

# The Accusation of Irja' against Imam Abu Hanifah

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Tafhim (Instruction):

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds. Allah send prayers, blessings and peace on the Chief of the Messengers, his family and all his Companions.

To proceed:

A questioner asked me about the statement of the Imam of the Path, the Pole of Reality, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaylani (Allah Most High be pleased with him and give him satisfaction) in Ghuniyyat al-Talibin when mentioning the sects that will not attain salvation where he divided the Murji'ah into twelve sects, and one of them were the Hanafis. Then after a detailed explanation, he said: "As far as the Hanafis are concerned, they are the companions of Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man. He believed that faith (iman) is confession (iqrar), cognizance (ma'rifah) and belief in Allah and His messengers and what He brought through him", all according to what al-Barhuti mentioned in Kitab al-Shajarah. Al-Barhuti then said that this statement of [al-Jaylani] (may his secret be sanctified) is invalidated by two modes of criticism:

First the Hanafis are from amongst the Ahl al-Sunnah by agreement of those [whose opinions] are counted. So, it is not correct to count them from the Murji'ah sect and regard them as deviant and consider them to be unsaved (ghayr naji).

Second, he explained the beliefs for which the Murji'ah were designated as Murji'ah, and he counted the Hanafis among them, so the implication of [his speech] is the Hanafis expressed these [beliefs], adopting them as their creed, **but the fact is not so**. He said that they were called Murji'ah since they believed that if any accountable person says La ilaha illa Llah Muhammad al-Rasul Allah (There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah), and then commits all sins, he will not in principle enter the Fire. And from that which **there is no doubt is that the Hanafis are free from such beliefs**.

I [Shah Waliullah] say: that irja' is of two types: one which expels an adherent from the Sunnah, and an irja' that does not expel [an adherent from the Sunnah]. As far as the first is concerned, it is to believe that one who confessed with the tongue and testified with the heart,

will not in principle be harmed by sin. As far as the second is concerned, it is to believe that actions ('amal) are not a part of faith (iman), but it deserves reward or punishment.

The reason for differentiating between them is that the Companions (Sahabah) and the Followers (Tabi'un) agreed on the deviation of the Murji'ah in saying that actions deserve reward and punishment, and their opponents will thus be considered deviant and heretical.

As far as the second issue is concerned, it is not one among the issues on which a consensus from the Pious Predecessors (Salaf) has emerged, rather the evidences are conflicting. How many a hadith, verse and tradition are there which signify that faith (iman) is other than actions ('amal), and how many evidences are there which suggest that faith (iman) is applied to both words and actions? The dispute is nothing but a reference to [a mere difference in] phraseology, as all agree that a sinner does not come out of iman and is deserving of punishment [merely on account of committing a sin]. Moreover, it is possible to divert the evidences signifying iman as both [words and actions] from their outward meanings with a little attention.

Imam Abu Hanifah is from among those who expressed this second view, and he is from the elders of the Ahl al-Sunnah and their imams. Yes, the followers of his school of thought and his adherents in furu' (secondary issues) held different opinions. From among them were the Mu'tazilah like al-Jubba'i, Abu Hashim and al-Zamakhshari, and from among them were the Murji'ah and others. Thus, these [individuals] would follow Imam Abu Hanifah in the secondary issues of jurisprudence but they did not follow him in the fundamentals of beliefs, and they would attribute their false beliefs to Abu Hanifah (may Allah be pleased with him) in order to spread their madhhab and they would cling onto some of the statements of Imam Abu Hanifah (may Allah be pleased with him).

So the Ahl al-Haq from among the Hanafis like al-Tahawi (may Allah have mercy on him), etc, stood up and explained the madhhab of Imam Abu Hanifah (may Allah be pleased with him) and defended him against what they attributed to him. Numerous narrations corroborate that which we say and it is not hidden from anyone who refers to the books [on this matter]. Hence, the relation between the Hanafis and Ahl al-Sunnah is common in one regard and particular in another regard ('umum wa khusus min wajhin).

Now, you should know that the Shaykh (may Allah be pleased with him) mentioned the Murji'ah, the people of irja', among the deviant sects who are out of the fold of Ahl al-Sunnah. He said this is the reason that they were called Murji'ah. He mentioned among them the Hanafis, i.e., people who follow Imam Abu Hanifah in furu' and claim that he agreed with them in their position. Then he mentioned his statement which they cling onto, and thus he said that [Abu Hanifah] believed that faith (iman) is the same as confession (iqrar).

Once we have reviewed these matters, both criticisms disappear, and it is clear that the Shaykh (may Allah be pleased with him) did not accuse Imam Abu Hanifah, nor the Maturidi Hanafis, may Allah protect him against all these, and he only attributed that which he attributed to a group of the Murji'ah who affiliated themselves to Imam Abu Hanifah in the furu' and clung onto the outward meaning of his statement and they misinterpreted his statement.

(Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah, 1:27-29)

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