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THE ISSUE OF FAITH (IMAN) IN THE WORK TA'WILAT AL-QUR'AN

Abstract. *This article is devoted to the views on the issues of faith expressed in Abu Mansur Moturidi's work "Ta'wilat al-Qur'an". It is known that Abu Mansur Moturidi lived and created at the time when the distortions in the belief were at their peak, and at the same time he refuted several erroneous categories such as khawarij, mu'tazilites, and karromites with both intellectual and narrative evidence. In this work of Moturidi, not only in his time, but also in today's time, there are enough refutations of currents that try to achieve their selfish goals by throwing various conflicting issues among the civilians who are living harmoniously and by distracting them.*

Key words: *tafsir, aqeedah, faith, kufr, shirk, discord, khawarij, mu'tazilites, karromites, qarmatites.*

INTRODUCTION

Faith (iman) occupies a central position in Islamic theology, shaping both the spiritual identity of the believer and the foundations of religious doctrine. Linguistically, the term iman denotes "affirmation," while in Islamic terminology it signifies the acknowledgment of essential truths such as the oneness of God (tawḥid), prophethood, resurrection, divine reward, and punishment. Classical scholars also emphasize the importance of iqrar—a verbal declaration of faith—which, although not a part of the essence of faith, functions as a legal requirement for applying the rulings of Islam within society.

The concept of taḥqiq, meaning "to examine or verify," further underscores the theological effort to define and substantiate faith on both textual and rational grounds. Theologians such as Abu Manṣur al-Maturidi reject the notion that faith consists merely of verbal pronouncement without inward conviction. He demonstrates, through Qur'anic

verses, Prophetic traditions, and rational proofs, that genuine faith must reside in the heart, while verbal testimony serves only as an outward legal identifier of one's belonging to the Muslim community. In contrast, scholars like Ḥakim Samarqandi maintain that both inner affirmation and verbal declaration are essential, drawing distinctions among groups that emphasize only one aspect. These discussions contributed to defining orthodoxy in early Islamic theological debates, particularly in relation to groups such as the Karramiyya, who reduced faith to utterance alone, and whose anthropomorphic tendencies set them apart from mainstream Sunni thought.

Classical scholars continued to refine the definition of faith by distinguishing its essence from its perfection. According to the Ḥanafis and Maturidis, the essence of faith neither increases nor decreases; rather, it is one's obedience and moral conduct that fluctuate. The Ash'aris, however, argue that faith itself can increase or decrease, citing Qur'anic evidence that speaks of believers whose faith grows over time. These differing interpretations illustrate the rich diversity of early Sunni theological discourse.

Exegetical discussions, particularly those found in Maturidi's *Ta'wilat al-Qur'an*, further illuminate the nature of faith. In his commentary on Qur'an 2:284, Maturidi emphasizes that actions are not intrinsic components of faith; rather, they are expressions that may enhance one's religious standing without altering the core of belief itself. He uses this reasoning to refute Mu'tazilite claims that sinners cannot be considered true believers, arguing instead that as long as a person internally affirms the truths of revelation, he or she retains the status of a believer.

The relationship between *iman* (faith) and *islam* (submission) has also been a subject of scholarly debate. While some consider the terms synonymous, others differentiate them based on Qur'anic usage, noting that *islam* pertains to outward submission while *iman* refers to inward conviction. Maturidi offers one of the most nuanced articulations of this distinction, associating each term with different spiritual faculties and levels of inner awareness. His analysis situates faith within the heart, knowledge within the inner conscience, and *tawḥid* within the innermost secret, thus presenting a layered understanding of religious experience.

A further theological discussion concerns whether faith is created or uncreated. Maturidi argues that faith is created because it exists within the realm of created beings, whereas Ḥakim Samarqandi posits a dual classification: the human act of professing

faith is created, while the meaning it conveys—being an attribute of God—is uncreated. This distinction parallels classical debates on the createdness of the Qur'an and reflects broader principles of Islamic theology.

