue in today's increasingly complex Muslim society. The research method employed in this study is a literature review, based on the analysis and synthesis of relevant literature on the specific research topic. Titled "Imam Mahdi in the Perspective of Sunni Tradition: Differences in Beliefs and Interpretations," the findings suggest that al-Mahdi plays a crucial role in elevating the status of Islam and the Muslim community to their true potential. This will enable the Muslim community to shield itself from the negative effects of materialistic modernization and blind imitation of traditions that may not align with Islamic values, as conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The term 'Mahdi' refers to an eschatological figure in Islam, believed to come in the end times to establish justice throughout the world. In the Shia Islamic perspective, Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, and according to their beliefs, he will appear at some point in the future.

**Keywords:** Imam Mahdi, Sunni, Differences, Beliefs, Interpretations

### Abstrak

Konsep Imam Mahdi memiliki tempat istimewa. Namun, perbedaan dalam keyakinan dan tafsiran mengenai Imam Mahdi dalam komunitas Sunni telah menyebabkan kebingungan dan bahkan perselisihan di kalangan umat Islam. Untuk memahami lebih lanjut bagaimana Imam Mahdi dilihat dari perspektif tradisi Sunni dan perbedaan dalam keyakinan serta tafsiran, penelitian ini akan menggali kerumitan pandangan ini dan mengidentifikasi kerangka pemahaman yang berbeda. Ini akan membantu kita menghargai keragaman dalam pemikiran Islam dan bagaimana pemahaman ini memengaruhi praktik keagamaan dan pandangan umat Muslim, serta memahami pentingnya dialog antar aliran dalam masyarakat Islam yang semakin kompleks saat ini. Metode penelitian yang di gunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode studi kepustakaan (*library research*), dengan pendekatan penelitian yang didasarkan pada

analisis dan sintesis literatur yang relevan untuk topik penelitian tertentu. Dalam hal penelitian dengan judul "Imam Mahdi dalam Perspektif Tradisi Sunni: Perbedaan dalam Keyakinan dan Tafsiran". Hasilnya al-Mahdi memiliki peran penting dalam mengangkat martabat Islam dan masyarakat Muslim ke tingkat yang sesungguhnya. Hal ini akan memungkinkan masyarakat Muslim untuk terhindar dari efek negatif modernisasi yang cenderung bersifat materialistik dan sikap peniruan buta terhadap tradisi yang mungkin tidak sesuai dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Sebagaimana yang disampaikan oleh Rasulullah Saw. Kemudian istilah 'Mahdi' merujuk kepada figur eskatologis dalam Islam. Ia diyakini akan datang pada akhir zaman untuk membawa keadilan ke seluruh dunia. Dalam pandangan Islam Shia, Mahdi adalah Imam kedua belas, yang menurut keyakinan mereka, akan muncul pada suatu saat nanti.

**Kata Kunci:** Imam Mahdi, Sunni, Perbedaan, Keyakinan, Tafsiran.

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## A. Introduction

Today, we are often bombarded with news about the appearance of Imam Mahdi, often portrayed as a just and honest world leader who will establish a prophetic caliphate to eradicate injustice in the world before the Day of Judgment. In recent times, many have claimed to be Imam Mahdi, not only abroad but also within the country (Ritonga et al., 2022, p. 31). Imam Mahdi is one of the most profound and perplexing figures in the history and beliefs of Islam. Despite the immense significance of this figure in Islamic tradition, understanding of him varies significantly among different sects, leading to divisions in beliefs and interpretations.

In the Sunni tradition, which is one of the largest and most widely dispersed branches of Islam, the concept of Imam Mahdi holds a special place. However, differences in beliefs and interpretations regarding Imam Mahdi within the Sunni community have led to confusion and even disputes among Muslims. To gain a deeper understanding of how Imam Mahdi is viewed from the Sunni tradition's perspective and the differences in beliefs and interpretations, this research will delve into the intricacies of these views and identify the frameworks of varying understandings. This will help us appreciate the diversity in Islamic thought and how these understandings influence religious practices and the perspectives of Muslim communities. It also underscores the importance of inter-sectarian dialogue in today's increasingly complex Islamic society.

In this context, Islam emphasizes the principle of freedom with true responsibility. The creed of monotheism, which serves as the cornerstone of unity for the entire Muslim community, inspires a sense of brotherhood. Starting from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the spirit of unity prevailed among the believers. However, this unity began to waver, particularly as the second period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs approached, during the reign of Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. The most noticeable change in Muslim unity was related to political disputes with religious undertones that emerged among competing Muslim factions. These events marked the beginning of a subsequent era of disintegration, particularly after the assassination of the third Caliph.

These events paved the way for the emergence of various sects within Islam, each with differing doctrines or teachings. In essence, during these times, political conflicts intertwined with religious aspects triggered deep divisions within the Muslim community. Individual freedom to hold their own views and beliefs remains respected in Islam, but with the understanding that such freedom must be accompanied by strong moral and social responsibility. This reflects the complexity and dynamics in the history of Islamic development and underscores the importance of nurturing unity and inter-group dialogue within the Muslim community (Nuh, 2020, p. 688).

The resurgence of fanaticism within certain groups on one hand and the emergence of a cult-like reverence for individuals from the Prophet's family, especially 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Ahl al-Bait, on the other, seems to have had a significant influence on the formation of Shiite theological doctrines in their historical context. Their defeats in the political and military domains during the rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, which led to many of their Imams becoming political victims, appear to be key factors that drove the development of the idea or myth of Imam Mahdi or al-Mahdi al-Muntazar (Ahmad Muhammad Subki, n.d., p. 40). Thus, what sets this research apart from previous studies is that it provides a distinct and pertinent contribution to the understanding of issues surrounding Imam Mahdi and the diversity of perspectives within the Muslim community today.

## **B. Research Method**

The research methodology used in this study is a literature review method, with a research approach based on the analysis and synthesis of relevant literature on the specific research topic. (Saifuddin Anwar, 2001, p. 1) In the case of the research with the title 'Imam Mahdi in Sunni Tradition: Differences in Beliefs and Interpretations,' a literature review research method can be used to gather and analyze relevant textual sources, including books, academic papers, journals, and other sources discussing Imam Mahdi. The literature review research method is a robust approach for delving into the topic without conducting empirical research, as it allows the researcher to explore existing understandings in the available literature. (Sutrisno Hadi, 2002, p. 9)

## **C. Discussion Results**

### **1. Sunni Theology**

The Sunni perspective on the concept of al-Mahdi, as interpreted by Ibn Khaldun, highlights the importance of having a strong fanaticism in supporting and upholding religious propagation and rule. Ibn Khaldun explains that religious propagation and the expansion of power cannot reach perfection without the existence of a strong force that diligently adheres to these goals. Fanaticism here refers to a deep-seated spirit and loyalty to the mission of religious propagation, which is a key factor in fortifying and protecting the teachings. According to Ibn Khaldun, with this strength

and strong spirit, Allah will provide full support to such efforts (Ibn Khaldun, 2000, p. 456).

Ibn Khaldun's view on the role of al-Mahdi as a symbol of fanaticism and the birth of a new community striving to achieve political goals based on millenarian ideas. This fanaticism is seen as the key to success in achieving these objectives, while a lack of fanaticism can lead to the decline and defeat of a community. The interpretation of al-Mahdi in Ibn Khaldun's model appears to be more relevant to contemporary thinking than viewing it in a highly abstract and fantastical context. The term 'al-Mahdi' can be seen as the embodiment of innovative ideas aimed at rebuilding the Islamic world, which may have faced stagnation, pessimism, and a lack of vision in addressing the challenges of the present age (H.M. Rasyidi, n.d., pp. 6–7).

