



The Limits of Religious Freedom in Islamic Theology

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Abstract

Theology was able to place an important place for it among the Islamic sciences, to the point that it was presented in the rank in honor of its subject honor, which is the search for the same duty of existence. That made speech syntax for her, However, he started at a later period as if he deviates from his original goal on the day that some Islamic factions made him an exclusionary theology and sent him a line of speech directed by the logic of the surviving division and the allegations of Milli and beekeeping preference. The ego has the side of the other, or even the opponent, and coexists with it, claiming that it possesses the truth and rightness that goes on with the surviving group alone. He devoted the separation of Muslims and dispersed them, colliding with the jurisprudence of the unity of the ummah, which the Qur'an and Sunnah called for, supported by the discourse of the surviving group, which became a weapon in reviving the tendency of atonement, exaggeration and fanaticism, after all the group of truth and salvation were poured into a pool of its origins that no one shared in that.

Key words: *theology, religious pluralism ,Surreal theology, surviving division ,atonement.*

Les limites de la liberté religieuse dans la théologie islamique

Résumé

La théologie a pu se faire une place importante parmi les sciences islamiques, au point qu'elle a été présentée au rang d'honneur de son sujet d'honneur, qui est la recherche du même devoir d'existence. Cependant, il a commencé à une période ultérieure comme s'il s'écartait de son objectif initial le jour où certaines factions islamiques lui ont fait une théologie d'exclusion et lui ont envoyé une ligne de discours orientée par la logique de la division survivante et les allégations de Milli et de préférence apicole. L'ego prend le parti de l'autre, voire de l'adversaire, et coexiste avec lui, prétendant qu'il possède la vérité et la justesse qui ne concernent que le groupe survivant. Il a consacré la séparation des musulmans et les a dispersés, heurtant la jurisprudence de l'unité de l'oumma, que le Coran et la Sunna appelaient de leurs vœux, soutenue par le discours du groupe survivant, qui est devenu une arme pour raviver la tendance à l'expiation, à l'exagération et au fanatisme, après que tout le groupe de la vérité et du salut a été versé dans une piscine de ses origines que personne ne partageait dans ce domaine.

Mots clés : *théologie, pluralisme religieux, théologie surréaliste, division survivante, expiation.*



Introduction

What becomes immediately apparent upon returning to Islamic heritage, particularly during the dawn of Islam, is that Muslims of that era were under the guardianship of two powerful authorities in terms of thought and practice: divine revelation authority and prophetic authority. They would be commanded and comply, called upon and respond, and forbidden and abstain. Such power was alongside the strong presence of the Prophet's personality (peace be upon him) and the tremendous spiritual infusion of Islamic values and teachings. The Prophet was able to form a society of brotherhood, unity, and harmony because religious rulings (fatwa) were confined within the scope of prophethood and flowing with meanings from the authority of revelation, which had not yet ceased.

Thus, a unified code in faith and practice was formulated, albeit on an oral level. This means that plurality and diversity regarding matters of faith and rulings did not exist at all in the presence of the chosen trustworthy Prophet (peace be upon him). However, this unified image of religiosity did not last long. Disagreement soon emerged after the period following the Prophet's death, and the decisive turning point in the history of the Islamic caliphate was represented by the state of hostility and conflict that reached the point of drawing swords, which would affect the witnesses of the prophetic community (the Companions) over an issue that did not touch the core of religion but its branches: leadership (imamate).

This event fulfilled the prophetic predictions about the division of the nation, as evidenced by the narration of

Abdullah ibn Amr: "There will surely come upon my nation what came upon the Children of Israel. The Children of Israel split into seventy-two sects, and my nation will split into seventy-three, exceeding them by one. All of them will be in Hell except one sect." They asked, "Which is this one sect?" He said, "What I and my companions are upon" (Al-Ajurri, 1997, 307-308). All theological sects adopted this hadith in their polemical confrontations with their opponents.

