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A Comparative Perspective

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APPRAISING SUFISM IN THE THOUGHT OF IBN TAYMIYYAH AND HASAN AL-BANNĀ: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Ahmad Nafiu Arikewuyo*

Abstract: Sufism as a religious trend has attracted a lot of scholastic polemics among Muslim scholars. One of the popular critics of Sufism is Ibn Taymiyyah, whose thoughts have indelibly influenced the teachings of modern Salafiyyah. While waging war against the propagation of Sufism, modern Salafi scholars have branded counterpart scholars with traces of sympathy for the adherents of mysticism, including Hasan al-Bannā, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Against this backdrop, this work examines, with comparative analysis, the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah and Hasan al-Bannā over Islamic mysticism and mystics. The purpose of the comparative study is to decide whether the two scholars' views regarding the subject are responsible for the disagreement among their adherents. The research is library-based and adopts descriptive and analytic methods. The bulk of the information was gathered from the works of the two scholars, the works on the duo and relevant materials on the subject. The findings of the research showed there is no significant difference in the thought of the two scholars over mysticism. However, Al-Bannā, contrary to Ibn Taymiyyah, had once been a core member of a Sufi Order. This assertion has since constituted a source of controversy over the proper status of Al-Bannā as either a Sufi adherent or fair critic. This article recommends further research over the cause of disparity regarding Sufism between Ibn Taymiyyah and modern Salafis.

Keywords: *Sufism; thought; Ibn Taymiyyah; Hasan al-Bannā; comparative; appraising*

INTRODUCTION

The etymologic root of the word 'Sufism' is a contentious subject among Muslim scholars. While the majority of scholars contend the word originates from 'šūf,' i.e. wool, which was the source of clothing for the past ascetics, others attribute its origin to *suffah*, i.e. a place purposely constructed by the Prophet beneath the mosque for the destitute among his companions. A lot of Oriental scholars argue that 'sophia,' a Latin word that means wisdom,

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is the origin of Sufism.¹ Technically, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) viewed that Sufism is an act of secluding from the mundane adornments and ornaments and restricting one's self to ritual dedications.² Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani (d. 1078), as reported by Al-Ilori, describes a Sufi as someone with a pure heart from moral and spiritual perversions.³ The heated discussion over Sufism is prompted by the peculiar doctrines of the mystics, not the positive definitions rendered to it by its supporters. Such doctrines include *al-Fanāu* (annihilation), *al-Maḥabbah* (love), *al-Istighāthah* (seeking assistance from the saints), *at-Tawassul* (intercession), *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (pantheism) and *al-Ḥulūl* (incarnation). Arikewuyo's view is accurate when he declares the positive definition given by mystics, such as describing Sufism as the purification of souls or an act of manifesting asceticism has never constituted the bone of contention among the proponents and antagonists of the trend.⁴ Rather, it is the aforementioned mystic techniques that have exposed the subject to many polemics. Hence, Sufism has constituted one of the most debated discourses within the realm of Islamic scholarship. Of the scholars who contributed to the discourse with many indelible marks on the thought of contemporary Muslims are Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728) and Hasan al-Bannā (d. 1948). The former wields influence within the fold of modern Salafis while the latter's influence is noted not only among the members of the Muslim Brotherhood Society, which he founded, but among a very wide circle of contemporary Muslim elites. Against this background, this article compares the views of these two influential scholars over the discourse of Sufism.

There is much academic focus by researchers on the position of these two scholars over the controversy in Sufism and their judgment of the mystics. At-Tablawi asserts that Ibn Taymiyyah is not a staunch critic of Sufism as assumed by common Muslims.⁵ However, in clear contrast to his submission, Qadri and Dauda Yusuf observe that, from the literature of Ibn Taymiyyah and based on where he was buried, i.e. *Maqbarat Sufiyyah*, it is not out of point to assume he is an adherent of the Qadiriyyah Sufi Order.⁶ Arikewuyo, in his refutation of the submission of the two aforementioned researchers, argues that the praise of al-Jaylāni (d. 1166) by Ibn Taymiyyah and his burial at the Sufi burial ground is insufficient evidence to attribute Ibn Taymiyyah to the mystics, especially that none among his student biographers ever claim such a grave allegation.⁷ Yusuf Qaradawi describes Ibn Taymiyyah as a fair and objective critic of the mystics in contrast to modern Salafis, who have been accused of

¹ Ahmed Nafiu Arikewuyo, "A Comparative Study of al-Ghazali's and Ibn Taymiyyah's Views on Sufism," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 17 (2020): 18.

