

جمال أصول الدين

*A Summary of the  
Principles of Religion*

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*Arabic Edition, Annotated English  
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TURATH  
PUBLISHING

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## THE PRINCIPLES OF RELIGION

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## Foreword

BY MUSTAFA CERİĆ,  
GRAND MUFTI EMERITUS OF BOSNIA

Theologians are not prophets, and neither are prophets theologians. At the highest degree of religious change—the successive dispensation of God’s Law—prophets are the inaugurators of ‘paradigm shifts’, whereas theologians are their defenders and keepers. The idea of a ‘paradigm shift’ was introduced by the American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn in the philosophy of science, but it has proven useful in non-scientific fields as well. It refers to the time when the usual and accepted way of doing or thinking about something changes completely. Indeed, history from the perspective of Islam is not a mere repository of anecdotes or chronicles, but the decisive transformation of the faith and social relations of humanity by those of God’s messengers singled out for possessing ‘firm resolve’ (*ulū al-‘azm*): ‘So, be patient [O Muḥammad], as were those of firm resolve among the messengers. . .’ (Q. 46:35). The following messengers may be named as responsible for paradigm shifts: Noah (Nūḥ), Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Moses (Mūsā), Jesus (‘Isā) and Muḥammad, peace be upon all of them. It is the common belief of Jews, Christians and Muslims that Noah built the ark of human salvation from the flood; that Abraham renewed the practice of unadulterated monotheism; and that Moses brought a comprehensive divine Law. Christians and Muslims agree that Jesus shifted attention from the Law of the book to the law of love. Finally, Muslims alone uphold the truth that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was given the final task to integrate all

these decisive prophetic achievements into the single form that we call 'Islam', which means a wholehearted submission to the Lord of all the worlds (*rabb al-ālamīn*).

After the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his 'charisma', i.e. his legacy or *mirāth*, became the spiritual and moral treasure of the community, which was faced with the challenge of managing it. In other words, after the period of 'charisma', there was a period of 'post-charisma', where, according to Max Weber's typification, a community mainly moves in three recognisable directions: (1) towards the 'routinisation' of charisma, or its embodiment in stable social structures; (2) the perpetuation or continuous activity of charisma; and (3) the dissemination or distribution of charisma. It is not difficult to recognise that in the case of Islamic history this pattern can be observed by the community's division into Sunnism, as routinisation through the ulema and office of caliphate, Shi'ism, as perpetuation through the chain of Shi'ī imams, and Khārijism, as dissemination of charisma through their continuous rebellion.

This classification of the history of Islam is political with a doctrinal background. For Sunnīs, reference can be made to the well-known hadith: 'This matter (i.e. leadership) belongs to the Quraysh as long as there are even two of them'. Nevertheless, this principle was not observed throughout Islamic history (I note in passing that over a century has elapsed since the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924). On the other hand, Shi'ism draws from the event of Ghadir Khumm, where it is reported that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, had said: 'To whomever I am a master (*mawlā*), 'Alī is also his master' (Sunnīs generally reject the interpretation that these words concerned the succession of community leadership, rather than the event itself). And finally, we have Khārijism, which does not respect either of these two traditions, but uses the Qur'ānic slogan: 'There is no authority beyond God's authority' (*in al-ḥukm illā lillāh*), thereby

initiating constant rebellions against the established order in the Muslim society and state. Throughout the centuries, the majority of the Muslim community has favoured the Sunnī path of ‘routinisation’. This has meant preserving social stability by sharing the prophetic legacy widely amongst all its learned members right back to the generation of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, may peace and blessings be upon him, and holding pragmatically appointed leadership morally accountable to the community. It is within this latter tradition that the present book is situated.

One of Ramon Harvey’s theological contributions has been to point out that within the major branch of Sunnī theological tradition known as the Māturīdī school, we have been led into misfortune by our neglect of the distinctive theology of Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. One example shall make the stakes clear. Al-Māturīdī provides an alternative to both the fallacy of the Muʿtazilī imposition of norms for God’s actions as well as the Ashʿarī notion of God’s absolute and unlimited will, such that God subjectively determines what is good or evil solely by His words. Although he was not well heard in Baghdad from distant Samarqand, Imam al-Maturīdī takes an important intermediate position on this issue: it is God’s own wisdom (*ḥikma*) that decides the moral parameters of the divine command. In this, and the many other theological matters that flow from the affirmation of a distinct attribute of wisdom, al-Māturīdī retains a credible claim to deserve precedence ahead of the Ashʿarīs in the contest to be the pre-eminent rational keeper of Sunnī orthodoxy. In today’s philosophical language, God’s wisdom refers to the metaphysically impossibility for God to create ‘foolish’ or ‘vain’ things in this world or the next, despite their intrinsic logical possibility. This has an important consequence insofar as it becomes necessary by the very intelligibility of the world that the rational human agent can recognise certain aspects of God’s wise design.

Harvey rightly begins his introduction to this volume by stating: