

Tracing Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī's Sunni Theological Thought (1761–1825) in *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*

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Abstract

This article examines Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī's articulation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* theology in his *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Living during the transition from late premodern Islamic traditionalism to the modern period, al-Ṣāwī witnessed the emergence of the Wahhābī movement in the Arabian Peninsula, which he sharply criticized and associated with the Khawārij. In his gloss, al-Ṣāwī addresses fundamental theological questions and engages critically with other schools of *kalām*. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, this study argues that al-Ṣāwī adopted a firm position in defending the doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* against two perceived extremes: radical textualism, represented in his account by Wahhābism, and ultra-rationalist liberalism, associated with Mu'tazilism and neo-Mu'tazilism, as well as the intellectual and political influence of French colonialism. The *Ḥāshiyah* affirms a broad range of Sunni doctrinal principles encompassing both foundational doctrines (*uṣūl*) and subsidiary questions (*furū'*). Its principal theological concerns include the doctrine of God, prophethood, and eschatology. Moreover, al-Ṣāwī's commitment to the four Sunni legal schools, rejection of rigidly literalist exegesis, strong criticism of what he regarded as modern Khārijism, employment of *ta'wīl* and *tafwīd*, and defense of established Sunni religious practices collectively constitute a distinctive articulation of Sunnism in early nineteenth-century Egypt.

Keywords: Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah; Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī; Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī; Tafsīr al-Jalālayn; Sunni theology; Qur'anic exegesis

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tentang pemikiran *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī dalam *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Al-Ṣāwī terlahir di era transisi dari tradisi tradisionalisme abad pertengahan menuju era modern-kontemporer, ia hidup sezaman dengan Gerakan Wahabiyah yang mulai muncul di semenanjung Arab, di mana ia melontarkan kritik tajam terhadap gerakan tersebut dengan menyandingkannya bersama kelompok Khawārij. Al-Ṣāwī menangani isu-isu teologis mendasar dalam *ḥāshiyat*-nya dan terlibat dalam diskusi serta debat dengan kelompok kalam lainnya. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif-analitis, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa al-Ṣāwī memiliki posisi yang sangat tegas dalam menjaga akidah *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* dari dua kutub ekstrem, yaitu kelompok radikal-tekstualis (Wahabiyah) di satu sisi dan kelompok liberal ultra-rasionalis (Mu'tazilah dan Neo-Mu'tazilah) serta pengaruh kolonialisme Prancis di sisi lainnya. Pelbagai prinsip akidah *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* yang mencakup masalah-masalah dasar (*uṣūl*) dan masalah-masalah cabang (*furū'*) dikukuhkan dalam *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Di antara pokok pemikirannya adalah pandangannya terkait ketuhanan, kenabian dan eskatologi. Selain itu, dukungan al-Ṣāwī terhadap empat mazhab, penolakan terhadap penafsiran tekstual, kritik keras terhadap Khawārij modern, penggunaan *ta'wīl* serta *tafwīd*, serta pembelaannya terhadap amalan tradisi *Ahl al-Sunnah* merupakan beberapa ekspresi Sunnisme partikular versi al-Ṣāwī di Mesir pada awal abad ke-19.

Kata Kunci: Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah, Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī, Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī, Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, Sunni, Penafsiran Al-Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, the Qur'an is an ocean containing various kinds of pearls, precious stones, and other treasures. The Qur'anic sciences, in his view, are pearls concealed within shells, requiring exegetes to dive into the ocean and open those shells to obtain the gems within. The outer layer of the Qur'anic sciences is designated the "science of the shell" (*'ilm al-ṣadaḥ*), whereas the pearls and precious stones contained within it constitute the "science of the kernel" (*'ilm al-lubāb*). Arabic grammar, Qur'anic recitation, the variant readings of the Qur'an, semantics and rhetoric, and exoteric interpretation belong to the sciences of the shell. The inner sciences of the Qur'an, by contrast, are manifested in Qur'anic narratives, theology, jurisprudence, Sufism or the purification of the soul (*taṣkiyat al-naḥs*), and gnosis (*ma'rifa*).¹ In al-Ghazālī's classification, *kalām*, whose function is to protect the beliefs of ordinary Muslims from the doctrinal deviations of heterodox groups, constitutes one of the Qur'an's inner sciences.²

Linguistically, *'aqidah* denotes a bond, an affirmation, a consolidation, or a firmly held belief. Terminologically, it refers to a conviction securely and decisively bound to the human heart, regardless of whether its object is true or false. According to 'Alī Jum'ah, throughout history no individual or community has ever lived without being guided by a religion or ideology that influences attitudes and actions.³ *Kalām*, meanwhile, may be defined as the discipline concerned with establishing Islamic religious doctrines through convincing evidence.⁴

In his monumental work *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī identifies 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the first theologian of *Ahl al-Sunnah* among the Companions. He subsequently regards 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz as the first Sunni theologian of the generation of the Successors, followed by Zayd ibn 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Sha'bī, and al-Zuhrī. According to al-Baghdādī, the earliest theologians among the jurists were Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Shāfi'ī. Both are reported to have composed works with broadly similar objectives: strengthening the doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah* and refuting groups regarded as doctrinally deviant. Among the works attributed to them are Abū Ḥanīfah's *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* and al-Shāfi'ī's *Taṣḥīḥ al-Nubuwah wa al-Radd 'alā al-Barāhimah*.⁵

¹ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Jawahir Al-Qur'an: Selami Samudera Al-Qur'an Dan Temukan Mutiaranya*, trans. M. Tatam Wijaya (Jakarta Selatan: Penerbit Qaf, 2023), p. 46–48.

² Al-Ghazali, *Jawahir Al-Qur'an...*, p. 52.

³ Ali Jum'ah, *Aqidah Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Moqattam, 2011), p. 9.

⁴ Ahmad Hanafi, *Teologi Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2010), p. 3.

⁵ Abdul Qahir Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Baina Al-Firaq; Wa Bayan Al-Firqah Al-Najiyah Minhum* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sina, 2012), p. 314–315.

Qur'anic exegesis and theology are, in fact, closely interconnected disciplines. Their intimate relationship is evident both in the status of theology as a prerequisite for Qur'anic interpretation and in the works of exegetes such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, who incorporated rational theological argumentation into their commentaries. Al-Ṭabarī, one of the earliest major exegetes in Islamic history, regarded the soundness of an exegete's beliefs (*ṣiḥḥat al-i'tiqād*) as a primary condition of Qur'anic interpretation.⁶ Similarly, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, in *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, enumerated fifteen disciplines that an exegete should master, one of which is *uṣūl al-dīn*, or Islamic theology. Mastery of this discipline is particularly important because the apparent wording of certain Qur'anic verses may seem to attribute to God qualities that are theologically impossible, thereby requiring theologians to employ interpretive strategies such as *ta'wīl*.⁷

One prominent early nineteenth-century Sunni theologian and Qur'anic exegete who actively propagated the doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, particularly the Ash'arī tradition, was Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī al-Mālikī (d. 1825). Born during the transitional period between late premodern traditionalism and the modern era, al-Ṣāwī lived at a time when the Wahhābī movement was emerging in the Arabian Peninsula. He was among the scholars who strongly criticized this new religious movement and drew an explicit comparison between its perceived extremism and that of the Khawārij. At the same time, the intellectual challenge posed by anti-madhhab modernists, together with the growing hegemony of the natural sciences and scientific method following the Scientific Revolution, increasingly reshaped Muslim theological discourse. Scientific exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-'ilmī*) subsequently emerged as a new and influential trend among nineteenth-century Muslim scholars.

Walid Saleh has argued that the decline, or even “demise,” of *kalām* in the Islamic world began with the earliest waves of modernity. He characterizes this decline as a death that occurred without a funeral. According to Saleh, although neo-Mu'tazilism has recently re-emerged and gained influence, the inherited language of *kalām* has become obsolete and is no longer employed as a dominant framework for interpreting the world. A substantial proportion of contemporary Muslims, he suggests, now affirm the doctrine of human free will, a position historically associated with the Mu'tazilah. At the same time, the theological works that have come to dominate the

⁶ Imam Jalaluddin Abd al-Rahman Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2006), p. 455.

