

**Scholastic Traditional Minimalism: A critical analysis of
intra-Sunni sectarian polemics**

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Abstract

This thesis is an analytical exploration of the influence of medieval theology on contemporary scholastic traditionalist polemics within Sunni Islam. Intra-Sunni sectarian polemics as an emerging area of study is relatively untouched as opposed to sectarian violence. A detailed mapping of the theological terrain from the genesis of Sunni 'orthodoxy' and the perennial tensions within the classical theological tradition and how they have manifested parochially into the contemporary scholastic traditionalist trends of the Barelwi, Deobandi, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and Wahhābī within the backdrop of the Sufi-Salafi contestation of Sunni authenticity is timely. Concern regarding growing extremism prompted Muslim Ulama, academics and political leaders to create unity initiatives such as the Amman Message and the Sunni Pledge in dealing with this problem and also delineating 'orthodoxy'. The theological basis for these neo-credos can be explained as doctrinal 'minimalism'. Minimalism is a growing social construction of scholastic traditionalists through which the warring factions are attempting to salvage the historical continuity with 'orthodoxy' and placate Sunni infighting. The thesis aims to examine the theological veracity of the minimalism project and explore its doctrinal, methodological and ethical facets. Polemicism and excommunication is the current state of affairs within Sunni theological discourse. Minimalism is deemed as the antidote to this problem.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In contrast to earlier times, when theology was the intellectual discussion of divinity the dominant state of contemporary Sunni theology (*kalām*) is polemical and the competing factions embroiled therein are largely from the traditionalist camp.¹ Scholastic traditionalism represents a textual orthopraxic reading of Islam which maintains the authority of 'scholars' (*‘ulamā’*) trained in the classical disciplines such as Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*) and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), and stresses on an unbroken chain (*silsila*) back to Prophet Muhammad himself. Ramadan argues that this form of traditionalism exhibits a literalist approach. The largest bloc comprises the Ash‘arīs and Sufis in general.² Moreover he demarcates Salafi traditionalism as distinct from the scholastic traditionalists. Nasr on the other hand, includes the Wahhābī movement as a 'truncated' manifestation of traditionalism.³ With Nasr's understanding this thesis will include the Salafis, especially those such as al-Albānī *et al* who maintained strong connections with the *‘ulamā’* of Saudi Arabia as 'scholastic traditionalists' on the premise that a general allegiance is afforded to 'scholarship'. Furthermore it is these two groups; the Ash‘arī Sufis and Athari Salafis that are, on the one hand claiming 'orthodoxy', and on the other offering 'minimalist' measures to deal with this apparent Sunni infighting.

¹ By traditionalist I am referring to two generic strands of Sunni thought; Sufi and Salafi which refer to the following of trained scholars (*‘ulamā’*) who are products of the traditional seminary (*madrasa*) system.

² Ramadan, Tariq. *To Be a European Muslim: A study of Islamic Sources in the European Context*. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation 1999) pp. 239 – 241.

³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. (Kegan Paul International: London and New York, 1990), p. 12.

Infighting generally manifests on the intra-Sunni level where the Sufis and Salafis are polarised against each other.⁴ However, dissension within an intra-Salafi and intra-Sufi setting is also not uncommon. Christian and Jewish theologies may have experienced similar polemical infighting as definitions of 'orthodoxies' were hammered out, but in general they have managed to systematise theology to the needs of their respective communities. Theology ought to organise dogmata, prioritise hermeneutic principles and attempt to synthesise ostensive 'contradictions' in the tradition. Since Islam had no centralised 'clerical' authority, the majoritarian Sunni tradition as Watt aptly illustrates, 'gradually attained a fuller and more precise formulation of its beliefs as circumstances forced the Muslims to decide between rival interpretations of basic texts'.⁵ As such Sunni theology in particular has perennially focused on defining itself rather than proffering a systematic approach to theology and theology's innate concern with 'orthodoxy' – it is a residual polemical product. As follows, Sunni Islam can be considered as having always been inherently polemical as even the earliest credos were effectively 'refutations' (*rudūd*) against competing 'orthodoxies'.⁶ Netton suggests that later Ḥanbalī trends in Sunni Islam have claimed authenticity via a 'flight to tradition' method.⁷ Polemics of contemporary Sunnism is underpinned by this subtext and what could be termed a desperate 'fight for orthodoxy'.

The height of these polemics – a period that marks the 'degeneration' of *kalām* theology in Sunni discourse can be linked roughly to the advent of the Wahhābī

⁴ Sufis are Sunnis who recognise the following of the four Sunnī schools of jurisprudence. Salafis are Sunnis who prefer non-conformism to schools of jurisprudence. The textual unifying factor between these camps is the broad Sunni ḥadīth corpus.

⁵ Watt, Montgomery. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: an extended survey*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 56.

⁶ Watt p. 56.

⁷ Netton, Ian Richard. *Islam, Christianity and Tradition: A Comparative Exploration*. (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2006) p. 132.

movement and British colonial rule in India. Polemical tensions were often explained as the product of subjugation from outside. However, even after independence, the anti-colonial milieu in which these polemics are embedded did not lose its potency. On the contrary it gained more momentum as a result of factors such as globalisation and a general sense that the *umma* is leaderless.

The creation of the state of Israel and the defeat of the Arab nations in the 'Six Day War' and other major events fuelled polemics further as each theological faction laid the blame on the other. It was after the 1980s Afghan Jihad that a certain sense of confidence reemerged in the idea of a 'global *umma*'. For one thing it put the Muslim in direct contact with the 'Muslim other', hence uniting them upon a common cause. 'Abdullah 'Azzām's *Defence of the Muslim lands* treatise coupled with Mufti Ibn Bāz's 'Blessed Afghan Jihad' edict (*fatwā*) managed to somehow unify hitherto theologically 'warring' factions such as the Sunni Sufis, Salafis, Deobandis, Barelwis and even Shī'as. It is in this era that we find Salafis and Sufis promoting 'cooperative' literature and subsequently a type of anti-polemics genre starts to surface.⁸ 'Abd al-Hādī al-Miṣrī under the Saudi Jurist Ibn Jibrīn's guidance authored his *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a: Ma'ālim Inṭilaqāt al-Kubrā* (Sunnism: Major milestones and headways) and the renowned Sufi sage 'Alawī al-Mālikī's *Maḥāḥim yajib an tuṣahḥah*' (Concepts needing clarification). Both attempt to address, albeit theoretically, the inherent discord within Sunni Islam and how they could potentially forge ahead beyond historical prejudices. It is worthy to note that the former provides us with a formal theory of 'Sunni principles'. Both these works remained influential largely in scholarly circles only.

The events of 11th September 2001 became a watershed moment for not only the West but also the Muslim World and in particular Sunni scholastic traditionalists of all

⁸ Much of this genre focuses on 'cooperation' (*ta'āwun*) with other 'heterodox' Muslims and as such may be understood as Muslim ecumenism.

persuasions. Far from dispelling the *imperial narrative* of 'Dār al-Islām – Dār al-Ḥarb', the Afghan Jihad actually rejuvenated it irrespective of the Jihadist momentum. The jubilation of victory gave real-world relevance to traditionalism once again. The 'War on Terror' and reactions from Muslim and non-Muslim quarters forced the traditionalists into a moment of introspection. Subsequently, the 2004 Amman hotel bombings brought together more than 500 traditionalist Scholars from Sunni, Shī'ā and Ibādī communities to sign a declaration which would condemn 'extremism' and define the broad parameters of 'orthodoxy'.

In 2007 the Muslim Diaspora community in the United States and the United Kingdom drafted the *Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation Between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge* which sought to address two problems; namely the pressure from outside in defining 'orthodoxy', and the calls from within to stop 'Sunni-infighting'.⁹ In 2009 Nūḥ Keller on the request of his own followers delivered his judgement regarding the ongoing polemics between the Deobandi and Barelwi scholarship in his article *Islam, Īmān and Kufr*. He is one of the first to use the word 'minimalism' in relation to Sunni theology. Plantinga [2005] has used 'minimalism' in reference to Christianity in his essay '*Trimming our sails with the help of philosophy*'. In it he argues that he is very sympathetic to those who keep their theological commitments '*minimal*' and that the study of philosophy inevitably leads one to become a '*theological minimiser*'. He argues this is all in order to 'keep us from spouting theological nonsense we claim to be derived from the Bible when in actuality it creeps into our minds from other sources'.¹⁰ It can be said that this is true of the Sunni Muslim experience.

⁹ See Appendix III.

¹⁰ Plantinga, Theodore. *Trimming our Sails with the help of philosophy*. Myodicy, Issue 23, June 2005 <<http://www.plantinga.ca/m/MCX.HTM>>

Elsewhere, global players such as al-Qarāḍāwī are promoting 'centrism' (*waṣaṭiyya*) in doctrine and approach, a concept which can be traced back to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹ It is within this backdrop we could identify the concept of 'minimalism' being instrumentalised as an antidote to 'extremism' in general and 'polemicism' in particular.

Both Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalists have argued that there are certain 'broad based principles' (*uṣūl al-ʿitiqād*) or 'doctrinal canons' (*qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʿid*) which are either normative rules or set dogmata. This type of theological nomenclature can be located in the classical creedal lore. ʿAbd al-Hādī in his *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Maʿālim Inṭalaqāt al-Kubrā* has extrapolated thirteen essential principles which he presents as the credos of core Sunnism. He does not subject these doctrines to scrutiny in accordance to the internal ethos of Sunnism, nonetheless these doctrines indicate a process of constructing 'orthodoxy'. Moreover he has ignored the contemporary fragmentation of Sunni Islam though his title inspires otherwise for a unity schema. He has refused to even mention or condemn the Ashʿarīs which indicates he may have attempted to appease the Egyptian scholarship and Salafi hardliners. Though he has highlighted 'admissible' internal differences his thesis is embedded in a binary 'Tradition' (*sunna*) v 'Innovation' (*bidʿa*) narrative and hence glossed over much of the tensions within the Sunni tradition and its paradigm of 'orthodoxy'. This work is possibly the first of its kind in the Salafi tradition to recognise the puritanical outlook of Salafism and the propensity of infighting within that tradition, though the author does not give us this indication. This work has been approved by Ibn Jibrīn a previously

¹¹ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, 'Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī on women' in *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī*, ed. by Skovgaard-Peterson and Gräf (London: Hurst and Co Publishers, 2009), p. 181.

high ranking Saudi Wahhābī scholar, one could argue that it has been engulfed by the more popular polemical literature within Salafi lore.¹²

Salafi scholarship is often discredited by certain Sufis and consequently not viewed as Sunni. ʿAlawī's treatise *Mafāhīm yajib an tuṣahḥaḥ* is one of the most significant Sufi contributions at placating the polemic with the Salafis. Endorsed by scholastic traditionalists from around the world, in it he exonerates Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and even Muhammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from Sufi detractors. The work is primarily an apologetic for Ashʿarism and Sufism and not necessarily an attack on Wahhābism. He does however deal with peripheral jurisprudential and doctrinal issues and fails to touch upon where Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism actually converge. This work is prompting initiatives such as the Amman Message, the Sunni Pledge and also the emerging Yemeni Ḥabā'ib scholarship.¹³

Hamza Yusuf, an avowed traditionalist of the Sufi persuasion is notably the most vocal in promoting the 'broad based principles' of Sunni Islam, and thus he is among the signatories of the aforementioned *Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation Between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge* which entails an agreement to recognise Salafis as fellow Sunnis. This thesis will identify and explore these 'broad-based principles' and test their minimalistic efficacy. Yusuf has promoted these 'broad-based principles' over the past two decades, pushing this forward through his recent translation of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭahāwī's credo.¹⁴

¹² Muhammad.ʿAbd al-Hādī, *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Maʿālim Inṭalaqāt al-Kubrā*. (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṭayba, 1988)

¹³ Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm yajib an tuṣahḥaḥ*. (Casablanca: Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadīthiyya, 2002)

¹⁴ Hamza.Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Ṭahāwī*. [translation, introduction and annotation] (California: Zaytuna Institute, 2008)

It is argued in this study that minimalism is an artificial construct of scholastic traditionalists who are hoping to salvage the historical continuity of 'orthodoxy' and reduce infighting within Sunni Islam. Unity initiatives such as the aforementioned Amman Message and Sunni Pledge will be examined as major case studies in addition to other smaller manifestos and test the theological authenticity of these 'neo-credos'. This thesis is attempting to identify 'minimalism' as a growing and crucial theological trend within Sunni scholastic traditionalism.

Literature review

The aim of this section is to set out the state of knowledge within the field, to examine the contribution of the major authors and to position the thesis within this. It is important to point out that, although the contributions discussed here have to varying extents informed the thesis, no single work to date has broached directly the subject of theological minimalism in the context of Islamic theology. The works selected are of interest from a general perspective.

Watt's *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, now a classic in the field, has no doubt been an important source for the present study. He exhaustively surveys all the major developments of *kalām* from early Islam through to the beginning of the Post-Classical Age (circa 14th century) with particular emphasis on the origins and progression of Ash'arism. The study highlights the imperviousness of Ḥanbalism to Ash'arī dominance and calls this phenomenon 'Ḥanbalī vitality'. Though Watt links this vitality to Wahhābism, he excludes much of the modern polemics and the convergence of Egyptian Salafism with Najdī Wahhābism. While he identifies other classical schools of theology as 'Sunni', Watt does not treat with much depth core Sunni doctrines.¹⁵

¹⁵ Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: an extended survey*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004)

Van Ess in his *Flowering of Muslim Theology* highlights all the major tensions within *kalām* and in particular illustrates the social construction of 'orthodoxies'. Of all the non-Arabic sources consulted in this study, Van Ess attempted intentionally or otherwise to articulate a minimalism which is non-excommunicative in outlook. He discusses alternative narratives of orthodoxy, including those conceived along majoritarian lines, such as 'The Great Masses' (*al-sawād al-aʿẓam*), as well as other minoritarian conceptions of orthodoxy such as the Saved Sect (*al-firqa al-nājiya*), notions which are integral to contemporary Sufi-Salafi polemics. Van Ess's account is sympathetic and arguably outlines a normative theology. However, doctrine and core dogmata are overlooked in this work, as well as how classical doctrinal developments are shaping contemporary traditionalist polemics.¹⁶ This area is one of the main contributions of the present study.

Kung's seminal work *'Islam: Past, Present & Future'* chronicles the development of the Muslim intellectual heritage and draws upon both the Jewish and Christian traditions. This work is both sympathetic yet critical in its overview of Islamic thought. Kung has aptly historicised key doctrinal developments. He has not dealt with much Arabic literature himself and has predominantly approached it from a historical point of view. Additionally, he has to some extent ignored the current polemics of Sunni Islam and how that may fit in his paradigm changes.¹⁷

Abrahamov's work *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* has been informative for the present study insofar as it highlights the perennial dichotomy of traditionalism and rationalism in Islamic theological discourse. He treats the place of

¹⁶ Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*. [trans. Jane Marie Todd] (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006)

¹⁷ Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present & Future*. [trans. John Bowden] (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007)

reason in Muslim theology, the polemics that emerged in the classical period and the difficulty of polarising these approaches. However, Abrahamov has not contextualised this dichotomy within current theological tensions. It is here that the present study builds, exploring the tension of tradition (*naql*) v. reason (*ʿaql*) within contemporary scholastic traditionalism.¹⁸

Lewis' *Islamic Britain* is another important study for the purposes of this thesis since it concentrates on the British Muslim Diaspora, highlighting the significance of the sectarian divides namely Barelwi, Deobandi, and *Ahl-i-Hadīth* and their influence on the politics of identity. His approach is primarily that of a sociological historian though he touches upon the theological differences between these groups and their satellite institutions in Britain.¹⁹ Like Lewis, Geaves has provided an ethnographic, anthropological and historical overview of the Deobandi and Barelwi movements and their influence in Britain. Geaves's analysis on sectarian hostilities within these traditions and the 'lack of interest' on part of 2nd and 3rd generation Muslims in the UK is somewhat inaccurate and out of date.²⁰ Both studies inform the discussion of Deobandi and Barelwi tensions within this thesis.

The purpose of the study

Contemporary extremism, often manifesting itself violently, whether it be of the Jihadist persuasion or the often media paraded, popular communal reactionism to 'blasphemy' as in the Rushdie Affair can be referenced back to classical theology. Apostasy (*ridda*) and excommunication, be it major (*takfīr*) or minor (*tafsīq*), are

¹⁸ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998)

¹⁹ Lewis, Philip. *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*. (London: I.B. Taurus, 1994)

²⁰ Geaves, Ron. *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain with Reference to the concepts of 'Ummah' and 'Community'*. Monograph Series Community Religious Project. (Department of Theology and Religious Studies: University of Leeds, 1996)

intrinsic to theological discourse. Watt claims that 'all theological and philosophical ideas have a political or social reference'.²¹ It is argued in this thesis that minimalism is a response to the politics of the late 20th century and as such will help us understand the theological reference of contemporary extremes. Moreover since *ridda* and *takfir* are products of *kalām* as we shall see, it can be said that this is essentially a 'traditionalist' problem as the modernists are not concerned with the strictures of 'orthodoxy' which produces these mechanisms for self-preservation.

Minimalism is a socially constructed part of the ongoing identity politics of the Sunni Muslim community and its response to new socio-political realities such as globalisation and pluralism. Since the thesis aims to explain the evolution and reaction of religious sectarianism, essentially this study is a sociology of theology – an attempt at understanding the logic behind the historical formation of 'orthodoxies' and doctrinal developments, old and new.

Research in this area hitherto has primarily focused on the sociological explanation of religious sectarianism. Geaves and Lewis both provided extensive and exhaustive ethnographic accounts of the Sunni Muslim Diaspora in the United Kingdom. Metcalf has given a thorough historical socio-political survey of the Sunni factions. This thesis will incorporate as case studies namely, the Barelwi, Deobandi, and *Ahl-i-Hadīth* (Shah Waliullah Nexus) neo-Sufi movements and demonstrate how they can archetypally represent generic trends on the global *umma* scene. Halverson provides a lucid insight into the ongoing fragmentation and competing 'orthodoxies' within Sunnism and how Political Islam is playing a pivotal role in facilitating this polemical dialogue. It is from this corpus and the extant polemical lore in Arabic that I intend to survey and analyse the hypothesis of minimalism.

²¹ Watt p. 1.

The significance of the study

Minimalism may work as it is still in its infancy and at least ostensibly not as rigid as historical 'orthodoxies' of the past. In addition minimalism is not a 'reform' measure in the strictest sense; hence it promises 'continuity' with the past, which is the crux of traditionalism. How other 'classical' religious social exclusion mechanisms such as 'excommunication' may impede minimalism is not clear. Arkoun intimates that the trappings of 'orthodoxy' are intellectually holding Muslim academia back and this thesis is an exhaustive exploration of the problematisation of 'orthodoxy' which as aforementioned brings issues such as excommunication and apostasy to the public forefront.²² Minimalism is symbolically the discussion of the traditionalist 'acknowledgement' of this problem. In sum minimalism is heralding a paradigm shift in Sunni scholastic traditionalism of both the Sufi and Salafi persuasions – it essentially entails the abandoning of the strictures of 'orthodoxy'. It is one step closer to actual reform and has the potential to bridge the gap between traditionalists and modernists.

Methodology

My main approach is that of theological hermeneutics, exploring in a deconstructive manner the development of ideas from providing a general historical survey. In exploring the phenomenon of minimalism I intend to provide a 'genealogy of orthodoxy'. The following entails an itinerary of literature that will be consulted.

- Arabic sources such as the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth canons
- Classical credos in Arabic with their commentaries
- Refutations, Treatises, Fatāwā compendia
- Contemporary polemical literature in Arabic, English and Urdu if and where necessary and available
- Contemporary minimalist literature in Arabic and English if available.

²² Arkoun, Mohammed. *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert* (London: Saqi Essentials, 2006)

- Classical credos with their commentaries and translations where available by Western scholars.
- Historical surveys of theology provided by the likes of Watt, Madelung, Van Ess, Netton *et al.*

My main thesis questions are:

- To what extent is the claim that the concept of 'minimalism' is embedded in classical theological discourse justified?
- To what extent do classical theological schisms shape contemporary polemics?
- To what extent can minimalism work?

Other questions:

- To what extent is the claim that 'new' theological *controversies* are unprecedented?
- To what extent is minimalism a laconic articulation of 'orthodoxy'?
- To what extent do these minimalist initiatives represent an 'inclusive' outlook and maintain 'authenticity'?
- Are these minimalist initiatives a new manifestation of identity-politics?
- Is 'orthodoxy' as claimed by El Shamsi and Brown a social construction? If that is the case, then what does that imply for minimalism?
- To what extent can the parochial manifestations of contemporary traditionalism be helpful in mapping trends and identifying latent tensions?
- Is it possible to adequately map the contemporary intra-Sunni polemical terrain?
- How does the theory of 'minimalism' deal with historical prejudices?
- To what extent does 'orthodoxy' and 'minimalism' resort to 'excommunicative' measures?

CHAPTER ONE: MINIMALISM AS A THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

In essentials - unity,

In non-essentials - liberty,

And in all things – charity

[*St Augustine of Hippo*]

In this chapter minimalism as a formal theory will be presented with its main three components; doctrinal, methodological and ethical. This will be explored by setting the scene within the backdrop of the general intra-Sunni polemics and mapping the intra-sectarian terrain. Moreover other facets of minimalism such as scholastic traditionalism and the 'flight to tradition' phenomena will be introduced. In addition I shall explore the phenomenon of theological minimalism as an emerging social construction of 'orthodoxy' and how historical theological principles have translated into contemporary minimalist dogmatic schemas and religio-political initiatives. I am aiming to understand minimalism as an emerging development within a Sunni theological framework. This thesis will mainly concern itself with the *Sunni* brand of Islam.

1.1 MINIMALISM

The term 'minimalism' in its non-theological setting is somewhat elusive as it permeates many divergent strands of thought and disciplines. As a generic term it is associated with art, architecture and music where a given work as Meyer explains is 'stripped down to its most basic components'.¹

¹ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 3 – 5.

In US Law the philosophy of Judicial Minimalism focuses on a *holistic* interpretation of constitutional law.² As such, Judicial Minimalism has interesting parallels with 'normative jurisprudence' or the object orientated (*maqāṣid*) mechanism within the Islamic legal tradition.³ Postmodern religion has been influenced perhaps by minimalism as an ethos. Minimalism in this regards is interpreted by people of religious persuasions as an incarnation of classical asceticism within the mystic traditions of any given religion.

Theodore Plantinga queries in his essay '*Trimming our sails with the help of philosophy*' whether we should aim for minimalism in religion and theology. He holds that this could help 'stop religious do-gooders to spout nonsense'.⁴ This highlights the polemical atmosphere of doctrinal discourse in religion and in Plantinga's case the contemporary Christian experience.

Scholastic traditionalists in the Muslim faith and in particular Sunni Islam agree in spirit of Plantinga's thesis. Minimalism is more than just theology as it would be an antidote to a dominant polemical discourse amidst traditionalists and modernists in general but between traditionalists in particular. It is in this respect we shall use the term 'minimalism' as a signifier to certain polemical phenomena in Sunni Islam. Svensson argues:

² Christopher J. Peters, 'Adjudication as Representation', *Columbia Law Review*, No. 6 (Oct., 2000), Vol. 100, p. 415. Judicial minimalism though not particularly relevant to theological minimalism there are some parallels with the object orientated *maqāṣid* tradition in Islamic jurisprudence which in spirit is also minimalist.

³ Wael B Hallaq, *A history of Islamic Legal Theory: An introduction to Sunnī Uṣūl al-fiqh*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005), pp. 168 – 174.

⁴ Theodore Plantinga, '*Trimming the Sails with the help of Philosophy*', *Myodicy: Notes on Christianity and Ideas*, 23 (2005) <<http://www.plantinga.ca/m/MCX.HTM>> [accessed 20/1/14]

Doctrinal minimalism is not, however, a late seventeenth-century novelty. It has one of its most important sources in Erasmus and his *philosophia Christi*, which is simple and consists mainly of a good life that drives us away from scholastic disputes and the doctrinal “maximalism” born from such disputes. This is usually portrayed as a return from “speculation” to biblical simplicity.⁵

It can be deduced that minimalism is, in its most basic conception, a theological approach or method (*minhāj*) to manage dogmata. The frequency of the term *minhāj* in Muslim polemical lore indicates the significance of conformity amidst a non-centralised entity such as Sunni Islam. Contemporary *kalām* is very much focused on *minhāj* in addition to the classical ‘orthodoxy’ (*sunna*) and ‘heterodoxy’ (*bid‘a*) dichotomy. This approach could in doctrine be viewed as normative so that minimalism is a process in identifying ‘principles’, just as the classical theologians constructed ‘orthodoxies’ and outlined ‘heterodoxies’.

Moreover the emergence of ‘unity initiatives’ in the Muslim world and the West which we shall include in this chapter are examples of minimalist theologies or new orthodoxies in the making. Furthermore one is dealing with the research question primarily as a theologian therefore much emphasis will be given on set dogmata and the historical context of their development in terms of schools and theological trends and the role they play in formulating current polemical discourse.

1.2 HYPOTHESIS

Polemics is arguably the dominant state of contemporary Sunni theology (*kalām*) and the competing factions embroiled are mainly from the traditionalist camp. In this thesis

⁵ Manfred Svensson, ‘Fundamental Doctrines of the Faith, Fundamental Doctrines of Society: Seventeenth-Century Doctrinal Minimalism’, *The Journal of Religion*, 2nd ser., 94, (2014), p. 163.

it is argued that minimalism is a social construction of scholastic traditionalists in salvaging the historical continuity of 'orthodoxy' and placating infighting within Sunni Islam. Unity initiatives such as the Amman Message and Sunni Pledge will be examined as major case studies in addition to other smaller manifestos and test the theological credence of these neo-credos. I want to explore the claim that these initiatives are representative of an 'inclusive' and 'authentic' outlook.

1.3 MINIMALISM IN AN ISLAMIC CONTEXT

The past few decades has found the idea of minimalism in Sunni traditionalist circles very much in vogue, most notably amongst Sunni Muslim preachers and scholars. The word 'minimalism' in *ʿaqīda* was used by Nuh Keller in his polemical lecture on 'the Altitude of God', describing himself as a minimalist, and arguing that Wahhābī creedalism is maximalist.⁶ Hamza Yusuf another prominent neo-traditionalist scholar has periodically made reference to the 'broad-based principles' of Sunni Islam elucidating the point that doctrine should not have polemical undertones.⁷ Ḥasan al-Bannā' (d. 1368/1949) from amongst the Sunni Islamists put forward at least by the

⁶ Nuh Keller, *Altitude of Allah* [lecture] (1994) <http://www.islamic.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/shaykh_nuh_ha_mim_keller.htm> [accessed 20/1/14] Keller is a guide (murshid) of the Shādhiliya order (*ṭarīqa*) and self-professed minimalist, though known for his polemics against the Wahhābis, was made aware of Sufi scholastic infighting between the Deobandis and Barelwis by his own followers representing both orientations. In response, Keller presented an independent assessment of this raging controversy. It has been received with some discord naturally. Though he has cut through the sub-polemical issues and extrapolated the core areas of contention, he has not outlined a schema of 'orthodoxy' as he and other traditionalists argue for. Nonetheless Keller's work can be seen as micro-minimalism within Sufi scholastic traditionalism - a type which mirrors the Salafi infighting polemical lore

⁷ Hamza Yusuf, *Secularism the Greatest challenge facing Islam*. [lecture] (1994) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AX8ck7jttU>> [accessed 20/1/14]

Muslim Brotherhood as the embodiment of 'centrism' (*waṣaṭiyya*).⁸ Centrism hence became a core leitmotif in Islamist circles to placate theological tensions. This type of understanding is further championed by the contemporary Syrian Jurist and Ash^carite theologian Professor Wahba al-Zuhaylī who posits an Islamic Centrism (*waṣaṭiya al-Islam*) which encourages 'moderation in doctrine and conduct' (*al-ic̣tidāl fi al-ic̣tiqād wa al-sulūk*). He explains centrism in doctrine as a normative dogma that is ostensibly simple and comprehensible to all and also profound enough to appeal to all levels of intellect.⁹ Svensson too argues that doctrinal minimalism is embedded in this egalitarian sentiment.¹⁰ Centrism (*waṣaṭiyya*) of al-Zuhaylī may convey the import of minimalism in Arabic better than a literal translation e.g. *aqalliya*, *adniyya* both imply shortcoming, the latter also denoting disparagement.¹¹ The term minimalism doesn't have an Arabic equivalent though a legal maxim salvages this problem 'the crux of the matter is the concept not the name' (*al-ic̣ibra bi-musammayāt lā bi al-asmā*).¹² Moreover the word *tajrīd* may give the original English meaning of 'stripping' bare, though *waṣaṭiyya* best encapsulates the spirit of the notion,¹³ minimalism is more accurate as it entails as Platinga argued 'trimming'.¹⁴

⁸ Husam Tammam, 'Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and the Muslim Brothers: the nature of a special relationship' in *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī*, ed. by Skovgaard-Peterson and Gräf (London: Hurst and Co Publishers, 2009), p. 70

⁹ Sulṭān al-Ḥarbī, *Mufakkirūn yunāqishūna "Waṣaṭiyya al-Islām wa athruhā fi al-fikr wa al-sulūk"*. 9/3/11 no 13781 (2011) <<http://www.alyaum.com/News/art/6323.html>> [accessed at 20/1/14]

¹⁰ Svensson, p. 177.

¹¹ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980) [entry: قائل], pp. 782-783. [entry: دنو], pp. 294 – 295.

¹² Bassām ^cAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jābī, *Majalla al-Aḥkām al-^cAdliya*. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004), p. 86. [Article 3] This maxim falls under the rubric of *al-ic̣ibra fi al-^cuqūd li al-maqāsid wa al-ma^cānī, lā li al-alfāz wa al-mabānī*.

¹³ Wehr, [entry: مجرد], pp 119-120 [entry: وسط] pp. 1066 – 1067.

¹⁴ Theodore Platinga. *Trimming the Sails with the help of Philosophy*. 2005 <<http://www.platinga.ca/m/MCX.HTM>> [accessed 20/1/14]

Minimalism in this religious sense like 'orthodoxy' would essentially entail subservience to text but not necessarily with the restrictions of literalism or figurative interpretation, it does not indulge in 'is not' (apophatical) and 'if' (hypothetical) methods, neither does it negate them. It would allow interpretations within its own loose matrix of propositions. In this regards *kalām* would have steered the dogmatic functionality of doctrine (*ʿaqīda*), that is to say the mere enunciation of creed more towards the speculative trappings of dialectic theology. Walker seems to echo this hypothesis in his translation of al-Juwaynī's (d. 478/1085) *Conclusive Proofs* in which he argues that *ʿaqīda* became too abstruse due to the dialectics of *kalām*.¹⁵

It may now be pertinent to question what exactly minimalism is in a theological context. Having established that it entails the stripping or trimming of something down to its bare essentials, three core questions arise; firstly, is minimalism a set of doctrines stripped from a body of dogmata? Secondly, is minimalism a method of interpretation or source methodology and lastly is minimalism an ethical attitudinal outlook? The first question may translate into the stripping down of a cohesive dogma by dispensing with certain doctrines, how this may bode with traditionalists is unpredictable. The second question will require an insight in text interpretation methods. The last question perhaps moves in to the domain of social constructionism. Furthermore a more challenging question one would like to examine is at what point does minimalism in Islamic theology loose its mainstream appeal and itself become dogmatic.

1.4 MINIMALISM AS FORMAL THEORY

After considering the above dimensions of minimalism, if one were to 'strip the Islamic dogma down to its bare essentials' and present like Thomas Hobbes (d. 1090/1679) an *unum necessarium*, then the creed of Islam would simply be the testimony '*there is no*

¹⁵ Abū al-Maʿālī Al-Juwaynī, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitāb Al-irshād ilā qawāṭiʿ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-ʿitiqād*. (Reading: Garnett Publishing Limited, 2000), pp. xix – xx.

god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger'. This form of minimalism theoretically would be incontestable to all Muslims irrespective of their sectarian persuasions.¹⁶ However this level of minimalism is too rudimentary to necessarily constitute a minimalism which encapsulates a 'Sunni' outlook i.e. one which provides 'orthodox' bearings. Moreover many traditionalists may perceive minimalism as a form of modernism due to its pluralistic revisionism and potential latitude in doctrinal issues.

Attempts at providing a minimalist framework within doctrine have been postulated by many different thinkers within the Islamic tradition at certain periods of history as we shall see. Drawing upon this I have identified three strands of minimalism; minimalist doctrine, minimalist theological methodology and minimalist ethics. Minimalist theological methodology and ethics shall be dealt with in the coming chapters. As for minimalist doctrine, one would argue that there are three layers:

1. The first layer would entail the agreed upon creed of all Muslims be they Sunni or otherwise such as the 'testimony of faith' (*shāhāda*) i.e. '*There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger*'
2. The second layer would consist of doctrines such as the six articles of faith (*belief in God, His angels, His Books, His messengers, the Last Day and the Decree*) which generally all Muslims would agree upon with some disagreement on the doctrine of the Decree and understanding the essence of God.
3. The third layer would comprise of certain agreed upon principles of Sunni Islam (*al-uṣūl allatī ittafaq 'alayhi ahl al-sunna*) which in reality is a kind of normative dogmatism advocated notably by Ḥanbalī theologians, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) being at the forefront.

¹⁶ Mainstream Muslims stipulate the belief in the finality of prophethood (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) as intrinsic to this doctrine; nonetheless it is a creed Muslims of all hues regard as essential.

Minimalist theological methodology also has three main layers:

1. The first layer consists of the *general affiliation* to early Sunni Muslim scholarship especially that of the Pious Predecessors (*salaf*).
2. The second would include the theological (*kalām*) traditions of mainstream Sunni Islam, namely the majority Ash^ʿarite, Māturīdite and minority Ḥanbalī (Atharite) schools.
3. The third layer would be made up of parochial traditions like the Indo-Pak Deobandi, Bareilwi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movements or Arab Sufi and Wahhābī traditions.

Methodological minimalism may include doctrinal issues, however the key feature of this minimalism is its designation of scholarship (*ʿulamāʾ*) as a source methodology or the devolving of authority to them.

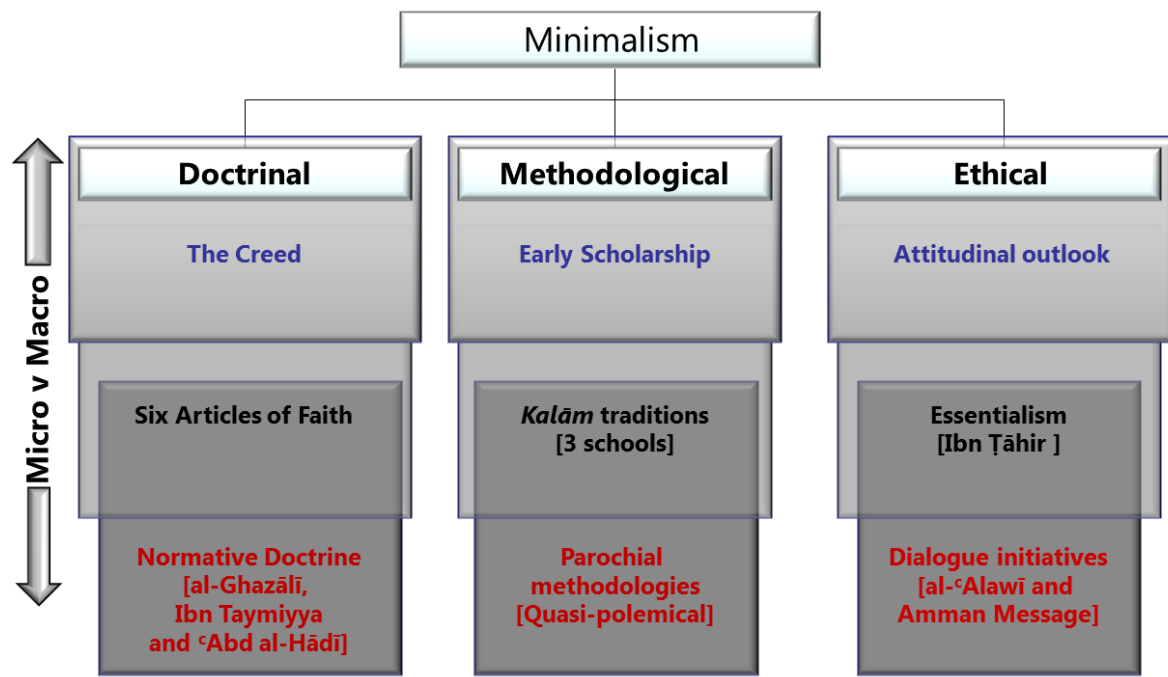
Ethical minimalism likewise consists of three main layers:

1. The first layer would consist of a framework comprising of an attitudinal outlook. Most notably being inclusive and non-excommunicative.
2. The second layer would be an essentialism which could serve as an ethos.
3. The third layer would include modern dialogue and unity initiatives.

Each layer complements the former and expands upon it. The inner layers would facilitate *macro-minimalism* which would be agreeable especially in doctrinal minimalism to Muslims of all persuasions. However the outer layers would largely provide *micro-minimalism* as these are where debates and tensions would ensue. In the present work one is mainly focusing on minimalism within the remit of Sunni scholastic traditionalism and whether macro/micro minimalism is possible, or if indeed

neither at all. Modernism will be dealt with but in a cursory manner as it is beyond the scope of this present work.

Figure 1:1 Minimalist Paradigm



1.4.1 DOCTRINAL MINIMALISM

Dogmatic Islam has played a significant role in the formulation of doctrines and methods of interpreting text. Indeed dogma (*‘aqīda*) provided the framework for the evolution of schools of theology and the dialectic problems that resulted from these stem from base *‘aqīda*. Currently the revival and cultivation of theology in Sunni scholastic traditionalism has been supplanted with polemics which would have hitherto been inconsequential peripheral issues but now take centre stage influencing the dynamics between divergent trends. As such, it is perceived as Netton maintains ‘a flight to tradition’ and as far as minimalism is concerned this would be a flight to correct belief, as juristic ethical difference can be more easily dispensed with. Therefore *‘aqīda* in terms of the very articles of belief would be the most crucial factor in

minimalism as theology is merely an 'intellectual/rational' articulation of accepted dogmata.

1.4.1.a The testimony as a minimalism – a largely Qur'ān specific approach

The Islamic creed as is espoused by definitive verses of the Qur'ān has been posited as a form of minimalism. This creed would include the basic creeds of monotheism, finality of Muhammad's prophethood and some eschatological issues. Stress on this type of minimalism would be placed merely on the affirmation of the articles of belief and not necessarily a detailed discussion of any of it i.e. those issues which would require figurative interpretation would be avoided. Moreover this approach is slightly sceptical of creedal propositions backed by the Ḥadīth literature. Modernist thinkers like Ghulam Parvez and others subscribe to this type of minimalism and scepticism to Ḥadīth based *'aqīda*. There are some sceptical discussions within the traditional Ash'arī school which shall be highlighted in later chapters. Ultimately the testimony would be the greatest and most significant manifestation of a minimalism as this would entail the complete *stripping off* of peripheral doctrines.

1.4.1.b The six articles of faith as a minimalism – a largely Qur'ān and Ḥadīth approach

The 2004 Amman Message, one of our case studies for minimalism, was a conference which comprised of many representatives from Sunni, Shiite and Ibāḍite scholarship who unanimously agreed that their core beliefs are the same.

'All are in agreement about the five pillars of Islam: the two testaments of faith (*shahādātayn*); the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*); almsgiving (*zakāt*); fasting the month of Ramadan (*ṣawm*), and the Ḥajj to the sacred house of God (in Mecca). All are also in agreement about the foundations of belief: belief in Allah (God),

His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and in the Day of Judgment, in Divine Providence in good and in evil.¹⁷

The two testaments are incorporated in the basic aforementioned creed. The Five Pillars of Islam (*arkān al-islām*) are a creedal acceptance of the obligation of performing these tasks as they are definitively proven in the Qur'ān. As for the 'foundations of belief' (*arkān al-īmān*) or 'six articles of faith', these are derived largely from the Qur'ān Q2:285, Q4:136 and other verses throughout the Qur'ānic text. Notwithstanding the agreement of scholars at the Amman Convention, the verses pertaining to divine decree and destiny have been open to interpretation. Free will and determinism find their roots in the *ʿaqīda* discussions of classical Islam and remain surrounded by a range of interpretations which continue to persist to this day. Though the Sunni creed regarding the divine decree as is understood from doctrinal texts resembles the 'compatibilism' of free will and predestination of Hobbes, contemporary attitudes amongst scholastic traditionalism of all persuasions appears to be largely fatalist. Modernist revivalists like Iqbal on the other hand are exponents of freewill.¹⁸ It is likely those who have traditionally argued against the inclusion of destiny as an essential component of creed would have done so under the premise that it is not mentioned with the other five articles in the Qur'ān. The complete six article formula is found in the tradition of Gabriel (*ḥadīth Jibrīl*) where Gabriel is said to have asked Muhammad what faith is, to which he replied;

*'Faith is to believe in God, the Angels, the Books, the Messengers, the Last Day and the Decree, the good of it and the bad of it'*¹⁹

¹⁷ H.M. King Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein, *'The Amman Message'*. (Amman: the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), p. 17. PDF <<http://www.ammanmessage.com/>> [accessed 20/1/14]

¹⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2013) pp. 49,109.

¹⁹ Sahih Muslim, 1:5, 97, p. 681.

This tradition in its own right lays down the framework for a tripartite minimalism as we shall discuss later. Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī uses these six articles as a minimalism in and of itself. In his terse commentary on the *‘Aqīda* of Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) he remodels the text in a template which fits into these six articles. I would argue that the inclusion of the decree is what gives these articles its Sunni idiosyncratic mark. This is for two reasons; the first being its *amodal* manner in dealing with abstruse creedal issues and secondly that it itself is based on Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) which indicates Sunni Islam’s textualism. The six articles of faith would constitute the second most significant expression of doctrinal minimalism. At this level there is a slight ‘Sunni’ imprint on this doctrine.

1.4.1.c The thirteen principles of Sunni Islam – a largely interpretative (ta’wīlī) and ḥadīth specific approach

Jurisprudential studies are split in two main areas the case studies or rulings of schools which are termed the ‘branches’ (*furū‘*) and the rules or principles (*uṣūl*) which were used to arrive at such rulings. In the same vein a set of doctrines has been established from the textual sources. Many books and small treatises have been authored in attempts to collate doctrinal data which is replete in the *ḥadīth* corpus.

Schools of theology initially emerged as a means by which to *polemically* defend doctrine, while also identify principles of belief or rules pertaining to the management of dogma. These schools did propose doctrinal outlines, however because of early polemics these very principles were obfuscated by peripheral doctrinal issues.

Thirteen Sunni specific principles have been asserted by ‘Abd al-Hādī as being the ‘agreed upon’ principles of Sunni Islam. Though these thirteen points may not be the only principles of Sunnism they represent the core creedal propositions found in

doctrinal primers like the Māturīdī *al-ʿAqāʿid* of Abū ʿUmar al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), the Ashʿarī *Jawhara* of al-Laqqānī (d. 1041/1632) and finally the Ḥanbalī (Atharī) *Lumʿa al-ʿItiqād* of Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 620/1223). Most if not all their creedal pronouncements could be encapsulated within the following thirteen principles of ʿAbd al-Hādī. One is of the view that these thirteen points would provide a workable framework for a Sunni minimalism which is more elaborate than just the six articles in fact the thirteen can be neatly placed as extensions of the six articles. They are as follows:

1. Faith consists of enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and action through compliance. It increases through good deeds and decreases through sins.
2. Faith is of two types; principle [*aṣl*] which are the doctrines and subsidiaries [*furūʿ*] which entails conviction in those doctrines and actions which emanate as the fruits of faith:
3. Affirmation [*ithbāt*] of the Divine Attributes with amodality [*tafwīḍ*]. And transcendence [*tanzīh*] without denial [*taʿṭīl*]
4. Nobody could see God in this world:
5. The Beatific Vision [*al-ruʿya*] of God in the Garden is true.
6. Belief in the marvels [*karamāt*] of the saints [*awliyā*].
7. The Qurʾān is the uncreated speech of God.
8. Affirmation of doctrinal matters confirmed by solitary transmission [*khabr āḥād*].*
9. Loving and following the Companions of the Prophet and his family, his wives, at the same time acknowledging that no one is impeccable other than the Prophet.
10. Belief in everything the Prophet informed us regarding life after death.
11. No one can be guaranteed punishment or reward without a specific proof.
12. Belief in predestination.

13. Obedience to the emirs– be they pious or impious – in order to establish the laws of Islam [Hajj, Jihad + Islamic governance].²⁰

It is not clear whether these principles were enunciated by one person or simply synthetically amalgamated by many from disparate statements of early Islamic scholarship. Furthermore these Sunni ‘principles’ are seldom cited by mainstream Sunnis though they may actually subscribe to these themselves. Salafi circles make passing reference to these. However these principles have the potential to undermine their rigid ‘methodology of the Salaf’ (*minhāj al-salaf*) as it seems fluid enough to accommodate broader Sunni understandings i.e. those of theological persuasions. Of all the possible modes of minimalism these 13 points may prove to be the most potent. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, they are pertinent to Sunni discourse albeit at a base level, secondly they constitute doctrines in themselves and they are distinctively comprehensive without being too universal nor decidedly particular in their focus. In addition, though these can be accepted by not only the classical schools of Sunni theology but also the contemporary scholastic traditionalist parochial methodologies, points 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 are susceptible to interpretation. I shall assess in the coming chapters the veracity of this model in light of considerations such as figurative interpretation and literalism and also establish to what extent this potentiality could undermine its efficacy as a workable minimalism.

1.4.1.d Normative doctrine

In jurisprudential studies the discipline of ‘objectives of law’ (*maqāṣid al-shārʿa*) or what in common law is called normative jurisprudence emerged as a sub-science of theoretical jurisprudence which transcended the mere interpretative and deductive methods of given legal rulings. This discipline illustrated that there is a rationale (*ʿilla*)

²⁰ Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī, *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Maʿālim Inṭalaqāt al-Kubrā*. (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṭayba, 1988) pp. 87 – 96.

behind every ruling in sacred law.²¹ One could deduce that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) strove to lay the foundations of a minimalism that sought to do the same for dogmata. The most significant of his works in this regards are *Al-Iqtiṣād fi al-ʿItiqād* and *Ijām al-ʿAwām* in addition to the *Fayṣal al-Tafrīqa*. In the *Iqtiṣād* he devotes four key categories of doctrine; the first is the essence and transcendence of God, the second is Divine Attributes and their sempiternity, the third is the discussion on the rationale on God’s actions and the fourth is prophetology and eschatology. Though still largely conformist to the Ashʿarī model one could argue that the *iqtiṣād* was his attempt to organise doctrine in a palatable manner and as the title in Arabic suggests, – moderation in doctrine. The *Ijām* on the other hand indicates a shift in al-Ghazālī’s approach in his own words;

‘I intend to clarify to you the doctrine of the Pious Predecessors, by explaining what is obligatory upon the general masses to believe in regarding these reports from them....in it I will elucidate what needs looking into and *what can be dispensed with*’²²

Though the *Ijām* was a polemic against the anthropomorphists, it was simultaneously and most significantly an attempt to simplify doctrine irrespective of the suspicions surrounding its authenticity. It is interesting to note that throughout this work he pushed amodality (*bilā kayf*) and, again as the title suggests purging nuanced *kalām* from doctrine though the methods of al-Ashʿarī’s (d. 936/324) transcendence is replete in the text.

²¹ Muḥammad Abdū, *Al-Fikr al-Maqāṣidī ʿinda al-Imām al-Ghazālī*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2009) pp. 9- 11.

²² Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Ijām al-ʿawām ʿan ʿilm al-Kalām* in *Majmūʿa rasāʿil al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, [no date]), pp. 319 – 356. Note that the authenticity of this book being authored by al-Ghazālī is circumspect.

1.4.2 METHODOLOGICAL MINIMALISM

Though scholastic traditionalists take pride in their syllabi as it includes theology (*kalām*) as one of their core disciplines, *kalām* has largely stagnated, and I am contending that a polemical 'fight for orthodoxy' has taken its place. Discussions on atomism, epistemology and other classical *kalām* doctrines have not been updated with developments in Western philosophy and science, like political ideologies, evolution and quantum physics. We are now witnessing a discourse centred largely on peripheral issues brought on by the fusion of Sufism and theology and on the other hand jurisprudential romanticism as is exemplified in the contemporary Sufi-Salafi divide.

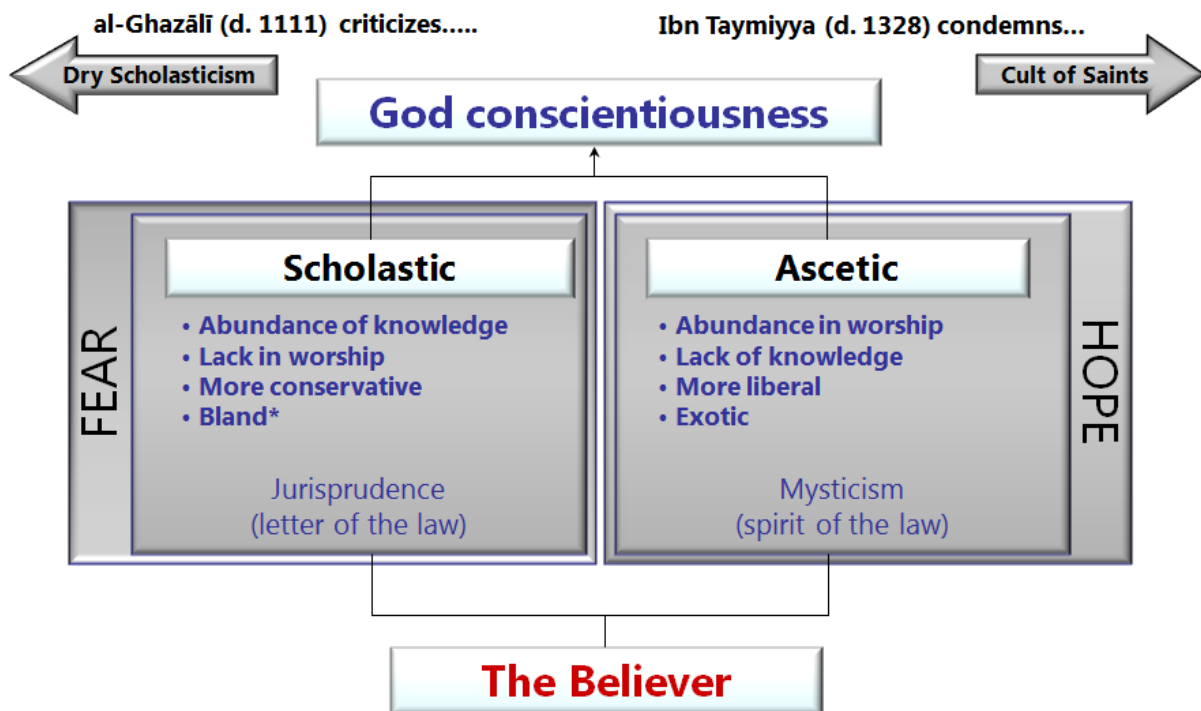
The main polemic within Sunni Islam on the macro level is dissonance between Sufism and Salafism. That is, if Sufism is understood as mysticism and Salafism as legalism. This could be understood as an extension of al-Ghazālī's jurist (*faqīh*) versus mystic (*sūfi*) divide or Ibn Taymiyya's scholar (*ʿālim*) versus ascetic (*zāhid*). In this narrative the objective of the believer is piety and God-consciousness (*taqwā*).²³ The scholar's knowledge may bring them closer to God even with little devotion as they are moved by *fear* of straying from the *rules* set by God; whilst the ascetic's devotion and love of God brings him/her closer to Him. He or she is not too concerned about rules as in everything they are moved by the *hope* in God's benevolence and that their actions are in *spirit* with the will of God. Polarizations of both methods have been criticised. Al-Ghazālī criticises the dryness or bland nature of the scholastic method, whereas Ibn Taymiyya condemns the cult of personality that results from what he regards as the uninformed method of the ascetic in relinquishing textualism and over-reliance on human intermediaries.²⁴ It is worthy to note that perhaps this dualism in the early days

²³ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Qudāma, *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn*. (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Īmān, [no date]), pp. 18 -19.

²⁴ Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: an extended survey*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 88, 142 – 146.

was not necessarily polemical but rather methodological however gradual controversies throughout the ages may have served as a catalyst which polarised these methods into a polemic.

Figure 1:2 Methods of religiosity



The Sufi –Salafi models are of course not monolithic and neither is each group homogenous. I will concentrate on four popular traditions namely, the Barelwi, Deobandi, Wahhābī and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* which are prey to this polarised divide. The Barelwi and Deobandi factions fall under the Sufi camp and have much in common yet are beset in a sub-polemic amongst themselves, something we shall explore in chapter five. The Deobandis on the other hand have a complicated relationship with the Salafi camp as they sympathise with them on many issues. The Wahhābīs and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* have strong links between themselves. One would argue that these four factions are to some extent archetypal of the current polemic and other Arab/non-Arab models can be construed in this manner:

1. Folkloric Sufism [the Barelwis]
2. Reform Sufism [the Deobandis]
3. Conformist Salafism [the Wahhābīs]
4. Non-conformist Salafism [the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*]

In the Arab lands the Tījāniya and Ḥabashiya orders have strong parallels with the Barelwi movement in that much emphasis is placed on the ritualistic aspects of mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) and the personality of the *Shaykh* of the order. The Sanūsiya order would be an appropriate counterpart of the Deobandis in that though inspired by Sufism they intend to purge it from ‘impurities’. Many non-Ash‘arī yet *madhhab* followers could be likened to the Wahhābīs and in fact some, like Shu‘ayb al-Arnaut a renowned Ḥanafī *ḥadīth* scholar, subscribes to the doctrines of Wahhābism.²⁵

The core polemics between the Sufi and Salafi divide are doctrinal but extend also to the jurisprudential. Firstly the age old debate over the attributes of God. Though not all Ash‘arīs are Sufis, most contemporary Sufis would subscribe to the Ash‘arī school of theology.²⁶ Ash‘arism is considered neo-Mu‘tazilism by the Salafis because of its use of figurative interpretation in understanding the Divine Attributes and because of the general role of reason (*‘aql*) in relation to scripture (*naql*).²⁷ Atharism is a relatively obscure revival in Syria of Ḥanbalī *kalām* of Ibn Qudāma and others. These Atharīs claim that this school is an ‘orthodox’ addition to the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools and their ideologue is Muhammad Sālim al-Safārīni (d. 1188/1774).²⁸ Existing Ash‘arī and Māturīdīs largely ignore or are unaware of even the existence of this school. This is

²⁵ Abū al-‘Izz al-Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, 2 vols (Beirut: Resalah Publications, 2001), i, pp. 7 – 32.

²⁶ Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alawī al-Mālikī, *Mafāhīm yajib an tuṣaḥḥaḥ*. (Casablanca: Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadīthiyya, 2002), pp. 97 – 99.

²⁷ Safar Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥawālī, *Manhaj al-Ash‘ira fi al-‘Aqīda: Hal al-Ash‘ira min Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. (Sana: Markaz al-Siddiq al-‘Ilmī, 2000), pp 18 – 20.

²⁸ Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abdullah al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-Durra al-Marḍiyya fi ‘Aqd Ahl al-Firqa al-Marḍiyya* Riyadh: Muhammad Suleiman Publications, 2004), pp. 5- 10.

further complicated as Wahhābīs also claim to be Atharī and hail al-Safārīnī as one of their imams. In general the Sufis or Ashʿarīs to be precise view Atharism as neo-anthropomorphism. Halverson's account of Atharism ignores Safārīnī's Atharism and seems to confuse it with Salafism.²⁹

Secondly the issue of prophetology or specifically the nature of Muhammad did not hold a central position in the classical period of Islam in theology. However it has now become one the most controversial issues amongst Sunni Muslims. Central to this is the issue of blasphemy against the Prophet. The Sufis argue for sublime prophetology, that Muhammad is unlike any human while the Salafis contend for mortal prophetology that he is of flesh and blood. Sublime prophetology includes the infallibility of the Prophet but more specifically an exoticism regarding the Muhammadan essence. Mortal prophetology stresses the humanness of Muhammad. This debate is generally not too controversial in the generic Salafi Sufi divide however it is an area of huge discord within the Sufi scholastic traditions of the Sub-continent as is exemplified in Prophet Muhammad's knowledge of the Unseen. Essentially this issue broadens the discussion of what actually constitutes blasphemy against Muhammad. I shall discuss this at length in chapter five.

Thirdly the question of intercession which was traditionally a part of theological discussions has now become a polarised debate. Khārijites and Muʿtazilites reject intercession outright on seemingly definitive textual grounds. Sunni Islam however has a complex understanding of this issue. The theologians and traditionalists all agree that one may intercede through God's names or one's own good deeds. The area of contention however, is intercession through righteous men or women of God. Theologians argue that this includes both living and dead righteous folk whereas traditionalists (*muḥaddithūn*) would argue only the living may be granted such rank and

²⁹ Jeffery R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ashʿarism and Political Islam*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 35 – 57.

that intercession through the dead would entail *shirk*. Ḥasan al-Bannā' argues that this is more a jurisprudential debate than a doctrinal one in point fifteen of his *Twenty Principles*.³⁰

A key area of jurisprudential discord occurs in acts of worship in particular Sufi rituals such as collective remembrance (*dhikr*) especially if this is synchronous. When bodily movements are associated with verbal remembrance it becomes more controversial. The *ḥaḍara* is one such form of *dhikr* practiced by orders like the Shādhiliyya and is pejoratively referred as *raqṣ* (dancing) and is condemned by Wahhābīs as well as some reform Sufis including Shaykh Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī.³¹

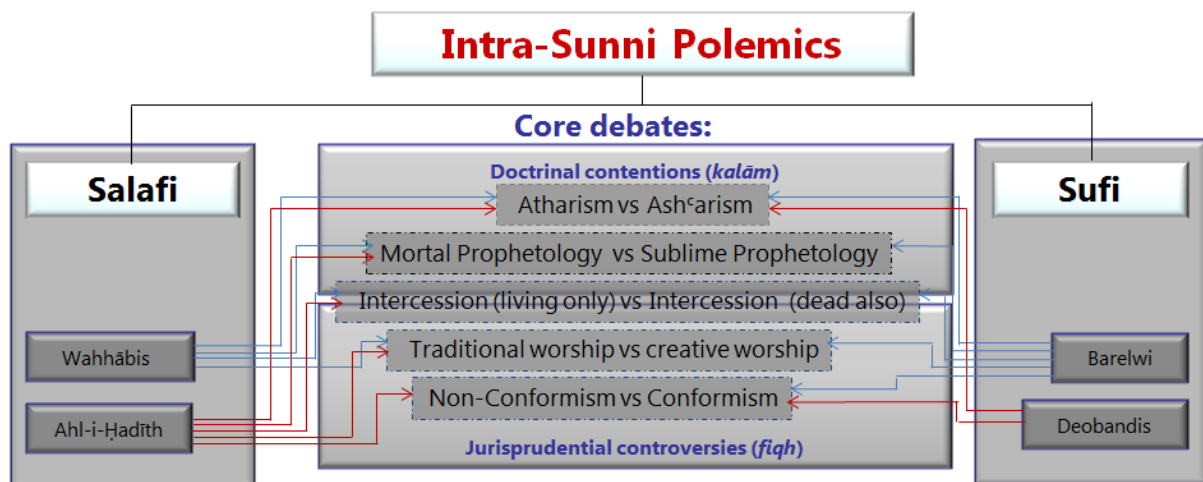
The *madhhab* versus *no-madhhab* debate is a jurisprudential issue which divides scholastic traditionalism into two camps. Salafism generally implies non-conformism with the exception of the Wahhābīs. Sufis are now almost exclusively conformist. This debate was at its apex in the late 1980s to the 90s in the West and was arguably the most defining polemic between the two camps.³²

³⁰ ʿAbdullah Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Shumūl al-Islām: fī ḍaw' sharḥ ʿilmī mufaṣṣal li al-uṣūl al-ʿishrīn li al-imām al-shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā'* (Beirut: Resalah Publications, 1997), pp. 18.

³¹ Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Fiqh al-Sīra: maʿa mūjiz al-tārīkh al-khilāfa al-rāshida*. (Cairo: Dār al-Salām: li-ṭibāʿa wa al-nashr wa al-tawzīʿ, 2004), pp. 302 – 304.

³² Tim Winter (Abdal-Hakim Murad), 'Understanding the Four Madhhabs: the problem with anti-madhhabism' <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/newmadhh.htm>> [accessed at 12/3/15]

Figure 1:3 Doctrinal and jurisprudential tensions



1.4.2.a Flight to tradition –classicist minimalism

Netton observes from a phenomenological assessment of Islam and Christianity that both traditions have exhibited a 'flight to tradition' as a reaction to the challenges of modernity. Islam and Christianity are on the one hand text-bound but also are represented through the dynamism of tradition as is found in the Pious Predecessors and the Church Forefathers respectively. Netton sheds some light on the organic notion of Sunna in Islam:

'The terms *sunna* and *ḥadīth* have a certain fluidity, but both technical terms have become virtually synonymous. Strictly speaking, 'where the term *ḥadīth* refers to a document, the term *sunna* refers to the usage described in such a document'. Both may be rendered as 'tradition/Tradition'.

The observance by the Islamic *umma* (community) of the *sunna* is the *Imitatio Muhammadi*.....As a sign, then, the term *sunna* in Islamic Arabic signals at least four major areas of discourse, as may be seen from the above discussions: it alerts us via the

Qur'ān to Divine custom and precedent; it reminds us of *jāhili* (pre-Islamic) tribal custom and precedent; it focuses the Muslim mind from an early period on the custom and precedent of the Prophet Muhammad; and it speaks of a desired 'orthodoxy' enshrined in *communal* (but by no means monolithic) custom and precedent, with all the developed and developing and theological implications of such established customs down the ages.³³

Sufi and Wahhābī trends of thought fall under scholastic traditionalism in the sense that both advocate *textual* literalism or interpretation for that matter as is sanctioned by *scholars* (*ʿulamāʾ*). Therefore scholarship is integral to traditionalism and consequently the best scholarship of Islam to this collective happens to be the prophetically 'proclaimed generations' (*al-qurūn al-mashūda lahum bi al-khayr*).³⁴ The motif of a 'return to the Salaf' has been recurrent through Islamic history and most Sufi revivalists too promoted such a return to 'simple Islam'. Netton suggests the key difference between Sufi scholastic traditionalism and Salafi scholastic traditionalism is that Sufi traditionalism is inspired by imitation (*taqlīd*) of the early generations in addition to the accumulative corpus of knowledge of the progenitors of this strand of thought whereas the Salafis who are inspired by Ibn Taymiyya are anti-*taqlīd* and polemically set themselves against the four established schools of thought and their conclusions on the interpretations of the sacred texts.³⁵ They are pro-*ijtihād*, at times they have been pro-rationalist as is the case with the Egyptian *Daʿwa al-Salafiyya* of Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) but largely this strand has been eclipsed by Wahhābī puritanism. It seems Wahhābism did not necessarily set itself as a *Daʿwa*

³³ Ian R Netton, *Islam, Christianity and Tradition: A comparative exploration*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 126.

³⁴ Sahih Bukhārī 'The Best of the Community is my generation, then those who come after them and then those who come after them'. 3450/3451

³⁵ Netton, *Christianity and Traditio*, p. 129.

Salafiyya, this notion was introduced by Muhammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī who according to his protégé ʿAlī Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī was deeply influenced by the *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Rashid Riḍā (d. 1354/1935).³⁶ From this it could be said that al-Albānī changed the spirit of the rationalist Salafism ʿAbduh, and Riḍā, and fused it with Wahhābī rejectionism. Netton draws striking parallels with the Lefevberist doctrine and Wahhābīs in their anti-modern and excommunicative outlook. Importantly though Salafism is by no means a monolithic school in itself. One would like to point out here that there is a base Salafism acceptable to all which unlike the methodological Salafism of the Wahhābī strand recognises a simple Islam but not through *isnād* of Ḥanbalīs like Ibn Taymiyya *per se*. One may even call this Salafi minimalism in a broad sense.

1.4.2.b Scholastic traditionalism or the theological schools of Sunni Islam as minimalism – a largely speculative approach

Primarily scholastic traditionalism which will be discussed in some later chapters is as Tariq Ramadan points out essentially the following of scholarship (*ʿulamāʾ*).³⁷ In its broadest application it would refer to scholarship of the 'classical' period of Islam. For the Sufis it would comprise largely of speculative theology based on the Ashʿarī or Māturīdī schools, conformism to one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence with Sufism as an option. This approach espouses imitation (*taqlīd*) of its scholarship. On

³⁶ Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī, *Ḥayāt al-Albānī: wa Athāruhu wa Thanāʾ al-ʿUlamāʾ ʿalayhi*. (Maktaba al-Sarrāwī, 1987), pp. 400 – 402.

³⁷ Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context*. (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 239 – 241. Ramadan has provided appendices with some reference to the sectarian diversity within the Sunni diaspora. In particular his identification of what he terms 'scholastic traditionalism' is of interest to this study as it provides an effective framework in mapping the polemical terrain. He has made a clear distinction between Salafi reformism and Salafi traditionalism (Wahhabism). Ramadan has alluded to the polemics but not the dynamics between these traditions.

the other hand for the Salafis it would entail non-conformism to schools of Jurisprudence and a rudimentary creedal affiliation to early Muslims or in particular Ḥadīth scholars (*ahl al-ḥadīth*). This approach ostensibly promotes independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). Moreover a new development has taken place in Islamic theological studies, the emergence of a third Sunni school calling itself the Athariyya. One would like to postulate here that this is another example in addition to the Wahhābism of Watt's 'Ḥanbalī vitality' which was largely ignored by the vast majority Muslim and Western writers for some time. This is largely unheard of, however claims to this school are being made on the one hand by Wahhābī Ḥanbalīs and more interestingly Sufi Ḥanbalīs in Syria by a convert scholar Musa Ferber.³⁸ The only academic work I have discovered that deals with this Atharī school or least mentions it is Jeffrey Halverson's *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam*. However Halverson's account of Atharism is to some extent convoluted as he does not make the differentiation of Syrian Ḥanbalī Atharism and Wahhābī Najdī Atharism rather presenting Wahhābism as a homogenous Atharism.³⁹ Discussion of the Atharī school is indeed an intriguing matter as on the one hand it challenges the traditional mainstream view of an Ash'arī and Māturīdī model of mainstream 'orthodoxy' hence ushering perhaps a revisionism and on the other hand how it does not challenge the 'validity' of the said model it merely deems itself an addition to the mainstream and not necessarily an exclusive model of 'orthodoxy'. Notwithstanding that the claim for Athariya is being compromised as Wahhābīs like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān and others are beginning to appropriate the Syrian Atharī chain into Najdī Wahhābism and consequently polarising it against an Ash'arī and Māturīdī model.⁴⁰ Muhammad Ibn Sālim al-Safārīnī (d. 1188/1774) maintains that

³⁸ Musa Furber. 'About Me', *Musa's Muftic Musings*. (2012) <<http://www.musafurber.com/biography/>> [accessed 14/3/15]

³⁹ Halverson, pp. 34 – 44.

⁴⁰ Al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-Durra al-Mardīyya*, pp. 11 – 14.

the 'saved sect' consists of the Ash^ʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī schools.⁴¹ This notion of a three schools 'orthodoxy' is a type of compatibilist mainstream which is to some extent bridging a polarised traditionalist (*muhaddithūn*) versus theologians (*mutakallimūn*) gap. It on the one hand may give credence to the Wahhābīs as being part of the broader Sunni tradition but, on the other, will be challenging in their circles as it compromises their age old antagonism to theological schools. Likewise it would force the theological model to reconsider its rigid formulations of 'orthodoxy'. I shall discuss the significance of al-Safārīnī's 'three schools' statement for minimalism in later chapters. It is of note here that Watt's assessment of other defunct 'Sunni' schools of theology too may challenge normative *ʿaqīda* and models of orthodoxy.⁴²

Paradoxically all the schools of Sunni theology maintain that imitation (*taqlīd*) in creedal matters is unlawful therefore an individual must understand his or her religion according to their own capacity and exert their intellect in doing so.⁴³ However there is a strong emphasis in Sufi scholastic traditionalism not to differ with the Ash^ʿarī and Māturīdī models as they are paradigms of 'orthodoxy'⁴⁴. Likewise the Salafi scholastic traditionalists emphasise that the doctrinal position of the early generations the Salaf are manifest on truth.⁴⁵ In essence this precludes the plausibility of not initiating precedent.

Furthermore it is interesting to note that some Deobandi scholars like Yūsuf Binnūrī seemed to advocate a three school methodology in the 20th century in his introduction

⁴¹ Muḥammad ibn Sālim Al-Safārīnī, *Lawā'ih al-Anwār al-Saniyya wa Lawāqih al-Afkār al-Sunniya: Sharḥ qaṣīda ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Hā'iyya fī ʿAqīda Ahl al-Athār al-Salafiyya*. (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Rushd, [no date]), pp. 141 - 142.

⁴² Watt, pp. 98 – 110.

⁴³ Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ʿalā Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2003), pp. 108 – 112.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 339.

⁴⁵ Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma, *Lumʿa al-ʿItiqād al-Hādī ilā Sabīl al-Rashād (commentary Ibn ʿUthaymīn)*. (Riyadh: Maktaba Ṭabariyya, 1995), pp. 35 – 38.

to Anwar Shah Kashmiri's (d. 1352/1933) *Ikfār al-Mulḥidīn fi Ḍurūriyāt al-Dīn* a refutation against the Ahmadiyya sect, or more precisely an excommunication of this sect.⁴⁶ The Deobandis have by their opponents and critics been described as either Wahhābī or quasi-Wahhābī. Indeed the Deobandis especially those of Rashīd Gangohī's (d. 1323/1905) ilk not only admired but had links with the Wahhābī scholarship of Saudi. Consequently one may conclude that the Deobandis were juggling with the notion of reconciling Sufi scholastic traditionalism with Salafi/Wahhābī scholastic traditionalism and posited a tripartite minimalism of Sunni theological schools or methods i.e. Ash^ʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī. Perhaps this minimalism was an attempt to placate either the apprehensions of the Sufis or the Salafis regarding their own particular group. More plausibly it is what could be termed the 'Shah Waliullah effect', a notion we shall explore later.

Although Ḥasan al-Bannā' (d. 1368/1949) the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood has made some theological observations regarding minimalism which we shall look at later, even the Brotherhood despite being a political movement, for some reason has never deemed it expedient to adopt a tripartite model. In fact on the one hand they have largely adopted the Wahhābī creed and thus are opposed to the *kalām* traditions⁴⁷, and then figures like Sa^ʿīd Ḥawwā push forward the Sufi scholastic traditionalist model of conformism to jurisprudential schools and theological affiliations to Ash^ʿarī or Māturīdī schools only.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Muḥammad Anwar Shāh Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār al-Mulḥidīn fi Ḍurūriyāt al-Dīn* (Karachi: al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī, 1996), p. iv. (s)

⁴⁷ Halverson, pp. 65 – 68.

⁴⁸ Sa^ʿīd Ḥawwā, *Jawlāt fi al-Fiḡhayn al-Kabīr wa al-Akbar wa Uṣūlihimā: Abḥāth tujīb ʿalā aḥamm al-as'ila fi naẓariyāt al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya*. (Beirut: Dār ʿAmmār, 1988), pp. 14 -15.

1.4.2.c Ṭaḥāwism as a minimalism

Al-Ṭaḥāwī's *Bayān al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ca* or what is commonly referred to as the *ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya* is rapidly becoming a broad-based text which loosely unites most Sunnis whether of the Sufi or Salafi persuasions. Ironically it has not been a mainstream text insofar as wide dissemination yet it now yields a strong mainstream status. It is almost absent from the traditional syllabi of most of the Muslim world though it seems it was largely taught in Syria and Egypt.⁴⁹ In the West it has become the first *ʿaqīda* text taught in Sufi and Salafi circles. The Sufi traditionalists have introduced it in their *Dars-i-Nizāmi* as a primer before more complex introductions to theology like *al-Jawhara* (Ashʿarī) and *al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiyya* (Māturīdī). The Wahhābīs have incorporated it in their syllabus as one of the texts of *ʿaqīda* before 'heavy duty' books like *al-Wāṣiṭiyya* of Ibn Taymiyya, the *Lum'ca al-ʿItiqād* of Ibn Qudāma and the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1791).⁵⁰ It is difficult to ascertain who advanced al-Ṭaḥāwī onto their syllabi. The first translation in English was carried out by Iqbāl Aḥmad Azamī and it has now been translated with an introduction and appendices by Hamza Yusuf. There is call by Yusuf in his introduction to al-Ṭaḥāwī's for Sunnis to be content with the surface details of al-Ṭaḥāwī and not explore the elaborate details⁵¹

Yusuf's normative stance here is an indication of scholastic traditional minimalism albeit in a rudimentary form. Moreover al-Ṭaḥāwī's text seems to transcend the *kalām* schools. Ṭaḥāwī himself is commonly mistaken to be Māturīdī. This is because the Sufi traditionalists have an 'orthodox' paradigm which has two imams of *kalām* Abū al-

⁴⁹ G.M.D. Sufi, *Al-Minhāj: Being the Evolution of Curriculum in the Muslim Educational Institutions of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*. (Lahore: Ashraf Printing Press, 1981) pp. 69, 74, 104, 122-125, 143-145.

⁵⁰ Bakr Abū Zayd, *The Etiquette of Seeking Knowledge* (trans. By al-Shuweikh) (Birmingham: al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 2000), pp. 38, 84.

⁵¹ Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī: al-Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah* [Translated, Introduced and Annotated by Hamza Yusuf] (California: Zaytuna Institute, 2008). See introduction.

Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936) and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). However al-Ṭahāwī is largely independent as he disagrees with both the aforementioned imams, but inclines towards the Māturīdī perhaps because he was a Ḥanafī as the Māturīdīs historically were largely Ḥanafīs and he in his own words set out to vindicate the Ḥanafī masters.⁵² Likewise the Salafīs contend that he was an Atharite, though he has *kalām* inclinations in discussing God not being contained by the six directions as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz highlights in his annotations.⁵³ Furthermore the text does not clearly indicate a *kalām* stance and neither does it necessarily oppose it like conservative Ḥanbalīs. On this premise both theological (*kalāmī*) and traditional (*atharī*) commentaries were written for this text. ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Maydānī’s (d. 1298/1881) short commentary explains the text with reference to Māturīdī and Ashʿarī works.⁵⁴ Abū al-ʿIzz al-Adhruʿī (d. 792/1390) or more commonly known as al-ʿIzz al-Ḥanafī authored a larger commentary drawing largely on the Ibn Taymiyyan school, this commentary is the most commonly available.⁵⁵

1.4.2.d The parochial methodologies of post-speculative theology – a reactionary polemical approach

These methodologies can be described as the polemical phase of theological discourse. Indeed early theology had its fair share of ‘wrangling’ (*tanuṭṭuʿāt*), however this acute phase largely deals with peripheral issues which early theologians did not emphasize. Broadly speaking the traditionalists tend to conserve methodologies in order to not ‘break the chain’.⁵⁶ On the one hand there are the Sufī traditionalists

⁵² Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭahāwī, *Islamic Belief: al-Aqīdah at-Ṭahāwīyah* [Translated by Iqbal Ahmad Azamī] Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2002), p. 5. [prelude to point 1]

⁵³ Ibn Bāz, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. *Taʿlīq ʿalā al-ʿAqīdah al-Ṭahāwīyyah* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan li al-Nashr, 1998), pp. 11 – 12.

⁵⁴ ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Maydānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdah al-Ṭahāwīyyah*. (Damascus: Darel Fikr. 2002), pp. 9 – 16.

⁵⁵ Al-Adhruʿī, I, pp. 28 – 30.

⁵⁶ Aftab Ahmad Malik, *The Broken Chain: Reflections upon the neglect of a tradition*. (Bristol: Amal Press, 2003), pp. 5 – 9.

whose general methodology comprises of conformism to schools of jurisprudence, doctrine based on established theological schools and *ṭarīqa* based Sufism.⁵⁷ In this thesis we shall refer to the Deobandi, Barelwi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* factions as case studies of this type of parochialism. As asserted by Barbara Metcalf, these movements draw inspiration from Shah Waliullah (d. 1176/1762) of Delhi. However they emerged during the British Raj and so each faction are sceptical of one another.⁵⁸ The Barelwis and Deobandis are both Ḥanafī in jurisprudence, Ash^ʿarī/Māturīdī in theology and recognise the Qādīriya, Naqshbandiya, Suhrawardiya and Chishtīya Sufi orders. It could be argued that Deobandis are reform Barelwis insofar as they still have the *shaykh/aspirant* (*pīr/murīd*) Islam of the Barelwis however their outlook has been markedly Wahhābī as they are staunchly anti-innovation. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* were Ash^ʿarī in theology and followed the same dominant orders of Indian Sufism however they have always been non-conformist in jurisprudence.⁵⁹ Once doctrine and Sufism is what could unite these different groups, but be that as it may, this is no longer the case for the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement as they have abandoned both *ṭarīqa* based Sufism and Ash^ʿarī theology for Wahhābism without the Ḥanbalī jurisprudence as they remained loyal to their own 'jurisprudence'. It is worthy to note that paradoxically the Barelwi, Deobandi, and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* groups are opposed to each other's' traditions and any tradition outside of these would generally be deemed 'modernist', in a sense they acknowledge each other as the traditionalists but with colossal internal disagreements. Methodology (*minhāj/maslak*) is to some extent a form of imitation (*taqlīd*) but more specifically it is perceived to be clinging onto something which has an unbroken chain (*sanad*). Though theoretically Barelwis, Deobandis and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* could go beyond

⁵⁷ Winter, Tim (Abdal-Hakim Murad). *Understanding the Four Madhhabs: the problem with anti-madhhabism* [online revised edition] <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/newmadhh.htm>> [accessed 14/3/15]

⁵⁸ Metcalf, Barbara. *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 43.

⁵⁹ Ṣiddīq Ḥasan al-Qinnūjī, *Abjad al-ʿUlūm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2002), pp. 232-230, 419-420.

these traditions and straight to the classical period, abandoning these traditions according to them entails the denunciation of *sanad*. This is what makes one a 'modernist' even if one is *looking back*.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding that there have been attempts by individual scholars from among each of these groups to find commonality in the framework for minimalism as set out by Shah Waliullah. This is a particularly attractive proposition due to its connecting back to a romantic pre-colonial India. One which is free from tiresome polemics. Likewise the Wahhābīs have made attempts to bridge gaps with the Sufis in general by playing the anti-Shiite card.⁶¹

1.4.2.e Polemical minimalism

The current thesis question is embedded in a polemical narrative within Sunni Islam with particular emphasis on the Sufi – Salafi divide. Discernibly there are more polemical polarisations within Sunni Islam but it may be contended that this is the most potent especially quantitatively. Other considerations like modernism versus traditionalism can fall under this discussion too and will be considered later. The Sufi – Salafi divide involves many different groups which may not necessarily identify themselves as Sufi or Salafi, yet this polarisation has caused many to align themselves to either side. Rather ironically, it is as if this mutual antagonism itself serves as minimalism. So on the one hand the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* will align themselves with the Arab Salafis and Wahhābīs in an anti-Sufi stance and conversely the Barelwis will ally themselves with Arab Sufis in anti-Salafi movement. One could argue that the Salafiyya movement in the 1980s yielded a lot of influence on many different religio-political groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as being a considerable influence in the galvanisation of Muslim movements into the spirit of the Afghan Jihad. This in turn put the Salafis at the helm of what was a conceivably Pan-Sunni movement. Nonetheless following the First Gulf War a deep split emerged within the movement. This resulted

⁶⁰ Malik, *ibid*, p. vii.

⁶¹ Ṣāliḥ Ibn Yūsuf al-^cAlī, *Inṣāf al-Ahl al-Sunna wa mu^cāmalatuhum li mukhālīfihim* (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus al-Khaḍrā', 1994), pp. 11 – 14.

in the leadership, by that one means its scholarship, into adopting an apolitical outlook and to viciously condemn all those who had hitherto been 'orthodox' Muslims.⁶² The Brotherhood were branded deviant and with them the liberal Salafis. Post 9/11 the Salafis have lost the clout that they had in the late eighties and early nineties.⁶³ Now we are witnessing the rise of a Sufi resurgence whereby hitherto disparate Sufi orders are slowly galvanizing into a transnational movement comprising of Western Sufis and scholarship in mainly the Yemen, Syria, Mauritania and to an extent Sudan, Morocco, Turkey and the Sub-continent in addition to others.⁶⁴

Though doctrine will play a decisive role in an affiliation to either of these camps there is a growing trend of reactionary exclusivism and articulations of rigid methodologies hitherto unheard of. The Salafis have developed elaborate means of excommunication from the 'congregation' in the form of 'weighing up' (*mawāzana*) individuals.⁶⁵ This process is also crudely referred to as a form of the Ḥadīth studies notion of 'impugment and validation' (*jarḥ wa ta'dīl*) by the followers of a pro-Saudi Salafi, Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī. Although generally not the case, some Sufi movements like the excessive elements within the Sub-continent Barelwi movement and the Syrian *al-Ṭarīqa al-Ḥabashiyya* too have adopted measures similar to these in an attempt to resist Wahhābī revisionism. This phenomenon whether Salafi or Sufi, though not widespread, is nonetheless prominent and can be described as a new 'Sunni' inquisition (*mihna*), in the sense that the polemic of the times is a 'fight for orthodoxy'.

⁶² Ṣāliḥ Ibn ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Najdī, *Unṣur akhāka zālīman aw maẓlūman: naẓarāt salafīyya fī ārāʾ al-shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī*. (Cairo: Maktab al-Ṭayyib, 1998), pp. 5-10.

⁶³ Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2014) pp. 110 – 114.

⁶⁴ Fuad Nahdi, *Radical Middle Way*, [online brochure] <http://www.radicalmiddleway.org/uploads/editor/files/RMW_5_year_brochure_online.pdf> [accessed 14/3/15]

⁶⁵ Aḥmad al-Maḥmūd, *In urīd illā al-islāḥ mā astaṭaʿtu*. (Riyadh: Silsila Tawjihāt li Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya, 2001), pp. 11 – 22.

1.4.2.f The deathbed conversions and other normative doctrines

Often in the non-*kalām* discussions of doctrine, anecdotal examples of ‘deathbed conversions’ are cited which could be best explained as a form of minimalism as on the point of impending death. One would argue that this is indeed a type of minimalism as it is highly unlikely that one would necessarily subscribe to a given tradition and all its nuances in such circumstances. A prime example which is frequently championed by traditional literalists but also included in theological commentaries is the famous quote of Abū al-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085):

‘I dived into the vast ocean (theology), and entered that which was prohibited for me, if my Lord does not have mercy on me, then woe to the son of al-Juwayni! Here and now, I die upon the *creed of the old ladies of Nishāpūr!*⁶⁶

What was the creed of the old ladies of Nishāpūr? Historical sources at the time indicate that the population were largely Sunni and presumably Ashʿarī.⁶⁷ That is assuming whoever these old ladies he was referring to were actually conversant with scholastics and some theological issues. It is most probable that the creed was either a short catechism as short creeds are taught outside of the seminaries from parent to child. Muslims of the Indian subcontinent have a formula of belief based on the famous Tradition of Gabriel. The wording is as follows:

⁶⁶ Sulṭān Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar fī Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-Akbar*. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1998), pp. 36.

⁶⁷ Winter, Tim (Abdal-Hakim Murad). *Understanding the Four Madhhabs: the problem with anti-madhhabism* [online revised edition] <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/newmadhh.htm>> [accessed 14/3/15]

'I believe in God, the Angels, the Books, the Messengers, the Last Day and the Decree, the good and the evil of it is from God and also the in the bodily resurrection after death'⁶⁸

This wording is most likely taken from the *Fiqh al-Akbar* of Abū Ḥanīfa.⁶⁹ It is now commonly known in the Sub-continent and Central Asia as the 'Elaborate Creed' '*Imān-i-Mufaṣṣal*'. Strictly speaking this set of doctrines can serve as a minimalism which transcends the boundaries of Sunnism. In addition to this creed there is a follow up commonly known as the 'Comprehensive Creed' '*Imān-i-mujmal*' which reads:

'I believe in God, as He is, with His Divine Attributes and Names, and I accept all the rulings of Faith and its constituents'⁷⁰

This catechism brings in belief in the Divine Attributes but not necessarily a discussion of their interpretation. Moreover it is ambivalent in its wording and perhaps the word *mujmal* aptly describes it as it also means ambiguous. This second creed perhaps indicates an affinity to mainstream *ṣifātism* of the Sunnis. Could both together serve as a composite minimalism?

Generally the traditionalists hold that this utterance of al-Juwayni is a denunciation of the dialectic tradition. They corroborate this with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) lamentation on the trappings of theology:

⁶⁸ Shameem Al-Mamun, *The Book of Prayer, Salah: with daily Du'aas & Tajweed*. (Slyhet: Messrs Sirajul Islam, 2004), p. 23. See appendix VII.

⁶⁹ 'Alī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 53 – 55.

⁷⁰ Al-Mamun, *ibid* p. 23. See appendix VII.

‘I have exhaustively researched theology, but to no avail, for it does not quench a thirst, nor does it cure an ailment. I now hold that the method of the Qur’ān is the best approach’⁷¹

Statements like this are polemically buttressed by the Salafis to Ash‘arīs as deathbed conversions. Al-Juwaynī, al-Rāzi and even al-Ghazālī according to them eventually died upon the method of the Salaf.⁷² Drawing upon this the Salafis understand minimalism is the holistic following of the early generations who opposed theology. The Qur’ān and Sunna are not sources only for the Salafis but a ‘methodology’. The Sufis too admired Ibn Taymiyya’s erudition and also claim he denounced his excommunication of many Muslims.⁷³

Al-Juwaynī’s statement regarding the old ladies of Nishapūr is not given any aphoristic consideration, on the contrary it is understood as a simple understanding and appreciation of religion – a *peoples’ creed* if you like, a creed in theory which cannot be appropriated by an elite.

1.4.3 ETHICAL MINIMALISM

‘Abd al-Hādī and Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādi (d. 429/1037) both devote considerable attention to an ethos that mainstream Muslims should espouse. They did not consider doctrine alone as the hallmark of a mainstream outlook. In fact doctrine on its own can be prone to dogmatism and puritanism. This ethos is encapsulated in a communalist, scholastic and pluralistic outlook. Scholastic traditionalists have posited a tripartite ethical or methodological minimalism based on dogmatism, conformism to schools of

⁷¹ ‘Alī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 36.

⁷² Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*. (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus al-Khaḍrā’, 2001), pp. 115 – 121.

⁷³ Nuh Keller. *Iman Kufr and Takfir*. <http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 14/3/15]

law and mysticism. This may be termed Sunni essentialism. Additionally, this type of minimalism is not a set of dogmata or schools rather it consists of guidelines. In both classical literature and modern Islamist discourse the core proposition of this type of minimalism is as al-Qaradāwī contends 'Islam being situated between excess and rejection (*bayna al-ifrāṭ wa al-tafrīt*)'⁷⁴ or the words of al-Ṭahāwī 'between extremism and falling short (*bayna al-ghuluw wa al-taqṣīr*)'.⁷⁵ Centrism arguably is inspired by the Prophetic tradition '*the best of affairs are the middle (medium)*'.

1.4.3.a Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī's Sunni essentialism as a minimalism

Ibn Ṭāhir ambitiously in his heresiographical work 'the differences between the sects' (*al-farq bayn al-firaq*) diverges from other works such as Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 456/1064) 'Conclusion on religions, heresies and sects' (*al-faṣl fī al-milal wa al-niḥal*) and al-Shahrastānī's (d. 548/1153) 'Religions and sects' (*al-milal wa al-niḥal*) insofar as he set out a Sunni essentialism embedded in the narrative of the 'seventy two sects'. Ibn Ṭāhir's account of Sunni essentialism can be perceived as one of the first elaborate articulations of minimalism which is not presented in the typical creedal manner. Notwithstanding that his minimalism falls short of a cohesive methodology. After an exhaustive designation of the 'seventy two sects' he deals with the notion of the 'Saved Sect' or mainstream Islam in three inquiries; a) who they are b) what they believe and c) what makes this group different from the other seventy two sects.

Ibn Ṭāhir identifies eight 'classes' of people who represent Sunni Islam. This method largely seems to be a quantitative method i.e. the *majority* of peoples in these eight categories will *most likely* be of Sunni extraction. In this sense it is perhaps more 'mainstream' than a rigid 'orthodoxy'. He lists the following in answering 'who they are':

⁷⁴ Al-Qaradāwī, ʿAbdullah Yūsuf. *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt: dirāsa jadīda fī daw' al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī 1999), pp. 9 – 15.

⁷⁵ Al-Ṭahāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 19. [point 104]

- I. The theologians (*mutakallimūn*): this group thoroughly know the themes of divinity, prophetology, and eschatological issues such as reward and punishment. In addition they are aware of the conditions of independent reasoning (*itjihād*) in jurisprudence and religious and political leadership. They have adopted in this knowledge the approach of the theologians who are vindicated of anthropomorphism and denial of God's attributes and the heresies of the Rāfidites, Khārijites, Najjārities and all other heretics.
- II. The jurists (*fuqahá'*): this group consists of the Imams of jurisprudence of both the traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and rationalist (*ahl al-ra'y*) schools of law. They are those who subscribe to principles of religion as is understood by the *ṣifāti* theologians regarding the sempiternity of God and are free from the heresies of the Qadarites and Mu^ctazilites. They affirm the Beatific Vision of God without anthropomorphising and denying His attributes. They also affirm the bodily resurrection from the graves, the questioning by the two angels in the graves, the Pool, the Bridge, the Intercession and pardoning of sins other than ascribing partners to God. They maintain that the dwellers of the Garden will be in eternal bliss and the disbelieving dwellers of the fire will suffer eternal torment. They uphold the Imamate of Abū Bakr, ^cUmar, ^cUthmān and ^cAlī. They praise the Pious Predecessors of this community. They recognize the obligation of performing the Friday prayer behind Imams free of heresies. They also recognize the obligation of deducing rules from the Qur'ān, the Sunna and

the consensus of the Companions. They agree with the permissibility of wiping the socks, the divorce uttered thrice in one sitting, the impermissibility of temporary marriage and they maintain the obligation of obeying the leader as long as he does not command a sinful act. Figures like the colleagues of Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī, al-Awzāʿī, al-Thawrī, Abū Ḥanīfa, Ibn Abī Laylā, the colleagues of Abū Thawr, the colleagues of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the Zāhirites and all other jurists who follow the theologians regarding the attributes of God fall in this category and their jurisprudence is not polluted by any heterodoxies.

- III. The traditionalists (*muhaddithūn*): this group comprises of those who have a comprehensive knowledge of historical reports and traditions conveyed from the Prophet and distinguished the strong (*ṣaḥīḥ*) from the weak (*saqīm*) and know causes of approbation and censure of narrators of traditions. This knowledge of theirs is not adulterated with any heresies.
- IV. The linguists (*ahl al-lughā*): this group has those who have mastery over most themes of literature, grammar, morphology and follow the methods of the Imams of language like al-Khalīl, Abū ʿAmru ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, Sibawayh, al-Farrāʾ, al-Akhfash, al-Aṣmaʿī, al-Māzinī, Abū ʿUbayd, and all the Imams of grammar from both Basra and Kūfah whose knowledge is not mixed with the heresies of the Qadarites, Khārijites and Rāfiḍites. Whosoever inclines towards their heresies is not of *Ahl al-Sunna* and neither should their opinion in language be considered authoritative.

- V. The Qur'ānic exegetes (*mufasssirūn*): those who have full understanding of the recitations of the Qur'ān and its exegetical explanations of its verses and their interpretation according to the viewpoint of *Ahl al-Sunna* as opposed to the heretics.
- VI. The Sufis and ascetics (*ṣūfiyya wa zuhhād*): Those men and women who are pleased with destiny, content with little, aware that the eyes, ears and heart are all accountable, they prepare for the Day of Return, act without pretension (*riyā'*). Their school (*madhab*) is that of reliance and total submission to God
- VII. The Warriors (*mujāhidūn*) Those men and women garrisoned on the front lines, facing the enemy, fighting them, and protecting the sanctuaries and homes embody the doctrines and spirit of *Ahl al-Sunna*.
- VIII. The masses (*ʿawām*): from this group are the masses of the majority of Muslim lands in which the emblems of *Ahl al-Sunna* are manifest as opposed to those territories where the hallmarks of the people of caprice and whims are dominant. What we mean by this group of masses those who believe in the authority of the scholarship of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* in the themes of Divine justice, monotheism, eschatological recompense, and refer to these scholars in religious matters and imitate them in issues of lawful and unlawful and do not subscribe to the heresies of innovators. They are as the Sufis call them 'the stuffing of Paradise' (*ḥashw al-janna*).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ ʿAbd al-Qāhir Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* (Beirut: Dar el-Marefah, 1997), pp. 267 – 278.

In answering the question 'what they believe in' Ibn Ṭāhir lists the following principles:

1. Epistemological affirmation of reality
2. The temporality (createdness) of the universe
3. Recognition of the Creator and His attributes of essence
4. Recognition of His sempiternal attributes
5. Recognition of His names and attributes
6. Recognition of His justice and wisdom
7. Recognition of His messengers and prophets
8. Recognition of Prophetic miracles and Saintly marvels
9. Recognition of consensus issues
10. Recognition of commands and prohibitions
11. Recognition of the mortality of humans
12. Recognition of Caliphate, Imamate etc.
13. Comprehensive recognition of Islam and faith
14. Recognition of matters pertaining to the *awliyā'* and their ranks
15. Recognition of the eschatological ruling on antagonist disbelievers and heretics.⁷⁷

It is here that Ibn Ṭāhir has failed to layout the principles of Sunnism clearly, as these are largely issues which many non-Sunnis would necessarily subscribe to – i.e. these are faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufr*) queries rather than 'mainstream' or 'non-mainstream'. Points 8, 12, and 14 represent 'core' Sunni principles. Points 13 and 9 would be peripheral Sunni discussions whereas the rest are largely 'core' Islamic principles. Therefore this set of principles does not adequately represent Sunni specific doctrines as they are articulated in generic terms.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 283 – 284.

Lastly Ibn Ṭāhir contends that the salient feature of *Ahl-Sunna* that distinguishes them from his designations of the 72 sects is the lack of excommunication (*‘adm al-takfīr*). He argues that God divinely protects *Ahl al-Sunna* from excommunicating each other.⁷⁸ Hence this may be Ibn Ṭāhir’s key minimalism as opposed to determining creedal points. His critique of all the 72 sects excluding the Murji’ite sect and its denominations is primarily premised on their inherent excommunicative nature. Ibn Ṭāhir’s minimalism is effectively quantitative mainstream which is not excommunicative. This ethical definition can prove very significant in the formulation of a minimalism for modern Sunni factions as much of the polemics has as we shall see in later chapters resulted in excommunication over peripheral issues. Furthermore as a critique of this point it could be argued that excommunication however evil it may be deemed, is in effect integral to Sunni orthodoxy irrespective of Sunni theologians of all persuasions denying this, as it delineates the boundaries and ensures correct dogma. All the Muslim inquisitions are borne out of excommunicative theological processes.

1.4.3.b Quintessential Sunnism

There have been many attempts in the modern era to define Sunnism perhaps largely out of reaction of modernity and the growing trend of modernist thought during the colonial period. Quintessential Sunnism would be traditionalist attempts at explaining the core values of a minimalist Sunni Islam. This traditionalist attempt has two interpretations; Sufi and Salafi. One is adopting Seyyed Hussain Nasr’s definition of traditionalism which according to him would include the Wahhābis albeit as a truncated form of traditionalism but a mode of traditionalism nonetheless.⁷⁹ Ramadan

⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 320 – 321.

⁷⁹ Hossein Nasr Seyyed. *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. (London: Keagan Paul International, 1990), p. 12. Nasr in his *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* like Guenon promotes all hues of traditionalism as a form of ‘organic’ orthodoxy and that modernism is the undoing of theology. Nasr’s work was primarily a polemic against

in this manner argues that traditionalism maintains the following of a class of scholarship who can interpret the text.⁸⁰ Metcalf too argues that the revivalist movements especially the Barewli, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* of British India are best described as 'traditionalist.'⁸¹ Based on these observations one would argue that there are two broad strands of scholastic traditionalism; Sufi and Salafi.

Though Sufi scholastic traditionalists may recognise the inevitability of parochial manifestations of Sunnism they posit a minimalism which they argue encapsulates the famous 'tradition of Gabriel' in which Prophet Muhammad is questioned by the Archangel Gabriel on Islam, faith and excellence. Islam according to this group is realised in the outward legalistic tradition of Islam or Shari'ah or those bodily devotional acts. Faith (*īmān*) is interpreted as doctrine or the very set of beliefs one is required to believe in in order to be Muslim. Finally, there is excellence (*ihsān*) which is perceived to be an experiential mode of religious practice. A Sufi traditionalist minimalism would comprise the obligatory following of one of the four Sunni jurisprudential schools (*madhhabs*) which is the best legal articulation of *Islam* in its outward physical manifestation especially through bodily compliance (*ʿaml bi al-jawāriḥ*). The doctrine or dogma of *faith* would be enunciated in theological schools of the Ash'arites and Māturīdites; and it is through these schools 'orthodoxy' is assured. Spiritual *excellence* can be best expressed through the mystic path which requires one to give a pledge to a *shaykh* and be initiated in a *ṭarīqa* of Sufism. Unlike the jurisprudential practice of Islam there is no restriction to the multitude of mystic orders that one could follow, however it is advisable that one should only give the pledge to one *shaykh* at a time. Moreover the manner of litanies and practices of devotional acts differ from order to

modernism however as aforementioned he admits that even Wahhābism is to an extent traditionalism which is useful for this study.

⁸⁰ Ramadan, pp. 239 – 245.

⁸¹ Metcalf, Barbara. *A Concise History of Modern India*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006), p. 143.

order with an emphasis on collective remembrance of God. These litanies are either hadith based or introduced through *ijtihād*.

The Salafi scholastic approach would be best exemplified as a physical ritualistic Islam or compliance of those legal aspects through a non-conformist jurisprudential tradition (*lā madhabiya*) or as Netton suggests an absolute literal '*imitatio Muhammadi*'. Its doctrine could only be articulated through the *textualism* of literalist traditionist scholars (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) which is devoid of any *kalām* overtones the stock of which usually comprise of Ḥanbalīs.⁸² Often this approach would simply be referred to as the school of the pious predecessors (*madhhab al-salaf*). As for the manner in which 'spiritual excellence' should be interpreted, there should be no mystic tradition or orders for that matter. The pledge to any individual other than Prophet Muhammad or the political leader of one's nation is redundant. Notwithstanding that the Wahhābīs do advocate a 'purification of the soul' (*tazkiya al-nafs*) which would comprise of litanies based solely on the *ḥadīth* rather than 'innovations' of Sufi orders.⁸³ This form of spirituality or spiritual path encourages individual remembrance of God rather than collective which according to them is 'innovative'.

Moreover one could argue that there existed an aphorismic minimalism which is generally attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. Evidently He was once asked what the position of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* was and he replied:

'It is to prefer the two Elders (Abū Bakr and ʿUmar), love the two son-in-laws (ʿUthmān and ʿAlī) and recognising the wiping of *the*

⁸² Al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-Durra al-Marḍiyya*, pp. 44 – 47.

⁸³ Zarabozo, Jamaal al-Din M. *Purification of the soul: Concept, Process and Means*. (Riyadh: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translation, 2002), p. 105.

two socks.' [*an tufaḍḍila al-shaykhayn, wa an tuḥibba al-khatanayn wa an tara al-mashʿalā al-khuffayn*]⁸⁴

There are numerous versions of this statement with slight stylistic shifts and occasional additions, however the common denominator are these three clauses. One may synthesise the first and second clause and posit that this surface level illustrates reverence of what Sunni Muslims collectively call the four rightly-guided Caliphs and by extension all the Companions of Prophet Muhammad. However it can be suggested that on some level Abū Ḥanīfa may have deliberately worded this to placate the sectarian trends of his time which did exert influence even on the mainstream. Interestingly Abū Ḥanīfa used the word preference for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar which might indicate he was attempting to win over the Khārijites who do not recognise the latter two caliphs as rightly-guided. One is not suggesting that Abū Ḥanīfa was Khārijite sympathiser; rather that he appreciated the trends within the Muslim community regarding their opinions of the Companions of the Prophet. Abū Ḥanīfa on the contrary is argued to have held Shiite sympathies evidently because studying under Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and also preferring ʿAlī over ʿUthmān.⁸⁵

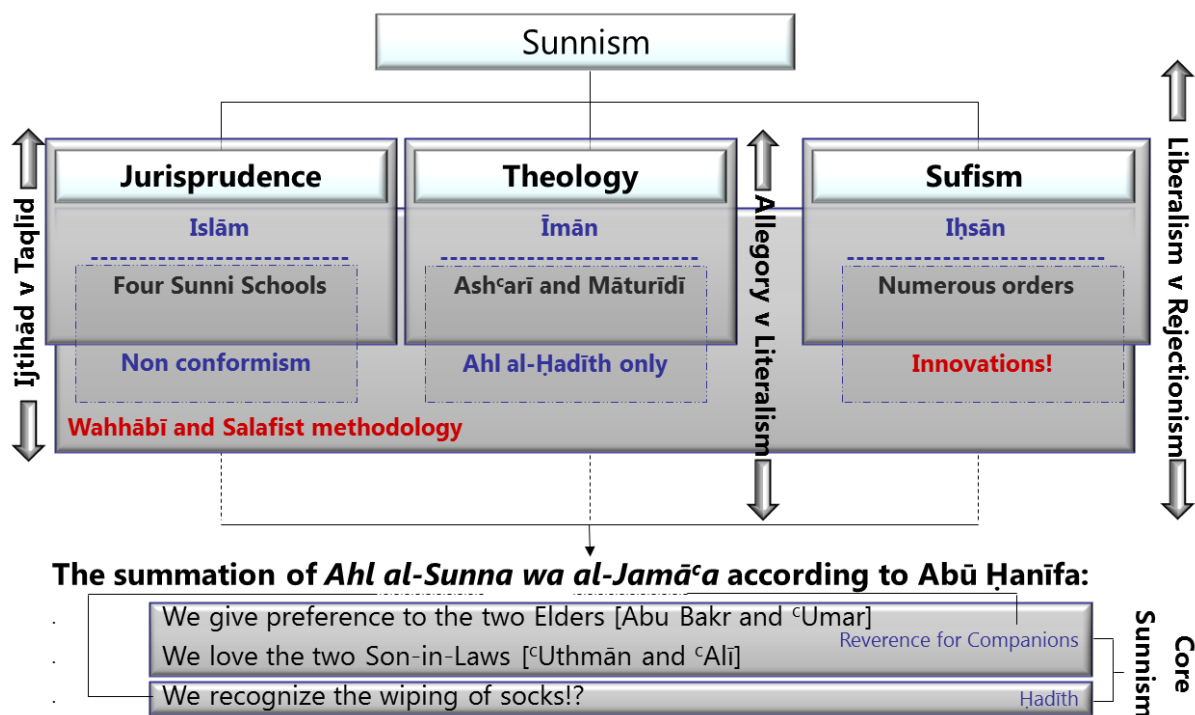
The third clause confounds the common reader as it implies that wiping of the socks is a cornerstone of the Sunni creed and it is found in creedal primers such as al-Ṭaḥāwī. This leads us to the question; is or should the wiping of the socks itself intrinsically be taken as dogma or was Abū Ḥanīfa's statement cryptic? The most plausible answer would be that Abū Ḥanīfa was cryptically alluding to the Sunni or mainstream Muslims' recognition of accepting solitary *ḥadīth* transmissions (*ahād*). Early Shiite and other non-Sunni Muslims do not recognise the permissibility of the ritual practice of wiping moist hands over leather socks as a concession for a part of ablution in travel. The

⁸⁴ Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiyya*. (Damascus: Al-Rāzī publications, [no date]), p. 255.

