

Taqīd, *Ittibā*^c and *Ijtihad*: Contrast and Complementarity

[THEME I]

*The Term Taqīd as Defined in
Lexicons, Law, and Technical Usage*

IN A discussion of the trilateral root *q-l-d*, Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH/1004 CE) wrote:

The letters *qāf*, *lām* and *dāl* make up two sound roots, one of which denotes the act of hanging or suspending something on something or someone, and the other of which denotes fortune or destiny. The original meaning of this root is that of twisting or plaiting. The derivative noun *qilādah* refers to a necklace, while the phrase *qalladahu al-amr* means that someone assigned or appointed someone to a task.

The plural of *qilādah* (*qalā'id*), which occurs once in the Qur'an, is consistent with the meaning set forth above. In *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, 5:2, the term *qalā'id* refers to the garlands placed around the necks of animals to be slaughtered as sacrificial offerings, while in the Sunnah we have the saying of 'Ā'ishah, "I braided by hand the garlands for the Messenger of God's sacrificial animal (*qalā'id hadī rasūl Allāh*). Then he adorned it (*qalladahā*) with them."

Like the Qur'an, the Sunnah does not explicitly define the verb *qal-lada* (verbal noun, *taqīd*). As for the action referred to as *taqīd* with respect to religion, it is spoken of in well-known sayings of the Prophet

which, if not outright forgeries, are weakly attested, and have left an unwholesome impact on the Muslim community. According to one such saying, “If any of you imitates a scholar, he will be faultless before God on the Day of Judgment.”

Al-Shāṭibī quoted Ibn Mas‘ūd in *Al-I‘tiṣām* as saying, “Beware lest any you of lets his religion be a mere imitation of someone else’s such that if this other person believes, he believes, and if this other person disbelieves, he also disbelieves.” Hence, a number of scholars have described imitation as “a grievous innovation” (*bid‘ah ‘aẓīmah*) that had been unheard of in the early centuries of Islam.

Uṣūl scholars’ definitions of *taqlīd* have tended to reflect this same attitude. As we have seen, the verbal noun *taqlīd* is related etymologically to the word *qilādah* (necklace, garland) that one places around the neck of a person or a sacrificial animal. Hence, it is as though the imitator were ‘hanging’ the ruling with respect to which he imitates a *mujtahid* around the latter’s neck. In the technical sense the verb *qallada* is defined as the act of adopting the opinion or position of someone else without supporting evidence. As such, this definition excludes acting on the words of the Messenger of God or the consensus of the Muslim community, a layperson’s appeal to a mufti, or a judge’s reliance on the testimony of upright witnesses, since all of these actions are based on supporting evidence.

Commenting on the illegitimate reliance on imitation, al-Shawkānī wrote:

The individual engaged in *taqlīd* is someone who inquires about neither the teaching of the Qur’an nor about the example of God’s Messenger but, rather, thinks about nothing but the teaching of his imam. As for someone who goes beyond the teachings of his/her imam to ask about the Qur’an and the Sunnah, he or she is, by definition, not a *muqallid*.

This is why *taqlīd* has been defined as “accepting what someone else says without requiring him to produce evidence for what he is saying.” Before al-Shawkānī, Ibn Ḥazm had defined *taqlīd* as “following someone God Almighty has not commanded us to follow.” Ibn Ḥazm

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went on to state that “the practice of *taqlīd* is forbidden by all [divinely revealed] laws without exception...” Similarly, al-Suyūṭī defined *taqlīd* as “following someone without good reason. Indeed, it is a sign of unbelief, which is clear from *Sūrah al-Zukhruf*, 43:22, where the heathens of the Prophet’s day excused their unbelief with the words, “...‘Behold, We found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is in their footsteps that we find our guidance!’”

Ironically, one finds that the very individuals whose teachings were imitated the most – namely, the founders of the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence – were the most adamant in their condemnation and prohibition of *taqlīd*, and their insistence on the importance of study, *ijtihād*, and the search for supporting evidence. Their pronouncements on this matter are well known, in fact. Abū Ḥanīfah, for example, is reported to have said, “No one is permitted to quote a statement we have made without knowing where we got it.” And Abū Ḥanīfah’s student Abū Yūsuf (d. 182 AH/798 CE) took the same stance. Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH/795 CE) wrote in the same spirit, “I am only human. Sometimes I am wrong, and sometimes I am right. So when I express an opinion, examine it. If it agrees with the Qur’an, accept it. But anything that does not agree with the Qur’an and the Sunnah, reject it.” Expressing a similar attitude, al-Shāfi‘ī stated, “If a statement is valid, I affirm it as part of my teaching,” and, “If something I say conflicts with the Sunnah of the Prophet, then follow the Sunnah and disregard what I say.” Lastly, we have the statement made by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: “It is a sign of ignorance and lack of understanding that one should allow one’s religion to be dictated by other human beings.”

