

The Hanafi-Maturidi Conception of Faith in the Context of Liberty and Its Contemporary Relevance and Significance

Hasan Onat*

This article deals with the relevance and significance of the Hanafi-Maturidi understanding of faith in the context of freedom. The paper first highlights the current problems experienced by Muslims and then examines their root causes in the context of freedom. First of all, it is useful to underline a very discernable fact. Among the problems faced by more than one billion seven million Muslims in the world, economic and educational problems are the most visible, yet there lay much more serious problems behind. The most significant problem of Muslims today is the issue of freedom and justice. It is necessary to place these issues at the core because these concepts have a structure that directly bears the quality of a paradigm in human thought. Societies' perception of freedom and justice, fundamentally affect their economic production, their conception of religion as well as the political systems they would establish. Therefore, this article's main purpose is to draw attention to the fact that the most important problem of Muslims is freedom and justice.

Conflicts are abound in the Muslim world. There is so much bloodshed everywhere, and the worst of all is that children die. In a world where children die, it does not make much sense to be economically or educationally backward or advanced. The most concrete testimony of this suffering is currently taking place in

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Yemen. Depraved people block the humanitarian aid to this country stricken with diseases and where mostly children, the elderly and women die. In such circumstances, Muslims are challenged with impasses.

The following example may make it easier for us to understand the issue in Islamic geography: both the killer and the killed shouts "Allahu Akbar!" These people neither hear each other, nor can they find the opportunity to think about who manufactured the weapon they use. This is the extent of pain we are facing in real terms. Many evil deeds including human rights violations, deaths and wars in the Muslim geography are legitimized by the mechanism of *takfir*. If the opportunity to live humanely is to be sought and freedom and justice are to be re-established in this geography, there are definitely many things to be done, but the first thing to do is to change the point of view.

In this geography, the human has evaporated. And where the human evaporates, it becomes very difficult to see the fact that human being is indeed a value per se. Talking about freedom and justice can often be perceived as a luxury or pushed into the category of a fantasy. The contemporary focus of this paper attempts to shed light on the following point. The main argument is this: no matter who you are, whether you are the influential and authoritative people running the state, or the leader of a community or a cult, or someone influential in a non-governmental organization, there is only one thing to do if you are a human being, especially a Muslim: to stop the bloodshed in this geography. For this, it is necessary to prevent legitimization of bloodshed, especially the kind that is done by using religion.

What is the purpose of bringing the name of Maturidi to the agenda in the context of these issues, then? Of course, the main purpose cannot be promoting a sectarian or Maturidist division. Muslims love to sanctify tradition so while thinking about these problems and their solutions, I looked for a source we can lean on that is based in the tradition. Hence, I came across the Hanafi Maturidi understanding of faith. Therefore, we can ask whether it is possible to bring forward the liberal stance in this disposition and reconstruct it without resorting to a type of Hanafi-Maturidi factionalism, which will do no one any good. This paper is a preliminary attempt on devising such a technique for doing so. I argue that a positive answer can be given to the question of whether it is possible to dig

into the founding principles in Maturidism that make up a human being and liberate humans, and reconstruct them according to contemporary circumstances, as well as generate new ideas based on these reconstructed principles. I try to highlight a few points on how this can happen.

In this context, a few main issues can be raised. The first of these is the issue of deed versus faith, in which the principle that gives legitimacy to *takfir* comes to the fore. In the Shafi-Hanbali tradition, it is possible to find statements which declare that it is necessary to kill a person who does not practice the prayers. If this is accepted as true, especially if it is interpreted as a requirement of religion, it would not be possible to prevent violence in the Islamic geography. Likewise, in Hanafi tradition, which is known to be liberal, there are some views by Hanafi jurists putting forward imprisonment of those who do not practice the prayers. Although these views are also problematic, Abu Hanafi states that: "One prays because he is a believer, not a believer because he prays." In other words, in Abu Hanafi's thinking, the stance on worship -in its root form- is quite clear. That is, deed is one thing, faith is another. A person who does not practice prayers is left to Allah for judgment as a sinner, and there is no worldly sanction. As a matter of fact, there are no worldly sanctions regarding prayer or fasting in the Qur'an. Prophet Muhammad did not punish anyone in his life for not praying or not fasting. Nonetheless, these root principles on the one hand, and the way they are understood and lived in the course of history on the other, are often quite divergent.

