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datum prijema / date of receipt: 07.03.2023.

datum recenzije / review date: 20.06.2023. / 26. 06. 2023.

datum prihvatanja / date of acceptance: 30.06.2023.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52510/sia.v4i1.57>

UDK: 28:929 Maturidi A.

28-42

Izvorni naučni rad — Original scientific paper

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**U SJENI KVAZI-SALAFĪ IDEOLOGIJE:  
POVRATAK PROSVJETITELJSKO – SUNNITSKO-SINTETIČKOJ  
TEOLOGIJI IMĀMA AL-MĀTURIDĪJE**

**IN THE SHADOW OF QUASI-SALAFĪ IDEOLOGY:  
A RETURN TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF IMĀM AL-MĀTURIDĪ'S  
SUNNI SYNTHETIC THEOLOGY**



## Abstract

There is a consensus today among Muslim scholars: the Muslim global nation (*Ummah*) is in a big crisis. This crisis is similar to the two greatest crises in Muslim history: the crisis of the fall of the Abbasid *caliphate* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the crisis of the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The current crisis has different external and internal causes. The challenge for nations as well as individuals in crisis, is to discover which parts of their identities are working well and should not be changed, and which parts are no longer working and should be changed. Today, the Muslim *Ummah*, individually and collectively, needs the wisdom and courage to recognize what must be changed in order to cope with the new situation. But, at the same time, we must draw a line and emphasize the elements, which are fundamental to our religious, cultural and civilizational identities, which cannot be changed. The Muslim *Ummah* should not be directed towards the utopian idea of *ṭubāwīyyah*, i.e., a place that does not exist (no-where), but should be directed towards the idea of true faith and common sense, the way it was directed by Imām al-Māturīdī in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Samarkand. Namely, Imām al-Māturīdī established a synthesis between *Naql* (Tradition) and *Aql* (Reason) in the real world of faith and reason, where they do not collide, but meet on the basis of success in this world (*al-dunyā*) and salvation in the Other World (*al-ākhirah*). In this paper, the author sheds light on the idea of synthetic Islamic theology of Imām al-Māturīdī in the spirit of Sunni-Hanafi teaching, the idea he elaborated in his doctoral dissertation in 1986 at the University of Chicago under the mentorship of Pakistani professor Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988). This idea may reflect the meaning of the word crisis: "to separate", "to decide", "to draw a distinction", and it could also mean a "turning point" from utopia to the reality of the contemporary history of the Muslim *Ummah*. So, let us begin again this historical journey from Samarkand with the spirit and mind of the Great Imām Abū Mansūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Ḥnafi al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī (d. 333h/944m).

**Key words:** *utopia*, *ṭubāwīyyah*, *khilāfet*, *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, Imām al-Māturīdī, faithful obedience (*ṭā'ah*), explanation (*bajān*), *Nakl* - *'Aql* (conflict or synthesis)

# IN THE SHADOW OF QUASĪ-SALAFI IDEOLOGY: A RETURN TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF IMĀM AL-MĀTURĪDĪ'S SUNNI SYNTHETIC THEOLOGY

## I

### In the Shadow of Utopia (tūbawīyyah)

The Muslim moralist Ibn Taymiyya<sup>▼1</sup> of 13<sup>th</sup> century and the English utopian Thomas More<sup>▼2</sup> (1477-1535) of 15<sup>th</sup> century have nothing similar except that, each one of them in their own terms, had been against the existing place of living, searching for or dreaming of a place of no-where, i.e., a place that does not exist in a real world. This is called *utopia* from Greek οὐ(ου)+τόπος, which means “nowhere” or “no-place”. The word *utopia* has often been taken to mean “good place”, through confusion of its syllable with the Greek *eu* as in *euphemism* or *eulogy*. As a result of this mix-up, another word *dystopia* was invented, to mean “bad place”. But, strictly speaking, imaginary “good places” and imaginary “bad places” are all **utopias**, or nowhere.<sup>▼3</sup>

Thomas More was not first who dreamt of utopia, a “good place” for living. He was preceded by Plato (42-347 before Mīlād ]B.M.[)<sup>▼4</sup> with his *Republic* as well as by Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) with his *The City of the Sun*.<sup>▼5</sup>

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▼1 Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) is one of the most influential Muslim scholars, who, as a member of the ḥanbali school, advocated the return of Islam to its sources: the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyya was the inspiration of the traditionalist movement of Islam in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. He left significant works - often republished in Syria, Egypt, Arabia, and India - that extended and justified his religious and political engagements. In addition to countless *fatwas* (legal opinions based on religious law) and several dogmatic writings, the most interesting of which is the *Wāsiṭiyyah*, two works deserve special attention. One is: *Al-Siyāsat al-ṣar’iyyah* ("Treatise on Shariah-Just Politics") and the other: *Minhāj al-sunnah* ("The True Path of Tradition"). This is one of the best works of comparative theology that has survived from medieval Islam.

▼2 Thomas More (1478-1535) was an English humanist and statesman. He was one of Henry VIII's closest advisers. He did not approve of the king's break with the pope and opposed the law that gave the king supreme authority over the Church of England. Due to principled opposition to the divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon he clashed with the king. For refusing to take the oath of allegiance to Henry VIII as the supreme head of the Church of England, the king accused him of treason and had him executed. In 1935, he was declared a saint. Thomas More was one of the greatest intellectuals of his time. His main work *On the Best Arrangement of the State and On the New Island of Utopia* („De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia libellus”), is famously known under the abbreviated name *Utopia*, which was printed in Leuven in 1516 with the help of his friend Erasmus of Rotterdam.

▼3 See, John Carey (ed.): *The Faber Book of Utopias*. Gardners Books, 2000, p. xi.

▼4 Plato (427-347 BC) is a famous Greek philosopher. He founded his own philosophical school in a grove near Athens dedicated to the hero Akademos, the famous Academy. In his most extensive dialogue, *The State*, Plato uses mythic and symbolic means to show how one should live in this world. Plato thinks that the state should not take care of the goodness as much as it should take care of the soul, because the soul itself is a reflection of immortality in its tripartite nature - the eager, willing and rational soul, so the education of the soul must be reflected in all manifestations of the establishment of the state. Plato advocated that rulers and guardians can have neither private property nor their own family. Thus, they have common children. The strictness and obedience in that order are ensured by eugenics and euthanasia. By this way the harmony of ethics and politics is achieved: producers embody moderation, guardians courage and rulers wisdom, while their mutual harmony is realized in justice - the highest virtue of the state that strives for the *Good*, because "the Good is bigger than being (sein) and higher in nobility and power."

