

A Critique of the Impact of Islamism on Salafism: The Case of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi

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Abstract

This article examines how Islamism—defined as the fusion of political ideology and religious doctrine—has reshaped contemporary Salafism and contributed to the emergence of radical Salafi-Islamist currents. Although historically older, Salafism initially influenced Islamism in matters of belief and methodology. Over time, however, Islamist ideology exerted a reverse influence on Salafism, producing hybrid movements such as neo-Salafism, jihadi-Salafism, and takfiri groups that legitimize political violence. By analyzing the works of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, a former Islamist who later adopted Salafi positions, the article explores how core Islamic concepts (tawhid, din, 'ubudiyya, taghut, and takfir) are reinterpreted for political purposes. Al-Qudsi's discourse expands the scope of worship and divinity to include modern institutions and ideologies, leading to an all-encompassing takfiri logic that delegitimizes Muslim societies, secular governance, and democratic participation. The study concludes that contemporary radical movements cannot be adequately explained through Salafism alone; rather, the ideological framework of Islamism constitutes the primary determinant of radicalization. Early Islamist theorists (e.g., Mawdudi, Qutb) did not always advocate violence, yet their conceptual architecture facilitated later violent reinterpretations. Understanding this ideological transformation is essential for explaining modern jihadism and the sociological function of takfir within group identity formation and political conflict.

Keywords: Islamism, Salafism, Jihadism, Takfir, Taghut, Tawhid, Political Theology, Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, Radicalization, Islamist Ideology

Introduction

In recent decades, the emergence of violent and exclusionary movements in the Islamic world has generated an extensive body of academic literature seeking to explain the ideological roots of radicalization. A dominant tendency within this literature has been to associate contemporary jihadist and takfiri movements primarily with Salafism, often treating Salafi theology as the principal explanatory framework for religiously motivated violence. As a result, radical groups are frequently described through labels such as “jihadi-Salafism,” “neo-Salafism,” or “radical

Salafism,” while non-violent Salafi currents are distinguished as “quietist” or “traditional” Salafism.

This Salafism-centered explanatory model, however, suffers from significant analytical limitations. First, it struggles to account for the diversity of radical movements that do not originate from Salafi theological traditions, such as the Taliban, Shi‘i militant groups, or Islamist movements shaped by Hanafi or Sufi backgrounds. Second, it overlooks the fact that Salafism, as a broad religious orientation, has historically encompassed a wide spectrum of positions, many of which explicitly reject political activism and violence. Consequently, explaining radicalization solely through Salafism risks both conceptual reductionism and historical inaccuracy.

This article advances the argument that Islamism, rather than Salafism, constitutes the primary ideological framework underpinning contemporary radical movements. Islamism is understood here not merely as political activism inspired by Islam, but as a modern political theology that reinterprets core Islamic concepts in order to construct a comprehensive ideological system aimed at restructuring society and political authority. While Islamism initially drew upon Salafi theological elements—particularly in matters of creed and textual literalism—over time it exerted a reverse influence, reshaping Salafi discourse itself and giving rise to hybrid formations such as Salafi-Islamism, jihadi movements, and takfiri currents.

Central to this transformation is the redefinition of foundational Islamic concepts such as *tawhīd* (divine unity), *‘ibāda* (worship), *dīn* (religion), *ilāh* (deity), *tāghūt* (false deity or rebellious authority), and *takfir* (excommunication). Within Islamist discourse, these concepts are expanded beyond their classical theological meanings and reconfigured to encompass political authority, legal systems, modern institutions, and ideological affiliations. Through this process, political opposition, participation in modern governance structures, and even ordinary social relations are reframed as matters of faith and disbelief. The outcome is an all-encompassing ideological logic that legitimizes exclusion, delegitimizes Muslim societies, and, in its more radical forms, provides a theological justification for violence.

To explore this process in depth, the present study focuses on the writings of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, a prominent Salafi-Islamist thinker who began his intellectual trajectory within Islamist circles before adopting a Salafi theological framework. Al-Qudsi’s works offer a particularly illuminating case study, as they articulate in a systematic and explicit manner the Islamist reinterpretation of

tawhīd and its practical consequences. Through a close reading of his texts, this article examines how classical Islamic concepts are mobilized to construct a rigid binary between belief and disbelief, loyalty and enmity, and how this binary functions as a mechanism for ideological boundary-making and political mobilization.

Rather than treating al-Qudsi as an isolated or marginal figure, this study approaches his thought as representative of broader patterns within Salafi-Islamist discourse. The conceptual structures identified in his writings are not unique to a single geographical or cultural context; similar frameworks can be observed across diverse movements ranging from militant groups in the Middle East to radical organizations in Africa and Southeast Asia. This suggests that the issue at hand is not merely individual extremism, but a coherent ideological paradigm with transnational reach.

By situating Salafi-Islamist thought within the wider intellectual genealogy of Islamism—particularly the influence of early theorists such as Abul A‘la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb—this article seeks to demonstrate that contemporary radicalization cannot be adequately explained without addressing the political-theological architecture of Islamism itself. Although early Islamist thinkers did not uniformly advocate violence, their conceptual frameworks provided the semantic and ideological tools later employed to justify takfir and armed struggle.

Ultimately, this study argues that a careful theoretical analysis of Islamism is indispensable for understanding modern jihadism and takfiri movements. Beyond its relevance to the study of political violence, such analysis also sheds light on the sociological function of takfir as a mechanism of identity construction, group cohesion, and moral polarization. By critically examining the theological premises underlying Islamist discourse, this article aims to contribute to a more nuanced and analytically robust understanding of contemporary radical movements in the Islamic world.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, text-centered and conceptual-analytical methodology grounded in the disciplines of Islamic theology (kalām), Qur’anic exegesis (tafsīr), and the sociology of religion. Rather than focusing on empirical fieldwork or organizational case studies, the article

aims to uncover the ideological and theological foundations of contemporary radical movements by analyzing their core concepts, interpretive strategies, and discursive constructions.

The primary method employed is critical textual analysis. In this framework, the writings of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi are examined as representative texts of Salafi-Islamist thought. Al-Qudsi is not treated merely as an individual thinker, but as a case study through which broader ideological patterns within Salafi-Islamism can be identified. His works are analyzed to demonstrate how key Islamic concepts—such as *tawhīd*, *ibāda*, *dīn*, *ilāh*, *tāghūt*, and *takfir*—are redefined and recontextualized within a modern Islamist political theology.

The analysis proceeds through a comparative-conceptual approach. First, the classical meanings of these concepts are established by reference to authoritative sources in Sunni Islamic scholarship, including Ash‘arī, Māturīdī, and early Salafi traditions, as well as classical exegetical and juristic works. These traditional definitions are then systematically compared with their reinterpretations in Salafi-Islamist discourse. This comparison allows for the identification of conceptual shifts, semantic expansions, and ideological reinterpretations that underpin radicalizing tendencies.

In addition, the study employs elements of historical-contextual analysis by situating Salafi-Islamist interpretations within the broader intellectual trajectory of modern Islamism. Particular attention is given to the influence of early Islamist theorists such as Abul A‘la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, whose conceptual frameworks—though not always explicitly violent—provided the ideological architecture later utilized by radical movements. This historical layering helps explain how theological concepts were gradually transformed into instruments of political exclusion, identity construction, and legitimization of violence.

While the article includes normative theological critique, this critique is not presented as polemical argumentation but as an internal evaluation grounded in the criteria of Islamic scholarly tradition (*uṣūl al-dīn* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*). The purpose of this critique is to assess whether Salafi-Islamist interpretations remain consistent with established principles of Islamic theology, hermeneutics, and jurisprudence, particularly concerning faith (*īmān*), disbelief (*kufr*), and the limits of *takfir*.

Finally, the study consciously avoids reducing radical movements to sociological or security-based explanations alone. Instead, it prioritizes ideological coherence and theological reasoning as primary explanatory variables. By doing so, the article seeks to demonstrate that contemporary

jihadism and takfiri movements cannot be adequately understood without a careful examination of the conceptual transformations introduced by Islamist political theology, especially as it intersects with Salafi interpretive methods.

