Reason Before Revelation?

The Ashʿarī "Universal Law" Refuted

Al-Rāzī's rule that reason overrules the revelation, answered from the Book, the Sunnah, the Salaf, and the Ashʿarīs' own books

Introduction

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

إِنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ، نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ، مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ، وَمَنْ يُضْلِلْ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ، أَمَّا بَعْدُ

Praise belongs to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help. Whomever Allah guides, none can lead astray, and whomever He leaves astray, none can guide. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah alone, without partner, and that Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger.

Allah sent His Messenger (ﷺ) with a clear Book and a Sunnah that He preserved through men who weighed every word they carried. Whoever spends his days with the books of the Sunnah, with their chains and their narrators, comes to love that care: the Companion who heard, the Successor who memorised, and the imam who tested every link before he accepted a report. By that care the religion reached us, and on it rests the authority of the Book over every opinion.

The Ashʿarīs call themselves Ahl al-Sunnah and claim the heritage of the Shāfiʿī imams. Yet their teaching on the attributes of Allah stands on one rule: when what they call reason meets the plain sense of the revelation, the revelation gives way. Every verse they reinterpret and every ḥadīth they set aside passes first through this rule. If it stands, no text on Allah's names and attributes is safe from it; if it falls, everything built on it falls with it. For that reason I have begun with the root, before the branches.

Nor is the rule a page of past history. It runs through the textbooks of the school down to our time, and its modern defenders still write in its support and accuse those who reject it of rejecting reason itself. A

Muslim who loves the Book and the Sunnah meets it sooner or later, often dressed in fine words about "the harmony of reason and revelation". He has a right to see it in the words of those who made it, and to see what the imams answered.

I have divided the work into four parts:

(i) *Part One* sets out what the revelation itself says about where disputes are taken, and how the Companions and the Salaf lived by it.

(ii) *Part Two* presents the law in the words of its authors, from its first premise to its last consequence, with nothing added and nothing hidden.

(iii) *Part Three* takes the three premises of the law one by one and shows each to be false, then follows the law to where it leads and answers every defence its advocates have raised.

(iv) *Part Four* calls three witnesses from within the school itself: the man it is named after, its most celebrated scholar, and the man who gave the law its name.

Throughout, I have kept before me the command of Allah:

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّٰمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِٱلْقِسْطِۖ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَـَٔانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُواْۚ ٱعْدِلُواْ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰۖ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرُۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ٨﴾

﴿O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allāh, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allāh; indeed, Allāh is [fully] Aware of what you do.﴾ (*Qur'an 5: 8*)

So the Ashʿarīs speak here in their own words, from their own books. Where they agree with the truth, that is said plainly, and their scholars are named with respect and prayed for. But an error is called an error, and nothing in the revelation is given up for its sake. Every report relied on here has an established chain, and every quotation was read on the

page of its source. I ask Allah to make this work sincerely for Him, and a means of guidance for whoever reads it.



PART ONE

The Revelation Is the Judge

Allah Settled the Question

The question is older than any theologian. Allah settled it when He told the believers where to take every dispute, and when He declared His Book free of contradiction:

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِى ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِنكُمۡۖ فَإِن تَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ فِى شَىۡءٖ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمۡ تُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَحۡسَنُ تَأۡوِيلًا ٥٩﴾

﴿O you who have believed, obey Allāh and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allāh and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allāh and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.[1]﴾ (*Qur'an 4: 59*)

﴿أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَۚ وَلَوۡ كَانَ مِنۡ عِندِ غَيۡرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُواْ فِيهِ ٱخۡتِلَٰفٗا كَثِيرٗا ٨٢﴾

﴿Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? If it had been from [any] other than Allāh, they would have found within it much contradiction.﴾ (*Qur'an 4: 82*)

A dispute goes back to Allah and the Messenger (ﷺ), not to a third judge set above them; and a Book with no contradiction in it cannot contradict

1. Ibn Kathīr on this verse: "Mujāhid and others of the Salaf said: that is, to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger. This is a command from Allah that everything people dispute about, in the foundations of the religion and its branches, be referred to the Book and the Sunnah ... It shows that whoever does not take his disputes to the Book and the Sunnah and does not return to them is not a believer in Allah and the Last Day" (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, 2/345–346).

what sound reason knows to be true. Then Allah declared the religion complete:

﴿ٱلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِى وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ ٱلْإِسْلَـٰمَ دِينًا ...﴾

﴿This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islām as religion.﴾ (*Qur'an 5: 3*)

At ʿArafah, in the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) asked the gathered Companions:

وَأَنْتُمْ تُسْأَلُونَ عَنِّي، فَمَا أَنْتُمْ قَائِلُونَ؟

"And you will be asked about me. So what will you say?"

They answered:

نَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ بَلَّغْتَ وَأَدَّيْتَ وَنَصَحْتَ

"We bear witness that you have conveyed, fulfilled and given sincere counsel."

He raised his forefinger to the sky, pointed it towards the people, and said three times, "O Allah, bear witness."[2] A religion conveyed in full on that day needs nothing added to it centuries later in order to be understood, and a Messenger who conveyed it in full did not leave its greatest matter, the knowledge of his Lord, to be settled by those who came after him.

2. Muslim, no. 1218, from the long ḥadīth of Jābir (رضي الله عنه) on the Farewell Pilgrimage. Al-Khaṭṭābī, citing this witness and the verse of completion, said that the Prophet (ﷺ) "left nothing of the matters of the religion, its rules, foundations, laws and details, without explaining it and conveying it complete, and did not delay its explanation beyond the time it was needed"; and since no one can narrate from him or from any of his Companions a single letter of the theologians' argument from accidents and substances, "it is known that they went a different way" (*al-Ghunyah*, as quoted by Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, 2/152–155).

The Companions Set Their Own Judgement Aside

At al-Ḥudaybiyah the Companions learned what it means to place their own judgement beneath the revelation. The terms of the treaty looked to every sound mind like a humiliation, and ʿUmar (ﷺ) came to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) asking why they should accept them when they were upon the truth. The Prophet (ﷺ) answered:

يَا ابْنَ الْخَطَّابِ، إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَلَنْ يُضَيِّعَنِي اللَّهُ أَبَدًا

> "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, I am the Messenger of Allah, and Allah will never let me be lost."

Then Sūrat al-Fatḥ came down, and the treaty their judgement had counted a defeat Allah called a clear victory. Years later, at Ṣiffīn, Sahl b. Ḥunayf (ﷺ) stood among men who trusted their own opinion and told them what al-Ḥudaybiyah had taught him:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّهِمُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ

> "O people, suspect yourselves."[3]

Their reason was not set aside on that day; it was put in its place. It recognised the Messenger, and then it followed him where it could not yet see the end of the road.

The Salaf: Guidance Lies in What Is Narrated

The Path Is the Narrated Tradition

The Companions handed this on in words. ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd (ﷺ) said:

إِنَّ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابُ اللَّهِ، وَأَحْسَنَ الْهَدْيِ هَدْيُ مُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ، وَشَرَّ الْأُمُورِ مُحْدَثَاتُهَا

> "The best speech is the Book of Allah, the best guidance is the guidance of Muḥammad (ﷺ), and the worst of affairs are the newly invented ones."[4]

3. Al-Bukhārī, no. 3011.
4. Al-Bukhārī, no. 6849.

Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110 AH) (رحمه الله)[5] described the generation he had met:

كَانُوا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ مَا كَانَ عَلَى الْأَثَرِ

"They held that a man is on the path as long as he is on the narrated tradition."[6]

A man asked al-Zuhrī (d. 124 AH) (رحمه الله)[7] about the ḥadīth of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), "He is not of us who strikes the cheeks, and he is not of us who does not honour our elders," and others like it. Al-Zuhrī lowered his head for a while, then raised it and said:

مِنَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ الْعِلْمُ، وَعَلَى الرَّسُولِ الْبَلَاغُ، وَعَلَيْنَا التَّسْلِيمُ

"From Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, is the knowledge; upon the Messenger is the conveying; and upon us is submission."[8]

No Opinion While a Text Exists

The imams of the schools drew the same line. Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204 AH) (رحمه الله) set out the order in which a ruling is reached, the Book and the Sunnah

5. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sīrīn al-Baṣrī, the Successor. Ibn Saʿd: "*thiqah, maʾmūn*", a jurist and an imam of wide knowledge and scrupulous piety (*al-Ṭabaqāt*, 7/143).
6. Al-Dārimī, *al-Musnad*, no. 142, with a ṣaḥīḥ isnād.
7. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Muslim b. Shihāb al-Zuhrī, the Successor and imam of Madinah. Ibn Saʿd: "*thiqah*", rich in ḥadīth, knowledge and narration, and a comprehensive jurist (*al-Ṭabaqāt*, Mutammim al-Tābiʿīn, 186); he died in Ramaḍān 124 (Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 55/309).
8. Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3/579 (no. 1001), from al-Ḥumaydī, from Sufyān b. ʿUyaynah, with a ṣaḥīḥ isnād; Abū Nuʿaym, *al-Ḥilyah*, 3/369, from al-Walīd b. Muslim, from al-Awzāʿī. Al-Bukhārī cites it *taʿlīqan* (without its isnād), with the wording "from Allah is the message" (Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, chapter 46).

