

Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful

Reflection, intellection and freewill are among the most manifest peculiarities of the human being. Throughout his life, man engages in the discovery of the universe by utilizing these features and on the basis of which he chooses a particular way and order in a bid to give answers to his material and spiritual needs. In other words, human actions in both the individual and social realms of his life demand that they emanate and must be patterned from a kind of attitude about the universe.

The totality of these methods and attitudes is the same with what is technically called “religion” which may vary according to the type of worldview of individuals. In a broader classification, religion can be divided into two, viz. theistic and atheistic religion. In the same manner, theistic religion can be classified into monotheistic and non-monotheistic, and monotheistic religion, in turn, can be grouped into original (immune from distortion) and non-original (distorted).

On this basis, man has never been and will never be able to live without religion. What is meant by those who technically have no religion is that they have not accepted the theistic religion, and the great mission of the prophets of God is primarily to introduce the original theistic religion to mankind – the religion whose main slogan is total submission to the One and Only God:

﴿ إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ﴾

“Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam.”¹

Submission to God means not to worship anyone or anything other than God and to obey the Divine laws and decrees. These laws and decrees are what are technically called *shar‘ah*:

﴿ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَا ﴾

“For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path.”²

According to what have been mentioned in the verses of the Qur’an and Prophetic sayings (*ahādīth*), the Divine *shar‘ah* is limited to five, viz. those of Prophet Nūḥ (Noah), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Mūsā (Moses), ‘Īsā (Jesus), and the Holy Prophet (‘a),³ the last one being the final⁴ and known as the Islamic *shar‘ah* and Islamic creed.

The heavenly *shar‘ahs* are identical and the same in terms of the foundations and principles of beliefs. The belief in the One and Unique Creator who has the loftiest Attributes of Perfection – “*To Allah belong the Best Names*”⁵ – and in the abode of the Hereafter in which all human beings will receive the appropriate recompense of all their good or bad deeds, as well as the belief in the Divine plans conveyed by the prophets to the people so as for them to distinguish the right path from the wrong one are ideological foundations of all heavenly *shar‘ahs*.

Yet, today, the only *shar‘ah* which must be compatible with the Divine beliefs and precepts is the *shar‘ah* of Islam, because the other *shar‘ahs* have suffered from distortion and alteration, and incorrect beliefs such as the Trinity and extremism with respect to the prophets have crept in. The beliefs which are introduced, therefore, as the spiritual doctrines in the religions with heavenly origin are devoid of originality and credibility, and one must look for these spiritual doctrines in the Islamic theology and not in those of Christianity and others.

Islamic theology is nourished by two sources, viz. reason (*‘aql*) and revelation (*waḥy*). Firstly, by citing axiomatic and definitive principles, reason proves the existence, knowledge, power, and wisdom of God, and on the basis of these rational theological doctrines, it also establishes the necessity for revelation and the infallibility of the prophets. And through revelation and prophethood (*nubuwwah*), it recognizes anew all the spiritual doctrines.

Once again, by utilizing logical thinking, it embarks on elucidating and reinforcing those doctrines. On this basis, although Islamic theology is also anchored in revealed (*wahyān*) texts and facts, it utilizes the method of reflection and intellection in all cases, because through a certain medium revealed facts are also traceable to rational principles and foundations.

Of course, the method of rational thinking can be demonstrative, falsification-oriented or dialectical. This is a sort of mission which is shouldered by the Muslim theologian and to which his endeavor and rhetoric is related. Since he aims at acquiring formal and real knowledge of the spiritual beliefs, nothing will be acceptable except demonstrative proof, but if he aims at the enlightenment and teaching of the truth-seekers or the commitment and failure of the obstinate truth-evaders, he will adopt the methods of rhetoric and wholesome disputation. This is what God has commanded the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) so as to invite mankind to the Divine religion with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in the

best way.

﴿ اُدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ﴾

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best.”⁶

Throughout the history of Islamic theology, various schools of theology and tendencies which have different views and varied approaches in ideological discourse have come into being. In citing outward meanings and texts of revelation or relying on reason and rational analyses, most of these schools of theology have gone into extremes.

The *Ahl al-ʿAdāth*⁷ and *ʿanbalīs* from among the *Sunnīs* and the *Akhabirīs*⁸ have adopted extreme literalism, just as the *Muʿtazilīs*⁹ have extremely kept aloof from the literal implications of revelation in their rational analyses and interpretations. In their midst, there have been also figures and schools (*madhāhib*) that assumed the middle way, as Abū ʿIṣāsan al-Ashʿarī¹⁰ and Abū Manṣūr al-Maṭurīdī¹¹ had such an idea. As to whether they achieved their aim or not, it is another thing which can be dealt with elsewhere.