The science of theology (kalam) emerged in this turbulent political scene, taking on the task of defending the creed against its opponents. Although its origins were purely political, it was nourished by political disagreement among Muslims regarding the issue of retribution for Uthman's blood and the resulting loyalty and disavowal. Historically, it is noticeable that theology has witnessed more fervour in its activity within Islamic society than outside it. The issue of leadership and others captured the attention of the theological mind, leading to diversified opinions, multiple visions, escalated debate, widespread hysteria of excommunication and innovation accusations, and the entrenchment of an exclusionary, accusatory mentality embodied by all sects that sought to monopolise the concept of the one saved sect and centralise salvation within the victorious denomination and its righteous followers.

Despite this, the features of this saved sect were not clearly defined in the text of the hadith, whose chain of transmission and content were later questioned. The Prophet did not establish a scale and standard by which the saved sect could be distinguished from the perishing ones, except by following what he and his companions were upon. All sects attribute their sayings and actions to the Sunnah.



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What is the position of theological science toward the reality of sectarian diversity and plurality that characterised the history of creeds? Why did theological sects seek to convince others of their principles and doctrines while rejecting and excluding other sects sharing the same religion, claiming they possessed the truth and were on the straight path? Did politics play a role in reducing and diminishing the margin of religious freedom within Islamic society?

Regarding the methodology adopted in this article, we have employed analytical and inductive approaches, as they are most suitable for the topic, allowing us to return to texts from references or sources and explore their contents and deconstruct them to serve our research purposes. Additionally, we used the comparative method whenever necessary to approach the sayings and doctrines of different sects.

1. Sectarian Victory

The spirit of excommunication overwhelmed most theological practices and doctrinal debates because the adopted "straight path theology" was classificatory and exclusionary: either a believing survivor or a perishing infidel. Theological science, which in its essence was directed toward defending the creed, was transformed into a defence of the premises and axioms of sects, victory for them, and compelling opponents to accept their doctrines.

Imams and scholars worked to achieve religious truth, defining the boundaries of research and engagement, and empowering us to accept any innovation with evidence, regardless of its proponent's claim that it originated from the Quran, Sunnah, reason, or reality. "From this perspective, we

often observe in theological research that the claimant's argument is made through the Quran, Sunnah, or reason, but it is rejected and ignored because it contradicts the consensus of scholars and theologians of that school" (Hubb Allah, 2002, 67).

Now we move to witness this exclusionary, excommunicatory reality among sects, all of which raise their hands to the same sky and turn their necks toward the same qibla. The guardians of creed proceeded from a logical observation: either you believe what we believe or you become infidels, and there is no middle ground between our logic and your contradiction, because religious truth is one and does not accept diversity or plurality and can only be concentrated in one party and a specific sect, each claiming it is distributed here.

"This means centralising truth within a specific school and the impossibility of stating any kind of overlap or distributional truth among schools" (Hubb Allah, 2002,72).

2. Historical Materials in the Culture of Theological Exclusion (A Reading in the Excommunication Literature of Sects)

2.1. Excommunication Among the Kharijites

The Kharijites were perhaps the first sect to inaugurate an excommunicatory "straight path theology" and create a dark scene for the community of monotheism, acting as the first political-religious movement to bargain Muslims' creeds in the name of the text. They classified them as either infidel apostates whose blood and honour could be violated or believing survivors, according to the group's doctrine. They applied their sectarian scale to the Companions, starting



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with the Battle of Siffin (37 AH), bargaining creeds with politics.

"The Kharijites unanimously agreed on declaring Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God be pleased with him) an infidel for accepting arbitration, though they differed on whether his infidelity constituted polytheism or not. They unanimously agreed that every major sin is infidelity, except the 'Najdites', who do not say this. They unanimously agreed that God Almighty punishes perpetrators of major sins with eternal torment, except the 'Najdites', followers of Najda (d. 169 AH). (Al-Ash'ari, 2017, 140).

All books on sects and religions have confirmed the consensus of this group's members on excommunicating their opponents and declaring jihad against them, even including common people who committed major sins, considering them acts of infidelity that expel one from the religion. Every opponent, present or absent, received a certificate of departure from religion, accompanied by the joyful news of suffering and loss in both worlds. Such conduct allowed them to build a revolutionary philosophy against subjects (perpetrators of major sins) and rulers in the name of the sacred.

Their history was one of rebellion, revolt, and uprising against rulers. Loyalty and disavowal were the pillars of Kharijite belief.

