

<https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.Si4.2024.5488-5501>



African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

Imam Al-Shafi'i's Position on Theology

Dr. Seyed Zuhair Al-Mesilini (Tunisia)

Scientific Department of Islamic Theology, Golestan Representative Office, Al-Mustafa International University, Tunisia

Orchid code:0009-0008-1335-7267

Volume 6, Issue Si4, Aug 2024

Received: 15 June 2024

Accepted: 25 July 2024

Published: 15 Aug 2024

doi: 10.48047/AFJBS.6.Si4.2024.5488-5501

Abstract

During the emergence and development of theology, the scholars held differing opinions. Some supported the field, considering engagement in theology permissible as long as one's obligations were not neglected. Others opposed the study of theology, viewing it as contrary to divine law and even forbidding association with theologians, labeling them as innovators. This debate and criticism surrounding theology contributed to its examination and definition, eventually establishing it as an independent discipline with its methods. Various opinions exist regarding the legitimacy of theology, and three main tendencies can be identified: The first tendency was vehement opposition and rejection of theology, with proponents explicitly condemning it and warning against its adoption in their writings. Those who held this view considered theology intertwined with religious matters and criticized those who engaged in it, labeling them innovators.

Imam Al-Shafi'i is among those associated with this position, as expressions of his condemnation of theology and its proponents have been reported. Verbal evidence was viewed as a tool used by speakers to articulate their beliefs and knowledge acquired through reason or transmission, to substantiate their claims, to refute opponents' accusations, or to address inconsistencies resulting from conflicting statements. It indicates that Imam Al-Shafi'i sought to critique verbal evidence, considering its structure and purpose. Contrary to the first tendency, which rejected theology comprehensively, followers of the second tendency emphasized its necessity and the need to pay attention to it as an essential obligation or a sufficient pursuit. One prominent advocate of this view is Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, who discusses the benefits of engaging in theology in his treatise "Istihsān al-Khawḍ fī 'Ilmal-Kalām". Supporters of the third tendency argue for a balanced approach, separating the praise and condemnation of theology. Imam Al-Ghazali was a prominent figure in this group.

Keywords: Imam Al-Shafi'i, theology, opposition to theological discourse, ruling on engagement in theology, formulation of textual evidence

Introduction

Theology is connected to comprehending textual jurisprudence and matters related to beliefs. It is a field of study that originated in Islamic society and draws from Muslim sources while influenced by other sources. Like other disciplines, theology has been influenced by and has influenced other sciences. Throughout its history, theology has undergone various stages where it intersects with influential factors, much like other fields of study. However, its primary purpose remains

establishing and defending faith-based beliefs and addressing doubts. Scholars have differed in their views on the legitimacy of theology, with some attributing the issue to certain theologians' use of philosophical and logical approaches that have distanced the field from its fundamental sources and analogical methods.

On the other hand, movements emerged among scholars of Fiqh and Salaf who advocated for abandoning theology and relying solely on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, considering it sufficient. One of the reasons Imam Al-Shafi'i distanced himself from theology was his strong opposition to theologians and their approaches. This opposition played a significant role in criticizing the theologians and their method of formulating verbal evidence, assuming a conflict between Quranic and verbal evidence. It led some to prioritize verbal evidence over legal and Quranic evidence, assuming that verbal evidence could replace religious and Quranic evidence. However, the study of verbal evidence emphasizes that it does not substitute for legal evidence but rather specializes in addressing doubts and confusions introduced by innovators. The confrontations of theologians were not limited to opponents within the Islamic community but also extended to opponents who solely relied on rational evidence, such as Jews, Christians, Magi, Mandeans, and Zandaqas.

Among those opponents were individuals who insisted on using only rational and logical evidence in their verbal debates with theologians. Imam Al-Shafi'i is considered one of the prominent scholars associated with statements that diminish the value of verbal evidence and express objections to the approaches of verbal theologians.

It is believed that Imam Al-Shafi'i's warnings regarding theology and its methods were not aimed at undermining the foundations of the field but rather calling for reform in the methods of theology. He advocated for regulated and coherent laws rooted in religious sources, Quranic methods, and rules of expression in the Arabic language. This study aims to delve into Imam Al-Shafi'i's perspective on theology, its verbal evidence, and its methods to understand the theoretical foundations on which he based his critique of theology and its methodologies. The study also explores whether he proposed an alternative for this field to defend religion and beliefs against the doubts raised by skeptics and whether his criticism of theology as a science or a verbal structure is related to the prevalence of doubt over love. Has he remained steadfast in both theoretical and practical positions?

Discussion Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

1) Imam Al-Shafi'i, a renowned scholar, is associated with statements that undervalue the importance of verbal evidence and criticize theologians' approaches and dialectical methods. He engages with the evidence presented by contemporary theologians, critiques its form and content, and responds to adversaries by identifying flaws in their structures of verbal evidence. Moreover, he provides practical models of valid evidence.

2) The Mu'tazilites, who lived during the same time as Imam Al-Shafi'i, played a significant role in organizing verbal evidence and elevating its status. They leaned towards a rational inclination, emphasizing the reporting of verbal evidence as auditory evidence. Additionally, they employed philosophical and logical approaches that influenced the formulation of verbal evidence.

3) Imam Al-Shafi'i holds a clear theoretical position in which he critiques the methods and approaches of theologians and their presentation of verbal evidence. He warns against the objectives pursued by speakers through their statements. Furthermore, he holds a practical position in providing practical verbal evidence models. He connects verbal evidence not to logical and philosophical structures but to legal and fundamental evidence, aligning it more closely with comprehension and persuasion.

