

Modern Atheism: A Reading of the Concept and Means of Confronting Its Spread

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Abstract

This study aims to clarify the concept of atheism and the necessity of confronting it. It also seeks to identify its destructive effects on individuals and societies. The study focuses specifically on the most effective ways to counter the growing influence of atheism within Muslim communities and among individuals with weak faith, amid the significant changes in social media tools and platforms. To conduct this study, the author employed descriptive and analytical methods. The study is structured with an introduction, three sections (chapters) and a conclusion, which presents the most important findings. The study defines the concept of modern atheism and provides a methodological framework for confronting it.

Keywords: modern atheism, concept, confrontation, dangers, means.

Introduction

The meaning and scope of atheism varies widely depending on its application to different ideas and groups of people who support imported ideas promoted by atheists or misguided organisations that disseminate concepts far removed from scientific truth. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of atheism in terms of how it is used, its historical development and related terms, together with their synonyms and implications, so that the concept becomes clearer and its meaning is fixed unambiguously, thereby removing any confusion surrounding this term and how its meaning has developed.

In its commonly circulated descriptions, atheism may be understood as the denial of the existence of a natural creator and lord of the universe. It may also be described as the rejection of the religious beliefs of one's community. In addition, three other intellectual positions are often associated with atheism:

- The position affirming belief in God, but on the basis of rational inference rather than revealed guidance (divine revelation).
- Agnosticism: a position in which its adherents find no decisive proof of the existence or non-existence of God.
- A position that holds the statement 'God exists or does not exist' lacks the logical characteristics that would make it capable of proper verification; thus, it is neither true nor false. Furthermore, this latter claim does not necessarily imply the denial of God's existence

if His existence has been established through inner experience (conscience) or direct sensory observation.

Section One: Conceptual Framework (Entry Point)

1. Atheism in Language

In Arabic, atheism may be understood as either a verbal noun derived from the augmented triliteral verb (أَلْحَدَ—يُلْحِدُ—إِلْحَادًا)¹, or a term originating from the triliteral root (لَحَد). The letters Lam–Ha–Dal designate a name meaning uprightness/straightness².

Al-Raghib (d. 502 AH) states: ‘Alhada so-and-so’ means ‘he turned away from the truth’, and ‘lahada with his tongue to such-and-such’ means ‘he inclined/turned’. The plural forms are alhād and luhud. He also notes, citing al-Kisa’i, that a distinction was made between atheism (الإلحاد) and lahd (اللحد): ‘Al-ilhad is turning away from intention (purpose), whereas in al-lahd it is leaning towards a thing³.’ He further explains that ‘alhada’ can also mean ‘to argue’ or ‘to dispute’, while ‘lahd’ can mean ‘to incline and deviate’.

Similarly, the Qur’anic verse states:

‘The tongue of the one to whom they incline is foreign’ (An-Nahl 16:103).

It has also been said: ‘lahdahu’ means ‘to bury him’, and ‘alhada lahu’ means ‘to make a niche/grave for him’, i.e. to prepare a ‘lahd’.

In addition, it is said: ‘lahadat al-mayit’ (the deceased was placed in a niche) and ‘alhadahtu’ means ‘to place him in the lahd’⁴. The expression ‘lahad as-sha’m an al-hadaf’ means ‘the arrow missed the target’, i.e. it turned away from it. Similarly, it is said: ‘qad alhada fi ad-dīn’⁵ meaning ‘he deviated from it’, i.e. he departed from and inclined away from the religion⁶.

Thus, a person who commits ilahād is someone who attacks or undermines religion and turns away from it. The plural forms are mulhidun and mulahidah⁷, and these are cited as the original basis for the term ‘atheism’. In the phrase (to commit atheism in religion), it means ‘to deviate from the truth’, or to doubt God, so the one who does so is an atheist (mulhid)⁸.

