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SALAFI CHALLENGE AND MĀTURĪDĪ RESPONSE: CONTEMPORARY DISPUTES OVER THE LEGITMACY OF *KALĀM*

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Introduction

It has of course been widely recognized that recent years witnessed the emergence of a new form of global Salafism throughout the Muslim World, which manifests itself in a variety of strands, ranging from apolitical and quietist currents such as the *al-salafiyya al-'ilmiyya*, chiefly represented among others by the Ethiopian Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī (b. 1930), to the horrific Jihadi-Salafism of the so-called Islamic State (IS)¹. Despite its marked internal diversity and disunity, global Salafism exhibits a shared outlook as far as its denunciations of various widespread religious practices, doctrines and intellectual traditions within mainstream Sunni Islam are concerned. In this respect, Salafism's attacks on key ritual practices such as *mawlid* celebrations are most widely acknowledged. Indeed, the contest over the legitimacy of *mawlid* celebrations² has clearly emerged as a major catalyst for conflicts – intellectual, verbal as well as physical – between Salafis and their opponents across the Muslim World as well as in Muslim minority contexts, with remarkable repercussions and side-effects. Three instructive examples may suffice to illustrate this point. In Cambodia, the local Muslim community has been virtually bifurcated into a pro-*mawlid* majority and an anti-*mawlid* Salafi minority³. Interestingly, the former group is increasingly dominated by the local Tablīghī Jamā'at (TJ), who came to fully champion the *mawlid*'s cause, despite the ambivalent – and at times even explicitly negative – position towards the practice by certain prominent figures of the Deobandi and TJ spectrum⁴. In Kenya, Salafi criticism of *mawlid* has brought about an unlikely alliance of Sunni and Shi'i defenders of the practice against their detractors⁵. In Egypt, *mawlid*s served as occasions for intra-Muslim violence already in

¹ Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism. Islam's New Religious Movement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

² For an overview of the debate since the 18th century see: Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 169-207.

³ Philipp Bruckmayr, *The Contentious Pull of the Malay Logosphere: Jawization and Factionalism among Cambodian Muslims (late 19th to early 21st centuries)*, (Vienna: unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Vienna, 2014), p. 433 f.

⁴ Thomas Gugler, *Mission Medina. Da'wat-e Islāmī und Tablīgī Ġamā'at*, (Würzburg: Ergon, 2011), p. 73f.

⁵ Kai Kresse, "Debating *maulidi*: Ambiguities and Transformations of Muslim Identity along the Kenyan Swahili Coast", in Roman Loimeier & Rüdiger Seesemann (eds.), *The Global Worlds of the Swahili*:

the late 1970s as the more explicitly Salafi and radical wing of the *al-Jamā'at al-Islāmiyya* began to target the practice⁶.

Just as fundamental for the non-Salafi Sunni mainstream, however, is the fact, that also the adherence to particular schools of Sunni law and theology has been the subject of Salafi criticism and charges of *bid'a* (i.e. reprehensible innovation). Whereas most scholarly attention has so far been focused on the debates surrounding the legitimacy of the four Sunni schools of law, the present paper will contrarily concentrate on Salafi attacks on the Sunni schools of scholastic theology, and on Māturīdism in particular. Indeed, the traditionally Ḥanafī-Māturīdī spheres of Turkey and South and Central Asia have all turned into major arenas for the conflict between proponents and opponents of *kalām*. This new predicament to *kalām* and its established schools has, however, in many places resulted in a backlash represented *inter alia* by greater theological *madhhab* consciousness and pronounced affirmation, besides also precipitating growing interest in Māturīdism in overwhelmingly Shāfi'i-Ash'ari Southeast Asia. Thus, the present paper will present and analyze selected contemporary cases of Salafi condemnations of Māturīdism and the responses they have engendered.

The nature of Salafi criticism to Māturīdism

It is perhaps in order to initially make a few comments on the nature of Salafi criticism to Māturīdism, which can be said to operate on five different levels. Firstly, on the most general plane, Māturīdism is denounced for being a doctrinal orientation within the science of *kalām* or dialectic theology, which endeavors to delineate and rationally defend religious doctrines concerning the nature of the divine, creation, Islam and belief. It is hereby plainly the fact that *kalām* is a science only developed after the days of the righteous forefathers (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), which makes it warrant the label *bid'a* from the Salafi viewpoint, in addition to its purported debt to (Greek) philosophy⁷. Whereas studying the foundations of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) is accepted and deemed crucial for the believer, *kalām* is rejected as a whole. Moreover, Māturīdīs (and Ash'aris) are charged for conflating the two⁸.

Secondly, on the next level, Māturīdism is rejected for representing a specific *madhhab* or school of thought. As the emergence of *madhhabs* is similarly regarded as an innovation of later Islam, Māturīdism and any notion of complying with established school opinion (*taqlīd*) is rejected as such, together with the four Sunni

Interfaces of Islam, Identity and Space in 19th and 20th-Century East Africa, (Berlin: LIT, 2006), p. 209-228.

⁶ Roel Meijer, "Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action. The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya", in *ibid.* (ed.), *Global Salafism*, p. 196.

⁷ On Greek philosophy as a cause for Māturīdī deviance in doctrine and even *shirk* in practice see, for instance, Khālīd b. 'Alī al-Mardī al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd 'aqā'id al-Ashā'ira wa l-Māturīdiyya*, (al-Riyād: Dār Aṭlas al-Khaḍrā', 1429/2008), p. 240f.

