

Chapter 4: The Infallible Divine Authority: Source of Law and Doctrine in Islamic *ijma'*

In the preceding pages, we have addressed the issue of *ijma'*. We have seen that, on the one hand, the Islamic concept of consensus is interpreted as an intellectual acceptance of divine truth and, on the other hand, as an expression of trust in God and the Prophet. We have also noted that, to a certain degree, the Islamic concept of consensus requires the acceptance of educated opinions acquired through a thorough study of Islamic law and through the intellectual effort known as *ijtihad*.

It is thus the obligation of every observant Muslim to place his trust in the wisdom of others.¹ The entire structure of Islamic society is based on this trust in the rulings of scholars since, for all intents and purposes, the acceptance of these religious rulings constitutes an acceptance without reservation of revealed law.

The concept of *ijma'* as a source of law and doctrine implies, in an objective sense, the acceptance of a body of divinely revealed laws which must be accepted in their entirety as a manifestation of the acceptance of the sovereign authority of God. In a subjective sense, embracing divine authority represents the sanctifying flux [*barakah*] instilled by God in the human soul through the bounty bestowed upon the Prophet.

Such submission is never blind and unconditional. Blind following is unacceptable when the motives that are expounded are not sufficiently convincing or do not coincide with the inner meanings of the revelation.² If, as we have said, some Islamic tenets, mandates or principles must be accepted completely, totally and wholeheartedly, it is because they are directly ordained by the revelation, which is free of errors,³ and because they are based on the authority of the Prophet and the Imams. In Islam, in order for a norm or dictate to be accepted, it must be firmly based on God's revelation and the *sunnah* of his Prophet.⁴

In such cases, transcendental and ineffable reality becomes evident as soon as reason elevates itself beyond the sphere of sensible truth and attains the level of intelligent truth. It is for this reason that it is

the obligation of every Muslim to refrain from submission to a dictate until he is convinced with certainty that what he is accepting is legitimate and in complete accord with revealed truth.⁵ This is the teaching of Shī‘ism as taught during the time of the Prophet and further developed on the authority of the Imāms as part of their prophetic supplement.

Regardless of their efforts and actions, ordinary human beings do not deserve the rank of absolute authority over others. Even the greatest of human efforts cannot be compared to the divine gift of prophecy and the grace of *wilāyah*. The authority of the Prophet was the result of revelation.

The Prophet passed his supreme status and the mandate of his mission, the spread of revealed truth, to his cousin and son-in-law Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib. This divine authority was passed on to his descendants and successors who are the definitive authorities of Islām whose obligation was to amplify it and actualize it.

The human efforts of the Imāms would be of little or no benefit were it not for the fact that their external words and actions were accompanied by the rays of light which flow within them, the Muhammadan truth [*al-haqqah al-muhammadiyah*], the gnostic or esoteric reality, the divine presence in their hearts which are the true depositories of eternal wisdom. It is for this reason that they receive the titles of “legatees” and “executors” of the revelation. As can be appreciated in light of the above, *ijmā‘* is an intellectual assent of divinely revealed truth, assent which does not exclude trust.

Whenever infallible divine authority is absent, human life loses its direction and ceases to be oriented towards God as a final destination. Although God calls all human beings to obedience and the straight path, not all are reached. And not all of those who are reached by His call respond to it, because not all are chosen, obey and submit to His authority.⁶ The Prophet and the Imāms are the most obedient and submissive to God's authority.

This is because they are the Chosen Ones, the purest souls on earth. They are epiphanies [*mazhar*, lit. “appearance” or “manifestation”], theophanies [*tajalliyāt*, lit. “illuminations” or “revelations”], and signs [*āyāt*] of the infallible divine authority. Such authority cannot be claimed by just anyone. Rather, it must be considered as a gift or grace from God. When ‘Alī, the depository and inheritor of the infallible divine authority and the Vicar of God, was preparing himself to enter the scene of Islāmic life, not even the opposition and collusion of the followers of Abī Bakr could impede this apparition which was announced by the Prophet prior to his death and awaited by his family and closest companions. ‘Alī struggled tirelessly against them and became their most dreaded enemy.⁷ He always upheld his right to the succession and debunked all of the arguments used against his legitimate aspirations. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

From the opposition and collusion of the followers of Abī Bakr, to the resistance and reaction of ‘Alī and his followers, the historical development of the Caliphate revolved around the issue of the succession of the Prophet. They involved one another and illuminated one another. In light of authentic and trustworthy

sources, the situation becomes clear and enables us to see that the historical emergence of Shī'ism was based on metaphysical and cosmological principles, even though the chain of secular conflicts have externally emphasized the political side. This leads us to the fundamental issue which interests us most: the concept that Shī'ite Islām was a divinely ordained development destined to convert itself into an invisible axis and visible hinge of the entire prophetic *wilāyah*. In order to understand this, it is necessary to examine its exoteric reality *on the inside*, starting with its esoteric and Gnostic interior.

