Scholars are the Prophets Successors
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[Please note: Images may have been removed from this document. Page numbers have been added.]

Scholars are successors of the Prophet and the defenders of religion. They are the ones who do not deviate from the truth, embracing lairs and ignorant interpretations. They play a major role in the Ummah.

Due to the importance of scholars in Islam, and the role of their tasked mission, one should be aware of the danger of not distinguishing between scholars working to further the word of Allah, and those preferring earthly things and materials. It is necessary to differentiate between the two types according to religious law in obeying and respecting these scholars. Following the religious way of addressing their mistakes and hoping to reconcile between scholars and those working for Islam, [we] decided to approach this subject as follows;

1. Scholars' status in Islam
It is known that religious knowledge is the successor to prophecy as scholars are to prophets. For this reason, they deserve credit. Allah describes them in his holy Quran "Allah elevates those believers among you and scholars". He also made their uniqueness third in line, after himself and his angels. Allah says "Allah, his angels and scholars are witnesses that there is no Allah but him." He also added that the Prophet said "the preference of a scholar compared to an average person, is like the moon compared to others starting on a full-moon night." In the Hadith, Abu Da'ud al-Tarmidi and al-Darqtani stated the prophet's saying "Prophets did not inherit money, but rather knowledge, so whoever follows the same path, is lucky".

The classification of scholars is derived from the importance of their role and responsibilities assigned to them, according to what Allah says. For this reason, underestimating them or talking negatively about their knowledge is associated with danger. Talking negatively about scholars is the beginning of launching destruction of the credibility and creating a religious leadership void in the Ummah. This would lead ignorant leaders to take over and mislead the Ummah.

People of knowledge have warned against talking negatively about scholars. Ibn 'Asakir said "Know that scholars' bodies are pious, and Allah has made it known where the boundaries are. So whoever talks poorly about them Allah will inflict heart disease on him prior to his death."

2. Difference between Good and Bad Scholars

Most of the readings talk about scholars, their benefits and positions, while warning against tarnishing their reputation. Allah has assigned them with speaking the truth loudly. Imam Shafi'i said that scholars in the religious sense are "active scholars".
As much as Allah has raised their status, he has lowered the status of bad scholars. The Quran has described a scholar whom Allah has blessed with knowledge. In order to speak the truth and raise the word of Allah, he preferred the material world and followed his own materialistic aspirations. Rather than leading his people in the right path, he misguided them. Allah describes him as follows, "Tell them about the story of the one whom we granted our knowledge but who decided to follow Satan and was aberrant. If we wanted, we could have raised his status, but he resorted to materialistic things. He is like a dog, if you put something on him, it gasps - or if you leave it alone, it still gasps".

Regardless of who the person was, which happened to be Bal'am bin Ba'Awrai, al-Qurtubi says, "this verse is addressed to those who memorise the Quran and do not follow its teachings; no one should be impressed with his knowledge." Allah provided other examples of Jewish scholars who had been assigned this task. Allah says "The example of those who were assigned with the Torah but did not follow through, are like a donkey carrying items on its back". As far as those who use their knowledge for personal gain, Allah says "Woe unto those who wrote the book themselves to personally gain from it. Woe unto what they wrote and woe unto what they earned."

A bad scholar's departure from the right path is due to two main factors:

1 - Lack of acting upon their knowledge; this is active deviation from the truth because people follow their example
2 - Changing what Allah said, while interpreting laws for their own benefit

In addition to what Allah stated regarding this category of scholars, history confirms this reality, so we do not need to go into more details. The past and present are full of examples that support this claim.

1st example

When Gamal Abdel Nasser adopted communism and forced his people to do so, Shaykhs at al-Azhar who are historically known for defending Islam and standing up to tyrants, supported this new ideology under the name of Islam because of his daily broadcasting program, "Communism and Life". Because of that, he misled many Muslims.

2nd example

When the same tyrant decided to execute groups of preachers in Egypt such as Abdel Aqadir 'Awdah and other brothers, al-Azhar University issued a Fatwa saying "These infidels' repentence will not be accepted". Gamal Abdel Nasser picked this Mufti after Shaykh Muhammad Khadhar Husayn refused to do so. This is an example of what is happening today within the Gulf states and to its preachers, such as Shaykhs Salman and Safar.

For example, these bad scholars have allowed ignorance to go on, oppressed those speaking the truth, affected the principle of Tawhid, and helped spread the wrong teachings. All this was done for the sake of monetary gain. These types of scholars have sold their lives and the hereafter for
materials things. Ali bin Talib, peace be on his soul, was right when he said, "Two types of people break my back; dissolute scholars and ignorant hermits".