⁸ See for example the discussion of the issue by Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl al-Shaykh in Maḥmūd 'Alī 'Abd al-Raḥmān (ed.), *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdat al-Ṭaḥāwīyya. Sharḥ al-sādat al-'ulamā'*, 2 vols. (n.p.: Dār 'Ālim al-Fawā'id, n.d.), I, p. 17f. On the divergent understandings of *uṣūl al-dīn* separating Ibn Taymiyya and the contemporary Ash'aris see M. Sait Özerverli, "The Qur'ānic Rational Theology of Ibn Taymiyya and his Criticism of the *Mutakallimūn*", in Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), p. 79f.

schools of law and Ash'arism, as the second major Sunni school of theology. As has been noted, the issue of the legitimacy of the institution of the *madhhab* and the practice of *taqlid* represents – in contrast to theological thought - a main point of internal differentiation of the Salafi movement, separating the traditional Wahhābis, who are commonly followers of the Ḥanbaliyya, from what Haykel has dubbed the “*ijtihād*-minded Salafis”⁹. It must be noted in this regard, that the Salafī critics of the *madhāhib* – be they legal or theological schools – denounce them not only for representing innovations, but also for causing factionalism (*ta'aṣṣub*), and thus weakening Islam¹⁰. Additionally, their teachings are routinely presented as departing from the original legal and theological thought of their eponymous founders, who are commonly absolved from the failings of their latter day followers. As far as Māturīdism is concerned, which is often described by its adherents as representing nothing less than the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa, something most forcefully argued in later times by Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bayāḍī (d. 1098/1687) and Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1951)¹¹, it is hereby claimed that its doctrine actually differs from that of Abū Ḥanīfa¹². One author puts forward three main reasons for this Ḥanafī-Māturīdī departure from the creed of Abū Ḥanīfa, who is heralded – together with his disciples - as an early representative the *ahl al-sunna*: 1) the view of Abū Ḥanīfa as a towering figure engaging in *kalām*; 2) the fact that many Ḥanafīs had been among the leaders of the allegedly heretical Jahmiyya and Mu'tazila before the emergence of the Māturīdiyya; and 3) the fact that – then and now – the majority of Ḥanafīs had supposedly only rarely immersed themselves in the sciences of hadith¹³.

Thirdly, and closely related to the first two points, fundamental assumptions and methods of reasoning and demonstration attributed to Māturīdism (and the *mutakallimūn* as a whole) – such as *ta'wīl* (interpretation), *tanzīh* (abstraction) and *tafwīd* (lit. delegation, i.e. leaving knowledge of the actual meaning of the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur'ān to god, while at the same time rejecting their literal meaning) - are criticized as deficient and dismissed as both unsound as well as insufficiently derived from authoritative texts (i.e. Qur'ān and canonical hadith)¹⁴.

Fourthly, Māturīdism finds itself denounced on the grounds of certain of its specific doctrines and approaches, including among others its teachings about the on-

⁹ Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafī Thought and Action”, in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, p. 42f.

¹⁰ The poetically inclined Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī, for example, speaks of the “spitefulness of the grave-worshippers and extremist factionalist imitating school followers”, (*khubth al-qubūriyya wa l-ghulāt al-muqallidat al-muta'aṣṣibat al-madhhabīyya*). Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī, ‘*Adā' al-Māturīdiyya li l-'aqīdat al-Salafīyya*, 3 vols. (al-Ṭā'if: al-Ṣa'īq, 1419/1998), I, p. 37.

¹¹ Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt al-marām min 'ibarāti l-imām Abī Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007); Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Ta'nīb al-khaṭīb 'alā mā sāqahū fī tarjamat Abī Ḥanīfa min al-akāḍīb* (n.p.: n.p., 1410/1990). This view was, however, also held by early Māturīdī scholars such as Abū l-Yusr al-Pazdawī (d.493/1100) and Abū l-Mu'in al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114). Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 4-7.

¹² al-Afghānī, ‘*Adā' al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 11, 193-200.

¹³ *ibid.*, I, p. 199f.

¹⁴ Aḥmad b. 'Awaḍ Allāh b. Dākhl al-Luhaybī al-Ḥarbī, *al-Māturīdiyya. Dirāsatan wa taqwīman*, (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-'Āsima, 1413/1992-1993), p. 133-185; al-Afghānī, ‘*Adā' al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 501-582; II, p. 5-401; al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 137-180.

tological structures of the world and existence, the divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), the anthropomorphic depictions of god in the Qurʾān, human agency, the nature of belief, and eschatology. In the briefest of treatments, these points of doctrinal conflict are broken down to three general issues, namely *tawḥīd*, *ṣifāt* and *īmān*¹⁵. The for Salafis seemingly most disturbing Māturīdī doctrines are hereby those concerning the divine names and attributes and the nature of belief, which are accordingly also taking up the greater part of Salafī refutations of Māturīdism. Thus, Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī’s work (to be discussed in more detail below), which represents the most elaborate anti-Māturīdī text to date, is above all concerned with the Māturīdiyya’s allegedly deviant teachings on the oneness of the names and attributes (*tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa l-ṣifāt*)¹⁶. Similarly, the longest chapters in al-Kharbī’s earlier work on the Māturīdī school as well as in al-Ghāmīdī’s recent refutation of Ashʿarism and Māturīdism are the ones on the attributes¹⁷.

Discussions of the nature of belief, however, figure almost as prominently in Salafī critiques of Māturīdism. Mainly revolving around the crucial questions whether works are forming part of belief and whether it is accordingly subject to increase or decrease as a result of one’s behavior, the respective sections are evidently more concise, but nevertheless deemed to be of central importance by the authors¹⁸. Indeed, the present Saudi minister of Islamic Affairs, Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl al-Shaykh, for instance, bases his swift exclusion of the Māturīdīs from *ahl al-sunna wa l-jamāʿa* on their *murjiʿī* definition of faith as consisting of pronouncement through the tongue and affirmation through the heart only¹⁹. From the other end of the Saudi Salafī spectrum, the oppositional theologian Safar al-Ḥawālī (b. 1950) likewise rejects Māturīdī doctrine as *murjiʿī*, and links this denunciation to his larger religio-political agenda, including his collective labelling of Muslims, who accept being subjected to regimes not based on Islamic law, as *Murjiʿīs*²⁰.

