

Theological Divergence and Political Convergence in Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood

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Abstract: This study explores the theological and political dimensions of two major Islamic revivalist movements: Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood. It begins by situating both within the broader context of colonialism, the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, and the subsequent crisis of modernity in the Muslim world. Methodologically grounded in library-based qualitative research and comparative textual analysis, the study traces the evolution of Salafiyyah from Hadith-centered traditionalism to its revivalist expression in figures such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Parallely, it examines the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood under Hasan al-Banna, focusing on its holistic Islamic vision that integrates theology with education, political activism, and social welfare. Results indicate that while both movements uphold core Sunni beliefs—particularly *Tawhīd* and the rejection of *Bid'ah*—they differ sharply in strategic orientation. Salafiyyah emphasizes theological rigidity and purification, often leading to polemical exclusivism, whereas the Brotherhood employs theology as a platform for unity and pragmatic reform. These contrasting approaches reflect deeper tensions in how modern Muslims negotiate tradition, authority, and modernity. The study concludes by highlighting the contribution of both movements to Islamic revivalism and their enduring impact on contemporary Muslim political and spiritual thought.

Keywords: *Salafiyyah; Muslim Brotherhood; Tawhīd; Revivalism; Political Islam.*

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century marked a critical turning point in the trajectory of the Muslim world, characterized by the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, European colonization of Muslim territories, and the consequent erosion of Islamic authority. In response, various revivalist movements emerged, seeking to reclaim the lost political, moral, and theological stature of Islam. Among the most prominent of these were the Salafiyyah movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, both of which aimed to restore the Islamic order, albeit through distinct

theological and methodological frameworks. This chapter provides the intellectual backdrop for understanding the theological polemics between these two movements, while grounding the discussion in broader revivalist trends and post-colonial Islamic thought.

Additionally, this research acknowledges the complexity of comparing two doctrinally grounded movements. To mitigate interpretive bias, the selection of primary texts, such as Ibn Taymiyyah's 'Majmū'at al-Fatāwā' and Hasan al-Banna's 'Majmū'at Rasā'il'—was guided by their canonical status and historical influence. Their usage in this study ensures that the comparison is not only thematically aligned but also rooted in representative theological articulations.

The emergence of Islamic revivalist movements in the twentieth century was rooted in a dual crisis: the collapse of Islamic political unity and the invasion of Western epistemologies through colonial rule. The loss of the Caliphate—long perceived as the political embodiment of Islamic authority—was accompanied by a profound sense of betrayal and displacement among Muslims worldwide. This triggered widespread intellectual ferment, leading to reformist responses that sought to counter the forces of secularism, nationalism, and cultural Westernization with renewed commitment to Islamic sources (Ali, 2022; Rehman, 2023; Rock-Singer, 2021).

Central to these revivalist efforts was the notion of returning to Islam's origins, through the processes of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform), a conceptual pairing frequently invoked by both the Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood. These efforts emphasized a return to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the only legitimate sources of guidance in personal, theological, and political life (Arikewuyo, 2019; Rock-Singer, 2021; Weismann, 2024). As such, theological reform became both a spiritual imperative and a strategic response to colonial and post-colonial oppression.

At the theological level, both movements promoted a purist understanding of Islam. Yet, while Salafiyyah focused primarily on theological orthodoxy and purification, the Muslim Brotherhood pursued a broader program of Islamization of society and politics, drawing on Islamic theology as a means to address modern governance and civil society. The distinction lies not in the fundamentals of their creed—which largely overlap—but in their prioritization, interpretation, and application of theological doctrines. For Salafis, theology ('Aqīdah) was an end in itself; for the Brotherhood, theology was a tool for communal uplift and political reform (Arikewuyo, 2019).

The broader political motivations of these movements cannot be divorced from their theological visions. Movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafiyyah were united in their opposition to colonialism and secular nationalism. They aspired to decolonize Muslim societies by re-establishing Islamic values in public life and governance. The restoration of the Caliphate, or a similar form of Islamic political unity, became a symbol of both theological and political revival (Al-Janabi, 2020; Gani, 2023). The experience of colonization, particularly the imposition of Western educational systems, legal frameworks, and social norms, compelled Muslim thinkers to reassess the foundations of Islamic civilization in light of modernity (Ali, 2022).