MAIN PART

Overall, the scholarly debates surrounding faith—its nature, essence, components, and ontological status—form a crucial part of Islamic doctrinal history. By examining these positions, this study highlights the intellectual depth of Islamic theology and the enduring relevance of classical discussions in understanding the foundations of belief in Islam. “Iman”, in the dictionary, means “affirmation”. In Islamic terminology, confirming matters such as tawhīd (the oneness of God), prophethood, resurrection, and the rewarding of good and punishment of evil is called iman.

Iqrar (verbal declaration), according to leading scholars, is considered a condition for implementing the rulings of Islam.

“Tahqiq” in the dictionary means “to examine”. In terminology, “tahqiq” refers to proving a particular issue with evidence (Jurjani, 2012:115).

Maturidi mentions that some groups claim that faith (iman) consists only of pronouncing the testimony of faith with the tongue and has no connection to the heart. He then proves through transmitted evidence (the Qur'an and Hadith) as well as rational proof that faith must reside in the heart, while verbal declaration is required only for applying the legal ruling of being a Muslim (Maturidi, 1986:373).

Hakim Samarqandi, however, states that iman is both the affirmation of the heart and the verbal declaration (Ibrahim Hilmi Wafi, 1896). A group that pronounces the testimony of faith with the tongue but has no inner affirmation is considered hypocrites (munafiqs); if a person believes inwardly but does not verbally declare it, he is a disbeliever (kafir); whoever considers faith to be solely the work of the heart without including verbal declaration is a Jahmi; and whoever claims that faith consists only of verbal declaration is a Karrami (Ibrahim Hilmi Wafi, 1896:12).

According to the Karramis, faith is merely verbal declaration. “The Karramis are the followers of Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Karram. They do not deny the attributes of Allah, but they attribute corporeality to Him and engage in anthropomorphism. This sect later divided into smaller sub-groups, reaching twelve in number. Their main groups are

six: the Ubaydiyya, Tunniyya, Zariniyya, Ishāqiyya, Waḥidiyya, and Ḥasimiyya, each holding distinct beliefs” (Ibrahim Ḥilmi Wafi, 1896:148).

Abu Ḥafṣ Najm al-Din al-Nasafi states the following in his work *Aqaid al-Nasafiyya*:

“Iman is to affirm as true what the Prophet (peace be upon him) brought from Allah and to acknowledge it. Thus, actions are acts of obedience; therefore, they can increase, while iman itself neither increases nor decreases.”

According to the Ash’aris, the essence and perfection of faith can increase and decrease. They cite the verse, “so that their faith may increase along with their (existing) faith,” (Surat al-Faṭḥ, verse 4) as evidence.

According to the Ḥanafis, the essence of faith does not increase or decrease; rather, its perfection can increase or decrease.

According to the Maturidi view, faith arises within individuals by their own choice. He also responds to the incorrect views of various sects of his time regarding this issue.

“The Messenger (Muḥammad) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Each of them believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers, making no distinction between any of His messengers. And they say, We hear and obey. Our Lord, we ask for Your forgiveness. To You is the final return” (al-Baqarah, 284).

When Maturidi comments on this verse, he emphasizes the nature of faith and that actions are not included in its definition. He states: “This verse is proof against those who doubt their own faith. For Allah has attributed faith to those who believe in Him and His Messenger. In this verse there is also a refutation of the Mu’tazilites, because Allah affirmed the faith of those who believe in the matters mentioned above, whereas the Mu’tazilites removed the name “believer” from them. Even if a person commits a major sin, as long as he believes in what is mentioned in the verse, Allah calls him a believer and bears witness to it” (Maturidi, 2005:290).

Based on this commentary, Maturidi stresses that the word iman is applied to those who truly believe, and that actions are not part of its definition. Therefore, it is not permissible to label those who have faith as disbelievers.

Actions are not considered part of iman, because in many cases actions are mentioned as being associated with faith. That which is connected to something else is clearly distinct from it. Likewise, for actions to be valid, faith is a necessary condition, as in

the verse: “Whoever does righteous deeds while being a believer...” (Surat Toha, verse 112) A condition is always something different from that which it conditions.

In his work “Ta’wilat al-Qur’an,” Abu Maṣṣur al-Maturidi cites several hadiths related to faith. Among them:

أَتَدْرُونَ مَا الْإِيمَانُ بِاللَّهِ؟ أَنْ تَشْهَدُوا أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

“Do you know what faith in Allah is? Faith is that you bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that I am the Messenger of Allah” (Maturidi, 2005:290).

