

THE INTRICACIES OF THE SALAFIYYAH'S BELIEF ON 'ARSH (THRONE) AS CONTAINED IN THE QUR'ĀN

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Abstract

'Arsh, in relation to Allah, is one of the issues that have been generating diverse views among the scholars of different blocs in Islam. This is because it is mysterious in nature. The Salafiyyah enclave is one of the key actors whenever topics relating to the Being of Allah and His 'Arsh came up for discussion. The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the various submissions of the Salafiyyah scholars on 'Arsh with a view to bringing out the disparities therein and their implications. The exegetical method is adopted for proper and adequate assessments of related issues. The findings of this paper revealed that there is no common ground among the Salafiyyah when it comes to 'Arsh and the Being of Allah and that both constituted parts of *Mutashābihāt* (allegorical issues) that Q.3:7 directed the Muslims to keep off discussions on them. It also revealed that some Salafiyyah scholars are equally guilty of anthropomorphism which they have accused many scholars of other blocs of. The paper therefore concluded that *Tafwīd 'l-Ma'nā wan-Nafyyu 'l-Kayf* (abstinence from explanation and negation of likeness) is what the Salaf and majority of the scholars held onto and advocated, either in relation to 'Arsh or allegorical issues in Islam. It is therefore recommended that the contemporary Muslims should limit themselves to what is stated in both Qur'ān and authentic *Hadīth* with regards to *Mutashābihāt* without giving explanation to their modality or rejection of them.

Keywords: Salafiyyah, 'Arsh, Tafwīd, Mutashābihāt, Modality.

• Introduction

One of the major discourses of the Salafiyyah scholars which slightly distinguishes their belief system from other blocs that make up the Sunni Islam, especially the Ashi'ariyyah and the Shūfiyyah, is the concept of belief in Allah vis-à-vis the 'Arsh (throne). Each of these blocs held, with high sense of tenacity, the beliefs that are somewhat contradictory about the nature of existence of Allah and 'Arsh. This has elicited polemics from the scholars of each of these schools. The Ashi'ariyyah and the Shūfiyyah in their respective submissions seem to be on the same page. This is because both of them opine that Allah is present everywhere and that His existence is not limited to the 'Arsh or the heavens.¹ This is in sharp contradiction to the submissions of the Salafiyyah scholars in whose opinions, Allah is above the seventh heaven and establishes Himself on His throne ('Arsh) but His knowledge is present everywhere.² A cursory glance at these two positions reveals that the former (Salafiyyah) speaks to the transcendence nature of existence of Allah while the latter (Ashi'ariyyah) is related to His immanence.³ This has been the belief that the Salafiyyah scholars have been propagating and they have not only accused those

who held contrary views by declaring them as *Mubtad'īn* (innovators),⁴ they also declared some of them as *Kuffār* (infidels).⁵

This paper is an assessment of the various views of the *Salafiyyah* regarding the 'Arsh of Allah. Appraising issues that are related to Allah and His 'Arsh is imperative considering its intimate connection to Islamic beliefs system and the implications of harbouring wrong beliefs about Allah which is capable of taking one out of the fold of Islam. It will be recalled that the major issues which prompted the transgression of various sects and the subsequent declaration of them as deviants by scholars revolve around their beliefs about Allah. The sects like *Shī'ah*, *Mu'tazilah*, *Khawarij* among others are noted for expressing strange beliefs about Allah and other fundamental issues in Islam. This paper seeks to shed light on this critical aspect in Islamic belief system in order to safeguard contemporary Muslims from falling into the abyss of confusion which can lead to disbelief.

This paper will also examines various issues that bordered on the *Salafiyyah* expositions on *Arsh* in relation to Allah which have accounted for irreconcilable disparities in their submissions. It also juxtaposes some of their views with the principles of anthropomorphism (*Al-Tajsīm*) which has been adjudged by the *Salafiyyah* scholars as constituting *Kufr* (infidelity) and on the basis of which sects like *Jahmiyyah*⁶ among others that engrossed in it were excommunicated.

• **Salafiyyah: A bird's-eye view**

Salafiyyah refers to the body of adherents of the practices of the *Salaf*. The advocates are equally known with different names such as *Ahlu 's-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah*, *Ahlu 'l-Athari*, *Ahlu 'l-Hadīth* among others. The *Salaf* itself refers to the Muslims of the first three generations of Islam, which cover the generation of the Prophet when he was alive and lived with the companions, the generation of the companions when the Prophet was no more alive and the mantle of leadership in directing the affairs of the *Ummah* fell on their shoulders and the generation of the successors to the companions when all of them (companions) had departed the world. This is firmly established in the tradition of the Prophet which states that: "The best of people are those of my generation. Then those that followed them, and those that followed them."⁷ The people of these three generations are known as the *Salaf As-Salaf 's-Sālihūn* (the pious predecessors) and the period is known as the best of all generations that came after it. Those generations that came after the *Salaf* are therefore enjoined to take to them (*Salaf*) as their models in their understanding and practice of Islam. This is to ensure and maintain their righteousness as well as their steadfastness on the right path as established by the Prophet.⁸