first, then consensus, then analogy, and he explained why analogy may never come forward while a text stands:

> لِأَنَّهُ لَا يَحِلُّ الْقِيَاسُ وَالْخَبَرُ مَوْجُودٌ، كَمَا يَكُونُ التَّيَمُّمُ طَهَارَةً فِي السَّفَرِ عِنْدَ الْإِعْوَازِ مِنَ الْمَاءِ، وَلَا يَكُونُ طَهَارَةً إِذَا وُجِدَ الْمَاءُ
>
> "Because analogy is not lawful while the report exists, just as dry ablution is purification on a journey when water is lacking, and is not purification once water is found."[9]

Analogy is itself built on the texts, and yet it falls silent when a text speaks; how much more silent must be an argument that was never drawn from a text at all. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH) (رحمه الله), answering the caliph al-Mutawakkil's question about the Qur'an, said:

> وَلَسْتُ بِصَاحِبِ كَلَامٍ، وَلَا أَرَى الْكَلَامَ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَا كَانَ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ، أَوْ فِي حَدِيثٍ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ، أَوْ عَنْ أَصْحَابِهِ رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ، أَوْ عَنِ التَّابِعِينَ، فَأَمَّا غَيْرُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنَّ الْكَلَامَ فِيهِ غَيْرُ مَحْمُودٍ
>
> "I am not a man of kalām, and I do not see speaking on any of this except with what is in the Book of Allah, or in a ḥadīth from the Prophet (ﷺ), or from his Companions, may Allah have mercy on them, or from the Successors. As for anything other than that, speaking with it is not praiseworthy."[10]

9. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risālah*, 598–600 (paras. 1812–1819). He adds that a ruling by the Book and an agreed Sunnah is "the truth outwardly and inwardly", while a ruling by a report narrated by single narrators is the truth outwardly, "because error is possible in the one who narrated the ḥadīth"; and that what comes after the Sunnah is a proof only when the Sunnah is lacking.

10. *Masāʾil al-Imām Aḥmad*, narrated by his son Ṣāliḥ, 2/430.

The Chain Guards the Religion

How was that tradition kept? ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181 AH) (ﷺ)[11] answered in a sentence:

الْإِسْنَادُ مِنَ الدِّينِ، وَلَوْلَا الْإِسْنَادُ لَقَالَ مَنْ شَاءَ مَا شَاءَ

> "The chain of transmission is part of the religion. Were it not for the chain, anyone could say whatever he wished."[12]

This is the way the law described in the next part leaves behind. The Salaf asked of every report, "Who narrated it?", and of every belief, "Where is it in the Book and the Sunnah?" The law asks only, "Does our reason allow it?"

11. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak al-Marwazī, born in 118. Ibn Saʿd: "*thiqah, maʾmūn, imām, ḥujjah, kathīr al-ḥadīth*", author of many books and of poems on asceticism and jihād; he died at Hīt returning from an expedition (*al-Ṭabaqāt*, 7/263).

12. Muslim, *al-Muqaddimah*, 1/15, with a ṣaḥīḥ isnād. Ibn Taymiyyah observed that those who reject transmitted proofs in the name of reason do not reject them for any weakness in their chains: "many of the transmitted proofs they reject are far stronger than those they accept", for they accepted the latter only because they believed reason pointed to them, making revelation a mere support for reason and not the source of their knowledge (*Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/174–175).

PART TWO

Their Law in Their Own Words

A rule that decides the fate of every text deserves to be heard in full before it is answered. Here it is, step by step, in the words of the men who built it.

The Premise: "By Reason We Knew the Truth of the Revelation"

The whole structure rests on one claim: that the truthfulness of the revelation is known only through reason, so that reason is its root and the revelation its branch. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH) (رحمه الله)[13] put it in the form his successors repeated for centuries, praising the group that joins reason and transmission:

> وَمَنْ كَذَّبَ الْعَقْلَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الشَّرْعَ، إِذْ بِالْعَقْلِ عَرَفْنَا صِدْقَ الشَّرْعِ
>
> "Whoever declares reason false has declared the revelation false, since it is by reason that we knew the truthfulness of the revelation."[14]

On its face this sounds like reverence for both. Everything depends on what is meant by "reason", and the next step shows it.

13. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī al-Ṭūsī, called Ḥujjat al-Islām, the leading Shāfiʿī of his last years (Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 4/216). Ibn ʿAsākir, whose *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī* was written to defend al-Ashʿarī and his followers, names him the renewer of the fifth century (*Tabyīn*, 53).

14. Al-Ghazālī, *Qānūn al-Taʾwīl*, 19–20. In the same sentence he adds that this way is "a hard ascent", easy in some matters "but difficult and arduous in most". The same premise stands at the head of the school's textbooks: al-Baghdādī wrote that "the soundness of the Sharīʿah is built on the soundness of prophethood, and the soundness of prophethood is known by reflection and inference" (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 14–16); and al-Ījī, that a purely transmitted proof "is inconceivable, since the truthfulness of the reporter is indispensable, and it is established only by reason" (*al-Mawāqif*, 2/48–51).

The Law: Reason Rules, the Text Is Reinterpreted or Left Unknown

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) (ﷺ)[15] gave the rule its classic form in *Asās al-Taqdīs*, his book on the divine attributes. When definitive rational proofs establish something and transmitted proofs seem on the surface to say the opposite, he says, there are four possibilities:

(i) both are affirmed, which is impossible, since it affirms two contradictories;

(ii) both are denied, which is also impossible;

(iii) the transmitted is affirmed and the rational denied, which he rejects, because the soundness of revelation is known only through reason, so that to discredit reason in order to save revelation would destroy both;

(iv) the rational is affirmed and the transmitted set aside.

Only the fourth is left, and he states it in these words:

> لَمْ يَبْقَ إِلَّا أَنْ يُقْطَعَ بِمُقْتَضَى الدَّلَائِلِ الْعَقْلِيَّةِ الْقَاطِعَةِ: بِأَنَّ هَذِهِ الدَّلَائِلَ النَّقْلِيَّةَ إِمَّا أَنْ يُقَالَ إِنَّهَا غَيْرُ صَحِيحَةٍ، أَوْ يُقَالَ: إِنَّهَا صَحِيحَةٌ إِلَّا أَنَّ الْمُرَادَ مِنْهَا غَيْرُ ظَوَاهِرِهَا [...] فَهَذَا هُوَ الْقَانُونُ الْكُلِّيُّ الْمَرْجُوعُ إِلَيْهِ فِي جَمِيعِ الْمُتَشَابِهَاتِ
>
> "Nothing remains but to affirm, as the definitive rational proofs require, that these transmitted proofs are either said to be unsound, or said to be sound but meaning something other than their outward sense [...] This is the universal law to which recourse is had in all the ambiguous texts."[16]

The lines left out give the two exits: if reinterpretation is allowed, the interpretations are set out; if not, the meaning is consigned to Allah. Three things in this text decide everything that follows. Reason is called

15. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Rāzī, known as Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Shāfiʿī in fiqh. Ibn Khallikān calls him unique in his age and says he surpassed his contemporaries in kalām and the rational sciences; his works include *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, *al-Maḥṣūl* and *al-Arbaʿīn* (*Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 4/249). His school is not in doubt: Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, himself an Ashʿarī, names him first in the sixth generation of al-Ashʿarī's followers (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, 3/372).

16. Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, 220–221.

"definitive" before any examination, while revelation is only "outward meanings". The first answer offered for the transmitted proof is that it "is unsound". And the only exits are reinterpretation (*taʾwīl*) and consignment (*tafwīḍ*); in neither of them does the revelation decide anything.

The Law Applied to the Verses of Allah's Exaltedness

The law was not a thought experiment. In the same book, answering those who affirmed from the Qur'an that Allah is above His creation, al-Rāzī applied it to the verses themselves:

> لَمَّا عَرَفْنَا بِتِلْكَ الْقَوَاطِعِ الْعَقْلِيَّةِ: أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ مُرَادَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنْ هَذِهِ الْآيَاتِ: إِثْبَاتَ الْجِهَةِ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى، فَلَا حَاجَةَ بِنَا بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ إِلَى بَيَانِ أَنَّ مُرَادَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنْ هَذِهِ الْآيَاتِ، مَا هُوَ؟
>
> "Since we have known by those rational certainties that what Allah the Exalted intends by these verses is not the affirmation of direction for Him, we have no need after that to explain what Allah the Exalted does intend by them."[17]

The verses are Qur'an, so their transmission is certain; their plain sense is that Allah is above; and nothing turned them from it except what he called rational certainties. That is the law at work: a text certain in its transmission is set aside by an argument, and its meaning is then left unknown.

17. Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, 198–199. He introduces this with the words "here we choose the way of the Salaf" (*wa-ʿinda hādhā nakhtāru madhhab al-salaf*); the answer to that claim is in Part Three. Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Samʿānī al-Shāfiʿī laid down that denial needs proof as much as affirmation: "whoever claims a ruling about anything, whether affirming or denying, must establish proof for it", citing *"Say: Produce your proof, if you should be truthful"* (al-Naml 27: 64); and whoever claims to know that a thing is not so is asked whether he knows it by necessity or by proof, and if by proof, whether by reason or by revelation, and must bring it (*Qawāṭiʿ al-Adillah*, 3/384–385).

Three Walls Around the Text

A law that overrules the text would be exposed if the text were ever allowed to be certain. So the school raised three walls around it.

First: Ten Conditions No Text Can Meet

Al-Rāzī wrote in *al-Muḥaṣṣal*:

الدَّلِيلُ اللَّفْظِيُّ لَا يُفِيدُ الْيَقِينَ إِلَّا عِنْدَ تَيَقُّنِ أُمُورٍ عَشَرَةٍ

"A verbal proof does not yield certainty except when ten things are certain."[18]

The ten are certainty of:

(i) the infallibility of those who transmitted the meanings of its words;
(ii) its grammar and its word-forms;
(iii) the absence of any second meaning shared by a word;
(iv) the absence of figurative use;
(v) the absence of a meaning transferred by custom or revelation;
(vi) the absence of specification to particular persons or times;
(vii) the absence of anything implied but unstated;
(viii) the absence of any change in word order;
(ix) the absence of abrogation;
(x) the absence of any rational objection, "which, if it existed, would prevail".

18. Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa-l-Muta'akhkhirīn*, 31; Ibn al-Qayyim quotes it in *al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah*, 2/633, as the first of the false principles he sets out to demolish. He then quotes Ibn Taymiyyah's first answer: knowing what a speaker means does not depend on these ten things at all, for whoever knows that the Messenger meant a thing, and knows that he is truthful, has certain knowledge (2/634). Al-Bayḍāwī gives the same list and the same reason, "since reason is the root of transmission, and to declare the root false in order to declare the branch true is impossible" (*Ṭawāli' al-Anwār*, 133–135).

Since all of these can rarely be known together, the conclusion follows by itself: no text is certain, and every text waits on reason. The last condition settles the matter alone. A text is certain only if reason does not object, and reason objects whenever the theologian says it does.

Second: "All of Them Are Speculative"

Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631 AH) (ﷺ)[19] drew the conclusion openly. Closing his argument that Allah is not above His creation, he dismissed in one sentence every text of the Book and the Sunnah his opponent might bring:

> وَهِيَ بِأَسْرِهَا ظَنِّيَّةٌ، وَلَا يَسُوغُ اسْتِعْمَالُهَا فِي الْمَسَائِلِ الْقَطْعِيَّةِ
>
> "They are all speculative, and it is not permissible to use them in definitive questions."[20]

Third: "Most of Them Are Not Sound"

Al-Ghazālī added the wall that touches the people of ḥadīth most directly. In *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād* he wrote:

> وَأَمَّا مَا قَضَى الْعَقْلُ بِاسْتِحَالَتِه فَيَجِبُ فِيهِ تَأْوِيلُ مَا وَرَدَ السَّمْعُ بِه، وَلَا يُتَصَوَّرُ أَنْ يَشْمَلَ السَّمْعُ عَلَى قَاطِعٍ مُخَالِفٍ لِلْمَعْقُولِ، وَظَوَاهِرُ أَحَادِيثِ التَّشْبِيهِ أَكْثَرُهَا غَيْرُ صَحِيحَةٍ، وَالصَّحِيحُ مِنْهَا لَيْسَ بِقَاطِعٍ بَلْ هُوَ قَابِلٌ لِلتَّأْوِيلِ
>
> "As for what reason judges impossible, what revelation brought about it must be reinterpreted; it is inconceivable that revelation should contain anything definitive that contradicts what is rational. The outward sense of the ḥadīths of anthropomorphism: most of them are not sound, and the sound ones among them are not definitive but open to reinterpretation."[21]

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19. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abī ʿAlī al-Āmidī, born in 551. He began as a Ḥanbalī in Baghdad, moved to the Shāfiʿī school and gave himself to the rational sciences, in which, Ibn Khallikān says, no one of his time had memorised more. Jurists in Egypt accused him of corrupt belief and the doctrine of the philosophers, and he left for Ḥamāh; he died in Damascus (*Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 3/293–294). Al-Subkī names him right after al-Rāzī among al-Ashʿarī's followers (*Ṭabaqāt*, 3/372).
20. Al-Āmidī, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, 200.
21. Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*, 115–116.

The verdict on the ḥadīths comes before any examination of their chains. They are "not sound" because their meaning is rejected, and the few whose soundness cannot be denied are "not definitive". This is the reverse of everything the scholars of ḥadīth did. They judged a report by the men who carried it, and then believed what it said; the law judges it by what it says, and then decides whether its carriers are to be trusted.

From Argument to Settled Rule

By the next generation the law no longer needed a defence. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684 AH) (رحمه الله)[22] mentions it in passing, as a settled principle, while explaining one of al-Rāzī's answers on a question of language:

> وَإِذَا تَعَارَضَ الْعَقْلُ وَالنَّقْلُ يَتَعَيَّنُ تَأْوِيلُ النَّقْلِ لِلْعَقْلِ عَلَى الْقَاعِدَةِ
>
> "When reason and transmission conflict, the transmitted text must be reinterpreted in favour of reason, according to the rule."[23]

The same sentence, in slightly different words, runs through the later textbooks of the school.[24]

22. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī, head of the Mālikī school in Egypt in his time, skilled in fiqh, uṣūl and the rational sciences, who took much of his learning from ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām (Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dībāj al-Mudhhab*, 1/236). Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām stands in al-Subkī's list of al-Ashʿarī's followers (*Ṭabaqāt*, 3/372), and al-Qarāfī's own words here call al-Rāzī's law "the rule".

23. Al-Qarāfī, *Nafāʾis al-Uṣūl*, 2/755–756. He adds that reinterpretation without support from sound evidence is not allowed.

24. Al-Ījī makes the absence of a rational objector a condition of certainty, "since if it existed it would certainly be given precedence over the transmitted proof, for it is not possible to act on both ... and to give transmission precedence over reason is to annul the root by the branch" (*al-Mawāqif*, 2/51–57).

What Is Agreed and What Is Not

A contemporary Ashʿarī, Saʿīd Fawdah,[25] states the shared principle in words Ahl al-Sunnah accept:

> أَنَّهُ لَا يُوجَدُ تَعَارُضٌ بَيْنَ الْمَعَانِي الثَّابِتَةِ عَلَى سَبِيلِ الْقَطْعِ بِالْعَقْلِ، وَبَيْنَ الْمَعَانِي الثَّابِتَةِ عَلَى سَبِيلِ الْقَطْعِ بِالنَّقْلِ [...] فَإِنَّ الْقَاطِعَ هُوَ الْمُقَدَّمُ
>
> "There is no conflict between meanings established definitively by reason and meanings established definitively by transmission [...] the definitive one is given precedence."[26]

Taken as it stands, this is true; it is almost word for word the first answer of Ahl al-Sunnah set out in Part Three. The parting comes after it. In al-Rāzī's law the rational side is "definitive" before it has been examined, al-Āmidī declares the texts of the Book and the Sunnah "all speculative", al-Ghazālī declares most of the ḥadīths "not sound", and the ten conditions ensure that no text can ever qualify. So "the definitive is given precedence" means in practice that the rational claim always wins and the text always yields.

(i) *Agreed:* two definitive proofs cannot conflict, and the definitive is preferred to the speculative.

(ii) *Disputed:* that a proof is definitive merely because it is called rational, and that a text of revelation is speculative merely because it is transmitted.

(iii) *Disputed:* that the only way out is reinterpretation or consignment, and never acceptance of what the text says.

25. Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Fawdah (contemporary), author of *Naqḍ al-Risālah al-Tadmuriyyah* and *al-Kāshif al-Ṣaghīr ʿan ʿAqāʾid Ibn Taymiyyah*, both published by Dār al-Rāzī in Amman to defend Ashʿarī doctrine against Ibn Taymiyyah.

26. Fawdah, *Naqḍ al-Risālah al-Tadmuriyyah*, 144.

Part Three

Three Premises, Three Collapses

The law stands on three premises: that "reason" is one agreed judge; that revelation is known to be true only through the reasoning of the theologians; and that reason is certain while the text is not. The imams answered each of them long before al-Rāzī gave the law its name, because the Jahmiyyah and the Muʿtazilah had already rejected texts in the name of reason.[27] Their answers are set out here premise by premise; then the law is followed to the place it leads, and its defences are heard one by one.