In English and French, the term ‘atheism’ refers to a rejection of religion, as if God does not exist⁹. Accordingly, in Arabic linguistics, atheism essentially means deviation from the norm, inclination away from intention/purpose, or turning away from something. These three meanings form the core around which the word “lahd” revolves in Arabic lexicographic usage.

2. Atheism in Terminology

¹- Jami al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an — al-Tabari, 9/123.

²- (Dictionary of Linguistic Measures/Standards) — Ibn Faris, 5/236.

³- Al-Dhari'a to the Virtues/Excellences of the Divine Law (Makarim al-Shari'a) — al-Asfahani, p. 737.

⁴- Al-Dhari'a to the Virtues/Excellences of the Divine Law (Makarim al-Shari'a) — al-Asfahani, p. 737.

⁵- (The Intermediate Dictionary) — Mustafa Ibrahim al-Zayani, 2/817.

⁶- (The Tongue of the Arabs) — Ibn Manzur, 3/388.

⁷- (The Intermediate Dictionary) — Mustafa Ibrahim al-Zayani, 2/817.

⁸- Dictionary of Transitive Verbs with a Particle/Preposition — Ibn al-Milyani, 1/324.

⁹- Al-Sihah: The Language and Its Sciences, Abd Allah al-Ulaili, 2/435.

In terminology, the term ‘atheism’ (الإلحاد) or the designation ‘atheist’ (الملحد) is used for people who attack or doubt God or religion. In this context, Arabic, along with other languages, includes a number of closely related or synonymous terms, such as deism (time-worship), Manichaeism, materialism, esotericism and heresy/impiety.

Accordingly, atheism has been defined in several ways, including the following:

- ‘Ali b. Talha, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, states: ‘Atheism is denial.’¹⁰ He also said: ‘Atheism is placing speech in a position other than its proper place.’
- Qatada and others are reported to have said: ‘Atheism is disbelief (kufr) and stubbornness.’¹¹
- Al-Harawi defined it as: ‘Atheism is deviation from the path of Islam.’¹²
- Abu Ubayda said: ‘The root of “mulhid” is the one who inclines away from the truth, and atheism is turning aside from intention/purpose.’

In common usage, the term is used to describe someone who deviates from religion, whose doctrine has turned away from all religions¹³. Alternatively, it refers to the ‘unjust deviator from intention/purpose’¹⁴. This is supported by the Qur’anic verse:

“Indeed, those who incline in Our verses do not escape Us.”

(Surat Fussilat 41:40). They transgress and deviate.

It has also been defined as follows: ‘a philosophical doctrine founded on nihilism (nothingness), based on the negation of the existence of God the Most High, the idea that the universe came into being without a creator, and that matter is both the creator and the created.’¹⁵

The operational (practical) definition that I will follow in this study is as follows:

Atheism is defined as the denial of the existence of Allah Most High and the rejection of revelation, along with all that necessarily follows from it, namely belief in the Last Day and everything related to it, or the denial of any one of these three foundational principles.

This definition is used to determine the type of atheism and the most appropriate method for dealing with and refuting the atheist.

Section Two: Types of Atheism and Its Origin

Types of atheism

By reviewing what has been written on atheism, its origin and its development, it can be concluded that there are two types of atheism:

The first type consists of denying the existence of God, asserting the eternity of matter, and considering matter to be the origin of the universe. Consequently, it claims that the universe came into being without a creator. Furthermore, according to the proponents of this thesis, matter is both the creator and the created.

¹⁰- The same reference, 2/435.

¹¹- (The Beginning and the End) — Ibn Kathir, 9/107.

¹²- The same reference, 9/107.

¹³- (The Tongue of the Balance) — Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 12:210.

¹⁴- Al-Kashshaf: The Truths of Revelation and the Eyes of Statements in the Aspects of Interpretation — al-Zamakhshari, 2/593.

¹⁵- Al-Mawsu‘a al-Masira: The Travelling/Enduring Encyclopedia of Religions, Doctrines and Contemporary Groups — Mani ibn Hammad al-Juhani, 2/803.