² AbdurRahman bn Khaldun, *Mudaddimah bn Khaldun* [Ibn Khaldūn's Preamble] (Cairo: Maktabat Tawfiq, 2009), 113.

³ Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilori, *Falsafat al-Wilāyah* [Philosophy of Saintship] (Lagos: Daarun-Nur Printing Company, 2012), 13.

⁴ Arikewuyo, "A Comparative Study," 18.

⁵ Mahmud at-Tablawi, *At-Tasawwuf fi at-Turāth Ibn Taymiyyah* [Sufism in the Works of Ibn Taymiyyah] (Cairo: Al-Maktabat al-Markaziyyah, 1984), 12.

⁶ See Yasir Anjola Quadri, "All in the Name of God" (paper presented at the One Hundred and Thirty-Third Inaugural Lecture, Ilorin, Nigeria, 2013), 6; Dauda Gambari Yusuf, "A Study of Sufism in the Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah" (Master's diss., University of Ilorin, 2013), 73.

⁷ Ahmed Nafiu Arikewuyo, "Al-Ghazali in Selected Works of Ibn Taymiyyah" (Master's diss., University of Ilorin, 2015), 30.

unobjectivity in their assessment of the Sufis.⁸ Abu al-Hasan An-Nadawi, while giving an account of Muslim scholars whose achievements in Islam are influenced by the instrument of Sufism, mentions Ibn Taymiyyah as a typical example.⁹

In the same vein, al-Bannā's position over Sufism has also attracted much academic analysis. His submissions on mystics in his autobiographic work have remained the basis on which his proponents and opponents premise their comments.¹⁰ Most of the Salafi writers such as an-Najmi, Madkhali and Faysal al-Hashidi conclude that al-Bannā was not only a Sufi adherent but one with ideological corruptions of the mystics.¹¹ An-Nadawi regards him as a Sufi but one with mystic reformation.¹² Shurbaji aligns with the submission of an-Nadawi that al-Bannā is an adherent of Sufism but free from mystic indoctrination and ideological heresies.¹³ However, Qaradawi has portrayed al-Bannā as a mixture of Salafi teachings and Sufi training. Hence, he only embraced the positive sides of the two trends.¹⁴ Al-Wa'ī, in his submission, asserts that al-Bannā should not be regarded as a Sufi; rather, he should be considered as a fair critic of the trend.¹⁵

It is obvious from the foregoing that the two scholars' stances regarding mysticism is controversial. Hence, the pool of academic interest in analysing their views. However, the gap that has not been filled from the above literature is the comparison of their views. The present research attempts to fill this gap.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF IBN TAYMIYYAH AND HASAN AL-BANNĀ

Glancing through the lives and scholarships of both scholars, it is obvious they share many phenomena while being at loggerheads in other areas. It is instructive to first consider the areas of agreement in their lifestyles.

The family from where Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā emanated was reputable with religious scholarship, most especially in the field of *ḥadīth* (prophetic tradition). Ibn Taymiyyah's father, Shihabud-Din, was a noted teacher of *ḥadīth* and a renowned preacher in the Central Mosque of Damascus. His uncle, Fakhr ad-Deen, was also a reputable scholar and

⁸ Yusuf Qaradawi, *Al-Ḥayāt ar-Rabbāniyyah Wal 'Ilm* [Spiritual Life and Knowledge] (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1995), 9.

⁹ Abu al-Hasan an-Nadawi, *Rabbāniyyah Lā Rahbāniyyah* [Spiritualism and not Spinsterhood], 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2010), 63.

¹⁰ Hassan al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah Wad-Dā'iyyah* [Call and the Caller's Diary] (Cairo: Darus Sahwah, 2011).

