A LECTURE ON ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

I. Basic Beliefs of Islam.

Before taking up the subject of Islamic theology proper I should like, by way of introduction, to outline the basic religious beliefs which are common to all Muslims. As you may know, Islam was founded by the Prophet Muḥammad in the Arabian Peninsula in the first quarter of the seventh century. At the age of forty the Prophet began to receive certain revelations which he believed came from God. He was commanded by God to recite these revelations publicly and was told that God had chosen him to be His messenger and prophet. The revelations which he received were collected and preserved as sacred scripture by his companions and followers and this collection of revelations is known as the Qur'ān. I should like to stress here that the Qur'ān is considered by Muslims to be the speech or word of God himself, rather than something composed or written by the Prophet.

What the Prophet Muḥammad himself said, as opposed to what God revealed to him, was also preserved by his followers and later collected into books, and these sayings, which are known as traditions, or $had\bar{\imath}th$, are as authoritative in religious matters as the Qur'ān itself. Islam thus possesses two sources of revealed truth, the first being the Qur'ān, which is the record of God's message to mankind through the Prophet, and the second being the $had\bar{\imath}th$, or collected sayings and acts of the Prophet. It is from these two sources that the basic religious beliefs of Muslims are derived.

What, then, are these basic beliefs? First of all, Muslims believe that God is absolutely one and that Muḥammad is His messenger or prophet. In fact, to become a Muslim it is sufficient to bear witness to the fact that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is His messenger. Muslims further believe that God created the universe, and that He has periodically revealed His word to a number of prophets and messengers, among whom are included Jesus and Moses and the other prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Muslims believe in angels, in the resurrection of the body, in a final Day of Judgment, and in a Heaven and a Hell where humans will be rewarded or punished in accordance with their acts and beliefs in this world.

These basic beliefs are summed up in two very short creeds found in two separate verses of the Qur'ān, which I should like to read to you. The first verse is:

The messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and his angels and His scriptures and His messengers—We make no distinction between any of His messengers—and they say: We hear and we obey. (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord. Unto thee is the journeying. (Qur'ān, II:285)¹

¹ The translations of Qur'ānic verses are those of Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall in his *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

The second is:

O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which He hath revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime. Whoso disbelieveth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers and the Last Day, he verily hath wandered far astray. (Qur'ān, IV:136)

Then, of course, in addition to being the source for religious beliefs, the Qur'ān and the $had\bar{\imath}th$ are also the primary sources for Islamic moral and ethical precepts as well as for Islamic law.²

II. The Early Theologians.

Let me now turn to Islamic theology. The early Islamic theologians³ were primarily interested in dealing with what appeared to them to be problems or even in some cases contradictions in the text of Qur'ān and the $had\bar{\imath}th$. What were some of these problems?

One area of scripture in which there appeared to be problems had to do with God's unity and His attributes. God is described in the Qur'ān as being the only God and as a God who has no partners. We find in the Qur'ān, for example, such verses as the following:

Lo! I, even I, am Allah. There is no God save Me. So serve Me and establish worship for My remembrance. (Qur'ān, XX:14)

Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray. (Qur'ān, IV:116)

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! whose ascribeth partners unto Allah, for him Allah hath forbidden paradise. His abode is the Fire. For evil-doers there will be no helpers. (Qur'ān, V:72)

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve. (Qur'ān, V:73)

In addition to stressing God's oneness the Qur'ān also ascribes certain attributes to God. He is described as being Living, Knowing, Willing, Powerful, Seeing and Speaking. These attributes are usually ascribed to God in the form of verbs or adjectives, but sometimes these attributes are ascribed to God in the form of nouns. For example, the Qur'ān describes God as having knowledge in the following verses:

 $^{^2\,}$ On the basic beliefs of Islam see A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932.

³ These were the theologians who were active from the 2nd/8th century through the 5th/11th century. See the brief history of Islamic theology to be found in Ibn Khaldūn's *The Muqaddimah*, vol. III, pp. 34-68.

He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. (Qur'ān, II:255)

But Allah (Himself) testifieth concerning that which He hath revealed unto thee; in His knowledge hath He revealed it; and the angels also testify. And Allah is sufficient Witness. (Qur'ān, IV:166)

Now the ascription of these seven attributes to God led the early theologians to ask what precisely is the relationship of these attributes to God Himself, that is, to God's essence. If the attributes are eternal, that is, if God has always had the attributes of knowledge, will, power, and so on, then are these attributes in some way distinct from God's essence or are they in reality the same as His essence? If they are distinct from His essence then God's unity is impaired because we then have more than one eternal being, namely, God's essence plus each one of His attributes. If this is the case could these attributes then be considered partners of God? On the other hard, if the attributes are really the same as His essence, then the attributes do not really exist in themselves and the Qur'ān is ascribing to God non-existent attributes. If, however, God's attributes are not eternal then God must have created them, but if He created them, then they are part of His creation and cannot be attributes of Himself.