Salafism and Islamism

Islamism is a modern movement that emerged from the fusion of political theory and creed. Although Salafism is historically older, Islamism has been influenced by Salafism in both methodology and belief. Over time, however, Islamism has also influenced Salafism itself, leading to the emergence of numerous new currents from within Salafism. In fact, its impact has not been limited to Salafism alone. By influencing Shi‘i and Sunni groups alike, as well as even Sufi groups that are known for their opposition to Salafism, Islamism has played a significant role in the radicalization of religious groups. This article examines how Islamism has affected Salafis and how it has transformed their core ideas, using the example of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, who was first an Islamist and later became a Salafi.

Without any fundamental change in their core doctrines, many new movements—such as Neo-Salafism, Jihadism, Jihadi Salafism, Takfirism, and Qutbism—share a common denominator: Islamism. As Islamist ideology has merged with perspectives that approve of violence to varying degrees, numerous new groups have emerged. While some of these groups do not hesitate to use violence and terrorism as practical tools, others adopt a form of theoretical support for violence through concepts such as jihad and takfir.¹

Some researchers attempt to explain contemporary radical groups primarily through Salafism.² Since there are Salafis who do not endorse violence, violent radical groups are often distinguished from mainstream Salafism by labels such as Neo-Salafism, Contemporary Salafism, Jihadi Salafism, or Salafism. However, it is inaccurate to explain or label groups such as the Taliban or the Shi‘i Hashd al-Sha‘bi—both known for their opposition to Salafism—through the concept of Salafism. In our view, the most distinctive feature for explaining radical formations in the Islamic

¹ Since the views of Islamist–Salafi movements on jihad will be examined separately in another article, the issue of jihad is not addressed in this study.

² e.g., see: Mehmet Kubat, “The Converging and Diverging Aspects of Salafism and Neo-Salafism,” *İnönü University Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 2, Malatya, 2017.

world is Islamist ideology. Therefore, rather than focusing on Salafism, it is more accurate to consider Islamism as the defining characteristic of radical movements. Differences among these groups emerge primarily in terms of the extent to which they legitimize violence as a means of achieving political demands. Accusing political opponents of heresy or disbelief, seeking to seize political power, and demanding a religion-based constitution constitute the common ground of Islamism and groups influenced by it.

Some scholars argue that the defining characteristic of radical movements is their approval of violence and therefore claim that jihadism is their shared feature. Certain Islamist groups also adopt the label “jihadi” themselves in order to attract supporters more easily and to religiously legitimize violence. However, this approach is also insufficiently explanatory. The struggle on the ground—whether it is called jihad or action—is a reflection of an underlying theory. Analyzing ideological groups solely on the basis of their practical manifestations, without examining their foundational theories, does not provide an adequate explanation.

When Islamist ideology merges with Hanafism, the result is the Taliban; when it combines with Shi‘ism, it produces the Iranian Islamic Revolution and its Shi‘i successors. Even when Islamism intersects with Sufism, Islamist Sufi formations emerge, as seen in some religious orders in Turkey.

Rather than examining all radical Salafi movements in order to identify the ideological impact of Islamism on Salafism, we found it more appropriate to analyze these ideas through the works of a single author. This is because Salafi-Islamists from different geographical regions and cultural backgrounds share similar core views and similar methods of theoretically grounding those views. In this study, we do not focus on issues specific to Salafism, such as the acceptance of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt khabariyya*). Although differences exist in the evidentiary methods and details, there are core ideas that remain constant from Boko Haram in Nigeria to Islamist groups in the Philippines.

There are two fundamental characteristics that distinguish Salafi-Islamism from classical Islamist ideology: takfir and the understanding of jihad. In 1971, the “Takfir and Hijra” group was founded in Egypt by Mustafa Shukri, marking a turning point in Islamist ideology. The second major turning point was the Afghan Jihad, during which Islamist movements gained direct experience in armed conflict. Jihadists later carried this experience back to their own countries, integrating it into Islamist ideology. This article examines the Salafi-Islamists’ ideas centered on tawhid,

worship, religion, and takfir, as these are theoretically shared concerns across all Islamist movements.

These issues will be examined through the works of Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi. One of the prominent figures of Salafi-Islamism, Shaykh Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, was born in Jerusalem in 1937. He initially joined the Muslim Brotherhood but later left the movement due to differences in matters of creed. He rejects claims that he was affiliated with the Takfir and Hijra group or that he adopted the views of the Kharijite school.³

In his works *This Is Tawhid* and *Rejecting Taghut Is a Requirement of Tawhid*, al-Qudsi addresses key Islamist concepts such as worship, religion, deity, and taghut. The author argues that rejecting worldly deities other than God is a religious obligation and cites concepts and institutions such as humanism, democracy, and the United Nations as examples of modern taghut.

When the general framework of al-Qudsi's ideas in *This Is Tawhid* is examined, it becomes clear that he interprets fundamental Islamist concepts—such as deity (ilah), lordship (rabb), worship, and religion—from a Salafist perspective. From the standpoint of interpretive freedom in understanding historical and religious truths, such views can be regarded as alternative interpretations, even if they are not widely accepted and have historical precedents. However, by actualizing these ideas through concrete contemporary examples, the author adopts a method that fosters hostility, exclusion, and hate speech toward different groups.⁴ In theory, Salafi-Islamists do not differ from classical Islamist ideology that began with Mawdudi. Yet through the selection of examples and the updating of ideas, Islamism is transformed into an ideology of violence.

The author attempts to substantiate his views using Islamic sources, but he interprets these sources through a one-sided ideological reading that excludes alternative perspectives. In some cases, he selectively cites parts of Qur'anic verses while ignoring others, removing texts from their context and assigning meanings that have no precedent in the classical exegetical tradition. When

³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 11–12. Al-Qudsi is a controversial figure, and numerous refutations and critical writings have been produced about him. His critics are not limited to opposing ideological camps; Salafi and Islamist authors have also criticized him sharply for his views and methodology. For examples of such critiques, see: <https://tawheedkales.yoo7.com/t682-topic>; http://fatawa-tartosi.blogspot.com/2013/08/blog-post_1103.html?m=1

⁴ In this book, al-Qudsi employs a discourse aimed at addressing the identity crises of Muslim youth by excluding and othering those who are different or outside his own framework. In order to prevent what he perceives as the assimilation of Muslims, he encourages the declaration of unbelief (*takfir*) against differing ideas and groups, as well as withdrawal from the society in which one lives. In this respect, his views parallel those of the “Takfir and Hijra” group that emerged in Egypt in the 1970s.

interpreting Qur’anic verses and hadiths, he avoids engaging with the views of scholars of exegesis and jurisprudence, instead favoring interpretations that affirm Islamist ideology. While his method of approaching scriptural texts is Salafist, his choice of examples reflects a political approach that prioritizes opposition to contemporary political actors.

The Core Views of Salafi-Islamism

1. Tawhid

In the preface to his book *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi states that *tawhid* is the essence of Islam and that all of Islam’s commands and legal order derive from it. He argues that the right to legislate and to issue rulings belongs exclusively to God.⁵ He claims that “those who today associate themselves with Islam do not fulfill the meaning, pillars, and conditions of *tawhid*.⁶ According to him, the duty of Islamic preachers is to call people to *tawhid*, to educate them according to *tawhid*, and to work toward eliminating all forms of shirk. He notes that the book was written for this purpose and structured in a question-and-answer format. The book consists of 56 questions and answers.

The author divides *tawhid* into two parts: 1) the pillar of affirmation, and 2) the pillar of rejection. The conditions of the pillar of affirmation are as follows: 1) worshipping only God and associating nothing with Him; 2) exerting all one’s efforts to call people to this belief; 3) befriending, loving, and supporting the people of *tawhid*; and 4) refusing to consider those who do not fulfill *tawhid* as Muslims and declaring them unbelievers (*takfir*).⁷

The conditions of the pillar of rejection are: 1) purifying oneself from shirk; 2) actively calling people to abandon shirk; 3) behaving harshly toward those who do not abandon shirk and showing enmity toward them; 4) declaring those who commit shirk to be unbelievers.

The author claims that “those who have the ability to learn the truth but turn away from it and imitate their shaykhs in matters of disbelief have definitively fallen into disbelief.” He further states that “those who lived during a period of interruption (*fatra*) and to whom the message of the

⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 5.

⁶ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 6.

⁷ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 19.

