

of some dead Sufi, then all that needs to be done is to point out what is problematic about these sayings, without further need to slander the Sufi who said these things.¹⁹⁸ Again, al-Shawkānī's ultimate objective is to redeem living Muslims and not to malign them or the dead Muslims they venerate.

It is in the interest of Muslims, therefore, and not against them that al-Shawkānī targets practices associated with the cult of tombs. Furthermore, because of this concern for the collective interest of Muslims, al-Shawkānī's dogmatic expositions are invariably grounded in social and historical analysis. In fact, al-Shawkānī maintains that dogmatic blunders are prevalent not because of any ambiguity in the essential creed of Islam but mainly because of the powerful tendency among people to conform to common social practice. Thus Muslims grow up seeing the cult of tombs everywhere around them, and they see many corrupt scholars make a living from this cult rather than denounce it; these Muslims are thus led to believe that this is a legitimate act of worship. So while he does not sanction this cult, al-Shawkānī clearly understands its causes, and this understanding affects the way he attempts to curtail it. Most Muslims who engage in this practice, according to al-Shawkānī, do not do so because of some inherent evil tendencies they have, but out of a genuine, though misguided, desire to worship God. These inherently good Muslims are driven to such acts by social and historical factors for which they are not totally responsible. Left to their own devices, ordinary Muslims would be able to differentiate between permissible and prohibited forms of Sufi practice. The solution to the problem of tomb worship thus lies not in a Wahhabi crusade but in removing the historically specific impediments that prevent ordinary Muslims from directly engaging the scripture. *Taqlid*, therefore, is the source of all problems, and in this respect there is little difference between the worshippers of saints and the followers of schools who treat these schools as if they are independent religions, and who treat the imams of these schools as if they were infallible prophets.¹⁹⁹

Taqlid and the Culture of Experts

Underlying the various critiques by eighteenth-century reformers of extreme Sufi practices and Sufi claims to intercession, as well as school partisanship and the corporate authority of *madhhabs*, is a fundamental rejection of the exclusive agency of intermediaries. The final responsibility for violating the law is always individual, but so is the authority to pronounce final judgment on the meaning of the scripture. Despite frequent emphasis on the role of scholars, no distinguished figures within any particular intellectual trend is accorded exclusive authority, nor is any one discipline held superior to the

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others. Furthermore, no person or school holds absolute intellectual authority over the masses of Muslims. Hadith, as we will see, was no doubt the favored discipline, but its value was primarily a function of its accessibility to ordinary Muslims and the impossibility of professionalizing or monopolizing the knowledge that derives from it. Eighteenth-century intellectuals had very strong views about many issues, and their discussions were animated and assertive; yet the veracity of whatever views they held was always subject to the final assessment of their audiences, the Muslims who always retained the right to think and choose for themselves. It is particularly significant that on several occasions, eighteenth-century reformers voiced strong and unqualified opposition to some of the Islamic disciplines of learning but then concluded that, to avoid imitation, readers ought to learn about these disciplines and decide for themselves whether the negative assessment is warranted.

Such was, for example, al-Shawkānī's view of the discipline of *kalām* (speculative theology). In view of its subject matter that treats issues of dogma and creed, no kind of expertise could be used to claim more intellectual and even political authority than the discipline of *kalām*. As such, al-Shawkānī's rejection of this field was part of his larger reservation with respect to elitist claims to authority. In addition, however, this rejection of *kalām* stems from an earlier tradition of criticizing theology that prevailed among the traditionalist scholars of Zaydi Yemen, starting with Ibn al-Wazīr. Historically, Zaydis in general were strong advocates of the Mu'tazilī school of theology.²⁰⁰ In contrast, the traditionalists, starting with Ibn al-Wazīr and on to al-Ṣan'ānī and al-Shawkānī, were opposed to theology, although this opposition was not restricted to the Mu'tazilī school but applied equally to the more orthodox Ash'arī school.²⁰¹ Following the example of the early pious generations of Muslims, al-Shawkānī maintains, one should not waste effort on useless subjects such as *kalām*. This subject, he adds, was introduced after the formative period, whereas the Companions of the Prophet abided by what was reported in the Qur'ān and the Sunna regarding God's attributes and related questions of theology. Al-Shawkānī further asserts that most religious knowledge derives from transmitted evidence, in contrast to the minimal amount of knowledge that derives from rational speculation. As such, the views of the various theological schools that are not grounded in the scripture, and which suffer the added defect of being based on thin rational evidence, are useless and misguided.²⁰² Yet despite his dislike of *kalām*, al-Shawkānī urges his students to study it and to familiarize themselves with the theology of the Ash'arīs, Mu'tazilīs, Māturīdīs, and the Zaydis. He then warns the student not to be discouraged by the frequent criticisms by scholars of *kalām* and their assertions that it has little or no value; one who follows such advice without studying

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