Writing on *Salafiyyah*, Al-Damijī stresses the importance of following the footsteps of the early *Salaf*. He submits that the *Salafiyyah*'s sources of inspiration are the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as understood and explained by the scholars of the early generations (*Salaf*).⁹ He explains further that the *Salafiyyūn* show exceptional love and appetite for pristine knowledge and understanding of Islam from the primary sources. They tend to apply pristine Islamic knowledge and comply with the teachings of the Prophet as reported in authentic *ahādīth*. They follow the foot-steps of the Companions because they are convinced that, since they (companions) lived with the Prophet and witnessed the revelation of the *Qur'ān*, they have a clearer and better understanding of the

methodology more than anybody among the Muslims of later generations. They are therefore described by him (Al-Damijī) as the most learned group of Muslims of all generations who guard jealously what was bequeathed to them by the *Salaf*.¹⁰

The *Salafiyyah* is not primarily a *fiqh* group or a *Madhhab*. It is basically a theological movement with distinct *'Aqā'id* (creeds) which are geared towards liberating the Muslims from the shackles of alleged wrong beliefs. It will be recalled that understanding the six articles of faith had posed major challenges to early Muslims and had led to the emergence of different sects. *Salafiyyah* therefore preserves the teachings and doctrines of the *Ahlu 's-Sunnah* and offers distinct form of explanations to them (articles of faith). They are equally noted to have been major exponents on the concepts of *Al-Walā Wal-Barā'* (Loyalty and disavowal), *Takfīr* (declaration of someone as an infidel), and concept of *Bid'ah* (innovation) among others.

Although the history of *Salafiyyah* in the modern time has largely been traced to Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728AH/1328CE), it has its root from the companions of the Prophet, particularly Ibn Abbas, a prominent companion of the Prophet who was noted to have made the pronouncement of *Ahlu 's-Sunnah Wal-Jamā'ah* while interpreting the content of Qur'ān 3:106.¹¹ *Salafiyyah* can as well be traced to Ahmad Ibn Hambali (d.780-855CE/164-241AH) who having preserved the teachings of the early generations of Muslims against various forms of interpolations and interferences, named it *Ahlu 'l-Athari* or *Athariyyah* (the followers of the foot-steps of the early generation).¹²

Salafiyyah therefore metamorphosed from those two nomenclatures and it was first used by Ibn Taymiyyah who, in many places in his *Fatāwā* (legal opinions) was noted to have called and referred to many people as *Salafī* because they fashioned their beliefs and religious activities after those of the first three generations of Muslims.¹³ The use of *Salafī* by Ibn Taymiyyah was based on the reference from the authentic narration of the Prophet, who while instructing his daughter, Fatimah, informed her that he remained the best predecessor to her.¹⁴ This was later amplified by different scholars who came after him (Ibn Taymiyyah), especially his students, disciples and admirers. Prominent among them were Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (d.727AH/1349CE) and Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb (d.1792CE/1207AH). In the recent times, it has become a household name courtesy of activities and efforts of scholars like Shaykh Muhammad Nasirudeen Al-Bānī (d.1999 CE) who adopted the nomenclature as a mechanism to checkmate the growing influence of the *Wahhābiyyah*, the Saudi brand or faction of *Salafiyyah* or *Ahlu-Sunnah Wal-Jamā'ah*.¹⁵

• *'Arsh* in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth

'Arsh is one of the mentioned entities in the Glorious Qur'ān which remains enigmatic in the theological discourse across ages. The Glorious book mentions it (*'Arsh*) in about twenty-eight places (28) places. In most of these places, Qur'ān keeps the readers in suspense as there is no clear expression of the precise nature of *'Arsh* and how it exists. The various references to it (*'Arsh*) in the Qur'ān come under two broad headings. These are *'Arsh* in relation to kings and *'Arsh* in relation to Allah. In the first instance, it is mentioned as a majestic chair which is meant for the royals. This is in respect to the narratives relating to Prophet Yusuf, his father and brothers. The same goes for Queen Balqīs whose royal chair was reported to King Sulaiman as majestic and he looked for means of bringing it under his domain. These narratives, which covered four different

chapters, left one with a clear symbol of what *Al-'Arsh* connotes. In other words, they are the symbol of magnificent and beautiful royal stool.

The second instance from the Qur'ānic passages on *Al-'Arsh* is in respect of Allah. This is shrouded in ambiguity which no intellect has been able to unravel. The first set of Qur'ānic references, in eight (8) chapters and nine (9) verses describe Allah as the owner of the 'Arsh. Two different expressions are employed to convey this. These are *Dhu'l-'Arsh* (owner of the Throne) and *Rabb l-'Arsh* (Lord of the Throne). The two may harbour some element of irrelevancies in their grammatical senses; they hold the same significant similarities as both end up describing Allah as the One who has the power over *Al-'Arsh*.

