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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

KNOW—MAY GOD, the Exalted, help you—that when I pursued the *madhhab* of Imām Aḥmad, may God the Exalted have mercy on him, I found him to be of great stature with respect to the sciences. He excelled in the study of the juridical sciences and the views of the predecessors (*Salaf*) to the point that not a single matter arises that he does not have a scriptural reference for or some form of remark to make. However, because he adheres to the approach of the *Salaf*, he only wrote what they transmitted. Therefore [it was only natural that] I found his *madhhab* void of the literary compositions whose kind was numerous amongst those [scholars] who follow a different approach [than him]. So, I wrote some detailed exegeses. Amongst them are: *al-Mughnī* [that exists] in [several] volumes, *Zād al-Masīr*, *Tadhkirat al-Arīb* and others.

Concerning the sciences of ḥadīth [I wrote a number of] books, among them are: *Jāmi' al-Masānīd*, *al-Ḥadā'iq*, *Naqī al-Naql* and many books regarding *al-Jarḥ wa al-Tā'dīl* (the science of weighing positive and negative factors for evaluating the reliability of ḥadīth narrators). I have not found the Ḥanbalīs to have a single commentary in the topic of comparative *fiqh* except that al-Qāḍī Abū Ya'lā said: "I used to say, 'what is it with the advocates of the *madhhabs* that they mention the variance of those who have opposing views but they do not bother to mention the views of Aḥmad.'¹

¹ Imām Aḥmad kept the company of Abū Yūsuf at the start of his [scholastic] career as Yahyā ibn Ma'īn says about him in his book, *Ma'rifa al-Tārikh wa al-'Ilal*, "I heard Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal say, 'I kept the company of Abū Yūsuf, and then I kept company with others after his time.'" Aḥmad used to preoccupy himself with the books of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan and would extract some abstruse responses from them according to what al-Khatīb related with his chain of transmission to al-Ḥarbī on his authority. He [also] accompanied many of the jurists of Iraq, and sat with Shāfi'ī during his second visit to Baghdad after the demise of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan. So he acquired an ample portion of *fiqh*. Despite all of this, his greater focus and the focus of his disciples was upon the narration of ḥadīth. [In this regard] he did not follow the methodology of the jurists in the matters of *fiqh* [*al-tafīr*], designating its sources, and elucidating the points of legality of judgments and assigning them [to their particular places] to the point that it was rare that he had a unique view and differed from those *fuqahā* who came before him in a particular ruling of *fiqh* (*fi al-furū'*). So if he differed with Shāfi'ī for example in anything from his new school you would see him agreeing with Abū Ḥanīfa or one of his disciples or Mālik, may God be pleased with them. So the authors of the books of comparative *fiqh* found it negligible to mention the views of Aḥmad by simply mentioning the variance of the jurists who came before him.

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Then, I forgave them, since we [Ḥanbalīs] do not have a single commentary on *fiqh*, so, I wrote a commentary for them.”

[In spite of Abū Ya‘lā’s attempts] in his commentary, he neither clarified what was *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authenticated) nor did he express contention with the rejected [sayings]. He also mentioned some irregular analogies,² and I witnessed one of our companions delivering a lesson while taking recourse to the commentaries of Iṣṭilām, As‘ad, ‘Āmili, and Sharīf while borrowing things from them [in spite of being unreliable sources]. So, I composed some commentaries for them such as: *Kitāb al-Inṣāf fī masā‘il al-Khilāf* (“Impartiality About Matters of Disagreement”); *Jannat al-Nazar wa Junnat al-Faṭr* (“Garden of Contemplation and Armor Against Fissure”) and *‘Umda al-Dalā‘il fī Mashhūr al-Masā‘il* (“Reliance of All Proofs Regarding the Popular View of All Issues”). Then I deemed it appropriate to gather the ḥadīths of the commentary (of Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā) by which the advocates of the different *madhhabs* present as proof, and I clarified the basis for that which is sound and the point of contention in that which has been contested. I then composed a book about the [Ḥanbalī] *madhhab* that incorporated these ḥadīths, calling it *al-Bāz al-Ashhab al-Munqaḍḍ ‘alā Mukhalifī al-Madhhab* (“The Flaming Falcon Swooping Down on the Dissenters of the [Ḥanbalī] School”). In the science of the branches of *fiqh*,

The recording of his views alongside the views of the other jurists in the books of comparative *fiqh* did not become widespread until the time of Ibn Hubayra al-Wazīr. When he published his *Iṣāh* and specified a sizable volume amongst its volumes to the variance of the four Imāms, he gave it complete attention, and strove to spread it by spending enormous sums, [so much so, that] those who wrote in the area of comparative *fiqh* began to mention the views of Aḥmad alongside the views of the other Imāms. Ibn Jarīr reached him in age and met his disciples, and despite that he did not mention his views in what he wrote regarding the variance of the jurists while mentioning those who were of the likes of Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kīsān Aṣamm. So the Ḥanbalīs asked him about that, and he said the like of which is: “Aḥmad was not one of the jurists. Rather he was from the people of ḥadīth. And since I did not meet him, I could not learn from him nor have I met any of his disciples who were worthy of learning anything from.” So the agitation of the Ḥanbalīs was incited against him. Then what Yāqūt mentions in *Mu‘jam al-Udabā* and Ibn Kathīr mentions in his *Kāmil* occurred [about that incident].

