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**PRINCIPLES OF ABU MANSUR AL-MATURIDI,  
CENTRAL ASIAN ISLAMIC THEOLOGIAN  
PREOCCUPIED WITH THE QUESTION OF THE  
RELATION BETWEEN THE IMAN/CREDO AND THE  
ACTION IN ISLAM**

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**Abstract**

The Central Asian Muslims have been following Khanafi-Maturidi School since they had converted to Islam. Basing his knowledge on Abu Hanifa's theistic principles Abu Mansur al-Maturidi became a unique religious ideologist of the Khanafi School since the XI-XII centuries. After fall of the Soviet Union the various alien sects spread widely across the region which was once dominated by Khanafi-Maturidi School. The adepts of the alien sects along with expansion criticized and defused the religious views and traditions that the local people had practiced over centuries. This endangered the Central Asian Muslims belief system. The article explains the notions and relations of the 'iman'/credo and 'deeds' which would be a basic principle of the vanishing Maturidi teachings. Nowadays Imam Maturidi's theistic principles especially concerning the 'iman'/credo should be studied and analysed thoroughly, thus reviving his teachings with objective of tackling the religious extremism, ensuring the religious tolerance and stability in the Central Asia.

*Keywords:* Theology, epistemology, qalam, Mu'min, Muslim

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1. Summary**

Abu Mansur al-Maturidi is a highly respected Islamic scholar for writing Maturidi Creed and honoured with title 'Imam of Right Path'.

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He was born in the small town Maturid located near Samarkand which was one of the biggest cities in Maweranahr, Central Asia [1]. Based on history timeline it is known that he spent his entire life and passed away in this city [2]. But his date of birthday is unknown. Many Islamic scholars suppose he was probably born between 230-240/844-854. Regarding the date of his death, it is supposed he passed away approximately in 944. Nevertheless Nasafi did not indicate in his books what year Maturidi died. He only told that Maturidi died after 935, al-Ashari's date of death [3].

The Central Asian Muslims, since they had converted to Islam, have been following mainly the Sunni version, that is, Khanafi Madhab. Although this school emerged first in Kufa, and then spread across the Islamic world, its scientific approach, especially the knowledge of kalamand fiqh methodology were developed in the Central Asia, which was later named Eastern Khanafi School. Imam Maturidi, in turn, was a prominent Khanafi scholar who made a great job to pave ideological and scientific path of Khanafi School. Later his teachings were eventually constructed as Khanafi-Maturidi Kalam since Nasafi and Pazdawi era. Thus he had built many theories and developed numerous conceptions for the Khanafi School following Abu Hanifa himself.

However for reasons unknown to us Imam Maturidi's teachings were not researched duly as those of Imam Ashari, Tahawi, Gazali and Ibn Taymiyyah [4]. That is why Central Asian Muslims, who originally chose Khanafi-Maturidi school, are urgently called to initiate thorough study of Imam Maturidi's teachings, religious opinions and views. His scientific approach to the iman/credo, being the most critical pillar in Islam, should be paid crucial attention. This can even be an efficient tool to prevent the religious fanaticism and extremism currently spreading widely among the Central Asia and European Muslims.

### ***1.2. The iman as basis of religion***

The iman/credo is the most critical pillar as any religion is concerned. If we look at Islamic history the iman/credo related issues were given special due. The various Islamic schools made numerous opinions concerning the notion of the iman/credo, iman and religious rituals/righteous deeds concord. To summarize, the iman and religious rituals/righteous deeds concord were the most important themes discussed among the madhabs and schools constructed on legacy of the high standing Islamic scholars.

That is why the brilliant scholars in Islamic history, Abu Hanifa and Imam Maturidi, made their own statements regarding the iman/credo and religious duties/righteous deeds concord.

Being a founder of Sunni monotheism Imam Maturidi made his theological statements concerning the iman influenced by Abu Hanifa's theological opinions, of which he made use from epistemological perspectives and which he based on logical proofs.