"They are united in saying disavowal of Uthman and Ali (may God be pleased with them both), and they prioritise this over every act of obedience. They do not validate marriages except on this basis, they excommunicate perpetrators of major sins, and they see uprisings against the imam when he contradicts

the Sunnah as right and obligatory" (Al-Shahrastani, 2008, 93).

We can recall the Kharijite excommunicatory and exclusionary text in its Ibadi form, which allowed us to examine the Kharijite corpus without the mediation of a loyalist or opposing historian. The pillar of Ibadi imams in Algeria, Amhammad ibn Yusuf Atfiyyesh (d. 1332 AH), went on to say that the Ibadi school was correct and considered that an Ibadi's doubt in his school was infidelity and hypocrisy, as not all Islamic sects are equal with the Ibadis in righteousness and certainty. In his commentary on the book "Al-Nail wa Shifa al-Alil" by Al-Thamini (d. 1223 AH), he says,

"A person must distinguish his religion as he distinguishes the path to his home. The one who doubts that it is correct and that our opponents' religion is wrong is a hypocrite even if he is from among us, and he will not smell the fragrance of Paradise even if he prays until the bone of his forehead emerges, or fasts perpetually, and gives charity without limit" (Atfiyyesh, 1983, 430-431).

This approach is a fraction of the exclusionary, monopolistic Kharijite theology saturated with the spirit of excommunication and elimination that takes the principle of sectarianism and bias in dealing with the different other, expressing a unique extremism in centrality against a condemned marginal majority, thereby muffling the voice of Islam calling for tolerance and acceptance of difference. "Recognition of the other is not something incidental to Islam but is a characteristic that has distinguished it throughout the ages" (Al-Sheikh, 2017, 295).



2.2. Excommunication Among the Shiites

The Shiite mind harboured a strong desire for excommunication and exclusion of anyone who deviated from their principles, particularly the imamate. They considered it a dividing line between infidelity and faith, considering it a fundamental principle of religion. Hence came their denial and condemnation of everyone who rejected this principle or considered it among the branches. The first imamate is established for Ali (may God be pleased with him), and no one rejects this rule except an ignorant person or an apostate.

If we examine the Imami heritage in this regard, we will locate sufficient texts of savagery due to their abundant theological production. They stated that anyone who denies Ali's imamate is considered a true infidel, even if they appear to be Muslim (Hubb Allah, 2014, 430).

The idea of principles played a prominent role in that sharp distinction between sects, as human interpretations were presented to distinguish the good from the bad in belief. This is what the Shiite doctrinal mind represents, like other theological minds, in excommunicating the opponent and tormenting and humiliating him. Either a believer in the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar, or a rejecter of infallibility, or a denier of the text and changer of the concept of Mahdiism, or a rejecter and doubter of the imamate of the twelve – all of these necessitate infidelity, heresy, and expulsion from religion. Even sects that agreed with them on the first guardianship of Ali (peace be upon him) were not spared, their sin being that they differed from them in the order of imams, like the Ismailis and Zaidis.

"It should be known that for all who departed from the Twelver Shiite sect among individual Shiites, like the Zaidis, Waqifis, Fathis, and the like, the apparent ruling is that their status is like that of the Nasibis in what we mentioned, because whoever denied one of them (peace be upon them) was like one who denied them all, as narrated in their reports" (Al-Bahrani, n.d., 189).

This creed needed authority to be strengthened and expanded. Merging with politics and approaching the sultan serves the sect's desire for victory for its doctrines and defeat for others. This doctrine was written for the Twelver Shiite mind with the establishment of the Safavid state in Iran under Shah Ismail I (d. 930 AH), who was strongly attached to the Imami Shiite school. He did not delay in imposing sectarian and political unification.

"Ismail, after seizing Tabriz, imposed the Twelver Shiite school on its inhabitants and forced them to wear the Qizilbash sign, persecuted his Sunni opponents and killed about twenty thousand of them, testing them in various ways..." (Al-Taqus, 2009, 54-55).

