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Navigating the 'Mid-Sized Cushion': Defining *Ghuluww* Through Qur'ānic Parameters within Contemporary Twelver Scholarship

This research paper investigates the Qur'ānic and theological parameters of *Ghuluww* (religious exaggeration) within the context of Twelver Imāmī Shī'ism. Drawing upon Qur'ānic usage and the recorded narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt, this study identifies a Qur'ānically grounded definition of *Ghuluww* that subsumes the diverse manifestations of this phenomenon, including the attribution of roles, functions, powers, and attributes to the Imams which are not proven for them by authentic routes or which they themselves explicitly repudiated.

Central to this study is a critique of modern 'reductionist' definitions espoused by certain voices within Twelver scholarship that attempt to limit the scope of *Ghuluww* solely to the most blatant claims of divinity (*Ulūhiyyah*) or prophethood (*Nubuwwah*) for the Imams. In contrast, this investigation highlights the perspectives of preeminent contemporary Twelver scholars, such as Grand Ayatullah Sayyid 'Alī al-Sistānī and the late Ayatullah Muḥammad Āṣif al-Muḥsinī, who have been critical of such reductionist frameworks and their application to the construction of the correct Imamology.

The paper argues that adhering to a rigorous, evidence-based definition of *Ghuluww*, grounded in established epistemological proof rather than emotional sentiment, is the only fail-safe method to safeguard the creed from corruption, distortion, and heterodox departures from the original teachings of the school. Ultimately, this study aims to chart a methodology for identifying the 'path of moderation' advocated by the Imams. It anchors itself on the Imāmī exhortation for Shī'a to be like 'mid-sized cushions' (*al-Numruqah al-Wuṣṭā*), serving as the standard to which the extremist (*Ghālī*) must return and the laggard (*Tālī*) would do well to aspire.

Keywords: *Ghuluww*, Twelver Imāmī Shī'ism, Imamology, *Tafwīd*, Esotericism, Religious Moderation.



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