Not only does the Qur'ān ascribe these seven attributes to God, it also describes God in many places in very anthropomorphic terms. God is described as having a face or countenance, hands and eyes, and as seating Himself on His throne. Let me quote some verses containing anthropomorphic descriptions of God. In the following verse God is described as having a hand:

Therefor Glory be to Him in Whose hand is the dominion over all things! Unto Him ye will be brought back. (Qur'ān, XXXVI:82)

He is also described as having eyes:

Build the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration, and speak not unto Me on behalf of those who do wrong. Lo! they will be drowned. (Qur'ān, XI:37)

He has a face or countenance:

And cry not unto any other god along with Allah. There is no God save Him. Everything will perish save His countenance. His is the command, and unto Him ye will be brought back. (Qur'ān, XXVIII:88)

He sits on a throne:

The Beneficent One, Who is established on the Throne. (Qur'ān, XX:5)

Who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six Days, then He mounted the Throne. The Beneficent! Ask anyone informed concerning Him! (Qur'ān, XXV:59)

If this description of God is literally true, then He must be a corporeal being—a body in time and space. And since all bodies are divisible into parts, God's unity is again impaired.

On the other hand, there is one verse in the Qur'ān that states that there is nothing at all similar to Him or that there is nothing anything like Him:

The Creator of the heavens and the earth. He hath made for you pairs of yourselves, and of the cattle also pairs, whereby He multiplieth you. Naught is as His likeness; and He is the Hearer, the Seer. (Qur'an, XLII:11)

Thus, although God is frequently described in anthropomorphic terms, the Qur'ān seems to be saying in this verse that we are not to understand any anthropomorphic description of God in the same way we would if we applied such a description to humans. God is not in any way similar to His creation.⁴

Now the other example of two doctrines that appear to be contradictory in the Qur'ān and which concerned the speculative theologians was the problem of free will and determinism or predestination, that is, the relationship of human power and capability to Divine power.

The Qur'ān describes God as having complete power over His creation. To what extent, then, do humans have the freedom or power to act themselves? Do they, for example, have the power to obey God's commandments or even the power to believe in Islam? Certain verses of the Qur'ān seem to indicate that they do not have this power. For example one verse states:

And whomsoever it is God's will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto Islam, and whomsoever it is His will to send astray, He maketh his bosom close and narrow (Qur'ān, VI:126)

Another verse says:

And though We should send down the angels unto them, and the dead should speak unto them, and We should gather against them all things in array, they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant. (Qur'ān, VI:112)

And still another verse:

Had Allah willed, they had not been idolatrous. (Qur'ān, VI:108)

And another:

And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers? It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath set uncleanness upon those who have no sense. (Qur'ān, X:100-101)

On the other hand, other verses indicate that man is free to believe or disbelieve as he wishes, and that God will reward him for his belief and good deeds, and punish him for disbelief and evil deeds. For example:

Say: (It is) the truth from the Lord of you (all). Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve. Lo! We have prepared for disbelievers Fire. (Qur'ān, XVIII:30)

⁴ For a discussion of the problems related to God's attributes see Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. III, pp. 55-75.

Other verses imply that humans have power over their own acts and will be rewarded and punished accordingly:

This day no soul is wronged in aught; nor are ye requited aught save what ye used to do. (Qur'ān, XXXVI:53)

And whose doeth good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter paradise and they will not be wronged the dint in a date-stone. (Qur'ān, IV:124)

And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in aught. Though it be of the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We bring it. And We suffice for reckoners. (Qur'ān, XXI:47)

So here we have two apparently contradictory doctrines: one that says that human actions and beliefs are determined by God's power and will, and the other that says that humans have the power to do whatever they wish, and that they will be rewarded if they believe and obey God and punished if they don't.

How, then, did Muslims try to explain these apparently contradictory doctrines found in the Qur'ān? They developed two positions. One was that of the speculative or rationalist theologians⁵ and the other was that of what are usually called the traditionalists. Let me take up first the position of the speculative theologians. The speculative theologians saw their task as one of interpreting the doctrines of the Qur'ān in such a way that they would be acceptable to reason, and they did this by accepting as true one of the contradictory doctrines and then explaining or interpreting the opposing doctrine in such a way as to make it agree with the doctrine they had chosen to accept.

