

Sīrat al-Rasūl, aw, al-Ṭarīqah al-Muḥammadiyah

M.H.A.N. al-Shaybānī - Muhammad, Prophet, d. 632



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Chapter 5 You Must Know Your Faith in Detail: Redefinition of the Role of Knowledge and Boundaries of Belief in Ottoman Catechisms (‘Ilm

As Norman Calder pointed out, while the books of law contained expressions of creed, medieval creeds did not contain references to law, which he, in turn, interpreted as the limits of the genre of creed to establish the boundaries of orthodoxy. This emphasis on knowledge, as synonymous with imān, raised the question as to its scope and nature.

Chapter 5 You Must Know Your Faith in Detail: Redefinition of the Role of Knowledge and Boundaries of Belief in Ottoman Catechisms (‘Ilm

İznîkî responds that Muḥammad indeed proclaimed that the faith of those who pronounce the shahāda is sound because he wanted to facilitate people coming to faith. In view of the scholars from Arab provinces of the empire, this stipulation amounted to takfir—the act of declaring other Muslims infidels kāfir—which was considered contrary to the Sunni tradition and was singled out as such in a number of medieval Sunni creeds, including Hanafi ones.

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As his interpreters understood it, Abū Ḥanīfa demanded knowledge of God and of the Prophet, as well as acknowledgment of what the Prophet brought from God in a summary manner jumlatan, without a detailed explanation.

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In particular, anyone with a solid knowledge of ‘ilm-i ḥāl would be able, after just a short conversation, to identify heretics who have proliferated within the Ottoman realm and infiltrated the army and the government, according to Nuṣṣī. The latter explanation is important because it highlights

the diversity within the Hanafi madhhab across the Ottoman Empire. İznikī was a product of the early Ottoman scholarly environment in Anatolia.

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As El-Rouayheb points out, this stance on taqlīd in matters of īmān was entirely opposed to the Hanbali stance on the issue. In this respect, the overall concept of the Ottoman ‘ilm-i ḥāl appears to fit squarely into the framework for knowledge incumbent upon each individual believer as envisioned by al-Ghazālī see above.

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