¹¹ Ahmad Yahya Najmi, *Raddul Jawāb* [Refutation to the Response] (Cairo: Darul Minhaj, 2009), 23; Rabi'u Amir Madkhali, *Jamā'atun Wāhidah* [A United Group] (Cairo: Darul Minhaj, 2002), 48; Faysal al-Hashidi, *Risalatun Ukhawīyyah* [A Brotherly Letter] (Yemen: Darul Athar, 2002), 28.

¹² an-Nadawi, *Rabbāniyyah Lā Rahbāniyyah*, 63.

¹³ A. H. Shurbaji, *Hassan al-Bannā* (Alexandria: Darud Da'wah, 1999), 95.

¹⁴ Yusuf Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwānūl Muslimūn* [The Muslim Brotherhood] (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1999), 346.

¹⁵ T. Y. Al-Wā'ī, *Al-Ikhwānūl Muslimūn* [The Muslim Brotherhood] (Mansurah: Ash-Shuruq, 2005), 325.

writer.¹⁶ Al-Bannā's father, in the same way, was a scholar who focused on *ḥadīth*. He is credited with re-arranging the famous *Musnad Imam Ahmad*, which took him ten years and was published in 24 volumes.¹⁷ Coming from this scholarly background helped to build a solid foundation upon which the scholastic struggles of the two reformers would later rely. One of the obvious manifestations that corroborated the fact the two scholars were beneficiaries of their educated family is that they became grounded scholars in their 20s. Ibn Taymiyyah, at the age of 22, was appointed to the chair of *ḥadīth*, which his father occupied, and soon began to rival the fame of traditionalists of the time, such as Ibn Daqīq al-Īdī, Kamaldin Zimlakani and Shamsudeen Adh-Dhabi.¹⁸ Similarly, at 22 years, Al-Bannā could formulate a religious gathering comprising the most dedicated youths of the day, which later turned into the most influential Muslim organisation in the Muslim world in the 20th century.¹⁹

Another meeting point between the two scholars is the characteristic features of the age in which they lived. Ibn Taymiyyah's childhood coincided with the era when the Muslim world was in retreat. The eastern lands were overrun and devastated by the Mongols, and in the west, the Muslims had been ousted completely and finally from Spain.²⁰ Additionally, the religious face had been tainted by Greek philosophy, theological complexities and mystic superstitions. A reformer was direly needed. Likewise, al-Bannā's childhood witnessed the worst scene and event in the modern history of Islam. The Muslim world in general and Egypt, in particular, were in a mournful state that had defied every corrective measure. Whole Muslim territories, except for Saudi, Yemen and Najd, were colonised by Western powers. This was followed by the fall of the caliphate and the rise of Israel's state in the Muslim domain of Palestine.²¹ Coming back to Egypt from where al-Bannā was born, the oldest Islamic institution Al-Azhar University, was obsessed with internal problems, which made it helpless in the face of overlapping challenges wrecking the nation. The orbit around which the misfortunes of Egyptian Muslims revolved was British occupation. Although Egypt was not the only victim of British Westernisation among the Muslim territories; this encounter was similar to that of Turkey in the sense that Westernisation drove out Islam entirely from the socio-political terrains in that ancient Muslim domain.²² From the above historical account, it is obvious that the negative features characterising the era of Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā included: foreign occupation of Muslim lands, spiritual degeneration of Muslims and lack or scarcity of a committed reformer who could inspire and deal with these issues.

Another coincidental phenomenon in the lifestyles of the two scholars is being anti-establishment and opposing the oppression and non-steadfastness of the sitting power. Ibn

¹⁶ Qamaruddin Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distribution, 2007), 2.

¹⁷ Shurbanji, *Hasan al-Bannā*, 99.

¹⁸ Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah*, 3.

¹⁹ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 35.

²⁰ Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah*, 4.

²¹ Arikewuyo, "Al-Ghazali in Selected Works of Ibn Taymiyyah," 27.

²² Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 22.