In this context, the concept of al-Mahdi becomes a symbol of change and renewal in thought and action within the Islamic world. More than just an individual figure who will appear at the end of times, al-Mahdi can be interpreted as an embodiment of the fanaticism and spirit of change needed to address the challenges faced by the Muslim community today. This idea takes into account the fact that contemporary challenges can be highly complex and require innovation in various fields, including politics, society, economics, and intellectual pursuits. By regarding al-Mahdi as a representation of new ideas, society may be more motivated to participate in efforts to rebuild a strong and thriving Islamic world and confront various issues with a strong spirit. Thus, the concept of al-Mahdi can serve as a source of inspiration driving positive action and renewal within the Muslim community today.

Al-Mahdi plays a significant role in elevating the dignity of Islam and the Muslim community to its true stature. This will enable the Muslim community to steer clear of the negative effects of modernization, which tend to be materialistic, and blind imitation of traditions that may not align with Islamic values. As conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in his saying:

" Indeed, you will follow the ways of those before you, handspan by handspan, cubit by cubit, to the extent that if they entered the hole of a lizard, you would follow them." A companion asked, "Do you mean the Jews and the Christians?" The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, replied, "Who else?" (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, from Sa'id al-Khudri).

The books of Sahih Bukhari and Muslim, tasked with facing and defeating the Dajjal (the enemy of Islam), can be interpreted as symbols of the emergence of reformist groups who are always aware of the threats and challenges that continually afflict the Muslim community. They are consistently oriented towards the interests of Islam and the Muslim community and are committed to safeguarding them from the worldly temptations associated with worldly pleasures, especially as a result of the application of advanced technology in various aspects of human life.

In this context, the figure of Isa al-Masih (Jesus) can be interpreted as a symbol of a leader or individual responsible for the mission of renewal and the protection of the

Islamic faith. They advocate the purity of Islamic values and strive to defend the truth of the religion from disruptions and negative influences, such as materialism and hedonism. Therefore, there is no need for individuals to claim to be al-Mahdi or Isa al-Masih literally, especially by practicing beliefs or rituals that contradict the pure teachings of Islam and do not involve elements of superstition or innovation (*bid'ah*)."  
(H.M. Rasyidi, n.d., p. 7).

The statement in the hadith above highlights the extent to which the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as modern elements in culture and lifestyle, has affected the behavior and attitudes of Muslims in their daily lives. It is evident that in many cases, the political, social, economic, and cultural systems among Muslims have been influenced by Jewish and Christian societal traditions, which are often regarded as modern norms to be followed. Understanding and practicing Islam often become limited to ritual aspects, while in other aspects of daily life, there is a strong influence from Jewish and Christian traditions.

This situation has resulted in many Muslims possibly losing their orientation towards true Islamic teachings. Religion is often reduced to mere ritualistic forms without influencing their values and way of life. Therefore, in situations like this, there is a need for the emergence of figures who can be likened to the Mahdi, which in this context refers to strong and committed *da'is* (religious callers). They serve as guides and leaders of the Muslim community, guiding them back to pure Islamic teachings and saving them from the potential hypocrisy, idolatry, immorality, and disbelief that can poison their understanding and practice of religion. This understanding emphasizes the importance of guiding and educating the Muslim community to comprehend and apply their religious teachings in various aspects of daily life while distancing themselves from the negative influences of traditions that may contradict true Islamic values. (Syarafuddin Al-Mus-awi, 1983, p. 29).

The reality outlined in the statement of the Prophet Muhammad above indeed poses a challenging issue that is difficult for contemporary Muslim society to avoid, especially given the highly dynamic nature of social change. One of the primary reasons for this dynamism is the rapid cultural acculturation and social interactions facilitated by the advancements in modern communication technology. This phenomenon has broken the isolation of traditional communities, allowing them to absorb various foreign cultural elements, particularly Western liberal culture.