These, then, are examples of statements attributed to some of Islam’s leading scholars in prohibition of imitation in general, and of imitating them in particular. As for someone who, having adopted the position of one of these imams, seeks to defend this position with evidence, he is deemed not a *muqallid*, or imitator but, rather, a highly regarded *mujtahid*: a scholar who exerts laudable effort in the pursuit of proper understanding and interpretation of authoritative religious texts.

In further clarification of this matter, Ibn al-Qayyim wrote:

The imams whose names you have mentioned did not engage in the type of *taqlid* in which you yourselves engage, nor did they justify it in any way. Rather, the few instances in which they engaged in *taqlid* had to do with minor matters in relation to which they found no text from either the Qur'an or the Sunnah; rather, all they had available to them were statements that had been made by individuals more knowledgeable than they were. As a result, they had no choice in these matters but to be imitators, and when one has no choice, one is excused. As for those who have access to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and sayings of the Prophet's Companions and are capable of gathering evidence in support of the truth but choose instead simply to imitate something someone else has thought or said, they are like someone who, even though he has access to meat from an animal that has been slaughtered according to proper Islamic procedures, chooses instead to eat the meat of an animal that died in some other way.

In illustration of this point, al-Shāṭibī related what Bāqī ibn Mikhliḍ (d. 276 AH/889 CE) found when he returned to Andalusia after a visit to the East. While in the East, Bāqī ibn Mikhliḍ had met Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and other scholars, whose writings he studied carefully. When he arrived back in Andalusia, however, he encountered imitators who insisted on adhering to nothing but the school of Imam Mālik and denounced all others. As a consequence, they harassed and ostracized him, leaving him “abused and abandoned in an outer courtyard.” Al-Shāṭibī commented on this incident with the words, “This is what happens when we set other human beings up as arbiters of truth, and when we succumb to excess in our attachment to this or that philosophy or school of thought when, in all fairness, we should perceive that everyone is a venerable scholar in his own right.”

For this reason, as Ibn al-Qayyim notes in *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'in*:

they refer to the *muqallid* as an opportunist, as someone lacking in character who leaves his religion in the hands of others. Similarly, the *muqallid* is described as being a blind man lacking in insight and understanding. The *muqallid* is someone who follows any braying donkey, or turns aside for anyone who shouts in the street. Of such people, the Commander of the Faithful 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib once said, “they have not

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been enlightened with knowledge and have no firm foundation on which to lean.” Al-Shāfi‘ī described the *muqallid* as “someone who gathers wood in the dead of night,” and forbade others to imitate him or anyone else.

Among later scholars, the most prominent critics of *taqlīd* are followers of what has been termed “the reformist movement” (*al-ḥarakah al-iṣlāḥiyyah*) or “modern Salafism” (*al-salafiyyah al-ḥadīthah*) and the various movements and schools of thought that have branched off from them.

Reformist thinker Rashid Rida (1865-1935) wrote sardonically in this regard:

The argument proffered by *muqallids* in favor of relying on the books of dead men rather than on the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger is that those with the ability to be led aright by them [the Qur’an and the Sunnah] have all died out. Hence, [they say,] Muslims should stop trying to live by the Qur’an and the Sunnah and start depending instead on the writings of later scholars who derived rulings on all religious questions from the rules set forth by their imams. We should accept everything these scholars said, and only read the Qur’an and the Sunnah as a means of receiving a spiritual blessing. And if words of a jurist conflict with what was said by God and His Messenger, we should suspect our own reasoning abilities while holding this deceased jurist blameless. We should apply this dead scholar’s teachings while belittling our own minds, which have been deprived of the chance to explore God’s Manifest Revelation and the Pristine Sunnah about which the Prophet once said that ‘its night is as bright as its day’ – in other words, that no one can mistake its true meaning ... On the Day of Judgment, God will not ask us about what others said or how they understood things. Rather, He will ask us about the Book He revealed from on high to guide us and about the Sunnah of His Prophet, who made clear what had been revealed to us.

