



The Position of the Juristic Schools Concerning the Ash'arī School

Shaykh Abdullāh al-Ghālī and Shaykh Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Idlibī

Translated by Surāqah al-Tufāhī¹

Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

The opponent said:

According to the Mālikī school:

The Ḥāfiẓ of the Maghreb and its erudite notable, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, narrated with his chain from the jurist of the Mālikī school in the east (In Iraq), Ibn Khuwayz Mindād², that he said in the book of testimonies, explaining the words of Mālik: ‘The testimony of the people of innovation and desires is not allowed.’: ‘According to Mālik and the rest of our companions, the people of desires are the people of theological rhetoric. Hence, every practitioner of theological rhetoric is from the people of desires and innovation—be they Ash’arī or other than that. Their testimony shall never be accepted in Islām. They should be abandoned and chastised for their innovation. If they persist upon it, repentance should be sought from them.’

Response:

1. Applying the statements of the great Imāms such as Mālik and others to the Ash’arīs is a mistake. Imām Abūl Ḥasan al-Ash’arī was born after the death of Imām Ahmad—who was the last of the four Imāms—not to mention Imām Mālik. The people of

¹ Adapted and translated from the works of Ustādh Abdullāh al-Ghālī and Ustādh Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Idlibī in response to Safar al-Ḥawālī’s *Manhaj al-Ashā’irah fi al-Aqīdah*.

² Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Abd Allah, (or b. ‘Alī). D.390 *Hijrī*

theological rhetoric in the time of Imām Mālik were the Jahmiyya and Mu'tazila who had espoused falsehood. Their intent was not to defend the creed of the people of truth or give it victory. Imām al-Bayhaqī responded to this misconception when he said:

Allāh knows best, but by theological rhetoric, they only meant the theological rhetoric of the people of innovation. During their epoch, it was only the innovators that were known for theological rhetoric. As for Ahl al-Sunna, very infrequently did they engage in theological rhetoric until they were obliged to do so afterwards.

2. The opponent used the words of Ibn Khuwayz Mindād al-Mālikī against the Ash'arī school, yet the reality is that he was not considered reliable in his knowledge or citations.

Ḥāfiẓ b. Ḥajr al-'Asqalānī said in Lisān al-Mizān:

He possesses odd (reports) from Mālik and personal opinions and interpretations that the elite of the school did not reach, such as his view that the slaves are not included in the (Divine) address directed to free people, and that the singular report (*Khabar al-Wāhid*) benefits knowledge...

...Abūl Walīd al-Bājī spoke ill of him stating that he was not skilled in investigation, nor was he strong in jurisprudence. He used to claim that in the school of Mālik, it is not permissible to witness the funeral prayer of a practitioner of theological rhetoric, accept their testimony, marry them, or entrust them. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr also criticized him as well.³

Imām Abūl Walīd al-Bājī said concerning him:

I did not hear any mention of him among the scholars of the Iraqis. He used to completely shun theological rhetoric and have aversion towards its people, so much so that this led to loathing of the practitioners of theological rhetoric among Ahl al-Sunna. He ruled that the people of theological rhetoric were people of desires, concerning whom, Mālik said what he said with regards to their testimonies and marriages.

Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ said concerning him: "He possesses oddities from Mālik. He also has personal legal views that the erudite of the

³ Lisān al-Mizān; 5/329 Dār al-Fikr ed.

school did not reach . He was not skilled in investigation, nor was he strong in jurisprudence.”⁴

So this is the view of some of the leading Mālikī scholars and jurists, such as Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Bajī, and Qāḍī ‘Iyād, not to mention the view of one of the leaders in *al-Jarh wal-Ta’dīl* (criticism and lauding of Ḥadīth narrators), Ḥāfiẓ b. Ḥajr. Likewise, there is no doubt that most of the Mālikī jurists are Ash’arīs.

The opponent said:

According to the Shāfi’īs:

Imām Abūl ‘Abbās b. Suraij, nicknamed ; al-Shāfi’ī⁵ the second, who lived during the time of al-Ash’arī said:

We don’t believe in the interpretation of the Mu’tazila, Ash’arīs, Jahmiyya, atheists, corporalists anthropomorphists, the Karrāmiyya and those who speak of ‘*how*’. Rather, we accept them (the reports concerning the Divine attributes) without interpretation, and we believe in them without resemblance (to the creation).

Response:

The opponent—may Allāh guide him—used the words of Imām Ibn Suraij to prove that the Shāfi’īs condemn the Ash’arīs. This is completely false for two reasons:

1. This statement is not authentically attributed to Imām Ibn Suraij. The Ash’arīs, as an independent school of theology did not manifest during Imām Ibn Suraij’s time. Ibn Suraij died in the year 306 Hijrī, whereas al-Ash’arī died in the year 324 Hijrī. al-Ash’arī was born in the year 260 Hijrī. So, if al-Ash’arī remained a Mu’tazilī for forty years before separating himself from al-Juba’ī, and we assume that he started learning from him at ten years of age, this would mean that Ibn Suraij died a few years before al-Ash’arī’s repentance. Even if we supposed for arguments sake that Ibn Suraij died after al-Ash’arī’s repentance by a few days, how could he condemn a theological school that had not yet independently manifested itself in that name? Without doubt, Imām Ibn Suraij did not say this, as surely he did not know the unseen.

⁴ See: Tartīb al-Madārik of Qāḍī ‘Iyād; 4/606, al-Dibāj of Ibn Farhūn; 2/229, Tārīkh al-Islām of Imām al-Dhahabī; rank 39/40, pg 217, and al-Wāfi bil-Wafayāt of al-Ṣafadī; 2/52.

⁵ Abūl ‘Abbās Ahmad b. ‘Umar b. Suraij (born 249 Hijrī)

Another thing that illustrates the weakness of this narration from Imām Ibn Suraij is that the narrator, Abūl Qāsim Sa'd b. 'Alī b. Muhammad al-Zinjānī was born after the death of Ibn Suraij by approximately 80 years! He was born in the year 380 Hijrī and died in the year 471 Hijrī . Ibn Suraij was born in the year 279 Hijrī and died in the year 303/306 Hijrī , therefore the chain is severed⁶

2. The scholars of the Ash'arīs and the heads of Ahl al-Sunna among the Ash'arīs were adherents of the juristic school of Imām al-Shāfi'ī, such as Imām al-Ghazālī, the author of *al-Wajīz*, *al-Basīt*, and *al-Wasīt* in Shāfi'ī jurisprudence. The Shāfi'ī Imāms such as: Imam al-Ḥaramain, al-Nawawī, Ibn Ḥajr, al-Rāzī, al-Subkī, and Ibn al-Ṣalāh were all Ash'arīs. See the book; *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyya* and you will find that they were Ash'arīs. How could the opponent have missed all of this?

The opponent said:

Imām Abūl Ḥasan al-Karajī⁷, from the Shāfi'ī scholars of the fifth century, said the following:

The Shāfi'ī Imāms have not ceased censuring and exiling those that ascribed them to al-Ash'arī, and they disavowed themselves from what al-Ash'arī built his school upon. They have not ceased prohibiting their companions and loved ones from descending around its border areas—according to what I have heard from many Imāms and Shaykhs.

He then gave an example from the Shaykh of the Shāfi'īs in his time, Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfara'īnī who was nicknamed; al-Shāfi'ī the third:

The severity of the Shaykh upon the people of theological rhetoric is well known, so much so that he distinguished Shāfi'ī fundamentals of jurisprudence (Usūl al-Fiqh) from the fundamentals of al-Ash'arī. Abū Bakr al-Rādhaqānī commented upon it and it is in my possession. Shaykh Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī conformed to his way in his two books; al-Luma' and al-Tabsira. Even if a view of al-Ash'arī agreed with an angle from our companions, he would distinguish between the two and say: 'It is the view of some of our companions, and was also the view of the Ash'arīs.' He did not consider them from the companions of al-Shāfi'ī's school. They censured them and their way in the fundamentals of jurisprudence, not to mention the fundamentals of creed.

⁶ Siyar 'Alām al-Nubalā'; 18/385

⁷ Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Mālik al-Karjī, the major Shāfi'ī Imām. D.571 Hijrī

Response:

1. The view of one scholar that dissents from his entire school, can in no way be considered to represent the entire school.
2. Imām al-Sam’ānī, a scholar that was Ash’arī in creed, praised the creed of al-Karajī. In addition, there is no actual chain for the narration mentioned by the opponent, rather, it was mentioned by Ibn al-Qayyim without a chain, in his *Ijtimā’ al-Juyūsh al-Islāmiyya*, as well as Ibn Taymiyya in his *Tis’īniyya*.
3. Ibn Taymiyya cited the words from al-Karajī from a supposed work of his titled: *al-Fusūl fī al-Usūl ‘an A’imma al-Fuhūl Ilzāman li Dhawī al-Bid’i wal-Fuḍūl*. al-Isnawī said in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya* in al-Karajī’s biographical notice: ‘He has authored works in jurisprudence and [Qur’ānic] exegesis, as well as a work called ‘al-Dharā’i fī ‘Ilm al-Sharā’i.’ al-Isnawī did not mention any work on creed belonging to al-Karajī, which adds doubt regarding the authenticity of this quote.

In addition to this, a poem was ascribed to al-Karajī that contained some elements of anthropomorphism. These portions are not correctly ascribed to him for three reasons:

1. The Ash’arī Imām, al-Sam’ānī, praised the poem and it is not possible that he could have praised anthropomorphism. It also contained insults against al-Ash’arī and things that no scholar could say. It is not possible that al-Sam’ānī could have praised that.
2. The author of those forged lines claimed that al-Ash’arī was murdered in Ahsā’. This is false because he died upon his death bed of natural causes.
3. al-Sam’ānī stated that the poem was a little more than two hundred lines, while the poem that contains anthropomorphism is over two hundred and forty lines. This means that there was clear forgery—not to mention that the forged lines of poetry do not fit with the rest in their style and the blatant anthropomorphism. Imām al-Sam’ānī said: “He has a poem ending with the letter ‘*bā*’ about the Sunna. Therein he explained his creed and the creed of the Salaf. It is a little more than two hundred lines and I read it in his presence at his house in Karj.”

Based on all of this, it is known that the poem is not correctly ascribed to al-Karajī. If it was, it would make him out to be a liar, for how can he claim that al-Ash’arī was murdered in Ahsā’? Nay, these extra lines were from other people that did not fear Allāh. They added them in order to give aid to their falsehood. May Allāh deal with them with His justice.⁸

⁸ See: *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya*; 3/384

The opponent said:

“Shaykh Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī conformed to his way in his two books; al-Luma’ and al-Tabsira.”

Response:

To claim that Imām al-Shīrāzī was not an Ash’arī is clearly incorrect. Take the following proofs:

1. Imām al-Shīrāzī was one of those that signed his name to document⁹ written by al-Qushayrī during the tribulation of Baghdād.⁹ al-Shīrāzī said:

It is as stated in this document regarding the status of the Shaykh, Imām and unique one, Abū Nasr al-Qushayrī—may Allāh increase his likes among the Imāms of the religion—as one that has organized gatherings and mentioned Allāh in a manner that befits Him regarding His Oneness, His Attributes, and negating likeness from Him. I did not hear anything from him other than the way of the people of truth from Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamā’at. This is what I take as my religion with Allah ﷻ. This is what I firmly believe, and this is what I have found the Imāms of our companions upon. Many among the anthropomorphists were guided by way of him. They all became adherents to the way of the people of truth, and there remained not but a few among the innovators.¹⁰