Finally, Māturīdism is – as a living tradition - at times summarily attacked for its perceived association to Sufism and shrines, and the deviant behavior and superstitions Salafism routinely attributes to it. It is hereby noteworthy that the Salafī critiques of Sufi practices inserted in refutations of the Māturīdiyya are not only expressed in theological terms on a general level, but are indeed explicitly identifying adherence to Māturīdī creed, among other things, as a specific reason for the emergence and persistence of practices and religious ideas – ranging from the building of domes and mosques over graves, to their visitation (*ziyāra*) and to the notions of *tawassul*

¹⁵ Cf. Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad Āl al-Khamīs, “al-Māturīdiyya rabībat al-Kullābiyya“, in id., *Ḥiwār maʿa Ashʿarī* (al-Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Maʿārif li l-Nashr wa l-Tawzīʿ, 1426/2005), p. 161-164.

¹⁶ al-Afghānī, ‘Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya, II, p. 407-654; III, p. 7-250.

¹⁷ al-Ḥarbī, *al-Māturīdiyya*, p. 217-375; al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 263-364.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 367-414; al-Ḥarbī, *al-Māturīdiyya*, p. 451-484; Āl al-Khamīs, “al-Māturīdiyya rabībat al-Kullābiyya“, p. 163f.

¹⁹ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (ed.), *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdat al-Taḥāwīyya*, p. 17.

²⁰ Safar b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥawālī, *Zāhirat al-Irjāʾ fī l-fikr al-islāmī*, (n.p.: Dār al-Kalima, 1420/1999), esp. chs. 3-4. Cf. Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), p. 86-119 (esp. p. 99ff.). Al-Ḥawālī is, besides Salmān al-ʿAwda (b. 1956), one of the leaders of the *Ṣaḥwa* (Awakening) trend within Saudi Arabian Salafism, which is characterized by its criticism of the Saudi government. Cf. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State. Islamic Voices from a New Generation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), esp. ch. 2.

and *shafā'a* (intercession) - amounting to *bid'a*, heresy and even *shirk* (polytheism). Indeed, it is in this regard the label *shirk*, which is most commonly employed. Its usage for the religious phenomena in question is hereby at times legitimized through reference to history, for example by stressing the fact that also at the time of the prophet Nūḥ, it had been the veneration of righteous ancestors, which gave way to *shirk*²¹. Moreover, in line with Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb's approach towards saint worship²², it is emphasized that *shirk* most frequently involved the worshipping of angels, prophets, saints (*awliyā'*), righteous people (*ṣāliḥūn*), jinn and the stars, rather than that of stones, trees and actual idols²³. It is the Māturīdis perceived lack of understanding of *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (i.e. the oneness of the worship of god), which – according to their Salafi critics – lies at the root of all these deviant (or better yet, *shirkī*) practices ascribed to them²⁴. Far from being a primarily historical discussion for the Salafis, however, they are paying a significant amount of attention to modern so-called *Qubūriyya* (“grave-worshippers”) currents within the Māturīdiyya, namely the followers of al-Kawtharī, the Barelwī (i.e. the Indian Ahl-i Sunnat movement), Tablīghis and parts of the Deobandi school²⁵.

The decisive word of Ibn Taymiyya

As far as antecedents are concerned, it has to be emphasized that modern Salafi criticism of *kalām* and Māturīdism is to a significant degree informed by the thought of the controversial Mamluk scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), a comparatively marginal figure during his day, but a towering giant in present Islamic thought²⁶. Ibn Taymiyya had routinely denounced the Ash'aris, who always constituted his main target among the accepted Sunni schools of theology, as Jahmis, after Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. c. 745) and his followers, hence the title of his massive refutation *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'ihim al-kalāmiyya*²⁷. He charged them *inter alia* with obscuring and misrepresenting the divine attributes and the ontological structures of existence, and of subscribing to the Jahmi definition of belief, which is – in basing belief solely on affirmation in the heart - even more reductive than the *murjī'ī* one²⁸. In all three cases Ibn Taymiyya's pejorative Jahmi label must be regarded as implicitly also extending to the Māturīdis, who have of course actually commonly refuted Jahmi teachings in their writings. Accordingly, present Salafi authors are likewise keen to

²¹ al-Afghānī, 'Adā' al-Māturīdiyya, III, p. 255f.

²² Cf. Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities”, *Arabica* LVII (2010), p. 177.

²³ al-Afghānī, 'Adā' al-Māturīdiyya, III, p. 257f.

²⁴ *ibid.*, III, p. 251-304; al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 191-243.

²⁵ al-Afghānī, 'Adā' al-Māturīdiyya, I, p. 198; al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 202-208. Exhibiting a broad perspective, al-Ghāmīdī (*Naqd*, p. 208), for example, also includes Hüseyin Hilmi Işık (d. 2001), the Turkish publisher and editor of - particularly Naqshbandi - Sufi texts, who was a fervent opponent of modern Islamism and Salafism as well as of modernist thinkers such as Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), in this category. Cf. Hüseyin Hilmi Işık (ed.), *The Annotated Translation of I'tiqād-nāma by Mawlānā Diyā' ad-Dīn Khālid al-Baḡhdādī*, (Istanbul: Ihlās Vakfı, 1976), p. 48-50.

²⁶ Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, (Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

²⁷ Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Halīm b. Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'ihim al-kalāmiyya*, 10 vols. (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1426/2005).

