



THREE MALAY THEOLOGICAL (AQIDA) TEXTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND ISSUES CONNECTED TO HUMAN ACTIONS

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Abstract: This paper attempts to provide an archeology of knowledge more specifically the knowledge of faith as it is taught in contemporary Malaysia. Several texts have been identified to be taught in various madrasahs and at times local community prayer halls called "surau" in teaching credal belief to the religious students and public. A total of three main texts had been identified as being the most popular in the teaching of credal belief to the masses. Credal belief as it is sanctioned by the country's religious establishment is the Ash'a'rah school which is part of the broad Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah belief system in Islam. The texts chosen are the popular texts used in teaching aqidah in the madrasah and mosques in the country. They are *al-Durr al-Thamin* (1232/1817), *Aqidatun Najin fi ilmi usul al-Din* (1308/1891) and *Faridatul Fara'id* (1313/1895). The relation between God and His creatures as depicted in the texts here would be exposed and analysed. Whether human actions are free or taking from the teachings of Ash'a'rite theologians, the idea of *kasb* is explained. This paper via a critical textual analysis aims to ask questions connected to issues of freewill while highlighting the role of God in human actions.

Keywords: Malay, Aqida, God's Acts, Power, Will, Fatani

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Introduction

THE TEACHING of aqidah or belief in contemporary Malaysia still follows the traditional way in the sense that texts written in the 19th or early 20th century are still being used by many mosques and places of Muslim learning. Apart from these informal places of learning the Islamic aqidah or faith is taught in schools to all Muslim students and play a major role in the making of the Malay Muslim understanding of issues connected to faith and belief.

Studies on the making of these syllabuses and the impact they have on the psyche of the Malay Muslims are still very few and scarce and are a challenge to future studies.

Initially the texts were written mainly for the sake of making the Muslim creed easier to be taught to the students of madrasah without the usual *kalam* or high theology discussion included in them. As a prelude, Islamic texts in Malaysia are mainly studied by people in places of worship such as mosque and teaching religious schools i.e. 'pondok' and madrasah. These texts are rarely being read independently by individual Muslims following the warning by religious teachers and popularly propagated that to study the texts themselves would mean the teacher being the devil! Such warnings have led to a passive understanding on the part of the reader of these texts. Such belief which is based on a false and weak hadith of the Prophet is against the teachings of the Quran which invites usage of reason and the intellect as can be seen in *Afala ta'qilun, afala tatazakkaron, afala tadabbarun* verses. In the conservative mind however the teacher or the ustaz¹ holds the final say in all interpretation of texts.

The paper here intends to study texts which teaches aqidah or faith to the Malay Muslim masses in Malaysia in an informal setting. There are cases where such texts are used in a formal setting i.e. the religious madrasah or 'pondok' places where religious students are taught however these will not be dealt with here. The three texts chosen here represent the intermediate level before the students take to the study of higher Ash'arite texts in the field of aqidah or principles of religion (usuluddin). According to Wan Shaghir Abdullah² and Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani³, these texts teach higher level students or students who have completed their study on other elementary books such as *Bidayah al-Hidayah* of

¹ a term given to whoever teaches religion in Malaysia. Normally the person who speaks on religion has to get a certificate of compliance given by the state religious institutions or body. The certificate requires the person teaching to have a minimal cursory knowledge of Islam at the level of diploma.

² W. Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Wawasan Pemikiran Islam Ulama Asia Tenggara*, vol. 1-7 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 2000).

³ Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani, *Ulama Besar dari Patani* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 2002), 67.

Muhammad Zain Aceh (1757) and *Sirajul Huda* (undated) of Muhammad Zainuddin as-Sumbawi. Wan Shaghir goes further in asserting that these texts were usually taught at the elementary level of studies for religious studies students in the madrasah in the east coast of Malaysia.

The method used is a critical analysis of the texts to see how they deal with issues connected to God's relations with human beings in regards to human actions and God's actions. Studies in the past has often looked at giving a descriptive exposition of the texts without having any particular method of investigation especially in regards to asking theological questions. The texts were mainly given a descriptive treatment with each author's background. As such it is felt that it is time for these texts to be treated in a more critical manner with theological questions which provide a more practical grounding rather than an abstract manner in which these texts has always been treated as.

Azra⁴ has given us a background of these Patani scholars and their connections to Muslim scholars in the haramayn and surrounding areas. Most recently Bradley⁵ has given a much more detailed treatment of these Patani scholars and focused on the writings of Daud al-Fatani. Matheson and Hooker⁶ in her paper on Jawi literature still published and used in contemporary Malaysia had focused on Patani Islamic scholarship and how the texts we are studying here are still being taught locally. Their study proves the role of local Jawi publishing house in the proliferation of these texts in contemporary Malaysia. If when they wrote the paper these texts were not yet romanised and are limited to the east coast of Malaysia and in some minor madrasahs, with the romanization of these texts has made reading easier than when it was in Jawi. Furthermore, with the involvement of big Muslim publishers in

⁴ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998).

⁵ Francis R. Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Daud Bin Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2016).

⁶ Virginia Matheson and Michael Barry Hooker, "Jawi Literature in Patani: The Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 61, no. 1 (254) (1988): 1-86.

Malaysia such as al-Hidayah and others has enabled the texts to reach a much wider audience than before.

Wan Shaghir Abdullah who was the great grandson of Ahmad al-Fatani was also instrumental in making these texts more accessible to the general public by republishing them himself. His publication house Khazanah Fathaniyah had published works by Daud, Zayn al-Abidin and most importantly Ahmad al-Fatani in various monographs and short studies. Wan Shaghir himself had written various monographs⁷ and papers on the role of Patani scholars in dissemination of Islamic knowledge to the people via their writings. In his writing⁸ on the role of the Patani scholars in teaching the aqidah he described the texts used and their influence on present day madrasah or pondok students in Kelantan and to a lesser extent beyond Kelantan. He however does not engage with the texts directly and is happy to give a description of the texts rather than ask practical questions of them. It is clear that there is a gap or lacunae in the research in regards to these three texts that most research gives a descriptive but not a proper theological exposition on these texts. The purpose of this paper however is more modest and that we would investigate these texts with the aim of bringing out their main views in regards to issues connected to freewill and the like. A more detailed theological treatment would have to be dealt with elsewhere.

Al-Durr al-Thamin (The precious pearl)

The writer of the book was Shaikh Daud bin Abd 'Allah al-Fatani (1769-1847).⁹ He was a prolific writer whose writings include works on theology, fiqh, the Muslim prayer (ṣalāt), dhikr, sufism and aspects history. There is also a compilation of letters he wrote to the Malay Sultans on issues of religion. A native of Patani, Daud left his homeland when he was 15 and took up residence in Makkah for the rest of his life. He died and was buried in Ta'if in 1847. Daud never came back to Patani but his

⁷ See in particular his, *Wawasan Pemikiran Islam*, vol. 1-7.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place...* See especially Chapter 4 (pp.63-83) for a brief history and analysis of the works of Shaykh Daud.

influence in traditional Malay Muslim consciousness in the region is immense. His books are still being read and commented upon in madrasah and mosque throughout the country. Perhaps his most famous and influential book is the *Munyatul Musalli* which is a book detailing the act of praying with all of its shari'a rulings. The book is a constant staple in many pondok or traditional places of religious learning most especially in the east coast of present-day Malaysia. For the purposes of this paper, we shall only look at his work on theology.

Description of al-Durr al-Thamin (1232/1817)

In the introduction of the book, the writer says that his heart was moved to write a book in which he would compile the sayings of realized scholars (*ulama yang muhaqqiqin*) on the issue of faith and theology and make it available in Jawi so as it would be of benefit to those who are not adept in Arabic language¹⁰. The book is a compilation on all things important in principles of Islamic religion. He begins with an elaborate discussion on what Islamic knowledge is and then veers into how knowledge is acquired from a pure kalam view. By relying on an-Nasafi he accepts the tripartite division of ways of acquiring knowledge as given by Nasafi in his *Aqa'id*. An-Nasafi was an Ash'arite but of the Maturidi school. His *Aqaid* is available in Jawi since the 16th century in the Malay world. It is probable that Daud al-Fatani had acquaintance with it even before he went to Mekkah to further his study. The text is considered a popular text used by teachers of the first stage of principles of Islamic religion. The tripartite division of acquiring knowledge is via the five senses, true traditions (*khabar sadiq*) and akl. "and all the causes for knowledge i.e. the cause for acquisition of knowledge are three (causes): healthy senses, true traditions and the intellect which is light (*nur*) that is shown into the heart according to the potentiality of each human beings. The differences between them is due to the ability of light to penetrate the heart which is based upon their different

¹⁰ Daud bin Syeikh Abdullah al-Fathani, *Al-Durr al-Thamin (Permata yang Indah) Menyatakan Segala I'tiqad pada orang yang mu'minin*, trans. Noraine Abu (Batu Caves: Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn Bhd, 2011).

potentials. The most perfect intellect is our Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.”¹¹

Although Daud mentions the intellect as light, when he comes to it he discusses it from the angle of logic and how real knowledge is based upon the method of experimentation and cause and effect or istidlal in Arabic. He further explains the role of the intellect in ascertaining true knowledge by the nature of the akl in accepting rational axioms such as the whole is bigger than half, one is half than two and less than ten and the axiom which says statements are accepted based upon the prove that it brings.

“These evidences are called kasbi (acquired) because it is based upon sight (nazar) such as the character of this world is originated because we see it changing and all that changes are originated (hadith).”¹²

This reliance on the method of istidlal and the teaching of rational axioms indicate the training of Daud al-Fatani in the field of Kalam and maybe philosophy. It is not surprising that he was familiar with the work of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and al-Ghazzali of whom he quotes quite freely in the text.

God's Acts: His essence and attributes are they the same?

Daud al-Fatani begins the section on God's Acts by quoting from al-Ghazzali, that nothing exist except via His Power (*qudrat*) and thus all things are new (*baharu*).

“They are made by His Power with the abundance of His Justice that they are made in the best possible creation for surely God is omniscient, and sure in His actions and just in all His rulings. And they can never make similar the Justice of God with the justice of creation because the others commit injustice in their rule and their judgments because things are not theirs absolutely.”¹³

For only God can do justice perfectly as He is the Owner of all things and creations. Therefore, there can never be injustice for God because whatever He owns, He commands. He brought things from non-existence to existence to state His Power and Will (iradatNya) and not because he requires them to exist¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136.

"And He has all the gift for all creation ...that He has all the power to punish and tests all of His creation and if He does all of that surely it is His Justice and never can He be said to be unjust or evil. And if given rewards for obedience, surely it is given due to His graciousness and His promise but not because it is compulsory upon Him because there is no compulsion upon Him nor can He be asked to fulfill His promise by those obedient servant."¹⁵

So God is free according to this reading to do whatever that He wants to and He is not constrained by His Promise nor His grace. This is based upon the sayings of al-Ghazzali which Daud has brought here.

God's Acts and human freewill

In regards to issue concerning God's acts and how does His acts connect to human being's ability to have freewill, the author discusses this when he is commenting upon as-Sanusi's statement. Sanusi (d.1490) says, "As for what is permissible for God in His truth is that He creates all the contingent or He does not"¹⁶ in order words it is His right to create or not to create every contingency.

The author says, "it is like it is up to Him to give providence to His servants wealth and up to Him too to abstain from giving the servant wealth. Like it is up to Him to create evil i.e., to cause the occurrence of evil upon His servant and up to Him to do good upon His servants and to give rewards to His servants when they do good deeds and to punish them when they do evil but it is not obligatory upon God to act either way, according to reasoning (akl)."

This position is congruent with al-Ash'ari's own position as he mentions it in his *Makalat al-Islamiyyin*, "When God is attributed with Power to create kasb for His servants, then He is powerful in forcing them including forcing them to commit evil."¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 137. The Jawi text is on pg

¹⁷ Abū al-Hasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-'Ash'arī, *Kitāb Maqālāt Al-Islāmiyyīn Wa Ikhtilāfi al-Muṣallīn* (Die Dogmatischen Lehren Der Anhänger Des Islam), ed. Helmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1980), 157.

This is the position of the Ash'arite theologian which is in contrast to the Mu'tazili position on this issue¹⁸. For the Mu'tazili theologians would say God does not go against reasoning and they have made God to follow the reasoning of human beings. The Ash'arites according to this method of thinking seeks to free God from being constrained by reasoning or rationality. Therefore the author as an Ash'arite follow this idea that God can do whatsoever that He wishes in regards to His servants.

The author then proceeds to discuss the Mu'tazili position and proceeds to destroy that position via quoting a story of Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari and his dialogue with his teacher al-Jubba'i. The story is a famous one and is the one frequently quoted by Ash'arites to show their superior position vis a vis the Mu'tazili. It is the story of the 3 brothers, one who dies but has done a lot of good deeds, the second is a sinner, and the third has died before reaching the age of maturity, where would their place be, asks Ash'ari. The author proceeds to quote Jubba'i's answer, the first will receive a place in heaven and given a high status, the second will be punished in hell and the third will be in heaven. Ash'ari then asks, Is the third person the same as the first in status in heaven? Jubba'i answers, No, because the obedient has done good deeds in his life, then Ash'ari retorts: Then the young who died would say to God, It would be better for me that you should have allowed me to grow up and do good deeds so as for me to receive the same status as my brother.

Jubba'i answers, God would say: Know that if you were allowed to grow, you would surely be one of the deniers and you would be in hell. Thus it is better that you are caused to die by Me when you were young.

Ash'ari responds: Then the sinner amongst the brothers would say, isn't it better for all of us in hell that you should have caused all of us to die when we were young then? Thus Jubba'i's arguments is cut off and he became silent and surprised because Imam Ash'ari had managed to destroy his method which says it is

¹⁸ I have treated this question to some extent in my paper on taklif. See Mohamad Nasrin Nasir, "The Concept of Taklif According to Early Asharite Theologians," *Islamic Studies* 55, no. 3-4 Autumn-Winter (2016): 291-299.

compulsory upon God to do good and for the betterment (*aslalh*) of human beings.¹⁹

The author then continues to discuss the issue of God's acts and its connection to human beings' actions by relying upon Laqqani's *Jauhara al-tawhid* which is a commentary on Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin*.

He begins with a statement which says that God creates for all His servants and everything that comes from His servants are also created by Him. Both actions whether they are by choice or by force i.e. actions that are forced upon them, all of these actions are made by God. According to the author this is the position of the *ahl sunnah wal jama'ah* and the position of the *Mu'tazili*. He however does not explain nor argue this position.

He continues to state that it is compulsory upon God to give guidance i.e. by making the power to be obedient upon all His servants which he chooses including the giving of His redha and His love. In the same way He creates the power to do evil deeds in His servants which are acts far from His redha and love²⁰.

He then proceeds to state that it is compulsory upon us to believe that God fulfills i.e. perfect those who were promised rewards due to them doing good deeds and this is the teaching of both *Ash'ari* and the *Maturidi*. However, it is not compulsory upon God to fulfill the promise to punish those who have done evil because it is permissible for God to go against this promise and this does not mean any lacking on the part of God. It increases the respectability and glory of God that instead of giving punishment he gives something better that is reward. This is the position of *Imam Ash'ari* and this is against *Maturidi* for the latter believes that God does not go against both his promises for to do so would indicate slackness on the part of God²¹.

The author does not elaborate further on this issue however as we can see above his position is the *Ash'arite* position with minor differences with the *Maturidi*. One interesting point of note is that it is always thought that Malay Muslims are followers of the

¹⁹ al-Fathani, *Al-Durr al-Thamin*, 138–139.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 141–142.

Maturidi school instead of the pure Ash'arite school. This is perhaps due to the popularity of the Aqa'id an-Nasafi which is considered to be the oldest theological text in Jawi. Looking at the al-Durr al-Thamin we see a complete division from the Maturidi position.

On the issue of kasb or delegation of powers by God upon the servants for their acts, the author begins by quoting from as-Sanusi again, "as for us the follower of the Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah, the servant's actions are compulsory upon him by the power of God. He then proceeds to state and then reject the position of the Jabbariya and the Qadariyya. He states the position of the ahl sunnah as,

"..the servant does not affect anything i.e. for the servant is kasb for all his actions that is dependent upon his obligations (taklif). There is only the ability to choose in his actions whether to do or not so that the result of his choice would result in him receiving reward or punishment. Know that the ruling for that is in reality from God."²²

In other words the power to create is God's but the power to choose is the servant. However God is not obligated to punish those who commit evil deeds for He can just as well He reward them. So God is not constrained by reasoning for He is all Powerful.

So the emphasis is more upon God's Power or Qudrat.

But what of human's actions? Are human beings free to act or are they under obligation by God's power? Are they free to choose?

Daud's position is more complex here for he believes there are circumstances where human beings can choose but sometimes human being's actions are forced upon them by God. So his position is not entirely the position of the Jabbariya but he does believe some aspects of the action perhaps some actions due to circumstance is forced upon human beings.

That is why he concludes this section by saying, "after we have known that surely God creates all of our actions be they good or evil and if giving rewards upon good deeds like being obedient

²² Ibid., 143.

is all due to His gift and if He punishes us for the evil done, surely it is due to His Just nature and because both to be obedient and commit evil are both His Acts²³. They are also made to become sign that show they are choices and if they are flipped i.e. given reward after committing evil deeds and punishment after committing good deeds, surely they are both permissible (and true) to our reasoning (akl)."

He then quotes the verse of the Qur'an that says, "He is not questioned for things that He does and they are questioned." (21:23)

It is the constant emphasis upon God's Power or qudrat that makes the Ash'arites to question human being's ability to create their actions. Their actions are driven by the choices they makes however for the choice to happen i.e. for the action to be actualized that is beyond the power of human being. It is God's power for the humans have only the choice and they are rewarded or punished due to this choice that they make. However even here the Ash'arites maintain the position of God's power that he is able to flip the reward and the punishment as He wishes for He is not questioned but the humans are.

Up till now it is clear that Daud al-Fatani follows the Ash'arite position in regards to human freewill and choice.

Bradley sums up the position as, "forged a middle path between predestination and freewill, arguing that humans generally made decisions based upon freewill but that some actions were yet preordained" (Bradley, 2016:78). This is based upon his reading of a part in the *Durr al-Thamin*²⁴.

However as we have seen via the discussion above the position is more nuanced. For Daud does not talk about the action of man being preordained but he instead focuses on the issue of whether man has the power to create actions. Secondly Daud's position can be seen to be based upon the teachings of Sufism and theology, a mixture of sorts. As seen above Daud begins by quoting al-Ghazzali from his *Arba'in fi Usul al-Din*. Daud uses al-Ghazzali's statement to justify his own reading of al-Sanusi's

²³ "kerana taat dan maksiat itu perbuatanNya pada kedua itu", Ibid., 144.

²⁴ He refers to page 48 of the Jawi text and made this conclusion.

statement and that is to preserve the Power of God to give punishment or reward to whomever God wishes. Perhaps it can even be ventured that Shaykh Daud's position is more akin to the teachings of Sufism more than the dry theology of the mutakallimun.

Description of *Aqidatun Najin fi ilmi usul al-Din* (1308/1891)

The writer of the third text under focus here was Syaikh Zain al-Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani (d.1913) also known as Tuan Minal. He was born in Bendang Badang which is a village in between the towns of Yala and Patani in the kingdom of Patani. He was educated both at the local madrasah and later in Makkah. He became a prominent teacher when he came back to Patani and many of his books are read by students and used in teaching religion in the mosques in Malaysia. His most famous work is the *Aqida al-Najin fi 'Ilm Usul al-Din* which is the text studied here.

Brief description of the book

In the introduction of the book Zain al-Abidin mentions that the book consists of his translation of the Introduction (muqaddima) by as-Sanusi²⁵ from *Umm al-Barahin* and he added his own explanation on the translated parts so as to clarify or to make clear for the readers²⁶. This reminds us of the *Durr al-Thamin* above where Daud had used the same method. This is unlike Ahmad's *Farida* which is more of a summary with his own exposition on the principles of *Aqida*.

Eventhough the method is the same with the *Durr al-Thamin*, the *Aqida al-Najin* is relatively longer than it. The part which is connected to our discussion on freewill is in the chapter on *Qudrat* and *Iradat*. As we have seen in the explanation given by Daud in

²⁵ Sanusi had written 3 parts in explaining his view on the Muslim *Aqida*. The *Umm al-Barahin* is the shortest version of it. See H. Bencheneb, "Al-Sanūsī," ed. P. Bearman et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), accessed November 25, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1001.

²⁶ Zain al-Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani, *Aqidatun Najin Fi Ilmi Usul Al-Din*, trans. Noraine Abu (Batu Caves: Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn Bhd, 2014), 2.

his Durr al-Thamin here we see a different approach taken by Zain al-'Abidin.

Zain al-'Abidin discusses God's Will and distinguish it from His Command (Amr). He says, "Know that Will and Command are different and separated between the two. The contradiction within the Mu'tazila is that some of them say that they (Will and Command) are one and the same. Some other says that Will is the concomitant (luzum) of Command. The Mu'tazila has built based on it that God does not want evil and other bad deeds. But the Ahl Sunna built (on something different) that God can sometime want something but it is not a command like all evil acts connected to disbelief and adultery. Some who are wanted by God to fall into kufr will fall into kufr like those who commit evil deeds God command by it and He does not want it like the faith of (or the lack of it) Abu Jahl and Abu Lahb. The proof for this that the Prophet had called them to faith but they did not come to faith because God did not want it (for them)."²⁷

In another section discussing things impossible for God's attributes, Zain al-'Abidin criticizes the Mu'tazila for believing that human being is free by choice (ikhtiyari) to create their own action with the Power (qudrat) that God made for them. The aim here is to free God from all other entity of power²⁸. The Power is God and God's alone. No other entity has Power. So the Mu'tazili is wrong in suggesting that human being has power even if given by God. The Ash'arites believe all Power is God's and no other entity has any.

"It is impossible for there to exist with God an entity which affect to an action from all actions. This is kam munfasil to His Acts."

It is adding to His Acts. By freeing God's essence from all kinds of attachments, Zain al-'Abidin believes in God's essence being pure from all others and thus denying His Oneness. Thus to believe otherwise that His attributes are connected to His essence as some allege is according to Zain al-'Abidin an act of *kufr*²⁹.

²⁷ Ibid., 73.

²⁸ Ibid., 112.

²⁹ Ibid., 113.

The Faridatul Fara'id (1313/1895)

The writer and a brief description of the Farida

The book was written by Shaykh Ahmād bin Muḥammad Zayn bin Muṣṭafā bin Muḥammad al-Faṭānī, who according to Schnouck Hurgronje was the Malay “savant of merit” in Makkah in the 19th century³⁰. He was born in 1856 at kampong Jambu, Yaring, Patani, Malaya. He was sent to study religion at Mecca. He never returned to Patani, as he died in Mecca in 1908. His teachers included Sayyid Umar al-Shami al-Baqā'ī (d. 1896); Sayyid Ahmād bin Zaynū Dahlān (d. 1886), who was known as a staunch critique of the Naqshbandīyah Ṣūfī order³¹; Shaikh Ibrāhīm al-Rāshidī (d. 1874); and Shaikh Ahmād al-Dandarāwī (d. 1909) while in Mecca³². The last two were instrumental in inducting al-Faṭānī into the Ahmādīyah Ṣūfī order which was a reformist Ṣūfī order—reformist in the sense of its attempt to cleanse past Sufism and Ṣūfī orders from deviant practices and doctrines. Al-Faṭānī studied many branches of religious knowledge from this scholar including the Qur'ān, traditions (ḥadīth), law and rhetoric and poetics³³. After completing his study at Mecca he later went to Egypt to al-Azhar University and spent seven years there.

Though the entirety of his career was in Mecca, al-Faṭānī was known as a prominent teacher to many influential figures in Malaya. One of his students was Nik Mahmud bin Nik Ismail who later became the prime minister of Kelantan (east coast of Malaysia), Haji Ibrahim became the mufti of Kelantan, Haji Muhammad Salih later became the *qādī* for Cambodia, Khatib Jabar later became the imam of Sambas (West Kalimantan)³⁴.

Al-Faṭānī was placed in charge of the short-lived Turkish Printing Press (1880–1910) in Mecca, and was considered to be a

³⁰ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century* (Leiden, The Netherland: Brill, 1931), 306.

³¹ Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 57–58.

³² W. Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Syeikh Ahmad Al-Fathani: Pemikir Agung Melayu Dan Islam*, vol. 1–2 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 2005), 68–78.

³³ Ibid., 1–2:45.

³⁴ Matheson and Hooker, “Jawi Literature in Patani,” 28.

“savant of merit” by scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje when they met³⁵. He used the position to print the many works of Patani scholars, especially Dā’ūd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī, which were later read by the Malays in Southeast Asia³⁶. Altogether there were twenty-five religious books that Aḥmad al-Faṭānī printed in Mecca for the Malay world. Although the Turkish printing press did not last long, the impact upon Malay understanding of religion with the publication of these works should not be underestimated. These books became the standard text for the teaching of religion in Malay and they are still being read in today’s contemporary world. After years of active service and scholarship, Shaykh Wan Aḥmad al-Faṭānī died in Mina at the relatively young age of fifty. He was buried at al-Ma’lā in Mecca.

According to his great-grandson Wan Shaghir Abdullah³⁷, Wan Aḥmad al-Faṭānī was a prolific author with around thirty-eight works to his name. He has written on ḥadīth, law, rhetoric and Arabic grammar, theology, and Sufism. Apart from these prose works he was also an able poet producing twenty-five works of poetry on aspects of religion and in the introduction to many Arabic works.

Farīdat al-Farā’id fī ‘ilm al-aqā’id (Important Sections in the Knowledge of Belief) was published in Mecca in 1895. The book discusses *tawhīd* and other principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) following Ash’arī theology. This includes God’s attributes and His Acts, the various attributes of the Messenger of God, Regarding the Angels, previous revelations and a discussion on the various obligations in Islam. Included in this later part are the three main sins (usury, committing adultery, and drinking intoxicants), discussion on intercession (*shafā’āt*) of the Prophet on the Day of Judgment, and a discussion on the souls (*rūh*) of various individuals.³⁸

³⁵ Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 286; Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 59.

³⁶ Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 59.

³⁷ Abdullah, *Syeikh Ahmad Al-Fathani*, 1–2:95–117.

³⁸ W. Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Faridatul Faraid Syeikh Ahmad Al-Fathani* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1990), 95–122.

God's creation of Human actions

For the sake of this paper we shall focus on the aspect of principles of religion (*'uṣūl al-dīn*).

As with Daud in the section above, Ahmad had also discussed the issue of God's creating all actions in the section on Will (Iradat). However unlike Daud, he does not dwell too much on the kalam aspect of the issue. Instead he proceeds to explain how God is the creator of all actions be they good or evil in contrast to the Mu'tazili position. He says, "But the power of the Will include to bring to exist and to cause not to exist. This power of Will This is in contrast to the Mu'tazila who said that surely "God does not will (iradat) with all that is evil and bad". it is however compulsory(wajib) upon us to have adab in regards to God that we would not attribute all that is evil to originate from God except when teaching. And it is not permissible for anyone to argue that everything that is evil is due to the will of God and His predetermined Action and thus offer it as an excuse for him/her to commit the evil. By this very argument many people such as Kings and Nobles have used whenever they oppress others or commit adultery. They believe that (with such argument) they would escape from the punishment and wrath of God. If they use that argument to justify their oppression and adultery then surely they have become kufr. And may God protect us from that!"³⁹

Ahmad is here saying even though all actions good and evil are created by God but this should not be used as an excuse in committing evil deeds such as oppression and adultery. He however does not explain how the two position can reconcile. If we believe all actions to be made by God including the evil ones then how can we attribute responsibility to human beings? For how can God punish human beings when it is God Himself who created the evil deed and not the human being? Unlike Daud in his *al-Durr al-Thamin* above who constantly relied on the theologians, Ahmad is ambitious in explaining his own view on the issue.

³⁹ Ibid., 42.

In a footnote to the section on explanation of God's Power, Ahmad writes about delegation of power (kasb) and free choice (ikhtiyar).

"...in rejection of the saying of the Mu'tazila who said, surely God's servant creates all acts on his own freewill (ikhtiyari) like eating and walking. Also in rejection of the Jabbariya who said, there is no effort or will by the servant at all neither external nor inner, for the true belief which is the belief of the Ahl Sunna is that the actions of the servant does not affect on anything for surely the servant can only choose and strive to do the external act..."⁴⁰

"It is not permissible to hold on to the argument (above) with the intention of running away from sharia punishment (had and ta'zir) due to the sin committed. However if his intention is to avert people's criticism of his conduct then it is permissible to use such an argument."⁴¹

Meaning that the reality is true that God is the creator of good and bad. This argument should not be used to run away from punishment but it should be used to explain one's actions to others.