Colonial trauma also provided fertile ground for the development of transnational networks of Islamic reform, as evidenced by movements like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia. These networks shared theological frameworks and anti-imperialist ideologies, fostering solidarity across national boundaries (Gani, 2022). In Indonesia, colonial educational policies inadvertently catalyzed Islamic reform movements like Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam (Persis), which used print media and modern

education to counter colonial influence and promote ethical Islam (Rohmana, 2018). Thus, the reformist trend emerged both as a religious necessity and as a cultural-political response to Western domination.

In this revivalist landscape, Salafiyyah reasserted itself as a call to return to the practices of the Salaf—the Prophet Muhammad’s companions and their successors. The movement emphasized strict adherence to the textual sources of Islam and rejected all forms of innovation (*Bid‘ah*). During the Abbasid period, Salafism developed as a reaction to philosophical trends that integrated Greek thought into Islamic theology. Figures like Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and later Ibn Taymiyyah defended textual literalism’s sanctity while cautiously engaging reason to interpret Islamic doctrine (Arikewuyo, 2019). This tradition was revived in the modern era by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, whose Wahhabi variant of Salafiyyah stressed militant refutation of perceived polytheistic and superstitious practices, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula (Bakrū, 2012).

However, the evolution of Salafiyyah into its current form has led to a variety of expressions, ranging from intellectual conservatism to political quietism and, in some contexts, radical extremism. This fragmentation stems from differing emphases on theological rigidity, political engagement, and textual interpretation (Merone, 2023; Weismann, 2024). While some Salafi groups remain staunchly apolitical, others have developed politicized ideologies that advocate for Islamic governance, albeit still rooted in ‘Aqīdah-centric theology.

In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, positioned itself as a social-political movement that sought to transform Egypt—and eventually the wider Muslim world—through Islamic activism. Al-Banna emphasized that Islam encompasses every aspect of life, including politics, economics, education, and social welfare (al-Bannā, 2011). His vision challenged the marginalization of religion to the private sphere, a hallmark of secular liberalism imported through colonial channels. The Brotherhood’s activities ranged from da‘wah (religious preaching) to political lobbying and humanitarian services, embodying a holistic approach to reform. As such, theology was instrumentalized as its societal agenda’s moral and ideological backbone (Isani et al., 2024).

Importantly, both Salafiyyah and the Brotherhood were animated by a shared sense of crisis: the degradation of Muslim values, erosion of spiritual discipline, and fragmentation of the Ummah. However, they proposed different remedies. The Salafis viewed theological error as the root of the problem, prioritizing purification of creed (especially *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah*) and condemning theological laxity as a form of modern *shirk* (polytheism). In contrast, the Brotherhood sought to build coalitions, prioritize gradualism, and address social injustice through Islamic governance, framing doctrinal issues as secondary to moral and political reform (Yūsuf, 2005).

The theological rift is further deepened by their differing approaches to controversial theological matters, such as intercession (*Tawassul*) and God’s attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*). While Salafis reject *Tawassul* as a form of forbidden innovation, the Brotherhood tends to view it as a juristic matter open to interpretive differences (al-Bannā, 1998; Qarḍāwī, 1999). Similarly, on the issue of anthropomorphic descriptions of God, Salafiyyah maintains a literalist position grounded in early Hadith scholarship. In contrast, following Ash‘arite reasoning, the Brotherhood permits metaphorical interpretation as long as it preserves divine transcendence.

These theological disagreements are not merely academic—they have shaped mutual accusations between the groups, with Salafi scholars sometimes declaring Brotherhood figures outside the fold of Ahl al-Sunnah, while the Brotherhood denounces Salafi rigidity as divisive and reductionist. Such theological polemics have often overshadowed broader reformist

objectives, contributing to intra-Muslim fragmentation (al-Ḥāshidī, 2002; Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, 2003).