Imam Maturidi's outstanding follower Abu Mu'in an-Nasafi's student, Imam Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Akhmad Ala ad-Din as-Samarqandi wrote in the introduction to the commentary on *Kitab at-Tawilat*: "Sheikh, Imam Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Makhmud al-Maturidi's (May Allah be pleased with him) *Kitab at-Tawilat* is a valuable book which explains the Sunni monotheism and iman/credo, Abu Hanifa's and his followers' (May Allah be pleased with them) methodology of Islamic jurisprudence and issues are along the lines of the Quran" [Ala ad-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad Samarkandi, *Sharkh Tawilat al Maturidiya*, book by Suleimanya, Weluiddin Efendi manuscript section No. 297.211, 1a].

Abu Hanifa's religious opinions were introduced to Imam Maturidi by his teachers. For instance, he and his teachers were mentioned in the chain of Islamic scholars who preserved *Kitab al-Alim wa al-muta'allim* considered to be written by Abu Hanifa. This chain is completely trustworthy [5]. It says: "This text was narrated by Muhammad ibn Muqatil ar-Razi (and Abu Suleiman al-Juzjani) to Abu Bakr al-Juzjani who then narrated it to Abu Mansur al-Maturidi" [6].

Emphasizing the fact that Imam Maturidi had upheld the Sunni Islam long before Imam Ashari, Al-Bayady told: "Maturidi is not Ashari's follower, as many people would tend to think. He had upheld the Sunni Islam long before Ashari, he was a scholar to thoroughly explain and systematically develop Abu Hanifa's and his followers' school/knowledge." [7]

## **2. Methods**

The following research methods have been used in the article: comparative historical analysis, hermeneutical and linguistic analysis, induction and deduction methods. Various scientific works belonging to the Middle Ages and the modern period in Arabic, Turkish, and Kazakh languages have been made use of, with special attention reserved to those ones that concerned the Hanafi-Maturidi school of thought. The research starts with the analysis of the opinions concerning the credo/action issue made by different Islamic schools of thought. By the hermeneutical analyses of some Quranic verses, the authors show that the position of Imam al-Maturidi is much more in line with the apparent and obvious meanings of the Quran. Analysis of the historical data allows the author to elucidate the role and place Imam al-Maturidi has played in the Islamic thought of his time and, through the methods of deduction, the conclusion is made. The graphical images were also made use of in order to make the data more accessible.

## **3. Results**

On the basis of Imam Maturidi's works 'Kitab al-Tawhid' and 'Kitab at-Tawilat' we have expounded his ideas on the iman(faith)/credo and iman(faith)-based action relationship issue and can conclude the following.

### ***3.1. The iman should be in heart***

The faith is something that is confirmed or endorsed by heart, whereas to accept tenets of faith by tongue is a necessary condition to be publically considered as 'Muslim' and be entitled to all rights of Muslim people. Therefore, the seat of faith is the heart, no one but God Himself being able to be in charge of the latter. Imam Maturidi wrote the following about it: "One group of people said: 'The iman is just about affirmation with the tongue, it has nothing to do with heart'. But we tell: "If we judge based on knowledge and logic, we will see that it is the heart that is the right seat of the iman/credo". He came up with various proofs of this conclusion. For instance, it is his comment to the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse of the Ali-Imran sura: "They are the ones whose deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter", as Imam Maturidi said: "One of the meanings of this verse is that the righteous deeds they did to their close people, their rituals, donations and so on with view of getting closer to Allah, become worthless, as it is the iman/credo that goes first, and only then do actions come. Their righteous deeds become worthless, for they do not possess the iman/credo." [8]

### ***3.2. Deed is not part of the iman***

The faith and the faith-based action are not the same; to put it differently, religious mores and all other religion-endorsed actions cannot be a part and parcel of faith itself.