Abdul Hadi (d. 1343) reports that, during the visitation of a delegation of the *Ulamāu*, including Ibn Taymiyyah, to admonish the Khan of the Mongols, none of the *Ulamāu* dared speak except Ibn Taymiyyah, who directed the following warning to the Muslim ruler:

You claim to be a Muslim ruler having under his rule the Muhaddithun, Imam's muftis and shaykhs, but you invaded and ruined our nation for no tangible reason. Your ancestor, despite being non-Muslims, neither attacked us and nor broke their pact.²³

On many occasions, Ibn Taymiyyah was detained in the state prisons consequent on the conspiracy of the leading scholars of his time. He died in confinement, where he was banned from having access to books, pens and students.²⁴

Similarly, al-Bannā strongly went against the status quo maintained by the Muslim rulers of his time. He often declared the current system being upheld by the Arab leaders as anti-Islam and advocated for substitution with Islamic supremacy. In one of his public sermons, in the presence of many of his followers, he invoked:

We shall direct our call to the constituted authorities as being represented by the political figures, ministers, scholars, and political parties, and we shall invite them to our path; we shall hold them to lead the Muslims with courage devoid of hypocrisy. If they heed the call, we shall cooperate with them but if they resort to hiding under ungenue excuses, we will constitute a threat against all political leaders that are not ready to support the cause of Islam.²⁵

Al-Bannā did not see the Muslim rulers across the Muslim world during his time as having the idealism required of Muslim leadership. He said:

It is necessary at this juncture to state that the Muslim Brothers are yet to see in any of the contemporary governments be it in the past or current time the one which can take up the task of, or willing to support the Islamic system of governance. The Muslim Ummah should take note of that and should pressurize the leaders on doing the needful.²⁶

On 11 February 1949, al-Bannā was shot by the hired assassins of King Faruq's agents and released his last breath after being abandoned in a hospital emergency room bleeding without any first aid response.²⁷ From the above analyses, it is apparent that Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā were not on good terms with the authorities of their respective times.

Asceticism is another trait shared equally by the two eminent scholars. Al-Bazzar, one of the major biographers of Ibn Taymiyyah, reported the sage had an ascetic attitude since his childhood.²⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah's asceticism led to the extent that he never thought of acquiring

²³ M. Ibn Abdul Hādi, *Al-'uqud ad-Durriyyah Fi Manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah* [Virtues of Ibn Taymiyyah] (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1998), 5.

²⁴ Arikewuyo, "Al-Ghazali in Selected Works of Ibn Taymiyyah," 28.

²⁵ Hassan al-Bannā, *Majmu'at Rasā'il al-Imām* [Compendium of the Imam's Treatises] (Cairo: Daru Sahwah, 2011), 156.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, 113.

²⁸ Umar Ali al-Bazzar, *Al-'alam' al-'Aliyyah fi manāqib Ibn Taymiyyah* [The Virtues of Ibn Taymiyyah] (Cairo: Al-maktab al-Islamiy, 1998), 42.

worldly ornaments and pleasures, such as a wife, children, clothes and befitting residence.²⁹ He died without leaving behind any surviving child. Al-Bannā, in the same way, never lived a luxurious life. He was a primary school teacher with commitment and dedication. His outfit was always characterised with simplicity and, despite being the overall leader of a foremost Muslim organisation with overwhelming and wide followership across every segment and sector of the society, he would not amass commensurate wealth with his revered position and status.³⁰

Against the foregoing, Ibn Taymiyyah's scholarship differed from al-Bannā's in notable areas. One of those areas is the rate of engagement in theological polemics. The highest percentage in the life and works of Ibn Taymiyyah was spent and dedicated to refuting the perceived theological errors of the Shi'ah, Jahmiyyah, Asha'irah and Qadariyyah. In a statement credited to him, Ibn Taymiyyah claimed there was no ideological sect in Islam in which historical development, growth, scholars and contents evade his knowledge, and he mastered virtually all sects more than his contemporaries.³¹ In the course of refuting the ideological mistakes of sects, Ibn Taymiyyah launched a striking blow on eminent scholars such as Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Al-Kindi (d. 873), Ibn Rushdi (d. 1198), Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) and Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). His opposition and condemnation of these theologians subjected him to sheer hatred from adherents of the various groups in Islam. In contrast to this, al-Bannā believed that widening the inherited gulf of polemics and arguments among the traditional theologians would contribute more to the existing in-fight.³² Although he is inclined to the theological conviction of Ibn Taymiyyah, he never committed many resources to the project of refuting his ideological opponents. This is why his group, Muslim Brothers, has assumed the umbrella body for adherents of different sects.³³