Despite these differences, both movements remain central to Islamic revivalism in the modern era. They offer contrasting but complementary paradigms: Salafiyyah appeals to those who seek religious certainty through creed and text, while the Brotherhood resonates with those drawn to Islamic activism, social justice, and political transformation. The current study argues that their theological divergence is less about doctrinal content and more about methodology, emphasis, and application.

This research situates itself within the broader discourse on modern Islamic revivalism by comparing the theological frameworks of Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood. Through this lens, it seeks to evaluate whether their polemical relationship is sustainable or whether a more integrated theological understanding could serve the broader unity of the Ummah. In so doing, it contributes to a nuanced understanding of how Islamic theology functions as both a spiritual and political discourse, particularly in post-colonial Muslim societies.

METHOD

This study employs a library-based qualitative research methodology to conduct a comparative theological analysis of the Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood movements. The approach emphasizes textual, historical, and interpretative analysis, drawing on both classical and contemporary Islamic literature to examine theological frameworks, creedal articulations, and ideological applications (Hasan et al., 2024; Saefullah, 2024).

The primary data sources include foundational texts and writings by key figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, and Ḥasan al-Bannā, along with thematic works on *Tawḥīd*, *Bid‘ah*, and Islamic governance. These are examined alongside secondary literature from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly monographs, and relevant academic dissertations. The textual approach allows the research to explore how Qur’anic verses and Hadith are interpreted through Salafi and Brotherhood paradigms, revealing doctrinal emphases and hermeneutical divergences (Aminrazavi, 2021).

In addition, the study incorporates historical and contextual analysis to situate theological developments within their socio-political environments, particularly the legacy of colonialism and the post-Caliphate vacuum (Arikewuyo, 2019; Ali, 2022; Rock-Singer, 2021). Following the principles of comparative method (*muqāranah*), the study contrasts theological narratives to identify thematic convergences and epistemic tensions between the two movements.

By integrating reason (*‘aql*) and revelation (*naql*), the study maintains objectivity and critical neutrality in evaluating how each movement constructs its doctrinal priorities and mobilizes theology for reform (Hasan et al., 2024). This layered methodological design affirms the rigor of Islamic qualitative theology while bridging the analytical space between traditional orthodoxy and modern revivalist praxis.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Historical Foundations of Salafiyyah

For example, Ibn Taymiyyah in *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* strongly criticizes practices such as saint intercession, which he frames as violations of *tawhīd*. Similarly, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* explicitly links the veneration of graves with *shirk*, a position foundational to Salafi theology.

The historical development of Salafiyyah illustrates a rich and dynamic evolution of Islamic theological thought—from its classical roots in Hadith scholarship to its modern expression as a revivalist movement with significant socio-political influence. This chronological transformation reflects a complex interplay of religious doctrine, philosophical engagement, and political circumstance. The Salafi tradition has been shaped by three prominent figures—Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab—each of whom contributed foundational elements to what is now identified as contemporary Salafism (Nesprava, 2017).

Ahmad ibn Hanbal laid the initial doctrinal groundwork for Salafiyyah by establishing a theological method centered on strict textualism. His unwavering commitment to the Qur’an and Hadith and refusal to concede to speculative theology distinguished him from contemporaneous rationalist movements like the *Mu‘tazilah*. Ibn Hanbal’s theological resistance and refusal to adopt *kalam* methods were seen as acts of spiritual steadfastness, preserving the authenticity of Islamic belief and practice (Agustono, 2023; Nurfalina & Effendi, 2024). This commitment to *naql* (transmitted knowledge) over *‘aql* (rational reasoning) was instrumental in institutionalizing the Hanbali school, which would later serve as the epistemological base for Salafi scholars.