4) Imam Al-Shafi'i believes that the deficiency in verbal evidence lies not within the evidence itself but in how it is structured and its intended purpose, which is ultimately a means to an end. According to his perspective, if the goal of theology is to dispel doubts, then verbal evidence must possess this characteristic. If formulated correctly, verbal evidence convinces opponents, eliminates doubts, and addresses objections, making it acceptable in Shafi'i's view.

Discussion Objectives

The objective of this research is to comprehensively understand the theoretical and practical position of Imam Al-Shafi'i regarding theology and his approach to engaging with it. We aim to explore his objections to the methods employed by theologians and their dialectical approaches. Furthermore, we investigate whether he has proposed any alternatives in formulating verbal evidence. Additionally, we aim to identify the critical characteristics of the verbal approach according to Imam Al-Shafi'i and delve into the theoretical foundations underlying his critique of the theologians' approaches and their method of formulating verbal evidence.

Discussion Methodology

In this study, we employ a descriptive-analytical approach as the primary methodology, aligning with the nature of the research. The use of inductive reasoning allows us to analyze the most significant statements of Imam Al-Shafi'i about theology and the methods employed by theologians. This approach is chosen due to the recognition of Imam Al-Shafi'i as one of the distinguished scholars who diminished the significance of the verbal approach and expressed objections to the dialectical approaches of theologians.

Discussion Significance

1) This research sheds light on the perspectives of Imam Al-Shafi'i, a prominent figure in the Ahlu Sunna school, regarding theology, the methods of theologians, and the formulation of verbal evidence. It also elucidates Imam Al-Shafi'i's stance towards theology and its methods. The study seeks to explain the controversy caused by Imam Al-Shafi'i's views on verbal methods during his time and rationalize the structures of verbal evidence and their relationship with legal arguments.

2) The significance of this research lies in articulating Imam Al-Shafi'i's position on theology and its methods. It aligns his theoretical stance, which criticizes theology and prohibits engagement with it, with his practical position of involvement in theology through a specific structure of verbal evidence inspired by legal and principled evidence from the field of jurisprudence.

3) The study presents a clear perspective on Imam Al-Shafi'i's position regarding verbal approaches and the formulation of verbal evidence. It justifies Imam Al-Shafi'i's prohibition of engaging with theology and those involved. Additionally, it highlights the alternative proposed by Imam Al-Shafi'i for the structure of verbal evidence, emphasizing legal and principled frameworks instead of relying on philosophical and logical structures.

Research Outline

The research is structured into an introduction, three main sections, a conclusion, and recommendations. The introduction begins by discussing the role of theology in understanding religious texts and emphasizes that verbal evidence should not replace Sharia evidence. Instead, the specific structure of Sharia evidence effectively addresses doubts, objections, and deviations introduced by innovators. The introduction also acknowledges that theologians faced adversaries within the Islamic circle and opponents who relied solely on rational arguments, such as Jews, Christians, Magi, Mandaeans, and innovators (heresy). The discussion in the research is organized around four key themes: research methodology, research significance, research objectives, and research hypotheses.

In the first section, the focus is on the different definitions of theology by Muslims. This section highlights the perspectives of adherents regarding the purpose and benefits associated with this discipline. The definitions reveal that the scope of theology is often limited to specific interests to exclude adversaries from the discussion. While some definitions broaden the realm of verbal evidence to include opponents within the Islamic viewpoint, they still acknowledge them as theologians.

The second section delves into Imam Al-Shafi'i's theoretical standpoint on theology and the reasons behind his critique of its methods. He considers its practitioners inadequate for defending the religion and Islamic principles.

The third section explores Imam Al-Shafi'i's practical stance on theology and its methods. Instead of relying on complex logical and philosophical structures, he proposes alternative models to address verbal issues. The section concludes by presenting some of the research findings.

Finally, the research includes a conclusion summarizing the key points discussed in the preceding sections and synthesizing the findings. Recommendations are also included to guide future research in this area.

Topic One: Muslims' Perspectives on Theology

Upon thoroughly examining the works of ancient scholars who have extensively researched and scrutinized theology, it becomes evident that they have presented multiple definitions of theology using various terms. These diverse definitions reflect its proponents' varying perspectives regarding the purpose and benefits of the study and engagement of theology. The classifications of these definitions can be categorized as follows:

First Approach: This perspective defines theology as one of the defensive sciences. One of the earliest definitions in this regard is provided by Al-Farabi (died 339 AH) in his book "Ihsa' al-Ulum," where he states that theology is: "A discipline that empowers individuals to defend religious beliefs and specific actions prescribed by the religion's founder, as well as to refute anything that contradicts them using well-founded arguments" (Al-Farabi, 2010, p. 100). Al-Iji (died 756 AH) defines it in "Al-Mawaqif fi Ilmi'l-Kalam" as: "A field of knowledge that enables individuals to establish religious beliefs, present supporting evidence, and counter doubts" (Al-Iji, 1997, p. 7). Furthermore, Al-Iji states: The purpose of belief is the act of believing itself, separate from any associated actions, and the purpose of religious knowledge pertains to the religion of Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, even if we are mistaken, we do not exclude opponents from being considered theologians (Al-Iji, 1997, p. 23). Ibn Khaldun (died 808 AH), in his work "Muqaddimah,"

defines it as: "A field of knowledge that encompasses evidence regarding faith-based beliefs through rational reasoning, serving as a response to those heretics who deviate from the beliefs of the Salaf (early generations) and the people of Sunnah in their beliefs" (Ibn Khaldun, 2006, p. 585).

Second Approach: This perspective offers an essentialist definition of theology that does not involve a defensive nature. The pioneer of this approach is Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (died 505 AH), known for his opposition to philosophy. Al-Ghazali criticizes the proponents of the first approach and accuses them of adopting Greek philosophical terms and incorporating them into Islamic thought. He believes that their definitions of theology are predominantly philosophical and imported. Al-Ghazali argues that the actual validation of faith-related matters relies on deriving them from the Quran and Sunnah, leaving no room for alternative methodologies, philosophical theories, or rational arguments to establish them. Al-Ghazali discusses various approaches to proving religious beliefs and states: "The Quran and the traditions contain everything relevant to theology. Anything beyond these sources leads to objectionable debates, innovation, adherence to sectarian contradictions, a form of intellectual adventurism, and an extensive exploration of topics, most of which are nonsensical and delusional, incompatible with human nature, unworthy of consideration, and irrelevant to religion. Some of these topics were not prevalent in the early Islamic era. Immersing oneself entirely in them constitutes an innovation" (Al-Ghazali, 1939, p. 40).

As a result, Al-Taftazani provided the following definition of theology: 'It is the study of the existence of beings based on Islamic law' (Al-Taftazani, 1989, p. 176). In his work *Sharh Al Maqased*, Al-Taftazani (d. 793 AH) defined it as: 'The study of religious beliefs based on transmitted evidence' (Al-Taftazani, 1989, p. 163). Al-Jurjani (d. 813 AH) introduced it in *Al Ta'rifat* as: 'A discipline that explores the inherent qualities of existence based on Islamic principles' (Al-Jurjani, 1991, p. 201).

There appears to be a disparity between Imam Al-Ghazali's definition and the definition mentioned by Adududdin al-Iji, which encompasses two aspects: affirming beliefs and refuting doubts concerning those beliefs. Al-Ghazali's definition suggests that he limited the scope of theology to one aspect: presenting evidence and refuting doubts. It clarifies that when Imam Al-Ghazali discusses theology, he does so within the context of his engagement with the field. Consequently, he expresses his intention: 'The objective is to safeguard the beliefs of Ahlu Sunna and protect them from the disturbances caused by heretics' (Al-Ghazali, 1988, p. 39).

Al-Ghazali approaches the discussion of theology in a manner that seems to pertain to the phenomenon of Ahlu Sunna, even though theology encompasses various schools and endeavors that are not necessarily focused on preserving the beliefs of Ahlu Sunna, despite al-Iji's emphasis that disagreement—even if we make mistakes—does not exclude someone from being a theologian (Al-Iji, 1997, p. 23). Therefore, one researcher explains Al-Ghazali's position in the following manner: 'He discusses theology exactly as he practiced it and perhaps intended to respond to those who believe that theology is entirely unnecessary' (Al-Shafi'i, 1991, p. 18).

If Al-Ghazali views the purpose of theology as preserving the beliefs of Ahlu Sunna from distortions caused by innovations, it implies that individuals with a sound nature and those with no doubts, such as children, do not require theological study. Al-Ghazali suggests that the correct method of educating children involves teaching them these beliefs separately, without delving into theology and the evidence put forth by theologians. He expounds on this topic in his book '*Al-Ihya*.' However, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the subject matter is not limited to children alone but

extends to the general population. To address this, he wrote a book titled 'Iljam al-Awam 'an Ilm al-Kalam,' clearly indicating his intention and rationale for its composition, as explained in the introduction (Al-Ghazali, 1416 AH, pp. 3–5). From al-Iji's definition, the following points can be derived (Ramadan Abdullah, 1986, p. 19):

- a) Theology encompasses statements from Ahlu Sunna and their opponents.
- b) Beliefs must be derived from Sharia; theology aims to substantiate these beliefs to others through argumentation and refutation of doubts.
- c) Since these beliefs are precise and coherent, one must thoroughly understand them and their supporting evidence; mere imitation is insufficient.

These definitions can be approached from the following perspectives:

Aspect One: Content and Significance

Firstly, despite the various perspectives and intellectual sources associated with theology, there is a consensus among its proponents regarding its definition, importance, and the need for its study. This consensus emerges when discussing the emergence of theology as a field and its role in defending religious beliefs through various means.

Secondly, the definitions we have examined exhibit a shared understanding of theology as a discipline used to clarify and defend beliefs against skeptics, pagans, and heretics.

Thirdly, these definitions highlight theology's elevated status and significance, emphasizing its connection to its subject matter and the issues it addresses. They also underscore its purpose and necessity, affirming its authenticity and Islamic foundations.

Fourthly, the definitions provided for theology establish its close association with the fundamental principles of religion, particularly in terms of clarification and defense. Al-Khwarizmi mentions when discussing the foundational concepts addressed by theologians: 'The first is the emergence of entities, countering the Al-Dahriya sect's belief in the eternity of time and affirming that the world is created and originated by the Almighty. It also refutes the attribution of the Magi, Zandaqas, and the Trinity in Christianity affirms prophethood against deniers of prophethood, and establishes the prophethood of Muhammad. Furthermore, it discusses the concept of Imamate and its suitability. These are the religious foundations that theologians engage in discussing and debating. Anything else is either a subsidiary or introductory to these. (Al-Khwarizmi, 1984, p. 58)

Fifthly, throughout its historical development, theology has been referred to by various names that carry implications regarding its acceptance as a genuine Islamic discipline. Islamic scholars, taking into account the deep understanding of the subject matter, have given it names such as 'Al-Fiqh al-Akbar,' indicating that the study of creedal issues is the 'Greater Jurisprudence' in contrast to 'Al-Fiqh al-Asghar,' which pertains to 'Smaller Jurisprudence.' It has also been referred to as the 'Science of Oneness,' as monotheism is a central religious issue around which much of the research in this field revolves.