Prophet did not reach are not considered Muslims... The most accurate description for them is polytheists (mushrik).”⁸ According to the author, a *kafir* is someone who is judged to be an unbeliever in this world and deserves punishment in the hereafter, whereas a *mushrik* is someone who is judged to be an unbeliever in this world, but whose status in the hereafter will be determined after a separate test there.⁹

According to the author, even if a person is a Muslim, abandoning any one of the pillars of tawhid requires issuing a definitive ruling that this person is either an unbeliever or an apostate, and this itself is among the conditions of tawhid.¹⁰ As examples, the author states: “Whoever accepts secularism, democracy, communism, capitalism, racism, man-made systems, or legislative assemblies has abandoned tawhid... Such a person is an unbeliever.”¹¹

The first condition of the pillar of rejection, which the author describes as the third pillar of tawhid, is “to disassociate oneself from shirk, to purify oneself from it, and to forbid people from committing it.”¹² To clarify this level, he gives the following contemporary example: “This level requires abandoning secularism, democracy, communism, racism, capitalism, and democracy, and warning people against them. It also requires abandoning courts that do not rule by God’s laws and warning people against them.”¹³

The second condition of the pillar of rejection is to use all one’s strength to purify people from shirk.¹⁴ According to him, “in order to enter Islam, it is absolutely necessary to hate the polytheists and those who love them, to insult them, and to show enmity toward them.”¹⁵ The third condition of the pillar of rejection is to declare unbelief upon those who do not accept tawhid. According to the author, “whoever says, ‘I do not show enmity toward the polytheists,’ or shows enmity but does not declare them unbelievers... that person is not a Muslim.”¹⁶ He adds: “This level requires treating harshly those who oppose secularism, democracy, communism, capitalism, racism, man-

⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, pp. 25-26.

⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 27.

¹¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 29.

¹² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 29.

¹³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 32.

¹⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 34.

¹⁶ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 36.

made laws, legislative assemblies, and every idea opposed to Islam, calling those who believe in them deviant unbelievers, and insulting them.”¹⁷

The fourth condition of the pillar of rejection is to declare unbelief upon those who commit shirk, regardless of who they are.¹⁸ According to the author, even if a person fulfills all Islamic obligations and even if muftis and judges rule according to Islamic law, if they commit shirk, then by the consensus of all scholars they are unbelievers.

In the twelfth question, the author asks about the ruling on a person who worships only God and rejects secularism, democracy, capitalism, and all man-made laws, but does not hate, oppose, or declare unbelief upon those who commit these acts of disbelief. He answers: “Such a person has not entered Islam, because he has fulfilled some of the pillars of affirmation of tawhid but failed to fulfill others. These people are among the most dangerous of those who invalidate tawhid.”¹⁹

In the thirteenth question, the ruling is asked about those who feel hatred toward such people but do not show enmity or declare them unbelievers. The author claims that these individuals also have not entered Islam.²⁰

In the fourteenth question, the ruling is asked about those who feel hatred and show enmity but do not declare unbelief.²¹ The author states that these individuals too have not entered Islam. According to him, whether one lives in the abode of war or the abode of Islam, whether one has the opportunity to learn or not, whether the proof has been established against one or not, ignorance, interpretation, and imitation are not valid excuses when it comes to corrupting the essence of Islam. Whether due to ignorance, interpretation, or imitation, anyone who does not know or who corrupts the essence of Islam is not considered a Muslim.²²

¹⁷ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 38.

¹⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 42.

²⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 44.

²¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 44.

²² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 127.

2. The Distinction Between *Tawhid al-Uluhiyya* and *Tawhid al-‘Ubudiyya*

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, who authored a separate work on tawhid entitled *This Is Tawhid*, states in the preface that “most people today who claim to be Muslims are in fact upon shirk.”²³ This statement suggests that the author’s primary audience consists mainly of Muslims themselves. Since the main addressees of the book are “Muslims who have deviated from tawhid,” the author seeks to substantiate his arguments through Qur’anic verses and hadiths. Among the topics covered in the book are: the types of tawhid; the meaning and some forms of worship; the conditions and rulings regarding sitting with polytheists; taghut; the meaning of the declaration of tawhid; shirk and its types; disbelief and its types; hypocrisy and its types; acts that nullify Islam; principles that distinguish believers from polytheists; attachment to beings other than God; and the ruling on befriending unbelievers and polytheists and assisting them. The central theme of the book is tawhid. The author divides tawhid into three categories: 1) tawhid al-rububiyya, 2) tawhid al-uluhiyya, and 3) tawhid of God’s names and attributes.

- 1) Tawhid al-rububiyya is belief that God is the Creator, the Provider, the One who gives life and death, the One who answers supplications, and that divine decree and destiny come from God.²⁴
- 2) Tawhid al-uluhiyya is to devote worship exclusively to God and to obey and submit to Him unconditionally.²⁵

According to the author, true faith is realized only through tawhid al-uluhiyya, because it encompasses the other two forms of tawhid. Tawhid al-rububiyya and tawhid of the divine names and attributes are not sufficient, in his view, for a person to be considered a believer or a true monotheist. If tawhid al-uluhiyya is deficient, the individual is, according to the author, a polytheist. As evidence for this view, he cites the case of the polytheists of the pre-Islamic period, who believed in tawhid al-rububiyya yet were not considered Muslims. 3) Tawhid of the divine names and attributes refers to affirming all of God’s attributes mentioned in the Qur’ān and the authentic Sunnah without interpretation (ta’wil).

²³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p.

²⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 12.

²⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 13.

Critique

The author's classification of tawhid from different angles and his acceptance of 'ubudiyya—which is related to action—as the foundation of faith are not compatible with Ash'ari and Maturidi theology. According to these two Sunni schools, action is not a pillar or essential component of faith. Rather, it is a complementary element that, according to the Ash'aris, increases or decreases faith, and according to the Maturidis, perfects or diminishes it. For this reason, both schools—and even the early Salaf scholars—held that a person who commits major sins does not thereby exit Islam.

The author's treatment of belief in the divine names and attributes as a third category of tawhid appears to function as an argument used to declare unbelief upon Muslims who do not interpret ambiguous attributes (*mutashabih attributes*) in the manner he and his followers adopt. Although the distinction between tawhid al-uluhiiyya and tawhid al-rububiyya has been used by Sufis, it has not been accepted by theologians (*mutakallimun*). Sufis employed this distinction primarily to emphasize tawhid al-rububiyya, stressing that the ideal believer should entrust themselves fully to the exalted Creator who provides sustenance, grants healing, and fulfills all human needs. Those who adopted the Salafi approach, by contrast, used this distinction to emphasize tawhid al-'ubudiyya. Ibn Taymiyya and his followers employed this distinction in order to warn against practices such as sacrificing at graves, seeking intercession, and *tawassul*, which they viewed as excesses that violate tawhid al-uluhiiyya.

Later, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, likened Muslim communities to the polytheists of the pre-Islamic period on the grounds that they violated tawhid al-uluhiiyya, and used this argument to declare them unbelievers. He regarded those who did not adopt his views as polytheists for failing to uphold tawhid al-uluhiiyya, deemed their lives and property lawful, and fought against them. Wahhabis considered grave visitation, seeking intercession from the dead, and *tawassul* as forms of worship, and on the grounds that these practices contradicted tawhid al-uluhiiyya, they moved toward declaring unbelief upon Muslims who did not share their interpretations. Yet these matters are not foundational issues of faith but rather practical issues. The intentions of those who engage in such practices and the rituals involved change the meaning and substance of the acts in question. Islamic scholars have generally regarded excesses in these matters as innovations (*bid'a*) and have not treated them as issues pertaining to the essence of faith.

While the author addresses classical debates such as grave visitation, intercession, and *tawassul* in his book, he expands the framework of tawhid al-uluhyya in order to speak more directly to contemporary societies. Adopting the approach found in Mawdudi's *Four Key Concepts*, he includes obedience to modern institutions and adherence to different ideologies within the scope of tawhid al-uluhyya. According to the author, "no act of worship may be directed to anyone other than God," a principle unanimously accepted by all Islamic scholars. However, he further claims that worship also encompasses the following concepts: obedience, accepting authority, love, hatred, supplication, fear, hope, reliance (tawakkul), desire (raghba), dread (rahba), humility (khushu'), awe (khashya), repentance (inaba), seeking help (isti'ana), seeking refuge (isti'adha), asking for assistance, sacrificing animals, and making vows.²⁶ According to the author, all these meanings are subsumed within the concept of worship.