The trajectory of Salafiyyah expanded under Ibn Taymiyyah, who systematized earlier theological concepts and responded directly to philosophical trends and Sufi metaphysics that he perceived as deviant. While maintaining a Hanbali textualist framework, Ibn Taymiyyah introduced a nuanced rationalism that sought to harmonize reason with revelation. He argued that when properly guided, authentic reason would not contradict the scriptural sources. His fierce critiques of speculative theology (*kalam*), Sufism, and Greek philosophical influence positioned him as both a defender of *orthodoxy* and a reformer addressing the theological dilemmas of his era (Ibn-Taymiyyah, 2006; Maevskaya & Aga, 2024; Nasution & Mansur, 2018; Umar & Woodward, 2020). Moreover, his reinterpretation of *jihad* as a comprehensive theological and social duty laid the ideological foundation for future movements to engage politically with theological intent.

In the 18th century, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab radicalized Salafiyyah by emphasizing the purification of Islamic beliefs and practices. Disturbed by what he viewed as widespread heretical innovations, including shrine veneration and Sufi rituals, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab launched a campaign to restore the oneness of God (*tawhīd*) to its original, uncompromising form (Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, 1999). His teachings condemned these practices as *shirk* (polytheism) and legitimized *takfīr* (excommunication) against those who upheld them, a move that expanded the boundaries of theological exclusion. His strategic alliance with the political leadership in Najd led to the institutionalization of Salafism in the Saudi state, allowing his interpretation of Islam to dominate religious institutions and global missionary networks in the modern era (Nurfalina & Effendi, 2024; Umar & Woodward, 2020; Agustono, 2023).

This historical evolution across the three stages—foundational orthodoxy, philosophical reformulation, and political revival—demonstrates that Salafiyyah is not a monolith but a tradition marked by adaptation to its context. While Ahmad ibn Hanbal prioritized the preservation of prophetic traditions, Ibn Taymiyyah applied those principles to the intellectual crises of his time. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab politicized them in response to religious laxity and colonial encroachment.

Core doctrinal elements—such as strict monotheism, rejection of innovation (*bid’ah*), and the primacy of scriptural sources—remained consistent across these stages (Župek & Beránek, 2025). Yet, the emphases and applications shifted based on historical necessity. Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s resistance laid the foundation for scriptural authority; Ibn Taymiyyah’s engagement with philosophical schools preserved theological boundaries; and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s confrontation with social customs led to revivalist activism that fused theology with governance. These transformations reflect theological continuity and methodological dynamism, each scholar integrating theology into their contemporary struggle for Islamic authenticity.

The Salafi movement’s contemporary expression, primarily as it evolved within Saudi Arabia, is often characterized by its doctrinal rigidity and state-backed propagation. However, the intellectual diversity within the movement reveals internal debates over the application of Salafi principles in modern life. Scholars like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, for instance, advocated a rationalized version of Salafiyyah that accommodated *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and modern scientific knowledge—an effort to Islamize modernity rather than reject it outright (Ali, 2022; Rock-Singer, 2021).

Nonetheless, the persistence of literalism and purist theology in certain Salafi circles has attracted criticism for fostering exclusivist interpretations. The extensive reliance on classical texts and suspicion of modern methodologies have led to polemical engagements, especially against fellow Sunnis like the Ash‘arites and Maturidiyyah. This antagonism has polarized theological discourse within the Sunni tradition, reinforcing sectarian boundaries rather than promoting unity (al-Ḥāshidī, 2002; Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, 2003).

As recent scholarship shows, the political ramifications of Salafiyyah vary across contexts. While some Salafi branches pursue quietism and restrict themselves to *da’wah* and education, others have embraced activism and militancy. Radical offshoots, invoking the works of Ibn Taymiyyah selectively, have reinterpreted classical doctrines of *takfīr* and *jihad* to justify violence, as seen in the ideological claims of jihadi Salafists (Mahmoud, 2022; Župek & Beránek, 2025). These developments raise critical questions about the use and abuse of classical theology in contemporary political projects.

Despite these variances, what remains central to Salafiyyah is its claim to theological authenticity based on proximity to the Prophet’s era. By continuously asserting the need to emulate the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (pious predecessors), the movement maintains its appeal among Muslims seeking an unambiguous religious identity amid the complexities of modern life. However, the movement’s continued focus on doctrinal exclusivism, often at the expense of theological inclusivity, has contributed to intra-Muslim fragmentation and hindered broader reformist cooperation.