⁸⁵ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 187 – 188.

veracity of the wiping of the socks rests on solitary transmissions and many eschatological beliefs too are based on this category of *ḥadīth*. We shall look into the role of *aḥād* traditions in the dynamics between traditionalism and 'modernism' in later chapters. One may also view his cryptic statement as a generic reference to the Sunna or tradition and in this case Abū Ḥanīfa chose to use a tradition which itself is not a dogma but rather a ritual to illustrate the organic dimension of tradition. Equally it could also be argued that his choice of words were more for poetic licence though not absolutely arbitrary. Drawing upon this it could be concluded that Abū Ḥanīfa's Sunni minimalism is effectively stripped down to two components; a) reverence of all the Companions and b) the recognition of solitary traditions (*aḥād*). These two elements distinguish Sunni Muslims from non-Sunnis whether they are Shiite or Ibādī. Sunni Islam centres on respecting all of Muhammad's Companions and the traditions reported by all of those Companions, as opposed to Ibādism which recognises many Companions but equally dismisses others, and Shī'ism which recognises those Companions who were with ʿAlī during his problems against his adversaries.

Figure 1:4 Sunni Methodologies



1.4.3.c Minimalism modelled on ecumenism

There are some interesting parallels one can draw with Muslim minimalism and Christian Ecumenism. Ecumenism is largely aimed at fostering broader unity amongst Christian denominations by means of many different initiatives with a particular hope of creating a united Christian Church. In this sense Ecumenism is not focused on just, tolerance and good relations in a religious pluralistic setting but on issues of 'orthodoxy'. Longstanding historical prejudices and insufficient knowledge of each other's traditions complicates matters further.⁸⁶ The movement is at times compromised by the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Roman Catholicism encourages broad-based unity with Christians but they would reject what they consider unity which betrays the scriptural teachings. Minimalism within this movement is to some extent problematic as it is understood as anti-dogmatic i.e. reconciliation cannot be bought at the expense of truth.⁸⁷ The Anglican Communion has been most responsive to this call for unity.⁸⁸ It is difficult to draw exact parallels with the Christian tradition; however, if Salafism is understood as Protestantism insofar as that it is a rejection of 'rigid' scholasticism then we could appreciate why contemporary minimalism has been spearheaded by the likes of ʿAbd al-Hādī. Notwithstanding this, unfortunately Salafism also exhibits a staunch resistance akin to the perceived Catholic stance by figures such as Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī.⁸⁹

Muslim minimalism essentially aims at some level of unity, it would specifically attempt to highlight 'agreed upon' (*mutaffaq ʿalayhi*) doctrine and not necessarily to construct

⁸⁶ Eric Lionel Mascall, *The Recovery of Unity: a Theological Approach*. (London: Longmans – Green and Co., 1958), pp. 1 – 2.

⁸⁷ Leonard Bacigalupo, 'The Pan-Christian Movement' in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Oct., 1941), pp. 316-331.

⁸⁸ N. D. Emerson, 'An Anglican's View of Church Unity' in *The Furrow*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 40-44.

⁸⁹ Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī is the leading figure amongst apolitical Salafis. He is a vehement polemicist against Sufis; however it is Islamism and Jihadism which he has focused on since the First Gulf War. See Meyer Global Salafism.

a new 'orthodoxy' by rejecting existing models of belief. It may dispense with certain doctrines as speculative (*ẓannī*) or superfluous but not outright declare them unfit for belief. Currently the Sufi–Salafi polemic compromises a successful minimalism from emerging. Moreover we shall explore historical prejudices which may hinder minimalist projects. Thus far theoretically Islamists should be most receptive to a minimalism if they are to gain political grounds, however they are not decisive on whether they want to be viewed as a populist movement or as a reforming one. In other words they too are bound by strictures of 'orthodoxy'. Fundamentalists on the other hand would view these types of unity measures as 'unethical'.⁹⁰

In the present study focus is on a minimalist model within the scholastic traditionalism (both Sufi and Salafi) framework in Sunni Islam with particular attention to parochial methodologies of the Barelwi, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movements. The inspiration to carry out this research was ushered by reading two books; *Mafāhīm yajib an tuṣaḥḥaḥ* by al-ʿAlawī al-Mālikī and *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Maʿālim Munṭalaqāt al-Kubrā* by ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Miṣrī. ʿAlawī al-Mālikī is a renowned Sufi scholar and in his work *Mafāhīm* which is largely a Sufi apologetic, he not only defends doctrines and rituals that Sufis and Ashʿarīs subscribe to, he also seems to bridge the gap between them and the Wahhābīs.⁹¹ Though it can be construed as a polemical work it is not necessarily polemic against the Wahhābīs, in fact on numerous occasions al-ʿAlawī exonerates Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim from Sufi allegations. Likewise the *Ahl al-Sunna* work by ʿAbd al-Hādī is one of the first works in the modern era attempting to *explicitly* construct a minimalism.⁹² Usually Salafi attempts at defining Sunnism patently excludes Sufis and Ashʿarīs – this work which was commissioned by Ibn Jibrīn is an exception. Interestingly al-Hādī makes ample

⁹⁰ Aḥmad al-Maḥmūd. *In urīd illā al-iṣlāḥ mā astaṭaʿtu*. (Riyadh: Silsila Tawjihāt li Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya, [no date]), pp. 46 – 47.

⁹¹ Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm yajib an tuṣaḥḥaḥ*, pp. 230 – 231.

⁹² Al-Hādī, pp. 65 – 69, 87 – 96.

reference to the aforementioned Muhammad Sālim al-Safārīnī who advocates three schools of Sunni theology and al-Hādī leaves his work open to interpretation and stresses on quantitative orthodoxy. It would be pertinent to point out here that the bulk of what we may identify as initiatives towards minimalism in doctrine have been presented by authors of Salafi persuasion in the form of apologia. One would postulate that this is due to the excommunicative disposition of Salafism with groups outside of its tradition and also its rigid absolutism within its own tradition – an acute fixation with methodology (*minhāj*) which has consequently culminated in the form of many Salafi *shaykhs* falling from grace by veering from *minhāj*, and it is for this precise reason such works are being authored i.e. Salafi non-Salafi polemic and Intra-Salafi infighting which is not helping the Salafi image.

1.4.3.d The Amman Message – Muslim Ecumenism?

Another initiative, the Amman Message Project which could be termed as minimalism with an 'ecumenical' outlook emerged in Jordan. This initiative was issued in Amman November 2004, by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan in consultation with senior Muslim scholars. It attempts to clarify to the modern world *the true nature of Islam* and *the nature of true Islam*. Though the document does not mention the subtext of the War on Terror, it is likely that the Amman hotel bombings of 2005 pushed the pressing need of dealing with 'Sunni' extremism. King Abdullah asks three critical questions; who is a Muslim? Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate? And finally who has the authority to deliver *fatwas*?⁹³ In it, traditional scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) and university academics highlight what Islam is and is not. This declaration is historic as 500 representatives of all dominant Muslim traditions (Sunni, Shīʿa and Ibādī) were finally brought together to point out who are Muslims. Amongst the signatories are Shaykh al-Azhar Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭāwī, Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī and Ayatollah Sistani. It is argued and ratified by these scholars that 'the *Amman Message* is merely a concrete

⁹³ The Amman Message, pp. 84 - 85

restatement and crystallization of the common principles of traditional, orthodox, 'moderate' Islam—in all its traditional schools of thought and law—the Islam to which over the vast, overwhelming majority of the world's approximately 1.4 billion Muslims belong.⁹⁴ This definition justifies the inclusion of the Amman Message in this thesis as a case study not only as a Sunni - Shī'ca unity initiative but more specifically as it declares legitimacy through 'traditionalism' and 'orthodoxy' – the components of scholastic traditionalism. Reza Shah-Kazemi views the Amman Message itself as 'orthodoxy':--

'In our times, Muslim orthodoxy has received its broadest ever definition, thanks to the collective *fatwā* of the leading scholars of Islam issued in Amman in July 2005.'⁹⁵

Prior to this Sunni jurists would confine the Sharī'ca to the four Sunni schools. All participating scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues which became popular as the 'three points of the Amman Message' – these are;

1. They specifically recognised the validity of all eight *Madhhabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shī'ca* and *Ibaḍī* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true *Salafi* thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2. Based upon this definition they forbade *takfīr* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
3. Based upon the *madhāhib* they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby

⁹⁴ Ibid p. 87

⁹⁵ Kazemi, Reza Shah. *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism*, (Louiseville: Fons Vitae, 2010), p. 6.

exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.⁹⁶

The core elements of minimalism i.e. base doctrine, juristic pluralism and non-excommunicative outlook are apparent in this declaration though the declaration itself is not necessarily free from criticism. The eight schools amalgam does not include the *Ahl-i-Hadīth* nor non-Conformist Jurists though cynically the defunct Zāhirī school is included. There is no mention of modern and liberal Islam. Interestingly both Ash‘arism and Salafism have been highlighted as this is a core issue of Sunni infighting. It is as though this declaration’s intent was to quell scholastic traditionalist infighting more so than ostensibly tackling radicalisation and extremism or even a broader Sunni – Shī‘a unity. Though the Amman Message is a joint Sunni-Shī‘a initiative, it is still in spirit a continuation of al-Hādī’s and ‘Alawī al-Mālikī’s attempts albeit much broader in scope. The sunnicentric stamp is clear even in the three core issues insofar as non-Sunni Islam is only nominally dealt with and not embedded in the polemical backdrop as is within the Sunni setting. This one feels delimits the scope of the current thesis.

1.4.3.e The Sunni Pledge – a cessation of hostilities?

In addition to the Amman Message there is the *The Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge* which is also an explicit attempt at masking the polemical implosion within Sunni Islam and essentially a follow up clarification of the Amman Message. This ‘Sunni Pledge’ is argued to be the work of Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn Bayya, Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir and Yasir Qadhi.⁹⁷ The three page document declares the following:

⁹⁶ The Amman Message, pp. vi, 85 - 86

⁹⁷ <<http://www.salafitalk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?Forum=9&Topic=6237>> [accessed 19/10/15]

'Recognizing that the specter of sectarianism threatens to further weaken and debilitate our struggling Muslim community at this critical time in human affairs, and recognizing that Allah, Exalted is He, has given the Muslim community in the West a unique historical opportunity to advance the cause of peace, cooperation, and goodwill amongst the people of the world, we the undersigned respectfully:

- Urge Muslims to categorically cease all attacks on individual Muslims and organizations whose varying positions can be substantiated based on the broad scholarly tradition of the Sunni Muslims. We especially urge the immediate cessation of all implicit or explicit charges of disbelief;

- Urge Muslim scholars and students of sacred knowledge to take the lead in working to end ad hominem attacks on other scholars and students; to cease unproductive, overly polemical writings and oral discourse; and to work to stimulate greater understanding and cooperation between Muslims, at both the level of the leadership and the general community;

- Urge Muslims in the West, especially our youth, to leave off unproductive and divisive discussions of involved theological issues that are the proper domain of trained specialists, and we especially discourage participation in those internet chat rooms, campus discussion groups, and other forums that only serve to create ill-will among many Muslims, while fostering a divisive, sectarian spirit;

- Urge all teachers to instruct their students, especially those attending intensive programs, to respect the diverse nature of our communities and to refrain from aggressive challenges to local scholars, especially those known for their learning and piety;
- Urge our brothers and sisters in faith to concentrate on enriching their lives by deepening their practice of Islam through properly learning the basics of the faith, adopting a consistent regimen of Qur'anic recitation, endeavoring to remember and invoke Allah in the morning and evening, learning the basics of jurisprudence, attempting to engage in voluntary fasting as much as possible, studying the Prophetic biography on a consistent basis, studying the etiquettes that guide our interactions with our fellow Muslims, and the performance of other beneficial religious acts, to the extent practical for their circumstances;
- Finally, we urge the Believers to attempt to undertake individual and collective actions that will help to counter the growing campaign of anti-Islamic misinformation and propaganda that attempts to portray our religion as a violence-prone relic of the past unsuitable for modern society, and by so doing justify indiscriminate wars against Muslim peoples, occupation of Muslim lands, and usurpation of their resources.

Saying this, we do not deny the reality of legitimate differences and approaches, nor the passionate advocacy of specific positions based on those differences. Such issues should be rightfully discussed observing established rules of debate. However, we urge the above measures to help prevent those

differences from destroying the historical unity and integrity of the Muslim community, and creating irreparable divisions between our hearts. Further, we do not deny the urgency, especially in light of the situation in Iraq, of efforts to foster greater cooperation between diverse Muslim communities. Hence, this document should not be seen as negating any statements, or declarations designed to foster greater peace and harmony between diverse Muslim communities. However, we feel, as Sunni Muslims, a pressing need to first set our own affairs in order.⁹⁸

Yasir Qadhi has faced the most acrimonious criticism amongst the Salafi contingent involved in this Pledge. He argues:

"It is important to stress, however, that the purpose of this pledge is not to vindicate or justify one ideology over another. These differences have existed within Sunni Islam (in the broad sense of the term) for the last twelve centuries, and the fact of the matter is that, barring some sort of Divine Intervention, it does not appear that these difference will leave us any time soon.

Therefore there needs to be a more pragmatic and realistic attempt at cooperation, one that retains our traditionalisms and respects our historical traditions, yet at the same time takes into account the context of our current political and social situation."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *The Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge*. p. 1 – 2. See Appendix III

⁹⁹ <<http://www.salafitalk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?Forum=9&Topic=6237>> accessed 19/10/15

This document is available in PDF format on most of the Sufi and some Salafi websites. Like the Amman Message a genealogy of the problem is not adequately highlighted. Although the concern of infighting is clearly enunciated. The back story of the Sunni Pledge is not put forward by the authors of this document possibly due to how embarrassing it is for the very signatories themselves who were embroiled in these polemics.¹⁰⁰ It is ironic that the blame for the polemical discourse is shifted on 'ignorant' laymen when the signatories themselves have trained the masses in the vernacular of these controversies. An apology for their own contribution to part of the problem would not be unwarranted.

Unlike the Amman Message the back story of the Sunni Pledge begins in the late eighties when the polemics against the Sufis started with likes of Bilal Philips and the dominant discourse was a general critique against 'cultural' Islam, Barelwism due to British demographics being the prime target. Sufi practises were highlighted as 'polytheistic' and constituting minor heterodoxy (*bid'at mufassiqat*). No robust response emerged from the Barelwis until the advent of convert scholastic traditionalism. At the forefront was the charismatic Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, Tim Winter (Abdal Hakim Murad) and Shaykh Nuh Keller who presented Sufi Islam as rich intellectual tradition and arguing that the intellectual and even spiritual bankruptcy of Wahhābism. If Salafism's critique against Sufi traditionalists was 'extreme' – the response from the Sufi traditionalists was hardhitting, accusing Wahhābism of outright anthropomorphism. This cold war continued until the signing of the Sunni Pledge by the very warring participants. In chapter five we shall explore the general Sufi – Salafi polemic and the more acute Barelwi – Deobandi contestations of Sunni traditionalism which provides the basis for this particular initiative.

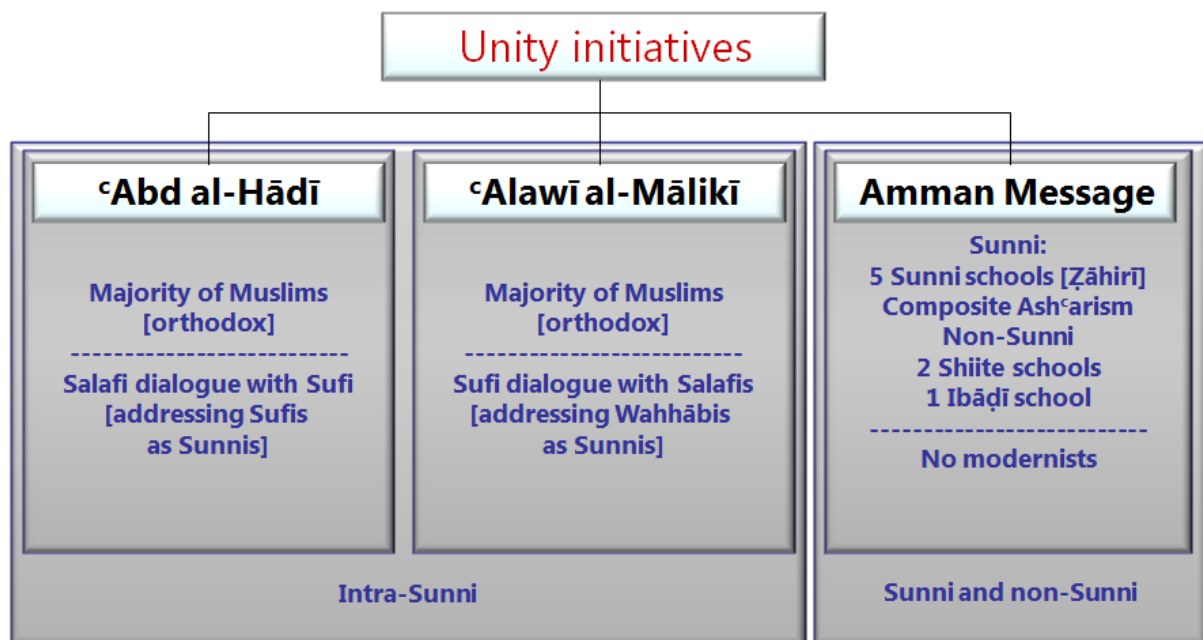
¹⁰⁰ For the sake of brevity, here on I will refer to this as the Sunni Pledge.

The Sunni Pledge was signed by prominent Western Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalists. They have agreed upon the broad based principles of Sunni Islam and that the layman is only responsible to know the essentials of creed i.e. the six articles of faith and that 'theological discussions are to be deferred to trained specialists'.¹⁰¹ These signatories have acknowledged each other as being from the Sunni tradition which has attracted much debate and controversy. It has not been wholeheartedly accepted by the community at large and each respective strand of traditionalism. Though the document is well represented by Sufi traditionalists it is interesting to note that Nuh Keller and Tim Winter are not amongst the Sufi signatories. Salafi blogosphere views this as a capitulation of 'truth'.¹⁰² In effect Salafi infighting is proving to be the most obstructive force impeding a full united front or conciliation between the Sufis and Salafis. A major failing which has been highlighted by Salafi critics of the Sunni Pledge is that no senior Salafi 'Ulamā' such as the likes of al-Fawzān or others on the 'Permanent Committee' (*al-lajna al-dā'ima*) were consulted for the Sunni Pledge nor the Amman Message for that matter. Notwithstanding the challenges this is indeed historic and can be argued to be a practical realization earlier Sunnicentric initiatives like that of al-Hādī and 'Alawī al-Mālikī. In subsequent chapters we shall assess the efficacy of these initiatives and whether their inspiration was drawn from sincere attempts at dealing with the adverse effects of these polemics or a botched publication relations stunt in an unpredictable post 9/11 world. Like earlier 'minimalisms' it seems ominous that the politics of the day is shaping contemporary minimalist initiatives.

¹⁰¹ 'The Sunni Pledge' p 1. See Appendix III.

¹⁰² Abu Uyainah. 'Yasir Qadhi's Pledge to Unite Upon Falsehood', SalafiTalk.Net [Sep 2007] <<http://www.salafitalk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?Forum=9&Topic=6237>> [accessed 18/3/15]. The thread indicates the displeasure of many Salafi brethren due to the lack of scholarly representation from senior Salafi scholarship.

Figure 1:5 Minimalist projects



1.5 Conclusion

The degeneration of *kalām* has culminated in the phenomenon of contemporary intra-Sunni polemics. Salafis and Sufis as a result are polarised in two broad camps and more nuanced archetypal subgroups (Wahhābī, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth, Barelwis and Deobandis) embroiled in this infighting are subsumed by this broader division. The problem with the polemics is that there is further fragmentation within each division i.e. intra-Salafi and intra-Sufi. Movements for intra-Sunni dialogue or even pan-Sunnism are indicative of the intensity of the current polemic. Minimalism is a scholastic traditionalist response to this polemical implosion and more significantly a social construction to salvage the historical continuity of ‘orthodoxy’. Reform of the theological tradition has not been considered as an option.

Prior to this study theological minimalist schemas had not been highlighted. In this chapter the core doctrinal and methodological models of minimalism have been identified and articulated from both the Sufi and Salafi points of view. The unity measures and inter-sectarian dialogue initiatives are based on these dogmata and principles. It seems that the lack of a coherent articulation of minimalism maybe

because once clearly enunciated, as has been in this chapter, it inadvertently highlights problems within Sunni Islam i.e. a lack of unanimity on correct or essential dogmata, methodological tensions and a seemingly expedient ethical outlook.

Our basic model of minimalism which we will use for comparative purposes throughout this study is the tripartite paradigm of doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalisms.¹⁰³ This model encapsulates the myriad of sources that these groups extrapolate for their minimalist initiatives. Doctrinal minimalism consists of the very dogmata needed for any foreseeable minimalist theology and we have put forward in this chapter the most central doctrines taken from surveying popular Sunni credos. The thirteen points raised by al-Hādī are of significant importance and we shall assess its permeability. We may term this and attempts by al-Ghazālī as 'normative doctrine' or 'centrism'. Therefore it can be argued that the Testimony, Six Articles and Thirteen principles form the superstructure of doctrinal minimalism.

Methodological minimalism is as Netton *et al* have highlighted essentially a 'flight to tradition' going back to the method of the Pious Predecessors of Islam or more generically the authority of *sanad*-based scholarship. This following of authority can also manifest in the acceptance of a three school (Ashʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī) paradigm for 'mainstream' theology. Parochial methodologies are largely polemic and can undermine minimalism by proposing polemical minimalisms. Ethical minimalism is the attitudinal outlook i.e. inclusiveness (non-excommunicative) and dialogue initiatives that are taking place between different factions. It seems that instead of letting go of *kalām* altogether, scholastic traditionalists need minimalism to hold the edifice of traditionalism together. Therefore minimalism is a resoundingly traditionalist mechanism and not modernist as it is keen on patching up *tradition* rather than deconstructing it.

¹⁰³ See Fig. 1:1.

The genesis of minimalism may be viewed as a reaction to the polemicisation of old and new theological debates and hence a methodological tool to patch up perennial theological problems. One may ask has minimalism been around since the early development of theology and was that the default stance of proto-Sunnism at some point. We shall establish what constitutes macro and micro minimalism in the coming chapters. On face value Abū Ḥanīfa and Ibn Ṭāhir advocate minimalisms without the trappings of *kalām* or creedal technicalities and these unity measures (Amman, Sunni Pledge etc) are drawing inspiration from these earlier minimalisms.

The originality of this chapter rests on the comprehensive mapping of the terrain and identification of the core polemics and the key players. Moreover the basic model of minimalism and the core doctrinal principles which have hitherto not been adequately delineated, provides us with a workable schema through which we can navigate through this complex polemical maze due to the decentralisation of authority in Sunni Islam.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ROOTS OF MINIMALISM IN CLASSICAL SUNNI THEOLOGY

In the previous chapter the notion of minimalism was explored and its core doctrinal, ethical and methodological bases were surveyed. The Amman Message and the Sunni Pledge were introduced, both of which are unprecedented minimalist initiatives. In this chapter I intend on exploring the genesis of the notion of minimalism in Islamic theology and the social constructions of early 'orthodoxy' in Sunni Islam. I am arguing that minimalism is a contemporary scholastic traditional account for an ahistorical 'orthodoxy' which finds its inspiration in Classical Sunni Theology. I shall explore the notions of 'virtue-based' and 'quantifiable' orthodoxies and how these concepts inform contemporary polemics. This chapter will provide a survey of classical Sunni theology and its historical tensions which have subsisted throughout the ages and how minimalism finds its identity in Classical Islam. Moreover a brief overview of both Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism will be introduced.

The three questions this chapter is aiming to answer are a) is 'orthodoxy' as claimed by El Shamsi and Brown a social construction? b) If that is the case, then what does that imply for minimalism? c) is minimalism a laconic articulation of 'orthodoxy'?

2.1 ORTHODOXY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Four factors played a significant role in stimulating the need or discussion of 'orthodoxy' in Islam. These causes may also be interpreted as reasons for differences emerging in early Muslim discourse. The first is the influx of new ideas and practices. The second is modes of interpretation. The third is the authority of early Muslims and lastly the fourth, the phenomenon of excommunication which inextricably is connected to the first two causes. Though majoritarian 'orthodoxy' is claimed by Sunni Muslims,

the name for Sunni Islam in Arabic (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ah*) as an entity is a later phenomenon.

Netton suggests that the terms 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy' are value laden and misleading, for him even non-Muslim scholars for too long have been preoccupied with these terms.¹ Hence Sunni Islam was often referred to as 'orthodox' and Shiite Islam as 'heterodox'. The Mu'tazilite inquisition is the first attempt of institutionalising orthodoxy. This is later mimicked by Hanbalis and then finally the Ash'aris. It is through the chains of power that this end was achieved. Foucault and philosophers of structuralist persuasion argued that people develop literary documents in an attempt to provide structures of meaning that will help them make sense of what seems otherwise chaotic. Moreover he maintains that knowledge is not inherently neutral but rather embedded in power structures.² As such then, orthodoxy can be understood as an assertion of power. Minimalism likewise is a tool which provides sense to the textual sources. El-Shamsy hence argues that 'orthodoxy' itself in Islam is a social construction which should not be understood as a tangible thing but rather a process – a social phenomenon.³

Calder finds difficulty in accurately defining orthodoxy within Sunni Islam due to its heterogeneity.⁴ Orthodoxy in Sunni Islam is underpinned by Prophetic Tradition and the notion of the body of believers referred to as the 'collective'. There is no centralised

¹ Netton, *Islam, Christianity and Tradition*, pp. 103 – 105.

² Rabinow, Paul (ed.) *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p 12 - 14

³ Ahmed El-Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 97.

⁴ Norman Calder, *Interpretation and Jurisprudence in Medieval Islam*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), p. 69.

church authority in Islam to provide 'orthodoxy'. Tradition is possibly the most fitting term to represent the connotation of 'orthodoxy'. Scholastic traditionalism according to its proponents is an articulation of this *tradition*. Minimalism is not a new theology but rather a synthetic construct of Sunnism. Al-Bannā', Yusuf, Qāḍī and others speak of minimalism in the context of Sunni Islam and the notion of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ca*. The core components of Sunni Islam which are tradition, community and historicism will now be explored.

2.1.1 Tradition [Sunna]:

Ḥadīth plays the most significant identifying factor of Sunnism as suggested by the term *Ahl al-Sunna*. Minimalism as an outlook is cognisant of this and as such finds its identity in the Sunni tradition by acknowledging the authority of the written or textual Sunna. The Sunna in turn, is understood in legal terms as the speech, practice and approval of Muhammad.⁵ Ḥadīth literature which comprises the sayings of Muhammad thus becomes the cornerstone of Sunni faith. All the contemporary scholastic traditional groups, the Salafis, Sufis, *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, Deobandi and Barelwis all refer to the same Ḥadīth literature, i.e. the Six Canonical Books (*al-ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*) and other reliable sources, and Goldziher argues that the significance of this corpus in Muslim learning and life has been of the highest order.⁶

Al-Jurjānī defines Sunna lexically as a path or method (*ṭarīqa*) which can be either good or bad, or even tradition (*ʿāda*). In legal terms, he defines it as the path which is adhered to in the religion not out of obligation. The Sunna is what the Prophet regularly did

⁵ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), p. 44.

⁶ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*. (trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 37 – 40.

but left out at times (*mā tarakahu ahyānan*).⁷ If by what is left out one understands as non-obligatory then Sunna if interpreted as 'orthodoxy' would also entail non-binding. Ḥadīth scholars include physical or characteristic descriptions of Muhammad within the remit of Sunna.⁸ Legal theorists especially al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) defines Sunna as that which has been transmitted from the Prophet specifically and not been specified in the Qur'ān. In their view it serves as an explanation of what is in the Book.⁹ Al-Shāṭibī explains that the word Sunna was used to imply 'orthodoxy' as a reaction to the emergence of new 'sects'.¹⁰ Abd al-Hādī observes that many of the latter-day scholars (*muta'akhhirūn*)¹¹ whether Ḥadīth scholars or otherwise began to use the term Sunna for sound doctrine. In fact many works especially by Ḥanbalī scholars were written on the science of *ʿaqīda* as books of 'Sunna'. Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795/1393) posits that the term Sunna would deter one from opposing it as it would herald their perdition.¹² In this sense Sunna would be 'orthodoxic' in outlook.

The authority of the Sunna in Sunni Islam is generally uncontested. Prophetic tradition is considered as non-recited revelation (*wahy ghayr matlū*).¹³ As a source it is second

⁷ Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī. *Al-Taʿrifāt*. (Beirut: Darelfikr, 1998), p 88.

⁸ ʿAbdullah Yūsuf al-Judayʿ, *Tahrīr ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*. 2 vols (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Rayyān, 2003), i, pp. 17 -19.

⁹ Al-Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq. *Al-Muwāfaqāt fi Uṣūl al-Sharīʿa*. 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, [no date]), iv, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid p 3 - 4

¹¹ There is a general demarcation of scholarship along the chronological lines as has been highlighted earlier in a general Pious Predecessors (*salaf*) and Successive Generations (*khalaf*) setting. This is then further expanded to include medieval to pre-modern scholarship by designating Early Elders (*mutaqaddimūn*) and Latter-day Scholars (*muta'akhhirūn*) division.

¹² Al-Hādī, p. 44.

¹³ The Sunna by many including Kamali is considered as unrecited revelation, i.e. that which to some extent holds the authority of the Qur'ān though does not constitute its wording.

to the Qur'ān, and as such Muslims are required to adhere to the teachings and practices of Muhammad:

*What I have forbidden for you avoid; and what I have ordered you to do, do as much as you can.*¹⁴

From his words *as much as you can* it could be deduced that Sunna is not definitively binding as the Qur'ān. Unlike the Qur'ān regarded by Sunni Muslims as the unequivocal literal Word of God, the authenticity of the Sunna is open to question. Authentic Sunna is divided into a) Mass transmitted (*mutawātir*): to the extent where so many people have narrated it, it would be impossible that they were lying. And b) Solitary transmissions (*āhād*): these traditions have further classifications.¹⁵ Though devotional acts are largely based on solitary transmissions it is argued by theologians that doctrine should be based only on mass-transmission. Shaltūt claims a scholarly consensus on this issue.¹⁶ His assertion has some ramifications for doctrines that have been held on to dearly by traditions especially those concerning eschatology. Mass transmission denotes definitive knowledge whereas solitary only speculative. It is plausible that for this reason in early Islam there was a split in jurisprudential approaches to Islamic law; the method of the traditionalist (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) scholars who can be described as textualists and the rationalist (*ahl al-ra'y*) who conversely would be intentionalists. Minimalism is a traditionalist project and as such is anchored to an extent in *ḥadīth* textualism.

¹⁴ Al-Bukhārī, 96:2, 7288, p. 607.

¹⁵ Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, *Taysīr Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*. (Lahore: Maktabah Rahmaniyyah, [no date]), p. 17.

¹⁶ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Al-Fatāwā: Dirāsa li-muskilāt al-muslim al-mu'āṣir fī ḥayātihi al-yawmiyya al-ʿamma*. (Cairo: Dar el-Shurouk, 2004), p. 53.

2.1.2 Community [*Jamā'a*]:

Minimalism is geared towards the communal cohesiveness of traditional Islam. As we have seen in the previous chapter, ethical minimalism focuses on the idea of affiliating with the body of believers and in that sense is 'orthopraxic' in outlook. The Arabic word *jamā'a* literally denotes a group, a collective, a congregation and other synonymous words.¹⁷ In jurisprudential terms it refers to the congregation of prayer.¹⁸ However its general linguistic definition is community. Many *ḥadīth* abound with the notion of 'clinging to the community'. Notwithstanding these traditions the concept of *jamā'a* seems to be contentious in both contemporary and classical theology. The ramifications for minimalism and contemporary polemics in general are significant. Al-Shāṭibī in his work *al-I'tiṣām* which is a sourcebook for contemporary Salafi polemicists lists the divergent views of the scholars regarding who the 'community' refers to;

1. The Companions
2. The scholars of sacred knowledge
3. Political leaders
4. The great masses
5. The community of Muslims under the leadership of the Emir.

Some scholars especially ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101/720) who is popularly dubbed as the Fifth Rightly-Guided Caliph argued that the *jamā'a* in the Ḥadīth corpus refers to the Companions only since they established the foundations of the religion and

¹⁷ Wehr, pp. 135. [entry: جمع]

¹⁸ Aḥmad Ibn Naqīb Al-Miṣrī, *Reliance of the Traveller: A Classical Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* [Trans, Nuh Keller] (Maryland: Amana Publications, 1994), p. 170.

they never agreed upon error.¹⁹ This is only the Sunni account as it interprets the ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya conflict as a hypothetical legal (*ijtihādī*) dispute.

On the whole Sunnis consider the Companions as fallible human beings but be that as it may, it is insisted that they are spoken of in the best light only. Those who subscribe to this view corroborate this assertion with other traditions hailing the virtue and authority of the Companions. This effectively highlights what one terms a ‘companionist’ outlook of Sunni Islam that is to say a doctrine which holds reverence of all of Muhammad’s companions. The concept of inherent ‘uprightness’ (*ʿadāla*) of the companions of Muhammad was embedded in the Sunni definition as a result of the polemics against the Shiite and Khārijite views on the companions. Juynboll suggests that it was later theologians who put all the Companions on an equal level of absolute trustworthiness.²⁰ In effect Sunni Islam’s idiosyncratic difference from the other sects was marked by the recognition of this uprightness of *all* Companions and as such it is second to Ḥadīth itself but also inextricably linked to it since the literature was transmitted by them or ascribed to them. Brown suggests that this ‘companionism’ became a cornerstone of traditional ḥadīth sciences and by extension Sunni Islam.²¹ Minimalism very much anchors itself in this notion. This principle will be explored in chapter four.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1448) contends that the collective refers to the Scholars of Sacred Knowledge (*ahl al-ʿilm*), the jurists and ḥadīth masters. Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī also lists the factions of *Ahl al-Sunna* in his herisographical treatise *ʿal-Farq bayn al-*

¹⁹ Abu Ishāq Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Iʿtiṣām*. (Beirut: Darel Marefah, 2000), pp. 518 – 519.

²⁰ G. H. A Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 6.

²¹ Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996), pp. 85 – 87.

Firaq' which was discussed in chapter one. One may infer from this designation that this would imply the *jamā'ca* would essentially consist of scholarly elite since they are to be followed in matters of religion and consequently this would exclude laymen who are followers. Alternatively, perhaps this may be interpreted as a two tier *jamā'ca*. This is the central philosophy of the scholastic traditionalism of all persuasions i.e. the positing of scholars as custodians of 'orthodoxy'. El Shamsy articulates that the history of orthodoxy is not simply a history of ideas but rather a history of how claims to truth were enshrined in social practices, such as rituals and in institutions such as the "community of scholars".²²

Al-Asqalānī posits a view which complements the second view. He argues that the *jamā'ca* refers to 'the people of binding and loosening' (*ahl al-ḥil wa al-ʿaqqd*). This group includes the scholars as referred to above but also the political leaders. The obligation of having political leaders and following them has been discussed in the theological works and has been clearly enunciated by Abū ʿUmar al-Nasafi in his *ʿAqā'id*.²³ In contemporary Islam many discussions of whether it is proper to follow an unjust Muslim ruler and be patient or exhibit civil disobedience either through peaceful means or armed opposition have arisen in modern Sunni polemics. This most notably, during the Arab Spring of 2011.²⁴ Furthermore El Shamsy identifies three layers of the orthodox body; the scholars, ordinary believers and the government.²⁵ Effectively the

²² Ahmed El Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy', in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter, pp. 97.

²³ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiya*, pp. 233 – 241.

²⁴ Minhaj.com, 'The Egyptian Revolution, Networks of Awthaan, Allaah's Qadariyy and Shar'iy Hukm and Those Who Resent and Mock the Divine Hikmah and the Qadariyy and Shary'iy Asbaab' *politics and current affairs*. (Feb 2011) <<http://www.manhaj.com/manhaj/articles/irktb-allaahs-qadari-and--shariyyy-hukm-the-egyptian-uprising-and-the-islamic-awakening-qutbi-kindergarten.cfm>> [accessed 27/05/12]

²⁵ Ahmed El-Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter, pp. 115.

convenient marriage of government and scholarship is what regulated 'orthodoxy' in the past and is indicative too in the Amman Message.

Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) explains that the *jamā'a* is all people (*jumla al-nās*) the majority of whom are united upon the allegiance of the Sultan and the upright methodology (*al-nahj al-qawīm*).²⁶ Al-Shāṭibī asserts that this *jamā'a* consists of the *mujtahid* scholars of this community (*umma*), those who practice the Sharī'a and *all those who follow them*.²⁷ It would seem from this that al-Shāṭibī is defining the great masses through the 'orthodoxy' of scholarship rather than virtue of themselves.

Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) agrees with the above explanations of the *jamā'a*, however he claims that the import of the tradition is maintaining the community by obeying whoever they have appointed as their emir; whoever rescinds his allegiance forfeits the claim to be part of the *jamā'a*. It could be inferred from al-Ṭabarī's statement that this means all Muslims. Unlike the other statements especially al-Shāṭibī's where Sunni imams are the head of the leadership and the followers fall under them as long as they abide to the Sunni imams, al-Ṭabarī's statement has no qualification of Sunnism as such. Hypothetically if a Sunni Ḥanafī decides to rebel against the Imam yet his Shiite counterpart recognises the authority of the Sunni Imam – would the Shiite have more claim to the *jamā'a* than the Ḥanafī? In Saudi Arabia, especially after the first Gulf War many Wahhābīs became vehemently critical of the Royal establishment; this incurred an equally vociferous reaction from Wahhābi scholars. These Wahhābī scholars were branded Khārijites by the rebelling Wahhābīs,

²⁶ Muhammad al-Jazarī Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Nihāya fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2000), p. 453. (سود)

²⁷ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿtiṣām*, pp. 19 – 22.

despite being from the same school of thought and irrespective of their claim to Sunni Islam.²⁸

Effectively what is becoming evident here is that these scholars were attempting to make sense of their reality through the text. Four approaches can be identified in the appropriation of the word 'community'.

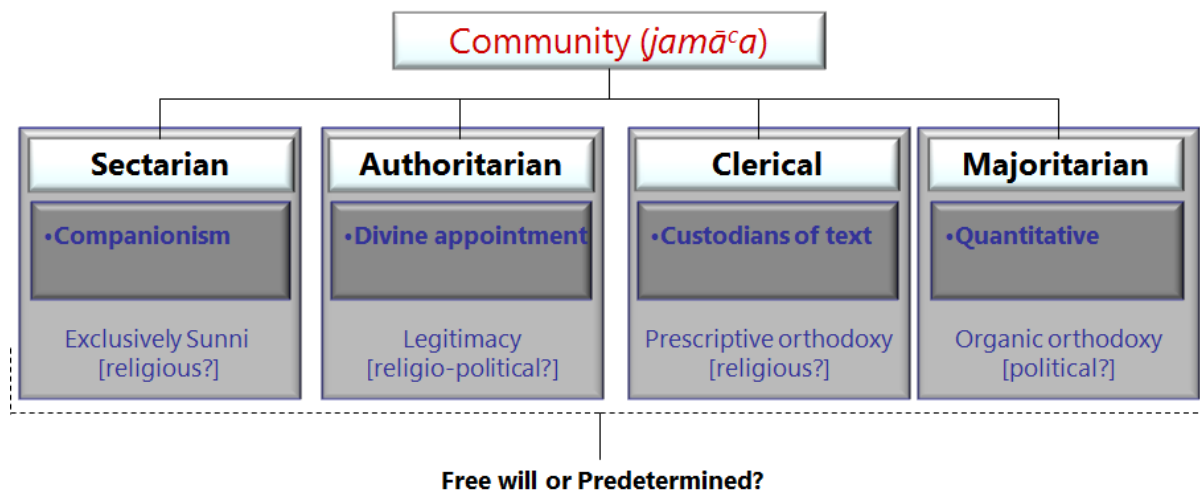
1. *Sectarian*: whereby the claim to revere all companions would readily exclude Shiite and Khārijite Muslims.
2. *Authoritarian*: the political powers of the day attempted to claim orthodoxy by the right that God had assigned them positions of power and responsibility. Historically both the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties were complicit in this. Goldzher notes how the Umayyads used the doctrine of decree to legitimise their claim to rule over Muslims, while the argument for free will weakened their political agenda.²⁹
3. *Clerical*: the traditionalist Ḥanbalī and Ashʿarī scholarship have vied to lay claim to orthodoxy by virtue of them being custodians of knowledge and being heirs of the prophets.
4. *Majoritarian*: the natural order would be numerical and this compounds rigid orthodoxy as a body of people do not constitute a monolithic entity.

²⁸ Bowen, p. 63.

<<http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecid=ndv12&articleid=grv070001&articlepages=1>> [accessed 27/05/12]

²⁹ Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, pp. 83 – 85.

Figure 2:1 Defining the congregation



Consequently even if Muslims decide to identify themselves with the name '*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*' there is no categorical agreement as to whom the *jamā'ah* definitively refers to and it constitutes the second, organic facet of 'orthodoxy'. Minimalism has not shed much light on this. Furthermore the community majoritarian thesis has two dimensions to it; virtue based orthodoxy which is a historicism and quantity based orthodoxy.

2.2 Virtue-Based Orthodoxy

In addition to 'textual' orthodoxies there is what can be termed virtue-based orthodoxy. Virtue-based orthodoxy plays a significant role in the polemical dynamics of contemporary Sunni Islam especially between the Sufi and Salafi factions. On the one hand there is the notion of understanding orthodoxy through the historical link back to early Islam and on the other hand the practice of early Islam is in and of itself an 'orthodox' methodology. Methodological minimalism articulates a broad 'flight to tradition' as its base. Van Ess comments upon this type of historicism:

‘Both the reformist and the fundamentalist currents of modern Islam take their inspiration from a history that favours the beginning over the end, the past over the future. Such a view unquestionably posits a utopia of the ideal beginning, so to speak.’³⁰

He goes on to argue that this motif is not uncommon and links it with European romanticism and nationalism. The myth of a utopia is according to him, constructed in order to forge an identity.³¹ Minimalism is in this manner, an *identity politics* tool.

2.2.1 Ash‘arī and Māturīdī views on ‘historical’ orthodoxy

The Sunni theologians recognise two periods within Islamic orthodoxy. The first period is that of the Pious Predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), which includes the first three generations of Muslims. Shaykh Ramadan al-Būṭī³² perceives this period as a blessing which was time contingent (*baraka zamaniya*) and not necessarily a theological school (*madrasa*) in its broadest sense.³³ Prophetic tradition seems to acclaim the first three generations;

³⁰ Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*. (trans. Jane Marie Todd) (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 117.

³¹ Van Ess, p. 117.

³² Shaykh al-Būṭī was a leading scholar of the Ash‘arī school of *kalām*. He was an avowed traditionalist whom Western Muslim converts like Keller and Yusuf regarded in high esteem.

³³ Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafiyya: Marḥala Zamaniyya Mubāraka lā Madhab Islāmī*. (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), p. 11 – 23.

*'The best of my community is this generation, then those who succeed them and those succeed them'*³⁴

The virtue of the early generations is extolled in all Sunni creeds and theological works such as the *Jawhara al-Tawhīd* of Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī, *al-ʿAqā'id* of Abū ʿUmar al-Nasafī and *Lumʿa al-ʿItiqād* of Ibn Qudāma. The second period of historical orthodoxy is that of the Venerable or Upright Successors (*al-khalaf al-ṣādiq*) which is beyond the first three generations of Islam. The theologians corroborate this with a tradition of the Prophet

*'This knowledge is carried by upright individuals of every successive generation' (yaḥmilu hādha al-ʿilm min kulli khalaf ʿudūluhu).*³⁵

Subsequently all the scholars after the period of the Salaf which include celebrated personalities such as al-Ghazālī, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), Qāḍī ʿAyāḍ (d. 544/1149), Muḥiy al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) and others are reverently referred to as the Khalaf notably by Sufi scholastic Ashʿarīs.³⁶ The Khalaf though may differ on minor issues with the Salaf, are considered their natural successors because of the *isnād*³⁷ system – they have inherited their traditions. Both the Salaf and the Khalaf periods are aptly called 'Classical Islam' by traditionalist Muslim scholars of Europe like T.J. Winter. Sometimes classical Islam is interchangeably used for traditional or

³⁴ Al-Bukhārī, 62:1, 3650, p. 297.

³⁵ ʿAshiq Ilāhī al-Burnī, *Zād al-Ṭālibīn min Kalām Rasūl Rabb al-ʿĀlamīn*. (Karachi: Matkaba al-Bushra, 2011), p. 46.

³⁶ Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm*, pp. 97 – 99.

³⁷ The Ḥadīth canons of transmission such as sanad referencing (*sanad - silsila*) and permission to narrate (*ijāza*) eventually permeated all the classical syllabi and became fused with Muslim orthodoxy.

'mainstream' Islam.³⁸ The traditionalist understanding of historical orthodoxy is generally optimistic to change and development as long as it is in spirit with the past. This early group of Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians have confidently responded to two waves of Hellenism and were not shy of adopting/Islamising foreign methods.

2.2.2 Ḥanbalī view on historical orthodoxy

The Ḥanbalī, and in this respect one is referring to the neo-Wahhābi Salafi groups, also recognise two distinct periods of historical orthodoxy. The first is pure Islam, the period of first three generations, the Pious Predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), and the second period is the centuries of deviation. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb is alleged to have said that from the 1100 CE onwards to roughly 1700s the *umma* has been upon manifest error.³⁹ Delong-Bas notes that the followers of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb on this premise of *umma*-wide deviancy also opposed the Ottoman Empire whom they regarded as not only morally but religiously corrupt.⁴⁰ Modern Salafis argue that the Turkish Empire was a decadent entity permissively lax on shirk and innovative practices.⁴¹ The Wahhābīs do not consider the Salaf period as just a historical phase, rather they contend that Salafism (*salafiyya*) is a methodology (*minhāj*).⁴² Everything after the Salaf period which does not correspond to the tenets of this '*minhāj*' is upon misguidance. Early Islam is in no need of modifications or re-evaluations, and consequently a 'Venerable Successors' model is redundant. The Wahhābīs do not use the term 'Khalaf' for latter day scholars. The Salaf period is the classical period of

³⁸ Tim Winter, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* Winter, ed. by Tim Winter, pp. 2 – 4.

³⁹ Ibn 'Alawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm*, pp. 71.

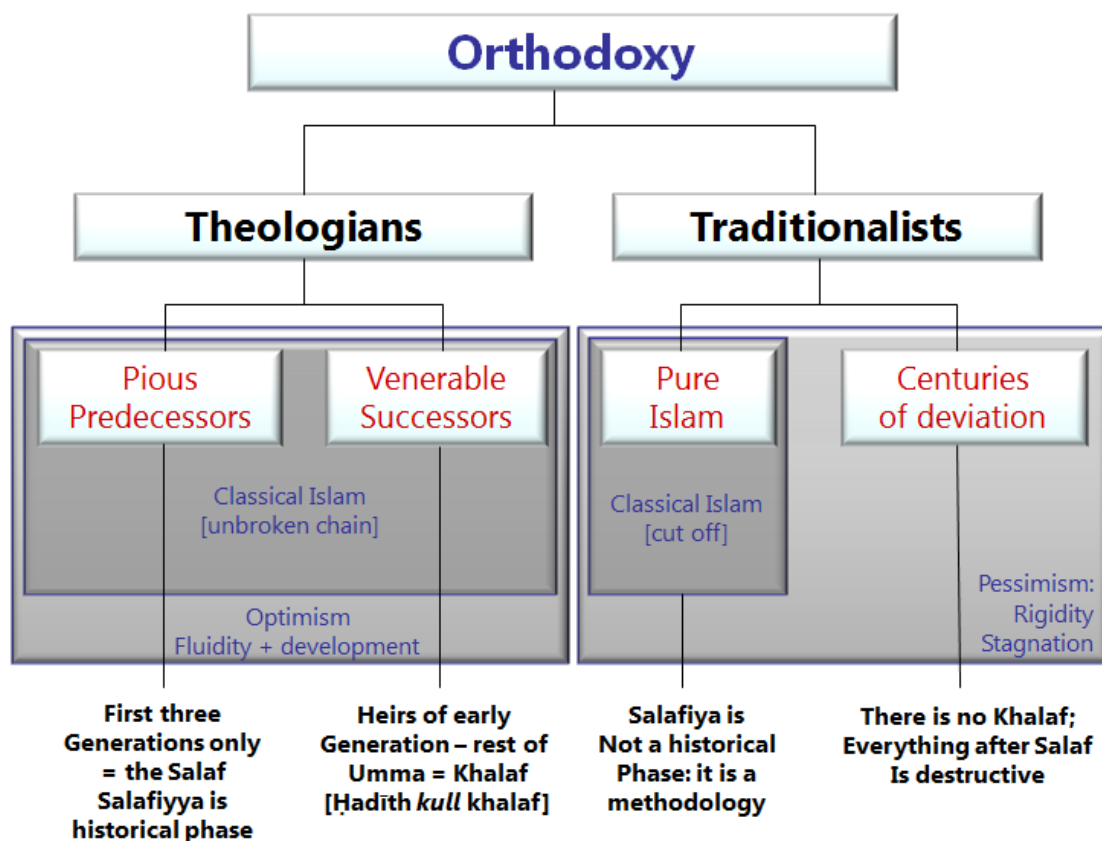
⁴⁰ Natana J Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. (Cairo: The American University Press in Cairo, 2005), pp. 246 – 247.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Amīn Ibn 'Ābidīn, *Hāshiya Radd al-Muḥtār 'alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār Sharḥ Tanwīr al-Abṣār*. 14 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 2002), vi, p. 413.

⁴² Rabī' ibn Hādī al-Madkhalī, *Al-Tamassuk bi al-Manhaj al-Salafi*. (Algiers: Dār al-Mīrāth al-Nabawī li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', [no date]), pp. 5 – 6.

pristine Islam which did not naturally pass on to successive generations or develop in to a more sophisticated manifestation rather it was cut off. The *isnād* did not prove to be a safeguard from deviation it became merely a tool of transmission and for that matter transmitted the idiosyncratic errors of former generations. The overall vision is pessimistic and antagonistic to change, and the outlook is puritanical and rigid.

Figure 2:2 Orthodoxy through time



2.2.3 The Pious Predecessors – Sunni Historicism

Both reform and traditional Islam posit a type of historicism of early Muslims. Modern reform views this period as the dawn of a liberation theology whereas traditionalism would view early Islam as orthodoxy in and of itself. Minimalism also entertains this notion not on the doctrinal but on theological and methodological grounds. It is worth noting that this historicism inspires modern traditional Salafism.

The first community (*salaf*) sometimes translated as the Pious Predecessors, literally refers to forefathers of the first few generations. As for the technical import Al-Ghazālī states ‘whenever I mention Salaf I mean the Companions and the Successors.’⁴³ Al-Bājūrī (d. 1276/1859) an Ash‘arite theologian maintains the Salaf refers to previous prophets, the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), the Successors (*tābi‘īn*) of the Companions and the Successors of the Successors (*tābi‘ al-tābi‘īn*) especially the four Sunni Imams (Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Al-Shāfi‘ī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal).⁴⁴ Interestingly al-Hādī agrees with al-Bājūrī regarding the four Sunni Imams and includes their contemporaries, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and all the scholars of Ḥadīth who according to him were not accused of Khārijite, Shiite, Murji‘ite, Jabarite, Jahmite or Mu‘tazilite heterodoxies.⁴⁵ These definitions are inferred from the tradition of the ‘best of generations’. The Salaf refer to the first three generations and the epoch is sometimes referred to as the Inception of Islam (*ṣadr al-islām*).

In the nineteenth century Muhammad Abduh began a ‘call back to the way of the Salaf’ (*Da‘wa Salafiya*), though his reform had some rationalist overtones, this movement eventually culminates in the modern trend of reformers such as Fazlur Rahman *et al.* It is this *salafiyya* which according to Kurzman is the crux of all forms of revivalism.⁴⁶ Netton calls this phenomenon the ‘flight to tradition’ a major preoccupation of Salafis and also a motif found in the Christian religious tradition.⁴⁷ In the late twentieth

⁴³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ijām al-‘awām ‘an ‘ilm al-Kalām* in *Majmū‘a rasā’il al-Imām al-Ghazālī* Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya [no date] p. 320.

⁴⁴ Al-Ṣāwī, Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad. *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*. Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr 2003 p. 436.

⁴⁵ Al-Hādī, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Charles Kurzman, ‘Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context’ in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*. ed. by Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 8 – 13.

⁴⁷ Netton, *Islam, Christianity and Tradition*, pp. 127 – 133.

century this *da'wa salafiyya* was appropriated by Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and veered towards Saudi Wahhābism.⁴⁸ Another term used for the Salaf is Ahl al-Ḥadīth. The group literally refers to the scholars of Ḥadīth and those jurists who do not confine themselves to a juristic school of thought (*madhab*) as such.⁴⁹ The Ahl al-Ḥadīth in this literal sense i.e. being Ḥadīth scholars are trusted by all Sunnis as they have preserved and narrated the Prophetic Traditions. This term is used by the Salafis and the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement of the Indian Subcontinent as a reference to a jurisprudential non-conformist group.⁵⁰ ʿAbd al-Hādī however illustrates that the term Ahl al-Ḥadīth in this regard and *Ahl al-Sunna* are synonymous and therefore the connotation here is more encompassing. In fact Ibn Taymiya emphasises that Ahl al-Ḥadīth is not restricted to Ḥadīth narrators and scholars rather it includes all scholars and Muslims who act upon the Sunna.⁵¹ In this regards El Shamsy remarks;

‘The discipline of the traditionists rested on a shared methodology, an accepted body of material, and a *minimum* set of doctrines.....the traditionists formed a transnational network of like-minded scholars whose focus was on gathering and then ascertaining the authenticity and accuracy of reported prophetic traditions’⁵²

⁴⁸ Ahmed, Sayf ad-Deen. *Al-Albani Unveiled: An Exposition of His Errors and other Important Issues*. nmusba.wordpress.com pp. 49 – 52. [PDF version]. This book was in print during the 1990s and was the Sufi Scholastic defence against the Salafi onslaught. Masud.co.uk has uploaded this online on his website. <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/albintro.htm>> [accessed 18/3/15]

⁴⁹ ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Qārī,. *Barnāmij ʿAmalī li l-Mutafaqqahīn*. (Birmingham: Dar al-Arqam,), pp. 27-28.

⁵⁰ Bowen, pp. 75 – 76.

⁵¹ Al-Hādī, p. 50.

⁵² Ahmed El Shamsy, ‘The Social Construction of Orthodoxy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter, p. 105.

From El-Shamsy's observations it is indicative that the Ḥadīth scholars probably played the most significant role in setting a cohesive scholastic body or methodology acceptable to Muslims especially of the Sunni persuasion as they standardised a succinct Sunni syllabus. This was further cemented by the pro-Shāfi'ite Ḥadīth canonisation project which gave the Ahl al-Ḥadīth centrality in Sunni representation.⁵³ Methodological minimalism on its first level is rooted on this type of 'early forefathers' orthopraxic Islam.⁵⁴

2.3 Quantifiable orthodoxy

In addition to the virtue-based historical orthodoxy one would argue that there is also what maybe termed quantifiable orthodoxy, that is to say an orthodoxy based on an existential abundance or paucity of believers in the body of the community as a divine signpost of guidance. There is the exclusivist 'Saved Sect' narrative which is embedded in a pessimistic 'minoritarian' outlook and a counter inclusivist 'Great masses' narrative which is entrenched in an optimistic 'majoritarian' worldview. This dichotomy fuels contemporary intra-Sunni polemics and its roots can be found in classical theology. Both these outlooks inform in classical times Ḥanbalī / Ash'arī and contemporary Salafī / Sufi scholastic traditionalist claims to orthodoxy. Classical theology deals with this at length; minimalism however attempts to overlook this phenomenon. An explanation of this would be that any unity initiative is radically compromised by either narrative.

⁵³ Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 50.

⁵⁴ See Fig. 1:1.

2.3.1 The Saved Sect [*al-firqa al-nājiya*]:

The first of the quantity based orthodoxy we shall examine is that of the 'Saved Sect'. The thesis of this narrative is that only one sect amongst many within the Muslim faith shall attain salvation, the rest shall be punished in the inferno but not forever. Scholastic traditional Salafism is very much embedded in this narrative. The origins of this notion can be traced back to an eschatological prophetic tradition:

*'The Jews have split into seventy one sects, the Christians into seventy two sects, my Umma will splinter into seventy three sects all of them are in the fire except one – the community (al-jamā'a)*⁵⁵

A plain reading of this tradition would give the impression that the Saved Sect will be outnumbered by the others. Ḥadīth such as this and others pertaining to this notion have been used by both the dominant Ash'arī/Māturīdī camp and the minority Ḥanbalī faction. The Ḥanbalīs in particular have taken a keen interest in this narrative as is evident in their lore. Al-Safārīnī's *al-Durra al-Marḍiyya fī 'Aqd Ahl al-Firqa al-Marḍiyya* and other works are indicative of this movement. Historically the Ḥanbalīs dissociated themselves from the Ash'aris and as such their exclusivity is best justified in a 'Saved Sect' worldview. Additionally, this narrative is embedded in a deterministic universe. The splinter of the community into sects and schisms is a fulfilment of prophecy. Contemporary Salafism is engaged in the promotion of this thesis and the resounding motif in their discourse is the 'methodology of the Saved Sect' (*minhāj al-firqa al-nājiya*).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibn Māja, 36:17, 3992, p. 2716.

⁵⁶ Jameel Zaynoo, *The Methodology of the Saved Sect*. (London: Darussalam International Publications Ltd, 2003), p. 4.

The Ash^carī/Māturīdī view on the other hand has a more general understanding of this though not denying the veracity of the tradition. Contemporary Sufi scholastic traditionalists would argue that the Saved Sect narrative is one only entertained by ‘fringe’ Ḥanbalīs of the past and Salafis of today, yet we can even see figures like Ibn Ṭāhir clearly embedding Sunni Islam in a ‘seventy three sects’ narrative and attempting to identify all of these.⁵⁷ Al-Juday^c proves Van Ess’s judgement on this tradition by declaring it ‘good’ (*ḥasan*). Good implies speculative authenticity.⁵⁸

The Wahhābīs have an obsessive fixation over this tradition which is dubbed ‘*The Ḥadīth on the splintering of the Umma*’ (*ḥadīth iftirāq al-umma*) and it has been the most dominant subject of Wahhābī publications.⁵⁹ Being a minority does not deter this faction on the contrary it further consolidates it. Truth can only be one and interpretation causes division. New ideas and practices upset identity and historical continuity and therefore these are to be opposed. Individuals who veer off the ‘correct’ methodology are to be warned of and avoided.⁶⁰

Religion as whole in this narrative is viewed pessimistically as it is difficult and holding on to it is like holding on to burning coal.⁶¹ Though community (*jamā^ca*) is central to Sunnism this narrative does not necessarily see salvation in affiliating with the body of

⁵⁷ Al-Baghdādī, pp. 276 – 325.

⁵⁸ ^cAbdullah Yūsuf al-Juday^c, *Aḍwā’ ^calā Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma*. (Beirut: Mu’assasa al-Rayyān, 1998), p. 36 – 37.

⁵⁹ Many of the written and audio literature in the 1990s were titled along the lines of ‘Divisions in the Umma’ and ‘Methodology of the Saved Sect’.

⁶⁰ ^cAbdullah ibn Muḥammad al-Jaw^cī, *Al-Ikfār wa al-Tashhīr: Ḍawābiṭ wa maḥādhir*. (London: Darulifta, 1991), pp. 51 – 73.

⁶¹ Al-Tirmidhī, 31:73, 2260, p. 1879.

the Umma alone – Tradition (*sunna*) is ultimately the safeguard, effectively they are more ‘orthodoxic’ and ultimately this narrative is inflexibly monolithic and rejectionist.

Both Salafi and Sufi scholastic traditionalists recognise the ‘Saved Sect’ narrative; however contextualising this is very much the preserve of Salafi circles. Here we shall borrow the framework of the Tradition of Gabriel’s tripartite dimensions of faith, legal (*islām*), doctrinal (*īmān*) and spiritual (*iḥsān*) to demonstrate the extent of ‘Saved Sect’ minimalism, as even the Salafis allow some differences of opinion. From the jurisprudential plane the Saved Sect approach for them identifies the Sub-Continent *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, the Arab Salafiyya and the Wahhābī Ḥanbalīs. From the theological dimension only one school is acceptable and that is the Salafi (Atharī) school. And from the spiritual plain only a cautious asceticism (*zuhd*) would be acceptable as opposed to Sufism because of the propensity of innovative practices and ‘incorrect’ doctrine. Political Islamic movements can be accommodated if they subscribe to Salafist doctrine; however Saudi Wahhābīs oppose the very notion of political movements.⁶² Another aspect of this contextualisation is the assertion that there is a dearth of ‘orthodox’ Islamic scholarship.

An acute obsession amongst Salafi polemicists is the real-world updating of the ‘72 deviant sects’ thesis. They feel these 72 sects are perennial phenomena and need to be identified in order for safeguarding the masses. Ironically Ibn Taymiyya clearly enunciated ‘to categorically designate a particular group as one of the 72 sects requires evidence, God has prohibited discussion without knowledge in general and particularly His religion’. He argues further ‘Many people identify groups as belonging to the 72 based on conjecture’.⁶³ A further corroborating theme in the saved sect

⁶² Al-Najdī, pp. 65 – 67.

⁶³ Al-Juday^c, *Aḍwā’ ‘alā Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma*, p. 52.

narrative is the prophetic tradition of the 'Victorious Faction' [*al-Ṭā'ifa al-Manṣūra*]. This tradition reads:

'a group from my Umma will be manifest upon truth, those who oppose them or forsake them, cannot harm them'.⁶⁴

All Sunni groups quote the Hadith of *al-Ṭā'ifa al-Manṣūra* to generically mean Sunni Islam as a whole, however at times this *ḥadīth* has been used to reference particular groups or persuasions within Sunni Islam. Modern Sunni Jihadists also use this tradition as a propaganda tool to galvanise support for recruitment and general public appeal.⁶⁵ Perhaps the wording of the Ḥadīth gives the impression that this group will be a minority and further supplements the 'Saved Sect' thesis. It could be argued here that the Ḥanbalis used these traditions to justify themselves for their lack of popularity amongst the general Muslim masses. This 'Saved Sect' narrative is one of the challenges minimalism faces as it feeds off conspiracy theories.

2.3.2 The Great Masses [*al-sawād al-a'zam*]

Van Ess argues that out of reaction to the 'Saved Sect' narrative which was constructed to understand sectarianism a counter narrative – the 'Great Masses' was put forth by the community.⁶⁶ One is compelled to agree with Van Ess that the authenticity of the 'Great Masses' narrative is less convincing than that of the 'Saved Sect' traditions. The

⁶⁴ Muslim, 33:53, 4950, p. 1020.

⁶⁵ Ḥaṣan Ṣādiq al-Liwā', *Judhūr al-Fitna fi Firaq al-Islāmiyya mundhu 'ahd al-Rasūl ilā ihtiyāl Sādāt*. (Maktaba Madbūlī: Cairo. [no date]), p. 339.

⁶⁶ Van Ess, p. 21.

Great Masses narrative is backed by the most authentic version of this genre from Ibn al-Athīr, hardly a canonical reference point:

*'My community will not agree upon error, if you witness divergence then affiliate with the great masses [alaykum bi al-sawād al-aʿazam]'*⁶⁷

Interestingly the Ashʿarīs and Māturīdis generally cite this tradition in most of their theological works. It is this narrative which is used by the Ashʿaris to bolster their claim to orthodoxy. Makdisi indicates that Ibn al-Subkī declared the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī schools as the definitive articulations of Sunni Islam through the great masses narrative because of their demographic spread.⁶⁸ This claim is further buttressed on the argument that the vast majority of Muslims follow the four schools of Sunni Islam and these two schools of theology. The 'Great Masses' tradition to an extent has nurtured a sense of confidence amongst mainstream Sunni scholarship, in that the *majority* will be safeguarded from deviation. This optimism is echoed in the following *ḥadīth*:

*'God forgives my umma for their mistakes, forgetfulness and what is done under duress.'*⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya*, p. 453. This is also narrated by Ibn Māja, 36:8, 3950, p. 2713 though not as authentic.

⁶⁸ George Makdisi, 'Al-Ash'ari and the Ash'arites in Islamic Religious History: II The Problem of al-Ash'ari', *Studia Islamica*, 18 (1963), pp. 37-39.

⁶⁹ Ibn Māja, 10:16, 2043, p. 2599.

Drawing upon this tradition and the notion of consensus (*ijmāʿ*) there has been a general appeal towards accepting the majority view what in Arabic is called the *jumhūr* set especially in Qurʾānic Exegesis. This term is further found in the field of jurisprudence. The word *jumhūr* (majority) is used generally as a reference to three out of four of the Sunni schools.⁷⁰ In exegesis and Ḥadīth studies the words majority 'akthar' are frequently used. In this sense *jumhūr* can be understood as a mainstream. The later generations of scholars are regarded as part of the community (*jamāʿa*) which includes all early authorities. The later generations as aforementioned are referred to as the Venerable Successors. In fact the scholars who emerged during the decline of the Ottoman Empire are called the Latter-day Scholars (*al-mutaʾakhhirūn*). Their views are in this narrative equally authoritative as the earlier scholars (*al-mutaqaddimūn*) because they are deemed as the successors of the first three generations.⁷¹ In jurisprudential theory there was a subtle debate regarding whether there is a plurality of truths. Mainstream Sunni Islam is represented by the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence. Each school acknowledges the veracity of the other, and all of them collectively epitomise truth. Muqtedar Khan a postmodern Muslim thinker argues:

'Islam was from the beginning comfortable with reason. Recognising its immense potential and necessity but also remaining acutely cognisant of its limitation. The Ghazali-Ibn Rushd debate on the nature of causality is an excellent chronicle of Islam's position on reason. Islam simultaneously recognised the absoluteness of Truth as well as the relativity of truth claims. For nearly 1300 years Muslims have believed in one Shariah but

⁷⁰ Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 404.

⁷¹ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafiyya*, pp. 9 – 23.

recognized more than four different, competing and even contradictory articulations of this Shariah.⁷²

This group contend that the *mujtahids* may have differing views but they are all true, albeit some more than others. Diversity is the ethos of the 'Great Masses' narrative, there are always many different ways of arriving at similar conclusions and as such interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is permissible and often a necessary tool because of the diverse nature of individuals within the collective body. This narrative perhaps views Islam also as a cultural phenomenon and as such is comfortable with the idea of creativity or innovation in religious devotional acts which will be explored later.

Sunni Islam affirms the fallibility of scholars and the potential of error on their part. However in this narrative it is understood that the faults of people are to be overlooked and their virtues highlighted instead.⁷³ Ostracisation is anathema to the 'Great Masses' narrative. Consequently this faction is aware that 'impurities' can permeate the body of the community. Unlike the 'Saved Sect' narrative, religion as understood by the 'Great Masses' narrative is easy. The ultimate focus of this narrative is simply the affiliation with the community. Affiliation to the community will protect one from extremisms. The community is regarded as the safeguard. There are many traditions warning those who distance themselves from the community.

At one level the Great Masses may be viewed as a syncretism, especially in terms of making up the numbers. There are some 1.5 billion Muslims – are these the Great

⁷² Muqtedar Khan, 'Islam, Postmodernity and Freedom', *Ijtihad: for freedom of thought and independent thinking for Muslims everywhere*. (2002) <<http://www.ijtihad.org/discourse.htm>> [accessed 28/05/12]

⁷³ Al-^cAlī, pp. 77 – 84.

Masses the Ḥadīth alludes to? On another level theologians are attempting to present a monolithic synthesis of orthodoxy and linking it to the Great Masses narrative. This is the bane of minimalism.

The 'Great Masses' thesis gives credence to the notion of a popular or mainstream Islam. Contextualising the Great Masses is usually attempted by Sufi scholastic traditionalists. In the like manner of Salafi traditionalists the Sufis on the jurisprudential plain recognise at least the Four Sunni Schools of jurisprudence. As for doctrinal trends, throughout history two popular schools of Sunni theology were promoted. According to some though, to a certain extent minority schools can be accommodated. The popular Sufi orders throughout the Muslim lands constitute part of the Great Masses – a parallel perhaps to Christian Ecumenism. Political Islamic Movements can be accommodated whether or not Pan-Sunni as they can serve as vehicles for the promotion of 'Popular Islam'. This narrative also argues that the Umma has enjoyed a plethora of scholarship from the time of the Companions up to the present day. Ibn Qudāma's axiom 'Difference is mercy' constitutes the ethos of the Great Masses narrative. Though this group recognise the 'Saved Sect' tradition, they see no need of updating and identifying the seventy two sects. Having said that, Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, an esteemed Ash'arite theologian painstakingly attempted to identify these sects in his heresiographical work. Al-Juday^c criticises Ibn Ṭāhir for identifying the seventy two sects, arguing that 'deviation' had not discontinued up to Ibn Ṭāhir's era.⁷⁴

Scholastic traditionalists would argue that the 'Saved Sect' and 'Great Masses' narratives are somehow complementary of each other, it is evident from the dynamics

⁷⁴ Al-Juday^c, *Aḍwā' c'alā Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma*, pp. 47 – 52.

of the Sufi / Salafi divide how these narratives inform their polemics. Therefore it would be prudent to argue that these narratives are conflicting and dichotomous.

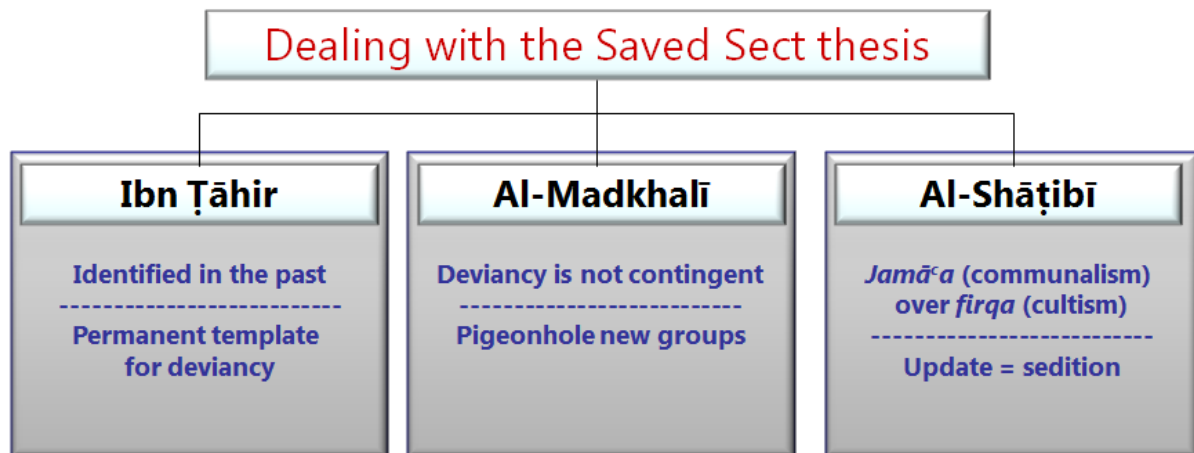
From this discussion it has been established that both groups essentially recognise the validity of both the 'Saved Sect' and the 'Great Masses' narratives since both are backed by prophetic tradition. However basing methodologies upon these traditions poses some pragmatic problems for Muslim community cohesiveness and hence minimalism as a project. The designation of seventy two deviant sects in support of the 'Saved Sect' narrative can be viewed in three ways;

1. *Historical identification approach*: Complete culmination of seventy two *distinct* sects which can be used as a permanent template for 'deviation'. This has been attempted as aforementioned by Ibn Ṭāhir but criticised by al-Juday^c.
2. *Real-world update approach*: Rabī^c al-Madkhalī a Wahhābī polemicist argues that any contemporary group which 'veers' from the doctrines and practices of Sunni Islam should be pigeonholed in the seventy two sects.⁷⁵
3. *Non-committing ambiguous approach*: al-Shāṭibī contends that there is no need to identify these sects; in fact identification of them could lead to producing rifts and fuelling animosity amongst Muslims. What is intended from the tradition is the importance of community (*jamā'a*) in its broadest sense and not cultism (*firqiyya*).⁷⁶ The sects could be viewed as an allusion to trends which should be avoided – the knowledge of the sects in religious epistemological terms is from the realm of the unseen (*al-ghayb*) and hence intrinsically controversial.

⁷⁵ Al-Madkhalī, p. 6 – 7.

⁷⁶ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-I'tiṣām*, pp. 506 – 514.

Figure 2:3 Approaches to updating the ‘Saved Sect’



Another issue of significance which pertains to the ‘Ḥadīth of the Saved Sect’ is the notion that ‘difference’ (*ikhtilāf*) is not the same as ‘separation’ (*iftirāq*). The Great Masses narrative reconciles differences with the concept of community. To them community is a loose conglomeration of diverse trends which are linked to core principles. They promote diversity but not cultism. On the other hand the Saved Sect narrative is by and large monolithic and antagonistic to diversity. They argue that differences are the cause of cultism. Van Ess dismisses the very authenticity of both premises.⁷⁷ His cynicism is not unfounded as al-Juday^c a leading traditional expert (*muḥaddith*) concedes that that neither is rigorously authentic.⁷⁸

The ‘Saved Sect’ narrative is what sustained Ḥanbalī vitality whilst Ash^carī dominance may have been facilitated or justified through the ‘Great Masses’ argument. Minimalism best fits in a ‘Great Masses narrative’. It is understandable why ‘Abd al-Hādī embedded his thirteen principles of Sunnism within the ‘Great Masses’ narrative.⁷⁹ Though he addresses the ‘Saved Sect’ narrative in his work, being a Salafi he is mindful of the potential divisiveness of this narrative which is prevalent in

⁷⁷ Van Ess, pp. 40 – 41.

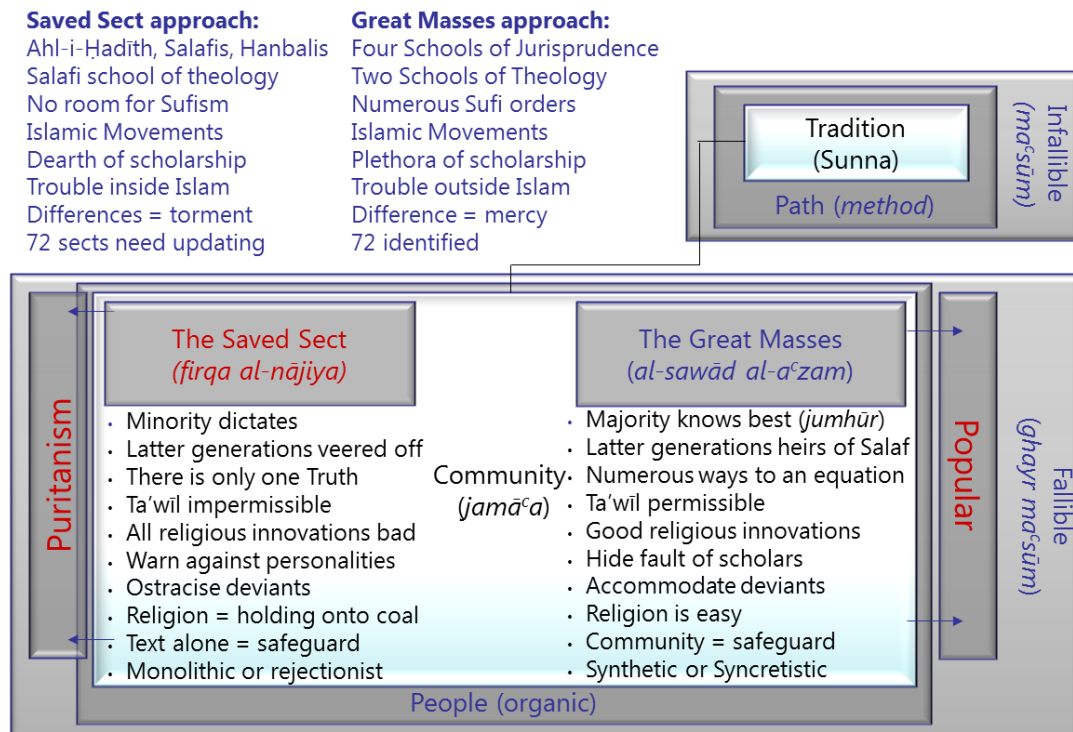
⁷⁸ Al-Juday^c, *Aḍwā’ ‘alā Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma*, pp. 60.

⁷⁹ Al-Hādī, pp. 168.

contemporary Salafism. Sufi scholastic traditionalists too resort to the 'Saved Sect' narrative whenever they find it difficult to understand new 'deviancies'. Minimalism is indeed impeded by the Saved Sect narrative unless it is understood as Ibn Taymiyya explains it - as perennially the most populous sect.⁸⁰

One could deduce that these constructed virtue-based and quantifiable 'orthodoxies' were historical ways of understanding sectarian divisions in the early community. Ramadan al-Būṭī interestingly historicises the virtue-based 'orthodoxy' arguing that the early Muslim era (*salafiyya*) is a blessed historical phase (*marḥala zamaniyya*) and not a methodology, and fervently asserting that methodologising 'salafism' itself constitutes an innovation (*bid'ā*).⁸¹ Both narratives are quantity based assumptions, one more expansive - the other more restrictive.

Figure 2:4 Contextualising the Saved and Great Masses



⁸⁰ Al-Hādī, p. 78.

⁸¹ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafiyya*, pp. 221 – 242.

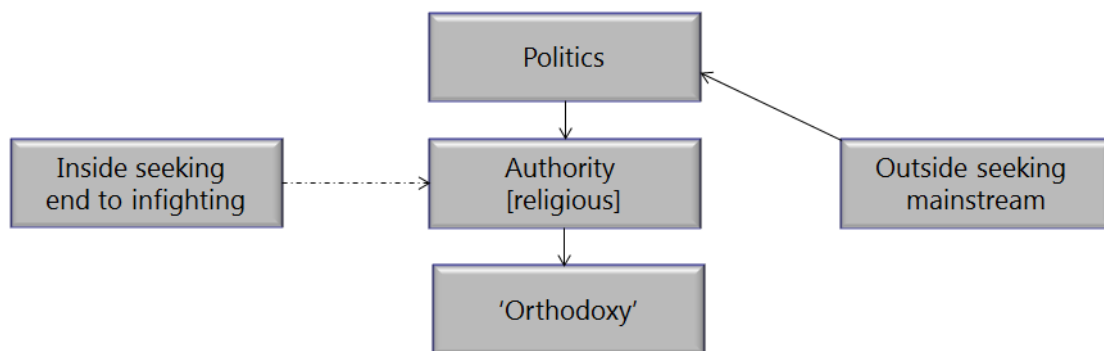
All the aforementioned 'orthodoxies' are social constructions. Initially they were attempts by the community to provide structure to a plethora of ideas floating around. Politics of the day led the way to doctrinal trajectories in early Islam. The first Sunni Caliph Abū Bakr's decision to punish those who did not pay the *zakā* informs the Khārijite definition of action (*ʿamal*) being integral to faith (*īmān*). If Khārijism was rebellion then Murji'ism as a reaction became loyalism and as such actions were detached from the faith definition.⁸² It was these political issues which set doctrinal trajectories and effectively informed 'orthodoxy'. Religious authorities approve of the political actions of rulers and this in turn is then channelled as 'orthodoxy'. Not all doctrines are informed in this way but many can be accounted for. One such classical issue is the 'createdness' of the Qur'ān. This hypothesis explains how orthodoxy is produced and endorsed. In the current setting Muslims, whether in Muslim lands or, perhaps more particularly in the West are also demanded by the politics of the day to provide both non-Muslims and Muslims with their understanding of 'mainstream' faith as a means to tackle radicalism. The RAND corporation a think tank aimed at countering Islamic extremism with moderate readings of Islam was established on such a premise.⁸³ This pressure has come from the terrorist acts of 9/11, 7/7 and other atrocities and arguably has brought about the most tangible results culminating in the Amman Message. Sectarian infighting too plays a part in the redefining process, however it has thus far not been as 'successful' as the Amman Message. The fact that both religious authorities and state leaders signed up to this declaration may contribute to its longevity.

⁸² Cook, Michael. *Early Muslim Dogma: A source-critical study*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 33 – 43.

⁸³ Rabasa *et al.* *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*. (California: RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy, 2007), p. iii.

Reconciling the infighting was first attempted by political Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood whose vision is entrenched in pan-Sunnism. Al-Bannā' promoted his *Twenty Points* as an attempt to curb the broad Sufi – Salafi divide. ʿAbd al-Hādī's thirteen principles and ʿAlawī al-Mālīkī's *Mafāhīm* are also indicative of the demands of 'orthodoxy' informed by the infighting in Sunni Islam.⁸⁴ Keller's article on *Islam, Īmān and Kufr* which will be dealt with in chapter five is another key example of 'orthodoxy' informed by the infighting of Barelwi and Deobandi Sufis. These attempts have not seen much success as they are individual attempts and have not been endorsed by any state and have failed to reach the grassroots. Ultimately minimalism and all its levels are social constructions.

Figure 2:5 Informing orthodoxy



2.4 Heterodoxy

Dressler addresses the notion of 'heterodoxy' in his essay *How to conceptualize Inner-Islamic plurality/difference: 'Heterodoxy' and 'Syncretism' in the writings of Mehmet F. K Köprülü (1890-1966)*. He argues that the binaries of heterodoxy and orthodoxy are more difficult to define in Islam. Popular Islam is seldom interpreted as heterodox and this is usually the result of what he terms the 'politics of othering'.⁸⁵ He adds:

⁸⁴ Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālīkī), *Mafāhīm*, pp. 5 – 8.

⁸⁵ Markus Dressler, 'How to Conceptualize Inner-Islamic Plurality/Difference: 'Heterodoxy' and 'Syncretism' in the writings of Mehmet F. Köprülü (1890-1966)' in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 3rd ser. (December 2010), 37, pp. 252.

'The orthodoxy/heterodoxy binary was initially introduced by outside observers as a classification tool with objective to reduce complexity in an attempt to make sense of the complex theological and political realities of Islam'⁸⁶

Dressler goes on to critique these binaries as relationships of power. Orthodoxy especially is a tool whereby Muslims are given the power to regulate, or adjust 'correct' practices, and rebuke, undermine or get rid of 'incorrect' practices.⁸⁷ Heterodoxy by virtue of our argument for orthodoxy too is a social construction. If heterodoxy includes innovation minimalism does not offer much explanation of dealing with this. Calder provides a very broad and optimistic interpretation to the limits of orthodoxy as that which includes Sunni canon as well as rivalling Shia, Mu^ctazilī and other views.⁸⁸

2.5 Theology

Minimalism especially in its doctrinal dimension has its historical roots in the theological schools as aforementioned in chapter one. Theology is an articulation of dogma and ultimately the crux of minimalism is doctrine and doctrinal minimalism which begins with the creed, the six articles of faith and the thirteen principles of Sunnism as espoused by ^cAbd al-Hādī.⁸⁹ Methodological minimalism places emphasis on early scholarship and also historical schools of theology.⁹⁰ It could be argued that

⁸⁶ Dressler, p. 253.

⁸⁷ Ibid p. 256.

⁸⁸ Calder, p. 83.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 1; Section 1.1.4.c.

⁹⁰ See Fig 1:1.

the aim of theology is to substantiate dogma whereas the objective of minimalism is to merely enunciate and identify it.

Here we shall discuss doctrine (*‘aqīda*) and theology. Doctrine can be found in Qur’ānic and Ḥadīth sources without any reference anchoring, however it is to some extent an arduous task. Theology provides some systematisation of doctrine. Minimalism attempts to extrapolate doctrine from this systematisation process. Before exploring the classical schools of Sunni theology I shall first survey theology (*kalām*) as an Islamic discipline. Historically though we are posed with a problem as doctrine and theology are inextricably presented as one. Hence theology includes doctrine but not all doctrine will include theological schemas. Halverson accurately makes this distinction:

‘Works of theology (*kalām*) contain proofs, expositions and rebuttals of the doctrines and arguments of one’s doctrinal opponents. Creeds (*‘aqā’id*), on the other hand merely statements of the proper articles of belief (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and are generally intended to tell us *what* to believe but not *how* or *why*.⁹¹

The first and most common word used for this science is *‘aqīda*, literally translated as dogma or creed.⁹² This word is more comprehensive as it connotes the idea of a belief system (*i‘tiqād*) and also a principle of faith (*mu‘taqad*). The second word used for this science is *‘ilm al-kalām* or simply *kalām* for short. Al-Jumaylī argues that the lexical definition of the word *kalām* does not convey its meaning; rather it is best understood

⁹¹ Halverson, p. 53.

⁹² Wehr, p. 628. [Entry: عقْد].

by its scope, methodology and its objective.⁹³ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ījī (d. 816/1413), defines *kalām* as ‘a science which deals with affirming religious doctrines [*al-ʿaqqāʿid al-dīniya*] by citing (scriptural and rational) proofs and dispelling controversies’.⁹⁴ Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) in his *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* provides a slightly less discursive connotation - ‘science of religious doctrines drawn from indisputable sources [*al-adilla al-yaqīniya*]’.⁹⁵ Al-Ghazālī defines this science as ‘a science, the purpose of which is the preservation and defence of Sunni doctrine from the heretics’.⁹⁶ Though generally not considered a theologian Ibn Khaldūn too echoes the aforementioned definitions that the whole science ‘involves arguing with logical proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims (*salaf*) and Muslim orthodoxy (*ahl al-sunna*)’.⁹⁷

The Ḥanbalīs do not delve into the definition of *kalām* as they prefer other names for this science.⁹⁸ However Abū al-ʿIzz al-Ḥanafī who authored the most authoritative Atharī commentary on al-Ṭaḥāwī’s creed does not delve into the definition of *kalām* and simply refers to it as the principle of the religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*).⁹⁹ Contemporary Ḥanbalī Wahhābī works too have taken this approach. One may deduce this could be due to the aversion early Ḥanbalīs had towards Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī’s notion of a ‘Sunni *kalām*’ as *kalām* was hitherto only associated with innovation (*bidʿa*).

⁹³ Al-Jumaylī, p. 64.

⁹⁴ Al-Ījī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 1998, vol. i, pp. 40 – 41.

⁹⁵ Al-Taftāzānī, Saʿd al-Dīn. *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*. 3 vols Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 2001, vol. 1 p. 27.

⁹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* in *Majmūʿa rasāʿil al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, [no date]), p. 582.

⁹⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005), p. 348.

⁹⁸ Oliver Leaman, ‘*The developed kalām tradition*’, in *Cambridge companion to classical Islamic theology* ed. by Tim Winter, p. 82.

⁹⁹ Al-Adhruʿī, ii, p. 109.

The word *kalām* is actually a truncation of *‘ilm al-kalām al-ilāhi* which could be a direct translation of the Greek *Theos logi* ‘speaking of God’.¹⁰⁰ The Mu‘tazilites a group of rationalist Muslim theologians were the first to use this term and developed it as a science which as Watt describes ‘involved the process of introducing Greek ideas into the discussion of Islamic dogma’.¹⁰¹ According to traditionalist Muslims of the early generation especially prior to the advent of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and the popularity of his school, the connotation of the word *kalām* was exclusively pejorative in Sunni Islam.¹⁰² This however did not preclude the popularity of this school. The ultimate sources of *kalām* according to all the Sunni schools of theology are the Qur‘ān and the Sunna. Shaykh al-Būṭī suggests that many Ash‘arī and Māturidis allow the secondary use of rationality (*‘aql*) as a source.¹⁰³ Moreover rationality is not used in issues pertaining to divinity except if these rational proofs are definitive (*qaṭ‘ī*), as for jurisprudential issues speculative (*ẓannī*) evidence can be used.¹⁰⁴ This perhaps explains the demarcation of doctrine as the principle of religion (*aṣl al-dīn*) and practice as the branch (*far‘ al-dīn*). The Ḥanbalis overall contend that there is no room for rationality as a source of theology; the Qur‘ān and Sunna should suffice, using rationality is allowing whims and desires to reign free.¹⁰⁵ Another popular name was Monotheism (*‘ilm al-tawḥīd*) as the core subject matter is divinity. The Ḥadīth scholars to some extent and even some of the later Ash‘arīs use this name. Much of the polemical debates within *kalām* or *‘aqīda* amongst Sunnis can be condensed to the discussion of divinity.¹⁰⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa referred to this science as ‘Greater Jurisprudence’

¹⁰⁰ Wolfson, Harry Austryn. *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 1 – 2.

¹⁰¹ Watt, p. 46.

¹⁰² ‘Alī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 29 - 38.

¹⁰³ Al-Būṭī, Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān. *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya wa al-Falsafāt al-Mu‘āṣara* (Damascus: Darel Fikr, 2008), pp. 104 – 124.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, pp. 120 – 121.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ḥawālī, pp. 17 – 18.

(*fiqh al-akbar*) in fact he authored a treatise with this name.¹⁰⁷ This may be an indication that mainstream Sunnis at the time of Abū Ḥanīfa did not have doctrinal issues at the forefront of their religious discussions, thus he stressed that this science is the 'Greater Jurisprudence' as it is affirmation of orthodoxy. Abū Ḥanīfa's early career involved argumentation with the divergent sects in Basra before he moved to Islamic Law.¹⁰⁸ Some of the Ḥanbalī scholars simply referred to this science as the Sunna by which is implied 'orthodoxy'. The choice of calling it 'Orthodoxy' is because anything contrary to it is 'heterodoxy'. Or since the Mu'tazilites and all the other non-Sunni trends emerged the conservative Sunni scholars' reaction was simply a call to return back to the *Sunna* – a 'flight to tradition' reaction. Furthermore its designation as Sunna insinuates its speculative nature i.e. that if one differs with it, it may not excommunicate one out of the fold of Islam.

Like the definition of this science the scholars have divergent views on the scope of the subject and the themes it covers. The Majority of Sunni scholars, al-Bayḍāwī (d 685/1286) being at the forefront, maintain that the subject matter of *kalām* is the 'essence of God' (*dhāt Allah*), the possibilities for God. A second group argue that the theme is 'what exists'. Al-Taftāzānī and al-Ījī contend that the science includes 'what is *known* in as far as it is concerned with the affirmation of religious doctrines'. This epistemological import is supported by al-Ghazālī who writes 'the theologian looks in to the generality of things, it is existence itself which is divided into eternal and created, the created is further divided into essence and accident.....' It seems from al-Ghazālī's words that both epistemology and cosmology are essential themes in theology. Al-Jumaylī observes that this is how al-Ghazālī's methodology was different to that of al-

¹⁰⁷ The authenticity of *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* is contested.

¹⁰⁸ ᵀAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 14.

Ash^ʿarī in that he mixed some philosophy with theology.¹⁰⁹ Latter day scholars like Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī and others maintain that the themes of theology are;

- a) that which is permissible and impossible upon God,
- b) that which is permissible and impossible for Messengers and
- c) the resurrection and existence¹¹⁰

Some Arab scholars were preoccupied with Greek and foreign philosophy but it was the Mu^ʿtazilites who were the first to delve into this field and systematically develop a theology for Islam. The Ash^ʿarīs sanitised *kalām* for Sunni consumption, however this appeasement did not bode well with a minority consisting primarily of Ḥanbalīs and Ḥadīth Scholars who disapproved of even the notion of a '*Sunni kalām*' which opposed the rational 'heterodox' theology (*al-kalām al-bid^ʿī*). Their argument rests on the premise that the Salaf did not attempt to convince the rationalists of orthodox doctrine by using rationality.

For lay people the doctrine or dogma was referred to as *ʿaqīda*. This is by far the most common name for this subject. Al-Ṣāwī maintains that the legal ruling for learning *ʿaqīda* is an individual obligation at the foundation or dogmatic level (*ijmāliyan*) and a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) at the scholastic (*tafṣīliyan*) level.¹¹¹ This indicates that theology is distinct from doctrine but not separate from it. Moreover *kalām* has a more scholastic undertone, incorporating methodology, doctrine and dialectics, whereas *ʿaqīda* is simpler as it incorporates doctrine or core beliefs. One will generally

¹⁰⁹ Al-Jumaylī, p. 69 – 71.

¹¹⁰ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī*, p. 84.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

refer to an Ash^ʿarī or Māturīdī *kalām* rather than an Ash^ʿari *ʿaqīda*, the reason for this is that the Sunnis argue that their two or three schools have one common *ʿaqīda*.

As for the scholastic pursuit of *kalām* the scholars have differed. Al-Shāfiʿī, Mālik, Aḥmad, Abū Ḥanīfa, Sufyān al-Thawrī along with all the Ḥadīth scholars of the Salaf maintain that it is prohibited to delve in to scholastic *kalām*.¹¹² As for the contemporary scenario, the Sufis are pro-*kalām* whereas the Salafis are vehemently anti-*kalām* basing their judgement on the views of the early jurists.

2.5.1 Documentation of the Sunni creed:

All the Sunni *kalām* systems pride themselves in representing the *ʿaqīda* of the early Muslims. Documentation of their creed manifested in two manners; polemical refutation (*radd*) and presentation (*ʿarḍ*). It is largely through polemical refutations that 'orthodoxy' was *constructed*. An example of this kind of literature is Abū Yūsuf's (d. 182/798) *Radd ʿalā al-Qādiriyya* and other treaties which were titled in the same fashion. It is at this point in the early generation so called heterodoxies were being exposed before any cogent orthodoxies were being enunciated. It was in the ninth century that codified presentations such as al-Ṭaḥāwī's *Bayān al-Sunna* etc proliferated. The ascription of theological works to the notables of the early generations such as Abū Ḥanīfa and his '*Fiqh al-Akbar*' is still circumspect.

As for the later significance of this science al-Ṣāwī explains that though early Islamic thought was not heavily focused on doctrinal science they considered this science the 'Principle of Religion' (*aṣl al-dīn*). This was the *creed* of the religion while law (*fiqh*) was the Branches of the Religion (*farʿ al-dīn*) as it incorporated the *practice* of the faith

¹¹² Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya*, p. 118.

emanating from correct doctrine.¹¹³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) asserts that this science is absolutely the greatest science in Islam as it deals with knowing the Almighty. Moreover he corroborates this with the verse Q13:28 '*Surely with the remembrance of God hearts are tranquil*'.¹¹⁴ It may seem from his statement that the study of this science may have a spiritual dimension to it. Abū al-ʿIzz al-Ḥanafī also agrees with al-Rāzī in claiming that this is the greatest science of Islam.¹¹⁵

One of the key themes of the polemical debates is the notion of reading and interpreting text. The Qurʾān enjoys a rich hermeneutic tradition which has been inherited from the earliest Muslims. What then is the general methodology of reading text? Al-Nasafī states that the general methodology of all the schools of Sunni theology is the affirmation of the outward meaning (*ithbāt ḡawāhir al-nuṣūṣ*) of the sources wherever possible.¹¹⁶ The Ḥanbalīs of the Salafi persuasion also subscribe to this view however the Ashʿarī and Māturīdis are more liberal in their use of figurative interpretation (*taʿwīl*) when they cannot literally affirm the outward meanings of the sources.¹¹⁷ This *taʿwīl* is one of the controversial divisive grey areas.

2.5.2 Sunni Methodology

A primary concern of minimalism is methodology and in particular a base schema which transcends the nuances of the theological schools. As such the diverse contemporary Sunni groups may have rigorous and perhaps exotic methodologies, but at root they are in agreement that the primary sources of Sharīʿa are the Qurʾān,

¹¹³ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḡ al-Ṣāwī ʿalā Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, p. 84.

¹¹⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. *Al-Maṭālib al-ʿĀliya min al-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī*. 3 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyyah. I pp. 13 -15.

¹¹⁵ Al-Adhruʿī, I, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḡ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiya*, pp. 257 – 258.

¹¹⁷ Al-Adhruʿī, I, p. 16 – 19.

the Sunna, the consensus of the community (*ijmāʿ*) and analogy (*qiyās*). If we are to synthesise the core methodologies of all of the Sunni factions we find that they agree upon the following;

- I. The Qurʾān and the Sunna are the criterion for truth and falsehood.
- II. Only the Messenger of God is infallible [*maʿṣūm*]
- III. The Consensus [*ijmāʿ*]
- IV. Independent personal reasoning [*ijtihād*] is used in the absence of statutory precedent.
- V. Revelation [*wahy*] is always given precedence over rationality [*ʿaql*].
- VI. Affiliation with the Community [*jamāʿa*].

All that corresponds to the statutes is accepted and anything which contravenes them is rejected. Anything definitive in the Qurʾān must be accepted as is the case for authentic Ḥadīth.

Generally speaking Sunnis consider Muhammad as an infallible prophet even though the Qurʾānic and historical Muhammad is ostensibly fallible. Even Muhammad's levels of fallibility are discussed in the books of *kalām* theology yet glossed over in the credos. The notion of an infallible Muhammad is the cornerstone of Sunni doctrine and hence of primary significance in a minimalistic schema. If only Muhammad could be infallible then any other imam, shaykh, saint (*walī*), scholar (*ʿālim*), jurist (*faqīh*), caliph (*khalīfa*), successor (*tābiʿ*), or even Companion (*ṣaḥābī*) can make mistakes. Al-Ṣāwī clearly expresses that God has protected all the prophets and the angels from

committing enormities.¹¹⁸ Moreover the blasphemy issue subsists only through an infallible Muhammad.

Sunni Islam stresses on communalism, and consensus (*ijmāʿ*) in theory facilitates this. It however poses a problem for minimalism as the conditions stipulated for convening an *ijmāʿ* are effectively the preserve of scholarship and it is scholars who are at loggerheads. The complexities of *ijmāʿ* in shall be further elucidated in chapter four.

When the statutes are silent independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) is permitted. Though there is debate surrounding this issue, in particular when a layman needs to decide on whether to make scholarly imitation (*taqlīd*) of one particular *mujtahid* or school (*madhab*) or to just follow scattered opinions. However, generally speaking *ijtihād* is recognised by all Sunnis. They agree unanimously that there is no *ijtihād* where Qurʾān and Ḥadīth are definitive. There is some discussion that *qiyās* is *ijtihād*. The Ṣāhirīs reject *qiyās* though they technically use *qiyās*.¹¹⁹ Note that Ṣāhirīs are still considered part of Sunni Islam even though they overtly reject one of the four primary sources of Sharīʿa.¹²⁰ Quite significantly, Ṣāhirī claim to Sunnism is further bolstered by their inclusion in the Amman Message.

If revelation collides with reason then the classical Sunni position of the Ashʿarīs and Ḥanbalīs is that revelation is given preference. The Māturīdīs were closer to the Muʿtazilites who argued for the reconciliation of tradition and rationality. Minimalism

¹¹⁸ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī*, p. 300.

¹¹⁹ Wahba al-Zuhaylī. *Al-Wajīz fi Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. (Qadīmī Kutub Khāna: Karachi, [no date]), pp. 56 – 65.

¹²⁰ Al-Baghdādī, p. 277.

would prefer the Māturīdī position however it would be wrestling with Ashʿarī/Hanbalī resistance.

Islam is seen especially by Sunni Muslims as a communal religion. The notion of affiliating with the *jamāʿa* is central to this. Though ostensibly the Salafis may be deemed by mainstream Sunnis as more reactionary and reclusive, they have stressed the issue of 'fidelity and dissociation' (*al-walā' wa al-barā'*). This may be interpreted as a general allegiance to the body of the Muslim community as if it were an entity like a nation. However this notion is deeply exclusivist and has fuelled excommunicative tendencies as we shall learn later. Furthermore it has informed other areas of Islamic orthopraxy, for example in Sufism the emphasis on a spiritual order (*ṭarīqa*) as an inner collective. This can also be seen in the 19th century reformers. 20th century Islamists further advanced this idea by promoting the idea of 'Muslim political organisations' which members sign up to.