Classical Islamic scholars note that the term *'ibada* is used in approximately thirty different meanings in the Qur'an.²⁷ The fact that a word carries multiple meanings is linguistically inevitable. Indeed, the Qur'anic term *salat*, one of Islam's core concepts, is used both in its lexical sense and in the technical sense referring to the ritual prayer. There is, of course, a distinction between the meaning a term acquires in religious terminology and its root meaning or various linguistic usages. Just as the meanings of calling, invoking, or supplicating found in the word *salat* cannot all be equated with the ritual prayer, one cannot ignore the technical religious meaning of *'ibada* and instead apply its root and usage-based meanings as acts of worship. Nor can it be claimed that the term *salat* necessarily entails all of its lexical meanings.

As a technical religious term, *'ibada* refers to acts of obedience performed with the intention of drawing closer to the exalted Creator by venerating Him in response to His blessings. In other words, worship, in its terminological sense, is submission performed solely toward the divine creative power with the intention of worship. Even if meanings such as obedience or submission appear in the non-technical uses of the term *'ibada*, these cannot be regarded as ritual acts of worship performed with the intention of worshipping a deity.

²⁶ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, pp. 29-56.

²⁷ Al-Firuzabadi, Articles A, B, and D.

3. Obedience to Human Authority and the Concept of Worship

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, worship (*'ibada*) consists of “all outward and inward deeds and statements that God loves, accepts, and is pleased with.” He further argues that “directing worship exclusively to God is realized by directing *nusuk* (ritual acts), legislation (*tashri'*), and authority (*wilaya*) solely to God.”²⁸ According to the author, the concept of worship includes the meanings of obedience, judgment, loyalty, and enmity.²⁹ He claims that obedience and submission are signs of love, stating: “Whoever claims to love God while not obeying His commands and while not outwardly submitting to His law is nothing but a lying heretic.”³⁰

Critique

Lexically, worship conveys the meanings of submission and obedience, but as a technical concept it refers to submission and obedience directed toward a creator with the intention of glorifying Him. Islamic jurists have distinguished between obedience (*ta'a*), seeking closeness (*qurba*), and worship (*'ibada*). According to them, obedience refers to fulfilling commands and avoiding prohibitions, while *qurba* encompasses all actions performed with the intention of drawing closer to someone. Worship, however, is defined as servitude performed with the intention of worship and with recognition of the object of worship. The glorification of God and the intention to comply with His commands constitute the core characteristics of worship.

Accordingly, for an act to qualify as worship, three conditions must be met: 1) it must involve glorification of the Creator; 2) it must be performed to attain God’s pleasure; and 3) it must be carried out with the intention of worship.³¹

The glorification inherent in worship is of the highest degree and is directed exclusively toward the Creator.³² Moreover, acts of worship are deeds whose ultimate judgment pertains to the hereafter.

²⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting the Taghut*, p. 13.

²⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting the Taghut*, pp. 17-40.

³⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting the Taghut*, pp. 13-14.

³¹ Zakariyya al-Ansari. *Hudūd al-Anīqa*. Articles A, B, and D.

³² Al-Tahanawi. *Kashshāf Istilāhāt al-Funūn*, Articles A, B, and D.

Belief in a Creator entails loving and obeying Him, yet people do not always obey those whom they love. Indeed, the Prophet Adam disobeyed a divine command, and no one has claimed that Adam or other prophets who experienced similar situations exited Islam. For this reason, Islamic theologians have not regarded obedience to the Creator or submission to His rulings as pillars of faith, but rather as indicators of the degree of perfection of one's faith. In the Sufi tradition, figures such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya famously stated, "You claim to believe in God, yet you disobey Him—this is truly astonishing," thereby emphasizing that a perfected believer should not rebel against God.

In the Islamic tradition, the relationship between faith and obedience has been approached from a psychological perspective and used as an argument for spiritual and moral refinement in the process of human maturation. However, the author treats this relationship primarily from sociological and political perspectives, transforming it into a divisive and exclusionary argument. This interpretation is incompatible with historical realities as well as with the theological and Sufi traditions of Islam.

The term *'ibada* is distinct from obedience, judgment, and authority. When words differ, their meanings also differ. The term obedience applies to both religious and worldly forms of compliance, whereas obedience within worship represents a specific type of obedience. Islamic theologians have defined worship as "the actions of morally responsible individuals performed not for personal desires but to attain God's pleasure and to glorify Him."³³

a. The Pillars of Worship

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, "the three pillars of worship are directing *nusuk*, legislation (*tashri'*), and authority (*wilaya*) exclusively to God." Based on these concepts, he argues that worship encompasses the entirety of life and claims that anything embraced through submission constitutes worship. According to the author, worship is not limited to ritual acts such as sacrifice, prayer, pilgrimage, and supplication; rather, legislation and accepting the authority of others also fall under the category of worship.³⁴

³³ Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani. *Al-Ta'rīfāt, Articles A, B, and D.*

³⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *This Is Tawhid*, p.

These views are commonly articulated by leaders of modern Salafi trends and contemporary Islamic movements, such as Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi. These authors reinterpret the concept of worship by assigning it an action-oriented, sociological, and political content, in contrast to the positions of classical theologians and jurists. Drawing on the views of these modern thinkers and other Salafist writers, the author states: “If a judge or an assembly is granted the authority to declare what is good and bad, sovereignty, and the power to command, and if obedience is shown to them, this constitutes worship and amounts to attributing divinity to them.”³⁵

Similarly, he argues that if a person accepts being judged (even in the most trivial matters) by a court that rules according to a law other than God’s law, whether in private or public affairs, then that person has worshipped the judges of that court and become their servant.³⁶ On this basis, the author considers being judged by any court outside of Sharia courts, regardless of the issue, to be disbelief. While he regards obedience to laws that contradict Sharia as disbelief in matters governed by religious rulings, he also claims that rejecting all courts other than Sharia courts in judicial matters is a requirement of tawhid. Based on this reasoning, he argues that secularists, racists, capitalists, democrats, and similar groups cannot be considered Muslims—even if they accept God’s lordship—because they commit major shirk.

Critique

Expanding the concept of worship and shifting it into the worldly and political realm is not consistent with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or historical realities. The concept of *uluhīyya* refers to accepting a being as God or deity. Accepting a being as the Creator-God entails obedience, love, and submission to Him; however, obedience, love, and submission are also directed toward entities other than God. These concepts have a much broader semantic scope. Human beings obey, love, and attach themselves to many things other than God. Unless these attachments involve recognizing those entities as Creator-God and worshipping them accordingly, such attachments do not constitute worship.

³⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *This Is Tawhid*, pp. 31-36.

³⁶ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *This Is Tawhid*, p. 35.

When one accepts a being as God, obedience, love, and acceptance of His rulings follow; yet even this necessity has not been regarded as absolute by theologians. For example, a person who commits a sin involving disobedience to God does not become a polytheist. Acts of disobedience, sin, and rebellion do not expel individuals from Islam. This view has been unanimously accepted by Maturidi, Ash‘ari, and Salaf scholars.

Historically, the Kharijites—known as a violent group—claimed that committing major sins expelled a person from Islam and argued that appointing arbiters other than the Qur‘an constituted disbelief. However, these views were rejected by the majority of Islamic scholars. In Islamic jurisprudence, acts of worship such as prayer, almsgiving, pilgrimage, and fasting are treated under a separate category, while transactions such as trade, marriage, and inheritance law are addressed under the category of *mu‘amalat*.

Muslims living in non-Muslim lands and accepting their laws has never been regarded by any jurist as a reason for apostasy. On the contrary, complying with the laws of the host country and providing security and trust has been described as a religious obligation. Indeed, when Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, they lived under the authority of the Christian king, the Negus, and even assisted him in his war against his enemies. The Prophet Muhammad participated in the pre-Islamic pact known as the *Hilf al-Fudul* and later praised this agreement after receiving prophethood. Furthermore, the Qur‘an recounts that the Prophet Joseph served as a minister under a king who was not a believer.³⁷

4. The Concept of Religion (Din)

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, the most important meaning of *din* is to issue rulings, resolve disputes, legislate, submit to a supreme authority, obey, and pledge allegiance.³⁸ As evidence for this view, he cites the various linguistic and textual usages of the term *din* in both everyday language and religious sources. He also refers to Ibn Taymiyya’s statement (“When *din* is attributed to the servant, it means worshipping and obeying; when it is attributed to God, it means being worshipped and obeyed”) to substantiate the relationship between religion and obedience.

³⁷ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 48.

³⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 48.