²⁸ Abū l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa l-Niḥal*, 2 vols. in one (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-'Aşriyya, 1426/2006), I, p. 69.

emphasize that Ash'aris and Māturīdis are, despite their many differences, actually representing just one group (*firqa*)²⁹.

Yet, it must be emphasized that Ibn Taymiyya's works appear to be characterized largely by an overall ignorance of Māturīdism and its exponents. *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, for instance, in which the author's prime interlocutor is clearly the Ash'ari luminary Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), never refers to any Māturīdī work³⁰. Also Abū Ḥanīfa's *Fiqh al-akbar* is only mentioned once, namely in connection with the critical issue of the transmitted attribute (*ṣifat al-khabariyya*) of *istiwā'* (i.e. the seating on the throne)³¹. The only reference to al-Māturīdī that I have so far been able to locate in the vast opus of Ibn Taymiyya, however, explicitly associates him with the Jahmiyya. Thus, al-Māturīdī and his follower Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 580/1184), about whom the author had probably become aware due to the latter's debates with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, are listed among a number of scholars from among the later followers of the four schools of law, whom he regards as having followed the Jahmiyya and the Mu'tzila in their positions on the origination of accidents and bodies as basic elements of creation and (consequently also of) human existence³².

Present Salafi appropriation of the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya as major critic of Ash'arism and Māturīdism can be said to be of two kinds. Certain currents within Salafism have at times generally deemed engagement in debates with the adherents of the Sunni schools of theology as futile, by virtue of their conviction that Ibn Taymiyya has already refuted their teachings in a decisive and definitive manner³³. On the other hand, present Salafi authors of works directed against the Māturīdiyya have evidently fully endorsed his ideas, discourse and categories, and have built upon them to also address doctrinal developments among later Māturīdī scholars as well as the positions defended by present adherents of the school. One most obvious element of this endorsement is the common usage of the derogatory *murji'ī* and, particularly, *jahmī* labels in reference to Māturīdism, which pervades the entirety of texts perused for this study³⁴. Whereas al-Ḥawālī relies on Ibn Taymiyya to also

²⁹ al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 99. In this respect, the author also invokes Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 792/1390) frequent straddling of the lines between the two schools.

³⁰ Cf. the index of books in Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, X, p. 241-262.

³¹ *ibid.*, I, p. 193. Salafi-Māturīdī discord on the matter revolves around the Māturīdis' understanding of *istiwā'* as an action and not as a divine attribute. The Māturīdiyya in therefore charged with *ta'īl* or divesting the divine of his attributes (another feature associated with the Jahmiyya) as well as with engaging in anthropomorphism, whereby the Māturīdī position is also linked to their doctrine of the attribute of *takwīn* (bringing into existence). al-Afghānī, 'Adā' al-Māturīdiyya, III, p. 7-31. Cf. Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, I, p. 154-218; id., *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Ahmad ibn Taymiyya*, 37 vols. (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1425/2004), V, p. 365-396.

³² *ibid.*, XVI, p. 268f.; cf. al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 255.

³³ Haykel, "Nature of Salafi Thought", p. 40.

³⁴ Additionally, the *kullābī* label appears in connection with the Māturīdiyya, though less frequently, hence the title of the work of Muḥammad Āl al-Khamīs, Āl al-Khamīs, "al-Māturīdiyya rabībat al-Kullābiyya". Its usage seems to owe a lot to Ibn Taymiyya's ambivalent position towards al-Ash'ari. Whereas he at times refers to the latter in fully positive terms, thereby absolving him from the errors of his later followers, he appears to seek to discredit him at other times through his association with Abū Muḥammad Ibn Kullāb al-Qaṭṭān (d. 855). Cf. Racha el Omari, "Ibn Taymiyya's 'Theology of the Sunna' and his Polemics with the Ash'arites" in Rapoport and Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, p. 102f.

refute later Māturīdis such as Kamāl al-Dīn b. (al-)Humām (d. 861/1457) and Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭashkōprüzāda (d. 968/1561), the prime object of Salafi loathing from among the modern Māturīdis are clearly Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, an ardent defender of Ḥanafism and Māturīdism and former adjunct to the last Ottoman *shaykh al-islām* Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (d. 1954)³⁵, and certain South Asian Muslim groups. This state of affairs is, however, closely connected to the influential work of one particular South Asian Salafi exponent of anti-Māturīdism.

Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī: South Asian doyen of anti-Māturīdism

Even though it is Saudi Arabia, which is commonly primarily associated with the spread of Salafism in general, and anti-*kalām* thought and literature in particular, it has to be noted that the most prolific modern writer of Salafi refutations of the Māturīdiyya hails from South Asia, where he had initially studied under Māturīdi theologians and Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufis associated with the Deobandi school. After being educated in Pakistan in a scholarly milieu strongly opposed to the pioneering South Asian spearhead of Salafism, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth movement, the Afghan Pashtun scholar Abū ‘Abdallāh Shams al-Dīn (b. 1372/1952-3) came to adopt Salafism after his exposure to it at the Islamic University of Medina (IUM), under the likes of Bin Bāz (d. 1999), Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) and the latter’s South Asian successor as chair of *ḥadīth* al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad al-Jūndlāwī (Gundlavi). Now calling himself Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī, he authored several refutations of Ḥanafism and Māturīdism³⁶, among whom his three-volume ‘*Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya li l-‘aqīdat al-salafīyya*, which is based on his M.A. thesis at the IUM submitted in 1989, represents his opus magnum. Fully endorsing Ibn Taymiyya’s line of thought and terminology, he likewise characterizes his opponents the Māturīdis and Sufis as *jahmiyya* and *qubūriyya* (“grave-worshippers”) respectively.