Al-Shāfiʿī's model of Sunni methodology is based on a tradition of the Prophet:

*'The Prophet sent Muʿādh ibn Jabal as a judge to the Yemen. The Messenger asked him: 'Muʿādh if a judicial matter is raised how will you judge? He replied 'I shall judge by the Book of God.' The Prophet then said: 'If you do not find it in the Book of God?' He replied 'by the Sunnah of the Messenger of God.' The Prophet added: 'If you don't find it in the Sunnah of the Messenger of God? He said: 'I shall judge by exercising ijtihād' (ajtahidu bira'yī)....'*¹²¹

¹²¹ Al-Tirmidhī, 13:3, 1327, p. 1785.

It is from this tradition that methodology has been articulated by legal theorists. Analogy (*qiyās*) according to al-Shāfiʿī is effectively *ijtihād*, if it is *ijtihād* then it will be speculative and not definitive like the first two sources. Even the first two sources especially the Qurʾān would generally be considered definitive in transmission rather than import. The Sunna on the contrary is rarely definitive in transmission.¹²² The Consensus (*ijmāʿ*) on the other hand is largely debated as to its practicality and occurrence.

2.5.3 Innovation

Like other major religious dispensations, the debate of tradition and innovation is not new to Islam. One of the greatest controversies of Islamic theology is the concept of innovation. More detail to this will be paid attention to in chapter four. Innovation (*bidʿa*) in religion can be either doctrinal or devotional, i.e. worship based. Literally it means an innovation, however it is technically considered to be the antithesis of Sunna therefore it comprehensively denotes 'heterodoxy'.¹²³ The concept of innovation is one of the controversial 'grey areas' of classical Islamic theology and contemporary polemics. This tension of tradition versus innovation is one that a minimalist schema cannot overcome without negotiating some concessions.

2.5.4 Reverence of Scholars and their authority in religious affairs

Before we could delve into the trends within Sunni scholastic traditionalism which will be discussed in chapter five we shall take a cursory glance at the role of scholars in Sunni Islam. Ultimately scholars are the focal point of orthodoxy. Minimalism does not

¹²² Hallaq, p. 59.

¹²³ Muhammad Tātāyī. *Idāḥ al-Maʿānī al-Khafiya*. (El-Mansoura: Dar El-Wafa, 2005), p. 54.

provide any tangible alternative to this i.e, minimalism is not a liberation theology. Ahmed El Shamsy identifies the scholars as one of three primary societal arenas which represent 'orthodoxy'.¹²⁴

All the Sunni factions agree that the Scholars (*‘ulamā’*) are the best representatives of the Prophetic way adducing verses such as *'Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants who have knowledge'* Q35:28. Scholastic traditionalists use this to mean the institution of scholarship which developed with Islam. Other such traditions are used:

*'Those who have knowledge are heirs of the prophets'*¹²⁵

As for their authority they also adduce verses such as *'Follow God, His Messenger and those in authority among you'* Q21:7, Q12:76. The words *'ūli al-amr'* Q4:59 according to the exegetes refers to both political leaders (*umarā’*) and scholars (*‘ulamā’*).¹²⁶ In classical Sunni theology Muslims must have an allegiance or pledge (*bay‘a*) whether enunciated or not to the political leader of the Muslim land one resides in. Similarly *a fortiori* a general allegiance is afforded to the body of Muslim scholarship. In this thesis we have chosen to qualify traditionalism with the word scholastic whether we are referring to Sufi or Salafi persuasions as ultimately in both these traditions the *‘ulamā’* hold esteemed authority. The scholars in Sunni Islam are considered deputies of the Messenger of Islam (*nuwāb al-rasūl*). Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) a sage from the period of the Salaf: argued that if there were no scholars people would behave like

¹²⁴ Ahmed El-Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* ed. by Tim Winter, p. 115.

¹²⁵ Abū Dāwūd 24:1, 3641, p. 1493.

¹²⁶ Abū ‘Abdullah al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*. 11 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah: [no date]), iii, p. 167 – 170.

animals.¹²⁷ Ibn Ṭāhir lists eight groups who represent Sunnism. Five out of this eight are from the Scholarly body.¹²⁸ Sunni theology unequivocally argues for the fallibility of scholarship and hence disagreement is inevitable. Amongst the reasons for scholastic disagreement is;

1. The belief that a certain action is abrogated.
2. Admissible personal reasoning [*ijtihād*]
3. To err is human!

The jurists have argued that *ijtihād* is not cancelled out by another *ijtihād*.¹²⁹ Muhammad is considered infallible by all the Sunni traditionalist factions, but this is not the case for either the Companions or the rest of believing body of Muslims.¹³⁰ On the third point some Muʿtazilites and even some Ashʿarites maintain that the *mujtahid* is always correct. They are not arguing for infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) rather that knowledge somehow is divinely protected. Mainstream Sunni Islam argues on the contrary that a scholar can hit the mark and miss. This general affiliation to scholarship is central to scholastic traditionalism of all persuasions.

2.5.5 Early tensions - Collision of rationality and tradition

A tension emerged in early Islamic theology – that of the collision of tradition (*naql*) and reason (*ʿaql*), and it is this very tension which gives birth to all the theological

¹²⁷ Al-Maqdisī, ʿAbdul Raḥmān Ibn Qudāma. *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn*. (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Bayān, [no date]). p. 7.

¹²⁸ Al-Baghdādī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir. *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1985), pp. 240 – 243.

¹²⁹ Al-Zuhaylī. *Al-Wajīz fi Uṣūl al-Fiḥ*, p. 231.

¹³⁰ Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, p. 368.

schools including the conservative Ḥanbalīs. Abrahamov has highlighted this tension in '*Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and rationalism*':

'It is a common human phenomenon that tradition and reason may oppose each other, mainly because tradition causes continuity, and hence stability, while reason causes change, hence instability'.¹³¹

Abrahamov's concern is not unfounded as the dialogue between reason and tradition has in the past manifested as a recurring polemic. It is easy to dismiss this tension as one that occurred between the Mu'tazilites and the traditionalists (notably Sunni *ḥadīth* scholars) in the medieval period and now between scholastic traditionalism and reform Islam; however we can see that this tension also permeates the traditionalist camp. Early Ash'arism espouses the amodality (*bilā kayf*) of the Ḥanbalīs and later reclaiming the figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) method of the Mu'tazilites. Moreover Abrahamov finds difficulty in describing Ibn Taymiyya as merely a traditionalist – in fact he contends that far from just regurgitating Ḥanbalism, he was ultimately a rational traditionalist for his intellectual defence of 'orthodoxy'.¹³²

In the late Umayyad and early Abbasid period Muslim scholars were greatly attracted to the translations of Greek and Latin works, exposing them to Hellenic thought. Watt observes that this eventually led to the development of the discipline of 'philosophical theology' or *kalām*.¹³³ Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 256/873) intrigued by the method

¹³¹ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. vii.

¹³² *Ibid* pp. x – xi.

¹³³ Watt, p. 37.

of the Philosophers saw a need to bring philosophy in line with Islamic doctrines. He is usually dubbed as the 'Father of Arab Philosophy' and generally attributed as being the first to disseminate 'Greek philosophy for Muslims'.¹³⁴ Al-Kindī articulated that revelation and rationality are congruent if revelation is understood within the dictates of reason.¹³⁵ Other philosophers like Abū Naṣr al-Farābī (d. 339/950) were comfortable in giving rationality preference over revelation.¹³⁶ Wolfson hints that the settings of *kalām* already were in place before the Muṣṭazilites who later become the foremost representatives of *kalām* and were, prior to the Ashʿarīs, referred to as the theologians (*mutakallimūn*).¹³⁷ Al-Jumaylī contends that theology is other than philosophy and corroborates this with the assertions of contemporary philosophers who argue that theologians are not philosophers. Even Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748) the founder of the Muṣṭazilite tradition remarked 'every issue of theology has been scrutinised by the Greek philosophers'.¹³⁸ Effectively therefore theology is a by-product of the philosophical exercise of the Arab experience. The stimulus for the Arabs to delve into these two disciplines i.e. philosophy and theology was the ambivalent details of two doctrinal issues; the nature of God and the notion of destiny. In addition Muslims came into contact with peoples of high intellectual culture and even criticised their beliefs; this in turn encouraged them to utilise philosophy and theology as polemical tools to defend their doctrines.¹³⁹ Moreover both philosophers and theologians recognise the role of reason (*al-ʿaql*) in interpreting the world. Al-Jumaylī summarises the key differences between Arab philosophy and theology;

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 39 – 40.

¹³⁵ Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A short introduction*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), p. 23.

¹³⁶ Al-Ghazālī and other Ashʿarites accused the Muslim Neo-Platonists of this method. See Jackson's translation of *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa*.

¹³⁷ Wolfson, pp. 3, 25.

¹³⁸ Al-Jumaylī, p. 74.

¹³⁹ Watt, p. 42.

1. Theology deals with God, man and society, whereas philosophy deals with God, man, society, existence and nature
2. The method of theology is harmonisation of rationality and revelation whereas the method of philosophy is rationality which will lead to the truth.
3. The aim of theology is defending religious doctrine by using scriptural and rational proofs, whereas the aim of philosophy is to arrive at truths by using reason.¹⁴⁰

Arguably this overarching historical tension is what polarised the Muʿtazilites as rationalists and the Ḥanbalites as traditionalists. Later with the collapse of the Muʿtazilites, this effectively created the most potent theological polemic as it resurfaced and on one level whereby it polarised the Ashʿarīs against the Ḥanbalīs and on the other level each camp felt the resonance of this irreconcilable dichotomy.¹⁴¹ The early and latter-day (*salaf-khalaf*) divide is not merely a chronological phenomenon but also methodological. Subsequent generations of Ashʿarīs wholeheartedly accept the figurative interpretation (*taʿwīl*) as sound and 'orthodox', the very notion that previously put them at opposite ends of the spectrum. Contemporary Wahhābī Atharism during the 1980s felt this tension when Ibn Bāz delivered his *fatwa* on the heterodoxy of believing in a heliocentric worldview. He sustains his argument through literalism of the statutes.¹⁴² Conveniently this book has had no reprints to date. It could be argued that this internal *ʿaql* versus *naql* struggle in the Sunni experience is exemplified in the Qurʾānic traditional versus hypothetical opinion schools of exegesis dichotomy.¹⁴³ In Islamic law this corresponds to the debate

¹⁴⁰ Al-Jumaylī, pp. 74 – 75.

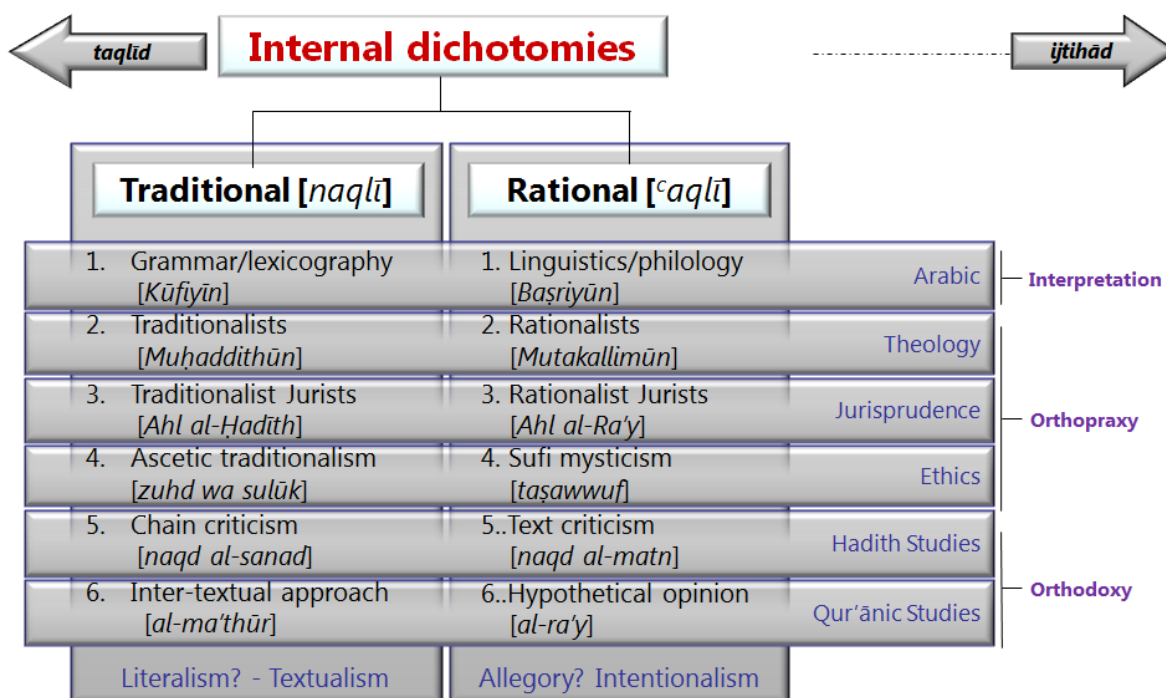
¹⁴¹ Abrahamov, pp. 19 – 31.

¹⁴² ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz, *Al-Adilla al-ʿAqliyya wa al-Ḥissiyya ʿalā imkān al-ṣaʿūd ilā al-kawākib wa ʿalā jaryān al-shams ḥawl al-arḍ wa sukūn al-arḍ*. (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Riyāḍ al-Ḥadītha, 1982), pp. 5 – 14.

¹⁴³ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qurʾānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*. (New York: Routledge 2010), pp 1 – 32.

between the traditionalist *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* versus rationalist *Ahl al-Ra’y* schools. In the like manner the traditional ascetic (*zāhid*) and the mystical Sufi which affects Sufism to this day. Finally the much overlooked chain criticism (*naqd al-sanad*) versus text criticism (*naqd al-matn*) contradiction within ḥadīth studies.¹⁴⁴ Ironically one would argue that though the definitive historicity of the Qur’ān is upheld by Muslims, interpreting its contents has been acceptable yet *ḥadīth* with its speculative historical validity does not enjoy the same latitude in interpretation. All of this is embedded in the medieval literalism versus metaphorical interpretation methods. This dichotomy opens the floodgates to all other theological tensions as we shall explore in the coming chapters. Al-Bannā’ too recognised this perennial tension within Sunni thought and ambivalently addressed it in his twenty principles of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁴⁵

Figure 2:6 Rational and Traditional tensions within Sunni epistemology



¹⁴⁴ Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 114.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Qaradāwī, *Shumūl al-Islam*, p. 18.

Furthermore this tension generically distinguishes scholastic traditionalists from their 'modernist' reformer counterparts. Minimalism and traditionalism on the whole does not pay much attention to this 'problem'.

2.5.6 Aversion of *kalām* by early religious authorities

The Muʿtazilites were clearly the pioneers of *kalām* theology. Theology as a science was not fully endorsed by the early Sunni scholars.¹⁴⁶ Watt observes that European scholars were attracted to the views of the Muʿtazilites as they regarded them as free thinkers. In reality they were not much different to the Sunni theologians. The origins of this group are unclear but a popular anecdote found in Sunni theological works is as follows;- Ḥasan al-Baṣri was asked about the outcome of a grave sinner in the hereafter, would he be regarded a believer and enter Heaven or a disbeliever and enter Hell. Wāsil ibn ʿAṭāʾ interjected and said 'he would be neither' and would end up in 'a place between the two places' (*manzila bayn al-manizaltayn*). Upon hearing this Ḥasan remarked 'he has withdrawn (*iʿtazala ʿannā*) from us'. This gave rise to the collective name to this school, Muʿtazila the 'withdrawers'. However one would argue that it is very plausible this group like the traditionalists were proto-Sunnis. Though as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) highlights they have their reservations on Ḥadīth authenticity they do not deny it as a religious source and in addition they were neither like the Khārijites nor the Shiites on the question of the Companions of Muhammad, that is to say they too at core like Sunnis are Companionists.¹⁴⁷

Latter-day Ashʿarīs and contemporary Sufi scholastic traditionalists are posed with a problem - much of the negativity towards *kalām* originates in the period of the early

¹⁴⁶ Abrahamov, pp. 27 – 31.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Qutayba, Abū Muḥammad. *Taʿwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999), pp. 48 – 60. All classical theological sects adduced ḥadīth to back their doctrinal propositions.

generations. Abū Yūsuf remarked 'knowledge of *kalām* is ignorance and ignorance of *kalām* is knowledge'. Al-Shāfi'ī declared 'my ruling on the theologians (*ahl al-kalām*) is that they should be pelted shoes for abandoning the Book and the Sunna'. Mulla 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606) explains that these statements were regarding 'heterodox *kalām*' (*al-kalām al-bid'ī*).¹⁴⁸ Interestingly even Ibn Taymiya an avowed enemy of *kalām* comes to its defence and argues 'not all of *kalām* is bad – *kalām* was a conventional trend (*ḥaqīqa 'urfīya*)'.¹⁴⁹ By bad *kalām* it may be assumed that he is referring to Mu'tazilism, but it is unclear what good *kalām* would be. Though plausible, it is unlikely that he is attempting to vindicate Ash'arī *kalām*. Most likely though, he realised his own intellectual expression of Ḥanbalism constituted a new *kalām*. Abrahamov certainly describes him as rational traditionalist theologian.¹⁵⁰ Abrahamov classifies theologians into three; a) rationalists b) traditionalists and c) rational traditionalists.

Both protagonists and antagonists of *kalām* mention accounts of prominent latter-day scholars who denounced theology. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī and including whom the Ash'arīs and Sufis call the Proof of Islam, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī are all reported to have abandoned the scholastic *kalām* tradition near the end of their lives. 'Alī al-Qārī deduces the reasons for criticising the theologians were;

1. Abandoning the Book and the Sunna and the principles of Islam.
2. Its convoluted arguments cause doubts in religion.
3. It inculcates dry scholasticism and diverts one from general Islamic practice.
4. Contradictions.

¹⁴⁸ 'Alī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 29 – 31.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Hādī, p. 114.

¹⁵⁰ Abrahamov, p. 51.

5. Giving reason free reign in religious matters is an innovation,
6. Promotion of sectarian and cultish trends.¹⁵¹

Ironically he himself was a theologian and his commentary on the *Fiqh al-Akbar* in the like manner gives rise to all these reservations he had against *kalām*. Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) criticizes al-Āmidī (d. 630/1233) and Al-Ghazālī, accusing both of them of copping out on many issues and being confused on others!¹⁵² Paul Walker, the translator of al-Juwaynī's *al-Irshād* poignantly remarks that the corpus of Sunni theology is difficult to grasp and the narrow strictures in theological discourse prevent a casual interest in it.¹⁵³ One can conclude that perhaps the *kalām* tradition has over-intellectualised doctrinal issues and hence compounded minimal creedalisms.

2.5.7 Sunni Schools of theology

It is pertinent now to explore the history of Sunni schools of theology as one manifestation of methodological minimalism is the recognition of three Sunni schools of *kalām*.¹⁵⁴ The political rifts in the early Caliphal period served as a catalyst for theological 'controversies' to surface whether that was in the form of romantic veneration of the *Ahl al-Bayt* amongst the Shiite or the non-negotiable *ḥākimiyya*¹⁵⁵ amongst the Kharijites or the relatively quietist approach of the rest of the early Muslim body. These controversies divided the Muslim community into distinct sects.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵¹ cAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azha*, p. 32 – 37.

¹⁵² Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyy*, p. 121.

¹⁵³ Al-Juwaynī, p. xix.

¹⁵⁴ See Fig. 1:1.

¹⁵⁵ Sayyid Khatab, 'org"Hakimiyyah" and "Jahiliyyah" in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Jul., 2002), pp. 145-170. Hakimiyyah as a political outlook was introduced by Sayyid Qutb and now advocated by Jihadists who argue that sovereignty should be to God alone. Even al-Qaraḍāwī attempts to argue that the Ḥākimiyya concept is entrenched in Sunni legal theory. See *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt*.

¹⁵⁶ Watt, p. 14.

majority seemed to establish a diverse conglomeration loosely tied by the common methodological adherence to the Qur'ān and the Sunna as understood by the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and Successors (*tābi'īn*) and the Successors of the Successors (*tābi' tābi'īn*). Other groups outside of this large group had more rigorous and exotic methodologies restricted to individual companions rather than the collective and they became more puritanical. These smaller groups most notably amongst them the Shiite deemed some of their leaders as absolutely infallible.¹⁵⁷ These smaller groups according to the majority, developed cultish outlooks and did not affect the larger group due to geographical locations and sometimes secretive membership.

With the expansion of the Muslim empire, an influx of foreign ideas slowly began to permeate the Islamic syllabus. Some of it was wholeheartedly accepted by a small group; however the majority of the early generation rejected these foreign ideas and methods.¹⁵⁸ For the traditionalists they were restricted in their binary view of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Minimalism too faces this challenge.

2.5.7.a Proto-Sunnism: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Traditionalists

Blankinship aptly uses the term Proto-Sunnism for the period before the advent of the Ash'arite school.¹⁵⁹ This period Sunnism would most likely have been represented by Ḥadīth scholars. Amongst the champions of Sunnism was the student of al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who openly opposed the Mu'tazilites on their doctrine of the 'created speech' of God. Aḥmad argued that the doctrine of the first three generations was that of 'uncreatedness of the Qur'ān'. There are no clear indications of a documented account of this doctrine or the term at least being used by the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁵⁹ Khalid Blankinship, 'The early creed', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* ed. by Tim Winter, p. 42.

Companions and early Successors. Nonetheless Aḥmad is diametrically set against the rationalists.¹⁶⁰ It is after Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal that the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* – the People of the Prophetic Tradition and the Collective begins to gain currency.¹⁶¹ It is interesting to note that subsequent scholars who followed Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's school of jurisprudence rarely adopted theological schools in the *kalām* sense and simply referred to Aḥmad's writings/statements on doctrinal issues. Other scholars too followed Aḥmad's example and the main bloc of these *ʿulamā'* were represented by the Ḥadīth scholars (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*). Blankinship does not provide any new light on this with his notion of proto-Sunnism; essentially the roots of Sunni Islam are located within a Ḥanbali and *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* nexus.¹⁶² Deathbed conversion anecdotes of Sunni theologians denouncing dialectics tend to provide accounts of a 'return to the creed of Aḥmad' hypothesis amongst them al-Ashʿarī, al-Rāzī and al-Juwaynī.¹⁶³

2.5.7.b The Ashʿarite school

According to Frank, because of Ḥanbalī resistance, Ashʿarism ultimately become the doctrinal school of Sunni Shāfiʿīs and Mālikīs.¹⁶⁴ The contemporary scenario has not changed much, Wahhābism represents the Ḥanbalī school and Sufi Shāfiʿī/Mālikīs are largely Ashʿarī. This is further substantiated by the little explored Ḥanbalī Atharī school that Halverson alludes to and seemingly attempts to discredit as Wahhābism.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Al-Hādī, p. 57 – 58.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁶² Khalid Blankinship, 'The early creed', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* ed. by Tim Winter, pp. 42 - 54.

¹⁶³ Al-ʿAlī, pp. 147 – 149.

¹⁶⁴ Richard M Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 5 – 6.

¹⁶⁵ Halverson, pp. 34 – 44.

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī faced a crisis in his life when he could not come to terms with the doctrine of the eschatological outcome of a believer who is sinful. A disbeliever in God according to the Qurʾān should end up in the Inferno, just as a believer in God should enter Paradise. What is then the outcome of a believing sinner? The Muʿtazilites rationally invented an intermediary position (*manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*). Legend has it that the Prophet Muhammad came to him in a dream and told him to denounce the way of the rationalists and embrace his Sunna instead.¹⁶⁶ His theology is characterised by general literalism of the religious statutes. He articulated this through the medium of the rationalist tools that the Muʿtazilites used. Presentation of the teleological, cosmological and ontological arguments for the existence of God still marked the imprint of Muʿtazilite style. However his understanding of divinity was that of the Proto-Sunnis in that he refutes anthropomorphism and affirms those attributes which denote physical qualities to God yet stressing that God is unlike any of His creation (amodally). This is evident in his work *al-Ibāna* where he professes to adhere to the doctrines of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.¹⁶⁷ Later Ashʿarites chose to use figurative interpretation of the attributes and differed with their master; this position became more popular than his view and eventually became the standard. He differed with the Muʿtazilites on the question of free will and predestination adopting a compatibilism approach resembling that of English Philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Though al-Ashʿarī acknowledges and admires aspects of Muʿtazilite intellectualism, he gave precedence to the religious scriptures. Keller observes that the Ashʿarī school has been the standard-bearer for the faith of Sunni Islam for most of Islamic history.¹⁶⁸ Concurring with Keller’s argument of Ashʿarī supremacy, Nadwi claims that because of the close affinity the Māturīdī school shared with the Ashʿarī school it eventually merges into a

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Naqīb al-Miṣrī, p. 1030 x47.

¹⁶⁷ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Al-Ibāna ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyāna* (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Bayān, 1999), p. 24, 43.

¹⁶⁸ Ibn Naqīb al-Miṣrī, p. 1030 x47.

composite Ashʿarism especially in the Indian Subcontinent.¹⁶⁹ Frank maintains that works on the Ashʿarī school range from very short catechetical works to more long and complex summae in which theological controversies are debated.¹⁷⁰

2.5.7.c The Māturīdite school

At the same era of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī another Sunni theologian emerged Abū Maṣūʿ al-Māturīdī. Al-Māturīdī's intent was to demonstrate that Abū Ḥanīfa and followers of his school were Sunnis; though it is universally acknowledged that Abū Ḥanīfa was Sunni, many accusations of 'heterodox' doctrines were ascribed to him.

Halverson highlights a crucial overstatement of Sufi scholastic traditionalists and the mantra of two 'Orthodox' schools of Sunni theology. He argues that Watt, Wolfson and Abrahamov make only fleeting visits to this school and the extant Arabic sources do not provide us with any more insight.¹⁷¹ It was no coincidence that this school was represented by the Ḥanafīs. This school was not as popular as al-Ashʿarī's, and was largely confined to Central Asia. Currently Turkish and Bosnian scholars are predominantly Māturīdī. The Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mustapha Ceric describes Māturīdite theology as 'middle of-the-road' Sunni theology.¹⁷² His thesis *Roots of synthetic theology* is one of the first attempts of presenting minimalism through these classical schools.

¹⁶⁹ Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Saviours of the Islamic Spirit*. (trans, M. Ahmad) 3 vols. (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1976), I, p. 97 – 98.

¹⁷⁰ Frank, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ Halverson, pp. 22 – 23.

¹⁷² Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣūʿ al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)*. (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), p. 44.

It is not entirely clear whether al-Māturīdī figuratively interpreted the divine attributes. Likewise this is also unclear in standard Māturīdī works like the *‘Aqā’id* of al-Nasafī and the commentary of *Fiqh al-Akbar* by ‘Alī al-Qārī. The current Sunni polemics are embedded in the polarised Ash‘arism versus Salafi Ḥanbalism. The Māturīdīs are not entirely excluded from this debate and are ‘guilty’ according to the Salafis because for their recognition of the Ash‘arīs as orthodox. But on the whole the Māturīdīs have not been the object of acrimonious criticism from the Salafis as much as the Ash‘arīs because they do not *evidently* employ figurative interpretation of the divine attributes. At this juncture it is noteworthy to mention that another famous Ḥanafī jurist and theologian Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī vindicated Abu Ḥanīfa and shares a similar methodology to al-Māturīdī of whom he was a contemporary. Al-Ṭahāwī is largely revered by the Salafis – perhaps Ceric’s ‘middle of-the-road’ was also embodied in al-Ṭahāwī’s seemingly all-accommodating Sunni theology. On the whole the Sunnis throughout the centuries adopted either the Ash‘arite or Māturīdite methods as the standard. The respective scholars are referred to as ‘the two Imams of theology’.¹⁷³ Keller a scholastic traditional Sufi maintains that the substantive differences between the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools are minute.¹⁷⁴ In the next chapter we will explore how these differences feed into current polemics.

2.5.7.d Ḥanbalī vitality - the Atharite School of theology

With the exception of some Ḥanbalīs, al-Ash‘arī is considered the hero of Sunni theology whereas Melchert argues Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was one of Sunni Islam’s central defining heroes.¹⁷⁵ It emerges that the Ḥanbalīs never truly adopted the Ash‘arī methodology, as is evident from al-Ash‘arī’s own work *Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fi ‘Ilm al-*

¹⁷³ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, p. 339.

¹⁷⁴ Ibn Naqīb al-Miṣrī, pp. 1030 x47.

¹⁷⁵ Christopher Melchert, ‘Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur’ān’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*. 2nd ser. (2004), 6, p. 22.

Kalām. The Ashʿari school was largely represented by Mālikīs and Shāfiʿīs, whilst the the Māturīdī had almost exclusively been pushed by Ḥanafīs.¹⁷⁶ The vast majority of Ḥanbalīs on the contrary largely subscribed to the not so popular Atharī school of theology. A few notables from the Ḥanbalī school may exhibit theological inclinations and periodically rebuked anthropomorphism of other Ḥanablīs and such were understandably identified as Ashʿarīs. This list includes the grammarian Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 769/1368), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and others who could be described as theologians in the strictest sense.¹⁷⁷ The most significant players in Atharī theology would include Ibn Qudāma and the influential polymath Ibn Taymiyya. Not all Atharis were Ḥanbali; Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) a Shāfiʿī Jurist and Abū al-ʿIzz al-Adhruʿī the Ḥanafi commentator of al-Ṭahāwī's credo. Ḥanbalism or Atharism claims to uphold the amodal (*bilā kayf*) approach of the Pious Predecessors.

Whether modern Wahhābīs are necessarily historical heirs of the classical Atharīs as they themselves claim, is somewhat contentious. From the above one can conclude that Ḥanbalism was the dominant school in the Proto-Sunni period and Ashʿarism from the inception of that school to the present day is the dominant school of Sunnism. Ḥanbali vitality is not merely a remnant of the past but rather its historical continuity in the Wahhābī movement is a challenge to the presumed dominance of the Sunni theological orthodoxy. We are now witnessing not only the resurgence of Wahhābism but also a newer Ḥanbalī Atharism in Syria.

Halverson chooses to refer to Wahhābism as contemporary Atharism. This is to an extent erroneous as there are two strands of Atharism. Wahhābīs like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān are beginning to define themselves as classical Atharis; however there is an emerging

¹⁷⁶ Frank, p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Halverson, p. 35.

Athari movement from Syria distinct from its Wahhābi counterpart. This strand of Atharism was first brought to light by Musa Ferber who is a traditionalist 'student of sacred knowledge'.¹⁷⁸ On a micro-level he may have initiated a paradigm shift in scholastic traditionalism's notion of 'orthodoxy' as Yūsuf and T.J. Winter are evidently giving this third school some credence.¹⁷⁹ Yusuf is using al-Ṭaḥāwī as a pan-Sunni credo.

Halverson is conflating Atharism as anti-*kalām* – this is not necessarily the case as we shall demonstrate. This new Atharism corroborates Watt's 'Ḥanbalī vitality' thesis. Furthermore this later strand of Atharism poses a new problem for both Sufi and also Salafi scholastic traditionalism. As for the Sufis, it has ignored this strand of Ḥanbalism which is represented by Muhammad Sālim al-Safārīnī who throws a spanner in the works of the two schools of 'orthodox' Sunni Islam thesis;

'The Saved Sect (*firqa nājiya*) consists of three groups; the Atharīs, Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs'¹⁸⁰

It is noteworthy that he embeds this tripartite orthodoxy within the 'Saved Sect' narrative which is, as has been illustrated earlier an idiosyncrasy of the Ḥanbalīs. Moreover the Salafi scholastic traditionalists have in front of them a predicament as Salafism only recognises Atharism. The crisis of contemporary Sunni Islam is the fascination or obsession of Sufis designating the Wahhābīs or Salafis as distinct sects

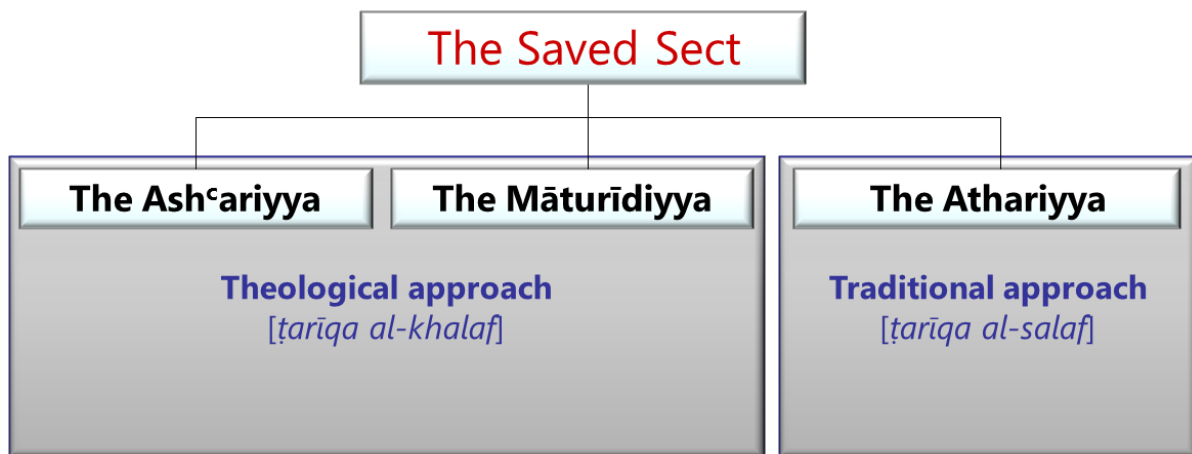
¹⁷⁸ Musa Ferber, *Is there an Atharī ʿaqīda?* <http://spa.qibla.com/issue_view.asp?HD=7&ID=4856&CATE=24> [accessed 26/5/2012]

¹⁷⁹ Winter, *Classical theology*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Safārīnī, pp. 141 – 142.

from mainstream Sunni Islam, or as if they are remnants of the old Khārijites and this is mutually repaid by the Wahhābis who consider the Sufis as quasi-Shiite. So this vindication of Ashʿarism and Māturīdism compounds the existing polemic which was otherwise justified. Moreover al-Fawzān a senior member of the the ‘Permanent Committee’ (*al-lajna al-dā’ima*) of Saudi scholars recognises al-Safārīnī as an ‘orthodox’ Salafi and conveniently authors a commentary on al-Safārīnī’s work in which all remnants of the tripartite school is absent in addition to surprisingly, the usually anti-Ashʿarī polemic. One may argue that al-Fawzān is attempting to forge a link with Syrian Atharism thus giving Wahhābism more appeal to Sufi scholastic traditionalists.

Figure 2:7 Al-Safārīnī’s ‘three Sunni schools’ synthesis



Methodological minimalism of the second level espouses the recognition of three ‘orthodox’ schools of theology which this Syrian brand of Atharism provides comfortably. This is contested by both Sufi scholastic traditionalists who are the spiritual heirs of the Ashʿarī Māturīdī bloc and also by the Salafi scholastic traditionalists who find their identity through rigid Athari Ḥanbalism. In this respect al-Safārīnī is possibly the first minimalist theologian who challenged this seemingly age old dichotomy. We shall explore the collapse of theology in chapter six.

2.5.8 Theological trends

Arguably it can be said that there are four major early theological trends within Islam which culminated from the tension of tradition and rationality. The first group are the Arab Philosophers (*falāsifa*) like al-Kindī who discussed the concept of divinity and put forward the cosmological, theological and ontological arguments for the existence of God.¹⁸¹ The second group consists of the Muʿtazilites commonly referred to as the rationalists and most plausibly the founders of Islamic theology in its truest sense. The third group comprises of two groups the Ashʿarites and the Māturīdites who are referred to as a single composite school by Muslim historians like Nadwi.¹⁸² The fourth trend is the Ḥanbalī literalist school which can be seen as an extension of the earlier Ḥanbalī and non-Ḥanbalī traditionalists at the time of al-Ashʿarī. Other Sunni scholars periodically rebutted Ibn Taymiyya and the Wahhābīs and usually their rebuttals were apologia for the permissibility of a Sunni *kalām*. Shaykh al-Būṭī challenges the Wahhābīs and accuses Ibn Taymiyya of inventing his own *kalām*. He adds that the title of Ibn Taymiyya's work titled *Aversion of rationality and scripture (dar' ta'āruḍ al-ʿaql wa al-naql)* evinces *khalaf* (later Ashʿarī) methodology and yet paradoxically he aligns himself as an enemy of logic.¹⁸³ For this reason it would be appropriate to classify Ibn Taymiyya as a 'theologian', a literalist at times, but a theologian nonetheless. Abrahamov identifies Ibn Taymiyya as a rational traditionalist.¹⁸⁴ To conclude the Philosophers and Muʿtazilite approaches in the syllabi of traditional Sunni seminaries are categorised as 'Heterodox theology' (*ʿilm al-kalām al-bidʿī*) whereas the Ashʿari/Māturīdī and Ḥanbali approaches fall under 'Orthodoxy theology' (*ʿilm al-kalām al-sunnī*).

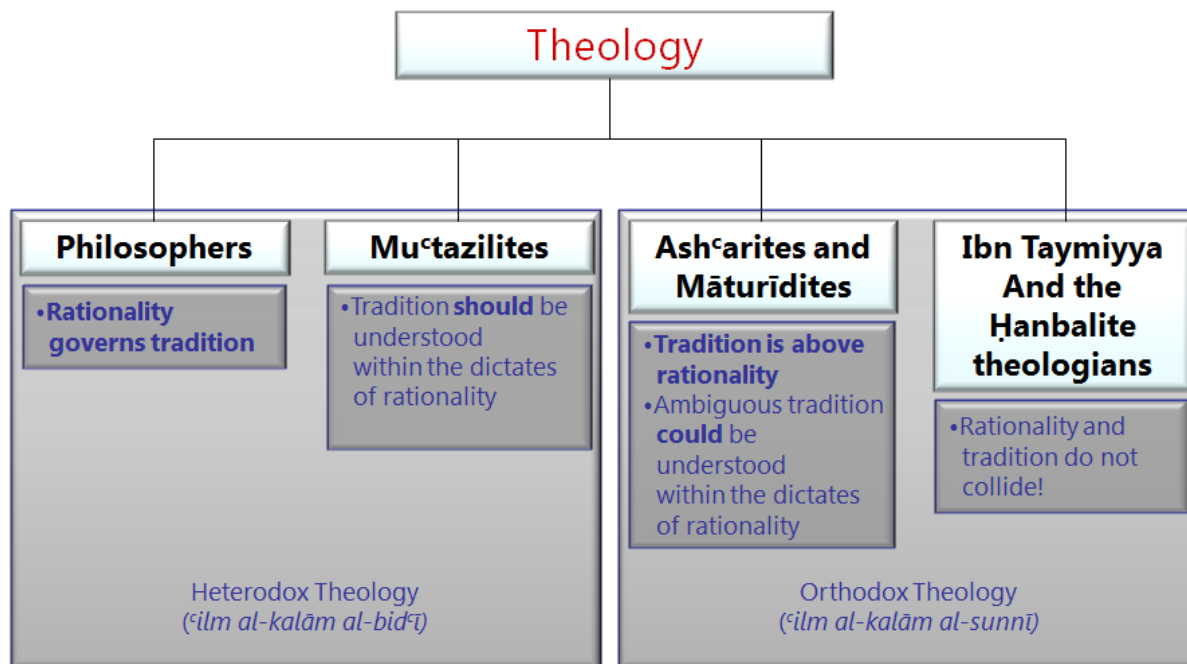
¹⁸¹ Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*. p. 25 – 28.

¹⁸² Nadwi, I, p. 98.

¹⁸³ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafiyya*, pp. 158 – 162.

¹⁸⁴ Abrahamov, pp. x – xi.

Figure 2:8 Kalām Theology



2.6 Scholastic traditionalism

Ramadan identifies two major trends within contemporary Sunni Islam; modernism and scholastic traditionalism.¹⁸⁵ The focus of this study is on scholastic traditionalism. Sunni polemicists are debating who fits under which category. In this thesis I have concentrated on two broad trends of traditional Islam – Sufi and Salafi. Four other parochial groups are subsumed under this this, namely the Barelwi and Deobandi factions which fall under the Sufi trend, and the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and Wahhābī factions which fall under the Salafi trend. Olivier Roy treats both Sufism and Salafi Wahhābism as forms of traditionalism.¹⁸⁶ Geaves concentrates and explores the influence of these factions in his *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain* and so too does Lewis in *Islamic Britain* who recognises the significance of these sectarian traditions. In this

¹⁸⁵ Ramadan, pp. 239 – 245.

¹⁸⁶ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: the Search for a New Ummah*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 234.

sense this study is primarily focusing on the theological ideas that are prevalent amidst the Sunni Muslim diaspora in Britain.

Hermansen surveys the growing phenomenon of global Sufism which is a nexus of Turkish, Middle Eastern, South Asian and diaspora communities.¹⁸⁷ The notion of 'traditional' Islam was advanced by convert Muslims primarily of Sufi persuasion. T.J. Winter and Nuh Keller are arguably the key players in Western Muslim traditionalism. Hermansen highlights how Keller and other convert *shaykhs* have established strong links with international Sufism and also the Muslim diaspora communities. Their ideas are slightly modified from those of their spiritual forerunners Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ian Dallas. It is worthy to mention that these figures had no grassroots appeal until the charismatic Hamza Yusuf began proselytising a new brand of traditionalism. This traditionalism gave credence to the existing parochial models of traditionalism amongst the Muslim Diasporas of the United Kingdom and the United States. The notion of traditional Islam was fused with an idea of a 'classical' Islam. Küng argues that 'classical' Islam is an expression of cultural influence by Persian lifestyle and Hellenic science on the civilisational aspect, and Islamic law represented through the medieval schools and a theology closely resembling 'scholasticism' of other faiths.¹⁸⁸ It was with this mantra that Yūsuf, Winter and Keller instituted Sufism and classical theology as the intellectual heritage of Muslim civilisation. Through their combined strengths, this form of traditionalism became a mass movement as it achieved grassroots appeal amongst the Sunni Indo-Pak Diasporas especially in the

¹⁸⁷ M. Hermansen. 'Global Sufism' in *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*. ed. Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler and Gritt Klinkhammer (London: Routledge 2009), pp. 26 – 39.

¹⁸⁸ Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* [trans. John Bowden]. (Oxford: One World, 2009), p. 254 – 255.

United Kingdom. Scholastic traditionalism is a remnant of imperial Islam, and its knowledge was produced in the environment of that world.

2.6.1 The scholar as the mouthpiece of tradition

Gellner argues that in Islam there is no formal clerical organisation and as such he regards Muslim theology as to some extent egalitarian.¹⁸⁹ Theoretically this may be true but in reality the dynamic between laypeople and scholarship in Islam is scarcely different to other religious traditions. The Sufis and Salafi scholastic movements are not churches yet the power they yield is no less than that of any authoritative institution. The key dynamic is that the scholars (*‘ulamā’*) are in charge. This affiliation to scholarship is facilitated by the jurisprudential tool of imitation (*taqlīd*).

We have previously explored how scholasticism or the reverence of scholarship and indeed the presence of scholarship is a key component in classical theology and notions of orthodoxy. The role of scholarship is paramount in the ‘orthodoxy’ narrative of both Sufi and Salafi settings. Scholars are expected to be well versed in traditional Islamic disciplines such as theology, jurisprudence, tradition (*ḥadīth*), exegesis and Arabic. Moreover the knowledge a scholar possesses must have an unbroken chain (*sanad*) connecting all the way back to the Prophet.¹⁹⁰

Sufis have an added dimension in that there is reverence for the ‘friends of God’. Though the Salafis recognise the concept of *wilāya*, they are in Ibn Taymiyya’s fashion

¹⁸⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism: Reason and Religion*. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Malik, pp. 5 – 9.

against the 'cult of personality'. Sufi *wilāya* is more exotic and hierarchical. Like scholarship *wilāya* is justified only through sound transmission.

An issue of concern which shall be duly explored, is the inclusion of politics in Sunni credos. Al-Nasafī's *al-ʿAqā'id* and al-Ṭahāwī's *Bayān* all include the obligation of appointing a political leader and the prohibition of rebelling against the unjust. The Arab uprising of 2011 has shattered this creedal point.¹⁹¹ Scholars such as Ali Gomah, al-Būṭī *et al* were lambasted by the masses and their credibility has been severely damaged.¹⁹² We are possibly witnessing a paradigm shift in regards to the authority the *ʿulamā'* have yielded for so long and the complacency and quietism of the Sunni theological tradition as a whole towards issues of social justice. Both Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism flourish under oppressive authoritarian regimes. Criticism of the ruling elite is quickly pointed out by this brand of scholarship as 'Khārijite rebellion'.

Moreover traditional Islam is rooted in the notion of affiliation (*iltizām*) to an emir and a collective.¹⁹³ This affiliation is translated in the unpronounced pledge (*bayʿa*) which in the Islamic legal sense is given to the leader of the nation. In addition to this pledge following on from the institutionalisation of Sufism, the Sufis introduced a pledge which an aspirant (*murīd*) on the spiritual journey gives to a master (*shaykh*). Sufis are presented with the predicament of two pledges, one to the country and the other to an organisation. Ḥawwā a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue argues that the Sufi and

¹⁹¹ Yasmine Saleh, *Egypt's Al-Azhar Islamic authority blossoms in the Arab Spring*, Reuters [7 Sep 2011] <<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2011/09/07/egypts-al-azhar-islamic-authority-blossoms-in-arab-spring/>> [accessed 26/5/2012]

¹⁹² <<http://www.mideastviews.com/articleview.php?art=557>> [accessed 26/5/2012]

¹⁹³ Abrahamov, p. 5.

Islamist pledges are non-binding 'pledges of piety' (*bayʿa al-taqwā*).¹⁹⁴ This pledge is considered an innovation in Salafi quarters.

Furthermore scholastic traditionalism stresses on the unbroken chain (*silsila*) of taking knowledge from those authorised to teach. License (*ijāza*) was originally used in Ḥadīth studies and Qurʾānic recitation and then permeated all other Islamic disciplines most significantly Sufism.¹⁹⁵ A *shaykh* or teacher would issue *ijāzas* to his disciples upon completion of his/her studies in Arabic sciences, jurisprudence and other sciences. This *ijāza* was then borrowed by the Sufis and became an integral part of the Sufi path, where only a *shaykh* with an *ijāza* from his master can either succeed him or initiate his own order (*ṭarīqa*). Eventually this *ijāza* becomes the bedrock of traditional education whereby one could not teach publicly without procuring an *ijāza* from a teacher.¹⁹⁶ Yusuf arduously displays his *ijāza* and the long connected chain back to al-Ṭahāwī in his commentary.¹⁹⁷ Thus the *ijāza* and *sanad* are the criterion of authenticity in Sufi scholastic traditionalism.

El-Shamsy highlights the ambiguous nature of the *ijāza* system, arguing teachers sometimes gave *ijāzas* without even meeting the individuals or more notably not having a rigorous assessment criterion in place. Western scholarship interpreted the proliferation of the *ijāza* as a sign of general decline in Islamic scholarship.¹⁹⁸ Traditionalists on the other hand regard the lack of this *ijāza* as the precipice of Islamic

¹⁹⁴ Ḥawwā Saʿīd. *Taribiyatunā al-Rūḥiyya*. (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2004), p. 182.

¹⁹⁵ Siddiqi, p. 86.

¹⁹⁶ Sufi, p. 45.

¹⁹⁷ Yusuf, pp. 41 – 45.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed El Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy', in *Classical Islamic Theology* ed. by Tim Winter, pp. 99.

scholastic decadence.¹⁹⁹ Due to the vagueness of the *ijāza* the Sufis developed more exotic versions.

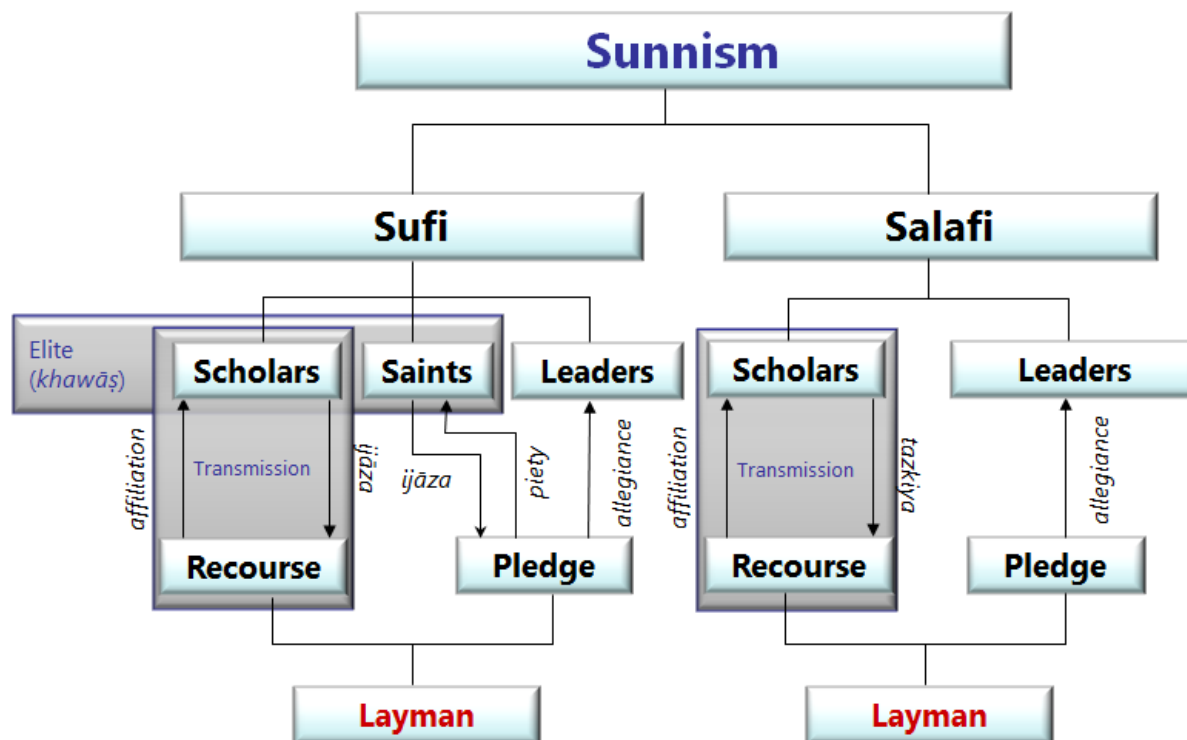
Though the Salafis in theory have disregard for the *ijāza* as is understood by the Sufis, they too in recent times have developed a mechanism akin to the *ijāza* of the Sufis and have termed it *tazkiya*, the veracity of a scholar is judged by a *tazkiya* issued by an established scholar. Al-Madkhalī legitimises his call to Salafism by a *tazkiya* from Ibn Bāz.²⁰⁰

The layman in both the Sufi and Salafi worldview is anyone who is not a scholar of Islamic Sacred Knowledge. The Salafis maintain that it is obligatory for a layman to follow the Qur'ān and the Sunna in line with Islamic scholarship. The Sufis on the other hand contend this is not sufficient, since the layman is more prone to satanic impulses he/she must follow a Sufi *shaykh*. The dynamics in both Sufi and Salafi Islam is that scholars and *shaykhs* are in a position of authority over laypeople. Though imitation (*taqlīd*) is a contentious issue for the Salafis both groupings theoretically are encouraged to imitate scholarship. It is *taqlīd* which holds the edifice of traditionalism together.

¹⁹⁹ Malik, pp. 1 – 3.

²⁰⁰ Al-Madkhalī, p. 14.

Figure 2:9 Laymen – Scholar dynamics



2.7 Conclusion

Doctrinal minimalism finds its roots in Sunni Islam on all three levels (creed, articles and principles).²⁰¹ Methodological minimalism on the early generation level technically poses no significant problem; however strict readings of Salafism tend to view the early generation as a methodology (*minhāj*). Second level methodological minimalism espouses al-Safārīnī’s three schools of Sunni theology (Ash‘ari, Māturīdī, and Atharī) schema.²⁰² As such methodological minimalism overlooks some of the tensions between these classical schools especially between Ash‘arism and Ḥanbalī Atharism. Additionally this three schools model is challenged by the existing predominant intra-Sunni polemic of a polarised Sufism and Salafism which argues for either two schools only (Ash‘ari/Māturīdī) or a one school only (Atharī) ‘orthodoxy’ respectively. Later we

²⁰¹ See Fig. 1:1.

²⁰² See Chapter 1, section 1.4.2.b

shall explore the more polemical outlook of the parochial manifestations of these schools in chapter five.

Orthodoxy is a social construction in Islam as there was no religio-political authority to regulate it. Historically whenever this transpired officially it culminated in the Muʿtazilite and Ḥanbalī inquisitions and it was fraught with negative consequences. It is perhaps because of this historical lesson that traditional Islam is focused on self-preservation and working towards a unity. Moreover minimalism could facilitate tradition to subsist in an ever changing modern world and that is why the Amman Message and the Pledge have been initiated to facilitate dialogue with the Muslim 'other'. Furthermore minimalism in this manner too is a social construct as it is the attempt of traditionalists making sense of the polemical propensity of traditional Islam. Minimalism finds its roots in the textualism of tradition (*sunna*) and the organic dimension of community (*jamāʿa*). Quantifiable 'orthodox' narrative of the 'Saved Sect' is usually the approach of the Salafis and it decidedly impedes minimalism, whereas the 'Great Masses narrative' is more conducive for minimalism.

Essentially the tension of reason and tradition is an integral part of Sunni history and perhaps its identity. It is this tension that set the trajectories of the Muʿtazilite, Ashʿarite, Māturīdite and also the Ḥanbalite theologies. The Ashʿarī and Māturīdī schools synthesised reason and tradition in their respective theologies. Ḥanbalism always resisted theology whether it be of Muʿtazilite or Sunni Ashʿarī persuasion because of their compromising of tradition in favour of reason. Doctrinal minimalism on all its levels has nothing to add to this debate as Halverson asserts doctrine does not speak of *how* and *why*. Methodological minimalism however can accommodate such a synthesis.

Scholastic traditionalism of both Sufi and Salafi persuasion lays great emphasis on *‘ulamā’* and hence they are correctly designated as ‘scholastic’ traditionalists. Methodological minimalism of early generations and theological schools represents this form of traditionalism. Reverence of scholarship is recognised by both Sufis and Salafis however the ‘cult of personality’ amidst Sufis is somewhat of a contentious issue. Effectively traditionalism is a broader form of jurisprudential tool of scholastic imitation (*taqlīd*). Traditionalism especially of Sufi, Ash[‘]arī, and *madhab* conformist stock promotes *taqlīd* not merely as an expedient pedagogic tool but also a mechanism of ‘orthodoxy’. Moreover *taqlīd* presents a paradox for dogma as it is impermissible in doctrinal matters and as such founders the edifice of any ‘orthodoxy’.²⁰³

Ash[‘]arism finds its Sunni identity through Ḥanbalism no matter how much it wants to move beyond it. Ḥanbalism in all its manifestations has strongly resisted Ash[‘]arism. Ultimately minimalism is informed by classical theological constructs of orthodoxy and in particular the doctrinal principles of ‘Abd al-Hādī are presented by a Ḥanbali – notably Ibn Taymiyya.

These theological schools vied against each other for dominance and eventually the Ash[‘]arī School enjoyed the most exposure. Ḥanbalism resisted this dominance and it has translated in the Salafi scholastic traditionalist camp which comprises of Salafis and Ḥanbalī Wahhābis. We have demonstrated in this chapter how scholastic traditional minimalism with its contemporary polemical nuances can be easily located in the schisms of classical Sunni theology.

²⁰³Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 108 – 112.

From the above discussion it is clear that minimalism is socially constructed and hence likely to change in accordance to time and space. Minimalism can be understood as a laconic articulation of 'orthodoxy'.

The originality of this chapter rests on the discovery of the tripartite Sunnism, quantifiable orthodoxy theses.

CHAPTER THREE: PERENNIAL THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

So oft in theologic wars,

The disputants, I ween,

Rail on in utter ignorance

Of what each other mean,

And prate about an Elephant

Not one of them has seen

[John Godfrey Saxe]

In the previous chapter we explored the roots of minimalism in Classical Sunni theology. In this chapter we shall explore perennial tensions of classical theological controversies which subsisted through medieval times and how they inform the contemporary Sufi and Salafi divide. The key issues of controversy include; the interpretation of the statutes especially those pertaining to the Divine Attributes of God, the nature of religious 'innovation' and the debate on religious orthopraxy. The two main questions this chapter aims to answer are a) to what extent is the claim that the concept of 'minimalism' is embedded in classical theological discourse correct?, and b) to what extent do classical theological schisms shape contemporary polemics?

The first controversial issue to be discussed is modes of literal and allegorical interpretation of the Divine Attributes and how this issue is very much vibrant in

contemporary polemics as it was in early Islam and the medieval period. I shall explore the nuances of Ash^ʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī schools' positions on amodal (*bilā kayf*) and figurative interpretations (*ta'wīl*). The second most significant issue is the notion of 'innovation' (*bid'ā*) in the religion. I shall attempt to establish whether Sacred Law itself perpetuates and facilitates religious innovation or is, as popular Islam suggests merely the product of the 'whims and desires' of the masses. This issue is the most distinguishing in the demarcation of Sufi and Salafi traditionalism at present. Though Sufi scholastic traditionalists whitewash Ash^ʿarī and Māturīdī theological nuances, this chapter explores how their respective arguments for orthopraxy and orthodoxy have historically been informed by Khārijite and Murji'ite definitions of faith and how these have then translated in to contemporary nomenclature in Muslim identity politics of 'practising' (*multazim*) and 'non-practising' (*ghayr multazim*) religiosity.

The problem with contemporary attempts at defining core Sunni theological doctrines is that it often confuses itself with historical methodological manifestations or interpretations of this original theology. The foundational doctrines of Islam are agreed upon by both the Sunni and Shiite. Though some Shiite add the words 'ʿAlī is the friend of God as appointed by the Messenger' (*ʿAlī waliullah waṣṣāhu al-rasūl*) this according to the Sunnis does not nullify the creedal pronouncement. Ultimately the creed on a macro-level is definitively the same for all the sects. This is then followed by core principles of Sunnism which amongst Sunnis are perhaps tacitly agreed. These principles of Sunnism consist of dogmata which are to some extent devoid of a developed *kalām* and by definition acceptable to all – this I identified as a macro doctrinal minimalism within Sunni Islam. On another level these very principles are articulated through the *kalām* theological traditions of the Ash^ʿarite and Māturīdites of which only a general agreement can be determined through a three schools paradigm suggested by al-Safārīni. The *kalām* tradition is hence identified as a methodological minimalism. In addition to these theologies there are parochial

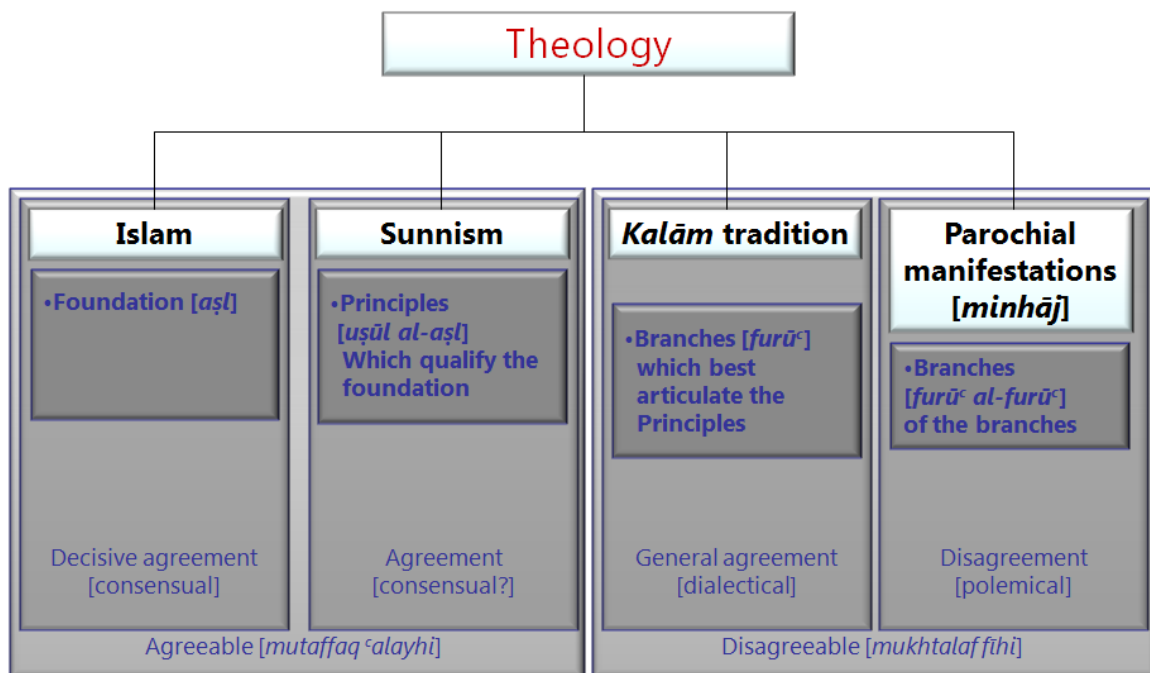
methodologies which assume the vanguard of interpreting the *kalām* tradition albeit in the form of polemics. Ultimately all of this forfeits the claim to 'orthodoxy' if the core doctrines of Islam are excluded. These parochial methodologies will be dealt with in the following chapter five and constitute a significant impediment for the minimalist model. The *kalām* tradition has stood the test of time and would be the normative approach to orthodoxy. The parochial manifestations of the *kalām* traditions tend to be contextual to time and place and therefore exhibit a fluidity which may undermine and even put 'orthodoxy' into question. The crux of the matter is that the mechanism of agreement i.e. the consensus (*ijmāʿ*), has failed to provide unanimity on an essentialist dogma other than the creed itself. Goldziher illustrates a subtle distinction between dogma and theology, arguing that prophets are not theologians;

'The theologian answers questions that lie outside the prophet's sphere of interest; he reconciles contradictions the prophet would have been at ease with; he devises inflexible formulas, and erects rows upon rows of argument into ramparts, in the hope of securing those formulas against assault from within and without. He then derives all his systematically ordered tenets from the prophet's words, not infrequently from their most literal sense. He proclaims that those tenets are what the prophet had intended to teach from the outset. Theologian disputes with theologian, each hurling the cunning arguments of an arrogant subtlety at anyone who, using the same means, draws different conclusions from the living words of the prophet'¹

¹ Goldziher, p. 67.

The models of minimalism explored in chapter one can facilitate albeit loosely, the creed and Sunni principles on the doctrinal level. However, it founders on the methodological component where the general affiliation to the Pious Predecessors has to be reconciled with the schools of theology and furthermore their various parochialisms. Methodological minimalism struggles with a superstructure that is fraught with internally competing ideas, and in spirit could dispense with theology.

Figure 3:1 Orthodox Theology



In this chapter we shall explore the grey or controversial areas within classical theology which shape up the polemics of today. Though there are many debates within the dialectic tradition of Islam one feels the most potent are those of figurative interpretation and the notion of innovation.

3.1 Amalgamation of theological and traditional discourse on monotheism

The two most exhaustive issues given meticulous attention in Islamic theology are the issues of divinity and predestination. However concerning the discourse on predestination, in regards to the paradox of God knowing the outcome of everyone's actions and simultaneously bestowing them the freedom of choice, all factions within Sunni Islam are unanimous on reconciling this with amodality (*bilā kayf*). Netton articulates divinity in Islam;

'God is unequivocally one in orthodox Islam and the doctrine of His absolute unity (*tawḥīd*) is a major and constant *leitmotiv* in the Qur'ān'²

This and all other references of *tawḥīd* are encapsulated in the very short Qur'ānic chapter 112. The Ash'arī and Māturīdī scholars do not stress on varying facets of monotheism, however the Ḥanbalī theologians especially Ibn Taymiyya divides monotheism into three categories; monotheism of lordship (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*), monotheism of divinity (*tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*) and monotheism of the divine names and attributes (*tawḥīd al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*).³ The terms Ibn Taymiyya uses are also in vogue amongst Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians, though not as separate monotheisms.

Monotheism of Lordship is according to Ibn Taymiyya and the Ḥanbalīs, the form of quintessential monotheism that all religions monotheistic or otherwise affirm. Such a theoretical *tawḥīd* could have existed amongst the ancient traditions of Egypt, Greece

² Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*. (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994) p. 2.

³ Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya li Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya*. (Riyadh: Dā Ibn al-Jawzī, 2000), p. 21.

and India.⁴ Muslims and many non-Muslims alike recognise the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God which fall under this type of 'monotheism'. This is a level of affirming God's unity yet it still does not qualify one as a Muslim according to mainstream interpretation. Monotheism of Lordship essentially declares that God exists (*mawjūd*) and simply entails the mere recognition of God as the Creator (*khāliq*). This monotheism is understood as *a priori*.

Monotheism of Divinity is the *tawḥīd* which is specific to revealed religions. This form of monotheism entails the recognition that not only does God exist but also that He alone is to be worshipped (*maʿbūd*). Some of the Ashʿarīs contend that both Lordship and Divinity are intrinsically one and the same thing.⁵ Monotheism of Divinity perhaps can be understood within the ambit of the ontological argument. There is no need for proofs of the existence of God; therefore worship Him.

Monotheism of the Divine Attributes entails the crux of theology i.e. the nature of God. God in Muslim theology has both a transcendent and immanent aspect and these are understood through these attributes.⁶ Through these attributes the uniqueness of God is understood, that God is an entity but unlike others. While in classical theology such discussion may have initially stimulated intellectual discussion, in more contemporary theology, and not entirely unlike in the past, it represents polemics at its best. If in the past the polemic was between the Muʿtazilites and the Ḥanbalīs, then in the modern setting it has been updated with the Ashʿarites and the Wahhābi Ḥanbalīs again. The Wahhābīs accuse the Ashʿarīs of only affirming seven odd Divine Attributes, yet the

⁴ Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp. 1 -2.

⁵ Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, p. 89.

⁶ Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p. 22.

same criticism is not directed towards al-Safārīnī who lists exactly seven Attributes in his poem. These are;

1. Life (*ḥayāt*)
2. Speech (*kalām*)
3. Vision (*baṣar*)
4. Hearing (*samʿ*)
5. Desire (*irāda*)
6. Omniscience (*ʿilm*)
7. Omnipotence (*qudra*)⁷

These seven are those affirmed by the Ashʿarites in most of their credos. Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī a contemporary Salafi argues that some other Sunni theologians, perhaps Ashʿari or Māturīdis organise *tawḥīd* into two categories; General Monotheism (*tawḥīd ʿāmm*) which includes both Lordship and Divinity, and Specific Monotheism (*tawḥīd khāṣṣ*) which pertains to the Divine Names and Attributes.⁸ Al-Fawzān one of the successors of the late Mufti of Saudi, Ibn Bāz and avowed Wahhābī, though he promotes this tripartite *tawḥīd*, he acknowledges in his own words;

‘These three types of *tawḥīd* are derived from the Book and the Sunna, however the Messenger never said that *tawḥīd* has three facets’⁹

⁷ Al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-Durra al-Marḍiyya*, p. 78.

⁸ Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, p. 89.

⁹ Al-Fawzān, *Sharḥ al-Durra al-Marḍiyya*, p. 34.

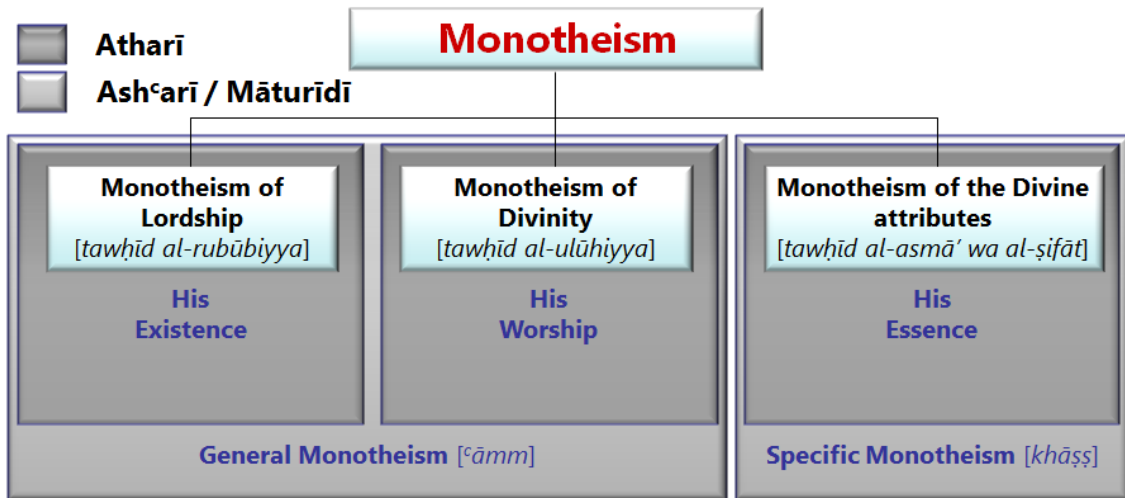
The Muṣṭazilite scholars discussed monotheism in a manner which provided a clear understanding of divinity and it too was tripartite;

1. What is necessary for God (*al-wājib lillah*):
2. What is possible for God (*al-jā'iz lillah*):
3. What is impossible for God (*al-mustaḥīl lillah*):

The early Ḥanbalīs reject this approach as it smacks of Hellenistic rationalism, however the latter day Ḥanbalīs like al-Safārīni who were neither Ashʿarīs nor Māturīdīs yet they maintained a distinct Ḥanbalī tradition borrowed this paradigm.¹⁰ Al-Fawzān explains many latter-day Ashʿarī and Māturīdīs refuse to acknowledge an Atharī or Ḥanbalī theological school. It could be argued that the Ḥanbalī approach to some degree resembles the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī *kalām* method. Shaykh al-Būṭī, Yūsuf Binnūrī, and European Scholars have appropriately identified the Atharīs as Ḥanbalī theologians. Evidently there is an attempt by Saudi scholars like al-Fawzān and others to give the puritanical Najdī Wahhābī movement credence and acceptability within mainstream Sunni Islam by forging a link with the more moderate Ḥanbalī *kalām* tradition of al-Safārīnī, Ibn Qudāma and others.

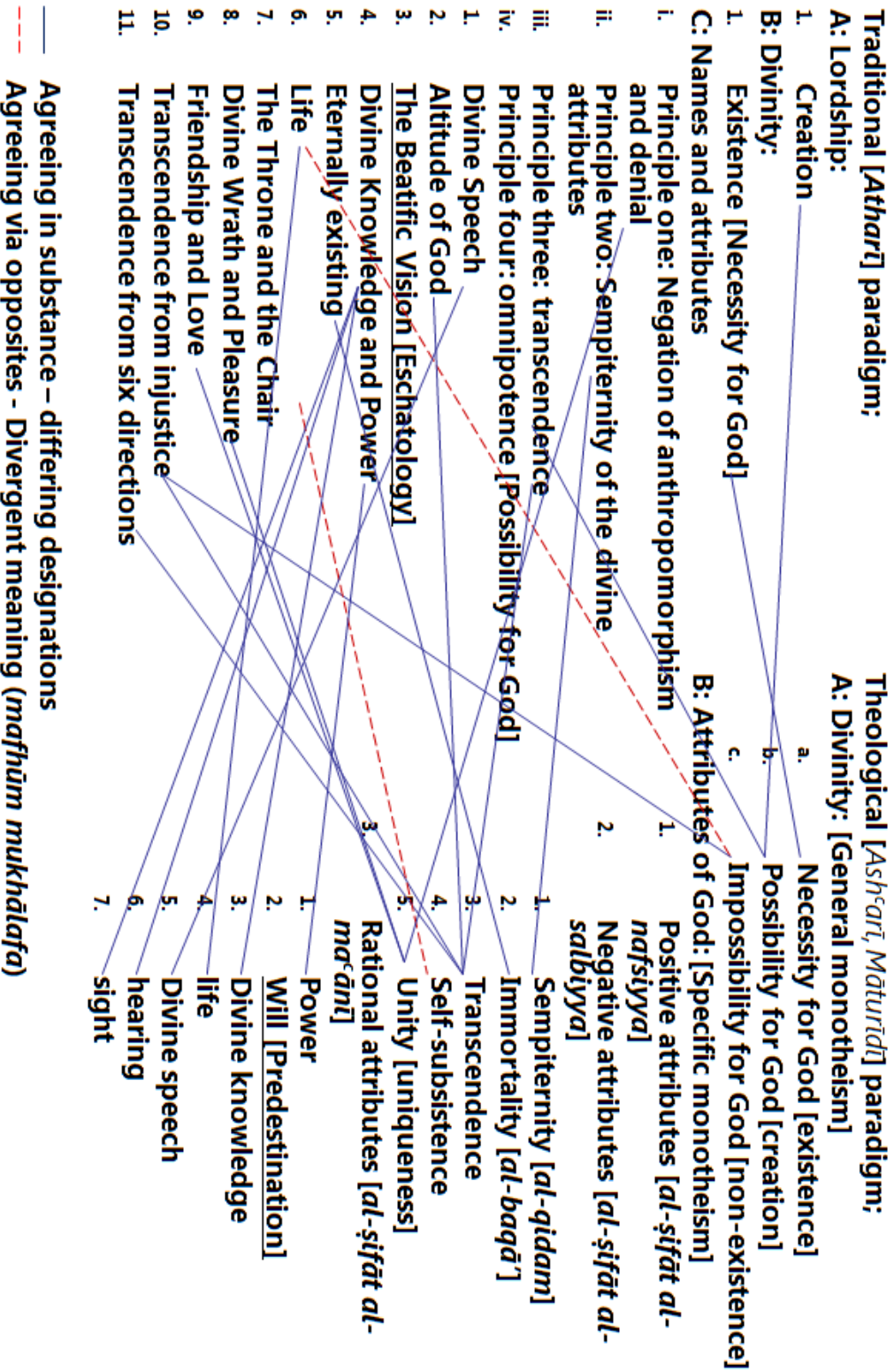
¹⁰ Ibid. p. 36.

Figure 3:2 Division of Divinity



If we look at the diagram below, we can see that no matter how seemingly disparate the traditional (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) and theological (*kalām*) approaches on the discourse of monotheism may be, they both deal with fundamentally the same issues. Moreover the first two forms in the case of the traditionalists and one in the case of the theologians are uncomplicated. The third form for the traditionalist or the second form for the theologians is slightly more complex.

Figure 3:3 Amaglmation of approaches to monotheism



Furthermore one argues these classifications of the theologians and traditionalists are guidelines to understand doctrine and do not constitute dogma itself.

3.2 Interpretation

3.2.1 Literalism v Metaphor: the Medieval Islamic debate

Abū Ishāq al-Isfrāyīnī (d. 418/1027) a Shāfi'ite theologian and the great Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya argue that metaphor (*majāz*) no doubt occurs in ordinary literature however it does not occur in the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions. This view is supported by the contemporary exegete Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī. The main reason for this group's rejection of the occurrence of metaphor in the Qur'ān according to al-Shinqīṭī is that every metaphor can be rejected on linguistic grounds.¹¹ It could be deduced from this that this is essentially a semantic debate as it abounds in both theological and jurisprudential works. These scholars were not necessarily literalists but may have taken on this approach to retain the accessibility of the text. Gauchet sheds some light on this point:

'The necessity to rigidly regulate a body of doctrine against open-ended interpretation also legitimated an uncompromisingly personal understanding of the divine will. The difference from Islam is glaringly obvious. The Koran's revelation is itself literal and indisputable presence of the transcendent in immanence and thus dispensed with interpreters, lest it succumb to the uncertainties of

¹¹ Muḥammad al-Amīn Al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḍwā' al-Bayān fī Ṭdāḥ al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*. 6 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ehia Al-Tourath al-Arabi 1996), vi, pp. 393.

internal judgement or to an outbreak of subjective values. No clergy, no Reformation'¹²

Gauchet may have overstated the inevitability of interpretation and schools of exegesis that flourished in Islam but nonetheless he highlighted the non-elitism of epistemology. Another reason why Ibn Taymiyya especially would be anti-metaphor is that arguing for the existence of metaphor in the Qur'ān *ipso facto* legitimises figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Divine Attributes of which he was a staunch opponent and perhaps esotericism (*bāṭiniyya*) too. Contemporary Salafism has retained this minority position. Blankinship maintains that this medieval debate of literalism and metaphor polarises contemporary Salafi and Sufi scholastic traditionalists.¹³

Notwithstanding the debate within Sunni Islam regarding literalism and metaphor, a key methodological approach of the Sunnis is the literal affirmation of text. Gleave maintains that for most legal theorists the literal meaning was the default stance, presumably based on the maxim 'the principle in speech is literal' (*aṣl al-kalām al-ḥaqīqa*).¹⁴ This is somewhat true for the *mutakallimūn* too as al-Nasafī a Māturidite theologian upholds that the 'outward import of statutes are to be established' (*al-nuṣūṣ ʿalā ḥaqāiqihā*).¹⁵ This is a view subscribed to by both the Sufi and Wahhābī factions. It would be prudent to point out that though this debate is now firmly embedded in Sunni Islam it was originally what polarised classical Sunni Ḥanbalism

¹² Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A political history of religion* (trans. Oscar Burge) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 79 – 80.

¹³ Blankinship "introduction" in - Ibn al-Jawzī, Abd Al-Raḥmān. *The Attributes of God* (trans. 'Abdullah bin Hamīd 'Alī) (Bristol: Amal Press 2006), p. xiii.

¹⁴ Robert Gleave, *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 146.

¹⁵ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 257.

from Muṣṭazilism. This tension is a by-product of the collision of rationality and revelation.

Sunni exegesis and theology hence developed modes of interpretation. The most significant approach to interpreting text is the quasi-literal explanation (*tafsīr*). Explanation in Arabic has the connotation of expounding upon, clarification, though usually in the sense of providing synonymous meanings.¹⁶ In a way *tafsīr* highlights and affirms the literal meanings.¹⁷ Explanation in the literal sense poses no significant difficulty for those portions of Qur'ānic text pertaining to morals, devotional acts and historical narrative.

A more controversial approach to explaining the Qur'ānic text is the notion of figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Figurative interpretation involves applying some secondary meaning out of contextual necessity. Though this issue is contentious amongst theologians and is generally viewed as an 'innovation' of the rationalist Muṣṭazilites it is firmly established that some Companions of Muhammad actively promoted its use. The formative schools of exegesis were polarised into the literal traditional approach of Ubay ibn Kaḥab's school of Medina which vehemently rejects such interpretation and the more rational approach of Ibn Mas'ūd's school of Kūfah which advocates its permissibility. Abdul-Raof succinctly describes this tension as 'the dichotomy of explanation and interpretation' which too is firmly entrenched in this debate between literalism and metaphor.¹⁸ Advocates of interpretation argue that the import of ambiguous text is still extant and interpretation allows it to unravel its meanings. This process is still an affirmation of text (*ithbāt al-naṣṣ*). Interpretation is

¹⁶ Ḥāfiẓ Thanā'ullah al-Zāhidī, *Tafsīr al-Uṣūl*. (Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 1997), p. 122.

¹⁷ Gleave, p. 72.

¹⁸ Abdul-Raof, pp. 84 – 110.

most required for issues pertaining to those portions of the Qur'ān relating to divinity, miracles and other eschatological issues which fall under the rubric of belief in the unseen (*al-īmān bi al-ghayb*), the knowledge of which is the sole preserve of God.

An intermediary method was employed by early Sunni scholars, which may be seen as somewhat of an intellectual copout. This method entailed applying the literal connotation without necessarily discussing 'the how of it' (*bilā kayf*). This is used again for those issues pertaining to the unseen realm (*al-ghayb*), particularly divinity and predestination. Explanation (*tafsīr*), interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and amodality (*bilā kayf*) are all orthodox methods of interpretation though the extent to which each is applied is an area of debate. It is interesting to note that *bilā kayf* is a construction of the Successors of the Companions and has not been considered an 'innovation' despite it being untraceable as a notion back to the Companions and it has no textual precedence in either the Qur'ān nor the Sunna.

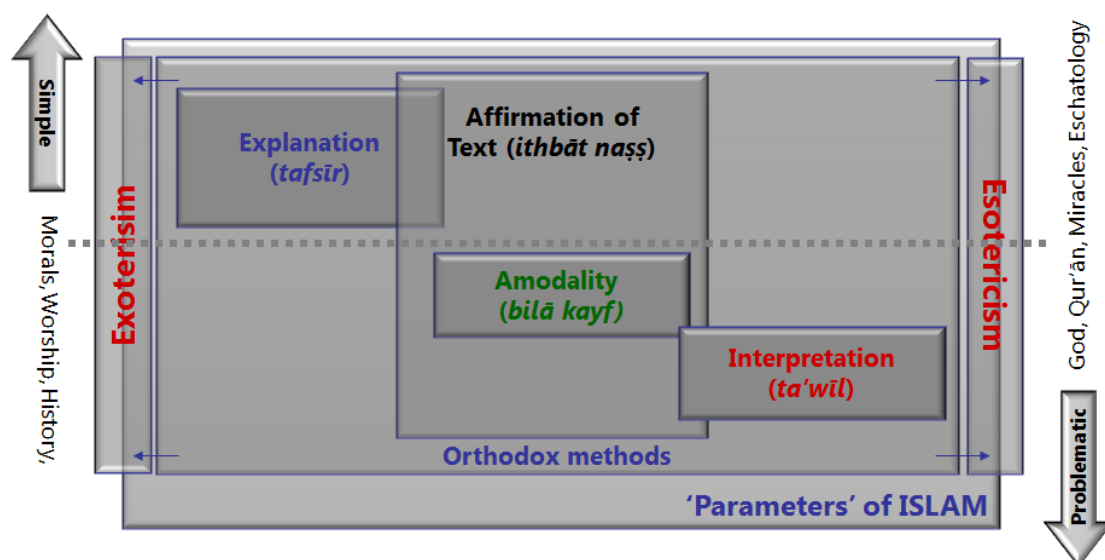
An extreme yet logical conclusion of literal interpretation or what can be termed explanation would be exotericism (*ẓāhiriya*). Though exotericism has been accommodated to some extent within the Sunni Islamic Jurisprudential heritage as is evident with the Sunni acceptance of the now defunct *Ẓāhirī* school, it is vehemently opposed by them in the theological domain.¹⁹ It can be argued that the literalist trend has permeated the *Wahhābī* and modern Salafist movements.²⁰ Moreover this phenomenon cannot be easily pigeonholed with group methodologies, i.e. a Sufi could also be exoteric.

¹⁹ Gleaves, pp. 170 – 174. Even the Salafi polemicists accuse Ibn Ḥazm of being a 'Jahmite' for interpreting the attributes of God.

²⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt*, p. 189.

Esotericism has been opposed by Sunni theologians since the early days. Al-Ghazālī was at the forefront in repudiating the esoteric tradition.²¹ Salafis largely accuse Sufis of being influenced or resemble traits of early Bāṭini thought. Both exoteric and esoteric trends are considered unorthodox by the Sunnis but still plague Sunni thought.

Figure 3:4 Theological hermeneutics



3.2.2 'Orthodox' methods of interpretation

In this section we shall discuss the use of the methods of interpretation especially in respect to the divine attributes of God. God in Muslim theology has both a transcendent and immanent aspect and these are understood through His attributes.²²

²¹ Jackson, Sherman. *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafrīqa*. (trans. Sherman Jackson) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 109.

²² Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p. 22.

Through these attributes the uniqueness of God is understood, that God is an entity (*shay'*) but unlike others.²³

Amodal interpretation entails applying the literal connotation without discussing the 'how' of its implication. This was the position of the early jurists like Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid (d. 104/722), Qatāda (d. 118/736), and the generality of early Sunni scholarship. Amodal interpretation was later championed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī. Ḥanbalī theology is in essence inspired and constricted to amodality of the Divine Attributes. The Ashʿarīs recognise that *bilā kayf* was not necessarily an explanation and succinctly refer to it as 'consignment' (*tafwīḍ*) of its knowledge to God. The Ḥanbalīs rarely use the term *tafwīḍ* for *bilā kayf*. However it seems that Abu Jaʿfar al-Ṭahāwī in his creed unequivocally articulates *bilā kayf* as 'copping out':

'Unless he leaves the knowledge of things that are ambiguous to the One who knows them (wa radda ʿilm ma ishtabaha ʿalayhi ilā ʿālimi)'.²⁴

We have explained that the Companions themselves differed on the notion of *taʿwīl*, moreover many of the Qurʾānic exegetes are of the opinion that *taʿwīl* was synonymous to *tafsīr* (explanation), and *tafsīr* is an explanation of an expression whether it conforms to the literal understanding or not. The latter-day jurists and theologians argue that it is applying a secondary import because of some contextual necessity.²⁵ Figurative interpretation of the Divine Attributes became a decidedly contentious issue amongst

²³ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 117 – 120.

²⁴ Al-Ṭahāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 8.

²⁵ Al-Jurjānī, p. 38.

early theologians. The Muʿtazilites opted for figurative interpreting of those unclear expressions which pertained to Divinity.

Classical traditionalist scholarship comprising largely of Ḥanbalis and Ḥadīth masters countered this approach of the Muʿtazilites with amodality. Henceforth figurative interpretation of the Divine Attributes was stigmatised as Muʿtazilite heterodoxy. Notwithstanding that the Muʿtazilites viewed amodal interpretation as nothing more than an intellectual copout and inherently anthropomorphic.

Later generations of Ashʿarīs recognised the value of figurative interpretation and adopted this within their theology though they did not necessarily describe amodality as a 'copout' they did not exhaust much effort in promoting it as the standard. Ashʿarī *kalām* claims it is the historical continuation of early (*salafī*) Islam in its broadest sense. It was *bilā kayf* of al-Ashʿarī and the generality of early Muslim scholars that set them aside from the Muʿtazilites. This friction can be seen as a tradition versus reason tension and reason eventually seeped through in Ashʿarī theology. It could be argued that since reason is employed after religious texts in Ashʿarī theology that it maintained latent Muʿtazilite traits which resurface in an 'orthodox' garb. Muhammad Abduh and the modernist movement may have as Martin *et al* suggest found a symbol in Muʿtazilism but it was his Ashʿarī upbringing which could have played a pivotal role in setting him on a rationalist trajectory.²⁶

²⁶ Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward with DWI S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. (Oxford: One World, 1997), pp. 129 – 135.

Furthermore literalism poses some problems with the following verses: *'He is with you wherever you are'* Q57:4 and in *'He is God in both Heaven and Earth'* Q6:3 bearing in mind the transcendence of God. If one were to argue that *'he is with you'* literally it constitutes disbelief according to all Sunni theologians, moreover if one were to say *'he is with you' bilā kayf*, this too is unacceptable. In this instance it can be deduced that perhaps there is a quasi-literalist overtone after all in *bilā kayf*. So the only option left is *ta'wīl*, we find that even the Wahhābīs explain Q57:4 *'He is with you'* i.e. with His knowledge. Likewise *'He is God in both Heaven and Earth'* is explained not only by the Wahhābīs but also the Ash'aris as God is 'worshipped' in both Heaven and Earth.

3.2.3 Interpretation of the Divine Attributes

Here focus will be on certain ambiguous verses and the controversies surrounding their interpretation. Interpretation is a grey area which compounds minimalism. There are a few debates on certain peripheral issues in prophetology (*nubuwwāt*) and eschatology (*sam'iyāt*) at present, however the most contentious area of debate in theological studies in the past has been in divinity (*ilīhiyāt*) and in particular the issues pertaining to the essence (*dhāt*) of God and His divine attributes (*al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*). Historically these debates were largely in an inter-sectarian i.e. Sunni versus non-Sunni setting but now in the contemporary arena, as will be illustrated, this has transpired into intra-Sunni polemics.

As for ambiguous passages in the Qur'ān, some verses evidently ascribe spatiality (*jīha*) to God e.g. *'They fear their lord above them'* Q16:150. Others evince mobility (*ḥaraka*) *'Your lord comes with angels row upon row'* Q89:22. Whilst others still delineate physicality or corporeality (*jismiya*) *'While your Lord's face will remain full of splendour'* Q55:27 *'Diabolis, what prevents you from kneeling down before something I have created with My own hands?'* Q38:75. As aforementioned mainstream reading entails

affirmation (*ithbāt*) of text. On such issues the Pious Predecessors were non-committing and employed a hybrid notion of amodality between literalism of the Anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*) and metaphorical figurative interpretation of the Mu^ctazilites. Although initially the position of the Pious Predecessors was absolute (*mutlaq*) amodality, the Ash^carī theologians theoretically called this approach 'the most sound' (*aslam*), and yet for some reason they still felt it needed some elaboration (*tafṣīl*). The latter day Ash^carites adopted figurative interpretation of such passages which ostensibly denote God in anthropomorphic dimensions. Ash^carism was initially opposed to Mu^ctazilism but later allowed itself to be influenced possibly by way of reaction. This understanding of difference was hailed by mainstream Ash^carīs as the Pious Predecessors (*salaf*) and Venerable Heirs (*khalaf*) divide on the interpretation of the divine attributes.²⁷ Consequently Q16:150 altitude (*fawqiyya*) would be God's magnanimity, Q89:22 approach (*majī'*) would entail the angels of God, His face (*wajh*) would mean his essence and his hand (*yad*) his omnipotence. At this juncture it should be made clear that these interpretations were the precise articulations of the Mu^ctazilites which evidently were vehemently rejected by Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik and their contemporaries.²⁸

Later on these interpretations gained currency amongst Sunni theologians and were adopted as the method of the *khalaf* which was considered 'more judicious' (*aḥkam*). Ash^carīs prescribe this method for those who find it difficult to comprehend the *amodality* of the Salaf and not necessarily as a capitulation to the Mu^ctazilites. What distinction there is between 'most sound' and 'more judicious' is unclear. The Wahhābīs contend that how can latter generations decide their method is 'more

²⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, p. 94, n. 31.

²⁸ ^cAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 121 -122.

judicious' than the first three generations who have been acclaimed by the Prophet.²⁹ The schism of classical theology regarding the Divine Attributes is based on two principles;

1. Affirmation of God's attributes without anthropomorphism (*al-ithbāt bilā tashbīh*)
2. Transcendence of God without negation (*al-tanzīh bilā ta'ṭīl*)

The logical conclusion of affirmation via literalism is anthropomorphism which is conceptual polytheism in Islam as it is likening God with creation. In like manner the transcendence via allegorical interpretation would result in negation of a word's quiddity which is in Muslim theology quasi-atheism. Crichton argued that 'if something can mean anything it means nothing'.³⁰ It is interesting that early Sunnis termed some of the Mu'tazilites and Jahmites as 'negators' (*mu'atṭila*) solely because of their use of *ta'wīl*. Conversely it is worth noting that the Mu'tazilites regarded the *bilā kayf* of the Sunnis as nothing more than anthropomorphism. Indeed theologians took their various stances on such issues whilst remaining cognisant of the complexity of their own stances, hence making aphoristic axioms to absolve themselves. Abū Ḥanīfā remarked that 'God is an entity unlike other entities' and the Ash'arites popularised an axiom in their works 'everything you perceive in your mind regarding God, God is other than that'.³¹

²⁹ Al-Juday^c, ^cAbdullah Yūsuf. *Al-Muqaddimāt al-Asāsiyya fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. (Leeds: Al-Judai Research and Consultations, 2006), p. 345.

³⁰ Michael Crichton, *Aliens and Global Warming*. [lecture] 17/1/2003 <<https://www.cfa.harvard.edu/~scranmer/SPD/crichton.html>> [accessed] This is essentially a refutation of 'Drakes equation'. I have applied it here. For example if 'hand' (*yad*) can be interpreted as power (*qudra*) there is nothing hindering one to interpret it as any non-lexicalised metaphor, such as love, reach, mercy *ad infinitum*.

³¹ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, p. 7.

3.2.4 Schism over amodality (*bilā kayf*)

Amodality at least in the early development of Muslim theology could be seen as the position of Sunni Islam as even al-Ashʿarī champions amodality over figurative interpretation. Later Ashʿarism and Ḥanbalism resurrect the polemic of the Muʿtazilites and the early Sunnis with some modifications. The Ḥanbalis were keen to point out that the Ashʿaris have shown their true colours and are now resorting back to their Muʿtazilite roots by endorsing figurative interpretation of the Divine Attributes and by doing so are *a fortiori* undermining the early Muslims. Ashʿarism faced a predicament as the Ḥanbalis were arguing vehemently for *bilā kayf* as the only 'orthodox' method of interpretation. The Ashʿarīs declared many of these Ḥanbalīs which included Ibn Taymiyya as anthropomorphists. The Ḥanbalis put the charge of Jahmite negation (*taʿtīl*) of Divine Attributes on the Ashʿaris. This heralded the beginning of intra-Sunni sectarian infighting.

Theoretically the Ashʿarīs could accept the amodality of the Ḥanbalis however they argued that the amodality of the Pious Predecessors was noncommittal (*tafwīd bilā kayf*) whereas the Ḥanbali amodality was in fact literalism (*ḥaqīqa bilā kayf*). It is this qualification of literalism (*ḥaqīqa*) to *bilā kayf* for Ashʿarīs which is anthropomorphic. Ḥanbalīs reject the noncommittal amodality and argue this is an Ashʿarī invention.³² The roots of the noncommittal amodality can be traced to a statement of Mālik ibn Anas regarding the reading of ambiguous passages. Mālik is reported to have said 'we used to rush pass these verses'. Consequently Sunni amodality can be defined in legal theory (*uṣūl*) jargon as restrictive (*muqayyad*) like that of the Ḥanbalīs and absolute (*muṭlaq*) like that of the Ashʿaris. This was the debate in medieval Islam and has

³² Ibn Bāz & al-Fawzān, *Tanbihāt fi al-radd ʿalā man taʿawwal al-ṣifāt*. (Riyadh: KSA Department of Research and Fatwa. 1985), p. 70.

subsisted to this day amongst the Wahhābīs and Ash‘arīs of today. It could be argued simply as the Wahhābī versus Sufi polemic as almost all Sufis affiliate with the Ash‘arī or Māturīdī doctrines.

Contemporary Wahhābī literature is replete with ‘attributist’ (*ṣifātī*) polemics most notably found in the works of Ibn Bāz, Ibn ‘Uthaymīn and now their successors ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl al-Shaykh and Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān. Ibn Bāz and al-Fawzān refuted Muhammad ‘Alī al-Ṣabūnī a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue and how the position of the early Muslims was not that of noncommittal amodality.³³ Likewise though not as vocal, the Ash‘arī response is spearheaded by Sa‘īd Ramadan al-Būṭī and Sulaymān Wahbī al-Ghawjī in Syria.

Convert scholarship in the West took a leading role in defence of Ash‘arism first with Ian Dallas and now with Keller, Yusuf and Winter. Keller in his translation of Ibn Naqīb’s *Reliance of the Traveller* dealt extensively with these issues and also via audio literature. Ibn al-Jawzī’s critique of Ḥanbalī anthropomorphists has been translated with a foreword by Dr Blankinship who sets the contemporary context of this debate by naming the Salafī figureheads of those who are the intended targets of this polemic.³⁴

The Ash‘arī *ta’wīl* is actually the same in wording as the Mu‘tazilite *ta’wīl*, yet even those amongst the Ash‘arī school of the *tafwīd* position will argue that these two *ta’wīls* are different. This same courtesy is not afforded to the Salafīs who are accused of being anthropomorphists, even though they use the get-out clause *bilā kayf* which should differentiate their position from that of the true anthropomorphists. Ḥasan al-Bannā’

³³ Ibn Bāz & al-Fawzān. *Tanbihāt*, pp. 67 – 68.

³⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, pp. xiii – xix.

declares both *ta'wīl* and *bilā kayf* as types of interpretations which are merely assumptions.³⁵

Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd (d. 702/1302) proposed 'A middle approach' between the *bilā kayf* of the Salaf and the *ta'wīl* of the Khalaf.³⁶ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī (d. 1241/1825) maintains that one who recognises God through evidence even if cursory and not in accordance to the normative methods of the theologians by consensus is considered a believer.³⁷ Perhaps al-ʿĪd and al-Ṣāwī both realised the obscurantist nature of the *bilā kayf* proposition. Moreover *taqlīd* is forbidden in doctrinal issues and everyone's perception of God and eschatological issues at some level will be idiosyncratic. *Bilā kayf* and *ta'wīl* are the methods of understanding doctrine and not doctrine itself. Kamāl ibn al-Humām (d. 861/1457) upholds al-ʿĪd's position arguing, 'the middle approach is conducive for the understanding of the layman' unfortunately Ibn al-Humām did not clearly enunciate what this middle approach is. This could be a lucid example of minimalism as the intent of minimalism is expounding dogma and reconciling minute tensions. Interestingly this third possibility never saw the light of day in theological discourse.

Furthermore the very verse Q3:7 which is the ambit of the literalism and allegory debate also sheds light on the notion of interpretation:

'He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the

³⁵ Ḥasan al-Bannā', 'Risālā al-Aqā'id' in. *Majmūʿ Rasā'il al-Imām al-Shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā'*. (Beirut: Mu'assasa Islāmiyya, 1981), p. 418.

³⁶ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 127.

³⁷ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ʿalā Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, p. 108.

Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord"; and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding'

Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates *ta'wīl* as hidden meanings. These hidden meanings are known to God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. There is a subtle grammatical debate on the import of this verse. One argument is that 'and those' is in apposition to 'God' and therefore human beings can unravel those meanings.³⁸ Another argument is that these are two contrastive sentences hence rendering the meaning as only God knows its hidden meanings as Ali has translated.³⁹ God has knowledge and He has given man some knowledge but God alone will know the exact nature of the hidden meanings whereas scholars can only have an approximate understanding of these hidden meanings.

In line with al-ʿĪd, al-Ṣāwī and Ibn al-Humām, Ḥasan al-Bannā' the ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was also an Ashʿarī in his unfinished treatise *al-ʿAqā'id* summarises the Salaf *bilā kayf* and Khalaf *ta'wīl* and reconciles both as a 'composite interpretation; (*ta'wīl fī al-jumla*).⁴⁰ In his view *bilā kayf* is not an answer as it is merely conceding one's lack of knowledge - a cop out. *Ta'wīl* is a theoretical answer which could potentially be wrong. Though this idea is not necessarily new it was not clearly

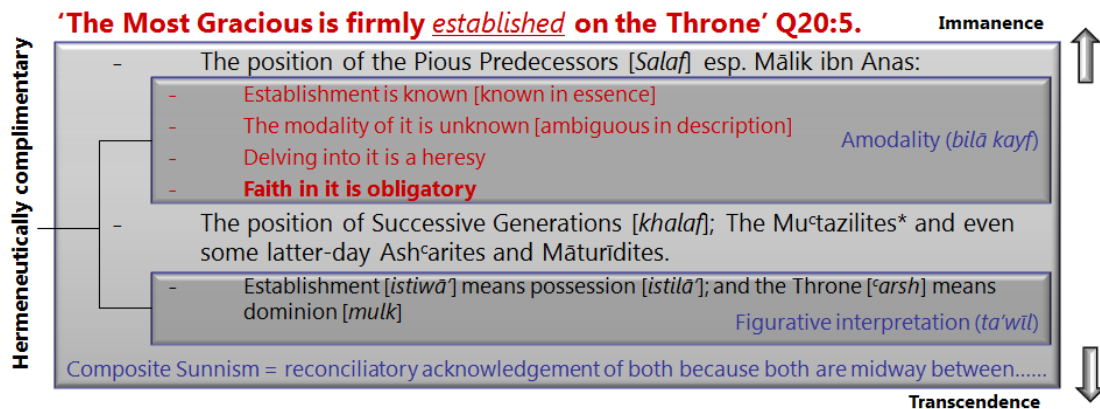
³⁸ Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*. 4 vols, (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1995), I, p. 333.

³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, I, pp. 462 – 463.

⁴⁰ Al-Bannā', p. 418.

articulated in the past as it could have been misunderstood as an indictment of Sunni methods of textual analysis since *ta'wīl* though permissible, carries a negative connotation and to claim that the Pious Predecessors evaded such issues will prove controversial.

Figure 3:5 Şifāt debates



3.2.5 Implications of the 'correct' interpretation of the Divine Attributes

The literalism and metaphor debate in medieval Islam crystallised in the formation of distinct theological schools and its effects have subsisted to this day. It is the most defining issue which influences all religious discourse from discussions on Divinity, scripture and sacred law. Generically literalism constitutes those 'clear' revelations whereas metaphor or allegory would comprise the 'ambiguous' scripture. Sunni orthodoxy maintains that there is no interpretation of clear revelation (*lā ta'wīl fi al-qaṭ'iyāt*).⁴¹

As aforementioned the extreme logical conclusion of literal interpretation of the Divine Attributes would result in anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). This in turn is diametrically mirrored by the extreme logical conclusion of allegorical interpretation which culminates in negation (*ta'ṭīl*). Notwithstanding the internal debate amongst Sunnis

⁴¹ Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār*, p. 78.

regarding the true nature of *bilā kayf* i.e. whether it is non-committal amodality (*tafwīḍ bilā kayf*) or literal amodality (*ḥaqīqa bilā kayf*) it is to a certain degree anchored towards literalism because of its intrinsic intent of establishing Divine immanence (*ithbāt*). Figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) on the other hand is firmly anchored towards allegorical interpretation as its intent is establishing Divine transcendence (*tanzīh*).

The Ḥanbalī Atharites and Salafi scholastic traditionalists tend to group *figurative interpretation* with Jahmite denial. Denial (*ta'ṭīl*) is a major heterodoxy according to Ghawjī's 'issues known by necessity in the religion' whereas *ta'wīl* is at worst a minor heterodoxy in this regards. Moreover this *kalām* has literalist overtones. Sufi scholastic traditionalists such as Abdullah al-Harārī al-Ḥabashī consider contemporary Ḥanbalī Atharites as anthropomorphists.⁴² The Atharite get-out clause from the charge of anthropomorphism is that they argue for amodality. However this is not convincing to the Sufi Ash'arīs.

