

# THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY LESSON AND ITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

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Received: 16/07/2024

Published: 03/03/2025

**Abstract:** *This article deals with the problem of contemporary theological education and its epistemological and methodological issues, a topic that has aroused our scientific curiosity due to the numerous challenges that hinder the learning process of theological education. These challenges can be summarised in two aspects: the epistemological aspect and the methodological aspect, which have been addressed in the content. In order to discuss this intellectual issue, we divided the topic into an introduction, in which we presented the main frameworks of this topic, the objectives of its study and the methodology adopted, followed by three sections: in the first section, we defined the research concepts, namely the epistemological issue and the methodological issue; in the second section, we analysed the epistemological issue and its types; and in the last section, we explored the methodological issues. We concluded this paper with a series of findings derived from the analysis and exploration of these issues.*

**Keywords:** *Contemporary theology teaching, methodological issues, epistemological issues.*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of theology has always been a real challenge for educators, researchers and those interested in it in general, because of the numerous issues that threaten the success of the educational and research process in this field and hinder the achievement of its intended goals in the context of the community. These challenges affect two fundamental pillars: the epistemological aspect and the methodological aspect, with serious consequences for the reality of Islamic discourse and communication - where channels of dialogue have been closed, resulting in strained relations and the spread of exclusionary and hateful rhetoric. This is particularly worrying given that a discipline as noble as theology, by virtue of the dignity of its subject matter - divine matters - should be a point of consensus and a unifying factor.

This gives us the legitimacy to ask the following question:

What are the epistemological and methodological problems that have plagued contemporary theological teaching and led to a fragmented reality? Has this question been raised in traditional theological studies?

This is what I have attempted to explore in this article through a realistic examination and practical engagement in the design of theology classes for students at the Islamic University.

**Sections:** The answer to this question is addressed in three sections:

1. Conceptual Introduction: Definition of terms and concepts.
2. Identification of epistemological issues.
3. Identification of methodological issues

Finally, a conclusion summarises the findings and outlines recommendations.

**Methodology:** A descriptive approach was used to present the current state of contemporary theology teaching, along with an analytical method focused on critiquing the observed flaws in the framing of these lessons, with the aim of deriving solutions that can contribute to addressing these flaws and successfully implementing contemporary theology teaching both theoretically and practically.

**Desired Objectives:**

- Achieve an accurate diagnosis of the current state of theology lessons and the issues surrounding them.



- Highlight the strength of traditional theology lessons and the potential to apply their methodology in contemporary educational and research processes in this field.
- Activate contemporary theology lessons to address the issues in Islamic communication and dialogue, aiming to unify the community once again.
- The results and outcomes are summarized in the conclusion, along with the key recommendations that researchers in the field of theology should adhere to in order to achieve the desired objectives.

## SECTION ONE: CONCEPTUAL INTRODUCTION

### First: Definition of Theology Lessons:

#### A. Definition of “Lesson”:

- Linguistically: The general meanings of the root (د ر س) include: obscurity of effect, wear, reading and learning, training and facilitation, treading and trampling, and separating grain from ears<sup>1</sup>.
- Terminologically: “A lesson is the amount of knowledge studied at a specific time.”<sup>2</sup>

#### B. Definition of Theology (علم الكلام):

- **Science (علم) Linguistically:** The general meanings of the root (علم) include: knowledge and understanding, effect and characteristic, banner, emergence and fame, creation and existence, gathering and assembling<sup>3</sup>.
- **Theology (كلام) Linguistically:** The general meanings of the root (ك ل م) revolve around the following concepts: meaningful speech and communication, and discourse<sup>4</sup>.

#### Theology (علم الكلام):

Theology is considered an original science that emerged in the Arab Islamic environment, specializing in affirming the principles of Islamic faith and refuting the arguments of its opponents<sup>5</sup>. This has led some to regard it as a companion to jurisprudence and a complement to it. The theologian engages in rational proof of the foundational principles from which the jurist derives rulings and fatwas.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi defined it as follows: “The art of theology enables a person to defend the limited opinions and actions stated by the founder of the faith and to refute anyone who opposes them with arguments. This art is divided into two parts: one concerning opinions and the other concerning actions. It differs from jurisprudence because the jurist accepts as given the opinions and actions articulated by the founder of the faith and establishes them as principles from which necessary conclusions are drawn. The theologian supports the principles used by the jurist without deriving anything else from them”<sup>6</sup>. Al-Farabi sees theology as an art or craft, but does not specify whether he is referring to Islamic theology or something else.