Based on this definition, he argues that “if a person, even in the smallest matters of life, submits to the rulings and laws of someone other than God, then—even if he verbally claims thousands of times that he belongs to God’s religion, Islam—he has in fact entered the religion of the one whom he obeys.”

Critique

By treating the various linguistic usages of a word as evidence and assuming that each usage represents the literal meaning, the conceptual scope of *din* is excessively expanded. However, Islamic theologians have defined *din* as “the divine laws established by God.”³⁹ It is categorically impossible to regard worldly laws and regulations as religion. Submitting to a law in force—even if it contradicts religious norms—does not imply worshipping that law or attributing divinity to it.

Words used in language acquire a distinct religious content and become technical religious terms beyond their lexical meanings. Religious terms—such as *salat* (prayer)—may appear in the Qur'an in both their lexical and technical senses. Although the word *din* lexically conveys the meaning of submission, it has also acquired, as a religious term, the meaning of divine law. Ignoring this established terminological meaning and instead treating the laws one submits to or the institutions one is affiliated with as religion on the basis of lexical meanings alone contradicts both religious and social reality. Moreover, as the author claims, describing modern ideologies and institutions such as democracy and humanism as religions constitutes a clear anachronism.

Throughout history, even during periods when Islamic law was applied, state authorities were granted the power to enact laws, and many legal codes regulating commercial and administrative matters were implemented on the basis of customary law (‘urf). Islamic scholars did not claim that obeying such laws constituted religion, nor did they argue that compliance with them expelled individuals from Islam.

³⁹ Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani. *Al-Ta‘rifāt, Articles D, Y, and N.*

5. The Concept of *Ilah* (Deity)

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, an *ilah* is that which is worshipped. Any being to whom any form of worship is directed becomes the *ilah* of the worshipper.⁴⁰ The characteristics of *uluhiyya* include the exclusive right to legislate and judge, immunity from accountability, being loved for one's essence, being worshipped for one's essence, and possessing the power to cause harm and benefit.⁴¹ Based on these premises, the author turns to the concept of *taghut*, stating that everything worshipped other than God is *taghut*, that is, a false deity.⁴²

The author argues that for faith to be valid, *taghut* must first be rejected, asserting that obedience to *taghut* and faith in God cannot coexist in the same heart. As examples of *taghut*, he lists the following: Satan; whims and desires; those who do not rule by what God has revealed; any law other than God's law; anything loved and obeyed for its own sake rather than for God's sake; homeland and nationalism; racism; the ideology of humanism; the people; in some respects, the majority; parliament; the United Nations; the International Court of Justice in The Hague; idols that are worshipped; stones, bowls, images, and animals; democracy; magicians; those who claim to have knowledge of the unseen; and everything worshipped besides God.⁴³

He expresses his judgment on *taghut* as follows: "Whoever works for, defends, or seeks to establish a constitution, system, or ideology not derived from Islam, or democracy, or a thought that contradicts Islam, has denied God."⁴⁴ He further condemns those who obey *taghut* and its supporters, assist their disbelief and deviation, participate in parliamentary elections and democratic systems, reject the people of tawhid, and distance people from them, exclaiming, "Woe to them."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 52.

⁴¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 52-62.

⁴² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 62-70.

⁴³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 75-93.

⁴⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 228.

⁴⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 227.

Critique

As the author himself acknowledges, according to Islamic scholars, *taghut* refers to devils, sorcerers, and all idols worshipped besides God. However, as noted earlier, because the author assigns a new meaning to the concept of worship, everything that is obeyed, whose authority is accepted, that is loved, or that is respected becomes *taghut* in his framework. If Islamic jurisprudence contains a ruling on a particular matter, any law that contradicts this ruling is considered *taghut* by the author. Every ruling and institution whose legitimacy is not derived from Islam is *taghut*. Every national or international institution not established according to Islamic law is *taghut*. Any scholar, intellectual, journalist, administrator, or leader who does not think in accordance with Islam—or who does not accept the author’s views (and thus, in his terms, is not among the people of *tawhid*)—is *taghut*, and electing them constitutes worship of *taghut*. According to the author, anyone who does not reject *taghut* and who worships it is either a polytheist or an apostate.

However, exegetical scholars have emphasized that the term *taghut* in the Qur'an refers specifically to idols worshipped as deities besides God. According to tafsir scholars, *taghut* is “everything that rebels against God and everything that is worshipped besides God, whether through coercion or willingly; whatever is worshipped besides God—be it a human being, Satan, or an idol—is *taghut*.⁴⁶ Ibn Kathir, one of the scholars highly regarded by Salafis, states: “The term *taghut* encompasses all the evils committed by the polytheists of the pre-Islamic period, such as idol worship, acting upon the judgments of idols, or seeking help from idols.”⁴⁷

As can be seen, exegetical scholars have interpreted the Qur'anic concept of *taghut* as referring to the idols worshipped by the Arabs of the pre-Islamic period or, more broadly, to deities and gods worshipped besides God. They also cited Satan, sorcerers, and the idols of the pre-Islamic period as examples of beings worshipped besides God. These examples demonstrate that the concepts of worship and deity were understood in a specific technical sense. Explaining and exemplifying *taghut* through modern concepts without taking into account the technical meanings of worship

⁴⁶ Al-Tabari. *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 5-419.

⁴⁷ Ibn Kathir. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 1-683.

and deity constitutes a distortion of the concept and a misapplication of Qur’anic terminology to inappropriate domains.

6. Judgment Belongs to God Alone: Adjudication (Muhakama)

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi’s claim that “adjudication belongs exclusively to God,” based on the Qur’anic verse “*judgment belongs only to God*,” is a view that was first articulated by the Kharijites.⁴⁸ In advancing this claim, the author cites only the latter part of the verse while omitting its first part, even though the first part conveys a meaning that directly contradicts his argument.⁴⁹ The verse in question, spoken by the Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him), states:

*“You worship nothing besides Him but names you and your forefathers have invented, for which God has sent down no authority. Judgment belongs only to God. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know.”*⁵⁰

As is evident from the verse as a whole, the subject concerns the rejection of the idols worshipped in Egypt at the time and emphasizes that God has revealed no authority declaring them to be deities.⁵¹ Classical exegetical sources have interpreted the verse in precisely this manner. By removing the first sentence of the verse, however, the author interprets the phrase “*judgment belongs only to God*” as meaning that “the authority to command and prohibit—in other words, the authority to legislate—belongs exclusively to God.”⁵² In contrast to the author’s claim, the verse actually emphasizes that judgment in matters of divinity (*uluhīyya*), lordship (*rubūbiyya*), and worship belongs solely to God.⁵³

By altering the contextual meaning of the verse, the author effectively contradicts its intent and, without textual evidence, expands the semantic scope of *uluhīyya* and worship. Some exegetes

⁴⁸ Qur’ān, Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40.

⁴⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 36.

⁵⁰ Qur’ān, Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40.

⁵¹ Al-Tabārī, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40; al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40.

⁵² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *Rejecting Taghut*, pp. 36.

⁵³ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40, vol. 6, p. 241.

have interpreted the phrase “*judgment belongs only to God*” as meaning that only God determines what and whom should be worshipped.⁵⁴

A similar usage appears in the words of the Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him) in Surah Yusuf, where he addresses his sons:

*“O my sons, do not enter by one gate but enter by different gates. I cannot avail you anything against God. Judgment belongs only to Him. Upon Him I have relied, and upon Him let those who rely place their trust.”*⁵⁵

Here, the assertion that judgment belongs solely to God emphasizes that decree and destiny are exclusively in God’s hands. Likewise, in Surah al-An‘am (6:57), the phrase “*judgment belongs only to God*” refers to God’s exclusive authority to determine when punishment will be inflicted.⁵⁶ As these examples demonstrate, the Qur’anic usage of this expression does not convey a worldly or political sense of governance, as claimed by the author and the Kharijites. Instead, verses are removed from their context, their meanings distorted, and they are repurposed to justify takfir.