Sixthly, the definitions offered by Ash'arism regarding theology shed light on the issues addressed by this discipline. While acknowledging that mistakes have occurred in certain stages and approaches, these definitions focus on monotheism. However, there have been instances where theological discussions deviated from their intended purpose, leading to debates between different

sects to prove the superiority of one sect's principles over the others. This divergence has detached theology from its original social and creedal mission.

Second Aspect: Artistic and Logical

First Note: One noteworthy observation is that specific definitions of theology have been narrow in scope, limiting it to a specific religious sect. It indicates a bias by those proponents towards a particular belief system. Such narrow definitions lead to sectarian biases, deviating from the principles of universality and inclusivity, thereby failing to meet the criteria for an authentic definition. For example, Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali confined the scope of theology within the framework of Sunni beliefs. In his work *Ihya' al-Ulum al-Din*, he explained the intended meaning of theology as follows: "The purpose of theology is to safeguard the beliefs transmitted by Ahlu Sunna from the righteous predecessors, not from others, as seeking the truth through inappropriate means is an attempt to discover the truth of matters" (Al-Ghazali, 1939, p. 40).

Furthermore, besides limiting theology to Ash'arism, Ibn Khaldun distanced it from other sects and even considered them innovators who needed to be combated, utilizing theology as a weapon against them. From this perspective, his definition does not fundamentally differ from Al-Ghazali's. Thus, theology has its roots in Ash'arism, its survival in Sunni doctrines, and its objective of defending Ash'arism Sunni thought against any opposition in terms of approach and methodology (Ibn Khaldun, 2006, pp. 587–589). However, it should be noted that Adududdin al-Iji mentioned in his definition of theology that: "We do not exempt the opponent – even if they are mistaken – from being considered among theologians" (Al-Iji, 1997, p. 34).

Second Note: Some of these definitions suggest that the primary objective of theology is limited to the defense of doctrine and does not extend to further exploration or substantiation. Imam Al-Ghazali alludes to this perspective, stating: "The Quran and Sunnah establish doctrinal beliefs, and there is no need to prove them through reason" (Al-Ghazali, 1988, pp. 8–9). He highlights the superiority of rational evidence over verbal evidence. In *Ijam al-Awam*, he asserts, "The evidence derived from the Quran is like nourishment that benefits some, whereas the evidence from theologians is like medicine that benefits some but harms many. The evidence from the Quran is like water that benefits infants, children, and strong men, whereas other evidence is like food that may be beneficial at times but causes illness at others, and children do not benefit from it" (Al-Ghazali, 1416 AH, p. 35). Similarly, Abdel Rahman Badawi argues: "The mission of theology was purely defensive and did not emphasize the clarification and exposition of beliefs" (Badawi, 1971, p. 14).

Returning to the initial discussions on verbal evidence, it becomes evident that they revolved around matters concerning faith, its boundaries, and its essence. For example, there were debates about the status of those who commit major sins and whether they remain within the realm of faith. These inquiries extended to other topics related to the origin of belief and the comprehension of the principles held by each side, elucidating them through rational arguments. It signifies an understanding of the content and reality of faith rather than merely its defense. Furthermore, the use of the term "power" in al-Iji's definition of theology (Al-Iji, 1997, p. 7) emphasizes the need for comprehensive knowledge of all beliefs and the associated evidence, which relies on substantiating them, refuting doubts, and acquiring knowledge of the methods of rational evidence (Al-Tahawini, 1996).

Third Note: These definitions exhibit variations akin to the different forms of evidence used in theological matters and can be categorized into three tendencies based on their approach to establishing proof.

The first tendency: Advocates of this perspective assert that the validation of religious beliefs and theological subjects primarily relies on hidden verbal evidence and cannot be effectively substantiated by rational evidence about theological issues and their subdivisions. They argue that these matters can only be comprehended through statements and Sharia. This inclination is evident in the definitions put forth by Al-Ghazali, Al-Taftazani, and Al-Sharif al-Jurjani (Al-Ghazali, 1416 AH, p. 35).

The second tendency: Supporters of this trend emphasize that theological matters should exclusively be proven through rational evidence, with no room for reliance on verbal evidence. This inclination, perhaps, stems from their rejection of the incorrect roles assigned to theologians and philosophers. This perspective is evident in Ibn Khaldun's definition of theology, adhered to by the author of "The Twentieth Century Encyclopaedia" (Ibn Khaldun, 2006, pp. 587–589).

The third tendency: Advocates of this trend differ from the previous two tendencies in their understanding of the nature of demonstrative evidence in theological matters and intentionally disregard the aspect of proof. Consequently, their definitions do not address the nature of proof itself, whether it is confined to rational evidence, verbal evidence, or a combination of both. It can be observed in the definitions provided by al-Farabi, al-Iji, al-Tahawini, and other later scholars (Al-Taftazani, 1989, p. 176).

Despite the divergence among theologians regarding the nature of demonstrative evidence in theological matters—whether it relies on rational evidence, verbal evidence, or a combination of both—a crucial common point can be inferred from these overarching definitions. These definitions perceive theology as a defensive discipline and a means to safeguard religious beliefs. It is not pursued as an end but primarily utilized as a tool to substantiate and protect religious beliefs.