⁷ Al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan...*, p. 456.

market following the decline of classical *kalām* are predominantly creedal texts produced by the Wahhābī movement, many of which explicitly adopt anti-*kalām* and anti-Ash‘arī positions.⁸

Saleh’s claim, however, cannot be accepted without qualification. Nevertheless, the need to reorganize and revitalize *kalām*, particularly the intellectual tradition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*, has become increasingly important in the contemporary context. One of the principal functions of *kalām* is to protect ordinary Muslims from various forms of doctrinal deviation, including religious extremism and radicalism, as well as from the negative consequences of modern and contemporary imperialism, colonialism, and globalization. This study represents a modest contribution to the reconstruction of Sunni theological thought by examining al-Ṣāwī’s intellectual profile and his critical responses to the political upheavals generated by Napoleon Bonaparte’s French occupation of Egypt between 1798 and 1801. It also investigates his engagement with fundamental theological questions, particularly those arising from the doctrines promoted by the Wahhābī religious movement in the Arabian Peninsula.⁹

Later scholars portrayed al-Ṣāwī as a protector of Egypt and a defender of its people. He demonstrated considerable sensitivity to the diverse problems and conflicts confronting Muslims generally and Egyptian society in particular.¹⁰ One way he defended Muslim identity and sought to reorganize the Sunni tradition in response to foreign ideologies and the Wahhābī movement was by strengthening Sunni scholarly literacy and intellectual traditions. This effort was undertaken through the composition of extensive commentaries and glosses, among which was his *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Tafṣīr al-Jalālayn*.

METHODS

This article is based on library research. Its principal primary source is al-Ṣāwī’s *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Tafṣīr al-Jalālayn*. His other writings on theology, including *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī ‘alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*, *Sharḥ al-Kharīdah al-Bahīyyah*, and other relevant works, are employed as supplementary sources. Using a descriptive-analytical method, this study examines al-Ṣāwī’s articulation of *Ahl al-Sunnah*

⁸ Walid A. Saleh, "Contemporary Tafsir: The Rise of Scriptural Theology", *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, 2020, p. 694.

⁹ The Wahhābī movement is a modern Islamic fundamentalist movement that sought to establish a society whose traditions and practices conformed to a literalist (textual) interpretation of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Historically, the movement launched attacks against Iraq and Syria, causing concern for the Ottoman Sultan Maḥmūd II (1785–1839), who at that time exercised authority over the Arab provinces. He subsequently ordered the governor of Egypt, Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, to suppress the Wahhābī rebellion. The campaign succeeded in temporarily containing the movement before it expanded significantly again at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Yudian Wahyudi, *Wahabi: Ajaran Dan Metode Penyebaran Dalam Gerakan Wahabi Di Indonesia (Dialog Dan Kritik)* (Yogyakarta: Bina Harfa, 2009), p. 18–21.

¹⁰ Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, 'The Small World of Aḥmad Al-Ṣāwī (1761–1825), an Egyptian Khawṭī Shaykh', *Dalam Michael Kemper & Ralf Elger, The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p. 135.

wa al-Jamā'ah thought in his gloss on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. This method involves identifying and systematically describing the relevant textual evidence before subjecting it to critical analysis.

DISCUSSION

An Intellectual-Biographical Sketch of Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī

Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī's full name was Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī al-Mālikī al-Khalwatī. He was born into a distinguished family belonging to the Banū Ḥanīfah, whose lineage was reportedly traced to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, a son of the fourth caliph, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. His Banū Ḥanīfah ancestors were originally inhabitants of the Ḥijāz who migrated in 805 AH/1403 CE and settled in Ṣā al-Ḥajar al-Gharbiyyah, a village situated along the Nile in Egypt.¹¹ It was in this village that al-Ṣāwī was born in 1175 AH/1761 CE. His father, Sīdī Muḥammad, was a respected religious figure known for his scrupulous piety, ascetic way of life, and strong religious commitment.¹²

Al-Ṣāwī began his intellectual formation in his hometown, completing his memorization of the Qur'an at age 5 under his father's supervision. In 1187 AH/1773–1774 CE, at the age of twelve, he moved to Cairo to study at al-Azhar, an institution that would eventually provide the setting for the development of his intellectual and spiritual career. As described by Mānī' ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, al-Ṣāwī became one of the leading Mālikī scholars of al-Azhar, a Qur'anic exegete affiliated with the Ash'arī theological tradition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, and a prominent Sufi figure of his time. He was also a spiritual guide (*murshid*) of the Khalwatiyyah order and was remembered for his extensive learning, exemplary character, and numerous miraculous deeds (*karāmāt*) reportedly witnessed by his contemporaries.

Among his numerous teachers, Aḥmad al-Dardīr is the only one whom al-Ṣāwī himself discussed in considerable detail. During the first six months following his arrival at al-Azhar, he received the Khalwatī spiritual covenant (*'abḍ*) from al-Dardīr. Aḥmad al-Dardīr became a central figure in the consolidation of Khalwatī influence in Egypt during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this respect, he succeeded Muḥammad ibn Sālim al-Ḥifnī (1689–1767), who had served as Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar from 1757 and had himself been initiated into the Khalwatiyyah by the Syrian Sufi master Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī.¹³

¹¹ Ismail 'Abdullah Al-Magribi, *Al-Nur Al-Wadda' Fi Manaqib Wa Karamah Al-Anlīya' Wa Hujjah Al-'Ulama Sayyid Ahmad Al-Sawi* (Cairo: Matba'ah Sidq al-Khairiyah), p. 21.

¹² Mayeur-Jaouen, "The Small World...", p. 110.

¹³ Mayeur-Jaouen, "The Small World...", p. 114–115.

Al-Shishtī relates that, from an early age, al-Ṣāwī attracted the attention of al-Azhar's scholars because of what they perceived as signs of saintliness and unusual intellectual depth. In addition to studying under Aḥmad al-Dardīr, al-Ṣāwī received instruction from al-Shāfi'ī al-Junādī, who became his teacher after the death of his father; Muḥammad 'Ibādah; Aḥmad al-Sijā'ī; Sulaymān al-Jamal (d. 1204 AH/1790 CE); Muḥammad al-Amīr (d. 1232 AH/1817 CE); Muḥammad 'Arafah al-Dasūqī (d. 1230 AH/1815 CE); and Shaykh al-Islām 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī, who served as Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar from 1208 AH/1793 CE until he died in 1227 AH/1812 CE.¹⁴

Al-Ṣāwī had numerous disciples and *kebulafā'*, or authorized representatives and successors in spiritual instruction. Their presence indicates that his influence extended beyond Egypt to Mecca, Medina, Sudan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and other regions. Among the disciples listed in the hagiographical work *Manāqib al-Wuddā'* are 'Alī al-Shādhilī, Muḥammad al-Shādhilī, 'Abd Allāh al-Maghribī, 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Shādhilī, Faṭḥ Allāh, Aḥmad Abū al-Layl, Marjān Āghā Sālīm, 'Alī al-'Aqbāwī, Muḥammad al-Qāḍī al-Far'ūnī, 'Umar al-Khashyān, Khalīl al-Qāwūqajī, Yūsuf al-Kafrāwī, Muḥammad al-Bayyūmī, Muḥammad al-Bannā, Muḥammad al-Suhālī al-Zarqānī, Aḥmad al-Shishtī, Ibrāhīm, Muḥammad al-Kutkutbī, Aḥmad al-Khalīfī, Muḥammad al-Maghribī al-Tūnisī, Sālīm al-Sawāḥilī, and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Jawwād al-Kafrāwī.¹⁵

Al-Ṣāwī produced a substantial body of scholarship across Qur'anic exegesis, Mālikī jurisprudence, theology, rhetoric, devotional literature, and Sufism. His major works include *Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*; *Bulghat al-Sālik li-Aqrab al-Masālik fī Furū' al-Fiqh al-Mālikī*; *Sharḥ 'alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd* by al-Laqqānī; *Hāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ al-Dardīr 'alā Risālatihī fī 'Ilm al-Bayān al-Musammā bi-Tuḥfat al-Bayān*; *al-Asrār al-Rabbāniyyah wa al-Fayūḍāt al-Raḥmāniyyah 'alā al-Ṣalawāt al-Dardīriyyah*; *al-Farā'id al-Saniyyah 'alā Matn al-Hamziyyah*; *Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Ikhwān fī 'Ilm al-Bayān*; *Sharḥ Manẓumat Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā* by al-Dardīr; *Hāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ al-Kharidah al-Bahiyyah*; *Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*; *Risālah fī al-Jihād*; *Risālah fī al-Radd 'alā Munkirī Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*; *Risālah fīmā li-l-Khawab min Shurūṭ wa Ādāb*; *Hāshiyah 'alā Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*; and *Risālah fī Sharḥ al-Basmalah*, among other writings.¹⁶

Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen observes that al-Ṣāwī successfully continued the Azharī scholarly model developed by his teacher, Aḥmad al-Dardīr, a model that remained influential and continued to dominate al-Azhar throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Al-Ṣāwī died in Medina and was buried

¹⁴ Al-Magribi, *Al-Nur Al-Wadda'*..., p. 27–30.