2. Imām al-Shīrāzī stated in some of his written works:

Whoever was upon the school of al-Shāfi’ī in the subsidiary branches, and upon the creed of al-Ash’arī in the fundamentals, then he is the sign post on the path and he is upon the clear truth...as for the statement of the ignorant ones that we are Shāfi’īs in the subsidiary branches and Ḥanbalīs in the fundamentals, then he is not to be relied upon because Imām Ahmad did not author a book in creed and nothing of that sort was attributed to him, save his patience when he was beaten and imprisoned after the Mu’tazila attempted to coerce him to agree to their belief regarding the creation of the Qur’ān and his subsequent refusal. He was invited to a debate but did not debate. Adhering to the way of those that composed independent works (in creed), spoke concerning it, and silenced the innovators with

⁹ Also called the *Fitna al-Qushayriyya* or the *Fitna al-Ḥanābila*.

¹⁰ Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya; 3/99

clear cut evidence and obvious proofs is more appropriate and better.¹¹

No one should suppose that Imām al-Shīrāzī prohibited others from following a juristic school besides that of al-Shāfi’ī, or a Sunnī creed that is not established on the same methodological foundations of the Ash’arīs. Rather, he was clarifying that whoever was on that path, then he us upon the truth—contrary to those that impute innovation upon them. He also clarified in this quote that al-Ash’arī authored works, established a methodological basis, and went into detail in matters of creed in a manner and level of detail unlike that of other scholars.

Whoever is in doubt regarding Imām al-Shīrāzī’s creed, let them read his creed that is printed in the introduction to his book al-Luma’. In it, he says:

...from that, they believe that the first obligation upon the one that is of sound rational mind and at the age of puberty is to intend investigation and inference (from the creation), both of which lead to knowledge of Allāh ﷻ...

...they also believe that servile conformism [Ar. *Taqīd*] with regards to knowledge of Allāh ﷻ is impermissible because servile conformism is accepting the statement of another without evidence...

...they also believe that Allāh is not a corporal body [Ar. *Jism*]...¹²

...according to the people of truth, the intellect can not independently obligate or declare good or bad...

...it is not to be said that Allāh’s speech is in multiple languages. This is because languages are from the attributes of the creation...¹³

...then, they believe that Allāh is ‘*Mustawīn ‘Alā al-‘Arsh*’, and that His *Istiwā’* is not settlement or spatial contact. This is because settlement and spatial contact are both from the qualities of created bodies, and the Lord ﷻ is infinitely pre-eternal—which proves that He was without a place, then He created place, and He is now as He always was.¹⁴

He said about the opponents of the Ash’arīs:

¹¹ al-Ishāra ilā Madhab Ahl al-Haqq, pg 283.

¹² Sharh al-Luma’ with the introduction of al-Shīrāzī: 1/91-95

¹³ Ibid: 1/97, 100

¹⁴ Ibid: 1/101

“Their open display of what they are upon of anthropomorphism, cursing of Muslims, and imputing them with unbelief does not prove that they are upon the truth...and from their evils: their cursing the people of truth as well as their backbiting of them, maligning their names in front of the common folk and giving them the nickname; al-Ash’arīyya.¹⁵

The opponent said:

Similar to his words—nay, even more severe—were the words of Shaykh al-Islām al-Harawī al-Ansārī. It is to be noticed that both the Shāfi’īs and Ḥanbalīs claim him for their own. What he said regarding the (the Ash’arīs) was quoted in al-Tis’īniyya from the book; *Dhamm al-Kalām* (in condemnation of theological rhetoric)...