Now the first group of theologians to interpret the Qur'ān in this way were the Mu'tazilites.⁶ They were also known as the People of Unity and Justice because of the stress they placed on the unity and justice of God. The Mu'tazilites believed that the doctrine of God's unity was essential to Islam and that any statements in the Qur'ān which seemed to compromise this unity had therefore to be interpreted in such a manner as not to impair in any way God's absolute unity. If God is knowing, they said, he cannot be knowing through knowledge because then we would have two eternal beings, namely God's being or essence plus His knowledge. They therefore said that God cannot know through knowledge but only through His own essence. Similarly, they claimed that He is powerful not through power but through His essence, and also living and perceiving through His essence.⁷ Thus

 $^{^5}$ These were the $mutakallim\bar{u}n$ who engaged in $kal\bar{a}m$ or speculative "speech" or "talk."

⁶ For further information on the Mu'tazilites see the article "Mu'tazila" by D. Gimaret in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. VII, pp. 783-793.

⁷ The Mu'tazilites denied, however, that speaking was one of God s attributes. Their position was that God did not speak Himself but that He created speech in others. See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, pp. 527-563. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār willing was also not one of God's eternal attributes. See his *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 440.

they denied that God had knowledge or power or other attributes in the sense that these attributes were superadded or additional to His essence. In reality all God's attributes were one and indistinguishable from His essence.⁸

Now in denying that God's attributes were distinct from His essence they went counter to certain verses of the Qur'an such as the verse I mentioned previously, "In His knowledge hath He revealed it," in which God's knowledge is treated as something distinct from His essence.

On the other hand, in accord with the verse that states, "Naught is as His likeness," the Mu'tazilites denied that there was any likeness at all between God and His creation. They were consequently obliged to use allegorical or metaphorical interpretation $(ta'w\bar{u}l)$ to explain the many anthropomorphic descriptions of God which are found in the Qur'ān. For example, in the verse which states, "He it is who created the heavens and the earth; then He mounted the throne," they interpreted the phrase "He mounted the throne" to mean "He gained mastery over." Similarly, the face of God, which is mentioned in a number of verses, they interpreted to mean God's essence.

In the same manner, when the Mu'tazilites took up the question of free will and determinism, they decided in favor of free will, and attributed to creatures the power to carry out their own acts. They argued that if humans did not have the power to choose and create their own acts, there would be no point to the rewards and punishments promised by God to humans in the next life. They claimed that God was a just God and that it was inconceivable that God would reward or punish humans for acts over which they had no power or control.⁹

Now the Mu'tazilites justified this use of allegorical interpretation by quoting a certain passage of the Qur'ān which they chose to read as follows:

He it is who hath revealed unto thee the Scripture wherein are clear revelations, which are the substance of the book, and others which are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue that which is allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save God and those who are of sound instruction. They say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed. (Qur'ān, III:7)

From this passage it is clear that the Qur'ān itself admits that it contains allegorical or ambiguous verses which demand explanation, and this is, of course, exactly what the Mu'tazilites were attempting to do, namely, to explain these allegorical verses on the assumption that they were those who were described as being "of sound instruction" in the verse quoted.

However, one of the lines in this same passage which I have just quoted is itself ambiguous. In Arabic the line which says, "None knoweth its explanation save God

⁸ For further details on the Mu'tazilite position on God's attributes see 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, $Kit\bar{a}b$ al- $U.\bar{y}\bar{u}l$ al-Khamsah, pp. 182-213.

⁹ On the Mu'tazilite position on free will and determinism see 'Abd al-Jabbār, Sharh al-Usūl al-Khamsah, pp. 323-390.

and those who are of sound instruction," can just as easily be understood to mean, "None knoweth its explanation save God," with the end of the sentence coming at that point, and a new sentence beginning with "And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein: the whole is from our Lord." In other words there is a question here as to where one sentence ends and the next one begins. Thus, if we substitute the second way of reading this line for the first, the whole passage would then be read as follows:

He it is who hath revealed unto thee the Scripture wherein are clear revelations which are the substance of the book, and others which are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue that which is allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save God. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.