In verses such as “*Whoever does not judge by what God has revealed—they are the unbelievers / wrongdoers / transgressors,*” the term *kufr* has been interpreted not as disbelief that expels one from Islam, but rather as a characteristic or behavior associated with unbelief.⁵⁷ Some exegetes have held that the verse refers specifically to those who deny God’s revelation outright.⁵⁸ The context of these verses relates to the People of the Book altering the rulings in their own scriptures. Replacing a divinely revealed ruling with a new one and then claiming that “this is God’s ruling” undoubtedly carries the implication of placing oneself in the position of God. It is for this reason that the Qur’an states: “*They took their rabbis and monks as lords besides God.*”⁵⁹

Islamic scholars have unanimously agreed that failing to apply a religious ruling or following an alternative ruling does not, in itself, expel a person from faith, because action is not a pillar of faith. For this reason, verses stating that those who do not judge by what God has revealed are unbelievers have been subject to interpretive explanation (*ta’wil*). Raghib al-Isfahani explains

⁵⁴ Baydawi, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 40.

⁵⁵ Qur’ān, Sūrat Yūsuf (12), verse 67.

⁵⁶ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat al-An‘ām (6), verse 57.

⁵⁷ Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Mā’ida (5), verses 44, 45, and 47.

⁵⁸ Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr* of Sūrat al-Mā’ida (5), verse 44.

⁵⁹ Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Tawba (9), verse 31; Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (3), verse 64.

these verses as follows: The Kharijites used this verse as evidence to claim that anyone who abandons God's judgment is, in all circumstances, an unbeliever. Other scholars, however, argued that one becomes an unbeliever only if one judges while denying God's revelations. Some scholars maintained that the term *kufr* in this verse refers to ingratitude rather than disbelief that expels one from Islam. Others divided disbelief into categories, stating that what is intended here is minor disbelief (*kufr asghar*), which they described as "*kufr below kufr*" (*kufrun duna kufr*).⁶⁰

7. The Ruling on Polytheists and Unbelievers

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, idolaters and polytheists who do not accept Islam are to be killed if Islam is presented to them and they refuse it.⁶¹ People are to be fought until they utter the testimony of tawhid (*kalimat al-tawhid*). If a person utters the testimony of tawhid but does not direct acts of worship exclusively to God or commits an act that nullifies tawhid, war is to be resumed against that person.⁶² According to the author, those who claim that merely uttering the testimony of tawhid renders a person Muslim are effectively claiming that hypocrites are believers. He argues that for one's life and property to be protected, it is necessary both to utter the testimony of tawhid and to act upon its requirements. What the testimony requires, according to him, is obedience to God, directing all worship exclusively to Him, and rejecting all objects of worship other than Him.

Critique

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi divides people into three categories: polytheists (*mushrikun*), unbelievers (*kuffar*), and monotheists (*muwahhidun*). Polytheists, according to him, are those to whom the call to Islam has not yet reached and who lack knowledge of the true religion. Their ruling in this world is that of unbelievers, while in the hereafter they will be subjected to a new test. The second group consists of unbelievers—those who do not believe in tawhid and do not reject shirk. These individuals will be cast into Hell in the hereafter, and in this world their lives and property are

⁶⁰ Raghib al-Isfahani, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 362.

⁶¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 113.

⁶² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 116.

considered lawful. If they are from the People of the Book, they may be allowed to live on the condition that they pay a tax and accept Muslim political authority; if they are Muslims who have not entered tawhid, they are to be killed. As can be inferred from the author's expressions, he declares unbelief upon everyone who does not belong to his group and who does not accept his interpretations, deeming their lives and property lawful.

However, Islamic scholars have held that anyone who declares the two pillars of the testimony of faith—"there is no deity but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger"—is a Muslim, and that uttering the testimony of tawhid is sufficient to enter Islam. One of the most important figures of Salafi creed, al-Tahawi, articulated this foundational principle by stating that one enters Islam by what one entered it and exits it by the same means. Ibn Taymiyya, regarded as one of the most influential figures of Salafi thought, states the following on this matter:

"The leaders of the religion and the scholars of Islam are unanimously agreed on a matter that is necessarily known from the religion of the Messenger of God: every unbeliever is invited to pronounce the testimony of tawhid, whether he is an atheist, a polytheist, or from the People of the Book. Whoever pronounces the testimony of tawhid becomes a Muslim, and without uttering it, one does not become Muslim."⁶³

Similarly, Ibn Rajab, one of the prominent Hanbali scholars, states:

"It is definitively known that the Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted the entry into Islam of those who wished to embrace it merely by their utterance of the two statements of the testimony of faith. Through this, they acquired all the rights of Islam and were granted protection. He severely condemned Usama ibn Zayd for killing a man who said 'there is no deity but God' during battle in order to save himself from death. The Prophet even accepted the conditions of those who wished to enter Islam but stated that they would not perform prayer or give alms."⁶⁴

Islamic scholars have reached consensus that uttering the testimony of tawhid is sufficient for a person to be considered Muslim and that no additional condition is required. They regarded verbal affirmation as sufficient and held that only God knows whether a person truly believes. The author's claim that a person must fulfill the requirements of the testimony of tawhid in order to be

⁶³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar 'Ta 'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 8, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 228.

considered Muslim is a position categorically rejected by Islam and even denied by the early authorities of the Salafi tradition that the author claims to follow.

Indeed, the Qur'an states:

"O you who believe, when you go forth in the way of God, investigate carefully, and do not say to one who offers you peace, 'You are not a believer,' seeking the goods of worldly life." (Qur'an, al-Nisa 4:94)

This verse clearly indicates that not only the testimony of faith, but even a gesture of peace is sufficient to prohibit harming a person. In another verse, the Qur'an states:

"When the hypocrites come to you, they say, 'We testify that you are indeed the Messenger of God.' God knows that you are His Messenger, and God testifies that the hypocrites are liars. They have taken their oaths as a shield and thus turn people away from the path of God." (Qur'an, al-Munafiqun 63:1–2)

Imam al-Shafi'i derived from this verse that even if a person does not truly believe but verbally expresses Islam, this expression is sufficient for that person to be considered Muslim. Among the Salaf scholars, Imam al-Darimi also accepted Imam al-Shafi'i's view, stating that uttering a statement affirming Islam is sufficient and that no further investigation is required.⁶⁵

Islamic scholars did not divide tawhid into acceptance and rejection with such conditions; rather, by rejecting deities and shirk, they referred specifically to idols and false gods worshipped as deities. Declaring unbelief upon people who identify as Muslim on the grounds that they fail to fulfill the requirements of tawhid, and deeming their lives and property lawful, has historically been asserted only by extremist sects such as the Kharijites. The inviolability of life and property—regardless of belief—is a fundamental principle. Alongside this, freedom of belief is among the essential and indispensable rights of human beings, and protecting these rights constitutes a primary objective of Islamic law.

a. Not Taking Unbelievers as Allies

⁶⁵ Hatim al-'Awni, *Takfir Ahl al-Shahādatayn*, p. 65.

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi identifies *wilaya* (allegiance or alliance) as the third pillar of worship. According to him, regardless of form or appearance, whoever loves or hates for someone other than God, or shows loyalty or enmity for other than God, becomes a servant and worshipper of that entity.⁶⁶ In his view, tawhid means affirming God's oneness in matters of love.⁶⁷ If a person commits acts of disbelief or shirk for the sake of something they love, that object becomes their deity. Based on this reasoning, the author opposes interfaith dialogue and religious freedom. He states:

*"False religious scholars claim that there is no enmity between Islam and followers of other religions and that emphasizing loyalty and enmity in Islam constitutes extremism and fosters hatred among nations and peoples."*⁶⁸

According to the author, such views constitute disbelief, are deliberately planned to undermine Islam, and contradict tawhid. He asserts:

*"It must be clearly known that in order to be Muslim, it is absolutely necessary to declare the polytheists unbelievers, to show enmity toward them, to hate them, and to hate those who love and defend them."*⁶⁹

He further concludes that contemporary rulers who associate themselves with Islam while operating within human-made systems are, in fact, "hardened unbelievers," because they have taken polytheists as allies, drawn close to them, and exalted them.

The author opposes not only friendship between Muslims and followers of other religions in social relations, but also relations between states. For this reason, he argues that Muslims must distance themselves from unbelievers and, if possible, migrate away from them:

*"Otherwise, remaining among them constitutes a sinful act. If one lacks the ability to migrate elsewhere, then one must distance oneself from them as much as possible, avoid their beliefs, reduce interaction with them, and remain patient until a path of migration becomes available."*⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, pp. 148-149.

⁶⁷ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 149.

⁶⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 151.

⁷⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 62.