On the other hand, Al-Iji defines it as: “A science that enables one to affirm religious beliefs by presenting arguments and dispelling doubts. The beliefs referred to are those that pertain to belief itself rather than action, and ‘religious’ refers to the religion of Muhammad, peace be upon him”<sup>7</sup>.

Al-Ghazali believes that “the purpose of theology is to protect the beliefs of the people of the Sunnah from the disturbances of the people of innovation. A group of theologians arose, and God moved their motivations

<sup>1</sup>- Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language: Arabic Language Academy in Sharjah and Union of Arabic Language Academies, Al-Qasimi Publications, 1st edition, 2020-2024 (D.R.S).

<sup>2</sup>- A group of linguists, The Intermediate Dictionary, 2nd edition, Arabic Language Academy in Cairo, Egypt, 1972, Vol. 1, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup>- Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language: Arabic Language Academy in Sharjah and Union of Arabic Language Academies (A.L.M).

<sup>4</sup>- The same reference (K.L.M).

<sup>5</sup>- Taha Abdul Rahman, Renewing the Method in Evaluating Heritage, 2nd edition, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, n.d., p. 141.

<sup>6</sup>- Abu Nasr Al-Farabi. Enumeration of Sciences, n.d., National Center for Development, Beirut, 1991, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>- Izz al-Din al-Iji, The Positions in Theology, ed. Abdul Rahman Ameera, 1st edition, Dar al-Jil, 1997, p. 21.



to defend the Sunnah with a structured discourse that exposes the confusions of the people of innovation that contradict the established Sunnah. This is how theology and its scholars came into being<sup>1</sup>.

Al-Amidi considers theology to be the noblest of all sciences, stating: "The noblest of sciences is the one known as theology, which studies the nature of the necessary being, its attributes, actions and relations."<sup>2</sup>

### Definition of Theological Education:

The term "theological education" refers to the epistemological and pedagogical process concerning the content, topics and methods of theology in academic institutions and centres. In this process, the teacher interacts with the learner to produce theological knowledge.

### First: Linguistic and Terminological Definition of "Subject" (إشكال)

#### A. Linguistically:

The term "issue" is derived from the verb "شكل" (to form) with either a pronounced or unpronounced "kaf". It means similarity; we say "هذا شكل هذا" (this is like that). A problematic or ambiguous matter is described as "مشكل", indicating that this is like that<sup>3</sup>. "إشكال الأمر" refers to its ambiguity. Ibn Manzur adds that anything mixed or confused is considered problematic<sup>4</sup>, which is in line with the definition in "Al-Mujam Al-Wasat"<sup>5</sup>.

#### B. Terminologically:

A problem is a matter that causes confusion in understanding. For legal theorists, it is something that cannot be understood without evidence from another source<sup>6</sup>, making it a problem - a case that needs to be addressed<sup>7</sup>. Lalande defines it in his encyclopaedia as a characteristic of a judgement or issue that may be true, but which the speaker does not explicitly affirm. The "problematic" is that which is doubted and can be asserted freely, without sufficient evidence, and can therefore be considered as unresolved<sup>8</sup>.

### Second: Linguistic and terminological definition of "cognitive"

#### A. Linguistically:

The term "cognitive" is derived from the root عرف (to know). Ibn Manzur mentions that it comes from "العرفان" which means to inform someone of something. The term "تعريف" (definition) means to inform or announce. It also means to search for something lost<sup>9</sup>. In addition, to know is to perceive something through one of the senses<sup>10</sup>.