His work, although – at least in published form - predated by similar efforts of the 1990s by the Saudi scholars Aḥmad b. ‘Awaḍ Allāh al-Ḥarbī and Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Āl al-Khamīs³⁷, arguably constituted one of the first full-fledged Salafi refutations of *kalām* focused specifically on the Māturīdiyya, and was, moreover, to prove highly influential in Salafi circles both in Saudi Arabia, its initial place of publication³⁸, and on a global scale. Whereas al-Ḥarbī had ended his survey of

³⁵ Already al-Kawtharī’s Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya master Aḥmad Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Kumushkhānawī (Gümüshanevi, d. 1894) appears to have attached considerable importance to adherence to Māturīdism. Cf. Aḥmad Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn b. Muṣṭafā al-Kumushkhānawī, *Kitāb jāmi’ al-mutūn fī ḥaqq anwā’ al-ṣifāt al-ilāhīyah wa-al-‘aqā’id al-Māturīdiyya wa al-falz al-kufr wa taṣḥīḥ al-a-‘māl al-‘ajībiyya* ([Istanbul]: n. p., 1273/1856-7).

³⁶ Abū ‘Umar al-Manhajī, “Kunt māturīdiyyan wa sūfiyyan fa-hadānī Allāh ilā l-‘aqīdat al-salafīyya“, *Ṣayd al-Fawā’id* (website), <http://saaaid.net/feraq/el3aedoon/13.htm> (last accessed July 20th 2014). Also Safar al-Ḥawālī cannot be regarded as a pure product of Arab Salafism, as he also studied, among others, under the India-born Ahl-i Ḥadīth scholar ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Ḥasan al-Hindī (d. 2007), another South Asian teacher at the IUM. Mariam Abou Zahab, “Salafism in Pakistan. The Ahl-e Hadith Movement”, in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, p. 130.

³⁷ al-Ḥarbī, *al-Māturīdiyya*. The earlier work of Muḥammad Āl al-Khamīs (*Minhāj al-Māturīdiyya fī l-‘aqīda*) has been inaccessible to me, but is cited both by al-Afghānī as well as in a later book by the author. al-Afghānī, *‘Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 11; Āl al-Khamīs, “al-Māturīdiyya rabībat al-Kullābiyya”, p. 168.

³⁸ South Asian expert knowledge has earlier already been in demand in Saudi Arabia concerning the Ahmadiyyah movement. Thus, Ihsān Ilahī Zāhir (d. 1987), the son-in-law of al-Afghānī’s teacher

Māturīdī history with Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606), it was al-Afghānī, who identified a number of Islamic currents – most of them of South Asian origin - as representing the modern Māturīdiyya (*al-Māturīdiyyat al-hāditha*)³⁹. Firstly, the Barelwis, or more precisely the Sufi-oriented Ahl-i Sunnat movement, which was founded by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān of Bareilly (d. 1921), and constitutes, besides the Deobandis and the Salafī Ahl-i Ḥadīth, one of South Asia’s three major Sunni *maslaks* (“sects”, or rather orientations). Secondly, the Kawtharis, that is, the followers of Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, among whom he includes the former Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997) as well as the Deobandi scholar Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Banūrī (d. 1978), who first popularized al-Kawtharī’s works within the *maslak*⁴⁰. Thirdly, the Deobandis, among whom the Tablighī Jamā‘at and the Deobandis of Panj Pīr (*al-Jamā‘at al-Fanjfirīyyat al-Diyūbandīyya*, i.e. his former teachers with Deobandī, Māturīdī and Naqshbandī pedigrees in Panj Pīr, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan) are discussed separately⁴¹.

Most Salafī refutations of Māturīdism published after al-Afghānī’s work appear to have been influenced by his heavy focus on al-Kawtharī and the mentioned South Asian groups. A later work by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Āl al-Khamīs, which lists ‘*Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya* as a chief source, provides information on four “famous men” from among the Māturīdiyya: Abū l-Yusr al-Pazdawī (d.493/1100), Abū l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), *Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī* (d. 580/1184) and *al-Kawtharī*. In a brief overview of the evolution of Māturīdism until the present day, he jumps from Ibn al-Humām directly to Muḥammad Qāsim al-Diyūbandī (i.e. *al-Nanawtawī* [d. 1297/1877], one of the two founders of the *Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband*), Aḥmad Riḍā Khān al-Barīlwī and *al-Kawtharī*⁴². Khālid al-Ghāmīdī, another student of Bin Bāz writing after al-Afghānī, enumerates 62 Māturīdis, including many Ottoman and South Asian scholars, and ending with al-Banūrī’s Deobandi teacher Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī (d. 1933) and, unsurprisingly, al-Kawtharī⁴³. Moreover, he characterizes the Barelwis as “one of the major currents of *mushrikūn* of our day”⁴⁴.

The influence of Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī’s work, however, extends well beyond the academic and more scholarly spheres of Salafī writing into the Jihadi spectrum, the realm of fatwas by popular web muftis, and the area of polemics disseminated chiefly via blogs. This is exemplified by the fact that also the Jordan-born but Lon-

Gundlavi, had his study-cum-refutation of the movement published with heavy backing by Bin Bāz in 1967. *Iḥsān Ilahī Zāhir*,

Al-Qādiyāniyya. Dirāsa wa taḥlīl (al-Riyād: Idārat al-Buḥūth al-‘Ilmiyya wa l-Iftā’ wa l-Da’wa wa l-Irshād, 1984). I am indebted to Simon Wolfgang Fuchs (Princeton) for this information.

³⁹ al-Afghānī, ‘*Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 288-293; III, p. 308-343.

⁴⁰ Cf. Philipp Bruckmayr, “Past and Present Aspects of Māturīdism in South and Southeast Asia”, in Ahmet Kartal (ed.), *Uluḡ Bir Çınar İmām Māturīdī Uluslararası Sempozyum Tebliğler Kitabı* (Istanbul: Ofis Yayın Matbaacılık, 2014), p. 128.