Furthermore, this approach is strengthened by advancements in discoveries and modern educational systems that provide convenience and material comfort in life but often lead to dissatisfaction in certain aspects of life. As a result, modern society often feels less content and seeks more intense life experiences. This situation can lead to looser behavior in relation to norms and values that were once considered sacred or taboo. Consequently, there is a shift in human behavior and values.

Behavior that was previously considered inappropriate can transform into accepted or even celebrated conduct, and vice versa. This illustrates the shift in values

within modern society, which often no longer prioritizes moral and ethical aspects in daily life. Therefore, to confront these challenges, it is crucial to understand and apply religious and ethical values as guiding principles in dealing with rapid social and cultural changes.

The result of the social changes and material advancements faced by modern humans is the loss of spiritual meaning in their lives. The imbalance between material achievements on one side and a decline in spirituality on the other has caused many people to become less selective in accepting foreign cultures or traditions that may be detrimental. As a result, they often exhibit a high degree of tolerance towards deviant behaviors that contradict religious teachings.

In this context, modern capitalists, who are leaders in the use of advanced technology, have the power to influence the well-being or detriment of the situation in various countries around the world. Some of them can be interpreted as symbols of what the Prophet referred to as the Dajjal in the end times. Therefore, in situations like this, the presence of al-Mahdi or al-Masih in a more contemporary and contextual symbolic sense becomes crucial. This reflects the need for resilient, knowledgeable, and far-sighted religious callers (Da'is). They are capable of addressing the issues faced by society and presenting Islamic alternatives in dealing with various behaviors, traditions, and circumstances of the community in the future. They can also adapt to modern societal conditions, enabling them to deliver Islamic teachings in a relevant manner. More importantly, they have the ability to fill the spiritual void that may be felt by those fixated on technological progress. These religious callers can serve as agents of change to strengthen Islamic values and integrate them into modern society. Thus, the future resurgence of Islam may indeed emerge from the West as part of the complex historical dynamics.

## **2. The Emergence of Imam Mahdi**

The emergence of Imam Mahdi is a belief in Islam that is generally associated with Shia groups. Imam Mahdi is believed to be a coming leader who will bring justice and truth to the world before the Day of Judgment. However, it's important to remember that views on Imam Mahdi can vary among different Islamic groups, and not all Muslims believe in this concept. It's crucial to note that beliefs and interpretations of Imam Mahdi can differ among various Shia groups, and there are different approaches to understanding this concept. Furthermore, the understanding of Imam Mahdi in Islam has also been debated by various Islamic scholars and intellectuals. As explained in Islamic encyclopedias, the belief in the coming of the savior Imam Mahdi at the end of times is deeply rooted among both Sunni and Shia scholars. This is due to a number of hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which are considered mutawatir (narrated by so many that their authenticity is unquestionable) by most Sunni and Shia scholars regarding his coming at the end of times (*Ensiklopedi Islam*, 2005, p. 212).

Abu al-Husain Muhammad bin al-Husain al-Abiri, in his book "Manaqib Ash-Shafi'i," states that hadiths regarding al-Mahdi are well-known and mutawatir (narrated by so many that their authenticity is unquestionable). He is said to be from the Ahl al-Bait, ruling for seven years, filling the world with justice, and indeed, Isa (Jesus) also comes out to assist him in defeating the Dajjal (the Antichrist). Al-Mahdi leads the prayer of the Muslim community, and Isa follows him as a follower.

