

**REDICAL MUSLIM FRINGE GROUPS'
RECOURSE TO *TAKFĪR*
(ACCUSING MUSLIMS OF INFIDELITY)
A CRITIQUE**

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This paper analyses dogmatic extremism with a special focus on legal rulings regarding the matter of accusing other Muslims of being infidels. It defines the Arabic term according to the Qur'ān, *Hadīth* literature, and traditional Islamic dialogues. The study employs a qualitative content analysis of relevant literature referring to issues relating to unbelief (*kufr*), polytheism (*shirk*), faith (*īmān*), accusing Muslims of infidelity (*takfīr*), and legal injunctions holding societal implications. The scope is limited to the issue of *takfīr* advocated by organizations or individuals without focussing on their historical background. It attempts to correct misconceptions of Islam as an unjust immoderate religion. It considers accusations of unbelief made in respect of (i) Individuals who are guilty of acts of sin and disobedience; (ii) Rulers who do not base their policies and judgements on the *Shari'ah*; (iii) The subjects of such rulers who continue to accept the authority of a ruler who conducts himself in this way; (iv) and individuals who leave or withdraw from Islamic organizations. The paper also includes scholarly critiques of extremist views on accusing Muslims of infidelity and provides intelligent responses based on solid evidence from the *Sunnah*, as well from the exegetes.

Keywords: Disobedience, Extremism, Faith, Infidelity, Organization, Sin.

Introduction

Current Muslim life is threatened by extremism/radicalism, particularly with regard to interpreting religious injunctions and accusing fellow Muslims of infidelity by radical Muslim fringe groups. Thus, this

discourse focuses on the full range of efforts made by individual Muslims or fringe groups who accuse other Muslims of infidelity (*takfīr*) or apostasy (*irtidād*). Twentieth century scholars have increasingly discussed the phenomenon of extremism because it poses an advancing menace to peace by giving rise to hatred, enmity, hostility and disunity. The Muslim world restlessly approaches a cross roads posed by the deadly challenge. According to researchers, extremism manifests in individuals and organisations due to misunderstandings and misapplications of sound Islamic injunctions. Strange conclusions and roguish presumptions have been drawn from the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth*. The writer posits that such inferences do not comply with the fundamental Islamic teachings, and as such, serve to negate the ultimate purpose of Revelation (*maqāṣid al-waḥī*). Many extremists/radicals enjoy a blind adherence to literal interpretations of Islamic texts that lack 'in-depth' research and analysis. They make little concerted effort to examine their interpretations to ascertain if they align with the objectives of *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Revealed Law). Consequently, they submerge common, uneducated and innocent Muslims in an ocean of chaos, controversy, confusion, contradiction, deception, delusion and dissension. This is primarily due to distortions that replace accurate trustworthy interpretations of the revealed Islamic message.

According to Muslim scholars, extremism/radicalism manifests when accusing Muslims as infidels or apostates for the reasons: [1] due to his/her disobedience; [2] a ruler who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed; [3] followers of such a ruler; [4] a Muslim who leaves a Muslim organisation; [5] a Muslim who does not migrate; and [6] for not accusing other Muslims as infidels.

None of these causes fully regards the rules of *Sharī'ah* with sober and informed consideration. Furthermore, extremism also manifests as (i) the innovation of arbitrarily halting, affirming or declaring a position of judgement on someone pending verification or investigation; (ii) interpreting contemporary Muslim societies as those equivalent with the era of *Jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic period); and (iii) passing rulings related to understanding of the concept of *Dār* (the Land).¹

As the issue in hand is crucial, it is important to understand Arabic terms used by the extremists in arguments, articulations and religious exhortations when discussing the issue of charging someone with unbelief (*kufīr*). Terms such as *īmān* (faith) and *kufīr* (unbelief) are widely used

in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* literature. Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand their true meanings in the light of the Qur'ānic and Sunnatic perspectives that accord with the methodology applied during the early Islamic period, and which held a genuine understanding of the Texts. Generally, a consensus on undistorted teachings has already been reached which effectively solves all societal problems. Both terms (*īmān* and *kufṛ*) are more than sufficiently studied for purposes of highlighting the implications of employing them in the contemporary Islamic discourse between moderate and extremist scholars. The term *kufṛ*, as used in the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* under different contexts, especially requires proper perspective. Otherwise, detecting the extremist abuse that propels common Muslims towards devastation by nurturing a culture of subversion that expels fellow Muslims from the *Ummah* is nearly unachievable.

This paper analyses verses of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth*. It draws attention to explanations made by the *Companions* (R.A.) and scholars who have studied extensively and have commented on the concepts of *kufṛ* and *takfīr* (the charge of 'unbelief' and 'infidelity'). It endeavours to inform Muslims and non-Muslims of the Islamic worldview and activate logical cognizance of authentic Islamic injunctions and values, particularly on the matter of *takfīr*. It attempts to correct misconceptions about Islam as an unjust immoderate religion. The methodology applied is that of a qualitative content analysis of relevant verses taken from the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* with special reference to accusing Muslims of infidelity. The analysis is followed by a presentation of positions taken by the *Companions* and their Successors (*tābi'īn*) (R.A.), as well by the Qur'ān's exegetes, scholars and jurists. The scope is limited to the issue of *takfīr*, whether it is advocated by organizations or individuals, and not to study the historical background of the extremist or radical groups or their ideologues. Considering limitations, this study provides only a few examples from early Islamic sources.

Towards Understanding the Meaning of the Term, *Kufṛ*

Ibn Fāris mentioned that *al-kāf*, *al-fā* and *al-rā* are basic roots that indicate 'hiding' or 'covering' something. *Kufṛ* is the opposite of *īmān* because it is like hiding the truth.² The term means, to cover and to hide. *Kufī*; *kufṛān* and *kufur* mean 'to be irreligious', 'to be an infidel', and

‘not to believe in Allah’.³ The term is used in different exegetical and juristic texts with different meanings, sometimes for the state of unbelief that expels someone from a community and at other times for the type of unbelief that does not exile a person from his/her own community. The term ‘unbelief’ has branches, like *īmān*. Each branch of *īmān* is called *īmān* as Allah says, “Never would Allah make your faith no effect.”⁴ In relation to this, Abū Hurayrah (R.A.) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Faith has over seventy branches or over sixty branches; the most excellent of which is the declaration that there is no god but Allah and the humblest of which is the removal of what is injurious from the path and modesty is the branch of faith.”⁵

Among these branches, there are some, that if terminated, cause *īmān* to disappear such as the branch of the *shahādah* (evidence). There are others that even if people do not act on them, such people remain in the state of *īmān*, such as the last branch (of faith), which is the removal of harmful objects from roads. Between them are unequal branches of great divergence.

The same philosophy is applied to *kufr*, which also has roots and branches. Some of which charge someone as an infidel and others, if holding one of them, he possesses a characteristic of *kufr*. In this regard, Ibn Sallam conveys that as far as the *aḥādīth* regarding unbelief and polytheism are concerned, they do not specifically indicate that those who have the same attributes as mentioned in these *aḥādīth* are infidels or polytheists. However, they also have different indications such as attributes and ways that are present among the infidels and polytheists.⁶

Hence, unbelief (*kufr*) is of two types. The first is major unbelief (*al-kufr al-akbar*), which leads to the fire of hell forever. The second is minor unbelief (*al-kufr al-aṣghar*), which inevitably threatens a person but does not lead him to the fire eternally.⁷ In succeeding pages, types of unbelief are analysed for the reader’s benefit and comprehension, thus, rendering true meanings of the term *kufr* and relevant issues.