According to this reading, then, no one knows the meaning of the allegorical verses of the Qur'an except God, and it is therefore useless for any human to try to explain them. All one can do is simply to believe in them without knowing what their real meaning is since only God knows their real meaning.¹⁰

Now this reading of this verse was used to justify the other basic position which Muslims took with respect to allegorical or ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān. Those who took this position, that is, the position which rejected allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān, are often referred to as traditionalists, and I should like to read to you a statement made by one of the most famous of these traditionalists, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, hin which I think expresses this position very clearly. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was questioned once about the anthropomorphic descriptions of God both in the Qur'ān and in the Prophetic traditions and he answered as follows:

We believe in them and accept them as true without rejecting any part of them God should not be described in excess of His own description of Himself, boundless and immeasurable: "There is nothing anything like him! He is the Hearing, the Seeing." Therefore, we say exactly what He has said, and describe Him as He has described Himself, without going beyond His description nor removing from Him any of His attributes merely for fear of some possible slander which might be levelled against us. We believe in these traditions, we acknowledge them, and we allow them to pass intact as they have come down to us, without being able to understand the how of them, nor to fathom their intended sense, except in accordance with His own description of Himself; and He is according to His own description the Hearing, the Seeing, boundless and immeasurable. His attributes proceed from Him and are His own. We do not go beyond the Koran or the traditions from the Prophet and his Companions; nor do we know the how of

¹⁰ On the use of allegorical interpretation by the Mu'tazilites see 'Abd al-Jabbār, $Mutash\bar{a}bih\ al\text{-}Qur'\bar{a}n$, especially pp. 13-39.

¹¹ See the article "Aḥmad B. Ḥanbal" by H. Laoust in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I, pp. 272-277.

these, save by acknowledgement of the Apostle and the confirmation of the $Qur'\bar{a}n.^{12}$

Now the traditionalists not only abstained from using allegorical interpretation themselves, but severely criticized the speculative theologians for making use of it. Ibn $Qud\bar{a}mah^{13}$ in a work called *The Censure Of Speculative Theology* lists nine reasons why allegorical interpretation is wrong.

The first reason he gives is that the Qur'ān itself prohibits allegorical interpretation, and this is evident from the passage I read to you earlier, particularly the line which reads, "None knoweth its explanation save God."

The second reason is that the Prophet himself did not use interpretation in explaining the Qur'ān, and if he saw no reason to use allegorical interpretation there is even less reason for anyone else to use it.

The third is that none of the early Muslims made any use of allegorical interpretation either, but merely accepted the Qur'ān and the traditions as they received them.

The fourth is that allegorical interpretation amounts to making judgments about God in matters about which the interpreter has no real knowledge. Let me quote from Ibn Qudāmah here:

Allegorical interpretation is tantamount to the passing of judgment upon God regarding matters which the interpreter does not know, and the interpretation of His intent by that which the interpreter does not know that He intended. Now the most that the interpreter can claim is that a given expression admits a given meaning in the classical language. But it does not necessarily follow from the mere fact of the expression's admissibility of this meaning that this meaning is intended by it. For just as it may admit this meaning it may also admit others. It may even admit still other meanings with which the interpreter is not acquainted.¹⁴

The fifth reason is that allegorical interpretation is an innovation in religion and any innovations are automatically heretical. To prove his point here Ibn Qudāmah quotes several traditions of the Prophet. One of those he quotes is the following: "The most evil of things are the innovated ones." Another is: "Beware of innovated things for every innovation is a heretical innovation, and every heretical innovation is an error."

The sixth is that all egorical interpretation is unnecessary, because, Ibn Qudāmah says, and again I quote:

For we have no need to know the meaning which God intended by His attributes; no course of action is intended by them, nor is there any obligation

¹² Quoted by Ibn Qudāmah in his $Tahr\bar{i}m$ al-Nazar, pp. 8-9 (English translation), pp. 11-12 (Arabic text). The translation is that of George Makdisi.

On Ibn Qudāmah see the article "Ibn Ķudāma al-Maķdisī" by G. Makdisi in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. III, pp. 482-483.

¹⁴ The translation is that of George Makdisi. See Ibn Qudāmah, *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar*, p. 21 (English translation), pp. 30-31 (Arabic Text).

attached to them except to believe in them, and it is possible to believe in them without the knowledge of their intended sense.¹⁵

The seventh reason is that allegorical interpretation cannot be incumbent upon the generality of mankind because they do not have sufficient knowledge to undertake it.

The eighth is that allegorical interpretation amounts to private opinion concerning the Qur'ān and the traditions, and anyone who interprets the Qur'ān according to his private opinion commits an offense.

And finally, the ninth reason is that allegorical interpretation includes the ascription to God of attributes which God did not ascribe to Himself. For example, when the interpreter says that the Qur'ānic verses which state that God "mounted the throne" mean that He "gained mastery over," he is ascribing to God the attribute of "mastery" although God did not ascribe this attribute to Himself. He is furthermore denying to God the attribute of "mounting the throne" which God did ascribe to Himself. ¹⁶

In summary, then, the traditionalist position is that the Qur'ān and the traditions are true and must be accepted and believed in as they are regardless of whether we can understand them or not. In fact, we should make no attempt to understand any Qur'ānic verse or tradition the meaning of which is not immediately obvious to us, for we have no way of knowing whether our interpretation of it is correct or not. Ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān need not bother us since the unambiguous verses are all we need for the satisfactory performance of our religious duties. Notice that the traditionalists do not say that scripture is always to be understood in its literal sense. All they say is that it should be accepted as true whether we can understand it or not. As far as I know no major Muslim sect ever held that scripture must always be understood in its literal meaning.