### ***3.3. Deed is result of the iman***

The actions which are considered to be religiously obligatory, as well as all other good deeds one undertakes are attendant upon his accepting faith, not the other way round.

### ***3.4. Deeds are based on the iman***

The base of religion is genuine acceptance of faith articles. Thereby, all of one's actions are based on this acceptance, the actions being considered as religiously improper and worthless unless done consequent to the acceptance of the faith articles.

### ***3.5. Non-fulfilment of religious deeds does not result in the apostasy***

If a Muslim does not perform the obligatory forms of worship and all other deeds prescribed upon all the Muslims by the law of Sharia, he is still considered to be a Muslim provided he does not negate the most essential faith articles of Islam (al-m'alum fi ad-din bid-darura). His comment to the verse 112 of the Taa-haa sura is one of his numerous proofs of it: "But he who does of

righteous deed while he is a believer”. Proceeding from the verse, Imam al-Maturidi states the iman/credo and actions are not interrelated notions: “This verse brings a proof that a person can be Muslim without doing righteous deeds” [8, p. 313].

### 3.6. *Sinful Muslim is not infidel*

Those Muslims who have committed great or even smaller sins are still considered to be Muslims unless they believe that something that is clearly prohibited in Islam is permissible to do.

If we consider the attained results, we can see that they are closely interrelated. Every result is a pre-condition for the next one to come; in other words, the first one ensues from the second one, and from the second one the third one follows. This is a clear proof of the logical consistency of the distinguished Imam al-Maturidi’s scientific methodology and his conclusions that he drew concerning the nature of relationship between the faith/credo and the faith-based actions.

Hence, in order for us to see how a comparison between the opinions of Imam al-Maturidi and his major opponents can be drawn as far as the meaning of the Islamic notion of the ‘iman’ and its relationship with the religion-endorsed actions and deeds are concerned, let us have a look at Table 1.

**Table 1.** Maturidi and Kharijis/Mutazalites views on iman/creed and actions in Islam.

<b>Maturidi view</b>	<b>Kharijis and Mutazalites view</b>	
Iman/creed ↓ Believe by heart (Deed is not part of the iman)	Iman/creed ↓ Believe by heart, affirmation with tongue and fulfilling mandatory deeds	
Muslims who have committed sins ↓	Muslims who have committed sins	
↓ Muslim, not an infidel	↓ Infidel	↓ Not a muslim, not an infidel

In the end of the article there is the conclusion that today’s circumstances require Muslims to re-examine their prominent scholars of the past in order to solve their problems of today, the most important of them being the problem of extremism and radicalism in general, and the problem of division and schism, in particular.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Concordance of opinions between Abu Hanifa and Maturidi concerning the iman

In all five preserved books considered to be written by Abu Hanifa we see that the iman/credo is first of all a strong belief in heart and that the iman/credo and actions are separate notions. For instance, Abu Hanifa in his *al-Wasya*, book of precepts, defines Sunni version of iman/credo as follows: “Iman/credo is affirmation with the tongue, believe by heart and mind. However, the iman/credo is not restricted by affirmation with the tongue. Had the affirmation with the tongue been considered to be enough, the hypocrites would have been accepted as Muslims. Neither is it delimited by mind, otherwise the people of book would have been Muslims.” [9] The definition made by Abu Hanifa concerning iman/credo clearly points out that iman/credo in Islam is a pure belief in Allah. The affirmation of belief with the tongue is, in Abu Khaifa’s opinion, an integral part of the iman/credo [10].

That is why Imam Maturidi stated that the iman/credo is first of all believing by heart [8, p. 373-374; 11], and that this belief being uttered by tongue is a mandatory action so that one can be responsible for all his actions as a Muslim [12]. So, everyone who intends to be considered a Muslim and to possess all the rights of a Muslim in this world is to meet this requirement.