The Imamis, like other sects, believed they were intended by the hadith of the saved sect and were carriers of the burden of defending religion and preserving its traditions, eliminating every foreign innovation that disturbs this religion, especially at the level of creed, and achieving the required Islam. "We found the saved sect to be the Imami sect because they separated from all schools, and all schools have shared in the fundamentals of creeds, and this is solid verification" (Al-Jazairi, 2010, 224).



2.3. Excommunication Among the Mutazila

The Mutazila were able to build principles of belief that unified their followers, and undoubtedly the final formulation of Mutazila doctrines was preceded by disputes, disagreements, and debates with sects. The Mutazila research culminated in five principles considered sacred in the sect's history, which became the focus of doctrinal research. They taught them to people as the testimony is taught to one seeking the religion of Islam.

"None of them deserves the name of Mutazila until he combines the doctrine of the five principles: monotheism, justice, promise and threat, the intermediate position between two positions, and commanding right and forbidding wrong. When these five characteristics are complete in a person, he is a Mutazila" (Al-Khayyat, 1925, 126-127).

The Mutazila made the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong a pretext for exposing opponents' faults so they would receive their share of disgrace and torment if they did not recant their claims and opinions, while they were advocates of freedom and supporters of reason. "Know that one of the things our sheikhs (may God have mercy on them) relied upon in excommunicating the Mujabbira and Mushabbaha was ignorance of God Almighty" (Al-Busti, 1129 AH, 20).

The Mujabbira also received ample refutation and confutation from Judge Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415 AH), who presented many proofs in his books that refute their doctrines and criticise them, concluding that the philosophy of determinism announces its adherent's departure from religion and negates his creed due to the implications that follow from it, corrupting monotheism and justice and

trivialising promise and threat, which cannot be detailed here. The judge's ruling on them was:

"These Mujabbira, with their knowledge of the ugliness of these ugly things, attributed them to God Almighty without shame or regard... their condition became worse than that of other infidels... so their condition became worse than that of other false claimants among atheists, anthropomorphists, and others for these reasons" (Ibn Ahmad, 1996, 778).

The anthropomorphists had a share in this, especially since the Mutazila had devoted themselves to transcendence to the degree that they negated attributes, fleeing from the multiplicity of eternal, as the judge was asked about this: "Why did you label them with this and accuse them of it and exclude them from being monotheists?" (Al-Balkhi, Ibn Ahmad, Al-Jashami, 2017, 160).

The Mutazila also excommunicated everyone who rejected and did not acknowledge the creation of the Quran, and monotheism was dropped from him because that doctrine was considered a subsidiary doctrinal principle touching the essence of monotheism, so he had no share in religion.

The Mutazila, like other sects, sought help from politics to support their creed and spread their doctrines, which was strengthened by Al-Mamun's (d. 218 AH) declaration of this, in fulfilment of his Mutazila belief. He began by corresponding with jurists to test scholars on the doctrine of the created nature of divine speech, foremost among them the people of hadith and their jurists. This was in the year 218 AH, as narrated by Al-Tabari (310 AH). The message carried the final formulation of the creed in Mutazila language:



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"The Commander of the Faithful sees that you should seek the repentance of whoever said his doctrine, since that doctrine was pure infidelity and pure polytheism in the Commander of the Faithful's view. If he repents from it, publicise his matter and desist from him. If he persists in his polytheism and refuses that the Quran is created through his infidelity and atheism, strike off his neck and send his head to the Commander of the Faithful" (Al-Tabari, n.d., 641).

These texts were considered historical evidence of the Mutazila's involvement in sectarian oppression and faith-based racism that they practised against their opponents. The notion of freedom they defended became merely a slogan hiding behind fanaticism that narrows and rejects the other. "All Islamic schools imposed their existence through rejecting the other, and their true features were only clarified by excluding and excommunicating him. There is no meaning for true tolerance except negating the self, because sectarian relations are based on affirming and sanctifying it while negating the other. So its choices are ontological, placing it between existence and non-existence" (Al-Gharabawi, 2008, 48).

