How This Idea Was Built

The privatization of Islam did not emerge from the Islamic scholarly tradition. No classical school of thought produced it. No major scholar from the first twelve centuries of Islam argued for it. It was manufactured, deliberately, through a process that began with a single political event and continued through a century of careful engineering.

When the Ottoman Khilafah was abolished in 1924, the structural body through which the Ummah exercised its collective obligations was destroyed. What followed was not a vacuum. Colonial powers and the secular nationalist governments they installed immediately began filling that vacuum with a replacement framework. Secular education systems were built across Muslim-majority lands. State-controlled mosques were constructed and state-approved imams were appointed to fill them. Scholars who spoke about the political dimensions of Islam were imprisoned, exiled, or killed. The curriculum of Islamic education was gradually narrowed to ritual, personal conduct, and theology stripped of its political content.

The message delivered to generations of Muslims was explicit: Islam is for the masjid. A good Muslim prays, fasts, gives to charity, and is quiet. Questions about why Palestine is occupied, why Muslim lands are governed by systems imported from European capitals, why the Ummah has no collective political voice are questions a pious Muslim does not ask.

This is the origin of Islamic individualism. It was not a conclusion reached through careful reading of Quran and Sunnah. It was a product delivered to the Muslim mind through a century of institutional pressure. Understanding this is essential, because the individualist often holds their position with genuine sincerity. They were taught it by people they trusted, in institutions that carried the name of Islam. The problem is not their sincerity. The problem is the idea itself, and the idea has a source that has nothing to do with the Islamic tradition.

Now, with this historical context established, the arguments of the Islamic individualist can be addressed directly, one by one, with the evidence that the tradition actually produces.

Argument One: "My Duty Is to Fix Myself First"

This is the most common entry point for Islamic individualism. It presents itself as wisdom. Self-improvement before external action. Inner purification before political engagement. The argument borrows from real Islamic concepts, the importance of tazkiyah, the warnings against hypocrisy, the priority of internal sincerity, and then uses them to construct a complete withdrawal from collective obligation.

The Quran does not support this conclusion.

Allah says:

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

"You are the best nation produced for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah."[1]

The address is plural: كُنتُمْ. The function being described is public and collective: enjoining good and forbidding evil. And this collective, public function is stated as the very condition that makes this Ummah "the best." The distinction between the best nation and others is not personal piety alone. It is the active, organized, collective work of upholding truth and resisting falsehood.

Allah then follows this with a direct command to organize for this purpose:

وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"And let there be among you a group who call to goodness, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong. And it is they who will be successful."[2]

"Among you" is an instruction to the whole community to maintain an organized group dedicated to this work. This is not a description of personal virtue. This is an organizational command. It calls for a structured body of people working collectively for a collective purpose. The individualist who reads this ayah and concludes that personal spiritual development satisfies it has performed a remarkable act of selective blindness.

Ibn Taymiyyah addressed this directly in his work on commanding good and forbidding evil. He wrote:

> *"As with any collective obligation, this means that if those sufficient for the task do not come forward, everyone capable of it to any extent is in sin to the extent of his*

[1] Surah Al-Imran, 3:110
[2] Surah Al-Imran, 3:104

> *capability in that area. This is because its obligation when it is needed is upon every Muslim to the extent of his/her ability"*[3]

The argument that "I must fix myself first" is not wrong as a starting point for personal development. It becomes wrong when it is used as an endpoint, a complete substitute for collective obligation. Personal piety is the foundation. The Quran demands that it also become the fuel for organized public action. A foundation that leads nowhere is not a foundation. It is a dead end.

Argument Two: "You Are Only Responsible for Yourself"

The most common Quranic argument from the Islamic individualist position comes from Surah Al-Ma'idah:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنفُسَكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُم مَّن ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ

"O believers! You are responsible for your own souls. Whoever goes astray cannot harm you if you are guided."[4]

"See," the individualist says, "*Allah only holds you responsible for yourself. The misguidance of others is not your problem.*"

This reading was addressed and rejected by the first Caliph of Islam, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, in one of his khutbahs, recorded in the collections of Imam Ahmad. The account is preserved in the tafsir of Ibn Kathir and confirmed across multiple sources. Abu Bakr stood before the people and said: "*O people! You read this ayah and you explain it the wrong way. I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, say: 'If the people witness evil and do not change it, then Allah is about to send His punishment to encompass them.' By Allah, it is incumbent upon you that you bid what is good and forbid what is evil, or else Allah will grant domination upon you to those who are the worst among you, and they will greatly chastise you, and then when your righteous ones pray to Allah, their prayers will not be answered.*"

This is the first Caliph, the closest companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, correcting this exact misreading in front of the community. The ayah is a comfort for the believer who has fulfilled the duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil and found that others still refused guidance. It releases the individual from blame after they have acted. It is not a license to never act.

