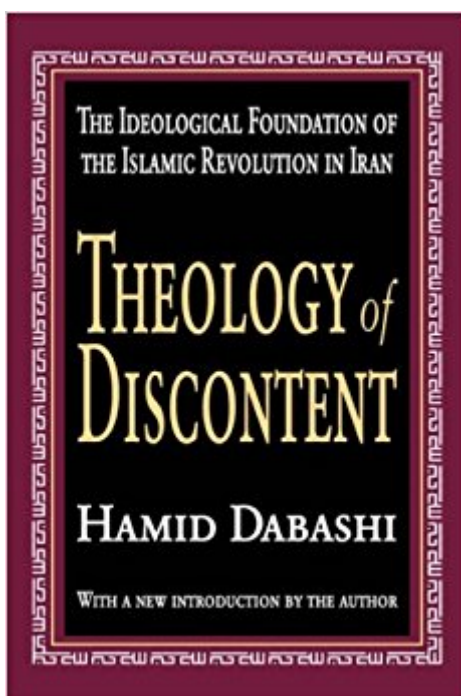


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Theology Of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation Of The Islamic Revolution In Iran



Synopsis

Scores of books and articles have been published, addressing one or another aspect of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Missing from this body of scholarship, however, has been a comprehensive analysis of the intellectual and ideological cornerstones of one of the most dramatic revolutions in our time. In this remarkable volume, Hamid Dabashi brings together, in a sustained and engagingly written narrative, the leading revolutionaries who have shaped the ideological disposition of this cataclysmic event. Dabashi has spent over ten years studying the writings, in their original Persian and Arabic, of the most influential Iranian clerics and thinkers. Examining the revolutionary sentiments and ideas of such figures as Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, Morteza Motahhari, Sayyid Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, and finally the Ayatollah Khomeini, the work also analyzes the larger historical and theoretical implications of any construction of "the Islamic Ideology." Carefully located in the social and intellectual context of the four decades preceding the 1979 revolution, *Theology of Discontent* is the definitive treatment of the ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution, with particular attention to the larger, more enduring ramifications of this revolution for radical Islamic revivalism in the entire Muslim world. This volume will be of interest to Islamicists, Middle East historians and specialists, as well as scholars and students of "liberation theologies," comparative religious revolutions, and mass collective behavior. Bruce Lawrence of Duke University calls this volume "a superb and unprecedented study.... In brilliant figural strokes, he arrays EuroAmerican sociological theory as the crucial backdrop of a deeper understanding of contemporary Iranian history."

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Customer Reviews

-, --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Hamid Dabashi is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is the author of, among other works, the acclaimed *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*.
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What this book does really well is bring together the most important Islamist ideologues of the Iranian Revolution into one place so the reader can get a better understanding of how and where these men developed this unique form of Islam, and in so doing gives the reader an extraordinary look into the evolution of this brand of Islam. This type of work is essential because it gives the reader a real sense of the evolutionary nature of revolution and the ideologies behind some of the most important people in creating this theocracy. Reading works on these individuals doesn't give the reader the whole picture in how each of these men affected the other. Simply reading about Jalal Al-e Ahmad and his work, in isolation, doesn't give the reader the more important understanding of how this man's work affected the intellectual milieu within which these other men operated and developed their own ideas. Without Ahmad would there have been as fertile ground for Shari'ati, and without Shari'ati's revolutionary ideas about thought and action within an Islamic context would there have been as fertile ground as others like Motahhari and Khomeini found for their ideas? This book helps the reader understand the answers to these and other questions. One aspect of this book I truly respected was the author's tackling of tough problems in an honest way, and dealing with each man's ambiguities and contradictions lays out the bare facts giving the reader an honest look at the problems with their ideologies. Shari'ati is an excellent example of this in that the author shows his lack of ability to confront Marxist theory from within an Islamic context. More often than not Shari'ati found himself having to borrow from Marxist theory and language in order to combat his opponents. This created garbled rhetoric that at times validated the Marxist dialogue and interpretation of his opponents. Also Mr. Dabashi highlights how Shari'ati's style of freethinking and not ever really thinking through his ideas to a more sound conclusion caused some difficult scenes