Ibnu Hajar al-Haitami in "al-Qaul al-Mukhtashar" mentions that what we must believe is what has been confirmed by authentic hadiths, such as the existence of the awaited al-Mahdi, the coming of the Dajjal, and Isa praying behind him. Similarly, al-Shawkani states that hadiths regarding al-Mahdi al-Muntadhar (the awaited one) are mutawatir, hadiths concerning the Dajjal are mutawatir, and hadiths about the descent of Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary) are also mutawatir. (Syeikh Mutawalli Sya'rawi, 2006, pp. 74–75). Hadiths regarding this include:

The hadith narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, where the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "I give you glad tidings of Al-Mahdi, who will appear among my followers, even when there will be difference of opinions and many disasters. He will fill the earth with justice, just as it had been filled with injustice and oppression. All the inhabitants of the earth and the sky will be pleased with him. He will distribute wealth rightly." When asked, "What does it mean to distribute it rightly?" The Prophet replied, "Equally among the people." (Abubakar, 2020, p. 111)

"If the world were to remain for only one day, Allah would prolong that day until He sends in it a man from my family whose name is like mine and whose father's name is like my father's (Muhammad, son of Abdullah). He will fill the earth with justice and fairness just as it was filled with oppression and injustice before." (Narrated by Abu Dawud).

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "Verily, this world will be filled with oppression and tyranny, and when oppression and tyranny are in abundance, Allah will send a man from my family, his name will be like my name, and his father's name will be like my father's name (Muhammad, son of Abdullah). He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny before. During his time, the heavens will not withhold a single drop of its rain, and the earth will not withhold a single plant of its produce. He will live among you for seven years, or eight years, or nine years." (Narrated by Thabrani).

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "Al-Mahdi is from my progeny, with a broad forehead, a long, straight nose. He will fill the earth with justice and fairness, just as it was filled with oppression and tyranny before him, and his reign will last for seven years." (Narrated by Abu Dawud and al-Hakim).

It has been narrated from Ummi Salamah that she heard the Prophet say: "Al-Mahdi is from my descendants, a son of Fatimah." (Narrated by Abu Dawud).

"I bring you the good news about Al-Mahdi, whom Allah will send among my community when there are many disputes among people and earthquakes. He will fill the earth with justice and fairness, just as it was filled with tyranny and oppression before." (Narrated by Ahmad)

Aisha narrated, "On a certain day, the body of the Prophet shivered in his sleep. We asked, 'Why are you doing something that you haven't done before, O Messenger of Allah?' The Prophet replied, 'A strange event will happen, that a group of people from my community will set out to pursue a man from the Quraysh who has sought refuge at the Ka'bah. When these people reach the desert, they will be swallowed by the earth.' Then we asked, 'Won't there be various kinds of people on that journey through the desert?' He answered, 'Yes, among them are those who are going to fight him intentionally, some who are compelled to fight, and others who are on a journey, but they all perish at the same time and place. They come from different intentions. Then Allah will resurrect them on the Day of Resurrection according to their intentions.'" (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

"After the death of a ruler, there will be disputes, and a man from the people of Medina will flee to Mecca seeking refuge. Some people from Mecca will come to him, and they will force him to accept the Bay'ah (pledge of allegiance) as the Imam Mahdi. He will be pledged allegiance at the Ka'bah between the Rukn and Maqam Ibrahim. Then, an army will be sent to him from the people of Greater Syria, but it will be swallowed up in the desert between Mecca and Medina." (Narrated by Abu Dawud) (Abi Dawud Sulaiman bin Asy'as al-Sijistani, n.d., p. 467)

### **3. The Concept of Imam Mahdi Influences Worship Practices.**

"The Concept of Imam Mahdi Significantly Influences Worship Practices, particularly within the Shia Islamic tradition. Imam Mahdi is considered the Imam who will appear at the end of times to bring justice, truth, and end injustice in the world. Its influence on worship practices can be observed through several key aspects:

- a. First, the concept of Imam Mahdi influences prayers and hopes in worship. Shia adherents often include prayers for the coming of Imam Mahdi in their worship. They hope and plead to become faithful followers of Imam Mahdi when he appears. These prayers reflect their anticipation for a better future and the resolution of existing injustices in the world.
- b. Second, pilgrimage and visits related to Imam Mahdi are also an integral part of worship practices. Shia followers often visit places associated with Imam Mahdi, such as his tomb or other pilgrimage sites, as a sign of respect and love