¹⁵ Al-Magribi, *Al-Nur Al-Wadda'*..., p. 145–158.

¹⁶ Mar'i Hasan Al-Rasyid, *Baina Yaday Al-Kitab Dalam Hasyiah Al-Allamah Al-Sawi 'ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain*, J.1 (Lebanon: Dar Tahkik al-Kitab, 2024), p. 41–42.

¹⁷ Mayeur-Jaouen, "The Small World...", p. 144.

in the al-Baqī' cemetery on 7 Muḥarram 1241 AH/1825 CE.¹⁸ According to biographical and hagiographical accounts, he anticipated his approaching death before departing for the pilgrimage. He bade farewell to his family and disciples, reportedly saying, *ḥabībī da'ānī wa al-waqtu qaruba*—“My Beloved has called me, and the appointed time has drawn near.” After completing the pilgrimage rites, he travelled from Minā to Medina and visited the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad. Several days later, he fell ill and died in the city for which he had long yearned.¹⁹

On *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*

Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn is an extensive gloss on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a Qur'anic commentary initially composed by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864 AH/1459 CE) and completed after his death by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. Concise in form yet dense in meaning, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* has often been described as the quintessence of Qur'anic exegesis (*lubb lubāb al-tafsīr*). It became one of the most widely read commentaries and received considerable scholarly attention throughout the Islamic world. Muhammed Coşkun identifies it as one of the most prominent exegetical works of the post-*Kashshāf* period, as demonstrated by approximately thirty commentaries and glosses devoted to its interpretation.²⁰ In his study, Van den Berg similarly concluded that *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* was among the most commonly used works in the curricula of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) across the Indonesian archipelago, surpassing many other Qur'anic commentaries in popularity.²¹ Among the glosses on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, al-Ṣāwī's *Ḥāshiyah* has been one of the most extensively studied in Indonesia.²² Al-Ṣāwī's scholarly transmission was directly connected to the two authors of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, and he studied the work in its entirety under three of his teachers: Sulaymān al-Jamal, Aḥmad al-Dardīr, and Muḥammad al-Amīr.²³

Al-Ṣāwī composed his *Ḥāshiyah* over approximately three years, between 1225 and 1228 AH/1809 and 1812 CE, in Egypt.²⁴ Its composition thus coincided with, or immediately followed, Ibn Sa'ūd's conquest of Mecca between 1803 and 1806, the occupation of Medina in May 1805, and the subsequent control of Mecca between 1807 and 1812. These developments were accompanied by the destruction of sacred sites and restrictions imposed on pilgrimage caravans,

¹⁸ Muni' Abdul Halim Mahmud, *Manabij Al-Mufasssirin*, (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Masri, 2000), p. 289.

¹⁹ Al-Magribi, Al-Nur Al-Wadda'..., p. 87.

²⁰ Muhammed Coşkun, 'Major Shifts in Classical Tafsīr: From Early Exegesis to the Rise of Al-Shurūḥ Wa-l-Ḥawāshī', *Ilāhiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi*, 1.63 (2025), p. 16 <<https://doi.org/10.29288/ilted.1559000>>.

²¹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren Dan Tarekat* (Yogyakarta: Gading, 2025), p. 179.

²² Hikmatul Luthfi, 'Lailatul Qadar Perspektif Ahmad Al-Shawi (Studi Kitab Hasyiah 'ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain)', *Jurnal Al-Fath*, 16.1 (2016), p. 26.

²³ Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, *Hasyiah Al-Allamah Al-Sawi 'ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain*, J.1 (Lebanon: Dar Tahkik al-Kitab, 2024), p. 54.

²⁴ Muhammad 'Ali Iyazi, *al-Mufasssirun; Hayatihim Wa Manhajihim*, J. 2 (Teheran: Wizarah al-Saqafah wa al-Irsyad al-Islami), p. 775.

including those travelling from Egypt.²⁵ Although the *Hāshiyah* was written during this period of political and religious upheaval, no conclusive evidence indicates that its composition was ideologically motivated by a desire to respond directly to the Wahhābī movement. Nevertheless, the work contains a brief passage in which al-Ṣāwī condemns the Wahhābīs as liars, thereby revealing his critical attitude toward the emerging movement.

Al-Ṣāwī explicitly explains the background to the composition of his *Hāshiyah* in its introduction. His explanation reflects the centripetal force of the Qur'an and the discipline of exegesis, particularly the central scholarly position occupied by *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. His principal motivation was the nobility and elevated status of Qur'anic exegesis as the foundation and foremost discipline of the religious sciences. He was especially drawn to *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, which had become a central reference for scholars endowed with spiritual insight and illumination (*ahl al-baṣā'ir wa al-tanwīr*). Al-Ṣāwī also acknowledged a spiritual motivation, namely a divine prompting (*al-dā'ir al-ilāhī*) that inspired him to study *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. This process eventually led him to abridge the gloss of his teacher Sulaymān al-Jamal, entitled *al-Futūḥāt al-Ilāhiyyah bi-Tanẓīh Tafsīr al-Jalālayn li-l-Daqā'iq al-Khaṣṣiyah*. At the same time, he supplemented this abridgement with additional explanations and meanings that, in his account, were disclosed through the abundant illumination emanating from the work.²⁶

According to al-Ṣāwī, al-Jamal's *Hāshiyah* was a comprehensive work that synthesized approximately twenty works of Qur'anic exegesis and the Qur'anic sciences. These included *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, *Tafsīr al-Khaṭīb al-Makki*, *al-Durr al-Maṣūn fī 'Ulūm al-Kitāb al-Maknūn*, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm ilā Maẓāyā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, *Tafsīr al-Kawāshī*, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, *al-Nabr al-Mādd*, *Tafsīr al-Sāqiyah*, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, *al-Kashshāf*, and the commentary of Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, among other exegetical works. His sources in the Qur'anic sciences included al-Suyūṭī's *al-Taḥbīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* and *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. In matters of grammar and rhetoric, al-Ṣāwī referred to al-Suyūṭī's *al-Alfiyyah fī al-Naḥw wa al-Taṣrīf wa al-Khaṭṭ*, Ibn Mālik's *Alfiyyah*, and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*. In his discussion of variant Qur'anic readings, he accorded particular importance to al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*.²⁷

Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī may be characterized as a Qur'anic commentary that combines the rational and scholarly method of *dirāyah* with the spiritual and allusive method of Sufi interpretation, or

²⁵ Mayeur-Jaouen, 'The Small World...', p. 143.

²⁶ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, *Hasyiah Al-Sawi 'ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain*, J. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2000), p. 3.

²⁷ Muhammad Abu Bakar Muhammad, 'Hasyiah Al-Sawi Ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain; Dirasah Wa Tahqiq Min Awwal Surah Al-Baqarah Ila Akhir Surah Al-Anfal'. Disertasi (Kuala Lumpur: al-Madinah International University Kuala Lumpur, 2013), p. 12–20.

ishārah.²⁸ The work is structured by first citing the relevant text from *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, followed by supplementary explanation and commentary. Although al-Ṣāwī's gloss is substantially based on an abridgement of al-Jamal's *Hāshiyah*, it does not merely offer marginal comments on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Rather, al-Ṣāwī frequently provides detailed explanations, engages in scholarly discussion, and conducts comparative analyses involving al-Bayḍāwī's commentary and its glosses, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, *Tafsīr al-Khaṭīb*, and other exegetical works. He does not, however, always identify these sources by title in the body of his gloss.