If we fairly and meticulously reflect on this, we will find out that out of these scholastic tendencies and schools of Muslim theology, the only school (*madhhab*) which has correctly adopted the middle path is the school of the Holy Prophet’s *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a). They are the ones whom the Holy Prophet (ﷺ)¹² has called the Lesser of the Two Weighty Things (*thiqal al-aḡhar*) alongside the Qur’an which is the Greater of the Two Weighty Things (*thiqal al-akbar*), and clinging to them as well as to the Qur’an is the source of salvation and freedom from deviation.¹³

In another statement, the Prophet (ﷺ) has likened them to the Ark of Noah¹⁴ and whoever embarks on it shall be saved from storm which does not refer here to the storm of wind and drowning in the seas but the storm of capricious and fallacious views and ideas. And anyone who turns away from it will drown. Their approach – as Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has stated – is to move along the middle way, and not to deviate toward the left or right. It is in this way that the Book (Qur’an) and the *Sunnah* will become immune from any type of distortion and alteration.¹⁵

The Imāmiyyah theologians – whether those who had engaged in verbal *jihād* in the presence of the infallible Imāms (‘a) or those who have vigilantly defended the sanctity of the ideological beliefs during the Period of Occultation (*ʿaḡr al-ghaybah*)¹⁶ – have trodden the path of the infallible Imāms (‘a). Because of their being not immune from error, one cannot approve of each and every theoretical view and practical approach that they have.

What is important, however, is that their strategic policy has been designed and organized according to the fundamentals and principles of the school of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a). In every period of time, they have

played their theological role according to the needs and circumstances and in the arena of writing and compiling, they have been able to produce valuable theological texts and now, Islamic thought and conceptual civilization exists in a number of important sources.

It is evident that the precedence of change and development requires that this approach must persist, and taking into account the changes and needs of the time, the Muslim theologians must assume their theological responsibility in the realm of speaking and writing.

The present book is a step toward this direction. It deals with a set of ideological and scholastic questions based upon Islamic theology from the perspective of Shā‘ah Imāmiyyah school of thought. Reason and revelation (the Qur’an and *Sunnah*) have been the final reference and arbiter in decisions and evaluations.

Meanwhile, the ideas and opinions of Islamic thinkers, Shā‘ah Imāmiyyah scholars in particular, have been amply utilized. With the aim of knowing the truth and exemplifying honest scholarship, the sources and references of the views and opinions of others have been cited and sometimes, their names or titles are even mentioned in the text or footnote. As pointed out, the citation of the views and opinions of others aims at knowing the truth and exemplifying honest scholarship as well as to revive the names and profiles of the thinkers who have suffered a lot in the way of religious pursuits and for whom blind following and imitation have no meaning.

Structurally, the sections of this book have been arranged in textbook style, and at the end of every lesson, related questions have been selected, thus providing for a summary of the discussion, on one hand, and an opportunity for self-test, on the other hand. Since brevity and conciseness can be regarded as a principle in any textbook, this approach has been taken into account in writing this book. It has been tried, nevertheless, that the passage of the book be clear and fluent and free from unfamiliar and obscure terms and complex or difficult phrases. Be that as it may, the author does not regard his work as free from any form of defect or error in terms of content and structure, and he will most openly and sincerely welcome constructive criticisms of the experts.

In closing, I deem it necessary to mention that in the cover of the previous edition of this book, what was erroneously written as the title is *Tarjumeḥ-ye Kitāb-e Muḥḥirāt fī ‘l-Ilḥiyyāt*. This state of affairs had created ambiguities and amphibologies to the dear students and seminarians. Henceforth, this is to note that this book entitled *‘Aqā’id-e Istidlālī (Discursive Theology)* is an independent work and it is neither a translation nor exposition of *Muḥḥirāt fī ‘l-Ilḥiyyāt*.

Of course, since both books are written by the same author and, on the other hand, the present book has been written with the aim of replacing the book *Muḥḥirāt fī ‘l-Ilḥiyyāt* for the Islamic seminaries for the respected ladies, the discussions in the present work will have a central role in understanding the subjects of the book *Talkḥ al-Ilḥiyyāt* as many sections and topics of both books are similar or the same. As such, it can be claimed that studying the book *‘Itiqādāt-e Islām* is a means of understanding

the subjects of the book *Muḥḥirāt fī al-Ilḥiyyāt*.

It is hoped that this work could strengthen and defend the Islamic doctrines and elucidate them to the students of the genuine Islamic beliefs.

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Farvardīn 21, 1384 AHS

Rab‘ al-Awwal 1, 1426 AH

1. Sūrat al-‘Imrān 3: 19.

Unless otherwise stated, the translation in this volume of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarī’s *The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies, 2004). [Trans.]

2. Sūrat al-M‘īdah 5:48.

3. “He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, ‘Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.’ Hard on the polytheists is that to which you summon them” (Sūrat al-Shūrā 42: 13). See also *Al-Burḥān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 4, pp. 179–178.

The abbreviation, “a” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ‘alayhi’s-salām, ‘alayhim’us-salām, or ‘alayh’s-salām (may peace be upon him/them/her), which is mentioned after the names of the prophets, angels, Imams from the Prophet’s progeny, and saints (‘a). [Trans.]