The theologians (i.e. Ash'ari and Māturīdis) likewise categorise *amodal literal interpretation* with absolute anthropomorphism and corporealism, which according to them constitutes a major heterodoxy. The method of the theologians has rationalist overtones. Salafi scholastic traditionalists consider contemporary Ash'arism as Jahmite denial. The Ash'arī get-out clause from the charge of *denial* (*ta'ṭīl*) is that *ta'wīl* is unlike *denial*, it is still affirming meaning. Moreover the Ash'arīs recognise both amodality and figurative interpretation though they distinguish their amodality from that of the Atharites.

⁴² Al-Harārī, p. 48.

The dichotomy of early generation (*salaf*) *bilā kayf* and latter generations' (*khalaf*) *ta'wīl* has proven to be one of the key controversies of theology and a potent force in keeping contemporary polemics alive. Minimalism does not perceive this as necessarily a dichotomy but rather akin to differing views in the realm of jurisprudence and other areas of Islamic thought.

The theologians have on the one hand developed a synthesis of both these positions and accept them as orthodox yet treat the Wahhābī *bilā kayf* as anthropomorphic which brings the dialectic back to the polarised polemic. In a sense this evinces rationalist overtones and possibly undermines the *kalām* method as Muṣṭazilites used to label *bilā kayf* not only as a copout but also anthropomorphic and for this reason the Wahhābīs accuse the Ashʿarīs of being Muṣṭazilite sympathisers.⁴³ Both *bilā kayf* and *ta'wīl* comfortably fit in Netton's immanence and transcendence of God paradigm. Later Ashʿarism ostensibly promises to reconcile these however Wahhābism at the moment is still viewing these positions as diametrically antithetical to each other and embedded in the old traditionalist versus rationalist divide. These debates are an extension of the literalism and metaphor dialectic.

Furthermore there are implications of this debate on literalism and allegory on Islamic practice in that *taqlīd* (scholarly imitation) reflects the equivocal *bilā kayf*. This is expressed through a traditionalist revisionism which comprises affirmation of old texts and generally not questioning the veracity or feasibility of tradition.⁴⁴ On the other hand reform echoes *ta'wīl* and is expressed through rationalist scepticism of text and updating tradition in light of new knowledge. Both *taqlīd* and reform are within the

⁴³ Aḥmad al-Ḥarbī, *Al-Māturīdiya: dirārasatan wa taqwīman*. (Riyadh: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1993), pp. 513 – 517.

⁴⁴ Ṭāhā Jābir al-ʿAlwānī, *Ijtihād*. Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), p. 18.

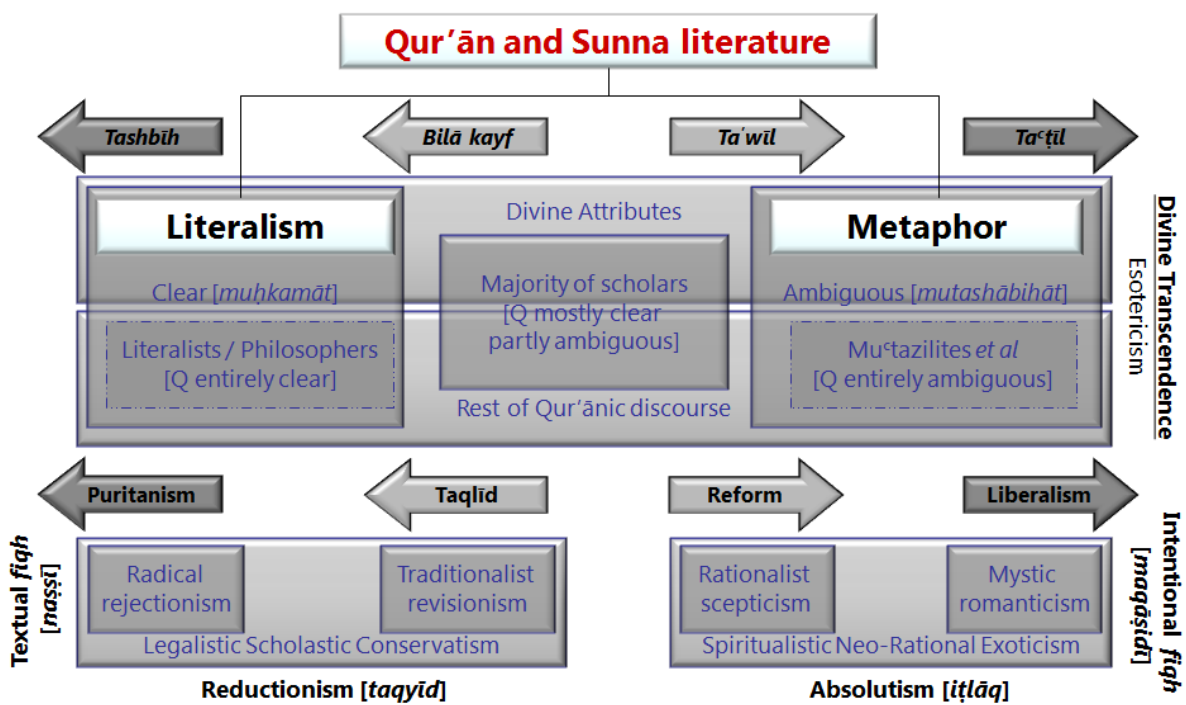
ambit of orthodoxy; however there is a conflict at present between traditionalist revisionism and rationalist scepticism. A more puritan view of texts leads to radical rejectionism especially of 'innovation' and anything modern. To an extent radical rejectionism mirrors *tashbīh* in a methodological manner in that it is purely focused on literalism. Puritanism can be understood as an extreme manifestation of *taqlīd*. Both radical rejectionism and traditionalist revisionism can be grouped as legalistic scholastic conservatism in that the primary focus of these methods is textualism. On the other side of the spectrum we find liberalism which is expressed and inspired by mystic romanticism in that the goal is more important than the means to the goal. Like radical rejectionism and traditionalist revisionism we can place mystic romanticism with rationalistic scepticism in that both focus on intentionalism.

At this juncture one might question how mysticism could inspire rationalism; it seems that rationalism and mysticism recognise the absolutism of text and those more prone and conducive for interpretation. Essentially *ta'wīl* is viewed by its protagonists as a means of understanding text contextually, whereas antagonists view it as the floodgates for liberalism and the precursor to any innovation. Moreover one concludes that legalistic scholastic conservatism is expressed through qualification or reductionism (*taqyīd*) of text, i.e. text is dependent on exegesis, whereas neo-rational exoticism is exemplified through absolutism (*iṭlāq*) of text. In legal theory absolutism is the norm and reductionism requires evidence as we find in the maxim 'the absolute is treated absolutely except if evidence proves otherwise' (*al-muṭlaq yajrī 'alā iṭlāqihi mā lam yaqum 'alayhi dalīl*).⁴⁵ Furthermore though *ta'wīl* is controversial it will facilitate Islamic reform and could be viewed as the crux of absolutism. Likewise we

⁴⁵ 'Abdullah Yūsuf al-Juday', *Taysīr 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. (Leeds: Al Judai Research and Consultations. 2004), p. 233.

can possibly view *bilā kayf* or *tafwīd* as a manifestation of stagnant *taqlīd* and as such is the backbone of reductionism which may inhibit liberal reform moves.

Figure 3:6 Approaches to statutes



This medieval debate has significantly shaped up the contemporary polemic between Sufi scholastic traditionalists and Salafi scholastic traditionalists. Hamid ‘Ali⁴⁶ through the enduring support and guidance from the heads of contemporary convert Sufi scholastic traditionalists in the West translated a medieval text on the ‘Attributes of God’ which deals extensively with how literalism contributes to anthropomorphism. Without equivocations Blankinship and ‘Ali have concluded that Wahhābi Ḥanbalīs are neo-anthropomorphists and their get-out clause of *bilā kayf* is still corporeal at heart and not identical with that of early Sunni Islam.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hamid ‘Ali is a student of Hamza Yusuf and has translated Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Daḥ Shubah al-Tashbīh bi-Akaff al-Tanzīh*. See Appendix II.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, pp. 141 – 151.

Ibn Bāz and al-Fawzān have assiduously responded to these Ashʿarī claims and by no means apologise for their stance on literal amodalism. They argue that the ‘supposed’ non-committing amodalism of early Sunni Islam is but an invention of the Ashʿarī school and has no foundations.⁴⁸ Historically we can observe despite the Ashʿarī claim of their two schools of ‘orthodoxy’ thesis that the Ḥanbalīs tenaciously resisted this. If the Wahhābīs are the majority of contemporary Ḥanbalīs then they have indeed opposed the two schools thesis and argue instead of the Ḥanbalī (Atharī) school as the ‘orthodox’ school. Even more conciliatory Ḥanbalī Atharī theologians like al-Safārīni argued for a three schools of ‘orthodoxy’. Moreover many Ḥanbalīs are noted by al-Judayʿ to have concocted Prophetic traditions in support of anthropomorphic descriptions of God. In the like manner traditions espousing absolute transcendence too were forged to counter these.⁴⁹ Furthermore the authenticity of traditions supporting the notion of God having two eyes may be circumspect.⁵⁰

Makdisi maintains that it was al-Subkī who claimed al-Ashʿarī’s creed as the dominant creed of Sunni Islam particularly through its Shāfiʿite representation.⁵¹ We find al-Laqqānī and latter-day Ashʿarīs bringing the affiliation to schools of jurisprudence as a sign of ‘orthodoxy’.⁵² One could argue that jurisprudence especially the four schools had substantial representations from Murjʿite, Muʿtazilite and also Anthropomorphists before the crystallisation of Māturīdī, Ashʿarī and Atharī theologies. Madelung observes that Murjism can be seen as a precursor to Maturīdism which eventually dominated the Ḥanafī school.⁵³ Muʿtazilism was strikingly popular amongst Mālikīs

⁴⁸ Ibn Bāz & al-Fawzān, *Tanbīhāt*, pp. 64 – 72.

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī, p. xvii.

⁵⁰ ʿAbdullah Yūsuf Al-Judayʿ, *Al-Muqaddimāt*, p. 344.

⁵¹ Makdisi, p. 17.

⁵² Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 332 – 339.

⁵³ Madelung, pp. 31 – 39a.

and Shāfiʿī jurists which would plausibly explain their transition to Ashʿarism.⁵⁴ The Anthropomorphists (*ṣifātiyya*) had a large Ḥanbalī following and eventually the stock of Ḥanbalism merged into Atharism.⁵⁵ Hence Māturīdism, Ashʿarism and Atharism became 'orthodox' theological articulations of Sunni jurisprudence. This seems to corroborate Bauer's hypothesis that heresy always precedes orthodoxy.⁵⁶

Essentially this debate on literalism and allegorical interpretation of the Divine Attributes is deeply entrenched in classical theology and is a vibrant polemic between the broader Sufi scholastic traditionalists and Salafi scholastic traditionalists which minimalism cannot easily overlook.

3.3 Grey areas in mainstream interpretation and practice

One finds a recurring theme in some issues in Qur'ānic discourse especially on ambiguous matters – that of a quietism. The Sunni theologians aptly developed a mechanism when confronted with inexplicable issues especially those pertaining to dogma; they term it non-committence (*al-tawaqquf*).⁵⁷ Perhaps this was an extension of the early *bilā kayf* of al-Ashʿarī. What distinguishes Ashʿarite theology from the rationalist Muʿtazilite theology is that the default stance of the early Ashʿarites was that of 'consignment' (*tafwīd*). Contrastingly the Muʿtazilites had confidence that Islam was a rational religion and therefore every doctrine can be explained rationally.

⁵⁴ Frank, p. 5 – 6.

⁵⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, pp. xiii – xix.

⁵⁶ Walter Bauer, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in earliest Christianity' in *New Blackfriars*, 54, 637 (2007), pp. 283 – 284 <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/wam.leeds.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1973.tb07188.x/pdf>> [accessed 15/3/15]

⁵⁷ Non-comittment is observed by theologians want to remain neutral on ostensibly thorny issues. Tawaqquf as a method is also prevalent in *uṣūlī* discourse. See al-Taftāzānī *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id*.

Figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) was crucial in this process. The reason for Sunni theologians adopting this type of quietism can be found in certain Qur'ānic passages and Ḥadīth literature. In Q5:101 we find 'O ye who believe! Ask not of things which, if they were made known unto you, would trouble you.' Abū Dāwūd narrates:

'That which is lawful is plain and that which is unlawful is plain and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which not many people know...'⁵⁸

These statutes are encapsulated by point 75 of al-Ṭahāwī's creed; 'When our knowledge about something is unclear, we say: 'Allah knows best''.⁵⁹

It could be argued that the social construction of Sunni orthodoxy has two manifestations; mainstream reading of text and mainstream practice. Orthodox methods of mainstream reading would be the mere affirmation of statute (*ithbāt al-naṣṣ*). A grey area here would be 'interpretation' (*ta'wīl*). Qur'ānic exegesis recognises two types of interpretation, commendable (*mamdūh*) and blameworthy (*madhmūm*).⁶⁰ Likewise we will find in mainstream practice an 'orthodox' method would be the mere practical observance or upholding of tradition (*al-ʿamal ʿalā al-sunna*). An ambiguous area here would be 'innovation' (*bidʿa*), especially in terms of what constitutes a religious 'innovation'. Popular Islam recognises 'good' and 'bad' innovations, Wahhābis only recognise 'bad' innovations.

⁵⁸ Abū Dāwūd, 22:3, 3330, p. 1473.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭahāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 15 [point 75]

⁶⁰ Abdul-Raof, pp. 1 -32.

Though the holistic concept of Sunna may give the impression of being a puritanical orthodoxy and unwilling to change, when put in context with the concepts of reform and renewal some parallels can be drawn with notions of 19th century British conservatism. Edmund Burke advocated a conservatism which did not resist change but rather it was a prudent willingness to 'change in order to conserve'.⁶¹ Mālik laid down the rudiments of reform '*the last portion of this Umma will only be reformed by what reformed the first portion*'. This understanding gave currency to the notion of reform (*iṣlāḥ*). Modern conservatism according to O'Sullivan is a 'philosophy of human imperfection'. If this can be said about the nature of Islamic 'orthodoxy' then reform has a pivotal role in continually 'perfecting' the tradition or dispelling it from 'excesses'. Moreover in the Ḥadīth tradition narrated by al-Bayhāqī we find;

*'This knowledge is carried in every successive generation by its most upright folk who quash the interpolations of the excessive (taḥrīf al-ghālīn), assumptions of the prattlers (intiḥāl al-mubṭilīn) and the interpretations of the ignorant (ta'wīl al-jāhilīn)'*⁶²

This Ḥadīth evinces the idea that sacred knowledge is in a state of flux and people will steer it accordingly. Another concept usually spoken of in the same way as reform is the notion of renewal (*tajdīd*). Abu Dāwūd narrates the Prophet saying in a tradition;

⁶¹ Andrew Haywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 69 -70.

⁶² Al-Burnī, p. 46.

'At the turn of every century, God will raise a man from this community who will renew its religion (yujaddid lahā dīnahā)'⁶³

It can be argued that there is a subtle difference between the notions of reform and renewal hitherto not highlighted by scholars before. Perhaps because of this lack of not differentiating between the two we have huge contentions and schisms regarding the very notion of 'reform' in the sense of a complete rewrite of the tradition as we shall see in chapter five and the apprehension towards reform as modernism. Reform (*iṣlāḥ*) is derived from the IV form verb *aṣlahā* which means to 'correct' or 'set straight' and this connotation best denotes the concept of opposing innovation in religious matters. Conversely *tajdīd* is derived from the II form verb *jaddada* which means to 'renew', in a sense this denotes the notion of giving life to tradition.⁶⁴ Correction (*iṣlāḥ*) is required of 'innovation' (*bid'ah*) just like renewal (*tajdīd*) of tradition (*sunna*). Does Islam need a reformation or has it always been in a state of constant reform? To demonstrate the idea of proactive understanding traditional reformist movements; Uthmān Dan Fodio (d. 1232/1817) describes his mission as 'Enlivening the tradition and placating innovation (*iḥyā' al-sunna wa ikhmād al-bid'ah*)'. Shāh Waliullah the patriarch of Indo-Pak Sunnism was seen as the 'reviver of the tradition and queller of innovation' (*muḥyi sunna wa qāmi' al-bid'ah*). This according to Fazlur Rahman manifested in the dominant traditionalist movements like the Barelwi, Deobandi and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth.⁶⁵ The polemics of these latter traditions are embedded in Waliullah's narrative of an Islam constantly struggling with 'heterodox' interpretations and

⁶³ Abū Dāwūd, 36:1, 4291, p. 1535.

⁶⁴ Wehr, pp. 521 -523. [entry : *جدد* *abd صلح*]

⁶⁵ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 39 – 42.

practices. Sheikh argues that this anti-*bid'ā* discourse momentum begins with the Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī (d. 1040/1631) and the Ottoman Qādīzādelis.⁶⁶

Renewal (*tajdīd*) can be seen as a mere reaffirmation of the generally accepted standard and therefore proactive. However *iṣlāḥ* on the other hand has more of a challenging nature as it could potentially upset the status quo especially of non-mainstream views becoming the mainstream and therefore this approach can be viewed as reactionary. It would be interesting to note that all Sufi and non-Sufi Sunni movements balanced the two notions and have divergent views on what is peripheral to essential tradition (*sunna*). The Wahhābis have stressed more on *iṣlāḥ* and this has got them into loggerheads with many mainstream Sunnis as *iṣlāḥ* requires setting things straight and in the Wahhābi – Sufi polemic it meant dealing with Sufi ritualistic 'excesses'.⁶⁷ It is also interesting to note that 19th century reformers like ʿAbduh and al-Afghani who are to some extent considered to be neo-rationalists by traditionalist Sunnis, they are attributed with initiating reform calling back to the way of the early generations – a call back to 'classical Islam' (*daʿwa salafiyya*).⁶⁸ This was later to influence the modern Wahhābī and other reform movements.⁶⁹ Wahhābī and Salafi reform would entail referring back to radical old which would be free from non-Sunni influence.⁷⁰ Deobandi reform would constitute referring back to pre-colonial old free tradition from Western influence.⁷¹ Barelwi reform would amount to referring back to

⁶⁶ Mustapha Sheikh, 'Taymiyyan Influences in an Ottoman-Ḥanafī Milieu: The Case of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (2014) p. 5.

⁶⁷ David Commins, *The Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 50 – 53.

⁶⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 216.

⁶⁹ Ibid pp. 196 – 199.

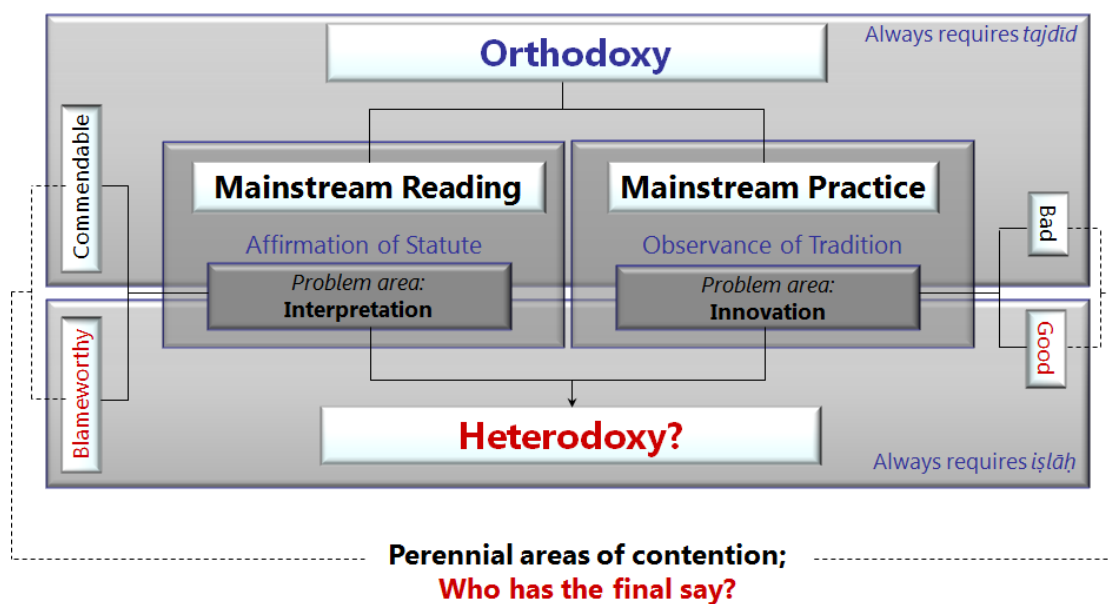
⁷⁰ The Rightly Guided Caliphal era is regarded as the 'Dawn of Islam' (*Ṣadr al-Islām*).

⁷¹ Colonialism and the subsequent subjugation are viewed as the source of deviancy and in eschatological terms.

the immediate old comprising of upholding folkloric traditions repudiated by Wahhābīs and modernists.⁷²

To sum up *tajdīd* in Sunni traditionalism is needed to uphold and conserve mainstream reading and practice, moreover the understanding of commendable interpretation can be observed and likewise renewing the understanding of 'bad' innovations. Conversely *iṣlāḥ* cannot be made of mainstream reading and practice as that would constitute rewriting Islam, therefore *iṣlāḥ* has its appropriate place in correcting 'blameworthy' interpretation and 'good' innovations. These latter two are perennial issues of contention, particularly since there is no church in Sunni Islam which has the final say on this and could regulate understandings.

Figure 3:7 Renewal and Reformation



⁷² The Bareilwi movement like their Deobandi counterparts view deviancy within eschatological and deterministic framework.

3.4 TRADITION

I have extensively touched upon the definition of tradition (*sunna*) according to the nomenclature of the theologians, traditionalists and legal theorists. Here we shall analyse the holistic understanding of tradition according to contemporary persuasions within Sunni thought. At base tradition is religion itself. Seyyed Hossein Nasr articulates traditional Islam as 'the attitude towards various facets of Islam itself', in a sense Islam is a pluralistic tradition.⁷³ Nasr's evaluation of traditional Islam is the default Islam which is romantically based on the Qur'ān and the Sunna which existed before the pre-modern era. His thesis is that in the 18th century secularising humanistic tendencies of the European renaissance permeated Islamic lands and this has had drastic consequences on Islamic thought.⁷⁴ Nasr explains an eclectic and pluralistic nature of traditional Islam:

'Not every traditional scholar has been a master of all the traditional schools of thought nor accepted all their premises and teachings. Even in the traditional world, followers of one school of *kalām* opposed other schools of *kalām*, followers of *kalām* opposed philosophy and philosophers of one school against those of another. But all these oppositions were once again within the traditional universe'⁷⁵

Nasr's view of traditional Islam is essentially almost all Sunni and even Shiite manifestations of theological traditions before the modern era. Wahhābism came a little earlier than other neo-rationalist movements and was heavily literalist and deeply

⁷³ Nasr, p. 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

entrenched in Ibn Taymiyyan Ḥanbalī puritanism. Ramadan categorises Sufism and Wahhābism as scholastic traditionalism though both traditions are the antithesis of each other, they are essentially not influenced by modern ideas. Wahhābī traditionalism is vehemently anti-Sufi, anti-philosophy and to some extent anti-rationalist, however it is interesting that although traditional Islam is seen as pluralistic it finds difficulty in accommodating Wahhābism as part of the traditional world of Islam. Understandably this can be explained as a reaction to the existing polarised polemic of Sufism versus Wahhābism. Nasr asserts that even Wahhābism is a truncated form of traditional Islam.⁷⁶ Furthermore this notion that traditional Islam especially of Sufi scholastic persuasion is somehow tolerant of differences is over exaggerated as the polemics in contemporary parochial manifestations of intra-Sufi factionalism of the Barelwi and Deobandi and also the Ḥabashī movements as we shall see in the chapter five. Notwithstanding that it is evident that traditional Islam and modernism are at loggerheads and as such traditionalism finds a unity point amongst all hues of traditionalism within this polemic. That is to say anti-modernism may be a macro-minimalism. Tradition is an 'organic' expression of the religion through transmission from generation to generation by imitation.

3.5 INNOVATION

Introducing new practices in religion is the second controversial grey area in Sunni discourse. Innovation (*bid'ā*) in Sunni Islam is perceived as the antithesis of tradition (*sunna*). In its broadest connotation it implies 'heterodoxy' and hence is integral in identifying the non-Sunni other.⁷⁷ Here we intend to explore the controversy surrounding religious innovations and how it has shaped contemporary polemics. Traditional reform movements inspired by Salafism and Wahhābism take on this salient characteristic of vehemently opposing religious innovation and as such these

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Tātāyī, p. 54.

movements tend to polarise themselves against mainstream Sufism. The Deobandi movement in this study has been identified within the Sufi traditionalist camp; however on the issue of innovation they have a striking affinity with the Wahhābī movement in their staunch anti-*bidʿa* approach.

Sunni theologians explain the phenomena of religious innovations as the social following of 'whims and desires'.⁷⁸ The innovation controversy is compounded by Sunni theologians arguing for 'good' religious innovations. This study is aiming to establish that the Sacred Law itself is the main ambit from where both 'innovations' are declared prohibited and initiated. Ḥadīth lore is replete with the censure of 'religious innovation'. A famous tradition of the Prophet states:

*'Every innovation is misguidance and every misguidance is in the Hellfire' (kull bidʿa ḍalāla, wa kull ḍalāla fī al-nār).*⁷⁹

There is some disagreement on the interpretation of this Ḥadīth. Literal readings would connote all innovations are wrong, whether they are religious or technological innovations. Historically a small band of Khārijites took this approach.⁸⁰ Al-Shāṭibī names an authority from the early generations of Sunnis, Muhammad ibn Aslam as subscribing to this type of view too.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Al-Ṭahāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Al-Nasāʾī, 19:22, 1579, p. 2193.

⁸⁰ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya*, pp. 58 -61.

⁸¹ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿtiṣām*, p. 362.

A minority of Sunni scholars including Al-Shāḥibī, Ibn Taymiya and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb argue that this tradition indicates that all practical ‘religious’ innovations are incorrect. Al-Nāṣir al-Saʿdi a contemporary Wahhābī explains that this includes all theological innovations like Shiism, Muʿtazilism etc and practical devotional innovations whereby one worships God in a manner not sanctioned by God and His Messenger. Moreover he argues that deeming unlawful what God proclaims as lawful is also an innovation.⁸²

The majority (*jumhūr*) of scholars of Sunni Islam and especially Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) and Abu Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) contend that ‘religious’ innovations are of two kinds;

1. Bad religious innovations (*bidʿa madhmūma*) [*fī al-dīn*].
2. Good religious innovations (*bidʿa ḥasana*): examples of [*li al-dīn*]

Bad religious innovations are the ones that are referred to in this tradition. However there is no indication as to how one can ascertain unprecedented devotional acts constituting innovation. A case study example is that of al-Būṭī who though being Sufi in persuasion vehemently opposes the *ḥaḍara* (remembrance of God accompanied with synchronous movement) of the Sufis. His argument is similar to that of the Wahhābīs and he even acknowledges this to some extent.⁸³ The Ḥanbalīs have been the most vehement against ‘religious’ innovations, perhaps this is due to the use of ‘blocking the means’ a source of Sacred Law.

⁸² Muhammad ibn Sayyid. *Sharh al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīya*. (Cairo: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq Publishers, 2006), p. 51.

⁸³ Al-Būṭī, *Fiqh al-Sīra al-Nabawīya*, pp. 302 -304.

On the other hand many Sufis contend that their actions are in harmony with the dictates of the Shari‘a and they inter-textually explain this Ḥadīth with another tradition ‘*whoever introduces into Islam a tradition he has its reward*’⁸⁴

Considering the above three views, ironically the controversy of figurative interpretation (*ta’wīl*) is being employed in restricting and allowing ‘innovation’. It is evident that the position of some of the Khārijites and Ibn al-Aslam as pure literalism, the position of al-Shāḥibī *et al* is a constrictive *ta’wīl* and the majority view as expansive *ta’wīl*. Moreover there may be an elliptical reference to ‘religious’ innovations and the latter views are both based on figurative interpretation. *Ta’wīl* in essence is an assumption and in this manner is treated as absolute (*muṭlaq*), and if it is absolute then according to legal theory restriction (*taqyīd*) requires evidence. This debate is difficult to resolve since the processes of declaring an action an innovation can be identical as is the case with al-Būṭi’s stance on the *ḥaḍāra*. As a result, religious innovations can be categorised based on this absolute and restricted viewpoint into two categories; contravening innovations and corresponding innovations.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī argues that not every innovation is prohibited; rather what is prohibited is that innovation which contravenes Sunna and cancels out a legal ruling.⁸⁵ For example if the innovation promotes diminishing the importance of the Sunna itself. This category can be termed *bid‘a al-mukhālifa*, a contravening innovation.

⁸⁴ Ja‘far Ibn Ismā‘īl al-Barzanjī, *Al-Mawlid al-Nabī al-Akram Sayyidunā Muḥammad*. (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār [no date]), pp. 6 – 11.

⁸⁵ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi, [no date]), pp. 76.

A corresponding innovation is one which maintains tradition. For example if this innovation encourages to act upon a liturgical aspect of the Sunna, the Prophet's Birthday (*mawlid*) is something which was not done in the early generations but it encourages Muslims to emulate their leader and also on a worship level send liturgical prayers and salutations upon him. This is rationalised under the rubric of a legal principle which states that 'the thing which encourages a good act is also good'.

3.5.1 Popular categorisation of innovations

It would be pertinent to mention here that there are two prominent categorisations of innovations. The first position is that of al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) who argued that anything the Prophet did not do would be branded as innovations. However these can be further subdivided into five types;

1. Mandatory (*wājiba*):
2. Prohibited (*muḥarrama*):
3. Recommended (*mandūba*).
4. Disliked (*makrūha*).
5. Permissible (*mubāḥa*).

Al-ʿIzz and others include polemics and grammar under mandatory innovations. Under prohibited innovations ʿAlawi al-Māliki includes anything which contravenes the Sunna and is not endorsed by general statutory evidence or utilitarian benefit (*maṣlaḥa*). Recommended innovations include the establishment of seminaries, the construction of minarets etc. Disliked innovations are those that even the early generations disliked for example ostentatious mosques and embellished Qur'ānic manuscripts. Furthermore *wājib*, *mandūb*, *mubāḥ* innovations which mirror their legitimate deduced legal rulings (*aḥkām sharʿiya*) are not to be found in the Prophetic vernacular.

The great Shāfiʿite jurist al-Nawawī who is highly respected by all brands of contemporary Sunni Islam including the Wahhābīs, emphasises things that did not occur in the Prophetic can be termed innovations, however from these ‘innovations’ are those which are intrinsically good (*ḥasan*) whilst others are not.⁸⁶

The second position is the more restrictive view of Ibn Rajab and other Ḥanbalite jurists who regard innovations as negative though in principle accept type 1, 3, and 5, however they do not consider these as innovations per se. Ibn Rajab contends the import of innovation is what has been newly introduced which has no basis in Sacred Law, whereas anything which has a basis in Law cannot be termed innovation technically (*iṣṭilāḥan*) though lexically that is possible. In essence this view is not different from the view of the majority.

ʿAlawi al-Mālikī is hailed as one of the leading Ḥadīth scholars of Saudi yet somewhat ostracised by the dominant Wahhābī scholars due to his Sufi Ashʿarite inclinations. Wahhābī scholars view al-Mālikī as a Sufi polemicist, his approach to dealing with the Wahhābīs in reality can be viewed as a proactive vindication of Sufi Scholastic Traditionalism. In fact throughout his acclaimed work *Mafāhīm* he puts himself at loggerheads with his own Sufi audience by defending Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from popular Sufi accusations. Al-Mālikī argues in defence of ‘good’ religious innovation;

⁸⁶ ʿAlī Jumʿa, *Al-Bayān limā yushghil al-Adhhān*. (Cairo: Al-Maqtam li al-nashr wa al-tawzīʿ, 2005), p. 205.

'Not everything that the first three generations and early Muslims did not do can be categorised as impermissible objectionable innovations. These innovations are to be weighed under legal evidence. If there is utilitarian benefit then it will be obligatory or prohibited if there is harm etc. The means (*wasā'il*) have the same ruling as the objectives (*maqāṣid*).....The argument that something was not done by the Salaf is not evidence, in fact it is the absence of evidence (*ʿadm dalīl*)⁸⁷

Al-Shāṭibī who is otherwise deemed to be anti-innovation seems to have articulated this much earlier. He argues that 'it does not behove scholars to apply the word innovation to deduced rulings which were missed by the first generations, nor in his opinion should enhanced or expanded upon etiquettes (*ādāb*) be viewed as innovations as their principles are based on sacred law.⁸⁸

The *bidʿa fī al-dīn* (*bidʿa madhmūma*) could be termed *bidʿa khilāfiya* an innovation of contradistinction i.e. one which patently opposes the spirit of the Sunna by clearly making additions to core worship, since a general rule in worship is rigidity (*al-taḥattum*).⁸⁹ Apart from the contentious polemics within Sunni Islam the core devotional acts are not the subject of debate. Moreover the *bidʿa li al-dīn* (*bidʿa ḥasana*) could be termed *bidʿa wifāqiya* an innovation of correspondence or complimentary innovation which upholds the spirit of the Sunna. There is an abundance of optional prayers, though this is a little easier to accept as there is no restriction on optional prayers. In addition to the Eids, extra celebrations like the

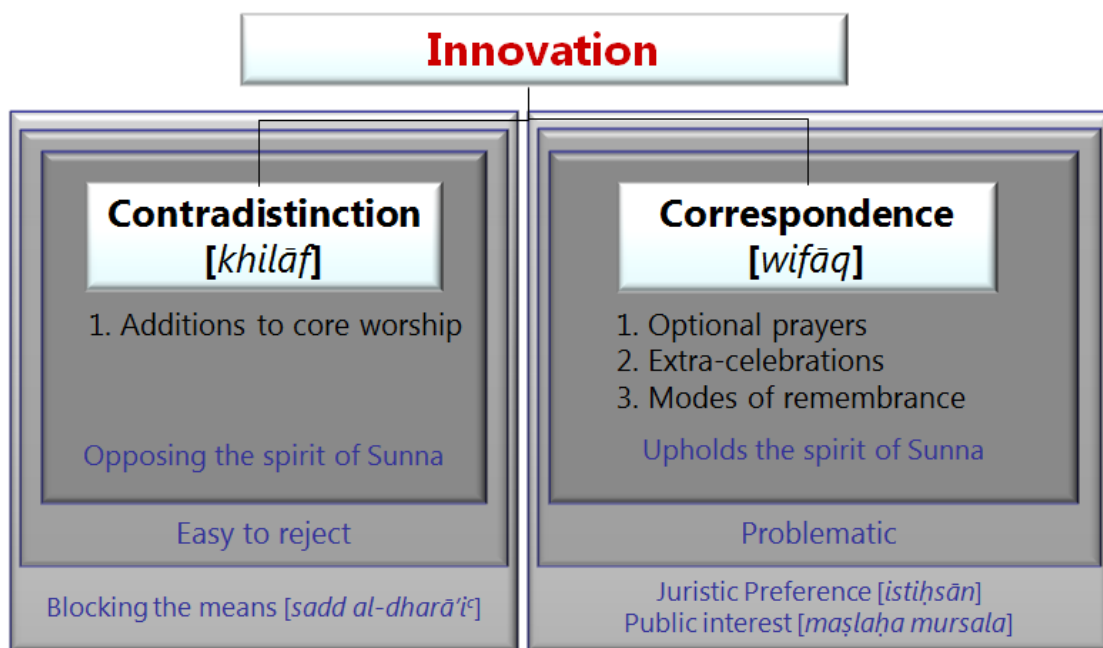
⁸⁷ Al-Barzanjī, pp. 9 – 10.

⁸⁸ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿItisām*, pp. 168.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

mawlid, the 15th of Sha^cbān and other historical dates and now public holidays and remembrance days. Other issues include modes of remembrance especially collectively. All of these and issues pertaining these examples will prove problematic. It is through certain rational sources of sacred law that these will be tolerated or opposed.

Figure 3:8 Dealing with Bid^ca



3.5.2 Bid^ca in theological treatises

Evidently *bid^ca* in terms of its nature has not had much coverage in early Ash^carite and Máturidite works. One finds *bid^ca* is elaborated upon more in Ḥadīth commentaries and the jurisprudential texts than in *‘aqīda* or *kalām* discourse.

Notably the works of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are characterised by an anti-innovation subtext. Ibn Taymiyya’s *Minhāj al-Sunna* is strikingly embedded in this anti-innovation narrative. Watt and others have

identified the propensity of Ḥanbalī scholarship detaching itself from the main bloc of mainstream Sunnism as a consequence of the anti-innovation worldview.⁹⁰ Sufis view Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim as eccentric Ḥanbalīs, however they are overly fond of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Rajab and Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī.

Though contemporary Sufis like Ḥasan al-Saqqāf attempt to argue that there was a more moderate reading within Ḥanbalism which subscribes to the Ashʿarite methods, they also hold that this was eventually eclipsed by the Wahhābī trend. Wahhābism according to al-Saqqāf is perversion of old Ḥanbalism. The Wahhābis too understand that figures like al-ʿAsqalānī and al-Nawawī are from Ashʿarite bloc, and from time to time choose select personalities outside of Ḥanbalism who are revered by the Sufis yet their doctrines do not contradict Wahhābism. Outstanding figures outside of the usual Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb cosmos include al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Nawwawī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Shawkānī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Dhahabī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, al-Qurṭubī. According to the Wahhābis the closest to them in affinity is the Mālikī jurist al-Shāṭibī. It is interesting to note that *al-Iʿtiṣām* is essential reading amongst the Wahhābis as it is probably one the most exhaustive treatise on the subject of innovation. However the purpose of *al-Iʿtiṣām* is not necessarily a polemic against the Sufis. In fact al-Shāṭibī does on occasions vindicate many Sufi masters and accommodates some Sufi ritualistic practices which Wahhābis find troublesome.

Al-Shāṭibī defines innovation as an 'unprecedented invention' (*ikhtirāʿ ʿalā ghayr mithāl sābiq*). He attempts to make an inter-textual link with Q2:117 'The Originator of the Heavens and the Earth' (*badīʿ al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ*), and explains that God alone has the intrinsic quality of creating *ex nihilo*. In a sense he is insinuating that one is attempting to imitate God by introducing religious innovations. One accused of

⁹⁰ Watt, pp. 142 – 148.

initiating or engaging in innovative practices/beliefs is pejoratively referred to as an 'innovator' (*mubtadi*⁹¹). Its English equivalent would be the word 'heretic'. Al-Shāṭibī observes that there are two methods in religious practices; that which is based on the letter of the law and that which is not. According to him all of the traditional Islamic sciences are based on the spirit of the law and therefore do not constitute 'innovation'.⁹¹ Theology is an exposition of monotheism; jurisprudence is an exposition of worship. Where perhaps one could observe affinity between al-Shāṭibī and the Wahhābīs is his opinion on collective remembrance (*dhikr*) and the celebration of the Prophet's birthday as innovations. Sheikh's study on *al-Majālis al-Abrār* of al-Āqḥiṣārī, has demonstrated that *bid'a* discourse is by no means the monopoly of Wahhābism, in fact Ottoman Ḥanafīs were as predisposed to condemning *bid'a* as early as the sixteenth century as contemporary Salafism.⁹² Studies such as Sheikh's challenge modern traditionalist views as those espoused by Keller that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb resurrected the Taymiyyan polemic against Sufis.

3.5.3 Censure of innovations

Linguistically the word 'innovator' connotes positive meanings, however an 'innovator' (*mubtadi*⁹¹) is almost exclusively now used by passing value judgements. In the past the word 'transgressor' (*fāsiq*) would have been used to differentiate mainstream Sunnis from other sects, though the word transgressor has a more disparaging undertone as it casts aspersions upon the very character and religiosity of a person. A *fāsiq* conveys in English the meaning of a sycophant, profligate, tyrant, licentious and wicked person.⁹³ This term doesn't necessarily carry the meaning of heterodoxy unless we deem righteous acts alone as the hallmark of mainstream demeanour, if that is the case then that would constitute Khārijite religiosity who used righteous action as a

⁹¹ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿItisām*. p. 23.

⁹² Sheikh, p. 6 – 8.

⁹³ Wehr, pp. 713. [entry : فسق]

distinctive criterion for orthodoxy. Though the mainstream regards the Khārijites as violent extremists they do consider them as god-fearing Muslims. Though the categorisation of heterodoxies is still referred to as disbelief (*kufr*) and deviancy (*fisq*), the word *fāsiq* is on the wane and in its stead we find the word innovator (*mubtadi*⁹⁴). Wahhābism identifies all other groups that do not agree with them as the innovators.

Some of the early generations held excessive views regarding conduct and transactions with 'heterodox' Muslims. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī maintained 'Do not sit with a heretic lest your heart may become diseased by him'. Yahyā ibn Abī Kathīr stressed that if one were to cross paths with a heretic he should take another route. These statements though theoretically considered eccentric, are measures entrenched in the fabric of contemporary Salafi methodology (*minhāj*) and characterises their attitudinal outlook. Sufis also to a lesser extent reflect this.

Though historically the Ḥanbalīs have proven to be the most literal and zealously anti-innovation, Mālik seems to be the most opposed to innovations; however generally adherents of his school have not exhibited this level of opposition to innovation. Mālik is reported to have said '*Whoever introduces an innovation in Islam and deems it good, he is claiming that Muhammad betrayed his message*'. Al-Shāṭibī and to an extent Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr are key Mālikī figures that were anti-*bidʿa* and still enjoy a warm acceptability in Wahhābi Islam. Historically the Wahhābīs were more receptive to Deobandi students however due to doctrinal and jurisprudential differences highlighted to them by the Ahl-i-Hadīth the Wahhābīs now seem to favour two groups, the Ahl-i-Hadīth and Mauritanian Mālikīs.⁹⁴ Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī a Mauritanian scholar was a teacher of the late Mufti of Saudi Ibn Bāz and also Ibn

⁹⁴ The translation of the Qurʾān in Urdu authorised by the Saudi authorities was by Shaykh al-Hind Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan and now by Muhammad Junaghari.

Uthaymīn and to an extent influenced the Wahhābī syllabus.⁹⁵ Interestingly the Mauritanian Mālikīs are also revered by the Sufis who consider them as traditionalists. Furthermore these Mālikīs do not exhibit the folkloric Sufi trends that is prevalent elsewhere in places like Morocco and the Sudan. One may term this phenomenon as the 'anti-innovation nexus' which serves as unifying dynamic between certain factions of Sunnis loosely includes Shinqīti Mālikīs, Najdī Ḥanbalīs, Deobandī Ḥanafīs and the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*.

3.5.4 Sacred Law as the source of innovation

It is under the light of Qur'ān, Sunna, consensus (*ijmā'*) and analogy (*qiyās*) that any innovation can be judged. There are some objections to Qiyās by the Zāhiris and the Shiite, irrespective of this, these four are considered the primary sources of legislation in Islam. These sources have earned this name as they constitute scriptural evidence especially the Qur'ān and Sunna or at least based on the scripture like the *qiyās* and *ijmā'*. Furthermore the Qur'ān and Sunna are considered infallible whereas the *ijmā'* and the *qiyās* are not. In addition to these are disputed secondary sources of legislation which are based on rational evidence. These are juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*), custom (*urf*), companions' view (*madhab al-ṣaḥābī*), previous law (*shar' man qablana*), and blockage (*sadd al-dharī'a*). Both the scriptural and rational evidence go hand in hand in formulating laws. Scripture is the principle and rationality explains the scripture. Rationality can at times influence the understanding of scripture and therefore these rational evidences are differed upon. Most of the civil laws in Islam are based on rational proof.

⁹⁵ This is evident in Salafi circles where West African texts such as *al-Ājrūmiyya*, *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik and the *Marāqī al-Ṣa'ūd* on uṣūl (Mālikī) are being promoted.

There are no categorical scriptural proofs for the rational processes of law other than the ethos of the statutes themselves. For this reason early jurists differed on the veracity and validity of these processes as they can be prone to abuse. Hypothetically speaking if one were to use these processes to formulate a ruling which ostensibly may appear innovative this should be considered *ijtihād* or at least bad *ijtihād*, but *ijtihād* nonetheless as the 'ruling' would be the result of following legal process. For if many innovations are viewed as bad judgements then this could potentially placate the Sufi – Salafi divide on devotional acts and be facilitated in an inclusive ethical minimalistic methodology.

For an innovation to be an innovation it must be based on 'following ones whims and desires' and not the legal *ijtihād* processes. It is unclear how the jurists define 'whims and desires' and consequently whether an innovation was concocted on 'whims' and not via the secondary sources of law. Ultimately it would be improbable to ever truly establish whether one introduced an 'innovation' from caprice or law. Most would opt to not blame the law itself.

It is very difficult to define an innovator as innovations do not constitute a sect. That would effectively mean innovations are inevitability even within the boundaries of 'orthodoxy'. From al-Shāṭibī's discourse one can highlight that 'innovative' tendencies can be categorised into four main types;

1. Delving into grey areas (*mutashābihāt*)
2. Reliance on weak traditions
3. Rejection of solitary traditions

4. Context of evidence⁹⁶

As for delving into grey areas, theologians mainstream or otherwise have done this. Moreover there is the added problem of defining what is necessarily controversial. All the interpretative tools of theology negation (*ta'ṭīl*), interpretation (*ta'wīl*) amodality (*tafwīd*) and affirmation (*ithbāt*) are controversial.

Reliance on weak tradition is a cross-sectarian phenomenon. Even within mainstream Sunnism not only the Sufis who are usually accused of using weak traditions but also many exegetes and jurists are complicit in this. Ḥasan al-Baṣri and the preachers were notorious for using weak and fabricated traditions.⁹⁷ Juday^c indicts early Ḥanbalīs of forging traditions in support of anthropomorphic descriptions of divinity. The jurists too forged traditions in support of their jurisprudential schools.⁹⁸

On the other extreme there are those who because of weak traditions neglect the solitary corpus. Essentially the rejection of solitary traditions nullifies the bulk of Muslim devotional acts.⁹⁹ This was very common amongst the Mu^ctazilite jurists of the past and is an emerging phenomenon in Muslim modernism at present.

Lastly presenting evidence out of context is also considered innovative. Rarely has any sect in Islam claimed what they do is 'innovation' as in a wilfully flagrant violation of Sunnah; on the contrary they claim it is tradition. Moreover many of the devotional

⁹⁶ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿIṭṣām*, pp. 193 – 233.

⁹⁷ Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*. 3 vols. (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1977), I, pp. 124 – 125.

⁹⁸ Al-Juday^c, *Taḥrīr ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*, II, p. 1044.

⁹⁹ Ibn Qutayba, pp. 117 – 118.

'innovations' prevalent amongst the Sufis are usually justified by them through the legal processes. The Wahhābīs on the other hand contend that the Sufis are acting on 'whims and desires'.

The innovation polemic is in this regards more potent than the classical theological interpretation of scripture schism. It is innovation that polarises contemporary Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism into two distinct camps. It is in fact, this polemic which is also a key component in the polemic between the Barelwis and the Deobandis.

The very attitude that the Wahhābīs have towards innovations is from rational proof i.e. blocking the means as we shall see rather than just scriptural. Moreover one argues that these secondary sources have fostered a conducive attitude in permitting some innovations.

Arguably erroneous *ijtihād* can be perceived as good innovations, in the like manner innovations which are not deduced from the *ijtihād* processes can be deemed as bad innovations. One is arguing that most innovations especially those the Sufis uphold like collective *dhikr*, *mawlid*, *ḥaḍara* etc are argued to be inferred from text. Non-scriptural or 'whimsical' innovations have rarely been noted at least within purely Sufi circles; in the classical period self harm prevalent amongst the *malāmatiya* could be one of these types of innovations as these contravene other legal maxims such as 'no harm and no reciprocating harm' (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍarār*).

Furthermore there seems to be a very fine line between scriptural or whimsical innovation. As a result it seems that it would be very difficult to regulate 'innovations'

and effectively the current Sufi – Wahhābī arguments on innovation is unlikely to abate. The Sufis themselves also are divided on their own devotional acts as is evident amongst the Barelwi and Deobandi movements on the one hand and also the aforementioned *ḥaḍāra* which al-Būṭi refutes at length.

Though mainstream Sunni groups do not include customary acts under innovations there are some Sunni scholars like Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285), ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām and others who argue that hereditary rule, political quietism (especially against injustice), appointment of non-scholars in high positions, pictures of the emirs and the like which were not prevalent in the time of the Salaf, are innovations. According to this group these customary innovations have taken on a religious manifestation as people observe these religiously.¹⁰⁰ Moreover this group contends from a legalistic point of view that Sharīʿa does not demarcate between worship (*ʿibādāt*) and civil transactions (*muʿāmalāt*), hence if the Sharīʿa commands not to innovate in worship likewise it would be incorrect to innovate in customary acts. This is very interesting as the Saudi scholars in 2011 argued that demonstrating against injustice is an innovation.¹⁰¹

3.5.4.a Presumption of continuity (status quo)

If an unprecedented issue arises in the daily life of a Muslim where a legal ruling is required it is initially presumed permissible until the sources of law can prove its illegality. Therefore if an issue has not been adequately proven impermissible

¹⁰⁰ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-ʿItisām*, pp. 362.

¹⁰¹ مجلة البحوث الإسلامية بيان من هيئة كبار العلماء

بالمملكة العربية السعودية

بشأن حرمة المظاهرات وخطرها على الأمة

بتاريخ 1 / 4 / 1432 هـ

<<http://www.alifta.net/Fatawa/fatawaDetails.aspx?BookID=2&View=Page&PageNo=1&PageID=13353&language=ar>> = [18/3/15]

especially those which have no mention in the statutes it would also be considered an *ijtihād* and consequently permissible. A common legal maxim abounds in jurisprudential discourse 'the original state of things is permissibility' (*aṣl al-ashyā' al-ibāḥa*). In the context of innovations if there is no clear prohibition of a given action in the statutes the original state likewise should be permissible, thus treating this 'innovation' as an *ijtihād*. There is however a flip side to this equation, the majority of jurists which includes the Mālikīs, Shāfi'īs, Ḥanbalīs, Zāhirīs and the Shiite all maintain that the original state of a given issue is that of permissibility until statute proves otherwise. The latter-day Ḥanafīs contend the opposite i.e. the original state of any unprecedented issue is that of impermissibility (*aṣl al-ashyā' al-taḥrīm*).¹⁰² This discussion has huge ramifications on how jurists actually deal with perceived innovations. Theoretically the Ḥanafīs who are considered the most liberal of schools by both their co-religionists and also non-Muslim scholarship, are in this instance the most antagonistic to innovations. Though the Ḥanafī demography spreads over a vast geographical plain and are fairly liberal we find the Indian Deobandi Ḥanafīs indicative of this type of anti-innovation outlook. Metcalf argues that this is due to their affinity with the Wahhābīs and influence from other reform movements in colonial India.¹⁰³ Ironically the Wahhābīs who although are Ḥanbalī have taken this approach too and are more fervent than the Deobandis. To them every action should be treated with circumspection. This maxim explains why they are apprehensive of unprecedented issues and declaring them as innovations.

3.5.4.b Public interest

Public interest (*maṣāliḥ al-mursala*) is one of the differed upon legislative sources of Sacred Law. Often public interest is confused with innovations. The legal theorists

¹⁰² Al-Zuhaylī, *Al-Wajīz fi Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, pp. 115 – 116.

¹⁰³ Barbara D. Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 65- 66.

define it as '...which is conducive with the objectives of the law'.¹⁰⁴ Any given proposal is weighed according to the benefit or harm it will yield (*jalb al-maṣlaḥa wa dar' al-mafṣada*). There were initiatives the Companions took like the compilation of the Qur'ān in one manuscript, appointment of registers, establishment of prisons, tithes and tributes on lands which were derived on this principle. Islamist parties like the Ennahda party in Tunisia opt for secular law through the Sacred Law principle of public interest.¹⁰⁵ Public interest is of three types;

1. Necessities: these are necessities for living a dignified life. a) preservation of religion, b) preservation of life, c) preservation of intellect, d) preservation of lineage and e) preservation of property.
2. Facilitations: these are necessary to make the practice of religion easier. Examples of this would be the shortening of prayer in travel, making up fasts later if one is ill or on travel.
3. Embellishments: these make life easier. examples of this would be documentation of transactions.

Al-Zuḥaylī argues that Abū Bakr's famous *Ridda Wars* were also borne out of public interest to preserve religious identity and no other scriptural justification.¹⁰⁶ One argues that if this is true then this will herald a new evaluation on the *ḥudūd* punishment of apostasy. It will no doubt arouse controversy as firstly a *ḥadd* punishment that has been accepted unquestionably will be brought into discussion and

¹⁰⁴ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Al-Wajīz fi Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, pp. 92.

¹⁰⁵ Nadia Marzouki, *Nahda's Return to History, The Immanent Frame : Secularism, Religion and the Public Sphere*. [April 2012] <<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/04/30/nahdas-return-to-history/>> [18/3/15]

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 94.

secondly Abū Bakr's move will be the subject of scrutiny which is sensitive in Sunni theology.

There are two dominant views on the validity of public interest. The Shāfi'is, Shī'ā and Zāhiris do not recognise its validity. Their argument is that of preserving the integrity of Sacred Law and that the judgements of Islam do not alter from generation to generation, so this principle could potentially undermine the statutes as anyone could question the extent to which for example, *ḥudūd* punishments are in the best public interest. As such, this group do regard this as a controversial principle which could promote innovations, and though innovations are seen in a negative light they can yield benefits. The Ḥanafis, Mālikis and Ḥanbalīs on the other hand do recognise the validity of public interest. Their argument is that Islam is contextual to all times and places and this principle facilitates this aspect.¹⁰⁷

3.5.4.c Silence from the first three generations

A polemic amongst contemporary Sufis and Salafis is whether Muhammad, his Companions and the Successors not doing something is evidence for its illegality in Sacred Law. This notion is very much embedded in Ḥanbalī thought. The Salafis weigh up any action which these blessed generations did not perform as innovations. ʿAbdullah al-Ghimārī a traditionalist strenuously argues that leaving out (*tark*) does not constitute evidence in Sacred Law neither does it entail obligation or prohibition. Any prohibition must be proven from statutes where one perpetrating such an act would warrant censure or punishment in the Hereafter.¹⁰⁸ Prohibitions according to the legal theorists are established by any one of the following sources;

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 95 – 96.

¹⁰⁸ Jum'ā, *Al-Bayān limā yushghil al-Adhhān*, p. 210.

1. Qur'ān
2. Sunna
3. Consensus
4. Analogy
5. Juristic preference
6. Public interest
7. Presumption of continuity
8. Custom
9. Edicts of Companions
10. Previous Law
11. Blockage

The fact that the first three generations didn't do something doesn't according to the legal theorists constitute prohibition. Ibn Ḥazm the renowned Zāhirite jurist criticizes the Ḥanafīs and Mālikīs for deeming certain Sunna prayers before sunset prayer (*maghrib*) as undesirable (*makrūh*) because of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān leaving it out. This Sunna prayer is popular in other schools of Jurisprudence.

3.5.4.d Bilāl's initiative

Many of Muhammad's Companions performed devotional acts without necessarily imitating the Prophet himself. Bilāl a prominent Companion of Muhammad, used to pray two units after ablution. The fact that Muhammad did not do this worried other Companions but when the Prophet learned of this he praised Bilāl.¹⁰⁹ One may argue that the initiative of Bilāl falls under the rubric of Sunna as Sunna consists of statements, actions and approvals. The Prophet's approval is sufficient to absolve Bilāl

¹⁰⁹ Al-Bukhārī, 19:17, 1149, p 89.

of 'innovation'. The point however is the fact that he acted out of his own accord without initially seeking the approval – or perhaps somehow he was confident because of his understanding of the principles of Islam that it would be approved. This anecdote is adduced by Sufis to buttress their arguments for the permissibility of 'good innovations'.

3.5.4.e Juristic preference and good innovation

A tradition of the Prophet states 'Whatever the Muslims regard as good it is good with God'.¹¹⁰ From this, legal theorists extrapolated a mechanism for legal approval and termed it juristic preference (*istiḥsān*). This principle is hotly disputed as a legislative source.¹¹¹ The majority of scholars recognise the validity of juristic preference and are of the opinion that it is abandoning hardship for ease which is a principle in Law, we find in Q2:185 '*God wants ease for you, He doesn't want hardship for you*'. In some Ḥadīth traditions we find that if the Prophet were to choose between two issues he would opt for the easier one. Theorists also deduced a maxim 'choose the lesser of two evils'. Al-Shāfi'ī, the Shiite and the Zāhirites argue that rationality is the source of juristic preference and not scripture.¹¹² Moreover al-Shāfi'ī is reported to have said '*istiḥsān* is capricious and whimsical' and also 'whoever makes a juristic approval (*istaḥsana*) he has legislated (*shara'ca*) [unlawfully]'.¹¹³ Therefore the scholar and the layman can equally legislate based on rationality alone. In reality juristic preference is an extension of analogy or public interest.¹¹⁴ Effectively juristic preference opens the floodgates for innovation and this may explain al-Shāfi'ī's aversion towards it.

¹¹⁰ Many have ascribed this tradition to the Prophet and generally considered weak. See Kamali *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*.

¹¹¹ Al-Zuhaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, II, p. 735.

¹¹² Al-Juday'ī, *Taysīr 'ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. pp. 193 – 196.

¹¹³ 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Al-Wajīz fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2006), pp. 184.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 90.

Although we have seen the pejorative connotation of the word *bid'ā* a tradition implies that introduction of some new things are in fact commendable which reads 'Whoever introduces into Islam a good tradition (*sunna ḥasana*) he will have its reward'.¹¹⁵ To what extent one can differentiate between a good tradition and a good innovation is at present unclear. In contemporary polemics the Sufis use *istiḥsān* as their main *ratio legis*.

3.5.4.f Bad *ijtihād*

Scholarship in Sunni Islam according to the majority of scholars can in instances be prone to error. Only the Mu'tazilites and some Ash'arites uphold that *ijtihād* is always correct. At face value it may ostensibly seem that these latter groups are arguing that scholars are infallible. One may deduce from this that they are arguing that *ijtihād* is a mechanism for articulating the Qur'ān and the Sunnah which are infallible as both these groups are against the idea of infallible human beings, therefore this means i.e. the *ijtihād* must also be infallible. Erroneous *ijtihād* to them is no different from innovations whether the intention was good or not, since the result conflicts with the infallible sources an incorrect position is tantamount to innovations as potentially people could follow these *ijtihāds*. Additionally, those who are accused of contriving innovations in religion usually corroborate their argument on the premise of *ijtihād*. Likewise those who declare an act as innovation also do so on the basis of *ijtihād*. Effectively the innovation debate ends up in a *cul de sac*.

3.5.4.g Blocking the means (*sadd al-dharī'a*)

If juristic preference is permissive principle then its antithesis is the inhibitive 'blocking the means' principle. Legal theorists argue that the means to a prohibited thing should also be prohibited. This principle effectively overrules object orientated jurisprudence.

¹¹⁵ Muslim, 47:2, 6800, p. 1144.

The feasibility of this source of Sacred Law is to some extent disputed. The Mālikīs and the Ḥanbalīs absolutely regard blocking the means as a source of Law. On the other hand Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfi‘ī only allow it in certain instances.¹¹⁶ Many things have been prohibited through blocking the means for example weapons should not be sold to non-Muslim states, grapes shouldn't be sold to a wine merchant, a man and woman should not be alone lest all these bring about 'harm'.

According to al-Shāṭibī, Mālik was excessive (*shadīd al-mubālagha*) in blocking the means. This may explain Mālik's antagonism towards juristic preference and also the affinity of contemporary Wahhābīs and some Mālikīs. Elsewhere however al-Shāṭibī argues that not every means to vice is a vice.¹¹⁷

Moreover the jurists who don't consider blocking the means as an independent source of legislation argue that prohibitions made through this method are based on the propensity of an action leading on to another illegal action and this propensity is ultimately conjectural (*ẓannī*) in nature. Consequently declaring an action as innovation through blocking the means is by definition debatable as it is part of the *ijtihād* process.

The gender segregation phenomenon in Islam is a product of *ijtihād* after the incident of the 'false accusation' against Muhammad's wife ʿĀ'isha. Prior to this there was no clear prohibition of an unmarried couple being alone. Even after ʿĀ'isha's vindication from God in the Sunni tradition, segregation became obligatory as a means to prevent any impropriety. In essence gender segregation may be viewed as a societal innovation

¹¹⁶ Al-Zuhaylī, *Al-wajīz fi uṣūl al-fiqh*. p. 110.

¹¹⁷ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-I'tiṣām*, p. 327.

and if understood as such may actually be helpful toward challenges of religiosity in the secular space.

Juristic preference is the ethos of contemporary Sufism as it allows a plethora of spiritual and jurisprudential conventions integral to the mystic tradition. In the like manner blocking the means is very much the ethos of Salafism. In this thesis the Deobandis have been identified as reform Sufis, they too have used blocking the means to declare many otherwise accepted norms in their own tradition as means to innovations, thus they do not observe the *mawlid*.¹¹⁸ A damning indictment against the Deobandis by other fellow Sufis is that they are heavily influenced by the Wahhābīs.

3.5.4.h Custom

Muslims regard their religion as a complete way of life where there is no demarcation between the sacred and the secular. One may argue that Sacred Law consists of statutes (*naṣṣ*) which are constant and circumstances (*ṭawāri'*) which will vary according to time and place. The legal theorists have included custom (*ʿurf*) as a source of legislation. Legal maxims like 'custom is effective Sharīʿa' (*al-ʿurf sharīʿa muḥkama*) and 'what is proven through custom is like statutory evidence' (*al-thābit bi al-ʿurf thābit bi al-naṣṣ*) abound in jurisprudential corpus.¹¹⁹ Much of today's secular common law can be viewed as Sharīʿa compliant, in that culture or custom is to some extent utilitarian in nature and has served the needs of man. Where custom goes against statute it is deemed un-Islamic. Moreover the jurists divide custom into two; that which is corrupt (*fāsid*) which constitute infringement on statute and iniquitous and that which is correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and does not go against statute and is beneficial for humans

¹¹⁸ Sahāranpūrī, Khalīl Aḥmad. *Al-Muḥannad ʿalā al-Muḥannad* in. *'Aqā'id 'Ulemā'-i-Deoband*. (Karachi: Darul al-Isha'at [no date]), p. 246 – 252.

¹¹⁹ Al-Jābī, p. 96. [Article 75]

and facilitates their affairs. Any corrupt custom is considered akin to pre-Islamic unjust practices.

Arabo-centricism is largely overlooked by legal theorists in their understanding of custom. They posit Arab culture as Muslim culture. Non-Arab cultures have been declared innovative by Arab chauvinistic jurists. Many devotional acts in Islam can be historically identified as cultural practices.

3.5.4.i Case studies on innovations in light of the above sources of law

Possibly the most contentious and sensitive issue is celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*al-mawlid al-nabawī*). It would be prudent to point out that the sensitivity rests on the Sufi premise that the celebration is inextricably connected to a believer's love of the Prophet.

Those who subscribe to the validity of the *mawlid* view it as a means of commemorating the founder of Islam; this group includes most Muslims of Sufi persuasion. On the other hand there is a minority consisting of mostly the Wahhābīs, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth, some Deobandis and other political Islamist organisations which are affiliated to these groups, who maintain that the *mawlid* is a 'religious' innovation. The case put forward by the Wahhābīs for its impermissibility rests on the fact that first of all there is no clear mention of celebrating the Prophet's birthday in the Qur'ān or the Sunna and secondly this was not a practice of the first three generations, in fact it is argued that it was introduced six hundred years after the Prophet's demise.¹²⁰ The fact that Muhammad was not only born on the 12th of Rabī^c al-Awwal but also that he

¹²⁰ Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Islamic Months: Merits and Precepts*. (Karachi: Idaratul Ma'arif, 2000), pp. 27 – 38.

passed away on this date too according to popular opinion causes some controversy. Moreover the Wahhābīs view this tradition as a pale imitation of Christianity and other faiths.

‘Alawī al-Māliki puts forward the legal justification in favour of the *mawlid*. It can be argued it is a Sunna from the Qur’ānic perspective, Jesus Christ and other prophets gave significance to the days that they were born. However those who observe the *mawlid* contend that it is a good innovation (*bid‘a ḥasana*). From a customary point of view birthdays are celebrated or at least remembered; this type of custom does not necessarily go against the principles of Islam. Moreover birthdays and public holidays are there for people to commemorate those who came before; if birthdays serve as means of prayer for them then this too is intrinsically good. The *mawlid* serves as a remembrance or day of awareness when Muslims can acquaint themselves with their leader. For this reason it promotes religiosity and therefore is in line with public interest (*maṣlaḥa*). Moreover everything is presumed permissible until evidence can prove otherwise (*istiṣhāb*). The Qur’ānic references indicated birthdays may have been celebrated in the Jewish and Christian traditions and therefore can be permissible in Islamic law if it does not contravene it (*shar‘ man qablana*). Thus one can deduce that *mawlid* has been thought through *istiḥsān*, *maṣlaḥah*, *istiṣhāb* and *shar‘ man qablana*. These ‘rational’ sources of law are differed upon and therefore the whole concept of *mawlid* and especially *bid‘a ḥasana* in general could be viewed as a correct or incorrect *ijtihād* rather than something which is the result of whims and desires. If minimalism is to function properly it would help if this understanding is adopted.

On the contrary the Wahhābīs also push forward an argument against the *mawlid* in that firstly it is an innovation and secondly since it is an innovation it could lead to other innovations and possibly sinful acts and therefore should be condemned. Their

argument is that if it leads to something unlawful it too should be unlawful. From this it can be seen that *mawlid* is declared an innovation through blocking the means (*sadd al-dharāʿa*) which evidently is also one of the 'rational' sources of law. Furthermore both views are products of *ijtihād* and a legal maxim states '*ijtihād* is not annulled by another *ijtihād*' (*al-ijtihād lā yanquḍu bimithlihī*). Though theoretically one could suggest simply viewing these positions as *ijtihāds* as a viable means of promoting theological tolerance, unfortunately these views are embedded in a wider polemic; the *mawlid* is viewed by its protagonists as demonstrating love of Muhammad and its antagonists are seen as those who denigrate his station. The antagonists of the *mawlid* view the protagonists as innovators who have veered from the Sunna. This polemic is used to identify camps, the protagonists are usually the Sufis and the antagonists are mostly the Wahhābīs. Furthermore this is also a crucial divisive issue within the Sufi camp such as the Barelwis and the Deobandis and it is one that defines these groups.

One feels this issue cannot be reconciled from a *bidʿa/sunna* or *bidʿa ḥasana* dialectic rather if it is viewed from *ijtihād* viewpoint it may move from its current theological domain to the jurisprudential domain. Theological differences or debates usually herald sectarian overtones whereas jurisprudential differences are inevitable and indeed polemical yet they are more palatable. Ḥasan al-Bannā' proposed that intercession (*tawassul*) should be viewed as a jurisprudential issue rather than theological one. This mode of thinking is unacceptable to Wahhābīs and in large part it is not popular amongst the Brotherhood followers.¹²¹

Another contentious debate is the collective *dhikr* especially if synchronous amongst Sufi practitioners. This argument is not necessarily embedded in the Wahhābi - Sufi polemic. There are established litanies from the Prophet Muhammad which over time

¹²¹ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Shumūl al-Islām*, p. 18. [Principle 15]

have been institutionalised by the many different Sufi *tariqas*. ‘Ali Gomah and the majority of Sufis argue that it is permissible to gather and make remembrance of God. Moreover he argues that it is reported in the traditions that the angels hover over the ‘gatherers of remembrance’ (*ḥalaq al-dhikr*), though it has not been established that the early generations collectively made remembrance the wording of the tradition evinces its permissibility. The Wahhābīs and other Sufis apply figurative interpretation by restricting ‘gatherings of remembrance’ to actually mean ‘circles of knowledge’.¹²² In *uṣūl* terms the wording is absolute (*muṭlaq*) and any restriction (*taqyīd*) requires evidence. Collective *dhikr* is a barrier between the Sufi – Wahhābī divide and it is unlikely this debate will subside. Having said that a further controversy which the Wahhābīs find abominable and has now aroused much debate amongst Sufis is the aforementioned dance (*raqṣ*), which is commonly referred to as the *ḥaḍāra*. The Sufis argue that this type of remembrance is permissible under the rubric of the verse Q3:191 ‘those who remember God standing up, sitting down and on their sides’. Moreover they argue that indeed the dance is a physical exercise and if it is viewed as such it does not contravene Islamic teachings. The litanies replete in the Prophetic traditions have no specific designation in terms of what manner they need to be conducted in. Therefore in their view two *maṣlahas* have been amalgamated into one; physical training and spiritual nourishment. According to them they have not introduced a new form of worship. They also buttress this argument with the natural synchronous movement that children and students of the Qur’ān make when they recite the Qur’ān, it helps them concentrate and has never been declared an innovation. Furthermore not all Sufis recognise the permissibility of the *ḥaḍāra*. Al-Būṭī a leading traditionalist scholar who otherwise is hailed by the Sufis and seen as the defender of Sunni Islam against the Wahhābīs has rebutted this act in his *Fiqh al-Sīra*. He not only declares it an innovation he disparagingly attacks it as frivolous pageantry and refutes the validity of the evidence posited by those who regard its permissibility.

¹²² ‘Ali Jum‘a, *Al-Bayān limā yushghil al-Adhhān*, pp. 241 -242.

Moreover he vindicates himself by dissociation from the Wahhābīs though in this case he acknowledges his agreement with them.¹²³ This argument and others like it may be seen as an indictment of Sufi practice yet it can also be viewed as some buffer between the Sufi – Wahhābī polemic.

On the other hand we are witnessing Wahhābīs softening on issues like the *mawlid* though in spirit they consider it an innovation; conferences on the 12th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal are held regarding the life of the Prophet. Though these conferences are responses to the Sufis they too at the moment constitute an ‘innovation’, one could imagine this polemic itself will eventually in the future cause the Wahhābīs to understand the rationale of the Sufis behind their position – if not a wholesale acceptance at least a mutual appreciation.

In *fiqh* there are majority (*jumhūrī*) views, literal (*ẓāhirī*) views, rational (*ʿaqlī*) views, precautionary (*iḥtiyāʿī*) views and also irregular (*shādhah*) views, it is not the norm to cast the irregular views as innovations, though they are not practiced upon they are still part of the Islamic jurisprudential heritage. Since most innovations are the result of the jurisprudential processes of juristic preference, public interest and to some extent custom it would be pertinent to treat these as jurisprudential anomalies.

Likewise the declaration of innovations as bad innovations has largely been through a rational jurisprudential process – blocking the means. This does not necessarily entail that Sharīʿa itself is the source of innovation, but does acknowledge that it is prone to interpretation. In effect arguments regarding innovation linger around speculative evidence (*dalīl ẓannī*) and most of the differences in jurisprudential discourse fall under

¹²³ Al-Būṭī, *Fiqh al-Sīra al-Nabawiya*, p. 303 – 304. n. 110.

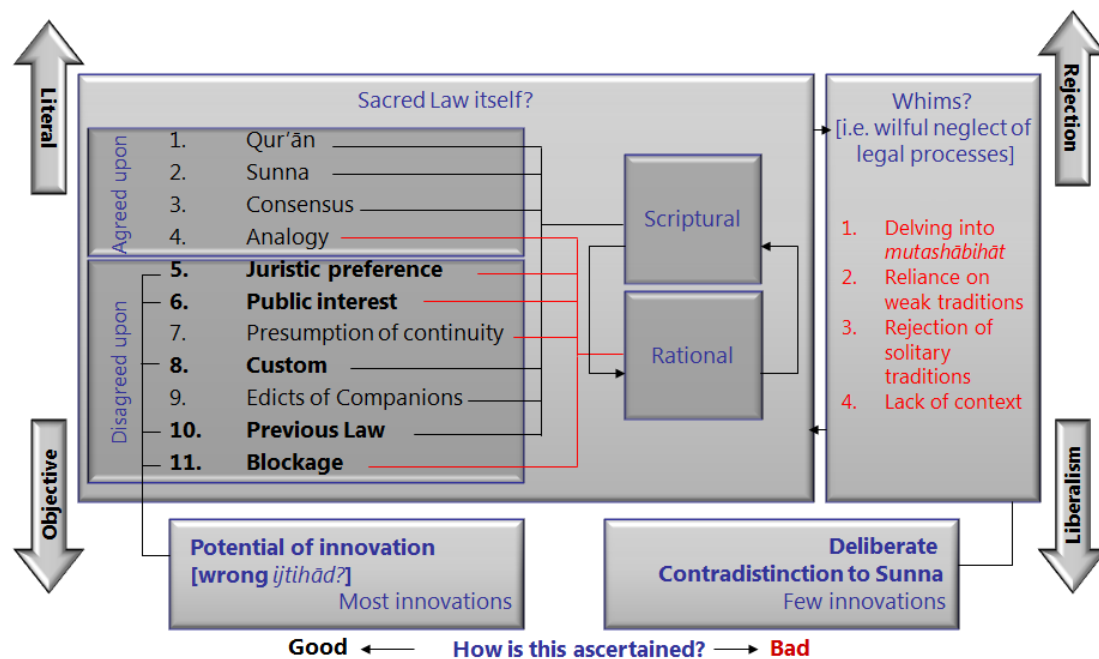
this category, in fact some legal theorists argued that jurisprudence is the domain of conjecture (*al-fiqh min bāb al-ẓunūn*)¹²⁴ and this axiom explicates the existence of numerous schools (*madhāhib*) and methodologies (*manāhij*). Treating innovations through a theological ambit would further promote polemical discourse which will inhibit real dialogue.

Sunni theologians of all persuasions maintain that innovations are borne out of whims. How can one explain and designate 'whims'? Perhaps it can be thought of as wilful neglect of legal processes. In the history of Islam how many 'innovations' have occurred and been defined as such can never be known. A significant question arises here; that is the wilful neglect of legal processes in the method of modernists and secular liberals; this shall be addressed in chapter five. Perhaps in this sense the acting on whims is akin to the following of forged ḥadīth which similarly neglects the documentary processes of ḥadīth traditions. Moreover it is intriguing how the Wahhābīs view ritualistic practices contrary to Sunnah as the worst innovations and the Sufis view modernism as the most devastating of innovations threatening tradition.

Furthermore from the above discussion one deduces that though it will be easy to identify an innovation in terms of it being new and unprecedented, the ascertainment of any innovation as a bad religious innovation however, has largely remained theoretical throughout the ages and is unlikely to be reconciled between the current liberalist trend of many Sufis and the rejectionist stance of the Wahhābīs. In essence one is arguing that like other issues of jurisprudential studies like the elusive *ijmāʿ*, the ambiguous *taqlīd*, the controversial *talfīq*, *bidʿa* has proven to be possibly the most obscure and divisive of issues.

¹²⁴ Wahba al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), I, p. 20.

Figure 3:9 Sources of innovation



3.5.4.k Impact of aversion to *bid'ā* on Islamic thought and creativity

As aforementioned the understanding of innovation according to mainstream scholarship is that it refers to religious innovations. However even al-Shāṭibī entertains the plausibility of extending this to non religious (*‘ādiya*) issues.¹²⁵

We may explore another bipartite understanding of innovation according to the dominant strands of Sunni thought; the Sufi and Salafi methods. In sum the Sufis are apprehensive of conceptual or methodological (*minhājī*) innovation which may not necessarily oppose the Sunna but upset the status quo and the Salafis are vehemently opposed to ritual or practical (*‘amalī*) innovations which according to them patently oppose the Sunna. Paranoia abounds amongst Sufis with regards to conceptual innovations like for example the ideas of reform (*iṣlāḥ*) which effectively entails the upsetting of status quo. Actual rewrites of old texts would be viewed as sacrilegious to scholastic traditionalists of the Sufi persuasion. To date the syllabi of most of the

¹²⁵ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-‘iṭṣām*, p. 362.

traditional Islamic seminaries teach not only outdated legal and theological manuals but also philosophical texts which has long since moved on from Aristotlian and Neoplatonist traditions.¹²⁶ The legal texts are historically rooted in the *Dār al-Islām* versus *Dār al-Ḥarb* worldview which compounds the way in which Muslims understand the current geo-political situation. Huntington highlights that there is nostalgic obsession of past glory and current weakness.¹²⁷

Pragmatism is viewed as modernist capitulation to the Western thought. The Salafis are weary of the old texts if they are not corroborated by scriptural evidence. This type of thought has influenced Sufi traditionalists in substantiating and revising old texts perhaps as knee-jerk responses. Al-ʿAlawī's *Maḥāhīm* best exemplifies this trend.

Modernist Salafis are more accommodating in embracing scientific developments than literalist Salafis and the Sufis in general. An example of this would be the attempts by certain Salafis like Dr. Usāma Ḥasan to present an 'orthodox' understanding of the Darwinian evolution theory.¹²⁸ In this respect the Sufis and the literalist Salafis are more antagonistic. Moreover it is unclear as to how the old cosmological view of the universe will be updated in light of current scientific research amongst contemporary theologians. Al-Būṭī in his *Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya* has adopted a polemical approach in his response to Western philosophy very much like the Islamist response to secular ideologies.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Sufi, p. 186 – 187.

¹²⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and The Remaking of World Order*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 32.

¹²⁸ Usāma Ḥasan, *Knowledge Regained*. *The Guardian*. [Sep 2008] <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/sep/11/religion.darwinbicentenary>> [accessed 18/3/2015]

¹²⁹ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya*, pp. 13 – 19.

Civil disobedience is a controversial issue in Sunni theological discourse and T.J. Winter is of the opinion that a general attitude of political quietism beset the Muslim community. This cannot be said about the Shiites and modernist Salafis who tend to be more politicised and have developed pragmatic political theorems. Furthermore a conceptual innovation which is challenging Muslim epistemology is Western academic objective criticism. It is commonly accepted in Sunni Islam that all companions, saints, scholars and political leaders are fallible human beings. Criticising the Companions of Muhammad is and has proven to be a controversial and divisive issue. Criticism of *shaykhs* though they are fallible according to Sufi scholastic traditionalists is irreverently sacrilegious and is seen as part and parcel of the Western influence. Sufi ethics may have had a profound influence on this type of thinking.

Rationalist Salafis have to some extent embraced the Western academic tradition and have reformed many traditional Islamic seminaries/universities on Western pedagogic structures. The literalist Salafis or Wahhābis have no compunction in criticising scholars as this is part of 'impugment and validation' (*jarḥ wa al-ta^cdīl*) process. If the status quo is maintained and scholars continue to regurgitate the old it is unlikely to witness a major paradigm shift in Islamic thought.

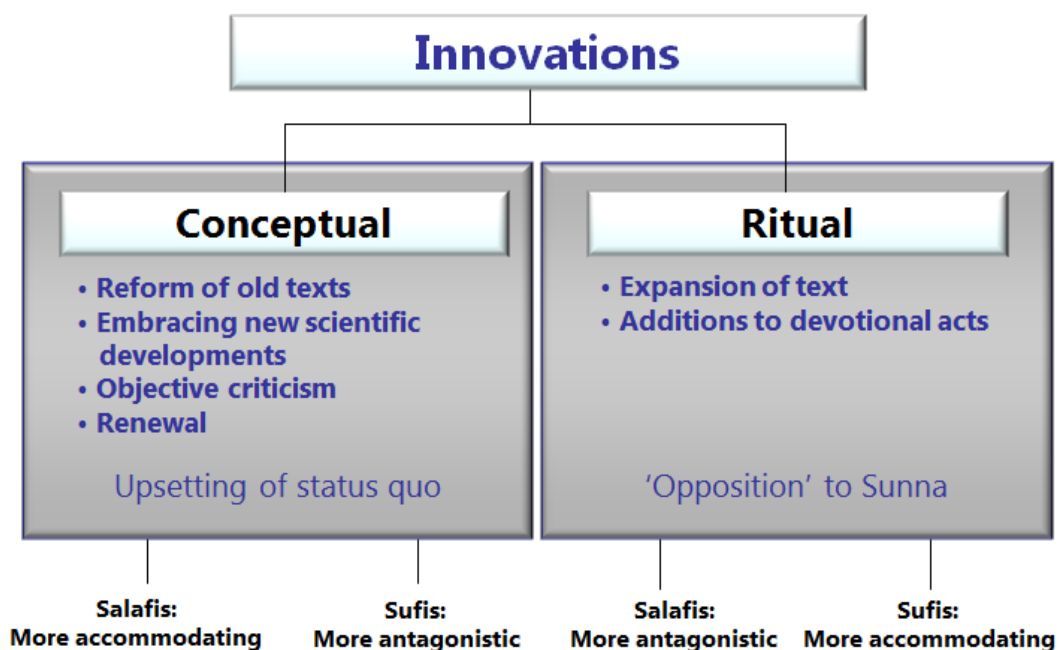
Presently the thought structure has been aptly described by al-^cAlwānī as somewhat of an intellectual stagnation which in his view has been embedded in the *taqlīd* tradition.¹³⁰ By *taqlīd* here one is not referring to the jurisprudential or scholarly imitation rather the prescriptive attitude prevalent in traditional learning. Furthermore it would be an oversimplification if one were to assert that the Sufis either

¹³⁰ Al-^cAlwānī, p. 29 – 30.

accommodate innovations or are prone to them yet their aversion to conceptual innovations is decidedly resolute. Likewise though the Wahhābīs can be described as anti-ritualistic innovations and more accommodating towards conceptual innovations sometimes this has not been the case as Ibn Bāz demonstrates in his *Ideological Attack*.¹³¹

Key issues in ritual practices would be expansion of text and additions to devotional acts. The Sufis are willing to expand upon old texts but not abandon them. The Salafis would argue that old texts should not hold the same weight as scripture. It has already been mentioned that the Sufis are more accommodating in expanding upon ritual practices that facilitate devotional acts and piety. The Salafis would argue that ritualistic innovations clearly oppose the Sunna.

Figure 3:10 Attitudes to innovation



¹³¹ ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz, *The Ideological Attack* (trans. Abū ʿĀliya) (Hounslow: Message of Islam, 1999), pp. 35 – 42.

As for what impact this general aversion towards *bid'ca* has had on stifling new thought and creativity is very complex. Al-^cAlwānī and Nadwī both speak of an 'intellectual stagnation' (*al-jumūd al-fikrī*) which has beset Muslim scholarship for some time yet have not linked to *bid'ca* paranoia.¹³²

Moreover an evaluation of the corpus of Islamic jurisprudential, exegetical, traditional and theological literature indicates on the one hand a rich hermeneutic tradition however rarely the status quo has been upset. Revision in schools of jurisprudence in terms of taking stronger opinions from other schools outside of one's own though not articulated in clear terms as *bid'ca*, polemical literature would certainly indicate that it is perceived as such.¹³³ Update of theological doctrines in light of modern empirical scientific data is also being met with much resistance especially issues such as evolution. Notwithstanding this in the domain of science and technology the word for innovation is 'invention' (*ikhtirā'*) which does not carry the same negative connotation as *bid'ca*.

It may be contended that the flexibility of the rational sources of Sacred Law such as juristic preference and public interest to some extent allow innovations to proliferate. Sunni jurists have failed to arrive at some consensus to categorically decide whether a given issue is declared an innovation. If innovations are deemed as *fatwas* or *ijtihāds* which undoubtedly they are products of, then this could potentially alleviate the polemical undertones in the discussion on innovations. Effectively an innovation becomes a 'bad' *fatwa* rather than a 'heresy' and this for contemporary polemicists would be conducive for dialogue between certain groups especially the Sufis and the

¹³² Al-^cAlwānī, p. 31.

¹³³ ^cAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥusaynī, *Umda al-Taḥqīq fī al-Taqlīd wa al-Talfīq*, (Damascus: Dār al-Qādirī, 1997), p. 103.

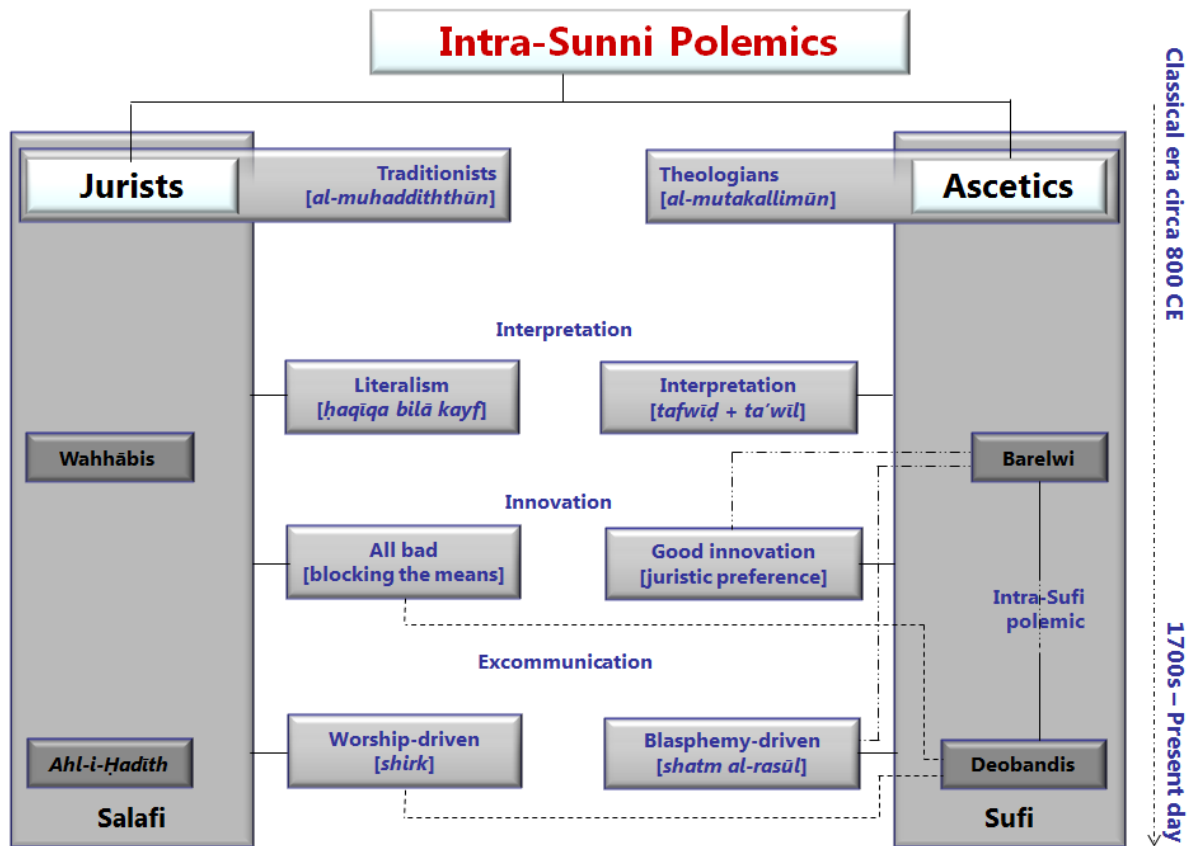
Wahhābīs. Likewise 'real' innovations could be viewed as those introduced by wilfully neglecting legal processes and these have been rare usually occurring under customary folkloric traditions i.e. from secular practice.

Historically the Sufi revivalists, who may otherwise be viewed as lax on *bid'ā* by the Wahhābīs were in fact staunch in their opposition to these types of cultural innovations which had origins in other religious traditions.¹³⁴ Another rational source of Sacred Law, blocking the means (*sadd al-dharī'a*) which is characterised as a gatekeeper of Islamic ritual practice can also be abused to prevent things which otherwise would be lawful. Drawing upon this one argues that the current intellectual stagnation prevalent amongst Muslim scholarship i.e. that of the *taqlīd* tradition relies heavily on blocking the means in an attempt to maintain 'orthodoxy' and not allow 'deviancy' to proliferate; however, inadvertently this curtails much needed creativity and vision.

If we are to look back historically the Abbāsīd era is considered the 'Golden Age' of Islamic intellectual development and it should also be stated that many of the Sufi orders and practices too came into vogue in this period and were accommodated by many, overlooked by most and also opposed by a few. What can be extrapolated from this is that the discussion on innovation is not new and this type of debate and discussion produced new thought in the past, and it will now encourage renewal (*tajdīd*) and reform (*iṣlāḥ*) and if it is reengaged in a light it may foster an attitude conducive to proactive change.

¹³⁴ cAbd al-Wahhāb Farḥāt, *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī: Ḥayātuhu wa Madrasatuhu fī al-Taṣawwuf*. (Cario Maktaba Madbūlī, 2003), pp. 279 – 281.

Figure 3:11 Key historical polemics



3.6 ORTHODOXY V ORTHOPRAXY

The definition of faith according to the different theological sects in early Islam has a profound impact on how Muslim religiosity is understood in the contemporary settings of 'practising' and 'non-practising'.

In classical theological debate the Jahmites maintained that faith does not need to be professed openly to anyone; faith in their understanding was a private venture. The Murj'ites argued that faith is enunciation on the tongue and affirmation in the heart, action is not included in this. In this sense the Murji'ites stressed orthodoxy – a Salvationism based on the acceptance of correct creed.

The Khārijites on the other hand argued that faith constitutes enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and compliance with the limbs. It is through the latter component of this definition that the Khārijites stressed orthopraxy being integral to orthodoxy. Hence anyone falling short of religious practice compromised their 'faith'. Their Salvationism is compounded by the damnation of wrong action. It seems from Muṣṭazilism's 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil' that they too understood major sin as compromising faith.

Interestingly the Māturīdi definition of faith as is evident from Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdi, al-Ṭaḥāwī and even Abū Ḥanīfa, is ostensibly identical to that of the Murjītes. Abū Ḥanīfa has been accused of being a Murjīite a charge which he nonchalantly rejects though he admits agreeing with them on the definition of faith.¹³⁵ Madelung suggests that Murjīism facilitated the spread of Ḥanafism which in turn made Māturīdism popular amongst that school.¹³⁶ Moreover the stigma of latent Murjīism amongst Ḥanafis is highlighted by Luknawī who argues that many early Ḥadīth traditionists would refer to Sunni Ḥanafī Māturīdis as Murjīites and this would include the likes of Abū Ḥanīfa and his colleagues.¹³⁷ Ibn Bāz audaciously criticises al-Ṭaḥāwī's definition of faith and argues that it is problematic due to its latent Murjīite influence.

The Ashʿarīs, Ḥanbalīs and the majority of early Sunnis defined faith as enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and compliance with the limbs.¹³⁸ This definition evidently resembles that of the Khārijites and of the sources examined no such

¹³⁵ Al-Luknawī, ʿAbd al-Ḥayy. *Al-Rafʿ wa al-Takmīl fī al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*. Maktaba al-Matbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya bi-Ḥalab: Beirut 2000 pp 364 - 365

¹³⁶ Madelung, pp. 32 – 39a.

¹³⁷ Al-Luknawī, p. 352.

¹³⁸ Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Al-ʿAqīda wa ʿIlm al-Kalām*. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2009), p. 126.

comparison has been made. Al-Būṭī and all Sunni theologians of Ashʿarī and Māturīdī persuasion play down this definition of faith as only semantic differences between the two schools.¹³⁹

Murji'ite definitions of faith foster non-judgementalism; however it may compromise the understanding of orthopraxic religiosity which Sunnis uphold. At core this definition is predicated on belief being a dogma and hence only orthodoxy is essential. The Murji'ite sect was the least excommunicative of all the medieval Muslim theological schools. Minimalism and Sunni essentialism tends to portray Sunni orthodoxy as non-excommunicative as we shall see in chapter four.

Khārijite definitions of faith incite judgementalism as its orthopraxic understanding of religiosity is integral to orthodoxy. It is this outlook which made early Khārijism excommunicative in outlook. Excommunication is an orthopraxic expression of faith. Notwithstanding the Sunni (esp. Ashʿarī, Ḥanbalī etc) dissociation from Kharijism, the affinity they share in their definition of faith probably explains why excommunication remained in Sunni theological discourse as perhaps a means of protecting orthodoxy and enforcing orthopraxy to preserve Sunni identity.

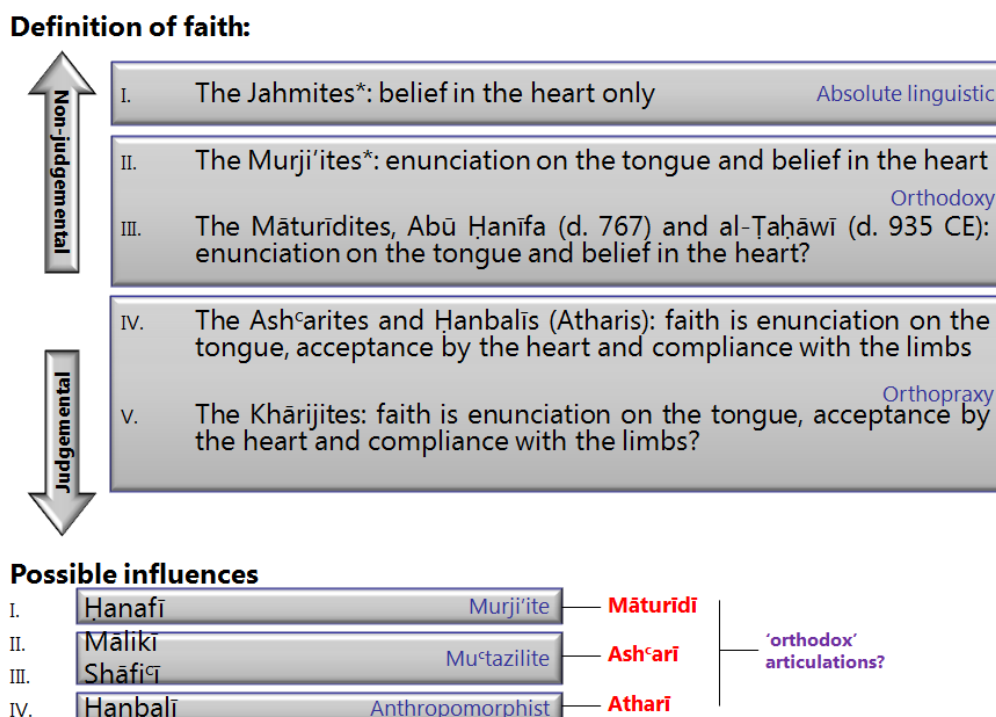
Wahhābism though polemically characterised by other Sunni groups as neo-Khārijism is decidedly born out of this type of judgementalism. Islamist organisations such as the *Ḥizb al-Tahrīr* and later Salafi Jihadists began excommunicating heads of state in the Muslim world if they were implementing laws other than the Sharīʿa.¹⁴⁰ It is from

¹³⁹ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya*, pp. 117 – 124.

¹⁴⁰ Roel Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Roel Meijer. (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), p. 194.

this tripartite definition of faith that they justify their claims of excommunication. It could be extrapolated from all these definitions of faith that the Murji'ite – Kharijite tension served as a catalyst for Sunnis to construct their own definition which evidently have remnants of both these sects. In like manner Ḥanafism as Madelung suggests had a large Murji'ite following. Similarly Frank argues that the Māliki and Shāfi'ī schools had Mu'tazilite membership. The Ḥanbalīs were largely represented by the anthropomorphist or so called *ṣifātīs*. It could be argued that Māturīdism, Ash'arism and Athari Ḥanbalism are attempts at 'orthodox' articulations of otherwise 'heterodox' origins. What we can deduce from these aforementioned definitions of faith is that the Sunni definitions are closely flanked by the diametric views of the Murji'ites and the Kharijites.

Figure 3:12 Orthodox versus orthopraxic faith



This orthodoxy v. orthopraxy debate is not potent at present amongst scholastic traditionalists, however it does have strong resonance in the Islamist versus Cultural or

Secular Muslim context, where the Islamist would regard not only observing the rituals but the implementation of the whole political and legal system of Islam as true practice of the faith. The Muslim Brotherhood, *Jamāt-i-Islāmī* and other such organisations subscribe to this view. The secular Muslim's faith would in such a scenario be reconciled by the Murji'i/Māturīdi orthodoxy.

In Britain this tension is visible in the university Islamic societies which are promoting the Khārijite/Ash'ari/Hanbalī orthopraxic 'practising' Muslim religiosity. The gender segregation problem is pushed through this model. This model has in a worst case scenario the propensity of culminating in the judgementalism of old Khārijism and neo-Salafi Jihadism.

The definition of faith issue is a tool for Muslim identity politics, at least on the orthodoxy – heterodoxy level. We shall see in the next chapter the legacy of excommunication in theology, its inherent 'evil' and also its expedient polemical necessity. Ash'arī and Salafi orthopraxy/religiosity in this way becomes judgemental, exclusivist and damnationist in outlook, whereas the Māturīdi orthodoxy is arguably more inclusivist and salvationist. In sum the Wahhābis excommunicate on grounds of 'polytheistic worship', and likewise the Sufis too excommunicate for 'blasphemy' against the Prophet Muhammad.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I focused upon two controversial issues that beset classical theological discourse and have resurfaced again in contemporary intra-Sunni polemics, interpretation and innovation. The controversy of interpreting the Divine Attributes entailed on the one hand understanding these in a literal (*ḥaqīqa*) sense which was the

position of the Şifātis in the proto-Sunni and contemporary period, and on the other hand in an allegorical (*majāz*) sense as was adopted by the Mu^ctazilites. These two linguistic devices translated in theological stances as anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) and denial (*ta^cṭīl*). This polarisation of two non-Sunni factions then takes a temporary twist when the Şifātis are subsumed by the Sunni traditionalist Ahl al-Ḥadīth school which argues for an amodal (*bilā kayf*) quasi-reconciliation of the debate. Later the Ash^carīs decided to incorporate the stance of the Mu^ctazilites and coopt it as 'orthodox' in addition to the *bilā kayf* of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth. Ḥanbalīs react to this by accusing the Ash^carīs of holding heterodox notion of denial (*ta^cṭīl*) and betraying the understanding of the upright forefathers (*salaf*). Ash^carīs further accuse these Ḥanbalīs of being anthropomorphists and argue that the Ḥanbalī amodality is not the original 'non-commitment' (*tafwīḍ bilā kayf*) of the early generations but rather an 'amodal literalism' (*ḥaqīqa bilā kayf*) innovation. Ḥanbalīs contest the opposite is true i.e. *tafwīḍ bilā kayf* is an invention. This is the current Sufi Ash^carī and Salafi Wahhābī polemic and is as strong as ever as is evident from the superabundance of Salafi literature and Sufi rebuttals/exposés like Hamid Ali's translation of Ibn al-Jawzī's *The Attributes of God*.

Notwithstanding this polemic, al-Ḥawālī observed that the Ash^carīs and the Wahhābīs are Sunnis in all doctrinal points except the interpretation of the Divine Attributes.¹⁴¹ This survey of discourses on *tawhīd* in Ash^carī and Atharī works indicate that there seems to be a synthesis on the issues of Divinity irrespective of the debates surrounding Divine attributes.

The second most controversial issue was innovation. Innovation in its general implication could include more than just devotional acts; the violent secessionism of the Khārijites is considered *bid^ca* as they never truly introduced 'new' forms of worship

¹⁴¹ Al-Ḥawālī, p. 17.

or ritual. Therefore secessionism is a methodology (*minhāj*) and methodology can be 'innovative' (*bid'at*) without necessarily constituting 'new ritual acts'. There is a flip side to this because it is easier to recognise ritual innovations. Khārijism is now, as in the past, hailed to be the most destructive force threatening the 'moderation' of the mainstream. Secessionism in the past was violent and today we witness this today also in Salafi Jihadism which stems from Sunni Islam. Another dimension to secessionism is what one terms non-violent secessionism. None of the varying Sunni methodologies are impervious to this 'innovation'. Non-violent secessionism constitutes 'sedition' (*fitna*) which in Qur'ānic discourse is worse than murder in that murder in Islam is reconcilable through justice, pardoning and blood-money. Non-violent secessionism manifests in implicit excommunication, or what could be understood in the Weberian sense of 'social exclusion'. We have stressed in this chapter that the Sacred Law itself is what allows acts to be introduced as religious or condemned as irreligious. Rarely have innovations been accounted for through merely 'whims and desires'. Some innovations like the celebration of the *mawlid* have more polemical expediency than gender segregation. This Sunna versus *bid'at* debate is perpetuated by the juristic dialectic between *istihsān* and *sadd al-dharī'a*. The rational processes of Law have been at play here and hence it can be seen as being broadly embedded in the age old tradition versus reason dichotomy. Furthermore most 'innovations' are argued to be the product of *ijtihād*. Despite this it has rarely been seen as conducive for intra-sectarian dialogue to perceive 'innovations' as bad or erroneous *ijtihād* just like any other jurisprudential ruling.

The orthodoxic and orthopraxic definitions of faith in the past have resurfaced in the polemical scene though not as potent as the interpretation of the Divine Attributes and the innovation controversies. This classical debate does not polarise the scholastic traditionalists in the same manner as the other two issues, however it is embedded in the 'practising' religious Muslim and 'non-practising' cultural/secular Muslim identity

politics dichotomy. This divide can be seemingly reconciled theologically but has not been given due consideration by the Islamists nor scholastic traditionalists. The Khārijites have been stigmatised as judgemental extremists who include action as part of faith, yet it is hardly acknowledged that their orthopraxic definition of faith is identical to that of Ashʿarīs and the Salafis in wording at least. The Murjiʿites clearly excluded action from the definition of faith and the Māturīdites ostensibly did the same. Early theologians remind us of the similarity of Māturīdī orthodoxic definition of faith. Orthopraxic definitions of faith can be excommunicative to some extent. Though Sunnis pride themselves as non-excommunicative in outlook, it is this latent Khārijite orthopraxy which best explains certain excommunicative outbreaks amongst Sunni traditionalists and is usually driven by either 'blasphemy' against the Prophet or 'polytheistic practices' as we shall see in the chapter four.

Effectively Sunni Islam's trends can be traced back to non-Sunni foundations; on the generic level we can see the Ḥanafī school represented Murjiʿism and then Māturīdism. The Ḥanbalī school represented the Ṣifātīs and then the Atharis. The Mālikīs and Shāfiʿīs largely represented the Muʿtazilites and then Ashʿarism. On the faith definition level we see a transition from Murjiʿism to Māturīdism and then Kharijite/Muʿtazilites to Ashʿarism and Ḥanbalism. What can be extrapolated from all of this is that Sunni Islam loosely subsumed all these defunct sects and their doctrinal tensions, be it interpretation of the Divine Attributes, religious innovations or the nature of orthodoxy itself. Sunni Islam lacking a rigid orthodoxy is always prone to these perennial theological trappings and the challenge of minimalism is to prevent it from acute polemicism.