#### B. Terminologically:

Knowledge and cognition refer to understanding something through reflection and contemplation of its effects. It is more specific than knowledge and is opposed to denial<sup>11</sup>. It is said that someone "يعرف الله" (knows God) but not "يَعْلَمُ الله" (learns about God). Cognition is used for limited knowledge gained through contemplation.

<sup>1</sup>- Al-Ghazali, The Deliverer from Error, ed. Saad Karim Al-Fuqay, n.d., Dar Ibn Khaldun, Alexandria, n.d., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>- Seyf al-Din al-Amidi, The Ultimate Goal in Theology, ed. Hassan Mahmoud Abdel Latif, n.d., The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, 1391 AH, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>- Lexicon of Language Standards. Ahmad bin Faris al-Qazwini al-Razi, Abu al-Hasan, ed. Abdul Salam Muhammad Harun, Dar al-Fikr, 1399 AH/1979, Vol. 3, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>- Lisan al-Arab, Muhammad bin Makram bin Ali, Abu al-Fadl, Jamal al-Din Ibn Manzur al-Ansari, Dar Sader, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1414 AH, Chapter on "Shin", Vol. 11, p. 352.

<sup>5</sup>- The Intermediate Dictionary, Arabic Language Academy in Cairo, Dar al-Da'wah, Chapter on "Shin", p. 491.

<sup>6</sup>- The same source, same page.

<sup>7</sup>- Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic, Ahmad Mukhtar Abdul Hamid Omar with the help of a team, World of Books, 1st edition, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 1228.

<sup>8</sup>- Philosophical Encyclopedia of Lalande. André Lalande, Volume One A-G, Oueidat Publications, Beirut.

<sup>9</sup>- Lisan al-Arab, previous source, Chapter on "Ain", Vol. 9, p. 237.

<sup>10</sup>- The Intermediate Dictionary, previous source, p. 595.

<sup>11</sup>- Vocabulary in the Strange of the Quran, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad known as Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, ed. Safwan Adnan Al-Daoudi, Dar al-Qalam, Damascus, 1st edition, 1412 AH, p. 561.



In grammar, it denotes what is set to indicate a specific thing, including pronouns, names and ambiguities, and what is defined by the definite article or added to one of them. In philosophical terms, knowledge is the understanding of something as it really is, preceded by forgetting, which occurs after knowledge. This is why God is referred to as “العالم” (the knower) rather than “العارف” (the cogniser).

In mystical terms, it is considered a high degree of certainty in which doubts are dispelled by clarity, and it is described as evidence of complete perception, the removal of uncertainties by the appearance of the invisible, and the arrival of divine light upon the righteous<sup>1</sup>.

### Third: Definition of “Methodological” (منهجي) Linguistically and Terminologically

#### A. Linguistically:

“Methodological” is derived from “النهج” (the path), which means clear and evident. “منهاج” (method) is similar to “منهج” (method), and to “نهج الطريق” means to follow a clear path<sup>2</sup>. It also refers to the clarity of steps taken and the sequence of breaths due to fatigue. “منهاج” is the clear path, as stated in the Quran: “For each of you, We have appointed a law and a method.”<sup>3</sup>

#### B. Terminologically:

The methodology is the established path taken to arrive at a specific conclusion<sup>4</sup>. This path may not be predetermined intentionally and deliberately. Here, the term “arrangement” is used to describe the mental activity that involves multiple ideas, judgments, and evidence around a single topic, organized in the best manner to make the subject known<sup>5</sup>.

## SECTION TWO: COGNITIVE FLAWS AND THEIR TYPES

**First:** The absence of verification of the source of information, its context, and importance requires extensive training and knowledge in:

1. The Arabic language, its rules, and grammatical philosophy in general. “Especially since it contains a pure Islamic philosophy at its core, such as the concepts of past, present, and future time, the idea of causality, and the rational grammatical analogy. In summary, all propositions of Islamic thought should be derived from the depths of grammar and language. This has even been reflected among the Sufis, who wrote about the grammar of mysticism and attempted to apply the methodology of indication and reference to various grammatical opinions.”<sup>6</sup>

There are also common terms between “grammar and theology”, which the researcher Mustafa Ahmed Abdul Alim Bakhit compiled in his doctoral thesis, including: condition, description, movement, stillness, place, accident, essence, absolute, limited, conception, affirmation, essence, existence and non-existence<sup>7</sup>.