The most important view of Abu Hanafi on the issue of deed-faith developed by Maturidi is that deed and belief are separate. The opinion of Abu Hanifa that "A person prays because he is a believer, but he is not a believer because he prays." is one of the important principles of this tradition that really deserves to be pondered. How can we usefully interpret this view today? If I can make a quick comment about the present, I can say that we are drown in politics in-and-out, and the politics is driven by the most used information that originate in the frontal lobe of our brain. We also got pretty shallow. Instead of making an effort to understand the issues in depth, we are satisfied with what we immediately see. It is possible to find proof of this claim on social media. Recently, there was a serious earthquake in Istanbul that really caused fear in people.

The comments about this earthquake were quite shallow and superficial. It showed that people were looking for excuses to blame each other and did not make an effort to understand. Again, the comments made on social media about a young girl who died due to cancer in the past few days were heartbreaking and at a level that did not fit with humanistic or Islamic values. Becoming superficial also means that people look for excuses to blame and *takfir* each other. It is indispensable to go beyond this and to go for the roots that legitimize it. If there are expressions in a tradition such as the murder of a person who does not practice prayers, it will not be possible to produce anything let alone to find a permanent solution to these problems, without confronting and coming to terms with the unwholesome veins in the tradition. For this reason, Abu Hanafi's view that deed and faith are separate is very significant.

Abu Hanafi has another view that might shed light on today. According to him, all believers are equal in faith. In a way, this is a marvelous idea. How does it shed light on today? Today, there are caste systems formed in the field of religion. While Muslims criticize the clergy in Christianity, more than one class of clergy emerged in Muslims' religious understanding. In order to go beyond this clerical understanding, it is essential to revisit the issue of equality in faith that Abu Hanafi draws attention to. Once we are able to understand and adopt this view, the result will be that no one will be able to exploit someone else's faith by saying, "I am better than you in faith" because this has no place in religion. The issue of equality in faith is indeed one of the most important principles put forward by Abu Hanafi. This view also implies an understanding that eliminates the perception of being chosen in religious terms. At present, in circles with accentuated religious sensibilities, a perception that some people are specially assigned by Allah might emerge from time to time. From the point of view of Islam, the only persons assigned, that is, the only persons to be appointed by Allah, are the prophets. Except for the prophets, Allah did not give anyone the duty of an inspector, certainly not with respect to religion. In the case of Islam, there is no chosen person apart from the prophets. By creating the man, Allah Almighty has made man himself chosen. Here, the principle of equality in faith revealed by Abu Hanafi really sheds a great light on the present.

Another principle put forward by Abu Hanafi is related to the relationship between faith and reason. All of these principles were carried to a higher level by Imam al-Maturidi. The liberal understanding of faith in the Hanafi tradition is primarily about faith being based on reason, which al-Maturidi really took to a higher level. Al-Maturidi states that any feeling that encourages not thinking is the work of the devil. The obvious meaning of this is this: Whoever you are, wherever you are, if you are against reason, if you discredit reason, if you despise reason, you are either the devil, turned in the devil or on the path to become one. Developed and systematized by Abu Hanafi, this is one of the most important principles of Maturidi thought that will shed light on the present.

Another view that is particularly relevant to present time is the distinction of religion and politics. Unfortunately, we are not able to find the opportunity to go to the roots of our own values within the framework of these concepts. Since we are moved away from humankind's course of history, we are condemned to the concepts we imported from the West. Secularization and laicism debates in the West are more recent debates, whose past does not exceed three or four centuries. On the other hand, the debates on the distinction between deeds and faith in Islamic thought are debates with a history of approximately 1300 years. Since we are mental prisoners of the West and the Western thought, we have difficulty in perceiving separation of religion and politics as part of the distinction between deeds and faith in Islamic thought. At this point, Maturidi made a magnificent inroad that sheds light on humanity about 1100 years ago, with the distinction between religion and politics. Nevertheless, when the Maturidi thought is brought to the fore in contemporary debates, it is common to encounter backlash. Instead of understanding Maturidi, people may claim that one is a "secularist". Even though we have come to the positions of accusing each other very easily, the way to overcome this is to reveal the cells in our roots that may illuminate our present – just like stem cell therapy in medicine. We may have to reactivate a stem cell therapy both in the cultural and social spheres. That's why I consider the points I am trying to make, extremely important.

