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**ABSTRACT**

“Utilizing the Sermon to Incorporate Change: Shaykh Sha’rawi’s  
Epistemological Enforcement of Ulama Authority”

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Muhammad Mitwalli Sha’rawi (d. 1998) emphasized the unique capacity of the *ulama* to direct religious discourse amidst threats to their exclusive status as the interpreters of revelatory knowledge. Additionally, by insisting that access to irrefutable knowledge can only be gained through proper revelatory interpretation, he also affirmed the necessity of the *ulama* as intermediaries between divine disclosures and human understanding for all times. Basic Islamic epistemology explains knowledge according to a bipartite division between human knowledge (both secular and religious) and God’s knowledge. Religious knowledge is distinguished from secular knowledge because it is directly linked to God; it entails deciphering God’s will and intentions as they are disclosed in the revelatory sources. Based on this idea, Sha’rawi posited a hierarchy of knowledge and of those who claim expertise in any area of knowledge. In Sha’rawi’s hierarchy, God’s knowledge, and by extension those with expertise in interpreting theological intentions through revelation, was placed above all types of human knowledge by encompassing them. By giving precedence to the theological in his epistemology, Sha’rawi made all knowledge completely dependent on God’s system and subject to God’s control. He thereby propounded that in order for believers to gain any surety in knowledge they need the guidance of one who is an expert in the religious sciences and can interpret and explain the Qur’an. Sha’rawi, as an *‘alim*, was the living example of such a guide. Moreover, Sha’rawi said that anyone who has expertise in any realm associated with the non-theological should not disclose information about God’s system. Sha’rawi displayed the absolute necessity of the religious expert to extract knowledge applicable to the modern context from God’s disclosure, as it was deposited in the revelation to be brought forth for his time.