Major Unbelief

Major unbelief leads someone to hellfire forever. Islamic texts treat unbelief as the opposite to faith. Allah says,

“If Allah had so willed, succeeding generations would not have fought among each other, after clear (signs) had come to

them, but they (chose) to wrangle, some believing and others rejecting.”⁸

“Allah is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith, the patrons are the evil ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness. They will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein (forever).”⁹

“How shall Allah guide those who reject faith after they accepted it and bore witness that the Messenger was true and that clear signs had come unto them?

But Allah guides not a people unjust.”¹⁰

All the three verses imply that people who commit major unbelief will be in the hellfire eternally. Scholars discuss major unbelief by dividing it into five types as follows.¹¹

The Unbelief of Lies: This refers to denying the prophethood (*nubuwwah*). This sort of belief is rare among infidels because Allah gave clear signs to His prophets (ﷺ) that were supported, strengthened and backed by explicit evidence.

Allah depicts the condition of such people:

“And they rejected those signs in iniquity and arrogance, though their souls were convinced thereof: so see what was the end of those who acted corruptly.”¹²

Sayyid Quṭb explains:

“The Quraysh elders were certain of the truth of the Qur’ān but they persisted in denying it and rejecting the Prophet’s call to believe in Allah alone. They wanted to continue with their false beliefs because of the privileges and gains they felt would be threatened if they were to abandon their religion. They realized that such gains and privileges depended totally on their false beliefs and that Islam was sure to do away with them. They felt their position to be very shaky, compared with the clear truth of Islam. Such is the truth. Its rejecters do not deny it out of ignorance. They deny it because they know it to be the truth and realize that it threatens their interests and privileges. Hence, they deliberately reject it.”¹³

Unbelief of Vanity and Arrogance: The prime example of this unbelief is Iblīs (Satan) who did not deny the commandments of Allah nor repudiate Him but rather emerged with vanity and arrogance. Like Iblīs, many former nations and communities reflected this as many do presently. Regarding this, Allah mentions their replies to the prophets (ﷺ), “They said: “Ah! Ye are no more than human, like ourselves.”¹⁴ On this, Maudūdī wrote:

“The disbelievers meant to imply that the Prophet (ﷺ) was a human being like anyone else in every respect; he was eating, drinking and sleeping and having wife and children like others. He was feeling hungry and thirsty and suffering from heat and cold, disease and calamities. There was nothing unusual and extraordinary in him to accept him as a Prophet (ﷺ) and believe that Allah communicates with him and sends His angels to him.”¹⁵

The arrogance and vanity of their replies reflect this type of major unbelief.

Unbelief of Avoiding: This refers to turning away from the Prophet (ﷺ) consciously and by heart by not listening to him but rather avoiding him. Here, a human being neither testifies nor denies, neither loves nor has enmity towards him, and does not pay attention to him by any means. The avoidance is obvious and takes place wantonly.

Unbelief of Doubt: One is not certain of accepting Muḥammad as the Prophet (ﷺ) of Islam but does not accuse him of lying. Yet he/she doubts him and his mission as being entrusted by Allah. In Makkah, people were misled and confused by both Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab who exhausted all efforts to keep people away from the Message by instilling all sorts of doubts about the mission of the Prophet (ﷺ).

Unbelief of Hypocrisy: One outwardly shows his faith while inwardly concealing unbelief. On this, Allah says, “Of the people there are some who say: “We believe in Allah and the last day; but they do not (really) believe.”¹⁶ Maudūdī wrote that the hypocrites:

“... delude themselves by imagining that their duplicity will safeguard their interests but obviously their policy proves harmful in this world and most surely shall be so in the next world. A hypocrite might

succeed in deceiving some people for some time but they cannot deceive all people for all times. When such a person is exposed, he loses all honour once and for all. As to the hereafter, mere lip service will carry no weight there because it is deeds alone that matter there.”¹⁷

These are some examples of major unbelief that justify one’s expulsion from the community of believers.¹⁸

Minor Unbelief

Minor unbelief brings threats to a person but does not lead him/her to the hellfire eternally. These include all forms of disobedience (sin), as sin is one element of unbelief.¹⁹ Obedience is recognised as faith; hence, disobedience is accounted as unbelief. Disobedience is the opposite of gratitude, as obedience is an act of gratitude.²⁰ About this, Allah says, “We showed him the way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).”²¹ Allah also says, “If anybody is grateful, truly his gratitude is (a gain) for his own soul; but if anybody is ungrateful, truly My Lord is free of all needs, supreme in honour.”²²

A few *aḥādīth* mention unbelief synonymously with disobedience. We reproduce them for greater clarity and for the purpose of avoiding conflicts and confrontations. To begin with, ‘Abd Allah (b. Mas‘ūd [R.A.]) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Abusing a Muslim is *Fusūq* (i.e. an evil doing) and killing him is *kufr* (disbelief).”²³ Disbelief, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, does not mean that it drives someone out of the *Ummah*. Scholars reached this inference based on what Allah says, “If two parties or groups among the believers fall to fighting...”²⁴ In this verse Allah does not refer to them (the two parties fighting one another) as unbelievers; rather they are referred to as believers who fall into fighting. The induction is that it is inappropriate to call believers infidels merely because of fighting or disagreement. Disagreements or differences of opinions cannot form a basis for the accusation of infidelity.

Along this line of thought, al-‘Asqalānī reiterated that whenever a believer commits disobedience or sin, he is not regarded as an infidel, for Allah has recognised him with the category of a believer. Instead of accusing him of unbelief, an attempt at compromise should take place to

maintain peace and harmony; he should not be driven out of the *Ummah* merely due to fighting, nor can there be any unusual judgement.

Abū Hurayrah (R.A.) reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Two matters are signs of disbelief on the part of those who indulge in them: defaming and speaking evil of a person’s lineage and wailing over the dead.”²⁵ Al-Nawawī remarked there were different views among scholars but the most appropriate was (i) to consider these characteristic activities of infidels and people of pre-Islamic days. He further stated that (ii) these same characteristics lead a person into a state of unbelief and that (iii) they indicate ingratitude for Allah’s blessings and compassion.²⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah interpreted both matters as ‘signs of disbelief’, meaning that these characteristics are found in people as *kufṛ* in that they are like the actions of disbelievers but without implying that the observer of one branch of *kufṛ* would become a total disbeliever; that is, unless genuine *kufṛ*, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, is explicitly seen in such a person.²⁷

Al-‘Asqalānī drew lessons from the *aḥādīth* on the permissibility of employing the word *kufṛ* for qualities that do not drive someone out of the *Ummah* and for monotheists who are also punished for their sins.²⁸ Al-Nawawī remarked that this *ḥadīth* provided evidence for using the word *kufṛ* for something in which there is no denial of Allah (such as being ungrateful to one’s husband or for the favours provided by Allah), or His compassion and truth.²⁹ Moreover, what supports this principle is the classification of unbelief into two kinds, major and minor. Using this approach, gross misconceptions of those who accuse others of unbelief evaporate. The *ḥadīth* teaching that monotheists will be taken out of hellfire further supports the argument. Al-Bukhārī infers that sins are due to ignorance but that a sinner is not a disbeliever unless he worships others along with Allah.

