

IN THE COMPANY OF THE IMĀMS

The Lives & Wisdom of Islām's Great
Legal Scholars

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INTRODUCTION

I have always liked studying the lives of righteous people, including Islām's great 'ulamā' (sg. 'ālim, scholars). Among these, I have paid special attention to the four a'immaḥ (sg. imām), those great fuqahā (sg. faqīh, jurists) who established the four legal schools which are prevalent throughout the Islāmic world. I have found the lives of these a'immaḥ to be full of lessons for character-building, etiquette, and good behaviour. No less, I have found that studying their lives enriches one's general and specialized knowledge of Islām. Indeed, a careful reading of their biographies provides new cultural insights about the societies wherein their legal schools became widespread.

For these reasons, I decided to write a small treatise about the lives of each of the four a'immaḥ, wherein I tried to be as entertaining, insightful, and accurate as possible. Then, I reviewed what I had written to identify the areas of convergence and disagreement between those great 'ulamā' with the purpose of revealing the unity of their basic assumptions as well as the multiplicity of their opinions and judgments. This demonstrates the scope and flexibility inherent in Islām, which takes into account the different historical, social, and geographical circumstances in which people find themselves.

Introduction

Allāh has allowed such scope of opinion to exist so that the teachings of Islām can stay vital for every place and time. Though all the legal schools are grounded in Islāmic teachings, none of them have a monopoly on the truth.

In this book, I support the idea of following the a'immah in a legitimate and balanced way, for they are among “those whom Allāh has guided, so follow their guidance [*Sūrah Sūrah al-'An'ām*, 6:90].” I seek to give them the praise they are due and refute the allegations of those who try to downplay or dismiss their achievements. At the same time, I want to discourage the tendency to think that those 'ulamā' were faultless, or to become chauvinistic or biased in favour of any one of them, or even to give preference to them as a group over the views of other 'ulamā'. Following one of the four legal schools should never lead people to anger, resentment, or disunity, which has happened at various times in history. Unfortunately, this tendency exists to some extent right up to the present day, and it warrants being addressed and discouraged.

This book seeks to make people acquainted with the truth about these eminent 'ulamā' and to do justice to their memory. As Allāh says: “And those who came (into the faith) after them say: Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who were before us in the faith, and place not in our hearts any rancour toward those who believe. Our Lord! You are full of kindness, most merciful [*Sūrah al-Ḥashr*, 59:10].”



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This book, in the end, is an expression of my love and admiration for them.

I ask Allāh to accept this work from me and to make it wellreceived by His righteous servants. Indeed, it is Allāh who speaks the truth and He who guides to the Straight Path.

Salman al-Oadah
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