Other similar references to *Al-'Arsh* in relation to Allah depict His relationship with it. They describe His position with 'Arsh. In about seven places, the Glorious book depicts Allah's "settlement" on the throne. There are also two verses which state that certain angels are carriers of the 'Arsh. In fact, every book that discusses faith in angels always mentions *Hamalatu l-'Arsh* as one of the classifications of angels.* Also, only one verse states that 'Arsh is surrounded by some Angels, while another one reveals that 'Arsh is on water.

As the colophon to *Al-Qur'ān*, the discourse about 'Arsh in the *ahādīth* of the Prophet is geared towards complementing and decoding the Qur'ānic provisions on it. There are those that described 'Arsh as the first creation of Allah.¹⁷ Another one also gives pictorial representation of marvelous nature of 'Arsh. It is described to be bigger than the universe and that the movement of the sun, moon and other planets takes place under it.¹⁸ There is another *Hadīth* that buttresses this by projecting that 'Arsh is on water while some state that it is in the sky.¹⁹ The Prophet is also reported to have said that the 'Arsh of Allah shakes for the death of Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh.²⁰ Also, there are many supplications from the Prophet which contain praises of Allah as the Lord of the 'Arsh.²¹ The Qur'ān states that He *Ar-Rahman* (the Merciful) "rests" comfortably on the throne. The word resting on throne (*Istiwā*) is often controversial among scholars, hence the next subhead.

• Conception of *Istiwā*

The central point of discussions and submissions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars on 'Arsh as contained in the Glorious Qur'ān is *Istiwā* which seems to have harboured the manner or nature of Allah's relationship with 'Arsh. Digesting the real meaning of *Istiwā* has posed challenges to scholars of different schools and different ages. In fact, it is the bone of contention among various scholars who have discussed Allah and His 'Arsh. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah submits that the word *Istiwā* from its ordinary Arabic language usage carries two major meanings one of which is literal while the other one is technical. He illustrated further that each can be taken from the Glorious Qur'ān. He therefore opines that, ordinarily, *Istiwā* means to be firm, equal, balance on something, complete or full among others, as could be deduced from Qur'ān 28:14. It also carries the meaning of direction or to face an entity as it could be deduced from Qur'ān 2:29 and 41:11. It has also been understood to connote "on top", over or rise above²² as could be deduced from Qur'ān 43:13, 11:44 and 48:29.

In its technical sense and according to various submissions of different *Salafiyyah* scholars, *Istiwā* carries five meanings. These include "*Alā*" which ordinarily connotes the mighty nature of the 'Arsh which occupies an elevated or a very high position above

seventh heaven. Nothing is therefore above the 'Arsh. This explains an authentic report of the Prophet as recorded by many compilers, including Imam Al-Bukhārī and Muslim wherein the Prophet directs Muslims to pray to Allah for *Al-Jannatu 'l-Firdaws*. He states that *Firdaws* is the topmost of all creations which has only Arsh above it.²³ This is the submissions of the likes of Mujahid and Imam At-Tabarī among other scholars.²⁴ *Istiwa'*, in the views of Al-Farrau and Al-Muthana, has also been interpreted to mean *Sa'ada* which connotes clamp over or an enthronement.²⁵ This however is a rare view among the scholars. 'Arsh' to some other scholars connotes *Irtifa'* which means to rise over or above. This is the view and submission of the Ibn Abbās, Hassan Al-Basri, al-Baghawi²⁶ and many other scholars. In the views of Al-Kalbī, Abdullah ibn Mubarak, Ibn Qutaybah, As-Shafi'i, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Baz and a host of others, *Istiwa'* connotes *Istiqarr* which means to settle down.²⁷ As-Subkī, Jalaludīn As-Sayūti and Imam Tabaranī in their understanding of *Istiwa'* have submitted that it connotes *Istīlā'* which means authority. They came about this submission that 'Arsh connotes the authority of Allah over the universe.²⁸

From the above submissions, there is an indication that there is no unanimity of opinions among the scholars of *Salafiyyah* and non-*Salafiyyah* enclaves on the meaning of *Istiwa'* bearing in mind that each scholar has a submission that goes a long with his position. It should be pointed out that none of them declared the other as guilty of *bid'ah* (innovation) or as a *Kāfir* (infidel) on the basis of their submissions while explaining *Istiwa'*.

• *Salafiyyah's Perspectives on 'Arsh (Throne)*

Salafiyyah scholars have expressed different views on the theory of Allah's establishment of Himself on the throne. They are of the view that Allah is not present at every place in essence but establishes Himself above the heaven on His throne. The argument is premised on dissecting the provisions of different verses of the Glorious Qur'ān and *ahādīth* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), some of which have been referenced above. The other verses of the Glorious book which they rely on include where the Almighty asked or directed the profession of faith in what is in the heaven (Q.67:16-17), the raising of 'Isā to Himself (Q.4:157) and the Qur'ānic narrations on the ascension (*Isrā' wal-Mīrāj*) of the Prophet (Q.17:1 and 53:1-18) among others.