Second type: This type consists of associating partners with Allah — or denying divine messages (revelations) — and rejecting resurrection, including what it entails in terms of judgment, reward, and punishment. This form of atheism does not necessarily constitute complete disbelief in the creator of the universe¹⁶.

At the same time, the philosophical concept of atheism has been described as follows:

“an integrated religious vision of life, the universe, and existence”. This is because its view of the universe and existence relies on metaphysical¹⁷ evidence that is not supported by logic, reason, argument or proof. Atheism claims that ‘nothingness added to nothingness became something great in the most splendid way’, that ‘fine precision’ (or careful calibration) occurred, and that ‘randomness’ produced life — whereas material reason, in its present arrogance, cannot produce even the simplest form of life. Atheism also argues that all moral values and value foundations that we consider correct — and which move in a direction completely opposite to matter — are not derived from material premises or the products of matter¹⁸.

It is also observed that this group of definitions does not merely restrict atheism to denying the existence of God, but adds further elements. The term ‘atheism’ is also used for: associating with Allah, denying divine revelations, denying resurrection, and denying what the Last Day contains of reward and punishment — even if these atheists do not fall into complete disbelief in the Creator of the universe. In this sense, atheism becomes the functional equivalent of religion: a philosophical doctrine or creed with an integrated vision of life, the universe and existence, and adherents in each area¹⁹.

2. The origin of atheism

There is no doubt that atheism has evolved over time, with each stage having its own characteristics. Atheism, in all its forms, existed in earlier civilisations. For this reason, many writers and philosophers were accused of atheism or heresy. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for researchers to determine the exact origin of atheism due to several factors. Its types may be similar depending on the idea or creed, whereas its causes may differ depending on the place, time period, or environment. Moreover, the concept of atheism is not clear-cut, and its meaning differs between the past and present. Nevertheless, heresy and atheism are long-standing phenomena, existing even before Christianity emerged. The Greeks, for example, accused a number of their philosophers, writers and thinkers of heresy for ‘deviating’ from the principles of the church (i.e. departing from established religious doctrine). Among them was the philosopher Socrates, who was sentenced to death by drinking poison in 399 BCE. Similarly, the sculptor Pheidias/Phidias (c. 500 BCE) and the playwright Euripides (c. 406 BCE) were accused of heresy and punished for it.

One of the earliest recorded movements of atheism in India may have appeared around 1000 BCE, when the first signs of doubt emerged in the Rigveda, one of the four ancient religious texts of Hinduism. Then, around five centuries BCE after the emergence of Buddhism, Buddha (c. 483–563

¹⁶- Religious Heresy/Atheism in Muslim Societies — Sabir Abd al-Rahman Tuayma, p. 11.

¹⁷- The Philosophical Dictionary, Arabic Language Academy (Cairo), pp. 197–198.

¹⁸- Return to Faith — Haytham Talat, p. 19.

¹⁹- Creeds of Atheism: Its Causes, Results and Effects/Traces — Ali al-Harbi, pp. 9–11.

BCE) attempted to redirect thought towards concentration on deities²⁰. However, atheism is a phenomenon with deep roots in all civilisations, evolving alongside societal development. Essentially, it is the outcome of a crisis in the spiritual state of the self when religious resources have been exhausted and the self can no longer believe.

Therefore, discussing atheism — its origin, development and transformation — is closely linked to environment, history and the stages through which each nation has passed. It is the result of a conflict between the self and the changing realities of life, and the many questions concerning existence that arise from this.

3. The Concept of “Modern/Neo-Atheism” and Its Emergence in Islamic Countries

First: The Concept of Modern/Neo-Atheism

After discussing the origin and development of atheism, we now turn to its contemporary/new concept.

The term ‘atheism’ is one that has undergone significant development, especially in the field of creed/theological research. It has come to be associated with a specific doctrinal condition whose core is the denial of the existence of the Creator. As a result, its meaning differs today from how it was understood in the past, due to multiple developments and causes, as well as changes in the scope of social activity, influence and impact. Some argue that the events of 11 September 2001 were the catalyst for the emergence of atheism in a new form, presented as an alternative to religious ideas. The repercussions of these events were used to demonstrate the supposed negative effects of religion on life and society.