Minimalism is deeply embedded in classical theological discourse as has been demonstrated in this chapter the schisms of the early era still shape contemporary

polemics. The originality of this chapter rests on the exposition of the contemporary polemics and the thesis that the lack of a cohesive Shari^ca hermeneutic is at the root of this infighting.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXCOMMUNICATION THE BANE OF SUNNISM

With regard to boys and adolescents, therefore, or those who cannot understand the seriousness of the penalty of excommunication, whenever such as these are delinquent let them be subjected to severe fasts or brought to terms by harsh beatings, that they may be cured.

[Benedict of Nursia]

In the previous chapter we outlined the perennial theological debates which ultimately manifest in polemical schisms, and these further translated into some form of excommunication. Moreover we examined theological debates which are polemical but nonetheless easily identifiable as *kalām* 'wranglings' or intellectual scholastics. The primary question at this juncture is to what extent does 'orthodoxy' and 'minimalism' resort to 'excommunicative' measures?

As aforementioned we shall critically explore more sensitive theological debates from the classical period which polarised and defined the schisms between the Sunnis and non-Sunnis. Additionally further examination will be made of what has already been identified as Shiite and Khārijite dynamics within Sunni Islam, unresolved residual tensions from the proto-Sunni period. These tentative polemics are more potent than the debates on divinity, interpretation and innovation as they culminate in excommunication (*takfir*) of some sort which is counterproductive for the minimalist project. Furthermore we shall look at how minor excommunication translates into the social exclusion of non-Sunnis. And lastly we shall explore two issues which may either

compound or facilitate minimalism: personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and the consensus (*ijmāʿ*).

4.1 Ethical minimalism: a non-excommunicative outlook?

In the basic minimalist model, we identified ethical minimalism as a core component. It was established that there are three facets to ethical minimalism. On the most essential level it at least claims to be non-excommunicative. On the second level it further delineates doctrinal parameters, the best example of which is provided by Ibn Ṭāhir in his *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*. The last level comprises the translation of the doctrine of 'non-excommunication' in the form of religio-political initiatives such as the Amman Message, Sunni Pledge etc. Ethical minimalism holds the key to the functionality of minimalism as a whole and could potentially work syncretically since its core macro component is non-excommunication as its 'orthodoxy'. It is the *spirit* of minimalism, whereas doctrinal and methodological elements constitute merely the letter of minimalism. This seems to be reminiscent of Murj'ism.

4.2 Companionism: Shiite – Khārijite tensions

The historical origin of judgemental excommunication according to Sunnism is traced back to the period of Caliph ʿAlī (d. 40/661). The civil war between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya (d. 60/680) served as a catalyst for two types of excommunicative trajectories; minor heterodoxy and major heterodoxy. As for minor heterodoxy this first emerged with Muʿāwiya and his forces refusing to offer their pledge to ʿAlī. These rebels were merely viewed as brothers in faith who had erred. Major heterodoxical excommunication emerged after the arbitration between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya which some who were loyal to ʿAlī, deemed as compromising the law of God and hence both leaders had *ipso facto* forsaken their faith and become apostates. This group historically has been referred to as the Khārijites (secessionists) as they seceded (*kharajū*) from the main body. This

notion of excommunication is linked especially to what is termed '*ḥākimiyya*' or divine rule. Contemporary groups like *Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr* and Salafi Jihadists champion this notion and in the case of the latter group, assassination attempts on Muslim leaders have been justified through this.¹

Judgementalism of excommunication was initially centred on certain Companions of Muhammad. Though Sunni Islam recognises the fallibility of the Companions, utmost reverence for them is central to Sunnism, this being the primary factor differentiating Sunnis from non-Sunnis, rather than issues such as the Sources of Islamic law. The concept of Islamic communalism is entrenched in the recognition of all the Companions as heirs of Muhammad and consequently they become the embodiment of orthodoxy.

The Companions in the Sunni tradition are considered the best Muslims. This concept of Muhammad and his Companions has parallels in Christianity where the best followers of Jesus are his Disciples and in Judaism where the best Jews are the Deputies. To an extent Sunni and Shiite Islam both have an 'organic' dimension to orthodoxy in that it is embodied through peoples; with the Sunnis all the Companions and with the Shiite the Prophets immediate family, the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their supporters. The Khārijites are vehemently opposed to this type of 'orthodoxy' as they view this as worship of men though they too acknowledge the virtue of the Companions only up to Caliph Uthmān's era.²

¹ Anthony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 14-16.

² Thomas Hodgkin, 'The Revolutionary Tradition in Islam' in *History Workshop*, No. 10 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 138-150.

It is universally acknowledged in the Sunni tradition that though the Companions are held in high esteem and collectively symbolise orthodoxy, individually they are fallible; however criticism of Companions is to some extent viewed as heterodoxy as we shall learn. In this regard Peters argues that Muslims like Christians relied on the notion of 'the Fathers' or 'the Ancestors'.³ These peoples in the Abrahamic traditions are in a sense the first hermeneutic tool for the commentary of scripture.

Polemical literature regarding the Companions especially the battles of Mu^ʿāwiyā and ʿAlī and also other notable figures like Abū Hurayra a prolific narrator of traditions surfaced early in Islamic history and these debates have resonance on sectarian relations today. The Shiite polemics would be critical against the Companions and the Sunni responses generally apologetic. Key figures amongst Sunni polemicists in defence of the Companions include Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī who not only rebutted Shiite allegations but also attempted to curb Shiite and Khārijite tendencies within the Sunni tradition as we shall deal with in this chapter. These polemics have subsisted throughout the ages and have ramifications on Sunni-Shiite and Intra-Sunni relations.

Ḥadīth masters define a companion as '*Anyone who met the Prophet and believed in him and died with faith.*'⁴ No specific length of time or closeness is stipulated in this definition. It is in Sunni Islam that the Sunna itself has been preserved through a vehicle of orthodoxy – the Companions. The *Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr* argue that a Companion is one who not only has met but spent time and enjoyed closeness to the Prophet. This view

³ Peters, F.E. *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*. Princeton University Press: Princeton Vol II p 45

⁴ ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *Asad al-Ghāba fī Maʿrifa al-Ṣaḥāba*. 8 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, [no date]), I, pp. 119 – 120.

of theirs is alienating them from mainstream Sunnis as they do not consider Mu^cāwiyā a Companion.⁵

4.3 *Ahl al-Bayt* – the Holy Family overtones

The family of the Prophet is held in high regard in both the Shiite and Sunni traditions. In Q33:33 we find; *'And God only wishes to remove all abomination from you ye Members of the Family and to make you pure and spotless.'* The Shiite view this as evidence for the infallibility of the Prophet's family, whereas Sunnis understand this verse as a reference to Muhammad's wives and only possibly to his blood relatives. In this sense there are parallels with the Christian notion of the Holy family.⁶

Moreover in the Shiite tradition because of this 'infallibility' they have the right and authority to rule over the Muslims in a communist vanguard party or Aristotelian-philosopher-king sense as is articulated in Ayatollah Khomeini's *wilāyat-i-faqīh* thesis.⁷ Peters observes that this strikes as a rather non-Arab notion, perhaps ancient Persian nationalism.⁸ Other Sunni Ḥadīth traditions in the view of the Shiites corroborate their stance. For example the tradition: *'I have left you two things, if you cling on to them you will not stray – the Book and my family (ʿitrātī).'*⁹ The centrality of the *Ahl al-Bayt* thesis also resonates in the *Ahl al-Bayt* movement the Abbasids co-opted and then conveniently abandoned. Many a ḥadīth was forged in support of the virtue of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.¹⁰

⁵ <http://forum.hizbuttahrir.org/archive/index.php/t-314-p-2.html> [accessed at 14/1/15]. This view is argued to be inspired by Rashīd Riḍā.

⁶ Peters, I, pp. 284.

⁷ Black, p. 334.

⁸ Peters, I, pp. 285.

⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, 46:31, 3786, p. 2041.

¹⁰ Al-Juday^c, *Tahrīr ʿUlūm a-Ḥadīth*, II, p. 1044.

The Sunnis though in principle differ with the political 'right' of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their infallibility, some Sufi traditionalists affirm quasi-infallibility to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Sufi shaykhs are more venerated if they belong to the progeny of Muhammad. A current trend emerging in Sufi scholastic traditional circles is centrality of the Ḥabā'ib of the Yemen, who are somewhat minimalist in their outlook.

The Khārijites and the Wahhābīs to an extent have an austere understanding of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, according to them Q33:33 refers to the Prophet's wives as is the norm lexically.¹¹ Sunnis and Shiites contend that *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to tribe as well. If one were to argue the *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to an entire tribe, according to the Khārijites and ancient Arab tradition lineage, is established through the father (*al-insān min qawm abīhi*) and not the mother like in the Jewish tradition.¹² Muhammad had no male heirs – at best one can establish a link back to ʿAlī. Moreover fatalistically it is argued by some that since Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets it is divinely written that Muhammad never had male heirs as unscrupulous peoples from his progeny could potentially have claimed prophecy. Furthermore the virtue of *Ahl al-Bayt* can manifest in racial superiority, whereby even in some *fiqh* books a non *Ahl al-Bayt* groom is not considered the same parity (*kuf*) for an *Ahl al-Bayt* bride.¹³

There is a trend amongst Shiite peoples who claim direct descent from ʿAlī to be primarily of Arab and Persian stock even in India. Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan explains this as

¹¹ Abū ʿAbdullah al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*. 11 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, [no date]), vii, p. 118.

¹² ʿAmīm al-Iḥsān, *Majmūʿa Qawāʿid al-Ḥanafīyya*. (Karachi: Madani Kutub Khāna, [no date]), p. 63. [maxim 53]

¹³ Charles Hamilton, *The Hedaya, or Guide; Commentary on the Mussulman Laws*. (Translation) 2 vols. (Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 1989), I, p. 96.

the last of the Sassanids intermarried with the nobles of Quraysh and perpetuated a royal bloodline through the *Ahl al-Bayt* amidst the general momentum of the Abbasid movement.¹⁴ Another intriguing phenomenon amongst the Shiite is that though conversion into Islam is welcomed, a non-*Ahl al-Bayt* Muslim let alone a convert cannot become a Shaykh or Ayatollah. On the other hand we find that Sunni Islam in the West amongst both the Sufi and Salafi camps are led by convert Muslims. Amongst the traditionalist Ashʿarīs Hamza Yusuf is a pioneer, T.J. Winter and Nuh Keller are also significant players. Likewise in the Salafi camp the most leading scholar representing *al-Daʿwa al-Salafiyya* in the West is Dr. Bilal Philips and other notables like Abdul Raheem Greene.¹⁵

4.3.1 Non-Sunni Ahl al-Bayt

Love for the *Ahl al-Bayt* is central to Sunnis as it is to the Shiite community. Ibn Taymiyya regards veneration for the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the Companions as an integral Sunni principle.¹⁶ A question arises as to whether the claim to *Ahl al-Bayt* now is valid or not based on the Arab patrilineal method. Moreover the Sunnis are presented with a predicament when confronted with the notion of venerating a member of the *Ahl al-Bayt* who evidently disparages some of Muhammad's Companions. The Wahhābi and Deobandi response is fairly predictable as they reject any Shiite claim to *Ahl al-Bayt* lineage. Shiite Islam prides itself in preserving the *Ahl al-Bayt* lineage, and to their advantage many Sunnis of Sufi persuasion including the Barelwis acknowledge the *Ahl al-Bayt* status of Shiite imams. The problem is how one could reconcile venerating a member of a heterodox sect; nonetheless Sufi-Shiite relations are good.

¹⁴ Ḥasan, Ḥasan Ibrāhīm. *Tārikh al-Islām: al-Siyāsī wa al-Dīnī wa al-Thaqāfī wa al-Ijtimāʿī*. 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1996), II, pp. 12.

¹⁵ Bowen, pp. 79, 123.

¹⁶ Chapter 1, Section 1.4.1.c.

This Sufi-Shiite unity could be explained by one of three factors. Firstly the Sunni veneration of the *Ahl al-Bayt* thesis closely resembles the infallibility of the *Ahl al-Bayt* imams in Shiism. Secondly it has been argued Sunni Sufism (*maʿrifā*) and Shiite Gnosis (*ʿirfān*) served as a means of dialogue between the two sects, moreover the veneration of *Ahl al-Bayt* thesis still resonates in their respective traditions.¹⁷ Lastly, both are characteristically anti-Wahhābī in their outlook as they in turn are classed by the Wahhābīs as innovators (*ahl al-bidaʿ*).

As aforementioned the Wahhābīs and some Deobandis are paradoxically faced on the one hand to respect *Ahl al-Bayt* yet some who claim to be *Ahl al-Bayt*, seem decidedly anti-Companionist. Either they disavow the *Ahl al-Bayt* in defence of the Companions which almost gives credence to the Shiite thesis that the Companions have always been against the *Ahl al-Bayt* or somehow reconcile it by arguing that there is no *Ahl al-Bayt* now. In their view the Shiite cannot be true claimants of *Ahl al-Bayt* as they curse the Companions and by doing so they forfeit this claim even if they were *Ahl al-Bayt* by birth right. This is a lucid example of how scholastic traditionalists for their own polemical expediency opt for reason (*ʿaql*) over tradition (*naql*), and in this case history. This will have ramifications on intra-Sunni relations as the Sufis are more pro *Ahl al-Bayt*.

At the turn of the last century Wahhābī Islam dominated the Islamic religious scene in the West partly due to Saudi funding of Wahhābī institutions. In this century Iran is pushing forward a pro-Shiite agenda and is to some extent more successful as they are engaging with the mainstream especially in politics and Sunni Islam in general. On the theological arena Sunni reformers like Tariq Ramadan are periodically invited on

¹⁷ Carl W Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1997), pp. 137 – 138.

Shiite channels especially Press TV.¹⁸ Likewise Shiite scholars are being invited by Sunnis particularly Barelwis on occasions such as Muharram. Iran is openly supporting Hamas, and Hamas is openly praising the Iranian regime which has upset Arab nationalists and Wahhābīs.¹⁹ This phenomenon can be explained by the anti-Wahhābī sentiment prevalent amongst vast majority of swathes of Sunni Sufis.

4.4 Monarchic rule

Furthermore though accusations are hurled against Shiite Islam of promoting monarchy through *Ahl al-Bayt* narrative, it can be argued that the Sunnis themselves promote an Arab monarchy, al-Nasafī promotes this in his *al-ʿAqā'id*;

*'The Muslims must have an Imam who implements their laws.....he must be from Quraysh and it is not permissible for other than them. Imamate does not have to be from Banī Hāshim or the progeny of ʿAlī'*²⁰

This notion is corroborated by a tradition *'the leaders are from Quraysh'* (*al-a'imma min quraysh*) and the fact that the first four caliphs were Qurayshites.²¹ Only the Khārjites hold a radical republican stance, as they argue any upright Muslim has the

¹⁸ Lauren Booth and Tariq Ramadan. 'Ramadan and Booth, Face to Face'. *LaurenBooth.Org*. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGIS4EhmH8I>> [accessed 10/9/14]

¹⁹ Joseph Braude, *'Let Hamas turn to Iran: Aid and a Bet'*, *The New Republic*. (Feb 13, 2006) <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/let-hamas-turn-iran>> [accessed 18/3/15]

²⁰ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, p. 235.

²¹ Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Ḥadīth*. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2005), pp. 206 – 207.

right to rule and once they veer from the law and lose the confidence of the people they can be removed.²² Unlike Sunni and Shiite political thought it seems to be Khārijite anarchism which speaks of a 'power to the people' narrative.

4.5 Virtue of Companions

Sunnis maintain that the Companions are the best Muslims and have been acclaimed in numerous verses in the Qur'ān for example Q98:8 '*God is pleased with them*' and Q48:18. A common practice for Muslims is to say '*Peace be upon him*' after any Prophets. This same eulogistic phrase is used for *Ahl al-Bayt* members by the Shiites. To an extent it is now perceived as a Shiite practice, however Ibn Kathīr highlights the general practice of Sunni scribes was to place '*Peace be upon him*' after 'Alī's name.²³ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d.) is accredited with introducing '*karram Allahu wajhahu*' after 'Alī's name instead of '*Peace be upon him*' as was popular amongst Sunnis.²⁴ He may have done this to distinguish Sunni reverence for *Ahl al-Bayt*. The Wahhābīs view this as an innovation. The general practice amongst Sunnis now is to only use '*Peace be upon him*' after prophets and '*May He be pleased with him*' after a Companion because of Q98:8. After any other Muslim '*May God have mercy on him*' is used. Some Sunnis would even use '*May God be pleased with him*' for any deceased Muslim and argue that it can be said since all Muslims fall under the rubric of Q98:8. The Shiites now use '*May God be pleased with him*' after certain Companions especially the first three Caliphs and likewise some Sunnis are using '*Peace be upon him*' after certain *Ahl al-Bayt* members. This may indicate a move towards a broader understanding of this *Ahl*

²² Ḥasan, I, pp. 316 – 318.

²³ Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Dīn. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*. 4 vols. (Riyadh: Maktaba Dār al-Salām, 1994), iii, p. 682.

²⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqa fī al-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Bidaʿ wa al-Zindaqa* (Dar al-Beirut Kotob: al-Ilmiyah, 1985), p. 47. See al-Haytamī in the aforementioned work and especially wherever 'Alī is mentioned.

al-Bayt versus Companions dichotomy and a better understanding between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

There are a good many fabricated traditions in support of the virtue of the Companions thesis, as al-Juday^c argues.²⁵ The following tradition is declared fabricated by many Ḥadīth masters yet is regurgitated on the pulpits of the Friday sermons throughout the Muslim world in particularly in the UK; *'My Companions are like stars, whichever one you follow, you will be guided'*²⁶

Another popular notion amongst Sunnis is that the least significant Companion is considered better than any other Successor, Successor of Successors, Saints, Scholars and Martyrs of the successive generations as is enunciated in a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī *'the best of generations is my generation'*. Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973/1566) has a pietist view of Companionship in that he argues that the mere visual encounter with Muhammad and belief in him is an act which no other deed can amount to.²⁷

4.5.1 The Companions amidst hypocrisy (*nifāq*)

In the proto-Sunni period, particularly before the crystallisation of Sunni theology we can examine the general views on the Companions of Muhammad. The Khārijites are the first to hold disparaging views of the Companions as far as Sunni Islam is concerned. For the Khārijites the Companions at the time of ʿUthmān onwards became corrupt and many in their view had disbelieved during the Battle of Ṣiffīn. The Shiite

²⁵ Al-Juday^c, *Taḥrīr ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*, II, pp. 1044 – 1045.

²⁶ This tradition has been reported in the non-canonical works and generally is declared as very weak or fabricated.

²⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Taḥhīr al-Janān wa al-lisān ʿan al-Khaṭūra wa al-Tafawwuhi bi Thalib Sayyidina Muʿāwiyā ibn Abī Sufyān*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1985), p. 5.

understanding is that a number of Companions were believers; especially those who stood by Imam ʿAlī, the rest were rebels or hypocrites. Shiism in this sense is steeped in the victimisation of *Ahl al-Bayt* at the hands of certain politically ambitious Companions.

Notwithstanding al-Haytamī's romanticism of Companionship (*ṣuḥba*), according to al-ʿAsqalānī the Prophet Muhammad left behind 114,000 companions. Ibn al-Jawzī maintains only 1060 Companions narrate Prophetic traditions. If the notion of hypocrisy (*nifāq*) is a perennial phenomenon and not contingent to the Prophet's life, then this group ought to be accounted for amidst the general stock of Companions. It is clear how the Shiite and Khārijite traditions are comfortable in identifying whom they deem as hypocritical Companions. As far as these two sects are concerned not all Companions are worthy of Muhammad's Companionship even if they were his contemporaries.

Sunni Islam develops what can be termed a 'Companionist' doctrine. This notion stressed that all the Companions are upright individuals (*al-ṣaḥāba kulluhum ʿudūl*). It seems most likely that this is an Umayyad religio-political invention in the like manner that the *Ahl al-Bayt* movement was co-opted by the Abbasid Caliphs. Umayyad Caliphs had to counter the rising Arabo-Persian threat in the form of Abū Muslim al-Khurasānī's (d. 137/755) *Ahl al-Bayt* movement which was gaining momentum even prior to his advent.

This movement was largely Shiite but also had a strong Sunni representation. The Umayyad countered this movement in a two-pronged manner; firstly they presented themselves as Arab imperialists and their opposition as foreign, and secondly they

presented themselves as defenders of the Companions' honour and their opponents as Companion-haters. To this end ḥadīth in favour of Arab supremacy/monarchic rule and virtue of the Companions were expediently forged. Sunni Islam is borne out of this political schism. It is no coincidence that many of the greatest figureheads like Shihāb al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) *et al* who were instrumental in the formation of proto-Sunnism enjoyed the benefaction of the Umayyad Caliphs such as Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 124/743). It is as if Sunnism became expedient to placate Shiite and Khārijite tensions.

4.5.2 Impugment of the Companions

Ḥadīth science invented a system of cross examining narrators of traditions, whereby the transmission of some were validated due to their upright integrity (*ʿadāla*) whilst many were subject to impugment (*jarḥ*) on account of bad memory, sectarian affiliations and immorality.²⁸ Consequently all the narrators of traditions i.e. the Successors and Successors of the Successors and beyond were put to this test except for the Companions of Muhammad. The doctrine of 'Validation of the Companions' (*ʿadāla al-ṣaḥāba*) thus emerged.

Al-Wuhaybī argues that recognising the integrity (*ʿadāla*) of all the Companions is an integral doctrine of Sunni Islam.²⁹ We have argued that this notion emerged as a politically expedient tool for the Umayyad caliphates; however it is unclear how it became an unquestionable doctrine. Al-Ṣābūnī is one of the few Sunni scholars to put this notion under some scrutiny. In Q49:6 Walīd ibn ʿUqba, is contextually alluded to as a transgressor (*fāsiq*);

²⁸ ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Luknawī, *Al-Rafʿ wa al-Takmīl fi al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*. (Beirut: Maktaba al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya bi-Ḥalab, 2000), p. 67.

²⁹ Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbdullah al-Wuhaybī, *Iʿtiqād Ahl al-Sunna fi al-Ṣaḥāba*. (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya athnā' al-nashr, 2007), p. 6.

'ye who believe! If an evil-liver bring you tidings, verify it,'. Q49:6

From this Sunni Islam deduce solitary (*āḥād*) transmissions of Ḥadīth are acceptable as long as an upright individual reports it. Moreover the legal theorists maintain that since verification is required for a transgressor it would be obligatory to accept the report of someone of upright integrity. The rationale behind this is the principle of 'divergent meaning' (*mafhūm al-mukhālaḥa*).³⁰ Conversely there is a popular position amongst jurists which has a pessimistic view of the human being, as a creature which is largely corrupt and therefore his/her probity needs to be established rather than taken for granted. However generally it is accepted that the principle is probity and transgression is incidental. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī (d. 1270/1854) is one of few Sunni scholars who asks the question does there need to be investigation in to the probity of a Companion especially in testimonies and transmission of knowledge? He lists some views regarding this:

1. The most popular view is that all the Companions are upright and their transmissions should not be questioned.
2. The Companions like anyone else are to be investigated especially in transmissions except for those who are patently upright like Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.
3. The Companions were upright up to the assassination of ʿUthmān after this period they are to be investigated.

³⁰ Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī, *Rawāʿiʿ al-Bayān: Tafṣīr Āyāt al-Aḥkām min al-Qurʾān*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2001), II, p. 451.

4. All the Companions except those who rebelled against ʿAlī are upright.³¹

Though position number 1 is held as the orthodox Sunni view, the context of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of Q49:6 as aforementioned identifies the 'transgressor' (*fāsiq*) as Walīd ibn ʿUqba, an otherwise upright Companion and this clearly illustrates that this discussion though controversial is still open. It is not clear who held view number 2. Al-Alūsī attributes view number 3 to 'some' scholars, it is not known who they were. It may be contended that this view resembles that of the Khārjites. The last view most likely is influenced by the early *Ahl al-Bayt* movement of the Shiite and Abbasids. It is clear from this how the politics shaped up the construction of the Validation of the Companions (*ʿadāla al-ṣaḥāba*) thesis.

4.5.3 Centrality of ʿAlī and the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Sunnism

We find in works on Islamic dogma, for example in the credos al-Ṭaḥāwī, al-Laqqānī and al-Nasafī, a sequential order given to the Companions in terms of virtue. The highest ranks are the ten who were guaranteed paradise by Muhammad. The four rightly-guided caliphs Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī fall under the ten. Al-Nasafī clearly declares Abū Bakr as the greatest Companion and Muslim after Muhammad.³² Though in Sunnism there is only one view on the order of the four caliphs and their virtue, in reality there are four opinions on this issue:

1. The first view places Abū Bakr as the greatest then ʿUmar and then ʿUthmān. After these three the rest of the Companions are the same in virtuousness.

³¹ Shihāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī Tafṣīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm wa al-Sabʿ al-Mathānī*. 11 vols. (Beirut Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2001), IX, [13] pp. 296 – 300.

³² Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, p. 227.

2. The second view is the most popular view and the one generally perceived to be the only view, which is the position of Abū Bakr being the greatest then ʿUmar then ʿUthmān and then finally ʿAlī after whom all other Companions are subordinate.
3. The third view places Abū Bakr as the greatest then ʿUmar then ʿAlī and then finally ʿUthmān.
4. The fourth view places Abū Bakr then ʿUmar as the greatest and abstains from dealing with ʿUthmān and ʿAlī.³³

The first view is generally ascribed to Mālik ibn Anas. Though this view may be deemed orthodox a great figure like Mālik subscribes to it, in contemporary Sufi discourse this would denigrate ʿAlī's ranking and ostensibly seem anti-*Ahl al-Bayt*. This view may be historically indicative of Umayyad bias against the *Ahl al-Bayt* and Mālikī demographics tended to be in Umayyad territories.

The second and most popular view places the greatness of the four caliphs according to their sequential tenures; this view is strongly advocated by al-Ṣāwī.³⁴ The third view which elevates ʿAlī above ʿUthmān could potentially be viewed as a response to the first, and historically pro-Abbasid. This position is attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa although in his *Fiqh al-Akbar* he seems to be in favour of the second and more popular view. There is a tendency for some to describe this viewpoint as Shiite and they term it quasi-Shiism (*tashayyuʿ*).³⁵ In essence it is a pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* view. This position is not favoured by Wahhābīs and Deobandīs as to them it gives credence to Shiism. Deobandīs regard this type of view as Shiite infiltration whereas ostensibly this is the position of their

³³ Al-Alūsī, IX, [13], p. 298.

³⁴ Al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 317.

³⁵ Al-Saraskhī, *Shams al-Islām. Kitāb al-Mabṣūṭ*. 15 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2001), I, p. 9.

own Imam in jurisprudence, Abū Ḥanīfa. They contest the validity of this kind of view as other Ḥanafis like ʿAlī al-Qārī have reservations regarding this and remarks, 'this smells of 'rejection' (i.e. Shiism).³⁶

The last view, that of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar being the greatest and the rest of the Companions being the same is to some extent like view three controversial. Though it is silent it smacks of Khārijite rejectionism through this abstinence.

From all these views one thing is certain: that in Sunni Islam Abū Bakr and ʿUmar are considered the greatest Muslims and are reverentially referred to as the 'Two elders' (*al-Shaykhayn*). The latter two caliphs ʿUthmān and ʿAlī are referred to as the 'two Son-in-Laws' (*al-Khatanayn*). Al-Hādī argues that all four of these views are valid and orthodox in Sunni Islam and ascribes this verdict to Ibn Taymiyya.³⁷ From one's observation of the literature the Wahhābīs generally seem to polarise the discussion, having said that even Sufis have towed this line too.

There are growing controversies in Barelwi circles regarding the virtue of ʿAlī above all the other Caliphs and Companions. Barelwis like the Deobandis subscribe to Sunni credos which as aforementioned push the 'four Caliphs ordinal' superiority doctrine. Some Barelwis are now debating the validity of the superiority of ʿAlī (*afdaliya ʿAlī*) after the prophets. This is proving to be a potent polemic within the Sufis and in particular the Barelwis and is further polarising them from the Wahhābīs and Deobandis. At core this issue constitutes a latent pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* doctrine which may have subsisted from the proto-Sunni period.

³⁶ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 188.

³⁷ Al-Hādī, p. 97.

To summarise, this discussion especially the recognition of the above four views as well as the 'controversial' fifth view will facilitate dialogue and understanding between Sunnis and Shiites.

4.5.4 The Companions as the 'Criterion of Truth'

It is established in Sunni Islam that even the Companions with their high stature and ranking are fallible human beings. Like the discussion in *uṣūl* on *mujtahids* they can make mistakes and sin. In the Subcontinent a new polemic emerged amongst the Sunnis – are the Companions the Criterion of Truth (*mi'cār al-haqq*). Abū al-A'ālā Mawdūdī a political Islamic ideologue, prolific writer and founder of the *Jamāt-i-Islāmi* party discussed the role of 'Uthmān as a caliph and touched upon some of the historical accusations of nepotism and his weak administration.³⁸ In theory this was nothing new but it brought much negative light on Mawdūdī and his movement by traditionalist Barelwi and especially Deobandi scholars. Periodically Mawdūdī defended his views and cited classical sources to placate the Deobandi onslaught but to no avail.

Mawdūdī argued that the Qur'ān and Sunna are the *Criterion* by which any religious action is measured. If 'Uthmān or anyone else falls short of that then that is inevitable from a man.³⁹ The Deobandi response was largely led by Husain Ahmad Madani who argued that the Companions are the Criterion of Truth and that Mawdūdī's criticism of

³⁸ Abū al-A'ālā Mawdūdī, *Khilāfat-o-Mulkiyat*. (Lahore: Idarat ul-Qur'an Ltd. 1966), p. 103 – 155.

³⁹ Ibid.

ʿUthmān was tantamount to cursing him and cursing a Companion in Sunni heresiology is a Shiite trait.⁴⁰

In essence both Mawdūdī and Madani agree that the Companions are fallible yet they have been acclaimed to be the best of generations by the Prophet himself. The issue is essentially a subtle nuance and not really a controversy. Al-Būṭī who is particularly popular amongst Western traditionalists, in his *Mūjaz al-Khulāfa'* also holds similar views to Mawdūdī regarding ʿUthmān but has not received the same reaction from either the Barelwis nor the Deobandis.⁴¹

4.5.5 Criticism of Companions and insulting them

Al-Nasafī states regarding the Companions '*we only speak well of them*'.⁴² In Sunni Islam a fine line has not been drawn between criticism of Companions and what would constitute outright abuse (*sabb*). This can be explained in part by the accepted notion that all the Companions are necessarily considered upright (*ʿudūl*) and therefore by definition are to some extent beyond criticism. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal seems to include criticism as akin to cursing which warrants in his opinion a chastisement from the Sultan.⁴³

Though Sunni Islam professes that abusing or cursing Companions is considered a major sin but not tantamount to disbelief, there is a difference of opinion between staunch Sunnis on whether one who curses Companions is out of the pale of Islam. The arguments are based on ambivalent passages in the Qur'ān regarding God's

⁴⁰ Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani*, pp. 119 – 121.

⁴¹ Al-Būṭī, *Fiqh al-Sīra al-Nabawiya*, pp. 367 – 370.

⁴² Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 243.

⁴³ Al-Wuhaybī, p 3.

satisfaction with the believers.⁴⁴ Shiite exegetes argue these verses pertain to all believers whilst Sunnis contend these are references to the Companions of Muhammad.

Moreover many traditions extol the virtues of select Companions, if one curses any of these Companions then that would *ipso facto* be a rejection of statute (*naṣṣ*). This latter hard-line stance has been championed by ultra-Sunni offshoots of the Deobandi factions in Pakistan like the *Sippāh-i-Ṣaḥāba*.⁴⁵ In addition it seems strange how Deobandi Ḥanafis have developed such an anti-Shiite rhetoric which is more commonly associated with Mālikī North Africa. Ḥanafī jurisprudence tends to have had better relations with the Shiite as is evident from the fact that Abū Ḥanīfa himself studied under Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.⁴⁶

A question arises here as to how academic objectivism would be viewed under 'orthodoxy'. Criticism of Companions in the historical Shiite tradition has largely been of a polemic nature. ʿAbdullah al-Wuḥaybī is critical of applying 'academic objectivity' (*al-minhāj al-ʿilmī*) on the history of the Companions and argues that this is the method of the Shiite.⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī authored a treatise just on the evils of criticising Muʿāwiya entitled *Purifying the heart and tongue from the dangers of disparaging Muʿāwiya the Son of Abū Sufyān*.⁴⁸ The authorial intent was to placate a trend within Sunni Islam which like certain Shiite trends victimised the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

⁴⁴ 'God hath pleasure in them and they have pleasure in Him' Q98:1

⁴⁵ Zia al-Rahman Fārūqī, *Tārīkhī Dastāwīz: Shīʿa Musalmān yā Kāfir, fayṣla āp karay*. (Jang: Shuʿba-i-nashr-o-ishāʿat Sippāh-i-Ṣaḥāba, 1995), pp. 17 – 22.

⁴⁶ Al-Saraskhsī, I, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Al-Wuḥaybī, p. 35 – 36.

⁴⁸ Al-Haytamī, *Taṭhīr al-Janān*, pp. 1 – 3.

4.5.6 Reconciliation of differences between the Companions

Though Sunni Islam affirms the doctrine of the integrity of all Companions, one of the most controversial issues contesting this notion is fact that the first civil war in Islam was between the Companions themselves. Sunni Islam deals with such issues in manner of non-commitment (*tawaqquf*) a discursive *bilā kayf*.

Some Muʿtazilites of Sunni persuasion were in a state of denial regarding the civil war as the Shiite and Khārijites from polarised viewpoints would argue why should the Companions be emulated as they fought against each other. One faction must have been on the side of truth. The Shiite put ʿAlī as spearhead of this side. The Sunnis too generally support this as ʿAlī was the rightful Caliph and so his contender Muʿāwiyah would be seen as a rebel. Sunni Islam attempts to reconcile this not in a rebellion versus authority setting, but rather through a correct *ijtihād* and incorrect *ijtihād* setting.

Muʿāwiyah a powerful governor of Syria wanted prompt justice for the murder of the previous caliph and his cousin ʿUthmān before offering his pledge to ʿAlī. Caliph ʿAlī on the other demanded the pledge of allegiance from Muʿāwiyah as he saw this as jeopardising the sovereignty of the nation. This is the root of Companions versus *Ahl al-Bayt* dichotomy. This grudge eventually passes on to both leaders' sons.

Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd maintains that most of the narrations regarding the internal disputes of the Companions are false and narrations which are correct are to be interpreted in

a good light.⁴⁹ From this one can deduce how even in history just like in scripture *ta'wīl* is applied to reconcile 'doctrinal' problems.

Whenever criticism of Companions is mentioned it generically refers to all Companions but in the Sunni Shiite polemic it refers particularly to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān. Though this polemic is more dubious in that ʿAlī was 'usurped' his right to the caliphate ʿAlī never openly opposed Abū Bakr and the others during their tenure. Muʿāwiyā's opposition to ʿAlī from the Shiite perspective is blasphemous and in the Sunni tradition poses huge controversies. Sunni credos tend to portray a quietist political thought whereby the governed should be patient with even tyrant rulers.⁵⁰ Here we find a Companion of some virtue fighting against the rightful caliph and a member of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Is rebellion and civil disobedience permitted in Islam? Muʿāwiyā's rebellion is interpreted as an *ijtihād*, can other rebellions be viewed in this way and if so what will be the implication for those in power? Moreover Muʿāwiyā was responsible for creating the dynastic system in Islam which Sunni Islam frowns upon. How is this different from Shiite *Ahl al-Bayt* monarchism?

4.6 Shiite and Khārijite dynamics within Sunni Islam

Sunni Islam still juggles with many thorny issues concerning the Companions and the response to Shiite and Khārijite accusations has been relatively unsubstantial. Moreover because of a myriad of views within Sunni tradition on these issues, it is difficult to ascertain whether these permeated into Sunni discourse or whether they developed by reaction.

⁴⁹ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 209 – 210.

⁵⁰ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 15. [point 72]

Perhaps it would be pertinent to conceptualise these views in the Companions versus *Ahl al-Bayt* setting. The followers of Muhammad comprised the Companions who consisted of the vast majority and the *Ahl al-Bayt* or members of his clan. Those who are ultra-*Ahl al-Bayt* especially the Shiite are pejoratively referred to by Sunnis as 'rejectors' (*rawāfiḍ*) because they reject some leading Companions especially the first three caliphs. On the other hand the Shiite pejoratively refer to those who uphold the rights of the first three Caliphs as 'usurpers' (*nāṣibiya*). The Sunni tradition too has its own version of *nāṣibiya* which is anti-^ʿAlī or *Ahl al-Bayt* Khārijism. This polemic further manifests with the battles between ^ʿAlī and Mu^ʿāwiyā and resumes when Mu^ʿāwiyā appoints his own son Yazīd as the caliph. ^ʿAlī's son Ḥusayn refuses to take the pledge of allegiance with Yazīd which results in his eventual demise and he is forever immortalised as a martyr in both Shiite and Sunni Islam. From a glance at this controversial topic five views emerge;

1. Popular Pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* Sunnism
2. Extreme Ultra-*Ahl al-Bayt* Sunnism
3. Extreme Ultra-Companionist Sunnism
4. Fringe Pro-Companionist Sunnism
5. Reconciliatory Sunnism

Popular Sunnism as espoused by classical theologians like al-Taftāzānī and contemporary Sunni methodologies like that of Aḥmad Riza Khan recognise ^ʿAlī as the rightful caliph, Mu^ʿāwiyā as a respectable contender and Ḥusayn as the rightful challenger. Al-Taftāzānī upholds that it is not permissible to curse Mu^ʿāwiyā and his faction. However this latitude is not afforded to Yazīd who is viewed as a villainous figure who murdered the grandson of Muhammad. Al-Taftāzānī entertains a valid

disagreement on the issue of cursing Yazīd.⁵¹ One could argue historically that this view largely helped the Abbasid movement. The ramifications of these controversies resonate in contemporary parochial polemics. The Barelwis are unanimous in their stance on Yazīd, the Deobandis are ambivalent and the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are somewhat apologetic for him. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* see the cursing of Yazīd as a doorway to cursing Mu^ḥāwiyā and then other Companions. This is a deeply sensitive issue and has implications on intra-Sunni as well Sunni-Shiite relations. Zakir Naik a famous Sunni *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* televangelist who enjoyed much appeal amongst all different hues of Sunnis exonerated Yazīd and caused a furore.⁵²

In contrast to popular Sunnism there is a contrasting view espoused by fringe Mālikīs like Abū Bakr Ibn al-^ḥArabī who view ^ḥAlī as the rightful caliph however they do not see Mu^ḥāwiyā as necessarily a rebel. In addition they view Ḥusayn as the one who made a rebellious move.⁵³ This view may have been funnelled by the Umayyad caliphs in their 'cogent' pro-Companionism project. The contemporary *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* champion this view and have periodically put themselves at loggerheads with many Sufi Sunnis, especially the Barelwis. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* argue that the Barelwis are pro-Shiite and the Barelwis in turn label the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* as Khārijite. This further buttresses the argument that classical theology informs contemporary polemics as is evident from this pejorative yet historically referenced name calling.

In addition to popular Sunnism there is an extreme version of this where some 20th century Sunnis like al-Ghimārī and Ḥassan al-Saqqāf have gone to 'excess' in defence

⁵¹ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-^ḥAqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, pp. 247 – 248.

⁵² Umer Khan. *Yazeed – The criminal of Karbala & the Hero of Zakir Naik*. Zakir Naik. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mMQbR_48IU> [accessed 27/7/12]

⁵³ Abū Bakr ibn al-^ḥArabī, *Al-^ḥAwāṣim min al-Qawāṣim: Fī taḥqīq mawāqif al-Ṣaḥāba ba^ḥda wafāt al-Nabī*. (Cairo: Maktaba al-Sunna, 2000), pp. 183 – 189.

of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and have not only cursed Yazīd which popular Sunnism may accept but also Mu^ḥāwīya.⁵⁴ The premise of their argument is that both opposed the *Ahl al-Bayt*. This view could be called extreme pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* Sunnism.

In addition to fringe Mālikī Sunnism there is an extreme interpretation of this where historians like Ibn Khaldūn and others actually thought Mu^ḥāwīya was correct in his rebellion against ʿAlī and similarly the appointment of his own son Yazīd.⁵⁵ This position seems to be informed by Umayyad politics.

The last view is a reconciliatory view presented by al-Ghazālī who argues that ʿAlī, Mu^ḥāwīya, Ḥusayn and Yazīd are Companions and sons of Companions. This is essentially a Pandora's box. Al-Ghazālī seems to exonerate Yazīd from the actual murder of Ḥusayn and argues that it is not befitting of a Muslim to curse others.⁵⁶ Al-Ghazālī is revered by all Sufis and is also pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* however he is not of the opinion that Yazīd was a disbeliever. Ibn Taymiyya to an extent seems to reflect this view. The crux of the matter is that the murder of the Prophet's grandson is seen as an act of disbelief (*kufr*), and ironically if this is so then it reflects Khārijite definitions of actions being integral to faith.⁵⁷

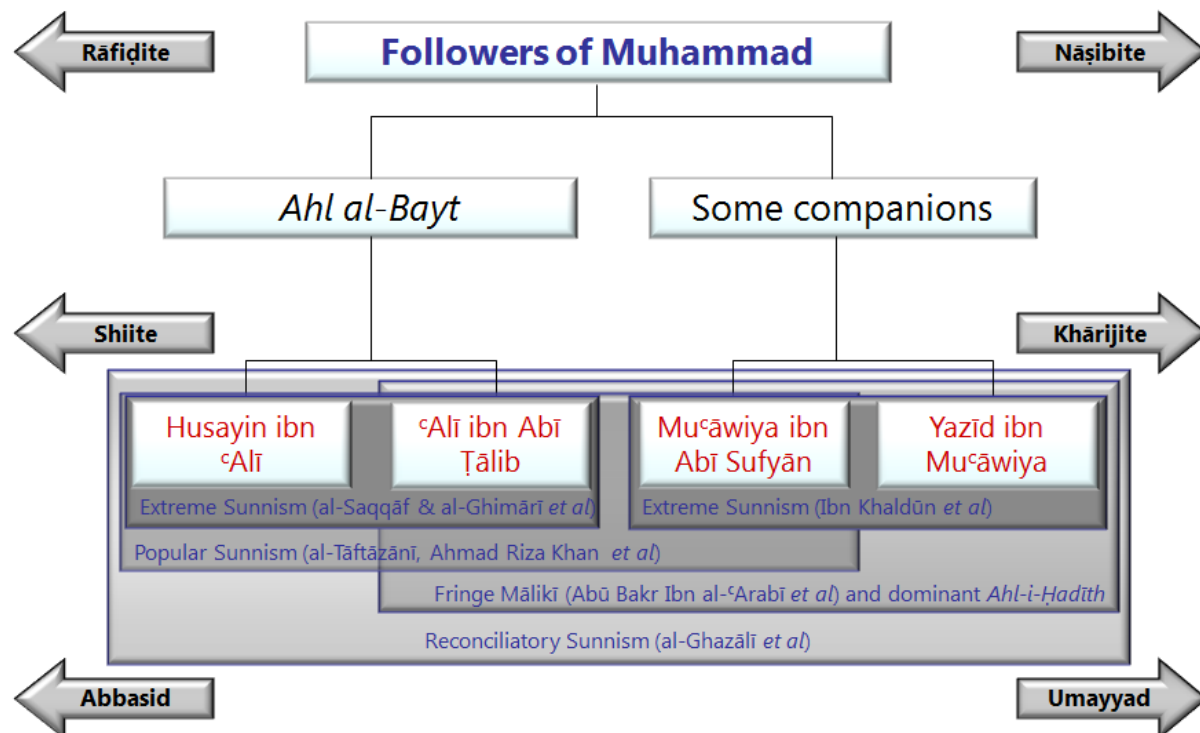
⁵⁴ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Maghrāwī, *Tanbīh al-Qārī ilā Faḍā'iḥ Aḥmad ibn Ṣiddīq al-Ghimārī*. (Marakesh: Mustapha al-Yusufi, 1996), pp. 17 – 19.

⁵⁵ Ibn Khaldun, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiya*, pp. 248 – 249.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Figure 4:1 Sectarian approaches to dealing with the Companions



4.7 EXCOMMUNICATION

Sunni theology stresses how deviancy from 'orthodoxy' began in the early days of Islam through false interpretation (*ta'wīl*) which eventually led to the phenomenon of excommunication (*takfīr*). We have already established that Khārijite excommunication was informed through orthopraxy; here we shall highlight how Sunni Islam too retained excommunication as a potent tool to preserve its own orthodoxy. Sunni theology of the past and even contemporary Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism alleges that a salient feature of Sunni Islam is that it is non-excommunicative. Though excommunication could be seen as the bane of Sunnism, theologians have attempted to set absolute boundaries of Islam beyond which one may be out of the pale often expressed as 'issues known by necessity in the religion' (*ma'lūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*). Denial of these has been referred to as 'major heterodoxies' (*bid'a mukaffara*). This could be viewed as macro-minimalism.

Muhammad Anwar Shah Kashmiri an early ideologue of the Deoband seminary authored an epistle *Excommunication of the heretics regarding the necessities in religion* (*Ikfār al-mulḥidīn fī ḍurūriyāt al-dīn*) the context of which was the Aḥmadiyya sect in British India. Ghulam Ahmed who according to some of his followers claimed prophethood, responded to Sunni and Shiite excommunicative edicts with the historical argument that 'moderate' Islam is non-excommunicative. Kashmiri's epistle is an attempt to dispel such a misconception that Sunni Islam 'never' uses excommunication. He explains 'issues known by necessity' as those that are clear to the educated or illiterate believer:

'The meaning of 'by necessity' as is evident from the corpus (*nuṣūṣ*): the knowledge of which one has from the religion of Muhammad. This knowledge is established by consecutive transmission (*tawātur*) and has become superabundant (*mustafīd*) whereby the masses know it. This includes matters such as monotheism, prophecy, finality of prophecy after Muhammad (*khatm al-nubuwwa*), the bodily resurrection, reward and recompense, obligation of prayer and alms, pilgrimage, the prohibition of liquor and similar issues..... Whoever denies any aspect of these necessities, even if he believes in part of the book whilst he disbelieves other parts, such a person is from the disbelievers, even if he runs to China or Europe to spread what he considers 'religion' and the ignorant regard it as service to Islam.'⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār*, pp. 2 -3.

Denial of these comprises disbelief according to mainstream Sunni Islam. The books of jurisprudence too are replete with rulings on apostasy. ⁵⁹ Alawī al-Saqqāf a contemporary Wahhābī scholar observes from his research on this issue of excommunication that disbelief according to all Sunnis, (he includes Ash‘arī and Māturīdī notables as well classical Ḥanbalis and Wahhābīs) can be in the form of a doctrine (*i‘tiqād*), statement (*qawl*) or an action (*fi‘l*).⁵⁹ However modern polemical works overlook some of the rulings on apostasy as many are edicts based on personal opinion (*ijtihād*) so therefore not definitive. Furthermore the types of disbelief have not been compiled and amalgamated in a cohesive manner.

Wahbī Sulaymān Ghawjī a contemporary Sufi traditionalist theologian from Syria attempts to systematise the most comprehensive types of disbelief. He himself is cognisant of what he describes as the expeditiousness of scholars in excommunicating people.⁶⁰ Nevertheless Ghawjī lists those who are according to the ‘known by necessity in the religion’ axiom not from the pale of Islam;

1. Jews, Christians, polytheists and apostates.
 - a. An apostate is an individual who was born Muslim, but exhibited his disbelief unequivocally, under no duress. His recantation was never verified until he died. It is to be said regarding such a person: “he lived as a disbeliever and died a disbeliever”
2. Those who deny any aspect of the religion that has been established by decisive proof [*dalīl qaṭ‘ī*]; for example any of the five pillars, bodily resurrection, reward and punishment in the hereafter.

⁵⁹ Alawī ibn ‘Abd al-Qādī al-Saqqāf, *Al-Tawaṣṣuṭ wa al-Iqtisād fi ann al-kufr yakūn bi al-qawl wa al-fi‘l wa al-i‘tiqād*. (Damam: Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 1999), p. 9.

⁶⁰ Alī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 527.

3. Whoever claims Islam [beliefs and laws] has no relevance in our times. In the sense that that time and place has changed.
4. Anyone who mocks or denies a facet of Islam that has been established by decisive proof:
 - a. The authenticity of the Qur'ān
 - b. The denial of the entirety of the Sunna, and the mass-transmitted [*mutawātir*] from amongst them.
 - c. Denying the absolute *ijmā'* of the *'ulamā'* particularly, the obligation of the five prayers, the Zakāt, the Fast and the Hajj, this occurs out of knowledge and deliberation and all things which depend on decisive proof.
5. Someone who denies an established attribute of God, or ascribes some deficiency to Him, or that God gained an attribute after not having it before e.g. knowledge after ignorance.
6. Whoever claims prophecy (*nubuwwa*) or messengership (*risāla*) after our Messenger Muhammad. This applies to those claimants at the Prophetic period or even recently like Ghulam Aḥmad of Qadian, who founded the Aḥmadiya sect. Whoever believes in such claimants out of knowledge and deliberation is a disbeliever.
7. Anyone who claims God resembles his creatures, and that he has a spatial body including pantheism.
8. Someone who denies the messengership of our Master Muhammad to all of mankind from his era till the righteous inherit the earth, likewise one who claims he was only sent to the Arabs.
9. Whoever claims God will accept another religion with Islam [perennialism], even if that religion was valid [i.e. from the previous dispensations], because the advent of our Messenger abrogates all previous religions and laws. Our

Messenger called the polytheists, Magians, Jews and Christians to believe in his message.⁶¹

Potentially Sufi and Salafi traditionalists accept this schema as 'major heterodoxies'. In addition this is an indication that Sufi traditionalists and their tone of excommunication share much of an affinity with their Wahhābī counterparts. Point three is a blatant excommunication of secular or cultural Muslims. It is perhaps for this reason Roy puts the Sufis, Salafis and Islamists together as fundamentalists.⁶² Points two, five and seven show how classical theological issues were not just friendly dialectics but fierce polemics. Point nine is one that has caused much controversy as Lings, Hossein Nasr, Gai Eaton *et al* subscribe to the perennialist doctrine of Rene Guenon who collectively represented contemporary 'traditionalism'. It is curious how this 'major heterodoxy' is conveniently ignored by the Sufi traditionalists such as Yusuf in his obituary for Lings.⁶³ Yusuf argues that there is dubious scope of evidence (*shuba al-dalīl*) for Lings *et al* 'heterodoxies', in essence he is arguing that such heterodoxy may actually be minor.⁶⁴ Moreover the rationale for Yusuf's students such as Abdullah Ali to distinguish their methodology as 'neo-traditionalism' as opposed to 'traditionalism' which was hitherto at least in academic circles associated with Nasr *et al*, is to allay accusations of perennialism.⁶⁵

⁶¹ cAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 527 – 529.

⁶² Olivier, p. 259

⁶³ Hamza Yusuf, 'A Spiritual Giant in an Age of Dwarfed Terrestrial Aspirations', *Q-News*, June 2005, pp. 53-58.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Shaykh Abdullah Ali, 'Neo-Traditionalism' vs 'Traditionalism'- Lamp post Educational Initiative. <<http://www.lamppostproductions.com/neo-traditionalism-vs-traditionalism-shaykh-abdullah-bin-hamid-ali/>> [accessed 18/3/15]. See Appendix II.

4.7.1 Figurative interpretation of decisive evidence (*al-ta'wīl fi al-qaṭ'iyāt*) and Dubious scope of evidence (*shubha al-dalīl*)

In Sunni theology figurative interpretation of definitive evidence is tantamount to disbelief. Al-^cAsqalānī maintains it is not acceptable to figuratively interpret something which is explicit (*al-ta'wīl fi al-ṣarīḥ lā yuqbal*). He adds that it is known that heresy results from *shuba*, [but if this heresy is tantamount to *kufr*] that interpretation does not deter disbelief (*al-ta'wīl lam yadfa^c al-kufr*).⁶⁶ Furthermore al-^cAsqalānī and other *ḥadīth* masters deal with two categories of heretics, major and minor. Minor heterodoxy (*bid^ca mufassiqa*) involves figuratively interpreting ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth literature and where evidence has speculative scope (*ẓanniya*). In addition it includes innovative practices which are new and conflict with the Sunna, and introduction of doctrinal issues which conflict with the spirit of the statutes. One who subscribes to such positions is still considered a Muslim though a profligate (*fāsiq*) or innovator (*mubtadi^c*). Major heterodoxy (*bid^ca mukaffira*) on the other hand entails figurative interpretation of the perspicuously clear (*muhkamāt*) verses of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth literature and evidence which is decisive (*qaṭ'ī*) in holding one meaning. This also includes denial of aspects of the religion, introduction of doctrines which clearly conflict with the wording of the statutes. One who subscribes to such views is considered to be out of the pale of Islam. Sometimes such a person is referred to as a heretic (*zindīq*). Generally the ruling of apostasy applies to such a person.⁶⁷

If an opinion or practice seems to contravene the practice of the early generations but not the express wording of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth literature, the theologians have called this 'dubious scope of evidence' (*shubha al-dalīl*) and consequently the advocate

⁶⁶ Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār*, pp. 37 – 42.

⁶⁷ ^cAlī al-Qārī, *Nuzha al-Naẓar Sharḥ Nukhba al-Fikr*, p. 521 – 522.

of such views is absolved from absolute unbelief.⁶⁸ However if the statement or practice opposes the express wording and especially definitive evidence which holds *only one interpretation*, one is not absolved of disbelief. Therefore it may be deduced that *shubha al-dalīl* is only for the first type of heterodoxy. One may also infer that *shubha al-dalīl* is a general jurisprudential maxim based on the Prophetic tradition: 'avoid the penalties (*hudūd*) with the slightest doubt' (*idra'ū al-hudūd bi al-shubuhāt*).⁶⁹ Ibn ʿĀbidīn (d. 1252/1836) argues that an innovation or heresy which opposes a decisive proof is not considered a *shubha* in absolving one from being excommunicated. He defines *kufr* as rejection (*takdhīb*) as not accepting (*ʿadm al-qubūl*) not necessarily attribution of lies (*lā nisba al-kidhb*).⁷⁰ One observes that it is not necessary for one to say God or His Prophet lies. Moreover doubting disbelief is disbelief (*man shakka fī al-kufr fa huwa kāfir*) in Sunni *kalām*.⁷¹

If one were to contravene an indisputable principle regarding which there is only one true position or if one is hesitant regarding things which necessitate disbelief – such a person would according to theologians also be unequivocally considered a disbeliever. This has also been alluded to by Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355). If one reaffirms his creed (*shahāda*), and stipulates that such a person must explicitly vindicate himself from the disbelief he or she previously enunciated.⁷²

⁶⁸ Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. *Bulūgh al-Marām min Adilla al-Aḥkām*. (Riyadh: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2008), p. 422.

⁷⁰ Ibn ʿĀbidīn, VI, p. 356 – 357.

⁷¹ Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāshid*. 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2001), III, p. 362.

⁷² Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Al-Sayf al-Maslūl ʿalā man sabb al-Rasūl*. (Amman: Dār al-Fath, 2000), p. 161.

It is clear that Sunni Islam retains an intricate tradition of excommunication rather than this misconception of it having a nonchalant attitude on the matter. Though Sunni Islam will argue its non-excommunicative outlook as what differentiates it from non-Sunni Islam, it is excommunication, major or minor which guarantees and facilitates its schemas of 'orthodoxy'.

4.7.2 Apostasy (*ridda*)

According to the jurists, apostasy is conversion from Islam to another religion or denunciation of faith.⁷³ Details of apostasy are found in the books of Islamic jurisprudence. The general ruling on the apostate is the death sentence though a grace period is granted in which he is allowed to reassess his position. The four schools of Sunni jurisprudence are unanimous that the apostate is to be killed.⁷⁴ Scholastic traditionalism of both Sufi and Salafi persuasion has not wavered on this.

The contemporary controversies surrounding the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie in 1989 and the cartoons of Muhammad are ongoing examples of how blasphemy laws are still derived from medieval theology and largely held by mainstream Muslims. Wahhābism has long been the object of criticism of this type of *takfīri* outlook, yet we are now witnessing an emerging phenomenon of Sufi *takfīrism*. Salman Taseer a Pakistani politician who wanted to repeal the blasphemy law was assassinated by Mumtaz Qadri, a member of the *Dawat-i-Islami*, a Barelwi organisation.⁷⁵ Taseer's murder was not condemned by mainstream religious quarters including the Sufi Barelwis.

⁷³ Al-Zuḥaylī, Wahba. *Al-Wajīz fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*. 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005), II, pp. 418.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, II, pp. 18 – 20.

⁷⁵ Bowen, p. 133.

Abū Bakr's famous 'apostasy wars' (*ḥurūb al-ridda*) brought about the discussion of apostasy amongst the companions. Some claimants of prophethood were fought against as those who left Islam however another group Abū Bakr decided to fight were Muslims who refused to pay the Zakāt.⁷⁶ Umar is reported to have objected to Abū Bakr's decision to fight the latter group. Zuhaylī sheds some light on this and argues that effectively Abū Bakr's decision is an *ijtihād* from him.⁷⁷ This *ijtihād* of Abū Bakr is where the Khārijites derived their notion of orthopraxic Islam. The Ash'arite and Salafi definitions of faith as aforementioned emanate from this too.

Apostasy is a process of excommunication and the fact that it is systematic indicates classical Islam was comfortable with this and scholastic traditionalism is complacent with it as it deems itself a historical continuation of early Islam. Minimalism does not engage with the excommunication or apostasy issues at all and leaves that to classical theology. This poses a two-pronged problem for minimalism; if it accepts the theological excommunication schema it defeats its own purpose of unification and moderation. On the other hand if it outright rejects the excommunicative processes it cuts itself off from old 'orthodoxy'. It seems like minimalism simply evades this issue and this may make hard-line traditionalists of either Sufi or Salafi persuasion, to not take this project seriously.

Many early Muslim theologians and jurists frequently excommunicated others. The following is an amalgamation from Kashmīrī's *Iḳfār* of such views;

⁷⁶ Philip K Hitti, *History of the Arabs*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1970), pp. 140 – 142.

⁷⁷ Al-Zuhaylī, *Al-Wajīz fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, III, See ḥudūd section.

Al-Ṭahāwī narrates from Abū Ḥanīfa: 'Execute the heretic for his *repentance is not known*.'.....Abū Mus^cab narrates Mālik regarding a Muslim taking up magic "he is to be executed and no repentance is necessary, because if a Muslim has become an apostate internally, his repentance cannot be established by his outward profession of Islam".....Ibn al-Humām narrates that Abū Ḥanīfa said to Jahm: "Get away from me you disbeliever!" (*ukhruj ʿanni yā kāfir*).....Al-Jaṣṣāṣ maintains: "the Ismāʿīlī's repentance is not admissible likewise all major heretics from whom doctrines of disbelief are known, they are to be executed even if they repent.".....Sufyān al-Thawrī said: "whoever asserts the Qurʾān is created is a disbeliever" ...⁷⁸

The above and al-Ghawjī's findings can be categorised into those things which constitute absolute belief because of denial (*jaḥd*) and those things which are tantamount to disbelief because of incorrectly interpreting decisive evidence (*al-taʿwīl fi al-qaṭʿiyāt*). Disbelief or apostasy from Islam is understood by Sunnis as occurring either through rejection of doctrine which entails denunciation of faith, conversion to another faith or uttering 'blasphemy' or corruption of faith as a result of interpreting decisive statutes through claiming or believing in continual prophetic revelation, the eschatological validity of all faiths, the denial of Muhammad's prophetic universality and other theological controversies regarding God's immanence and transcendence.

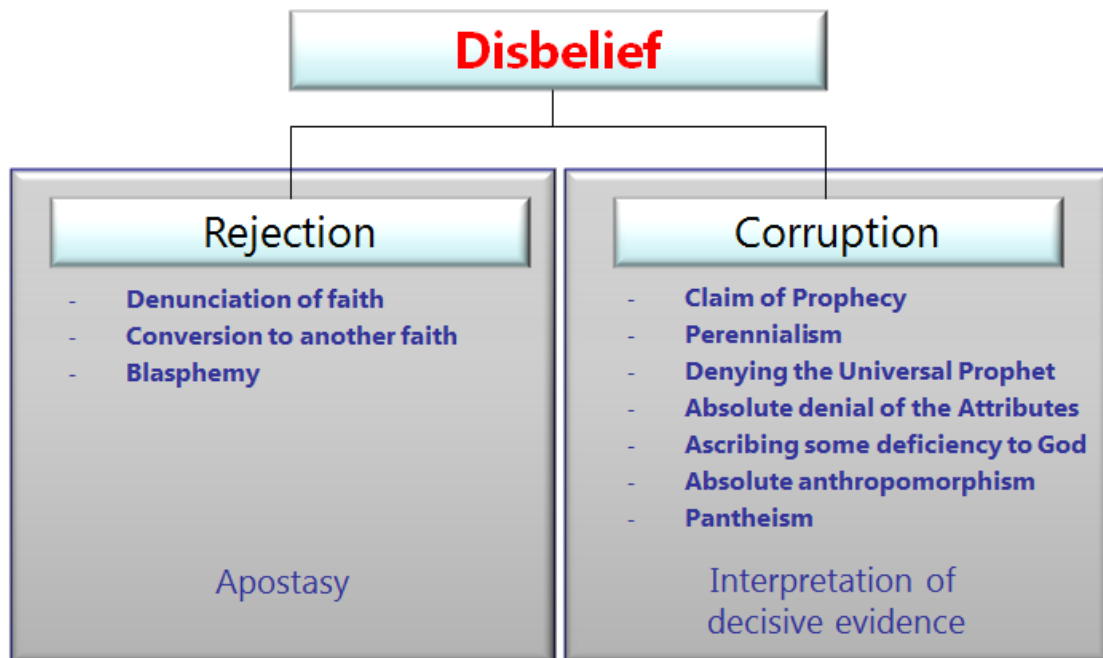
It is of note to mention that the very word '*ridda*' itself, suggests a return to something.⁷⁹ Apostasy in the Qurʾān meant the early convert community returning

⁷⁸ Al-Kashmīrī, *Iḳfār*, pp. 37 – 42.

⁷⁹ Wehr, pp. 333 – 334. [entry: رَدَّ]

back to the ways of the polytheistic Arabs and not necessarily conversion to another faith or abandonment of Islam as the classical theologians are suggesting.

Figure 4:2 Types of Kufr



4.7.3 Takfir

Excommunication (*takfir*) is one of the major issues in intra-Sunni polemics and the process of declaring someone an apostate. Each faction has hurled some charge of disbelief against each other. Though Sunni Islam argues that excommunication is a Khārijite 'innovation' it is a firmly established system within Sunnism. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī an authority for Sufi scholastic traditionalism asserts:

'that excommunication is a legal injunction (*ḥukm sharʿī*) the cause of which is denial of divinity or the oneness of God, denial of messengership, it could occur by enunciating a statement or doing

an action which the Lawgiver regards as disbelief even if it is not express denial (*wa in lam yakun jahdan*).⁸⁰

Notwithstanding the theological and jurisprudential acceptance of excommunication it is still a controversial issue in Sunni Islam. There is a tradition which warns of excommunication;

Whoever accuses a man of disbelief and is incorrect, the charge of disbelief falls back upon the one making the accusation! (irtaddat ʿalayhi) ⁸¹

The popular understanding of this as al-ʿAlawī and others put it, is that if one is wrong in excommunicating another, one him/herself becomes a disbeliever.⁸² As a result, most Muslim orators and preachers have called this 'gambling with faith' (*al-mujāzafa bi al-īmān*) and laypeople too exhibit this particular understanding. Even the tolerant al-Ghazālī agrees with al-Subkī that excommunication is a legal injunction, however it can, at instances be the result of *ijtihād* and therefore not binding.⁸³

Al-ʿAsqalānī on the contrary argues this is not the case. According to him it is even permissible to say this to your brother 'you disbeliever' (*yā kāfir*) out of advice and clarification (*naṣīḥa*), however if it is meant to shame and defame him then it would be

⁸⁰ Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Fatawā al-Subkī*. 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa [no date]), II, p. 586.

⁸¹ Al-Bukhārī, 78:44, 6045, p. 511.

⁸² Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm*, pp. 69.

⁸³ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid. *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa* in *Majmūʿa rasāʾil al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, [no date]), p. 267 – 268.

impermissible. Al-Nawawī says: they have differed in interpreting 'irtaddat ^ʿalayhi' (falls back on him);

- It is said that if one thinks it is permissible to call another a disbeliever (*kāfir*) then it returns to him; this is far from the context of the tradition.
- Others said the Khārijites are meant by it because they call the Muslims disbelievers [*ipso facto* it falls back on them], this is narrated by Qāḍī ^ʿAyāḍ from Mālik [and it is weak]...[the majority of Salaf consider the Khārijite as Muslims] Mālik's statement does have some weight [if it is understood as], many of the Khārijites excommunicated many Companions, some of whom the Prophet guaranteed paradise [for that would be tantamount to denying the Prophet's testimony]
- In effect the context of the tradition is reprimanding (*zajr*) a Muslim from saying such to his Muslim brother.
- It is said that his fault-finding for his brother falls back on him and the sin of *takfir* [he does not become a disbeliever] this is the preponderant view according to al-Nawawī.⁸⁴

It seems from the above that excommunication at some point is required even by laymen. Al-Khifājī (d. 1069/1659) illustrates this point;

'one is a disbeliever if he contravenes the scriptures and the definitive consensus, we excommunicate those who do not excommunicate one who adheres to a religion other than Islam, or hesitates in excommunicating them, or doubts their disbelief, or

⁸⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-^ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥh al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. 15 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 1997), x, pp. 569 - 572.

justifies their positions even if they themselves profess Islam and believe in it'⁸⁵

4.7.4 The Ahl al-Qibla

An early indicator of Sunni minimalism would be the theological maxim 'we do not excommunicate anyone of our *qibla*'. This maxim one would argue is a remnant of the Khārijite – Murji'ite orthopraxy versus orthodoxy tension. Al-Ṭaḥāwī includes this in his credo.⁸⁶ He furthermore said that 'a person does not step out of belief except by disavowing what brought him into it'.⁸⁷ Ibn Bāz contends that this restriction is subject to scrutiny, one could leave the religion of Islam for many reasons other than disavowal (*juhūd*) as has been clarified by the people of knowledge in the chapters of apostasy in jurisprudential manuals.⁸⁸ The theologians have defined *Ahl al-Qibla* as those who believe in the 'necessities of religion'. It is not necessarily a reference to those who pray towards the direction of Mecca. Al-Taftāzānī also sums this view in his words 'a person from *Ahl al-Qibla* is not a disbeliever as long as he does not contravene the essentials of the religion' (things known by necessity).⁸⁹ The Māturīdīs excommunicate anyone who denies anything which is explicative [*qaṭ'ī*] even if it is not known by necessity.⁹⁰ Kashmiri like Ibn Bāz argues that this maxim must not be absolute as he contends that if the words of disbelief (*kalimāt al-kufr*) do not render the one who articulates such expressions a disbeliever, then one should say the words themselves

⁸⁵ ḤAlī al-Qārī, Sulṭān Muḥammad. *Sharḥ Shifā li Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2001), ii, p. 561.

⁸⁶ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 13. [point 57]

⁸⁷ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p 5, p 13 [point 61]

⁸⁸ Ibn Bāz, *Taḥlīq Ḥalā al-Ḥaqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiya*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, III, p. 461.

⁹⁰ Al-Kashmīrī, *Ikfār*, p. 86.

are not disbelief which is then Sophism! (*sufuṣṭā'īya*).⁹¹ The spirit of minimalism is entrenched in this legal maxim of '*Ahl al-Qibla*'.

Theologians and jurists have laid some conditions for a judge regarding major heresy. If a confession is apparently made of a heresy, the judge would unequivocally decide the appropriate punishment. Alternatively, if the accused fails to absolve himself of the accusations then the judge must successfully prosecute. It must be established that the accused was not under duress whilst uttering 'words of blasphemy'. Moreover if the accused denies the accusations and the prosecution fail to indict then the accused is to be acquitted and exonerated. The Ibn Taymiyya versus Ibn Jamā'a *et al* case is indicative of this.⁹²

Excuses at times are proffered for why an individual may be absolved of heterodoxies. Recent conversion whereby one may not be fully cognisant of dogma is an example of this kind of exoneration. Inaccessibility to 'sound' scholarship can also be a factor and finally insanity - heterodoxies can be uttered in bouts of madness.⁹³ In addition the Sunnis introduced what Makdisi dubs the 'deathbed conversion' thesis, that is if a person was known to have held heretic views then perhaps they died as penitent believers.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid pp. 3 – 4.

⁹² See H. Laoust, *Ibn Taymiyya*, *El* ²

⁹³ *Al-ʿAlī*, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Makdisi, pp. 31 (deathbed repentance). The Sufis use this to argue that Ibn Taymiyya recanted all his harsh edicts against the Ashʿarīs. Likewise the Salafis claim al-Ghazālī died with the copy of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* on his chest. Symbolically abandoning the way of the theologians.

The nature of intra-Sunni polemics has indicated that excommunication has often been made against one another and largely not agreed upon. The Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ʿArabī debates of anthropomorphism and pantheism chronicles this type of excommunication. Later the excommunication of the Barelwi and Deobandi scholarship amongst Sufi traditionalists is also indicative of this type of excommunication which is differed upon. Al-Ḥawālī a controversial Salafi scholar lists erroneous views on excommunication found in Sunni lore:

1. 'We cannot excommunicate anyone'
2. 'We only excommunicate those who excommunicate us'!
3. 'We excommunicate those who commit major sins'!
4. Excommunication on issues which only amount to deviancy
5. Excommunication on issues which do not even amount to deviancy!⁹⁵

It can be deduced from this that number one precludes the possibility of excommunication altogether and is probably informed by latent Māturīdite Murji'ism. Al-Ṭaḥāwī ostensibly holds this view in his credo point 61;

'A person does not step out of belief except by disavowing what brought him into it.(*illā bi juḥūd mā adkhalahu fihī*)'⁹⁶

Though point 61 encapsulates the spirit of ethical minimalism, Ibn Bāz criticised al-Ṭaḥāwī's wording as it precludes the fact that there are words and deeds which can

⁹⁵ Safar Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Al-Ḥawālī, *Manhaj al-Ashāʿira fī al-ʿAqīda: Hal al-Ashāʿira min Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*. (Sana: Markaz al-Siddīq al-ʿIlmī. 2000), p. 33.

⁹⁶ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 13. [point 61]

render one a disbeliever without necessarily rejecting 'what brought him into it' as is easily accessible in the chapters on apostasy in legal manuals.⁹⁷ Sufi traditionalists in spirit too, at least agree with Ibn Bāz as they also are uncomfortable with the far reaching ramifications of point 61.

If this, as al-Ḥawālī is arguing 'erroneous', then it would unfortunately compromise ethical minimalism. Number two is attributed to some Ash'arites.⁹⁸ Sunnis do consider the Khārijites as Muslim even though this may not have been reciprocated. This is perhaps reactionary and to some extent it is reflected in intra-Sunni polemics as we shall see.

Number three apparently seems Khārijite but it is one that is informed by orthopraxy. By major sins here it may mean the abandoning of religious devotional acts such as the five pillars. There is a split on this issue as many consider one who stops praying as out of the fold of Islam.⁹⁹ Though the Khārijites have been perennially portrayed by the Sunnis as judgmental and the statutes they adduce for this position that they hold are the same as those held by the Sunnis. By way of example an adulterer/fornicator is described in the *ḥadīth*;

One does not believe whilst fornicating. (*lā yaznī al-'abdu wa huwa mu'min*)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibn Bāz, *Ta'liq 'alā al-'Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, p. 19 – 20.

⁹⁸ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. 4 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1998), IV, p. 370.

⁹⁹ Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Ḥukm tārik al-ṣalāt*. (Riyadh: Dār al-Jalālayn, 1992), p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Nasā'ī, 45:48, 4873, p. 2403.

Abandonment of prayer is also mentioned in this light;

The prayer is the covenant between us and them, whoever leaves it becomes a disbeliever. (*al-ʿahd alladhi bayna wa baynahum al-ṣalāt faman tarakaha kafar*)¹⁰¹

The emphasis on action being integral to faith is resoundingly clear. Khārijites and even the 'rationalist' Muʿtazilites both from this viewpoint opined that committing sin would hence be an 'act of disbelief'. The aforementioned orthopraxy of the Ashʿarite and Ḥanbalīs too are taken from these traditions. How they distinguish their stance from that of the Khārijites is probably as a result of deliberately following the excommunication route.

Many politicised Islamic groups of the twentieth century have taken this position. For instance the Egyptian *Jamāʿa al-Hijra wa al-Takfīr* and even the *Ḥizb al-Tahrīr*.¹⁰² This is most dangerous as it has proved controversial and is used by extremists to justify acts of terror.

Number four pertains to the aforementioned controversies of literal and allegorical interpretation of the Divine attributes. Sufi scholastic traditionalists inflate literalism as conceptual idolatry and the Salafi scholastic traditionalists argue that allegorical

¹⁰¹ Al-Tirmidhī, 38:9, 2621, p. 1916.

¹⁰² Al-Liwāʾ, pp. 295 – 297.

interpretation is quasi-atheism. This point is inherent in both classical theology and also modern polemics.

Number five pertains to Ashʿarite occasionalism and atomism. Māturīdī and Salafi scholastic traditionalism are more relaxed on these issues as they are deemed dialectical. Both Sulaymān Ghawjī a Sufi traditionalist and al-Hawālī agree that these are erroneous views. Poignantly this is a reminder that far from being an ‘innovation’ of the Khārijites, in essence excommunication is integral to Sunni theology.

It can be concluded that far from being ‘non-excommunicative’ as Ibn Ṭāhir claims, Sunni theology has an elaborate excommunicative system which has been articulated in theory as in the theological works through dialectics/polemics, and in practice as in the jurisprudential works through case studies on apostasy.

4.7.5 Lesser excommunication – veering off the *minhāj*

Excommunication, offensive and judgmental as it may seem does have its polemical uses. Major excommunication can serve as a macro inter-sectarian unity tool, although at the expense of one group being castigated and excluded. This was once achieved via the excommunication of the Ahmadiyya sect in the early twentieth century with the ‘*Anjuman Khatm-i-Nubuwwat*’ movement. It could be argued that this ‘unity’ was galvanised by the anti-colonial sentiments and mistrust towards the Ahmadiya movement and their ‘strong’ affiliation with the British Raj. For the Subcontinent Muslims, it was the first time it united the Shiite and Sunni Muslims on the one hand and the rivalling Sunni groups such as Barelwi, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* on the other. Undoubtedly this measure failed to unite both the macro inter-sectarian and on the intra-Sunni levels. In fact the Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* unequivocally

excommunicate the Shiite.¹⁰³ The Barelwis likewise excommunicate the Deobandi on the charge of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰⁴ In turn the Deobandi and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth too excommunicate the Barelwis though not outright.

If *takfīr* is a tool to delineate the boundaries of Islam as a religion, then for macro-minimalism, i.e. to outline boundaries of 'orthodoxy' or Sunni Islam, a lesser form of excommunication is needed which transpires in the form of measures such as *tabdīʿ* 'declaring one an innovator/minor heretic' or *tafsīq* 'declaring one a profligate'. This lesser form of excommunication is the ambit of intra-Sunni polemics and its antidote is minimalism. This form of minor excommunication is prevalent not only on the Sufi v. Salafi plane, but also on the intra-Salafi and intra-Sufi levels.

4.7.6 POLEMICISM – Minhāj Wars

Ideas and interpretations emerge - theologians flirt with these notions. Orthodoxy personified by mainstream scholarship intervenes and battles out the fine points of either accepting or rejecting these ideas for the benefit of masses. Scholarship fails to come to concrete conclusions and polemics ensue. Polemics manifest in parochial methodologies. The ultimate end is excommunication – either major or minor.

Polemics supplanting dialectic theology characterises the contemporary scholastic traditional scenario. Classical theology is still taught in both Sufi and Salafi seminaries albeit with an acute emphasis on the issues highlighted in this study. The points of contention in contemporary polemics comprise of Divinity as it did in the past, and

¹⁰³ Fārūqī, p. 70. Fārūqī manages to procure Debandi, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and even Barelwi signatories from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

¹⁰⁴ Rizā Khan, Aḥmad. *Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn*. (Lahore: Mu'assa Riḍā, 2006), pp. 49 – 50.

now, Prophetology. Discussions of cosmology embarrassingly resulted in geo-centric polemics against 'modernism' as is evident from Ibn Bāz's *al-Adilla al-Hissiya*, Riza Khan's *Fawz-i-Mubīn* and Musā Ruḥānībāzī's *Hayyi'a al-Wuṣṭā*. This eventually disappeared as the scholastic traditional masses slowly came to adopt modern scientism and the 'ulamā' eventually obliged and began to give credence to the reconciliatory initiatives of Maurice Bucaille in the 1970s and Odnan Oktar in the 1990s by occasionally deferring to their findings.

Arguments on Divinity in classical theology would not have polarised Sunni masses as the debates were confined to scholastic circles. However, in the contemporary scenario these debates have been brought into the public or laymen realm. The significance of the office of 'ulamā' since modernisation of the Muslim lands has been diminishing and these polemics serve expediently as a way of consolidating their authority as custodians of the text and interlocutors of orthodoxy. This end is not achieved through a mutual respect of each other as scholars and 'heirs of the prophet' but rather by portraying each other as sedition-mongers and the responsibility of the scholars to protect the masses.

4.7.7 Salafism v. Sufism

We have seen in chapter one the core issues of contention between Sufi and Salafi traditionalism. Contemporary intra-Sunni polemics is marked by this broad division. Salafi traditional polemicism is characterised by its anti-conformity to schools of law. Though theoretically they are not anti-*taqlīd* they are against absolute *taqlīd* to any human being other than Muhammad. One could argue that it is their theology influencing their jurisprudence. This anti-conformity issue can be traced back to the traditionalist Ahl al-Ḥadīth scholars who were largely non-conformists and also the contemporary subcontinent *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement which finds its roots in the

thought of Shah Waliullah. It is noteworthy that in essence the Salafi movement is not outright anti-*taqlid* as they recognise that the layman could follow a scholar or scholars though one is not bound by the confines of schools.¹⁰⁵ In this respect the Salafi movement is divided into two; the absolute anti-*taqlid* of al-Albānī and the conformist Ḥanbalism of Ibn Bāz, Ibn ʿUthaymīn and the Saudi scholars. Gleave pointedly observes that;

‘Contemporary Salafi scholars, being distrustful of the utility of the *madhhab* system, have made theological polemic and *ḥadīth* study, rather than *uṣūl*, the central component of their literary output’¹⁰⁶

Uṣūl hermeneutics was cultivated within theological discourse and it is due to this lack of sophistication on their part that they resort to the bankruptcy of polemics.

Salafi polemicism is further marked by its anti-innovation outlook. This is historically linked to the Wahhābī movement rather than Abduh’s *al-Daʿwa al-Salafiya*. Prior to Gulf War I Salafi traditionalism was a cohesive united front and all actively supporting the Afghan Jihad. After Desert Storm Ibn Bāz’s *fatwa* of allowing US troops entering Saudi caused controversy outside and within their ranks. Salafism previously embedded in the global jihad phenomenon now was overnight de-politicised. Al-Ḥawālī and al-ʿAwda became critical of the monarchy in Saudi and its scholarship.

¹⁰⁵ Ḥāfiẓ Thanāʾ Allah al-Zāhidī, *Talkhīṣ al-Uṣūl*. (Kuwait City: Manshūrāt Markaz al-Makhtūṭāt wa al-Turāth wa al-Wathāʾiq, 1994), p. 51.

¹⁰⁶ Gleave, p. 176.

Ibn Bāz, a symbolic figure in Salafism, supported the Saudi stance on al-Ḥawālī and al-ʿAwdā's incarceration. This in turn caused some to criticise Ibn Bāz whilst others began to excommunicate anyone who condemned these 'imams'. Most notably Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī and to a lesser extent Muqbil ibn al-Wādīʿī, focused most of their literature on Salafi infighting which has spawned other authors like Ibn al-ʿAlī *et al* to counter this trend. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Khāliq a Moroccan Salafi scholar became a target of al-Madkhalī and others followed.

As for Sufi traditionalism and polemics on one plane it is clearly polarised against Wahhābism. The age long tension is explained by Wahhābī antagonism towards Sufi traditions which are deemed by the Wahhābīs as 'innovations'.

We explored in the previous chapter the controversy surrounding innovation and the Wahhābī fixation on battling such innovations. This has periodically transpired through violence and the destruction of tombs and other such religious artefacts. Wahhābism has been viewed by their detractors, as vehemently judgemental. Ibn ʿĀbidīn a celebrated Ḥanafī jurist comments on the Wahhābī schism;

'...as it has occurred in our times with the followers of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb who came from the Najd and seized the Two Holy Sanctuaries (Mecca and Medina). They subscribed to the Ḥanbalī school, yet believed that they are true Muslims and whoever opposed them were polytheists. They deemed it permissible to kill

Sunnis and their scholars until God destroyed them and their land through the victorious Muslim army in the year 1233 AH¹⁰⁷

This is poignantly exemplified for the Sufis in the contemporary scenario of Salafi Jihadists such as al-Shabāb in Somalia, who filmed the destruction and exhumation of graves of pious men.¹⁰⁸ A move imitated in Libya and Tunisia during the Arab Spring.¹⁰⁹ Sufi mausoleums in Pakistan have also been the target of the *Tahrīk-i-Taliban Pakistan*.¹¹⁰

Sufi scholastic polemicism later focused against the non-conformism or anti-*taqlīd* of Salafism to schools of jurisprudence (*lā madhhabīya*) in particular the four Sunni schools. Western Sufis such as Winter, Keller and Yūsuf spearheaded this polemic in the late 1990s and even encouraged young Muslims from the West to study at traditional seminaries in the Muslim world.¹¹¹ The four schools thesis became integral to Sunni identity. Deobandis generally reconciled the Wahhābīs as Ḥanbalīs, rarely other Sufis would do this.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn ʿĀbidīn, VI, p. 413.

¹⁰⁸ USA Today, *10 things to know about Somali militants al-Shabab*, Associated Press. [sep 2013] <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/09/22/10-things-al-shabab/2849841/>> [accessed 30/12/13]

¹⁰⁹ Kiran Alvi. *Islamists Make Sufi Shrines A Target In North Africa*, NPR News. [Feb 2013] <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/02/10/171508858/islamists-make-sufi-shrines-a-target-in-north-africa>> [accessed 30/12/13]

¹¹⁰ Animesh Roul. *Pakistani Taliban Continue Their Campaign against Sufi Shrines*. Jamestown Foundation. Refworld UNHCR [April 2011] <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4db6bf722.html>> [accessed 30/12/13]

¹¹¹ Bowen, p. 121 – 125.

Sufi political quietism is marked by its apolitical outlook in general and its attack on political Islam. In the Arab lands the Sufis and Wahhābīs dissociated themselves from the Muslim Brotherhood as did Barelwi and Deobandis with the *Jamāt-i-Islāmī* in the Indian Subcontinent. Notwithstanding this both these political organisations still fit within the scholastic traditional cosmos and have some Sufi/Salafi representation. It is as if they are vehicles for traditionalism as they both maintain some centrality to ‘*ulamā*’ and the principles of Sunnism.

Moreover there is an acute defence of ‘good’ innovation on issues such as the *mawlid* as a response to Salafism. Global Sufism has created a broad network of Sufis consolidating their efforts in curbing Salafism. Al-‘Alawī is one key example of this type of networking. Convert scholarship in the West has also strengthened links with Diaspora communities. Though Sufi polemicism is largely against the Salafis and to an extent political Islam, the infighting amongst Sufis is more fierce than the broader Sufi – Salafi divide and has been largely overlooked by Western Muslim Sufis who are part of this Global Sufi movement. Keller is one of the first to deal with the tense Barelwi – Deobandi contentions as we shall see in chapter five. Interestingly Riza Khan and Sahāranpūrī both sought justification and vindication respectively from global networking with Arab scholars in the Middle East.¹¹²

These polemics have been informed by the broad ascetic – jurist dichotomy of early and medieval Islam and now culminate in the broad Sufi – Salafi trends. In addition these polemics are fuelled by the collapse of *kalām* theology as previously these issues

¹¹² Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī, *Al-Muhannad ‘Alā al-Mufannad: ‘Aqā’id Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* in *‘Aqā’id ‘Ulamā’-i-Deoband aur Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn*. (Karachi: Dārul Ishā’ah [no date]), pp. 288 – 326.

were considered dialectical however now they have become key doctrines of contemporary notions of 'orthodoxy'.

4.7.8 Social exclusion of non-Sunnis

The so called 'non-excommunicative' outlook of Sunnism is put to the test when weighed up against the historical attitude of Sunni theologians towards non-Sunnis. Excommunication in a broad sense can manifest in the form of social exclusion, and in this sense can range from outright excommunication, discrimination, cooperation to a 'liberal' acceptance of the other. Outside of theology we find Ḥadīth science being instrumental in outlining these exclusionist measures. The following issues can be deduced from the impugment (*jarḥ*) methods which translate into exclusion:

1. Polemical opposition (*radd*)
2. Transmission of knowledge (*riwāya*)
3. Boycott (*hajr*)

The statutes suggest Sunni Muslims are required to conduct themselves with non-Sunnis in terms of mutual coexistence. This includes within the religious framework the broader concept of fraternity. Let alone violence against fellow Muslims, backbiting (*ghība*) is a sin in Islam. The chain (*isnād*) system in Ḥadīth studies required *jarḥ* literally wounding of reporters which effectively was backbiting. Luknawī (d. 1304/1887) calls it such and justifies backbiting in this regards as it is for a 'noble' cause – the preservation of Prophetic knowledge.¹¹³ Conceptually the Ḥadīth itself became a polemic against non-Sunnism (*bid'ā*), hence disparaging statements became part of the polemical scene very early on. Ḥadīth masters deemed it obligatory to warn of

¹¹³ Al-Luknawī, pp. 52 – 67.

'heretic' narrators and highlight those weak in memory and moral uprightness. In this way Ḥadīth methodology is markedly judgmental and it eventually permeated Sunni *kalām*.

Theologians merely highlighted 'heresy' and commented on its eschatological validity, whereas the Ḥadīth masters carefully examined the epistemological value of true knowledge from 'heretics'. Ibn Sirīn (d. 110/728) and Mālik absolutely refused to accept Prophetic traditions narrated by 'heretics'.¹¹⁴ Others such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Muslim (d. 261/875) differentiated the 'levels' of heresy and adjudicated accordingly. Hākim (d. 403/1012), and Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/847) in the like manner rejected narrations from 'advocates of heresy' (*dāʿin yadʿū ilā bidʿatihi*). Furthermore there were those including Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfiʿī and al-Qaṭṭān who did not necessarily regard 'heresy', or minor heresy to be precise as a point of impugment.

Later Ḥadīth scholars seem to only mention the positions of 'absolute rejection' and 'advocacy of heresy' and deliberately ignoring the view that heresy is not an impugment. Perhaps after the rigid formulations of Sunni orthodoxy it was expedient for Sunni identity. Al-Judayʿ poignantly comments on this Sunni-centricism of impugment as a *ḥadīth* tool;

'Avoiding heretic narrations was contextual to the early documentation of tradition. After impugment and validation has been crystallised it was no longer needed. Many Sunni

¹¹⁴ Al-ʿAlī, p. 118 – 129.

propagandists too have lied regarding tradition though less in comparison to non-Sunnis.¹¹⁵

This is a rare admission amongst Ḥadīth scholars as it highlights the lack of neutrality of the Ḥadīth corpus. Moreover the crux of the matter here is the taking of knowledge as a whole from non-Sunnis. If the position of taking knowledge is the same as taking of Ḥadīth from non-Sunnis, then it could be argued that it is not recommended at best. Moreover the polarisation of Sunni Islam with non-Sunni Islam set these traditions on different trajectories and since the sources, especially the Ḥadīth became the preserve of Sunni Islam, there was no need for engagement with non-Sunni knowledge. Notwithstanding this, some Sunnis like Abū Ḥanīfa found no compunction in learning from the Shiite Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.

In the contemporary intra-Sunni scenario, Wahhābīs and Salafis in general are careful in taking knowledge from Sufi 'innovators'. This in turn is reciprocated by the Sufis who do not trust Wahhābī scholarship. Though this is the case theoretically it manifests in practice as a form of Sunni 'dissimulation' (*taqiya*) whereby students may hide their personal theology from their teachers. On the intra-Sufi dynamic this is also the case with the Barelwis and Deobandis who unlike the general Sufi – Salafi divide share an affinity with each other as we shall see in the next chapter. Notwithstanding this, in a minimalist model, taking knowledge wherever it comes from would be deemed as a general allegiance to truth.

¹¹⁵ Al-Judayʿ, *Taḥrīr ʿUlūm a-Ḥadīth*, I, p. 411.

4.7.9 Mutual coexistence with the Muslim other – the concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'*

In Wahhābī Islam a core leitmotif in creedalism is stressed; the notion of 'doctrinal allegiance'. This entails a Muslim offering his allegiance (*al-walā'*) to Islam and love for the faith and its adherents, alongside dissociation (*barā'*) from disbelief as well as hatred for polytheism and the disbelievers.¹¹⁶ This, according to their understanding, is intrinsically linked with the creed itself. This is further complicated when dealing with the Muslim other and usually translates into the social exclusion of 'outsiders'. By no means is this a Wahhābī idiosyncrasy as we shall learn. Watt identifies this notion as a historically Khārijite trend.¹¹⁷

Sunni Muslims are required to conduct themselves with non-Sunnis in terms of mutual coexistence. This includes within the religious framework the broader concept of fraternity. Prayer is a communal form of worship and irrespective of theological persuasions; Muslims are encouraged to pray together. It may appear immaterial at this juncture to highlight what is essentially a ritualistic practice which would ordinarily come under the remit of jurisprudence. However the issue of prayer to a large extent has ramifications on attitudes within group dynamics. It is no accident that mosques around the world are founded on the basis of sectarian persuasions. Each mosque is a hub to the Muslim community it serves, giving its attendees a sense of belonging. As such Muslims will generally affiliate with Mosques with which they can identify, and hence may refuse to pray in those belonging to the 'out group'. This refusal to pray behind Muslims then, is a milder form of excommunication or exclusion. Typically, those adhering to such practice do so having justified this position on the basis of

¹¹⁶ Salih ibn al-Fouzan, *Al-Walaa' wal-Baraa': Allegiance and association with the people of Islaam and Eeman and Disassociation and Enmity with the People of Falsehood and Disbelief in Islaam*. [translated by Abdur-Rahman Bansfield]. (Ipswich: Jam'iat Ihyaa' Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 1996), p. 4 – 5.

¹¹⁷ Watt, p. 7 – 13.

sectarian 'innovations' (*bida'*) and at times due to what they may deem a lack of piety or profligacy (*fisq*).

Theoretically the position of Sunni Islam is that prayer is permissible behind a profligate (*fāsiq*) or a heretic (*mubtadi'*). Abū Ḥanīfa is reported to have said 'we recognise prayer behind the pious and impious' (*barr wa fājir*).¹¹⁸ Minimalism would push this in its ethical methodology as it aspires to be non-judgmental. Many companions including Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn Zubayr were known to have prayed behind imams who theologians identify as impious.¹¹⁹ Deobandis have delivered edicts on the impermissibility or reprehensibility of prayer behind an imam who trims his beard less than a fist.¹²⁰ The Barelwis likewise maintain the impermissibility of prayer behind Wahhābīs and Deobandis based on the premise that they are non-Sunnis.¹²¹ Theoretically the Salafis should appear to be the most accommodating of all Muslim sects since they actively promote the permissibility of prayer behind non-Sunnis. Abū al-ʿIzz's fatwa is found in many Salafi polemical works;

'It is not from the conditions of being led in prayer that the member of the congregation know the doctrine of his imam nor is he to test (*yamtaḥinahu*) him 'what is your belief?'if he were to pray behind a 'heretic' who openly promotes his heresy or a profligate who openly sins yet such a person happens to be the appointed imam who leads the daily, Friday and Eid prayers, then

¹¹⁸ A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*. (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1979), p. 192, 220.

¹¹⁹ Al-ʿAlī, p. 123.

¹²⁰ Zakariyya Khandelvi, *Wujūb Iʿfā' al-Liḥya*. [PDF] p. 19 -20. <<http://waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=2761>> [accessed 17/3/15]

¹²¹ Rizā Khan, pp. 56 – 59.

his prayer is valid according to the generality of the early generations (*salaf*) and later generations (*khalaf*)¹²²

Minimalism would adopt this in its ethical outlook; however it is unclear how the polemics would abate as the doctrinal tensions still subsist.

4.7.10 Avoidance (*hajr*)

As is the case in many religious traditions, religiosity can lead to people restricting themselves to 'pious' company, moreover during the *Troubles* in Northern Ireland even friendship and relationships could be dictated by the pressures of sectarian affiliation rather than just devoutness of faith.¹²³ A tradition of the Prophet exclaims the triviality of such conduct amongst Muslims;

'It is not permissible for a Muslim to desert (*yahjur*) his brother for over three nights'.¹²⁴

On the other hand there are eschatological traditions indicating the splintering of the community into sects which highlight the prophetic remedy is to avoid these schisms (*fa^ctazil hādhihi al-firaq kullahā*).¹²⁵ Though desertion (*hajr*) is wrong in such

¹²² Al-Adhru^ci, II, p. 568.

¹²³ Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question: Ulster unionism and Irish nationalism, 1912-1916*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 29 – 30. Belfast and Londerry/Derry had 'interfaces' that effectively sealed off one community from the other. Much of the literature of the 'Troubles' describe sectarianism as a potent force which defined interaction between the Nationalist, Republic, 'Catholics' and the Unionist, Loyalist, 'Protestants'.

¹²⁴ Abū Dāwūd, 40:46, 4910, p. 1583.

¹²⁵ Ibn Māja, 36:13, 3979, p. 2715.

circumstances it would be obligatory to 'save' one's faith. Historically the Sunni-Shiite divide would have been justified through this method. In the contemporary intra-Sunni scenario Sufi and Salafi divisions to a large extent avoid social contact with each other. University Islamic societies and now the Internet expose Muslims to the Muslim *other*.¹²⁶

Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī amongst the Salafis is actively promoting secessionism (*hajr*) as part of the rigid Salafi methodology and he assuredly cites anecdotes from the early generations like al-Lālakāʾī (d. 418/1027) who used to walk on the other side of the road if an 'innovator' was walking towards him.¹²⁷ He also resorts to the view of al-ʿAsqalānī who maintained that those who oppose the Sunna do not fall under the ḥadīth of desertion. Sufis such as Ilyās Qādrī¹²⁸ and especially Abdullah al-Harrārī¹²⁹ too have adopted this approach.

Disaffiliation according to this understanding is a sophisticated methodical process. Perennially the discussion is who should be deserted or ostracised, what the necessary conditions for this are, whether greetings be given to such an individual, and lastly whether this secession will be perpetual or temporary.¹³⁰ Unfortunately there are many anecdotal references amongst Sunni scholars from the early periods who to an extent

¹²⁶ Much of the threads on Deenport <<http://www.deenport.com/>> indicate this especially in the polemics of secularity v religiousity and the general sectarian polemics.

¹²⁷ Al-Najdī, p. 36 – 40.

¹²⁸ Ilyās Qādrī founded the *Dawat-I-Islami* movement as a reaction to the success of the Deobandi *Tablighī Jam'at*. This group now yields a lot more clout within the Barelwis circles than other groupings and is known for their vehement *takfir* of Wahhābīs and Deobandis. See Bowen.

¹²⁹ Abdullah al-Harrārī like Ilyās is a staunch Sufi traditionalist scholar who regularly makes *takfir* of the Wahhābīs.

¹³⁰ Al-ʿAlī, p. 132 – 137.

approved of this type of disaffiliation with non-Sunnis. Al-^cAlī maintains that the early generations (*salaf*) used to warn people not to attend the assemblies of heretics, reading their books and listening to their speech. He cites others who were of the opinion that prayers should not be performed behind non-Sunnis as a chastisement to them. Some had even stipulated that friendship should be based on Sunni doctrine.¹³¹ Extreme though these views may seem much of the contemporary polemics evince this type of outlook and can be accounted for under the rubric of the *al-walā' wa al-barā'* thesis.

Ibn Taymiyya was probably the first to meticulously articulate a methodical process for affiliation which the Wahhābīs adopted. He contends that disaffiliation is of two categories: the first denotes abandoning sins and the second is as form of punishment. The evidence he adduces for the first type is from the Qur'ān Q6:68:

'When thou see men engaged in vain discourse about Our Signs turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme. If Satan ever makes you forget then after recollection sit not in the company of the ungodly.'

This is revealed in regards to the polytheists. The interpretation of this as referring to the people of innovation, whether as subscribed to by Ibn Taymiyya or any other exegete, is ultimately speculative (*ẓanni*). The second type includes punitive measures to discipline the heretic and 'bring him back to the Sunna'. All of this according to Ibn Taymiyya should be assessed under public interest.¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 132 – 137.

¹³² Al-^cAlī, p. 136.

4.8 Minimalism as an antidote to latent Sunni *takfirism*

Both Sufi and Salafi Scholastic Sunni traditionalists are cognisant of the *takfir* tradition within Sunni *kalām* and how it was utilised historically to delineate the boundaries of the house of Sunni Islam. The worst manifestation of intra-Sunni polemics is *takfir* of individuals and groups and this for the Scholastic traditionalists has the potential danger of undermining Sunnism. We can identify four intra-Sunni polemical excommunications;

1. Salafi excommunication of Sufis
2. Sufi excommunication of Salafis
3. Intra-Salafi excommunication
4. Intra-Sufi excommunication

Salafi excommunication of Sufis either in a major fashion or mere exclusion began with Wahhābism and its response to the Sufi 'cult of saints'.¹³³ This polemic has been vibrant since the foundation of Saudi Arabia and now being proselytised globally via the latest technological means. Eventually the attack on the 'cult of saints' manifested in schisms with the Sufi or cultural Muslims. Wahhābism offered an alternative narrative to Sufi Islam and its fixation with ritualism; however even to many of its own adherents it exhibited latent rigidity and dogmatism. In this sense Wahhābism was perennially destined to be at loggerheads with Ashʿarīs, Sufis and adherents of the four Sunni schools. ʿAbd al-Hādī an Egyptian Salafi traditionalist authored his 'Milestones' for Sunni Islam *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Maʿālim Inṭalaqāt al-Kubrā*. It emerged in the 1980s with a 'tazkiya' from ʿAbdullah Ibn Jibrīn third in ranking after Ibn Bāz and ʿUthaymīn. This work can arguably be described as the most cohesive exposition of a

¹³³ Bowen, p. 69.

minimalist theology. It is understood from the subtext that Sunni Islam could implode from within if it allows itself to succumb to extremes. It is noteworthy that he presents all the essentials of Sunni Islam without any reference to or against the Ashʿarīs.

Sufi excommunication of Salafis has not been as vocal as Salafi excommunication of Sufis. Barelwism and the Ḥabashī movement are the most forthright in absolute excommunication of Wahhabīs from the pale of Islam. Notwithstanding that Sufi excommunication of Salafis has usually been in the form of social exclusion of Wahhābīs as Sunnis or updating them as neo-Khārijites. ʿAlawī al-Mālikī was aware of this and attempted to build bridges with the Wahhābī scholarship of Saudi Arabia. He did this via his Sufi apologetic *Mafāhīm* which was a defence of Ashʿarism and Sufi practices. Throughout he addresses Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim as Sunni sages and even exonerates Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from Sufi excommunication;

‘Some seditious people (*ahl al-fitna wa al-sūʿ*) allege that Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb removed the Prophetic Chamber (*al-ḥujra al-nabawiya*) from the mosque, he denies that and is cleared of it (*tabarraʿa minhu*)¹³⁴

Excommunicative Sufis were most likely the ‘seditious’ people ʿAlawī is referring to. Nevertheless it seems from his treatise that the Wahhābī polemic against the Sufis may have dented Sufi confidence so much that he, unlike al-Hādī, needed thirty two scholars to back his thesis. ʿAlawī’s legacy at least in spirit is now being continued in the Sufi traditionalist camp by the Ḥabāʾib scholars of the Yemen who have now due

¹³⁴ Ibn ʿAlawī (al-Mālikī), p. 246.

to the British Government's '*Radical Middle Way*' project of de-radicalisation being given an audience in the West.¹³⁵

Intra-Salafi infighting emerged as aforementioned after the first Gulf War. Initially this manifested in Salafi criticism against the 'permanent committee' of Saudi *ʿulamā'* and their stance on permitting U.S. troops on Saudi territory to launch offensives against Iraq. More extreme elements within this faction became the Salafi Jihadists. The 'permanent committee' struck back with their protégé Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī and a barrage of polemical literature and speeches proliferated in castigating all the critics as Khārijīes.¹³⁶ Though the intent of this polemic was to quell the 'jihadist' element it became a potent inquisition (*miḥna*) within Salafi ranks and many moderate Salafis were failing the litmus test of the methodology (*minhāj*). The problem the moderates faced was that 'scholarship' was against them with al-Madkhalī as its mouthpiece. It was in the 2000s that some 'moderate' Salafis in the like manner of ʿAbd al-Hādī took minimalist measures to counter 'Madkhalism' within the '*al-Daʿwa al-Salafiya*'. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Najdī one of many Salafi traditionalist critics of al-Madkhalī observes;

'This sedition (*fitna*) of al-Madhkalī and his followers' despotism against his own Sunni brothers has no precedent in Islam. Polemics of the past largely occurred between Sunnis and non-Sunnis'¹³⁷

¹³⁵ *Radical Middle Way* <<http://www.radicalmiddleway.org/speaker>> Habib Ali Al-Jifri, Habib Kazim Jafar Muhammad al-Saqqaf, and Habib Umar bin Hafiz are all found on this website and frequently coming to Britain to speeches.

