

العقيدة الطحاوية

المسماة «بيان السنة والجماعة»

The Creed of  
Imam al-Ṭahāwī  
al-Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwiyyah



Translated, Introduced,  
and Annotated by

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## Foreword\*

ALL PRAISE BELONGS to God alone, and may God's blessings and peace be upon our master Muḥammad and upon his family and companions.

Our virtuous brother in faith, the associate jurist and professor of faith Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, has translated into English *The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī*—a beneficial endeavor, indeed, especially for non-Arabic speakers. The creed is one with which the entire community concurs.

*The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī* contains a general call to abandon accusations of disbelief against others and to forgo any pretense of knowledge about who is or is not in Paradise or in Hell; and to entrust all abstruse and knotty matters to the Omniscient and Wise.

For these aforementioned reasons, our scholars have not only accepted it but have added to it numerous commentaries from varying perspectives and schools. I recommend, however, for the general community, that it be memorized as it is, free of any speculations about matters the true nature of which can never be comprehended or even grasped. To use a metaphor from Mālik [d. 179 AH/795 CE], our creed has reached all of us pure and lucid, and entered as a groom into his bride's chamber, welcomed without question.

Any believer who wishes to deepen his or her knowledge in this religion should follow two courses. The first is to occupy oneself with those matters of faith that concern the heart and its states, as well as purification of the ego, enabling one to ascend to the degree of spiritual excellence. The second involves a course of study of

\* The Foreword was rearranged in its English translation for the reader's benefit. It was done with the author's consent and remains faithful to the original text.

practical jurisprudence in order to acquire the divine injunctions and rectify one's transactions and contracts.

One should also avoid any disputation and debate about theological matters that are predicated upon earlier philosophical problems that may no longer serve the current religious discourse or the materialistic intellectual challenges confronting the prevailing cultural environment.

*The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī* is written in lucid and non-technical language and is based upon the clear proofs in the Book and the Sunnah. It avoids complexities and doubtful matters, resembling Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī's creed [d. 386/996]. In fact, I wish that an opportunity arises for our brother, Shaykh Hamza, to translate that also. It would not be difficult for him to do so, given his high aspirations.

Shaykh Hamza's translation is trustworthy because of his firm grounding in Arabic and its rhetoric, as well as his breadth of knowledge regarding the theology of the early scholars. As for English, his tongue is Shakespearian. However, foremost of all, he is noted for his research, scruples, and sincerity—God willing—and hence is compelled to search and investigate in order to penetrate the depths of any subject and be able to distinguish between the essential and the incidental.

In conclusion, I pray to God, the Exalted, that He enrich our brother, Shaykh Hamza, and us, in providence and guidance.

ABDULLAH BIN BAYYAH

## Preface

THE PURPOSE OF Islam is to teach humanity unity. It begins with the unity of our Lord, that we unify Him in our understanding and associate nothing with Him. The renowned theologian and heresiologist, Imam Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) remarked that, “All what theologians have said concerning the unity of God can be summed up in two statements: first, God is other than any concept that comes to mind. Second, while the essence of God is utterly unlike other essences, it is, nonetheless, not devoid of attributes.”<sup>1</sup> God’s unity is also reflected in the world, such as in the bonds that connect the human community. At the immediate level, this unity teaches us not only that our co-religionists are brothers and sisters who share the same spiritual source, Abraham, but also that we are united with our fellow men as children of Adam and Eve, as well as with the rest of existence, as expressions of God’s creative power. Thus, we should reach out with good will and service not only to those who share our faith but to all humanity, so they might see our living faith in action.

The purpose of a creed is to engender a shared understanding through an articulation of the tenets of faith that are derived from revelation itself. Although the modern world has generally become skeptical of creeds, many Muslims still find refuge in their creed from the uncertainties and chaos of life. Only very recently have Muslims begun to fragment theologically, due to the loss of an authoritative religious leadership. It is ironic that unlike the skepticism fragmenting the West, it is the absolutist positions of some contemporary Muslims regarding other Muslims that has caused this fragmentation and attacks on other people’s faith.

For centuries, Muslims followed simple, concise doctrinal texts that unified them and prevented them from falling prey to those who would challenge the central tenets of faith. Children usually learned the tenets by rote, and teachers did not burden them with intricate and difficult theologies that remained the domain of advanced students of knowledge. Some modernist voices have introduced incidental wedge issues among the Muslim masses, presenting them as core issues; this has resulted in common Muslims debating rarified theological points normally relegated to a scholastic class. Most of these issues are matters best left alone. Indeed, some are insoluble points of difference that await God's clarification as He has promised in many Qur'anic verses. For unity to be restored, we need to first understand that unity is not uniformity, and that diversity of opinion and understanding is an essential part of human nature and fully incorporated within the framework of traditional Islam. We must also understand the difference between the essential beliefs and the incidental ones; this is achieved by adhering to the consensual core tenets articulated by our authoritative scholars. Islam's scholastic tradition is replete with treatises and texts that enunciate these tenets precisely and concisely. Of them all, Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī's (d. 321/933) has achieved unprecedented and widespread acceptance among Muslims.

I decided to translate Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī's creed partly because the small number of existing translations were done either in an impoverished English, or, in the few cases where the English was adequate, it seemed the precise meanings of the text were not conveyed without diverting from the aphoristic style of the author; instead, the translators used explanatory phrases or entire sentences that were not in the original. I felt the text deserved a thorough and exhaustive attempt at conveying the precision and eloquence of the Arabic in modern English prose. Furthermore, none of the existing translations were published with a critical edition of the Arabic text, as has been provided here. The more important motivation for my translation, however, is that this is a wonderfully unifying creed and deserves a far wider dissemination