The historical foundations of Salafiyyah reflect a theologically conservative yet methodologically evolving tradition. From Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s resistance to theological innovation, to Ibn Taymiyyah’s defense of orthodoxy within an intellectualized framework, and finally to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s politicized puritanism, Salafiyyah has traversed a path that situates it as both a guardian of Islamic creed and a contested voice in contemporary

Islamic revivalism. Its endurance and adaptability underscore the power of theology as a spiritual guide and a potent force in shaping Muslim responses to modernity, governance, and identity.

Formation and Mission of the Muslim Brotherhood

The formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 under the leadership of Hasan al-Banna cannot be understood apart from the socio-political upheavals of early 20th-century Egypt (Said, 2019). The movement emerged as a theologically grounded response to the fragmentation of Islamic authority following the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, the entrenchment of British colonial rule, and the accelerating tide of Western secularism. The Brotherhood's founding thus reflects both a historical reaction to modern colonial domination and a theological reassertion of Islam's comprehensiveness in the face of systemic marginalization.

British colonial rule in Egypt, formalized in 1882, had deeply disrupted the fabric of Egyptian society. It created widespread socio-economic inequalities, marginalized traditional Islamic institutions such as Al-Azhar, and introduced secular models of education and governance that were antithetical to Islamic values. The collapse of the Caliphate in 1924 intensified this crisis, leaving Muslims without a unified political authority. For Hasan al-Banna, these developments symbolized not only political defeat but also spiritual and moral decay, as Westernization threatened to erase Islam's role in public life (Blankinship et al., 2024; Khan, 2021). These factors catalyzed the formation of a movement that sought to reclaim Islamic authority and restore moral order through comprehensive reform.

Hasan al-Banna's theological vision framed Islam not merely as a religion of private piety but as a complete system encompassing life's spiritual, social, and political domains. This integrated view directly challenged the secular bifurcation of religion and state, which had become entrenched after colonial reforms (Jung & Zalaf, 2019; Mura, 2012). Influenced by classical Islamic principles and contemporary crises, al-Banna asserted that true Islamic revival required the infusion of Islamic values into all aspects of society, from education and economics to politics and public morality. In this view, the Qur'an and Sunnah were not abstract texts but actionable sources for societal restructuring.

Al-Banna's response to Western secularism was both ideological and practical. He viewed secularism not just as an intellectual problem but as a civilizational threat that had stripped Muslims of their heritage and ethical compass. His movement thus emphasized moral discipline, communal solidarity, and religious education as antidotes to the disintegration of Islamic values. As documented in his *Majmū'at Rasā'il*, he stressed the need to reorient Muslims toward tawḥīd and authentic Sunnah, while simultaneously advocating social activism as a form of devotion (al-Bannā, 1998).

The Brotherhood's founding was deeply embedded in a context of socio-economic distress, wherein many Egyptians—particularly in urban centers—suffered from poverty, marginalization, and disillusionment with both colonial administrators and local elites. In response, al-Banna developed a model that merged Islamic spirituality with community-based activism, organizing charitable programs, educational institutions, and healthcare services that met the tangible needs of the population (Jung & Zalaf, 2019; Munson, 2001). These efforts addressed material deprivation and legitimized Islamic solutions as viable alternatives to Western-imposed systems.

Politically, the Brotherhood's mission extended beyond cultural resistance. It became a politically engaged movement that sought to influence legislation, shape public discourse, and eventually challenge secular nationalist regimes. Al-Banna believed that governance rooted in Islamic values was divinely mandated and necessary for achieving justice and societal well-being. This political ambition was opposed to colonialism and propositional, offering a vision for an Islamic order grounded in sharia and ethical governance (Tahir, 2023).

A key theological cornerstone of al-Banna's vision was the revival of the ummah—the unified Muslim community—which he perceived as fragmented under colonial and nationalist forces. For him, the reconstitution of the ummah required spiritual awakening and institutional transformation. As such, the Brotherhood developed an organizational structure that mirrored this theological intent: a hierarchical yet participatory framework that mobilized scholars, workers, and students alike, cultivating a sense of collective mission rooted in Islamic identity (Wardana et al., 2022).