4. Sūrat al-Azḥab 33:40; ḥadīth on the Station of Guardianship (ḥadīth al-manzilah) in *ḥaḥīḥ al-Bukḥarī*, vol. 5, ḥadīth 56, p. 47 (English Translation); *ḥaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, ḥadīths 5913–15, pp. 1284–85 (English Translation).

5. Sūrat al-A‘raf 7: 180.

6. Sūrat an-Nahḥ 16: 125.

7. Ahl al-ḥadīth refers to many historical and modern Muslim movements that emphasize the use of ḥadīth in matters of religious faith and practices, as opposed to the Ahl al-Rayy or ‘the people of rhetorical theology’. [Trans.]

8. Akhbārī: follower of Akhbarism (akhbārīyah), a movement, which started within the Shā‘ah world about four hundred years ago. Its originator was Mullā Muḥammad Amīn ibn Muḥammad Sharḥ al-Astarḥādī (d. 1033 AH/1623–24). He openly attacked the Shā‘ah mujtahids in his work *al-Fawā‘id al-Madaniyyah*, vehemently contesting the Usūlīs’ claim that reason is one of the sources of fiqh. The Usūlīs’ hold the Qur’an, the Sunnah, reason, and ijma‘ (consensus) as valid sources for deduction of the rules of sharḥ. The Akhbārīs accepted the validity of only the Sunnah and rejected the rest. Understanding the Qur’an, they claimed, is beyond the capacity of a commoner, being restricted exclusively to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). [Trans.]

9. Mu‘tazilī: follower of Mu‘tazilah, a Muslim school of theology that flourished in the 8th–10th centuries Ba‘rah and Baghdad, which asserts that since knowledge is derived from reason (‘aql), the injunctions of God are accessible to rational thought and inquiry, and reason is the ‘final arbiter’ in distinguishing right from wrong. [Trans.]

10. Abū ‘I-‘asan al-Ash‘arī (died 330 AH): the founder of Ash‘ariyyah school of theology.

11. Abū Manḥūr Mīturīdī (died 333 AH): the founder of Mīturīdī school of theology.

12. The abbreviation, “ḥ”, stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ḥallāḥu ‘alayhi wa ‘alihi wa sallam (may God’s blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny), which is mentioned after the name of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (ḥ). [Trans.]

13. It alludes to the Tradition on Two Weighty Things (ḥadīth al-thaqalayn) which is one of the uninterruptedly transmitted (mutawḥḥir) ḥadīths.

See, inter alia, *Muslim*, *Al-ḥaḥīḥ*, (English Translation), Book 31, ḥadīths 5920–3; *AlTirmidhī*, *Al-ḥaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 621–2, ḥadīths 3786, 3788; vol. 2, p. 219; *Al-Nasā‘ī*, *Khaḥīḥī* ‘Alī ibn Abū ḥḥīb, ḥadīth 79. [Trans.]

14. It alludes to the Tradition on the Ark of Noah (ḥadīth al-ḥafḥ) which is acceptable to and relied upon by ḥadīth

scholars (muʿaddithin).

See, inter alia, Al-ʿakim al-Nayshabūrī, Al-Mustadrak ‘alā ḥadīth al-ʿaṣṣayn, vol. 3, p. 151; vol. 2, p. 343; Al-ʿayyūbī, Al-Dhurr al-Manthūr, vol. 1, pp. 71–72; Ibn ʿajar al-Makkī, Al-Sawʿīq al-Muhriqah, p. 140. [Trans.]

15. As recorded in Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 16, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said:

الْيَمِينُ وَالشِّمَالُ مُضَلَّةٌ، وَالطَّرِيقُ الْوَسْطَىٰ هِيَ الْجَادَّةُ عَلَيْهَا بَاقِي الْكِتَابِ وَأَنَارُ النُّبُوَّةِ.

“On right and left there are misleading paths. Only the middle way is the [right] path which is the Everlasting Book and the traditions of the Prophet.”

16. Minor Occultation (ghaybat al-ṣuḡhrā): the period of about 70 years (260 AH/872 CE–329 AH/939 CE) when the Twelfth Imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī was hidden from the physical plane but remained in communication with his followers through a succession of four appointed deputies, viz., ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd, Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān, ʿUsayn ibn Rūf, and ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad. At the death of the fourth deputies no successor was named, and the Major Occultation (ghaybat al-kubrā) began, and continues to this day. See Muhammad Bāqir as-Sadr and Murtadā Mutahhari, Awaited Saviour (Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publications), <http://www.islam.org/saviour/index.htm>; [1] Jassim M. Husain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imām: A Historical Background (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982); Ibrāhīm Amīnī, Al-Imām Al-Mahdī: The Just Leader of Humanity, trans. ‘Abdul ‘Azīz Sachedina (Qum: Ansariyan Publications), <http://www.al-islam.org/mahdi/nontl/index.htm> [2]. [Trans.]

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