"And it is not permissible for him/her to be content with evil deed when it is required from God Himself to abstain from it. Because "to be content with committing evil is committing evil itself!" But it is compulsory for him/her to be content with evil if God had commanded it to be so because to be content and follow the rulings of God. It is impossible to fight God's will for it is the bringing to existence of something without God wanting it (For God does not want anything for wanting is the attribute of creation)."

God is the ultimate Will and He wills things to exist with His Power. Nothing exist without God's Will. The author then proceeds to discuss what he means by cause and effect. For if God's attribute is Will then does it follow that He is the ultimate cause? To him the answer is a resounding yes. He would even reject the existence of causes to occur on its own without God's will. He says,

"if anyone were to believe that anything can affect another as a cause for another via its own essence or its own action, then that there is no doubt that the person has committed kufr."⁴²

Ahmad then proceeds to outline the different positions a person can take in regards to this issue of cause and effect. The

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., 43.

⁴² Ibid., 44.

most perfect position or the position which resembles reality which is the position of the belief (aqidah) is, “whoever believes that everything is brought to existence without any cause or effect acting upon it like hunger as a cause for eating but the effect of being full can only be nothing other than God, then surely this person is a true Muwahhid who has received God’s gift.”⁴³

For those who have a more scientific mind and believes in the finding of all the different causes “as reason would have him/her then the person might be ignorant of the reality and sometime this might lead them to *kufir*!”⁴⁴

So the true teachings of belief is that everything is created by God even the cause and the effect. Cause and effect itself does not work on their own essence but it is God who gives the effect and the cause for a thing.

“And the proof for God’s will is that if this is denied of Him then surely He would be weak because Power (*qudrat*) is stopped upon Will (*iradat*) from the mind’s view. And if He is weak then there will be nothing of this world and this is impossible due to us witnessing the world. Therefore God’s Power is affirmed and when that is affirmed then God’s Will also is affirmed and it’s negation is impossible i.e. the existence of something without Him Willing it to be.”⁴⁵

Looking at the two texts above we see some similarities and differences. The approaches taken is pretty similar perhaps owing to the Ash’arite position that both authors took. Daud’s method has to be closer to the original texts that he has used i.e. in explicating the meanings of each quotation taken. The Farida however tends to summarise the views of authors. The length of the Farida tend to indicate to us that it was meant as a summary of Ash’arite positions vis a vis the Mu’tazilite ones.

The *Farida* does not indicate a text influenced by the modernist Abduh as some who had studied Ahmad al-Fatani had alleged. The Farida has no such intention. Of interest is the utilization of various traditional logical (*ilm Mantiq*) tools by Ahmad which is not found in his predecessor’s work. The different training each had perhaps had influenced the way each texts was written.

⁴³ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

The fact that it is short makes it more attractive than the *Durr al-Thamin* for many in their teaching of aqida related matters. The *Farida* itself is still being read in Malaysia with the last printing from the *Matba'a al-Mu'arrif* in Penang dated 2006. There existence of many romanised version of the texts also indicate its popularity.

Conclusion

In regards to creation of acts good or evil the three authors follow strictly the Ash'arite position that God create all actions. Human beings have choices according to Daud in his *Durr al-Thamin* but in the last two works i.e. the *Aqida* and the *Farida* more emphasis is on God' Power. In regards to whether human beings have a choice and are they free to act, the three texts tend to be more vague and ambiguous at times. All tend to rely more on God's Power and their emphasis upon it does give the impression that the Ash'arite position as they understand it is quite close to the Jabbariya. The Ash'arite's constant emphasis upon God's Power and Will minimizes the idea of freewill on the part of power for the human being to create independent actions but in the view of choice human being are free to choose.

Interestingly the *Aqidatun Najin* does include a discussion on the difference between Will and Command and how God's Will does not mean God's Command. The author does try to make his position more tenable than the position of the Mu'tazila however its purpose is not for the freeing of human being to act but more to emphasise the error on the part of the Mu'tazila on this particular issue.

The ambiguity on the issue of freewill of human being leads many to regard God being in absolute Power in creating human actions and man have very limited if no power at all in regards to their actions.

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