The traditionalist position has remained more or less the same throughout Islamic history up to the present day.¹⁷ The speculative theologians, on the other hand, continued to develop their rationalist approach to Islamic doctrine. The Mu'tazilite school of theology, although ultimately rejected by most Sunni Muslims, continued to be favored by Shi'ite Muslims. Most Sunni Muslims adopted the Ash'arite school,¹⁸ which had been founded by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī¹⁹ in an

¹⁵ Again the translation is that of George Makdisi. See Ibn Qudāmah, *Taḥrīm al-Nazar*, p. 22 (English translation), p. 32 (Arabic text).

¹⁶ See Ibn Qudāmah, *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar*, pp. 20-23 (English translation), pp. 29-34 (Arabic text).

¹⁷ The modern adherents to this position are known as $salaf\bar{\imath}s$, that is, those who follow the path of the pious ancestors (al-salaf al-salaf al-salaf) who lived before the innovation of theological speculation.

¹⁸ On the Ash'arites see the article "Ash'ariyya" by W. Montgomery Watt in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I, p. 696.

¹⁹ On al-Ash'arī see the article "Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī" by W. Montgomery Watt in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I, pp. 894-895.

attempt to create a middle position between the position of the Mu'tazilites and that of the traditionalists. Other Sunnis followed a very similar school founded by $Ab\bar{u}$ Mans \bar{u} r al-Matur \bar{u} d \bar{u} .

With some exceptions the Ash'arites like the Mu'tazilites continued to use allegorical interpretation with respect to the anthropomorphic descriptions of God found in the Qur'ān.²¹ However, they tried to construct a theology which was in some respects closer to the position of the traditionalists. They did not, for example, go as far as the Mu'tazilites in saying that God's attributes, being indistinguishable from His essence, had no real existence in themselves, but rather affirmed the attributes as being distinct eternal entities although they were at the same time inseparable from God's essence and could not therefore be considered separate divine beings.²²

Similarly, not wanting to reduce in any way God's power over all events occurring in His Creation, but, on the other hand, wishing to maintain man's responsibility for his own acts, they devised the doctrine of acquisition (kasb) whereby God creates all human acts but humans acquire them by choosing them and thus assume responsibility for them.²³

III. The Later Ash'arite Theologians.

Nevertheless, in spite of this earlier Ash'arite attempt to take a sort of middle position between the traditionalists and the Mu'tazilites, the later Ash'arite theolo-

²⁰ See the articles "Al-Māturīdī" and "Māturīdiyya" by W. Madelung in the *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. VI, pp. 846-848.

See, for example, al-Baghdādī, Uṣūl al-Dīn, pp. 109-113; al-Juwaynī, al-Irshād, pp. 155-164; al-Ghazālī, al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād, p. 95; al-Ghazālī, Qānūn al-Ta'w \bar{u} l, pp. 6-12. Al-Ash'arī himself, however, at least in the two creeds attributed to him, did not use allegorical interpretation to explain the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, but took the traditionalist position. See his al-Ibānah, p. 8, and his Maqālāal-Islām \bar{u} y \bar{u} n, p. 320. Apparently al-Bāqillānī did not use allegorical interpretation either. See his al-Tamh \bar{u} d, pp. 258-262.

²² It was sometimes said by the Ash'arites, that God's attributes are "not He nor are they other than He." See al-Taftāzānī, Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyah, pp. 49-57 (English translation), pp. 258-260 (Arabic text); and al-Juwaynī, al-Irshād, p. 138. Al-Ash'arī's position on the attributes can be found in his Kitāb al-Luma', pp. 16-19 (English translation), pp. 12-14 (Arabic text). Further discussion of the attributes can be found in al-Bāqillānī, al-Inṣāf, pp. 33-34; al-Bāqillānī, al-Tamhīd, pp. 197-257; al-Juwaynī, al-Irshād, pp. 79-138; al-Juwaynī, al-Luma', pp. 138-147; al-Baghdādī, Uṣūl al-Dīn, pp. 79-108; al-Ghazālī, al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād, pp. 60-73. For the Maturidite position see al-Bazdawī, Uṣūl al-Dīn, pp. 34-40.

