The Commander of the Believers, our liege-lord 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was careful to prevent the dissemination of unverified knowledge — chainless knowledge — that was to proliferate after his time. He said: "Whoever finds a book containing knowledge that he did not hear from a person of learning, let him dip it in water until its ink is diluted." This hyperbolic ruling stresses the rigorous normative method in the conveyance of knowledge in Islam — encapsulated in Ibn al-Mubarak's axiom on isnād — and underlines, in passing, that such conveyance is personal and both oral and written because the pedigrees of books are their unbroken chains of transmission back to their authors.

Western-Minded Anti-Traditionists and Purists

In complete contrast, today, many purportedly educated Muslims — both purists and anti-traditionists — revere bookish knowledge and non-Muslim institutions of learning over and even at the exclusion of Islamic ones. They accredit Western titles and disciplines above the Islamic offices of learning and mashyakhhas. They speak, write, read, study, teach, debate after the fashion of non-Muslims just as they may also eat, dress, marry, divorce, and die as Westerners, without a second thought other than implicit or expressed hostility at the heritage of the forerunners in the Religion of Truth (although purists have managed to trumpet the art of lip service to "The Salaf" into a full-fledged ideology). Their approach to learning in our time is to orphan themselves of the principles of the learned Muslims of previous generations — their spiritual fore-parents as Imam al-Nawawi defined one's Muslim teachers in al-Taqrib wal-Taysir ilā Sunan al-Bashir al-Nadhr. They still have isnād — not so much to the people of the Prophetic Way and the Muslim Congregation as to the culture of the non-Muslim world and the ideas of "progressive" journalists, activists, news analysts, social scientists, and, at the other end of the spectrum, Marxist-Leninists and anarchists born-again as purists. Such are the manufactured imāms that have infiltrated the ranks of Muslim leadership and pose as the very Ulema they and their followers desert and belie. The Seal and Last of all Prophets said:"

"There will be, towards the end of time, Anti-Christians and arch-liars who shall say to you what neither you nor your foreparents ever heard before. Beware of them and keep away from them! Do not allow them to lead you astray nor sow discord among you."

A commentator of Mishkât al-Musâbîh said: "The Prophet meant those that will say to the people, 'We are scholars and shaykhs and are calling you to the Religion' whereas, in fact, they are liars and deceivers." In another hadith, Hudhayfah asked about the trials of the ends of time:

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1 Narrated by al-Khaṭṭāb in al-Kifāya (p. 352) and al-Sakhawī in Fath al-Mughith (2:153).
2 Qur’ān-only," feminists, Mawdūdists, and other "downgraded" neo-Mu‘tazilites such as the Californian Khalid Abū al-Fadl and, at opposite extremes, the Qurbian Hezb al-Tahrîr, Muhājirūn, Ikhwān, and other Islamists. They are all one in their modernist re-formism and fluid reinterpretations of the Qur’ān and Sunna.
3 Narrated from Abū Hurayra by Muslim and Ahmad.
“I said, ‘Is there, after this good, any evil, O Messenger of Allāh?’ He said, ‘Yes, the evil of those who call others while standing at the gates of the Fire.’ I said, ‘Messenger of Allāh! Describe them for us.’ He said: ‘They are a people of our complexion saying the same exhortations as we do and speaking our languages.’ I said, ‘What are your orders for me concerning them in case this happens in my lifetime?’ He said, ‘Stick to the Congregation of the Muslims.’ I said, ‘What if there is no Congregation?’ He said: ‘Isolate yourself from those sects even if you must chew on a tree-trunk [for food], until death comes to you while you are in that state!’”

Ill-Prepared Tradition-Minded Muslims

Some tradition-minded Muslims rush to the opposite extreme and emphasize superegregatory works and garb, forgetting that a servant must approach his Lord with obligatory works first – including the pursuit of necessary knowledge. Their solution to what they rightly view as a corrupt form of Muslim consciousness is to promote a few ostensible facets of tradition out of many but they neglect the intellectual formation that underlies it. The reason for such neglect is either that their defense of tradition is not genuine or that they come to such defense unequipped. As Imām Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “The chain of transmission (al-īsnād) is the weapon of the believer. Whoever has no weapon, how can he fight?” So they leave the long-term formative work to others but aspire to claim its fame and receive credit for it anyway. They might even oppose those that are better prepared when they should aid them or learn from them. “There is no rarer zuhd than the renouncing of leadership!” (Sufyān again) All of the above has also the trappings of sectarianism and deviation.

The Resulting Salad

In such a context thrive the modern types of false teaching, this one in the name of tradition, that one in the name of reform, the third one in the name of purism. The Law-bending Sufis, Shi‘is, and perennialists invoke tradition (or claim to in the case of the latter). The tie-clad Mu‘tazilīs and other hybrid or anti-traditional havana-puffing dā‘is that curse the Awliya and worship the worldly powers that be, invoke reform on the theme of a return to caliphate, or to the gold dinar, or on keeping a kennel at home and praying behind one’s wife. The less nescient but hypocritical, corrupt-to-the-bone purists invoke “The Salaf” to justify the Samson-like self-immolating murder of civilians. Such types have now replaced the murabbī in the education of the character and the ʿālim in the education of the mind – to Allāh we belong and to Him we return!

But if “Every Community has its Zoroastrians, and every Community has its Jews, and every Community has its Christians,” it remains also true that “There shall not cease to be a group in my Community who shall always overcome and stand for truth until the end of time.”