Also, there are many *ahādīth* of the Prophet which they equally based their submissions on. This includes the *Hadīth* of *Jariyyah* wherein the Prophet asked a slave woman, who was brought to him for her manumission and the Prophet made faith the condition thereof. The question that was put forward to her by the Prophet bordered on the location of Allah and she responded that Allah is in the heaven.²⁹ The *Hadīth* of Zaynab, the wife of the Prophet, who used to boast that Allah wedded her to the Prophet from His 'Arsh³⁰ is another one relevant one. Also, the narration that hints that Allah does come down to the level of first heaven in every last part of night to grant the request of those who would supplicate to Him³¹ is the stand point for the *Salafiyyah* scholars. They argue that each of these narrations suggests that Allah is above the heavens and they are enough to water down arguments that He is present at all places, otherwise there would not be the need for above narrations and the likes.

However, there is a slight difference among the Salafiyyah scholars on the nature of Allah's existence on the throne. Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728 AH/1328CE) and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (d. 751AH/1350CE) are of the view that Allah is sitting on the 'Arsh. In *Majm'u'l-Fatāwā*, Ibn Taymiyyah submits:

فَمَا جَاءَتْ بِهِ الْأَثَارُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنْ لَفْظٍ
الْقُعُودِ وَالْجُلُوسِ " فِي حَقِّ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى كَحَدِيثِ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ
رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَحَدِيثِ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَغَيْرِهِمَا "

And what was reported by the companions from the Prophet, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him that convey sitting in respect to Allah, the most exalted like the report of Ja'far bin Abi-Tālib, may Allah be pleased with him and Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him too and others apart from the two of them.

Ibn Taymiyyah therefore remarked that the question on whether or not Allah is sitting on the throne does and should not arise, or should simply be seen as a settled one. In another place, he explained that some scholars like Isma'īlī and Ibn Al-Jawzī, have rejected the submissions about the sitting of Allah and have refuted that Ḥadīth. He argued that the reports of the two eminent companions above (Ja'far and Umar) are acceptable to the Salafiyyah. Here is the report:

إِنَّ عَرْشَهُ أَوْ كُرْسِيِّهِ وَسِعَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَإِنَّهُ يَجْلِسُ عَلَيْهِ فَمَا يَفْضُلُ
مِنْهُ قَدْرُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَصَابِعٍ ٣٣

Indeed, His throne or chair covers the heavens and the earth and He is sitting on it, leaving the space of four fingers.

Although Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges that this report is contained in the *Tafsīr* of Imam Ṭabarī, it should be mentioned here that the narration has been declared as weak by Al-Bānī.³⁴ The bone of contention of Ibn Taymiyyah on this report is based on the proposition that 'Arsh is bigger than Allah Himself, if a space of four fingers can be left uncovered³⁵ and not His sitting on it. Also, there are further explanations, elsewhere that the space that is left after the sitting of Allah on Arsh is meant for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who will sit beside Allah.³⁶ He (Ibn Taymiyyah) says this is strange and contradicts what is known from the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth and the submissions of the Salaf.³⁷ He therefore submits that what is appropriate is:

فَالرَّبُّ مُسْتَوٍ عَلَيْهِ كَلِّهِ لَا يَفْضُلُ مِنْهُ قَدْرُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَصَابِعٍ ٣٨

The Lord is balanced on it (the throne) occupying the entire space without anything for the four fingers.

Although this does not however refute his (Ibn Taymiyyah) firm faith in Allah's sitting on the throne, the implication thereof is that both Allah and the 'Arsh which is a creation are of the same size. This undoubtedly is another extreme. Strengthening the submission that Allah sits on the Arsh further elsewhere and while defending those who denied the possibility of the angels carrying the 'Arsh of Allah as stated in the Glorious Qur'ān and in the bid to defend his position on Allah's sitting on the 'Arsh, he submitted that Allah can choose to sit on any of His creations even on the wings of the house fly.³⁹

This therefore depicts that the faith of Ibn Taymiyyah on Allah sitting on the throne is undamned.

In another dimension, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah in many of his works left no one in doubt as to Allah sitting on the throne. Explaining Qur'ān 17:79 where Allah mentions the elevation of those who observe night vigil to a praised worthy status, he submits that Allah will sit him (the Prophet) with Himself on the 'Arsh.⁴⁰ Also, in his *Bada'iu 'l-Fawa'id*, he writes:

وجاء حديث بإقعاده ... على العرش أيضا فلا نجحده ٤١

A *Hadīth* has been reported about His sitting on the throne and we never contested it.