Religion disintegration stems from two types of people; scholars and rulers. Bin al-Mubarak, peace be upon his soul, said "Kings and Bishops have ruined religion". Disintegration of rulers is caused by scholars' dissolution, which is caused by love for money and material things. Abu Hamid described scholars during his time, "Nowadays, greed has kept scholars quiet; their words contradict their actions. If they had true intentions and aided the truth, they would succeed. Disintegration of citizens is caused by kings, which in turn is caused by scholars with their love of money and glory. Whoever is corrupted will not be able to hold average people accountable, so how can they hold king and leaders responsible?

What has been stated before clearly shows that standing up to this category of bad scholars to uncover their truth and plans is a priority in defending Islam. Islamic scholars must take the responsibility to stand up to them. Among those who did were famous ones such as Imam Ahmad against al-Mutazila, bin Taymiyah against straying groups, and Shaykh al-Khadhar Husayn against secular communism and Egyptian tyrants of that time.

Responding to this category of scholars does not correspond to addressing mistakes made by true scholars because bad scholars are those who are against Islam and are not fully integrated within what is called "People of Knowledge" within its religious context. True scholars are known for speaking the truth and not being afraid of an unjust king or infidel ruler. In order to avoid any confusion, distinction between the two categories must be made before talking about laws and limits of obedience in Islam.

3rd example

Limits of scholars obedience and their glorification in Islam.

It is evident that Muslims follow the recommendations of scholars. Allah says "Oh you believers, obey Allah, his Messenger and those in charge of you". We have clarified earlier that obeying Allah and his Messenger consists of obeying scholars because they are the Prophet's successors. Allah says, "Ask those knowledgeable people among you, if you do not know".

There is much to be written about this issue. What we have mentioned should be enough to build a foundation to obey scholars. A majority of people believe that obeying scholars has no limits. It is a mistake to think so; it is an exorbitant mistake. Scholars are not prevented from making mistakes. Al-Imam Malik said "Every judgment can sway back and forth, except those made by a person in his grave", meaning the Prophet, peace be upon him. If scholars are forgiven for making mistakes after they rectify them, people are not forgiven for following these mistakes without rectifying them as soon as possible. Bin Mas'ud said "No one should imitate anybody, if he believes, he believes, and if he disbelieves, he disbelieves". Imam Ahmad said "You can tell that someone is not knowledgeable when he imitates someone else".

To limit this blind imitation of a scholar, religious laws warn against glorifying scholars more than what they are entitled. The Quran says that, among other reasons that people of the book
become disbelievers, is their exaggerated glorification of scholars so much that it dictates right and wrong without checking what Allah stated. Allah says in his Holy Quran "they adopted their rabbis and priests as their gods." Adopting this approach is al-Tirmidi as others said in the Hadith. Muslim scholars have warned against falling into what People of the Book did when they fabricated things. Among those who opened the door by debating this was Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, may Allah bless his soul. In his book al-Tawhid, he said "Those who obey scholars and rulers in forbidding that what Allah allows and vice versa, perceive them as gods”.

Scholars' obedience is tied to their commitment of defending the truth. The more they move away from speaking the truth, the more animosity is geared towards them. This is the religious true scale that confirmed in writing and by the actions of previous generations. Because scholars are prone to making mistakes, a religious style was adopted to clarify these mistakes, which is subject of our fourth example.

4th Example

Religious style in clarifying the mistakes of scholars

Reasons for mistakes by scholars and their influences differ. For this reason, a determined response and style are chosen to clarify these mistakes. If the mistake is a minor one, where evidence does not exist or there is a conflict of evidence, then drawing attention to the correct way is the appropriate approach.

However, if the mistake is about religion and the Shariah confirms evidence, then harsh words are needed and a warning of his judgment goes into effect. The prophet, peace be upon him, said to Abi-Zar, when the latter insulted Bilal by mentioning his mother, the Prophet said "You are a man of ignorance". He also said to al-Raht - who issued a Fatwa for his friend, who died following the Fatwa's command to wash with clean sand or earth when water was not available, "that killed him, may Allah kill them, if only they had asked when they did not know, the medicine of the impotent is to ask questions". He also said to Abu Bakr and Umar, may Allah bless their souls, "Powerful during Jahiliyyah, cowards in Islam". Ibn Abbas said to those who contradict his judgments [about the] Prophet following what Abu Bakr and Omar did, "It looks like a stone might fall on you from the sky, I said the Prophet said this, and you said Abu Bakr and Omar said it".

People of knowledge continue in their perseverance responding to these issues. It is said that Imam Ahmad, may Allah bless his soul, refused to say hello in return to Imam Yahya bin Mu'in, Allah bless his soul, when he visited him during his final moments. Under pressure from Abbasids, Imam Yahya bin My'in said some things that came from My'tazila and when Imam Yahya concluded reciting Ammar's speech regarding duress, Imam Ahmad did not accept it, and said after leaving "finished with Ammar's speech". There is also what is said about bin Taymiyah - regarding his moderation with those who opposed him - that he responded strongly to them when it came down to differences on similar issues. He said about those who stated that Tatars fought wrongdoers not infidels, "he made a grave mistake".