2.4. Excommunication Among the Asharites

The Asharite school did not depart from the concept of the saved sect. Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 324 AH) revealed in his writings the people of deviation and innovation from sects opposing Asharite beliefs. "After this, many of those who deviate from the truth among the Mutazila, people of predetermination, Haruriyya, and people of deviation in what they innovated and opposed the Book, Sunnah, and what the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions

were upon, and what the nation agreed upon, like the actions of the Mutazila and predeterminists" (Al-Ashari, n.d., 7-8).

Imam al-Juwayni (d. 478 AH) also continued refuting opposing schools, like the doctrine of the Shiite text proponents, criticising their doctrine and supporting the Sunni opinion on pledge and choice. "The claim of text has failed and collapsed; the truth has become clear to its seekers and emerged... the falsity of their school in particular has become evident" (Al-Juwayni, n.d., 68).

Politics had a share in supporting this school. The Ash'arite faith was able to penetrate the heart of the Seljuk minister Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485 AH), who declared it an official creed, announced from pulpits, streets, and markets, and people were tested in it as the state's official creed. "The Asharites dominated during the Seljuk era under the sovereignty of Shafi jurisprudence and the Nizamiyya school, the school of Minister Nizam al-Mulk, with one school: perhaps it was the first step toward one thought or one party in thought and politics" (Al-Khayun, July 2011, 34).

Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) was not far from this exclusionary behaviour and confiscatory mentality of certainty and truth. His book "Fada'ih al-Batiniyya" (Scandals of the Esotericists) carried a clear and scandalous image of the mentality of despotism and domination, permitting blood and violating honour without regard for the humanity of religious vision and the human nature of all knowledge derived from text. It did not carry harbingers of tolerance, dialogue, and humility because the accomplished belief stimulated feelings of hatred, criticism, cursing, and excommunication, issuing



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rulings of killing, displacement, and lying in wait for them and treachery:

"The concise statement about it is to follow with them the path of apostates in considering blood, wealth, marriage, validity of judgements, and fulfilment of worship... The obligation is only to kill them and purify the face of the earth from them – this is the ruling on those whose infidelity is judged among the Esotericists. Permission or obligation to kill them is not limited to their state of fighting, but we assassinate them and shed their blood because whenever they engage in fighting, their killing becomes permissible" (Al-Ghazali, n.d., 156).

Although the spirit of tolerance appeared in some of Al-Ashari's works, the followers had the greatest surge in judging creeds and appropriating truth from all theological sects. Here is Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi (d. 476 AH); after reviewing the fundamentals of Sunni Asharite belief, his judgement on whoever deviated from this corpus was:

"Whoever believes other than what we have indicated among the people of truth belonging to Imam Abu Hasan al-Ashari (may God be pleased with him) is an infidel, and whoever attributes to them other than that has excommunicated them, so he becomes an infidel by excommunicating them" (Al-Shirazi, 1988, 111).

2-5. Excommunication Among the People of Hadith

The current of creedal Salafism succeeded in building a theological system based on transmitted knowledge (relying on the Quran and Sunnah with little regard for reason), employing the text, the Prophet's traditions, and those of the Companions and Successors. By this, the people of Sunnah

and the community are known. Here came their opposition to reason in all its manifestations in matters of religious fundamentals (creed).

"These are the schools of people of knowledge, people of tradition, and people of Sunnah who adhere to its roots, are known by it, and are followed in it, from the Prophet's companions (peace be upon him) to our day. I have met those I met among the scholars of Hijaz, Sham, and others upon it. Whoever opposes anything of these schools, criticises them, or finds fault with their adherents is an innovator outside the community, departing from the path of Sunnah and the way of truth" (Ibn Abi Ya'la, n.d., 24).

This is the Sunni Hanbali belief that was formulated for common people, following the path of the predecessors and their traditions, away from the innovations of people of debate and theology. Since the issue of creating the Quran was a heated issue around which debate flared between theologians and people of hadith, the Hanbalis had a harsh position regarding this doctrine:

"The Quran is God's speech; He spoke it, it is not created. Whoever claims the Quran is created is a Jahmi infidel. Whoever claims the Quran is God's speech and stops, not saying 'not created', is worse than the first statement. Whoever claims our utterances and recitation of it are created while the Quran [itself is not] is a Jahmi. Whoever does not excommunicate all these people is like them" (Ibn Abi Ya'la, n.d., 29).