Examples of unbelief are injustice, sensuality and ignorance, and these have been divided into two kinds. The first type expels a person from the *Ummah* but the second does not.³⁰ This assessment was reported by the Prophet’s *Companions* (R.A.), the most knowledgeable in the Qur’ān; those who knew Islam intimately and fully understood unbelief’s elements. Muslims who learned from them were/are superior, but later generations failed to comprehend and eventually became divided into two groups. One group advocated the exclusion of all those who committed

major sins from the community, and went even further to pass the verdict of hellfire, forever, for those so condemned. The other group declared their own status as believers with perfect faith. Hence, one group exceeded the limits and the other did not. Nevertheless, Allah guided “the People of the Prophet’s Patterns and the Community” (*ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*) by showing them the path of moderation. Hence, there is unbelief *less than unbelief*; hypocrisy *less than hypocrisy*; polytheism *less than polytheism*; sensuality *less than sensuality*; and injustice *less than injustice*.³¹

Unbelief and its Consequences

According to scholars, there are two significant principles that encompass the concept of unbelief. The first is that a person can hold elements of faith and unbelief concurrently. The second is that driving a person out of the *Ummah* is dangerous and holds much risk.

First Principle

Good and righteous deeds are called ‘faith’ by Allah when He says, “Never would Allah make your faith of no effect.”³² On the other hand, sins (disobedience) are referred to as ‘unbelief’. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Abusing a Muslim is *Fusūq* (i.e. an evil doing) and killing him is *kufr* (disbelief).”³³ Hence, it is possible that some believers will have a branch or branches of unbelief or hypocrisy or ignorance. This is what the Prophet (ﷺ) meant when naming unbelief for some sins while not denying the faith of the sinner. This significant principle needs greater acknowledgement as the issue of redeeming sinners from hellfire (not to abide therein forever) is based on it, and is supported with evidence from the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*.

Evidence from the Qur’ān

Allah says, “And most of them believe not in Allah without associating (others as partners) with Him.”³⁴ Ibn Abbās said they have a part of faith for when they were asked, ‘Who created the heavens, the earth, and the mountains,’ ‘they say Allah.’ Yet, they associate others with Him in worship’. Although the verse was revealed concerning Arab polytheists, it is best to apply the ruling in general.

Allah says,

“The desert Arabs say: “We believe.” Say: “Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say ‘We have submitted our wills to Allah’. For not yet has Faith entered your hearts. But if ye obey Allah and His Apostle He will not belittle aught for your deeds: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.”³⁵

Here, Allah considers both their Islam and obedience to Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) by saying ‘they have no faith.

Evidence from Ḥadīth Literature

‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“Three characteristics make anyone who possesses them a sheer hypocrite; anyone who possesses one of them possesses a characteristic of hypocrisy till he abandons it; when he talks he lies, when he makes a covenant he acts treacherously, and when he quarrels he deviates from the truth.”³⁶

This *ḥadīth* shows that hypocrisy and Islam can be found simultaneously in one person.³⁷ The inference is that a person remains a hypocrite until he abandons such acts, also implying he might not remain a hypocrite forever. Likewise, a liar is regarded as committing a sin but the moment he stops lying he is no longer a hypocrite. What is drawn from the *ḥadīth* is that not all such acts expel a person from the *Ummah*. Hence, decreeing that a person committing such acts is in a state of unbelief is improper.

Second Principle

Accusing a Muslim of infidelity has severe consequences, so it is impermissible for a Muslim to pass any judgement against another Muslim unless there is irrefutable and authentic evidence. Calling a Muslim an infidel was also disapproved in a *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah (R.A.): “If a man says to his brother O *kāfir* (disbeliever), then surely one of them is such (i.e. *kāfir*).”³⁸

This *ḥadīth* infers that accusing others of infidelity is not an insignificant matter but is vitally important. Hence, utmost care should be taken in passing such a remark or judgement on others. The consequence is serious, to the extent that an accuser may reach the state of an infidel due to an unsubstantiated and false accusation. Thābit ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk (R.A.) reported that ... cursing a believer is like murdering him and whoever accuses a believer of disbelief, then it is as if he had killed him.³⁹ Obviously, this *ḥadīth* does not endorse the concept of accusing a believer of infidelity, especially since a false accusation of infidelity is equivalent to murder. Hence, regardless of situations and circumstances, a believer remains a believer and he shall not be accused as an infidel due to any kind of sin or disobedience, excepting polytheism.

Abū Dharr (R.A.) narrated that he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, “If somebody accuses another of *fusūq* (by calling him *fāsiq* i.e. wicked person) or accuses him of *kufī*; such an accusation will revert to him (the accuser) if his companion (the accused) is innocent.”⁴⁰ Ibn Daqīq remarks it is a severe threat to whoever accuses another of infidelity if the accused is innocent. Some Muslims have fallen into this predicament. Unfortunately, the phenomenon persists as, compared to times past, present Muslim society engages in the business of charging other Muslims with infidelity due to minor differences and disputes. Disagreement in beliefs and exchanging judgements of infidelity are spreading like a contagious disease.

The *aḥādīth* register stern warnings for those who accuse someone of infidelity. Clear commands for restraint are evident, as the issue is related to the *Shari‘ah*. As the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* stipulate solid principles, such judgements are not to be passed out on mere desire, whim, fancy, ignorance or bias. One who claims something due to absolute ignorance goes against the People of Knowledge (*ahl al-‘Ilm*), and by opposing them by accusing someone of infidelity, he eventually places himself among those who go astray. Such an act is the sign of the highest order of ignorance as there is none greater.⁴¹

Without knowing the esoteric sentiments of someone who appears indifferent and seems to reflect or manifest some dimensions of unbelief, even then it is not appropriate to accuse him of infidelity. Thus, an infidel is one who expands his chest wide open for disbelief. The heart of an infidel is satisfied and at peace with unbelief, especially when due to his

ignorance of what is against the path of Islam. There is no value in any deed of unbelief by which the doer does not intend to leave Islam and join a disbelieving community. Likewise, there is no consideration of words uttered by Muslims reflecting the meaning of disbelief unless they truly mean it and hold it as a creed.⁴²

Usāmah ibn Zayd (R.A.) said:

“Allah’s Apostle (ﷺ) sent us towards (the) Huruqah and in the morning we attacked them and defeated them. I and an Anṣārī man followed a man from among them and when we took him over, he said, *Lā ilāha illa Allāh*. On hearing that, the Anṣārī man stopped, but I killed him by stabbing him with my spear. When we returned, the Prophet (ﷺ) came to know about that and he said, “O Usāmah! Did you kill him after he had said *Lā ilāha illa Allāh*?” I said, ‘but he said so only to save himself.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) kept on repeating that so often that I wished I had not embraced Islam before that.”⁴³

This *ḥadīth* conveys that if a man confesses “there is no god but Allah,” then it is unlawful for other Muslims to kill him based on assumptions, suspicions or speculations. It also shows that the Prophet (ﷺ) demonstrated grave concern for Muslims who take the law into their hands based on imaginations and conjectures. Islam does not provide any room for the judgement of peoples’ actions without authentic and indisputable evidence. In Islam, justice is one of the noblest values to uphold. Due to severity of charging a Muslim with disbelief, even though he may be a disobedient sinner, scholars regard it as wrongdoing.