One distinctive feature of al-Ṣāwī's exegetical method is his practice of supporting his interpretations, when necessary, with other Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and statements attributed to the Companions and Successors. He occasionally criticizes the authors of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, although his criticism is generally expressed in a restrained and respectful manner. Among the formulations he frequently employs are *wa-kāna 'alayhi an yaqūla*, "he should have said," and *wa-kāna yanbaghi lahu an yaqūla*, "it would have been more appropriate for him to say."²⁹

In explaining Qur'anic verses and the formulations of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, al-Ṣāwī draws on several disciplines of Islamic scholarship, including grammar, morphology, rhetoric, and related sciences. His use of these disciplines reflects his broad command of Qur'anic exegesis and the Qur'anic sciences. He analyzes words and sentences through grammatical parsing (*i'rab*) in order to uncover their possible meanings, while employing morphology (*ṣarf*) to examine changes in the forms and structures of Qur'anic words. Al-Ṣāwī also devotes considerable attention to variant readings associated with particular verses, frequently citing readings from the canonical seven or ten traditions of Qur'anic recitation.³⁰

With regard to *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives, al-Ṣāwī adopts two principal approaches. In some instances, he leaves the narratives transmitted in *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* without comment; in others, he intervenes by clarifying what he regards as the sounder account.³¹ Mar'ī Ḥasan al-Rashīd observes that al-Ṣāwī offers more frequent comments and objections concerning the *Isrā'iliyyāt* transmitted by al-Maḥallī than those transmitted by al-Suyūṭī. His criticism is particularly pronounced when such narratives concern the status, dignity, or infallibility of the prophets. According to al-Rashīd, most of the *Isrā'iliyyāt* included in al-Ṣāwī's gloss belong to categories that may still be tolerated: either *al-maqbūl*, reports that may be accepted, or *al-maskūt 'anhu*, reports concerning which

²⁸ Mani' Abdul Halim Mahmud, *Manahij Al-Mufasssirin...*, p. 289.

²⁹ Iyazi, *al-Mufasssirin...*, p. 777–778.

³⁰ Iyazi, *al-Mufasssirin...*, p. 778.

³¹ Lumngatul Ma'arif & Eka Prasetiawati, 'Analisis Isrā'iliyyat Dalam Tafsir Hasyiah Al-Sawi Karya Ahmad Bin Muhammad Sawi Al-Maliki', *Al-Quds*, 4.1 (2020), p. 116.

judgment is suspended. Although the work also contains a limited number of reports categorized as *al-mardūd*, or rejected, these constitute only a small proportion of the material.³²

Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī's Conception of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah in Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn

In *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*, al-Ṣāwī affirms that the designation *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* refers to the followers of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, namely the Ash'ariyyah, and those of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, namely the Māturīdiyyah. He describes both figures as the two leading authorities in the doctrine of divine unity (*imāmā al-tawḥīd*).³³ A similar conclusion is endorsed by Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib in his extensive study of Sunni theology. Citing 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, al-Ṭayyib maintains that the major *mujtahid* scholars of the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfī'ī, and Ḥanbalī legal schools did not depart from the theological principles established by either the Ash'ariyyah or the Māturīdiyyah.³⁴

In *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, al-Baghdādī identifies fifteen foundational doctrines or creedal principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. These encompass both fundamental theological questions (*uṣūl*) and subsidiary issues (*furu'*). Sunni theologians agreed on the foundational principles, although they differed on certain subsidiary matters.³⁵ The following discussion examines several principal elements of al-Ṣāwī's Sunni theological thought as articulated in *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.

The Affirmation of Knowledge and Truth

In *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, al-Baghdādī presents the affirmation of the realities of things and the certainty of knowledge as the first principle of Sunni doctrine. This principle presupposes that knowledge is possible and that human beings are capable of attaining truth. Such a position stands in opposition to the relativism conventionally associated with the ancient Greek Sophists, who are understood to have denied both epistemic certainty and the objective realities of things.³⁶

Citing 'Alī Ḥarb, Jamāl al-Bannā argues that contemporary European thought—from Martin Heidegger's existentialism and Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction—does not seek to uncover an authentic reality or employ reason as an instrument for distinguishing good from evil. For al-Bannā, postmodern thought therefore represents a new

³² Al-Rasyid, *Baina Yaday Al-Kitab...*, p. 12–13.

³³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, *Syarab Al-Sawi 'ala Jawharat Al-Tawhid* (Damaskus: Dar Ibn Kasir, 1999), p. 339.

³⁴ Ahmad Al-Tayyib, *Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'ah* (Cairo: Dar al-Quds al-'Arabi, 2019), p. 18.

³⁵ Al-Bagdadi, *Al-Farq Baina Al-Firaq...*, p. 248.

³⁶ Al-Bagdadi, *Al-Farq Baina Al-Firaq...*, p. 239–252.

manifestation of sophism.³⁷ As a Sunni exegete, al-Ṣāwī upholds the possibility of certain knowledge and objective truth. He also affirms the Qur'an, the Sunnah or Prophetic tradition, scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) as the principal foundations and sources of Islamic law.

In his interpretation of Q. al-Nisā' 4:59, al-Ṣāwī identifies an allusion to these four sources of law within the wording of the verse:

“This verse alludes to the four juridical proofs, or the sources of the Sacred Law. God's statement, ‘Obey God,’ refers to the Qur'an. His statement, ‘and obey the Messenger,’ refers to the Sunnah. His statement, ‘and those vested with authority among you,’ refers to consensus. His statement, ‘then, if you disagree concerning anything,’ refers to analogical reasoning.”³⁸

In discussing this principle, al-Baghdādī emphasizes the Sunni consensus concerning the authority of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and *ijmā'* as sources of Islamic law. He contrasts this position with that of the Sumaniyyah, who denied the certainty of knowledge transmitted through recurrent mass transmission (*tawātur*); the Rāfiḍah, whom he accused of rejecting the authoritative status of the Qur'an and the Sunnah; the Khawārij, who rejected portions of the Sunnah; and al-Nazzām, who denied the probative authority of scholarly consensus.³⁹

In connection with this epistemological and juridical framework, al-Ṣāwī argues in his commentary on Q. al-Kahf 18:23 that Muslims are required to follow one of the four recognized Sunni legal schools: the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, or Ḥanbalī school. He discourages adherence to positions lying outside these four schools, even when such opinions appear to correspond to a statement of a Companion, an authentic hadith, or a Qur'anic verse. In al-Ṣāwī's view, departing from the four established legal schools may cause a person both to fall into error and to lead others astray; it may even result in unbelief. One of the pathways to unbelief, he argues, is rigid literalism—that is, restricting the interpretation of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions exclusively to their outward meanings.⁴⁰

Al-Ṣāwī further maintains that juridical opinions outside the four schools had not been comprehensively codified or systematically organized. By contrast, the four Sunni schools had incorporated a wide range of scholarly knowledge derived from the opinions of earlier jurists and either all or the majority of the Companions. They also possessed clearly articulated methodologies and detailed legal principles. Their doctrines had been documented, transmitted, followed, and

³⁷ Saifuddin & Habib, ‘Kritik Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Atas Kritik Jamal Al-Banna Terhadap Beberapa Pemikir Al-Qur'an Kontemporer)’, *Analisis*, 16 (2016), p. 116.

³⁸ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 2, p. 38.

³⁹ Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq...*, p. 239–252.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Allamah Al-Sawi..., J. 4, p. 137.

disseminated by successive generations of students to such an extent that their attribution and continuity attained the status of widespread, recurrent transmission.⁴¹

Al-Ṣāwī's insistence on adherence to the established legal schools may be understood as a defensive response or an intellectual strategy of self-preservation in the face of Wahhābī reformist discourses that challenged *madhhab*-based authority and generated controversy among Ash'arī scholars during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Citing al-Shishtī, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen notes that the Ḥijāz had become particularly dangerous by the end of the eighteenth century, as Bedouin groups reportedly raided and killed pilgrims returning from Medina.⁴²

Al-Ṣāwī refers to the killing and dispossession of fellow Muslims in his gloss on Q. Fāṭir 35:6, where he writes:

“It has been said that this verse was revealed concerning the Khawārij, anticipating their emergence. They distorted the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and, on that basis, declared the killing of Muslims and the seizure of their property to be lawful. Their counterparts may now be seen in the present age: a sect in the Ḥijāz known as the Wahhābiyyah. They believe themselves to be upon the truth, although in reality they are liars.”⁴³

Ibrāhīm al-Samanūdī records that another group spread throughout Egypt during the early nineteenth century, following the decline of Wahhābī influence: adherents of the Ṣāhīrī school, or followers of Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī. According to al-Samanūdī, this group presented itself as opposed to adherence to established legal schools and claimed to derive legal rulings directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, while disregarding the accumulated *turāth*, or intellectual heritage, of earlier generations of Muslim jurists.⁴⁴

The principal doctrinal challenges confronting al-Ṣāwī in Egypt from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century may therefore be identified as Wahhābism and Ṣāhīrism. These challenges likely constituted an important context for the distinctive articulation of Sunnism found in his writings, particularly in *Ḥāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalalayn*.