¹³⁶ Bowen, pp. 61 – 69.

¹³⁷ Al-Najdī, p. 14.

Yūsuf al-ʿAlī yet another Salafi traditionalist outlines 'Sunni behaviour towards non-Sunnis' in his *Inṣāf Ahl a-Sunna wa Muʿāmalatuhum li Mukhālīfihim* like ʿAbd al-Hādī also touches upon the 'minimalist' potential of Sunnism. Finally as of the late 2000s this faction of Salafi traditionalists found an authoritative sympathiser, Bakr Abū Zayd a member of the permanent committee and also Abū Bakr al-Jazā'irī. This schism manifests in Britain in the form of those Salafis who affiliate with 'Salafibookstores.com' which is the mouthpiece of Madkhalism and 'Hidaayah publications' which represents mainstream Salafism. Indeed this is a polemic which is seemingly tearing Salafism apart. Salafis clearly enunciate 'minimalist' schemas as an antidote to this problem, however they may have underestimated the potential of compromising Salafism since minimalism opens Sunnism to Ashʿarīs and Sufis which effectively renders the '*al-Daʿwa al-Salafiya*' redundant. In essence Salafism is meant to be rigid.

Intra-Sufi infighting in comparison to Salafi schisms is not as global in scope and tends to be somewhat parochial. The Subcontinent Barelwi and Deobandi schism is a lucid example of how Sufi Islam is susceptible to infighting just like the Salafis. This schism has paramount significance for the study of British Islam and identity politics as the vast majority of 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation South Asian Muslims in the United Kingdom affiliate to mosques which are of these traditions. Western Sufis like Yusuf, Winter and Keller were instrumental in channelling young British Muslims back to Barelwi and Deobandism in a fragile front against Salafism. Periodically the schisms and intolerance that these youngsters encountered when discovering their roots were dismissed by this body of convert scholarship.¹³⁸ Nuh Keller being a *shaykh* of the Shādhillī order had to deal with this schism as some of his followers were perpetuating this Subcontinent polemic. Eventually in 2008 Keller wrote his *Īmān, Kufr and Islam* essay in which he strips Sufi traditionalism to its bare essentials and 'reconciles' this polemic.

¹³⁸ Bowen, p. 131.

Deobandism exhibits some Wahhābī traits as it accuses Barelwism of polytheistic traits, yet it claims to be Sufi. The Barelwis excommunicate the Deobandis for blaspheming against the Prophet. In essence Sufi Islam is meant to be inclusive and that entails tolerating Wahhābism or Wahhābī tendencies within their own tradition i.e. the anti-innovation outlook. We shall explore the Barelwi - Deobandi schism in the next chapter.

4.9 Sustaining the schisms

In addition to the internal residual religio-political Khārijite and Shiite tensions, minimalism is compounded by independent personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and the consensus of the community (*ijmāc al-umma*). Both these notions are double edged swords. On the one hand a plethora of views based on *ijtihād* theoretically exhibits some form of religious pluralism which is conducive for minimalism while on the other hand, the subjective nature of *ijtihād* allows the introduction of 'innovations' and also the issuing of excommunicative edicts as we have previously seen in chapter three. Likewise the *ijmāc* paradoxically has the potential to keep it all together and, due to its internal inconsistency, the improbability of facilitating a consensus altogether.

4.10 Diversity

Minimalism in spirit celebrates diversity at least synthetically as its priority is unity. Difference of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) can be both divisive and unifying. The nature of the statutes can either be decisive (*qaṭcī*) or speculative (*ẓannī*). On decisive statutes, disagreement over 'core' doctrinal issues culminates in either faith (*īmān*) or disbelief (*kufr*). Likewise differing on jurisprudential rulings results in either the issuing of lawful (*ḥalāl*) or unlawful (*ḥarām*) edicts. Differing on decisive statutes is the ambit of the clear parts (*muḥkamāt*) of revealed knowledge and consequently would result in excommunication and therefore in theory is not open to disagreement. Speculative

differences on the statutes occur on three levels; derived jurisprudential issues, mainstream doctrinal issues and peripheral doctrinal issues. Differing on speculative statutes is the ambit of the ambiguous portions (*mutashābihāt*) of revealed revelation. *Ijtihād* can have free reign here. Muhammad ʿAwwāma a Sufi traditionalist confines the differences of opinion in academic issues (*masāʿil al-ʿilmī*) into three main areas;

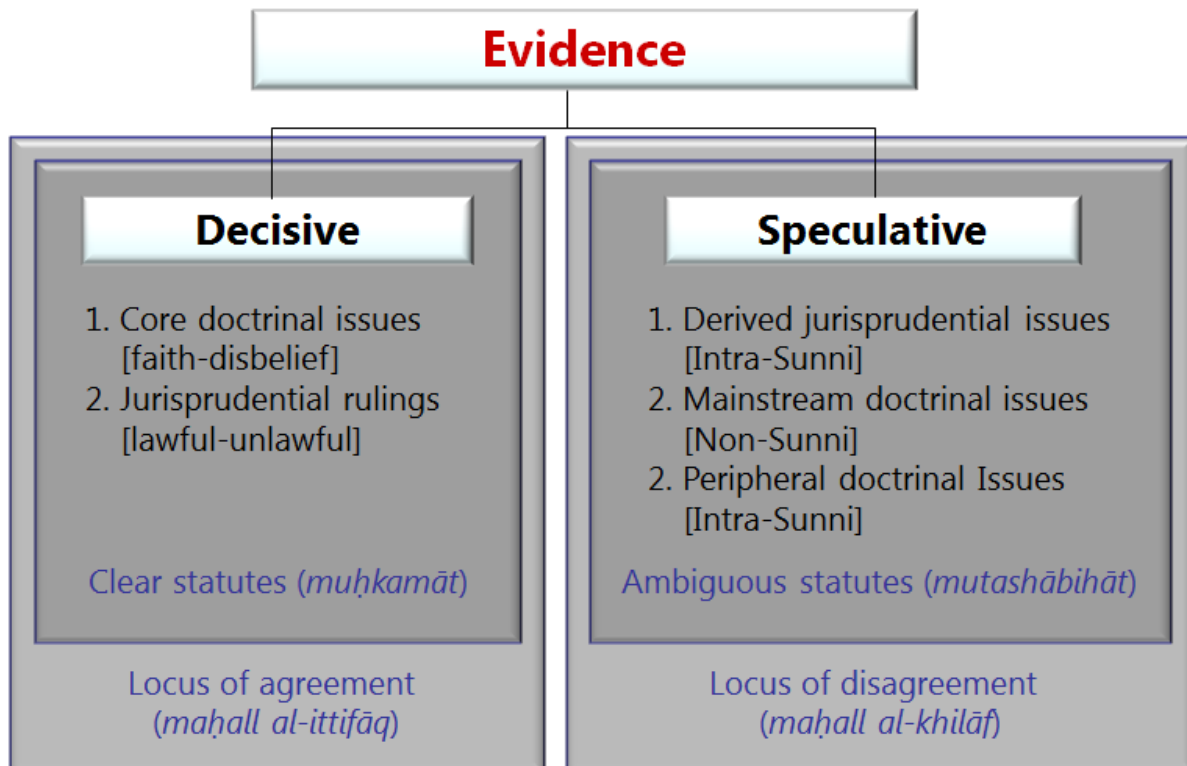
1. Religious/ideological difference (*al-ikhtilāf fī al-adyān*):
2. Doctrinal differences (*al-ikhtilāf fī umūr al-ʿaqāʿid*):
3. Jurisprudential differences (*al-ikhtilāf fī al-furūʿ al-fiqhiya*):¹³⁹

Differences in the first area, especially if these differences entail rejection of what is known by necessity in the religion would render a person who subscribes to these views as out of the pale of Islam. ʿAwwāma argues that freedom of opinion (*hurriya al-raʿy*) in such issues is not admissible. As for the second area, differences here resulted in those theological trends and sects which deviated from mainstream Proto-Sunnism like Shiism and Khārijism. The third area has two aspects peripheral doctrinal issues (*juzʿiyāt baʿd al-ʿaqāʿid*) for which there would be no problem in differing, and the jurisprudential issues which constitute the majority of differences within Islam. Subsequently this culminated in the birth of a new sub-science in Islamic Law called the etiquettes of disagreement (*adab al-ikhtilāf*). This entailed the reconciling of differing jurisprudential views primarily through the rubric of the *ijtihād* mechanism and certain legal maxims such as ‘one *ijtihād* does not annul another’ (*al-ijtihād lā yanquḍu bimithlihī*). Moreover in addition to valid difference of opinion, the notion of ‘erroneous *ijtihād*’ too was tolerated to account for the diverse jurisprudential tradition

¹³⁹ Muḥammad ʿAwwāma, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf fī masāʿil al-ʿilm wa al-dīn*. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʿir al-Islāmiyya, 1997), p. 14.

within Sunni Islam. Minimalism seems to be the theological version of *adab al-ikhtilāf*. If minimalism is treated in this fashion, many of the polemical issues raised in this study can be synthetically reconciled.

Figure 4:3 Scriptural evidence and its polemical potential



4.11 Unanimity – keeping it all together

The pivotal impediment obstructing unanimity on the formulation of a minimalist model is the consensus. The *ijmāʿ* mechanism is very much a Sunnicentric tool and was possibly (expediently) formed during the proto-Sunni period prior to the advent of al-Shāfiʿī's principles of legal theory. The notion of the Companions' Consensus (*ijmāʿ al-ṣaḥāba*) as definitive and the most authoritative, smacks of this type of Sunnicentricism.¹⁴⁰ Second in ranking is 'explicit consensus' (*al-ijmāʿ al-ṣarīḥ*) which entails the agreement of scholars *via* the documentation of their edicts and the

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad. *Marātib al-Ijmāʿ*. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998), p. 27.

collation of all these in a cohesive fashion.¹⁴¹ Lastly there is 'implicit consensus' (*al-ijmāʿ al-sukūṭī*) which comprises of a general agreement amongst many scholars with others remaining silent on the issue in question.¹⁴²

'Valid' conditions for an *ijmāʿ* to take place are themselves compromised by the conflicting views on their validity. The first is whether a non-Sunni is allowed to cast his/her view; the *Zāhirites* and *Ḥanbalīs* would disallow such a person.¹⁴³ This is exemplified in the lack of representation from Saudi scholars in the Amman Message, possibility due to the inclusion of non-Sunnis. Al-Ghazālī and many *Mālikīs* would allow non-Sunnis to be included in the *ijmāʿ* process.¹⁴⁴ Al-Zuḥaylī expressly backs this position and the Amman Message as a whole is a lucid working example of this type of *ijmāʿ* since many of the signatories are *Shīʿī* clerics. The second condition stipulates the scholars on an *ijmāʿ* must be absolute *mujtahid* scholars. This condition precludes a thousand years of scholarship under the 'closure of the doors of *ijtihād*' thesis. Al-Baqillānī argues that non-*mujtahids* should be able to convene an *ijmāʿ*.¹⁴⁵ The third condition for the validity of an *ijmāʿ* is an actual or real agreement must be reached between contemporary scholars. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ and many *Ḥanafīs* contend that the abstention of a few scholars does not affect the *ijmāʿ*.¹⁴⁶

In addition there are some 'invalid' conditions of *ijmāʿ*. Most of the *Ḥanbalīs* maintain that that *ijmāʿ* must take place after the extinction of all participating scholars of a particular era. This precludes the possibility of an *ijmāʿ* ever taking place. The *Zāhirites*

¹⁴¹ Al-Judayʿ, *Taysīr ʿIlm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 162.

¹⁴² Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, I, pp. 552 – 556.

¹⁴³ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, I, pp. 503 – 504.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*, I, p. 183.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid* vol. 1, pp. 181 - 182

¹⁴⁶ Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, *Al-Bināya Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, 13 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmīyah, [no date]), vol. II, pp. 296.

were even more sceptical and reject consensus except that of the Companions. Some Mālikīs posited the consensus of the People of Medina which is in spirit with their legal principles of Medina-centricism.

In addition there are two invalid types of consensus which corroborate the Shiite-Khārijite residual dynamics thesis within Sunni Islam. The first is the consensus of the Holy Family (*ahl al-bayt*) and the other the consensus of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs.¹⁴⁷ Though the Khārijites had their reservations about ʿUthmān and ʿAlī, any consensus amongst the four must have occurred during the tenures of the first two caliphs.

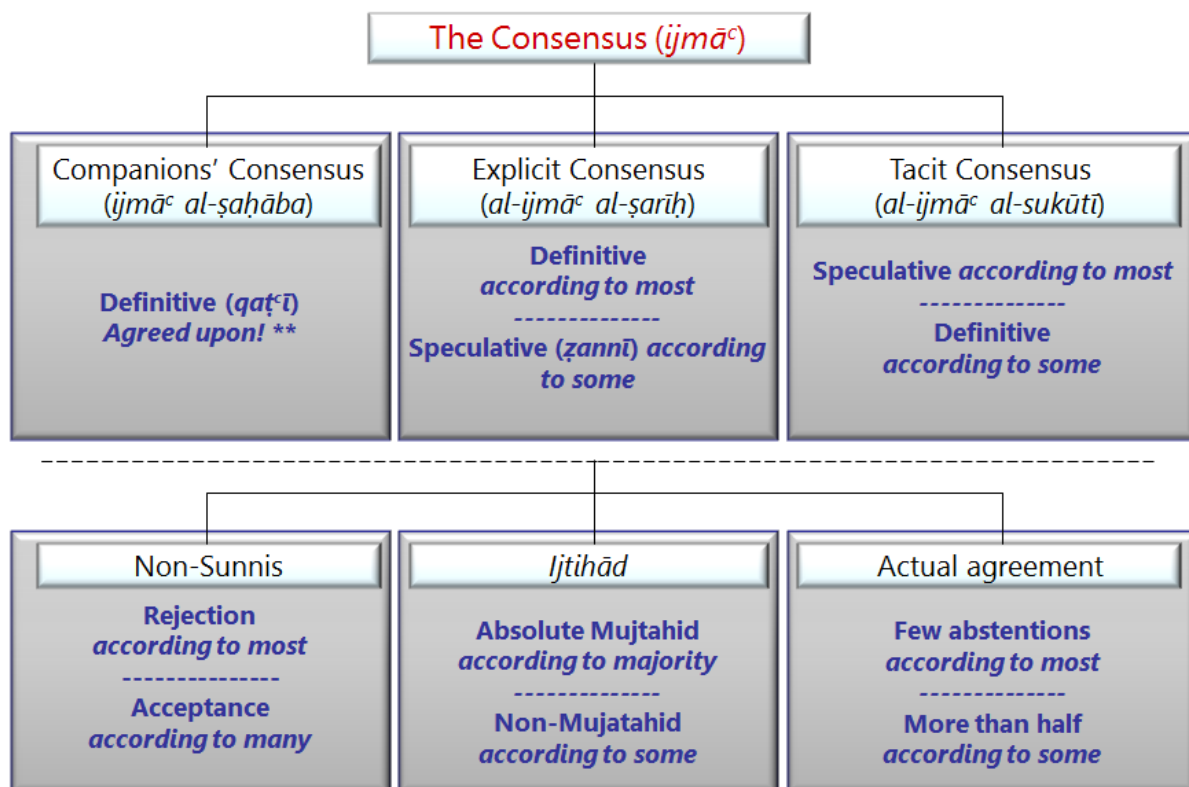
Indeed *ijmāʿ* can provide the mechanism to delineate the absolute essentials of issues of the religion (*maʿlūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*) as we have seen in chapter one and principles of minimalism too can be constructed via this means. Minimalism can however be compounded by the *ijmāʿ* as every dissension is an *ijtihād*. Independent reasoning will always compound the consensus. Moreover old excommunicative judgements can too be sustained through *ijmāʿ*.

Some Muʿtazilites and Shīʿa argued for the practical improbability of the *ijmāʿ*. First collating the opinion of all scholars and their respective opinions on a given issue would be arduous. Secondly agreement upon speculative evidence is difficult due to the varying customs of the individuals involved in the *ijmāʿ* process. Some Sunnis such as the Ḥanbalīs concur with this view. Since *ijmāʿ* is largely a Sunni principle, most Sunnis were optimistic about its efficacy, the Ḥanafīs expeditiously have claimed *ijmāʿ* on many legal issues. The historical feasibility for achieving consensus in the past was

¹⁴⁷ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, II, pp. 505 – 515.

largely implausible, however the contemporary possibilities *via* telecommunications ideally make the consensus somewhat of a reality. The Amman Message and the Sunni Pledge are two examples of how *ijmāc* can at least be facilitated. Due to the difficulty of the *ijmāc* mechanism in achieving absolute unanimity, the validity of many ‘new’ issues has been argued through this inherent weakness. Furthermore with the lack of a ‘Mosque’ institutionally representing ‘orthodoxy’ and an absolute *Shaykh al-Islam* a final say (*al-qawl al-faṣl*) on these issues is unlikely. It is for these reasons Iqbal argued that the *ijmāc* largely remained theoretical.¹⁴⁸

Figure 4:4 The elusive mechanism of agreement



The Amman Message included doctrinal issues which were at some point put forward as ‘essentials’. Disagreements most likely would have resulted from this not only on the inter-sectarian level but also within the Sunni contingent. Many theological

¹⁴⁸ Iqbal, p. 173 – 176.

compromises would have been made and then finally the points that all could comfortably agree upon, which will arguably have been a few, would then have been put forward as 'correct'. This process effectively hides all the historical prejudices and perennial tensions we have outlined in this study after mapping the theological terrain. This process is being mimicked in other parochial 'minimalist' initiatives. One such example is the Sunni Pledge (US and UK) and other internet forums. The Amman Message has been somewhat more successful due to a government arbitrating and executing a final decision on religious 'tolerance'. The Sunni Pledge and other such initiatives are, as we have seen, failing to reach the grassroots of their own following. In a later chapter we shall discuss why even this initiative is doomed to fail. The problem with these initiatives is that they reflect the same duplicity of using the 'principle of charity' to gloss over the internal inconsistencies of Sunnism as medieval heresiologists like al-Shahrastānī who initially argues for being objective (*min ghayr ta'aṣṣub*) by exposing the fractious nature of non-Sunni Islam and explaining his elaborate 'canons of designating' sects, predictably Sunni Islam being exempt from model of fractiousness.¹⁴⁹ Later he alludes to the Sunnis as those *mutjahid* scholars and legists by simply theorising their principles as a form of minimalism and explaining any debates between these groups are 'negligible' as they do not pertain to '*uṣūlī*' essentials.¹⁵⁰ Ibn Ḥazm likewise deals with Sunnism briefly, however he at least unlike al-Shahrastānī and Ibn Ṭāhir recognises Sunni inconsistencies and highlights them. He argues that the Murj'ite and those who hold Abū Ḥanīfa's definition of faith are closer to Sunnism, whereas in his opinion Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and al-Ash'arī are the farthest from Sunni Islam.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Abū al-Faḥr al-Shahrastānī, *Faṣl al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1992), p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, p. 208 – 219.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*. 5 vols. (Beirut: Darel Marefah, 1986), II, p. 111.

4.12 Conclusion

Excommunication can be understood as a residual tension from the proto-Sunni period which begins with the Civil War and the Companions. The originality of this chapter rests on identifying these core unresolved tensions. Amongst classical theologians the closest concession we find is from Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī:

‘Know, may God have mercy on you and us: the People of Heresy and Misguidance (*ahl al-bida^c wa al-ḍalāl*), the Khārijites, the Rāfiḍites and the Mu^ctazilites have exerted their effort to introduce their heresies and misguidance (*qad ijtahadū an yudkhillū shay’an min bida^cihim*) within *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā^ca*; however they have not be able to succeed’¹⁵²

Al-Bāqillānī’s conspiratorial analysis sheds some light upon the contemporary polemical scenario which subscribes to ahistorical ‘orthodoxy’. Watt and Western scholars on the contrary have argued for the notion of ‘doctrinal development’ and that it is from these very schisms Sunni Islam adopted a clearer form.¹⁵³

It seems both the Shiite and Khārijites have clear stances on the Companions. A standardised view on the Companions in the Sunni tradition has never really crystallised except generically accepting them as fallible but not individually indicting them. Probing into the Companions isn’t necessarily abuse (*sabb*) or an indictment of

¹⁵² Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Inṣāf fīmā yajib i’tiqāduhi wa lā yajūz al-jahl bihi*. In *al-‘Aqīda wa ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2004), p. 134.

¹⁵³ Watt, p. 56.

them. The Companions are an embodiment of orthodoxy and as we have seen in chapter two the 'community' (*jamā'a*) in the very title *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* according to many scholars refers to a particular conceptualisation of the Companions. It is clear from this discourse that even discussions within Sunni Islam regarding the Companions are complex as they do seem to give some credence to the arguments put forward by the Shiite on the one hand and the Khārijites on the other. Moreover these dynamics cause controversy amongst the Sufi and Wahhābī groups. In addition there isn't a unified voice in each camp regarding these issues. These dynamics are found in ʿUthmān and ʿAlī dogmatic preferences (*tafḍīl*). The Pro-Umayyads argue ʿUthmān's nepotism was an *ijtihād* and that his clan was more cosmopolitan than the Hashemites. The Pro-Abbasids contend that ʿUthmān was a weak leader and that the Hashemites held religious clout in Jāhiliya and now should do so in Islam. Perhaps the best model on Companionism is the Ghazālian model. However this is being undermined on the one hand by evident pro-ʿAlī tendencies on the one hand by some Sufis especially the Barelwis. While on the other hand there is an ultra Sunni companionism pushed forward by the Wahhābīs and Deobandis which is aggravating anti-Shiism. This vehement stance cannot subsist through the Ghazālian model as it would otherwise placate some of this tension and instead more radical views from biased historical sources are being used. Though the Muʿāwiya - ʿAlī issue is problematic as it was then, the Ḥusayn - Yazīd issue has far-reaching problems. Pro-Yazīdī's will be viewed as Wahhābī influenced and Anti-Yazīdī's will be viewed as Shiite influenced subversion. A clear distinction needs to be made regarding criticism and insult. Furthermore recognition of the complexity of this issue may facilitate a better understanding across the Sunni - Shiite spectrum.

The judgemental orthopraxy (judgementalism on the basis of religious practice) argument can be traced back to the definition of faith in Khārijite Islam and one that Ashʿarīs and Ḥanbalīs argue to be the mainstream position yet completely glosses over

the roots of this definition and its excommunicative potential be it major or minor. The Māturīdī non-judgemental orthodoxic definition has always been a thorny issue as it has been accused of being quasi-Murj'ite. These classical definitions still resonate in contemporary Muslim identity politics especially concerning the 'practicing' and 'non-practicing' religiosity discourse. Māturīdism is actually the liberal Islam that accommodates secularity. Calder in this regards offers an optimistic understanding of Muslim practice:

'...I do not think that Islam, either in its social practice or in its theological and intellectual traditions is a religion of orthopraxy; it is a religion of orthodoxy'¹⁵⁴

Excommunication has been intrinsic to the fabric of Sunnism and its *kalām*. Not only theologians, jurists and ḥadīth scholars were engaged in major and minor excommunication. The absolute understanding of 'we do not excommunicate' is ironically a 'heterodoxy' of the liberal Murj'ite sect.

Excommunication, like orthodoxy, is a tool for social control – inspired by the executive actions of Caliph Abū Bakr and subsequently championed by the Khārijites. Apostasy law is a product of *ijtihād* as Zuḥaylī suggests, arguing that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and other prominent Companions had reservations of the first Caliph's judgement. If that is so then as the maxim goes 'one *ijtihād* does not annul another'.

Minimalism is embodied in the *Ahl al-Qibla* argument; however the excommunicative mechanism of *kalām* compounds the minimalistic outlook of the 'we do not excommunicate anyone of our *qibla*' maxim. Far from being non-excommunicative Sunni theology developed an elaborate excommunicative system. Excommunication is in

¹⁵⁴ Calder, p. 67.

theory polemical however in practice it would be dangerous because of the Sacred Law's stance on apostasy. Just like minimalism will take advantage of the reconciliation thesis with the non-Sunni other, the polemicists would utilise the 'opposing of heresies' thesis to its logical end.

Backbiting (*ghība*) as a social ethical phenomenon was viewed as an evil and the mechanism of 'impugment and validation' (*al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*) became a necessary evil to protect tradition. When utilised outside of ḥadīth science its only function is polemical and facilitates all forms of excommunication. The minimalist measures of al-Ḥādī, Yūsuf al-ʿAlī and ʿAlawī, to counter this inherent problem all acknowledge the uses and misuses of impugment. Though any given excommunicative edict can be viewed as a 'wrong *ijtihād*', there is no executive authority in Islam to counter the issuing of such edicts as they are part and parcel of the scholastic *ijtihād* process. The *ijmāʿ* promises some unanimity however it as Iqbal *et al* have argued remained only theoretical.

The originality of this chapter rests on the findings of excommunication as intrinsic to Sunni 'orthodoxy' as is evident from Ashʿarite and Ḥanbalite orthopraxy. The excommunicative tendency results from their orthopraxic definition of faith which smacks of early Kharijism. The Māturidite should in theory be less excommunicative as their definition of faith is similar to the Murj'ite.

In sum orthodoxy needs excommunication and uses various methods in pursuit of this medium. Minimalism attempts to resist this and yet pay homage to orthodoxy. Ethical minimalism promises the functionality of minimalism as a whole and drives all the unity

and 'moderation' initiatives. However it is unclear how it can subsist against an internal need to remain authentic to 'orthodoxy' which is facilitated through excommunication.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEMPORARY POLEMIC FRAGMENTATION OF SUNNI ISLAM

*And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!*

[John Godfrey Saxe]

In the previous chapters, how classical Sunni theology endured some schisms and how certain controversies subsisted and became polemical, have been explored. In chapter four I illustrated how excommunication became an integral part of the forming of orthodoxy. Excommunication is the ultimate result of polemicism. This chapter will focus on contemporary intra-Sunni polemics as highlighted previously in the broader Wahhābi – Sufi schism demonstrating the perennial influence of classical theology in shaping today's debates. Particular attention will be paid to a very potent intra-Sufi tension; Barelwi and Deobandi polemics. This tension can be viewed as a microcosm of the Sufi – Wahhābi divide. The exposition of this contemporary polemical scene is more than just mapping the terrain – it highlights the current somewhat deplorable state of *kalām* as a tradition.

In this study it has been argued that methodological minimalism comprises of three manifestations. The first is the general affiliation to early 'Sunni' Muslim scholarship.

The second comprises the 'three schools' thesis. Finally affiliation to these theological schools did not placate the historical tensions and further parochial methodologies emerged. Watt observes that Wahhābism as a phenomenon indicates his 'Ḥanbali vitality' which seeks continuity with Ibn Taymiyya however it shows no interest in his methodology.¹ In this manner it can be argued that Bareilwi and Deobandi traditions too find a sense of continuity with Shah Waliullah yet show little interest in his dynamic methodology. In a sense these parochial manifestations of earlier theological trends become the new 'orthodoxies' and hence all the more polemically charged.

This parochial phase of scholastic traditional theology extends from the advent of the Wahhābī movement in the 1720s, throughout the colonial period up to the present era. These parochialisms to an extent can be viewed as anti-colonial reactionary phenomena. It is noteworthy that three broad categories of literature emerge within this polemical genre;

1. Antagonistic (polemical)
2. Reconciliatory (discursive)
3. Explanatory (minimal)

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* is among the first of this type in the antagonistic category the subtext of which is a polemic against the Sufis. Zaynī Aḥmad Daḥlān responds with his *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Wahhābiyya* and ʿAbdullah al-Hararī's *Ṣarīḥ al-Bayān*. Riza Khan's *Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn* is an example of quasi-*fatwa* refutation in which he collates edicts from Arabia excommunicating the Deobandis on blasphemy charges. Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūri responds in like manner with a quasi-

¹ Watt, p. 146.

fatwa apologetic *Al-Muhannad ʿalā al-Mufannad* where he too seeks the support of Arabian scholars in vindicating the Deobandi masters though not expressly excommunicating Rizā Khan. Moreover there is a subgenre of this type of literature which tends to carry titles such as ‘the Devil’s deception of.....’ (*Talbīs Iblīs*), ‘the *fitna* of.....’ (*Fitna*).²

ʿAlawī al-Mālikī’s *Mafāhīm* is an example of the reconciliatory category where the subtext has a more apologetic / vindication tone, rather than an attack *per se* on Wahhābism. ʿAbd al-Hādī’s *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* treatise could also be placed under this category as it is an apologetic for Salafism and how it fits in the broader Sunni tradition. Keller’s online essay *Islam, Imān and Kufr* is a reconciliatory judgement on the Barelwi and Deobandi schism which shall be examined in this chapter.

Finally there is an emerging trend in the polemical literature notably amongst the Salafis as a remedy or response to infighting. Yūsuf al-ʿAlī’s *Inṣāf Ahl al-Sunna* is indicative of this kind of literature which addresses the latent divisive outlook of Salafi traditionalism. The Sufis in the West too since 9/11 have witnessed some infighting and ‘we are traditionalists’ essay by Abdullah Ali a notable protégé of Hamza Yusuf.³ All of this literature can be classed as ostensibly ‘minimalist’. They are in effect ‘new editions’ to the historical parochial methodologies.

² Ibn al-Jawzī’s very own *Talbīs* being the inspiration behind this genre. The infamous excommunicator extraordinaire Sheikh Abdullah Faisal had a series of the ‘Devil’s deception of the Shia’, ‘.....of the Barelwis’, and even a ‘.....of the Salafis’ in which he excommunicates ‘pacifist’ pro-Saudi Salafis.

³ See Appendix II.

5.1 Contemporary Sunnism

The current makeup of Sunni Islam is more complex than any classical paradigm of 'orthodox' denominations of the tradition. In this chapter I will investigate if a doctrinal, methodological or ethical minimalist framework is possible in placating contemporary polemics within Sunni Islam and at what macro or micro levels it can function. More specifically I will focus on 'parochial methodologies' i.e. methodologies that have not only stemmed from classical theological schools but manifested with very peculiar idiosyncrasies. By way of example Ibn Taymiyya's theology can be termed Atharism or Ḥanbalī *kalām* and Wahhābism as parochial manifestation of this theology. Watt refers to this nexus as 'Ḥanbalī vitality'.⁴ Likewise the conformist legalism and Sunni *kalām* schools from al-Ghazālī to Shāh Waliullah eventually culminated in parochial methodologies like the Barelwi and Deobandi movements or those similar to them.⁵ One may term this nexus as '*Kalām* vitality'. Moreover Sunni polemical discourse can be divided into two chief categories; modernism versus traditionalism and intra-traditionalist schisms. Regarding the first polemic i.e. that of modernism and traditionalism I will primarily focus on modernism which may be perceived as '*revised*' traditionalism, in other words those methodologies of modern thought which to some extent conform to boundaries of classical paradigms.

⁴ Watt, pp. 146 – 147.

⁵ The Barelwi and Deobandi Sufi traditionalists have counterparts in the Arab World who share their commonalities with their respective methodologies. The predominant nexus of Arab Sufi traditionalism incorporates the seminary trained traditional 'ulema of Morocco, Mauritania, Syria, Sudan and now increasingly the Yemen. Traditionalists like Tim Winter and Hamza Yusuf have periodically invited and toured with scholars from these traditions in the UK and the USA. The Radical Middle Way project sponsored by the Home Office very much has extended their full support in encouraging this type of scholarship.

5.2 Medieval paradigms of Sunni theology

The classical paradigm of Sunni theology can be summarised as two dominant schools; the dialectic approach of the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī theologians and the literalist approach of predominantly Ḥanbalī traditionalists (*muhaddithūn*). These two distinct approaches are respectively termed the method of the theologians (*ṭarīqa al-mutakallimīn*) and the method of the traditionalists (*ṭarīqa al-muhaddithīn*).⁶ Prior to the advent of Ashʿarī and Māturīdī theology, *kalām* was largely associated with the rationalist Muʿtazilite theologians; one would argue this could be termed as the formative period of Sunni theological development. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī merely viewed his own method as a ‘theological’ articulation of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s doctrine.⁷ Al-Ashʿarī or Māturīdī’s *kalām* maybe regarded by Sunni Muslims as better or ‘orthodox’ expressions of rationalist theology. This *kalām* approach could therefore be viewed as the dialectical period of Sunni theology. On the other hand the Ḥanbalī *kalām* or vitality as Watt defines it is an expression of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* approach with its mainstream exponents being figures like Ibn Qudāma, Ibn al-Jawzī and more ‘controversial’ figures like Ibn Taymiyya. To an extent classical theologians lump this *kalām* versus tradition dichotomy as the ‘Pious Predecessors’ literalism versus the ‘Successive Generations’ rationalism or more commonly as the *Salaf - Khalaf* debate.⁸

5.3 Contemporary paradigms of Sunni methodological approaches

Drawing upon Watt’s understanding of Wahhābism as ‘Ḥanbalī vitality’ one could argue that the diversity of modern Sunni theological groups can possibly be best understood as new revivalist methodologies connected to historical trends of the past

⁶ Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām: yabḥath fī baʿḍ al-firaq al-Islāmiyya wa al-radd ʿalayhā min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunna*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2005), pp. 6 – 7.

⁷ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Al-Ibāna ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyāna* (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Bayān, 1999), pp. 43.

⁸ ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, *Al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir fī Bayān ʿAqāʿid al-Akābir*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1998), pp. 141 – 142.

as opposed to distinct sects or schisms based solely on interpretations of scripture. Netton loosely draws a link from ancient Ḥanbalism to modern Salafism in support of Watt's 'Ḥanbali vitality'.⁹ The concepts of reform and renewal have been dealt with in chapter three; here one would like to illustrate that the sum of most 'Sunni' movements neatly fall under either the rubric of revivalism or reform. On this note 'traditionalism' in all its various manifestations can be understood as revivalism and conversely 'modernism' could be viewed as reform.

5.3.1 Scholastic traditionalism

A comprehensive overview of the dominant methodologies within Sunni Islam would indicate two major trends under which other sub-trends can fall; Ramadan identifies this as what he terms Scholastic traditionalism and Modernism.¹⁰ He aptly describes traditionalism as a way of thinking with the following principles in mind;

'Reference to the scriptural texts, the Qur'ān and the Sunna, is fundamental for the partisans of this current of thought, with this peculiar characteristic that they refer rigorously, at times in an overtly exclusive way, to one or other of the schools of law (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, Ḥanbalī, Zaydī, Ja'farī or others). Moreover, they do not allow themselves any right to differ from the juristic opinions established within the framework of the school in question. The Qur'ān and the Sunnah are the sources as mediated through the understanding and application thereof laid down by the accepted *'ulamā'* of the given school'.¹¹

⁹ Netton, *Islam, Christianity and Tradition*, p. 132.

¹⁰ Ramadan, pp. 237 – 245.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 239.

One would add that 'traditionalism' of this kind can be broadly understood as a) conformism to schools of jurisprudence in law, b) conformism to doctrine as espoused by Ash'arī/Māturīdī theologians and c) spirituality as is practiced in the various *ṭarīqa*-based methods of Sufism. Moreover Ramadan identifies the Deobandis, Barelwis and their sub-groups as part of this type of traditionalism, arguing that these groups are somewhat anti-*ijtihād* and rely heavily on opinions of scholarship between the 8th and 11th centuries. Scholars of these eras are called 'latter-day authorities' (*muta'akhhirīn*).¹² This trend shines some light on the *Khalaf – Salaf* divide. Ramadan argues that in contrast to this understanding there is a form of 'Salafi traditionalism'. It is unclear whether he is referring to the Wahhābī movement here as he merely calls this group 'literalist' and hints that their *'ulamā'* are largely based in Saudi. Though they are similar to the 'scholastic traditionalists' in the sense that they regard Qur'ān and Sunna as the primary sources however they prefer to follow the mediation of 'early' (*mutaqaddimīn*) scholarship as the '*Salaf*' were a prophetically acclaimed generation. Furthermore they are staunchly against the notion of innovation in the religion.

Perhaps 'scholastic traditionalism' is a broader method of thinking which relies on scholarship *per se* to interpret the primary sources. These scholars are connected by a chain of transmission going back to Prophet Muhammad which modernist scholarship lacks, this is an assertion pushed forward by most traditionalists as a critique of their credibility and authenticity of their ideas.¹³ Where there is a perceptible difference between what Ramadan terms 'Salafi traditionalists' and 'scholastic traditionalists' is, I would argue, the following of Sufi orders and dialectic theology.¹⁴ Therefore it would

¹² Wehr, p. 10. [entry:أخر]

¹³ Malik, pp. 1 – 9.

¹⁴ Ramadan, pp. 239 – 241.

be more accurate to term 'scholastic traditionalism' as a broad umbrella which includes 'Salafi traditionalism' but also 'Sufi traditionalism' which depends on scholarship in countries like Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Morocco, the Subcontinent and Indonesia/Malaysia to name a few who promote Ash^carī/Māturīdī scholasticism and Sufism, as well as the literalist brand of Wahhābi Salafism of Saudi Arabia. In fact it is interesting why Ramadan placed Barelwis and Deobandis together under the grouping of 'scholastic traditionalism'.¹⁵ One would like to point out that the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement of India would also fall under the 'Salafi traditionalism' as though this group shares theological trends with the Wahhābīs however like the Sufis they stress *isnād* i.e. in the sense that their scholarship has an unbroken chain back to Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* were traditionally Ash^caris and Sufis though vehemently anti-*madhab* as their most prominent Ideologue the Nawāb Ṣiddīq Hasan Khan al-Qinnūjī observes.¹⁶

5.3.2 Modernism and the 'third wave of Hellenism'

As aforementioned the modernist trend is not the primary focus of this thesis as modernism does not necessarily advocate rigid paradigms of 'orthodoxy' like the traditionalist trends. Minimalism is another way of viewing 'orthodoxies' that are embedded in a traditionalist worldview. Traditionalism in its generic application is conformism to mainstream scholarship. One would posit that modernism is not a homogenous movement; rather there are three main trends as opposed to scholastic traditionalism which has two Sufi and Salafi trends. Modernism would also have both the Sufi and Salafi trend in addition to a *liberal* trend. As for the Salafi modernists ^cAbduh and al-Afghāni would be at the forefront of this contingent which aspires to return to earlier Islam and argue that the Islamic tradition is in harmony with modern Western rationalism and scientific empiricism; they have fused the agnosticism of the early generations with the sceptical mind set of modern intellectualism. In addition to

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 239.

¹⁶ Al-Qinnūjī, pp. 323 – 330.

this they are critical of the mystic tradition and its 'folkloric' outlook. In doctrine at the base level they subscribe to Sunnism but believe Sunni thought should not be stagnant.¹⁷ Sufi modernists would include Sir Muhammad Iqbāl who shared the same spirit of academic and intellectual freedom that ʿAbduh *et al* espoused i.e. being pro-*ijtihād* and acrimoniously criticised scholastic traditionalists, however Iqbāl differs with his Salafi modernist counterpart in that he is deeply influenced by Sufism and declares Rumi as his spiritual guide in addition to the likes of Al-Ghazālī and Shah Waliullah.¹⁸ Furthermore both Iqbāl and his protégé Ghulam Parwez are sceptical of Ḥadīth literature which puts them at loggerheads with traditionalism.¹⁹ Iqbāl enjoys the title of 'Savant' (*ʿallāma*) amongst all the scholastic traditionalist movements in the Subcontinent and could be described as a liberal 'orthodox', his student however is considered deeply controversial for his seemingly anti-*hadīth* stance.²⁰ The third trend within modernism as Esposito highlights would be those liberal scholars educated in Western or secular universities and inspired by humanism and other secular disciplines, the likes of Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammed Arkoun in addition to others driven by leftist revolutionary politics like Muhammad Mahmoud Taha or even feminism like Fatima Mernissi.²¹ The common denominator of the liberal modernist trend is their criticism or rejection of the validity of Ḥadīth. In sum all three trends promote reformation in Islam. As aforementioned reformation (*iṣlāḥ*) is viewed by traditionalists as 're-writing Islam', conversely renewal (*tajdīd*) is deemed by modernists as a regurgitation of the status quo and intellectually decadent eras of Islam. Traditionalists aspire to conform to the text (tradition) whereas modernists argue the context explains the text. One may draw parallels with the Christian debate on whether the Bible is a

¹⁷ Muhammad 'Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*. (trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1966), pp. 27 – 40.

¹⁸ Iqbal, pp. 186 – 187.

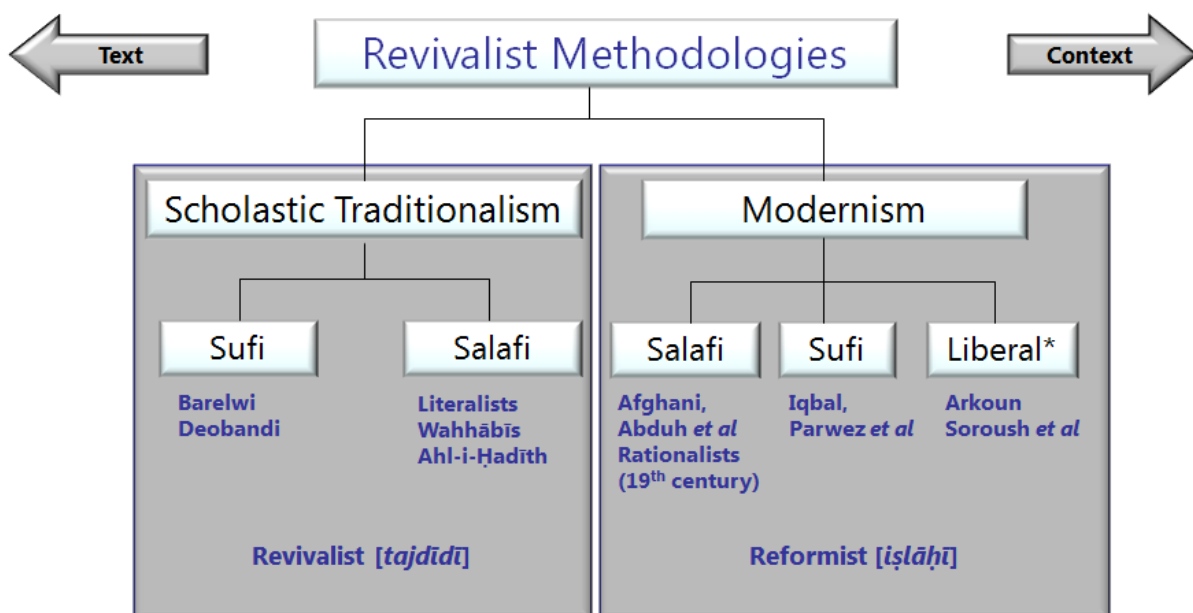
¹⁹ Brown, Daniel. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 138 - 139

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 140 – 141.

²¹ Esposito, John L. and Burgat, Francois (editors). *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), p. 106.

sola scriptura i.e. guidance or salvation is found solely in the scripture or *prima scriptura* i.e. it is the first source of guidance after which guidance is sought elsewhere especially via reason. The traditionalists would argue the Qur'ān is a *sola scriptura* and the modernists would contend that it is a *prima scriptura*. I have exhaustively dealt with the concepts of renewal and revival in chapter three and have argued that both concepts are text bound however renewal has been given more consideration amongst traditionalists as it entails reaffirmation of *precedent* whereas modernists promote reform and argue that Islam is organically contextual to all times and places.

Figure 5:1 Contemporary divisions



Traditionalism sets itself in a polemic against modernism. Modernism can be seen by traditionalists as an ‘innovation’ (*bidʿa*) in its broadest sense; perhaps in the like manner how classical traditionalists at one time may have viewed Muʿtazilite rationalists. Hobsbawm argues that tradition itself is a creation of modernity.²² With this understanding it could be argued that the Ashʿarite theologians may have been

²² Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’ in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1 – 3.

considered 'proto-modernists' by Ḥanbalīs as they too adopted Muṣṭazilite methods and even differed with the early generations and hence contravening *tradition*.

Moreover it is unclear what traditionalists deem as modernism. Some of the key issues confused as modernist thought include the promotion of *ijtihād* especially the denunciation of the myth regarding its closure and also non-conformism to classical schools of jurisprudence or theology. Non-conformism to the four Sunni schools is also considered modernism and also the following of concessions within and outside one's own school of jurisprudence what legal theorists call cross-*madhab* fatwa borrowing (*talfīq*).²³ Modernism is commonly construed by traditionalists as pro-*ijtihād* movements or a call for the 're-opening' of the doors of *ijtihād*. In this regards Muhammad Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā *et al* would be the progenitors of this trend and Tariq Ramadan and others would be the successors. More generically modernism is viewed as a *reformist* movement. In addition the following of legal concessions within jurisprudential schools of thought commonly referred to as '*talfīq*' is considered a hallmark of modernism. As picking and choosing across *madhhabs* according to traditionalists constitutes not only the following of whims and desires but also an inherent undermining of the integrity of *madhhabs*.²⁴ At times even the following of dispensations within schools of jurisprudence amongst conformists is viewed as 'modernism'.²⁵ Much of the contemporary polemic between Sufi and Salafi traditionalists has been embedded in the *madhhabs* versus no *madhhab* debate.

On the one hand the *al-Daʿwa al-Salafiyya* of ʿAbduh and Riḍā is viewed as 'modernist' because of its opposition to scholarly imitation (*taqlīd*) and overtly rationalist outlook.

²³ Al-Ḥusaynī, p. 224.

²⁴ ʿAbd al-ʿAlī al-Luknawī., *Fawātiḥ al-Raḥamūt Sharḥ Musallam al-Thubūt*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2002), II, pp. 436.

²⁵ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, II, pp. 1170.

Its anti-*taqlīd* stance makes it non-conformist. However there are non-conformist groups like the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* which are or were at one point very traditional in the sense that their non-conformism was not a rationalist reaction to conformism but rather a continued tradition of perhaps *Zāhirism*. Its chief proponents like *Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khan* recognised Sufi traditions and were part of Sufi orders. In addition though he is admired by the *Wahhābīs* it is worthy of noting that he too is critical of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his excommunicative outlook.²⁶ Furthermore the *Sharī‘a* is not confined to merely the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence; the opinions of many defunct Sunni schools are also considered part of Islamic legal heritage.²⁷ Another issue commonly misconstrued as ‘modernism’ is the taking of concessions from different schools of thought especially amongst those who recognised conformism. Absolute conformism to one school of jurisprudence is difficult and latter-day scholars proposed ‘*talfiq*’. Though this method is not strictly speaking non-conformism as it is in reality imitation (*taqlīd*) of another imam it is however generally viewed as such. Al-Azhar scholarship is largely conformist yet graduates from al-Azhar like Ali Gomah deliver fatwas according to all the schools.²⁸ Muslim Brotherhood affiliates prefer this approach in Islamic law as opposed to strict conformism or non-conformism as espoused by al-Bannā’.²⁹

Hossein Nasr maintains that modernism emerged some two hundred years ago which according to him ‘grew and was nurtured in Western civilisation’. He goes on to argue that modernism is marked by its criticism towards the ‘six canonical’ *ḥadīth* collections of Sunni Islam.³⁰ One would extrapolate from this that generically modernism

²⁶ Al-Qinnūjī, pp. 679 – 683.

²⁷ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, II, pp. 1167-1169.

²⁸ ‘Alī Jum‘a, pp. 214 – 226.

²⁹ Ḥasan al-Bannā’., *Majmū‘ Rasā’il al-Imām al-Shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā’*. (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-Islāmiyya li al-Ṭabā‘a al-Ṣaḥāfa wa al-Nashr, 1981), pp. 25 – 27.

³⁰ Nasr, p. 15.

according to Nasr's conceptualisation is a *rejection of tradition* in its broadest sense whether that entails the hadith traditions or the interpretations of early scholars. Modernism is understood by traditionalists as a new rebirth of the rationalism of the Muṣṭazilites. The rationalists argued that reason should be the criterion for truth and not the text alone. If the text is contrary to reason it should be understood within the dictates of reason. To such an extent even the hadith literature would be subject to this method of interpretation. Interestingly the 19th century reformers did not criticise the 'six canonical' works, on the contrary they preferred ḥadīth literalism of rigorously authentic traditions over the imitation of jurisprudential schools. I would argue that the emergence of phrases like 'Unadulterated Traditions' (*al-sunna al-muṭṭahara*) is not prominent prior to the 19th century reformist movement. In this regards it is worthy to note that Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī who is attributed with the spread of modern literal Salafism, was profoundly influenced by al-Manār magazine where Riḍā promoted the 'return to the Salaf' notion.³¹ Al-Abānī resurrected the *al-Daʿwa al-Salafiyya* which was more rationalist and brought in line more with the *al-Daʿwa al-Najdiyya* or what is pejoratively termed 'Wahhābism' of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.

The traditionalists associate Muhammad ʿAbduh, Rashid Riḍā, Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī *et al* as the founding fathers of modernist Islam. Ḥasan al-Bannā' and Abū al-Alā' Mawḍūdī to a less extent are considered modernists. Both these figures in particular are referred to as modernists as both presented Islam in an ideological framework. It is these movements that gave rise to modern Islamism. In addition secular or liberal Muslims are pigeonholed under the modernist bloc. In its core modernism is neo-rationalism or neo-Muṣṭazilism, in fact many modernists like Naṣr Abū Zayd promote

³¹ Stephane Lacroix, 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, pp. 58 – 77.

the Mu^ctazilite outlook.³² The acceptability of Mu^ctazilism is underpinned on the premise that they were part of a broader Sunni tradition. Abdul-Raof identifies the Mu^ctazili school of Qur'ānic exegesis as part of the Sunni Muslim heritage.³³ Moreover one would argue that even amongst the Ash^carīs there is an implicit admiration of the Mu^ctazilites albeit reactionary as is indicative in *kalām* texts that still make reference of their views even though the school has been defunct for centuries.

5.4 Influx of foreign knowledge

The key factor for the antagonism of classical traditionalists towards Mu^ctazilites and contemporary traditionalists towards 'modernists' I would argue, is not the use of rationality *per se* rather the adoption of ideas from outside the Islamic tradition; from other civilisations. Montgomery Watt identifies three periods of foreign knowledge permeating the Islamic syllabi. In the first period (8th – 10th centuries) foreign knowledge in particular Greek works were translated and Arabs began to experiment with Philosophy.³⁴ Al-Kindī attempted to present philosophy through the Qur'ān, in this sense it could be argued he was one of the first theologians of Islam as Netton argues he is firmly within the confines of a traditional Qur'ānic Islamic framework and that ultimately philosophy was second to theology for him.³⁵ This period witnessed the birth of rationalism within Islam. In the second period (11th – 13th centuries) Muslims became more conversant with Philosophy and took particular interest in the works of Plotinus via *Theologie Aristotelis*. Al-Kindī's legacy left an imprint on an emerging theological school who were pejoratively termed the 'secluded' bunch (*mu^ctazila*). This group are interesting as they are in essence traditionalist in so far as they recognised

³² Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawf: qirā'a fī khiṭāb al-mar'a*. (Beirut: Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-^cArabī, 2004), pp. 5 – 8.

³³ Abdul-Raof, pp. 9 – 12.

³⁴ De Lacy O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*. (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2002), pp. 154 – 164.

³⁵ Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp. 45 – 47.

the primary sources of Islam, the authority of the Companions and other issues that identified them with the masses of Muslims or in particular Sunni Islam. However on one issue they perhaps distinctly stood out. They placed much emphasis on the role of reason in religion. Since they recognised the Companions they accepted the ḥadīth literature narrated by them. They did however have a critical view of this literature not only in terms of authenticity but also on rational grounds. If ḥadīth contradicted the Qur'ān or reason that ḥadīth would either be deemed dubious or interpreted in a rationally plausible way.³⁶ The influence of this group's understanding on Sunnism is largely overlooked by traditionalists including Winter and Halverson. Mainstream Sunni theology as is exemplified in the works of Al-Ash'arī and Māturīdī indicate an inherent admiration of some of their rationalist methods. Mainstream Sunni Islam from this point onwards adopted this approach as opposed to the literalist traditionalist method of early Ḥanbalism. One may deduce that these two periods were a period where the 'text' or corpus of Islam in terms of Qur'ān, ḥadīth, fiqh. *ʿaqīda* and their interpretations were being developed. I would additionally argue though that al-Kindī, al-Farābī, al-Ash'arī, Ibn Rushd etc in their own way confidently approached this foreign heritage and made effective use of it. I would evince by al-Kindī's statement that a younger culture should have humility before an older culture or it could be understood as conquering peoples taking what they want from a vanquished people i.e. from a superiority complex for example the 'Best of Nations' (*khayr umma*) phenomenon/syndrome.³⁷ These two periods very much dealt with the meaning of the 'text'.

³⁶ Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward with DWI S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. (Oxford: One World, 1997), pp. 10 – 19.

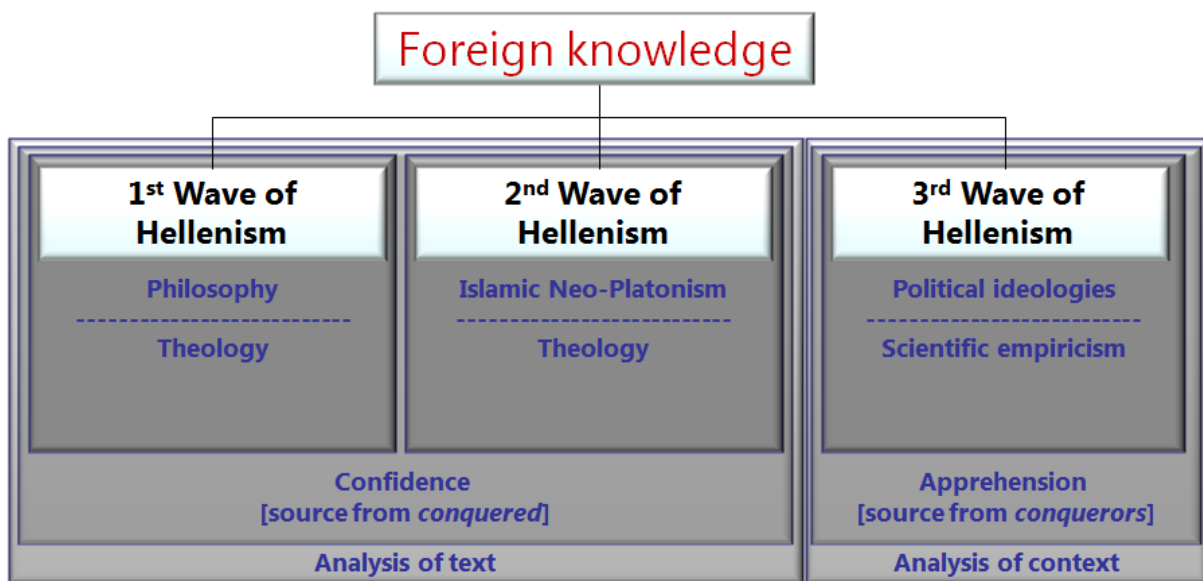
³⁷ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 70.

After the Mongol invasion of Baghdad and the sacking of Andalusia a steady decline can be noticed in Muslim intellectual output. The Muslim world witnessed an ever advancing West economically, technologically, intellectually and militarily. Colonialism had a devastating impact on the Muslim mind-set. Christian Europe had intellectually superseded the Muslim East. Many calls for modernisation were made in the Muslim World. Any calls for the reformation or renaissance in Islam were met with antagonism by traditional scholarship. Western science and technology characterised by its rigorous empiricism challenged superstitious views of the world. With the eventual collapse of the decaying Ottoman empire and the birth of nation states and new political ideologies suddenly Muslims were posed with evermore difficult decisions of determining their very future as for so long the Umma had been beset by a 'political quietism' towards its ruler(s) and now there was no ruler. Is Islam an ideology? Is secularism or secular ideologies like socialism, capitalism or communism compatible with Islam? It can be suggested that this period which Watt terms as the 'third wave of Hellenism', has been the longest and most confusing for Muslims as they have not managed to respond to this wave with the same confidence as the first two waves. Perhaps this is because the source of knowledge in the past was grounded in a vanquished people rather than from conquerors as is the case from the experience of colonialism. Calls for 'catching up to the West' are viewed as capitulations and defeatism. Both reformers and traditionalists argue that this particular juncture in history is the most challenging as the context is far more complex than in the first two periods. Watt outlines three major setbacks the Muslim world faced under the impact of colonialism;

'First, much of the Islamic world had been politically or economically dependent on Europe and the West, so that political and economic independence was the primary aim for Muslims. Secondly, contacts with the West and the acceptance of the products of Western

technology had led to many subtle changes in Islamic society, while many Muslims were being attracted by the secular forms of thought in the West, including its science. Thirdly, some of the attitudes found among Western colonialists had given many Muslims a feeling of inferiority³⁸

Figure 5:2 Outside influences



5.5 Contextualization of contemporary Sunni trends

5.5.1 The traditionalist Sufi and Salafi/Wahhābi split

Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya observed and dealt with a polarised rift in Sunni Muslim praxis, namely that of the legalistic letter of the law and the mystical spirit of the law approaches. Al-Ghazālī attempted to bridge that gap by amalgamating both traditions in his *magnum opus* the *Revival (ihyā' ʿulūm al-dīn)*. Al-Ghazālī, after his hiatus from court life and legal scholarship returned to approach jurisprudence with the eye of a Sufi; conversely Ibn Taymiyya dealt with Sufism albeit acrimoniously, from the

³⁸ Watt, pp. 158.

standpoint of a jurist. Al-Ghazālī criticised the jurisprudential tradition for its focus on outward rules and literalist overtone. Ibn Taymiyya’s denunciation of the mystic tradition was for its potential to ‘innovate’ and its esotericism which facilitates ‘heresies’. As aforementioned in earlier chapters this divide can be termed in the Classical era of Islam as the ‘*Jurist versus Mystic divide*’. This divide may not have in the past been polarised to the extent of forming two blocs; however the contemporary Sufi and Salafi split is a continuation of this controversy.

Sufi traditionalists in the Arab world are largely Ash‘arite and *madhhab* conformists, particularly those scholars of Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Egypt, Syria and the Yemen. ‘Abdullah al-Ghimāri, Muhammad Sālim al-‘Adūd, Ḥasan al-Fātih, Ali Gomah, Ramaḍān al-Būṭi, Ḥabīb ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Saqqāf respectively represent a traditionalist orientation. ‘Alawī al-Mālikī sought endorsements from some of these scholars for his work *Mafāhīm*.³⁹ In the West this strand of traditionalism as Sedgwick observes was first introduced by the likes of Frithjof Schuon, Charles Le Gai Eaton, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and René Guenon.⁴⁰ The ideas of neo-traditionalism were developed by this group which placed emphasis on conformism in jurisprudence, theology and spirituality. However Guenon’s idea of ‘perennialism’ i.e. the eschatological validity of all religions, did not bode well with other successive traditionalists like Winter and Keller.⁴¹ In the seventies Ian Dallas more commonly known as Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ṣūfī, promoted a traditionalism which had stronger links with Arab Sufi traditionalists in Morocco. This traditionalism encouraged *madhhab* conformism (primarily Mālikī), Ash‘arī creed and the Shādhilī Darqāwī order. Dallas’s variation, called the Murābiṭūn is known for its eccentric return to gold dinar

³⁹ Ibn ‘Alawī (al-Mālikī), *Mafāhīm*, pp. 11 – 66.

⁴⁰ Mark Sedgwick, *Sufism: the essentials*. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003), pp. 76 – 78.

⁴¹ Al-Miṣrī, pp 1103 – 1104.

currency as a reaction to the usurious practices in the financial systems of the contemporary world. Consequently it is to some extent marginalised from prominence in the broader Muslim communities in the West. Though this movement is Sufi, its goals are very much like the *Ḥizb al-Tahrīr* who call for the return of an Islamic caliphate and even proposes slavery as an 'interim situation'.⁴²

In the early nineties traditionalism was revamped by the charismatic personality of Hamza Yusuf through his popular lectures in both America and the United Kingdom. Yūsuf inspired many young Muslims to go to traditional centres of learning in the Muslim world. He particularly emphasised Mauritania as one of the most pristine examples of traditional pedagogy. Yūsuf too like his predecessors pushed forward *madhhab*-following, Ashʿarī and Māturīdī theology and Sufism.⁴³ The eighties witnessed the arrival of the Salafis in the West, against a backdrop of Saudi support for the Afghan Jihad and increased investment of money for promoting Salafism.⁴⁴ Yūsuf promoted a new traditionalism which focused on strong connections with the Arab world especially Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt and Syria and also an emerging new scholarship including the likes of Timothy Winter, Nūḥ Keller and other largely Caucasian converts. This new traditionalism set itself aside from the 'perennialists' for their 'heterodoxies' and also the Murābiṭūn for their 'eccentricities'.⁴⁵ Collectively this brand of traditionalism made a more concerted effort to engage with migrant communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Interestingly this particular hue of scholarship accepted both the Barelwi and Deobandi communities as traditionalists. Yusuf, Keller and Winter's pro-conformism to schools of jurisprudence and theology

⁴² 'Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi (Ian Dallas), *Jihad: a groundplan*. (Norwich: Diwan Press, 1978), p. 44.

⁴³ Yusuf, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Halverson, p. 148.

⁴⁵ Winter and Yusuf were students of Ian Dallas.

polarised them against the Salafis as they too decided to work at the grassroots level unlike their predecessors and concentrating on inner city communities.

Now we turn to Salafism as a form of traditionalism. We can look at Salafism in three phases 1) rational Salafism, 2) political Salafism (1970s – 1990s) and 3) apolitical Salafism (1990s to present). Ramadan makes a distinction between rational Salafism and literal Salafism.⁴⁶ Literal Salafism is nothing more than non-conformist Wahhabism. Rational Salafism as espoused by al-Afghāni, Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā understood the Salaf period as something akin to the European enlightenment period and not necessarily a methodology of 'orthodoxy'.⁴⁷ The polemic of the second and third era is pitched against primarily Sufi practices and *madhhab*-conformism heavily financed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Saudi Arabia. Though the so called 'permanent committee' (*al-lajna al-dā'ima*) in Saudi comprised of *apolitical* scholarship during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan these scholars namely Ibn Bāz, Ibn ʿUthaymīn and others were vocal in their support of the Mujāhidīn.⁴⁸ The eventual withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan heralded a new era of victory for political Islam and jubilation for Salafis. However, the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the impending Western intervention and Saudi endorsement of it caused an irreparable rift in Salafism. A handful of scholars Salmān al-ʿAwda, Safar al-Ḥawālī and ʿAbd al-Rahmān ʿAbdul Khāliq began to criticise Muslim political leadership, resulting in their being condemned by scholars of the permanent committee for their 'rebelliousness' (*khurūj ʿan al-sultān*).⁴⁹ At one point Bilāl Philips a leading convert Salafi scholar towed the Saudi propaganda which caused him to realign his allegiances.

⁴⁶ Ramadan, pp. 240 – 242.

⁴⁷ Calder, pp. 84 – 85.

⁴⁸ ʿAbdullah ʿAzzām, *Ayāt al-Raḥmān fī Jihād al-Afghān*. (Zarqa: Dār al-Manār, 1987), p. 23. This fatwa then appears in Hajj literature during the 1980s.

⁴⁹ Noah Salomon, 'The Salafi Critique of Islamism' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, pp. 164 – 167.

In 1994 Philips delivered a lecture at the University of Bradford on '4000 US troops convert to Islam', he lost much credibility in Western Salafi circles for this pro-Saudi stunt. He has since strove to align himself with political Salafis and has been ostracised by the Pro-Saudi Salafis.⁵⁰ British Muslims of Pakistani heritage and of the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* tradition had once strong links with Saudi Arabia, namely Dr. Suhaib Ḥasan.⁵¹ The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement have largely been political and have a strong representation in the *Jamāt-i-Islāmī* group in the Subcontinent. Political Salafism once incorporated the vast majority of Salafis around the world it is now only a minority. However since 'senior' Salafi scholarship like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān still tow the Saudi line and as a consequence political Salafism has become marginalised. Televangelism of Dr Zakir Naik is gaining ground in India and giving *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* Salafism more credence and in particular political *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*.⁵²

It would seem that since the demise of al-Albānī, the Salafiyya lost a sense of overall leadership.⁵³ This latest phase of *apolitical* Salafism can be best described as a 'fight for orthodoxy' within the Salafi movement as a whole. Rabī^c al-Madkhalī⁵⁴ is the arch polemicist of the pro-Saudi Salafiyya movement which emerged after the 'schism' of

⁵⁰ Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of "Authentic" Islam' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, pp. 393 – 396.

⁵¹ Bowen, p. 74.

⁵² Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Salafism in Pakistan' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), p. 141.

⁵³ Stephane Lacroix, 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, pp. 58 – 78.

⁵⁴ Rabī^c al-Madkhalī is apparently a scholar of Ḥadīth sciences yet his works are styled as heresiological and he has represented himself as the flag bearer of *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta^cdīl* and successor to Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz and Ibn ^cUthaymīn. His movement is staunchly apolitical. Political Islam to him and his followers is neo-Khārijism an innovation far worse the innovations of the Sufis. His polemic is largely against fellow Salafis. His legitimacy is more potent than all dissident Salafis as delivers religious verdicts on those who are critical of the Saudi Kingdom and he enjoys the patronage of the 'Permanent Committee'.

the first Gulf War. He is arguably responsible for the fragmentation of this once cohesive movement of 'anti-*bid'a*' Sunnis. His following is pejoratively termed the Madkhalites (*al-Madākhila*) however amongst his following he is deemed the successor of al-Albāni and 'heir of the Salaf'.⁵⁵ Prominent Salafis at the time of Salmān al-^ʿAwda and Safar al-Hawālī became critical of the Saudi regime which eventually concluded with their incarceration.⁵⁶ Al-Madkhalī has since gone from being a *ḥadīth* specialist to a self-appointed heresiologist primarily defending the *ʿulamā'* of Saudi and in particular the 'Salafi' methodology (*minhāj al-salaf*). His popularity lies in his exorbitant methods of excommunicating others, and ironically those who consider themselves Salafis. Most notably his immediate concern is Salafi Jihadism. He puts the blame of Salafi Jihadism on Sayyid Qutb and argues that the Salafi *da'wa* has become susceptible to 'Khārijite' innovations. Even those Salafis who condemn Salafi Jihadism but are nonetheless political in outlook constitute his primary target, thus he accuses the Muslim Brotherhood of this. His movement is apolitical and regards any form of civil disobedience whether protests, demonstrations or otherwise as 'Khārijite' rebelliousness.⁵⁷

Salafism prior to the Gulf War was seen as a loose umbrella of movements, however its factionalism and gross excessiveness in dealing with those who oppose their ideas was identified early on by ^ʿAbd al-Hādī and Yūsuf al-^ʿAlī. These two Salafi authors were aware of the outside albeit judgemental view of Salafism as a 'sedition' (*fitna*) amongst other Muslims because of its polemical nature. Both these authors advocated that Salafism needs to be 'maintained and regulated' if it is to be a viable alternative to Sufi scholastic traditionalism. It is worthy of noting that al-Hādī does not delve into the

⁵⁵ Al-Najdī, pp. 11 – 13.

⁵⁶ Noorhaidi Hasan, 'Ambivalent Doctrines and Conflicts in the Salafi Movement in Indonesia' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, pp. 184 – 187.

⁵⁷ Al-Najdī, pp. 65 – 67.

Ash^ʿarī versus Atharī polemic at all in his work *Ahl al-Sunna* which is endorsed by Ibn Jibrīn once third in line to authority after Ibn Bāz and Ibn ʿUthaymīn.⁵⁸ This work can be described as Pan-Sunni treatise where al-Hādī outlines the challenges Sunni Islam faces if it does not unite upon the principles of Sunnism. Alongside the absence of the Ash^ʿarī versus Atharī polemic he even promotes the idea of Sufis being Salafis.⁵⁹ Being an Egyptian he presumably tried to harmonise Azharism with a palatable Salafism or the other way around in order to appeal to the masses and ʿulamāʾ of Egypt. Of all these Salafi apologetics al-Hādī’s is the most optimistic and inclusive;

‘The truth is not a monopoly of any one individual or collective – as long as everyone maintains allegiance to the general framework (*al-iṭār al-ʿāmm*)’ to Sunni Islam⁶⁰

From this, one would uphold that al-Hādī’s thesis could confidently accommodate macro-doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalisms. Yūsuf al-ʿAlī’s work *Inṣāf Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* seems to address the potential of Sunni Islam being susceptible to ‘heretic’ trends. There is a growing awareness amongst Salafi scholarship that the *al-Daʿwa al-Salafiyya* is becoming a highly intolerant and divisive methodology. I would argue the root of this is in the Wahhābī methodology which is now characteristic of al-Albānī’s Salafism. To illustrate this point Muhammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb argued that the essence of religion rested upon two principles;

⁵⁸ Al-Hādī, p. 5. Interestingly Ibn Jibrīn is now considered non-mainstream Salafi because of his political views consequently does not hold the clout he once enjoyed.

⁵⁹ Ibid pp. 75.

⁶⁰ Ibid pp. 202.

Firstly) commanding the worship of God alone without any partners, urging people towards this, *fidelity to this and excommunication of those who abandon it*. Secondly) warning against associating others in the worship of God, *being harsh in this, being excessive in this and excommunicating those who fall in to this*.⁶¹

The reform movements of India like the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* and Deoband models drew inspiration from Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s social ethic of ‘commanding the good and forbidding the evil’ (*al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿani al-munkar*) which exhibit exotericism. I am hypothesising that the Salafiyya of Rabīʿ al-Madhkalī draws an analogy on Ibn al-Wahhāb’s principles of *tawḥīd* and *shirk* and extends it to ‘orthodoxy’ (*sunna*) and ‘heterodoxy’ (*bidʿa*). Moreover I would highlight that much of this apologetic literature is less an apologia for Salafi excesses against non-Salafis but more Salafi excesses against other Salafis. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Najdī addresses the issue of Salafi infighting in *Naẓarāt Salafīyya fī arāʾ al-Shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madhkalī* (Salafi observations on the opinions of Shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madhkalī) and in his estimation the Madkhali phenomenon is the ‘greatest sedition Sunni Islam has faced’⁶²

5.5.2 Deobandi Barelwis and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* controversies

The most challenging controversies impeding micro-minimalism would be the parochial methodologies of Sufi traditionalism and in particular the Deobandi and Barelwi schism. This polemic has been raging for a century and shows little sign of abating. The Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband is a religious seminary (*madrassa*) in the United

⁶¹ Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. *Al-Wājibāt al-Mutaḥattimāt al-Maʿrifa ʿalā kull Muslim wa Muslima*. (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan [no date]), p. 2

⁶² Al-Najdī, p 14.

Provinces of India. It was founded in 1867 by the movement's foremost ideologue Muhammad Qāsim Nanotawī. The Deobandi movement focused on Ḥanafī jurisprudence, Ashʿari Māturīdī theology and it promoted reform of Sufism based on the Chistiyya, Qādiriyya, Naqshbandiyya and Suhrawardiyya orders.⁶³ The Deoband movement pushed for more religious seminaries on this model of traditional reform. The scholars of this movement in particular Hussein Ahmed Madani politically aligned themselves with the independence struggle and in this sense can be considered proto-nationalists as they recognised the validity of fighting alongside Hindus and other non-Muslims to free their land from foreign invaders.⁶⁴ Others like Ilyās Khandhelwi in the 1920s opted for less politically ambitious goals but nonetheless promoted Deobandi scholarship and established a significant missionary movement, the *Tablīghī Jamāt* which encouraged laymen to get involved in preaching Islam.⁶⁵ *Tablīghī Jamāt* has now surpassed the influence of the Deobandi scholastic movement known as *Jam'iyat 'Ulama-i-Hind* (*Jam'iyat 'Ulema-i-Islam* in Pakistan). However the most significant figure within the Deobandi movement would be Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi who left an indelible impression on the Deoband as a whole and as Zaman argues was probably the most competent in facing the Deoband's chief rival movement led by Rizā Khan.⁶⁶ Deoband has been under media scrutiny particularly in the West because of the Taliban regime and its ideological roots in Pakistani Deobandi seminaries. The Deoband movement in India however support the Congress Party and were largely against the partition of India during the struggles for independence. In sum the Deobandi movement is a traditional reform movement and not Islamist in outlook as

⁶³ Sahāranpūrī, p. 213.

⁶⁴ Ira M Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 817 – 818.

⁶⁵ Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 38 – 40.

⁶⁶ Qasim Muhammad Zaman, *Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia*. (Oxford: One World, 2008), pp. 122.

they strongly oppose Mawdūdī and the *Jamāt-i-Islāmī*. Its contemporary foremost representative would be Taqī Uthmānī of Pakistan.⁶⁷

Aḥmad Rizā Khan was a talented traditional Sufi scholar who opposed the Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* reform movements. Rizā Khan like the Deobandis was a Ḥanafī jurist, Mātūrīdī theologian and a Sufi; however he accused them of promoting Wahhābī ideas especially their views regarding Prophet Muhammad and to curb their reform he sought to preserve traditional Islam and what he viewed as the Wahhābisation of India, thus he established the *Ahl-i-Sunnat wal Jamāt* movement.⁶⁸ This movement by its opponents is pejoratively referred to as Barelwism, although it too is sometimes used by the followers of Aḥmad Rizā Khan. Barelwism is akin to Deobandism in all the essentials of Sufi scholastic traditionalism i.e. jurisprudence, theology and spirituality, its main contention with the Deobandis is certain doctrines regarding Prophet Muhammad and the ritual practice of the celebrating the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*). Incidentally both the Barelwi and Deobandi syllabi are termed the *Dars-i-Nizāmī*.⁶⁹ Rizā Khan declared some of the key figures in the Deoband movement as disbelievers because of what he considered blasphemy against the Prophet. Rizā did not regard the validity of mass emigration (*hijra*) a jihad against the British and thus opposed the independence movement because he regarded the option to deal with Christian monotheists better than to power-share with Hindu polytheists. Arguably Barelwism is the dominant or 'default' Sunni Islam of the Subcontinent. Sanyal observes that Rizā Khan defined religion in more cultural rather than political terms and she also contends that Barelwism too is a 'revivalist' movement like the Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* counterparts yet only differing on the centrality of Muhammadan Prophetology and

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 123.

⁶⁸ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860 – 1900*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 264 – 296.

⁶⁹ Sufi, pp. 120 – 124.

the role of Sufism.⁷⁰ It can further be argued that since Shāh Waliullah is a link in the Barelwi chain it is inevitable that the movement would exhibit this 'revivalist' outlook. The most notable ideologue of this tradition at present is Tāhir al-Qādirī of Pakistan.⁷¹

The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement is the smallest of the three traditionalist movements of India but nonetheless as significant as the Barelwis and Deobandis. The movement can be traced back to Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwi (Shahīd) and its key protagonists include Siddīq Hasan Khan Qanūji. The movement is against conformism to jurisprudential schools and as such those who oppose them pejoratively call them either '*lā madhabiyya*' or '*ghayr muqallidīn*'.⁷² *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are more vocal in their criticism of Sufi folkloric practices. The most notable contemporary figure of the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* movement would be the late Iḥsān ilāhī Zahīr also of Pakistan.

Philip Lewis was possibly the first Western academic in his *Islam in Britain* to bring attention to these three methodologies albeit from a sociological perspective. The vast majority of Muslims in the UK are of South Asian origin mainly comprising of Kashmiri, Punjabi, Bengali, Pashtun and Gujarati ethnicities. Barelwism is dominant in the Kashmiri, Punjabi and Bengali cultures. Pashtun and Gujarati communities in the UK are almost exclusively Deobandi with the exception of some Gujaratis. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are largely represented within a minority of the Punjabi community but also the others by means of association and a growing trend of youth being attracted to Arab Salafism.

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⁷⁰ Usha Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi: In the Path of the Prophet*. (Oxford: One World, 2005), pp. ix – x.

⁷¹ Ibid p. 130.

⁷² Yusuf Ludhianvi, *Differences in the Ummah and the Straight Path*. (trans. Zahier Ahmed Ragie) (Karachi: Zam Zam Publishers, 1995), pp. 17 – 26.

⁷³ Lewis, pp. 143 – 172.

The Deobandi versus Barelwi polemic indicates a paradigm shift as historically theology initially enjoyed a rational outlook, and then a discursive outlook and now this is being overshadowed by creedalism which only focuses on 'orthodoxies' and 'heterodoxies' i.e. it is resembling the Wahhābi methodology in terms of uncompromising outlook on 'pedantic' issues. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* polemic is largely jurisprudential and is beset against both the Barelwi and Deobandi factions as both are conformists to the Ḥanafī school. The core jurisprudential issues between the Barelwi, Deobandis on one side and the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth on the other, is the concept of *taqlīd* of one school of jurisprudence.⁷⁴ Peripheral jurisprudential rulings on issues such as the manner of prayer dominate much of the polemical literature, for example al-Albānī's *Description of the Prophet's Prayer* has been rebutted by home-grown Deobandi scholarship such as '*al-Albānī Unveiled*' and '*The Prayer of a Believer*'. The jurisprudential polemic focuses on three liturgical issues; a) the recitation of Q1 (*al-fātiḥa*) behind an imam, b) raising the hands (*raf' al-yadayn*) in prayer whilst bowing and prostrating and finally the number of units concerning the Ramadan night vigil (*tarāwīḥ*). The Muslim TV channels in the UK provide a forum for these polemics to be discussed and debated.

As for the doctrinal schisms between these three groups, the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth align themselves with the Deobandis against the Barelwis. It is the Barelwi and Deobandi polemic which is the most significant of these. The key issues pertain to peripheral theological doctrines pertaining to divinity and prophetology. Other jurisprudential issues include the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday; Barelwis uphold its validity, the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* consider it an 'innovation' and the Deobandis are seemingly unsettled on this issue.

⁷⁴ Lapidus, pp. 779 – 802.

The Barelwi - Deobandi polemic is even more acrimonious than the Sufi - Salafi polemic as both the former share chains of transmissions and claims in representing Sufi Ḥanafī Islam in the subcontinent. At the forefront of the Barelwi faction is its founder and erudite scholar Aḥmad Rizā Khan of Bareli who singlehandedly spearheaded an anti-reform movement against scholars trained in the Deoband seminary including its founder and ideologue Qāsim Nanotawī, Khalīl Ahmed Sahāranpūrī, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and most significantly Ashraf 'Ali Thanwī.⁷⁵ Rizā Khan's indictment against the Deobandis emerged in the form of polemical treatise '*Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn*' in which he highlighted the 'major heterodoxies' of the Deobandis and got excommunicative approval from the scholars of Mecca and Medina in declaring the Deobandis as out of the pale of Islam. This excommunication entailed all Muslims to excommunicate the Deobandis and whoever chose not to, then the charge of excommunication falls on them as it is the very act of not declaring disbelief as disbelief that one themselves accepts disbelief.⁷⁶

Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī in response authored a terse rebuttal *Al-Muhannad 'alā al-Mufannad* (the Indian blade on the Liar) in which he attempts to vindicate himself and his peers from these accusations by consulting the very scholars of Mecca and Medina who had declared them 'disbelievers'. Though Deobandis have not categorically excommunicated the Barelwis as a response, they have periodically accused them of polytheistic practices. 26 charges according to Sahāranpūrī were labelled against the Deobandis listed below with the brief Deobandi responses:

1. Is it permissible to visit the Prophet's grave?

⁷⁵ Sanyal, pp. 35 – 37.

⁷⁶ Rizā Khan, pp. 49 – 52.

- Yes
2. What is your opinion on much salutations on the Prophet and the recitation of '*Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*' and other litanies [*awrād*]?
 - Yes these are recommended
 3. **Is intercession [*tawassul*] through the Prophet after his demise permissible?**
 - Yes intercession is permissible after the demise of the Messenger
 4. **Is *tawassul* permissible through the prophets, the righteous, martyrs and saints?**
 - Yes
 5. Is it correct to follow one of the four Imams in principles and branches of law [*fiqh*]?
 - Yes
 6. If *taqlid* is permissible what is its ruling?
 - It is mandatory (*wājib*)
 7. Do you follow a school [*madhab*] of jurisprudence [*fiqh*]?
 - Yes we follow Abū Ḥanīfa in the branches of *fiqh*
 8. Do you say that the Prophet's Birthday [*mawlid*] is legally reprehensible and from the evil innovations?
 - No..
 9. Have you mentioned that the *mawlid* is like *janam astami kunya*?
 - No but...
 10. Does this visit [Prophet's grave] require intention for the mosque?
 - No
 11. Is it permissible for one making *du'ā'* to face the Noble Tomb and intercede through the Prophet?
 - Yes

12. Are Sufi devotional acts and the pledge of Sheikhs, following orders [*ṭarīqa*] good, in addition can there be emanation [*fayḍ*] from the spirits of the Sheikhs or not?
- Yes we encourage our students but after completion of legal studies
13. **Do you affirm orientation for the Divine?**
- No
14. Is anyone better than Prophet Muhammad?
- No
15. Can there be a prophet after Muhammad?
- No
16. Do you see Satan as more knowledgeable than the Prophet?
- No..
17. **Do you say that the knowledge of the Prophet equals that of Tom, Dick, Harry and animals?**
- No...
18. Did any of you affirm actual lying on part of God?
- No...
19. Can falsehood enter the Word of God?
- No...
20. What is your view on Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian?
- He is a disbeliever and an anti-Christ
21. **Is the Prophet alive in his grave or is his life in the *barzakh*?**
- Alive in his grave not *barzakh*
22. Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab called people *mushriks* what is your view on that? What is your view on excommunication [*takfīr*]?
- Our view on him is the view of Ibn Ābidīn.
23. **What are your views on 'the Merciful is established on the Throne'?**
- Amodality (*tafwīḍ*) or figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is permissible here.

24. Do you say that the Prophet is better than us like an elder brother over a younger brother?

- No

25. Do you say that the knowledge of the Prophet is restricted to legal rulings only or was he given other knowledge and secrets?

- No

26. **Do you say that some Ash‘arīs recognise the possibility of lying on God’s part?**

- Yes....⁷⁷

With just a brief overview of these questions one might believe that a sharp decline had been established in the intellectual discourse of *kalām*. Points 1 -9 are jurisprudential branches differed amongst the jurists. 10 – 12 are peripheral jurisprudential branches. 21 -26 are doctrinal branches that stem from the classical *kalām* schools. Only 13 to 20 are doctrinal essentials differing on which would be a question of faith and disbelief.

5.5.2.a Core Issues

It might be argued that there are two core issues of contention amongst the Deobandis and Barelwis. The first is concerning divinity and exclusively an intra-*Kalāmi* Ash‘arī debate regarding cataphatic and apophatic methods of discussing peripheral issues pertaining to divine omnipotence (*qudra*). Lastly and perhaps most significant is Muhammadan Prophetology in which the acquaintance of Muhammad’s knowledge of the Unseen (*al-Ghayb*) is discussed. This latter issue may stem from Sufi exoticism. To date the most scholarly unbiased analyses of these polemics in the English medium has been presented by Nuh Keller in a sincere attempt to reconcile these issues which

⁷⁷ Sahāranpūrī, pp. 212 – 268. [questions and brief answers only]

no one before him has managed, after almost a century of this schism. Despite this though, his attempt too has caused a storm of controversy and resulted in numerous rebuttals against Keller. Nuh Keller is an American convert scholar of Islam and a *shaykh* of the Shādhillī order. It is pertinent to note here that the overwhelming majority of his aspirants (*murīdūn*) in the United Kingdom tend to be of ethnic Pakistani stock who are Barelwi or from Barelwi families. A minority of his followers are non-Barelwi, some coming from political Islamic backgrounds or Deobandi persuasion. For the last decade these controversies have been put forward to Keller whom initially dismissed these controversies as pedantic; however he had witnessed schisms and falling out within his own following which ushered him to resolve this matter once and for all.

5.5.2.a.i Cataphatic v apophatic Ash‘arism – can God lie?

Sunnism in general and Ash‘arism in particular emphasise the transcendence of God’s attributes. The base proposition is that God is unlike created entities, which in turn poses the query of what God *is* and *is not*. The assumption of cataphatic theology within Ash‘arism is that we can know of God through His divine names and attributes and that God should be described as He describes Himself.⁷⁸ Apophatic Ash‘arism would assume that God cannot be truly known and also that God’s nature is enigmatic and should not be limited by textual descriptions. Apophatic theological constructs are rational propositions. Namely God is outside of time and space, God is omnipotent, God is one but not in a numerical sense.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maydānī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwīyya* (Damascus: Darel Fikr, 2002), pp. 74 – 75.

⁷⁹ ‘Alī al-Qārī, *Minaḥ al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, p. 60.

In classical Islamic theology the Mu^ctazilites argued that God is omnipotent and therefore can do anything, is He then capable of injustice? They argued that He is capable but will choose not to.⁸⁰ The general Ash^carī response to this is that it is impossible (*maḥāl*) for God to be unjust.⁸¹ A discussion emerged amongst Ash^carī theologians that the impossible can be classified into two; firstly those things which are intrinsically impossible (*mustaḥīl dhātan*) for example non-existence and those things which are contingently impossible (*mustaḥīl ʿaraḍan*) for example for God to allow entrance of e.g. Abū Lahab into Heaven.⁸² The generality of Ash^carites argued that it is contingently impossible, and the reason God cannot is because He promised to punish Abū Lahab. Other Ash^carites according to Wahbī Sulaymān al-Ghawjī, argued that it is intrinsically impossible and this is the view Rizā Khan subscribes to and advocates as the only 'orthodox' view.⁸³ It is from this latter discussion some could argue it would sound unjust for God to do so or worse that it would imply that God could lie! Muslims believe that there is no lie in the word of God and neither does God engage in the act of lying. This controversy is ascribed to Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī who argued it is rationally possible though contingently impossible as God professes that He does not break His word.⁸⁴ Rizā Khan contends that it is rationally and intrinsically impossible for God to lie.⁸⁵ Keller is of the opinion that Rizā Khan mistranslated Gangohī's words 'rationally possible' as 'possibility of lying' (*imkān al-khidhb*).⁸⁶ Another issue connected to this is can God send another Prophet other than Muhammad, Qāsim Nanotawi argued that it is contingently impossible because God

⁸⁰ Ibid p. 392.

⁸¹ Al-Ījī, IV, pp. 216 – 222.

⁸² Abū Lahab is alluded to in Q111

⁸³ ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp 366, 392

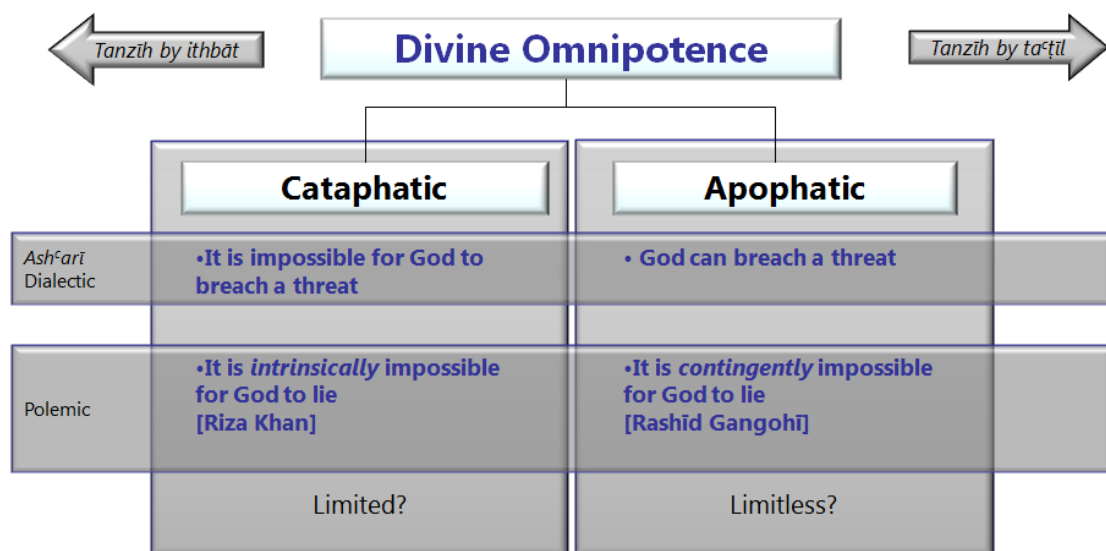
⁸⁴ Sahāranpūrī, Khalīl Aḥmad. *Al-Muhannad ʿalā al-Mufannad* in. 'Aqā'id 'Ulemā'-i-Deoband. Karachi: Darul al-Isha'at [no date] pp 258 - 263

⁸⁵ Rizā Khan, pp. 57 – 58.

⁸⁶ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*
 <http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

said that he is the Seal of the Prophets (*khātim al-nabiyyīn*) Q33:40.⁸⁷ The issue was at one point in history prior to this polemic, merely a dialectic discussion between theologians, however since then it had emerged with more potency in a sensitive time where another schism emerged in British India, that of the Ahmadiyya sect.⁸⁸ Both premises stress God's transcendence, one in a cataphatic (*ithbātī*) manner and the other in the apophatic (*taʿṭīlī*) manner. The cataphatic method places limits to God as it posits God should be understood *textually* whereas the Apophatic method seeks a *rational* limitless conceptualisation of God.

Figure 5:3 Kalām 'wranglings'



5.5.2.a.ii Exotic versus Reductionist Prophetology

Though the debate regarding praising Muhammad eulogistically is dominant in the broader Sufi Salafi polemic it is not as sensitive a controversy as it is between the Barelwis and Deobandis regarding the nature of Prophet Muhammad. Moreover even though we have identified the Deobandis as Sufi traditionalists, their prophetology is

⁸⁷ Sahāranpūrī, pp. 232 – 235.

⁸⁸ Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani*, p. 66.

largely Salafi. Mortal prophetology stresses Muhammad being the Messenger of God and nothing more than that – that in and of itself is Muhammad’s greatest station. Sublime prophetology stresses that Muhammad in addition to being the Messenger of God is also the Beloved of God (*Ḥabīb Allah*). Stemming from this is quasi-polemic where Sufis promote loving the Prophet (*ḥub al-rasūl*) as a part of faith.⁸⁹ The Salafis argue not loving the Prophet is disbelief, everybody should love Prophet and this love is only shown through following him.⁹⁰ Eulogies in praise of the Prophet have been the hallmark of mainstream Sufi lore, the odes of al-Buṣayrī (d. 696/1295) and al-Shirāzī (d. 690/1291) to name a few. Al-Bājūrī holds that every excess in his praise falls short (*kull ghluw fi ḥaqqihi taqṣīr*).⁹¹ The Salafi reaction to this is that if there are no boundaries to praising the Prophet then polytheistic trends may take currency and precautions should be taken.⁹² Al-Buṣayrī actually delineates the limits in his ‘Ode of the Cloak’ (*qaṣīda al-burda*) where he says:

‘Leave what the Christians have said regarding their Prophet and decide what you want in praise of him’⁹³

Ironically this verse is based on the same tradition used by the Salafis to critique Sufi eulogistic traditions. Al-Bājūrī puts Salafi apprehensions to rest by reiterating;

⁸⁹ ‘Alī Jum‘a, pp. 143 – 144.

⁹⁰ Fazl Ilāhī, *Ḥubb al-Nabī wa ‘alāmatuhu*. (Riyadh: Ministry of Islamic Affairs KSA, 2009), pp. 7 – 11.

⁹¹ Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī, *Ḥāshiya al-Bājūrī ‘alā Matn al-Burda*. (Casablanca: Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadītha, 2006), p. 7.

⁹² Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitāb al-Tauhid: The Book of Monotheism*. [trans. Supervised by Abdul Malik Mujahid] (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1996), pp. 78 – 79.

⁹³ Al-Bājūrī, p. 35.

'As Buṣayrī maintains the extent of our knowledge regarding Muhammad is that he is human. Therefore (I say) he is not an angel, nor a god, rather he is the best of God's creation i.e. better than any human being, jinni or angel'⁹⁴

Many Sufis described Muhammad as radiant light (*nūr*) and some even argued that his essence is that of light while not denying his humanness.⁹⁵ Though this according to the mediating scholars between the Deobandis and Barewli is a non-issue, one is merely highlighting it as a sub-polemic.

5.5.2.a.iii Blasphemies: polytheistic v insulting

In medieval Islamic theology many books were authored in defence of Prophet Muhammad against blasphemies from outside of Islam notably non-Muslim minorities (*ahl al-dhimma*) in Muslim majority lands. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī's *The Unsheathed Blade on one who curses the Messenger (al-Sayf al-Maslūl ʿalā man Sabb al-Rasūl)* and even Ibn Taymiyya's *The Sharp Sword against the one who vilifies the Messenger (al-Ṣārim al-Maslūl ʿalā Shātīm al-Rasūl)* are two examples of such. The wordings of these treatises indicate the emotionally charged nature of these texts albeit from two polar extremes of prophetology. Ibn Taymiyya argues that belittling the Prophet is an affront to the Almighty Himself. He goes on to argue that there is a near consensus that such blasphemy warrants the death penalty and the culprit is not even asked to repent.⁹⁶ Furthermore Ibn Taymiyya highlights that there is a difference of opinion on

⁹⁴ Ibid. pp. 39

⁹⁵ ʿAlī Jumʿa, pp. 149 – 150.

⁹⁶ Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Ṣārim al-Maslūl ʿalā Shātīm al-Rasūl*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 1998), pp. 33 – 38.

blasphemy against God for which respite is granted for repentance however this is not afforded to one who insults the Prophet.⁹⁷

As aforementioned the most controversial and sensitive polemic between the Barelwis and the Deobandis is the discussion on Prophet Muhammad's essence. This is not the case with the broader Wahhābī versus Sufi setting. Aḥmad Rizā Khan charged two prominent Deobandi scholars Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī and Ashraf Ali Thanwī with insulting the Prophet. The issue stems from a discussion regarding the knowledge bestowed by God to Muhammad. Rizā Khan decided to describe the Prophet as the 'Knower of the Unseen' (*ʿĀlim al-Ghayb*) arguing that God has given a portion of the 'Unseen Knowledge' not only to angels but prophets also. Notwithstanding that Rizā Khan in unequivocal terms states that the knowledge of the Prophet is not equal to the knowledge of God because the former is created knowledge and the latter is uncreated.⁹⁸ This clarification is entirely missed by the Deobandis, much like the Barelwis miss the clarification of Gangohī on the apophatic debate. Khalīl Aḥmad firstly responded by arguing that:

'there is no clear, unequivocal text in the Qur'ān to support the belief that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has vast knowledge, though there is such evidence in regard to Satan and the Angel of Death'

⁹⁷ Ibid p. 390 – 393.

⁹⁸ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*.
<http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

He then argues that Aḥmad Rizā goes on to draw a false analogy from this that since the Prophet has more merit than Satan he should *ipso facto* be more knowledgeable. The reality of the matter is that Rizā Khan interprets all the traditions regarding the Prophet’s limitariness of his knowledge as prior to God bestowing vast knowledge to him. In effect Rizā Khan draws upon textual evidence and not necessarily this analogy which rightly so is not admissible in Ash‘ari *Kalām*, the school which both factions revere. Nuh Keller observes how Khalīl can affirm vast knowledge to both the Angel of Death and Satan and it does not constitute polytheism (*shirk*) yet if affirmed to Muhammad it becomes so? If this vast knowledge is a divine attribute, ascribing it to any creature would be tantamount to *shirk*. Keller argues;

In sum, Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī’s disadvantageously comparing the Prophet’s knowledge (Allah bless him and give him peace) to Satan’s, the vilest creature in existence—regardless of the point he was making—is something few Muslims can accept. Whether Khalīl Aḥmad regarded it as a feat of ingenuity to show that because the Prophet’s knowledge was less than the Devil’s, it was *a fortiori* less than Allah’s, or whatever his impulse may have been, he badly stumbled in this passage. In any previous Islamic community, whether in Hyderabad, Kabul, Baghdad, Cairo, Fez, or Damascus—in short, practically anywhere besides the British India of his day—Muslims would have found his words repugnant and unacceptable.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*. <http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

Ashraf Ali Thanwi as a response to Rizā Khan calling the Prophet the 'Knower of the Unseen' made some remarks in his *Hifẓ ul-Imān* whether this Unseen was a part or all of it;

If it refers to but some of the unseen, then how is the Revered One [the Prophet] (Allah bless him and give him peace) uniquely special, when such unseen knowledge is possessed by Zayd and 'Amr [i.e. just anyone], indeed, by every child and madman, and even by all animals and beasts? For every individual knows something that is hidden from another individual, so everyone should be called "knower of the unseen." . . .

Keller offers the following explanation;

Thanwi apparently meant that the Prophet's (Allah bless him and give him peace) knowledge of the unseen was the same in kind as that any of the others mentioned, that is, the knowledge of the relative unseen, which, as explained above, merely means that each of Allah's creatures knows something that is "unseen" to others, while Allah alone has absolute knowledge of all of the unseen. Aside from Thanwi's artless comparison of the highest of creation with the lowest, the very point of saying it in refutation of Rizā is not plain, in view of the latter's explicit acknowledgement that no one can equal Allah's knowledge or possess it independently or be given anything but a part of it, even if, as Rizā says, "what a patent and tremendous difference

between one part [the Prophet's] and another [anyone else's]: like the difference between the sky and the earth, or rather even greater and more immense" ...¹⁰⁰

Rizā Khan's judgement on Sahāranpūrī and Thanwi was that they were disbelievers and whoever doubts their disbelief is also disbeliever. Keller explains Rizā Khan's rationale;

'Now, the temperament of Aḥmad Rizā Khan, with his acknowledged brilliance, doubtless played a role in this judgement, as did his love of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), which entailed withering scorn of those who did not share his somewhat exotic prophetology, and finally outright anathema (*takfīr*) of those who had emphasised the Prophet's humanity (Allah bless him and give him peace) with what appeared to be at the expense of his dignity.'

Keller maintains that His fatwa of *kufr* against the Deobandis, however, was a mistake. The root cause of this polemic is the misplaced Deobandi 'defence of Islam against *shirk*' and the fiery response of Aḥmad Rizā. The Deobandis were not intentionally disrespectful and Rizā Khan was understandably reactive but nonetheless wrong. Keller then concludes with the following remarks;

¹⁰⁰ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*.
<http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

'The Barelwi response to the Deobandis was probably far worse than the initial provocation, raising for the first time in Indian history the banner of *takfir* of one major group of Ḥanafī Muslims by another. The sad irony in this was that the greatest Wahhābī *bid'ā* of all, *takfir* of fellow Muslims, was unleashed in India by denunciations of "Wahhābism." Aḥmad Rizā's fatwas depicted his opponents as "Wahhābī sects," which his latter-day followers came to declare all Deobandis to belong to through a sort of "guilt by association."¹⁰¹

I have presented the most salient points raised by Nuh Keller; it may on the surface seem as a critique of the Deobandis yet this is not how it has been received by either the public or in the blogosphere.¹⁰² Nuh Keller who has been objective and critical of both sides in this essay but has been the subject of numerous rebuttals, most of which stem almost exclusively from the Barelwi quarters. A major criticism of Keller comes from Abu Hasan in his *The Killer Mistake: A Critique of Nuh Keller's "Iman, Kufr and Takfir"* who questions Keller's ability to access primary sources as many of the works were written in Urdu:

'How many people did Keller consult on the Deobandi-Barelwi issue? If he knows Urdu, then let him state himself how many books of both Deobandis and Barelwis did he read? Did he cross-

¹⁰¹ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*. <http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

¹⁰² There have been countless threads on Deenport.com and Sunnipath.com related to this article <<http://www.islam786.org/deobandis.htm#105699658>> there have been countless threads on Deenport.com and Sunnipath.com related to this article.

examine those who fed him Deobandi propaganda, or was it enough to be content with hearsay evidence in this matter?'¹⁰³

Keller's 'neutral' assessment of the polemic has caused rifts among Sufi scholastic traditionalists. Unlike the Deobandis, the Barelwis were less insular as they would invite scholars outside their own Barelwi tradition finding common ground on issues such as Sufism and the *mawlid*. The Barelwi affiliates have now to some extent ostracised Nuh Keller whom they once deemed a champion of Sunni Islam and now a 'Wahhābi sympathiser'.