Fathi al-Durayni has stated:

Given that *taqlīd* involves making statements for which one provides

no support or evidence, without reference to the higher aims of Islamic law and, thus, without resorting to any sort of *ijtihād*, it involves a suspension of one's reason. As such, *taqlīd* is an abdication of the God-given responsibility to think, reflect, and educate oneself set forth in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:36: "And never concern thyself with anything of which thou hast no knowledge: verily, [thy] hearing and sight and heart – all of them – will be called to account for it [on Judgment Day]!"

[THEME 2]

*Ijtihād and Taqlīd: Their Common and Contrasting
Formative Roles in the Muslim Community*

It should be noted that most of the scholars and imams who were quoted above as prohibiting *taqlīd* in the most uncertain terms only issued this prohibition with regard to those who have the ability to engage in *ijtihād*. As for those who are capable of discerning the difference between different types of textual and rational evidence but do not qualify fully as *mujtahids*, opinions differed as to whether *taqlīd* was forbidden to them or not. However, there was unanimous agreement that the uneducated layperson who is either unable to make reasoned judgments about legal matters or who is too preoccupied with making his living from day to day is permitted to engage in *taqlīd* as a matter of necessity.

Hence, for example, al-Shāfi'ī's prohibition against imitating him or other scholars did not apply to everyone without exception. Rather, he held that it was not permissible for everyone in a given generation to engage in *taqlīd* because if this happened, this would involve the neglect of a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) to engage in *ijtihād*. Since *ijtihād* is a communal obligation, said al-Shāfi'ī, there should be some individuals in every generation or age who undertake this task. Similarly, al-Ghazālī held that *ijtihād* is obligatory for persons who are qualified to engage in it, and these are the people who are forbidden to engage in *taqlīd*. In this connection he wrote, "It is agreed that when a scholar has completed the process of *ijtihād* and has concluded on this basis that a given ruling is the correct one, he has no right to adopt a ruling supported by someone else; rather, he must act on what he himself

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views as being right.” Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436 AH/1044 CE) wrote saying:

The proper approach to this matter is to say that the qualified scholar has the unquestionable obligation to engage in ijtihad and to act on the conclusions he reaches via this process ... No qualified scholar is to be considered more entitled to engage in ijtihad than any other; nor may any alternative to this obligatory process be established in the absence of evidence based on reason or revelation. There is, in fact, no such evidence in support of an alternative; therefore, no alternative is permissible.

As for al-Zarkashī, he divided the scholar’s obligation to engage in ijtihad into three categories. (1) Ijtihad as an individual obligation (*farḍ ‘ayn*) for scholars who are faced with specific situations that require them to issue relevant rulings; (2) ijtihad as a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) that some scholars engage in while others do not; and (3) ijtihad as a commendable action in relation to situations that are merely theoretical in nature, but have not yet arisen in actuality.

Ibn al-Jawzī (510-597 AH/1116-1201 CE) held the view that when the situations requiring legal rulings grew in number and complexity to the point where ordinary lay people found them difficult to understand and the likelihood of their erring in relation to them increased, the soundest alternative for lay people was simply to adopt the views of those who had studied these matters in depth. However, a given layperson could choose which scholar or scholars he or she would follow. al-Shāfi‘ī illustrated this situation as follows:

If someone is strictly a member of the laity for whom it is difficult to see the differences of opinion among transmitters of Islamic Law, he will have no choice but to follow one of these transmitters rather than another.

Many statements have been made to this effect. Al-Shāṭibī distinguished between “ijtihad peculiar to scholars”, and “general ijtihad that pertains to all morally accountable individuals.” Al-Shawkānī

complained that those wanting to opt for mere imitation

excuse themselves by claiming that the ‘door of *ijtihād*’ has been closed, and that God has withdrawn this grace from His servants. They then proceed to spoonfeed the general populace, who are equally devoid of knowledge, telling them that since the founders of the various schools of jurisprudence have passed away, leaving their schools of thought behind, there is no more need to engage in *ijtihād*. In so doing, they add to their original innovation (that of *taqlīd*) another, no less pernicious, innovation, namely, ‘closing the door of *ijtihād*,’ thereby piling transgression upon transgression, and dooming themselves to perpetual ignorance.