Elsewhere, in *Qasīdatu Nūmiyyah*, while alluding to the ascension of the Prophet to the seventh heaven and his proximity with Allah which he describes as close, Ibn Qayyim writes:

حتى يرى المختار حقا قاعدا ... معه على العرش الرفيع الشأن ٤٢

(The proximity is so close that) *Al-Mukhāṭṭar* (Muhammad) sitting with Him on the throne that is high above the universe.

Also, Ibn Qayyim in *As-Sawa'iq* argues that there is nothing in *Istiṭwā'* except the sitting of Allah on the throne.⁴³ Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim led others in their submissions that Allah is sitting on the throne.

The implication of the above submissions of both scholars (Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim) is attributing direction, limitation by place and space to Allah. Ibn Taymiyyah in many places is categorical in his argument on the limitation of Allah by space or to a place and that He is sitting on the throne. He opined further that whoever denies any of those facts about Allah has rejected and contradicted the basic knowledge of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.⁴⁴ This view was expressed by him on *Istiṭwā'* to establish his opposition to the stand of the *Jahmiyyah*, the modern *Mu'tazilah* of his time who attributed body and other human qualities to Allah and the *Ash'ariyyah* who denied some attributes of Allah.⁴⁵ It will be recalled that one of the allegations against Ibn Taymiyyah which led to his imprisonment and his subsequent death was his renditions about the Being of Allah. He held the view that Allah comes down to the first heaven as man descends from a higher place and also that Allah can move from one place to another.⁴⁶ Ibn Qayyim on the other hand was a direct student of Ibn Taymiyyah, hence the similarities in their submissions.

However, there are many other prominent scholars who have subscribed to limitations of Allah, though they rejected the proposition that Allah is sitting on the 'Arsh. These scholars submit in their different works that Allah is limited to a place and that it is His knowledge that covers every place. They include Abdullahi Ibn Mubarak (d.181AH), Ishāq Ibn Rahway (d.238 AH) Abu Ismail Al-Ansari Al-Harawī (d.481 AH) while among the modern scholars, Ibn Bāz, Al-'Uthaymīn, Shaykh Al-Fawzān, Rabi' Ibn Hādī Al-Madkhālī⁴⁷ among others who are known with this view. As to the sitting of Allah on the 'Arsh, they held that He settles on 'Arsh in a manner that befits His Majesty without going into details of it.⁴⁸

There is another bloc of the *Salafiyyah* who held a contrary view while explaining those verses and *ahādith* that are related to the throne and the existence of Allah. Having

[illegible]

Also the scholars of this kind of Sufiyyah are equally different from each other in whose opinion Allah is present everywhere in the sense of immensity. As Sufiyyah have unanimously to the view that Allah exists above the heaven with no explanation of His being and how He exists there. This is purely transcendental and the *Ishtiaqiyah* and the *istihbariyah* based their belief on their explanation and given the likeness to them. This therefore turned them to anthropomorphism. So is the main reason why the two kinds of Sufiyyah scholars advocate for the excommunication and anathematization of the two sects.

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Tafwidh is a concept which suggests the consignation or delegation of a decision to a particular authority or an individual. This can be clearly understood in the statement: *Prophet Allah is nominated in the Glorious Qur'an (40:44) where he states that he leaves his affairs in the hands of Allah.* The proponents of the concept of *Tafwidh* have argued for its legitimacy from the provision of the Glorious Qur'an. They opine that it (*Tafwidh*) is related to allegorical verses and ambiguities that surrounded their understanding. Generally, the verses of Qur'an are broadly divided into two as could be inferred from Qur'an 3:7. It reads:

He is who has set down in this the Book. In it are verses basic or
fundamental of established meaning. They are the foundation of the Book.
Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the
pure thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord and searching for its
hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And
they are so confused that they know not what they say. They know not
the position of the Book.

the whole of it is from our Lord " and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.

From the above, the *Muhkamāt* (clear-cut verses) and the *Mutashābihāt* (allegorical verses) could be identified and Qur'ān enjoins the people of knowledge to abstain from interpreting the allegorical verses, hence the popular statement across the orthodox works of *Tafsir* is "Allah knows His intention on those verses".⁵⁵ They only profess faith in them.

The proper understanding of the concept of *Tafwīd* and what constitutes it has been a point of argument among scholars. Basically, the perspective of the scholars can be divided into two. These are *Tafwīdu 'l-Kayf* (abstinence from modality) and *Tafwīdu 'l-Ma'ānā* (abstinence from meaning).⁵⁶ The former, according to As-Shinqīṭī, is to abstain from giving the modality or likeness to some attributes of Allah. He submits further that this is what is required from every believer. This is imperative for one not to fall into the pit of anthropomorphism. The latter on the other hand is abstinence from giving the explanation or rationalizing them. This therefore connotes that one cannot give the explanation to some attributes of Allah with or without the modality.