The individualist is not quoting the Quran. They are misquoting it in a way that Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq specifically warned against fourteen centuries ago.

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[3] Enjoining Good, Forbidding Evil, Ibn Taymiyyah
[4] Surah Al-Ma'idah, 5:105

Argument Three: "Politics Corrupts, The Pious Muslim Stays Away"

This is the most sophisticated version of the individualist argument, and it appeals to a real concern. The history of political Islam includes examples of corruption, ego, and manipulation done in the name of religion. The individualist points to these examples and says: "*see what happens when religion mixes with politics. Better to keep them separate. Better to focus on worship.*"

The problem with this argument is that it is not derived from Islamic principles. It is derived from the secular liberal principle of the separation of religion from public life, dressed in Islamic-sounding caution.

Ibn Taymiyyah, in his Al-Siyasah Al-Shar'iyyah, wrote with full clarity:

> *"It should be known that the exercise of authority for the benefit of the people is one of the greatest religious duties. Neither deen nor world order may be established without it."*[5]

Read that carefully. The exercise of political authority for the benefit of the people is, in Ibn Taymiyyah's words, among the greatest religious duties. A duty. Not corruption. Not a danger. A duty that belongs to the highest category of religious obligation.

Ibn Taymiyyah also said:

> *"Allah has commanded us to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and this duty cannot be rendered without power and authority. Likewise, all other social duties such as jihād, maintaining peace and order, justice, organizing ḥajj and ʿīd festivals, redressing abuses, helping the oppressed, enforcing the ḥudūd, and so on, cannot be carried out without political power and authority. That is why a prophetic ḥadīth says,* ***"The ruler (sulṭān) is the shadow of Allah on earth."***[6]

The argument from corruption proves too much. Scholars have also been corrupted. Does the individualist conclude that scholarship should be abandoned? Judges have been corrupted. Does that mean justice should be privatized? The existence of corruption within a domain does not justify abandoning the domain. It justifies purifying it.

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[5] Ibn Taymiyyah, 'The Political Shariyah on Reforming the Ruler and The Ruled,' Translation of as-Siyasah ash-Shari'ah fi Islah ar-Ra'i war-Ra'iyah, Dar ul Fiqh, UK, p.249 ; https://shamela.ws/book/31237/125

[6] Ibn Taymiyyah, Fatāwā 28:390-7. Translated in Ansari, op. cit., pp. 503-508

Argument Four: "The Hadith of Sitting at Home During Fitna"

The individualist also appeals to hadiths about withdrawing from trials. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did speak about sitting at home during fitna, about the trials of the end times, about not fighting when you cannot distinguish which side is right. These hadiths are authentic. Their application to the current situation is false.

The hadiths about avoiding fitna were understood by the scholars to refer to specific circumstances: civil wars between Muslims where both sides are fighting for power and not principle, situations where entering the conflict would add harm without adding any benefit. They are not a general permission to abandon collective obligation entirely.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said with total clarity:

> *"Whoever sees an evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot, then with his tongue. If he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith."*[7]

There is a hierarchy here. The heart is the last resort. The weakest option. What the individualist has done is take the minimum permissible response and declare it the maximum sufficient response. They have made the weakest degree of faith their permanent address, and they call it piety.

Furthermore, the situation of the Ummah today is not fitna in the classical sense. The genocide in Gaza is not a civil war between Muslims. The occupation of Muslim lands is not a succession dispute. The systematic erasure of Islamic governance from public life is not an internal theological disagreement. These are conditions that every scholar of every madhab would recognize as demanding a response, organized, structured, and collective.

What the Body Demands

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, described the nature of the Muslim community with a precision that leaves no room for individualist interpretation:

> *"The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."*[8]

[7] Hadith 34, 40 Hadith an-Nawawi
[8] Riyad as-Salihin 224

A body does not have private limbs. When the foot is injured, the hand cannot say: "*I will focus on my own wellbeing.*" The response is total, immediate, and disruptive. Wakefulness. Fever. The whole body mobilized.

Apply this to the reality of the Ummah. A child in Gaza has not eaten in three days. Families in East Turkestan have not seen their sons and daughters for years, imprisoned in camps that the Chinese government does not even try to hide. Sudan is burning. Kashmir is occupied. Al-Aqsa is crumbling while excavation tunnels undermine its foundations.

According to the Prophet, peace be upon him, this is a fever that should be in every Muslim. The individualist responds with du'a. Du'a is real. Du'a is necessary. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not say the body should pray for the suffering limb and then return to its regular schedule. He described a physical, urgent, total response. That response, in the age we live in, requires political organization, collective action, and the establishment of the structural capacity to actually protect the Ummah.