- He also identified purely theological terms that entered grammatical study, such as: substance, accident, essence, absolute, restricted, conception, affirmation, essence, existence and non-existence.

In addition, expressions commonly used in grammatical studies have theological and doctrinal influences in the language of grammatical composition, such as ‘self-sufficient’, ‘dependent’, ‘necessary’, ‘contingent’, ‘the same as’, ‘potentially’ and ‘actually’.

1- Clarification of Important Definitions, Zain al-Din Muhammad, known as Abdul Ra'uf bin Taj al-Arifin, Al-Munawi al-Qahiri, Dar Al-Kutub, 1st edition, 1990, p. 310.

2- Lisan al-Arab, previous source, Chapter on “Ha”, Vol. 2, p. 384.

3- The Intermediate Dictionary, previous source, Vol. 2, p. 957.

4- The same source, p. 317.

5- The same source, p. 803.

6- The Emergence of Philosophical Thought in Islam, Ali Sami Al-Nashar, n.d., Publishing House, 9th edition, n.d., p. 56.

7- The Impact of Creed and Theology on Arabic Grammar: Mustafa Ahmed Abdul Aleem Bakhit, 1st edition, 1433 AH/2012, Dar Al-Basair, Cairo, pp. 10 and 22.



There are even grammatical classifications based on theological foundations, such as the classification of words as “effective” and “affected”, and as “necessary”, “possible” and “impossible” on the basis of existence and non-existence.

Furthermore, the influence of beliefs and theological schools on the interpretation of semantic particles is evident, such as the assertion that “إِنْ” in the Qur’an indicates certainty, not doubt, because doubting God is not permissible, and that “عَسَى” in the Qur’an is obligatory, while in the speech of created beings it indicates hope and compassion<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, theologians were also masters of grammar and rhetoric, such as Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Jahiz, Al-Ramani and Al-Jurjani. Yaqut Al-Hamawi mentioned that “there is a book by Muhammad ibn Ishaq called ‘The Grammarians of the Mu’tazila’”<sup>2</sup>.

All this and much more is currently lacking in the framework for teaching theology.

**Second**, the inability to verify information because of a lack of historical understanding or a lack of historical culture. This is evident in the most fundamental aspects of any theological issue and the historical contexts surrounding its emergence. Theological discussions are often divorced from their origins and environments and viewed through the lens of the researcher and the circumstances of his or her time. This makes the study of theology more like a trial session than a cognitive lesson.

Consider, for example, the terms “Mu’tazila” and “Khawarij” and the historical conditions that produced and surrounded them. It is difficult to determine whether the Khawarij departed from the religion itself or from Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), and whether the Mu’tazila departed from Al-Hasan Al-Basri or from the majority of Muslim scholars.

Historians have written about history from their own perspective, as Ali Sami Al-Nashar notes. The subject has been explored by both Orientalists and Muslim scholars, often without a precise understanding of the legal, theological or political structures involved. History serves as a material for researchers to examine both subjective and objective phenomena, revealing the depths of what preoccupied Muslim thought and reflecting their external life.

We can rely on models such as Ibn Khaldun in his “Muqaddimah” and Al-Mawardi with his theories on politics. We cannot fully grasp their intentions in their writings without understanding the circumstances and historical contexts in which they composed their works, as well as the sources they used to document historical events<sup>3</sup>.

**Third:** Moreover, it is even more troubling to claim reliance on the texts, namely the Quran and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), while we lack a general understanding of the sciences of the Quran, exegesis, and the sciences of Hadith. This is a clear deficiency that does not require proof. When we examine the efforts of the early theologians, we notice a vast difference between our scientific and intellectual resources and theirs.

