

Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology, by Daniel Lav (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ix + 238 pp., ISBN: 978-1-107-00964-6, €60.00 / \$95.00 (hbk)

Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology by Daniel Lav is in one part a study of the debate in early Islam over the issue of *irjā'*, which came to be understood as the controversy over what constitutes belief and whether it is to be deferred to God or to humans. In another part, *Radical Islam* is a study of modern Salafism (its militant and non-militant manifestations).

Chapter One discusses the Murji'a movement in the first two centuries of Islam, separating it into two phases: the early and the classical. As Lav argues, the early phase of Murji'ism features disharmony among the views of its adherents and what it represented aside from their agreement to defer judgment on the actions of caliphs 'Uthmān and 'Alī to God. The classical phase, ushered by such figures as the jurist Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle, defined Murji'ism as promoting that to be a Muslim one has to believe in God and profess the *shahāda*. Accordingly, for classical Murji'a acts are supplementary and do not determine whether or not one is a believer.

In Chapter Two, Lav provides a rather scant discussion of the Sunnī scholar Ibn Taymiyya and his views against the Murji'a that does not really contextualize Ibn Taymiyya's interest in the *irjā'* debate. But more significantly, the author bypasses the period from the second century until the time of Ibn Taymiyya, and leaves the reader clueless regarding the further development and dissemination of Murji'ism among Sunnī Muslims before and after the time of Ibn Taymiyya.

Chapter Three takes us straight to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a huge jump, and analyzes such prominent names as Rashīd Riḍā and Ḥasan al-Bannā and several leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. The chapter exhibits some strong aspects and some weak aspects. Lav confuses the reader by using the expression *salafī* to denote several of these figures without actually explaining that the term at that time was used by two movements that had nothing in common (he barely acknowledges the issue in the next chapter on page 86). There is the Salafism of Muḥammad 'Abduh, and the

Salafism of the Wahhābīs. Most of those who were called Salafīs in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century were partly inspired by the reforms of ‘Abduh, such as Riḍā and al-Bannā. In this respect, Lav’s argument that “al-Bannā himself did not see any connection between these two concepts” (p. 53), meaning definition of faith and acts, misses the mark. Al-Bannā did indeed see a direct relation between acts and the definition of faith, but he was not interested in hairsplitting argumentations that preoccupied previous theologians.

Another issue with Lav’s articulation of early modernist views on acts and belief is that every time he discusses a modernist who links the two, he directly evokes the name of Ibn Taymiyya as if the latter was the only scholar to have combined the two and anyone who came after must have been influenced by him. I do not intend to undermine the relevance of Ibn Taymiyya. But Ibn Taymiyya is only one contributor to the debate over *ijā’*, and the Sunnī tradition features countless important names who took either side of the issue, and did inspire the modern debate in one way or another.

Chapter Five is the masterpiece of the book. It features a very important examination and analysis of the debate over acts and belief within the Salafī movement. Lav argues that the encounter between the views of Quṭb and classical Wahhābism gave rise to two trends: jihādī Salafism and quietist Salafism. The former accepted the views of the militant Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Quṭb and incorporated them within the larger framework of Wahhābism (especially the notion of *ḥākimiyya*: namely that sovereignty and legislation belong to God not to humans); in this respect, all Muslims who do defer to human-made legislations are apostates. Quietist Salafism, on the other hand, rejected Quṭb. The main fault-line between the two camps is that quietist Salafīs insist that before calling someone a *kāfir* (disbeliever) there must be clear signs that the person willed disbelief in his/her heart. The jihādī Salafīs contended that any act or saying that evokes disbelief is enough proof that the person who commits it is an apostate irrespective of whether he or she meant it or understood it as such (this is in context of declaring other Muslims disbelievers, especially rulers).

Chapter Six is another excellent piece that examines the conflicts among the jihādī Salafīs especially in terms of deep disagreements over pragmatism, strategies, and inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness. His

focus on such issues presents the reader with a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics and relationships between the many militant groups that are often lumped in the media, out of ignorance, as all being of the same color and persuasion. In this respect, it is interesting to note his discussion of the groups within the jihādī Salafis who criticize al-Qāʿida for achieving only its own destruction, or consider the Ṭālibān as outright unbelievers. Some of these jihādī Salafis emphasize doctrinal and theological conformity, whereas others focus more on a general and broad platform that allows for unity against the common external enemy.

In conclusion, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* is a very important book that has a serious flow. Its main contribution lies in the two chapters where Daniel Lav focuses on modern Salafis (quietists and jihādists) and masterfully unveils the complex dynamics between them and within each group. In this respect, *Radical Islam* is of tremendous importance to those who study the phenomenon of modern jihādī Salafis and its manifestation in the world of today, and Lav is to be commended for the efforts and research he put in these two long chapters.

But, in my opinion, the first half of the book should be ignored. Lav does not succeed in explaining why the modern debate over belief and unbelief is related to the debate in early Islam over the notion of *irjāʿ*, and subsequently the entire discussion of *irjāʿ* is too weak and pointless. The fact that modern pacifists and militants call each other *Khawārij* and *Murjiʿa* has to do with a particular modern understanding of the derogatory symbolism of each term. They have very little to do with the historical groups that carry those names, and if we assume they do we are only confusing ourselves.

Suleiman A. Mourad

Smith College, Northampton, MA-USA