On al-Ash'arī's doctrine of acquisition see his $Kit\bar{a}b$ al-Luma', pp. 53-75 (English translation), pp. 37-53 (Arabic text). See also al-Ash'arī, $al\text{-}Ib\bar{a}nah$, p. 9; al-Juwaynī, $al\text{-}Irsh\bar{a}d$, pp. 187-214; al-Baghdādī, Uṣ $\bar{u}l$ $al\text{-}D\bar{u}n$, pp. 133-137. For the Maturidite position see al-Bazdawī, Uṣ $\bar{u}l$ $al\text{-}D\bar{u}n$, pp. 99-111.

gians²⁴ increasingly attempted to rationalize Islamic doctrine, so that we find such theologians as al-Taft $\bar{a}z\bar{a}n\bar{\imath}^{25}$ and al-Jurj $\bar{a}n\bar{\imath}^{26}$ taking the position that scripture, that is, the Qur' $\bar{a}n$ and $had\bar{\imath}th$, must be proven to be true by rational arguments before it can be accepted as the basis of the religion. In other words, they believed that it was not sufficient for an educated Muslim simply to believe in his religion and in the truth of its revelation on the basis of faith. On the contrary, they believed that a Muslim must be convinced on the basis of rational arguments that his religion was true.

Now in order to prove the truth of scripture by completely rational means, the later Ash'arite theologians developed a series of rational proofs which culminated in a proof for the truthfulness of the prophet; for if the Prophet could be demonstrated to be telling the truth, then all statements contained in revelation, both in the Qur'ān and in $had\bar{\imath}th$, would be true statements and one could believe in them on the basis of reason rather than through mere faith.

This series of rational proofs developed by the Ash'arite theologians included proofs for the following doctrines or propositions: 1) the universe is originated; 2) the universe has an originator or creator; 3) the creator of the universe is knowing, powerful and willing; 4) prophecy is possible; 5) miracles are possible; 6) miracles indicate the truthfulness of one who claims to be a prophet; 7) Muḥammad claimed to be a prophet and performed miracles.²⁷

According to the theologians themselves, each of these proofs had to be demonstrated by what they called a rational proof or $dal\bar{\imath}l$ ' $aql\bar{\imath}$. They defined a rational proof as a proof based on premisses known intuitively or necessarily to be true through reason or sense perception, and which was consequently said to result in certain knowledge. Six varieties of necessary premisses upon which rational proofs could be based were commonly accepted by the theologians. These were:

1) $awwal\bar{\imath}y\bar{a}t$, first principles or axioms, such as the statement that the whole is greater than any of its parts; 2) $qad\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ $qiy\bar{a}s\bar{a}tuh\bar{a}$ $ma'ah\bar{a}$, which are propositions containing their own syllogisms, such as the statement that four is an even number; 3) $mush\bar{a}had\bar{a}t$, or sense perceptions, such as the statement that this fire burns;

These were the theologians who were active from about the 6th/12th century onwards and had come under the influence of the Islamic philosophers. Al-Ghazālī, who died in 505/1111, was apparently the first theologian to study the works of the philosophers and especially the works of Ibn Sīnā, and so might be considered both the last of the early theologians and the first of the later theologians. See Ibn Khaldūn, The Muqaddimah, vol. III, pp. 52-54. See also the article "al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad B. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī" by W. Montgomery Watt in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. II, pp. 1038-1041.

²⁵ On al-Taftāzānī see the article "al-Taftāzānī" by W. Madelung in *The Ency-clopaedia of Islam*, vol. X, pp. 88-89.

On al-Jurjānī see the article "al-<u>Djurdjānī</u>" by A.S. Tritton in *The Encyclopaedia* of *Islam*, vol. II, pp. 602-603.

²⁷ For these propositions see al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. I, pp. 39-40; al-Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, vol. II, pp. 50-51; al-Qūshjī, *Sharh al-Tajrīd*, p. 462.

4) $mutaw\bar{a}tir\bar{a}t$, which are historical or geographical facts reported by a sufficient number of witnesses such that it would be impossible to suppose that they were all lying; 5) $mujarrab\bar{a}t$, or facts known through experimentation, such as the statement that scammony is a laxative; 6) $hads\bar{i}y\bar{a}t$, or acute guesses, as for example, the statement that the light of the moon is derived from the light of the sun.²⁸

Distinguished from the rational proof was the scriptural proof or $dal\bar{\imath}l$ $naql\bar{\imath}$, which was defined as a proof containing one or more premisses taken from scripture. Scriptural proofs could not, of course, be used in the series of arguments used to establish the truth of scripture for that would involve a circular argument. However, once scripture had been rationally demonstrated to be true on the basis of rational premisses, scriptural proofs could be used in proving additional theological doctrines.