First Premise: "Reason Is One Agreed Judge"

Every Sect Calls Its Own Doctrine Rational

ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dārimī (d. 280 AH) (رحمه الله),[28] replying to the Jahmiyyah who said, "No, rather we go by what is rational," answered that there is no such single thing:

> لِأَنَّ الْمَعْقُولَ لَيْسَ لِشَيْءٍ وَاحِد مَوْصُوف بِحُدُود عِنْدَ جَمِيعِ النَّاسِ فَيُقْتَصَرُ عَلَيْهِ [...] رَأَيْنَا أَرْشَدَ الْوُجُوهِ وَأَهْدَاهَا أَنْ نَرُدَّ الْمَعْقُولَاتِ كُلَّهَا إِلَى أَمْرِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ
>
> "Because what is rational is not one thing, defined by limits that all people share, so that one could keep to it [...] we saw that the most guided course is to refer all rational claims to the command of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ)."

27. Al-Ṣanʿānī gave the measure for every such dispute: "Do not be overawed by those who hold a view or by their number, on either side; go back to the proofs, for they are the scale that tells truth from falsehood" (*Irshād al-Nuqqād ilā Taysīr al-Ijtihād*, 146).

28. Abū Saʿīd ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dārimī al-Sijistānī. Al-Dhahabī calls him imam, scholar, ḥāfiẓ and critic, devoted to the Sunnah and skilled in debate, author of *al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyyah* and *al-Radd ʿalā Bishr al-Marīsī* (*Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, 13/319–320). He took

Every sect, he observes, calls its own doctrine rational and its opponent's ignorance, and he closes with a rule that turns the law on its head:

فَالْمَعْقُولُ عِنْدَنَا مَا وَافَقَ هَدْيَهُمْ، وَالْمَجْهُولُ مَا خَالَفَهُمْ

> "So the rational, with us, is what agrees with their guidance, and the ignorant is what departs from them."[29]

"Their guidance" is the way of the Companions and those who followed them, and there is no way to know it, he adds, except through the narrated reports. A judge that disagrees with itself cannot rule over the revelation.

Today's Certainty, Tomorrow's Retraction

Abū Naṣr al-Sijzī (d. 444 AH) (رحمه الله),[30] the ḥadīth master of Makkah, added a second observation: the men of "pure reason" do not only disagree with one another; each of them disagrees with himself over time.

وَوَجَدْنَا أَيْضًا الْقَائِلِينَ بِالْعَقْلِ الْمُجَرَّدِ وَأَنَّهُ أَوَّلُ الْحُجَجِ مُخْتَلِفِينَ فِيهِ، كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ يَزْعُمُ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ مَعَهُ وَأَنَّ مُخَالِفَهُ قَدْ أَخْطَأَ الطَّرِيقَ [...] وَنَجِدُهُمْ أَيْضًا يَقُولُونَ الْيَوْمَ قَوْلًا يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُ مُقْتَضَى الْعَقْلِ، وَيَرْجِعُونَ عَنْهُ غَدًا إِلَى غَيْرِهِ، وَمَا كَانَ بِهَذِهِ الْمَثَابَةِ لَا يَجِبُ أَنْ يَكُونَ حُجَّةً فِي نَفْسِهِ

> "We have also found those who hold to pure reason, and that it is the first of proofs, disagreeing about it, each claiming that the truth is with him and that his opponent has missed the way [...] And we find them saying one thing today which they claim reason requires,

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fiqh from al-Buwayṭī, the companion of al-Shāfiʿī, and al-Subkī counts him among the Shāfiʿīs (*Ṭabaqāt*, 2/302).

29. Al-Dārimī, *al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyyah*, 126–128 (paras. 209–212).

30. Abū Naṣr ʿUbayd Allāh b. Saʿīd b. Ḥātim al-Sijzī al-Wāʾilī. Al-Dhahabī: "*al-imām, al-ʿālim, al-ḥāfiẓ, al-mujawwid, shaykh al-Sunnah*", shaykh of the Ḥaram and author of *al-Ibānah al-Kubrā* on the Qur'an being uncreated, "a large volume showing the breadth of the man's knowledge of narration"; and Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥabbāl said that al-Sijzī had a better memory than fifty like al-Ṣūrī (*Siyar*, 17/654–655).

> and turning from it tomorrow to something else. Whatever is like this cannot be a proof in itself."[31]

The Book, he goes on, is not subject to abrogation, and submission to it is obligatory, "so the proof is in it, not in bare reason". The school bears him out against itself. Al-Rāzī, as will be seen, laid down in one book that no verbal proof yields certainty, and conceded in another that it does when its context makes the meaning plain; and the law itself, as Part Four shows, was not the position of the man the school is named after.

The Clearest Rational Proof Is the Book of Allah

Abū al-Qāsim al-Lālakāʾī (d. 418 AH) (رحمه الله)[32] opened his collection of the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah by naming where the clearest reasoning is found:

> وَكَانَ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ مَقُولٍ، وَأَوْضَحِ حُجَّةٍ وَمَعْقُولٍ: كِتَابُ اللَّهِ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ، ثُمَّ قَوْلُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ وَصَحَابَتِهِ الْأَخْيَارِ الْمُتَّقِينَ، ثُمَّ مَا أَجْمَعَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَفُ الصَّالِحُونَ
>
> "Among the greatest of things ever said, and the clearest of proofs and of what reason grasps, is the Book of Allah, the manifest truth; then the word of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and of his chosen, God-fearing Companions; then what the righteous Salaf agreed upon."

Whoever turns from these and seeks the truth in what he desires, he goes on, has chosen his own ruin,

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31. Al-Sijzī, *Risālah ilā Ahl Zabīd*, 94–95. He continues: the Book drew attention to reason and its merit, and showed that whoever opposes the Book is among those who do not reason, "because reason requires the slave to accept from his Master and leave his own opinion for Him".

32. Abū al-Qāsim Hibat Allāh b. al-Ḥasan b. Manṣūr al-Ṭabarī al-Rāzī, known as al-Lālakāʾī. Al-Khaṭīb, who heard from him, says he settled in Baghdad, studied Shāfiʿī fiqh under Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarāyīnī, "understood and memorised", and wrote a book on the Sunan, a book on the names of the narrators in the two Ṣaḥīḥs and a book in explanation of the Sunnah; death overtook him at al-Dīnawar in Ramaḍān 418 before much was narrated from him (*Tārīkh Baghdād*, 16/108–109).

فِيمَا يَعْتَرِضُ عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَسُنَّةِ رَسُولِهِ بِضَرْبِ الْأَمْثَالِ، وَدَفْعِهِمَا بِأَنْوَاعِ الْمِحَالِ، وَالْحَيْدَةِ عَنْهُمَا بِالْقِيلِ وَالْقَالِ

"in opposing the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger by striking comparisons, pushing them away with every kind of absurdity, and turning from them with 'it was said' and 'he said'."[33]

For al-Lālakāʾī the Book is not one side of a contest with reason; it is the clearest reasoning there is, and what opposes it is only comparison and talk.

Second Premise: "Revelation Stands on the Theologians' Reason"

Prophethood Was Never Known by Kalām

The law's central claim is that the Book and the Prophet (ﷺ) can only be known to be true through the proofs of the theologians. Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388 AH) (رحمه الله)[34] met this very objection, put to him in the form: "You have rejected *kalām*; by what then do you know that the Book is true and the Prophet truthful?" He answered:

إِنَّا لَا نُنْكِرُ أَدِلَّةَ الْعُقُولِ وَالتَّوَصُّلَ بِهَا إِلَى الْمَعَارِفِ، وَلَكِنْ لَا نَذْهَبُ فِي اسْتِعْمَالِهَا إِلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ الَّتِي سَلَكْتُمُوهَا

"We do not deny rational proofs, or reaching knowledge by them. But we do not use them in the way you have taken."[35]

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33. Al-Lālakāʾī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl Iʿtiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamāʿah*, 1/7–9.

34. Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bustī, jurist, man of letters and ḥadīth scholar, author of *Maʿālim al-Sunan* and *Aʿlām al-Ḥadīth*, likened in his age to Abū ʿUbayd in knowledge and piety (Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, 2/214–215). Al-Subkī counts him among the Shāfiʿīs (*Ṭabaqāt*, 3/282).

35. Al-Khaṭṭābī, *al-Ghunyah ʿan al-Kalām wa-Ahlih*, as quoted in full by Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, 2/152–155. Ibn Taymiyyah described the place of reason in the same balance: reason is a condition for knowing anything and for the soundness of deeds, but it does not stand alone; it is a faculty in the soul like the power of sight in the eye. When the light of faith and the Qur'an reaches it, it is like the eye when the light of the sun reaches it; left to itself, it cannot see what lies beyond its reach; and set aside altogether, what remains is the life of an animal. The messengers, he adds,

That way, he goes on, is the argument from accidents and substances, which the theologians took from the philosophers. The Prophet (ﷺ) never called anyone to it, and not a letter of it is narrated from him or his Companions; yet he conveyed the religion complete. Those who believe in prophethood, he says, have been spared that crooked road.

Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāmah (d. 620 AH) (رحمه الله)[36] showed what the opposite claim implies about the Messenger (ﷺ) himself:

> فَإِنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ لَمْ يَأْمُرْ أَحَدًا مِنْ أُمَّتِه بِعِلْمِ الْكَلَامِ وَالنَّظَرِ فِي أَدِلَّةِ الْعُقُولِ لِيَعْرِفَ بِهِ صِحَّةَ مُعْتَقَدِهِ، بَلْ قَنِعَ مِنْهُمْ بِمُجَرَّدِ الْإِسْلَامِ
>
> "The Prophet (ﷺ) did not command anyone of his Ummah to study kalām and examine rational proofs in order to know by it that his belief was sound; rather he was content with their bare Islam."[37]

If faith were not sound until it passed through the theologians' proofs, then the Prophet (ﷺ) accepted from the Arabs a faith that was not sound, and that is to charge him with error.

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) (رحمه الله),[38] who gave his *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ al-ʿAql wal-Naql* to answering al-Rāzī's law, made the same point from history. Nations beyond counting followed the messengers with certain knowledge of their truthfulness without ever hearing of the argument from accidents, and the best of this Ummah believed without it. To reject what that argument concludes, he says,

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came with what reason cannot reach by itself, never with what reason knows to be impossible (*Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 3/338–339).

36. Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, born in 541, author of *al-Mughnī*. Al-Dhahabī: "*al-shaykh, al-imām, al-qudwah, al-ʿallāmah, al-mujtahid, shaykh al-Islām*", and he quotes Ibn al-Najjār: "*thiqah, ḥujjah*, noble, of abundant learning, upright, scrupulous and devoted to worship" (*Siyar*, 22/165–166).

37. Ibn Qudāmah, *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar fī Kutub al-Kalām*, 47–49, from his reply to Ibn ʿAqīl, who had called for the method of kalām over the way of the Salaf. He adds that the way of the Salaf "has been established as sound by definitive proof from the Book, the Sunnah and consensus, so there is no need to uncover its soundness by another proof".

38. Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, born in 661, the Ḥanbalī imam of Damascus (Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, 4/491 ff.).

لَا يَكُونُ قَدْحًا فِي الْعَقْلِيَّات، الَّتِي هِيَ أَصْلُ الشَّرْعِ، بَلْ يَكُونُ قَدْحًا فِي أُمُورٍ لَا يَفْتَقِرُ الشَّرْعُ إِلَيْهَا، وَلَا يَتَوَقَّفُ عَلَيْهَا

"is not an attack on the rational truths that are the foundation of the Sharīʿah; it is an attack on things the Sharīʿah does not need and does not depend upon."[39]

Not Everything Called Rational Is the Root of Revelation

Al-Ghazālī's premise, "by reason we knew the truthfulness of the revelation", hides a jump. Ibn Taymiyyah separated the two things it runs together. The truth of what the Messenger (ﷺ) reported does not depend on our knowing it at all; it is true whether people believe it or not. What our knowledge of it depends on is only the few rational truths by which his truthfulness is known, such as the signs Allah gave him. The knowledge reason yields is beyond counting, and it is plainly not the case, he says, that all of it is a root of revelation and a proof of its soundness.[40] The denial of Allah's being above His creation, for which the law was built, has nothing to do with how anyone came to know that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of Allah. To reject it touches nothing that prophethood rests on.

The Witness Cannot Overrule the Expert

Some of them gave the premise an image: reason is like the witness who vouched for the revelation's integrity, so to prefer the revelation over reason is to discredit the one who vouched for it. Ibn Taymiyyah answered the image with another. When people bear witness that a man is an expert in medicine, or in valuing goods, and the judge accepts him as more knowledgeable than they are, and then the witnesses dispute with the expert on a question of his own field, it is the expert who is followed, not the witnesses. Their witness was that he knows better than they do; to prefer their opinion over his would be to contradict their own wit-

39. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/310; on the nations who knew the messengers' truthfulness without this method, 1/132.

40. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/88–89.

ness. And should the expert declare that his witnesses erred in one particular matter, this does not undo their testimony to him, for a witness is not required to be free of every error:

فَالشَّرْعُ إِذَا خَالَفَ الْعَقْلَ فِي بَعْضِ مَوَارِدِ النِّزَاعِ وَنَسَبَهُ فِي ذَلِكَ إِلَى الْخَطَأِ وَالْغَلَطِ، لَمْ يَكُنْ ذَلِكَ قَدْحًا فِي كُلِّ مَا يَعْلَمُهُ الْعَقْلُ، وَلَا فِي شَهَادَتِهِ لَهُ بِأَنَّهُ صَادِقٌ مَصْدُوقٌ

"So when the revelation contradicts reason in some disputed matters and ascribes error and mistake to it there, that is no attack on everything reason knows, nor on its testimony that the revelation is truthful and confirmed as truthful."[41]

The Argument Overturns Itself

In his tenth reply Ibn Taymiyyah turns al-Rāzī's own argument against him. Reason has itself shown that the Messenger (ﷺ) is truthful and that what he reports must be accepted. To reject his report in the name of reason is to reject what reason has shown, and a reason shown to be wrong cannot then be used to oppose anything:

فَكَانَ تَقْدِيمُ الْعَقْلِ مُوجِبًا عَدَمَ تَقْدِيمِهِ، فَلَا يَجُوزُ تَقْدِيمُهُ

"So giving reason precedence requires that it not be given precedence; therefore it may not be given precedence."[42]

Third Premise: "Reason Is Certain and the Text Is Not"

Precedence Belongs to Certainty, Not to Reason

Ibn Taymiyyah's first reply goes to the root. Either the two conflicting proofs are both definitive, and then a conflict is impossible; or both are

41. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/138–143, the sixth reply, which opens: "When revelation and reason conflict, revelation must be given precedence, because reason confirms the revelation in everything it reports, while the revelation did not confirm reason in everything it reports."

42. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/170–171. He adds at once, "This is clear and evident", so it is his own position, not only a counter-argument.

speculative, and then the stronger is preferred; or one is definitive, and then it is preferred, whichever it is:

وَإِذَا قُدِّرَ أَنَّ الْعَقْلِيَّ هُوَ الْقَطْعِيُّ كَانَ تَقْدِيمُهُ لِكَوْنِهِ قَطْعِيًّا، لَا لِكَوْنِهِ عَقْلِيًّا

"If the rational one is supposed to be the definitive one, it is preferred because it is definitive, not because it is rational."[43]

From Yemen, Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840 AH) (رحمه الله)[44] reached the same answer against those who said, "If reason is overturned, revelation is overturned, for it is its branch":

أَنَّ تَقْدِيرَ تَعَارُضِ الْعَقْلِ وَالسَّمْعِ الْقَاطِعَيْنِ تَقْدِيرٌ مُحَالٌ؛ لِأَنَّ تَعَارُضَ الْعُلُومِ مُحَالٌ، وَلَوْ قُدِّرَ، بَطَلَا مَعًا

"Supposing a conflict between definitive reason and definitive revelation is supposing the impossible, because a conflict between two items of knowledge is impossible; and if it were supposed, both would fall together."[45]

The Opposite of "Revealed" Is "Innovated", Not "Rational"

The law sets "rational" against "revealed" as if they were two rival camps. Ibn Taymiyyah showed that the division itself is false. Whether a proof is rational or transmitted only tells us the way by which it is

43. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ al-ʿAql wa-l-Naql*, 1/86–87.

44. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr al-Ḥasanī of Ṣanʿāʾ, born about 765. Raised among the Zaydiyyah, he wrote *al-ʿAwāṣim wa-l-Qawāṣim* in reply to them, and Ibn Ḥajar described him as devoted to ḥadīth and strongly inclined to the Sunnah (al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ*, 6/272).

45. Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-ʿAwāṣim wa-l-Qawāṣim*, 5/51–52.

known; it says nothing of whether it is sound. The word that stands against "revealed" is another word altogether:

> وَأَمَّا كَوْنُهُ شَرْعِيًّا فَلَا يُقَابَلُ بِكَوْنِهِ عَقْلِيًّا، وَإِنَّمَا يُقَابَلُ بِكَوْنِهِ بِدْعِيًّا؛ إِذِ الْبِدْعَةُ تُقَابِلُ الشِّرْعَةَ
>
> "As for its being revealed, that is not set against its being rational; it is set only against its being innovated, for innovation is the opposite of the revealed way."[46]

The Qur'an itself is full of rational proofs: its parables and arguments for the oneness of Allah, the truthfulness of His messengers and the Resurrection are proofs that reason recognises, and they are revealed at the same time. So a revealed proof can never be overruled by an unrevealed one, any more than an innovation can be preferred to the way Allah commanded, or a lie to the truth.