As for Ibn Hambal's follower (d. 536 AH), he made the Asharite position (which distinguished between eternal self-speech and the Quran written in copies as letters and sounds) exceed the position of Christians and Jews: "The Asharites contradicted with their innovation the text of the



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Book, explicit Sunnah, proofs of reason, and consensus of people of religions from Jews and Christians, and exceeded the infidels of Quraysh in denying the Quran. We seek refuge in God, O brother, from this doctrine. Praise be to God for safety from this misguidance and ignorance" (Al-Shibl, n.d., 548).

Politics also played a major role in supporting the creed of people of hadith through issuing the Qadiri Creed (attributed to the Abbasid Caliph al-Qadir Billah (d. 422 AH)), which became a reference in determining belief, confiscating religious freedoms, and remained a ready authoritarian faith corpus for common and elite people, defended by political authority:

"This creed adopted the Hanbali vision and excessively favoured their positions, while targeting other Muslims and permitting the blood of some of them merely for adhering to a belief contrary to what was stated in it" (Al-Rifa'i, 2001, 6).

The goal of the document was to eliminate the activity of theologians and declare all opposing creeds as innovation, foremost the Mutazila. The authority of this creed extended over all Abbasid regions as a sacred text requiring obedience and threatening people of innovation, as Ibn al-Jawzi (597 AH) mentions in the incident of al-Qadir Billah's demand for repentance from people of Mutazila, Rafida, and others:

"Yamin al-Dawla and Amin al-Milla Abu al-Qasim Mahmud complied with al-Qadir Billah's command and followed his path in his territories that he appointed him over, from Khorasan and others, in killing Mutazila, Rafida, Ismailis, Qaramita, Jahmiyya, and anthropomorphists, crucifying, imprisoning, and exiling them, ordering their cursing from Muslim pulpits, and removing every group of

innovators and expelling them from their lands" (Ibn al-Jawzi, n.d., 66).

After this tour in the history of sects and the past of creeds, and our brief examination of the theologians' work in the field of creed and their position toward the other, we reach some results that can be recorded at the level of theorising and practising the theological mind that determined the pattern of relationship with the other through antagonism:

There is a fundamental cause that played a role in generating the logic of exclusion and aversion, preventing forms of objective, pure dialogue free from sectarian impurities, manipulation, and plotting against the other: the methodological flaw represented in the polemical method adopted by theological research and arguments. "Undoubtedly, the polemical method based on persuasion and not leading to reaching truth helps increase disagreement among its adherents, where each of the debaters clings to his opinion and has no readiness to abandon it, and all this increases the intensity of disagreement" (Al-Maghribi, 1994, 126). Its goal is not searching for truth but rather exposing the opponent's faults and disgracing them despite starting from the opponent's premises and accepting them, seeking to belittle and confound him in pursuit of victory and breaking the opponent, not truth itself.

Abu al-Qasim al-Isfahani al-Shafi (d. 535 AH) says, "The scholars of the predecessors said, 'We have not found anyone among the theologians from past times to our day who returned to his opponent's position or moved from his school to his debater's school, which proves they engaged in



what abandoning is better than engaging in" (Al-Isfahani, n.d., 100-101).

Conclusion

Finally, we conclude that no religious system throughout history has been spared from fanaticism and schism, which feeds on the hostile view of difference and variation. This was true for the history of Islamic theological science, which lives in atmospheres charged with conflict and antagonism, and in which and through which the phenomenon of excommunication, innovation accusation, and declaring people sinful took root, withdrawing all opportunities for coexistence and rapprochement with the other.

Therefore, to ward off this dark scene, it is necessary to begin among followers of all schools and sects to read the theological corpus anew, where pure reason advances with the intention of deconstructing the structures and mechanisms that fed religious violence and fanaticism that broke the back of the Islamic nation, aiming to obliterate them and activate the project of scientificity of theological study that new theology should carry as its concern.

This would place religious knowledge before the imperative of openness to human and social sciences, opening the door of interpretation to overcome the complex of imitation and the possibility of reviewing sources of reception, reading mechanisms, and understanding tools in order to provide a radical, not patchwork, solution to the problem of coexistence among those who differ from the children of this religion.

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