How successful, then, were these later Ash'arite theologians in establishing the truth of scripture by means of rational proofs? To their own satisfaction, at least, they were able to formulate proofs for all of the doctrines mentioned earlier except for the proposition stating that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of anyone claiming to be a prophet. Here they had to admit their inability to come up with any rational proof at all. Nevertheless in spite of their inability to prove this proposition rationally, they still believed that it was a true proposition. How could people be convinced, however, that it was a true proposition in the absence of any rational proof?

One solution to this problem was to resort to the following argument by analogy. Suppose that a powerful king is sitting on his throne before an audience. A man rises and announces that he is the messenger, or spokesman, of this king to his people. He then turns to the king and says something like "Your Majesty, if I am telling the truth with regard to my claim to be your messenger, then perform some act which is contrary to your usual custom." If the king then performs such an act all those present will know that the king performed that act only in order to confirm the truthfulness of the man claiming to be his messenger. In like manner God performs a miracle by the hand of the prophet and in so doing confirms the claim of the prophet to be telling the truth.

Realizing, however, that this argument by analogy fell short of being a really convincing argument, the theologians attempted another solution to this problem. This was to claim that the proposition that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of a

These premisses may be found in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsīyah, vol. II, p. 240; al-Iṣfahānī, Maṭāli' al-Anzār, pp. 26-27; al-Taftāzānī, Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid, vol. I, p. 19; al-Jurjānī, Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, vol. I, p. 123, vol, II, p. 36; al-Āmidī, Abkār al-Afkār, fols. 17b-18a. These necessary premisses are the same as the premisses of demonstration given much earlier by the philosopher Ibn Sīnā. See his al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt, vol. I, pp. 213-219; his al-Shifā', al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān, pp. 63-64; and his al-Najāh, pp. 61-66. Perhaps it was al-Ghazālī who first introduced these premisses to the theologians after studying Ibn Sīnā's writings on logic. See al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah, pp. 47-49; his Mi'yār al-'Ilm, pp. 108-111; and his Mihakk al-Nazar, pp. 47-52.

prophet is known necessarily to be true in spite of the fact that it cannot be classed under any of the six varieties of necessary premisses previously mentioned which were commonly accepted by rational thinkers.

Nevertheless, the explanation of how such a proposition could be known necessarily to be true and why such a solution was acceptable to Ash'arite theologians, can be found in the Ash'arite doctrine of what can be called immediate causality as opposed to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of mediate causality or $tawl\bar{\imath}d$.

According to Ash'arite doctrine God's power is limited only by logical impossibility. He is able to do anything He wishes except that which involves a logical contradiction. He cannot, for example, cause something to exist and not exist at the same time.²⁹ God is furthermore the immediate and only cause of everything that exists or occurs in the universe. All effects are caused directly by God rather than by the causes to which we commonly ascribe these effects. Thus, if someone moves his hand on which he is wearing a ring, God is the direct and immediate cause not only of the movement of the hand but also of the movement of the ring. The movement of the ring is not caused by the movement of the hand, nor the movement of the hand by the person who wills to move his hand.

Because God customarily acts in accordance with certain patterns and always, or almost always, causes the ring to move at the same time He causes the hand to move, it appears that the movement of the hand is the cause of the movement of the ring. It is, however, entirely within God's power to cause the hand to move without simultaneously causing the ring to move. Acts of God which are in accord with his customary pattern of acting are known as ' $\bar{a}d\bar{v}y\bar{a}t$. Acts which occur counter to His customary pattern are miracles or $khaw\bar{a}riq$ al-' $\bar{a}dah$, which literally means things which pierce or penetrate or go beyond the customary.³⁰

This doctrine of immediate causality is not only used to explain the occurrence of miracles but also to explain how knowledge is acquired. Like everything else, knowledge is something created directly by God. If we know that a first principle or axiom is true, is because God created this knowledge in our minds following our conception of both the subject and the predicate of the axiom. Similarly the knowledge that the conclusion of a syllogism is true is created by God after He has created in our minds the knowledge of the premisses.

This doctrine of God-caused knowledge thus explains how the proposition that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of the prophet can be known necessarily to be true; for when we witness a miracle and hear the words of the prophet, God creates in our minds the knowledge that the prophet is telling the truth.

However, since God is not under any compulsion to act according to his customary patterns and does, in fact, act counter to these patterns in the case of miracles, God can refrain from creating in our minds the knowledge of the truth of a proposition, even though that proposition might be true. Can God, however, create in our

On the limitation of God's power to what is logically possible see al-Sanūsī, Sharḥ $Umm\ al\text{-}Bar\bar{a}h\bar{\imath}n$, pp. 98, 103-105.