Additionally, the terms “modern” or “neo-atheism” have been adopted to describe the widespread phenomenon in both Western and Arab societies today. It is characterised by new ideas, methods, approaches and promotional means with the purpose of openly rejecting religion and religious commitment and all religions, especially Islam. Several scholars and researchers have defined ‘neo-atheism’, including the following definition:

Amr Sharif defined modern atheism as:

“a concept applied to the ideas proposed by a group of atheist writers”. These ideas are based on the view that it is not enough to coexist with atheism and religion; rather, it is necessary to attack divinity and religious concepts, criticise them, and subject them to scientific and objective analysis.” To this end, this movement adopted a natural-material interpretation of all phenomena, from the universe to human spiritual feelings.²¹”

Abdullah al-Shahri defines it as follows: ‘a Juhaila creed based on the assumption that God does not exist. In essence, it is a mental model constructed from conscious and unconscious assumptions about life, the universe and existence.’²²

In contrast, al-Ajri considers ‘new atheism’ to be: ‘the philosophical doctrine founded on nihilism, the core of which is the denial of the existence of God Almighty’²³. However, what we see today is

²⁰- The History of Atheism in Islam — Jurjis Salim Baqqa ‘in, Issue 1327.

²¹- The Myth of Atheism — Amru Sharif, p. 393.

²²- 'Details of the New Atheistic Case/Condition' — al-Shahry, p. 28.

²³- 'Atheist Militias' — Abd Allah al-Ujairi, p. 22.

that ‘new atheism’ is a movement that rejects or denies belief in God. It is characterised by an aggressive approach to presenting atheistic ideas and open attacks on religion. Moreover, its proponents do not merely practise personal atheism; they openly proclaim it and call on others to adopt atheism. This means that their goal goes beyond merely expressing an opinion in an attempt to influence others’ beliefs.

Accordingly, ‘new and contemporary atheism’ is a term coined by secular journalist Gary Wolf to describe the positions adopted by twenty-first-century atheists and to express a wave of intellectual denial of all religious beliefs, ranging from belief in God and the messages of the prophets to the behavioural implications thereof. This movement relies on modern science to present its arguments, moving away from philosophical schools and ideologies characterised by distinctive figures, educational methods and the use of modern technology. Motivated by hostility towards religion in general and Islam in particular, the above definition has the following features:

1. Clarifying the origin and timing of the term, it is important to note that this new wave of atheism has leaders who represent its ideas and objectives. It expresses a set of doctrinal deviations that deny the existence of God and are characterised by hostility and aggressiveness. Furthermore, scientism and natural science form the basis of its thinking and interpretation of phenomena, and it uses modern technology and social media to disseminate and advocate atheism.
2. Explaining how the concepts of new atheism are presented: new atheism uses simple, accessible language in its discourse. By contrast, ‘old atheism’ was grounded in philosophical and theoretical dimensions and was largely linked to academic work associated with elites. It was supported by scholars, thinkers and intellectuals. In contrast, New Atheism has become associated with popular culture due to its symbols, which have a notable presence in the media. These symbols have attracted large numbers of followers, admirers and people who are convinced by their ideas. They have also attracted those who post their images, request their autographs and display intense partisanship towards their views, sometimes bordering on aggressiveness and even violence. This is all in the name of defending atheism as a noble idea and combatting piety in all its forms, while some zealous admirers display extremist behaviours towards believers in God²⁴.