⁴¹ Likewise, the stature of the founder of the Indian Nadwat al-‘Ulāmā’, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nadwī (d. 1999), although generally receiving a much more positive assessment due to his partial Salafī leanings, is in the author’s eyes tarnished by his preference of al-Māturīdī’s thought and writings over those of al-Ash‘arī. al-Afghānī, ‘*Adā’ al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 293.

⁴² *Āl al-Khamīs*, “al-Māturīdiyya rabībat al-Kullābiyya”, p. 157, 164-168.

⁴³ al-Ghāmīdī, *Naqd*, p. 39-44.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 207.

don-based Palestinian Abū Qatāda al-Filasīnī (b. 1959), one of the central figures in the late 20th century fusion of Salafism and Jihadi-Takfirism⁴⁵, relied on it in his *Jum'at al-muṭayyibīn*⁴⁶. Also a fatwa by the director of the extremely popular Salafi website www.islamqa.info, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid (b. 1960), to the effect that the Deobandis should be regarded as misguided due to their adherence to Māturīdism, was most probably informed by Shams al-Salafī's work, although it is only Ibn Taymiyya who is explicitly cited⁴⁷. Additionally, the two polemical webpages www.maturidis.com and www.asharis.com are clearly drawing on Shams al-Salafī's classifications in identifying the Deobandi, Barelwi and Kawthari schools as the major present-day carriers of Māturīdism⁴⁸.

The Salafī Ḥanafism of al-Ṭaḥāwī and Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī

It must further be noted that Salafi groups are also prominently deploying a classical Ḥanafī catechism in their attacks on Māturīdism. Thus, Salafi treatises, forums and blogs on matters of *'aqīda* are frequently referring to the creed of Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 933)⁴⁹, and particularly to the commentary to it by Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī (d. 1390), a student of Ibn Taymiyya's disciple Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). The latter *sharḥ* is regarded by them as free from the deviations and misrepresentations of the numerous Māturīdī commentaries to the work, just as *al-'Aqīdat al-Ṭaḥāwīyya* itself is – in contrast to Māturīdī catechisms – presented as an authentic representation of the true beliefs of the *ahl al-sunna wa l-jamā'a*, except, for instance, concerning the definition of belief, where al-Ṭaḥāwī's position fully accords with anathematized Māturīdī teaching⁵⁰. Accordingly, editions, forewords, commentaries and glosses to the original and/or the *sharḥ* of Ibn Abī al-'Izz have also been produced by al-Albānī and major figures of the Saudi Arabian religious establishment such as Ṣāliḥ b. Fawzān al-Fawzān (b. 1933), a well-known Wahhābi scholar and member of the Permanent Committee for Research and the Issuance of Legal Opinions (*al-Lajnat al-Dā'ima li l-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyya wa l-Iftā'*), and the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl al-Shaykh. Notable examples are the edition of the *sharḥ* of Ibn Abī al-'Izz produced and introduced with an extensive foreword by al-Albānī, and a more recent edition, which includes glosses by al-Albānī, al-Fawzān and Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh⁵¹. It is also in this framework that the latter emphasizes, as mentioned above, that Māturīdis are not to be considered as forming part of the *ahl al-sunna wa l-jamā'a*⁵². Shams al-Salafī pictures al-Ṭaḥāwī and Ibn Abī al-'Izz as rare cases of quasi-Salafī Ḥanafism⁵³.

⁴⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism", in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, p. 251.

⁴⁶ Lav, *Radical Islam*, p. 180.

⁴⁷ This fatwa has evidently been translated into several languages, including German. <http://www.fataawa.de/Fatawaas/14.Sonstiges/1.Gruppierung%20&%20Sekten/6.Deobandies/0149.pdf> (last accessed 15th July 2015).

⁴⁸ Cf., for example, <http://www.asharis.com/creed/articles/mbeif-muhammad-anwar-shah-al-kashmiri-al-deobandi-al-maturidi-on-abu-hanifah-al-bukhar.cfm> (last accessed July 10th 2014).

⁴⁹ As far as forums and blogs are concerned see, for example, the entries at <http://salaf-us-saalih.com/?s=tahawiiyyah> (last accessed 16th July 2015).

⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Raḥmān (ed.), *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdat al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*, p. 12f. (from the glosses of Ṣāliḥ Āl al-Shaykh).

⁵¹ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (ed.), *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdat al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*, (Amman: al-Dār al-Islāmī, 1419/1998); 'Abd al-Raḥmān (ed.), *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdat al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵³ al-Afghānī, *'Adā' al-Māturīdiyya*, I, p. 307f.

A natural consequence of this configuration is that Ḥanafis and Māturīdis, who are generally likewise highly regarding al-Ṭaḥāwī's 'aqīda, are found issuing warnings to avoid the commentaries of Ibn Abī al-'Izz and al-Albānī⁵⁴. The controversy, however, already dates back to al-Kawtharī's time, who disparaged Ibn Abī al-'Izz, in his biography of al-Ṭaḥāwī, by merely noting that "a commentary has been published, authored by an obscure figure misleadingly associated with the Ḥanafī *madhhab* and betraying himself through his work as ignorant of this science and as an anthropomorphist beyond all measure" (*wa ṭaba'a sharḥ li-majhūl yansubu ilā al-madhhab al-ḥanafī zawaran yunādī san' yadhi bi-annahū jāhil bi-hādā l-fann wa annahū ḥashwī muḥtall al-'iyār*)⁵⁵.

