

## **Sunni Scholarly Perspective of Shi'ism**

Islam makes Muslim unity mandatory as Almighty Allāh has said: ﴿This is your nation - a single nation, and I am your Lord so worship me﴾<sup>317</sup>

Therefore for Muslims to distance themselves from one another goes against the commandments of Islam and goes against what the great Sunni scholars have said throughout history. Here are some examples:

### **Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi**

In his book *mizan al-'itidal*, al-Dhahabi said: 'Shi'ism was frequent amongst the generation after the Prophet (tabi'un) and in subsequent generations together with religiosity, piety and truthfulness. Were the traditions narrated by these people (the Shi'a) to be rejected then the whole body of the Prophetic traditions would be lost.'<sup>318</sup>

The great scholar Sharaf al-Din al Musawi in his valuable book *al-muraja'at* mentions the names of one hundred Shi'a men from whom the scholars of traditions and others have obtained their sources.<sup>319</sup>

## **Shaykh Shaltut**

Modern scholars are no different to their predecessors in this regard. Take for example the great former rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo Shaykh Muḥmoud Shaltūt who declared in a edict that: ‘The Ja‘fari school of thought known as Twelve-Imam Shī‘ism is a school of thought legally permissible to act upon similar to the other schools. It is necessary for all Muslims to know this and to cease their unwarranted fanaticism for particular schools of thought.’

### **The Edict in Full**

A question was posed to Shaykh Muḥmoud Shaltūt:

“Certain people believe that it is obligatory for a Muslim, so that his acts of worship and social interactions be correct, to follow one of the four well known schools of thought which do not include the Imami Shī‘ites or the Zaydi Shī‘ites. Do you agree with this opinion and hence forbid following the Twelver Shī‘ite school for example?”

Shaykh Muḥmoud Shaltūt answered:

1. “Islam does not make it obligatory for any of its followers to follow a particular school of thought. Rather we would say that every Muslim has the right to begin to follow any of the schools of thought that have been transmitted correctly and whose laws are recorded in that school’s particular books. Also, any follower of a particular school of thought has the right to change to another whatever that may be and there is no problem for him in this.
2. The Ja‘fari school of thought known as Twelve-Imam Shī‘ism is a school of thought legally permissible to act upon similar to the other schools. It is necessary for all Muslims to know this and to cease their unwarranted fanaticism for particular schools of thought. The religion and law of Allāh is not subject to or limited to a particular school. All [scholars of schools of thought] are considered to have made their efforts to reach their opinions and they are acceptable in the sight of Almighty Allāh. It is permissible for those who are not able to study and come to their own opinion to follow these schools of thought and to act upon what is laid down in their jurisprudence without distinction between acts of worship or social contracts.”

*signature*

Muḥmoud Shaltūt

Many other modern Sunni scholars and leaders have echoed the former rector of al-Azhar’s view.

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<sup>317</sup> See: al-mustadrak of al-Hakim: vol.3, p.149.

<sup>318</sup> The Holy Quran: The Prophets (21): 92

<sup>319</sup> See: *al-murāja'āt* of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsāwī: p.54. For an English translation of this work see the following website: <http://al-islam.org/murajaat/index.htm>

<sup>320</sup> The Holy Qur'ān: The Bee (16): 92