² Translator: A proper legal analogy cannot be applied if the reason justifying the ruling or point of legality is undiscerned. Amongst the conditions for determining the proper point of legality, is for the designated point of legality to be a description that is consistent throughout and suitable as a justification for the ruling being applied. When it happens that the determined point of legality is a description that is consistent throughout in all that it is being applied to, but is not suitable as a justification for the ruling—like saying that the reason that wine is forbidden is because it is wine, such a legal analogy is said to be irregular.

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I wrote *Kitāb al-Mudhhib fī al-Madhhab* (“The Gilder Regarding the Madhhab”), *Masbūk al-Dhahab* (“Moulded Gold”) and *al-Bulgha* (“The Means of Subsistence”). In the fundamentals of the religion, I wrote *Minhāj al-Wuṣūl ilā ‘ilm al-Uṣūl* (“The Way of Reaching Knowledge of the Religious Fundamentals”). In total, so far I have written some 250 works.

I have observed that some of our companions have written about matters of creed in a way that is not proper. There are three in particular: Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥāmid,³ his disciple, Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā,⁴ and Ibn al-Zāghūnī⁵ who composed books by which they have disgraced the *madhhab*. They held the attributes of God to be subject to human understanding and perception. They heard that God, Glorified and Exalted be He, created Adam on his⁶ image, upon him be blessing and peace. On that basis, they acknowledged for Him an image and a physical form, a face attributable to His essence, two eyes, a mouth, uvulas, molar teeth, and lights for His face which represent His majestic splendor, two hands, fingers, a palm, a little [pinky] finger, a thumb, a chest, a thigh, two shins, and two feet. [They even went so far as saying]: “We have not heard any mention of the head.” They [then] said: “It is possible for Him to touch and to be touched, and to bring the slave close to His being.” One of them said: “[...] He breathes.” Then they calm the common people by saying: “[These attributes] are not taken as commonly understood.”

³ He is the Shaykh of the Ḥanbalīs, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥāmid ibn ‘Alī al-Baghdādī al-Warrāq who died in the year 403. He was one of their greatest authors. His *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Dīn* contains serious errors some of which the author will mention. Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā was trained by him.

⁴ He is Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalf ibn al-Farrā al-Ḥanbalī who died in the year 458. According to Ibn al-Athīr and Abū al-Fidā, they reported that Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī said concerning him “Abū Ya‘lā has severely disgraced the *madhhab*. The waters of the oceans cannot wash it away.” In his *Ṭabaqāt*, Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā attributed to Imām Aḥmad unspeakable things, far from being true. Ibn Badrān Dushṭī reported in the section of “Comfirming the Limit” from *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* of Abū Ya‘lā what is more horrid than what the author will report about him in “al-Tashbīh” along with a clash occurring between exoneration and anthropomorphism in his statements. It is no secret to the observer that he is not the Abū Ya‘lā Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Mawṣilī, the author of *al-Musnad*, and narrator of the books of Abū Yūsuf from Bishr ibn al-Walīd.

⁵ He is Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Naṣr Zāghūnī al-Ḥanbalī who died in the year 527. He is one of the shaykhs of the author. In his *Kitāb al-Īdāh* he has some striking points of anthropomorphism that will dumbfound the astute person.

⁶ Translator: This ḥadīth will be discussed in greater detail later on. It would suffice to say here that the word “his” in the ḥadīth “Verily God created Adam in his image” is unclear. If it is a reference to God—it would mean “God’s image,” and if it was in reference to Adam—it would be Adam’s image. This ḥadīth is considered *mutashābih*. The traditional view is that “his” is in reference to Adam, upon whom be peace.

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They adopted the literal meanings of the names and ascriptions and called them *attributes*—an invented designation, of which they have no evidence, neither from transmitted knowledge of the text, nor reason. They did not carefully consider those texts that divert one's attention from adopting the literal meanings [of such expressions] to adopting those meanings that must necessarily apply to God, just as [they did not carefully consider] to negate the meanings implied by those literal expressions that are characteristics of finite beings. They were not satisfied with saying, “[It is] an attribute of action” until they said, “[It is] an attribute of the [Divine] essence [of God].” Once they determined those [words] to be attributes, they said, “We do not understand them according to the usages they imply according to language” like hand for ‘blessing’ and ‘power’ and coming/arriving to mean ‘goodness’ and ‘kindness,’ nor shin to mean ‘severity.’” “Rather,” they said, “We hold and understand them according to their well-acknowledged literal meanings,” while the apparent and literal meaning is what is familiar of human characteristics.