No Muslim is allowed to spy on another Muslim, or having spied, to swear by Allah that he (the sinner) will not be forgiven or admitted to Paradise. The fate of such a person will be that Allah will send him to Hell. Even, if an individual is righteous and pious with full of devotion and good deeds, he will be subject to punishment if he curses by an oath that a sinner or disobedient person will not enter Paradise.

Al-Ḥanafī says that it is a great injustice to testify against someone that Allah will not forgive him nor bestow His mercy but will enter him in the fire of hell where he would live forever, for it is a judgement for

an infidel after death.⁴⁴ The implication of calling a sinner an infidel is explicit when we know its consequences: [1] his wife is no more lawful for him and it is prohibited for her to remain with him (including her children); [2] it is obligatory on a ruler to punish him for changing religion after he has been declared an infidel; [3] if he dies in this state, *Sharī'ah* will not be applied; his body will not be washed; funeral prayer will not be offered and he will not be buried in the Muslim cemetery; [4] if he dies in a state of unbelief, he will be cursed by Allah and placed in the fires of hell where he would live forever.⁴⁵ Because these are the implications of charging someone with unbelief, great care must be taken in making such a judgement. Those who make such judgements consciously or unconsciously ought to be advised of the grave consequences. Organisations, groups, or societies subscribing to the philosophy of charging Muslims with infidelity for different reasons should be counselled, educated and exposed to authentic *aḥādīth* and edicts from trustworthy scholars who have deliberated such judgements.

SECTION I

Charging Individuals Who are Guilty of Acts of Sin and Disobedience with Infidelity

An established principle of *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is not to charge someone with infidelity for mere disobedience unless he believes in the permissibility of disobedience. Al-Ṭaḥāwī states that a Muslim cannot be charged as an infidel for any sin that he commits because he follows the direction of prayer (*ahl al-Qiblah*). Hence, he is treated as a Muslim as long as he does not consider that committing the sin is lawful. He also held that it is improper to declare that wrongs 'do him no harm' when done by the faithful.⁴⁶ Al-Nawawī argues that Muslims should know the opinions of truthful people and that nobody among those who follow the direction of prayer should be charged as an infidel due to sin, nor even those who follow mere desires, including People of Innovation (*ahl al-Bid'ah*). However, whosoever rejects any basic principle of Islam should be charged as an apostate or infidel, except for new Muslims or those raised in rural environments who do not have

adequate knowledge of the religion. Such people should be instructed in the religion first, and if they continue to reject, only then can they be charged as infidels after exhausting all educational avenues. The same rule applies to those who admit fornication, drinking alcohol, gambling, murder and other clearly unlawful matters.⁴⁷

At the same time, it is important to heed al-Ṭaḥāwī's teaching that the People of Truth (*ahl al-Ḥaqq*) do not regard anyone an infidel due to sin (meaning disobedience and mortal sin) but without leaving the pillars of Islam. Ibn Taymiyyah established that when it is said that '*ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*' agreed on the issue of not charging a sinner as an infidel, it clearly meant disobedience such as fornication and drinking alcohol. However, as far as the four pillars and testimony are concerned, if anyone leaves one of them there is disagreement.⁴⁸ Evidence in the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* asserts punishment for those who commit moral sins such as theft, fornication, drinking alcohol and libel. This demonstrates that they should not be killed but rather awarded prescribed punishments. However, if they are infidels, then they deserve the punishment of apostasy.⁴⁹

Ibn Sallām articulated reactions to the Khārijites' position that Allah had disavowed their statement by prescribing punishments such as cutting the hand of a thief and lashes for a fornicator or accuser. If sin leads someone to become an infidel, the sinner should not be given any punishment except death. For the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whosoever changes his religion, kill him." If they are not regarded as infidels, then they should be given the punishment of cutting and lashes.

Ibn Taymiyyah explained that every Muslim knows that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not regard drunkards, fornicators, accusers or thieves as apostate. However, the Qur'ān and recurrent *aḥādīth* mention different punishments for each instead of the punishment for an apostate: lashes for accusers and fornicators, the chopping of hands for a thief. However, if they are apostates, they can be killed.⁵⁰

Evidence from the Qur'ān

According to al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Bukhārī argued that if a believer commits disobedience (sin), he is not charged as an infidel because

Allah maintained the title of ‘believer’ for him.⁵¹ Allah says, “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.”⁵² Al-Bukhārī further articulated that sins take place due to ignorance and that such sinners are not disbelievers unless they worship others along with Allah. This is because of the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ), “You are a person who still has in him the remnants of the days of Ignorance,” – also, “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth ...”.

Commenting further, al-Bukhārī stated that the word *kufir* might be used metaphorically for disobedience, meaning ungratefulness rather than denial. This implies a kind of unbelief that does not drive a person out of the *Ummah*, unlike the Khārijites who believed that those who committed sins were infidels. The following text clearly refutes the Khārijites’ position, “Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth...”⁵³ Hence, whatever is less than *kufir* can be forgiven, meaning that setting partners equal with Allah indicates *kufir* in the same manner as the person who denies the prophethood and mission of Muḥammad (ﷺ) is infidel. Although he does not set another deity as partner with Allah, there is no disagreement among scholars that such a person will not be forgiven.⁵⁴

Ibn Taymiyyah reiterates that this stipulation does not include repentance because Allah says, “Say: “O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah. For Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-forgiving, most Merciful.”⁵⁵ Here the injunction is general because it means repentance, which is specific and provisional as revealed in *Sūrat al-Nisā*:48,⁵⁶ which indicates that whenever a sinner repents and turns to Allah, he/she is forgiven. Allah willed upon Himself the laws of grace and mercy. If anyone does a bad deed out of ignorance and thereafter repents and lives righteously, Allah, the Dispenser of grace, is most forgiving.⁵⁷

Evidence from *Sunnah*

There are *aḥādīth* related to the matter of unbelief that inspire a true understanding of its meaning. Considering limitations of the

current discourse on the subject, a few *aḥādīth* are now presented and explained. To begin with, Anas bin Mālik (R.A.) reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

“Allah, the exalted, has said: O son of Adam, I forgive you as long as you pray to Me and hope for My forgiveness, whatever sins you have committed. O son of Adam, I do not care if your sins reach the heights of the heaven, then you ask for My forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, if you come to Me with an earth load of sins, and meet Me associating nothing to Me’, I would match it with an earth load of forgiveness.”⁵⁸

Allah is all-forgiving. The forgiveness of Allah is subject to sincere prayer, supplication and repentance. Even if sins are huge, it is possible to be forgiven if Allah wishes; hence, one does not become an infidel due to sins, as is made obvious in this *ḥadīth*.

‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit (R.A.) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

“Whoever amongst you fulfils his pledge will be rewarded by Allah. And whoever indulges in any one of them (except the ascription of partners to Allah) and gets the punishment in this world, that punishment will be expiation for that sin. And if one indulges in any of them (stealing, illegal sexual intercourse, killing one’s own children, accusing an innocent person, disobedience to do good) and Allah conceals his sin, it is up to Him to forgive or punish him (in the Hereafter).”⁵⁹

Al-‘Asqalānī remarked on the *ḥadīth*, “And if one indulges in any of them and Allah conceals his sin, it is up to Him to forgive or punish him (in the Hereafter),” there is clear refutation of the Khārijites’ claim that those who committed sins and disobedience were infidels.⁶⁰ The Khārijites were regarded as the extremists of their day for this reason, among others. Hence, it is necessary to negate and distance their elucidations, articulations and inferences. Many contemporary Muslims should learn of their approaches and vain religious exhortations. Observing the present situation, one can reasonably deduce that numerous Muslims

have embraced the Khārijites' position. The absence of critical thinking and objective evaluative methods allow such personalities to disseminate false doctrines without realising the dire consequences, both here and hereafter.

Abū Hurayrah (R.A.) mentioned a man who drank wine and was brought to the Prophet (ﷺ). The Prophet (ﷺ) ordered the *Companions* (R.A.) to beat him. Some *Companions* (R.A.) beat him with their hands, some with their shoes and some with their garments (by twisting it) like a lash. When they finished the beating, someone said to the drunkard, 'May Allah disgrace you!' On that, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'Do not say so, for you are helping Satan to overpower him.'⁶¹ The *ḥadīth* shows that the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the *Companions* (R.A.) to curse the drunkard. To the contrary, he regarded him as a brother and advised the *Companions* (R.A.) to pray for him. If the drunkard were an infidel, the Prophet (ﷺ) would not have forbidden his *Companions* (R.A.) to curse him. Instead, he advised them to call him their brother and pray for him. From this, one can infer that a drunkard is not an infidel but rather a sinner and there is punishment for his sin. It also implies that a transgressor may have done good deeds during his life, which will be given to whom he had oppressed in this world on the Day of Judgement.⁶²

After a careful study of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth*, it becomes evident that any consideration of disobedience as unbelief is an exaggeration (immoderation) or religious extremism. Furthermore, it is contrary to Islamic characteristics such as the ease of religion, facilitation, justice and holistic mercy. Nevertheless, infidelity by means of disobedience, as believed and advocated by the Khārijites, was one of their principal dogmas.

Arguments of *Ahl al-Takfīr* and Our Response

Kufr, according to Shukrī Muṣṭafa's group, is not used in *Sharī'ah* except to indicate the opposite of *īmān* and its denial. Thus, it refers to a general ruling that embraces many kinds, each with a specific name such as *fiṣq*, *ẓulm* and *khubth*. When Allah says, "He has made non-belief, wickedness and rebellion hateful to you"⁶³, it means that

these three elements are *kufr* according to the general rule and are different by names of figures, all-inclusive in the word, *kufr*. In substantiating this claim, they refer to the verse 35 of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*. To Shukri Mustafā's people, all such cited names of different figures mentioned in the verse denote one rule with one meaning, i.e., referring to all believers with each having a different name based on the quality of faith.⁶⁴ Likewise, according to them, *fisq*, *zulm* and *khubth* refer to *kufr*.

The *ahl al-Takfīr* (people who call others infidels) called it *kufr* because of the insistence of disobedience. One may summarize this belief in the accusation of infidelity by means of disobedience as follows: [1] all disobedience (sins) is *kufr* to Allah; [2] the classification of 'infidel' cannot be removed from the disobedient except by means of repentance; and [3] repentance is the renewal of Islam. According to them, if a person disobeys once and does not repent, it shows persistent disobedience, hence, he is an infidel.⁶⁵ They quote *al-Furqān*:43, *Yāsīn*:60, *al-Nahl*:100, *al-An'ām*:121, *al-Jinn*:23, *al-Nisā'*:14, *al-Baqarah*:81, *al-Ḥujurāt*:11 and *al-Baqarah*:254 to substantiate the argument that sinful people are infidels. They also quote a *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah (R.A.) who reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "All my followers will enter Paradise except those who refuse." They said: O Allah's Apostle: "Who will refuse?" He said, "Whoever obeys me will enter Paradise and whosoever disobeys me refuses (to enter it)."⁶⁶ However, as we shall demonstrate, this *ḥadīth* is falsely explained to justify the conclusion that sinful or disobedient persons are infidels.

The Khārijites held this understanding with regard to the warnings (*al-wa'id*) and argued that a single disobedience is enough to make one remain in hellfire forever, but to enter the Paradise forever, it is necessary to perform all obedience. The *ahl al-Sunnah wa'al-Jamā'ah* adopt a moderate path. Accordingly, the *īmān* of a person who commits moral sins is imperfect: he is a sinner and is driving himself towards punishment. Nevertheless, it depends on Allah's grace/will, whether to punish (if he dies without repentance) or forgive him. Ibn Sallām remarked that not all disobedience and sins eliminate *īmān*, neither do they impose *kufr*, but such activity does deny the actuality of *īmān* and sincerity that Allah has attributed to believers.⁶⁷

On the position of the *ahl al-Sunnah wa'al-Jamā'ah*, Ibn Taymiyyah comments that they do not declare that those who pray like other Muslims are infidels simply due to disobedience and major sin as did the Khārijites. Rather, they state that the concept of brotherhood in *īmān* is firm and quite aside from disobedience. They do not remove elements of *īmān* from the deviant persons totally. They do not believe that they will be in hellfire forever, as did the Mu'tazilites. However, *fiṣq* is included in the name of *īmān* and does not come under the name of *īmān* by any means. They say, 'he is a believer with imperfect *īmān*' or 'he is a believer due to his *īmān*' but also that 'he is a deviant due to mortal sins'. Therefore, he will not be given the name generally, nor will the name completely removed.⁶⁸

The *ahl al-Takfīr* declare that a person is an infidel by means of disobedience and they use the Qur'ān as evidence. For example: "Then seest thou such a one as takes as his Allah his own vain desire?"⁶⁹ – "Did I not enjoin on you, O ye Children of Adam, that ye should not worship Satan; for that He was to you an enemy avowed?"⁷⁰ Their interpretation is that whosoever follows his vain desire and pursues disobedience commits *shirk*. However, scholars teach that the verse is specifically addressed to *mushrikūn* (polytheists) who worship their own vain desire. Al-Ṭabarī had a difference of opinion regarding *al-Jāthiyah:23*. According to some, it means one who takes desire as his religion and acts upon whatever he likes (without consulting the Qur'ān or *Sunnah*). Such people do not believe in Allah nor forbid what Allah forbids or permit what Allah permits. His religion is his vain desire, which he follows and acts out.