for the popular teacher. Even more than Shari'ati, the author also discusses how Khomeini's idea developed and the radical change that emerged from the man's early life and the more passive form of Shi'ism that he practiced and taught. The author doesn't shy away from really delving into these men and exposing them. I think the author does a good job in parsing out and then highlighting each man's contribution to the Islamism that came to be. In so doing, though, the author has to limit his work to Islamic context, and thus limit his discussion of each of these men's contributions to strictly the Islamic context. It is important for readers to understand this distinction coming into this work. The author's intention was to highlight the theological aspects of the Iranian Revolution, and in doing this the author doesn't go into the contributions or other aspects of these men's lives. This means that a lot of the importance of each of these men is left out of this work, and Khomeini is a perfect example of this. While Khomeini is certainly important within the theological, Islamist context, his import in the political and secular context is just as important. Khomeini's importance as a populist politician par excellence in the context of the revolution is the deciding factor that ensured the fall of the government and the eventual ascendance of the Islamists to power, because his greatest political achievement was his ability to be all things to all Iranians. He was able to unite many Iranians behind him who would not be for his vision of a theocratic state, but he was able to do this with amazing acumen rarely seen in politicians. One criticism is the author interjecting snippets of biographical information that was too limited to really add a greater understanding of the men but at the same time long enough to be a little bit tedious. The author offers discussions of their family histories and their upbringing, but the lack of depth offers the reader nothing which can give them value to the work. Also the author gets repetitive when discussing the rule of Reza Shah. With each man the author goes into how his oppressive rule towards the religious affected each of them. The problem is that each description reads almost exactly the same which makes sense since each man had so much in common, but after reading the same anecdotes over and over one can't help feel this could have been covered in the introduction without having to continually return to it over and over again. With that said, this is a great book that will give great insights to those looking to understand the Iranian state, the revolution or the men who were so instrumental to both. It is important for the reader to understand the context of the work so they don't forget this is only a part that contributes to the understanding of the whole. While there are some minor problems, these are minor and do not take away from the overall readability of the work and the import of the material. I certainly recommend this wonderful book to anyone looking to get a greater understanding of Iran.

Originally published about 1996, then some revision and reprinted again in 2006 and 2008 (as a

Second Printing by Transaction Publishers, but with a new, brief 'Introduction'). The author started researching and writing his original book immediately following the 1979 Khomeini Revolution in Iran which dumped the monarchy. The author opined: "the immediate failure of the Islamic revolution...brought its ideological foregrounding...to a historic conclusion. 'Islamic ideology' succeeded in establishing an Islamic Republic, but it ultimately failed to result in any enduring institutions of a democratic state apparatus or the necessary civil liberties needed conducive to it...and degenerated into a theocracy" (p. xiv). The author seems to be surprised that the Revolution should have ended otherwise; apparently, he failed to remember why the Muslim prophet Mohammad engaged in his military campaigns: to thwart those who opposed his taxation-without-representation religion. Instead, the author blames Western colonialization throughout the Arab world during the 18th and 19th centuries, which essentially 'corrupted' most Muslims from seeing Islam's secular enlightenment to the "Straight Path." But the author openly spreads the blame: "No one was more responsible for this mutation than Muslim intellectuals themselves: (p. xiii). The author provides 500 pages of a "who done it" analysis as to who were the spiritual figureheads of the 1979 Revolution (there are another 100 pages of endnotes). Chapter topics include: Formative Forces of 'the Islamic Ideology'; (1) Jalal Al-e Ahmad: The Dawn of 'the Islamic Ideology'; (2) Ali Shariati: The Islamic Ideologue Par Excellence; (3) Morteza Motahhari: The Chief Ideologue of the Islamic Revolution; (4) Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani: The Father of the Revolution; (5) Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Hossein Tabatabai: The Philosophical Dimension of 'the Islamic Ideology'; (6) Mehi Bazargan: The Devout Engineer; (7) Abolhasan Bani-Sadr: The Monotheist Economist; and (8) Ayatollah Khomeini: The Theologian of Discontent. Pertaining to Taleqani, the author discusses Taleqani's wrestling his Islamic thoughts against Social Darwinism and 'Free Will' over Predestination - and how these thoughts impacted his influence on the Revolution (p. 251). It helps if the reader has some understanding of market-economics in order to read through the author's socialist-Islamist 'liberation' perspective of the Revolution. He discusses the impact of other forces influencing the Revolution: college students, women, anti-Israel, communists, the mullahs, socialists, sexism, Khomeini, the oil oligarchy, the bazaar merchant's complaint of the importation of competing lower-priced Western-produced consumer-goods, etc. If you can work around the author's sociological concern for the "hegemonic perceptions of Muslim 'Self'", you can still find some informative, background-source 'tidbits' herein. [The author also wrote: "Islamic Liberation Theology", and was one of the co-authors of "Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran" (a wonderful collection of hundreds of photographs of various banners, posters, stamps, etc. that championed the 1979 Revolution).]

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