In *Kitab atTawilat* by Maturidi, when it comes to the issue of the iman/credo he says what follows: “The iman means belief/confirmation. We think the iman believes by heart. This opinion is argued by all Quran commentators and philologists who referred to the word (aamanu) in the Quran as meaning ‘they have believed’.” [8, p. 385]

### 4.2. Maturidi: what is the iman?!

If we pay attention to the statements concerning the iman issues in Imam Maturidi’s books, we will see that he was interested in the question ‘what is the iman?’ much more than in the question ‘whom should we believe in?’. So, raising the iman-related issues he attempted to discover the meaning of the iman, but not its subject.

However, when it came to the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad (be peace upon him), and his companions, Imam Maturidi mostly emphasized the subjects of the iman. In this regard he proceeds from the hadith well-known to all Muslims, namely, the one about the Prophet Muhammad (be peace upon him) answering the question “what is the iman?” asked by the Angel Gabriel [13]. So, when the Prophet was asked about this, he recited the 177<sup>th</sup> verse of the Baqara sura: “Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but true righteousness is to believe in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets”. The prominent companion Abdullah ibn Mas’ud, when asked about the iman, read the same verse [8, p. 3].

This situation was incited by religious questions which were raised following the numerous political factors and phenomena that have occurred after the lifetime of the companions and come to be great theological problems able to affect Muslims' consciousness and worldview. In fact, it can be correctly stated that each scholar is a hero of his époque or that each book is something mirroring its own time. Therefore, as it is evident from his writings, Imam Maturidi attempted to analyse and explain the iman related issues given the realities of his time and society.

In this regard Abu Hanifa and Imam Maturidi's opinions were very warmly welcomed by newly converted Muslims living in the early ages of the Islamic history. This trend could be easily observed during the early period of the Islamic expansion in the Central Asia (VII-VIII centuries), when newly converted Muslims received ill-treatment by the Arabs who had by the time represented the central power, and during the historic events and revolts which followed such treatment [14].

### **4.3. Maturidi's major opponents**

Qarmatians, Jahmites, Khawarijs and Mu'tazalites were strongly criticized in Imam Maturidi's books on the iman/credo, for they were very powerful in his époque. According to the Qarmatians, the iman is about affirmation with the tongue [15]. The Jahmites would understand the iman as the consciousness [16]. The Khawarijs and Mu'tazalites defined the iman as believing by heart, affirmation with the tongue and performing mandatory religious deeds. So while some of these sects ignored the iman related issues, some others, putting forward tougher requirements and conditions, made it quite difficult for people to convert to Islam.

Thus, let us have a clear idea of how the aforementioned groups understood the religious notion of 'iman' through Table 2.

**Table 2.** Karramites, Jahmites and Mutazalites/Kharijjs views on iman/creed.

<b>Karramites</b>	<b>Jahmites</b>	<b>Mutazalites/Kharijjs</b>
Iman/creed	Iman/creed	Iman/creed
↓	↓	↓
Ikrarun bi-l-lisan (Affirmation with tongue)	Ma'rifa (acceptance of Allah's existence)	Tasdiqun bi-l-qalb, ikrarun bi-l-lisan, 'amalun bi-l-arkan (believe by heart, affirmation with tongue and carrying out of mandatory deeds)

In his books Imam Maturidi strongly criticized the opinions of these religious sects in relation to the iman/credo and refuted them using sound arguments based both on his knowledge of the Islamic sources and pure logics. Refuting the Qarmatians view Maturidi wrote the following: "One group of people said: 'The iman is just about affirmation with the tongue, it has nothing to

do with heart'. But we tell: 'If we judge based on knowledge and logic, we will see that it is the heart that is the right place for the iman/credo. As far as our knowledge of the Scripture is concerned, Allah tells about hypocrites what follows: 'Those who say with their mouths: 'We believe', but their hearts do not believe... ' [17], and 'the Bedouins say 'We believe'. Say: 'You have not believed; but say We have submitted', for faith has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not diminish anything of your deeds. Surely Allah is Often Forgiving, Most Merciful.'" [17, p. 517]. These verses show that the iman is not only affirmation with the tongue, but also believing by heart [8, p. 520; 11, p. 471].