The Createdness of the Universe

The second doctrinal principle upheld by *Ahl al-Sunnah* concerns the createdness of the universe. According to this principle, the cosmos has a beginning, is not eternal, and exists as a created entity brought into being by God. Al-Ṣāwī's support for this Sunni principle is evident in his interpretation of Q. al-Aḥqāf 46:3, where he rejects the philosophers' claim that the universe is *qadīm*, or beginningless. He states:

⁴¹ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, *Syarab Al-Sawī 'ala Jawābrāh Al-Tamhīd*.

⁴² Mayeur-Jaouen, “The Small World...”, p. 137.

⁴³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, *Hasyiah Al-Allamah Al-Sawī...*, J. 5, p. 409.

⁴⁴ Ibrahim al-Samanudi al-Mansuri, *Sa'adah Al-Darayn Fi Al-Radd 'ala Al-Firqatayn Al-Wahhabiyah Wa Muqallidah Al-Zahiriyyah*, J. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Iman), p. 206.

“The expression *ajalin musamman* in this verse refers to a specifically appointed term, for time itself came into existence after the created beings to which it pertains. The verse also contains a refutation of the philosophers who maintain that the universe is beginningless.”⁴⁵

Although al-Ṣāwī does not identify the philosophers he has in mind, Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes that questions concerning the temporal origination and eternity of the universe occupied Muslim intellectual thought for approximately twelve centuries and cannot be properly understood apart from the Qur'an and the hadith.⁴⁶ Drawing on Aristotelian philosophy, Ibn Sīnā advanced a conception of the eternity of the cosmos and denied the possibility of bodily resurrection. These positions were severely criticized by al-Ghazālī. Ibn Rushd, despite his vigorous defense of philosophy in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, likewise argued that Ibn Sīnā had at times misunderstood and distorted Aristotle's thought.⁴⁷

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who combined *kalām* and philosophy and frequently incorporated Avicennian ideas into his theological project, nevertheless rejected the eternity of the universe in his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. In his interpretation of Q. al-Aḥqāf 46:3, al-Rāzī explains that the verse explicitly indicates that the universe was not created to remain eternally. Rather, it was brought into existence as a realm in which human beings perform deeds, after which God will destroy it and recreate it for the life of the hereafter. Accordingly, the expression *ajalin musamman* refers to the appointed time at which God will bring worldly life to an end.⁴⁸

The Creator of the Universe and the Attributes of His Essence

Among the principles on which *Ahl al-Sunnah* agree is that God, as the Creator of the universe, is *qadīm*: eternal and without beginning. He is not confined by spatial dimensions or temporal limitations and cannot be conceived as resembling His creatures.⁴⁹ In addressing the so-called verses of the divine attributes, namely verses whose apparent wording might suggest a resemblance between God and created beings, al-Ṣāwī presents both the position of the *salaf*, the earlier generations, and that of the *khalaf*, the later Sunni theologians.

Al-Ṣāwī affirms the validity of both approaches. He characterizes the position of the *salaf* as safer (*aslam*) and the position of the *khalaf* as more precise and judicious (*aḥkam*). In his interpretation of Q. al-A'rāf 7:54, for example, he follows the method associated with the *khalaf* by interpreting the term *istawā*, whose apparent meaning could suggest sitting or occupying a place,

⁴⁵ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 5, p. 282.

⁴⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis Sebagai Sumber Dan Inspirasi Filsafat Islam', Ensiklopedi Tematis Filsafat Islam (Buku Pertama), trans. Tim Penerjemah Mizan (Mizan, 2003), p. 36.

⁴⁷ Shams Inati, 'Ibn Sina', Ensiklopedi Tematis Filsafat Islam (Buku Pertama), trans. Tim Penerjemah Mizan (Mizan, 2003), p. 302.

⁴⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Razi, Tafsir Al-Fakhr Al-Razi Al-Musytahir bi Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir Wa Mafatih Al-Gaib, J. 28 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Al-Bagdadi, Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq..., p. 255–257.

as denoting dominion (*istilāʾ*) and governance (*taṣarruf*). Before offering this interpretation, however, he also presents the position of the *salaf*, who adopted the method of *tafwīd*, entrusting the ultimate intended meaning of the expression to God.⁵⁰

Al-Ṣāwī thereby reinforces the Sunni principle of affirming God's transcendence above all notions of anthropomorphism. In his view, *tashbih*, or the assimilation of God to created beings, generally results from a rigidly literal reading of Qur'anic and Prophetic texts. He argues that interpreting religious texts solely according to their surface meanings without considering their broader theological and linguistic contexts may constitute one of the paths leading to unbelief.⁵¹

Before al-Ṣāwī, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī had addressed this issue in *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimāt* in his discussion of *uṣūl al-kufr wa al-bidaʿ*, the seven principal sources of unbelief and religious innovation. One of these sources, according to al-Sanūsī, is an unqualified adherence to the literal meanings of Qur'anic verses and hadiths concerning foundational theological doctrines without possessing the intellectual capacity to distinguish between expressions that cannot possibly be understood literally and those for which a literal interpretation remains possible. Al-Sanūsī cites the dualists (*al-Thanawīyyah*) as an example. They fell into unbelief, he argues, because they interpreted the statement that "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" in Q. al-Nūr 24:35 as meaning that God is literally light. This interpretation ultimately led them to a dualistic conception of divinity based on the opposition between light and darkness. Al-Sanūsī further maintains that religious literalism has produced numerous doctrinal innovations. Among them is anthropomorphism, represented by the *Mujassimah*, who interpreted literally such scriptural references as God's hand, eye, direction, and spatial location in Q. Ṣād 38:75, Q. al-Qamar 54:14, Q. Ṭā Hā 20:5, and other passages.⁵²

God's Eternal Attributes

The affirmation of God's eternal attributes constitutes one of the principal doctrines distinguishing *Ahl al-Sunnah* from the Muʿtazilah. This position stands in opposition to the Muʿtazilī denial of attributes subsisting in the divine essence. In *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī ʿalā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*, al-Ṣāwī identifies God's eternal attributes as power (*al-quḍrah*), will (*al-irāḍah*), knowledge (*al-ʿilm*), hearing (*al-samʿ*), sight (*al-baṣar*), life (*al-ḥayāh*), and speech (*al-kalām*).⁵³

In his commentary on Q. al-Baqarah 2:20, al-Ṣāwī defines divine power as an eternal attribute subsisting in God's essence and relating to all possibilities, whether their existence or non-existence,

⁵⁰ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 2, p. 268.

⁵¹ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 1, p. 186.

⁵² Muhammad bin Yusuf Al-Sanusi, Syarh Al-Muqaddimat (Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 2009), p. 119–200.

⁵³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Syarah Al-Sawi ʿala Jawhrah Al-Tawhid..., p. 189.

in accordance with His will and knowledge.⁵⁴ Another major point of controversy between *Ahl al-Sunnah* and the Mu'tazilah concerns the divine attribute of will. The Mu'tazilah frequently cited Q. al-Zumar 39:7 "He does not approve of unbelief for His servants"—to support their doctrine of human free will. In his gloss, al-Ṣāwī responds by arguing that divine approval (*riḍā*) and divine will (*irādah*) are two distinct concepts.⁵⁵

The doctrine of human free will, historically associated with the Mu'tazilah, appears to have acquired renewed prominence in the modern period. Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), for example, adopted a position close to that of the Mu'tazilah, particularly regarding human freedom of action.⁵⁶ Walid Saleh has similarly claimed that the majority of Muslims in the modern period effectively adhere to a conception of free will.⁵⁷ Such a claim suggests the intellectual ascendancy of modernist approaches over traditionalist and Salafi positions in responding to modernity and its challenges to the authority of the '*ulamā*'.⁵⁸

At the same time, the pejorative labeling of those who emphasize the importance of the legal schools, *kalām*, and Sufism as "traditionalists," despite the depth of their scholarly traditions, may be interpreted as part of what Anja Nygren describes as epistemic colonization. From this perspective, inherited Islamic epistemologies are frequently marginalized or devalued by Eurocentric epistemological frameworks and secular intellectuals.⁵⁹