Response:

al-Harawī is: Abū Ismā’īl ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Harawī al-Ansārī who died in the year 481 *Hijrī*. He was a Ḥanbalī Sūfī who was known for his bigotry. He was far from the juridical school of al-Shāfi’ī and the Shāfi’ī scholars. There is no biographical notice for him in the collection in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’īyya* of al-Subkī, nor was a biographical notice written for him by Shāfi’ī biographers such as; Ibn Ṣalāh, Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, or al-Isnawī. The opponent’s statement that both the Shāfi’īs and Ḥanbalīs claimed him for their own has no basis.

There is no doubt that al-Harawī was a fierce enemy of the Ash’arīs in general, and Imām Abū Ḥasan al-Ash’arī in specific. He said about al-Ash’arī: “It has spread among the Muslims that their head (i.e. the head of the Ash’arīs) ‘Alī b. Ismā’īl al-Ash’arī used to not clean himself after relieving himself, perform ablutions, or pray.”¹⁶ So while al-Harawī’s stance is known, it in no way represents the ‘position of the Shāfi’ī school’, especially as he was not a Shāfi’ī in the first place, as is claimed by some.

The opponent said:

The Ḥanafīs:

It is well known that the author of the *Ṭahawīyya* and the one that explained it were both Ḥanafīs. Imām al-Ṭahāwī was a contemporary of al-Ash’arī and wrote his book of creed in order to clarify the belief of

¹⁵ Ibid: 1/113

¹⁶ al-Tis’īniyya 5/276

Imām Abū Ḥanīfa and his companions. It is similar to what is found in al-Fiqh al-Akbar from him (Abū Ḥanīfa). They narrated from the Imām that he explicitly imputed unbelief upon the one who says that Allāh is not over the Throne or hesitates concerning it. His close student, Abū Yūsuf declared Bishr al-Marīsī an unbeliever. It is well known that the Ash‘arīs negate “highness” and deny that He—the Exalted—is upon the Throne. It is also known that their fundamentals stem from Bishr al-Marīsī.

Response:

1. To argue that the Ḥanafīs are opposed to the Ash‘arīs, the opponent mentioned Imām al-Ṭahāwī. Did he find anything in his creed that is in opposition to the creed of the Ash‘arīs? The reality of the matters is that the author and his group have problems with certain parts of Imām al-Ṭahāwī’s creed, such as his statements:

- He possesses the meaning of Lordship, even when there was nothing lorded over [*Marbūb*], and He possesses the meaning of Creator when there was no creation.
- Far exalted is Allāh from having limits, ends, parts, organs, and tools. He is not encompassed by the six directions like the rest of created things.
- The actions of the servants are the creation of Allāh and the acquisition [*Kasb*] of the servants.

So does the opponent believe in these things? We certainly hope so! He then mentioned “the one that explained it (the Ṭahawīyya)”, referring to Ibn Abī al-‘Izz al-Ḥanafī. In no way did he represent the beliefs of the overwhelming majority of Ḥanafīs, rather, he had adopted the beliefs of Ibn Taymiyya.

Having said this, why did the opponent feign ignorance of Imām Abū al-Mansūr al-Māturīdī’s works in creed, as well as those of Imām al-Nasafī, and the various explanations of it that truly represent the belief of the overwhelming majority of the Ḥanafī jurists?

2. The opponent mentioned that Imām Abū Yūsuf declared Bishr al-Marīsī an unbeliever and that the Ash‘arī’s fundamentals stem from him. From his words, it seems as if he is attempting to make it appear to the reader that Imām Abū Yūsuf and the Ḥanafīs hold the Ash‘arīs to be unbelievers or at least close to unbelief. What

are these fundamentals that they took from him? How can he be the source of the Ash 'arī's principles, when he was accused of having beliefs close to that of the Jahmiyya, and Mu'tazila—all the while, the Ash 'arīs were the thorns in the throats of the Jahmiyya and Mu'tazila? Is this how research is conducted? Is this fairness? To Allāh we belong and to Him we return!