The Meaning Reached Us as Surely as the Words

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH) (ﷺ)[47] showed what the ten conditions and the law achieve together. The first makes every text uncertain in what it means; the second makes reason prevail over it whenever the two meet:

> فَإِذَا انْضَمَّ إِلَى هَذِهِ الْمُقَدِّمَةِ أَنَّ النَّقْلَ إِذَا عَارَضَ الْعَقْلَ وَجَبَ تَقْدِيمُ الْعَقْلِ، كَمُلَ عَزْلُ الْوَحْيِ
>
> "When to this premise is joined the claim that if transmission contradicts reason, reason must be given precedence, the dismissal of the revelation is complete."[48]

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46. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/198–200, the fifteenth reply. In the same reply he says that many theologians think the revealed proofs are confined to the bare report of the truthful one, and so divide the foundations of religion into "rational matters", which they hold the Book and the Sunnah do not teach, and "transmitted matters": "this is a mistake on their part; rather the Qur'an pointed to the rational proofs, explained them and drew attention to them".
47. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, born in 691, Ḥanbalī, the close companion of Ibn Taymiyyah; his student Ibn Rajab says he was unrivalled in tafsīr and in the foundations of the religion (*Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, 5/171).
48. Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah*, 2/633–636.

Against the first premise he points to what everyone knows: that "pilgrimage to the House is due to Allah from the people" means this House, this pilgrimage and these people, and that the meaning of most of the Qur'an reached the Ummah as surely as its words, for the Messenger (ﷺ) conveyed its meanings with even greater care than its wording.[49] Whoever knows what a speaker meant does not first count every possibility that he might have meant something else; the knowledge itself excludes them. Against the second, he separates the few rational truths by which prophethood is known from the many disputed claims later brought against the texts:

وَلَيْسَ الْقَدْحُ فِي بَعْضِ الْعَقْلِيَّاتِ قَدْحًا فِي جَمِيعِهَا، كَمَا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ الْقَدْحُ فِي بَعْضِ السَّمْعِيَّاتِ قَدْحًا فِي جَمِيعِهَا

"Rejecting some rational claims is not rejecting all of them, just as rejecting some transmitted reports is not rejecting all of them."[50]

The Law Turned Back on Its Makers

Ibn al-Qayyim then took the law and reversed its direction. If a meaning of Allah's speech is known, its contradictory is known to be false, whatever argument is dressed up to support it:

فَيَنْقَلِبُ هَذَا الْقَانُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِأَنْ نَقُولَ: الْعِلْمُ بِمَدْلُولِ كَلَامِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ عِلْمٌ يَقِينِيٌّ قَطْعِيٌّ لَا يَحْتَمِلُ النَّقِيضَ، فَنَحْنُ نَسْتَدِلُّ عَلَى بُطْلَانِ كُلِّ مَا يُخَالِفُهُ وَيُنَاقِضُهُ بِثُبُوتِ الْعِلْمِ بِهِ

"So this law is turned back on them, and we say: knowledge of what the speech of Allah and His Messenger means is certain, definitive knowledge that admits no contradictory; and so we infer the falsity

49. Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah*, 2/633–636. Al-Shāfiʿī had laid down the same: Allah addressed the Arabs in their own tongue, which speaks of a thing in general meaning the general, or in general meaning the particular, and uses a plain wording known from its context to mean other than its plain sense; "and all of this, the knowledge of it is found in the beginning of the speech, or its middle, or its end" (*al-Risālah*, 51–53, paras. 173–178).

50. Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah*, 3/799–801.

> of everything that opposes and contradicts it from the very fact that it is known."[51]

Every rational doubt that contradicts what Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) meant is therefore known to be false, he says, even before it is examined in detail; and this principle is sounder than their law, and nearer to reason, to faith, and to affirming the speech of Allah as it truly is.

Their Own Scholars Concede

The strongest evidence that the texts yield certainty comes from the authors of the law. In *al-Maḥṣūl*, after setting out the same list of doubts, al-Rāzī himself wrote:

> وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ الْإِنْصَافَ أَنَّه لَا سَبِيلَ إِلَى اسْتِفَادَةِ الْيَقِينِ مِنْ هَذِهِ الدَّلَائِلِ اللَّفْظِيَّةِ إِلَّا إِذَا اقْتَرَنَتْ بِهَا قَرَائِنُ تُفِيدُ الْيَقِينَ، سَوَاءٌ كَانَتْ تِلْكَ الْقَرَائِنُ مُشَاهَدَةً، أَوْ كَانَتْ مَنْقُولَةً إِلَيْنَا بِالتَّوَاتُرِ

> "Know that the fair view is that there is no way to gain certainty from these verbal proofs unless they are joined by contextual indications that yield certainty, whether those indications were witnessed or transmitted to us by mass transmission."[52]

So the texts can yield certainty after all, when their context makes the meaning plain; and the context of the verses on Allah's exaltedness is the whole Qur'an, the whole Sunnah, and the understanding of the Companions who witnessed its revelation. The later masters of the school went further and called the doubt itself sophistry.[53] Once the texts are

51. Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah*, 2/779–781.

52. Al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl*, 1/404–408.

53. Al-Ījī: "The truth is that they may yield certainty through witnessed or mass-transmitted indications that exclude the possibilities; for we know that the words 'earth', 'heaven' and the like were used in the Messenger's time in the meanings intended by them now, and to cast doubt on this is sophistry" (*al-Mawāqif*, 2/51–57). Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī: "the more correct view is that transmitted proofs may yield certainty when joined by others", as with the proofs that prayer is obligatory, whose intended meanings the Companions knew by witnessed indications and which reached us by mass transmission (*Ghāyat al-Wuṣūl*, 36). Al-Bāqillānī had counted "the text of the Book and the Sunnah in which there is no other possibility" among what yields knowledge and

admitted to give certainty, the ten conditions fall, and with them the claim that a text is never more than "outward meaning".

Following Is the Root, Reason the Branch

Qiwām al-Sunnah al-Aṣbahānī (d. 535 AH) (ﷺ)[54] named this very question as the line that divides Ahl al-Sunnah from the people of innovation:

فَإِنَّهُمْ أَسَّسُوا دِينَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَعْقُولِ، وَجَعَلُوا الاتِّبَاعَ وَالْمَأْثُورَ تَبَعًا لِلْمَعْقُولِ. وَأَمَّا أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ قَالُوا: الْأَصْلُ فِي الدِّينِ الِاتِّبَاعُ، وَالْمَعْقُولُ تَبَعٌ

> "They founded their religion on what is rational, and made following and the transmitted tradition subordinate to it. Ahl al-Sunnah said: the foundation in religion is following, and what is rational is subordinate."

Were the religion founded on reason, he continues, people would have had no need of revelation or of prophets, the meaning of command and prohibition would have been lost, and anyone could have said whatever he wished. He then puts a question to the one who says the religion is built on reason: when a command of Allah comes that goes against your reason, which do you take? If he says, "What my reason holds," he has left the way of Islam; if he says, "What came from Allah," he has abandoned his own claim.[55]

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certainty (*al-Taqrīb wa-l-Irshād*, 3/172); and a contemporary professor of kalām wrote that one cannot recklessly describe all the transmitted proofs as speculative or turn from them on account of this doubt (Ḥasan al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Madkhal ilā Dirāsat ʿIlm al-Kalām*, 163).

54. Abū al-Qāsim Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Taymī al-Aṣbahānī, called Qiwām al-Sunnah, born in 457. His student Abū Mūsā al-Madīnī called him the imam of the imams of his time and the model of Ahl al-Sunnah in his age (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 20/80–81).

55. Qiwām al-Sunnah, *al-Ḥujjah fī Bayān al-Maḥajjah*, 1/347–348. The same passage is also ascribed to Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Samʿānī al-Shāfiʿī (al-Suyūṭī, *Ṣawn al-Manṭiq*, 182). Ibn Abī Zamanīn of Elvira in al-Andalus wrote in the same spirit: "Know, may Allah have mercy on you, that the Sunnah is the guide to the Qur'an, that it is not grasped by analogy nor taken from minds; it lies only in following the imams and what the main body of this Ummah walked upon" (*Uṣūl al-Sunnah*, 35).

Ibn al-Qayyim put the whole dispute into verse in his *Nūniyyah*:

العلم قال الله قال رسوله ... قال الصحابة هم أولو العرفان

ما العلم نصبك للخلاف سفاهة ... بين الرسول وبين رأي فلان

"Knowledge is: Allah said, His Messenger said, the Companions said; they are the people of understanding. Knowledge is not your foolishly setting up a quarrel between the Messenger and the opinion of so-and-so."

والعلم عندكم ينال بغيرها ... بزبالة الأفكار والأذهان

سميتموه قواطعا عقلية ... تنفي الظواهر حاملات معان

"And knowledge, with you, is gained from other than these, from the refuse of thoughts and minds, which you have named 'rational certainties' that cancel the plain texts, though those texts carry meanings."[56]

Where the Law Leads

A rule is tested by where it leads when followed to the end. The law leaves its holders two exits, and Ibn Taymiyyah showed that both end in the same place. If the texts on Allah's attributes were meant to be reinterpreted, then the Messenger (ﷺ) addressed his Ummah with words whose plain sense was false and never told them what he truly meant. If they were meant to be consigned, then he addressed them with words of which no one was meant to understand anything. On either view the speech that was sent to guide them did not show them the truth.[57]

The philosophers saw this, and turned the law against the theologians themselves. Ibn Sīnā argued that the texts on the Resurrection are like the texts on the attributes: in neither, he claimed, did the Messenger

56. Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Kāfiyah al-Shāfiyah*, 226; two lines between the first pair and the second are left out.

57. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/201–205, the sixteenth reply. He adds that Ibn al-Nafīs used to say there are only two positions, that of the people of ḥadīth and that of the philosophers, while the position of the theologians is "plainly self-contradictory"; and since the philosophers' position is known to be false, "the truth must be the position of the Salaf, the people of ḥadīth, the Sunnah and the Jamāʿah".

explain things as they truly are. The theologians had no answer to him that their own law did not destroy, as Ibn Taymiyyah observed:

> فَكَانَ الَّذِي اسْتَطَالُوا بِهِ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ هُوَ مُوَافَقَتَهُمْ لَهُمْ عَلَى نَفْيِ الصِّفَاتِ، وَإِلَّا فَلَوْ آمَنُوا بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ حَقَّ الْإِيمَانِ لَبَطَلَتْ مُعَارَضَتُهُمْ وَدُحِضَتْ حُجَّتُهُمْ
>
> "What gave the philosophers the upper hand over them was their agreement with them in denying the attributes. Had they believed in the whole Book as it deserves, the philosophers' objection would have collapsed and their argument been refuted."[58]

This is the helplessness of the law in a single scene. The theologian who sets aside the verses on Allah's exaltedness because his reason objects cannot answer the philosopher who sets aside the verses on the Resurrection because his reason objects. Only the one who accepts the whole Book can answer both.

No Way Out

The defenders of the school, early and modern, have not left the law undefended. Each defence, however, is answered from their own books.

1. "We never put reason before a definitive text."

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Idlibī, a contemporary Ashʿarī, wrote that one will not find in their books, "even once", that they set a rational judgement against a text definitive in transmission and meaning and preferred reason; such a conflict, he says, is imagined only with texts whose meaning is uncertain.[59] The answer is al-Rāzī himself, quoted in Part Two: the verses of Allah's exaltedness are certain in transmission, their sense is plain, and he set them aside by rational certainties alone. As for "uncertain in meaning", the ten conditions make every text uncertain in meaning whenever reason objects, so the reply only restates the law. Ibn Taymiyyah named those who declared outright that rational proofs take

58. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/201–205.

59. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Idlibī (contemporary), *ʿAqāʾid al-Ashāʿirah fī Ḍiwār Hādiʾ maʿa Shubuhāt al-Munāwiʾīn*, 66–68, a defence of the Ashʿarīs written in reply to Safar al-Ḥawālī. Fawdah makes the same claim and adds that Ibn Taymiyyah does not present their view as it is (*Naqḍ al-Risālah al-Tadmuriyyah*, 144).

precedence over revealed ones without restriction: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī and those who followed them.[60]

2. "Reason is the foundation of revelation; to reject it is to reject both."

This is the heart of the law, and it has fallen three times over: the reason that established prophethood is not the reason of the theologians; the witness who vouched for the revelation cannot overrule it on the questions it was vouched for; and the argument, followed through, overturns itself.

3. "Consignment is the way of the Salaf."

Al-Rāzī presented leaving the meaning unknown as "the way of the Salaf". Ibn Taymiyyah answered from the Qur'an's own command to reflect on it:

> وَأَمَّا التَّفْوِيضُ: فَإِنَّ مِنَ الْمَعْلُومِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى أَمَرَنَا أَنْ نَتَدَبَّرَ الْقُرْآنَ، وَحَضَّنَا عَلَى عَقْلِهِ وَفَهْمِهِ، فَكَيْفَ يَجُوزُ مَعَ ذَلِكَ أَنْ يُرَادَ مِنَّا الْإِعْرَاضُ عَنْ فَهْمِهِ وَمَعْرِفَتِهِ وَعَقْلِهِ؟
>
> "As for consignment: it is known that Allah the Exalted commanded us to reflect upon the Qur'an and urged us to understand it and grasp its meaning. How then can it be that what is wanted of us is to turn away from understanding it, knowing it and grasping it?"[61]

The same verse that declares the Book free of contradiction, "Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an?", commands that it be understood. A Book whose verses about its Author were meant to stay without meaning would be a Book that cannot be reflected upon in the very matter it speaks of most. The Salaf consigned the *how* of Allah's attributes to Him; they never consigned their *meaning*.

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60. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 5/342. He adds that none of them benefits from the revealed proofs in the questions of the creed, because they hold that revelation does not give knowledge of what the speaker meant.

61. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/201–205.

4. "The theologians never said that."

Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Jahbal (d. 733 AH) (ﷺ),[62] answering Ibn Taymiyyah's summary of the theologians' method, that whatever reason does not affirm is denied and the texts are either forced onto rare usages of the language or passed over in silence, wrote:

وَالْقَوْمُ لَمْ يَقُولُوا ذَلِكَ

"The people did not say that."[63]

They said it in their own words, and Part Two has quoted them: al-Rāzī's "said to be unsound, or meaning other than their outward sense", al-Āmidī's "all of them speculative", al-Ghazālī's "most of them are not sound", al-Qarāfī's "according to the rule". Ibn Taymiyyah's summary is their own sentences joined together.[64]

5. "The people of ḥadīth have no share of reason."

The same writer described the people of ḥadīth as men who argue rationally with their opponents until they reach their own doctrines, and then grow dull and understand neither Arabic nor any other tongue.[65] Ibn Taymiyyah had already answered the charge in explaining al-

62. Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Ibn Jahbal al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfiʿī, born in 670; he heard *Musnad al-Shāfiʿī* from al-Fārūthī and died on 9 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 733 (al-Fāsī, *Dhayl al-Taqyīd*, 1/407). Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī printed his reply to Ibn Taymiyyah's *al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawiyyah* in full in his entry, where he argues for the Ashʿarī denial that Allah is above (*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, 9/34 ff.).

63. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, 9/68–69. He goes on that the theologians held that every attribute of perfection must be affirmed and every attribute of deficiency denied, and that what came from Allah and His Messenger is to be laid before the language of the Arabs.

64. Al-Muʿallimī described the same state of the school in al-Ghazālī's time: it was widely held that the creed turns on reason, and that where the texts contradict it they must be reinterpreted (*al-Qāʾid ilā Taṣḥīḥ al-ʿAqāʾid*, in *Āthār al-Muʿallimī*, 11/370–371).

65. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9/38–39. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī likewise wrote that in the creed one relies only on the theologians, not on narrators far removed from reflection (introduction to *al-Sayf al-Ṣaqīl*, 12), and called Ibn Taymiyyah one who "makes a show of combining reason and transmission" (13). Al-Muʿallimī answered that al-Kawtharī has a private usage of the word "reason", which he never explains, and then treats whatever he calls by it as reason in its known sense deserves to be treated (*al-Tankīl*, in *Āthār al-Muʿallimī*, 10/203–204).

Khaṭṭābī's words on the Salaf: they were people of knowledge and certainty, not of ignorance and imitation; Allah had opened their hearts to knowledge of Him; and the Book and the Sunnah, which they held, set out the truth together with the rational proofs and parables by which it is known, more complete in giving certainty than anything the theologians later devised.[66] The Salaf did not lack reason; they lacked the theologians' need for it to stand in for the revelation.

6. "Ibn Taymiyyah's reply is itself kalām."

Saʿīd Fawdah wrote that what Ibn Taymiyyah does and writes in his refutations is itself the kalām he condemns.[67] The Salaf, however, did not condemn kalām because it used reason, nor only because its terms were new. Ibn Taymiyyah explained:

بَلْ ذَمُّهُمْ لِلْكَلَامِ لِفَسَادِ مَعْنَاهُ أَعْظَمُ مِنْ ذَمِّهِمْ لِحُدُوثِ أَلْفَاظِهِ

> "Rather, their censure of kalām for the corruption of its meaning was greater than their censure of it for the novelty of its terms."[68]

To answer a false argument with a sound one, in the opponent's own terms where that is needed, and to weigh its meaning by the Book and the Sunnah, is what the imams allowed; it is not what they condemned.[69]

66. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 7/288–289. Al-Muʿallimī put the sources of the creed in four: two of the Salaf, "natural disposition and revelation", natural disposition including the ordinary rational reflection open to those who never learned kalām or philosophy; and two of the later generations, "deep-delving rational speculation and Sufi unveiling" (*al-Qāʾid*, in *Āthār al-Muʿallimī*, 11/327).

67. Fawdah, *al-Kāshif al-Ṣaghīr ʿan ʿAqāʾid Ibn Taymiyyah*, 87–88.

68. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/232–233. He adds that they condemned it for containing false meanings opposed to the Book, the Sunnah and sound reason, "and the sign of their falsity is their opposition to the Book and the Sunnah, and everything that opposes the Book and the Sunnah is definitely false".

69. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 1/43–44: "Addressing the people of a terminology in their own terminology and language is not disliked when there is a need for it and the meanings are sound, like addressing the Byzantines, Persians and Turks in their own language and custom"; the imams disliked it only where there was no need.