Al-Ṣāwī defends the Sunni doctrine that human beings possess *kash*, or acquired agency, over their actions, even though absolute will and the creation of those actions ultimately belong to God.⁶⁰ One of the principal means through which he defended Sunni theology was the composition of commentaries and glosses. As 'Alī Jum'ah, cited by Mary Elston, has observed, the function of the *ḥāshiyah* is not limited to clarifying difficult expressions. It also preserves the teachings of earlier generations. From this perspective, the gloss serves as a protective intellectual structure

⁵⁴ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 1, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Al-Ṣāwī distinguishes between God's *riḍā* (approval) and His *irādah* (will). God may approve of something, such as a person's faith, while not willing its occurrence, or vice versa. Accordingly, al-Ṣāwī classifies this matter into four categories: (1) God commands and wills its occurrence, such as the faith of believers; (2) God neither commands nor wills its occurrence, such as disbelief among believers; (3) God commands but does not will its occurrence, such as the faith of unbelievers; and (4) God wills its occurrence but does not command it, such as the disbelief of unbelievers. See Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, *Hasyiah Al-Sawi*..., J. 5, p. 160.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad 'Abduh was among the proponents of an eclectic approach in the discipline of *kalām*. In his work *Risālat al-Tanḥīd*, he combined elements of Mu'tazilī theology with the theological traditions of Ash'ariyyah and Māturīdiyyah. See 'Atif Al-'Iraqi, *Al-Syekh Al-Imam Muhammad 'Abduh Wa Al-Tanwir; Qarn Min Al-Zaman 'Ala Wafatih* (Cairo: Dar al-Rasyad, 2006), p. 207.

⁵⁷ Walid A. Saleh, *Contemporary Tafsir*..., p. 694

⁵⁸ Emad Hamdeh, 'Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam', *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 2021, p. 149–150.

⁵⁹ Joseph E.B. Lombard, 'Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies', *Religions*, 13.2 (2022), p. 6–7 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020176>>.

⁶⁰ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 3, p. 284.

safeguarding Islamic teachings against various forms of challenge in a period when progressively fewer readers could understand foundational texts directly.⁶¹

The Divine Names and Their Attribution to God

Ahl al-Sunnah agree that the divine names are *tanqīfī*, meaning that they may only be established on the basis of names by which God identifies Himself in the Qur'an, names used by the Prophet Muḥammad in authentic Sunnah, or names established through scholarly consensus. The derivation of divine names by analogy (*qiyās*) is not permitted in Sunni theology, a position that distinguishes it from the Mu'tazilah.⁶²

An example of al-Ṣāwī's support for this principle appears in his commentary on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* concerning Q. al-Isrā' 17:110. Al-Suyūṭī interprets the statement, "Say: Call upon God or call upon the Most Merciful," as meaning, "Say: O God, O Most Merciful." Al-Ṣāwī explains that al-Suyūṭī's formulation alludes to the *tanqīfī* character of the divine names. In other words, no name may be attributed to God except on the basis of what has been established by revelation and the authoritative sources of the Sacred Law.⁶³

Divine Justice and Wisdom

Among the creedal principles that attracted the greatest attention from Muslim theologians is the question of divine justice. Within the Sunni theological framework, guidance and misguidance ultimately proceed from God and are created by Him.⁶⁴ In his commentary on Q. Fāṭir 35:8—"Indeed, God leads astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills"—al-Ṣāwī explains that this passage constitutes a refutation of the Mu'tazilī position that human beings create their own acts. He argues that God would not have attributed guidance and misguidance to Himself had they not, in reality, fallen within the scope of His creative agency.⁶⁵

In his interpretation of Q. al-Naḥl 16:90, al-Ṣāwī elaborates on and compares the positions of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, the Mu'tazilah, and the Jabariyyah regarding human action:

"The command to act justly in this verse encompasses every form of justice. This includes justice in affirming divine unity, namely the belief that God possesses all attributes of perfection and is transcendent above every deficiency. Justice in matters of belief consists in attributing the creation of all acts to God while attributing acquisition (*kasb*) to His servants. This position differs from those of the Jabariyyah and the Mu'tazilah. The Jabariyyah deny human acquisition, which would imply that God's punishment of human beings constitutes injustice. The Mu'tazilah, by contrast, attribute human acts to the

⁶¹ Mary Elston, "Alī Jum'ah as Editor: Reviving the Ḥā Shiya in Late-Twentieth-Century Egypt", *Philological Encounters*, 9189 (2024), p. 22–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/24519197-bja10056>>.

⁶² Al-Bagdadī, *Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq...*, p. 260.

⁶³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, *Hasyiah Al-Sawī...*, J. 3, p. 343.

⁶⁴ Al-Bagdadī, *Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq...*, p. 261.

⁶⁵ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, *Hasyiah Al-Sawī...*, J. 5, p. 77.

creative agency of human beings themselves. *Ahl al-Sunnah* maintain that all acts are created by God, while acquisition is attributed to His servants.”⁶⁶

The controversy over divine justice between *Ahl al-Sunnah* and the Mu‘tazilah concerns a fundamental theological disagreement. For the Mu‘tazilah, divine justice constitutes one of their five foundational principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsah*), whereas Sunni theology emphasizes God’s absolute power alongside the human acquisition of acts. Al-Ṣāwī’s engagement with this controversy in his gloss may be understood as a response to major Mu‘tazilī doctrines articulated by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH/1144 CE) in *al-Kashshāf*.

Al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary occupies a distinctive place in the history of Qur’anic exegesis. It has long been regarded as an authoritative reference in linguistic and rhetorical analysis, while also attracting criticism for its Mu‘tazilī theological orientation. This dual character prompted Sunni scholars to evaluate, debate, annotate, and compose extensive marginal glosses on the work.⁶⁷ Over the centuries, numerous commentaries and glosses were written on *al-Kashshāf*. Major contributions from Mamluk Egypt and the Ottoman scholarly tradition focused on its linguistic dimensions, examined its theological arguments, and traced its considerable influence on later exegetical writing.⁶⁸ Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683 AH/1284 CE) is commonly regarded as the first scholar to compose a systematic refutation of *al-Kashshāf*, particularly targeting the Mu‘tazilī doctrines embedded within it.⁶⁹ Al-Ṣāwī, by contrast, generally responds to Mu‘tazilī positions substantively without explicitly naming either particular figures or their works.

Matters Relating to Prophethood and Messengership

Another theological issue that receives significant attention in al-Ṣāwī’s writings is the infallibility of prophets and messengers from sin. Earlier Sunni scholars had strongly objected to al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of Q. al-Tawbah 9:43, “May God pardon you,” which they considered insufficiently respectful toward the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Zamakhsharī understood the verse as a gentle rebuke for an offense that had been committed. On this reading, the verse implied that the Prophet had made an error and acted in a manner that was inappropriate.⁷⁰ Ibn al-Munayyir and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī sharply criticized this interpretation, which they viewed as reflecting Mu‘tazilī theology.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 3, p. 284.

⁶⁷ Shuaib Ally, ‘Forbidding the Reading of the Kashshāf: Clarifying the Mamluk Era Reception of Zamakhsharī’s Qur’ān Commentary’, 76.2 (2022), p. 315.

⁶⁸ Coşkun, Major Shifts in Classical Tafsir..., p. 14.

⁶⁹ Walid A Saleh, ‘The Gloss as Intellectual History: The Hāshiyah s on Al-Kashshāf’, 41 (2013), p. 222 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-13413402>>.

⁷⁰ Mahmud bin Umar Al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir Al-Kasysyaf ‘an Haqa’iq Al-Tanzil Wa ‘Uyun Al-Aqawil Fi Wujub Al-Ta’wil* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’refah, 2009), p. 435.

⁷¹ Walid A Saleh, The Gloss as Intellectual History..., p. 223.