Critique

Love and tolerance constitute foundational principles of Islam. The Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the Prophetic biography consistently promote tolerance, fraternity, and peace among human beings. The Prophet permitted marriage to Jewish and Christian women and himself entered into such marriages. Marriage is founded on love, and permitting it constitutes an encouragement of affection. He hosted Christian clergy from Najran in the mosque and allowed them to perform their worship there. He repeatedly emphasized that followers of other religions living among Muslims should not be harmed.⁷¹

The verse cited by the author regarding not taking Jews and Christians as allies (Qur'an, al-Ma'ida 5:51) serves as a warning against assisting the opposing side during wartime and reflects a specific historical context. Similarly, the verses cited from Surah al-Mumtahina (60:1–3) explicitly state, "O you who believe, do not take My enemies and your enemies as allies." These verses were revealed in connection with a particular historical incident in which a person sought to assist the enemy during war. Thus, they warn Muslims against aiding the opposing camp in times of conflict.

The Qur'anic injunctions not to take Jews and Christians as allies refer to refraining from supporting the enemy during the battles of the early Islamic period; they do not imply severing kinship ties, neighborhood relations, or ordinary human interactions, nor do they mandate hostility. Indeed, when the Prophet's uncle Abu Talib died, the Prophet instructed his Muslim son 'Ali to carry out his duties toward his father.⁷² Numerous examples in hadith and biographical sources emphasize the obligation of Muslims to treat their non-Muslim relatives with kindness.

8. *Takfir*

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi does not limit the concept of *takfir* to verbal declarations of unbelief; he also maintains that apostates and polytheists do not enjoy inviolability of life and property. He states: "For a person's life and property to be inviolable, it is not sufficient merely to utter the testimony

⁷¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 61.

⁷² Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 351.

of tawhid; rather, it is also necessary to reject everything that is worshipped besides God. If one does not reject what is worshipped besides God, then his life and property are not inviolable.”⁷³ He illustrates this view with the following examples:

“Secularists, racists, capitalists, socialists, liberals, and democrats have many different deities. They constitute different factions in terms of the deities they worship. Some obey Americans, some Europeans, and some Russians... Although the objects of their worship differ, they are united in essence—that is, in falling into major shirk. There is no difference among them with respect to shirk. God the Exalted says: ‘Fight them until fitna (shirk) is eliminated and religion belongs entirely to God’” (Qur'an, al-Baqara 2:193).⁷⁴

As can be seen, the author claims that Muslims whom he classifies as polytheists have no protection of life or property and that fighting them is a divine command.

Critique

These views are incompatible with Islam from both theological and historical perspectives. The Salaf, as well as Ash‘ari and Maturidi scholars, are unanimous in holding that the people of the qibla—those who identify as Muslims—cannot be declared unbelievers. During a military expedition, when a tribe on the opposing side declared, “We have become Sabians,” thereby implying their acceptance of Islam, Khalid ibn al-Walid nevertheless fought them and killed some captives. The Prophet Muhammad strongly condemned this act, raising his hands and saying: “O God, I disassociate myself from what Khalid has done.”⁷⁵

The Prophet also stated in multiple hadiths, “Whoever says ‘There is no deity but God’ will enter Paradise.”⁷⁶ There is consensus that one who utters the testimony of tawhid is to be considered Muslim. The pillars of faith consist of affirming in one’s heart the existence and oneness of God and the messengership of Muhammad. Expressing this affirmation verbally is sufficient for a person to be regarded as Muslim, and Islamic scholars have agreed on this definition of faith.

⁷³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 150.

⁷⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 173.

⁷⁵ Al-Bukhari, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, hadith no. 4339.

⁷⁶ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, hadith no. 496.

Beyond this affirmation, practical elements such as obedience, love, and submission are not considered pillars of faith. This claim—that such actions are pillars of faith—was first articulated by the Kharijites and later adopted by certain violent, literalist, and one-sided groups that followed them. Obedience inherently pertains to action, and the fact that action is not a pillar of faith has been particularly emphasized by Islamic theologians. Although scholars have differed in their interpretations of the relationship between faith and action, there is consensus among Sunni scholars that disobedience in practical matters does not expel a person from Islam.

As for warfare against unbelievers, Islam permits fighting primarily for self-defense in situations of aggression. Viewing war as a means of spreading religion is not consistent with Islamic principles. Verses in the Qur'an that permit fighting or encourage jihad must be evaluated within their historical contexts and should not be interpreted independently of the circumstances in which they were revealed. The Qur'an emphasizes religious freedom through universal principles, such as “There is no compulsion in religion” (Qur'an, al-Baqara 2:256) and “For you is your religion, and for me is mine” (Qur'an, al-Kafirun 109:6).

9. Taghut

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, the greatest problem facing Muslims today is the distortion of Islamic concepts. He claims that Satan and his supporters are working to undermine Islam by stripping Islamic concepts of their original meanings and replacing them with interpretations that pose no threat to their interests or systems of governance.⁷⁷ According to the author, the second major problem is Muslims' failure to recognize disbelief and to distinguish between unbelievers and Muslims. The third problem is that judgment among people is no longer based on God's Book and the Sunnah, but rather on human opinions and *taghut*.

Taghut is defined as anything that diverts people away from worshipping God. Foreign-origin laws are therefore *taghut*, and those who draft, disseminate, or implement such laws are either *taghut* themselves or soldiers of *taghut*.⁷⁸ The author states: “Whoever obeys *taghut*, does not declare them unbelievers, or does not declare unbelievers those who fail to declare *taghut* unbelievers, has

⁷⁷ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, pp. 31-32.

himself become an unbeliever and corrupted his faith.”⁷⁹ According to him, if a ruler permits something that God has prohibited—such as enacting laws that allow interest-based banking—that ruler becomes an unbeliever because he legislates for people and among people. He further argues that issuing judgments is an act of worship similar to prayer and fasting; therefore, whoever accepts a ruling other than God’s ruling is as if he has prayed and fasted for someone other than God.⁸⁰

The author maintains that the rulings of *taghut* can never be accepted and asserts that even if the entire world were to collapse, appearing before a *taghut* court would never be permissible.⁸¹ Supporting those who accept rulings other than God’s or failing to declare them unbelievers is, according to him, an act of disbelief. Because this issue concerns tawhid, ignorance is not considered a valid excuse.⁸² He further argues that for the testimony of tawhid to be effective, one must dislike unbelievers, harbor hatred toward them, and refrain from loving them. According to him, even loving an unbelieving close relative renders one an unbeliever.⁸³ He states that a person who associates with polytheists or sits with them cannot be judged as Muslim; rather, such a person must completely separate their life from them and openly declare disapproval of their disbelief and deviation.⁸⁴ He also asserts that failing to openly declare unbelievers as such, without a valid excuse, and living among them constitutes disbelief.⁸⁵

In his work *Rejecting Taghut*, Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi outlines eight conditions for rejecting *taghut*. According to the book, rejecting *taghut* requires: 1) declaring *taghut* and those who adhere to its religion unbelievers; 2) believing that worship directed toward *taghut* is false and invalid; 3) abandoning the worship of *taghut* and disassociating from it; 4) showing enmity toward *taghut*, harboring hatred for it, and disassociating from both it and its worshippers; 5) opposing *taghut* and its worshippers to the extent possible and waging jihad against them through speech and action; 6) distancing oneself from them and avoiding social interaction; 7) treating them harshly rather than gently; 8) refraining from befriending, cooperating with, or inclining toward them.

⁷⁹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 36.

⁸⁰ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 50.

⁸¹ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 55.

⁸² Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 82.

⁸³ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 110.

⁸⁴ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 110.

⁸⁵ Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, *The Essence of the Religion of Islam*, p. 117.

The author attempts to support these claims by citing Qur'anic verses concerning unbelievers, polytheists, and hypocrites, thereby seeking to demonstrate that those who worship *taghut* have exited Islam and that struggling against them is a religious obligation. According to him, merely rejecting *taghut* is insufficient; rejecting and declaring unbelievers those who worship *taghut* is also necessary for being a true believer. Recognizing and accepting only the people of tawhid is likewise required. Within this framework, anyone who does not share his views is deemed either a polytheist or an unbeliever.

However, Islamic theologians have articulated the principle that one exits Islam by the same means through which one entered it. Accordingly, anyone who utters the testimony of tawhid is a Muslim, and exiting Islam occurs only through denial of that testimony.

Critique

No Islamic scholar in history has ever stipulated the declaration of unbelief upon others as a condition of faith. Likewise, no Islamic scholar has regarded living under customary or alternative administrative systems—or complying with their laws—as an act of disbelief. By removing Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions from their contexts, assigning them new meanings, and reinterpreting Islamic concepts in a distorted manner, the author presents his ideological interpretations as religion and declares unbelievers those who reject them.