- for Imam Mahdi. These pilgrimages also serve as an expression of hope for a future meeting with Imam Mahdi.
- c. Third, the concepts of Patience and Obedience also play a key role in the influence of Imam Mahdi on worship practices. Shia adherents are taught to be patient and obedient in facing difficulties and injustices, with the belief that Imam Mahdi will come to end injustice. Therefore, this teaching influences daily worship practices, motivating followers to engage in worship with determination and steadfastness.
  - d. Fourth, the influence of Imam Mahdi is reflected in acts of kindness and social work. Shia believers hold that supporting goodness and justice is an essential part of preparing for Imam Mahdi's arrival. As a result, they actively engage in acts of kindness, such as helping those in need, and social work that supports justice and the well-being of the community.
  - e. Lastly, the concept of Imam Mahdi also affects the ethics and morals in daily worship practices. Ethical values such as honesty, kindness, and justice emphasized in the teachings of Imam Mahdi serve as guidelines in worship and in the daily lives of Shia followers.

The influence of the concept of Imam Mahdi on worship practices creates a strong bond between religious beliefs and tangible actions in the daily lives of Shia adherents. It also reflects their hope for the coming of Imam Mahdi as a positive change in a world filled with injustice and wrongdoing." (Smith, 2000, pp. 123–145).

#### **4. Disasters before the Arrival of Imam Mahdi**

In Islamic tradition, there are various beliefs and diverse views regarding disasters and signs that will occur before the arrival of Imam Mahdi. However, it is important to note that these views vary among different Islamic sects and schools of thought, and not all of them are accepted by all Muslims. Some disasters and signs often associated with the arrival of Imam Mahdi in some views include:

- a. Social and political turmoil and instability: Many views suggest that the world will experience severe social and political upheaval before the arrival of Imam Mahdi. This may include large-scale conflicts, governmental instability, and social divisions.
- b. Spreading of oppression and injustice: Some views mention that before the arrival of Imam Mahdi, the world will be filled with oppression and injustice, both on a national and international scale.
- c. Earthquakes and natural disasters: Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and storms, are often linked to signs of Imam Mahdi's arrival. Some views state that these disasters will increase before the emergence of Imam Mahdi.
- d. Major wars and conflicts: Some views suggest that a major war will occur before the arrival of Imam Mahdi, including large-scale conflicts involving various countries and groups.

- e. Moral decline and religious decline: Some views note that morality will significantly decline, and religion will be neglected before the arrival of Imam Mahdi.
- f. Spread of knowledge and information: Some views also mention that before the arrival of Imam Mahdi, knowledge and information will be widely disseminated, particularly through technological advancements and media development (Jaber Bolushi, n.d., pp. 98–104).

## **5. AL-MAHDI: The Awaited Messiah**

Literally, "al-Mahdi" means "the guided one" or "the one who is given guidance," and it refers to someone who is believed to be divinely guided and will come in the end times to establish a just and equitable global socio-economic system. (Wilferd Madelung, 1986, pp. 1230–1238). Furthermore, it is also expected that the Mahdi will bring about the realization of Islam as the final religion throughout the world (Paul Boyer, 2008, pp. 61–75). In essence, the Mahdi represents the embodiment of eschatological hope, asserting that Islam, as found in the Quran and Hadith, will ultimately prevail over other political and religious ideologies that are currently perceived as oppressive and misguided for humanity. Overall, Imam Mahdi symbolizes a political leader figure expected to correct all wrongs and injustices by disseminating the teachings of God throughout the world (Wejak, 2018, pp. 210–211)

In the Shia Islamic teachings, the concept of the Mahdi is rooted in the context of both political and religious struggle that began after the passing of Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet was not only a key figure in spreading Islam through wise political policies but also had a strong influence in mediating peace among various ethnic groups. The positive impact of Prophet Muhammad's leadership was profoundly felt in his efforts to unite diverse tribes. At one point, before his passing, he even became the leader of almost the entire Arabian Peninsula. However, towards the end of his 23-year mission of spreading Islam, it became evident that Islam had become a key factor in uniting and empowering various tribes and nations who adhered to the teachings of Islam.