Like other Sunni exegetes, al-Ṣāwī interprets divine pardon (*al-ʿafw*) in this verse as a form of admonition (*ʿitāb*) and rejects the proposition that pardon necessarily presupposes the commission of a sin. He therefore adopts *taʿwīl* when interpreting verses whose apparent wording might suggest prophetic fallibility. For example, in commenting on Q. al-Fath 48:2—“so that God may forgive you your former and later sins”—al-Ṣāwī argues that the apparent attribution of sin to the Prophet must be interpreted non-literally. The expression may refer to the sins of his community, may fall under the maxim *ḥasanāt al-abrār sayyiʿāt al-muqarrabīn*—“the good deeds of the righteous are regarded as shortcomings for those brought near to God”—or may employ forgiveness in the sense of prevention and protection. On the latter interpretation, the verse means that God protected the Prophet Muḥammad from committing sin. Al-Ṣāwī considers the first interpretation, which relates the expression to the sins of the Prophet’s community, to be more appropriate to the prophetic station.⁷²

Miracles and Saintly Charisms

The Qur’an is among the greatest miracles granted to the Prophet Muḥammad. In accordance with the Sunni position, al-Ṣāwī maintains that the Qur’an’s miraculous character may be discerned in the excellence of its language, particularly in its composition and arrangement (*naẓm*), as well as in the information it conveys concerning unseen realities. His understanding of Qur’anic inimitability is evident in his interpretation of Q. Hūd 11:17, where he writes:

“The term *al-shāhid* in this verse may refer to the miraculous character of the Qur’an. The meaning would therefore be that it is followed by a witness testifying that it comes from God, namely the Qur’an’s inimitability in its composition and in the meanings it contains concerning unseen matters. No one is capable of producing anything comparable to it, whether in its entirety or in part.”⁷³

This position differs from that attributed to certain Qadārī thinkers, who denied that the Qur’an’s miraculous character resides in its *naẓm*.⁷⁴ Walid Saleh argues that, in the modern period, the doctrine of scientific indications in the Qur’an has acquired the status of a new universal dogma in Islamic theology, displacing earlier accounts of Qur’anic miraculousness grounded in linguistic qualities such as composition, coherence, and rhetorical eloquence.⁷⁵ From another perspective, however, the Qur’an and the natural order may be understood as two complementary divine books. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the cosmos is God’s open book (*al-kitāb al-mafṭūḥ*), spread out through signs (*āyāt*) that invite interpretation, while the Qur’an is God’s recited book (*al-kitāb al-*

⁷² Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 5, p. 311.

⁷³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 3, p. 129.

⁷⁴ Al-Bagdadi, Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq..., p. 266.

⁷⁵ Walid A. Saleh, Contemporary Tafsir..., p. 694.

maqrū), composed of letters and words that likewise demand understanding. The recognition of one dimension need not therefore exclude the other.⁷⁶

Another theological doctrine affirmed by al-Ṣāwī is the reality of *karāmāt*, extraordinary occurrences granted by God to His saints. He criticizes those who deny the possibility of such charisms. In his interpretation of Q. al-Jinn 72:26, al-Ṣāwī discusses the unveiling of the heart (*kashf*) experienced by a saint as one form of *karāmah*. He nevertheless distinguishes saintly unveiling from prophetic disclosure. The latter is grounded in revelation and protected from error, whereas the former remains different in both degree and epistemic status.⁷⁷ The question of saintly charisms was particularly significant in al-Ṣāwī's historical context. He composed a separate treatise on the subject entitled *Risālah fī al-Radd 'alā Munkirī Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*. The work may have been directed against Wahhābī-oriented critics who tended to reject belief in saintly miracles or to characterize related practices as polytheistic or illegitimate religious innovations.

Commands, Prohibitions, and Moral-Legal Obligation

Abl al-Sunnah maintain that all obligations and prohibitions imposed upon morally responsible individuals derive from God's commands and prohibitions.⁷⁸ In his commentary on Q. al-Nisā' 4:165, al-Ṣāwī explains that, according to the Sunni position, the obligation to know God is established through revealed law. In other words, God does not hold human beings legally accountable for knowing Him solely through independent rational reflection without first sending messengers who provide authoritative proofs and evidence.

Al-Ṣāwī supports this position by citing Q. al-Isrā' 17:15: "We do not punish until We have sent a messenger." His position differs from that of the Mu'tazilah, who maintain that moral and religious obligation may be established by reason alone.⁷⁹ For Mu'tazilī theologians, human reason occupies a central and authoritative position in independently discerning good (*al-ḥasan*) and evil (*al-qabīḥ*) without prior dependence on revelation.⁸⁰ A comparable emphasis on reason may be found in the thought of the contemporary progressive Muslim thinker Jamāl al-Bannā, who reorganizes the hierarchy of the sources of Islamic normativity by placing reason in a position preceding, and in some respects superior to, the textual authority of the Qur'an and the hadith.⁸¹

The Finitude of Created Beings in This World and Their Eschatological Fate

⁷⁶ Wan helmy Shahriman Wan Ahmad, "Tinjauan Terhadap Konsep Kemukjizatan Al-Qur'an Menurut Pandangan Ulama", *International Journal of Al-Qur'an and Knowledge*, 1.1 (2021), p. 106.

⁷⁷ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 6, p. 185.

⁷⁸ Al-Bagdadi, Al-Farqu Baina Al-Firaq..., p. 269.

⁷⁹ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 2, p. 83.

⁸⁰ 'Abduh Al-Syimali, *Dirasat Fi Tarikh Al-Falsafah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Islamiyah Wa Asar Rijaliha* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1979), p. 196.

⁸¹ Sya'ban Tal'at Muhammad 'Usman, *Al-Hadasiyyun: Nasy'atuhum Wa Asbab Inbiraqihim Fi Qira'atibim Li Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Tabsir, 2025), p. 227.

Ahl al-Sunnah affirm the everlasting bliss of the inhabitants of Paradise and the everlasting punishment of the inhabitants of Hell. They also affirm the interrogation in the grave, the Prophetic basin (*al-ḥand*), the eschatological balance (*al-mīzān*), the bridge (*al-ṣirāṭ*), and the intercession (*shafā'ah*) of the Prophet Muḥammad and the righteous on behalf of sinful members of his community. These doctrines belong to the category of *sam'īyyāt*, namely matters concerning unseen realities that can only be known through the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and transmitted reports (*āthār*), rather than through unaided rational reflection.⁸²

Al-Ṣāwī's affirmation of the everlasting bliss of the inhabitants of Paradise and the everlasting punishment of the inhabitants of Hell can be seen in his commentary on Q. al-Bayyinah 98:6–8. He interprets the phrase *kbālidīna fihā abadan*, “abiding therein forever,” as indicating that the inhabitants of Paradise will enter it and enjoy its blessings eternally.⁸³ One of the most frequently debated theological questions in Islam concerns the possibility of seeing God in the hereafter. Al-Ṣāwī discusses the position of those who deny the beatific vision in his interpretation of Q. al-An'ām 6:103: “Vision does not comprehend Him, while He comprehends all vision.” He maintains that the possibility of seeing God can be established through both transmitted proofs derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and scholarly consensus, and rational demonstration.

Among the Qur'anic proofs he cites is Q. al-Qiyāmah 75:23: “Looking toward their Lord.” He also invokes the hadith transmitted by Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh, in which the Prophet compares the believers' vision of God in the hereafter to their unobstructed sight of the full moon:

“You will indeed see your Lord just as you see this full moon, and you will not crowd one another in order to see Him.”⁸⁴

Al-Ṣāwī's rational proof takes the form of a categorical conjunctive syllogism (*qiyās iqtirānī ḥamlī*). Its premises are that God exists and that whatever exists is, in principle, capable of being seen. The conclusion is therefore that the vision of God is rationally possible. In this argument, possibility does not imply that God is spatially located, physically delimited, or comparable to created objects; rather, it affirms that the beatific vision does not constitute a rational impossibility.

The Caliphate and the Imamate

Al-Ṣāwī affirms the Sunni position on the caliphate and political leadership: the Prophet Muḥammad did not issue an explicit, definitive designation appointing a particular individual as caliph after his death. This position is evident in al-Ṣāwī's interpretation of Q. al-Shūrā 42:38. He writes:

⁸² Laith Saleh Otoum, ‘Al-Sam'īyyat Al-Kawniyah 'inda Al-Imam Al-Sawi: Al-'Arsy Wa Al-Kursy, Al-Qalam Wa Al-Lawh, Al-Malaikah Anmuwzajan', *Al-Quds Open University for Humanities & Social Studies*, 62 (2023), p. 21.

⁸³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 6, p. 317.

⁸⁴ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 2, p. 211.