▼5 Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*. Merchant Books, 2010. Campanella Tommaso, talijanski filozof (Stilo, Kalabrija, 5. IX. 1568 – Pariz, 21. V. 1639)

However, Thomas More was the first to make the word *utopia* up for his book *Utopia*.<sup>▼6</sup> In *Utopia*, Thomas More presents to his readers an idealistic portrayal of a nation employing an egalitarian government. Through his spokesperson, the sagacious and well-traveled Raphael Hythloday, Thomas More describes and evaluates utopian politics and social values, including attitudes toward money, work, land ownership, punishment of crime, and poverty. *Utopia* has no lawyers. Politicians are respected but not venerated, and since there is no money or property, bribery is unknown. Utopians view marriage as a sacred institution. Premarital intercourse is prohibited and severely punished. “The head of each household searches out [from central warehouses] whatever he or his household needs and carries away their requirements without any payment or recompense. After all, why should anything be denied him? There is more than enough of everything, and there is no fear that anyone will take more than they really need”.<sup>▼7</sup>

The Arabs have translated the More’s *Utopia* as *ṭūbiyā* (wish, hope, yearning) from the word “*ṭayyibah*”, which means a goodness and good luck. The plural of it is “*ṭūbā*”, which is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an:

“Those who believed, and work righteousness *ṭūbā* (good luck)  
is for them and a beautiful place of (final) return”.

In the *Dictionary of jurisprudential terms*, the Arabic word “*ṭūbā*” means “happiness”, which is the name of a tree in the *Jannah* (Heaven). “Whoever gets the chance to reach such a tree will walk in the shadow of it for a hundred years”.<sup>▼8</sup> Then, neither the Muslim philosophers were without utopian ideas. The most conspicuous among them was Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (870-950) by his epochal work: *Mabādī’ āra’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍilah* (*Principles of the Views of the Citizens of the Perfect State*).<sup>▼9</sup>

Al-Fārābī is interesting to us not only because he developed a *utopia-ṭūbawīyyah* idea of *al-Madīna al-fāḍilah* (*The Perfect State*), but also because his major philosophical works permeate the *utopia-ṭūbā* idea, the works such as *Kitāb al-siyāṣah al-madaniyyah* (*The civil Politics*); *Al-tanbīh ‘alā sabīl al-sa’ādah* (*A Reminder Toward the Road of Happiness*); and *Fī taḥṣīl al-sa’ādah* (*A Triumph of Happiness*).<sup>▼10</sup>

Al-Fārābī’s utopian (*ṭūbawīyya*) ideas are not a mere imitation of Plato’s Republic, as some tend to think, but his “Virtuous City” is a structure of his theological opinions as well as his intention to make a “Perfect State”, whereby a noble society may live, the society that is compatible with the demands of time in which Al-Fārābī himself had lived.

▼6 More, Sir Thomas: *Utopia* (Transl. Ralph Robinson). Barnes & Noble Classics, New York, 2005.

▼7 More, Thomas: *Utopia* (Transl. Dominic Baker-Smith). Penguin Books, London, 2020.

▼8 *Mu’jam al-muṣṭalaḥāt al-fiqhiyyah*: *Kalimah ṭūbā ya’nī „al-sa’ādah” wa hiya ismu shjaratin fī al-jannah yasīru al-rākibu fī ḏllihā mi’ata ‘āmin*. (The word “*ṭūbā*” means „happiness”. It is the name of a tree in Paradise, under which a passenger walks for a hundred years).

▼9 Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī’s Mabādī’ Āra’ Ahl Al-madīna Al-fāḍila*: a Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, Clarendon Press, 1985 - 571 pages.

▼10 Ja’far Āl Yāsīn, *Al-Fārābī: al-a’māl al-falsafīyyah*, al-juzā al-awwal, Dār al- manāhil, Beirut 1992. 454 pages.

Indeed, Al-Fārābī's plan for an imaginary city-state and society is at the same time a sharp critique of or opposition to the existing Muslim state and society of his time. And that is the basic idea of any utopian concept - a critique or destruction of the existing state of affairs in order to construct or reconstruct nonexistent state. In fact, by negating the existing place one wants to find or reconstruct non-existent place, if not in reality then at least in the head of protagonists of an ideal society, in the case of the contemporary Muslim affairs to reconstruct a society in accordance to the ideals of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, the reverend and glorious forerunners of the first generation of the Prophet - the '*aṣḥāb*', then of the second generation of the Prophet and the first generation of the followers of the Prophet's '*aṣḥāb*' - the *ṭābi'ūn* and then the third generation of the Prophet, the second generation of the followers of '*aṣḥāb*' and the first generation of followers of the followers - *the ṭābi'ū al-ṭābi'īn*.



ILLUSTRATION ~ Some book covers in German, in Arabic and English, within which the work of Al-Farabi is analyzed.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Neke naslovnice knjiga na njemačkom, arapskom i engleskom jeziku unutar kojih se analizira djelo Al-Farabija.

In Europe or in the West generally the basic idea of Enlightenment (*tanwīr*) is founded on a deconstruction of existing methods in science and technology and, consequently, on the deconstruction of the existing norms in the state and society in order to construct new social norms and establish new scientific and technical methods. Here we have a movement or stride from unwanted past and present into a wanted future, while in the Muslim contemporary or modern history this movement was going the opposite way - from one unwanted preset toward a wanted past as a *ṭūbā-tree* in Heaven or utopian-*ṭūbāwian* no-whereistan. Indeed, this utopian idea, which could not originate and prevail without some theological premises, has always appeared at critical historical situations, especially when the Muslims were losing their place which they thought has belonged to them forever.