The *ahl al-Takfīr* advocates that when a Muslim commits a sin and does not repent, he becomes a disbeliever and will dwell in hellfire forever. However, this is a false stance because the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* indicate the lifting of punishment. For example, a believer is forgiven through repentance and this is consensus, as Allah states, "He is the One that accepts repentance from His Servants and forgives sins: and He knows all that ye do."⁷¹

Seeking forgiveness for sins protects a believer from hellfire. Abū Hurayrah (R.A.), on the authority of the Prophet (ﷺ), wrote:

"If somebody commits a sin and then says, O my Lord! I have sinned,

‘please forgive me!’ and his Lord says, My slave has known that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for it, I therefore have forgiven My slave (his sins).’ Then he remains without committing any sin for a while and then again commits another sin and says, O my Lord, I have committed another sin, please forgive me, and Allah says, My slave has known that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for it, I therefore have forgiven my slave (his sin). Then he remains without committing any sin for a while and then commits another sin (for the third time) and says, O my Lord, I have committed another sin, please forgive me, and Allah says, My slave has known that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for it, I therefore have forgiven My slave (his sin), he can do whatever he likes.’⁷²

Righteousness also removes sins. Allah said, “And establish regular prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night: For those things that are good remove those that are evil: be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord).”⁷³ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Five (daily) prayers and from one *Jumu‘ah* prayer to the (next) *Jumu‘ah* prayer, and from *Ramaḍān* to *Ramaḍān* are expiations for the (sins) committed in between (their intervals) provided one shuns the major sins.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, what the dead have done in terms of good deeds, such as giving alms, remain. On this, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son who prays for him (for the deceased).”⁷⁵

The intercession of the Prophet (ﷺ) and others for sinners on the Day of Judgement will be another safeguard from hellfire. Anas ibn Mālik (R.A.) reports that the Messenger (ﷺ) said, “My intercession will be for those of my people who have committed major sins.”⁷⁶ Major sins are like theft, adultery, drinking, gambling, etc. Such Muslims are sure to go to Hell because of major sins but will be saved by the intercession of the Prophet (ﷺ). There is consensus among the *ahl al-Sunnah* regarding the intercession of the Prophet (ﷺ) on the Day of Judgement. However, the Khārijites and a group of Mu‘tazilites denied the Prophet’s intercession. They believed that Muslims who commit major sins will remain in Hell forever, contrary to the belief held by the *ahl al-Sunnah*.

SECTION II

Charging Rulers who do not base their Policies and Judgements on the *Sharī'ah* with Infidelity

The Qur'ān explicitly mentions that the renunciation of the Law of Allah is an act of disbelief. This is stated in (*al-Mā'idah*:44, 45, 47), but scholars differ in interpretations: [1] some say these verses refer to the Jews who distorted the Book of Allah and modified the Law; [2] the word *kāfirūn* refers to Muslims, *ẓālimūn* to Jews, and *fāsiqūn* to Christians; [3] *kufr* is lesser than known disbelief, *ẓulm* is lesser than known oppression, and *fisq* is lesser than known immorality; [4] these verses, although addressed to the People of the Book, aim at all of humanity, Muslim or *kāfir*; [5] the meaning of “whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed (hence denying), he is a disbeliever,” i.e., who acknowledges both injustice and immorality.⁷⁷

The verse obviously means that whoever denies Allah as the only Judge, and also denies His Law, is a disbeliever. There is no exception for Jews, Christians or anyone else because the address is general: ‘whoever judges without the Law of Allah’ – this includes everyone. However, the cause of the revelation was particular and not general. It is known that this insight was due to the broadness of the letter and not the particularity of the reason. However, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān (R.A.) rejected the view that it was specifically sent in reference to the children of Israel. The reality is, therefore, that judgement without the Law of Allah is disbelief, whether in action or faith, so qualifies.

Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī mentions the condition of a judge who believes that the Law of Allah is not necessary and prefers an alternative or an underestimation of the Law, even when knowing Divine Law comes from Allah. Hence, it is the greatest level of disbelief if he believes in the necessity of Law, and yet, knowing this, deviates from the truth – such are regarded as disobedient. Here, *kufr* is reckoned figuratively as minor disbelief.⁷⁸ Concerning matters of Law, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm remarked that this verse refers to disbelievers, due to disbelief in both faith and action.

Disbelief in Faith Varies

Regarding a judge who denies the *superiority* of the Law of

Allah, the denial is no doubt of the basic principles of Islam. This leads to major disbelief and expels him from Islam. A judge who believes that laws other than the Laws of Allah are better and more comprehensive for humanity, in an absolute or relative manner related to the idiosyncratic issues is, without hesitation, considered a disbeliever, as this demonstrates clear preference for the law of man over the Law of Allah.

Without preference for the law of man while considering both equal degrees of truth, also leads to similar consequences because of the equalization. Hence, such judges contradict *al-Shūrā*:11 and *al-A'rāf*:54. Believing in the relevance of man-made laws that contradict the Law of Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) is another affirmation of disbelief at the most atrocious of levels, by establishing judgements from various sources while denying the Law of Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ). Unfortunately, this is a contemporary trend in Muslim countries.

Making rules and judgements from ancestral customs dating to pre-Islamic times while turning from the Law of Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) is disbelief in action, but does not expel someone from Islam. This is because judgements driven by motives and desires to judge by something out of Allah's Law, even while believing the Law of Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) are truth, account him as guilty. Although this does not exile him/her from Islam, the action is regarded as a major sin, even worse than known major sins such as fornication, consuming alcohol, etc., because what is stated as disbelief is worse than what is not stated or acted on.

Currently, exaggeration in charging judges of unbelief is obvious. Concerning this, Sālim al-Bahansawī said that the *ahl al-Takfīr* are of the opinion that all Muslim judges are disbelievers and those who are under their judgement and restrain themselves from changing the situation by aligning with other groups “on the truth”, are disbelievers, because their allegiance is to the accused judge.⁷⁹ Two things are now elaborated. The first is that of charging judges with unbelief without considering general details. The second is that of charging particular judges with unbelief without considering causes of ignorance, or duress, or other valid grounds.

The caliph, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (R.A.), faced hostility and enmity because he attempted to establish justice and for which cause he was poisoned. King Negus and his kind are in the bliss of heaven,

although not availing themselves entirely to the *Sharī'ah* due to the inability of distance and time, they judged according to their capability.⁸⁰ Hence, it becomes apparent that a judge can face obstacles/pressures that remove the law from the domain of major to minor disbelief. Hence, holding forth the accusation of disbelief for such judges is legally prohibited. Here is where cautiousness and attentiveness are especially obligatory in order to reach an acquittal.

SECTION III

The Charge of Unbelief of the Subjects of Such Rulers

People under rulers who do not enforce the Law of Allah have a different position. These are divided into two groups.

The first group comprises those who obey their rulers and follow what they believe. These are of two kinds:

(i) People who know that rulers have altered the religion and yet obey the alteration while believing it is legitimate to accept what Allah has prohibited, and believing in the prohibition of what Allah has made lawful – despite knowing that they trespass the injunctions. This group is regarded as having *kufir* towards Allah Almighty and Ibn Taymiyyah called it *shirk*.⁸¹ This circumstance is cited in *Sūrat al-Tawbah:31*.