For instance, consider Al-Razi, the well-known theologian, as he interprets the verse: “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding” (Quran 2:164). He commented on what was narrated about Umar ibn Al-Husayn reading the book of the astronomer to Umar Al-Abhari. One day, some jurists asked, “What are you reading?” He replied, “I am interpreting a verse from the Quran, which is His saying: ‘Do they not reflect upon the heaven above them, how We have built it?’ (Quran 50:6). I am explaining how it was constructed. Indeed, Al-Abhari was correct in what he said, for whoever delves deeper into the seas of Allah’s creations has greater knowledge of the majesty and greatness of Allah.” He then begins to interpret the Quranic verse, drawing on astronomical knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>- The same reference, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>- Dictionary of Writers, Shihab al-Din Abu Abdullah Yaqut bin Abdullah al-Rumi al-Hamawi, ed. Ihsan Abbas, 1st edition, 1993, Vol. 3, p. 1028.

<sup>3</sup>- Ali Sami Al-Nashar, previous reference, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>- Keys to the Unseen, Abu Abdullah Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1420 AH, Vol. 4, p. 154.



This applies to the first source of theological study. As for the second source, the Sunnah, the situation is not much different. Traditional theology and its attempts at reform are often accused of rationalisation and abstraction that exclude the text, giving the impression that this science is alien rather than original. However, researchers in most religious sciences, especially the sciences of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (or the Book and the Sunnah), arrive at a fair assessment of this knowledge and rightly preserve its originality.

I have traced more than twenty works in the science of Hadith, all of them of a theological nature, and I have arranged them according to the dates of death of their authors, starting from the year 197 AH. They are as follows:

- The Divine Decree and the related narrations by Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Wahb ibn Muslim Al-Misri Al-Qurashi (d. 197 AH).
- The Book of Faith by Abu Ubaid Al-Qasim ibn Salam ibn Abdullah Al-Harawi Al-Baghdadi (d. 224 AH), which mentions in the chapter on the description of faith in its completeness and degrees that scholars have divided into two groups regarding the issue of faith: one group claims that faith is sincerity to Allah with the heart, testimony of the tongues, and actions of the limbs, while the other asserts that faith is in the hearts and tongues, and that actions are merely piety and righteousness, not part of faith. He presents his position, which aligns with the Book and the Sunnah, that faith encompasses intention, speech, and action.
- The Book of Faith by the hadith scholar Abu Bakr Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Shaybah (195-235 AH), which includes a commentary on the saying of Abu Darda: "O Allah, I ask You for enduring faith, beneficial knowledge, and sound guidance," stating, "We see that there is faith that is not enduring, knowledge that does not benefit, and guidance that is not sound." This reflects a theological stance on the increase and decrease of faith.
- Response to the Jahmiyyah and Heretics by Abu Abdullah Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), a book on creed that contains an introduction and a chapter explaining the errors of the heretics, and a debate about Jahm ibn Safwan with the Samaniyyah. It also addresses the issue of seeing Allah on the Day of Resurrection, which the author affirms through his interpretation of the verse: "Some faces, that Day, will be radiant" (Quran 75:23), meaning beauty and brightness, "looking at their Lord" in Paradise.
- The Book of Faith by Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Abu Umar Al-Adani (d. 243 AH), which provides a model on the increase and decrease of faith in a chapter titled "On the Increase and Decrease of Faith." Sufyan said: "Faith is speech and action that increases and decreases." His brother, Ibrahim ibn Uyaynah, said to him: "O Abu Muhammad, do not say it decreases." Sufyan became angry and said: "Be quiet, boy; indeed, it decreases until nothing remains of it."
- The Creation of the Actions of the Servants by Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Ibrahim ibn Al-Mughira Al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH), which contains several chapters on issues of creed, such as those addressing the deniers who seek to alter Allah's words, and the chapter on the actions of the servants, where he argues that actions and their practitioners are created, citing the Prophet's saying: "Indeed, Allah creates every creator and their creation," and some recited at that time: "And Allah created you and what you do" (Quran 37:96). He also addresses the response to the Jahmiyyah and the deniers.
- The Book of Response to the Jahmiyyah by Abu Said Osman ibn Said ibn Khalid Al-Darimi Al-Sijistani (d. 280 AH), which includes the chapters classified by this hadith scholar:
  - The chapter on belief in the Throne, which the deniers rejected.
  - The chapter on the Lord's establishment on the Throne and His elevation to the heavens, which they also denied.
  - The chapter on descent.
  - The chapter on vision, among other purely theological chapters that Al-Bukhari addressed.
- The Book of Divine Decree by Abu Bakr Jaafar ibn Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan Al-Mustafid Al-Firiyabi (d. 301 AH), which provides an example in refuting the doctrine of compulsion and affirming human freedom:





From Abu Darda (may Allah be pleased with him), from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), who was asked: “What about our actions? Are they something that has already been decreed, or something we initiate?” He said: “Each person is prepared for that for which he was created.” Then Yunus turned to Said ibn Abdul Aziz and said: “The confirmation of this hadith is in the Book of Allah, the Exalted.” Said replied: “Explain it to me, O Halbas.” He said: “Do you not hear Allah, the Exalted, say in His Book: ‘And know that among you is the Messenger of Allah; if he were to obey you in much of the matter, you would be in difficulty. But Allah has endeared faith to you and has made it pleasing to your hearts and has made disbelief, sin, and disobedience hateful to you. Those are the rightly guided’ (Quran 49:7). O Said, if they abandoned as the wicked say, where would they go? Where they are endeared and beautified, or where it is made hateful to them?”

Thus, in the subsequent books, the science of Hadith interacts with the science of theology in a harmonious symphony, represented by the Muslim scholar who embodies both sciences, making it difficult to separate them without an unlikely and pathological disconnection of personality, which cannot be proven due to its actual non-existence.

- The Book of Names and Attributes by Imam Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb Al-Nasai (215-303 AH).
- The Book of Monotheism and the Affirmation of the Attributes of Allah by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Khuzaymah (d. 311 AH).
- The Book of Descent and The Book of Attributes by Imam Abu Al-Hasan Ali ibn Umar Al-Daraqutni (306-358 AH).
- Clarification of the Signs of Religion by Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310 AH).
- Response to Those Who Claim the Quran is Created by Ahmad ibn Salman Al-Najad (d. 348 AH).
- The Book of Attributes by Imam Ali ibn Umar Al-Daraqutni (306-385 AH).
- The Book of Faith by Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Mandah (d. 395 AH).
- Explanation of the Principles of the Belief of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah by Abu Al-Qasim Hibatullah ibn Al-Hasan Al-Lalakai (d. 418 AH).
- Affirmation of the Punishment of the Grave and the Questioning of the Two Angels by Ahmad ibn Al-Husayn Al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH).
- The Names and Attributes by Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH), who also wrote on belief and guidance to the path of righteousness according to the way of the Salaf and the companions of Hadith.
- The Book of Monotheism by Abu Muhammad Abdul Ghani ibn Abdul Wahid Al-Maqdisi (d. 600 AH).
- Two Sessions from the Gatherings of Abu Al-Husayn ibn Bushran by Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah Al-Busharani (d. 415 AH).
- Refutation of the Interpretations of the Attributes by Al-Qadi Abu Ya'la (d. 458 AH).
- Resurrection and Resurrection by Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH).
- Divine Decree and Predestination by Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH).
- The Evidence in Clarifying the Path and Explaining the Belief of Ahl al-Sunnah by Imam Al-Hafiz Qawwam Al-Sunnah Abu Al-Qasim Ismail ibn Muhammad Al-Taymi Al-Asbahani (d. 535 AH).
- Affirmation of the Attribute of Ascendancy by Abu Muhammad Al-Muwafiq Al-Din Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad, known as Ibn Qudamah Al-Maqdisi (d. 620 AH).
- Affirmation of Intercession by Shams Al-Din Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Uthman Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH).
- The Forty Hadith on the Signs of Monotheism by Abu Ismail Al-Harawi (396-481 AH).
- A Treatise Defending Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari by Abu Al-Qasim Abdul Malik ibn Isa ibn Darbas (576-659 AH).



- The Forty Hadith on the Attributes of the Lord of the Worlds by Shams Al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Uthman Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH).