Imam Maturidi further states: "As far as the reason, or the logical arguments are concerned, the iman is religion, and religion is constructed upon an invincible belief. The religion is all about believing by heart. The iman linguistically means (tasdiq)/believe/confirmation cannot be reached with compulsion as there is no creature in the world that can control the belief in its heart." [11, p. 475]

Imam Maturidi protested to the Jahmites opinions in relation to the iman as well. When commenting the Quranic verse "And there are messengers We have mentioned to you before, and messengers We have not mentioned to you" [17, p. 104], Imam Maturidi wrote the following: "Iman is not about one's consciousness, but about (tasdiq)/believe/confirmation, for in the aforementioned verse the Prophet Muhammad (be peace upon him) was not blamed for not knowing other prophets. Quite the opposite, the verse calls to believe in them in general." [8, p. 419] That means that the Prophet and Muslims are not required to know all prophets that have ever lived on Earth, but just to have general belief in the validity of all prophets sent by Allah. Thus, this verse shows that the iman is not just consciousness or knowledge.

The Islamic groups criticized by Imam Maturidi the most, were Mutazalis and Khawarijs. The reason was that they were radical sects with endangering views on the iman. Based on their radical opinion on the iman and actions related issues they could easily declare any Muslim apostates. Thus they could go as far as to authorize themselves to kill other Muslims and confiscate their property [18]. The Khawarijs attempted to consider the iman/credo related issues based on the object of the iman, that is, from the perspective of the deeds of a Muslim.

#### **4.4. *Who is infidel?! Maturidi's response to Kharijis***

According to Toshihiko Izutsu, the Khawarijs would be interested in the question 'who is apostate?' much more than in questions like 'what is the iman/credo?' or, at the very least, 'what is apostasy?' regardless of the fact that the iman issue is the most critical part of religion [19].

Izutsu states that the terms ‘iman’ and ‘kufr’ or ‘mumin’ and ‘kafir’ are the major ones as far the Quran is concerned; he refers to them as the central theme of the whole Quran. So, the Khawarijis constructed their creed on these two key notions of the Quran, too [19, p. 18].

It is completely evident that this radical attitude disseminated by the ‘Khariji’ sect mentality has caused radicalism and extremism to spread amongst Muslims. As a consequence of this kind of excess in religion, history has many examples when Islamic sects with such radical views initiated numerous conflicts and bloody battles. This view also affected the next generation of Muslims to some extent. Even in our days there are the so-called neo-Khawarijis. Like their ‘ancestors’, they are obsessed with the question ‘who is apostate?’, which incites them to declare as apostates those who disagree with them, and, thinking it permissible, to confiscate their property. Unfortunately, we witness how this wrong ‘belief’ leads to radicalization of some groups and individuals who consider as Muslims only themselves and commit various violences. They also are said to be puppets of some geopolitical powers.

In the early Islamic period the religious radicalism resulted from the political events; meanwhile nowadays it is ignited by the other reasons. The main roots of the religious radicalism are the following:

1. religious ignorance and common illiteracy in Muslim countries,
2. social inequality and poverty in most Muslim countries,
3. Muslim societies are divided into conflicting groups,
4. low education level.

That is why the current rising religious radicalism can be prevented only by addressing the above mentioned problems. Imam Maturid’s knowledge and theological opinions, who strongly criticized the religious views leading to the religious radicalism, are undoubtedly crucial.

When bringing their radical opinions concerning the iman/credo and actions, the Khawarijis and Mutazalis mostly refer to separate Quranic verses sent down during the war time or for certain reasons. For this reason, refuting their opinions Maturidi used their tactics, referring to Quranic verses. Nevertheless, unlike Khawarijis and Mutazalis, the Imam Maturidi did not refer to separate Quranic verses but scrutinized them in integrity.