“Consultation occupies an exalted position before God. The Companions likewise engaged in consultation after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad concerning important matters of religion and worldly affairs. The first question on which they consulted one another was the caliphate. This occurred because no explicit designation had been transmitted from the Prophet concerning it. Differences consequently arose, after which they gathered and deliberated until ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘We are satisfied, in the administration of our worldly affairs, with the person whom the Messenger of God approved for the administration of our religion,’ namely Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. They then reached an agreement.”⁸⁵

This interpretation differs fundamentally from the Twelver Shī‘ī doctrine that the imamate is the exclusive right of the Prophet’s Household (*Ahl al-Bayt*) and that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the Prophet’s legitimate successor by virtue of an explicit designation made before the Prophet’s death.⁸⁶

Like al-Ghazālī, al-Ṣāwī affirms the legitimacy of the successive caliphates of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁸⁷ In his account, the relative excellence of the Companions corresponds first to the order in which the four caliphs assumed office. They are followed by the remaining six of the ten Companions promised Paradise, then by those who participated in the Battle of Badr, those who fought at Uhūd, and those present at the Pledge of al-Riḍwān.⁸⁸ All the Companions, together with those who faithfully followed their path, received God’s approval, as expressed in Q. al-Tawbah 9:100: “God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him.”⁸⁹

Faith (Iman) and Islam

Like al-Suyūṭī, al-Ṣāwī associates the Ash‘ariyyah with the community described as loving God and being loved by Him. In *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, al-Suyūṭī interprets Q. al-Mā‘idah 5:54—“God will bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him”—as an allusion to the people of the Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī. In his gloss, al-Ṣāwī makes this identification more explicit, stating that the intended community is *al-qawm al-Ash‘ariyyūn*, the Ash‘arīs.⁹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī was himself a descendant of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī. Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī records his lineage as Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī ibn Ismā‘īl ibn Ishāq ibn Sālim ibn Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Bilāl ibn Abī Burdah ibn Abī Mūsā al-Ash‘arī.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 5, p. 236.

⁸⁶ Abbas Muhajirani, ‘Pemikiran Teologis Dan Filosofis Syi’ah Dua Belas Imam’, *Ensiklopedi Tematis Filsafat Islam (Buku Pertama)*, Terj. Tim Penerjemah Mizan (Mizan, 2003), p. 176.

⁸⁷ Imam Al-Ghazali, Kaidah-Kaidah Akidah: Pedoman-Pedoman Teologi Islam Yang Lurus, trans. Ach. Khoiron Nafis (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2025), p. 264.

⁸⁸ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Syarah Al-Sawi ‘ala Jawhrah Al-Tawhid..., p. 320–327.

⁸⁹ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 3, p. 67–68.

⁹⁰ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawi, Hasyiah Al-Sawi..., J. 2, p. 126.

⁹¹ Al-Tayyib, Ahl Al-Sunnah..., p. 21.

On the nature of faith, al-Ṣāwī adopts a mediating position between two theological extremes, the Khawārij and the Murji'ah. In his interpretation of Q. al-Baqarah 2:178,⁹² he rejects the Khārijī doctrine that a Muslim who commits a major sin thereby becomes an unbeliever. At the same time, he criticizes the Murji'ī assertion that sinful acts do not harm faith in any respect. The Murji'ah based their position partly on Q. al-Layl 92:15, *lā yaṣlāhā illā al-ashqā*, “None shall enter it except the most wretched.” They interpreted the verse as restricting entry into Hell exclusively to unbelievers and consequently concluded that believers would never enter Hell, regardless of the major sins they had committed.

Al-Maḥallī, followed by al-Ṣāwī, rejects this interpretation by arguing that the restriction (*al-ḥaṣr*) expressed in the verse requires qualification through *ta'wīl*. The intended meaning, according to this interpretation, is that no one will remain in Hell eternally except the most wretched, namely unbelievers. The verse therefore does not preclude sinful believers from entering Hell temporarily and subsequently being released through intercession.⁹³

Al-Ṣāwī also strongly condemns those who declare Muslims unbelievers for practicing *tawassul* or visiting the graves of God's saints on the grounds that such practices supposedly constitute worship of beings other than God. He argues that visiting the saints is, in essence, an expression of love for God. He associates this practice with the hadith, “There is no faith in one who does not love,” and understands it as falling within the general scope of the divinely commanded means of approach in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:35: “Seek the means of approach to Him.”⁹⁴

Al-Ṣāwī's interpretation of *wasīlah* and the visitation of saints represents a defense of established Sufi spiritual traditions and practices that were strongly opposed—and at times condemned as unbelief—by Wahhābī-oriented polemicists in the nineteenth century. Al-Samanūdī describes an Egyptian religious environment increasingly affected by Wahhābī discourses of *takfir*, which condemned such practices as seeking intercession through the righteous, celebrating the Prophet's birthday, constructing domes over graves, commemorating the death anniversaries of saints and pious individuals, and maintaining other religious traditions associated with *Ahl al-Sunnah*.⁹⁵

⁹² Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, Hasyiah Al-Sawī..., J. 1, p. 108.

⁹³ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, Hasyiah Al-Sawī..., J. 6, p. 292.

⁹⁴ Ahmad Bin Muhammad Al-Sawī, *Hasyiah Al-Allamah Al-Sawī 'ala Tafsir Al-Jalalain Volume 2* (Lebanon: Dar Tahkik al-Kitab, 2024), p. 231.

⁹⁵ Ibrahim al-Samanudi al-Mansuri, Sa'adah Al-Darayn..., p. 59.

CONCLUSION

In *Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī adopts a firm position in defending the doctrines of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, particularly Ash'arī theology, against two tendencies that he regarded as doctrinal extremes. On the one hand, he opposed the radical textualism that he associated with the Wahhābī movement; on the other, he resisted the ultra-rationalist orientation of the Mu'tazilah and later neo-Mu'tazilī tendencies, which, in his assessment, accorded excessive authority to reason at the expense of revelation and the Sacred Law. The political and intellectual challenges generated by Napoleon Bonaparte's French occupation of Egypt between 1798 and 1801 may also have shaped al-Ṣāwī's scholarly concerns. His *Risālah fī al-Jihād*, for example, can plausibly be read in relation to resistance against French colonial power, Western modernity, and the emerging secularizing tendencies introduced through the occupation. The challenges confronting al-Ṣāwī were therefore not merely political but also theological and epistemological.

Hāshiyat al-Ṣāwī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn and al-Ṣāwī's other writings demonstrate that he was not simply a Sufi scholar with expertise in Mālikī jurisprudence and other Islamic disciplines. He was also a theologian who addressed foundational doctrinal questions and articulated his position through sustained engagement with competing schools of *kalām*. His gloss contains a wide range of Sunni theological principles encompassing both foundational doctrines (*uṣūl*) and subsidiary questions (*furū'*). These include doctrines concerning God and the divine attributes, prophethood and prophetic infallibility, human action and divine justice, miracles and saintly charisms, revelation and moral obligation, and eschatological realities.

Several features distinguish al-Ṣāwī's particular articulation of Sunnism. These include his commitment to the four recognized Sunni legal schools; his rejection of rigidly literalist interpretations that could lead to anthropomorphism (*tashbīḥ*); his severe criticism of those whom he regarded as the modern counterparts of the Khawārij; his use of both *ta'wīl* and *tafwīḍ* in interpreting the divine attributes; and his defense of established Sunni and Sufi devotional practices. Together, these positions constitute a historically situated form of Sunnism shaped by the Egyptian intellectual environment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In his gloss, al-Ṣāwī discusses fundamental theological questions through the interpretation of Qur'anic verses while engaging, either explicitly or implicitly, with the doctrines of the Ash'ariyyah, Māturīdiyyah, Qadariyyah, Mu'tazilah, Khawārij, Murji'ah, Wahhābiyyah, and other theological currents. His exegetical theology is characterized by an attempt to integrate the normative framework of the Sacred Law with the spiritual insights of Sufism. It is also embedded in a scholarly tradition transmitted through his teachers and linked, in the traditional genealogy of

learning, to the authors of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, the Ash‘arī theological tradition, and ultimately the broader intellectual heritage of Islam.

Al-Ṣāwī’s work may therefore be understood as an important example of early nineteenth-century Sunni exegetical theology. Rather than merely preserving inherited doctrines, his *Hāshiyah* rearticulates them in response to the political, doctrinal, and epistemological transformations of his time. It thus demonstrates the continuing vitality of *kalām* within the gloss tradition and reveals how Qur’anic commentary could function simultaneously as a medium of theological instruction, intellectual preservation, and religious polemic.

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