Another area of disparity is that, while Ibn Taymiyyah is conventionally regarded as an encyclopaedic scholar of Islam with indelible marks in virtually all disciplines in Islamic scholarship, al-Bannā, though naturally brilliant and genius, could not be placed in the scholarly circle of Muslim jurists, theologians and exegetes. When he was asked: "why have you not published a lot of scholarly works?" al-Bannā replied: "I prefer publishing foot soldiers of Da'wah to publishing papers."³⁴ Interestingly, authoring many works did not prevent Ibn Taymiyyah from also producing encyclopaedic scholars. When it comes to scholarship, there is no basis of comparison between Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā.³⁵

Ibn Taymiyyah's works are filled with harsh statements and words of abuse towards his opponents, while al-Bannā is more accommodating and lenient to his opponents. Qamarudeen Khan attempts to defend Ibn Taymiyyah's short temper and harsh expression against his opponents:

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwānūl Muslimūn*, 85.

³¹ Al-Bazzar, *Al-A'alam al-'Aliyyah*, 32.

³² Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwānūl Muslimūn*, 182.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah*, 8.

The men who opposed him belonged to the establishment mostly fighting for vested interest. Hence he was bitter when he knew that what he was trying to establish was the faith and practice of the virtuous early Muslims, and the great scholars of the day recognized it to be so while his opponents were only defending selfish interest.³⁶

A perusal of al-Bannā's autobiographic work would convince the reader that the author is lenient, soft, simple and broad-minded towards everyone. Even though he condemned adoration of tombs and intercession (*tawassul*) as Ibn Taymiyyah has also done, al-Bannā's approach is characterised by caution and love.³⁷ However, this simplicity and leniency from al-Bannā did not surface when referring to autocratic rulers and Arab politicians. His references to these people are dominated by instigation and frank declaration. One such frank statement worth consideration is:

Demand from me to lead you into the depth of the sea and to fly with you into the cloud of heaven; to wage war against all arrogant autocratic ruler only in a time when there will be among you (Muslim Brothers) an army of 300 in the number who have gotten prepared spiritually and educationally.³⁸

SIMILARITIES IN THE THOUGHT OF THE TWO SCHOLARS OVER SUFISM

While diagnosing the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā over Islamic mysticism, it was discovered that the two scholars have similar opinions in major discourses on the subject.

The genesis of Sufism is a contentious matter among the scholars of Islam. While some scholars have traced the starting point of Sufism to the pre-Islamic era, others assert it is an inherent virtue in the first generation of Muslims.³⁹ However, Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Bannā agree that Sufism can be traced to the dominating trait of asceticism in Basra, which dates to the 2nd century of Islam. Ibn Taymiyyah said:

For Sufism kickstarted at Basra. And the first person credited with constructing a building for the Sufi gathering was some students of Abdulwahid who was also a student of Hasan.⁴⁰

Al-Bannā followed the suit of Ibn Taymiyyah when he submitted:

Among those who are reputable with Sufi traces was Hasan al-Basri who was emulated by many good clerics. A group within the Muslims had been known by the (methods) of indulging in remembrance of Allah, the last day, discouraging from acquisitiveness and spiritual training of the souls on obedience to, and fear of Allah.⁴¹

³⁶ Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah*, 6.

³⁷ Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwānūl Muslimūn*, 203.

³⁸ Al-Bannā, *Majmu'at Rasāil*, 193.

³⁹ Al-Ilori, *Falsafat al-Wilāyah*, 11.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Taqiyyudeen ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah* [Compendium of Verdicts] (Cairo: Darul Hadith, 2006), 6.

⁴¹ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 21.