These radical sects adhered to the opinion that a Muslim becomes apostate if he does not repent urgently. This issue is certainly related to the iman/credo and actions concord. In this regard the following Quranic verse has a criticizing content: “And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah while the weak among men, and women and children?!” [17, p. 90] and was commented by Imam Maturidi as follows: “These verses criticize Muslims for being passive in some actions. However they do not declare Muslims apostates. They require them to fight for God’s sake, and for the Companions that was something mandatory. To conclude, these verses refute the argument that Muslims become apostate upon committing great sins.” [8, p. 256]

In the above mentioned Quranic verses no matter how far the Muslims deserved to be blamed by Allah, He addresses them with the words ‘O, those who believe’. If the actions had been an integral part of the iman/credo, they would have not been called with phrase ‘O, those who believe’ for they would have been deprived a part of the iman and would have filled its blank space with disbelief. If the actions were deemed as a part of the iman, the sins and disbelief would be inseparable notions.

#### ***4.5. Maturidi does not neglect deeds required by religion***

However, this does not mean that Maturidi neglected the mandatory religious rituals and other actions or considered them not as major requirements of Islam. On the contrary, in his books Maturidi’s devotion to the additional religious rituals is clearly seen, not to mention his devotion to the mandatory ones. In the *Tawilat* book it is said that al-Fakqih Abu Mansur held the following: “Each thing/action is complete when its parts are complete. If a five-time prayer restricts himself to performing only the obligatory prayers, then would his worship be complete?!” [8, p. 3-6]

### **5. Conclusions**

#### ***5.1. Iman is the basis of religion, deed being a result of the iman***

Imam Maturidi upheld his religious teacher Abu Hanifa’s opinion stating that the iman/credo is first of all about believing by heart, and that the iman and actions are all but separate notions. In his opinion, religious rituals and other actions are not the most integral parts of credo. Having belief in Allah is a separate obligation, meanwhile five-time prayer, fasting and other rituals are mandatory and result from the credo. The iman/credo is the first and foremost obligation in Islam without which all other rituals and obligations cannot be performed. In his comment to the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse of the Ali-Imran sura “They are the ones whose deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter”, Imam Maturidi said: “One of the meanings of this verse is that the righteous deeds they did to their close people, their rituals, donations and others with view of getting closer to Allah, become worthless, as it is the iman/credo that goes first, and only then do actions come. Their righteous deeds become worthless, for they do not possess the iman/credo.” [8, p. 341] Imam Maturidi considered that the iman/credo, being the basis of Islam, should be in the heart as a place which can be controlled by no one but Allah [11, p. 607].

Basing himself on this idea, Maturidi believed that a Muslim cannot be declared to be apostate neither for not performing mandatory religious rituals nor for committing great sins, if he believes in Allah. Based on this opinion of Imam Maturidi’s, we see that he had not viewed the iman/credo and actions as part and parcel of one single whole; performing the mandatory religious rituals has been considered to be rather a separate issue.

## 5.2. Why to know Maturidi is important

The iman/credo and actions concord is undoubtedly a critical religious issue nowadays. As it is mentioned above, the Islamic history is full of episodes when the extremist sects such as Khawarijs and Mutazalis were announcing that the iman/credo and the actions are not separate from each other. Also, they were declaring other Muslims to be apostates for their ignoring the religious rituals and other actions in a complete or partial manner. That is why Imam Maturidi's teachings and his views concerning the iman/credo, religion, sharia and actions should be studied thoroughly in our days, too. The religious disputes the Muslims are currently obsessed with can be well settled by studying and extensively propagating the teachings and valuable legacy of the prominent Islamic scholars such as Imam Maturidi who was able to understand and expound basic concepts of Islam in the most correct and lucid way.

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