Someone once said to Jamal al-Afghani (1838-1897), “In order to go against what the imams [the founders of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence] taught, one will have to engage in *ijtihād*. According to the Sunnis, however, the door of *ijtihād* has been closed due to the impossibility of fulfilling the conditions necessary to qualify for this task.” In response, al-Afghani retorted:

What do you mean, ‘the door of *ijtihād* has been closed’? Based on what text from the Qur’an or the Sunnah has it been closed?! And which imam ever said that no one after him would be permitted to engage in *ijtihād* so as to educate himself in his religion and be guided by the Qur’an and the sound hadiths? ... The Qur’an was revealed in order to be understood, in order for people to use their reason to reflect on its meanings and to discern what rulings are to be derived from it ... I am certain that if Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, al-Shāfi‘ī, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal had remained alive to this day, they would still be busy deriving fresh rulings from the Qur’an and the Hadith. And the more deeply they delved into this task, the more precisely they would understand the teachings of Islam.

Al-Turabi wrote in a similar vein:

No one has closed the door to *ijtihād* based on any valid argument from either reason or Islamic Law. Rather, this door has been closed by

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virtue of developments that have taken place in Islamic thought and civilization. Even if Muslim jurists ruled that this door were to be opened, it would nevertheless remain closed, and no one would dare to walk through it. The reason for this is that religious impulses have diminished after their initial outpouring, a fact that has impacted both life and thought. If living conditions deteriorate, so does thought, but if thought stirs to life, people's conditions will likewise improve, since the two are inseparable.

The educational and formational role of the Muslim community and its requirements

Educational methods founded upon rote learning and tradition-bound thinking simply yield more *muqallids*, or tradition-bound thinkers, and destroy the possibility of maintaining 'community surveillance' over Muslim scholars. According to Ibn Ḥazm, whose methodological perspective was based on a progressive educational perspective, one condition for cultural renewal and advancement is to ensure that all members of the Muslim community are given a part to play in their society's forward movement. Those who are capable of engaging in *ijtihād* will be guilty of wrongdoing should they fail to do so. However, we are only accountable for the degree of *ijtihād* of which we are capable, and no more. This is in keeping with the Qur'anic principle that "God does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear:..." (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:286), and "Remain, then, conscious of God as best you can,..." (*Sūrah al-Taghābun*, 64:16).

What we wish to emphasize here is the educational role that can be played by members of the Muslim community, so that all of them together can fulfill their responsibilities toward each other and the Earth. In the view of al-Hajwi al-Thaalibi al-Fasi, it is possible to renew Islamic jurisprudence and restore it to the days of its youth, as it were. The primary cause for the Muslim community's having grown 'old and decrepit' is the habitual practice of *taqlīd*, while the cure to this infirmity is the practice of *ijtihād*, the path to which lies in educational reform. The capacity for *ijtihād* is actually more accessible now than it was in the past, according to al-Fasi, but in order to restore it, two things are needed. The first is the student's determination to acquire this ability,

and the second is sound moral training so as to develop the kind of integrity that inspires people's confidence in the *mujtahid*. Al-Hajwi was highly critical of the plethora of commentaries and abridgments of earlier works that have been produced over the centuries, his view being that if even a small portion of the effort that went into these publications had been devoted to deeper understanding of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the principles of jurisprudence overall, this would have proved highly beneficial to everyone on both the material and spiritual planes.

Al-Hajwi's critical remarks were not reserved solely for the sphere of Islamic jurisprudence, but extended as well to a variety of interrelated academic disciplines. The intimate causal connection between these disciplines and the *ijihad* movement is highlighted in his statement that

the scarcity or even absence of qualified *mujtahids* is due to the malaise that has afflicted the Muslim community in the sciences and elsewhere ... Muslim societies will not occupy a respected place among the nations of the world as long as they are lacking in these spheres. Consequently, we need *mujtahids* who are capable of functioning broadly, who are informed in social affairs, the social sciences, and human rights and are thereby equipped to formulate and pass legislation that is both consistent with Islamic law and with the spirit of the age.

Al-Hajwi did not support attempts to unify the various schools of jurisprudence. Rather, in his view, we should overcome the bigotry and narrow-mindedness that refuses to recognize that every school of thought is correct in some ways and flawed in others. Our aim is not to advocate for one school of thought over another but, rather, to advance Islamic law as a whole.