This vision of Islam as a total system is best understood in contrast with Salafiyyah, which, although similar in creedal orthodoxy, tends to emphasize creedal purification over political engagement. Whereas Salafiyyah often promotes theological rigidity and disengagement from politics (especially in its quietist forms), the Brotherhood insists that Islamic governance is a religious obligation and that engagement with modernity must be navigated, not rejected (Arikewuyo, 2019; Khan, 2021). Al-Banna's approach, therefore, represents a more pragmatic theological method, balancing doctrinal fidelity with contextual responsiveness.

Importantly, al-Banna's anti-colonialism was deeply theological. He portrayed the struggle against imperialism not simply as a nationalistic pursuit but as a form of jihad in its spiritual and political dimensions. The call for independence was merged with the call to revive Islamic law and ethics, making political liberation inseparable from religious reform. This dual framing positioned the Brotherhood as a hybrid movement, both reformist and revolutionary, grounded in Islamic epistemology yet responsive to modern political realities (Lutsenko, 2020).

The Brotherhood's theological flexibility attracted a diverse base—from traditional scholars to youth, conservative families to modern professionals. Its message was compelling because it provided an alternative vision that was at once Islamic, anti-colonial, and socially grounded. Through its ability to reinterpret Islam's foundational texts in light of contemporary challenges, the Brotherhood not only revived interest in Islamic governance but also reframed Islam as a liberating force in both spiritual and political senses (Maram, 2023).

The formation and mission of the Muslim Brotherhood under Hasan al-Banna reflect a deeply contextual theological response to colonialism, moral crisis, and institutional decay. The Brotherhood redefined Islamic revival as a comprehensive program of reform, uniting creed with social action, theology with politics, and piety with resistance. Its enduring influence lies in its capacity to bridge Islamic tradition with modern socio-political demands, making it a cornerstone of modern Islamic revivalism and a theological foil to the more creed-centric Salafiyyah. Through its synthesis of faith, activism, and nationhood, the Brotherhood demonstrated how Islamic theology could serve as a private guide and a public strategy for liberation and reform.

Shared Doctrinal Foundations and Divergent Strategies

Despite the notable theological and strategic differences between Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood, both movements affirm core aspects of mainstream Sunni theology, particularly the centrality of *Tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and the rejection of *Bid'ah* (religious innovation). These shared foundations reflect their collective commitment to reviving the Islamic faith by purifying it from perceived doctrinal and ritual deviations. However, how these principles are applied, prioritized, and contextualized diverges significantly, revealing two distinct paths in the broader Islamic revivalist landscape.

Tawhīd occupies a central position in both Salafi and Brotherhood theology. For Salafiyyah, *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah*—monotheism in worship—is a creedal assertion and a filter for orthodoxy that delineates acceptable and unacceptable forms of Islamic practice. Salafi scholars rigorously oppose practices such as saint veneration, shrine visitation, and any invocation other than to Allah, regarding these as violations of *Tawhīd* and as gateways to *shirk* (polytheism). This position is grounded in the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and further crystallized by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, whose works framed such deviations as existential threats to Islamic purity and community cohesion (Ismail, 2023).

The Muslim Brotherhood also affirms the centrality of *Tawhīd*, but within a broader theological and political framework. For Hasan al-Banna, *Tawhīd* is the foundational concept that unifies Muslims' spiritual, ethical, and political life. His theological outlook, echoed by Sayyid Qutb, emphasized that affirming God's oneness entails acknowledging His sovereignty over all aspects of life, including governance, economy, and education. Thus, *Tawhīd* becomes a call for personal monotheism and establishing an Islamic order that actualizes divine guidance in public institutions (al-Anani, 2019; Lutsenko, 2020). The Brotherhood's formulation of *Tawhīd* was less about exclusion and more about inclusion—mobilizing people across different classes and levels of religiosity to participate in collective reform.