Second Topic: Imam Al-Shafi'i's Theoretical Position Regarding Theology

Numerous accounts document Imam Al-Shafi'i's perspective on the legitimacy of theology, and subsequently, a specific position was developed within theology. This position influenced Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, who, based on his understanding of Al-Shafi'i's views in theology, adopted a similar stance in the field of logic (Al-Suyuti, 1970, pp. 30, 19, 63, 65). We will now outline the critical aspects of these positions as follows:

First) Al-Shafi'i's Reluctance to Engage in Theology

Reports indicate that Imam Al-Shafi'i refrained from delving into theology because he firmly believed that the Quran and the Sunnah provided clear and unambiguous explanations of religious beliefs (Al-Hanbali, 1986, p. 9). It is recorded that he stated, "If I wished to write a book refuting anyone, I could have done so, but theology is not my concern, and I do not desire to be associated with it in any way" (Al-Suyuti, 1970, p. 66). Perhaps it was this very standpoint of Al-Shafi'i, emphasizing caution in theological matters, that led him to declare, "I have engaged in theological debate only once, seeking forgiveness from the Lord" (Al-Suyuti, 1970, p. 65). It is believed by some that Al-Shafi'i's aversion to theological pursuits was not due to his inability to study theology. Instead, it was supported by clear evidence and justifications rooted in texts attributed to Prophet Muhammad, which advocated against excessive discussions in religious matters or debates about

beliefs. This position also addressed the inevitable negative consequences of certain theological factions, such as neglecting oral evidence, declaring opponents as non-believers, and relying on Greek logic to interpret Sharia phenomena. Despite their devotion and caution in matters of belief, the pious predecessors refrained from unnecessarily dividing matters of creed, similar to the theologians who paid attention to Al-Shafi'i's perspective.

Second) Condemnation of Theologians by Al-Shafi'i

Imam Al-Shafi'i held a different perspective concerning theology and its proponents, which is evident in his criticism of theologians. He believed refraining from engaging in theology was the path to goodness, while preoccupation with it led to evil. As a result, he began to censure theologians, considering their involvement as a manifestation of succumbing to worldly desires. In a recorded narration, he expressed, "If people knew the desires that theology entails, they would flee from it as they would flee from a lion." Consequently, Al-Shafi'i would become upset if someone asked him to write on theology. When Abu Thawr requested him to do so, Al-Shafi'i replied, "Whoever delves into theology will not attain salvation" (Al-Suyuti, 1970, p. 65).

While Al-Shafi'i appreciated scholarly gatherings and encouraged them, he did not accept the company of individuals engaged in theological discussions. His reluctance to associate with proponents of theology in such gatherings is unsurprising, especially given his expressed aversion to the discipline.

Third) Al-Shafi'i's Rulings Regarding Theologians

Reports have consistently depicted Al-Shafi'i's rejection of theologians and his strong aversion to their knowledge. He is quoted as saying, "A person who meets Allah with all sins except polytheism is better off than someone who meets Allah with even a little knowledge of theology" (Al-Ghazali, 1939, p. 95). Additionally, he commented on scholars engaged in theology, stating, "My ruling regarding those who speak about theology is that they should be isolated from their tribes and clans, as this is the punishment for those who distance themselves from the Quran and Sunnah and instead embrace theology" (Al-Razi, 1406 AH, p. 40). Consequently, he explicitly prohibits and warns against theology to the extent of considering it a departure from the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. These statements have confused the two factions. Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi explains, "One faction objects to Al-Shafi'i's knowledge and efforts due to his denial and condemnation of theology, displaying their ignorance of God and Prophethood. On the other hand, a faction regards Al-Shafi'i as an Imam, using these narrations as evidence of his hostility towards both Al-Shafi'i and the followers of theology. Those who believe that theology is a noble discipline employ it as a basis for criticizing Al-Shafi'i, while those who believe that Al-Shafi'i is a complete Imam use it as a basis for criticizing theology" (Al-Razi, 1406 AH, pp. 96-98).

To further emphasize his standpoint, Imam Al-Shafi'i maintained that theological books do not fall under the category of knowledge. Al-Rabi narrates, "I heard from Al-Shafi'i in al-Wasaya that if a person bequeaths his books on other sciences, including theology, those books should not be included in the bequest, as theology is not considered part of true knowledge" (Al-Dhahabi, 1413 AH, p. 29). These instances illustrate Al-Shafi'i's position on theology, criticism of its proponents, and his rulings. However, they also raise questions about reconciling this stance with his debates and discussions regarding theological matters with certain factions within the verbal school.

Several factors contribute to our hesitation regarding Imam Al-Shafi'i's position on theology and its proponents, which we will elaborate on as follows:

Firstly, it is essential to note that Imam Al-Shafi'i had studied theology extensively and excelled in it. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi narrates Al-Shafi'i's statement about himself, "I have excelled immensely in theology" (Al-Razi, 1406 AH, p. 136). Given this background, it is hard to imagine that Al-Shafi'i would reach such a high level of theology proficiency only to reject it later.

Secondly, al-Baghdadi attributed two books on theology to Al-Shafi'i within the subject of Usul al-Din: one dealing with the correction of prophethood and responding to doubts, and the other refuting the adherents of whimsical desires. This accurate attribution indicates that Imam Al-Shafi'i held specific views on these theological matters (Al-Baghdadi, 1928, p. 408). He also extensively discussed various topics related to the oneness of God and had opinions on fate, destiny, and faith (Al-Razi, 1406 AH, p. 40).