There is an argument among the scholars as to which of the two is the position of the *Salaf*. Ibn Hajar, As-Subkī and As-Sayūṭī among others held that *Al-Tafwīd 'l-Ma'ānā* is the position of the *Salaf*⁵⁷ while to the modern *Salafiyyah* scholars like As-Shinqīṭī, *Salaf* subscribed to neither of the two. They only believe and acknowledge the existence of those attributes without explanation or description of what and how they are. He writes:

ولكن الواقع أن بينه وبين مذهب السلف فرقاً بسيطاً جداً.
فالسلف مثلاً يقولون في مثل هذه الصفات: الاستواء معلوم،
وأصحاب التفويض يقولون: الله أعلم به، ولا يؤول ذلك واحد
منهما، ولا ينفيه واحد منهما، ولا يصرح بشرح لفظ من ذلك
واحد منهما، الخلاف فقط في الجواب عنه، فهذا يقول: معلوم،
وهذا يقول: الله أعلم به، فالأمر فيه سهل.⁵⁸

Actually, there exists between them, a difference that is crystal clear. For instance, commenting on the attributes of Allah like (*istiwā'*), *Salaf* held that "*Al-Istiwā' is known*", while the subscribers to *Tafwīd* held that "*Allah knows it best*". Neither of them interprets, denies or explains it. Where the disparity lies is in the choice of words for response. As one group employed "*it is known*" the other one adopted "*Allah knows the best*". So, it is a simple matter.

A probe into the above paragraph shows that both groups stand on the same pedestal when it comes to abstinence from indulging in any form of interpretations of the attributes of Allah and the likes. What stands obscure between them could be understood from the choice of language or expression. That the *Salaf's* attitude is to say "*it is known*" (*Ma'lūmun*) does not carry any difference from the submissions of the *Mufawīdūn* whose response is "*Allah knows*". This is because neither of the two camps can or has denied the knowledge of Allah or that of Man on ^C*Arsh*, though man must restrict himself to what is stated in both the Qur'ān and the authentic reports of the Prophet about it. Also, ^C*Arsh*, is

one of the allegorical issues that the provision of Qur'ān 3:7 describes the attitudes of those who are firmly grounded in knowledge as abstinence from discussion. description of explanation and profession faith in them. In other words, the abstinence of the latter does not connote their ignorance or denial of those allegorical elements but essentially they emphasize the need to consign the meaning and explanation of them to Allah. More so, the *Salaf* equally at the end of their explanations submit that the detail is best known to Allah as it befits His essence.

The proposition as submitted by As-Shinqītī is based on the views of Ibn Bāz and Al-ʿUthaymīn in their respective *Fatāwā* (legal opinions).⁵⁹ Both of them equally base their views on the position of Ibn Taymiyyah who describes *Tafwīd* as the path of the people of innovation.⁶⁰ From the above passage, it is clear that the submission of the scholars like As-Shinqītī is shrouded in ambiguity and confusion and represents the views of minority among the *Salafiyyah* scholars. This is because the view of the *Mufawidūn* with reference to the attributes of Allah is in consonance with the position of the Glorious Qur'ān (Q3:7).

To buttress this further, there are many narrations from different scholars like Imam Abu Hanifa in his *Al-Fiqh 'l-Akbar*,⁶¹ Imam Nawawī in his *Sharḥ Saḥīḥ Muslim* and *Al-Majmūʿ*,⁶² Ibn Al-Jawzī in his *Talbīs Iblīs*,⁶³ Imam Qurṭubī in his *Tafsīr*,⁶⁴ Ibn Hajar in his *Fatihu 'l-Bārī*,⁶⁵ Imam Ad-Dhahabī,⁶⁶ Ibn Kathīr,⁶⁷ Imam Badru 'd-Dīn Al-ʿAyinī⁶⁸ and Imam As-Sayuti in his *Al-Ittiqān*⁶⁹ among others in their various works submit that *Al-Tafwīd* must be observed regarding the attributes of Allah, especially the *Istiḥā*. They are therefore of the view that Allah is on the throne as it befits His majesty and no one knows the exactness of His existence there.

• The Implication of the *Salafiyyah*'s renditions on 'Arsh

A critical examination of the renditions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars above, especially those of the former scholars in whose opinion Allah's settlement on the throne is with limitation, directions and above all He is in sitting posture, shows that it clearly connotes anthropomorphic representation of Allah. It is obvious that the *Salafiyyah* scholars who expressed this view are unconscious of the anthropomorphic implication of it. As-Subkī⁷⁰ in one of his works has compiled a list of questions that will readily come to mind as one reads through the views and submissions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah who opined that Allah is sitting on the 'Arsh. Here are few of them.