According to some scholars, iman (faith) and islam (submission) are the same. Other scholars regard them as distinct concepts. As evidence for this distinction, they cite the following verse: “The Bedouins say, “We believe”. Say: “You have not believed; rather say, We have submitted” (Surat Hujurot, verse 14).

Faith is a required condition for the validity of islam. Therefore, every Muslim is a believer, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Some scholars, however, have said: every believer is a Muslim, but not every Muslim is a believer.

Some scholars have stated that the most accurate explanation on this matter is the statement of Abu Maṣṣur al-Maturidi:

“Islam is to recognize Allah Most High without attributing to Him any condition or likeness. The place of islam is the chest. Iman is to know Him as God; its place is the heart, and the heart is within the chest. Ma’rifah (gnosis) is to know Allah Most High through His attributes; its place is the inner self (the conscience), which lies within the heart. Tawḥid is to recognize the oneness of Allah Most High; its place is the innermost secret (sirr), which lies within the inner self. This is indicated by Allah’s statement: “The parable of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp...” (Surat Nur, verse 35).

Maturidi states that faith (iman) is “created” (makhlūq). As proof, he cites verses indicating that everything besides Allah is created (6:102; 40:62; 37:97; 67:13; 25:59) (Maturidi, 1986:385:388). Since iman is something other than Allah, he concludes that it is created.

Hakim Samarqandi, however, maintains that iman is both “created” and “uncreated.” This is because anything that belongs to the human being and his actions is created, while everything attributed to Allah is uncreated. To explain this, he uses the following example:

When a servant says “La ilaha illa Allah,” the movement of his tongue is his action, and the quality of this action is created. But the meaning of what he says—“La ilaha illa

Allah”—is an attribute of Allah, and therefore uncreated. There is a significant difference between the two. This is similar to the case of the Qur'an: its recitation is created, while the Qur'an itself is uncreated (Ibrahim Hilmi Wafi, 1896:60).

CONCLUSION

The study of iman (faith) within Islamic theology reveals a rich and multidimensional intellectual tradition in which scholars sought to define the essence, components, and implications of belief with precision and depth. While the linguistic meaning of iman centers on affirmation, classical theologians expanded this definition to encompass a complex interplay between inner conviction, verbal declaration, and spiritual understanding. Maturidi's insistence that faith originates in the heart and is validated by sincere belief stands in contrast to sectarian views that reduced iman to mere utterance, demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between external expressions of religion and their internal foundations.

The debates surrounding the increase and decrease of faith further illustrate the diversity of early theological thought. The Ash'ari view that faith can fluctuate reflects an emphasis on spiritual growth, whereas the Maturidi and Hanafi interpretation distinguishes between the unchanging essence of faith and the variable nature of obedience. Such distinctions highlight the methodological balance between textual interpretation and rational inquiry that characterizes Sunni theological discourse.

Additionally, the differentiation between iman and islam underscores the layered nature of religious identity in Islam. By situating islam as outward submission and iman as inward conviction, scholars such as Maturidi emphasized that genuine belief transcends formal compliance, residing at progressively deeper levels of spiritual awareness. This framework enriches the understanding of human religiosity by acknowledging that faith manifests differently across the mind, the heart, and the inner conscience.

The ontological debate over whether faith is created or uncreated reflects broader discussions on divine attributes and human action. Maturidi's view that faith is created aligns with the principle that all realities apart from God are contingent, whereas Hakim Samarqandi's dual perspective—distinguishing the created nature of human action from the uncreated nature of divine meaning—demonstrates the sophistication of classical kalam reasoning.

Overall, the extensive scholarly discourse surrounding iman affirms its centrality in Islamic belief and practice. Through meticulous argumentation, Qur'anic exegesis, and engagement with opposing viewpoints, theologians clarified foundational doctrines that continue to shape Islamic thought today. This examination of the nature, essence, and spiritual dimensions of faith underscores not only the intellectual vitality of the Islamic tradition but also the enduring relevance of classical scholarship in understanding the core principles that define religious identity and commitment.

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