These, then, were the overall features of al-Hajwi's formational, educational vision of *ijihad*. Given his forward-looking perspective on this issue, therefore, one is shocked to note the way in which he concluded the valuable discussions that fill the book in which he presented his analysis. In short, his final remarks are at complete odds

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with the conclusions he has drawn from his thorough-going critique of the history of Islamic jurisprudence and thought, an analysis in which he makes careful note of every strength and weakness, every infirmity and its cure. For as he approaches the end of this work of fine scholarship, he falls back suddenly on a kind of “individual salvation”, advocating that we “keep everything the way it has been,” his justification being that current conditions are so corrupt, and those with tendentious motives and greedy aspirations so ubiquitous, that the situation is essentially beyond repair. This, al-Hajwi argued in the end, is sufficient reason to surrender to things the way they are rather than working in the direction of reform.

Evidence turned on its head

A thorough examination of the evidence cited by advocates of *taqlīd* will lead to the very opposite of the conclusions they wish us to reach. In both the Qur’an and the Sunnah we encounter calls to learn, to ask questions, and to follow evidence and proofs wherever they lead. Ironically, the texts in which these calls are found are among the very texts that advocates of *taqlīd* view as their most convincing arguments. In *Sūrah al-Nahl*, 16:43, God says: “And before you also the apostles We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration: if you realize this not, ask of those who possess the Message” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation). Most commentators have been of the view that this verse was revealed in response to the idolaters of the Prophet’s day who denied that a true messenger of God would be a mere human being. In order to satisfy their doubts, they are urged to “ask of those who possess the Message” (*ahl al-dhikr*). The word *dhikr* here can only refer to the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. And if those whom these people were being commanded to inquire of were those in possession of ‘the Message’, then the verse being quoted is an argument against the *muqallids*, not in their favor, as al-Shawkānī points out, because the intent is for them to ask these people so that they can inform them of what they know.

Al-Ghazālī interpreted this verse in two senses. The first sense in which he understood it was as a command to lay people to inquire of

scholars, with a clear distinction made between the party asking, and the party being asked, while according to the second interpretation, the verse is instructing us to inquire about evidence so that we can increase in knowledge. In this connection, Ibn al-Qayyim quoted the hadith that relates how a man who was on a journey with some companions was wounded in the head by a stone. When, some time later, he had a seminal emission, he asked his companions if he would be permitted to resort to *al-tayammum*, that is, to perform his ritual ablution by wiping himself with sand rather than using water. His companions replied that as long as he had access to water, he would not be permitted to resort to sand ablutions, and they commanded him to bathe himself from head to toe. The man did as they told him, and died. When the Prophet was told what had happened, he exclaimed, "They killed him!" stating, "had they only asked if they didn't know for certain, for healing may be found through asking." The Prophet then went on to say that they could have bandaged the man's head, then allowed him to perform sand ablutions. This hadith serves as evidence against the practice of *taqlīd*, the reason being that the Messenger of God strongly criticized those who had issued a fatwa without knowledge on which to base it.

Also of relevance to this question are the hadiths that affirm the superiority of the Prophet's Companions and the virtuousness of emulating them. Emulating the Companions' actions is in keeping with the Prophet's command to follow the example of the rightly guided caliphs. By contrast, however, the Prophet did not command us to adhere to the practices established by this or that Muslim scholar, or to adopt the view of this or that *mujtahid*. How, then, can the advocates of *taqlīd* rely on such texts as support for something they do not approve?

Moreover, the differences of opinion that arose among the Companions are evidence of the dynamism of the process of *ijtihād* and the vitality of the Muslim mind. As such, these differences are a sign of God's mercy to the Muslim community and the latitude we have been given in our interpretations of God's commands. One wonders, then, at those who turn disagreements based on *ijtihād* into an argument in favor of *taqlīd*! In his book *Jāmi' Bayān al-ʿIlm*, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr

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(d. 463 AH/1071 CE) quoted Umayyad Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 101 AH/720 CE) as saying, “I would not want the Companions of the Messenger of God to have been in complete agreement, for if they had all held the same opinion, this would create hardship for people. Every one of them is a spiritual leader to be emulated. Hence, we are free to adopt the view of any one of them.” ‘Umar then added, “This applies to those engaged in ijtihad.”