The author goes so far as to portray even natural human bonds of affection as dangerous, actively promoting hatred and enmity. Islam, however, does not prohibit love among people. In Qur'anic verses that caution against taking Jews and Christians as allies, what is condemned is affection toward immoral or hostile actions—not love for human beings themselves. Disliking a person's wrongful behavior does not entail hating the person entirely. The Prophet Muhammad loved his uncle Abu Talib, who supported him extensively, and he wished for his guidance. This reality is explicitly stated in the Qur'an: "*Indeed, you do not guide whom you love, but God guides whom He wills, and He knows best those who are guided*" (Qur'an, al-Qasas 28:56).

Sowing hostility among people and encouraging hatred is not a religious command. Religion enjoins peace, love, and fraternity, and the Qur'an and Sunnah contain numerous examples affirming these principles. Just as it is impermissible to declare people unbelievers merely because

they love non-believers, even openly assisting unbelievers does not automatically render a person an unbeliever. A Muslim who spies in favor of unbelievers is not executed for disbelief nor deemed to have exited Islam. On this matter, the four Sunni schools of law, as well as scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, are in agreement.⁸⁶

The fact that Islamic scholars unanimously agree that even actions capable of causing great harm to Muslims do not, in themselves, justify *takfir* serves as clear evidence that individuals cannot be declared unbelievers on the basis of their actions or behaviors. Interpreting religious texts through a purely literalist method without regard for historical reality or scholarly tradition amounts to presenting one's own views as religion. In matters as fundamental as faith and disbelief, Islamic scholarship has established core principles accepted by consensus (*ijma'*). No individual has the authority to place themselves in the position of God or a prophet by expelling people from religion or redefining the foundations of belief. From this perspective, al-Qudsi's interpretations cannot be regarded merely as legitimate differences of opinion.

Conclusion and Evaluation

1. Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi addresses the issue of tawhid through the concepts of deity (*ilah*), worship, religion (*din*), and *taghut*. However, it becomes evident that his primary objective is not to explain tawhid itself, but rather to judge modern ideologies and institutions that he labels as *taghut*. Salafi-Islamists, influenced by modern writers such as Mawdudi, describe modern ideologies as “religions” and seek to substantiate the claim that movements such as humanism, socialism, and capitalism constitute modern religions whose adherents are unbelievers.
2. Taking as his starting point the slogan “Judgment belongs to God alone,” which was adopted from a Qur’anic verse and turned into a political slogan by the Kharijites—an early violent group in Islamic history—Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi rejects modern institutions such as courts and parliaments. He argues that issuing judgments outside God’s ruling contradicts tawhid.

⁸⁶ Hatim al-‘Awni, *Takfir Ahl al-Shahādatayn*, pp. 164–165.

3. By assigning a new meaning to the concept of worship, he claims that obeying a person or institution, accepting their authority, or showing them affection also falls within the scope of worship. According to militant Islamists, obedience to those who enact or support rulings contrary to religious law, recognizing them as legitimate rulers, or expressing affection toward them all constitute acts of worship, thereby rendering those who commit such acts unbelievers. On this basis, they argue that it is necessary to distance oneself from societies they regard as unbelieving, and where distancing is not possible, to harbor hatred, display hostility, and treat such societies as unbelievers.
4. It is evident that al-Qudsi adopts the same approach as Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement, who labeled Muslim societies as polytheists and deemed their lives and property lawful. According to al-Qudsi, those to whom the Islamic message has not reached are polytheists and are treated as unbelievers in this world, while in the hereafter they will be tested anew, with the righteous entering Paradise and the wicked Hell. Those to whom the call has reached—whether Muslim or non-Muslim—cannot be considered Muslims if they do not reject *taghut*, even if they pray and fast. In such cases, they are deemed unbelievers whose lives and property are lawful.
5. In the early period of Islam, *takfir* was employed by minority groups such as the Kharijites, the Mu‘tazila, and certain Shi‘i factions as a means of propaganda against their opponents and as a tool for preserving group identity. By rejecting widely accepted social norms, these groups sought psychological security as marginalized sub-communities, portraying broader society as deviant, misguided, or irreligious in order to reinforce internal cohesion. In contrast, the Sunni majority opposed *takfir* and did not regard obedience to unjust Umayyad rulers or the commission of major sins as grounds for declaring disbelief.
6. *Takfir* draws its strength from the logic of othering and self-differentiation, which constitutes the core argument of violent ideologies. Groups that engage in *takfir* tend to be inclined toward violence. Militant Islamists, in my view, pursue two primary objectives through *takfir*:
 - (1) the construction of a distinct group identity, by declaring unbelievers all those who do not share their understanding of tawhid or who do not show affection toward those who do;

(2) the preparation of ideological ground for violence against those they label as unbelievers.

7. Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi claims that individuals and groups who adopt different ideologies, accept democratic elections and similar mechanisms, or recognize legal sources other than religious texts are unbelievers.

8. Although al-Qudsi asserts that he differs from the Kharijites because he does not declare the early Salaf scholars unbelievers, he nevertheless claims that nearly all people today—including devout Muslims—are either polytheists or unbelievers. By reinforcing his arguments with concrete examples, he develops a discourse of exclusion and hatred that encompasses virtually everyone. While some contemporary Salafi writers adopt more moderate positions toward concepts such as democracy, al-Qudsi argues that those who accept democracy are unbelievers, as are those who refrain from declaring them unbelievers, and even those who do not declare unbelievers those who refrain from declaring unbelievers. In his framework, even silence offers no salvation, resulting in an all-encompassing discourse of hatred.

9. Despite Islam's prohibition of *takfir*, Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi persistently defends it. According to Islamic scholars, *takfir* can only be considered in cases where definitive rulings—transmitted through uninterrupted chains, established through mass transmission (*mutawatir*), and whose meanings are determined by scholarly consensus—are explicitly denied. Even in such cases, the psychological condition of the individual and their actual intent must be carefully examined. For this reason, scholars have held that if a statement admits even a one percent possibility of alternative interpretation, *takfir* should not be applied.

10. Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi claims that *takfir* constitutes one of the two fundamental pillars of tawhid, and indeed the most important one. However, a Muslim bears no obligation to declare others unbelievers. On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned: “If a person calls another a disbeliever, that accusation does not disappear; if the other is not a disbeliever, it returns upon the one who uttered it.” It is impossible to know with certainty who truly possesses faith, or to fully discern the inner states of human beings. Human psychology is fluid and constantly changing; some of the most prominent

Companions even approached the Prophet asking, “Could I be a hypocrite?” The *takfiri* mindset ignores human psychology entirely, issuing judgments as if dealing with machines, and with great arrogance and audacity, establishes a climate of fear by declaring: “If you do not reject this, you are an unbeliever; if you do not declare an unbeliever to be an unbeliever, you are an unbeliever; if you do not declare unbelievers those who refrain from declaring unbelievers, you are an unbeliever.”

11. Islam commands ease, encouragement, and the conveying of glad tidings; it is founded upon peace and tolerance and enjoins love for all human beings without distinction between believer and unbeliever. Justifying violence, discrimination, and hate speech through Islamic sacred texts or through the life of the Prophet is untenable. The attempt by Salafi writers to ground contemporary problems and modern concepts in religious texts through excessive interpretation represents a classic form of anachronism. The sociological and psychological foundations of *takfir* discourse—when used as a tool of violence and exclusion—also warrant further scholarly investigation.
12. The ideology of Islamism, shaped by early thinkers such as Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, has influenced numerous movements and religious groups. In this study, by examining the impact of Islamism on Salafism, we sought to analyze how Islamism evolved into an ideology of violence. We conclude that radical movements cannot be properly understood without analyzing Islamism’s core ideological pillars—such as tawhid, shirk, obedience to authority as worship, and *taghut*. Even if early Islamist thinkers did not explicitly endorse violence or terrorism, we observe that their ideas can easily be transformed into a violent ideology through the introduction of new examples and interpretations. There will always be those who seek to instrumentalize religion in political power struggles. However, sound interpretation of religious beliefs can, to a certain extent, prevent religion from being politicized and weaponized as a discourse of hatred. For this reason, we believe that the theoretical analysis of Islamism remains incomplete, and that such theoretical work is just as important as studying its practical manifestations.

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