Firstly, As-Subkī argues that it is clear from various accounts of the advocates of Allah's sitting on the throne among the *Salafiyyah* scholars that there is neither a direct nor indirect reference from either the Prophet or his companions to establish that fact. He argues further that issues relating to 'Arsh and other major discourses that divided the Muslim were not there during the period of the *Salaf*.⁷¹ Even, the reference to Ibn Abbas and Ibn Masud as cited by Ad-Dashti are⁷² untraceable and are unsubstantiated. Also, the *Ḥadīth* of Umar by Ibn Taymiyyah is declared by Al-Bānī as unfounded. This may not be unconnected to the fact that it was at the tail end of the period of *Salaf* when Islam has gained wider territorial expansion that issues relating to the Being of Allah surfaced especially from different new reverts into the religion of Islam. This became necessary due to the different concepts of God which they brought from their former religion. What is noticed from the various submissions of these scholars who advocated Allah's sitting

posture on the 'Arsh is that inference which is drawn from the various *ahādith* of the Prophet which state that Allah is sitting on the *Kursiy*.⁷³ This is another point of discussion which we shall endeavour to discuss in details.

Secondly, if it is established that Allah is sitting on the throne as submitted by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim among others and throne itself is undoubtedly a creation of Allah, bear in mind that every creature has the beginning, the *Ash'ariyyah* scholars have thrown up a question which bordered on where was Allah sitting before the creation of 'Arsh?⁷⁴ This question is necessitated by an authentic narration of the Prophet as reported by Imam Al-Bukhārī which states that Allah was in existence without anything before He created the 'Arsh.⁷⁵ Also, there is another authentic tradition that equally places 'Arsh as the first creation, there was a time when Allah existed alone before the creation, where was He sitting then?

Thirdly, there are many anthropomorphic implications on the submissions of the *Salafiyyah* scholars. They have clearly qualified and described Allah with human qualities such as limitation by space, direction, and sitting which by implication are capable of ridiculing His befitting status. More so, the Glorious Qur'ān is instructive when it states that nothing resembles or can be compared to Him (Q.112:4 & 42:11). Many of this is glaring from the various references from both the Qur'ān and authentic narrations of the Prophet as cited above. The principle of Islamic beliefs holds that there are league of angels known as *Hamalatu l-'Arsh* who are charged with the responsibility of carrying the throne of Allah. The simple question that will come to mind from the submissions of the pro-sitting *Salafiyyah* scholars' submissions is will Allah be carried by these angels?⁷⁶ This is purely anthropomorphic.

Fourthly, one of the principles on the basis of which many Sufis have been condemned by the *Salafiyyah* is the concept of *Ḥulūl* (incarnation). This technically connotes that Allah dwells inside His creation.⁷⁷ This is a concept that is generally believed by the *Salafiyyah* to have contradicted basic principles of Islamic tenets. The principle of incarnation is automatically at play if one attributes the existence of Allah to any of His creation. Closely related to this in terms of implication is Allah's self-sufficiency. It therefore connotes that Allah is not independent of His creation which is one of the major points that are raised by Imam Shafī'i and Imam Taḥāwī in his *Aqīdat Taḥāwīyyah* while discussing Allah and His 'Arsh.⁷⁸

Fifthly, as it is partly mentioned above, it is not un-doubtful that there is no clear-cut text from either the Qur'ān or Ḥadīth of the Prophet that lend credence to Allah sitting on the throne. The tradition that states the sitting of Allah relates it to *Kursiy* and not 'Arsh. The Ḥadīth reads:

عن عبد الله بن خليفة عن عمر قال: "إذا جلس الرب عزَّ وجلَّ على الكرسي"

On the authority of Abdullah bin Khalifah who reported on the authority of Umar who said: When the Lord, most Exalted sat on the Kursiy (chair)

This tradition is the most widely relied upon by the advocates of Allah's sitting on the throne and it has been declared a weak *Ḥadīth* by Al-Bānī on the basis that Abdullahi Ibn Khalifah is unknown among its reporters.⁸⁰

Also, it should be pointed out that from every indication, there is evidence that both the 'Arsh and *Kursiyy* are not the same. In fact, there is a tradition of the Prophet, quoted

by Ibn Kathir and At-Tabari among others in their respective works which differentiates between the 'Arsh and the Kursiyy by comparing the Kursiyy to a ring that is thrown into a desert.⁸¹ There is still another report that describes the 'Arsh as the foot-stool of Allah⁸² It is pertinent to state that Al-Bānī declared all these tradition weak⁸³ on the basis of which he declined subscription to Allah's sitting on the throne. This however does not invalidate our position on their relevance to our discourse on 'Arsh since the proponent of Allah's sitting on the throne premised their arguments on them. The question that will definitely come to mind is which of the two seats does Allah use and if both, why does He need two chairs? Sixthly, the position of the Glorious Qur'ān is clear on what should be the approach of the scholars to the allegorical verses. It discourages any form of attempt to render explanations to allegories that are contained in the Glorious Qur'ān which *istiva* is one of them. As submitted *inter alia*, this is one of the reasons why many scholars of the earlier time submitted that only Allah knows what He intends with the allegorical verses of the Glorious book.