Certainly, the fall of the Abbaside Caliphate in Baghdad by the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century, and, then, the final abolition of the institution of the Caliphate in Istanbul by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked the two most crises in the history of Islam and Muslims.▼<sup>11</sup> In the case of the former crisis it can be said that Ibn Taymiyya▼<sup>12</sup> and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya▼<sup>13</sup> were main protagonists of a utopian idea in the sense of a reconstruction of the deconstructed idea of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, while in the case of latter, i.e., the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, the main protagonists of the return to the path (*minhāj*) to a pure spring of pure and eternal water (*shir'ah*) was Muḥammad bin Abd al-Wahhab.▼<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the previous crisis, it can be said that Ibn Taymiyyah and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah were the main protagonists of utopian-*ṭūbāwīyya* thought in terms of reconstructing the deconstructed idea of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, while in the case of the latter crisis, i.e., the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, the main protagonist of the return to the Path (*minhāj*) of pure and eternal Norma (*shir'ah*) was Imam Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792). Shaykh-ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah was a combination of *'ilmu-l-tawḥīd* and *'ilmu-l-fiqh* with a certain appetite for politics, in which he was faithfully followed by his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. They both tasted prison at the same time because of it. After the death of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Jawziyyah was released from prison. Imam Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb is remembered more for his Puritan *'ilm-l-tawḥīd* than for his practical *'ilm-l-fiqh* with a special emphasis on the fight against *bid'at* (innovation) in the *ahl al-ṣūfiyyah*. From today's distance, different assessments can be made of the role of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah and Imam Muḥammad

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▼<sup>11</sup> The Abbasid *Caliphate* (*al-Khilāfah al-'Abbāsiyyah*) was the third *caliphate* to succeed the Prophet Muhammad a.s.. It was founded by a dynasty descended from the Prophet's uncle, 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (566–653), from whom the dynasty takes its name. They ruled as *caliphs* for most of the *caliphate* from their capital Baghdad in modern-day Iraq, after having overthrown the Umayyad *Caliphate* in the Abbasid Revolution of 750. The Abbasid period was marked by dependence on Persian bureaucrats (such as the Barmakid family) for governing the territories as well as an increasing inclusion of non-Arab into Muslims the society. The Abbasids age of cultural revival and fruition ended in 1258 with the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols under Hulagu Khan and the execution of the last 37th Abbasid *caliph* al-Musta'ṣim billāh who had ruled from 1242 until 1258.

Compare, Canfield, Robert L.: *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002., p. 5.; Holt, Peter M.: *Some Observations on the 'Abbāsid Caliphate of Cairo*. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. University of London, 47 (3), 1984., pp. 501–507.

▼<sup>12</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) left a considerable body of work - often republished in Syria, Egypt, Arabia, and India - that extended and justified his religious and political involvements and was characterized by its rich documentation, sober style, and brilliant polemic. In addition to innumerable fatwas (legal opinions based on religious law) and several professions of faith, the most beautiful of which is the *Wāsiṭiyyah*, two works merit particular attention. One is his *Al-Siyāsat al-shar'iyyah* ("Treatise on Juridical Politics"). The other, *Minhāj al-sunnah* ("The Way of Tradition"), is the richest work of comparative theology surviving from medieval Islam.

▼<sup>13</sup> Ibn al Qayyim al Jawziyya (1292-1350), his contributions to the Islamic philosophy are extensive, and they particularly deal with the Qur'anic commentaries, and understanding and analysis of the prophetic traditions (*fiqh-u Sunnah*). On this occasion we will single out the following studies: *Al-Kalam al-Tayyib wa-al-'Amal al-Salih* ("The Essence of Good Words and Deeds") and Commentaries on the book of Shaikh 'Abdullah al-Ansari: *Manazil-u Sa'ireen* ("Stations of the Seekers"), which is considered the epitome of knowledge of sufi books.

▼<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Sulaymān al-Tamīmī (1703–1792) was an Arabian Islamic scholar, theologian, preacher, activist, religious leader, reformer, and theologian from Najd in central Arabia. Sought to revive and purify Islam from what he perceived as non-Islamic popular religious beliefs and practices by returning to what, he believed, were the fundamental principles of the Islamic religion. His works were generally short, full of quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith, such as his main and foremost theological treatise, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd* ("The Book of Oneness").





ILLUSTRATION ~ Unknown Anonymous Greek artist, *Portrait of Sultan Mahmud II enthroned*. Istanbul, beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Nepoznati anonimni grčki umjetnik, *Portret sultana Mahmuda II na prijestolju*. Istanbul, početak 19 stoljeća.

Therefore, we are confronted here with another essential difference between utopian thought in Europe and utopian-*tūbāwiyya* thought among Muslims.▼<sup>15</sup> Namely, Europe had no choice but to go through the essential catharsis of its dark medieval past, which is rightly called the "dark age", followed by the "bright age" or the Enlightenment, while for Muslims that time was and remains the "bright age" of Muslim history, which has become "dark" due to the colonization of the area, where Muslims felt safe and prosperous. For both of these great crises in Muslim history, one had to blame someone other than the colonizers themselves, for the Baghdad the Mongols and for Istanbul the Europeans, but also to find a savior who knew the way back to the lost place, where victory and glory awaited the Muslims. In this process of looking for the "culprit" and "savior" to get out of the crisis, a process that takes a long time, it is easier for some to find the culprit than the savior.

One of these culprits is Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Maturīdī, who was known to the great *ulamā'* of Samarkand in the tenth century as: '*Imām al-hudā*', '*Alam al-hudā*', '*Imām al-mutakallimīn*', '*Musaḥḥiḥ 'aḳā'id al-muslimīn*', '*Ra'īs ahl al-sunnah*'.

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▼<sup>15</sup> Discussions about ideal states take shape depending on the time of their creation. Plato's State originates from the period of social disintegration after the Peloponnesian War. Therefore, its sharpness is probably partly caused by the hopeless circumstances that Plato witnessed. From Aristotle we learn about utopia, which was described by Hippodamus of Miletus, a great architect, urban planner and sociologist. He realized that a city can be more than just a group of houses, squares and temples, so he began to deal with the issue of social order. The period of disorder and violence of Thomas More, who laid the foundations for his imagined state, is similar to Plato's testimony. Utopia was a bridge by which he tried to connect the order of the Middle Ages with the new customs of the Renaissance. The utopia of the Renaissance authors arose from the great contrast of new possibilities on the other side ocean and the conditions that accompanied the collapse of the economy of medieval cities. As Plato's State, they tried to deal with the problem of transition.