1. Editor's Note: Shī'ite scholars are unanimous regarding the obligation of taqlīd. As Imām Khumaynī explains, "If one is not a mujtahid and does not have confidence in oneself, then he must follow a particular mujtahid and act according to his rulings" (The Practical Laws of Islām 17).

2. Editor's Note: As Imām Alī explains in al-Kāfī, if one has to choose between intellect, chastity and faith, one should choose intellect as intellect leads to faith (qtd. In al-Haiat: La vida, vol 1., 23: hadīth 22). He also explains that "The intellect is the messenger of truth" and "The foundation of all things is the intellect" (21, hadīth 11, 12). And as Imām al-Sādīq has said in al-Kāfī, "The intelligence is that through which man worships the All-Merciful and gains Paradise" and "He who possesses intelligence possesses religion, and he who possesses religion enters the Garden" (qtd. in Tabṭabā'ī A Shī'ite Anthology 55).

3. Editor's Note: According to Almighty Allāh, the Qur'ān is safeguarded:

"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (15: 9).

According to Ayatullāh al-Uzmā Sayyid Muhsin Hakīm Tabṭabā'ī, "The opinion of all the elders and the scholars of all the Muslims from the beginning of Islām till now, is that the arrangement of the verses and the chapters are the same, as it is in our hands. Our elders did not believe in tahrīf [textual change]" (Ahmad 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān 59a).

Ayatullāh al-Uzmā Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Khū'ī has ruled that "Any talk about tahrīf [textual change] of any kind in the Holy Qur'ān is only superstitious. No disarrangement of any kind has taken place in the Holy Qur'ān (61a). And, according to Ayatullāh al-Uzmā Sayyid Hādī al-Husaynī al-Milānī, "Neither any disagreement nor any shortage nor addition of any kind whatsoever has taken place in the Qur'ān.

The discussion and arguments about tahrīf [textual change], etc., are all false and unfounded. This is an Everlasting Miracle of the Holy Prophet. The Lord Himself has made incumbent on Himself its collection, recital and explanation and has said that He Himself will be its Guard. It has also been challenged that falsehood shall approach it neither from front or from behind. And Shaykh Sadīq has said 'Verily it is our belief that the Qur'ān which God sent down to His Prophet Muhammad is what is between the two covers and that which is in the hands of the people, and nothing more than that... And he also said that anyone who attributes unto us that we [the Shī'ah] say that it is more than that, he is a liar" (63a).

Ayatullāh Milānī concludes concisely that "The Holy Qur'ān is divinely protected. There is no tahrīf [textual change] of any kind in it."

4. Editor's Note: As Imām al-Sādīq has said, "Nothing exists but it has been described in the Book [of Allāh, al-Qur'ān] and the Sunnah" (Kulaynī 1:1:2, 157: hadīth 184.). Imām al-Kāzīm has said: "Certainly, the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of the Prophet contain each and every thing" (161: hadīth 190).

5. Editor's Note: The author is alluding to the Qur'ānic verses: "Produce your proof if ye are truthful" (2:111); "Bring your convincing proof (21:24); and "Produce your proof" (28:75).

6. Editor's Note: The Shī'ite position regarding predestination and free choice is a middle one. As Martyr Murtadā Mutaharī explains:

[F]ree will and freedom in Shī'ism occupy an intermediate position between the Ash'arite [absolute] predestination [jabr] and the Mu'tazilite doctrine of freedom [tafwīd]. This is the meaning of the famous dictum of the Infallible Imāms: *lā jabra wa lā tafwīda bal amrun bayna amrayn*: Neither jabr nor tafwīd; but something intermediate between the two [extreme] alternatives. (Mutaharī 1985)

7. Editor's Note: This is in sharp contrast to Nasr's claim that 'Alī did not oppose the first two Caliphs (Heart of Islām 66), a

view held by many notable Shi'ite scholars, including 'Allamah al-Hilli, and supported by historical anecdotes. As we explain in "Strategic Compromise in Islam:"

When Imam 'Ali's Caliphate was usurped on three occasions, he did not respond with the sword, but with silence and patience. The Imam understood that a civil war in the early days of the Islamic movement, when Muslims were surrounded by hostile enemies on all fronts, could very well lead to the annihilation of Islam.

His weapons were taqiyyah [pious dissimulation] and withdrawal from public affairs. As a result of these actions, many Muslims became keenly aware that there was something seriously wrong with the system. The Imam's apparent inaction was in fact the wisest and most effective of action through which he called into question the legitimacy and undermined the authority of the opportunistic rulers.

While 'Ali's did provide advice and guidance when called upon, his behavior was consistent with that of an opposition leader. Nasr's attitude is similar to that of Sachedina's who claims that 'Ali's appointment as Imam and Caliph was implicit and not explicit ("Islam" 1289; Rizvi Chapter 4). As Rizvi observes, "This dichotomy between 'the academician' and 'the believer' is indeed disturbing (Chapter 1).

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