Then, all this, and anything else I may have missed, can be attributed to subjective factors, primarily the absence of a mission-oriented goal in the learning process that alleviates difficulties and encourages mastery of this process to reap the fruits for the nation, aiming for the reward in the Hereafter before the worldly one, along with objective factors related to the circumstances that influence the learning process to form the educator and the students.

Sociology and other sciences contrast with our early scholars, who were characterized by a comprehensive scientific and intellectual mastery, as well as proficiency in the sciences of their time. They exhibited precision and productive scientific criticism to the extent that they produced new sciences, as the Muslim philosophers did when they translated Greek philosophy, explained it, and deconstructed it to develop a new philosophical method that did not stem from problems but from the foundational belief in the oneness of Allah and the search for evidence supporting it.

They “took a stance of rejection against logic, exaggerating in their criticism of it, warning against it, and prohibiting its learning and teaching.”<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah noted that all scholars distanced themselves from the study of logic after rigorously critiquing it, identifying its flaws. He mentioned various groups saying: “No Muslim scholar paid attention to their method; rather, the Mu’tazilites, Ash’arites, Karamites, Shi’ites, and other groups criticized it and affirmed its invalidity. The first to mix their logic with Islamic principles was Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, and Muslim scholars discussed it at length.”<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, as it is said, presented an original Islamic logic in his book *\*Response to the Logicians\**.

It should be emphasized that the method of the theologians is special and original. When they established theology to support faith-based beliefs with rational arguments, their approach included specific evidence, which they documented in their books, such as the evidence for the world’s creation by affirming the existence of accidents and their occurrence, and the impossibility of bodies being devoid of them.

Their influence was felt in the other sciences of their time. Figures such as Ibn Sina excelled in the natural sciences through his work *The Healing*<sup>3</sup>, as did Ibn Rushd, Al-Amidi and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. In medicine, scholars such as Al-Razi and Ibn Sina<sup>4</sup> made significant contributions. Even in agriculture, our scholars benefited from their predecessors through criticism and refinement, as demonstrated by Ibn Al-Awwam, who summarised the *\*Book of Nabatean Agriculture*, retaining only what was relevant to the art and omitting anything related to magic. While Ibn Al-Awwam excluded the section on magic, other scholars did not<sup>5</sup>; instead, they researched it and produced valuable knowledge, such as chemistry, as Jaber ibn Hayyan did, extracting the essence of the craft, as Ibn Khaldun notes in his “Introduction”<sup>6</sup>.

We can therefore conclude that the cognitive shortcomings mentioned above pose, and will continue to pose, a significant challenge to the success of contemporary theological studies, just as they did in previous periods. Failure to initiate immediate reforms will contribute to significant delays and unjustified obstacles to the desired civilisational revival, which must come from a clear understanding of the science of faith, through the dismantling and critical analysis of its components in a free, fundamental and objective manner, rooted in divinity and mission in the educational and teaching processes, as well as in contemporary specialized scientific methodologies.

<sup>1</sup>- Diwan of Beginning and News in the History of Arabs and Berbers and Those of Greater Importance Among Them, Abdul Rahman Muhammad bin Muhammad Ibn Khaldun Abu Zaid, ed. Khalil Shahada, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 2nd edition, 1988, p. 647.

<sup>2</sup>- Refutation of the Logicians, Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 337.

<sup>3</sup>- The same source, same page.

<sup>4</sup>- The same source, p. 651.

<sup>5</sup>- The same source, p. 652.

<sup>6</sup>- The same source, p. 655.





### THIRD AXIS: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The methodology is considered part of the personality of science and a foundation of its independence and uniqueness from other sciences<sup>1</sup>. Since the science of theology (kalam) began—like other Islamic sciences—relying on both reason and revelation in a balanced manner, it has evolved to vary in its reliance on each depending on the nature of each theological school and the circumstances of its development. Eventually, a rationalist inclination prevailed among later theologians<sup>2</sup>.