Regarding this, 'Adīy ibn Ḥātīm (R.A.) reported:

“I went to the Prophet (ﷺ) and on my neck was a golden cross and he said: O 'Adīy, throw away that idol and I heard him reciting *al-Tawbah:31*, and said, “They (People of the Book) were not to worship them but when they allowed something, they would make it allowed to themselves, and when they would forbid something, they would forbid it for themselves as well.”⁸²

Ḥudhayfah (R.A.) remarked that as far as they were not fasting like monks or performing prayers for their sake, yet when monks and priests allowed something they allowed it for themselves, and when monks and priests forbade something they forbade it to themselves – this was their priesthood.⁸³

(ii) The second kind of people are these: in spite of faith and

belief in the proscription of the unlawful and the legitimisation as lawful by their leader, they obey in disobedience towards Allah like a Muslim who commits sin while knowing it is sinful. Such people become encompassed by the law, as do those who commit sin. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated “obedience is required only in what is good.”⁸⁴ In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet (ﷺ) stated, “It is obligatory for one to listen to and obey (the ruler’s orders) unless these orders involve one in Disobedience (to Allah); but if an act of Disobedience (to Allah) is imposed, one should not listen to or obey it.”⁸⁵

On this *ḥadīth*, Ibn al-Qayyim wrote that ‘those who obey people in authority in sin towards Allah is sinful’, hence, no excuse can be brought before Allah and the sin of disobedience takes its charge, even if the matter had not yet been committed.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, even mere obedience in action does not imply *takfīr*, if obedience happens in faith. Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote that a believer who obeys a disbeliever shall become a disbeliever when such obedience happens in faith and it is the subject of disbelief and belief, but when obedience takes place in action while belief in *Tawḥīd* and faith remains, it is regarded as sinful.⁸⁷

The second group comprises those who condemn and are displeased by the circumstance. Based on the *aḥādīth*, they are not regarded as sinful, although afflicted by sin caused by withholding their denial despite the capacity to do so. On this, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

“Amīrs (leaders) will be appointed over you and you will find them doing good as well as bad deeds. One who hates their bad deeds is absolved from blame. One who disapproves of their bad deeds is (also) safe (so far as Divine wrath is concerned). However, one who approves of their bad deeds and imitates them (is doomed). People asked, the Messenger of Allah: Shouldn’t we fight against them? He replied: No, as long as they say their prayers.”⁸⁸

Al-Nawawī said that whoever hates and is displeased with abominable acts will get rid of his sin and punishment. This refers to people who are unable to deny it through action or word but turn in displeasure within their hearts. The same is evident for whoever is unable to eliminate such sins when silent, but the sin happens while they are pleased with it or when not detesting it.⁸⁹

The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“Listen, have you heard that after me there will be leaders and whoever enters upon them, condones their lies and supports them in their oppression is not from me and I am not from him and he shall not drink with me from the pool. Whoever does not enter upon them nor help them in their oppression nor condones their lies is from me and I am from him and he shall drink with me at the pool.”⁹⁰

This *hadīth* explicitly states that people are not allowed to condone lies from their leaders or blindly support them in oppression. Hence, it is clear that Muslims should not help them in oppressive activities. This implies there should be no support for such oppressors. Extremists, however, are generally disobedient to the cosmic law because they do not follow the path of moderation or fairness as shown by the Prophet (ﷺ) when he dealt with others; as such, they can never be condoned. In the light of some manifestations of these forbidden characteristics, extremists can be classified as oppressors because of their gross injustices, unbearable manipulations, and serious fabrications.

Currently, this is the circumstance when extremists accuse Islamic groups of infidelity with allegations of obeying leaders who rule without Islam’s Law. They say a Muslim becomes an apostate when he obeys whoever does not rule based on Laws revealed by Allah. Nonetheless, loyalty and obedience do exist separately from action without the consideration of intention and belief. They also say that someone who acts when provoked by the one who rules without Allah’s Law, and is loyal and obedient towards Him, manifestly deifies such a leader.

Circumstances are the same whether [1] a believer falsely believes that a ruler is implementing the laws of Allah; [2] a believer is conscious that his/her ruler contradicts the *Sharī’ah* but believes that he cannot change it; thus, such a believer recognises that his/her obedience to such a ruler is sinful; or [3] one who realises a ruler contradicts the *Sharī’ah* but falsely believes this is due to the ruler’s sanctity that sanctions the legitimizing of prohibitions and the prohibition of the lawful. Hence, they believe that obedience is obligatory without considering Allah’s command.⁹¹

The evidence for the unbelief of such followers is that Allah says, “They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah, and (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary.”⁹² These say that devotion towards monks and their order is without reserve and that this is loyalty. The verse equalized practical devotion towards monks and deification of the Messiah – proving that action and faith in the Law are equivalent as both lead to polytheism. Confirming this position is a verse pertaining to the children of Israel, without exception and without separating sinner from non-sinner or believer from non-believer.⁹³

SECTION IV

Charge of Unbelief of those Individuals who Leave or Withdraw from Islamic Organizations

Extremists have developed a peculiar understanding for the concept of a Muslim *Jamā‘ah* (organization). They stress that the existence of many *Jamā‘ats* (organizations) among Muslims is impermissible. Indeed, they reach beyond certain bounds to develop an exaggerated theory of *Jamā‘ah*. According to them, the *Jamā‘ah* is only one congregation from which separation or withdrawal is considered an act of disbelief. What they especially mean is their own *Jamā‘ah*; in this case, *Jamā‘at al-Muslimīn*, founded by Shukrī Muṣṭafa of Egypt during the twentieth century. The definition of separation from a Muslim *Jamā‘ah* is timely for the contemporary Muslim community, which is at a crossroads, being challenged by extremists and immoderate interpretations.

The definition of separation varies. If due to methodology and separation from mainstream Islam as a whole, it is regarded apostasy. Proponents claiming that separatists are apostates (or infidels) quote a *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Mas‘ūd (R.A.), that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“The blood of a Muslim man who testifies that there is no god but Allah and that I am the Apostle of Allah should not be lawfully shed but only for one of the three reasons: married fornicator, soul for soul, and one who deserts his religion separating himself from the community”⁹⁴

Ibn Daqīq says that what is meant by the *Jamā'ah* in the *ḥadīth* is a Muslim society and that separation from it is apostasy from the religion.⁹⁵ If separation is not ideological but structural, for example, denying a pledge of allegiance to an *Imām* (leader), it is generally not regarded as disbelief, but is regarded a major sin. However, this view gives rise to another point, because history records that some *Companions* (R.A.) refused their pledge to leaders of their age. Al-‘Asqalānī reported that Ibn ‘Umar refused his pledge to both Caliph ‘Alī and Caliph Mu‘āwiyah.⁹⁶ Later, he pledged to Caliph Mu‘āwiyah after the latter’s reconciliation with Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī.⁹⁷ Even so, he later denied homage to anyone on the matter of controversy until Ibn al-Zubayr (R.A.) was assassinated and the Caliphate was settled by ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn Marwān, to whom he then pledged allegiance.⁹⁸ The clear inference is that no one who does not pledge allegiance can be considered an unbeliever under similar circumstances.

There are two relevant *aḥādīth*. In the first, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “He who separates from the community within a span takes off the noose of Islam from his neck.”⁹⁹ The second is the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “One who dies without having sworn allegiance will die the death of one belonging to the days of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*)”¹⁰⁰ Al-Nawawī says that ignorance was a chaotic condition without a leader.¹⁰¹ Both of these *aḥādīth* are abused by the *ahl al-Takfīr* to favour their own theory.

Al-‘Asqalānī says that the death of ignorance refers to the ‘state of misguidance’. Death, here, is not that of a disbeliever but of a sinner. The analogy is this: ‘he dies the death of one who belongs to ignorance’, although he was not. It is intended as preventative. This view is supported by the *ḥadīth* that states ‘he who separates from the community within a span removes the noose of Islam from his neck’. If separation or withdrawal is because of an armed struggle, called *bāghī* (outrage) by jurists, it does not bring people to the level of disbelief. Outraged people are excused by Allah and not branded as infidels. In spite of this, extremists accuse anyone separated from their organization of infidelity. This is because of their false analogy that considers their own *Jamā'ah* the major (only) *Jamā'ah*. This is manifest extremism.