It's worth noting that during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, he managed to maintain peace and achieve agreements among different groups. However, his death led to disagreements about who should succeed him. The conflicts that arose after the death of Prophet Muhammad subsequently shaped the image of a messianic figure in politics, that is, the Mahdi. Although the term "Mahdi" had been used since the early days of Islam as an honorific title, in the context of the struggle to determine the successor to Prophet Muhammad, this term took on a deeper eschatological meaning (Wejak, 2018, p. 211).

The mission of Prophet Muhammad was indeed unique and unparalleled. During his time, there was no doubt about his prophethood. He possessed a prophetic charisma that was highly embracing and unifying. Therefore, the leadership void that emerged

after the death of the Prophet was keenly felt and needed to be filled promptly. Conflict and division were unavoidable consequences of the loss of this highly respected unifying figure. The differences in the criteria for selecting a successor to Prophet Muhammad were the primary cause of division. Two groups represented two different criteria. The first group argued that the successor to Prophet Muhammad should be chosen from among the faithful community (umma), and they subsequently appointed Abu Bakr as the leader. On the other hand, the second group believed that the successor to Prophet Muhammad should come from his close family, and they proposed Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, to be Muhammad's successor.

The major division in Islam indeed resulted in significant discord. The issue of political leadership legitimacy lies at the root of the division in Islam into two main groups: the Sunni, who follow the leadership of Abu Bakr, and the Shia, who support Ali ibn Abi Talib. Since then, the history of Sunni and Shia Islam has been marked by disagreements and even violent conflicts among fellow Muslims. The most famous conflict was the war between Iran (majority Shia) and Iraq (majority Sunni) in the 1980s. This historical backdrop has created the hope for the emergence of a political Messiah, the Mahdi. As explained, the term 'Mahdi' refers to an eschatological figure in Islam. He is believed to come at the end of times to bring justice to the world. In Shia Islam's perspective, the Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, who they believe will appear at a certain point in the future. (Abdur-Rahman Ibrahim Doi, 1987, pp. 147–159).

#### **D. Conclusion**

The emergence of Imam Mahdi is a part of the belief in Islam, generally associated with Shia groups. Imam Mahdi is believed to be a future leader who will bring justice and truth to the world before the Day of Judgment. In this context, the concept of al-Mahdi becomes a symbol of change and renewal in Islamic thought and action. More than just an individual figure who will appear at the end of times, al-Mahdi can be interpreted as an embodiment of the spirit of zeal and the spirit of change needed to address the challenges facing the Muslim community today. al-Mahdi plays a significant role in elevating the dignity of Islam and the Muslim community to a higher level.

This will enable the Muslim community to avoid the negative effects of modernization, which tend to be materialistic and blindly imitate traditions that may not align with Islamic values. Islam emphasizes the principle of freedom with true responsibility. The monotheistic belief (Aqidah tauhid), which serves as the foundation of unity for the entire Muslim community, inspires a sense of brotherhood. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad, this sense of unity permeated among them. However, this cohesion began to erode, especially as the second period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs approached, during the reign of Caliph 'Usman ibn 'Affan.

The most significant change in the unity of the Muslim community is related to political disputes with religious undertones that emerged among various competing

Muslim groups. These events marked the beginning of a subsequent period of disintegration, especially after the assassination of the third Caliph. These events paved the way for the emergence of various sects in Islam, each with different doctrines or teachings. Essentially, during these times, political conflicts blended with religious aspects triggered deep divisions within the Muslim community. Therefore, as conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad, the term 'Mahdi' refers to an eschatological figure in Islam. He is believed to come at the end of times to bring justice to the entire world. In the Shia Islamic perspective, Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, whom they believe will appear at some point in the future.

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