The methodological issues can be summarized as follows:

- Ideologizing Theological Information: This is evident in the sources and references used in theological studies, which leads to a reliance on a selective methodology suitable for the adopted ideology. Only what aligns with the instructor's perspective is conveyed, even if it involves a Quranic verse or a noble hadith, resulting in a distorted knowledge that is difficult to unify around. The practical application of theological study in universities and Islamic centers shows excessive sanctification of theological opinions along with sectarian mobilization, which even affected Islamic communities. Regardless of the differences in curricula and the backgrounds of authors, this science has consistently been taught and researched from a specific sectarian perspective, defined either by the institution organizing the course or by the doctrinal affiliations of independent authors who believe their primary role is to defend their beliefs and promote their cultural identity at any cost, focusing on the mistakes of opponents and exaggerating them to make unity among differing opinions and desires seem impossible.

- Viewing Theological Information Out of Its Historical Context: This often results from a lack of awareness of its historical circumstances, subjecting it to the judgments and conditions of the contemporary era. For instance, the stance on groups classified within the political category is problematic because it secularizes Islamic thought, separating the religious from the political, despite the fact that political disputes stem from legal rulings.

In the case of leadership (imamate), the disagreement revolved around four issues:

1. Is it permissible to have two caliphs or should there be only one? This issue has implications for Muslim unity and solidarity, as indicated by Allah's saying: "And do not dispute, lest you fail and lose your strength" (Quran 8:46).

2. Does the leader have to be from the Quraysh tribe? The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The leaders are from Quraysh."<sup>3</sup>

3. Should the leader be from a Quraysh family or can he be from other families? This has to do with following the Prophet's commandments and prohibitions.

4. Must he never have committed sins, or is it acceptable for him to have sinned? This is due to the praise of the obedient and the higher status of the righteous compared to the guilt of the sinful and their lower status. This led to the question of the leadership of the inferior (mufadhdhal) over the superior (fadl) in the theological and non-theological intellectual heritage.

It is noteworthy that the origin of these questions stems from the presence of religious texts that are clearly religious, while the political aspect opposes them.

- Information is followed by judgements about its proponents: At best, this leads to the innovation of dissenters and, if not, to their excommunication from the Muslim community.

All this has led, in my opinion, to a complete blockage of horizontal communication ("self to self"), resulting in the fragmentation of the community and the overwhelming presence of doctrinal judgments with sectarian

<sup>1</sup>- Introduction to the Study of Theology, Hassan al-Shafie, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>- The same reference, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>- The Classified Book of Hadiths and Reports: Abu Bakr Ibn Abi Shaiba, Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Othman Ibn Khawasti al-Absi (d. 235 AH), ed. Kamal Yusuf Al-Hout, Publisher: Al-Rushd Library, Riyadh, 1st edition, 1409 AH, Chapter: On Disliking Revolt in Fitnah, Hadith Number: 37155, Vol. 7, p. 452.



backgrounds (innovation, excommunication and, subsequently, violence and killing), which is the current reality of the Ummah.

It is therefore essential to address the educational and institutional framework of theological study, but through coordinated institutional efforts that bear the burden of this task and seek the reward from Allah, so that we may hasten the desired civilisational revival.

### CONCLUSION:

At the end of this scholarly analysis, we arrive at several conclusions, which are presented as follows:

Contemporary theological study faces significant challenges that directly hinder its educational process and prevent the intended message from reaching the audience. This necessitates that researchers in the field address this issue in order to activate contemporary theological discourse in line with the challenges facing the Islamic Ummah.

These challenges can be summarised in two aspects: cognitive issues and methodological issues.

The cognitive aspect lies primarily in the lack of verification of the source of information. This is due to a lack of in-depth training in the Arabic language and in the documentation of information, which can be attributed to insufficient training in historical contexts, as well as a lack of familiarity with contemporary sciences such as astronomy, biology and sociology. More critically, there is a clear cognitive deficiency in the use of the Holy Qur'an and the texts of the noble Sunnah.

Methodological problems include reliance on selective methodology, sectarian bias and ideologisation of information, as well as divorcing theological information from its historical context and passing judgement on the proponent of the information.

After discussing this issue, it becomes clear to the theological researcher the strength and efficacy of traditional theological studies and our need to return to using their methodologies in contemporary theological discourse.

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