This can be substantiated further by stating that scholars have divided the attributes of Allah into three. These are *Al-Sifātu 'l-Dhatiyyah* (essential attributes) and *Al-Sifātu 'l-fi'iliyyah* (Attributes of actions).⁸⁴ The first one refers to attributes that are related to the Being of Allah. It is divided into two, which *Al-Khabariyyah* is one of them. This refers to the class of attributes that cannot be comprehended by intellects. The Glorious book just made reference to them without detailed explanations of what they mean. They include hand, eyes, face and *Istiwā*.⁸⁵ Apart from the Glorious Qur'ān that enjoins the faithful to stay clear of giving explanations to them, scholars like As-Shātībī among others are of the view that ambiguous verses cannot be taken as evidence, either in *fiqh* or *aqidah* matters on the basis of which one can be declared as deviant.⁸⁶ This is not unconnected to the fact that the exact meaning of those verses is only known to Allah alone.

Findings

Having examined various issues that are related to 'Arsh and the perspectives of the Salafiyyah scholars on it, it is discovered that there exist irreconcilable disparities within the bloc of the Salafiyyah scholars. The earlier or the classical ones like Ibn Taymiyyah and his foremost student, Ibn Qayyim, are of the view that Allah sits on the throne, though without a reliable evidence. They came about this from their understanding of *Istiwā*. Other Salafiyyah scholars in their numbers counter this and held the view that the modality of His establishment on the throne is unknown.

The Salafiyyah scholars equally differed on the limitation by space and direction. The scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (728 AH) Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (751AH), Ibn Bāz, Al-Uthaymīn, Shaykh Al-Fawzān, and Rabi' Ibn Hādī Al-Madkhalī among others subscribe to the view that Allah has limitations while Ibn Hajar, Ibn Kathīr, Ad-Dhahabī, Al-Qurtabī among others held a contrary view. To them, Allah cannot be limited by space.

It is clear from the various submissions of different scholars on *Tafwīd* which is another central point of discussion that it (*Tafwīd*) is the position of the Salaf and many of the Salafiyyah scholars in both the modern and the classical times. This is because there is evidence for it in the Glorious Qur'ān and many scholars have taken their cue from the Glorious book. The submission of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Bāz and Al-Uthaymīn among others

that *Tafwīd* constitutes innovation therefore cannot hold water. More so, they provide no evidence, either for or against it.

From the historical accounts and base on different references, one of the discourses among the scholars of Islam which has not been taken by scholars with levity is the issue of anthropomorphism. Many have been declared as innovators for holding on to a view about Allah which harbours anthropomorphic concept. The implication of *Salafiyyah's* subscriptions to sitting, direction and limitation by space, while explaining Allah's relationship with 'Arsh' is anthropomorphic. They are therefore guilty of it. The *Salaf* and the classical scholars held that explanation must not be given on them but as Muslims, one is obliged to have faith in them.

• Conclusion

'Arsh, as contained in the Glorious Qur'ān, carries two meanings of which one is known as royal stool, while the other one constitutes part of *Mutashābihāt*. Scholars of different backgrounds have attempted to explain and interpret 'Arsh in relation to Allah. This has engendered polemics of different sorts, even among the *Salafiyyah* scholars. *Istiḥḥā* is the central to understanding Allah's relationship with 'Arsh. It is differently interpreted by different *Salafiyyah* scholars and none of these interpretations connotes the exact or the modality of how Allah relates with 'Arsh. In fact, the submissions of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, which depict Allah as sitting on the Throne, could not gain wide acceptance among the *Salafiyyah* scholars, because they harbour some elements of anthropomorphism. The *Salafiyyah's* house is therefore divided over what constitutes Allah's relationship with 'Arsh. This, exactly, is the implication of dabbling into *Mutashābihāt* which Qur'ān enjoins the Muslims to steer clear of them.

At-Tafwīd is another central discourse that has bearing on 'Istiḥḥā'. It presupposes consignment of the meaning of *Istiḥḥā* to Allah while professing faith in it, without interpretation or description. This is in consonance with the provision of the Glorious Qur'an (Q.3:7) and it represents the views and submissions of various scholars of Islam, like Ibn Hajar, Imam Suyūṭī, As-Subkī and Imam Nawawī among others. This could be drawn from their explanations, especially on the *Mutashābihāt*, which is technically conceptualized as *Tafwīd 'l-Ma'nā wa Nafyu'l-Kayf* (abstinence from explanation and negation of likeness). The objection of some *Salafiyyah* scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Bāz and Al-Uthaymīn to *Tafwīd* lacks substance and there is no significant difference between *At-Tafwīd* and the views they advocated, as examined in this paper. This is because both camps agree that it is only Allah that Has the exact understanding and descriptions of how it befits Him, hence the interpretation or description from other than Him should be avoided and rejected.

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