In sum Sahāranpūrī and Thanwi regard exotic prophetology as bordering on polytheism whilst Rizā Khan deems the reductionist prophetology of the Deobandis and Wahhābīs as blasphemous. Barelwis have often made *takfīr* of Deobandis whilst no Deobandi of any standing has reciprocated with *takfīr* of Rizā Khan, however one would argue that Yūsuf Ludhianvi implicitly accuses him of *shirk* in his polemic '*Differences in the Umma and the Straight Path*'.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore Keller is of the opinion that these issues are not genuine *'aqīda* issues in the sense of being central tenets of faith that no one can disagree about and remain a believer; nor rendering either side outside of the pale of 'orthodoxy'.¹⁰⁵ These issues are as theologians would say 'abstruse notions' (*'awīṣāt al-masā'il*) only understood by select scholarship. The irresponsible introduction of such matters to the laity as a polemic has caused much

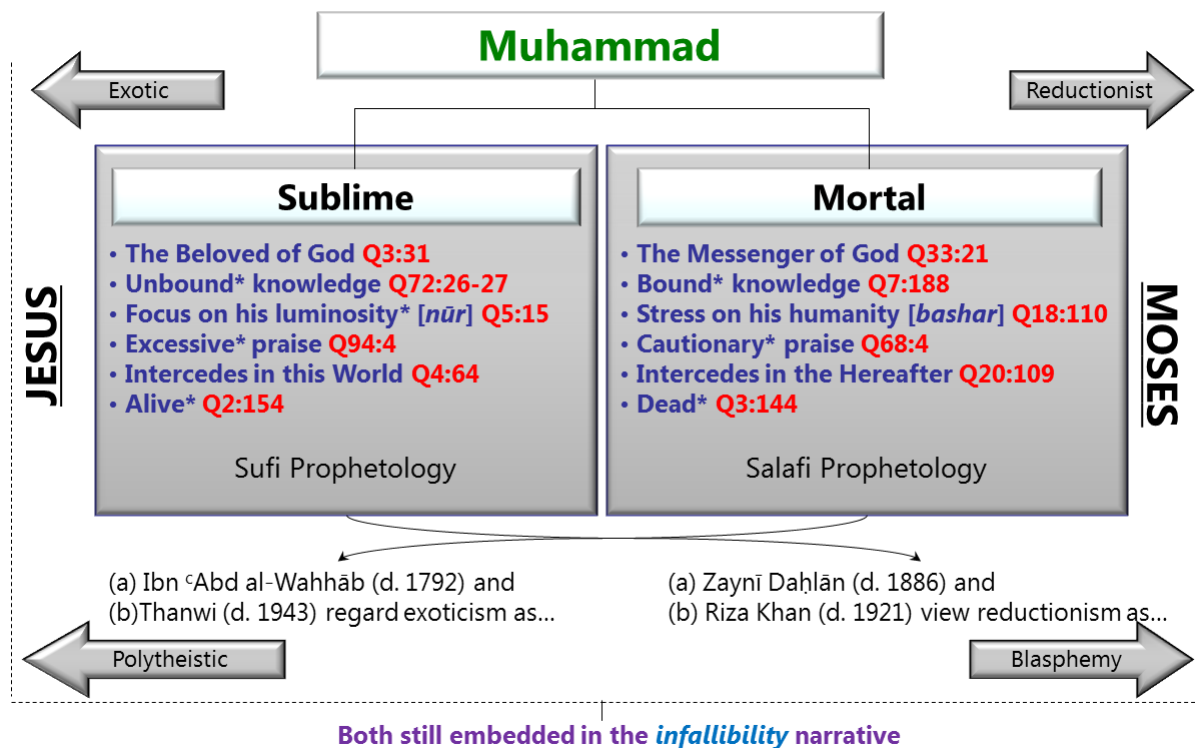
¹⁰³ Hasan, Abu. *The Killer Mistake: A critique of Nuh Keller's 'Iman, Kufr and Takfir'*. (Ridawi Press, 2013) p. 49. PDF

¹⁰⁴ Ludhianvi, pp. 31 – 42.

¹⁰⁵ Keller, *Iman, Kufr and Takfir*. <http://shadhilitariqa.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=20> [accessed 18/3/15]

schism in the Subcontinent and also in the UK. It has now surpassed mere intellectual curiosity and investigation.

Figure 5:4 Prophetology



The blasphemy law problems in Pakistan were influenced by the Barelwi scholarship in general to target Wahhābīs, but in particular their arch-rivals – the Deobandis. These historical polemics that Keller has addressed consist of the backdrop of contemporary blasphemy issues. Keller has aptly described the Barelwi reaction as akin to the excommunicative outlook of the Wahhābīs. The assassination of the governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer was carried out by Mumtaz Qadiri who according to the Dawn was a member of *Dawat-i-Islāmī* a Barelwi affiliate.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Kamran Yousaf, *Dawat-e-Islami comes under military's radar*, The Express Tribune [Sep 2011] <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/250572/clamping-down-dawat-e-islami-comes-under-militarys-radar/>> [accessed 28/7/2012]

5.5.2.b Peripheral Issues

In addition to the core areas of controversy aforementioned there are numerous peripheral issues of doctrine and Islamic ritual which have been prominent in these discussions. Some are inconsequential and largely jurisprudential whilst others significant enough to illicit genuine theological discussion. To mention significant minor differences between the Deobandis and the Barelwis, the discussion of Muhammad being light (*nūr*) or human (*bashar*), or omnipresent (*hāḍir wa nāẓir*), intercession issues and the celebration of *mawlid* are issues of perennial debate on the pulpits, blogosphere and now on TV.

The discussion of the Prophet being 'light' or 'human' was considered a non-issue as it was not asked by the scholars of the Middle East in Sahāranpūrīs apologetic. The Barelwis argue that Muhammad is not a mere mortal but has a sublime nature or more specifically he is made of light.¹⁰⁷ The Deobandis and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* argue that he is made of flesh and blood. In any case this is a less controversial example of exotic prophetology versus reductionist prophetology. Moreover although this is not an Arab polemic, it was brought to the attention of Ali Gomah and he dealt with it in a conciliatory manner.¹⁰⁸

There is some misunderstanding on the part of the Deobandis by what prophetic omnipresence means. The words '*hāḍir wa nāẓir*' (Urdu *hāẓir o nāẓir*) imply the meanings of omnipresence and omniscience respectively. With this understanding many *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* and Deobandis excluding the rich Sufi strand amongst them accuse

¹⁰⁷ Abu Ammar, *Traditional Scholarship & Modern Misunderstandings: Understanding the Ahle al-Sunnah*. (Bristol: Islamic Information Centre, 2001), pp. 47 – 54.

¹⁰⁸ cAlī Jumʿa, p. 149.

the Barelwis of ascribing a Divine Attribute to Prophet Muhammad which amounts to *shirk*.¹⁰⁹ In Sunni theology however, and Wahhābī Salafī creedalism in particular God is *not* omnipresent as He cannot be confined to His creation.¹¹⁰

The intercession issue is one which the Sunnis in general have huge differences regarding. In particular the Barelwis send salutations upon the Prophet in the vocative form 'Peace and salutations upon you O Messenger of God' (*al-ṣalāt wa al-salām ʿalayka yā rasūl Allah*), the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* consider this practice to be polytheistic at worst and heretic at best.¹¹¹ In theory the Deobandīs are less antagonistic on this issue.

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Lastly celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad has become a defining issue in these polemics especially in the broader Sufi-Salafī backdrop, although it is essentially a jurisprudential matter. The *mawlid* is a devotional practice which has been a point of difference from the very classical period, through to our present times. Most Muslim scholars including the likes of al-Nawawī, al-Suyūṭī and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī considered it permissible and argued though it was not a practice in early Islam it was a 'good innovation' (*bidʿa ḥasana*) nonetheless as it reminded Muslims of the founder of their faith, whilst Ibn Taymiyya and other jurists contend that it is an innovation absolutely. The Deobandīs argued that the *mawlid* in essence is not impermissible as it is rejoicing and commemorating the advent of the Messenger yet according to Sahāranpūrī due to the 'innovative practices' that occur in such gatherings (namely in

¹⁰⁹ Ehsan Elahi Zaheer, *Barelwis: History and Beliefs* [Trans. Abdullah Phd] (Lahore: Tarjuman al-Sunnah, 1985), p. 136-155.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Qudāma, p. 68.

¹¹¹ Abu Ammar, pp. 23 – 32.

¹¹² Ludhianvi, pp. 39 – 45.

India) it has been declared a means to an innovation.¹¹³ The *mawlid* is a sensitive issue too because those who celebrate it argue how can Muslims condemn other Muslims for commemorating the advent of Muhammad into this world.

5.5.2.c Base Sunnism according to each tradition

The following passages provide some pointers to the methodologies of the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, Deobandi and Barelwi traditions. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are vehemently non-conformist and engage in polemics with Subcontinent Ḥanafīs. Traditionally they used to be Ashʿarī now they are almost exclusively Atharī in doctrine. In like manner they used to be Sufi and now anti-Sufi because of their new affiliation with Arab Salafism. By anti-Sufism one means anti-*shaykh* and *pīrs*. Anti-innovation in general is the ethos of this group and anti-*mawlid* is its mission. They deem the folkloric shrine culture as abominable. In essence they feel conformism encourages ancestor glorification, Sufism inspires innovations, *mawlid* engenders exoticism and the shrine culture encourages *shirk*.

Deobandi Sunnism promotes Ḥanafī fiqh, Ashʿarī Māturīdī *kalām* with some revision on intercession and prophetology inspired by Wahhābism. Sufism in its traditional sense is encouraged though certain practices are to be reformed. Deobandism like literal Salafism is an exoteric tradition; the attire is stressed as a part of identity. Much of their literature stresses the 'Beard, hat and garb' (*dārī, topī, kurta*).¹¹⁴ This could be because the movement was born in an anti-colonial momentum and the zealotry for holding on to identity. Deobandis like the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are anti-*mawlid* anti-

¹¹³ Sahāranpūrī, pp. 242 – 249.

¹¹⁴ Kandhelvi, Zakariyya. *The Beard of a Muslim and its importance*. Midrand: Waterval Islamic Institute [no date] p 1 - 2

Shrine.¹¹⁵ Ludhianvi's hypothesis in his treatise *Differences in the Ummah* is that Deobandism is the unadulterated Sunni Islam and the 'Straight Path' (*al-sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) inherited from Shāh Waliullah after delineating the 'heterodoxies' of the Shi'a, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth, the Jamāt-i-Islāmī and the Barelwis. Arguably this treatise is primarily a polemic against Barelwism as he devotes two thirds of the book against Rizā Khan and his doctrinal beliefs and ritual practices.¹¹⁶

Barelwi Sunnism introduces too many peripheral issues as core issues. One would argue the core issues are Ḥanafī fiqh and Ash'arī Māturīdī *kalām* with a Sufic outlook and as Keller describes an exotic prophetology. Like their Deobandi counterparts Sufism is central with an emphasis on preserving rituals. The *mawlid* is a hallmark for the love of the Prophet. The shrine culture is a means of revering the *awliyā'*. Given these discussions one would argue that the Deobandis are reform Barelwis. Leaving aside this raging polemic there are some figures within the Deobandi tradition that the Barelwis have positive views regarding namely Hājī Imdādullah the *pīr* of Ashraf Ali Thanwi and especially his treatise *Haft Masla* in which he vindicates certain Barelwi practices.¹¹⁷

5.5.2.d Other subcontinent traditionalists and reconciliatory initiatives

The Deobandi Barelwi polemic has overshadowed and eclipsed other articulations of Sufi scholastic traditionalisms in the Subcontinent. A common misunderstanding is that any Indian Ḥanafī must either be Deobandi or Barelwi and that scholarship of this type can only go through these schools. Barelwism is largely an Indo-Pak

¹¹⁵ E.A. Mann, 'Religion, Money and Status' in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*. ed. by Christian W. Troll. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1992), p. 168.

¹¹⁶ Ludhianvi, pp. 27 – 112.

¹¹⁷ Sanyal, p. 36.

phenomenon; Bangladesh or colonial Bengal according to Razia Banu had a more syncretic Sufism which admittedly shared practices with Barelwis such as the *mawlid* but did not adopt the methodology of Aḥmad Rizā Khan and his *takfir* of Deobandis and Wahhābis.¹¹⁸ In effect Bangladeshi Barelwism and Deobandism for that matter learned to accommodate the separation of religion and politics because of the large Hindu populace and interaction with them.¹¹⁹

Rizā Khan's outlook could be viewed inversely as Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb's two aforementioned principles. Firstly) Sunni Islam is marked by its love of Prophet Muhammad and secondly) by its opposition of those who insult or lower his status as out of the pale of Islam. The *mawlid* observing Ḥanafis of Bengal had their chain (*sanad*) going through Kanpūr India back to Shah Waliullah which is independent from the Deobandi, Barelwi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* chains.¹²⁰ Mufti Amīm al-Ihsān of Bangladesh is revered by Pakistani Deobandi scholarship who regard him as a Deobandi when in reality he shares more in common with the Barelwi movement. I am of the understanding that this is the case because of his positive stance on Deobandi scholarship as is evident in his work *Tadwīn-i-Fiqh*.¹²¹ He lists the Deobandi elders and Aḥmad Rizā Khan as the great Ḥanafī jurists of the Subcontinent.¹²² It is his synthesis of Sunnism which is noteworthy and evinces somewhat of a minimalism based on the link to Shah Waliullah. The Naqhsbandi Owaisi *Tanzīm al-Ikhwān* led by Muhammad Akram Awān arguably from a Deobandi background is also attempting to bridge the gap between these two traditions most notably by using the Barelwi appeal of

¹¹⁸ Razia Akter Banu, *Islam in Bangladesh*. (Leiden: Brill 1992), pp. 50 -51.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 180 – 181.

¹²⁰ Al-Barkatī, Amīm al-Ihsān. *Rasm al-Muftī wa ādāb al-iftā' wa ma yata'allaqu bi al-Muftī wa al-Muftī*. (Deoband: Ashrafi Book Depot, 1991), pp. 562 – 563.

¹²¹ Amīm al-Ihsān al-Barkatī, *Tadwīn 'ilm-i- fiqh*. (Karachi: Qadīmī Kutubkhāma, 1966), pp. 58 – 59.

¹²² *Ibid.* pp. 58 – 59.

Imdādullah. Karam Shāh al-Azhari an eminent figure from the Barelwi tradition likewise attempted to bring about dialogue with the Deobandis. These are just an indication of what we have identified as ethical micro-minimalism dialogue initiatives though they have not been as cogent as those of Abd al-Hādī, al-ʿAlawī and the Amman Message.¹²³

5.6 Conclusion

From the above one can argue that it is largely unclear what modernism actually comprises. If the notion of modernism is veering away from 'tradition' or the importing of foreign ideas, Muʿtazilism could be viewed as a form of proto-modernism for a) its veering from the positions held by the early generations and b) adoption of Hellenic rationalism, something which was perceived as alien. Would then latter-day Ashʿarism and Māturīdism be modernist in that they eventually adopted the *taʿwīl* of the Muʿtazilites and by doing so differed with the early generations? In this sense one would argue tradition is the creation of modernity. Modernist thought whether reformist or liberal could confidently accept macro-doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalism e.g. the base creed, spirit of early Islam and a broad-based outlook, however it would not accept micro-minimalisms i.e. rigid dogmatism, promotion of theological schools or essentialism as it would be deemed as promotion of rigid constructs of 'orthodoxies'. Furthermore other micro-minimalist structures such as normative doctrines, parochial methodologies and dialogue initiatives based on narrow discourse would also be problematic. Effectively macro-minimalism would also in addition to traditionalists appeal to modernist thought as possibly the only form of workable minimalisms as it does not allow any elite to monopolise the interpretation of such broad doctrines.

¹²³ Chapter 1, Fig. 1:5.

In terms of traditionalism, Sufi Salafi dialogue through the apologetics of ʿAlawī al-Mālikī and ʿAbd al-Hādī indicates a positive move in the right direction and now the culmination of an ethical macro-minimalism in the sense of All Muslims and micro-minimalism in the sense of Sunni essentialism as is exemplified in the Amman Message. The Sunni Pledge too provides micro-minimalism and in effect is an explicit recognition of the intra-sectarian fighting within Sunni traditionalism at least within the broader Sufi – Salafi backdrop. It does not explicitly deal with the Barelwi – Deobandi controversies yet it is understood from the UK/US context that it is attempting to address the negative consequences of these theological debates.

The Divinity and Prophetology controversies have been embarrassing for the Deobandis as they have been deemed as reductionists of Prophet Muhammad’s status and this may indicate their growing dissatisfaction with Ashʿarism as they are now beginning to move more towards Wahhābism.¹²⁴ Wahhābist sympathy and antipathy within the Deobandi tradition has been divisive. Khalil Aḥmad and Anwar Shah were anti-Wahhābī where as Gangohī and Thanwi were more receptive to Wahhābī ideas.¹²⁵ Deobandis have become more and more insular as they are failing to establish links external to themselves because of these insecurities. They condemn *mawlid* and find it difficult to relate with Ashʿarī Sufis elsewhere who do engage in *mawlid*. Because of this they feel more comfortable with the Wahhābīs and consolidated links in Saudi Arabia.¹²⁶ Conversely, Deobandis of the Whitethread Press in conjunction with traditionalists like Hamza Yūsuf are trying to promote a Deobandism which has more in common with Barelwism.¹²⁷ The ‘Radical Middle Way Project’ a UK based government sponsored initiative that aims to engage the Muslim community and

¹²⁴ Bowen, p. 3 – 4.

¹²⁵ Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani*, pp. 66 – 67.

¹²⁶ Bowen, p. 20.

¹²⁷ Abdul Rahman ibn Yusuf, ‘About Us’ *Whitethread Press*. <http://www.whitethreadpress.com/?page_id=2> [accessed 18/3/15]

tackle radicalisation is also providing a platform for a cross sectarian dialogue and corporation.¹²⁸

Barelwism is beset with similar tensions as the Deobandis and their stance towards Wahhābīs. Barelwis have successfully established links with Syrian, Egyptian and Yemeni scholarship. This they have done by sending students over to al-Azhar University in Egypt and al-Fatḥ in Syria. Barelwism finds common ground with these institutions, especially regarding issues like the Ḥanafism, and Taṣawwuf. Furthermore they have confidently hosted Western traditionalist scholarship like Hamza Yusuf, T.J Winter and Nuh Keller in their institutions, something which is less prominent in Deobandi circles. This may indicate a continuation of a precedent set by Rizā Khan who himself sought international links to bolster the profile of his movement. The Barelwis would like to cooperate with other Sunni Muslims but Rizā Khan's *fatwa* on the Deobandis and Wahhābīs compromises any real progress. Notwithstanding that, not all Barelwis take Rizā Khan's *fatwa* seriously. Very much like the Madkhalī Salafis the Barelwi 'ulamā' who seek broader links with other groups are ostracised by their own Barelwi brethren.¹²⁹ This form of zealous Barelwism can, as Keller has observed, be termed 'Sufi *takfīrīs*' or non-violent extremism. More specifically there is a movement within Barelwism aimed at raising its scholastic profile headed by Muhammad Imdād Hussain Pirzāda founder and principal of *Jamia al-Karam* seminary in Retford United Kingdom.¹³⁰ He is a successor to Karam Shah an al-Azhar trained scholar and his methodology is not polemically charged against either the Deobandis or Wahhābīs as is the case with other strands of Barelwism. This is evident in his short treatise *Islamic Beliefs (al-ʿAqā'id al-Islāmiyyah)*, in fact one would posit this is a Barelwi attempt at

¹²⁸ The Radical Middle Way. <<http://www.radicalmiddleway.org/>> [accessed 18/3/15]

¹²⁹ Tāhir al-Qādirī has been in the limelight within Barelwi circles for his attempts at working with Deobandi and the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth.

¹³⁰ Pirzada. 'About Us', Jamia Al-Karam. <<http://www.alkaram.org/about%20us/index.htm>> [accessed 18/3/15]

doctrinal minimalism as he has avoided controversial intra-Sunni polemical issues and presented a base dogma that could theoretically be acceptable to the Wahhābīs let alone their Deobandi counterparts with whom they share much of an affinity.¹³¹

These Deobandi - Barelwi polemics are significant even to other strands of thought including political organisations like *Jamāt-i-Islāmī*. Many of the political affiliates of *Jamāt-i-Islāmī* align themselves with the Deobandis and also regard themselves as a reform movement which puts them at a disadvantageous position politically as they then cannot appeal to Barelwis who are easily the majority in the Subcontinent. If Barelwism successfully spears forward a blasphemy case in for example Pakistan, at some point the Deobandis will be their prime target. Likewise if Deobandis or *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* manage to convince authorities to root out un-Islamic activities or what they deem as innovations then there will be complications for *mawlid* processions that the Barelwis participate in.

Branches of doctrine can be based on solitary transmission and therefore one is free to debate these. The Barelwi Deobandi schisms will continue until both parties admit that they can disagree on these issues without compromising Islam. Shah Waliullah is integral to all three Indian traditions, perhaps looking beyond the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, Barelwi, and Deobandi paradigms and extrapolating a minimalism based on his teachings could change this polemic or reconcile it altogether, we shall examine Shah Waliullah in the next chapter. Crucial though, these traditions are not only strands of thought but are now institutions in their own right. Revision of these traditions will be met with some resistance. Ironically these traditions should be more reconcilable than the general Sufi - Salafi divide as they are in agreement on doctrinal, methodological

¹³¹ Muhammad Imdad Hussein Pirzada, *Islamic Beliefs*. (trans. Muhammad Sajid Younus) (Retford: Al-Karam Publications, 1999), p. 1.

and ethical minimalisms at the macro levels of the base creed, early scholarship and attitudinal outlook and also the micro levels of accepting the six articles of faith, the 2 schools of Sunni *kalām* and Ibn Tāhir type essentialisms in addition to their identical *Dars-i-Nizāmī* syllabi. As argued earlier, Deobandism is only reform Barelwism. Their main areas of contentions are agreeing upon intra-Sunni micro minimalisms of normative doctrine as this would be too insufficient in detail, the parochial methodologies or what one would term parochial minimalisms and any dialogue initiatives. Interestingly Ashraf 'Alī Thānwi being the most prolific writer amongst the Deobandis – most of his works are constantly reprinted with the exception of his controversial *Ḥifẓ ul-Īmān* which is amongst being the few that are still in manuscript form or out of print. This may be a concession on the part of the Deobandis in that they recognised the controversy of Thanwi's words, whether they support him or not. Likewise moderate Barelwis like Tāhir al-Qādirī and Karam Shah do not excommunicate Deobandis as Rizā Khan did nor do they promote his *fatwas* on this divisive issue in a sense acknowledging the excesses of their spiritual master. Moreover the Barelwi - Deobandi polemic emerged in a historically volatile period under a colonial setting where groups were competing to represent the interests of the Muslims. Unlike the general Sufi – Salafi polemic which is a polemic of ideas, the Barelwi - Deobandi polemic is one of personalities and identity politics and as such these historical prejudices may be difficult to overcome until real reform takes place in these movements. Overall even Keller fails to point out that works such as *Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn* and *Al-Muhannad* and the expeditious tendency of the Arab scholars to both agree with the charges of excommunication and then ashamedly backtrack their edicts, is a sign of the degradation of *kalām* as a discipline. Any renewal of the *kalām* tradition will inevitably entail a rejuvenation of its polemical trappings.

CHAPTER SIX: PROSPECTS OF A COHESIVE MINIMALIST THEOLOGY

In the previous chapters we surveyed the historical development of theology in Sunni Islam, the latent perennial 'dialectic' and excommunicative tensions, and in the preceding chapter we examined the polemical culmination of theological discourse in contemporary Sunni sects and the schisms within them. In this chapter I attempt to draw a minimalist theology from a historical analysis of these *kalām* 'wranglings' and the contemporary minimalist literature of al-Hādī and ʿAlawī which encapsulates minimalism as a project. In addition I identified the Amman Message and the Sunni Pledge initiatives and how those principles inform these measures. I assess the success of these two projects. Moreover I will examine intra-Sunni polemics.

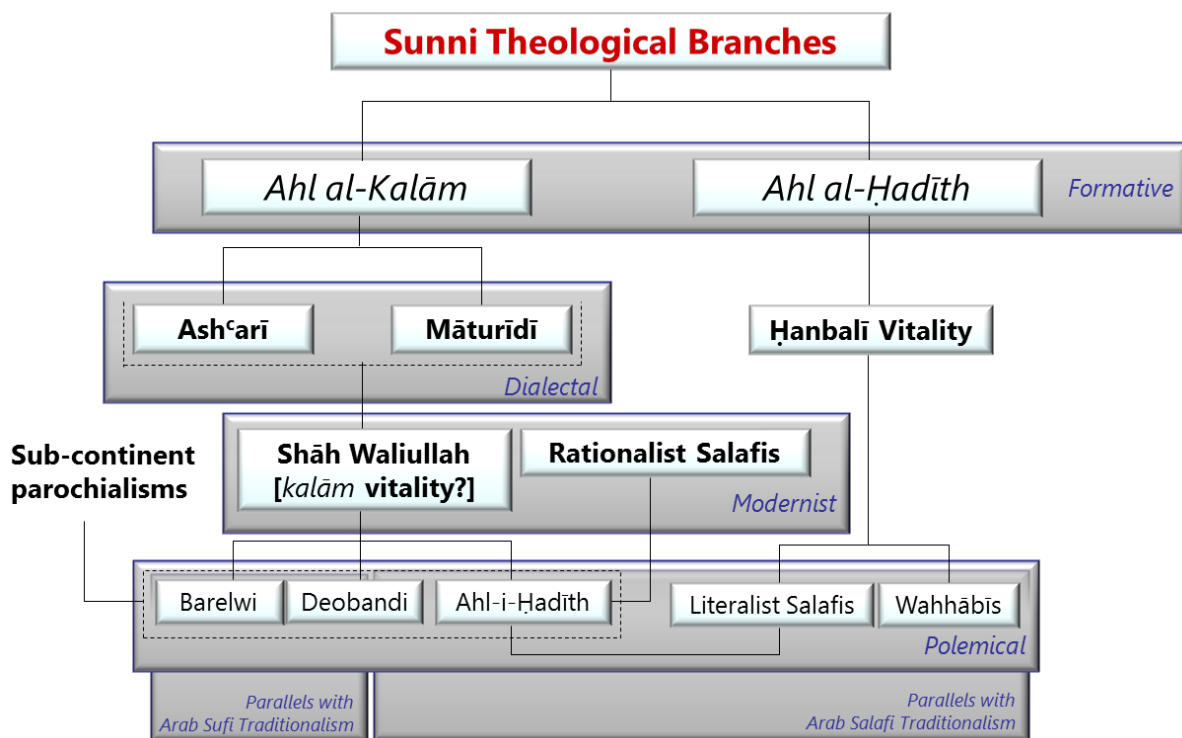
I have previously discussed broad-based principles and the ethical outlook of Sunni Islam which provides a framework for minimalism. Theological minimalism is not necessarily a new *kalām* in and of itself, but rather a *syncretic* school which incorporates the mechanisms of existing *kalām* traditions. Essentially core dogmata, principles of doctrine, historical continuity (schools of classical theology), source methodology and most importantly methods of interpretation in the form of accommodating both *taʿwīl* and *bilā kayf* as latter day Ashʿarites once did would form the foundations of such a functional *theology* and not be governed by the rigid strictures of 'orthodoxy' of the existing schools and their polemical setting.

6.1 Broad survey of Sunni theological trends

The rationality versus tradition debate in the formative period of Islam was exemplified through the Muʿtazilites and the Ḥanbalites. At this point one would consider Muʿtazilism as Proto-Sunnism. The *taʿwīl* of rationalism might be seen as a reaction to

or a phobia of anthropomorphism. The traditionalists were apprehensive of ‘rejecting’ the Qur’ān and thus chose a quasi-literal approach. This polemic remained and culminated eventually in the ‘Ḥanbalī vitality’ which subsequently led to Wahhābism on the one hand and on the other, what one would term *kalām* vitality which crystallised in Shah Waliullah’s thought and disseminated varyingly through Barelwism, Deobandism and the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*. I have chosen to refer to Shah Waliullah as a conduit of *kalām* vitality as his thought also influences modernism through the likes of Iqbāl. Likewise Abduh and the 19th century reformers were more inspired by *kalām* than the traditionalism of Salafiyya that they themselves promoted.

Figure 6:1 Theological overview



6.2 The broad based minimalist principles of Sunni Islam

It can be argued from surveying the development of theology and the doctrinal debates that transpired over the centuries that the relationship minimalism has to established doctrine is somewhat akin to the relationship of the discipline of legal

theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) to applied jurisprudence (*furūc al-fiqh*). Principles of jurisprudence emerge from the corpus of legal edicts which then gave broad-based outlines of the purpose of jurisprudence and an overall method of interpretation which was extrapolated from the disagreements of jurists.¹ In the like manner theological principles surface from the polemics between Sunni or non-Sunni schools of theology. One is of the opinion that a minimalism or normative theology (*uṣūl al-ʿitiqād*) to be precise within Sunni Islam was not clearly enunciated or seriously attempted because of how applied jurisprudence or *ijtihād* for that matter of any jurist is tested against the strictures of legal theory and if wrong a shadow of doubt is cast upon the jurist's judgement. If doctrine in a similar fashion is tested against a theological model it is not only the doctrine in question that would be put under scrutiny but also the source of the doctrine which in the case of dogma is based on *ḥadīth* statutes. Minimalism is required, in accordance to an internal logic of Sunni dogma, to deal with *contradictory* traditions pertaining to doctrine and for that matter *ḥadīth* literature is replete with such material.² Yet paradoxically it has been avoided as it may smack of Muʿtazilite rationalist seepage. I would argue that the Muʿtazilites gave rise to the Sunni *kalām* traditionalists who regarded rationality (*ʿaql*) next in order to tradition (*naql*) and as such history indicates an inevitable potentiality of the rational approach reclaiming its position in Ashʿarite theology. This internal *ʿaql* versus *naql* struggle in the Sunni experience is exemplified in the in the Qurʾānic traditional v hypothetical opinion dichotomy, in jurisprudential traditionalist *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* v rationalist *Ahl al-Raʿy* debates and the much overlooked chain criticism versus text criticism contradiction within hadith studies.³ In fact I would argue that though the 'definitive' historicity of the Qurʾān is upheld by Muslims, interpreting its contents has been acceptable yet paradoxically, *ḥadīth* with its 'speculative' historical validity does not enjoy the same latitude in interpretation.

¹ Nyazee, pp. 313 – 316.

² Siddiqi, pp. 126 – 128.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

6.3 Ibn Ṭāhir's Sunni essentialism

The problem with Ibn Ṭāhir's paradigm of minimalism is that it reinforces the 'seventy two sects' narrative without successfully outlining a coherent articulation of Sunnism on the doctrinal level though he has partially presented an ethical orthopraxy. The very assertion of a 'seventy two sects' narrative renders any minimalist model redundant due to its fatalistic ahistorical view of orthodoxy. That said though, his model serves well as an ethical outline of Sunnism. Ibn Ṭāhir also does not adequately present a creedal account of Sunnism but rather a methodological one. The main feature of this orthopraxy is its lack of excommunication. The contemporary Sunni groups that we have examined in this thesis i.e. the Barelwis, Deobandis, *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, the Sufis and Salafis in general fall short of this ethical outlook as all of them have in some shape or form accused one another of disbelief or minor heresy. Moreover as demonstrated in chapter four, excommunication is an established tradition within all Sunni articulations of *kalām*.

6.4 Shah Waliullah's thought as micro-minimalism for the Barelwi, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* methodologies

In the previous chapter we examined the Barelwi, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* polemics and established that the two former traditions have much in common and that the latter differs on conformism to schools and an antipathy towards the Sufi tradition. Rest aside the raging polemics between these traditions, one factor unites them all – the thought of Shah Waliullah. All three traditions contend that they are the true representatives of his tradition. Though Shah Waliullah adhered to the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence his approach to *fiqh* as is evident in his magnum opus *Ḥujja Allah al-Bāligha* was fused with three conflicting methods; the rigour of non-conformism, persistence on authentic *ḥadīth* as basis for legislation and also historicising *fiqh*. It is perhaps because of this seemingly revisionist approach to jurisprudence that the *Ahl-*

i-Hadīth view him with such adulation and the fact that he would frequently go against the Ḥanafī school's verdict on jurisprudential issues and also the modernists too who commend him for his revisionism.⁴ The Barelwis too regard Shah Waliullah in such high esteem because of his standing in the mystical sciences and also his son Shah ʿAbd al ʿAzīz (d. 1239/1824). Shah Waliullah can reconcile Ibn Taymiyya's legalism on the one hand and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī's theosophy on the other, as Ansari indicates in the Subcontinent heritage of Aḥmad Sirhindī.⁵ It may be argued that his approach could be considered a Sufi - Salafi synthesis in a far more syncretic manner than that of al-Bannā' and other neo-Sufis. In sum Barelwism maybe a manifestation of Waliullah's mysticism and the *Ahl-i-Hadīth* his legalism. The Deobandis would argue that they are his true progenitors for amalgamating both approaches.

6.5 Contextualisation of Sunnism according to the current polemical setting

Not all of the sub-polemics within contemporary Sunnism have been outlined but merely those which are archetypal. Mainstream reading of Sunni Islam can be described as 'textualism' and mainstream religious practice as a broad 'traditionalism or conservatism'. The two major factors which cause disagreement in Islamic theology are 'innovation' in religious practices and figurative interpretation of statutes as these challenge mainstream reading and practice.

There are two trends in mainstream reading or interpretation of statutes; literalist and obscurantist. This takes us back to the medieval debate on whether the Qur'ān should be interpreted literally or metaphorically/allegorically. Mainstream jurists and

⁴ ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Shāh Waliullah, *Hujjat Allah al-Bāligha*. 2 vols (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Kawthar, 1999), I, pp. 17 – 18.

⁵ Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: a study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī's Effort to Reform Sufism*. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), pp. 114 – 117.

theologians argued that the statutes are to be outwardly affirmed (*al-nuṣūṣ ʿalā ḡawāhirihā*).⁶

Obscurantism may arguably have its roots in the mystic traditions. Sometimes *outwardly affirming* the statutes becomes problematic and recourse must be made to 'figurative interpretation'. This interpretation which is broader than '*ta'wīl*', has become for some part of a structured methodology incorporating other exotic experiential elements such as inspiration (*ilhām*) and illumination (*kashf*). Though *kashf* holds an elevated status in Sufi lore the problem according to the epistemological model in *kalām* is as al-Nasafī says that '*kashf*' is not 'real' knowledge.⁷

There are two trends in methodological attitude towards 'religious innovations'; rejectionism and liberalism. Rejectionist interpretation of the prophetic *ḡadīth* 'all innovations constitute misguidance' (*kull bidʿa ḡalāla*) is restricted to innovation in religious practices.⁸ This would also entail the *ad hominem* rejection of statements because of *who* said it irrespective of the veracity of the statement. Liberal interpretation of 'all innovations' however, is restricted to 'bad *religious* innovations' as opposed to 'good religious innovations'.⁹ They only reject 'innovations' which conflict with the statutes. As such they allow latitude even in devotional acts especially in the interpretation of 'remembrance of God' (*dhikr*).¹⁰

⁶ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḡ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, p. 257.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 72 – 74.

⁸ Abū Ishāq al-Shāḡibī, *Al-Itiṣām*. Darel Marefah: Beirut. 2000), p. 23.

⁹ Ibn Naqīb al-Miṣrī, pp. 914 – 916.

¹⁰ ʿAlī Jumʿa, pp. 241 – 242.

6.6 Sunni trends and broader 'heterodoxies'

Al-Ghazālī and others before him outlined two trends within Sunni Islam, that of the jurist and that of the mystic. The jurist (*faqīh*) who was more concerned with the letter of the law and the Sufi who was only concerned with the spirit of the law and experiencing the gnosis of God (*maʿrifa Allah*).¹¹ The former would consider the latter uninformed and the latter would consider the former a 'dry academic'.¹²

Muslims understand Islam as a 'middle tradition' situated between the other Abrahamic dispensations of Judaism and Christianity which collectively make an 'orthodoxy' amongst all the remaining major faith traditions. Ibn Taymiyya makes an observation of Muslim 'deviancy' and expands upon al-Ghazālī's *faqīh/sufi* divide.¹³ Firstly Sunni Islam is deemed by mainstream Sunni Muslims as the 'orthodoxy'. It will be flanked by two polar 'heterodoxies'; Khārijism and Shiism. Khārijism by Sunnis would be considered the extreme manifestation of the literalist and rejectionist trend within Islam whereas Shiism would be deemed the exotic articulation of the obscurantist and liberalist (albeit relatively speaking) trend within Islam. The historical heirs of these original 'heterodoxies', i.e. Ibādism and contemporary Shiism with its varying schools and trends will compound this polarisation.

In Islam the experiences of the Jewish and Christian peoples are considered as part of its own accumulative heritage. The mentioning of the Jews and Christians who are also, alongside Muslims the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) is replete throughout the Qur'ān and Muslims are urged to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. The

¹¹ Ibn Qudāma, pp. 15 – 23.

¹² Ḥawwa, *Tarbiyatunā al-Rūḥiyya*, pp. 11 -19.

¹³ ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, *Al-Umma al-Wasaṭ wa al-Minhāj al-Nabawī wa al-Daʿwa ilā Allah*. (Riyadh: KSA Ministry of Islamic Affairs 1998), pp. 58 – 59.

inquisitiveness of Muhammad's Companions urged them to learn from Judeo-Christian sources as is evident in the early formulation of Qur'ānic exegesis.

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the *faqīh* is similar to a Jewish Rabbi and hence very textual in approach, and the Sufi is like the Christian monk. In other words Ibn Taymiya is conceptualising both Judaism and Christianity as broader 'heterodox' forms of proto-Islam. Conversely Christian writers like Van de Weyer speak of Islam as a 'heterodox' form of Christianity.¹⁴ Goddard highlights other Christian attempts to understand Islam as a Christian heresy.¹⁵ Aside from the value judgements inherent in both the Muslim perspective on Christianity and *vice versa* this is not necessarily negative as it is to some extent conducive of inter-faith dialogue and shows a convergence point of minimal commonality between the traditions.¹⁶

Effectively what we have on the base level is legalism, a letter of the law and 'following rules' manner of religion which can then be methodologically expressed through Salafism within a Sunni framework, which then in turn is flanked by the rejectionism of Khārijism within a broader Islamic framework and finally Judaism, a broader People of the Book framework. These trends share one thing in common a 'reduction' of human authority/personality where the text is given precedence over other considerations - broadly speaking 'scholasticism' which urges *empirical* knowledge. Though knowledge is respected the 'cult of scholars' is criticised. Moreover the rejectionism of Khārijism should not necessarily be understood in a pejorative sense rather it is an egalitarian

¹⁴ Robert Van de Weyer, *Islam and the West: A New Political and Religious Order Post September 11*. (Kuala Lumpur: O Books, 2001), pp. 29 – 30.

¹⁵ Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 39 – 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

understanding of religion i.e. their rejectionism is a rejection of elites monopolising truth.

The second trend in Sunnism is broadly speaking Sufism. At the very basic level there is mysticism in a broad sense of 'devotionalism' (*ta^cabbud*), a spirit of the law which can be methodologically expressed through the Sufi tradition within a Sunni framework, which in turn is flanked by the 'exoticism' of Shiism within a broader Islamic framework and finally Christianity in a broader People of the Book framework. These trends have one feature in common - 'excess' in human authority/personality where there is a 'centrality of a religious character' or significance given *to people to interpret* the text be they the *awliyā'* amongst the Sufis and the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) – broadly speaking a 'monastic tradition' which emphasises experiential knowledge and stresses a spiritual chain (*silsila*) of transmission.

It seems that the predominant theological schools who claim to be Sunni still fall under this *faqīh/sufi* divide. As previously identified there are four major sub-trends within the bipartite Sufi/Salafi setting, which adequately represents groups outside of the Sub-continent too;

Camp 1: Sufi scholastic traditionalism

1. Folkloric Sufism
2. Reform Sufism

Camp 2: Salafi scholastic traditionalism

3. Rigid Scholasticism
4. Non-conformism

Folkloric Sufism as a type of traditionalism includes the following of *madhhabs* and an emphasis on Sufi practices and reverence of *awliyā'*. Imitation (*taqlid*) of scholarship and *awliyā'* is encouraged. Although theoretically they are against religious 'innovation' in practice this may not be the case. They are very receptive to cultural accretions within their religious traditions. Generally this group is passive though not entirely apolitical and still flourish under strong secular regimes. The Barelwi tradition is an archetype of folkloric Sufism. The vast majority of Muslims worldwide at least on the cultural framework would share such an affinity with this type of setting. This Islam is exemplified with cultural-religious observances such as the *mawlid* and the maintenance of shrines of the *awliyā'*.

As for Reform Sufism it is not as popular as the aforementioned type of Sufism it nonetheless is a perennial phenomenon. The concept of *tajdid* is not only restricted to *fatwa* and law but also the spiritual sciences. Many of the Sufi orders reevaluated their positions on certain practices and began 'distilling' their orders from 'impurities' and bringing it back to the 'pristine' understanding of the early generation. The Deoband movement is an archetype of this. These types of Sufis can be harsh against innovation like the Wahhābīs and pejoratively identified by their adversaries as such. At times they embrace change, while at others they become reactionary and insular, as is often the case with Deobandis. Deobandis and other Sufis from North Africa agree with the Wahhābīs in their opposition to many Sufi practices. They may have been influenced by Wahhābīs by way of reaction.

Rigid scholasticism consists of groups which may adhere to schools of jurisprudence like other Sufi scholastic traditionalists yet reject the Sufi orders and oppose any form of 'religious' innovation. This group emphasises social reform and this ethos can be

judgemental and harsh. The Wahhābīs are the archetypes of this phenomenon. Due to globalisation many Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs and others are adopting this approach. It is noteworthy that the anti-innovation stance itself can serve as a polemical minimalism.

Non conformism entails groups which do not consider adherence to schools of jurisprudence as traditionalism. Their ideal is the Islam of the first three generations and the literal following of *ḥadīth*. This group is highly critical of general Sunni scholarship and only recognise a small group of Sunni *‘ulamā’* as ‘authoritative’. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* or the Arab Salafiyya are archetypes of this group, and they have a close affinity with the Wahhābīs.

6.6.1 Fault-lines;

Within the Salafi camp the Wahhābīs and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are closely interlinked and work together. As aforementioned, since the first Gulf War the Salafi movement is split in two main camps that of the apolitical Rabī^c al-Madkhalī strand and largely political non-Madkhalīs.¹⁷ The Wahhābīs by which one means Najdī Ḥanbalīs side more with the Madkhalīs. The Wahhābīs and the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are united against the Barelwis and folkloric Sufis in general. Iḥsān IIāhī Ḥāhīr’s polemic *Al-Barelwiyya* was endorsed in Saudi by leading Salafi and Wahhābī scholarship and is indicative of this solidarity.¹⁸

Within the Sufi camp the Barelwis and Deobandis are at loggerheads with each other primarily on doctrinal issues and actively work against each other. Nonetheless they are still united on issues like *madhhab*-conformism and validity of Sufi orders.

¹⁷ Bernard Haykel, ‘On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action’ in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*. ed. by Roel Meijer. (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), p. 34.

¹⁸ Zaheer, pp. 17 – 24.

Interestingly the Deobandis periodically are influenced by the Wahhābīs, some of their elders such as Kashmiri and Sahāranpūrī were critical of Wahhābīs whilst others praised like Gangohī them.¹⁹ The Deobandis feel more comfortable sending their graduates to Medina University rather than al-Azhar.²⁰ The irony of this is that the Wahhābīs despite acknowledging the validity of adhering to a single jurisprudential school and not having a problem with the non-Sufi Deobandis, they are now slowly distancing themselves from them.²¹ The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* and Deobandis are at loggerheads on jurisprudential matters. Though figure 6:2 (below) Illustrates Barelwism or archetypally folkloric Sufism as the most marginalised form of Sunnism in reality this umbrella of understanding quantitatively comprises the majority of Sunni Muslims in the world today in the broadest sense.²²

6.6.2 Obscurantist/Liberalist trend;

Excessive use of figurative interpretation leads to obscurities and there is a susceptibility to rely on someone else's explanation of religious matters. It is here that the cult of personality can develop. Sufi articulations of Islam tend to move beyond text and not necessarily against text. As previously presented it is flanked in the Sunni heresiological model by a Muslim 'heterodoxy' which is an 'excessive' expression of this type of obscurantism which in turn emphasises the cult of the *awliyā'*, 'Alī and the

¹⁹ Riza 'Uthmānī, *'Aqā'id 'Ulemā'-i-Deoband aur Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn*. (Karachi: Darul al-Isha'at, [no date]), pp. 228 – 230. Rashid Gangohi speaks highly of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb whereas Sahāranpūrī holds a negative view of him.

²⁰ Deobandism is a reactionary anti-colonial movement. The orthopraxy of Deobandism includes wearing 'Islamic' attire. Al-Azhar are liberal on such issues as this, Sufi practices and *madhab*-conformism, *talfīq* is the general outlook of Azhari legalism. See Phil Lewis *Islamic Britain*.

²¹ Increasingly old translations of the Qur'ān in Urdu by Deobandi scholarship such as Mahmūd al-Hasan (Sheikh al-Hind) are being replaced by *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* scholarship.

²² This is analogous to three schools of jurisprudence (*jumhūr*) bloc united against the Ḥanafīs who are the majority of Sunnis. Sunni dominant lands are predominantly Sufi and therefore share an affinity with the Barelwis especially on religio-cultural practices.

Ahl al-Bayt. In this sense Shiism is seen as what obscurantist Sufism could culminate into as ‘Alī, the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the infallible Imams. Furthermore on the broader ‘People of the Book’ framework i.e. if Islam is viewed as the ‘orthodox’ amongst these dispensations, Christianity would flank Sufism and Shiism as in that tradition as viewed by Muslims the personality of Jesus Christ, the Holy Family and the saints is very much pronounced. The two factors which link these obscurantist traditions are *the pietism of others* and their infallibility whether implicit or explicit. Hagiographical literature abounds in the Sufi camp at present with much emphasis placed on the marvels of the *awliyā’*. Moreover much distinction is given to human authority whether they are scholars or *awliyā’*. Emotionalism is encouraged with great importance given to the notion of love. In the Barelwi Sufi tradition love of the Prophet is central to the spiritual path.²³ In Shiism love of ‘Alī and the *Ahl al-Bayt* is integral to faith as is exemplified in the mourning ceremonies in the month of Muharram.²⁴ Sufis invoke the *awliyā’* through intercession (*tawassul*) which the Salafis find abominable. In a sense obscurantism could be deemed as imitation (*taqlīd*) in broader dimensions. It has already been argued that Sufi scholastic traditionalism can also have liberal trends. By liberal trends one means a move from rigid textualism. Though the Sufis recognise the validity of Sunni jurisprudence they may not follow it to the letter. Many Sufi devotional acts in all the different orders indicate this trend. Perhaps the normative jurisprudence (*maqāṣid*) approach culminated from Sufi considerations of intentionality.²⁵ The root cause of either literalist or obscurantist reading is the use or misuse of *ta’wīl*.

²³ The Sufis especially the Barelwis focus on ‘Love of the Messenger’ (*‘ishq-i-rasūl*). The Mawlid functions are used as events to remind Muslims of Muhammad. Polemical literature in defence of the *Mawlid* abounds in Barelwi scholarship.

²⁴ Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and law in Imāmī Shī’ism*. (Hampshire: Variorum, 1991), pp. 14 – 15.

²⁵ Muḥammad Abdū. *Al-Fikr al-Maqāṣidī ‘inda al-Imām al-Ghazālī*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2009), pp. 115 – 123.

6.6.3 Literalist/Rejectionist trend;

Although generally the Wahhābīs and Salafis are portrayed as being literalists an examination of theological works of the Ash^ḥarīs and Māturīdīs indicates that the general Sunni theological method is primarily literal.²⁶ Literalist theology did serve its purpose in conserving tradition in early Islam it however lost its intellectual appeal to other 'orthodox' forms of *kalām* i.e. that of the Ash^ḥarī and Māturīdīs.²⁷ There is a stress on the ascendancy of text on the one hand and a *reduction* of human authority, whether that is in the form of scholarship or the *awliyā'*. The *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* are a prime example of a rejection of the general authority of the masses of scholars throughout the centuries and the non-conformism of the literalist Salafis. The Khārijites flank the Salafi camp in that Wahhābism has been likened to Khārijism especially with respect to rebellion against the state in a pejorative manner by its opponents.²⁸ The Khārijites rejected human authority outright and were the proponents of 'theocracy' (*in il-ḥukmu lillah*) Q12:67, they rebelled against the emir and the general community and became very insular. The Khārijite doctrine of *Tawḥīd al-Ḥākimiyya* permeated Salafi discourse and has now divided what was once a united Salafi front.²⁹ Moreover the Khārijite ideological approach was such that they did not appoint emirs.³⁰ It is interesting to note the Salafi Jihadists who espouse the *ḥākimiyya* are branded as Khārijites by co-Salafists. In a broader 'People of the Book' framework Khārijism if Islam is viewed as 'orthodoxy', then Salafism and Kharijism would be flanked by Judaism as in that tradition much significance is given to the text and details though not in the rebellion sense.³¹ Ibn Taymiyya initiated his attack on the 'cult of saints' which then culminated

²⁶ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 257.

²⁷ Watt, pp. 75 – 97.

²⁸ Al-Qādirī, Muḥammad Ṭāhir, *Dehshatgardī aur Fitna-i-Khawārij*. (Lahore: Minhāj al-Qur'ān Publications, 2010), pp. 538 – 550.

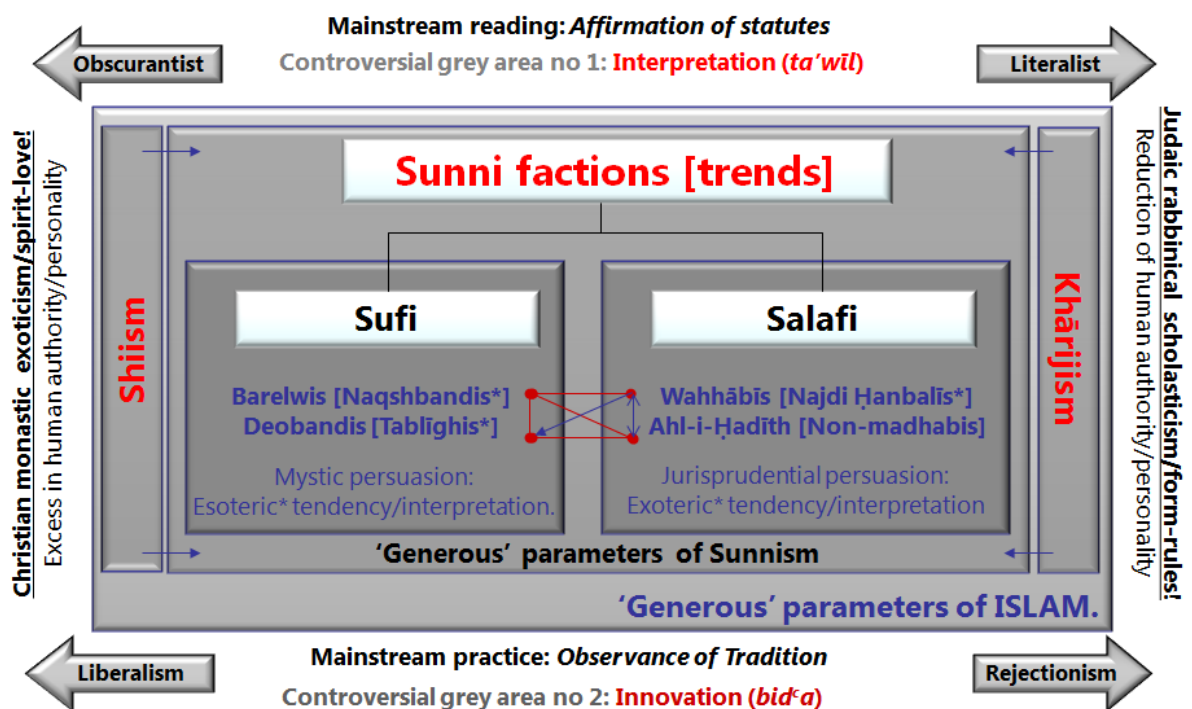
²⁹ Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. ed. by Meijer, p. 48.

³⁰ Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, I, p. 317.

³¹ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: History, Belief, and Practice*. (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 462 – 464.

in the Wahhābī movement and now sustained by global Salafism.³² Wahhābīs do not intentionally speak ill of the Prophet but are apprehensive of ‘excessive’ praise of the Prophet as it could according to their understanding, result in polytheism. Furthermore the role of scholarship is still significant however falling from grace in this setting is easy. This trend urges the literal adherence to scripture which in their understanding is love of the Prophet.³³ Outward appearance is crucial as it ‘reflects’ what is on the inside or commitment. The root cause of a rejectionist or liberalist attitude towards innovation is the absolute or restricted understanding of *bidʿa*.

Figure 6:2 Intra-Sunni sectarian dynamics



³² Watt, pp. 146 – 147.

³³ Fazl Ilāhī, p. 60.

6.6.4 Nuh Keller's minimalism

Minimalism as proposed by Keller is his attempt of firstly stripping down 'orthodoxy' to a bare minimum and reviving the *kalām* tradition. Keller also highlights in his *Kalām and Islam* article that theology has objectives (*maqāṣid*) and lists three to name a few;

- (1) to define the contents of faith;
- (2) to show that it is possible for the mind to accept, not absurd or inconsistent;
- (3) and to give reasons to be personally convinced of it.³⁴

I believe that Keller is here promoting a 'normative theology' (*maqāṣid al-kalām*) and that this *kalām* has served as a tool to not only promulgate 'orthodoxy' but also it is the key to minimalism as *kalām* allowed speculative discursive discourse – making sense of given beliefs. He further argues that there are certain notions that pertain to creedal studies which if understood by Muslim factions would foster tolerance. He highlights four main categories;

- (1) central beliefs that one must hold or one is not a Muslim;
- (2) beliefs that are obligatory to hold, but denying them does not make one a non-Muslim;
- (3) beliefs that are unlawful to hold, but affirming them does not make one a non-Muslim;

³⁴ Keller, *Kalam and Islam*. <<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/kalam.htm>> [accessed 18/3/15]

(4) and beliefs that no one can hold and remain a Muslim.³⁵

Keller in the line of al-Ghazālī also maintains that there are three layers of theology;

(1) Personal theology

(2) Discursive theology

(3) Rational theology³⁶

By personal theology Keller means set dogmata Muslims are required to believe whether central or obligatory. Discursive theology is affiliation to the *kalām* schools of al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī. Rational theology is the original Muʿtazilite *kalām* and latter-day Ashʿari *kalām* which veered more towards the Muʿtazilite tradition.

6.6.5 Six articles macro-minimalism

Gabriel's tradition (*Ḥadīth Jibrīl*) succinctly delineates the creed of Islam. On this level all Muslims as the Amman Message illustrates, believe in this creed:

All are also in agreement about the foundations of belief: belief in Allah (God), His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and in the Day of Judgment, in Divine Providence in good and in evil.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The Amman Message. p.20.

Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī rearranged the text of al-Ṭaḥāwī according to themes of the six articles. In this sense he has presented the central beliefs and obligatory beliefs through al-Ṭaḥāwī's text.³⁸ Hamza Yūsuf likewise regards al-Ṭaḥāwī's text as mere elaboration of this creed.³⁹ I would hereby highlight that both Yūsuf and al-Ṣāwī, one Sufi the other Salafi, have synthesised macro-minimalism (central beliefs) with micro-minimalism (obligatory beliefs).

6.6.6 The thirteen principles as Sunni macro-minimalism personal theology

From our findings one is attempting to extrapolate a minimalism which articulates a cohesive personal theology. After a survey of creedal treatise based on Ashʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī traditions one has evaluated the contents and creedal propositions in the core texts *al-Jawra* of Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī, *al-ʿAqā'id* of al-Nasafī, and the *Lumʿa al-ʿItiqād* of Ibn Qudāma and secondary and more advanced texts like *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* of al-Taftāzānī and the *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of al-Ījī are all encapsulated in ʿAbd al-Hādī's principles of Sunni Islam. The thirteen principles serve as micro-minimalism when pitched against non-Sunni Islam, however it serves as a macro-minimalism within the Sunni traditions and arguably the *core dogmata of personal theology* as Keller highlighted. One has listed the thirteen principles as an elaboration of the six articles of faith and arranged according to those themes. These doctrines are best presented according to the key issues of theology namely divinity, prophetology and eschatology. Discussion on the attributes is the move away from minimalism and into the realm of discursive theology. Some Salafis are willing to accept a minimalism along these lines albeit with reservations, Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān for example was asked 'are the Ashʿarites Sunnis?' to which he replied; 'they are Sunnis in all the issues of faith (*īmān*) and creed (*ʿaqīda*) except in the divine attributes'.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī, *Tahdhīb Sharḥ al-Aqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya*. pp. 5 – 9.

³⁹ Yusuf, pp. 9 - 11.

⁴⁰ Al-Ḥawālī, pp. 17.

We may comment on these principles:

1. Faith consists of enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and action through compliance. It increases through good deeds and decreases through sins.
2. Faith is of two types; principle [*aṣl*] which are the doctrines and subsidiaries [*furūʿ*] which entails conviction in those doctrines and actions which emanate as the fruits of faith.

These two points amalgamate a subtle disagreement between the Ashʿarites and the Māturīdites on whether faith fluctuates. It becomes necessary for Salafism to vindicate Abū Ḥanīfa from the accusation of Murjʿism and consequently Ibn Bāz argues that Abū Ḥanīfa’s disagreement with the majority is only semantic though his wording identical to the Murji’ites.⁴¹ However a careful examination would indicate that other Sunnis like Ramadan al-Būṭī would identify Abū Ḥanīfa as an ‘orthodox’ Murji’ite (*Murji’i al-Sunna*).⁴²

3. Affirmation [*ithbāt*] of the Divine Attributes with amodality [*tafwīḍ*]. And transcendence [*tanzīh*] with out denial [*taʿtīl*]
4. Nobody could see God in this world:
5. The Beatific Vision [*al-ruʿya*] of God in the Garden is true.

⁴¹ Ibn Bāz, *Taʿlīq ʿalā al-ʿAqīda al-Taḥāwīyya*, pp. 20 – 21.

⁴² Al-Būṭī, *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya*, pp. 96 – 97.

These three principles all fall under the *ta'wīl* versus *bilā kayf* debate. This debate will persist.

6. Belief in the marvels [*karamāt*] of the saints [*awliyā*].

Sufis largely promote pietism of their *awliyā*' whether in their hagiographies or in spiritual orders. Literature on this issue alone; 'the marvels of the *awliyā*' is what gives Sufism its obscurantist perhaps even folkloric outlook. The most prominent works are Yūsuf al-Nabahānī's *Jāmi' Karamāt al-Awliyā* [Compendium on the Marvels of the Saints] and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī. Wahhābis believe in the eventuality of marvels but rebut claims of these paranormal feats however they promote 'marvels' on the battlefield as is evident in 'Abdullah 'Azzām's *Āyāt al-Rahmān fī Jihād al-Afghān*' [Signs of God in the Afghan Struggle] forwarded by Mufti Ibn Bāz.

7. The Qur'ān is the uncreated speech of God.

A very abstruse issue which is incomprehensible to many a layman yet it is an agreed upon principle. This doctrine emerges during the end of the second century of Islam. One might argue the inclusion of this doctrine as a principle, is a reactionary attempt to distinguish 'Sunnism' from Mu'tazilism. At the core level of Sunnism i.e. Ḥadīth and Companions the Mu'tazilis are in agreement. A survey of the 'Sunni' views on this issue indicates firstly there isn't a unified definition of an 'uncreated' Qur'ān in fact 'Alī al-Qārī lists nine opinions, six of which are 'Sunni' and range from the literalist Ḥanbalīs to sophistry laden explanations of the Qur'ān being temporal.⁴³ Just as *ta'wīl* returned

⁴³ 'Alī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, pp. 109 – 111.

to Ash‘arism because of its latent adulation for Mu‘tazilism we can see the created Qur‘ān argument almost being accepted by al-Rāzī and others.⁴⁴

8. Affirmation of doctrinal matters confirmed by solitary transmission [*khbar āḥād*].

Sunni theology stresses that belief should be based on definitive evidence (*dalīl qaṭ‘ī*) and that includes perspicuous statutes from the Qur‘ān or mass-transmitted ḥadīth which makes it impossible for a mass of people to have come together and conspired to contrive a lie against the Prophet. Maḥmūd al-Shaltūt and others have reservations regarding the inclusion of solitary transmission in doctrine. We shall discuss these as impediments to minimalism.

9. Loving and following the Companions of the Prophet and his family, his wives, at the same time acknowledging that no one is impeccable other than the Prophet.

Reverence of Companions is integral to Sunni Islam but also we have seen there are Shiite sympathies within the Sunni tradition whether that is the preference of ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī or even the notion of *‘adāla al-ṣaḥāba*. Likewise there are Khārijite tendencies too in terms of how the aforementioned caliphs are viewed. Moreover no *mujtahid*, *shaykh*, *walī* or imam is deemed infallible. Even the infallibility of prophets is not absolute as this principle asserts as is evident in both *Ṣharḥ al-Mawāqif* and *Ṣharḥ al-*

⁴⁴ Calder, p. 68 -70.

Maqāṣid. One may include the love of the Prophet doctrine amongst Sufis within this principle.

10. Belief in everything the Prophet informed us regarding life after death.

11. No one can be guaranteed punishment or reward without a specific proof.

Belief in everything which has been authentically reported constitutes doctrine however as Siddiqi indicates large fabrications and inconsistencies are prevalent in eschatological data in the ḥadīth literature.⁴⁵ Apocalyptic literature serves both the seventy two sects narrative and a fatalistic world view.

In classical theology the Ashʿarites and Māturīdites differed on the fate of non-Muslims who have not received the message of Islam. Al-Ghazālī strove to place all of humanity into heaven at some point in time and this discussion has now culminated in a new inclusivism versus exclusivism debate.⁴⁶

12. Belief in predestination.

Sunni Islam is supposed to be compatibilist yet now it largely promotes fatalism. We can see this in early texts like al-Nasafī where the obligation of the appointment of a leader (*nasb al-imām*) is on God or the community; the Muʿtazilites argued that God

⁴⁵ Siddiqi, p. 115.

⁴⁶ Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī's Faysal al-Tafriqa*. [trans. Sherman Jackson] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 129.

is responsible whereas the Sunnis argued that the community controls their fate.⁴⁷ Contemporary Sufi and Salafi literature is embedded in the 'end of days' fatalistic narrative which is underpinned in a determinist world view.

13. Obedience to the emirs– be they pious or impious – in order to establish the laws of Islam [Hajj, Jihad + Islamic governance].⁴⁸

The ethics of commanding the good and forbidding the evil has been debated over in the classical sources. Winter argued that a political quietism beset Sunni Islam for a long period. Arguably both Shiite and Khārijite Islam were politically revolutionary in their outlook. Generally in both the contemporary Sufi and Salafi traditions Muslims are urged to be patient with tyrants and bad leaders unless they exhibit absolute disbelief or command people to sin. Those who rebel against the state are often considered political Khārijites especially in Salafi lore and now we have witnessed this in the Arab Spring wherein Sufi scholarship has conceded to this type of rhetoric too. The Wahhābī movement has been stigmatised for fighting against the Ottomans. *Jamāt-i-Islāmī* and the Muslim Brotherhood are viewed upon with some suspicion by traditionalists because of their 'disagreement' to this 'Sunni' principle. Furthermore there is evidence to suggest that not all Sunnis agreed to this absolutely as al-Shāfi'ī and Qaḍī 'Ayāḍ both advocated the ousting or removal of a tyrant or profligate leader.⁴⁹ Furthermore, how Jihad is to be interpreted in a modern context is a subject of debate. The classical books of jurisprudence were embedded in the imperial narrative of a *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-Ḥarb* world.⁵⁰ Largely traditionalist Muslims, both

⁴⁷ Al-Māwardī. *The Ordinances of Government: al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyya w'al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya*. (trans. Wafaa H. Wahba) (Reading: Garnett Publishing, 2000), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Al-Hādī, pp. 87 – 96.

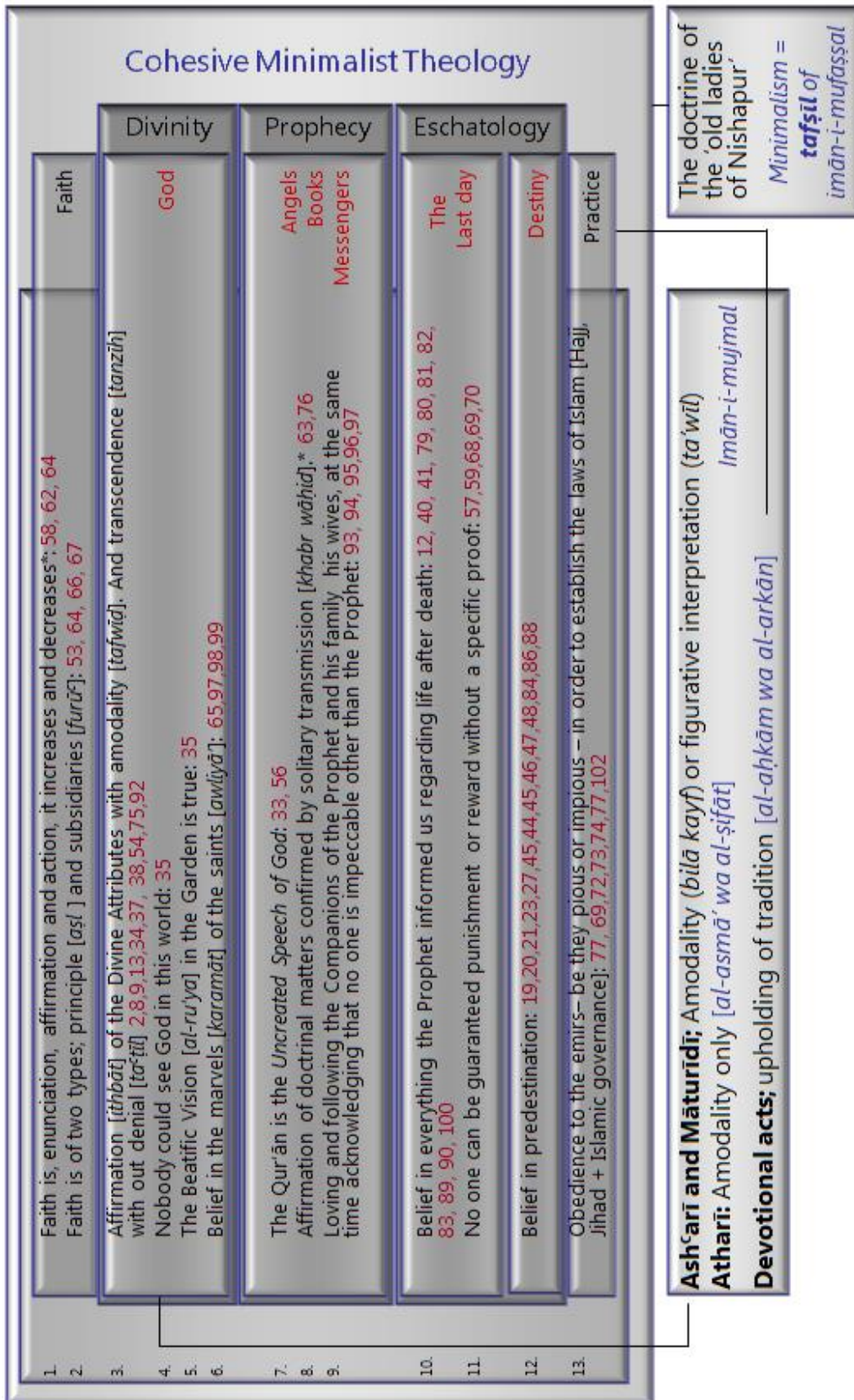
⁴⁹ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 239.

⁵⁰ Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (London: Touchstone Books, 1998), p. 32.

Sufi and Salafi are moving away from the classical imperial Jihad to either nationalist Jihad or setting Jihad as broader socio-political struggles which may even be non-violent.

All other secondary issues of doctrine can be lumped somewhat neatly under this paradigm. However one would argue from Keller's objectives of doctrine perspective that some of these principles, though they delineate core creedal issues/methods in themselves, do not constitute *a priori* knowledge and therefore do not require further explanation. Imitation (*taqlīd*) in doctrinal issues is considered impermissible and hence ironically none this can be set in stone.

Figure 6:3 Doctrinal Minimalism – a synthesis



Red Numbers = points in al-Ṭahāwī's credo [Iqbal Azami]

6.7 The workings of a minimalist theology

One might posit that there are firstly doctrines which would be essential for a minimalist theology, secondly doctrines which would be within the realm of scholasticism and lastly peripheral issues.

The essential doctrines for a minimalist theology would be the thirteen principles which serve as micro-minimalism in respect to non-Sunni traditions and macro-minimalism within a Sunni framework. These principles may be considered proto-*kalām* dogmata i.e. early Sunni creed before its articulation through the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī or Atharī vernacular. Furthermore these principles are agreed upon as essential to Sunnism by all classical Sunni schools and also contemporary Sufi/Salafi scholastic traditionalism and their parochial methodologies (Barelwi, Deobandi, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and Wahhābī).

Doctrines that have been established through scholastic debate are either dialectic i.e. part of the *kalām* tradition and the differences are apparent but nonetheless accepted or controversial which on a macro (non-Sunni) level is not reconcilable but potentially reconcilable within a micro intra-Sunni framework. Dialectics include classical issues like the disagreement of the definition and fluctuation of faith between Sunnis which still has resonance to this day in terms of Muslim identity politics and also the notion of amodality (*bilā kayf*) which is accepted as an 'orthodox' manner of dealing with complex issues.⁵¹ Latter day Ashʿaris in the spirit of this same tradition introduced 'non-commitment' (*tawaqquf*).

⁵¹ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Islamic Belief*, p. 15. [point 75]

Controversial issues include discussions on divinity, prophetology, intercession, innovation, and companions. As aforementioned, figurative interpretation and the notion of innovation are prime causes for disagreement in inter-Sunni versus non-Sunni polemics and also intra-Sunni disagreements/polemics. We have established that *ta'wīl* was the method of the Muṣṭazilites and used sparingly by Sunni theologians including the Ḥanbalī Atharīs. The current doctrinal polemic between Sufi Ashḥarīs and Salafi Atharis is the *bilā kayf* versus *ta'wīl* debate on God's attributes. Whether or not ascribing physical and spatial orientation (*jīha*) and corporeality (*jismiyya*) albeit through amodality (*bilā kayf*) are the key contentions. Moreover on the Barelwi Deobandi traditions which recognise the theological schools of Ashḥarīs and Māturīdīs are involved in a polemic regarding God's omnipotence (*qudrah*) in which they differed on whether God can intrinsically or contingently go against what He has promised. Interestingly both these polemics were in the classical period between Sunnis and Muṣṭazilites, the *bilā kayf* versus *ta'wīl* polarised Sunnis against Muṣṭazilites respectively, now Sunnis especially Ashḥarīs accommodate *ta'wīl* on the attributes. The debate on God's omnipotence was also originally a Sunni versus Muṣṭazilī polemic. The Sunnis argued it is impossible for God to be unjust and the Muṣṭazilites argued He can but chooses not to. One may argue that this is rationalist seepage into Ashḥarī *kalām*.

Generally Sunnis maintain that the prophets can make mistakes and have lapses (*khaṭī'āt wa zillāt*) in non-revelatory matters. Even in Sunni literature especially in ḥAlī al-Qārī's *A-Rawḍ al-Azhar*, there is a discussion on whether prophets could have sinned. Most argue that God protects them from doing so even before their commissioning as prophets whilst others argue that sinning can occur before prophethood.⁵² We have seen the argument regarding the sublime versus the mortal

⁵² ḥAlī al-Qārī, *Minah al-Rawḍ al-Azhar*. pp. 169 – 177.

nature of Prophet Muhammad and the sensitive polemic has been in the previous chapter amongst Barelwis and Deobandis as a continuation of these classical debates.

The intercession of Prophet Muhammad on Judgement Day is upheld by Sunnis and rejected by the Khārijites and Muṣṭazilites. More specifically an issue of heated debate between Sufis and Salafis is that of intercession (*tawassul*) through other mortals either living or dead. The Ashʿarī, Māturīdis which includes the Sufi scholastic traditionalists, Barelwis and Deobandis recognise the validity of a believer seeking intercession through the prophets and righteous men, living or dead.⁵³ The Salafis which includes the Wahhābīs and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* only recognize *tawassul* through living righteous men as valid and through the dead as leading to polytheism. It is worthy to note that Hasan al-Bannā' maintains that *tawassul* is a jurisprudential issue not a doctrinal one and therefore should not be controversial.⁵⁴ It maybe for this particular reason why Halverson identifies al-Bannā' as a neo-Sufi rather than a Salafi, as has previously been understood by non-Muslim scholars and Sufi polemicists.⁵⁵

One would argue that Sunni Islam has accepted the *tawassul* issue only because it is based on transmission (*naql*) and it conflicts, according the Khārijites and Muṣṭazilites, with reason (*ʿaql*). Within Sunni Islam the Wahhābīs struggle with this as in spirit they would agree with the rationalists on this issue but a number of traditions pose a problem.

⁵³ Sahāranpūrī, p. 220.

⁵⁴ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Shumūl al-Islām*. p. 18.

⁵⁵ Halverson, pp. 65 -78.

We have exhaustively dealt with the notion of religious ‘innovations’ and the views within Sunni Islam that al-Suyūṭī, al-^ᶜAsqalānī and the majority are of the view that innovations can be good or bad for religion. Ibn Taymiyya contends that all religious innovations are bad.

The issue of revering the Companions can be argued to be the most Sunni specific next to the Ḥadīth literature which Sunnis maintain come through these very peoples. The Sunnis have upheld that all the Companions are upright and should only be spoken of well though strictly speaking there is no definitive textual evidence to prove the former proposition and al-Ṣābūnī offers views contrary to it within the Sunni tradition.⁵⁶ We have seen that there are legitimate differences regarding the virtue of certain companions between the Sunni themselves. One may argue that these differences may either be reactions to Khārijite and Shiite views or that early Sunni Islam did not have a rigid ‘infallible’ view of the companions. The most divisive issue between Sunnis and Shiites is the ^ᶜAlī versus Mu^ᶜāwiya schism though generally most Sunnis would argue that ^ᶜAlī was correct in his position and are not disrespectful of Mu^ᶜāwiya. Shiites according to Sunnis revile Mu^ᶜāwiya and those who opposed ^ᶜAlī.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding that a minority of Sunnis either agree with the Shiite in their antipathy towards Mu^ᶜāwiya.⁵⁸ The Yazīd controversy is clearer as almost all Sunnis excluding the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* back Ḥusayn. In fact al-Taftāzānī indicates that it was common practice amongst Sunnis to curse Yazīd for slaughtering Prophet Muhammad’s grandson.⁵⁹ These issues (*ta’wīl, bilā kayf, sublime versus mortal prophetology, intercession, innovation and companions*) are possibly reconcilable but has the potential to be

⁵⁶ Al-Ṣābūnī, II, p. 452.

⁵⁷ Al-Haytamī, *Taṭhīr al-Janān*, pp. 1 – 5.

⁵⁸ Al-Maghrāwī, pp. 17 – 19.

⁵⁹ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharh al-^ᶜAqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, pp. 247 – 249.

polemical. Furthermore these were the classical inter-*kalām* (Sunni v. non-Sunni) polemics.

6.7.1 The Demise of *kalām* and its revival

Halverson argues that *kalām* suffered an untimely demise due to four factors; namely (1) the persistence of tradition or traditionalism, (2) the encroachment of philosophy (3) the rise of mysticism and (4) Sunni Solidarity and the 'Creedal Collapse'.⁶⁰ It is interesting that Halverson does not consider the critique of other scholars like Nadwi regarding a general intellectual stagnation rather he places the blame on the rise of Atharism. One would argue that the obituary on *kalām* was read long before the 'flourishing' of Atharism and modern Islamism. Iqbāl poignantly describes the state of *kalām* metaphysics as 'practically dead'.⁶¹ In fact one would argue that the Barelwi - Deobandi polemic would epitomise the death pangs of *kalām* and its degeneration. Barelwism and Deobandism drew inspiration from 'traditional' Sunni *kalām* sources to excommunicate each other without resorting to Ḥanbalī traditions. Notwithstanding the propagation of Wahhābism through new means such as globalisation, it is unconvincing as all the traditional seminaries in Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Turkey, the Subcontinent and beyond still teach Ashʿarī or Māturīdī credos. Both Halverson and Keller are optimistic of a revival of *kalām*. The Deobandi Barelwi polemic illustrates not only the stagnation of *kalām* but also that it has reached a crucial impasse whereupon it will be consumed by its 'own' polemics or abandoned altogether as a study just like philosophy was abandoned in the Sunni tradition earlier. Effectively minimalism, one would contend, is a *kalām* tool that could potentially give life back to theology.

⁶⁰ Halverson, pp. 33 – 54.

⁶¹ Iqbal, p. 97.

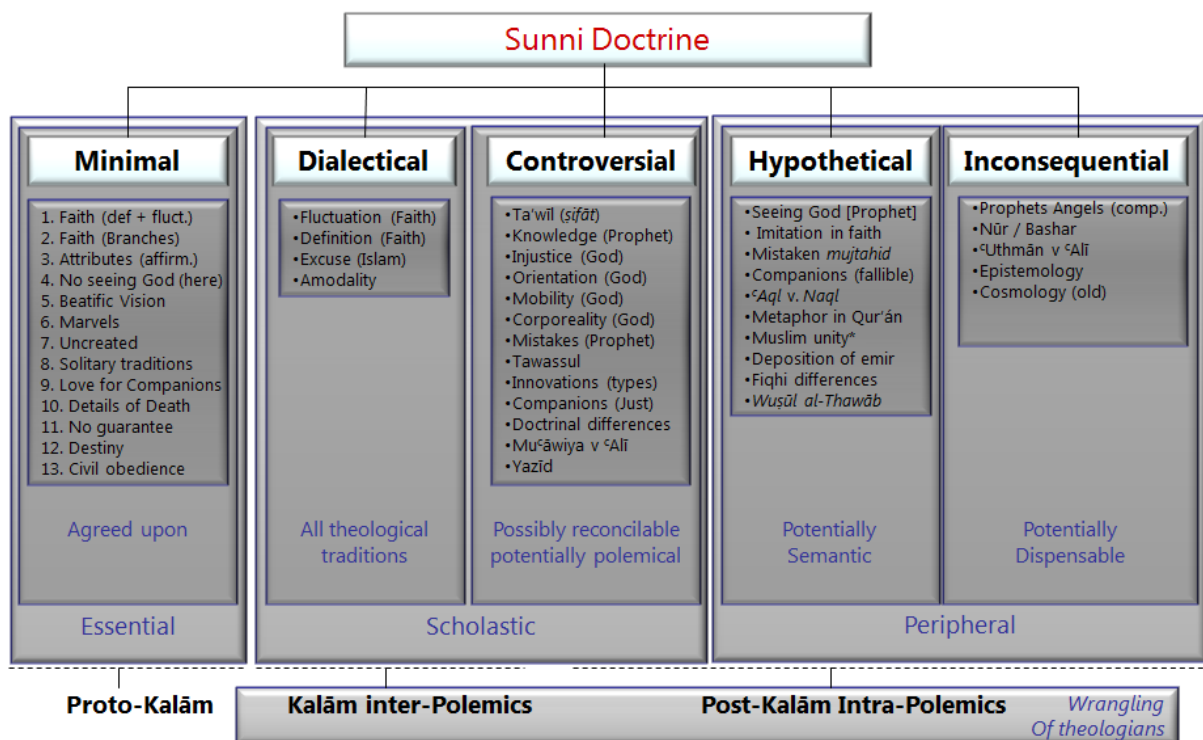
Thus this period of Sunni theology can be termed post-*kalām* polemics which has some remnants of the classical inter-*kalām* polemics in addition to parochial polemics most notably with an acute attention to Muhammadan Prophetology. Peripheral issues are those that theologians deem not essential to doctrine which include issues hypothetically argued or may even be inconsequential to 'orthodoxy'. As for the hypothetical, these issues shall now be discussed.

The disagreement of whether Muhammad saw God on the Ascension (*al-isrā' wa al-mi'rāj*) is one where the believer is at liberty to choose whichever and all agree that neither view constitutes 'heterodoxy'. Imitating (*taqlīd*) in issues of faith is considered lawful but one is sinful for not contemplating. Al-Ṣāwī lists many different views on this, some inspired by Sufis. The reality of the matter is that many may imitate others. Another issue is the disagreement between some Muṣṭazilites and Ashʿarites regarding whether the *mujtahid* can make a mistake or not. This argument is not regarding infallibility versus fallibility but rather the truth veracity of *ijtihād*. Sunnis affirm that the Companions are fallible, to what extent then can one criticise them? The rationality versus revelation debate is one which is largely semantic. Ibn Taymiyya and a minority of Sunnis argue that there is no metaphor in the Qur'ān. The deposing of an unfit emir is discussed in the books of Sunni theology but not in the credo *matns*. Jurisprudential differences are inevitable and accepted however doctrinal ones are theoretically not. Whether supplication benefits oneself or others (especially for the deceased) is differed upon.

Lastly inconsequential issues include doctrines which do not entail 'heterodoxy' or 'orthodoxy' within the Sunni tradition. This includes the discussion on whether or not certain righteous men and women can be better than angels. The preference of ʿAlī over ʿUthmān or *vice versa* is another example. In addition updating or changing

epistemological and cosmological models due to scientific and academic progress. And lastly though it has become polemical the Barelwi and Deobandi argument on prophetology on whether one should call Prophet Muhammad light (*nūr*) or human (*bashar*). Moreover these inconsequential issues indicate the overall decline or as Halverson puts it 'demise' of *kalām*. These are doctrines and debates that can be dispensed with. The theologians themselves recognised the pedantic polemical potential within *kalām* and called it the 'wrangling of theologians' (*tanaṭu^cāt al-mutakallimīn*), these scholastic wranglings have now become sectarian polemics.

Figure 6:4 Mapping Sunni theological discourse



6.7.2 Prospects of a working minimalism

In chapter one, we identified doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalisms. Each type has three sub-levels. Ethical minimalism is the most difficult to implement as it is largely theoretical and related to behavioural codes which are not decisively text

supported. Dialogue initiatives indicate some optimism but these may just be reactions to current events rather than a broader move to reform theology. Methodological minimalism is the locus of disagreement. The first level which is a general affiliation to early Muslim scholarship serves as Sunni macro-minimalism. Level two includes the *kalām* traditions in particular al-Safārīnī's three schools (Ash'arī, Māturīdī and Atharī) 'orthodoxy' paradigm which has elicited debate amongst the traditionalists. Lastly the 'revised' parochial methodologies of Sufi and Salafi scholastic traditionalism which have assessed the historical context of their teachings and that of their 'adversaries' and acknowledge that these methodologies are nuanced versions of older 'orthodoxies'. Doctrinal minimalism is most promising as on all three of its levels. Level one is minimalism based on the 'creed' itself, this is a macro-minimalism that 'all' Muslims accept. Level two minimalism i.e. the six articles of faith entails both macro-minimalism in that most Muslims can accept this and also as micro-minimalism where some Muslims may have reservations in the interpretation of one or two doctrines e.g. the decree. The final level includes normative doctrine as espoused by al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya and in particular 'Abd al-Hādī's thirteen principles serve as Sunni macro-minimalism arguably acceptable to all Sunni persuasions. This is just a general proposition now we shall look at the impediments towards a working minimalism

6.7.3 Impediments to minimalism

Six key impediments or loci of controversies have already been identified; 1) literalism and figurative interpretation on issues such as Divinity, the Qur'ān and prophetology 2) nature of Ḥadīth rationality versus revelation, solitary transmission on eschatological issues, and marvels / miracles 3) consensus (*ijmā'*) and its role on defining 'orthodoxy' 4) definitions of faith; identity politics 5) infallibility of the Prophet(s), *Ahl al-Bayt*, Companions, Scholars and *awliyā'* and finally 6) excommunication; blasphemy and Islamic governance – civil disobedience. Issues 1-3 are textual impediments whereas 4 – 6 are personal judgemental impediments.

As we have seen in chapter three literalism and metaphor were the dominant debates in medieval Islam regarding the limitations and scope of interpreting scripture. Amodality (*tafwīd* or *bilā kayf*) though accepted by the Ashʿarīs as an ‘orthodox’ method of interpreting the attributes of God they deem the contemporary Salafi amodality (*ḥaqīqa bilā kayf*) as anthropomorphism. The Salafis in response regard the figurative interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of the Ashʿarīs as either Muʿtazilism or as akin to denial of God’s attributes (*taʿṭīl*).⁶² Amodality is the preferred position in the Ashʿarī school and figurative interpretation is a provision for those who find amodality difficult.⁶³ We can establish that this was a classical debate, indeed at one point it was a polemic between Sunnis and their opponents yet later it was reconciled as part of broader intellectual heritage of Sunni theology. Now it is polarised back to the Sunni versus non-Sunni polemic. Furthermore one would like to point out that *bilā kayf* was more of a reaction to Muʿtazalī interpretation than a proposition in and of itself. The fact that latter-day Ashʿarīs reverted to interpretation and defended it is indicative of this.

Muhammadan prophetology contrastingly in the polemical sense was almost absent in classical theology. It is a sensitive issue, as on the one hand Muhammad is not to be spoken of as a god, and on the other hand he is a human being. If human, he could be subject to criticism like all other human beings. Both Salafi and Sufi traditionalists maintain that Muhammad was infallible (*maʿṣūm*) this then should render this polemic obsolete; however this is not the case. In a sense the uncompromising stance on blasphemy against the Prophet serves as a unifying factor for Sunnism.

⁶² Ibn Bāz & Fawzān. *Tanbīhāt fi al-radd ʿalā man taʿawwal al-ṣifāt*, pp. 8 – 10.

⁶³ Ibn Naqīb al-Miṣrī, pp. 1008 – 1011.

Ḥadīth is central to Sunni Islam and its macro-minimalism especially in Abū Ḥanīfa's essentialism model as discussed in the chapter one. Unlike the veracity of the Qur'ān, Muslim scholars have been somewhat critical in their approach to the Ḥadīth literature. The normative method is to critique the narrator (*naqd al-rāwī* or *al-sanad*) of a tradition in order to establish its authenticity.⁶⁴ Goldizher however pointed out that largely the majority of Muslim scholarship neglected text criticism (*naqd al-matn*) as they relied solely on the chain.⁶⁵ Zubayr Siddiqi lists the principles on which the text of a ḥadīth can be rejected;

1. Tradition must not contradict Qur'ān, mass-transmitted tradition or the consensus of the community or the accepted basic principles of Islam
2. Tradition must not contradict the dictates of reason, the laws of nature or common experience
3. Traditions describing disproportionately high reward for insignificant good deeds or disproportionately severe punishment for ordinary sins must be rejected.
4. Traditions describing the excellent properties of certain sections of the Qur'ān may not be authentic
5. Traditions mentioning the superior virtue of persons, tribes, and particular places should be generally rejected
6. Traditions which contain detailed prophecies of future events, equipped with dates, should be rejected
7. Traditions containing such remarks of the Prophet as may not be a part of his Prophetic vocation, or such expressions as are clearly unsuitable for him, should be rejected

⁶⁴ Al-Ṭaḥḥān, pp .143 – 149.

⁶⁵ Siddiqi, pp. 124 – 130.

8. A *matn* should not violate the basic rules of Arabic grammar and style.⁶⁶

Principles 1, 2, 6, and 7 are most significant to our current discussion. The collision of revelation and rationality was a prominent debated in classical Islamic philosophy and theology. The philosophers argued that if revelation contradicted reason then reason should reign. The traditionalists argued that revelation is given precedence. In addition the Iraqi school of jurisprudence (*Ahl al-Ra'y*) and in particular Abū Ḥanīfa were criticised for preferring *ijtihād* over weak traditions.⁶⁷ His rationale was that both are speculative (*ẓannī*) knowledge. Finally the Muṭazilites argued that revelation should be construed according to the dictates of reason. Latter-day theologians and modernists argued that revelation and reason are not necessarily antonyms. Ḥadīth scholarship is the first phase of traditionalism in its generic sense. Point 2 indicates that if a hadith goes against reason then its credibility is questionable. Even though this method of revising hadith is traditional in the sense that it is part of the Ḥadīth criticism lore it is the hallmark of modernist scholarship at present who implement these principles.⁶⁸ Mawdūdī rejected certain hadith which contradicted reason for example the hadith where a voice from the skies declaring the Mahdi in Hajj narrated by al-Zuhrī. Mawdūdī's argument is that God never intervened like this for any of the prophets so why would he for a follower of a prophet.⁶⁹ We can see from point six that many eschatological traditions are circumspect yet as Cook indicates the apocalyptic tradition enjoys huge popularity.⁷⁰ Maḥmūd al-Shaltūt a scholar from al-Azhar maintains that the majority of theologians are of the opinion that solitary transmissions of doctrinal nature should not be included as dogma because of its speculative nature.

⁶⁶ Siddiqi, p. 114.

⁶⁷ Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 252.

⁶⁸ Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, *Aḍwā' ʿalā al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya: aw difāʿ ʿan al-ḥadīth*. (Beirut: Dar al-Maʿārif [1957]), pp. 7 – 10.

⁶⁹ Daniel Brown, pp. 127 – 128.

⁷⁰ David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), pp. 232 – 233.

On this note he rejects the popular Sunni belief of the second coming of Jesus Christ arguing that these traditions are ultimately solitary.⁷¹ Anwar Shah Kashmiri upholds that most traditions on Christ's second coming are mass-transmitted and that rejection of mass-transmitted traditions is tantamount to rejecting the Qur'án.⁷² Interestingly the Mahdi is absent from *al-Bayān*, *al-Jawhara*, *al-^cAqā'id* and *al-Lum^ca*. Furthermore, it is unclear if the Mahdi is an individual separate from Christ from the wording of traditions. Ibn Khaldūn is accused of rejecting the Mahdist tradition in Sunni Islam because of his ambivalence on the issue in the Prolegomena as he mentions the controversy surrounding the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* pertaining to the Mahdi.⁷³ Many eschatological traditions especially those regarding the Mahdi are fraught with weakness of veracity and incredulity of soundness. Revision of these traditions would be deemed as 'modernism' and it would inevitably upset the fatalistic 'end of days' narrative which is embedded in scholastic Sufi and Salafi traditionalist worldview. The 'end of days' narrative is arguably an acute manifestation of folkloric Islam as Ibn Khaldūn suggests that the common people and 'stupid mass' in his era preoccupy themselves with this literature.⁷⁴ Moreover al-Juday^c's evaluation of the traditions supporting the 'saved sect' narrative is that at best they are 'good' (*ḥasan*) and he also applies the text criticism (*naqd al-matn*) method as its import is very pessimistic about the fate of Muslims and consequently conflicts with other traditions which indicate a positive outcome for the Muslims.⁷⁵ Van Ess too echoes al-Juday's scepticism and maintains that the 'seventy three sects' tradition is most certainly apocryphal.⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī found this tradition most troublesome and in an attempt to reconcile it with

⁷¹ Shaltūt, pp. 51 – 56.

⁷² Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī, *Al-Tasrīḥ bimā tawātara fi nuzūl al-Masīḥ*. (Beirut: Maktaba al-Maṭbū^cāt al-Islāmiyya bi-Ḥalab, 1992), p. 37.

⁷³ Ibn Khaldun, pp. 257 – 259.

⁷⁴ Ibn Khaldun, p. 259.

⁷⁵ Al-Juday^c, *Aḍwā' ^calā Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma*, pp. 16 – 31.

⁷⁶ Van Ess, p. 21.

his broad based salvation made excessive use of *ta'wīl* on conflicting *ḥadīth* as Sherman Jackson describes his 'theological tolerance' thesis.⁷⁷

A minimalism on the basis of *ḥadīth*, in terms of which *ḥadīth* serves as the foundation of dogma, is difficult as any attempt to form a minimalist framework rooted in *ḥadīth* would undermine all current Sunni typologies that emphasise *sanad*. However it is interesting to note that picking and choosing takes place amongst Sunni factions on doctrinal issues from *ḥadīth* especially on issues of prophetology. If mass-transmitted traditions are present as the only source of *ḥadīth* we are left with the problem that there are only approximately 200 to 400 odd traditions that can be classified under this type, additionally that they are not sufficient for the rigid methodologies that now hold dear to solitary transmissions. Furthermore there is a relatively unexplored issue of Sunni expediency in fabricating *ḥadīth*, al-Juday^c; argued many Sunni propagandists fabricated traditions too.⁷⁸ The *naqd al-matn* approach can serve as a minimalist tool in managing contradictory, convoluted, and ultimately inconsequential detail in dogma.

Fabrications of *ḥadīth* on theological grounds can be accounted for in three key themes a) doctrinal b) religio-political and c) legal. Both Sunnis and non-Sunnis fabricated traditions for these four theological issues. These subsume the following four points;

1. Attributes of God (*ṣifāt*)
2. Pro Ahl al-Bayt (*tashayyu^c*)

⁷⁷ Ibid .,pp. 40 – 42.

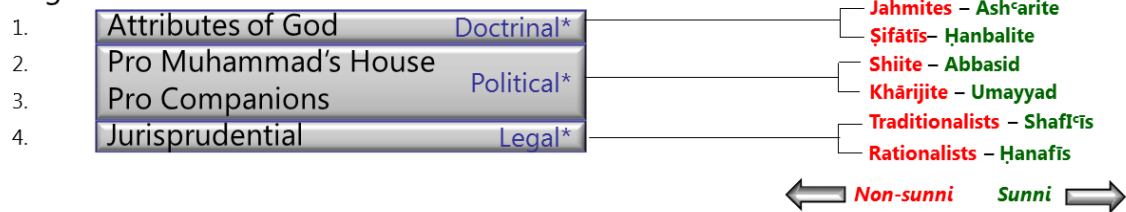
⁷⁸ Al-Juday^c, *Tahrīr^c Ulūm a-Ḥadīth*, I, p. 411.

3. Pro Companions (*ṣuḥbiyya*)
4. Jurisprudential (*madhhabiyya*)

The Attributes of God has served as a potent dialectic in the classical theological period and the contemporary scene. Non-Sunni Ḥashwiyites (Ṣifātiyya) forged traditions to corroborate the immanence (*ithbāt*) of God and the Jahmites countered this with fabricated traditions to back the transcendence (*tanzīh*) thesis. This fabrication is then continued by 'Sunni' Ḥanbalīs in the like manner of the Ṣifātīs and the Ashʿaris in same fashion as the Jahmites. It is interesting to note that the intra-Sunni polemic tries to make this historical link to each respective group. As identified in previous chapters the Shiite and Khārijite dynamics within Sunni Islam, their respective doctrines were buttressed within what Sunni traditionalists argue as fabricated. On the one hand many traditions were forged in favour of the virtue of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, al-Bukhārī *et al* highlight Shiite narrators in certain chains for these types of traditions. The counter narrative is the uprightness of the Companions' thesis which required a good many fabrications in virtue of the Companions. Though Sunnis argue that the Khārijites were the first to do this it has never been categorically proven, in fact Sunnis have been identified as fabricators of hadith especially in this regards i.e. the defence of the Companions. The Umayyad and Abbasid too utilise fabrication in this same fashion for their political expediency. Likewise many traditions were fabricated in defence of both the Ahl al-Ḥadīth traditionalist movement and the rationalist Ahl al-Ray' jurists in the proto-Sunni period. These then manifest in the four Sunni *madhhab* followers fabricating traditions heralding the advent of their respective founders. Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik and al-Shāfiʿī all have seemingly been prophesied by Muhammad in both positive and disparaging terms either by name or allusion.

Figure 6:5 Heterodoxies preceding orthodoxies and the sectarian fabrication of ḥadīth

Theological sectarianism:



The last textual issue which impedes a working minimalism is the consensus or more correctly the claims of absolute consensus especially on issues concerned with excommunication of Shiite, Khārijite and Mu‘tazilite doctrine. Arguably consensus provides a framework of minimalism. Ibn Ḥazm devotes a chapter on agreed upon Muslim dogmata in his *Marātib al-İjmā‘*.⁷⁹ The issues ‘known by necessity in the religion’ are argued to be issues based on consensus. Similarly the thirteen Sunni principles of al-Ḥādī are argued to be near consensus-based. Al-Juday^c argues that any consensus should be on definitive statutes.⁸⁰ The Ḥanafīs are too expeditious in claiming *ijmā‘* on issues and the Ḥanbalīs too restrictive making *ijmā‘* near-impossible. It may be argued that *ijmā‘* could play a positive role in either establishing a minimalism by express agreement or conversely maintaining a pluralistic status quo by not having a consensus ruling out minimalism.

Now we move on to judgemental impediments. The first of the problems here is the definition of faith and by extension ‘orthodoxy’. This issue is perhaps the most palpable difference between the Ash‘arīs and Māturīdīs in theology. Abū Ḥanīfa argued that faith is merely enunciation on the tongue and affirmation in the heart without expressly including action within this definition. The Ash‘arīs contend that faith constitutes

⁷⁹ Ibn Hazm, pp. 267 – 274.

⁸⁰ Al-Juday^c, *Tahrīr ‘Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, I, p. 162.

enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and compliance through the limbs. On face value Abū Ḥanīfa's definition is identical to the Murji'ite school, and consequently his critics have accused him of holding Murji'ite views. The late Ramadan al-Būṭī, an avowed protagonist of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī *kalām* tradition calls Abū Ḥanīfa's definition 'Orthodox Murji'ism' (*irjā' al-sunna*).⁸¹ It may be argued that it is plausible that Abū Ḥanīfa stressed the importance of doctrinal salvation over any individual believer's 'outward' commitment to his or her faith as a reaction to the excesses of the Khārijites who judged Muslims accordingly. Abū Ḥanīfa may have felt that the Ash'arī and Atharī definition smacked of Khārijite judgementalism. Though this is a subtle issue which most Ash'aris, Māturīdis and even Salafi Atharis feel is largely a semantic difference as Abū Ḥanīfa recognises that faith can also fluctuate and that sins have a harmful effect on faith. Abū Ḥanīfa's and the Ash'arī debate on the definition of faith has resurfaced in the 'practising/non-practising' Muslim identity politics of the present era. The Ash'arī/Atharī definition of faith would require 'orthodoxy' to be an *observed* 'orthopraxy' whereas Abū Ḥanīfa's definition could potentially allow doctrinal affiliation to 'orthodoxy' without action. The practising/non-practising dialectic has also permeated the general sectarian polemical setting. Non-practising or cultural Muslims as the new 'deviants' as they do not comply to the dictates of faith.

The second judgemental impediment is the concept of infallibility which entails the infallibility of the Prophet, Companions, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the Scholars and the *awliyā'*. As for the infallibility of the Prophet; Sunnis are in agreement that the Prophet cannot make mistakes in revelatory matters, but it is possible in non-revelatory matters.⁸² In their opinion they are divinely safeguarded from committing major sins. Though the Sunnis argue that the Companions are fallible human beings, ultra-Sunni movements

⁸¹ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Madhāhib al-Tawḥīdiyya*, pp. 95 – 103.

⁸² Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, III, p. 308 – 318.

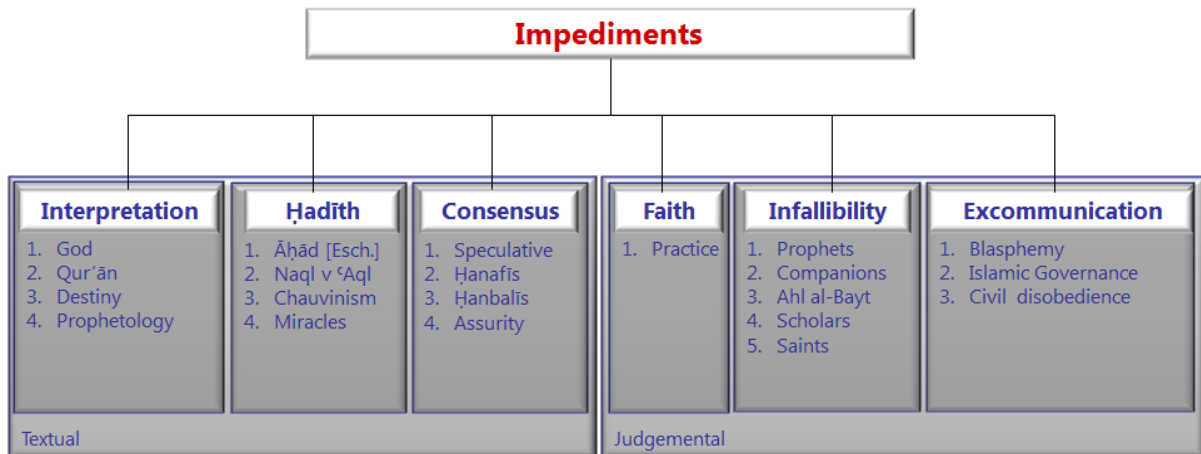
inspired by Wahhābism react to criticism of any Companions as blasphemous. By extension many Sunni Sufis treat the *Ahl al-Bayt* as divinely protected from blemish and as such would consider it blasphemous to criticise for example ʿAlī or his son Ḥusayn.⁸³ Traditionalism of both the Sufi and Salafi persuasion acknowledge the fallibility of Muslim scholarship yet often especially within the intra-Sunni polemics it is rarely acknowledged that one’s teachers may have been wrong. Furthermore especially amongst the Sufis the *awliyāʾ* are treated as infallible especially in the Shaykh / aspirant set-up.

The third and last judgemental impediment is excommunication. Excommunication can be major excommunication (*takfīr*) which entails declaring a Muslim outside of the pale of Islam or minor excommunication (*tafsīq/tabdīʿ*) which constitutes declaring a Muslim as ‘deviant’. Since no Muslim group has hegemony over others, excommunication of both types is a free for all. The issue of blasphemy could potentially be an impediment as we have seen in the Barelwi - Deobandi polemic on both divinity and prophetology in chapter five. Additionally, excommunication by laypeople of Muslim leaders is a potentially dangerous impediment. One would argue that this is generally associated with Khārijite judgementalism but can also be traced back to the definition of faith debate. Civil disobedience was largely frowned upon by mainstream Sunnis. Based on this it could be argued that political Sunni movements lost legitimacy because of their doctrine of taking Muslim leaders to account. Only a minority of Sunni scholars namely the likes of Qāḍī ʿAyāḍ argued that the unjust ruler should be deposed. Essentially from both sides have their arguments embedded in

⁸³ Dr Israr Ahmed was condemned by both Shiite and Sunni Barelwi scholarship for adducing a tradition authenticated by al-Tirmidhī which provides a context of revelation for Q4:43, in which ʿAlī was drunk and uttered ‘Say: O disbelievers! - I worship that which ye worship; Q109:1-2’, (dropping the negative *lā*). See Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-ʿAẓīm*. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bgUVyipwq8>>. [accessed 17/3/15]

theology. One would like to point out that the civil unrest in 2011 in the Arab World has caused many Sunni Muslim scholars to reconsider their stance on civil disobedience.⁸⁴

Figure 6:6 Milestones



6.8 Authority in Islam – Who is in charge?

Islam not having centralised authority or pope poses a problem when trying to account for any unanimity on theological issues. Calder makes an acute observation of this lack of authority and hierarchic structures in Sunni Islam in comparison to Christianity;

'Islam, by contrast, does not have such a system of authority. There has never been a council in Islam and there are no clearly articulated hierarchies. In fact, we cannot find a single Muslim (or Sunni) creed which is believed by all Muslims. There are probably hundreds of Muslim creeds.....'⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Al-Būṭī stood by al-Assad in Syria, and Ali Gomah stood by Mobarak. The Haba'ib argued they were neither with the Yemeni government nor the people.