PART FOUR

Witnesses from Their Own House

The strongest testimony against the law comes from inside the school: from the man it is named after, from its most celebrated scholar, and from the man who gave the law its name.

The Founder: The Message Needs None of Their Methods

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324 AH) (رحمه الله)[70] declared in *al-Ibānah*:

> قَوْلُنَا الَّذِي نَقُولُ بِهِ، وَدِيَانَتُنَا الَّتِي نَدِينُ بِهَا التَّمَسُّكُ بِكِتَابِ رَبِّنَا عَزَّ وَجَلَّ، وَسُنَّةِ نَبِيِّنَا عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، وَمَا رُوِيَ عَنِ الصَّحَابَةِ وَالتَّابِعِينَ وَأَئِمَّةِ الْمُحَدِّثِينَ
>
> "Our position, which we hold, and our religion, by which we worship, is holding fast to the Book of our Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, and the Sunnah of our Prophet, peace be upon him, and what is narrated from the Companions, the Successors and the imams of ḥadīth."[71]

70. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, descendant of Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (رضي الله عنه), author of refutations of the Muʿtazilah, the Rāfiḍah, the Jahmiyyah and others; al-Khaṭīb gives his death year on the authority of Ibn Ḥazm (*Tārīkh Baghdād*, 13/260).

71. Al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, 200–203. He continues that he holds what Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal held and opposes whoever opposes him.

Writing to the scholars of the frontier at Bāb al-Abwāb to set out the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah, he said the opposite of what his later followers made into a law:

فَلَوْ كُنَّا نَحْتَاجُ مَعَ مَا كَانَ مِنْهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فِي مَعْرِفَةِ مَا دَعَانَا إِلَيْهِ إِلَى مَا رَتَّبَهُ أَهْلُ الْبِدَعِ مِنْ طُرُقِ الِاسْتِدْلَالِ لَمَا كَانَ مُبَلِّغًا

"If, besides what came from him (peace be upon him), we needed the methods of argument that the people of innovation arranged in order to know what he called us to, he would not have conveyed the message."[72]

Ibn Taymiyyah, who is accused of misrepresenting the Ashʿarīs, drew the same distinction between the founder and the later school:

وَهَذَا الْكَلَامُ فِي الْأَصْلِ هُوَ مِنْ قَوْلِ الْجَهْمِيَّةِ الْمُعْتَزِلَةِ وَأَمْثَالِهِمْ، وَلَيْسَ مِنْ قَوْلِ الْأَشْعَرِيِّ وَأَئِمَّةِ أَصْحَابِهِ

"This position is in origin the doctrine of the Jahmī Muʿtazilah and their like; it is not the doctrine of al-Ashʿarī and the leading men among his followers."

The later Ashʿarīs, he explains, took it from the Muʿtazilah when they inclined towards a kind of Jahmī doctrine and even towards philosophy. Al-Ashʿarī had affirmed the attributes reported in revelation on the authority of revelation, and used reason only to support what revelation said, never to oppose it.[73]

72. Al-Ashʿarī, *Risālah ilā Ahl al-Thaghr*, 113–114. Earlier in the same letter he says the Prophet (ﷺ) showed his Companions the proofs of everything he called them to, "until their hearts were at rest with it and they refrained from seeking new proofs for it", and that it is impossible for anyone after him "to bring better guidance than he brought" (103–105).

73. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, 7/97.

The Proof of Islam Against His Own Law

Al-Ghazālī, whose sentence opened Part Two, described elsewhere a group who made reason the foundation and, whenever a plain text contradicted it, denied the report and called its narrator a liar. He warned:

وَلَا يَخْفَى مَا فِي هَذَا الرَّأْيِ مِنَ الْخَطَرِ فِي رَدِّ الْأَحَادِيثِ الصَّحِيحَةِ الْمَنْقُولَةِ عَنِ الثِّقَاتِ الَّذِينَ بِهِمْ وَصَلَ الشَّرْعُ إِلَيْنَا

> "The danger in this opinion is plain: rejecting sound ḥadīths transmitted by trustworthy narrators, through whom the Sharīʿah reached us."[74]

Yet he himself wrote that "most" of the ḥadīths on the attributes "are not sound", and a century later the first exit of al-Rāzī's law was exactly this: the transmitted proofs "are said to be unsound". His warning stands against his own sentence, and against the law that came after it.

A Lifetime Ending in "They Said" and "It Was Said"

And al-Rāzī himself, after a lifetime spent building the law, wrote these lines:

نهاية إقدام العقول عقال ... وأكثر سعي العالمين ضلال

وأرواحنا في وحشة من جسومنا ... وحاصل دنيانا أذى ووبال

> "The furthest that minds can step is a hobble, and most of the striving of the learned is astray. Our souls are lonely in our bodies, and the sum of our world is harm and grief."

ولم نستفد من بحثنا طول عمرنا ... سوى أن جمعنا فيه قيل وقالوا

> "In all our lifelong research we gained nothing but that we gathered 'it was said' and 'they said'."[75]

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74. Al-Ghazālī, *Qānūn al-Taʾwīl*, 17.

75. Al-Rāzī wrote these lines in his *Aqsām al-Ladhdhāt*, as Ibn Taymiyyah states (*al-Nubuwwāt*, 1/408); Ibn al-Qayyim quotes them with al-Rāzī's words "and on this meaning I said" (*Ijtimāʿ al-Juyūsh al-Islāmiyyah*, 1/469); and al-Dimyāṭī heard them through one narrator from al-Rāzī (*al-Thālith min Muʿjam Shuyūkh al-Dimyāṭī*, no. 51).

Two centuries before him al-Lālakāʾī had described those who turn from the Book and the Sunnah "with 'it was said' and 'he said'". Al-Rāzī reached the same words at the end of his road. It is reported that in the will he dictated in his final illness he said:

> وَلَقَد اخْتَبَرْتُ الطُّرُقَ الْكَلَامِيَّةَ وَالْمَنَاهِجَ الْفَلْسَفِيَّةَ فَمَا رَأَيْتُ فِيهَا فَائِدَةً تُسَاوِي الْفَائِدَةَ الَّتِي وَجَدْتُهَا فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ [...] دِينِي مُتَابَعَةُ مُحَمَّدٍ سَيِّدِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ، وَكِتَابِي هُوَ الْقُرْآنُ الْعَظِيمُ
>
> "I have tested the methods of kalām and the ways of philosophy, and I did not find in them a benefit equal to the benefit I found in the Mighty Qur'an [...] My religion is following Muḥammad, the master of the messengers, and my book is the Mighty Qur'an."[76]

The founder of the school said the message needs none of these methods; its most celebrated scholar warned against rejecting sound reports; and the author of the law ended where the Salaf began. No opponent could have said more against the law than they said themselves.

76. Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿah, *ʿUyūn al-Anbāʾ*, 466–467, without an isnād.

Conclusion

The law rests on three premises, and each has fallen:

(i) What is called rational differs from one sect to the next, and from one year to the next in the same man, so it cannot sit in judgement over the revelation; the clearest reasoning is the Book of Allah itself.

(ii) The truthfulness of the Messenger (ﷺ) was known to the Companions and to nations after them without the methods of kalām. Rejecting those methods touches nothing prophethood rests on, and the witness who vouched for the revelation cannot overrule it.

(iii) Precedence belongs to what is certain, not to whatever is called rational. The texts yield certainty, as al-Rāzī himself conceded, and the word that stands against "revealed" is not "rational" but "innovated".

What remains of the law is only its result: a text that is never allowed to mean what it says, ḥadīths judged unsound because of what they say rather than who narrated them, and a religion that waited six centuries for a theologian to tell it what its Book did not mean. Followed to its end, the law could not answer the philosopher who used it against the Resurrection, and its own founder, its most celebrated scholar and its author testified against it.

The way of the Companions and the imams remains as it was: reason recognises the Messenger (ﷺ), and then follows him; the Book is reflected upon and understood; the report is judged by its chain, and then believed. The witness at ʿArafah, "we bear witness that you have conveyed", needs no supplement.[77] Allah said, "refer it to Allah and the Messenger"; He did not say, refer it to what the theologians call reason. I ask

77. Al-Saʿdī wrote that the first obligation upon the slaves is to believe Allah in everything He reports about Himself, and to know with certainty "that it is impossible that any

Allah to show us the truth as truth and grant us to follow it, and to show us falsehood as falsehood and grant us to avoid it. And all praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds.



sound knowledge should come that contradicts what Allah has reported"; and that this principle alone suffices to refute every deviant saying without examining each in detail, "because whatever negates the truth is false" (*Fatḥ al-Raḥīm al-Malik al-ʿAllām*, 26–27). Ibn Bāz wrote that the work of reason is to reflect on what was revealed and understand it in order to follow it, while to make it a judge over the revelation, accepting part and rejecting part, is to take it beyond its bounds; and that the messengers never bring what sound reason judges impossible, "but they may bring what bewilders the minds" for their limits, and then the mind must submit to the truthful, wise and all-knowing (*Majmūʿ Fatāwā wa-Maqālāt Mutanawwiʿah*, 1/107).

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