The Prophet ṣaʿ said that victorious group invulnerable to the wrong of their enemies when he said, in another narration: “That group shall remain in charge of the

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4Narrated from Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
6As do the pseudo-Sufi mudhabdhabūn who are alternately traditional and anti-traditional depending on convenience but who positively adore the West and bow to the darkest sides of its ethos, such as the Scottish Hitler-eulogizing ex-actor who calls himself “Shaykh Dr. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Murābī” cf. http://mac.abc.se/home/onesr/ez/de/selph_e.html.
7Narrated from Sahl ibn Sa‘d al-Sa‘īdī by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Awsāf.
8A mass-transmitted hadith cf. al-Kattānī in Naṣīm al-Mutanāthir (p. 141).
Command of Allah, unharmed by those that oppose them, until the coming of the Command of Allah.” In the chapter of his Ṣaḥīḥ in which he cites this ḥadīth, Imām al-Bukhārī states: “These are the People of Knowledge” in the sense, of course, of traditional Sunni knowledge of the Companion-fiqh-based Schools of Law and not the orphaned, newfangled knowledge of the sects.

The Prophet also said, in praise of the latter-day generations (al-Khalīfah):

“From every succeeding generation its upright folk shall carry this knowledge in turn. They shall repeal from it the distortions of the extremists (taḥrīf al-ghilīn), the misinterpretations of the ignorant (ta’wil al-jāhilīn), and the pretenses of the liars (ıntihāl al-mubṭilīn).”

This is an authentic narration graded hasan gharīb ṣaḥīḥ by al-ʿAlī in Bughyat al-Mutamīs and ṣaḥīḥ according to Ahmad, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (per Ibn Kathir and al-Ṣanʿānī), and Ibn al-Wazīr but daʿīf muʿādal according to others. Narrated:

[1] from Abū Hurayra  by al-Ṭabarānī with two chains, one of which is fair (ḥasan), and by al-Khaṭīb in Sharaf ʿAṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth and al-Jāmiʿ with a very weak chain because of Maslama ibn ʿAli;

[2] from Abū Umāma  by al-ʿUqaylī with a weak chain;

[3] from Usāma ibn Zayd  by al-Khaṭīb;

[4] from Abū Hurayra and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar  by al-Bazzār, Tammām al-Rāzī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, and al-ʿUqaylī (the latter two stating “ibn ʿAmr”) with very weak chains because of ʿUmar ibn Khālid who is discarded as a narrator (matrūk) as indicated by al-Haythami;

[5] from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd  – the first sentence only, and with “inherit” instead of “carry” – by al-Khaṭīb;


[10] mursal from the Tābiʿī ABū ʿAbd Allāh al-Rahmān ʿIbrāhīm ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Udhri by al-Bayhaqī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, Ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ḥātim, Ibn Ḥibbān, and al-Khaṭīb. The latter narrates that Imām ʿAḥmad declared it sound (ṣaḥīḥ), a grading faulted by

9Narrated from Muʿāwiya by al-Bukhārī and Muslim as well as from Abū Hurayra and Ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd-Allāh al-Rahmān. The complete narration states: “He for whom Allāh desires great good, He grants him (superlative) understanding in the Religion (yaṭaqqīhū/yafqūhū fīl-dīn). I only distribute and it is Allāh Who gives. That group shall remain in charge of the Order of Allāh, unharmed by those who oppose them, until the coming of the Order of Allāh.” The scholars have explained that the first command in the ḥadīth is Law and Religion, while the second is the Day of Resurrection and Judgment.


12Al-ʿUqaylī, Duṣāʾ (1:9).

13Al-Khaṭīb, sharaf ʿAṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth (p. 28 §53).

14Ibn ʿArabī, Mukhtaṣar Musnad al-Bazzār (1:122 §86), Tammām al-Rāzī, Fawāʾīd (1:350), Ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bazzār, Tanbihār (1:59), al-ʿUqaylī, Duṣāʾ (1:10), and al-Haythami (1:140).

15In Sharaf ʿAṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth (p. 28 §54).

Yahyā ibn Sa‘id al-Qatān as cited by Ibn ‘Adī from al-Khallāl’s ‘Iāl. Ibn ‘Adī then cites a chain of trustworthy narrators for it. Al-Dhahabī in the Mīzān states that Mu‘ān ibn Rul‘a (who reports from al-Udhīr) is not reliable (Ibn Ḥajar grades him layyin) but in al-Mughni states that Ibn al-Madīnī declared him trustworthy as did Ahmad, as also reported by al-Khaṭīb. Al-‘Irāqī said: “This narration is missing at least two narrators (muqal) or missing the Companion-link (mursal). And this Ibrāhīm, who related it without naming the Companion, is not known to relate any narration other than this.”

In view of al-Tabarānī’s fair chain, Ibn ‘Adī’s chain of reliable transmitters, Ahmad and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s grading of šahīḥ, al-‘Alā‘ī’s similar grading, the number of Companions related to narrate it, and the widespread acceptance of this narration among the Masters, the correct grading appears is that of “sound” (šahīḥ) and Allāh knows best.

Imām Jamāl al-Dīn al-Hubayshi (712-782) said: “This narration is a proof that the Ulema of Ahl al-Sunna are all upright and there is no higher honor than the commendation of the Prophet ﷺ himself!” May Allāh Most High continue to raise their honor here and hereafter and bring the scheming of their detractors to nothing.

18Cf. also al-Harawī’s Dhamm al-Kalām (3:294-330), al-Bidāya (Turāth ed. 6:287=al-Ma‘ārif ed. 6:258), al-Jāhība (1:225), Taḍrib al-Rṣālī (1997 ed. 2:356-357=2:302-303) and Kashf al-Khafī’ (§143). This is the very first hadith the writer heard the late Shaykh Abd al-Qādir al-Arna‘ūt narrate, in his study in Damascus.
19Al-Hubayshi, Nashr Ṭay al-Ta‘rīf fī Fadl Ḥamalat al-‘Imān al-Sharī‘ (p. 40).