Compare, Mumford, Lewis: *History of Utopia*. Publishing house Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2008, p.10; Fourier, Charles: *Civilization and the new social world*. School book, Zagreb, 1980, p.159.



But after more than a millennium (1108 H, 1075 M) this honorary title of Imam al-Māturīdī was annulled by Abū Abdullah Shamsuddin bin Muḥammad Ashraf (1420), known as al-Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī of Pashtun. Namely, al-Shams al-Salafī decided to study ‘*aqīda*’ of Imam al-Māturīdī, which seemed to him corrupt and inappropriate to ‘*aqīdat al-salaf*’. I am not omitting the attribute of *al-ṣalīh* here, but it is al-Shams al-Salafī, who obviously believes that the term “*al-salafī*” means everything, especially that you are the only saved group (*al-firqah al-nājiyah*) under that name and that, therefore, you should be against (*al-* who are not *Salafis* in the al-Shams al-Salafī al-Afghani way. It does not matter whether you are *al-ṣalīh* or not. What matters is that you are *Salafī* in accordance to the al-Shams al-Salafī al-Afghani’s mind. He wrote his master’s thesis at the Islamic University of



ILLUSTRATION ~ *Baghdad: the psychological toll of being the world’s most attacked city*. An illustration from the *Jami al-Tawarikh* by Rashid al-Din shows Hulagu Khan’s forces storming Baghdad in 1258.

Medina in 1989 under the working title: “The attitude of the Al-Māturīdiyya on the *tawḥīd* of God’s names and attributes”).<sup>▼16</sup> One would have hoped to learnt about the great representatives of the *Ahl-i Sunni-Jama’ah*, the Imam al-Māturīdī, who for some reason was neglected in the ‘*aqā’id*’ dispute, where the Ash’arite ‘*aqā’id*’ school predominated, but al-Shams al-Salafī experiences a kind of Copernican turn, so that correct becomes incorrect in his mind, and what was considered good becomes bad. Then, al-Shams al-Salafī changed the working title of

▼16 See, Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī: ‘*Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya li al-‘aqīda al-salafīyya*’, 3 vols. (al-Ṭā’if : al-Ṣa’īq, 1419/1998), I: 39.

his master's thesis to the official title: *Enmity of the Al-Māturīdiyya towards the Salafi aqīda - their history and madhhab on Divine attributes*.

The logic is clear: if you don't have an enemy, invent it. That is how al-Shams al-Salafī does it. In three large volumes, each of 600 or more pages, al-Shams al-Salafī exposes the mockery of Imam al-Māturīdī, his disciples and followers, of whom Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (1879–1952) is his favorite target because, as al-Shams al-Salafī says, al-Kawtharī<sup>▼17</sup> was the restorer (*mujaddid*) of the Imam al-Māturīdī school.<sup>▼18</sup>

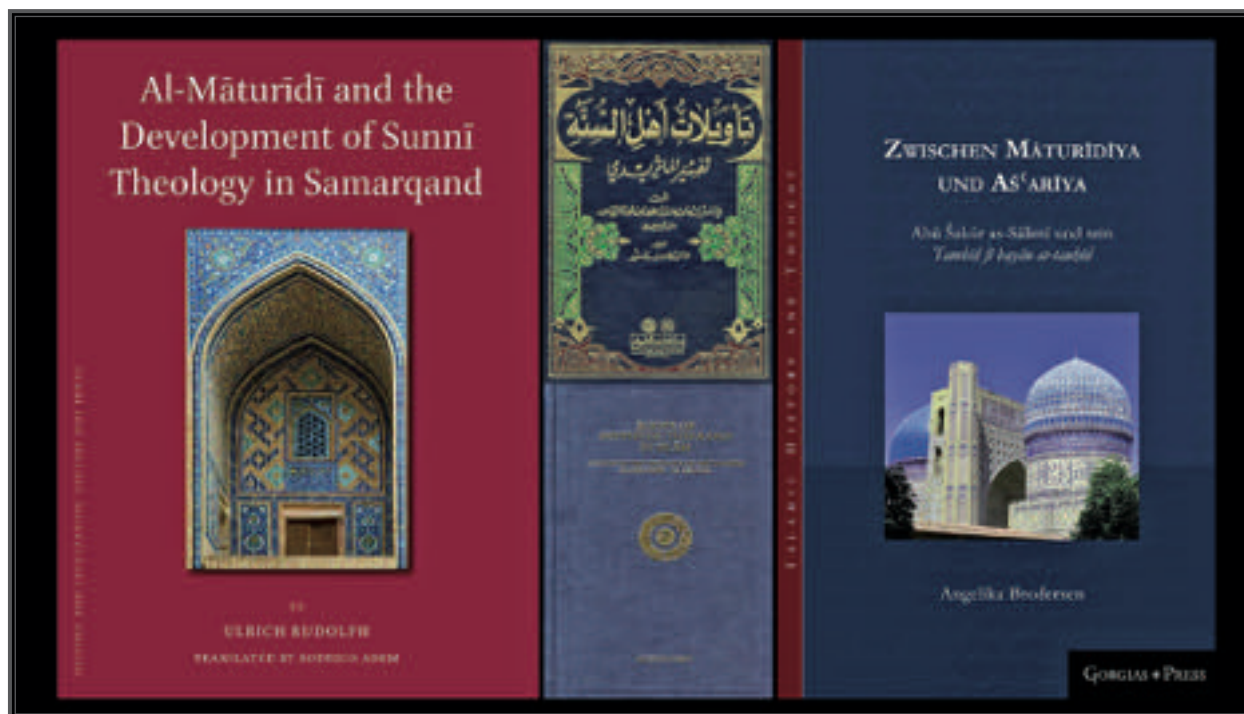


ILLUSTRATION ~ Some of the critical views on the work of Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Maturīdī - Cover of al-Maturīdī's *Tafsīr*.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Neki od kritičkih pogleda na djelo Imāma Abū Maṣṣūra al-Maturīdīja - Naslovnica knjige al-Maturīdījinog *Tafsīra*.