Māturīdi and other responses to the Salafi challenge

In general, the Salafi attacks on Māturīdism, and on *kalām* as a whole, have led to a strengthening of theological *madhhab* consciousness, growing networking and connectivity between Māturīdi scholars (and defenders of the Sunni legal and theological *madhāhib* in general) on a global scale and a reconfiguration of structures and modes of organization among its adherents. Beginning already in the first half of the 20th century with the cooperation of al-Kawtharī and the Indian Deobandi school, in the face of the Wahhābi and Ahl-i Ḥadīth challenges in the Middle East and South Asia respectively⁵⁶, this process has gained new momentum from the 1990s onwards. In Egypt *Maktabat al-Azhariyya li l-Turāth*, which has recently republished a number of relevant works authored or edited by al-Kawtharī, has embarked on a series on the legacy of the Māturīdi school (intriguingly not referred to as a *madhhab* but as a *madrasa*) in 2011, which has so far exclusively consisted of publications of rare commentaries to classical Māturīdi catechisms⁵⁷.

In South Asia, the otherwise strongly competing Barelwis and Deobandis have both exerted efforts at affirming and re-emphasizing their attachment to Māturīdism and the legitimacy of both Sunni schools of theology, *inter alia* by the production of new works of 'aqīda responding to Salafi denunciations and the circulation of brief doctrinal clarifications and lists of Māturīdi books, which commonly also include works of *tafsīr* such as Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī's (st. 1310) *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* and Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī's (d. 1725) *Rūḥ al-Bayān*⁵⁸. Similarly, the

⁵⁴ <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?3602-Maturidi-Aqeedah-Books>; <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?68391-The-relation-between-the-Maturidi-and-Tahawiyah-Aqeedah-and-the-Hanafi-Madhhab> (both last accessed 16th July 2015).

⁵⁵ Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *al-Hāwī fī šīrat al-Imām Abī Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī*, (n. p.: Maṭba'at al-Anwār al-Muḥammadiyya, n. d.), p. 40 n. 1.

⁵⁶ Bruckmayr, "Past and Present Aspects", p. 128; Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Banūrī, "Muqaddima" in Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Anwār, n.d.), [p. 85-95]; Sa'ūd ibn Šālīḥ al-Sarḥān (ed.), *Rasā'il al-Imām Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī ilā al-'Allāmah Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Banūrī fī al-sanawāt min 1358 H ḥattā 1371 H*, (Amman: Dār al-Faḥḥ li l-Dirāsāt wa l-Nashr, 2013).

⁵⁷ *Mīn turāṭ al-madrasa al-Māturīdīya*: Muḥammad Ibn Abī Bakr al-Maqdisī, *Ghāyat al-marām fī sharḥ Baḥr al-kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Azhariyya li l-Turāth, 2011); Abū l-Barakāt 'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī, *Sharḥ al-'Umda fī 'aqīdat ahl al-sunna wa l-jamā'a* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Azhariyya li l-Turāth, 2012).

⁵⁸ Cf., for instance, <https://friendsofdeoband.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/the-ashariyyah-and-maturidiyyah/> (last accessed 19th July 2015) and the first blog entry given in n. 54.

increased connectivity between these two groups and their counterparts in Turkey and the Arab World, as well as a growing sense of shared intellectual histories, are reflected in these endeavors for international audiences. Thus, for instance, we find a bilingual (English translation and Arabic original) version of the comparably obscure *Risāla fī l-ikhtilāf bayn al-Ashā'ira wa l-Māturīdiyya* of Kamālpāshāzāde (d. 1534) on the *Friends of Deoband* site, albeit without acknowledgment of the author⁵⁹. The recently resumed publication and translation of al-Kawtharī's works in India and renewed interest in the Urdu translation of Ismā'īl Haqqī's *tafsīr* by the Bareilwi scholar Fayḍ Aḥmad Uwaysī⁶⁰ likewise need to be viewed in this perspective, just as is the case – at the other end of the traditional Ḥanafi world – with the publication of a *kalām* gloss by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, the founder of the Bareilwi school, in Istanbul in the 21st century⁶¹.

In this regard also the efforts at countering the Salafiyya by major scholarly figures of global significance in the USA, Syria and Pakistan must be mentioned. Although himself a Shāfi'i-Ash'ari, the major refutations of the Salafis by the eminent Syrian cleric Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (d. 2013), entitled *al-Salafiyya marḥala zamaniyya mubāraka lā madhhab islāmī* (“The Salafiyya was a blessed epoch, not an Islamic *madhhab*”) and *al-Lā-Madhhabīyya akḥṭar al-bid'a tuḥaddid al-sharī'at al-islāmiyya* (“The Anti-Madhhabīyya is the greatest threat to the Islamic Sharia”)⁶², which was intriguingly quite likely inspired to some degree by an earlier epistle by al-Kawtharī⁶³, have also aided the Māturīdis' cause. Indeed, in his *al-Salafiyya*, al-Būṭī's expositions on the historical emergence and development of the science of *kalām*, which he describes – by quoting from Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 1406) *Muqaddima* – as rationally delineating and defending the beliefs of the schools of thought of the *salaf* and the *ahl al-sunna*, are taking Abū Ḥanīfa's *al-Fiqh al-akbar* and *al-'Ālim wa l-muta'allim* as their starting point, before he moves on to a critique of Ibn Taymiyya's opinions on *kalām*⁶⁴.

Similarly, also the first volume of the *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine* (1998) of Hisham Kabbani (b. 1945), a Lebanese-American Shāfi'i scholar and presently the

⁵⁹ <https://friendsofdeoband.wordpress.com/2012/05/24/the-differences-between-the-asharis-and-maturidis/> (last accessed 19th July 2015).