A small number of Muslim jurists have taken note of this fact and expounded on it. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for example, has established an approach to the issuance of legal rulings based on a number of important pedagogical foundations, one of which is the principle of “accompanying one’s fatwa with sufficient explanation and clarification.” Al-Qaradawi states in this connection, “I am not at all satisfied with the way in which some scholars, both ancient and modern, answer those who come to them for rulings. They might say simply, ‘This is permissible and this is impermissible,’ ‘This is allowed and this is forbidden,’ or ‘This is true and this is false,’ without adding anything further. As for me, when I give a fatwa I see myself as a mufti, a teacher, a reformer, a physician, and a guide.”

Al-Qaradawi’s approach is a noble one, based squarely on that of the Prophet himself. As such, it is reflected in the various situations in which he related to his Companions by teaching them, explaining things to them, forming and training them. Syrian scholar Shaykh Abu Ghuddah (1917-1997) identified nearly forty distinct teaching approaches that were employed by the Prophet in his lifetime. These included, among others, instruction through dialogue and questioning. He once asked his Companions, “Do you know what a Muslim is?” They replied, “God and His Apostle know best.” The Prophet then went on to say, “The Muslim is someone from whose words and actions other Muslims have no reason to fear harm.” Another of his approaches was to instruct via conversation and rational comparison, as when he responded to a young man who had come asking his permission to commit fornication by asking him questions such as, “Would you be willing to let someone do this with your sister? Your mother?” etc. Still another of the Prophet’s approaches to instruction was to draw analogies, cite examples, and identify causes, as when he

asked a certain woman, “If your mother owed a debt, would you settle it for her?” “Yes, I would,” she replied. “So, then,” he told her, “settle the debts you owe to God, for God is worthier of your loyalty [than even your mother].” At other times he instructed by means of similes and examples; by sketching on the ground; by giving his questioner more information than he or she had requested; by drawing the questioner’s attention to matters other than what he or she had asked about; by posing the same question he had been asked to the person who had asked it of him as a way of clarifying the ruling he was giving; by authorizing his Companions to answer a question on his behalf as a way of training them; by testing a scholar on his knowledge so that he could reward him with words of praise if he answered correctly; through humor and jest; and more.

The role and importance of *ijtihād* in the Muslim’s life was summed up well by Ibn Ḥazm, who wrote, “Each of us has the obligation to engage in *ijtihād* to the extent that we are able to, so as to acquaint ourselves with what God requires of us.”

[THEME 3]

Ittibāʿ and Taqlīd Compared and Contrasted

According to Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH/1004 CE), the trilateral root *t-b-ʿ* consistently bears the meaning of ‘follow’ or ‘walk behind’. This root is used repeatedly in the Qur’an in this sense as well. It is used sometimes in the figurative sense, as in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:38, which reads, “...those who follow My guidance (*man tabiʿa hudāya*) need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve,” and *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:208, which warns: “...follow not (*lā tattabiʿū*) Satan’s footsteps...” At other times it is used in the literal sense. *Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ*, 26:60, for example, reports that the Egyptians “...caught up with...” (*atbaʿūhum*) the Children of Israel as they fled the land of Egypt (cf. *Sūrah Yūnus*, 10:90). The verb *ittibaʿa* can also convey the sense of submission to something by way of obligation, as in *Sūrah al-Aʿrāf*, 7:203, where the Prophet is instructed to say “...‘I only follow (*innamā attabiʿu*) whatever is being revealed to me by my Sustainer...” Elsewhere, as in *Sūrah*

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al-Nāzi'āt, 79:6-7, it conveys the sense of one thing following another in succession. *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:42 employs the verb *atba'ca* in the sense of causing something to accompany or haunt someone over time. Speaking of Pharaoh and his hosts, God declares, "We have caused a curse to follow them (*atba'c nāhum fī hadhihi la'natan*) in this world..."

The Prophet is reported to have criticized certain people for adhering slavishly to the ways established by their predecessors, saying, "Indeed, you follow (*la tattabi'anna*) the practices of those who preceded you handspan by handspan, cubit by cubit." Many of those who reject the practice of *taqlīd* have found support for their position in this and other hadiths.

