

EXTENDING THE *MUTAWĀTIR*, STRENGTHENING THE *IJMĀ'*: A COMPARISON BETWEEN BEDIUZZAMAN AND AL-ATTAS ON KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION*

Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud

Introduction

The Holy Qur'ān speaks at length about the major prophets in order to illustrate the fundamental unity and universality of their belief and the consistency of their struggles. Since true scholars of Islam are heirs to these prophets, Muslims must therefore, after properly understanding the message of these prophets, study and compare the various teachings and contributions of their scholars, locating each one of them in their right and proper place. Comparing authoritative Muslim scholars and reformers—be it inter—or intragenerational—is a productive activity which is largely, and deplorably, ignored nowadays. If it is inter-generational and international, such comparison would ensure the continuity of belief and struggles across the generational spectrum and diverse socio-economic, historical and geographical circumstances. Even if such an effort is carried out on scholars of the same generation, it would still be a very productive exercise. This is so, because it would further embed and extend the universality of the Islamic message and strengthen the *ijmā'* of scholars in the face of rapid atomization and relativization of ontological, epistemological and ethical structures. This would in turn restore confidence to Muslims and grant us better strategies to face the present and future challenges. The present article, despite its many limitations seeks to achieve all the above results.

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By *mutawātir* we mean those established reports that have been passed down successively from the Holy Prophet and his companions down to our age through people whom our minds cannot conceive would lie on these matters. By *ijmā'* we mean the agreement of contemporary authoritative scholars of Islam on religious matters.¹

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's long life (1877–1960) and multifaceted contributions to the Muslims of Turkey in their most difficult religious, cultural and political period cannot be easily summarized. He and his contemporaries were forced to witness events heretofore unprecedented in the history of Islam: the abolishing of the Caliphate; theoretical ridicule and practical sidelining of the 'Aqīdah, Shari'ah and all the major institutions of Islam. After reading Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* collections such as the *Mektubat* (Letters), *Sözler*, *Şua'lar*, and the works of many scholars on him, I am quite convinced that it is justified to regard him as a true and fearless defender and expositor of traditional Islam. His defense and exposition of Islam is based not only on his right understanding of the various traditions within Islam and the intellectual and cultural currents in Europe, but also on his intensive involvement in the practical affairs of the country.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas was born in 1931 in a family which had distinguished itself in Islamic learning and public service in the Malay-Indonesian world and whose verifiable lineage from his paternal side goes back all the way to the Holy Prophet. For the past three decades, al-Attas has contributed significantly to the understanding of Islam as a religion and civilization among the educated Muslims in Southeast Asia and in other parts of the world as well. His 26 books and monographs on Islamic epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, ethics, psychology, education, and various aspects of Islamic history aimed at clarifying fundamental issues that have been misunderstood or confused or ignored by the Muslim elite in the contemporary world. Written in a philosophically

¹ See Sharif 'Alī al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt* (n.p: n.d), 10 and 199.