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The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi

Hamza Yusuf



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In an age of bewildering spiritual and intellectual confusion, creed has never been more important. Every Muslim is obliged to learn it and is promised protection from deviant beliefs by following the unassailable texts of the scholastic community of Islam. Of them all, The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi is the simplest, the most effective, and the least controversial. It serves as a sound basis for Islamic faith and is the most reliable of the early articulations of Muslim belief. Because Imam al-Tahawi avoided involuted theological issues and systematically presented the most fundamental aspects of dogmatic theology, his creed has achieved an unusual degree of acceptance in the Muslim milieu. In the thousand years since it was written, many great Muslim scholars have penned commentaries on it. It is still studied throughout the Muslim world and increasingly in the West. Born in Taha in Upper Egypt in 239 AH/853 CE, Imam Abu Ja far al-Tahawi lived until 321/933. He came from a family where intellectualism and aristocracy, as well as piety and passion were the hallmarks. He mastered both the primary sources of Islam and the ancillary sciences necessary for independent reasoning. A first-rate jurist, a brilliant grammarian and philologist, and an erudite man of letters, Imam al-Tahawi is best known for his eponymous creed. Imam al-Tahawi is called al-Azdi, in reference to the Yemeni clan known as Azd al-Hajar; thus he was a descendent of a people about whom the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, Faith is Yemeni. It is altogether fitting that the man who penned such a unifying creed, free of controversy, descended from the land of which faith itself is a descendant. His creed is a beacon of certainty in the darkness of doubt and ambiguity, and it provides seekers of knowledge with a luminous set of simple yet sound creedal statements.

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