Al-Shams al-Salafī is not only biasedly incorrect against Imam al- Māturīdī, but he is much more aggressively biased in praising himself because all failed in defending the *Salafi aqīda* except him, who was chosen and called to defend the *Ummah* from the dangers of those who are called to defend Muḥammad's (a.s.) *Shir'ah* Norm and *Minhāj* the Way of life , but they are not doing so. They are, Al-Shams al-Salafī claims, more dangerous than all, even more than Jews and Christians, who are not concerned with *al-aqīda* among Muslims. The fight against the *al-bid'at fī al-aqīdah*, as seen by al-Shams al-al-Salafī, is more important and valuable than *jihād* itself and that is why he left the jihād in Afghanistan and came to Medina to write his master's thesis against the al-Māturīdī *aqīda*,

▼17 Muḥammad Zāhid b. Ḥasan al-Kawtharī (1879–1952) was an aide to the last Sheikh-l-Islam of the Ottoman Empire, He was a polymath.

▼18 *Ibid*, p. 20.

as the highest act of *īmān/faith* for the specter of a guilty '*aqīda*' haunting over Muslim heads. This latest crisis among Muslims bears a resemblance to the crises of Ibn Taymiyyah and Abdul-l-Wahhābi, but it is special in that it is self-extorted or self-promoted as an internal crisis of mind and motive of individual or group interests in the distribution of inherited spiritual treasures or paths to springs or springs of the pure and eternal word of God, paths that interest groups block from each other so that all remain both without an open path and without a clear goal to the promised salvation. It was, indeed, a noble idea in the 1960s from noble royal and *ulamā'* minds to raise three reference Islamic universities to train young people based on authentic Islamic Sunni science from the Qur'an and Sunnah in Saudi Arabia, Medina; Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur; and Nigeria, Abuja. ▼<sup>19</sup>

Two projects have become successful: in Kuala Lumpur and in Medina. ▼<sup>20</sup> Many of our Bosnian students also studied at the Islamic University in Malaysia and Medina. Many of them today occupy important positions in our state and society. The Islamic theological school could not, and never will be reduced to only one Path to the source or fountain of the pure and eternal word of God, but the idea of *Tawhīd*, defined for each of you the Norma (*Shir'ah*) and the The way of life (*Minhāj*), to remain forever the same alive, as Medina will remain forever *hudā* and *nūr* for all Muslims and for all followers of Imam al-Māturīdī:

May Allah's mercy be upon him, his disciples,  
his followers and all who read his noble ideas of *Tawhīd*.




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▼<sup>19</sup> In the wake of realizing the impacts left by colonialization, modernity and globalization, Islamic scholars have been continuously putting on their efforts to address the issues of contextualizing Islam in the waves of emerging novel ways of thinking and perspectives. Muslim scholars since Muhammad 'Abduh had been looking for the ample approach to accommodate the modern thoughts within the boundaries of Islamic teachings resulting idea in the 1960s three reference Islamic universities to train young people. Although the real measurement for success of such approaches in addressing the gap between the Islamic world and the West has not been duly agreed upon, the echoes of the calls from scholars to continue marching have been resonating well within the Islamic scholarly circles. More about Muhammad 'Abduh see, Adams, Charles Clarence: *Muhammad Abduh : Biography, in: Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, Volume 10, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 1933.

▼<sup>20</sup> The *Islamic Science University of Malaysia* or better known as USIM is a unique public university, offering double major academic programmes from a variety of fields that integrate the *Naqli* and *Aqli* knowledge. USIM is also the only public university where Islamization of knowledge is addressed in all its academic programmes, reviving the Islamic Renaissance. The *Islamic University of Madinah*, established in 1961, is a medium-sized men only Saudi Arabian higher education institution formally affiliated with the Islamic religion. University students may study *Sharia*, *Qur'an*, *Usul al-din* and *Hadith*, while non-native speakers may also study Arabic language. The university offers Bachelor of Arts, Master's and Doctorate degrees.





ILLUSTRATION ~ Madinah al Munawwarah- Islamic University of Medinah.  
ILUSTRACIJA ~ Madinah al Munawwarah - Islamski univerzitet u Medini.





ILLUSTRATION ~ Shi'ism and Sunnism do not differ in fundamental matters of faith, so there are no differences regarding the performance of the *Haji* (a place and time of peace and tolerance), or the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

## II

### In the Search of **al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ** Instead of the Quasi-Salafi Ideology

The idea of *salaf* is a noble one. For, without a *salaf*, i.e. the autochthon ancestors, the *khalaf*, i.e. the autochthon descendants would not know their proper identity because the identity is “a continuity of memory”, and the memory, especially religious and spiritual one is preserved by *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, the good and caring ancestors. Thus, the *salaf*, i.e. the ancestors as a paradigm of the *khalaf*, i.e. the descendants are indispensable in defining and keeping the *khalaf's* internal and external identity.

Hence, no one has monopoly on the *salaf* as it is a Muslim shared property of individual as well as of collective identity as “the continuity of memory” of the tenets of faith, of the knowledge of history, of the sense of destiny, of the purpose of life and of the right to a success here in this world and to a salvation in the hereafter. Therefore, no one should be alienated from the right to identify himself/herself from belonging to the *salaf* as his/her rightful predecessors.

Based on this premise, we all as Muslims have the right to claim that we belong to the good heritage of the good *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, but no one has the right to monopolize this noble title by excommunicating those who are not in the line of his/her point of view about certain issues, including those opinions pertaining to the understanding of the very meaning of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. There is no genuine Muslim *‘ālum*, scholar, who alienated himself from *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. On the contrary, every *‘ālum*, scholar was proud to claim that he followed the path of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* and believed that he was part of *al-firqah a-nājiyah*, the saved group.

However, the Muslim scholars are confronted today with a *quasi-salafi* ideology, which tends to poison the spirit and body of the originality of the idea of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, the good and positive memory of the *salaf* as the core of the Muslim identity. This is why we need today, as our remote ancestor, Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's spirit and mind as well as the spirit of the al-Māturīdī's of teachings, i.e. the Māturīdiyyah of the past for the solution of the present spiritual, intellectual and political crisis of the *Ummah*.