Thirdly, Al-Shafi'i's criticism of theology is directed towards the verbal reasoning used by the Mu'tazilites to support their beliefs rather than theology as a whole. Al-Shafi'i lived during the same time as the Mu'tazilites, and despite his expertise in matters of faith, he disagreed with their over-reliance on reason and instead favored tradition. Therefore, his critique of theology should be understood as a critique of the specific form of theology adopted by the Mu'tazilites, especially considering the dominant influence of the Mu'tazilites in the theological discourse of that era (Al-Nashar, 1965, p. 244). The Mu'tazilites were known for initiating debates and discussions on creed-related issues, often leading to animosity between them and other Islamic factions, particularly jurists and traditionists. It resulted in the rejection of certain hadiths by the Mu'tazilites and the condemnation of the people of hadith (Amin, 1941, p. 135). Taşköprüzade mentions, "The prevalent discourse during the time of the skilled Imams was the speech of the Mu'tazilites, the Rajae sect, and similar groups" (Taşköprüzade, 1980, pp. 160-167).

Fourthly, the aversion attributed to Al-Shafi'i towards theology is likely based on specific foundations that underlie his stance on the subject. These foundations can be summarized as follows:

1) According to Imam Malik, this knowledge is not mentioned in the Quran or Sunnah or utilized by the predecessors. He expressed that if it were a matter of theology, the Companions and Successors would have discussed it, similar to legal rulings and laws. However, his perspective does not indicate a detestation of theology in general but rather disapproval of a specific form of theology that involves disagreement, controversy, and delving into matters that the predecessors did not previously consider. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti further explained that the reason for prohibiting attention to theology is its absence in the scripture and Sunnah and the lack of research conducted by the predecessors. Nevertheless, a verbal treatise attributed to Imam Malik that responds to the Zandaqas and Jahmi focuses on verbal issues such as his opinion on the creation of the Quran and the nature of faith.

2) Al-Shafi'i believed that engaging in theology poses dangers that can lead to alienation from the Quran and Sunnah or even forgetfulness. The approach of theology contradicts the approach of these two sources in matters of faith. Involvement in theology often leads to religious disputes that harden hearts and foster animosity. Al-Shafi'i compared theologians to those who discuss the ambiguities of the Quran, aligning with his stance regarding them.

3) Al-Shafi'i believed that delving into theology carries significant risks, particularly from a doctrinal perspective. The nature of theological issues involves the divine essence and attributes; errors in understanding them can lead to heresy and disbelief. Al-Dhahabi supports this viewpoint in his work "SiyarA'lam al-Nubala" (pp. 18–20).

4) Al-Shafi'i's critique of theological practices was explicitly targeted at a particular group, whom he assessed as lacking a solid understanding of theological foundations and failing to grasp the basic principles of religion and its evidence accurately. The discouragement from participating in theological discussions stemmed from the apprehension about their possible misinterpretations and inability to provide robust counterarguments against adversaries. It should not be interpreted as an outright prohibition of theology. For instance, it is documented that Ja'far al-Sadiq dissuaded one individual from theology while endorsing another. When queried about his seemingly contradictory actions, Ja'far al-Sadiq explained that the former was more skilled in debating. (al-Mufid, Tashih al-I'tiqadat al-Imamiyya: p. 202). Al-Shaykh al-Mufid summarizes that Ja'far al-Sadiq's discourse restriction was solely for those who lacked proficiency and guidance in its methodologies, leading to their downfall. He encouraged theological discourse among those who were well-versed and acquainted with its principles and procedures." (Al-Mufid, 1414 AH, p. 202).

5) Some of Imam Al-Shafi'i's statements that appear to criticize theology and vilify its followers have not been validated by reliable sources. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi highlighted this discrepancy: "Two groups have overstated Al-Shafi'i's perspective on theology. The first group's assertions criticize and question Imam Al-Shafi'i's knowledge. However, the second group's claims, which offer a balanced view of this knowledge, crucial for defending the fundamental tenets of faith and rebutting philosophers and other followers of various doctrines and sects, are much more credible."

6) To truly comprehend Imam Al-Shafi'i's views on theology, it is essential to study his life and the contextual circumstances of his era and abstain from premature judgments about Al-Shafi'i, especially about statements that might carry historical and academic importance concerning a particular aspect of theology. It necessitates a deep dive into his comments about theologians and their dialectical methods, his life events, the proliferation of Mu'tazilite ideologies, their defense by their proponents, and the positions of rulers and scholars against the hadith followers. In an era marked by disagreements and divergences, Al-Shafi'i was compelled to voice his opinions, not for argumentation or theological discourse, but to safeguard the scholars of hadith and guide critics towards truth and rectitude.

Topic Three: The Practical Theological Position of Imam Al-Shafi'i

To understand Imam Al-Shafi'i's theoretical theological perspective, examining his practical stance is essential. His theoretical viewpoint clearly expresses his critique of theological methodologies and strategies to establish verbal proof, cautioning against the intended objective of the speaker's discourse. In a broader sense, it highlights Al-Shafi'i's dedication to scrutinizing verbal evidence in terms of its structure and intended purpose. Hence, what is his practical orientation towards theology, and what does he consider an acceptable structure for verbal evidence?