⁸⁵ Calder, p. 68.

It is hence argued by Calder that creeds emerge in a fashion quite unlike ecclesial traditions, for example in the form of councils etc. In medieval times the ʿUlama claimed legitimacy through their established institutions, selected (canonical) texts and the patronage that they enjoyed from their affinity with any given political authority. Colonial rule and the absence of centralised political authority in the form of the Caliphate emasculated the ʿUlama and their centrality in Muslim representation. Zaman argues that the ʿUlama and other players such as Islamists and preachers are all engaged in the contestations on religious authority at present.⁸⁶ In the subcontinent the decline of the scholarship of the Faranghī Maḥall is accounted for alongside the political weakness and waning patronage. The Deoband seminary and its satellite institutions relied on public charity.⁸⁷ The parochial Subcontinent and Wahhābī traditions examined in chapter five are indicative of this kind of public support, perhaps in the form of anti-colonial resistance which may account for their historical longevity.

6.9 Politics of the day

Alongside the absence of overall institutional authority in Sunni Islam as an impediment to minimalism, there is the ever-changing reality of political allegiance which further delineates the polemics between the warring factions. To the scholastic traditionalists this age is an age of sedition (*fitna*) heralding the 'end of days'. This becomes a defence mechanism. Instead of explaining the deplorable state of theology and the infighting amongst the ʿulamāʾ, rather conveniently blame was placed on foreign interference and the legacy of colonialism. As a result conspiracy theories abound in these polemics, from the popular 'grand Jewish conspiracy' as Cook highlights to other parochial narratives.⁸⁸ The Barelwis are portrayed as pro-British

⁸⁶ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama and Contestations on Religious Authority*. In *Islam and Modernity*. (editors. Masud, Salvatore and Van Bruinessen) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 212.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 215 – 216.

⁸⁸ Cook, p. 232.

colonialist sympathisers by the Deobandis and the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth.⁸⁹ Politically the Barelwis were in support of partition of India along religious lines and the Pakistan ideology is embedded in the 'global umma' ethos and actively promoted migration to the Muslim majority state. The Ahl-i-Ḥadīth too agreed with the Barelwi stance. Deobandis were on the hand viewed as pro-Hindu sympathising nationalists by the Barelwis and those who the Pakistani partition.⁹⁰ Deobandis were arguing for the rights of equal citizenship of Muslims in a Hindu majority united India. Their focus could be described as 'local umma'. In this sense the Deobandis were see as quasi-secular. Lastly the Wahhābis, unlike the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth, were willing to support Arab nationalist aspiration in the form of support of local tribalism.⁹¹ Although politically religious they were anti-Ottoman. Consequently they are portrayed as pro-British by the Sufis as is exemplified in the forged *Confessions of a British Spy*.⁹² The pragmatic political stances that these groups may have maintained in the past are also treated as theological deviancies and rejuvenated in the polemics. Halverson argues against claims that the Taliban movement is somehow Māturīdite in outlook simply because of their affiliation with Deobandi seminaries.⁹³ Notwithstanding this current research cannot as Halverson has noted, ignore the parochial and classical theological backdrop of these sectarian traditions.

⁸⁹ Zaheer, p. 61 – 71.

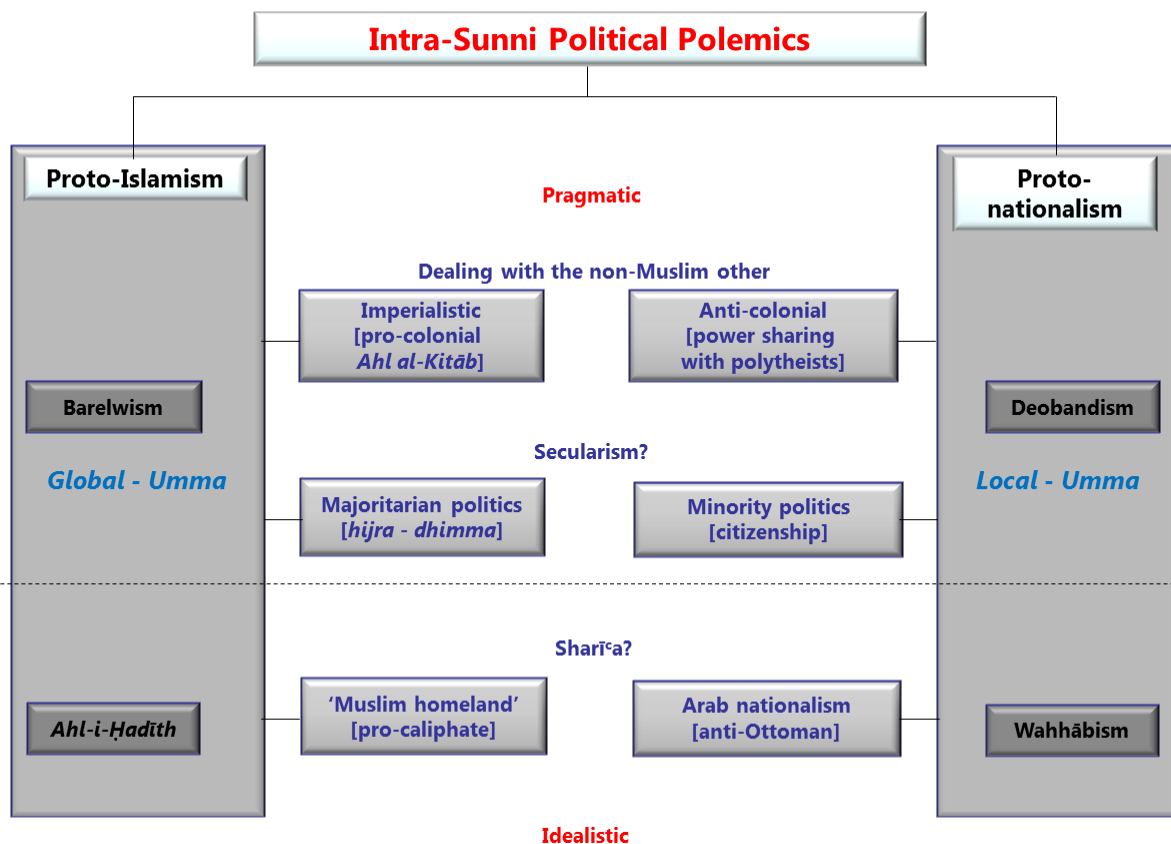
⁹⁰ Kayani, Muhammad Afaq. *The Ahl us-Sunnah Versus The Wahaabi Doctrines* (Lahore: Idarah Qamar-ul-Islam, 2000), p. 441.

⁹¹ Commins, pp. 71 – 72.

⁹² Hempher, *Memoirs of Mr. Hempher, The British Spy to the Middle East [Confessions of a British Spy]* (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 2001), pp. 3 – 4.

⁹³ Halverson, pp. 115 – 125.

Figure 6:7 Internal prejudices



6.10 Conclusion

The minimalist paradigm delineated in chapter one consists of three components and these three components are further divided in three levels. The first and most significant component of minimalism we argued was doctrinal since theology largely dealt with dogmata. Level one of this contains a macro level creed which Muslims of all persuasions Sunni or otherwise could agree on. Level two would include the six articles of faith which all the contemporary Sunni factions discussed in chapter five recognise as either a core Muslim or Sunni doctrine. In essence, all the groups could at least find commonality here. Level three would include the minimalist dogmata or normative doctrine set out by al-Hādī, al-Ghazālī and others. Theoretically speaking the thirteen points adequately expound upon the preceding six articles of faith, however the only problem would be the fact that al-Hādī a Salafi has proposed these

'normative doctrines' which may not bade well with Sufis and Ash^ḥarīs. At least it seems there is agreement on two levels of doctrinal minimalism with a possible third. The third level could perhaps at some point be agreed upon as we are witnessing with the dialogue initiatives of the Amman Message and the *Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation Between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge* between Sufis and Salafis. The third level would thus be micro-minimalism in respect to non-Sunni Muslims but would be the most salient manifestation of macro-minimalism within Sunni Islam. Svensson argues that there is an underlying egalitarian sentiment embedded in doctrinal minimalism: 'the doctrinal minimalists search for a Christianity that is simple, so that it may be fully understood by all'.⁹⁴ We could make use of Calder's understanding of 'recondite beliefs' to illustrate micro-minimalism.⁹⁵

The second most significant aspect of our proposed minimalism would be methodological. It is within this category of minimalism that one feels minimalism could not function successfully. The first level of this would include the general affiliation towards the first generations of Islam which can be considered macro-minimalism within Sunni Islam. The second level would include a controversial three schools of *kalām* i.e. Ash^ḥarī, Māturīdī and Atharī (Ḥanbalī) paradigm. At the moment this will be an unworkable minimalism as it is challenged on the one hand by Sufi traditionalists who consider the Ash^ḥarī and Māturīdī schools and on the other hand by Salafi traditionalists who only recognise the Atharī school. I have demonstrated on a theoretical level this was attempted historically by al-Safārīnī but unfortunately has not been even marginally accepted or at least discussed. I would argue the historical polarisations of *ḥ**aql* against *naql* and Sufi Ash^ḥarīs against Wahhābīs will prove a strong hindrance to this minimalism. The third level of methodological minimalism and the

⁹⁴ Svensson, p. 177.

⁹⁵ Calder, p. 68.

least effective would be the parochial minimalisms. I am here trying to look at other perhaps later historical considerations like the idiosyncratic methods of individuals rather than schools. For the Barelwi, Deobandi and *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth* polemics Shah Waliullah is a point of commonality. Ludhianvi concedes on this point regarding the Deobandi Barelwi differences:

‘There shouldn’t be any fundamental differences between these two factions since both accept Imam Abū Ḥanīfa as their guide in the field of *fiqh* and both accept Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī *rahimahumu Allah* as guides in the field of *kalām*. They both pledge their allegiance to the four schools, namely Qādirī, Chishtī, Suhrawardī and Naqshbandī.....’⁹⁶

Having said that the historical prejudices between these groups and the fact that Barelwism and Deobandism are no longer trends but rather institutions fully independent of each other and firmly polarised in recruitment drives as well, is indicative that parochial minimalism will easily give way to polemics.

The third and most flexible facet of minimalism is what could be termed ethical minimalism, which does not define dogma or delineate a rigid continuity with any methodology, rather it concentrates on outlook. This form of minimalism could work as even dogma is not necessary for it to function. The first level comprises an attitudinal outlook that has been dealt with in chapter four. On the second level is a significant yet romanticised minimalism i.e. that of a non-excommunicative outlook. All the

⁹⁶ Ludhianvi, p. 27.

aforementioned groups - Salafis especially though not exclusively - fall short of being able to achieve minimalism. This ultimately renders this form of minimalism as unworkable at least until groups decide not to excommunicate each other. The *takfīr* phenomenon no doubt abounds in both Salafi mainstream and *jihadi* thought however it is by no means restricted to them. The *takfīrism* of the Barelwis and the Lebanese Habashiyya is completely overlooked by Sufi traditionalists like Winter and Halverson. The Deobandis, though they do not make categorical *takfīr* of the Barelwis, they do however excommunicate the Shiite Muslims and groups affiliated with them and are embroiled in sectarian violence with Shiite communities. The Barelwis consider the Deobandis as out of the pale, and the Wahhābis to a lesser degree. However the third and final level of ethical minimalism consists of communication. This is proving to be promising; we may consider the Amman Message and the aforementioned Pledge realistic attempts of reconciling Sunni solidarity than a theoretical revival of *kalām*. Effectively minimalism, is a *kalām* tool. The only way minimalism could work would be if Sunnism is approached syncretically, however this is unlikely as it compromises the historical continuity of traditionalism.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ See Chapter 1, Fig 1:1.

CONCLUSION

For all their insistence on unity and unanimity neither Christians nor Muslims have managed to achieve these things for very long except with respect to a very few essential or core teachings and practices.¹

[Goddard]

In this study I have attempted to highlight the polemical tensions within contemporary Sunni Islam, with particular reference to scholastic traditionalist trends. I have demonstrated that these polemics have historical continuity beginning with the theological controversy of rationality against revelation in the classical period, through to Ashʿarī dominance in the medieval period, Ḥanbalī vitality and finally culminating in the collapse of *kalām* and the parochial polemics of the contemporary period. This study has confirmed that contemporary Sunni Islam is fragmented along sectarian divides. At the base level there is a split in methodologies which can be broadly designated as Sufi and Salafi. Under these designations more parochial methodologies have been identified namely 1) folkloric Sufism 2) reform Sufism 3) non-conformism and 4) dry Scholasticism. I have included the Barelwi, Deobandi, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and Wahhābī methodologies respectively as archetypal manifestations of these parochialisms. The fault-lines between these groups are interesting; the Salafi archetypes can be divisive internally but cooperate at least nominally against Sufism. Conversely the Sufi archetypes are in conflict with each other but are unified against the Salafis; however the Deobandis find some commonality with the Wahhābīs.

I set out initially to explore the plausibility of minimalism projects such as the Amman Message and the Sunni Pledge. Being a student of theology, I found it on one level

¹ Goddard, p. 3.

intriguing and promising, yet was sceptical about the foundational claims of these initiatives. I was under the impression that minimalism could be fully functional and provide a composite *kalām* based on broad principles which would be acceptable to all the varying factions of Sunni traditionalist Islam. This thesis presents an intellectual journey and exploration which completely undermines this initial view. In a sense I was searching for a Muslim parallel of the Ecumenical movement. State leaders, Ulama and Academics have been signatories to these documents. I was under the impression that we were witnessing a paradigm shift in scholastic traditionalism – i.e. it was moving on from the historical prejudices. In essence these initiatives were heralding the death pangs of traditionalism.

The Sufi factions recognise two theological schools: Ash^ḥarī/Māturīdī, the four jurisprudential schools: the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi^ḥī and Ḥanbalī schools, and numerous Sufi orders. Conversely the Salafis recognise only one theological school, that of the Atharīs, and prefer non-conformism in jurisprudence. Both Sufi and Salafi Sunnis view Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal as the champion of Sunni dogma. Al-Ash^ḥarī on the other hand is deemed the champion of ‘Sunni’ theology by the Sufi traditionalists. Halverson poignantly notes that active *kalām* discourse has been absent for almost five centuries.² Though theology as a discipline may be dead the affiliation that Sunni Muslims have to these historical schools especially the Ash^ḥarī and Māturidism is significant. One might argue that Sufi scholastic traditionalism has always asserted the significance of continuity through *isnād* and claims orthodoxy through demographic longevity and the Great Masses (*sawād al-a^ḥzam*) narrative. A small group of Ḥanbalī Sunnis were difficult to appease by this majoritarian ‘orthodoxy’. Over the course of time it emerges that the Ḥanbalīs never truly adopted the Ash^ḥarī methodology. Watt and others aptly describe this phenomenon as ‘Ḥanbalī vitality’. This tenacious refusal

² Halverson, pp. 143.

to assimilate to Ashʿarite dominance seemed to have stood the test of time with the advent of medieval Ḥanbalism *vis-à-vis* Ibn Taymiyya and then subsequently with Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and the Wahhābī movement in the Najd.

At the time I started the research, the Atharī school had not yet been subjected to academic enquiry at least not to any serious extent by Western scholars. Halverson touched upon this obscure school in his 2010 work *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam* but managed to obfuscate it with Salafi Wahhābism. This thesis shows that non-Wahhābī Atharism challenges the Sufi traditionalist ‘two schools’ orthodoxy paradigm. Intriguingly Muḥammad al-Safārīnī an advocate of Atharism argues for a ‘three school’ paradigm which includes the Ashʿaris and Māturīdīs. Today Atharism is being appropriated by al-Fawzān and other Salafis as it provides for them an *isnād* to early Ḥanbalism, notwithstanding that Salafi Atharism is against a three-school paradigm. A three-school paradigm would work as macro intra-Sunni minimalism however it has not yet received general acceptance in traditionalist circles. Micro-minimalism especially on both *kalām* and parochial methodological framework is impeded by historical prejudices.

Netton contends that the very terms ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’ are value laden judgements. This thesis has indicated that Sunni Islam has suffered a vacuum of ‘authority’ and throughout history has endured a crisis of authenticity as this intra-Sunni polemical scene shows. The source methodologies of Sunni Islam are not rigid enough to guarantee ‘orthodoxy’ and in reality could entertain ‘heterodoxies’. Watt observes that Muslim scholarship has largely ignored the idea of the development of doctrines and how dogmata are shaped by socio-political factors. This thesis has to some extent substantiated this assertion. Sunni Islam used two broad designations of ‘orthodoxy’ in understanding the term ‘collective’ which do not delineate any specific

methodology or dogmata. I have termed these as virtue based and quantifiable orthodoxy. As for virtue based orthodoxy, Salafi traditionalism is predicated on this type of 'orthodoxy'. Virtue based orthodoxy posits that the first three generations of Islam were the best representatives of true Islam. Though Sufi traditionalism does not reject this and also argues in favour of this it only differs with the Salafi proposition as Ramadan Būṭī asserts in that it is only a historical phase and not a methodology as such.³ Quantifiable 'orthodoxy' on the other hand is deduced from two prophetic traditions; one which gives the impression that the truth is found in one amongst seventy three positions and the other that the vast majority of Muslims would be upon truth.⁴ These have been term the Saved Sect (*firqā al-nājiya*) and Great Masses (*sawād al-aʿzam*) narrative in this thesis.

The Salafis use anecdotes from the latter generations that extol the '*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*' or ḥadīth reporters whom they perpetually identify themselves with. In a sense the word '*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*' connotes textualism. The problem with the Pious Predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*) is that it is an artificial construct created by later generations of theologians. Van Ess pointedly elaborates:

'Both the reformist and the fundamentalist currents of modern Islam take their inspiration from a vision of history that favours the beginning over the end, the past over the future. Such a view unquestionably posits a utopia of the ideal beginning'⁵

Whether the Pious Predecessors phase includes all the individuals of that era or not was not an issue of much contention. To restrict the connotation of the word Pious Predecessors, many including al-Ghazālī conveniently argued that this term refers to the Companions of Muhammad even though the Prophetic traditions espouse the first 'three generations' of Muslims which would include the Successors and the Successors

³ Al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafiyya*, p. 9.

⁴ Van Ess, pp. 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

of the Successors. Furthermore it is these generations that witnessed 'schisms' and many from these generations subscribed to the Mu^ctazilite, Murji'ite, Khārijite and Shi'ite schools. Essentially one is arguing that these periods were effectively the most controversial and 'orthodoxy' had not yet been constructed. The Wahhābīs have understood the Pious Predecessors' model as the upright and ideal Islam and consequently that successive generations veered from this 'historical orthodoxy'. As aforementioned Sufi traditionalism regards the Pious Predecessors' in Būṭī's words a 'blessed historical phase' (*marḥala zamaniyya mubāraka*) rather than 'orthodoxy' alone. Later generations of Sunnis especially Ash^carīs according to the Sufi traditionalists have minor methodological differences from the Pious Predecessors, especially regarding the role of rationality in religion and figurative interpretation. This ushered a need to construct a later or 'uninterrupted' orthodoxy vindicating the successive generations who effectively adopted the very methods the Pious Predecessors countered. Thus we find in later theological works the notion of 'Venerable Inheritors' (*al-Khalaf al-Ṣādiq*). Nonetheless the Pious Predecessors methodology or historical phase is necessary for continuity in all the traditionalist narratives Sufi or Salafi and as such I am arguing is an integral working element for methodological minimalism and have accordingly termed 'Early Scholarship'. This scholarship is indeed subjective as it only recognises 'Sunni' scholars and thus appeals to both Sufi and Salafi traditionalism. Netton has termed this kind of phenomenon as a '*Flight to Tradition*' which by no means is peculiar to Islam.

Notwithstanding the methodological differences within contemporary Sunni Islam there is also the propensity of these trends e.g. Sufi and Salafi taking on sectarian outlooks. Largely Salafi traditionalism is embedded in the 'saved sect' narrative which argues that the majority of Muslims will be upon error and only a handful would be clinging on to the Truth. Their contemporary polemical literature espouses this notion with the recurrence of titles of books and conferences 'The Methodology of the Saved

Sect' (*Minhāj al-Firqa al-Nājiya*).⁶ Sufi traditionalism posits a 'great masses' narrative, however it too conveniently falls back on the saved sect narrative especially with its competition with the growing revivalist, reform, and modernist challenges of contemporary Islam.

Though the traditions which support a 'Saved Sect' narrative have been the subject of criticism they have largely been accepted in popular Islam especially for their eschatological and seemingly deterministic appeal.

The very word 'sect' (*firqa*) conveys separatism; it is intriguing how this one 'Saved Sect' paradoxically becomes a collective (*jamā'a*). Moreover the traditions in support of this narrative purvey the meaning of only this *minority* out of seventy three will be receiving deliverance. Salafi Wahhābism is now decidedly embedded in this Saved Sect narrative. They are not swayed by the majority of Muslims differing with them on doctrinal and jurisprudential issues. In essence the 'Great Masses' narrative as a result is conveniently abandoned as it does not serve its theological outlook. Furthermore it is easy to be excommunicative (*takfirī*) within this worldview as falsehood is more abundant than truth. Splintering is also dominant in this trend. Wahhābism is particularly indicative of this. That is not to say that Sufi traditionalists do not have their own polemics, but Wahhābī scholars are notorious for 'exposing' those arguably within their own tradition who have veered from the methodology (*minhāj*).

The Saved Sect is not only a quantity but also in the various narrations a methodology – that of the Prophet and his Companions. It may be for this reason the Wahhābīs find this narrative more tangible than the 'Great Masses' in terms of delineating a *method*.

These traditions may have been needed to explain the divisions that occurred in early Islamic history. I agree with Van Ess in his judgement regarding these traditions as

⁶ Zaynoo, p. 4.

contradicting the more positive traditions that favour a majority over a minority. Moreover al-Juday^c a 'traditional' expert on *ḥadīth* literature in his *Tradition of the Community's Splintering (Ḥadīth Iftirāq al-Umma)* declares this tradition as only good (*ḥasan*) and begrudgingly uses rationalist techniques of text criticism in the like manner of Van Ess in curbing this tradition's prominence over the more optimistic traditions.

The Saved Sect narrative is in essence an anathema to minimalism and only accepts the primary facet of doctrinal minimalism which is basic Muslim creedalism.⁷ It cannot be reconciled with the remaining eight facets of doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalism as it fosters rejectionism, puritanism and more significantly insularity as it is entrenched in a deterministic eschatology and therefore distinctly creedal.

The 'Great Masses' notion in the *ḥadīth* traditions are not as replete as the 'Saved Sect' narrative. This narrative was advocated by Ash^carīs to substantiate their claims for 'orthodoxy'. Ash^carite theology claims 'orthodoxy' through its demographic diffusion and the popular historical longevity it has enjoyed, which according to them neatly aligns with the 'Great Masses' narrative. As aforementioned the traditions in support for the 'Saved Sect' have been subject to scrutiny, likewise *ḥadīths* supporting the 'Great Masses' are firstly scarce in comparison and the most authentic are only considered good reports (*ḥasan*). Nevertheless the influence of this tradition cannot be ignored as it is probably accountable for the *jumhūr* or mainstream syndrome in most Islamic disciplines. In fact the 'Great Masses' traditions are adduced in support of consensus (*ijmā^c*) a primary source of Sacred Law. This narrative does not outline dogmata or methodology like the Saved Sect narrative; it merely encourages affiliation with the majority of Muslims.

⁷ See Chapter 1, Fig. 1:1.

A criticism against the 'Great Masses' narrative is that though it argues 'orthodoxy' through popular following and historical longevity it does not outline any creed or methodology. Its premises rests on the assumption that the vast majority should be followed. If at any period of Islamic history if the Mu^ʿtazilites, or Modern Liberal Islam in the future becomes the mainstream then any tradition can claim 'orthodoxy'. It is perhaps for this reason the Wahhābīs ignored the 'Great Masses' narrative. It seems that the 'Great Masses' is more of an argument for an 'organic mainstream' and as such this is a more optimistic and non-eschatological worldview. The Great Masses narrative is certainly more agreeable in theory with my model of minimalism, possibly on all doctrinal, methodological and ethical levels. In spirit at least the roots of minimalism may be traced back to this 'Great Masses' narrative. This narrative is conducive to some form of pluralism even if accidental and embraces diversity (*ikhtilāf*) and perhaps even change as we have seen with Ash^ʿarism. Furthermore in contradistinction to the word 'Sect', 'Great Masses' (*al-sawād al-a^ʿzam*) actually connotes collective and other meanings of majority. I would like to draw attention to the possibility that it may have been the origins of Muslims trying to understand division through reality.

A rigid model of 'orthodoxy' can to some extent be sustained through a saved sect narrative a lot easier than via the great masses. The Saved Sect narrative cannot be reconciled with the Great Masses. The former implies a minority and the latter a majority. Despite this, Ibn Taymiyya ambitiously attempts to reconcile this by arguing that the 'Saved Sect' is the 'Great Masses' of all generations. Accordingly minimalism would function better in a great masses framework.

I would argue that any model of 'orthodoxy' will always be fraught with the classical internal tension of rationality (*ʿaql*) and tradition (*naql*) and especially the polemics that have been discussed in this thesis. Minimalism could manage this but not

necessarily bridge this gap. I have argued that Mu^ctazilism to some extent was default proto-Sunnism because of their veneration of Companions and reliance of *ḥadīth*.

The legacy of the literalism and metaphor in scriptures debate has resurfaced in modern polemics. Sufi scholastic traditionalists argue for the existence of metaphor in the statutes (*nuṣūṣ*) whereas the Salafi scholastic traditionalists only uphold the literal connotations of scripture. Indeed the Mu^ctazilites were the protagonists of figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and it was the Ash^carites who carried on this tradition and incorporated it within mainstream methodology. The Atharī or Salafi traditionalists renewed their antagonism towards *ta'wīl* and thus in their understanding remained true to their Ḥanbalī roots.

Likewise the role of the debate surrounding rationality and revelation in religion still has resonance to this day. The Mu^ctazilites reconciled rationality and revelation whereas the traditionalists (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) argued for rationality being abandoned in favour of revelation in the advent of a collision. Early Ash^carism took on the approach of the traditionalists or Ḥanbalis to be precise. Later Ash^carīs and Māturīdis began to bridge the gap between themselves and the Mu^ctazilites. This tradition (*naql*) versus reason (*ʿaql*) dichotomy resonated and permeated Sunni methodologies and its tension can still be felt in the major religious disciplines. I highlighted an overlooked dichotomy in hadith studies; i.e. that of 'chain criticism' (*naqd al-sanad*) versus 'text criticism' (*naqd al-matn*). This controversy is preceded by the mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) versus the solitary (*āḥād*) *ḥadīth*. According to Shaltūt and many Ash^carīs solitary traditions should not be included in dogma as they are to some extent speculative in nature. A selective approach in addressing solitary traditions or abandoning them in favour of mass-transmissions would be in keeping with our proposed minimalist model however it is controversial as it is seen as wholesaling the ḥadīth corpus which is integral to Sunni identity. The 'text criticism' method uses largely rationalist inductive techniques against the contents of ḥadīth and if applied would render many traditions pertaining especially to creed and eschatological

dogmata redundant if they go against reason. All of these debates have currently culminated in a tradition (*naqli*) versus reason (*ʿaqli*) on the one level between 'modernism' and 'scholastic traditionalism' but more significantly between 'Salafi scholastic traditionalism' and 'Sufi scholastic traditionalism'. Generally speaking the Salafis have opted for tradition like the Sufis; however this polemic can be explained by the internal inconsistencies of Sunni methodology.

In addition to the rationalist versus traditionalist dichotomy, I identified Shiite and Kharijite tendencies within Sunni Islam which explain the internal and external dynamics of Sunni Islam. Theologians generally backed the Sunni axiom 'all the Companions are upright' (*al-Ṣaḥāba kulluhum ʿudūl*) and as such the Companions were not subject to scrutiny. An historical evaluation indicates that this was not necessarily the case. Two interesting views put forward by al-Ṣabūnī indicate what I have termed Kharijite and Shiite dynamics within Sunni Islam. The first is that all the Companions were upright till the reign of Caliph ʿUthmān and the second all the Companions were upright except those who fought Caliph ʿAlī. We can also see remnants of these in theological works on the controversy surrounding Muʿāwiya and his son Yazīd. Juday^c has discovered that many traditions were forged in support of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and in response other traditions were fabricated in defence of all the Companions of Muhammad. These fabrications served Abbasid and Umayyad propaganda. This thorny issue has always remained part of the fabric of Sunni Islam. The Sufis tend to sympathise with the historical plight of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and Abbasids and as such have developed better relations with Shiite Muslims. The *Ahl al-Bayt* narrative is fairly central to various Sufi traditions and at times the Sufis have had reservations regarding Muʿāwiya. In contrast, the Salafis tend to be anti-Shiite and pro-Companions yet one is being hesitant in arguing that Salafis have Khārijite or Ibāḍī sympathies. On the parochial methodologies this culminated in to some extent, polarising the Barlewis and the Deobandis both of whom I have identified as Sufi

Scholastic traditionalists. Some extreme Deobandis have taken on an ultra-Sunni outlook which target Shiite Muslims and intend to radicalise other Sunnis. The Barelwis are not anti-Companion yet they are robustly anti-Yazīd and enjoy better relations with Shiite Muslims than their other Sunni counterparts. The Ahl-i-Ḥadīth have been vehemently pro-Companions to such an extent that they exonerate Yazīd. This tension surfaces in intra-Sunni polemics.

This thesis explored the dogmata, trends and sectarian dynamics of Sunni Theology. Wahhābism is a parochial manifestation of medieval Ḥanbalism. Though the creed of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was to the traditionalist camp at loggerheads with the rationalism of the Muʿtazilites it became the basis of the textual theology of Ibn Taymiyya and those later Ḥanbalī theologians like al-Safārīnī, and it was Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī who articulated it through a more sophisticated *kalām* medium. In other words Ashʿarī theology claims legitimacy through its Ḥanbalī origins. Māturīdī theology is more certainly Ḥanafī and could easily be traced back to Abū Ḥanīfa and his theological idiosyncrasies. Ashʿarism and Māturīdī theologies may have merged at some point however they are essentially representations of two subtly distinct creeds. Ahmed and Abū Ḥanīfa's differences however minute are synthetically reconciled by Salafis in the like manner that the Sufi traditionalists synthesise Ashʿarī and Māturīdī differences. I did not attempt to necessarily deconstruct Ashʿarī/Māturīdī or Atharī *kalām per se* but rather explored minimalisms on both dogma and methodology. Halverson observes that *kalām* suffered an untimely demise and in his opinion needs *reviving*. I would contend *kalām* needs *reforming* and that the Barelwi Deobandi polemic chronicles how *kalām* has degenerated from rational investigation to sectarian strife. This polemic is embedded in medieval Ashʿarī *kalām* and its 'wrangling of theologians' (*tannaṭṭuʿāt al-mutakallimīn*) and the current phase of post-*kalām* theological polemicism may be viewed as such. Excommunication (*takfīr*) was the outcome of this polemic and it is by no means dead. Moreover there may be an over-intellectualisation of creed by of the Sufis and an over-simplification by the Salafis.

Classic theology posits 'orthodoxy' is the affirmation of statutes and 'orthopraxy' the observance of tradition (Sunna). The antithesis of these are 'figurative interpretation' (*ta'wīl*) and innovation (*bid'ā*). Figurative interpretation is only controversial because it was one of the most distinguishing methodological positions between the Mu'tazilites and the traditionalist Sunnis. Minimalism would accept *ta'wīl* as a valid method as it was synthesised by the Ash'aris and Māturīdīs with the quasi-literalism of the early generations. Atharism cannot accept this.

I have demonstrated in this thesis that many theological and jurisprudential 'innovations' were not the result of pure 'whims and desire' or what I have termed 'wilful neglect of legal processes' but rather the very sources of Sacred Law itself, especially juristic preference (*istihsān*), public interest (*maslaḥa*), presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*), custom (*ʿurf*), previous law (*sharʿ man qablana*) and blockage (*sadd al-dharīʿa*). Consequently I have argued that most religious innovations have been the result of merely 'wrong' *ijtihād*. Minimalism would adopt the 'good innovations' (*bid'ā ḥasana*) position on this issue. *Ta'wīl* and innovation are the root cause of disagreement and cause of polemics.

I identified that the consensus in Sunni Islam is that scholarship is indeed fallible. Independent reasoning allowed a plethora of opinions to proliferate. The (*jarḥ wa ta'dīl*) books indicate that all notables were at some point in their career accused of some controversy. There is a tendency to 'exonerate' scholars of their mistakes or erroneous positions through the mechanism of the *ijtihād* process. Orthodoxy in essence did restrict opinion as it tried to regulate it. There is recognition of the human frailties of scholarship which manifested in rivalry and personal vendettas and as such polemics, especially within one particular tradition were to some extent not taken seriously. This was common in Sunni jurisprudence. It is the current polemical scenario which fails to address the human element of debate and conflict. Salafi scholastic traditionalism has more of a propensity to be critical of its own scholarship than Sufi

scholastic traditionalists however both camps share one outlook – imitation (*taqlīd*) which essentially qualifies them both as traditionalists.

It is interesting that Khārijite orthopraxy and Murji'ite orthodoxy are polarised as extremes in Sunni theology when in reality Sunni Islam itself exhibits this dichotomy through the Ash'arī/Atharī versus Māturīdī definitions of faith. Abū Ḥanīfa was accused of being Murji'ite because of his definition of faith as 'enunciation on the tongue and affirmation in the heart' (*iqrār bi al-lisān wa taṣḍīq bi al-janān*) which was the formula that the Mur'jites promoted. It is ironic that the Ash'arī/Atharī-Salafī definition 'enunciation on the tongue, affirmation in the heart and compliance with the limbs' (*.....wa 'amal bi al-arkān*) is rarely linked to the identical Khārijite doctrine of faith. It is the very deviancy from the third proposition that prompted the Khārijites to excommunicate their co-religionists. Minimalism would prefer the Māturīdite/Murji'ite definition as its scope is far more embracing than the judgementalism of the Ash'arī school. This may also be conducive for contemporary Muslim identity politics.

The travesty of Sunni polemicism is the phenomenon of excommunication (*takfīr*). Classical Khārijism is attributed with this 'innovation' which they took seriously. The Mu'tazilites likewise excommunicated those who did not agree with their 'orthodoxy'; however *takfīr* largely was not taken up by the state. Notwithstanding that the Murji'ites saw the evils of excommunication and declared that excommunicating Muslims was wrong. Ibn Ṭāhir's distinguishing 'Sunni' principle is its non-excommunicative outlook, however the history of Sunni theology clearly indicates that excommunication became part of the fabric of *kalām*, al-Ghazālī declaring it a 'legal injunction' (*ḥukm shar'ī*). The intra-Sunni parochial polemics are largely excommunicative especially with the Salafi factions and to an extent the Sufi (Barelwi - Deobandi). Essentially minimalism espouses a non-excommunicative approach which may be synthesised with the latent-Murji'ism of Māturīdism.

The idea of extremism is subjective and each group views the other as the extreme. The Sufis view the Salafis as extremists and ultimately as the 'problem', likewise the

Salafis consider the Sufis as extreme. The propensity of extremism is acknowledged by the religion itself and that it should be avoided. Extremism can be violent and also non-violent. Minimalism does not adequately define extremism.

The polarisation of contemporary Salafi and Sufi Islam can be traced back to the Jurist and Ascetic discord. As aforementioned the Wahhābīs and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth fall under the Salafi camp, whilst the Barelwi and Deobandi factions fall under the Sufi camp. The core polemics between the Salafi and Sufi camps includes Atharism versus Ashʿarism, mortal prophetology versus sublime prophetology, intercession, innovation in devotional acts and conformism to schools of jurisprudence. As for Atharism versus Ashʿarism this is essentially the amodality (*bilā kayf*) versus figurative interpretation of the Divine Attributes argument manifesting itself in theological schools. In the classical period this resonated as Ḥanbalism versus Muʿtazilism. It seems as though the *bilā kayf* construct caused more problems between the Ashʿarīs and Ḥanbalīs than it did to solve problems between the Anthropomorphists (*mushabbihā*) and the Absolute Negators (*Jahmiyya*). The Wahhābī and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth subscribe to Atharism, though the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth are newcomers to this school. Conversely the Barelwis and Deobandis subscribe to the Ashʿarī/Māturīdī schools. The Deobandis are showing signs of veering towards Atharism. The Wahhābīs, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and the Deobandis though, regard Muhammad as infallible yet he was ultimately a mortal to them. The Barelwis have a more exotic understanding of Muhammad though not denying his mortality they choose to speak of him in sublime terms. Intercession has always been a controversial issue in Sunni Islam and one which is at the forefront of Wahhābī polemics against Sufis. The Wahhābīs and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth argue that intercession is only permitted through the living pious servants of God whereas the Deobandis and Barelwis in particular permit intercession through the dead also. The Barelwis and Sufis in general recognise the notion of 'good' religious innovations i.e. those in devotional acts whereas the Wahhābīs, Ahl-i-Ḥadīth and the Deobandis reject all religious innovations irrespective

of the intent. The least significant polemic yet possibly the most vocal intra-Sunni polemic is the debate over conformism to schools of jurisprudence. Only the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth are against conformism. The general Salafi – Sufi divide can be understood as a continuation of anti-Sufi Ḥanbalism of Ibn Taymiyya and the pro-Sufism of al-Subkī which then channels to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and Zaynī Daḥlān. I included the Deobandis within the Sufi camp because of how much they have in common with Barelwism notwithstanding the bitter rivalry between these groups. Deobandism acknowledges Sufism yet exhibits the anti-innovation stance of the Wahhābīs. The Barelwi Deobandi polemic is significant in the British Muslim diaspora experience. The polemics are deeply rooted in the *kalām* tradition and any intolerance brought about as result is not the direct result of Atharism.

In this thesis I argued that a minimalist theology was emerging from the current polemical trends and debates in theology. This minimalism has three main facets and nine branches. The three facets are doctrinal, methodological and ethical minimalisms. The core premise of minimalism is doctrinal which has three layers of doctrine; the basic creed of Islam which would be an incontestable minimalism followed by the articles of faith minimalism which may be subject to some interpretation and then the normative doctrinal approach of al-Ghazālī and his 'Rules of Doctrine' (*Qawāʿid al-ʿItiqād*) and Ibn Taymiyya's 'Principles of Orthodoxy' (*Uṣūl Ahl al-Sunna*) which are textual doctrines used as rational criteria for other dogmata. I have argued that all the Sunni traditionalists i.e. the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī subscribe to the general propositions or thirteen points highlighted by al-Hādī as is evident in the core texts of their respective theologies for example the *Jawhara al-Tawḥīd*, *al-ʿAqāʿid al-Nasafiyya* and *Lumʿa al-ʿItiqād*. Essentially (majority) Sunni creed at core is Ḥanbalī. That is also the case with al-Ṭaḥāwī's largely accepted credo which admittedly is a vindication of Abū Ḥanīfa and his colleagues yet occasionally intimates Māturīdī idiosyncrasies.

Methodological minimalism is an integral issue as not only is doctrine an issue of debate in contemporary polemics but method (*minhāj*). This facet of minimalism is effectively the affiliation to scholarship a broad imitation (*taqlid*) and chain (*isnād*) of continuity the very bedrock of traditionalism *per se*. In fact the very words methodology as I have laid out are epitomised by the description of the groups under discussion in this thesis – Scholastic Traditionalism. Both Salafi and Sufi scholastic tradition recognise and argue, that they represent or at least affiliate with the Pious Predecessors or early scholarship of Islam. In addition this methodology would dictate conformity to historical schools of theology which articulated ‘orthodoxy’ of the Pious Predecessors. The Sufi traditionalists maintained that ‘orthodoxy’ beyond the simple creedal and general affiliation to Sunni Islam is exemplified in the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools. The Salafi traditionalists contend that ‘orthodoxy’ is embodied in the Atharī or largely Ḥanbalī school theology and that the former schools are deviant. A minimalist perspective would propose a three school paradigm which has been suggested by al-Safārīnī an Atharite and also by al-Binnūrī an Ash‘arite. Lastly in addition to theological methodologies I have identified ‘parochialisms’. These are not new theological schools but rather nuanced and institutionalised manifestations of earlier trends. The Barelwi, Deobandi, Wahhābī and Ahl-i-Ḥadīth factions are examples of this. The Barelwis and Deobandis are what I have termed a continuation of a *kalāmi* vitality, the Wahhābīs as Watt says a ‘Ḥanbalī vitality’ and the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth perhaps a ‘Zāhirite vitality’. Parochialisms are the bane of minimalism due to irreconcilable historical prejudices.

Ethical minimalism has been exhaustively dealt with in chapter four.

This included an attitudinal outlook which is not embedded necessarily in theology and is therefore not necessarily the strongest form of minimalism. This outlook is a broad ethos which would be comprehensive, objective, transparent and of high moral integrity etc. These attitudes are not the monopoly of ‘orthodoxy’ and neither were they pushed historically to form a rigid ‘orthopraxy’ as it may have been considered

untenable to many hence doctrine prevailed. Ibn Ṭāhir's essentialism posited that Sunni Islam is not excommunicative. Contemporary polemics are unabatedly excommunicative not only in the Salafi quarters but also Sufi. Notwithstanding the crisis of Sunni Islam and the internal tensions there are dialogue initiatives that have emerged to address this predicament. On the individual level ʿAlawī al-Mālikī from the Sufi camp and ʿAbd al-Hādī from the Salafi camp had initiated this process through their works on attempting to bridge the gap. This is also though not successfully being attempted in the Deobandi and Barelwi circles and Keller has made a positive contribution to this. More significantly we have seen this translate into the form of 'peace pacts' incorporating certain notables of all the factions discussed in this thesis. The Amman Message pushed forward a macro-Muslim minimalism. The *Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation Between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge* is perhaps a lucid example of this minimalist move in Sunni Islam initiated by Western Sufi and Salafi traditionalists. Though this was not as expansive and epic in proportion to the Amman Message it is a fitting explanation that traditionalists are beginning to acknowledge a crisis in Sunni Islam.

Sadly though, neither of these projects have been ground breaking, on the contrary it would seem that both have failed to reverberate even the slightest echo in the face of such huge polemics and is easily engulfed by it.

These initiatives could even be deemed disingenuous because the participants are intelligent and experts of theology. They could not have been so naïve as to have glossed over these irreconcilable differences. It seems it was not intended for grass roots level and thus certainly not expected to filter through. It was expedient for governments to listen to scholars rather than the masses. Masses would ask why can't there be a sixth contemporary Sunni school rather than a defunct Ṣāhirī school which is ostensibly a taunt at the Wahhābīs. It is authority which has failed to channel this to the masses, it is the politics of the day which has shaped the parameters of minimalism

especially as espoused in the Amman Message, moreover money essentially has maintained the current polemicism. We have demonstrated how these initiatives are new articulations of 'orthodoxy' driven by three key factors, firstly the insiders seeking an end to infighting we have seen Keller's, al-Hādī and 'Alawī's treatise addressing this. Secondly, outsiders wanting to understand the 'mainstream'. Thirdly the political leaders who put pressure on the Ulama to outline the 'tenets of faith'. The Amman Message emerges out of this process.

Minimalism isn't new. I have demonstrated that Abū Ḥanīfa's minimalism is the detailed attempt at delineating a methodology for 'orthodoxy'. Abū Ḥanīfa argued that Sunni minimalism is a) acknowledging the Companions of Muhammad and b) the ḥadīth corpus. Essentially Sunni Islam is Muhammadan Companionism. Minimalism was never water tight as with Abū Ḥanīfa's the Shiites and Kharijites could be exempt but what of the Mu'tazilites who did not deny Ḥadīth and at instances were ultra-Companionites. This may be termed formative minimalism.

Ibn Daqīq al-Īd and Kamāl ibn al-Humām both promoted not only a minimalism for the layman but a 'new' position between the approach of the Salaf and the Khalaf. This would indicate that minimalism was not rigid orthodoxy. Al-Ṭaḥāwī's text though not minimalist, does not conform rigidly to existing schools of theology. It has however been the only solid 'Sunni' creedal or micro-minimal link between the Sufi – Salafi divide. Minimalism could eventually be engulfed by the parochial methodologies as they are institutional.

Minimalism isn't necessarily a denunciation of *kalām* idiosyncrasies; rather it is a re-evaluation of the dialectic (*jadali*) approach. Minimalism may have the potential to become a rigid creedalism. There is also another potential problem of minimalism, if it is an alternative to the *construct* of 'orthodoxy', it could effectively corrode at Sunni

identity or at least be perceived to do so. Minimalism could be viewed as a re-write of Sunni Islam or indictment of it.

I have established that Sunni dogmata have issues that are minimal, dialectical, controversial, hypothetical and inconsequential. The minimal dogmata include the thirteen 'agreed upon' principles of doctrine. Dialectical differences incorporated the differed upon methods between schools of theology and their interpretive methods and therefore integral to the *kalām* tradition. Controversial issues include primarily in the Sunni-sphere probity into companions and prophetology a later by-product of Sunni *kalām*. The hypothetical and inconsequential issues are those are to some extent semantically reconcilable or altogether dispensed with without affecting theology.

The impediments I have identified occur most significantly in literal and allegorical methods of interpretation i.e. on issues of divinity and prophetology within the general Sufi Salafi divide and particularly within the Barelwi / Deobandi polemic. As for *ḥadīth* I feel that the solitary transmissions are contradictory not only on jurisprudential and eschatological issues but also doctrinal issues, every group can substantiate their 'secondary' dogmata from 'authentic' solitary traditions. In addition the rationality tension causes much debate within the acceptance of the *ḥadīth* corpus. If consensus was not theoretical the discussion on minimalism would have been void altogether. It seems consensus did not serve the 'orthodoxy' narrative. The disagreement between Abū Ḥanīfa and the others on the definition of faith has interesting resonances in contemporary identity politics. His opponents' view is judgemental and hampers minimalism. Though infallibility to an extent is reserved for Prophets, it seems that general scholarship is viewed in such esteem and therefore irreproachable. Excommunication on non-Islamic governance can be labelled as 'neo-Kharijism', however notions on blasphemy and heresy are not void of this type of judgementalism. The current civil disobedience in the Arab spring is causing mainstream Sunnis to reevaluate their 'political quietism'.

Minimalism only partially works especially at the doctrinal macro-Muslim and micro-Sunni levels of creed, articles and core normative doctrines. I argue that this is workable because it is largely textual. Methodological minimalism is where everything breaks down because it is historical. Ethical minimalism is to some extent promising yet it cannot sustain the onslaught of creedalism and methodological pedantry. The dialogue initiative projects are sincere attempts at recognising the crisis however its efficacy is questionable due to their naïve understanding of these complexities. Minimalism admittedly is a synthesis and would need to work syncretically perhaps by applying the 'principle of charity' which in spirit defeats its own purpose.

The originality of this thesis rests on a number of key issues;

1. Even though historians have surveyed and chronicled the development of theological schools and sectarian trends few have highlighted the move or argument for normative doctrine which one argues is essentially textual but potentially rational as it governs other dogmata.
2. The thirteen points as outlined by ʿAbd al-Hādī and ascribed to Ibn Taymiyya and essentially Ḥanbalī traditionalism. Though Māturīdī creedalism is Ḥanafī, al-Ṭahāwī has had more appeal with Ḥanbalīs. One has demonstrated that even Ashʿarī creedalism is at core Ḥanbalī and by extension Ashʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī or Sunni creed are resoundingly Ḥanbalī in essence.
3. A Tripartite 'orthodox' school which includes the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī and Atharī schools is being advocated by some traditionalists especially the Deobandis.
4. The Syrian Atharī school is not only another manifestation of Ḥanbalī vitality but that Halverson has unfortunately obfuscated this with Wahhābism. Moreover al-Fawzān and other Salafis are appropriating Atharism to substantiate this historical authentic Wahhābism back to mainstream Ḥanbalism.

5. Historical continuity of debates. The literalism and metaphor debate shapes much of today's controversies and this is exemplified in the Salaf – Khalaf dichotomy. The ascetic – jurist divide shaped up the Sufi - Salafi divide. Other historical debates like rationality – revelation remained within the fabric of Sunni methodology. Khārijite and Shiite tensions brought on by historical grievances and expediencies of the Umayyads and Abbasids still haunt Sunni Islam and existing polemics.
6. The archetypal parochialisms and especially the Deobandi - Bareilwi controversies which hitherto have not been dealt within purely the theological settings that they surfaced. Moreover that excommunication isn't a Salafi only phenomenon, the Sufis too are complicit of this. These polemics are no longer trends like the general Salafi – Sufi divide but rather distinct institutions. The severity of these polemics and their potential in shaping the dynamics between certain groups.
7. Contemporary Sunni polemicism has heralded a paradigm shift which indicates not only the collapse of kalām but also through the minimalist response perhaps the collapse of neo-traditionalism.

Throughout this study my research has indicated that there was a demarcation in theological approach between early and later generations of Sunnis, whether this is Salaf – Khalaf worldview of Sufi traditionalists or the Salafi romanticism of early Islam. Early Islam did not articulate a clear 'orthodoxy' as is constructed by later generations. Surveying theological texts I found some core principles which all theologies of Sunni persuasion can theoretically unite upon without necessarily denouncing their respective idiosyncrasies and these are the foundations of unity projects such as Amman Message, Sunni Pledge etc and are means of dialogue between these sects. As a result of studying the history of *kalām* we identified a minimalist theology; however it is only partially workable due to historical prejudices and internal contradictions.

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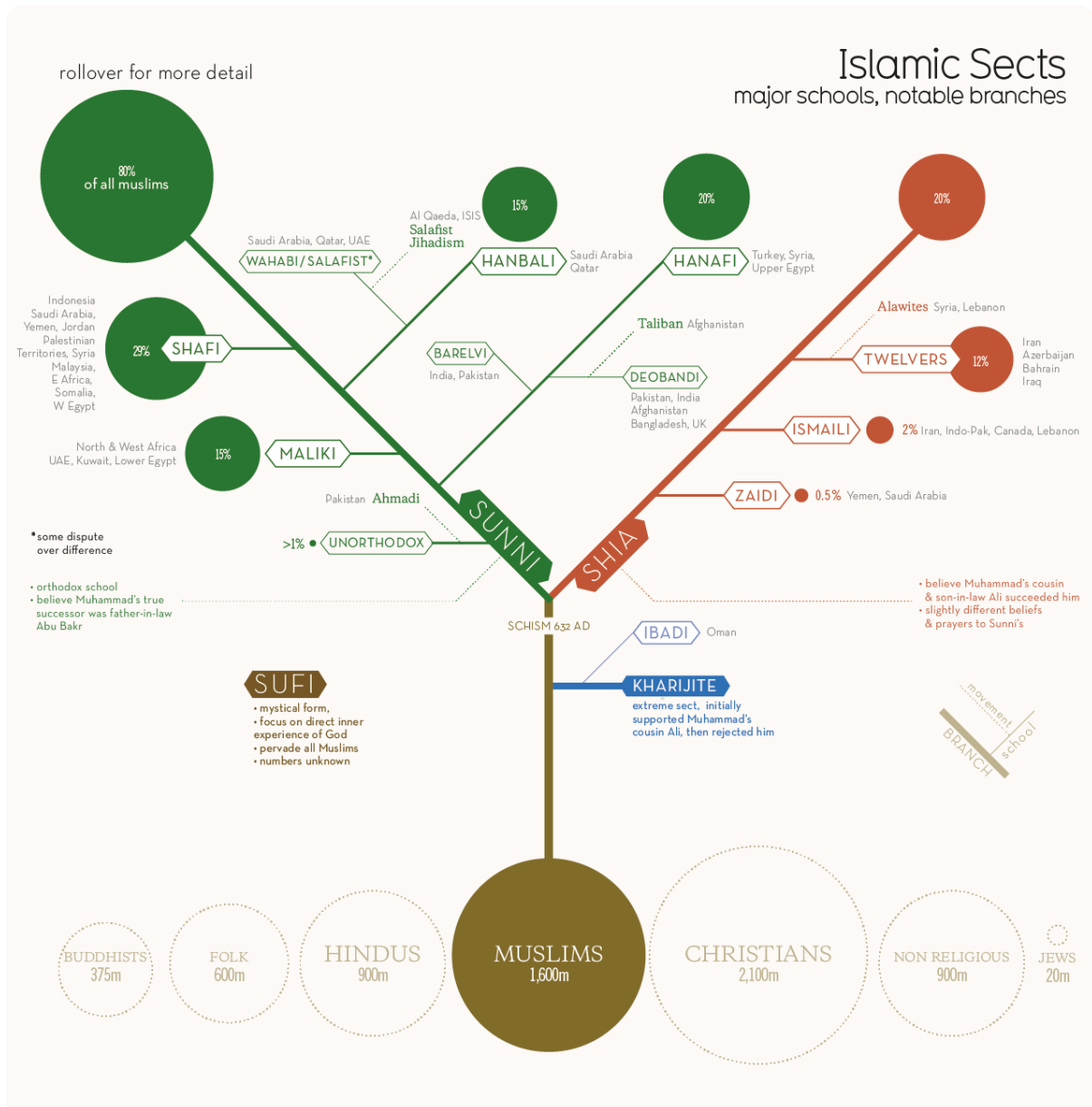
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Appendix I: Islamic Sectarian Overview



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Appendix II: Neo-Traditionalism

[‘Neo-Traditionalism’ vs ‘Traditionalism’-Shaykh Abdullah Ali](#) By [K M123](#) – January 22, 2012

At times, our scholars at Lamppost Productions and other scholars in the West are derisively referred to as ‘modernists’. This is a term that suggests the rejection of the classical, Islamic intellectual tradition. Is this really a fair way to describe our scholars? One of our scholars, Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali directly addresses this issue in this thought-provoking response to a question from one of our readers.

Question: Shaykh Abdullah, you once said in a lecture that you adhere to the ‘neo-traditionalist’ school of thought. Could you please expand further on what this means?

Shaykh Abdullah’s response: When I say that I am a “neo-traditionalist”, what I mean by it is that I incline towards and participate in the movement to return to the classical adherence to the schools of Islamic law (4 Sunni Schools), the study and contextualization of mainstream Sunni doctrine (viz. Ash’ari, Maturidi), and the study and practice of traditional text-based Islamic spirituality (historically referred to as Sufism). This being so is not to be understood that I am in favor of any sort of dogmatic adherence to any of the three forms of Islamic thought (fiqh, ‘aqida, and tasawwuf). Rather, one is to understand that any school of law, creed, or spiritual path and/or order is merely a means, not an end in itself. Each has a long and complicated history with respect to their formation, promulgation, and standardization. When I speak of being a neo-traditionalist, I also mean the manner that one goes about acquiring Islamic knowledge which is namely through direct contact with living human receptacles of knowledge (at least at the start of one’s scholastic career). When one studies fiqh, he/she should not believe that the truth is limited to one’s own school. Nay! One should not even imagine that the judgment passed according to fiqh is on par with the judgment that comes explicitly and immediately from Allah or His messenger (pbuh). When one studies doctrine or creed—what I prefer to call “dogmatic” theology, he should understand that the only aspects of that theology or doctrine that can be made binding on all Muslims is what has been transmitted decisively and unequivocal in its wording from Allah and the Messenger (pbuh). Everything else beyond that is a matter of interpretation which has been a subject of disagreement since the pioneer period precisely because the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) left no clear direction about it. The fact that he did not leave clear guidance on the matters is to serve as proof that it was not a fundamental part of his mission to deliver to the people. Otherwise, we would have to yield to the disparaging notion—God forbid—that he left us without fulfilling his mission. One may take a view on those matters after study, but they should never be utilized as bases to declare another Muslim an apostate even if we find some scholars doing just that. We reserve the right to differ with them on such declarations. As for Sufism (Tazkiyat al-Nafs) or whatever word one prefers to call it, one needs to realize that no one tariqa is more superior to another. This is largely because the tariqa has been made for the initiate for his/her personal development, not simply to develop rapport and camaraderie with other initiates. It is important as well to keep in mind that not every person is obligated to follow a tariqa as was the view expressed by Shaykh Ibn ‘Abbad, one of the leading scholars in Islamic virtue ethics in the 8th Islamic century. Add to that, virtue ethics among the pioneer community did not include fealty to shaykhs and other initiation related matters that we see today and have seen for centuries. Those of the early period sufficed themselves with the companionship (suhba) with the righteous and knowledgeable people, spiritual fraternity (ikha’), and mutual counsel toward goodness and good will. Saying this is not to say that following the tariqa in our own times is impermissible nor undesirable for many. It is merely to deflect the dogmatism of many today who claim otherwise. Another reason that I characterize this particular orientation as “neo”-traditionalism is that it is an attempt to restore things as they were (or at least as they are perceived to have been) during the period of our

sacred history. This orientation cannot rightly be called "traditionalism" because truly authentic traditionalism can only be known and practiced by those who have not been influenced by modern thinking. And all of us living today in one way or another have been influenced by modern thinking. So the past cannot completely ever be retrieved. Another reason is that "traditionalism" was not a monolithic phenomenon when it actually did exist nor was it static. It was more dynamic than believed to be today. For example, today it is impossible to adhere to a classical school of fiqh—taking only from the standard opinions (mashhur) in every issue, especially in Western countries. Imagine demanding that monetary transactions be carried out in the way they should be in the Shafi'i or Hanbali Schools in America or the UK. Or imagine telling people in those countries that praying Jumu'a is not valid because they don't fulfill the Hanafi condition of there being a sultan to initiate it; or a Maliki's (and others) insistence that it must be performed in a single central masjid; or the insistence of all of them that the khutba must be performed entirely in Arabic even if those attending can't understand a single word (among other issues). As for dogma, reflect on the controversy over the uncreated nature of the Qur'an as an English conversation. How do you convince people that this matter has relevance to them even though the classical works deal with it? Or how do you even show them what is problematic with saying the Qur'an is created? And even in the area of virtue ethics (tasawwuf), today many people (if not most) have shaykhs who live in distant lands away from them. They see them merely two or three times every year in the same way that people might go for one's annual physical at the doctor's office. Some good could come from this, but this way of shaykh-murid interaction is not at all "traditional" from my understanding. The predecessors spent time with their shaykhs such that the latter could actually diagnose their problems and then give them the appropriate remedies and prescriptions. As for education, interaction with scholars has been replaced by online courses, conventions, Friday sermons, and weekend seminars. Add to this that the matter of ijaza no longer holds the same importance it had during earlier periods largely because more of the world is literate today than they have been for most of our history. In the past, the human teacher was the book and the source of authority because of his expertise and integrity. Today, there are many people with ijaza, with expertise, and without the same sort of integrity. Or there are some with integrity without the ijaza. Furthermore, an extreme has developed where people think that ijaza is equivalent to achieving mastery of a subject or that it makes a person a scholar when in fact an ijaza in 9 out of 10 cases merely means a person completed the reading of a book with a learned person, not that the person has mastered the science. The rebirth of the ijaza discussion has also led a negative anti-Western degree politics as well which is also an extreme that needs to be avoided. Both are "means", not "ends." True scholarship results from living, continuing to learn, continuing to study, continuing to teach, making mistakes, and correcting them. That's the way that scholarship is achieved regardless of how one acquires one's knowledge. Neither the degree nor the ijaza were methods "revealed" by Allah to His messenger (pbuh). Again, there is good that comes from these ways of increasing knowledge, but they still fall short of a "traditional" way of being educated. Of course, I would argue that necessity in all of these cases is what has led to the novel approaches to these traditional aspects of the classical religious curriculum. But what it shows is that all of us in ways are influenced by modernity in such a way that it's nearly impossible to restore completely the way things once were, or the way we "imagine" they used to be. Or, the case might be that the "tradition" is simply dynamic and adjusts accordingly with the vicissitudes of time in those areas that are generally considered to be mutable. And Allah knows best.

<<http://www.lamppostproductions.com/neo-traditionalism-vs-traditionalism-shaykh-abdullah-bin-hamid-ali/>> [accessed 19/3/15]

Appendix III: The Sunni Pledge

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Pledge of Mutual Respect and Cooperation Between Sunni Muslim Scholars, Organizations, and Students of Sacred Knowledge

Hold fast to the Rope of Allah, all together, and be not divided. (Qur'an, 3:103)

Surely, those who have made divisions in their religion and turned into factions, you have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with Allah; then He will inform them of what they used to do. (Qur'an, 6:159)

In light of the Divine Word, we recognize that the historical nature of Sunni Islam is a broad one that proceeds from a shared respect for the Qur'an and Sunnah, a shared dependence on the interpretations and derivations of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), and a shared respect for the writings of a vast array of scholars who have been identified by their support for and affiliation with the Sunni Muslims and have been accepted as the luminaries of Sunni Islam - as broadly defined.

Likewise, detailed discussions in matters of theology are the specific domain of trained specialists, and proceed on the basis of well-defined principles and methodologies, which are beyond the knowledge of the generality of Muslims.

Our forebears in faith, with all the dedication, brilliance and sincerity clearly manifested in their works, have debated and discussed abstruse and complex issues of creed and practice, and have failed in most instances to convince their opponents of the veracity and accuracy of their positions.

The average Muslim is only responsible for knowing the basics of creed as they relate to a simple belief in Allah, His Angels, Scriptures, the Prophets and Messengers, the Last Day, and the Divine Decree.

Recognizing that the specter of sectarianism threatens to further weaken and debilitate our struggling Muslim community at this critical time in human affairs, and recognizing that Allah, Exalted is He, has given the Muslim community in the West a unique historical opportunity to advance the cause of peace, cooperation, and goodwill amongst the people of the world, we the undersigned respectfully:

- Urge Muslims to categorically cease all attacks on individual Muslims and organizations whose varying positions can be substantiated based on the broad scholarly tradition of the Sunni Muslims. We especially urge the immediate cessation of all implicit or explicit charges of disbelief:

- Urge Muslim scholars and students of sacred knowledge to take the lead in working to end ad hominem attacks on other scholars and students; to cease unproductive, overly polemical writings and oral discourse; and to work to stimulate greater understanding and cooperation between Muslims, at both the level of the leadership and the general community;

-Urge Muslims in the West, especially our youth, to leave off unproductive and divisive discussions of involved theological issues that are the proper domain of trained specialists, and we especially discourage participation in those internet chat rooms, campus discussion groups, and other forums that only serve to create ill-will among many Muslims, while fostering a divisive, sectarian spirit;

-Urge all teachers to instruct their students, especially those attending intensive programs, to respect the diverse nature of our communities and to refrain from aggressive challenges to local scholars, especially those known for their learning and piety;

- Urge our brothers and sisters in faith to concentrate on enriching their lives by deepening their practice of Islam through properly learning the basics of the faith, adopting a consistent regimen of Qur'anic recitation, endeavoring to remember and invoke Allah in the morning and evening, learning the basics of jurisprudence, attempting to engage in voluntary fasting as much as possible, studying the Prophetic biography on a consistent basis, studying the etiquettes that guide our interactions with our fellow Muslims, and the performance of other beneficial religious acts, to the extent practical for their circumstances;

- Finally, we urge the Believers to attempt to undertake individual and collective actions that will help to counter the growing campaign of anti-Islamic misinformation and propaganda that attempts to portray our religion as a violence-prone relic of the past unsuitable for modern society, and by so doing justify indiscriminate wars against Muslim peoples, occupation of Muslim lands, and usurpation of their resources.

Saying this, we do not deny the reality of legitimate differences and approaches, nor the passionate advocacy of specific positions based on those differences. Such issues should be rightfully discussed observing established rules of debate. However, we urge the above measures to help prevent those differences from destroying the historical unity and integrity of the Muslim community, and creating irreparable divisions between our hearts. Further, we do not deny the urgency, especially in light of the situation in Iraq, of efforts to foster greater cooperation between diverse Muslim communities. Hence, this document should not be seen as negating any statements, or declarations designed to foster greater peace and harmony between diverse Muslim communities. However, we feel, as Sunni Muslims, a pressing need to first set our own affairs in order.

In conclusion, having called our brothers and sisters to act on these points, we, the undersigned, pledge to be the first to actively implement them in response to the Divine Word:

Do you enjoin righteousness on the people and refuse to follow it yourselves and all along you are reciting the scripture!?! Will you not reflect? (Qur'an (2:44)

We ask Allah for the ability to do that which He loves. And Allah alone is the Grantor of Success.

Signed,

Abdelrahman Helbawi	Usama Hasan
Abdul Karim Khalil	Walead Mosaad
Abdullah Adhami	Yahya Rhodus
Abdurraheem Green	Yasir Qadhi
Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera	Zaid Shakir
Abu Aaliyah Surkheel Sharif	
Abu Eesa Niamatullah	
Aisha Faleh AlThani	
Asma Mirza	
Cheikhna B. Bayyah	
Dawood Yasin	
Ebadur Rahman	
Faraz Rabbani	
Fuad Nahdi	
Gul Mohammad	
Haitham al-Haddad	
Hamza Yusuf	
Hasan al-Banna	
Ibrahim Osi-Efa	
Jihad Hashim Brown	
M. Abdul Latif Finch	
M. Afifi al-Akiti	
Mehdi Kader	
Mokhtar Maghroui	
Muhammad Alshareef	
Muhammad Ash-Shaybani	
Muhammad ibn Adam	
Omar Qureshi	
S. Abdal-Hakim Jackson	
Shamira Chothia Ahmed	
Siddique Abdullah	
Suhaib Webb	
Tahir Anwar	
Talal Al-Azem	
Tanveer Hussain	
Tawfique Chowdhury	
Usama Canon	

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Appendix IV: The Amman Message [selections]

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



**THE
AMMAN
MESSAGE**

THE ROYAL AAL AL-BAYT INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC THOUGHT

2009 • JORDAN



INTRODUCTION

The Amman Message started as a detailed statement released the eve of the 27th of Ramadan 1425 AH / 9th November 2004 CE by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan. It sought to declare what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam.

In order to give this statement more religious authority, H.M. King Abdullah II then sent the following three questions to 24 of the most senior religious scholars from all around the world representing all the branches and schools of Islam: (1) *Who is a Muslim?* (2) *Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (takfir)?* (3) *Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)?*

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Based on the *fatwas* provided by these great scholars (who included the *Shaykh Al-Azhar*; Ayatollah Sistani and Sheikh Qaradawi), in July 2005 CE, H.M. King Abdullah II convened an international Islamic conference of 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars (*Ulama*) from 50 countries. In Amman, the scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues (which became known as the 'Three Points of the Amman Message'):

1. They specifically recognized the validity of all 8 *Mathbabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Ibadhi* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true Salafi thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2. Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
3. Based upon the *Mathabib* they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

These Three Points were then unanimously adopted

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by the Islamic World's political and temporal leaderships at the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit at Mecca in December 2005. And over a period of one year from July 2005 to July 2006, the Three Points were also unanimously adopted by six other international Islamic scholarly assemblies, culminating with the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of Jeddah, in July 2006. In total, over 500 leading Muslim scholars worldwide—as can be seen from the Grand List on the pages that follow—unanimously endorsed the Amman Message and its Three Points.

This amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijma'*) of the *Ummah* (nation) of Islam in our day, and a consolidation of traditional, orthodox Islam. The significance of this is: (1) that it is the first time in over a thousand years that the *Ummah* has formally and specifically come to such a pluralistic mutual inter-recognition; and (2) that such a recognition is religiously legally binding on Muslims since the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) said: *My Ummah will not agree upon an error* (Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith* no.4085).

This is good news not only for Muslims, for whom it provides a basis for unity and a solution to infighting, but also for non-Muslims. For the safeguarding of the

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legal methodologies of Islam (the Mathahib) necessarily means inherently preserving traditional Islam's internal 'checks and balances'. It thus assures balanced Islamic solutions for essential issues like human rights; women's rights; freedom of religion; legitimate *jihad*; good citizenship of Muslims in non-Muslim countries, and just and democratic government. It also exposes the illegitimate opinions of radical fundamentalists and terrorists from the point of view of true Islam. As George Yeo, the Foreign Minister of Singapore, declared in the 60th Session of the U.N. General Assembly (about the Amman Message): "Without this clarification, the war against terrorism would be much harder to fight."

Finally, whilst this by the Grace of God is a historical achievement, it will clearly remain only principial unless it is put into practice everywhere. For this reason, H.M. King Abdullah II is now seeking to implement it, God willing, through various pragmatic measures, including (1) inter-Islamic treaties; (2) national and international legislation using the Three Points of the Amman Message to define Islam and forbid *takfir*; (3) the use of publishing and the multi-media in all their aspects to spread the Amman Message; (4) instituting the teaching of the Amman Message in school curricula and university courses worldwide; and (5) making it part of the

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training of mosque Imams and making it included in their sermons.

God says in the Holy Qur'an says:

There is no good in much of their secret conferences save (in) whosoever enjoineeth charity and fairness and peace-making among the people and whoso doeth that, seeking the good pleasure of God, We shall bestow on him a vast reward. (Al-Nisa, 4:114).

THE THREE POINTS

THE THREE POINTS ENDORSED AT THE ISLAMIC FIQH ACADEMY CONFERENCE (VERSION 2)

The Official version of the three points of the Amman Message (see above) was the version signed by most of the signatories listed in the Grand list on the following pages. The three points were also endorsed at the Islamic Fiqh Academy's 17th session held in Amman, Jordan, on 24th-28th June 2006. The text had slight variations to the official text yet it followed an essentially identical form. This is duly noted as version 2 in the Grand List. The full text is as follows:

(1) Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathabib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Jafari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thabiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and property are inviolable. Moreover, in accordance with the Shaykh Al-Azhar's *fatwa*, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to the *Ash'ari* creed or whoever practices real *Tasawwuf* (Sufism) an apostate.

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Likewise, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to true *Salafi* thought an apostate.

Equally, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare as apostates any other group of Muslims who believes in God, Glorified and Exalted be He, and His Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him), the pillars of faith (*Iman*), and the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-evident tenet of religion.

(2) There exists more in common between the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence than there is difference between them. The adherents to the eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence are in agreement as regards the basic principles of Islam. All believe in Allah (God), Glorified and Exalted be He, the One and the Unique; that the Noble Qur'an is the Revealed Word of God preserved and protected by God, Exalted be He, from any change or aberration; and that our master Muhammad, may blessings and peace be upon him, is a Prophet and Messenger unto all mankind. All are in agreement about the five pillars of Islam: the two testaments of faith (*shahadatayn*); the ritual prayer (*salat*); almsgiving (*zakat*); fasting the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), and the *Hajj* to

THE THREE POINTS

the sacred house of God (in Mecca). All are also in agreement about the foundations of belief: belief in Allah (God), His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and in the Day of Judgment, in Divine Providence in good and in evil. Disagreements between the *'ulama* (scholars) of the eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence are only with respect to the ancillary branches of religion (*furu'*) and some fundamentals (*usul*) [of the religion of Islam]. Disagreement with respect to the ancillary branches of religion (*furu'*) is a mercy. Long ago it was said that variance in opinion among the *'ulama* (scholars) "is a mercy".

(3) Acknowledgement of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Mathahib*) within Islam means adhering to a fundamental methodology in the issuance of *fatwas*: no one may issue a *fatwa* without the requisite qualifications of knowledge. No one may issue a *fatwa* without adhering to the methodology of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. No one may claim to do unlimited *Ijtihad* and create a new opinion or issue unacceptable *fatwas* that take Muslims out of the principles and certainties of the *Shari'ah* and what has been established in respect of its schools of jurisprudence.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How does Islam function?

Islam has no central authority or church. It has been held together over the centuries and generations, across geographic, juridical and intellectual diversity, by texts and by established, authoritative interpretations of these texts—starting with the Holy Qur’an itself. Misinterpretation of these texts, and misunderstanding of the methodologies of their interpretation can have very dangerous consequences and can lead to an entirely different civilization from that of traditional orthodox Islam.

2. What are the greatest challenges facing Islam today?

Islam today as a religion faces many challenges and problems. Perhaps one of the greatest of these is misunderstanding and confusion about the true nature of the religion of Islam amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This misunderstanding has led to erroneous interpretations of Islamic texts and thus illegitimate

religious edicts (*fatwas*) by people who are intellectually and morally unqualified to make religious edicts. Correcting this situation through proper understanding of the traditional Islamic texts in all their diversity and complexity is thus of profound importance to the future of Islam and Muslims.

3. *What is The Amman Message?*

The Amman Message started as a simple but detailed statement issued in Ramadan 1425 AH / November 2004 CE in Amman, Jordan by King Abdullah II of Jordan and senior Islamic scholars. It described *what Islam is and what it is not*, and what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world *the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam*. It is a message of devotion to God, love of the neighbor, goodwill, moderation and peace.

4. *What are The Three Points of The Amman Message?*

In order to give more religious authority to the *Amman Message* and in order to tackle the root problem of misinterpretation in Islam, in 2005 King Abdullah II sent the following three critical questions to 24 of the most senior religious scholars from all around the world representing all the branches and schools of Islam:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Who is a Muslim?;
2. Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)?; and
3. Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)?

Based on the *fatwas* provided by these great scholars (who included the *Shaykh Al-Azhar*; Ayatollah Sistani and Sheikh Qaradawi), in July 2005 CE, King Abdullah II of Jordan convened an international Islamic conference of 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars or '*Ulama*') from 50 countries. In Amman, the scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues (which became known as the '*Three Points of the Amman Message*')

1. They specifically recognized the validity of all 8 *Mathbabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Ibadhi* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true *Salafi* thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2. Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.

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3. Based upon the *Mathabib* they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

These *Three Points* were then unanimously adopted by the Islamic World's political and temporal leaderships at the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit at Mecca in December 2005. And over a period of one year from July 2005 to July 2006, the Three Points were also unanimously adopted by six other international Islamic scholarly assemblies, culminating with the *International Islamic Fiqh Academy* of Jeddah (the Islamic World's leading juridical body), in July 2006. In total, over 500 leading Muslim scholars worldwide—as can be seen online (at www.ammannmessage.com)—unanimously endorsed the *Amman Message* and its *Three Points*.

5. *Why is it so Important?*

The signed, universal Islamic Consensus on the *Amman Message* and its *Three Points* is of the greatest importance because it amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijma'*) of the *Ummah* (nation) of Islam in our day, and a consolidation

is: (1) that it is the first time in over a thousand years that the *Ummah* has formally and specifically come to such a pluralistic mutual inter-recognition; (2) that such a recognition is religiously legally binding on Muslims since the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) said: *My Ummah will not agree upon an error* (Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith* no.4085), and (3) that it addresses one of the most critical problems facing Muslims today: lack of agreement about what constitutes Islam, and thus lack of agreement about who is a Muslim and what is truly 'Islamic'.

6. Is the content of the Amman Message something new in Islam?

No. There is nothing essentially new in the *Amman Message*, nor could there be for it to be truly authentic, for Islam is a religion revealed by God, and therefore not changeable by man. The *Amman Message* is merely a concrete restatement and crystallization of the common principles of traditional, orthodox, 'moderate' Islam—in all its traditional schools of thought and law—the Islam to which over the vast, overwhelming majority of the world's approximately 1.4 billion Muslims belong.

7. *What does 'Amman' have to do with the 'Message'?*

Nothing. The name 'Amman' merely comes from the fact that the Message was first launched in Jordan by the country's king and scholars. The Message is *a universal pan-Islamic one*, as is seen in its acceptance by Muslims authorities from every school of thought and of law in Islam, and in its ratification by Muslims from every country and major Muslim community in the world.

8. *Will it resolve all of Islam's problems? Will it help?*

No, the *Amman Message* will not resolve all of Islam's problems: no religion can be without problems on the worldly plane, especially in the modern age. *The Economist* (June 28th, 2007) argues that: This much is true: any of the Muslims who are drawn to jihadist violence, or to strident forms of political Islam, are indifferent to, or ignorant of, the nuances of theology; that makes them susceptible to "amateur" *fatwas*. But as a French scholar, Olivier Roy, points out, it doesn't follow that such people—when presented with sophisticated religious arguments—would change their mind. In many cases, they have a general aversion to the idea of elaborate theology.

However, what proper awareness, education and understanding of the *Amman Message* and its *Three*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Points, might well do, God Willing, is prevent 99.99% of Muslims from being influenced by illegitimate fatwas and sliding into *takfir* and terrorism, as a visceral over-reaction to poverty, injustice and mistakes in Western foreign policy. After all, God says in the Holy Qur'an:

O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for God in equity, and let not hatred of any people make you swerve from justice. Deal justly, that is nearer to piety. Observe your duty to God. Lo! God is Informed of what ye do.
(*Al-Ma'idah*, 5:8)

Finally, proper awareness of *The Amman Message*, may also, by exposing the illegitimate opinions of radical fundamentalists and terrorists from the point of view of true Islam, help in preventing calls in the West for hostility against Muslims as such. As George Yeo, the Foreign Minister of Singapore, declared in the 60th Session of the U.N. General Assembly (about the *Amman Message*): "Without this clarification, the war against terrorism would be much harder to fight". It thus may help to prevent a wider conflict between the over 55% of the world's population: approximately 2.1 billion Christians and 1.4 billion Muslims ...

9. *What could it mean for Islam's relations with non-Muslims?*

The Amman Message Initiative is good news not only for Muslims, for whom it provides a basis for unity and a solution to infighting, but also for all non-Muslims. For, in safeguarding of the basic principles, texts and legal methodologies of Islam, the *Amman Message* necessarily means inherently preserving traditional Islam's internal 'checks and balances'. It thus assures balanced Islamic solutions for essential issues like human rights; women's rights; freedom of religion; legitimate *jihad*; good citizenship of Muslims in non-Muslim countries, and just and democratic government, all key issues that are essential to world peace and harmony.

10. *What is the next step?*

In order that *Amman Message* not remain merely a historical agreement on basic principles, various steps are being taken to introduce it through pragmatic and institutional means, such as: (1) inter-Islamic treaties; (2) national and international legislation using the Three Points of the Amman Message to define Islam and forbid *takfir*; (3) the use of publishing and the multi-media in all their aspects to spread the Amman Message; (4) instituting the teaching of the Amman

**GRAND LIST OF ALL RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL
LEADERS WHO HAVE ENDORSED THE AMMAN
MESSAGE AND ITS THREE POINTS**

(July 2005–July 2006)

*Total number of signatures: 552 * from 84 countries*

CODE / CONFERENCE	TOTAL
§ True Islam and Its Role in Modern Society Conference, Amman (July 2005) [THREE POINTS VERSION 1]- SIGNED	201
¶ Forum of Muslim Ulama and Thinkers, Mecca (September 2005)- ENDORSED	42
* Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence Conference, Aal Al-Bayt University, Jordan (November 2005) - ENDORSED	33
∞ 9th Session of the Council of Ministers of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait (November 2005) - ENDORSED	7
∫ 3rd Extraordinary Session, OIC, Mecca (December 2005)- ENDORSED	54
≈ Moderate Islamic Thought and Culture, Amman (April 2006) [THREE POINTS VERSION 1]- SIGNED	55
◇ International Fiqh Academy Conference, Amman (June 2006) [THREE POINTS VERSION 2] - SIGNED	68

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Message in school curricula and university courses worldwide; and (5) making it part of the training of mosque *Imams* and making it included in their sermons.

II. What can you do?

Whoever you are, and wherever you live, you can help by adding your voice to this unique and historic international Islamic consensus. Please visit www.ammannmessage.com, where you can read more about the Amman Message and find many useful documents and links. Under the button saying: *Click here to endorse the Amman Message* (or on the automatic pop-up) you can add your name to the list of people worldwide who have endorsed and supported the three points. Your understanding of *the Amman Message* is in itself important goal. Your endorsement of the *Amman Message* is one way to contribute towards peace in the world.

HRH PRINCE GHAZI BIN MUHAMMAD
Chairman of the Amman Message Committee
July 22nd, 2007.

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π Muslims of Europe Conference, Istanbul
(July 2006) - ENDORSED

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ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

- 1 H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai }
President
- 2 Amb. Nusair Ahmad Nour §
Afghani Ambassador to Qatar
Islamic Envoy of the Government of Afghanistan

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

- 3 H.E. Mr. Florent Celiku }
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
- 4 Mr. Tahir Zenelhasani π

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

- 5 H.E. Mr. AbdelAziz Belkhadem }
Minister of Foreign Affairs
- 6 H.E. Lakhdar Ibrahimi §
Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United
Nations; Former Foreign Minister of Algeria

- 547 Shaykh Humud bin ‘Abbas al-Mu‘ayyad *fatwa*
- 548 Shaykh Ibrahim bin Muhammad Al-Wazir *fatwa* §
Secretary General of the Islamic Unification and Works
Movement
- 549 Shaykh Habib ‘Umar bin Muhammad bin
Salim bin Hafiz §
Principal, Dar al-Mustafa, Tarim
- 550 Shaykh Al-Habib Al-Jifri §
Islamic Missionary and Intellectual
- 551 Shaykh Muhammad Abduh Umar ◊
Head, Bureau of Direction and Guidance, Permanent
Committee of the General People’s Conference
- 552 Prof. Dr. Husayn Al-Umari §
Member of the Consultative Committee, Member of the
UNESCO Executive Committee; Professor of Modern
History, University of Sana‘a’

PDF

<http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=96&Itemid=80> [downloaded 19/3/15]

الأصول العشرون

يقول الإمام البنا :

أيها الإخوان الصادقون

أركان بيعتنا عشرة فاحفظوها :

« الفهم ، والإخلاص ، والعمل ، والجهد ، والتضحية ، والطاعة ، والقياس ، والتجرد ، والأخوة ، والثقة » .

أيها الأخ الصادق :

إنما أريد بالفهم :

أن نتقن بأن فكرتنا « إسلامية صميمة » وأن تفهم الإسلام كما تفهمه ، في حدود هذه الأصول العشرين الموجزة كل الإيجاز :

١ - الإسلام نظام شامل يتناول مظاهر الحياة جميعاً فهو دولة ووطن أو حكومة وأمة ، وهو خُلُق وقوة أو رحمة وعدالة ، وهو ثقافة وقانون أو علم وقضاء ، وهو مادة وثروة أو كسب وغنى ، وهو جهاد ودعوة أو جيش وفكرة ، كما هو عقيدة صادقة وعبادة صحيحة ، سواءً بسواء .

٢ - والقرآن الكريم والسنة المطهرة مرجع كل مسلم في تعرف أحكام الإسلام ، ويُفهم القرآن طبقاً لقواعد اللغة العربية من غير تكلف ولا تعسف ، ويُرجع في فهم السنة المطهرة إلى رجال الحديث الثقات .

٣ - وللإيمان الصادق والعبادة الصحيحة والمجاهدة نور وحلاوة يقذفها الله في قلب مَنْ يشاء من عباده ، ولكن الإلهام والخواطر والكشف والرؤى ليست من أدلة الأحكام الشرعية ، ولا تُعتبر إلا بشرط عدم اصطدامها بأحكام الدين ونصوصه .

٤ - والتحامم والرُقى والردع والرملُ والمعرفة والكهانة وادعاء معرفة الغيب، وكل ما كان من هذا الباب منكرٌ يجب محاربتُه « إلا ما كان آية من قرآن أو رقية مأثورة » .

٥ - ورأى الإمام ونائبه فيما لا نص فيه . وفيما يحتمل وجوهاً عدة وفي المصالح المرسلّة ، معمول به ما لم يصطدم بقاعدة شرعية . وقد يتغير بحسب الظروف والعرف والعادات . والأصل في العبادات التعبد دون الالتفات إلى المعاني ، وفي العاديات الالتفات إلى الأسرار والحكم والمقاصد .

٦ - وكلُّ أحد يُؤخذ من كلامه ويُترك إلا المعصوم ﷺ ، وكل ما جاء عن السلف رضوان الله عليهم موافقاً للكتاب والسنة قبلناه ، وإلا فكتاب الله وسنة رسوله أولى بالاتباع ، ولكننا لا نعرض للأشخاص - فيما اختلف فيه - بطعن أو تحجّير ، ونكلهم إلى نياتهم ، وقد أفضوا إلى ما قدّموا .

٧ - ولكل مسلم لم يبلغ درجة النظر في أدلة الأحكام الفرعية أن يتبع إماماً من أئمة الدين ، ويحسن به مع هذا الاتباع أن يجتهد ما استطاع في تعرف أدلته ، وأن يتقبل كل إرشاد مصحوب بالدليل متى صح عنده صلاح مَنْ أرشده وكفايته . وأن يستكمل نقصه العلمي إن كان من أهل العلم حتى يبلغ درجة النظر .

٨ - والخلاف الفقهي في الفروع لا يكون سبباً للتفرق في الدين ، ولا يؤدي إلى خصومة ولا بغضاء ، ولكل مجتهد أجره ، ولا مانع من التحقيق العلمي النزيه في مسائل الخلاف في ظل الحب في الله والتعاون على الوصول إلى الحقيقة ، من غير أن يجز ذلك إلى المرء المذموم والتعصب .

٩ - وكل مسألة لا يبنى عليها عمل ، فالخوض فيها من التكلف الذي تُهينا عنه شرعاً ، ومن ذلك : كثرة التفريعات للأحكام التي لم تقع ، والخوض في معانى الآيات القرآنية الكريمة التي لم يصل إليها العلم بعد ، والكلام في المفاضلة بين الأصحاب رضوان الله عليهم ، وما شَجَرَ بينهم من خلاف ، ولكل منهم فضل صُحبتَه وجزاء نَيْتِه ، وفي التأول مندوحة .

١٠ - معرفة الله تبارك وتعالى وتوحيده وتزبيهِه أسمى عقائد الإسلام ، وآيات الصفات وأحاديثها الصحيحة وما يليق بذلك من التشابه ، نؤمن بها كما جاءت من غير تأويل ولا تحطيل ، ولا نتعرض لما جاء فيها من خلاف بين العلماء ؛ وسعنا ما وسع رسول الله ﷺ وأصحابه : ﴿ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا ﴾ (١) .

١١ - وكل بدعة في دين الله لا أصل لها - استحسنتها الناس بأهوائهم ، سواء بالزيادة فيه أو بالنقص منه - ضلالة تجب محاربتها والقضاء عليها بأفضل الوسائل التي لا تؤدي إلى ما هو شر منها .

١٢ - والبدعة الإضافية والتُرْكِيَّة والالتزام في العبادات المطلقة خلاف فقهى ، لكل فيه رأيه ؛ ولا بأس بتمحيص الحقيقة بالدليل والبرهان .

١٣ - ومحبة الصالحين واحترامهم والثناء عليهم بما عُرِفَ من طيب أعمالهم قربة إلى الله تبارك وتعالى ، والأولياء هم المذكورون في قوله تعالى : ﴿ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ ﴾ (٢) والكرامة ثابتة لهم بشرائطها الشرعية مع اعتقاد أنهم رضوان الله عليهم لا يملكون لأنفسهم نفعاً ولا ضرراً في حياتهم أو بعد مماتهم فضلاً عن أن يهيبوا شيئاً من ذلك لغيرهم .

١٤ - وزيارة القبور أياً كانت سُنَّة مشروعة بالكيفية المأثورة ، ولكن الاستعانة بالمقبورين أياً كانوا ونداءهم لذلك وطلب قضاء الحاجات منهم من

(٢) يونس : ٦٣

(١) آل عمران : ٧

(٢ - نحر وحدة فكرية)

قُرب أو بُعد والنذر لهم وتشييد القبور وسترها وإضاءتها والتمسح بها والحلف بغير الله وما يلحق بذلك من المبتدعات كباثر حجب محاربتها ، ولا نتأول لهذه الأعمال سداً للذريعة .

١٥ - والدعاء إذا قُرِنَ بالتوسل إلى الله بأحد من خلقه خلاف فرعى فى كيفية الدعاء وليس من مسائل العقيدة .

١٦ - والعُرف الخاطى لا يغيرُ حقائق الألفاظ الشرعية ، بل يجب التأكد من حدود المعانى المقصود بها ، والوقوف عندها . كما يجب الاحتراز من الخداع اللفظى فى كل نواحى الدنيا والدين ، فالعبارة بالمسميات لا بالأسماء .

١٧ - والعقيدة أساس العمل ، وعمل القلب أهم من عمل الجارحة ، وتحصيل الكمال فى كليهما مطلوب شرعاً ، وإن اختلفت مرتبتا الطلب .

١٨ - والإسلام يحرر العقل ، ويحث على النظر فى الكون ، ويرفع قدر العلم والعلماء ، ويرحب بالصالح النافع من كل شىء . و « الحكمة ضالة المؤمن أتى وجدها فهو أحق الناس بها » .

١٩ - وقد يتناول كل من النظر الشرعى والنظر العقلى ما لا يدخل فى دائرة الآخر ، ولكنهما لن يختلفا فى القطعى . فلن تصطدم حقيقة علمية صحيحة بقاعدة شرعية ثابتة ؛ ويؤرگ الظنى منهما ليتفق مع القطعى ، فإن كانا ظنيين فالنظر الشرعى أولى بالاتباع حتى يثبت العقلى أو ينهار .

٢٠ - لا نكفر مسلماً أقر بالشهادتين وعمل بمقتضاها وأدّى الفرائض - برأى أو معصية - إلا إن أقر بكلمة الكفر ، أو أنكر معلوماً من الدين بالضرورة ، أو كذب صريح القرآن ، أو فسره على وجه لا تحتمله أساليب اللغة العربية بحال ، أو عمل عملاً لا يحتمل تأويلاً غير الكفر .

وإذا علم الأخ المسلم « دينه » فى هذه الأصول ، فقد عرف معنى هتافه دائماً: « القرآن دستورنا والرسول قدوتنا » . ا هـ .

حسن البنا

* * *

Appendix VI: 13 Principles of Sunni Islam

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين و صلي الله وسلم على نبينا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين
فقد قرأت هذه الرسالة السنية والجماعة فالفيتها رسالة قيمة مفيدة
تتضمن بيان مذهب أهل السنة في العقائد والأعمال وقد اعتمد فيها المؤلف على النقل عن
شيوخ القضاة والشيخ الاسلام ابن تيمية وأوضح بعد ذلك ما يجب على أهل السنة عمله
وما يتوقف عليه النور والظهور وبين الأخطاء والخطار التي قد يقع ضوئها وكيفية
السبل إلى العتقاد عليها وأخرج مذهب أهل السنة والجماعة وخطبهم الشديدة على أهل
البدعة وكيف يأخذ الحذر منهم وبالجملة فقد ابرع فيها الكاتب وأجاد الاثراء
والاختيار عن من كل مسلم حين يقرأ هذه الرسالة ان يفقه من فقهه وان لم يفقه
في تثبت عقيدته وتقويتها وينتبه في العمل الذي تستدعيه العقيدة في نفسه
وفي مجتمعه رجاء انه يفهم المجمع ويعرف الأخطار والأضرار ويوجه الدعوة لتقاومها
كل مبتدع وكل داع إلى التحلل أو الخروج عن الصراط السوي والتمس التعاريف وعليه
التكليات وصلى الله على محمد وآله وسلم

يقلم محمد بن عبد الرحمن الجبرين

Ibn Jibrīn's 'tazkiya' of al-Hādī's doctrinal schemas.

الفصل الرابع

الأصول التي اتفق عليها أهل السنة

- (١) أهل السنة والجماعة عقيدتهم في صفات الله : إثبات بلا تكيف ، وتنزيه بلا تعطيل :
- (٢) أهل السنة والجماعة عقيدتهم في القرآن : أنه كلام الله غير مخلوق :
- (٣) أهل السنة والجماعة يعتقدون أن الله عز وجل لا يراه أحد في الحياة الدنيا :
- (٤) أهل السنة والجماعة متفقون على رؤية المؤمنين لربهم بالأبصار في الجنة :
- (٥) أهل السنة والجماعة يؤمنون بكل ما أخبر به النبي ﷺ مما يكون بعد الموت :
- (٦) أهل السنة والجماعة يؤمنون بالقدر بجميع درجاته :
- (٧) أهل السنة والجماعة يقولون : إن الإيمان قول وعمل ، يزيد وينقص :
- (٨) أهل السنة يعتقدون أن الإيمان أصل وفروع وأن الإيمان لا يزول إلا بزوال أصله ولذلك فهم لا يكفرون أحداً من أهل القبلة بمطلق المعاصي . إلا أن يزول أصل الإيمان :
- (٩) أهل السنة والجماعة متفقون على جواز اجتماع العذاب والثواب في حق الشخص الواحد ولكنهم في الوقت نفسه لا يوجبون العذاب أو الثواب لمعين إلا بدليل خاص :
- (١٠) أهل السنة والجماعة يحبون ويتولون صحابة رسول الله ﷺ وأهل بيته وأزواجه دون أن يعتقدوا بعصمة أحد غير رسول الله ﷺ :
- (١١) أهل السنة والجماعة يصدقون بكرامات الأولياء وما يجري الله على أيديهم من خوارق العادات :
- (١٢) أهل السنة والجماعة مجمعون على قتال من خرج عن شريعة الإسلام ، وإن تكلم بالشهادتين :
- (١٣) أهل السنة والجماعة يفزون مع أمرائهم أبراراً كانوا أم فجاراً من أجل إقامة شرائع الإسلام :

Appendix VII: Sunni Catechism

[Taught to children in almost all Sunni mosques in the United Kingdom]

1. <i>Kalima-i-Ṭayyiba</i>	الكلمة الطيبة • لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله
• There is no deity save God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.	
2. <i>Kalima-i-Shahādat</i>	الشهادتان • أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له وأشهد أن محمد عبد ورسوله
• I bear witness that there is no deity save God alone. He has no partner. I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.	
3. <i>Kalima-i-Tawhīd</i>	التوحيد
a) There is no deity save God alone. He has no partner. His is the dominion. Praise is to Him. He gives life and death. [He is Alive and does not ever die. The Glorious, The Bounteous] All good is in his hand. He is omnipotent.	(a) لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له له الملك وله الحمد يحيي ويميت [وهو حي لا يموت أبداً أبداً ذو الجلال والإكرام] بيده الخير وهو على كل شيء قدير
b) There is no deity save Thee alone. None is second to Thee. Muhammad is the Messenger of God, the Imam of the Righteous and Messenger of the Lord of the Universe	(b) لا إله إلا أنت واحداً لا شيء لك محمد رسول إمام المتقين رسول رب العالمين
4. <i>Kalima-i-Tamjīd</i>	التمجيد
a) Glory be to God, praise be to God. There is no deity save God. God is Great. There is no power nor strength save from God the Most High, the Great.	(a) سبحان الله والحمد لله ولا إله إلا الله والله أكبر ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم
b) There is no deity save Thee. Thou are the Light. ⁸ God guides to His light whom he likes. Muhammad is the Messenger of God, Imam of the Apostles and Seal of the Prophets.	(b) لا إله إلا أنت نوراً يهدي الله لنوره من يشاء محمد رسول الله إمام المرسلين خاتم النبيين
5. <i>Kalima-i-Tawba</i>	التوبة
• I seek forgiveness from God, my Lord for every sin I have committed deliberately or mistakenly, openly or secretly. I repent to Him of the sin that I am aware of and the sin that I am unaware of. Thou art the Knower of the Unseen, Concealer of faults, Pardoner of sins. There is no power nor strength save from God Most High, the Great.	• استغفر الله ربي من كل ذنب أدنيت عمداً أو خطأ سراً أو علانية وأتوب إليه من الذنب الذي أعلم ومن الذنب الذي لا أعلم إنك أنت علام الغيوب وستار العيوب وغفار الذنوب ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم
6. <i>Radd-i-Kufr</i>	رد الكفر
• O Lord I seek Thy refuge from associating anything with Thee knowingly, and I seek forgiveness from Thee for (polytheism) that I do not know. I have repented from it and I have denounced disbelief, idolatry, telling lies, [backbiting, bad innovations, calumny, indecency, slander and all the sins. I submit and proclaim that there is no deity save God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.	• اللهم إني أعوذ بك أن أشرك بك شيئاً وأنا أعلم به واستغفرك لما لا أعلم به تبت عنه وتبرأت من الكفر والشرك والكذب [والغيبة والبدعة والنميمة والفواحش والبهتان] والمعاصي كلها وأسلمت وأقول لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله
7. <i>Īmān-i-Mujmal</i>	الإيمان المجمل
• I believe in God as He is, with all His names and attributes. I accepted all His commands, [enunciating with the tongue and believing with the heart]. ⁹	• أمنت بالله كما هو بأسمائه وصفاته وقيلت جميع أحكامه وأركانها [إقراراً باللسان وتصديقاً بالقلب]
8. <i>Īmān-i-Mufaṣṣal</i>	الإيمان المفصل

⁸ This ambiguity could either refer to God or the Prophet. The *Nūr-i-Muḥammadī* motif prevalent in Bengali syncretic Sufism could explain why reform Sufis such as the Deobandis and perhaps even the Barelwis abandoned this credo.


⁹ This addendum exhibits Māturīdite orthodoxy.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, the Last Day, the Decree; the good or bad of is from God, and the Resurrection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> أمنت بالله وملائكته وكتبه ورسله واليوم الآخر والقدر خيره وشره من الله تعالى والبعث بعد الموت
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All of these catechisms come from the Deobandi *Ta'lim al-Ḥaqq*, the Barelwi *Madanī Treasure of Blessings*. I have used a somewhat neutral catechism as a base, possibly traced back to Kānpūr (UP) as is prevalent in Bangladesh. Mawlānā Shamīm al-Ma'mūn synthesizes the Indo-Pak Deobandi and Barelwi with the dominant Bangladeshi Sunni catechism in his *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh* which otherwise excludes the fifth and sixth *kalimas* and only has the latter versions of *Kalima-i-Tawḥīd (b)* and *Kalima-i-Tamjīd (b)*. What can be seen is that *Kalima-i-Tayyiba*, *Kalima-i-Shahādat*, *Īmān-i-Mujmal* and the all-important Sunni-centric *Īmān-i-Mufaṣṣal* are the same and the rest are up for grabs. These differences can possibly be accounted for through geographic diffusion rather than sectarian as such, and rarely surfaces in intra-Sunni polemics. Nonetheless we can utilise these catechisms since they are used as minimalisms. The Arab Sunnis Sufi or Wāḥḥābī recognise the core catechisms highlighted here.

KEY

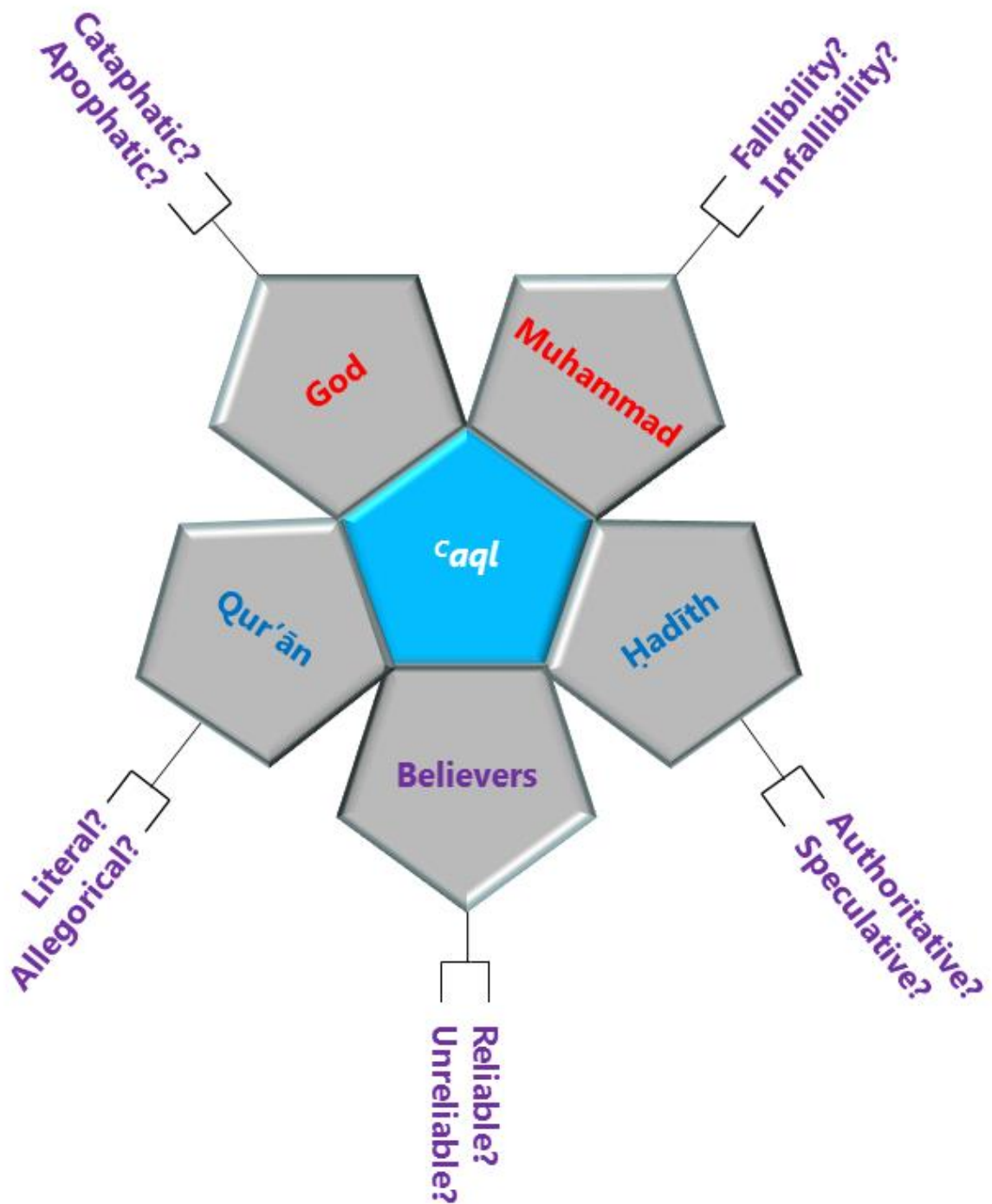
 Agreed by all.

 Deobandi – Barelwi

 Barelwi variant.

 Sunni Bengalis (Kānpūri?)

Appendix VIII: Macro-minimalism – forging an *unum necessarium*



'Confessional' Islam?