The Obligation They Cannot Escape: The Khilafah

Every argument addressed above leads to the same destination. The problems facing the Ummah today cannot be solved by personal piety alone. They require political power. They require the capacity to protect Muslim lands, to speak with a single voice, to deploy the combined weight of the Ummah's resources and geography. This requires a structure. The structure is the Khilafah.

The scholars did not leave this matter ambiguous.

Al-Mawardi, in *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyyah*, the foundational text of Islamic governance, wrote:

> "*The Imamate is established for the preservation of religion and the management of worldly affairs. Its appointment for those capable of fulfilling it in the nation is obligatory by consensus.*"

Imam Al-Nawawi, whose commentary on Sahih Muslim stands as one of the most authoritative works in the hadith sciences, wrote:

> "*The scholars consented that it is an obligation upon the Muslims to appoint a Khalifah, and that its obligation is by the shar', not the mind.*"

Imam Al Qurtubi said:

> *When Abu Bakr was about to die he proposed Umar to be the Imam. No one said this is not wajib on us or you. Rather this indicates its obligation as the Khilafah is the pillar upon which other pillars rest.*[9]

Imam Al Jurani said:

> *Appointing an Imam is the best in meeting the interests of the Muslims and in achieving the greatest aims (maqasid) of the Deen.*[10]

Ibn Khaldun said:

> *...the Sahabah agreed unanimously after the death of the Messenger (saw) on appointing the Imam and made it the most important obligations, even preferring it to the burial of the Messenger (saw) and remained committed to this great obligation in every period.*[11]

Imam Al ghazali said:

> *from the necessities of the shari'a that simply cannot be left*[12]

Al Amid said:

> *from the greatest interests of the Muslims and greatest pillars of the deen*[13]

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah siad:

> *It is important to know that one of the greatest obligations of the deen*[14]

Imam Al Haskafi said:

> *the most important of obligations*[15]

Dr. Ziauddin Sardar stated:

> *"The Khilafah is the most important religious position and concern for all the Muslims. The Islamic Shari'ah has stipulated that the establishment of Khilafah "Caliphate" is an essential obligation of the Deen. Rather, it is the greatest*

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[9] al-Qurtubi, al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an, 1:265
[10] Al-Iji, al-Mauaqif, Vol. 3, p. 581
[11] Muqadimat ibn Khaldun, p. 131
[12] al-Ghazali, al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad, p.128
[13] al-Amidi, Ghayat al-Muram, Vol. 1, pp.366-367
[14] Ibn Taymiyya, al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah, p.129
[15] al-Haskafi, Radd al-Muhtar, 1:548

> *obligation for the reason that the implementation of all other obligations is dependent on it".*[16]

The individualist who claims to follow the scholarly tradition cannot simultaneously dismiss the obligation that the scholars unanimously affirmed. The Khilafah is not a political preference or an ideological position among many. It is a Fard Kifayah, and since it does not exist today, the collective sin of its absence rests on every Muslim who understands this obligation and does nothing to work toward it.

Allah promises in the Quran:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ

"Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good that He will certainly make them successors in the land, as He did with those before them."[17]

This promise is tied to action: belief and good deeds. Working for the collective governance of the Muslims is among the highest good deeds available in this era, precisely because it is the one that the enemies of the Ummah have worked the hardest to convince Muslims to abandon.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, warned us of what happens when the Ummah loses its collective weight:

> *The people will soon summon one another to attack you as people when eating invite others to share their dish. Someone asked: Will that be because of our small numbers at that time? He replied: No, you will be numerous at that time: but you will be scum and rubbish like that carried down by a torrent, and Allah will take fear of you from the breasts of your enemy and last enervation into your hearts. Someone asked: What is wahn (enervation). Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): He replied: Love of the world and dislike of death.*[18]

This is the description of an Ummah that has privatized its Islam. Numerous, but weightless. Devoted in private, paralyzed in public. Too attached to individual comfort to respond as the body the Prophet, peace be upon him, described. The Islamic individualist, whatever their personal sincerity, produces exactly this condition with every day they spend convincing themselves and others that personal piety is sufficient.

The obligation is not ambiguous. The scholars have spoken across centuries and across all four madhabs. The Quran addresses a collective. The Prophet, peace be upon him,

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[16] Islam and Khilafah, p.99
[17] Surah An-Nur, 24:55
[18] Sunan Abi Dawud 4297

described a body. The body is suffering. The work for the Khilafah is the work of this generation, and it is worship of the highest order. So begin with the work!

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