Arising from the similar opinions provided by the two scholars over the genesis of Sufism, they have both admitted that Sufism is one of the orthodox trends in the history of Islam. The mystics according to them have predecessors among the generation that was next to the prophetic companion's generation. Hence, Sufism along with jurisprudence and theology should be given the same treatment of accommodation and integration since they all had traced the formative generations of Islamic religion. Ibn Taymiyyah's submission in this regard is worthy of quoting: "The correct opinion is to admit the Sufis as other scholars (such as the jurist and theologians) who are all making effort at being obedient to Allah."⁴²

Similarly, al-Bannā cues behind Ibn Taymiyyah when he declares: "This part (early discussed) is inherent in the discipline of Sufism which (popular) title is moral training; it is indisputable that this discipline is part and parcel of Islam."⁴³ Despite recognising Sufism as a branch of moral discipline in Islam by the two scholars, they both condemn the excessiveness that penetrated the professed asceticism of the Muslim mystics. While castigating the extremist trend of Sufis on asceticism, Ibn Taymiyyah gives the actual connotation of asceticism that agrees with pristine Islam as shunning all that is not beneficial on the Day of Resurrection.⁴⁴ Al-Bannā also admits the Sufis have manifested extremism while displaying asceticism.⁴⁵

Other aspects regarding Sufism condemned by Ibn Taymiyyah include *al-hulūl* (incarnation) and *wahdat al-wujūd* (pantheism). He declared al-Hallaj (d. 922) is a disbeliever due to his perpetration of incarnation and pantheism.⁴⁶ Al-Bannā also condemned the infiltration of Greek philosophies, logic and the heritage of other scriptural religions into Muslim mysticism.⁴⁷ Although he did not mention examples of such Greek infiltrations, it is possible he subscribed to the views of the antagonists of Sufism in that regard.

Despite this castigation by the two scholars, they held many Sufi Shuyūkh (respected scholars) in high esteem. Ibn Taymiyyah believes there is an abundance of saints whom Allah has honoured with making miracles (*karamah*) among the Sufis. In his letter to the followers of the revered Shaykh 'Adiyy (d. 886), who was a staunch Sufi devout, Ibn Taymiyyah uttered:

And there are among you (Sufis) those who are reputable for good traits, threading the right path, and manifesting spiritual unfolding and Karamah. There are also among you pious saints who have an indisputable recognition in the Ummah. Your preceding leaders possessed virtues, religious steadfastness, and obedience to the tradition which qualified them for Allah's honor.⁴⁸

Some of the names of big mentors in Sufism which Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned in his works with much respect and esteem include Junayd (d. 910), Al-Hakkari (d. 1150), 'Adiyy,

⁴² Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah*, 6, 10.

⁴³ Al-Banna, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 22.

⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah*, 11.

⁴⁵ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 23.

⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah*, 18

⁴⁷ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 25.

⁴⁸ Ahmad bn Taymiyyah, *Al-Wassiyat al-Kubrā* [The Supreme Admonition] (Kaduna: Merciful Production, 2006), 23.

al-Ghazali and others. In the same vein, al-Bannā, as entrenched in his Twenty Principles, encourages his followers to display love for the saints of Allah.⁴⁹ He makes special reference to Shaykh Abdulwahhāb al-Hassāfi, the propounder of the Hassafiyyah Sufi Order, whom he describes as a staunch caller to virtue and discourager from vices.⁵⁰

DISSIMILARITIES IN THE VIEW OF THE TWO SCHOLARS ON SUFISM

The three major difference between Ibn Taymiyyah's and al-Bannā's views on Sufism are: practical engagement in and affiliation to a Sufi Order; preference to the Sufi approach in moral training; and the call to reform Islamic mysticism or abandon it for the traditionalist trend. These three bones of contention are discussed below.

There is no contention over the fact Ibn Taymiyyah neither affiliated himself to any particular Sufi Order; neither his direct students nor biographers made this allegation. In fact, contrary to the conventional notion, Ibn Taymiyyah denies advocating for the Hanbali school of thought, with which he was reputable.⁵¹ Practically, he was an ascetic and devout worshipper. Some of his students, such as Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jaoziyyah (d. 1350), attribute a lot of spiritual exposure and manifestations to him.⁵² Such reports remain the authority of many writers who attempt to affiliate him to Sufism. However, these traits are not the reserve of the Sufis. Asceticism, devotion and manifesting spiritual exposure precede the mention of Sufism in the history of Islam.