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Bin al-Jazri, may Allah bless his soul, commented on Imam Abi Shama's speech, "Brother, look at this poor and contradictory writing that has been well-received. I asked our Imam Aba Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Jamali and he said this book must be removed. I said, Allah is our witness, we do not want to underestimate Imam Abi Shama, but rather warn people about these mistakes”.

[The remaining text made available by the Combating Terrorism Center.]

Imam Nawawi said that in his book “Al-Majmu’,” It is not the goal to exaggerate mistakes made by a person, even if that person is well respected, but instead, war about not falling for that person’s speech.”

We could say that these sources are accurate and scholars and companions (TN: Those who accompany the Prophet and report things he said) clearly show the severity of dealing with those who otherwise deviate from this. This truth shall be followed and a scholar’s errors shall not be pursued. Al-Shatibi said, Allah bless his soul, a scholar’s fault is not to be taken into consideration because it is based on contradicting the al-Shari’ (TN: religious law). For that reason it is considered an error.”

Leniency in addressing mistakes is required and so is a firm stand. Wisdom is to use the right approach at the right time.

Previous texts have shown the legitimacy of responding harshly to those who are inconsistent with these issues. It is justified against those who do not seek the truth, but rather decided on it intentionally, after it has become clear to them that they were on the wrong side. It has become evident that they serve rulers who decided to fight Allah. If the Prophet, peace be upon his soul, said (they killed him may Allah kill them) about those who issued a Fatwa regarding the person who washed with sand because water was not available and died, what should be said about those who issue fatwas that result in the death of thousands and even cause the entire Ummah/nation to vanish.

It has been said that they allow Allah’s enemies in al-Haramayn, Jerusalem and Palestine. What is the right thing to say to them as they align themselves with the Jews to fight Mujahidin in Palestine and other places? But what should be said about them as they collude with bad rulers to bury the truth and stand up to those who speak the truth among those who we think of them as true scholars, reformers, and preachers. They participated in what these people are suffering, ranging from prison to oppression.

These people, who issued Fatwas and those who allowed unjust regimes to use them as shields, defend their positions and decided to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the same trench, should not feel bad if al-Shari’ (TN: religious law) dictated or uncovered the illegitimacy of these regimes and the removal of their oppression on people.

There may be times when people will say that the regimes took advantage of them so they (scholars) could issue fatwas for the benefit if these rulers. This suggestion—if correct—does not change the dangerous implications resulting from these fatwas. This means that religious law
must remove it. This applies to those with good intentions who happen to be taken advantage of. However, this does not become permissible for those who intentionally have refused to reverse course after the truth came out and evidence was established against them. Even if it is said that they have been taken advantage of, it is a proof against them of losing one of the main conditions of Fatwa, which is being aware of what is going on. So, issuing a fatwa when missing this condition, is not religiously acceptable and they must be reprimanded for that.

This category of scholars who issue these fatwas and support injustice is what pushed the majority of people, who followed the truth, to withdraw their trust in them and cut off their ties. It was one of the reasons of tension between those who categorize scholars on the one hand and those working for Islam on the other hand.

Solving this issue is the subject of the following paragraph.

IV: The Right Way to Resolve this Issue

To overcome this stage of current tension, the following must be taken into consideration. Most of these issues Shaykh Dr. Nasser al-(‘Umru)—may Allah grant his release along with other brothers—in his letter “Scholars’ Piousness Bodies,” clarified the scholars’ responsibilities and summarized as follows. There are some additions and modifications:

1—A scholar must be a role model not only in his knowledge but actions as well. Allah says, “You are asking people to do good deeds, but you forget to do them yourselves, How could you be right?”

2—A scholar needs to make sure of all conditions of a Fatwa. If he is asked to issue a Fatwa, he needs to think very hard about the purpose of the person asking him to issue his fatwa after all conditions haven met according to al-Shari’ and reality.

3—A scholar needs to be aware of the possibility of being led into temptation, exploitation and deceit, especially by rulers who declare war against Allah.

4—A scholar needs to have courage to speak out, no matter what. His courage is what sets him apart from others as a role model for others. He needs to say to whoever is/was offensive, that he is/was wrong. Past scholars are the perfect example. Among them are, Said bin al-(Musayib)), Imam Ahmad, Al-Az bin ((Abd-al-Salam)), bin Taymiyah and others. May Allah bless their souls.

5—A scholar should stay away from suspicious ways of rulers of which the Prophet peace be upon him, and his companions have warned against. The prophet said (whoever gets closer to rulers will be...
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