This is exactly what we are trying to do in this paper - to show the al-Māturīdī's genuine methodological working out of a synthetic Sunni theology as well as an original epistemological framework for a synthesis of the *Naql* (Tradition) and *‘Aql* (Reason). Here I bring some extracts from my doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago



1986 titled “A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī”.<sup>▼21</sup> The result of this dissertation was not only a discovery of an orthodox Sunni theological doctrine, which comes along with al-Asha’rī’s as well as al-Ṭahāwī’s Sunni theology, but also it is a guideline for a genuine *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* theology against the quasi-*slafī* ideology. If this guideline was workable in the past, it means that it can be workable at the present. I understand that the study of the legacy of Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī’s spirit and mind in Tashkent is aimed at promoting exactly the Sunni theology of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* against quasi-*slafī* ideology.



ILLUSTRATION ~ Stone inscriptions of Imam al-Maturidi's original ideas are located inside the Imam al-Maturidi Memorial Complex at Chokardiza Cemetery in Samarkand.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Zapisi na kamenu originalnih ideja Imama al-Maturidija nalaze se unutar Memorijalnog kompleksa Imama al-Maturidija na groblju Chokardiza u Samarkandu.

<sup>▼21</sup> Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d.333/944)*. ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur, 1995.

### III

## In the Light of Imām al-Māturīdī's Synthesis of Naql - 'Aql Tensions

### 1. Faithful Obedience (ṭā'ah)

Although the idea of ṭā'ah (obedience) assumes the traditional or irrational approach to problems, in this case to religious or theological problems, it is not completely devoid of Reason. For one must also have a justification for adopting this traditional approach of ṭā'ah. In the case of the early stage of Islam, this ṭā'ah was adopted, first, second, because the community was not yet exposed either to internal conflict or external influences.

This first aspect may be further elaborated by the fact that the early Muslim generations saw in Islam both the resumption of primordial monotheism and, more importantly, the removal of old social injustice. They thus lived in the hope that Islam would provide a better life both here and in the hereafter. To attain either of these two goals, one had obediently to accept the new perspective because it comes not from immediate experience but was supposed to create one. Thus, on the one hand, the very idea that Islam came from authentic divine source, and, on the other, that it was different from the existing ethical, social and political system, had enough force to gain the total acceptance of the early Muslim community.

When we speak of the early stage of Islamic theology as ṭā'ah, we mean the total commitment of Muslims to the theoretical premises of Islam, without consciously questioning their implications or their possible logical conflicts. This, however, does not mean complete irrationality, but rather an acceptance of the idea that Reason is short of explaining everything. On the basis of this assertion we may explain Imam Malik's doctrine of *bilā kayf* (a non-committal or non-questioning) attitude to which the Sunni theologians often had recourse when they saw that there was no rational explanation for a certain theological proposition.<sup>▼22</sup>

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▼22 Malik ibn Anas, reverently known as *al-Imām Mālik* (711–795) by Sunni Muslims, was an Arab Muslim jurist, theologian, and *ḥadīth* traditionist. Born in the city of Medina, Malik rose to become the premier scholar of prophetic traditions in his day, which he sought to apply to "the whole legal life" in order to create a systematic method of Muslim jurisprudence which would only further expand with the passage of time. Referred to as the "Imam of Medina" by his contemporaries, Malik's views in matters of jurisprudence were highly cherished both in his own life and afterwards, and he became the founder of one of the four schools of Sunni law, the Maliki.

Schacht, J.: *Mālik b. Anas*; in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Second Edition, (ed.) P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online. Available at:



## 2. Elucidation (*Bayān*)

As long as there was no noticeable internal conflict within the Muslim community, this *ṭā'ah* attitude was both justifiable and strong. But, when a series of conflicts erupted within the community, this collective *ṭā'ah* lost its previous rationale and strength. It was, for example, hard for all Muslims to accept unquestioningly the assassination of the caliph 'Uthman, <sup>▼23</sup> to witness indifferently the battles of the Camel and *Ṣiffin*, <sup>▼24</sup> and to acquiesce obediently to the unfortunate events at Karbalā'. <sup>▼25</sup> Nevertheless, the community had to continue its life, and, therefore, there had to be a *Bayān* (elucidation or justification) of these unpleasant events. That is to say, the Muslim community had by now created its own tradition, and some events were not compatible with the fundamental principles of Islam on which this tradition was based. Furthermore, the rapidity of these events left no time for calm reasoning or reflection, but required an immediate response to the difficult question as to who was wrong and who right in these bloody struggles or, what was the relationship between Islamic theory and practice. The first reaction to this dilemma came from the Kharijites, who, revolted by the injustice of Mu'āwiya and upset by the indecisiveness of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, <sup>▼26</sup> proclaimed both parties wrong and, consequently, came up with the extreme theological judgement that a Muslim who committed mortal sin can no longer be regarded as a legitimate member of the Muslim community. This, in turn, opened a series of other extreme theological views. In counter-reaction to this Kharijite view came the stance of the Murijites, who, seeing the moral utopianism of the Kharijites, connected their theology with political conformism to the Umayyad regime. Worse than this Abdullah b. Saba' <sup>▼27</sup> went so far as to proclaim 'Alī b. Ṭālib as incarnation of God.

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<https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2>. Accessed 21.5.2021.; Haddad, Gibril F.: *The Four Imams and Their Schools*. Muslim Academic Trust, London, 2007., p. 121.

<sup>▼23</sup> The situation worsened on Thursday, 16 June. As Uthman stood in his balcony, Niyar ibn Iyad Aslami, a companion of Muhammad, lectured him from outside and demanded his abdication. In response, one of Marwan's servants threw a stone killing Niyar. Outraged by Uthman's refusal to hand over the attacker, the rebels started preparations to attack. The next day, Friday 17 June, they attacked his house setting the doors on fire. Around the time of mid-day prayers, Uthman was alone inside the house. Some Egyptian rebels climbed the houses of the neighbors and then jumped into Uthman's. According to the account of al-Waqidi (d. 823), Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr held the beard of Uthman threatening to kill him. Uthman rebuked him and asked him to leave. Muhammad pierced his forehead with an arrow. However, in another report Muhammad desisted from killing Uthman after the latter reminded him of his father Abu Bakr. Muhammad then vainly tried defending him from the attackers.