But any text [of the Qur'an and Sunna] is only held according to its literal meaning when it is possible and feasible. If something would redirect or negate this being done, it is understood and held according to its figurative understanding. They then become offended when they are accused of likening God to His creation and show harshness towards anyone who says this to them, while in the same breath, insisting, “We are *Ahl al-Sunna*,” (Upholders of the Prophetic Tradition) although in their statements they are clearly likening God to His creation.

There are some common people that have begun to follow them and I have advised them by saying, “Companions! Brothers! You are the People who adhere to the texts and follow them. This was the example of your Imām, the Greatest Imām, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may God, Exalted be He, have mercy on him, who under pain of torture, proclaimed, ‘How can I say what has not been said before?’”⁷ So, take care not to introduce into

⁷ Khallāl mentioned in *al-Sunna* with his chain of narration to Ḥanbal on the authority of his paternal uncle, Imām Aḥmad, that when Imām Aḥmad was questioned about the ḥadīths of the descent, the seeing, the placing of the foot and the like, he said concerning them that, “We believe in them, we declare them to be true, without how and [without] a meaning.” When asked about the establishment, he also said, “He became established on the Throne how He pleased and as He pleased without [having] limitation or a description that could be understood.” This is consignment [of its meaning to God] and exoneration as is the approach of the *Salaf*. Sometimes Imām Aḥmad would use *ta'wīl* (figurative interpretation) in some places as Ḥanbal also narrated on the authority of Imām Aḥmad that he

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his *madhhab* what does not belong in it. Then, you [three] said about the ḥadīths [of attributes] “We hold them and understand them according to their apparent meanings,” while the apparent meaning of [this word] ‘the foot’ would be the human limb. This is the same thing as what is said and believed by the Christians, may God, Exalted be He, distance them from His mercy [for saying such], about Jesus, upon him be blessing and peace. They understand that he is “God’s spirit” and that God, Sanctified and Exalted in Highness, has an attribute known as a spirit that entered into Mary.

Whoever says, “He became established with His Divine essence” has made Him, Sanctified and Exalted is He, subject to reality, as we understand it.⁸ It should not be neglected by anyone that the principle by which the faith is established is reason,⁹ and it is by way of this [reason] that we came to know and hold God to be Eternal without beginning. If only you had said, “We read the ḥadīths, and [then] keep silent,” then no one would have objected to [what] you [do]! [But you refuse to abstain from holding the texts and understanding them according to the apparent meaning] and this behavior is absolutely disgusting and repugnant.¹⁰ So, do not

heard him say, “They made an argument against me on the day of the debate [during his famous inquisition by the rulers of his time]. They said: ‘*Sūrat al-Baqara* will come on the Day of Resurrection and *Sūrat Tabarak* will come.’ Imām Aḥmad said: “So I said to them: ‘It is merely the reward. God, Splendid is His mention, said: *And your Lord comes with the angels rank upon rank* (Qur’ān 89:22) and this means that His power will come.” Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī said in his *Faṣl*, “It has been related to us about Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may God show him mercy, that he said concerning: *And your Lord comes*; Its meaning is: ‘And the command of your Lord comes.’” This [here] is figurative interpretation and exoneration as is the approach of the generations directly after the *Salaf*. As for what has been reported about Imām Aḥmad that contradicts what has preceded, it is a fabrication of an ignorant friend and a faulty understanding of the view of Imām Aḥmad.

⁸ This is due to the fact that “establishment” for humans is always understood in the sense of sitting. Those who would say that God, literally in His essence, is on the Throne would therefore be affirming that God is held, carried, borne and sitting or some other human act.

⁹ Translator: Here he is making a reference to the rule determined by the scholars of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* which says, “Reason is a root for revealed knowledge. So raising contention with reason would be to raise contention with revealed knowledge. And contention with the root to correct the branch necessitates contention with both of them together.”

¹⁰ While commenting on [a book entitled] *al-‘Aqūdiyya*, Ustādh Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh, may God show him mercy, in discussing the ḥadīth about the dispersion of the Umma [into 73 sects], said, “So if you said: ‘Surely the speech of God and the speech of the Prophet ﷺ is composed of Arabic expressions and its indications are known to the scholars of language; it is therefore compulsory to hold by the true indication of the expression whatever the case may be;’ I would say: “If that is so, then there would be none who are saved but the literalist party of Anthropomorphists who deem it obligatory to adopt all of