Imam Al-Shafi'i, as a religious leader and the originator of a philosophical school, took a firm doctrinal stance to reinforce the faith and shield it from the skepticism and divergence of those who misinterpret it. His involvement in theology led to exchanges with individuals from various philosophical schools and sects. He accepts the application of theology in a manner that he finds satisfactory but proposes it as an alternative to the previous theological constructs. He critically

examines the structure and objective the speaker seeks to achieve through verbal evidence. Consequently, what are the distinct features of the verbal method according to Imam Al-Shafi'i? To respond to this query, one must focus on the key aspects governing verbal evidence in Imam Al-Shafi'i's methodology, which will be elaborated as follows:

1) Imam Al-Shafi'i firmly posits that the construction of verbal evidence should be comprehensible and free from ambiguity, enabling everyone to understand it accurately without the entanglement of philosophical and logical complexities. He delineated these principles in his work "Al-Risalah" and consistently upheld them in his verbal dialogues and debates with adversaries with different methodologies and styles.

His strategy for crafting verbal evidence did not align with the methods of the Mu'tazilites, Qadariyah, Khawarij, or the theologians of his era. In contrast, he embraced a straightforward technique and style that resonated deeply with the intellect and emotions. Several examples can be found in the book "Al-Fadaelwa al-Tarikh."

About the proof of monotheism, he stated: "The variety in sounds and appearances, and this is evident proof drawn from the utterance of Allah the Exalted: 'And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors' (Ar-Rum: 22)." Therefore, the evidence that Imam Al-Shafi'i clearly emphasizes is derived from Quranic verses that speak to everyone, presenting monotheism in a manner that is equally accessible to scholars and the lay public.

2) Al-Ghazali concurs with this quality, drawing a parallel between evidence derived from the Quran and evidence presented by theologians. In his work "Iljam al-Awam 'an Ilm al-Kalam," he analogizes the Quranic evidence to nourishment that universally benefits those who partake. Conversely, he likens the evidence from theologians to a medicinal remedy where some may find benefit, yet the majority might suffer harm. He emphasizes that Quranic evidence is akin to water, providing benefit to infants, children, and the robust, while other forms of evidence resemble food that might temporarily benefit the strong but can cause illness later and does not aid children (Al-Ghazali, 1416 AH, p. 35).

3) Imam Al-Shafi'i, while formulating theological evidence, cautions against straying from the Quran and Sunnah and constructing evidence based on logical or philosophical principles. Bihaqi's account of Al-Shafi'i, specifically his statement, underscores this stance: "Any theologian referencing the Quran and Sunnah adheres to a critical boundary that must be respected. A theologian lacking this Sunnah foundation is futile" (Al-Bayhaqi, 1424 AH, p. 470). According to Al-Shafi'i, understanding the Quran and Sunnah's dictates protects faith and dispels uncertainties, constituting a defensive responsibility within theology. Theological practice encompasses two facets: an affirmative aspect aimed at substantiating religious beliefs with evidence and a negative aspect focused on dispelling doubts surrounding these beliefs.

4) Imam Al-Shafi'i argues that the limitations found in verbal evidence do not stem from the evidence itself but rather from its organization and intended purpose. He views it as a tool to accomplish a specific goal. If the purpose of theology is to dispel uncertainties, then the verbal evidence must possess this attribute; otherwise, it leads to doubt. When properly structured, verbal evidence convinces opponents, dispels uncertainties, and addresses doubts. Therefore, Imam Al-Shafi'i considers this type of evidence acceptable. The role of verbal evidence is to protect doctrine from being distorted by innovators through diverse arguments, a noble objective. However, in his

perspective, many theologians exaggerated their arguments and framed their evidence in a way that failed to assure people's minds and caused problems. As a result, Al-Shafi'i cautioned against such evidence, stressing the importance of a robust structure and keeping it free from exhausting debates.

5) Imam Al-Shafi'i emphasizes the adherence to Arabic language norms and avoidance of logical or philosophical frameworks when constructing verbal evidence. Al Resala mentioned, "I initially highlighted that the Quran was revealed in Arabic because someone unaware of the depth, variety, uniqueness, and meanings of the Arabic language cannot grasp the explanations in the book's sentences. However, those knowledgeable about it find their doubts dispelled. Hence, informing people about the Quran's Arabic revelation was a recommendation for Muslims, a duty not to be neglected" (Al-Shafi'i, 1940, p. 50). It clarifies that Imam Al-Shafi'i did not prohibit involvement in theology as an Islamic discipline aimed at substantiating religious beliefs, elucidating religious goals, and addressing doubts. Instead, he opposed the prevailing method of presenting verbal evidence in his time, often focused on personal or sectarian victories at the expense of the integrity of religion. He sought to establish specific criteria and regulations for the construction of verbal evidence, differing significantly from the critiques he faced, both partial and comprehensive, regarding his association with theology.

Results

In conclusion, I can summarize the most noteworthy findings derived from this inquiry:

- 1) Imam Al-Shafi'i's censure of theology and his cautionary statements should not be misconstrued as an endeavor to dismantle the fundamental principles of this discipline or undermine its significance and role. Instead, he advocates reforming the methodologies and redirecting their trajectory through a legitimate systematic approach rooted in Sharia sources and Quranic methods to present pertinent evidence coherent with the structure of the Arabic language.
- 2) Al-Shafi'i's critique of theologians is directed explicitly at those inclined towards innovation and personal desires. His critique stems from instances where individuals in his time sought to subvert the truth by employing philosophical arguments, causing skepticism. Therefore, his reproval is targeted at these particular individuals rather than theologians as a whole.
- 3) he explicitly clarified that his criticism of theology and attack on theologians were aimed at corrupt methodologies and divergent paths from rational thinking employed by certain theologians in their arguments. He intended to highlight deviant groups that steered theology away from its primary purpose, masquerading it as acceptable to rational minds but turning it into a tool for artful reasoning, debates, and fallacies.
- 4) Al-Shafi'i contends that verbal evidence possesses various flaws, including the likelihood that theologians might not pursue truth but engage in argumentation, hypocrisy, and a quest for dominance. Additionally, he cautioned against the perilous consequence of verbal evidence, compelling adversaries to accuse their opponents of disbelief and misguidance, thereby compelling theologians to challenge the faith of laypersons unfamiliar with the structure of verbal evidence.
- 5) Imam Al-Shafi'i provided practical instances of verbal evidence as he envisioned, structured based on its distinct principles and guidelines, rendering it more comprehensible and convincing. It maintains linkages with jurisprudential and foundational evidence, wherein he played a significant

role in establishing its groundwork. His adeptness in articulation and confrontation bolstered his stance.