The reason-faith relationship liberates people. With your permission, I would like to unpack this a little as time permits. I shall first make the formula clear here. It will be easier to understand if I put this

comparatively. The faith on which the Qur'an is based is a reason-based faith. Yes, it is based on reason because Prophet Muhammad clearly stated this: the one who does not have reason also has no religion. The prerequisite for responsibility in Islam is reason. In this context, the reason-faith relationship systematized by Maturidi thought emerges as follows. First, faith is knowledge-based. Therefore, al-Maturidi begins with systematization as the basis of the interpretation of his book. We can think how this corresponds to our own life. A person does not believe in what he does not know. For Islam, there is knowledge first. If the information is reasonable, if the information is meaningful, if the information is correct, then *tasdiq* (the confirmation) expressed by the classical Islamic *ulamah* will come. With his free will, the man believes, extending to and even encompassing the transcendental realm. What is the formula? I believe because it is true, because it is reasonable. The formula is very clear. First, its reasonableness is judged, and then faith ensue. In Christianity, faith is dogma, secret, and therefore unknown. You believe even if it is absurd because you believe first, and say that it is reasonable because I believe it, it is true because I believe it. Which form of faith is liberating? The Christian world has freed the mind from the pledges of church and imprisoned religion in the church in order to overcome the gripping fabric of this kind of faith. As a Christian, it is possible to make the following statement: "I am a scientist in the laboratory, and a Christian in the church." However, in Islam you cannot make this statement. If you are a Muslim, you are a Muslim in the laboratory, on the street, and in the mosque. This is the biggest advantage of being reason-based: Islam has nothing to seize from reason.

Today, Muslims have begun to religionize everything because they have lost the connection of faith with reason. Religionizing everything means that religion loses its basic functions. When everything becomes religion, religion loses its functions, in a sense, religion evaporates.

The severance of faith's connection with reason has another consequence apart from religionization of everything and religion's losing of its function: people lose their rationality as soon as faith loses its connection with reason. "Reasonable" is extremely important in human life. The disconnection of faith and reason causes us to

lose “reasonable” as well. The religionization of everything leads to abuse of pure, clean faith by others.

Three truths are often neglected in the faith-reason relationship. The first is the individuality of faith in Islam. No one can dictate who will believe what, a person can believe or not believe of his own free will. Secondly, the responsibility is also individual in Islam. No one can bear the sin of anyone. Third, only those who deserve it can go to heaven. Bulk reservations to heaven are not possible. It is at these points that the liberating dimension of faith emerges.

At the beginning of the paper, I argued that the most fundamental problem of Muslims is the issue of freedom and justice. What is happening in the Muslim world today is not preordained. It is the result of the choices of the Muslims so far. According to the expression of the Qur’an, the bad things that happen to us are because of what we have done with our own hands. Another interesting fact is that Almighty God openly says, “The worst creatures in God’s eyes are those who are willfully deaf and dumb who do not reason.” The 100th verse of Surah Yunus of the Qur’an says, “He will place defilement upon those who will not use reason.” Thus, it can be thought that what is happening in the Muslim world is not destiny. Indeed, there is nothing to be gained for us humans by blaming Allah.

If what happened is not destiny, then it can be overcome. The way to do this is to change our understanding of faith. In this context, the Qur’an says: Your faith commands you, and faith that is severed from reason leads people to evil and does not liberate them. The connection of faith with reason has to be re-established at this point. Only then can liberation processes work more healthily. The five purposes of Islam, called *makasat-1 hamse*, which the old ulema explained very well, are: protection of life, protection of mind, protection of property, protection of human dignity and progeny. These are in the category of fundamental rights and freedoms. If we update and reformulate *makasat-1 hamse* as *makasat-1 selase*, i.e. three basic purposes, the three indispensable aims of Islam in present circumstances can be summarized as freedom, life and justice. Islam exists to keep people alive; if you are ignoring life, if you are sacrificing people to religion, then the name of that religion will not be Islam. Because Islam exists to keep people alive, and this is the reason why the ancients put life upfront. The second purpose is freedom; freedom of thought, freedom of expression... Yes, the

essence of Islam is to liberate people. Where there is no freedom, what you do in the name of Islam will have no meaning. The third purpose is justice, which is the founding principle of divine creation, human mind, morality, science and jurisdiction. We imprisoned justice in the jurisdiction and forgot the other four principles. Thus, life, freedom and justice are our main problems today. If the Hanafi Maturidi tradition and the stem cells within that tradition can be revived, I think we can overcome many problems, particularly that of *takfir*, that cause us pain and legitimize spilling of blood.