In contrast to Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Bannā personally recalls how he was initiated into the Hasafiyah Sufi Order at the age of 14 years.⁵³ His stay in Damanhur, a settlement in Egypt, was highly dominated by mystic engagement, such as visitation to the special saints, sticking to spiritual silence and fasting, listening to admonitions and serious devotion to *Adhkar* (spiritual incantation).⁵⁴ That al-Bannā was once a Sufi devout cannot be disputed but his abandoning the trend for movement activities has assumed a subject of debate among his allies and foes respectively. While the largest numbers of modern Salafi writers staunchly believe al-Bannā died a Sufi, some of his allies such as Qaradawi submit that his movement activities have overshadowed his Sufi orientation.⁵⁵ The above antithetical opinions can be reconciled by submitting that, though al-Bannā was later carried away by the movement he founded, the influence of Sufi methodology in his later engagement could not be glossed over. Hence, he is not shy to declare that his movement is a mixture of Salafi and Sufi orientations.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, 203.

⁵⁰ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 18.

⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah*, 2, 202.

⁵² Shamsuddin Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij as-Sālikīn* [Routes of the Mystics] (Cairo: Maktabat Sunnah, 2013), 1, 119.

⁵³ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 19.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Qaradawi, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, 219.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The aforementioned discourse over how convinced al-Bannā is with the Sufi orientation in his later life receives more corroboration from his submission on the preference of the Sufi approach of moral and spiritual training to other strands of Muslim trends.⁵⁷ This submission was made after al-Bannā had founded his movement. Ibn Taymiyyah's submission is that all the various trends in Islam spread across the mystics, theologians, jurists and philosophers should embrace the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (orthodox) trend, which according to him, is the perfect school of thought in Islam.⁵⁸ It is therefore obvious from this analysis that al-Bannā had more inclination to Sufism than Ibn Taymiyyah.

The approach proffered by Ibn Taymiyyah to the religious heresies of the Sufis is more negative. He wanted the mystics to abandon their chosen and adopted trends for the trend he referred to as *ahl sunna* and *ahl al-ḥadīth*.⁵⁹ He could not see any sign of hope for the possibility of correcting the mistake of the mystics. Al-Bannā, on his side, believed that mysticism could be subjected to an overhaul of modern reform.⁶⁰ He encouraged those who can develop the reformative agenda to brace up so the Muslim umma could have the opportunity to maximise the untapped benefit inherent in this noble Muslim heritage.

All in all, the area of contention between the two scholars is insignificant as the abundant aspect of similarities that exist in their thought over mysticism.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analyses, it is obvious that Al-Bannā shared many things in common with Ibn Taymiyyah. It cannot be disputed that their similarities supersede their dissimilarities. However, from the current enmity between the adherents of Ibn Taymiyyah's school of thought as represented by the modern Salafiyyah, and the followers of Al-Bannā constituting the members of Muslim Brothers, it is obvious the common features of the two scholars are being glossed over.

The research also reveals there is a wide gulf between Ibn Taymiyyah's thought of Sufism and his adherents in contemporary time. As established in this research, Ibn Taymiyyah recognises mysticism and mystics as part and parcel of the Islamic heritage. The only point of meeting between Ibn Taymiyyah and modern Salafīs, as far as the discourse is concerned, is calling for abandoning Sufism for the *ahl al-ḥadīth* trend. The reason for this disparity, despite the heavy reliance on Ibn Taymiyyah's works as a means of legitimising religious stances by the Salafīs, calls for independent research. I, therefore, recommend further investigation into the causes of this disparity.

The research submits that al-Bannā supports the thriving of Sufism in its pristine form and agitates for it being the best means of moral training amid other traditional trends in Islam.

⁵⁷ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 24.

⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu'at al-Fatāwah*, 6, 31.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirat ad-Da'wah*, 22.

This aspect is a major point of contention with Ibn Taymiyyah, who perceived all trends in Islam as personal efforts that should be subjected to the scrutiny of the Qur'ān and *sunna*.

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