

International Conference Who are the *Ahl al-Sunna*?

A clarification of the methodology of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a* in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality and the effects that deviating from it has on world affairs.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds

Peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad, his Family and Companions

The International Conference on Who are the Ahl al-Sunna, 25-27 August 2016 (21 Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1437), Grozny, Chechnya, is part of a biennial series of scholarly conferences held in the month of August in the Chechen Republic. The conference was convened by the Shaykh Ahmad Kadyrov Regional Charitable Fund, Foundation for Chechen Islamic Culture and Education and Tabah Foundation, and hosted by the Presidential Office of the Chechen Republic.

Amid attempts by extremist Kharijite factions to seize the title of Ahl al-Sunna and define it by their incorrect and distorted understanding and practice of faith, the conference aimed to clarify the scholastic methodology of normative Sunni Islam, Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a, in relation to doctrine, jurisprudence, and spirituality, as has been understood and implemented by generations of Muslim scholars for over a millenia. Special attention was also given to examining the real-world effects of abandoning the normative path.

The conference brought together over 200 scholars from across the world. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar inaugurated the conference with a keynote speech that set the framework for remaining symposia. This year's conference was held in memory of Shaykh Ahmad Kadyrov, the late mufti and president of Chechnya who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda associated extremists in 2004.

The conclusions reached by the scholars in attendance are as follows:

- The opening speech of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar constitutes the foundational document upon which the conference is based.
- The Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a are those who follow:
 - The Ash`ari or Maturidi schools in doctrine—including the Ahl al-Hadith who adopted the principle of tafwid (Consignment)¹.
 - The Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi or Hanbali schools in Islamic law and jurisprudence.

¹ The scholars who belonged to the Ahl al-Hadith adopted either the position of tafwid on the issue of God's attributes or the position of ta'wil (interpretation), with tafwid more commonly adopted. Both positions are validated by the Ash`ari and Maturidi schools. The antropomorphists (mushabbiha) and the corporealists (mujassima) are those who interpreted the Quran's ambiguous verses (mutashābih) in a literal sense and imputed a physical form to God. The Ahl al-Hadith did not legitimate antropomorphism and corporealism as valid doctrinal positions. Cases where individual hadith scholars held these positions are rare exceptions and unrepresentative of the Ahl al-Hadith school as a whole.

- The path of spirituality in its manifestation as science and practice, namely the adornment of noble character and purification of the heart, as exemplified in the order of al-Junayd and the imams who followed his way.
- The methodology of Ahl al-Sunna honours all the different sciences which serve the Qur'anic revelation and identifies the features and higher aims of this religion, namely preserving human life, protecting the mind, protecting the religion from distortion, protecting people's property and honour, and upholding noble character.
- The Qur'an can be likened to a sacred precinct surrounded by sciences which serve it. They help to derive its meanings, extract the knowledge contained in it and understand its higher aims and ultimate purposes, which enable people to attain Allah's proximity. They help translate its verses into a living civilisation and a means of spreading peace and safety in the world. Its verses are manifested in the form of the arts, noble character, mercy, ease, belief and prosperous development. The various peoples, cultures and civilisations of the world will then see with their own eyes that this religion is a source of mercy for the whole of creation and a means of attaining felicity in this life and the next.
- The scholastic methodology of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a is the most comprehensive and precise of all the Islamic methodologies and the most developed in terms of selection of scholarly works and curricula. They provide the best and most sound method by which the Muslim intellect is able to comprehend Sacred Law and understand world affairs in all their complexity and reconcile between the two.
- The institutes of knowledge which represent the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a have produced hundreds of thousands of scholars and graduates over the centuries who spread throughout the world from Siberia to Nigeria and from Tangiers to Jakarta. They held various posts and positions: some issued legal responsa (fatwa), some were judges, some were teachers and some were preachers. They extinguished the fires of conflict and dissension, brought security and stability to society and spread knowledge and awareness.
- Throughout history, the scholars of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a monitored the emergence of every deviant sect, faction and group, documented its theological claims and statements and used scientific criteria to critique and refute those claims. They were decisive in confronting erroneous thought as it appeared and employed time-tested scholarly tools to clarify and correct aberrations. Where the scholastic methodology of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a was present and active, waves of extremism were driven back and the affairs of the Muhammadan community were in order, allowing them to turn their devotion to building civilisation. Geniuses from among the scholars of the religion thus emerged who contributed to the development of algebra, trigonometry, geometry, algorithms, medicine, eye surgery, psychology, oncology, epidemiography, embryology, pharmacology, biology, gravity, astronomy, the environment, phonetics and optics. This was the product of the methodology of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a.
- Throughout history, erroneous ideologies have appeared that claimed to derive their beliefs from divine revelation. They rebelled against the sound scholastic methodology of the Ahl al-Sunnah and tried to destroy it. They caused instability and threatened people's safety. The first of these harmful waves was the Khawarij. They have once again appeared in modern times in the form of

Salafi-takfirists, Daesh (so-called ‘Islamic State’) and similar extremist groups. What these groups have in common amongst their adherents is distortions of the over-zealous, forgeries of the fabricators, and misinterpretations of the ignorant. This has given rise to dozens of false concepts and incorrect interpretations, the result of which has been takfir, destruction, bloodshed and distortion of the image of Islam leading people to show enmity to Islam and to attack it. As a result of this, the upright bearers of the religion have deemed it necessary to prove that Islam is not responsible for these crimes. In doing so, they confirm the statement of the Prophet ﷺ in the sound hadith: “This knowledge will be carried in every generation by the upright. They repel from it the distortions of the over-zealous, the forgeries of the fabricators, and the misinterpretations of the ignorant.”

- This conference comes in the wake of attempts by extremists to seize the noble title of Ahl al-Sunna wa’l-Jama`a and to apply it exclusively to themselves while excluding its true adherents from it. The conference will be, with Allah’s permission, a blessed turning point in the effort to correct this severe and dangerous deviance and to clarify the concept of Ahl al-Sunna wa’l-Jama`a. This will be achieved through reviving its authentic scholastic methodology which the great learning institutions of the Muslim world have adopted. It represents a safety valve by which takfir and extremism may be dismantled. It will also be achieved by sending messages of safety, peace and mercy to the whole of creation, so that our lands become once again, by Allah’s permission, places of light and guidance.

The conference participants extended their gratitude to the Chechen Republic for its hospitable reception and prayed for its protection, safety and prosperity.

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