6) Imam Al-Shafi'i's vehement opposition to the goals and intentions of theology in his era underscores his belief that engaging in this discipline might not be permissible due to potential harm stemming from prevailing sectarian and intellectual differences at that time.

References

1. Abdul Hamid Musa, J. M. (1982). *Nash'at al-Ash'ariyah wa Tatwiruha*. Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, Beirut.
2. Al-Asfara'ini, A. A.-M. I. A.-D. (1940). *Al-Tabsir fi al-Din wa Tamyiz al-Firqa al-Najiyah min al-Firq al-Halikin* (edited by: Zahid al-Kawthari, M.). Al-Anwar Press.
3. Al-Baghdadi, A. Q. (1928). *Usul al-Din al-Islami*. State Press, Istanbul.
4. Al-Bayhaqi, A. I. A.-H. (1424 AH). *Manaqib al-Imam al-Shafi'i*. Damascus.
5. Al-Dhahabi, A. A. Sh. A.-D. M. I. A. I. U. I. Q. A.-T. (1413 AH). *Siyar al-Nubala* (edited by: Al-Arna'ut, Sh., & Al-Arqaqusi, M. N.). 9th ed. Al-Risalah Institute.
6. Al-Farabi, M. I. T. (2010). *Ihsat al-'Ulum*. 4th ed. Elmi O Farhangi Publications.
7. Al-Ghazali, A. H. M. I. M. A.-T. (1939). *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*. Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi and Sons, Egypt.
8. Al-Ghazali, A. H. M. I. M. A.-T. (1416 AH). *Ijam al-Awam 'an Ilm al-Kalam*. Included in "Majmu'at Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali. Dar al-Fikr, Beirut.
9. Al-Ghazali, A. H. M. I. M. A.-T. (1988). *Al-Munqidhmin al-Dalal*. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut-Lebanon.
10. Al-Hanbali, I. A.-I. (1986). *Shazarat al-Dhahab fi Akhbar Man Dhahab*. Ibn Kathir Publications.
11. Al-Iji, A. A.-D. A. A.-R. I. A. (1997). *Al-Mawaqif fi Ilmi'l-Kalam* (edited by: Umaira, A. R.). Dar al-Jil - Beirut, Lebanon.
12. Al-Jurjani, A. I. M. A.-S. A.-Sh. (1991). *Al-Ta'rifat* (edited by: al-Hafni, A. M.). Dar al-Rashad.
13. Al-Khwarizmi, M. I. A. (1984). *Mafatih al-'Ulum*. Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut.
14. Al-Nashar, A. S. (1965). *Nashat al-Fikr al-Falsafi Fil-Islam*. 3rd ed. Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt.
15. Al-Razi, F. A.-D. M. I. U. (1308 AH). *Tafsir al-Kabir*. Cairo.
16. Al-Razi, F. A.-D. M. I. U. (1406 AH). *Manaqib al-Imam al-Shafi'i* (edited by: Hijazi al-Saqa, A.). Al-Azhar University Library.
17. Al-Shafi, M. I. I. (1940). *Al-Risalah* (edited by: Shaker, A.). Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi.
18. Al-Shafi, H. (1991). *Al-Madkhalila Dirasat Ilm Kalam*. 2nd ed. Wahba Library.
19. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, M. I. A.-N. A.-B. (1414 AH). *Tasheeh I'tiqadat al-Imamiyah* (edited by: Ardehali, H.). 2nd ed. Al-Mufid Printing and Publishing, Beirut-Lebanon.

20. Al-Suyuti, J. A.-D. (1970). *Sawn Al-MantiqWa-Al-Kalam an Fann Al-MantiqWa-Al-Kalam*. Islamic Research Institute at Al-Azhar, Cairo.
21. Al-Taftazani, S. A.-D. M. I. U. (1989). *Sharh Al Maqased* (edited by: Umaira, A. R., introduction by: Morsi Sharaf, Sh. S.). Al-Sharif al-Radhi Publications, Beirut.
22. Al-Tahawini, M. A. I. A. I. A.-Q. M. H. A.-F. (1996). *KashafIstilahat al-FununwalUlum*. Lebanon Library, Beirut.
23. Amin, A. (1941). *Dhiha al-Islam*. 2nd ed. Committee for Authoring, Translating, and Publishing.
24. Badawi, A. R. (1971). *Madhahib al-Islamiyyin*. Dar al-Millayn, Beirut.
25. Ibn Khaldun, H. (2006). *Abd al-Rahman, Muqaddimah* (edited by: AbdulwahidWafi, A.). Egyptian General Authority for Books - Cairo.
26. Ramadan Abdullah, M. (1986). *Al-Baqillaniwa-Ara'uhu al-kalamiyah*. Al-Umma Publications, Baghdad.
27. Taşköprüzade, M.A.-S.W. M.A.-S. (1980). *Dar al-Ma'arif al-Othmaniya*. 2nd ed. Hyderabad, India.