⁶⁰ Muḥammad Fayḍ Aḥmad Uwaysī (trans.), *Fuyūḍ al-rahmān. Urdū tarjuma-yi Ruh al-Bayān* (Bahawalpur: Maktaba-yi Uwaysiyyah Riḍwiyya, 1983). That Haqqī's *tafsīr* was and still is – especially in South Asia – considered to be of relevance also far beyond the field of Qur'ānic commentary, to the inclusion of matters of *kalām*, can be gleaned from statements to this effect as well as from respective citations in the works of foundational figures as diverse as Abū l-Ḥasan al-Nadwī (cf. n. 41), Aḥmad Riḍā Khān of Bareilly and Tahir ul-Qadri (see below). Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī, *Purānē Āiragh*, 3 vols. (Lucknow: Maktaba-yi Firdaws, 1414/1994-1419/1998), I, p. 137f.; Aḥmad Riḍā Khān al-Barīlwi, *al-Mustanad al-mu'tamad*, on the margin of Faḍl-i Rasūl b. Shāh 'Abd al-Majīd al-Badāyūnī, *al-Mu'taqad al-muntaqad* (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitābevi, 2003), p. 96; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qādirī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 2006), p. 864.

⁶¹ al-Barīlwi, *al-Mustanad al-mu'tamad* (full reference in preceding note).

⁶² Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Salafiyya marḥala zamaniyya mubāraka lā madhhab islāmī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, [1988] 1431/2010); id., *Al-Lā-Madhhabīyya akḥṭar al-bid'a tuḥaddid al-sharī'at al-islāmiyya* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Fārābī, 1426/2005).

⁶³ Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, “Al-Lā-Madhhabīyya qanṭara al-lā-dīniyya” in id., *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Anwār, n.d.), p. 129-137.

⁶⁴ al-Būṭī, *al-Salafiyya*, p. 152f., 159-161.

most important Khālidi-Naqshbandi shaykh in the USA, represents a major defense of the Sunni schools of theology and spirited refutation of its Salafi critics from Ibn Taymiyya down to al-Albānī for the English-speaking world. While his section on al-Māturīdī - albeit placing great stress on the significant role he accords to human reason - is comparably brief, he untiringly emphasizes that he considers Ash‘arism and Māturīdism as equally representing true Sunni ‘aqīda⁶⁵.

Whereas less developed counterattacks on the Salafis from Māturīdī side routinely return the *jahmi* charge by referring to the former by the similarly historically charged derogatory label *hashwiyya* (i.e. those who stuff texts etc., charged by al-Māturīdī *inter alia* for considering works as forming part of belief – a position vigorously upheld by Salafi critics of Māturīdism), more sophisticated Māturīdī scholarly rebuttals focus in a systematic manner on turning their opponents steady recourse to Qur‘ān, *ḥadīth* and the writings of Ibn Taymiyya against themselves. Apart from al-Būṭī and Kabbani, another noteworthy case in point is Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qādrī (Tahir ul-Qadri, b. 1951) with his Urdu *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (2006), which likewise engages itself directly with Ibn Taymiyya’s works, while emphasizing Māturīdī doctrine and citing, among others, the writings of Najm al-Dīn and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī and Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī⁶⁶. Kabbani’s *Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order of America* and *As-Sunna Foundation of America* as well as Tahir ul-Qadri’s *Minḥāj al-Qur‘ān* organization have also sought to confront Salafi groups by developing organizational structures and modes of operation, including websites and educational schemes, resembling and rivalling those functioning as main conduits for successful Salafi expansion among the young⁶⁷.

Concerning more general and traditional expressions of Muslim culture on the subcontinent, it might be added that even *Bahishī Zīwar*, the work by the famous Ashraf ‘Alī Thanvī (d. 1943), which still serves as the traditional wedding gift for brides in the Deobandi spectrum and beyond in South Asia, has retained and emphasizes a number of key elements of Māturīdī ‘aqīda, such as the eternity of all divine attributes, human free will (*ikhtiyār*), and the nature of belief, which are naturally reiterated in the opening sections of the book⁶⁸.

On a side note, it may be mentioned that even in predominantly Shāfi‘i-Ash‘ari Southeast Asia, the Salafi challenge has resulted in a notably increased awareness and identification also with Māturīdism as the second school of Sunni theology, among those wary of growing Salafi influence. An extreme case of this development is arguably represented by the Malaysian *Almaturidiah* blog, which features a blacklist of supposed domestic Salafi opponents of *kalām*, including their occupational details⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine*, 8 vols. (Mountain View, CA.: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 1998), I, p. 30-32, 45f., *passim*.

⁶⁶ al-Qādirī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (cf. n. 60).

⁶⁷ Cf. Sadek Hamid, “The Attraction of ‘Authentic Islam’: Salafism and British Muslim Youth” in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, p. 397.

⁶⁸ Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Heavenly Ornaments (Bahishi Zewar). A Classical Manual of Islamic Sacred Law* (Karachi: Zam Zam Publishers, 2005), p. 22f., 26f.

⁶⁹ <http://almaturidiah.blogspot.co.at/> (last accessed 20th July 2015).

Conclusion

Since the late 1980s Māturīdism, as a theological schools hitherto largely ignored by Salafism, has drawn an increasing number of Salafi refutations, which are readily extending Ibn Taymiyya’s critique of the Ash’ariyya also to the Māturīdi school. The expansion of this kind of polemical literature, often appearing in academic garb in the form of dissertations and theses submitted at Saudi Arabian universities, was initially most decisively propelled by the work of the Pakistani author Shams al-Salafī al-Afghānī. In conclusion, however, it can be said, that the Salafi attack on Māturīdism appears to have, despite Salafism’s obvious gains at the expense of more traditional forms of Islam, specifically among the young, indeed resulted in a re-flowering of theological *madhhab*-consciousness and a renewed interest in the history and doctrines of the school as well as in a certain degree of “lived Māturīdism”, whereby attachment to it – of little to no relevance just a few decades ago - again moves more into the forefront of religious identity construction among those affirming it.