A similar pattern emerges in their shared opposition to *Bid'ah*. Both movements view religious innovation as a significant threat to authentic Islamic identity. Salafiyyah has historically taken a hardline stance, identifying many popular practices, especially those linked to Sufism, as corruptions of the prophetic tradition. Practices such as using amulets, invoking saints, or participating in spiritual rituals outside the *Sunnah* are often placed under reprehensible innovation, necessitating immediate refutation and correction (Arikewuyo, 2019; Ismail, 2023). This is consistent with their creed-centered activism, where doctrinal purity is often prioritized over other social concerns.

While similarly critical of religious innovation, the Brotherhood typically places these concerns within a larger reformist agenda. The movement has condemned what it sees as institutional stagnation and moral laxity among religious authorities and popular piety, especially those shaped by colonial influence or un-Islamic customs. However, rather than making *takfir* (excommunication) a central strategy, the Brotherhood often focuses on education, gradual reform, and social upliftment as tools to guide Muslims away from innovation and back to the original teachings of Islam (al-Anani, 2019; Arikewuyo, 2019).

Their divergent socio-political strategies thus temper the convergence in *Aqīdah* between the two movements. Salafiyyah—especially in its quietist forms—tends to withdraw from political engagement, favoring individual piety and theological clarity over institutional reform. This apolitical stance is informed by the belief that political power can corrupt faith and that societal transformation must originate from creedal purification rather than

legislative change (Shalata, 2016). Even when politically involved, as in some Salafi-jihadi branches, the engagement is usually framed as a defensive obligation to protect Islam from doctrinal and moral threats, not as part of a constructive civic program.

In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood developed as a grassroots political movement committed to transforming society by applying Islamic principles in governance, education, and public morality. Al-Banna's insistence that Islam is a complete system of life, one that includes the state, meant that political engagement became a religious duty. The Brotherhood's leaders and followers viewed state laws and institutions as legitimate arenas for Islamic reform, especially in post-colonial contexts where Western secularism and materialism were perceived as existential threats (al-Anani, 2020; Houston, 2018).

The theological unity in *Tawhīd* and *Bid'ah* thus provides legitimacy for both movements within the Sunni tradition, but their differences in methodology and application produce contrasting outcomes. Salafiyyah uses theology to preserve orthodoxy, whereas the Brotherhood leverages theology to engineer social and political transformation. These approaches influence how each movement interacts with secularism and modernity and how they respond to intra-Muslim differences. For example, while Salafiyyah may label Ash'arite or Maturidi interpretations as dangerous innovations, the Brotherhood often seeks common ground, focusing on shared creeds and deferring complex theological issues for unity (Arikewuyo, 2019).

This divergence is especially apparent in their treatment of ambiguous theological issues. Salafiyyah typically adheres to a literalist hermeneutic, especially regarding divine attributes, viewing any metaphorical interpretation as a slippery slope toward heresy. In contrast, Brotherhood thinkers such as al-Banna often acknowledge multiple valid interpretations, framing these debates as juristic rather than creedal, thus not grounds for division. This stance is informed by the Brotherhood's political pragmatism and desire for Muslim solidarity in the face of external threats (Arikewuyo, 2019).

Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood are united by their affirmation of Sunni orthodoxy, particularly in *Tawhīd* and the rejection of *Bid'ah*. However, they are divided by their prioritization and operationalization of these doctrines. Salafiyyah views creed as the singular axis of revival, often through theological correction and isolation from political mechanisms. The Brotherhood, however, sees creed as one component within a holistic Islamic revival, combining theology with activism to construct an Islamic order responsive to modernity and colonial legacy. These distinctions underscore the complexity of Islamic revivalism in the contemporary era, where shared foundations do not guarantee shared trajectories.