Secondly, the emergence of atheism in Islamic countries:

The spread of atheistic movements and ideas among Muslims, both at present and in earlier periods, began after the fall of the Islamic Caliphate, particularly during the early Abbasid era. During this period, however, they were referred to as ‘zindiqs’ (heretics). Following the end of the Umayyad era and the beginning of the Abbasid era, Muslim societies were subjected to waves of conflict and interaction with foreign forces hostile to Islam and its followers. This interaction culminated in the Crusader wars that struck the Islamic world and enabled certain aspects of the ‘threefold stratagem of deception’ (missionising, orientalism and colonialism) to disseminate atheistic ideas among Muslims. In some periods, this occurred through collaboration with these forces, while in others it was planned by them and elements were mobilised to disseminate atheism²⁵.

²⁴- One should examine the following issues: ‘Da‘wa and Education for Modern Atheism and the Role of Islamic Education in Confronting It’ — Jiana Muhammad Ali Mukhatara, pp. 562–563.

²⁵- The Three Wings of Deception and Their Feathers/Plumage — Abd al-Rahman Hanbaki al-Maydani, p. 434.

During the final years of the caliphate of ‘al-Mahdi’ and the short-lived caliphate of ‘al-Hadi’ (163–170 AH), a type of zindiq (heretical) ideas emerged. Al-Mahdi would arrest zindiqs on suspicion alone, try them before a judge and demand that they renounce zindiq heresy. Similarly to Europe’s Renaissance, the Arabian Peninsula also experienced a period of cultural and intellectual growth known as the ‘Golden Age’, beginning with the Umayyad period and continuing through the Abbasid era up to the Ottoman era.

Third Section: Methods for Confronting Contemporary Atheism

This section outlines the most effective methods to foster resilience and resistance against the prevalent tide of contemporary atheism and its harmful influences. This can be achieved through educational and preventive measures, as well as effective therapeutic approaches.

First: intellectual and doctrinal fortification

Islam provides a comprehensive vision of life, encompassing its systems, laws and relationships. In parallel, it established theoretical foundations and practical methods for dealing with any deviation from these systems, whether deliberate or unintentional. Therefore, anyone studying the methodology of the Noble Qur’an and the honourable Prophetic Sunnah will observe numerous preventive and therapeutic approaches targeting psychological, social, political, cultural, economic and other issues.

This is achieved either by presenting the ideal state of conduct to be followed or by identifying deviations from this ideal and offering solutions. Islam’s understanding of prevention is to safeguard individuals from committing prohibitions and sliding towards atheistic thought. To this end, it employs various means, such as rational and psychological persuasion, intimidation or attraction, and presenting human role models to follow or learn from. Legislation and deterrence are also used.

Islam does not limit itself to theory or generalities. Rather, it accompanies the actions of individuals and communities throughout their journeys, employing varied approaches in their dealings with themselves and with one another. Accordingly, some preventive measures for dealing with new atheism can be identified, such as forming a fully integrated Muslim personality, emphasising identity, structuring intellectual and behavioural frameworks at the individual and societal levels, and fostering positive social conduct. These matters have been presented in many branches, according to their importance and comprehensiveness.

Second: the centrality of revelation and Islam’s reference

Islam is concerned with shaping the Muslim in terms of doctrine, intellect and behaviour, and it has provided a clear curriculum for this purpose. Allah Most High says: “Say: Indeed, my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds” [Al-An‘am: 162]. Islam has also established a clear framework for a system of thought and conduct for individuals and societies, based on the ultimate goal of worship. Allah Most High says: ‘And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.’ [Adh-Dhariyat: 56].

Today, it is noticeable that instability of thought is accompanied by negativity of conduct. Thus, a backward society is not necessarily characterised by a lack of material resources, but rather by a lack of ideas. This is particularly evident in the way it uses the available resources, which vary in

effectiveness, and in its inability to create other resources. This is especially clear in the way it presents its problems, or fails to present them at all.²⁶

The blind, unexamined imitation of matters has a profound effect on bringing about stagnation in contemporary Muslim societies: it stifles intellectual and creative productivity, resulting in the nation's civilisational decline. It has also caused them to drift with the current of events, generating many human and social problems. 'Imitation and copying, whether of inherited tradition alone or of imported external influences, are the burial grounds of effectiveness and creativity because they paralyse people's faculties. Conversely, a sense of distinctiveness and a belief in uniqueness are the forces that unleash human beings' capacities for effectiveness and creativity.²⁷'

Therefore, Islam aimed to ensure that individuals and society as a whole attained excellence in thought and conduct. Accordingly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) took a firm stance against this matter, intended as a warning. When he saw one of the Companions reading a page from the Torah, he said: 'If Moses were alive among you, he would have no option but to follow me.'²⁸ This shows that Islam's teachings are based on balance and moderation of thought, which necessarily translates into action.