Madelung, Wilferd: *The Succession to Muhammad : A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997., pp. 135-138.; Humphreys, R. Stephen (ed.): *The History of al-Ṭabarī*; in: *Volume XV : The Crisis of the Early Caliphate : The Reign of 'Uthmān, A.D. 644-656/A.H. 24-35*. SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies. State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1990., p. 218.

<sup>▼24</sup> The Battle of Siffin was fought in 657 between Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, the fourth of the Rashidun Caliphs and the first Shia Imam, and Mu'awiya ibn Abī Sufyan, the rebellious governor of Syria. The battle is named after its location Siffin on the banks of the Euphrates.

<sup>▼25</sup> The events of Karbala reflect the collision of the good versus the evil, the virtuous versus the wicked, and the collision of Imam Husayn (the head of virtue) versus Yazid (the head of impiety). Al-Husayn was a revolutionary person, a righteous man, the religious authority, the Imam of Muslim Ummah.

<sup>▼26</sup> 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600-661) was a cousin, son-in-law and companion of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, a.s.. He ruled as the fourth Rashidun caliph from 656 until his assassination in 661. In later Islamic philosophy, especially in the teachings of Mullā Ṣadrā (1571-1640) and his followers, 'Alī's sayings and sermons were increasingly regarded as central sources of metaphysical knowledge, or "divine philosophy."

<sup>▼27</sup> 'Abd Allāh ibn Sabā' al-Ḥimyarī, was a 7<sup>th</sup>-century figure in Islamic history associated with a group of followers called the Saba'iyya. According to Sunni and Shia tradition, Abd Allah ibn Saba' was a Yemenite Jew from the Arab Himyar tribe who converted

A is well known; all these extremist groups disappeared in the course of Islamic history and have only served orthodox theology as bad examples. Two different groups within the realm of Islamic, however, have survived throughout the whole history of Islam and still hold fast to their early difference, namely, the *Sunnites* and the *Shi'ites*. The former has always represented the main stream of the Muslim community while the latter has always tried to be duly recognized and sometimes even to dominate. Just as the *Shi'ites* developed their own political philosophy, they evolved their own theological one as well. Here, however, our focus is on the theological development of the *Sunnites*, the majority part of the Muslim world, rather than the *Shi'ites*.

At first, the idea of the Sunnism implied political positivism rather than theological synthesis or Islamic orthodoxy. In fact, this early political Sunnism was developed to repel the opposition of the political theocrats of the *Shi'ites*. Thus, in this political sense of Sunnis, all groups that objected to the idea of the *Shi'ite* theocracy, such as the *Muriji'ites*, *Qadarites*, *Jabrites*, and so on, were considered to be the *Sunnites*. It was only later, when Sunnism came to represent ideological or theological synthetism, that the term was reserved for Islamic orthodoxy as opposed to all extremist theological groups regardless of their political attitudes. At this point of the stage of *Bayān* in Islamic theology, the most visible figure of Islamic theological moderation of orthodoxy was Abu Ḥanīfah,<sup>▼28</sup> the founder of one of the four main Islamic legal schools. He is not only important for us here because he probably was the only person at this stage who dealt seriously with theological problems. In fact, Abu Ḥanīfah left behind more books or tracts on Islamic theology than any of his contemporaries. Five of these tracts have been preserved, namely:

- ◆ *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*
- ◆ *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*
- ◆ *Kitab al-ʿĀlim wa al-Muta'allim*
- ◆ *Risālah ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī*
- ◆ *al-Waṣiyyah*<sup>▼29</sup>

There are some questions as to the origin of these tracts which are ascribed to Abu Ḥanīfah. Wensinck thinks "...that it (*al-Fiqh al-Akbar*)<sup>▼30</sup> represents the view of orthodoxy in the middle of the eighth century A.D. on the

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to Islam during Uthman's reign.

▼28 Nu'mān ibn Thābit ibn Zūṭā ibn Marzubān, commonly known by his *kunya* Abū Ḥanīfa (699–767), was a Persian Sunni Muslim theologian and jurist who became the eponymous founder of the *Hanafi* school of Sunni jurisprudence, which has remained the most widely practiced law school in the Sunni tradition. The sources from which Abu Hanifa derived Islamic law, in order of importance and preference, are: the Qur'an, the authentic narrations of the Muslim prophet Muhammad (known as *ḥadīth*), consensus of the Muslim community (*ijmā'*), analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), juristic discretion (*istiḥsan*) and the customs of the local population enacting said law (*urf*).

▼29 Wensinck, A.J.: *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge University Press, 1932.

▼30 See, al-Maghniṣāwī, Abu 'l-Muntahā: *Imām Abū Ḥanīfa's Al-Fiqh al-Akbar Explained* (transl. Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera). With Selections from 'Alī al-Qarī's Commentary Including Abu Hanifa's *Kitab al-Waṣiyya*. White Thread Press, London, 2007. This translation of *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar* is an unprecedented contribution to the subject of '*aqida* in English. A lucid rendering, unhampered by sterile literalism,

then prominent dogmatic questions; and that it reflects the discussions of the Kharijites, Shi'ites and Kadarites, not those of the Muriji'ites, nor those of the Mu'tazilites."▼<sup>31</sup> Our aim here is not to discuss Abu Ḥanīfah's theology *per se*, and the origin of his tracts, but rather to contend that they definitely represent his theological assertions and reflect, as Wensinck has rightly put it; "...the discussion of the Kharijites, Shi'ites, Kadarites, not those of the Mu'tazilites."▼<sup>32</sup> That is to say, Abu Ḥanīfah's theology is aimed at finding a moderate or inclusive theological way and at repelling those extreme elements of the Kharijites, the Shi'ites, the Qadarites, the Jabrites and the like. It is not yet rational in the sense that it still lacks a definite system of reasoning, and it is no longer *Tā'ah* theology because it has in itself certain theological judgements which are based on human experience rather than merely inspired by the Scripture.