However, there is a distinction to be made between *ittibā'c* and *taqlīd*. The word *ittibā'c* is used to describe adherence to the Qur'an; if no Qur'anic reference is available, it involves adherence to a text from the Sunnah; if no such text is available, it involves adherence to a position held by our scholarly predecessors, and which, to our knowledge, was accepted unanimously among them. If no text is available from any of these sources, then *ittibā'c* refers to adherence to the outcome of an analogy drawn between the situation at hand and a relevant text from the Qur'an; in the absence of such a text, an analogy will be drawn with a text from the Sunnah; if this is not possible, then it is drawn with a position held generally by our scholarly predecessors. However, such a position, in order to be valid, must itself be based on an analogy drawn from the Qur'an or the Sunnah. If two or more qualified individuals disagree over a given analogy, each of them is entitled to adhere to the position of which he is convinced based on his own *ijtihad*; conversely, he is not entitled to adhere to the position of some other *mujtahid* who disagrees with him. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr stated in his *Jāmi'c Bayān al-'Ilm*:

If you adhere to someone else's stated position without having evidence that requires you to do so, then you are engaged in *taqlīd*, which is illegitimate in Islam. If, however, you adhere to someone else's stated position based on evidence that persuades you to adopt the same position, then you are engaged in *ittibā'c*. *Ittibā'c* is permitted in Islam, while *taqlīd* is forbidden.

Ibn Taymiyyah classified *taqlīd* as a kind of blameworthy, impermissible *ittibāʿ*. On this point he stated:

Taqlīd, which is condemned by God, involves following one's whims and selfish desires (*ittibāʿ al-hawā*). One succumbs to the temptation to submit blindly to custom, or to conform to a practice because of family ties and family tradition; in other cases, one craves authority over others and thus imitates those with power, prestige and influence. God has made clear that we are to avoid this type of *taqlīd*, and to adhere to (*nat-tabiʿ*) what God revealed from on high to His messengers, who are themselves the authoritative evidence with which God has provided human beings.

As we have seen, Islam's leading early scholars urged others to adhere to authoritative evidence, but not to imitate them as individuals. Those who go where the evidence leads them are following in these scholars' footsteps. Such people take no particular individual, other than the Prophet, as their guide. Hence, it is incorrect to classify *taqlīd* as a kind of *ittibāʿ*. For in fact, *taqlīd* is opposed to *ittibāʿ*.

We read in *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, 9:100: "And as for the first and foremost of those who have forsaken the domain of evil and of those who have sheltered and succored the Faith, as well as those who follow them in [the way of] righteousness (*alladhīna ittabaʿūhum bi iḥsān*) – God is well-pleased with them, and well-pleased are they with Him..." Some commentators have equated *taqlīd* with the action of "those who follow them in [the way of] righteousness" (*alladhīna ittabaʿūhum bi iḥsān*). Ibn al-Qayyim, however, who disagreed with this interpretation, responded by noting that *taqlīd* is actually the very opposite of following such righteous people in their ways. Those who truly follow them in the ways of righteousness are those with knowledge and insight who refuse to give priority to any opinion, analogy, rational premise, or scholarly position over the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

According to contemporary thinker Taha Abd al-Rahman (born 1944), the only difference between *ittibāʿ* and *taqlīd* is the presence or absence of evidence. Understood from this perspective, *ittibāʿ* is adherence to a position that is supported by proof whereas *taqlīd* is adherence

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to a position that is not supported by proof. In other words, *ittibāʿ* is *taqlīd* based on evidence, while *taqlīd* is *ittibāʿ* unsupported by evidence.

Some scholars have gone so far as to say that terms such as *taqlīd*, *ittibāʿ*, *taʿassī*, *iqtidāʾ* and *istinān* all mean nearly the same thing. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:170, for example, we read, “But when they are told, ‘Follow (*ittabiʿū*) what God has bestowed from on high,’ some answer, ‘Nay, we shall follow (*nattabiʿu*) [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing’...” One notes that the verb *ittabaʿa* is used in this verse in both a positive and a negative sense, the latter of which is the very sense in which the word *taqlīd* is used by those who argue against *taqlīd*, but in favor of *ittibāʿ*. In fact, God Himself has used the word *ittabaʿa* synonymously with the most heinous form of *taqlīd*, or blind imitation. We read in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:166-167, “[On the Day of Judgment] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored (*alladhīna uttibiʿū*) shall disown their followers (*alladhīna ittabaʿū*), and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them], with all their hopes cut to pieces! And then those followers (*alladhūna ittabaʿū*) shall say: ‘Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could disown them as they have disowned us!’...”

Historically, however, there has come to be a well-founded legal, terminological and practical distinction between *taqlīd* and *ittibāʿ*, with the former being associated with unjustified and unfounded imitation, and the latter with thoughtful, well-founded emulation of another’s example, or adoption of his or her scholarly position.