Hence, charging a Muslim with unbelief because of outrage is clearly inappropriate. Trivial differences in interpretations, approaches and methodologies do not necessarily lead people to unbelief. Even those

who fight for some causes are treated as brothers. Therefore, if contemporary Muslims nurture differences ideologically, methodologically, structurally or technically when approaching doctrinal, legislative or political issues, in no way can this become a basis for charging someone with unbelief. These passages clarify such matters by stating that Muslims remain brothers and that their creed is not volatile; that is, unless an explicit and conscious confession is made to separate from or reject the religion.

Ahl al-Takfīr's position on apostasy for those separated from their *Jamā'ah* is based on two false arguments. The first is based on *āl-Imrān*:105-106. The second *aḥādīth* states [1] 'he who separates from the community within a span takes off the noose of Islam from his neck', and [2] 'the one who dies without having sworn allegiance will die the death of one belonging to the Days of Ignorance'. These are the sources abused by extremists for their misguided/misguiding deduction(s).

However, these verses address separation from principles of religion rather than separation from any group within the Muslim community. They refer, in particular, to separations that afflicted previous People of the Book. Ibn Kathīr wrote that Allah forbade the *Ummah* to resemble previous nations and communities in disputes and controversies, and in the abandonment of commanding righteousness and restraining from viciousness and atrocity.¹⁰² He also proposed that the way to avoid dispute is by adhering to the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, and also by clinging to the Muslim community which is a group characterized as people gathered in righteousness who keep themselves as Muslims. The *Jamā'ah* mentioned in the *aḥādīth* does not refer to a particular group at all – as falsely claimed and understood – but rather to the Muslim community as a whole. Separation or withdrawal from a specific group of people (or tiny *Jamā'ah*), is in no way regarded an act of disbelief. This section IV clearly unveiled errors used to recruit members for extremist *cum* terrorist organisations in the name of Islam. Hence, their quoting of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* out of context and in isolation, as legitimate claims, ought to be soundly rejected.

Conclusion

Our discourse allows us to conclude that Islam, under no conditions

whatsoever, advocates extremism/radicalism. Islam's messages are fair and moderate and do not allow fanaticism or religious bigotry. However, some Muslims, due to ignorance and misunderstanding, pursue obsessions and resort to extremism. Thus, they have become enemies of Muslims, creating much tension and no end to turmoil. Other contemporary Muslims even manifest indifference when interacting with those of remarkable immoderation in words and deeds that are contrary to the faith. Having analysed their views, interpretations and actions in the light of basic Islamic sources, the present work makes it clear there is no room in Islamic doctrine to accuse Muslims of infidelity due to disobedience or sin. This study provides references to the considerable portions of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* arriving at the right conclusions just cited. Illustrations, explanations and elucidations based on Qur'ānic evidence as articulated by honourable exegetes and scholars; logically substantiate Islam's firm position, that soundly rejects *extremism* in religion. Islamic doctrines that confute extremist positions were comprehensively elaborated and described for various aspects related to faith, unbelief, the charge of infidelity and polytheism with various legal implications.

The study has analysed appropriate Arabic terms that allow the more accurate perspective of exegetes who have dealt extensively with the subject matter in the light of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth*. We addressed the crucial matter of unbelief and its consequences to help eliminate misunderstanding among common and innocent people. The latter easily become intoxicated by false propaganda and diplomatic machinations proffered by fanatics and extremists who accuse others to achieve unilateral objectives in favour of vested interests. This paper discussed manifest extremism with special reference to [1] charging Muslims as infidels or apostates due to disobedience and sin; [2] charging a ruler who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed as an infidel; [3] charging a follower of such a ruler as an infidel; and [4] charging a Muslim who leaves an organisation as an infidel. These efforts were specifically made to help educate people regarding historically documented forms of extremism, so that current behaviours are more appropriately understood. For purposes of greater clarity and practicality, the discourse also focussed on significant aspects and implications of major and minor unbelief.

Extremist accusing of Muslims of infidelity has been a major issue

in the *Ummah* during the 20th century, and now extends to the 21st, serving only to further split and polarizing the *Ummah*. Jihādists, Boko Harām, Isis, Al-Qā'eda, Ṭālibān and other radical groups claim sincerity as though they are the only ones fighting for truth and the establishment of Islamic governance. Using this excuse, they justify violence, hijacks, kidnaps, murders, suicide bombings and all forms of terror. Nevertheless, this paper makes it robustly clear that all of these factions completely lack legitimate authority, and it further denies any religious justification for their actions. Hence, they have no legal or moral validation.

From an Islamic textual perspective, their activities are indefensible, their claims are unverifiable, their origins are suspicious, and their knowledge of the religion is truly questionable. Furthermore, they present numerous ambiguities. Therefore, granting them any sympathy is unwarranted. Legally, Muslims cannot offer support them, morally or materially, at any cost. Furthermore, the paper offers clarification for the contemporary categorization of people, which, unfortunately occurs too often without the provision of clear answers to questions raised by common people, as to who is reliable and who is not.

Recommendations

The author now offers some recommendations for further work. Key issues surround the Muslims engaged in judging others, who then fight and kill them based on false allegations and ignorant adjudication. These should rather spend their knowledge and energy in uniting Muslims under the truer banner of the complete Islamic message. This will enable them to eliminate hatred, hostility and animosity amidst any people who differ or who disobey or commit sins. Muslims should focus on social and educational development to prevent people from falling into extremism, fanaticism, or militant terrorism.

Institutions of higher learning in the Muslim world should review the curriculum of the Islamic sciences and develop courses that emphasize Islamic priorities for the *Ummah* as a comprehensive development with absolute cognition of contemporary human needs and realities. Designing new courses is crucial for students to attain an undistorted message in the contemporary context, one that enables a properly oriented awareness of contemporary activities in terms of extremism and terrorism.

Muslims must realise that enemies are entrenched within Muslim society who are not necessarily non-Muslims; and this pertains to women who look ultra-modern, liberal, disrespect Islamic dress, and even secularists. Rather, the greatest enemy Muslims have, is their own ignorance of contemporary realities. Truly, there is a monumental need for Muslim societies to learn the true message of Islam. Muslims must learn to respect one another, regardless of differences of opinions regarding religious views, interpretations, legal, political, cultural or educational matters. Muslims must reject the blind imitation of unhealthy fundamentalism infused with obsessive compulsions. Before accepting any religious explanation or view, efforts must be made to verify sources of information and authenticity.

Muslims must also uphold excellent ethical principles and values that support their unity. In other words, the *Ummah*'s unity should be a foremost priority. The manipulation of the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* by self-proclaimed theologians, clerics, preachers and exegetes with a warped understanding of Islam is undeniably real. Such people must be identified and their shallow religious knowledge exposed via intellectual forums and healthy discourse. Genuine Muslim leadership must be made even more aware of their enormous responsibility and obligations. If Islam is to be respected on a global scale, rather than permanently hijacked by Muslim extremists, they must take a clear stand on reforming the interpretation of scriptural sources by providing dynamic, competent, trustworthy Islamic leadership with commendable foresight and praiseworthy qualities and characteristics that inspire trust.

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