It is also important to note that the excellence Islam calls for does not imply insularity or retreating into oneself. Rather, the intended excellence lies in the distinctiveness of the Muslim's creed, thought and conduct, and in inviting others to do likewise. Conversely, it entails not participating in or adopting the ideas or behaviours of others. This is supported by the Prophet's (peace be upon him) statement: 'Do not affirm the People of the Book and do not deny them; say, "We believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us and to you"'.²⁹

The process of blending different beliefs and ideas can lead to a distortion of an individual's thinking, which in turn can result in distorted behaviour. This can happen through rigidity and extremism, or through moral and spiritual dissolution, which involves departing from the binding links of creed and value-laden principles.

When the intellectual framework is thrown into disorder, conduct likewise becomes disordered. Nursi pointed to this, stating: 'This divergence of ideas has shaken the very foundation of Islamic ethics, fractured the unity of the Ummah, and set us back from the ranks of civilisation.' This is because one of you declares the other to be an infidel and wrongs them, while the other considers the first to be ignorant and untrustworthy. " Thus, excess and deficiency prevail. The remedy for this ailment lies in reconciliation, which stems from unifying ideas and linking relationships — connecting them until one reaches the point of moderation, at which everyone will extend greetings and make peace.³⁰

Third: adherence to moderation and avoidance of extremism.

From a pedagogical perspective, providing an intellectual and behavioural framework for individuals and society as a whole is an effective way of confronting extremism. This can be achieved by basing

²⁶- The Problem of Ideas in the Islamic World, Malik ibn Nabi, p. 36.

²⁷- Intellectual Creativity and Civilizational Specificity, Amara Mohamed, p. 69.

²⁸- Musnad Imam Ahmad, 23/349.

²⁹- Commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, Ibn Battal, 9/111.

³⁰- Words, Said Nursi, p. 473.

Islamic education on Islamic morals and manners through its practical activities. This approach fosters behavioural balance, strengthens the individual's connection to society and shapes conduct positively, moving it away from extremism, violence and negative attitudes towards work.

Furthermore, the balanced nature of Islamic education distances Muslims from extremism in their worldview and thought processes, protecting them from rigidity and fanaticism.

This is because the Western view of life has led to a focus on the material over the spiritual, emphasising the satisfaction of worldly needs while neglecting the Hereafter. This has led to feelings of purposelessness and a lack of attachment to communal life, causing people to adopt extremist views and behaviours. Consequently, Islam sought to strike a balance between this world and the next, rejecting the surrender of Islamic civilisation to material excess. At the same time, it rejected monasticism and withdrawal for the sake of worship. Instead, Islam established the Hereafter upon this world, asserting that rectitude and prosperity in this world are the path to rectitude and the establishment of religion. Islam even treats the fulfilment of its followers' material needs and ensuring their safety and security in life as a legitimate basis for worshipping Allah.

As Allah the Exalted says in the Quran: "For the security and familiarity of the Quraysh, who are familiar with the winter and summer journeys, let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them and saved them from hunger and fear" (Quraysh 106:1–4).

Fourth: Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong

The obligation to enjoin good and forbid wrongdoing is one of the fundamental rites that uphold the establishment of society in Islam. It is an essential pillar for achieving intellectual and social security, and works towards reforming society and correcting deviations. This religious duty encompasses reform, guidance, admonition, prohibition and related matters. Allah the Exalted says:

'Let there arise out of you a group inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Indeed, they are the successful ones' (Qur'an 3:104). (Qur'an 3:104).

Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) has established the practice of enjoining good and forbidding wrong as a measure of the excellence of the Islamic Ummah and the soundness of Muslim society. He says: 'You are the best nation ever brought forth for mankind: you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah.' If only the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are disobedient.' (Qur'an 3:110).

The Qur'an also suggests that neglecting this obligation contributes to the corruption of society, exposing grave social issues, spreading vice and sin, and causing the social system to deteriorate. Allah says:

'Those among the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by the tongues of David and Jesus, son of Mary. This was because they disobeyed and persisted in transgression. They did not prevent one another from the wrongdoing they committed. How evil was that which they used to do!'

Fifth: Ensuring the Creation of Solutions to Social Problems

Islamic law pays special attention to the family, considering it the core and foundation of society, and a sound building block upon which it is constructed, through its comprehensive creed. It also emphasises worship, which strengthens the individual's relationship with Allah and qualifies them for a sound social life. Furthermore, Islam encourages noble character, the improvement of ideas, the

purification of the self, the correction of individuals' behaviour, and the regulation of relationships by establishing constraints that govern society's life in general.

However, no human society is free from problems, disputes and conflicts, which often arise due to deviation and flawed guiding principles within it. Consequently, social problems originate in thought, which forms the basis of behaviour. Thus, the relationship between thought and conduct depends on whether thought is sound or corrupt.

As Majd al-Kilani states: 'The health of societies and their illness depend on the soundness or corruption of thought.'³¹ Allah says: 'For each person, there are successive angels before them and behind them, guarding them by the command of Allah. Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves. And when Allah intends badness for a people, there is no repelling it, nor will they find any protector besides Him.' (Qur'an 13:11).

Accordingly, social problems produce many negative phenomena at both the individual and societal levels, the most prominent of which are deviation and extremism. Therefore, resolving them is a means of reducing their severity.

This therapeutic approach, from a pedagogical perspective, helps to solve a significant part of the problem. Poverty, unemployment, moral deviation and intellectual extremism are among the social problems that have a profound effect on the development of deviant ideas and, consequently, real-world practices that lead to criminality. Therefore, addressing these issues from an Islamic perspective is a way to contain this phenomenon, define its objectives, and ultimately bring it to an end.

The phenomenon of 'new atheism' began to spread in Islamic countries, undermining family cohesion within Muslim families and also affecting some young people. As it is a problem of ideas with behavioural consequences, it is necessary to work on several dimensions, including the intellectual, cultural, educational, family and societal dimensions. From this standpoint, the following issues must be taken into account:

- Pay attention to the media and its official channels in highlighting righteous role models characterised by knowledge and practice, and in limiting the media influence of atheists and their promoters.
- Overseeing publishing houses and libraries to ensure that atheistic novels and ideological and philosophical books that conflict with the fixed principles of Islam and disseminate atheism and its doubts with apparent openness and ease are not published. It is the duty of Islamic governments to preserve Islam and counter anything that undermines certainty, values and constants.
- Establish legal controls and regulatory systems to govern cultural cafés where young people gather, to prevent the promotion of atheistic culture.
- Blocking websites supported by prominent atheists which claim to champion victims while disseminating atheistic ideas.
- Conducting certain activities within educational institutions, such as schools, institutes and universities, to confront the wave of atheism. This requires the involvement of university

³¹- Thus Arose the Generation of Salah eddine, Majid Arsan al-Kilani, p. 247.

professors and teachers, enabling them to participate in the fortification of future generations' intellects and doctrine.