Doctrinal Priorities: *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah* versus Theological Unity

The Salafiyyah movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, though grounded in shared theological principles within the Sunni tradition, differ fundamentally in how they define, prioritize, and implement their religious doctrines, especially concerning the role of theology in social and political life. Central to this divergence is the treatment of *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah* by Salafiyyah and the broader, community-oriented theological approach of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Salafiyyah places *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah*—the affirmation of God's oneness in worship—as the foundation of its religious worldview. The doctrine is not merely theological but is seen as an identity marker that defines the boundaries of correct belief and practice. Any perceived

deviation from this monotheistic principle is considered a breach of religious authenticity. Therefore, Salafiyyah emphasizes the rejection of *bid'ah* (innovation) as necessary to protect *tawhīd*, advocating a return to the pure practices of the *salaf* (early Muslim generations) (Sinani, 2024; Ťupek & Beránek, 2025). Practices such as saint veneration, common in Sufi traditions, are often polemicized as forms of *shirk* (associationism), leading Salafis to adopt a confrontational stance in theological discourse.

This focus on doctrinal purity frequently leads Salafiyyah into exclusivist frameworks, where deviation from its interpretation of *tawhīd* results in theological boundary-marking. Their educational and da'wah agendas prioritize creed over sociopolitical engagement, emphasizing orthodoxy and adherence to early Islamic sources (Sinani, 2024).

In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood frames theology as a tool for spiritual development and social unity. While affirming Sunni orthodoxy, including *tawhīd* and the rejection of *bid'ah*, the Brotherhood does not position these as grounds for sectarian division. Instead, theology is integrated into a larger vision of Islamic revival that includes moral reform, social justice, and political activism (Arikewuyo, 2019). This inclusive and practical orientation seeks to galvanize Muslim unity rather than emphasize internal doctrinal fault lines.

Hasan al-Banna's foundational vision articulated theology as the moral and spiritual compass of the community, guiding individual piety and collective social reform. The Brotherhood avoids polemical debates that could lead to fragmentation, favoring educational and service-oriented initiatives to promote Islamic values (Arikewuyo, 2019). This approach allows the Brotherhood to build broad-based alliances across the Muslim world, functioning effectively as religious and sociopolitical actors.

While Salafiyyah upholds a theologically rigid structure emphasizing personal piety and purification from innovation, the Muslim Brotherhood adopts a dynamic strategy of theological pragmatism. The Brotherhood promotes unity and mobilization by minimizing divisive theological controversies and focusing on shared Islamic principles, particularly in colonial oppression and modern secularism (Arikewuyo, 2019).

Both movements claim legitimacy from foundational Sunni beliefs, particularly *tawhīd* and anti-*bid'ah* sentiment. However, their different emphases—Salafiyyah on theological exclusivity and the Brotherhood on social inclusivity—reveal contrasting visions of how Islamic theology should function in the modern world. This divergence continues to shape their respective roles in contemporary Islamic discourse and activism.

CONCLUSION

This study is limited by its textual focus, which may overlook the diverse and evolving sociopolitical expressions of these movements in different regions. Additionally, the reliance on primary theological texts might not fully capture the internal diversity and dissent within Salafiyyah or the Muslim Brotherhood. This study has examined the theological foundations and socio-political trajectories of Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood as two influential revivalist movements in 20th-century Islamic history. Both are grounded in the shared Sunni doctrines of *Tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and rejection of *Bid'ah* (religious innovation). However, they diverge significantly in how these creedal beliefs are applied within theological, educational, and political frameworks. Salafiyyah prioritizes theological purity and the literal application of foundational Islamic texts, framing *Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyyah* as the litmus test for authentic faith. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood integrates these doctrines within a broader spiritual development and social reform mission, positioning theology as a

vehicle for communal unity and political engagement. By tracing their historical roots—from Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah to Hasan al-Banna—the study reveals how each movement responds to the legacy of colonialism, the collapse of the Caliphate, and modern secular challenges. The comparative analysis also underscores that while both movements claim authenticity within Sunni Islam, they articulate different visions of Islamic revival: Salafiyyah through doctrinal exclusivity and apolitical purification, and the Brotherhood through socio-political activism and inclusive reform. These distinctions contribute to a nuanced understanding of contemporary Islamic thought and demonstrate the plurality of responses within Islam to questions of identity, authority, and modernity.

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