Therefore, by the stage of *Bayān* in Islamic theology we mean that period when the Muslim theologians were responding to the immediate challenges of their times with an intent either to condemn or to justify certain actions of the past. This "theology of elucidation" has rational elements in its procedure but is still far from the point to be called rational in the full sense of that term.

### 3. *Naql-'Aql* (Conflict and Synthesis)

Full development of Islamic theology came with the introduction of the more refined and more systematically worked out theological method. There is a general feeling among the students of Islam that the rational way in Islamic theology, and in other fields of Islamic studies as well, came as the result of the introduction, however indirect, of Greek philosophy into the intellectual world of Islam at the end of the first century of Islam.▼<sup>33</sup> On the whole, this assertion, of course, is true. However, I think that even if the Muslims had not known all the details of Greek philosophy, there would still have been some sort of rational impulse in their system of learning. For, Islam, i.e., the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet, is full of rational premises and rational explanations. Of course, Islam is first and foremost a religion, it is not unconditional dogma. But unlike many religions, it is not irrational in the sense of suppressing Reason, although it is not overly rational in the sense of espousing pure philosophy. Therefore, from the very beginning, Islam had assumed a certain amount of rationality which in the stage of *Tā'ah* was not really needed and in the stage of *Bāyan* was not well worked out.

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it draws on a number of commentaries to unlock a subject that has been largely inaccessible to in English. Combining Maghnisawi's basic commentary with copious notes carefully selected from 'Alī al-Qārī's super-commentary and the entire *Kitab al-Wasiyya of Abu Hanifa*, this edition promises to be an essential guide on the intellectual and rewarding journey through Islam.

▼<sup>31</sup> *Imām Abū Ḥanīfah's Al-Fīkh al Akbar – Explained*, by Abū Muntahā al-Maghnisāwī, with Selections from 'Alī al-Qārī's Commentary, Including Abū Ḥanīfah's *Kitāb al-Waṣīyyah*, Compiled and Translated with an Introduction by Abdu-Rahman ibn Yusuf, White Thread Press, 2014.

▼<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

▼<sup>33</sup> *Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, First published Mon Feb 23, 2009. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/>. Accessed 24.3.2021.

As is often the case with any religion, so it was with Islam, too, that a conflict between Reason and Dogma has inevitably arisen. The first initiative of this conflict came on the part of Reason, and the first exponents of it were called the Mu'tazilites.<sup>▼34</sup> Supported by the rational side of Islam and influenced by Greek philosophers, they were the first Muslim thinkers who saw in Reason all possible solutions for theological and other religious problems. This pure rationalism of the Mu'tazilites could not but provoke the other side of Islam, pure dogma. But probably, had it not been for interference by the state into the theological issues at this stage, which tipped the balance to favour Reason, this first conflict between *Naql* and *'Aql* in Islam would not have had such a great impact on the subsequent development of Islamic theology. Nevertheless, in this conflict of *Naql* and *'Aql* there were always those Muslims who were able to recognise the original Islamic intent and to maintain a balance between Reason and Dogma and who tried to work out proper system for realising that goal.

Al-Māturīdī is one of the best examples in this regard. In fact, as our study shows, he was one of the most original orthodox Muslim thinkers of the early period.<sup>▼35</sup> Indeed, without any exaggeration, al-Māturīdī may be regarded as the most genuine founder of Islamic synthetic theology.<sup>▼36</sup> He was not only able always to keep the balance between Tradition and Reason, but was also he was able to sow the validity of Tradition and the full strength of Reason within the context of that Islamic Tradition. As we shall see, many points concerning the early and later development of Islamic theology up to his time, points which are thought to be the discovery of modern scholarship, had already been made by al-Māturīdī in the fourth/tenth century.

Undoubtedly, al-Māturīdī's most important contribution to Islamic theological thought was his development of the Islamic theological theory of knowledge. The significance of his theological theory of knowledge, although not always fully recognized by either Muslim or non-Muslim scholars, is no less than that of al-Shāfi'i's theoretical framework of Islamic Law.<sup>▼37</sup> Furthermore, al-Māturīdī's scientific way of research, his sense of thorough analysis, and his objective critical mind reserve for him a place among the most serious thinkers of all times. We will see that al-Māturīdī was not afraid of any theological question, was not reluctant to take up any difficult issue and was not disinclined to any rational possibility.\*\*

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▼34 *Mu'tazilah*, ("Those Who Withdraw, or Stand Apart") Engl. *Mutazilites*, also called *Ahl al-'Adl wa al-Tawhīd*, in Islam, political or religious neutralists; by the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE the term had come to refer specifically to an Islamic school of speculative theology (*kalām*) that flourished in Basra and Baghdad (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century).

▼35 See, Cerić, Mustafa: *A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī*..., p. X

▼36 See, al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur (book ascribed): *al-'Aqa'id*. ms. Dar al-Kutub al-Masriyyah, No. 147, Aqa'id Taymur.; al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur: *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Eited by Fathalla Kholeif, Dar al-Mashriq, 1970.; al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur: *Kitāb Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah*. Ms. Dar al-Kutub al-Masriyyah, No. 873, Tafsir.; al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur: *Ta'wilat Ahla al-Sunnah*. (ed.) Ibrahim 'Awadain and Sayyid 'Awadain, vol. I, Cairo, 1391/1971.

▼37 Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (767–820), was an Arab Muslim theologian, writer, and scholar, who was one of the first contributors of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*). Often referred to as '*Shaykh al-Islām*', al-Shāfi'ī was one of the four great Sunni Imams, whose legacy on juridical matters and teaching eventually led to the formation of Shāfi'i school of *fiqh* (or. *Madh'hab*).

See, Fadel, Mohammad: *The True, the Good and the Reasonable : The Theological and Ethical Roots of Public Reason in Islamic Law*. *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*. Vol. 21, No. 1, University of Toronto, 2008.; Khadduri, Majid: *Translation of al-Shāfi'i's Risāla – Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Islamic Texts Society, United Kingdom, Cambridge, 2011., pp. 8, 11–16.



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