- Strengthening young people's confidence in themselves and in their religion, so that they are not deceived by the allure of Western civilisation and do not become an easy target for atheism and its propagators.
- Ensuring that families raise the new generation upon faith, goodness and guidance, and warn them against disbelief, sinful conduct and disobedience, taking the real responsibility assigned to parents. They must understand that today's struggle is one of ideas and doubts, and that it can only be confronted through behavioural and intellectual fortification.
- Emphasising the role of preachers, scholars and religious teachers in confronting the early signs of atheism that are becoming more prevalent. This includes delivering lectures, lessons and forums, and distributing books and articles that refute atheistic ideas by addressing doubts, eliminating myths and exposing conspiracies against Islam and Muslims, particularly those that aim to cast doubt on Islam's fixed principles, the authority of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah.
- Connecting with young people who carry the seeds of this ideology and guiding them towards the truth while responding to every doubt they encounter. Scholars are best placed to respond and should fulfil their obligation to spread this knowledge as widely as possible through modern means and open the doors of their gatherings to young people.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we found the following:

- Atheists are a group of people who deny the existence of God. They challenge societies that affirm faith, whether those societies are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or adhere to any other religion. In its fundamentals, atheism rests on the non-existence of God, the denial of Paradise as a reward, and the Fire as a punishment, to guide the lives of believers.
- Atheism in Islamic — and particularly Arab — civilisation has generally focused on belief in prophethood and the prophets. Some of its proponents have rejected the concept of divinity, whereas atheism in other civilisations has tended to focus directly on divinity. However, there is no real difference, as both forms of atheism negate religion: by denying 'God' in Greek culture, religion disappears; by denying the infinite in Western culture, religion disappears; and by denying prophethood and the prophets in Arab culture, religion likewise vanishes.
- What atheism advances is the dissemination of atheistic ideas through broadcasting ideas that weaken religious feeling and religious creed and stripping religious people of trust in every Islamic region. Moreover, they use religion to destroy religion itself. Their revolution is built on demolishing everything old and every beneficial sacred inheritance, so they attach all the faults of religious people to religion itself.
- Atheists promote atheism with all available material, intellectual, and moral means. Some, under the guise of Islam, fight it by undermining spiritual religious values, fostering doubt and deviation, and distracting the masses with slogans of contemporary destructive

ideologies—such as socialist atheistic secularism. This is what atheists, and those who have adopted atheism, are doing.

- The most prominent features of 'new atheism' include the hostility of its contemporary atheistic discourse, its extreme focus on natural and experimental sciences, its broad financial support and wide media dissemination, and its aggressive attacks on Islam. In addition, 'new atheism' attracts ordinary people, in contrast to 'old atheism', which was more elitist.
- One of the most important differences between old and new atheism is that classical atheism emerged from a philosophical worldview, such as Marxism or existentialism. In this context, atheism was one of the final outcomes of that worldview. By contrast, new atheism is atheism for the sake of atheism; it begins and ends with atheism. It is not a clear philosophical position and sometimes even adopts an anti-philosophical stance because its aim is to eliminate all forms of religiosity rather than place religion within a worldview. This has caused confusion over how to respond to atheists because most previous responses relied on philosophical debate, which is largely absent from new atheism. Consequently, the tradition of responses to atheism has become less effective. Observing Arab atheists reveals that their motivation is worldly life and its pleasures, as well as escaping the Shari'ah under the guise of 'freedom'. Consequently, they become enslaved to their desires and whims.
- Among the means of new atheism in preaching and education are authorship and writing, active scientific and social initiatives through satellite channels and electronic websites, and the creation of blogs and platforms that allow young people to voice their doubts and have them addressed.
- Those who respond to new and contemporary atheism should avoid emotional and spiritual retorts. Instead, they should equip themselves with contemporary scientific methodologies, modern techniques of argumentation and the art of debate. They should combine Islamic sciences with modern disciplines that benefit humanity and advance knowledge, such as sociology and anthropology.

Finally, I would say that confronting the spread of atheism is a shared responsibility — individuals, governments, scholars, preachers and officials must all play their part.

Praise be to Allah alone, and prayers and peace be upon the final prophet. It is Allah who makes His religion manifest, even when the disbelievers show hostility. Allah the Exalted says: 'Then Musa said, "If you disbelieve, you and all who are on the earth, then indeed Allah is Free of need and Praiseworthy."' (Qur'an 14:8).

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