³⁰ For an explanation of the Ash'arite position on causation see al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, pp. 185-196 (English translation), pp. 277-296 (Arabic text).

minds the knowledge of the truth of a proposition which in itself is false? Can He, for example, create in our minds the knowledge that a prophet is telling the truth when in reality the prophet is lying? The theologians answered this question in the negative on the grounds that such an act on the part of God would involve a logical contradiction in that the prophet would be both telling the truth and lying at the same time. God's power extends only to acts which are logically possible and He consequently cannot create in our minds knowledge of the truth of a proposition which in itself is false.³¹

LIST OF WORKS CITED

- 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī al-Hamadhānī, al-Qādī, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, edited by 'Adnān Muhammad Zarzūr, Cairo, 1969.
- 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī al-Hamadhānī, al-Qādī, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, edited by 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān, Cairo, 1384/1965.
- al-Āmidī, Sayf al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Abī 'Alī, $Abk\bar{a}r$ al- $Afk\bar{a}r$, MS Petermann I 233, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.
- al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl, Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Radd 'alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa-al-Bida', edited and translated by Richard J. McCarthy under the title The Theology of al-Ash'arī, Beirut, 1953.
- al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl, *Kitāb al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, Hyderabad, 1321.
- al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl, $Maq\bar{a}l\bar{a}t$ al-Islāmīyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Mu-sallīn, edited by Muhammad Muhyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Hamīd, Cairo, 1369/1950.
- al-Baghdādī, 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Tāhir, Kitāb Usūl al-Dīn, Istanbul, 1346/1928.
- al-Bāqillānī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib, $Kit\bar{a}b$ al- $Tamh\bar{\imath}d$, edited by Richard J. McCarthy, S.J., Beirut, 1957.
- al-Bazdawī, Abū al-Yusr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, edited by Hans Peter Linss, Cairo, 1383/1963.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, Kitāb al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād, edited by Muṣṭafā al-Qabbānī al-Dimashqī, Cairo, n.d.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah, Cairo, 1355/1936.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, *Miḥakk al-Naẓar fī al-Manṭiq*, Cairo, n.d.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, Mi'yār al-'Ilm fī Fann al-Manṭiq, Cairo, 1329.

 $[\]overline{}^{31}$ See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, pp. 316-324; al-Jurjānī, Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, vol. VIII, pp. 228-230, 236-240; al-Taftāzānī, Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid, vol. II, pp. 131-132; al-Āmidī, $Abk\bar{a}r$ al-Afkār, fols. 214b-215a, 217a-217b, 218a, 22la-221b.

- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, $Q\bar{a}n\bar{u}n$ al- $Ta'w\bar{u}l$, edited by Muḥammad Zāhid ibn al-Ḥasan al-Kawtharī, [Cairo], 1359/1940.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, translated by Sabih Ahmad Kamali under the title *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifah*, Lahore, 1958.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, edited by Maurice Bouyges, Beirut, 1927.
- Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, al-Muqaddimah, translated by Franz Rosenthal under the title *The Muqaddimah*, Bollingen Series XLIII, New York, 1958.
- Ibn Qudāmah, Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Maqdisī, *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar fī Kutub Ahl al-Kalām*, edited and translated by George Makdisi under the title *Ibn Qudāma's Censure of Speculative Theology*, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, New Series, XXIII, London, 1962.
- Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh, al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt, with the commentaries of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Tehran, 1377-1379.
- Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh, al-Najāh fī al-Ḥikmah al-Manṭiqīyah wa-al-Tabī'īyah wa-al-Ilāhīyah, Cairo, 1357/1938.
- Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh, al-Shifā', al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān, edited by Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī, Cairo, 1375/1956.
- al-Jurjānī, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf 'Alī ibn Muḥammad, Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, Cairo, 1325/1907. (A commentary on al-Mawāqif fī 'Ilm al-Kalām of 'Adud al-Dīn al-Ījī)
- al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ḥaramayn 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allāh, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭi' al-Adillah fī Uṣūl al-I'tiqād*, edited by Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā and 'Alī 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Hamīd, Cairo 1369/1950.
- al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ḥaramayn 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allāh, al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, edited by 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, Fayṣal Budayr 'Awn, and Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār, Alexandria, 1389/1969.
- al-Nasafī, Najm al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad, al-'Aqā'id, translated by Duncan Black Macdonald in his Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory, New York, 1903, pp. 308-315.
- al-Nasafī, Najm al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad, al-'Aqā'id. See: al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar, Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyah.
- Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York, 1953.
- al-Qūshjī, 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad, *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd*, Tabriz(?), 1307. (A commentary on *Tajrīd al-'Aqā'id* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī)
- al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, Hyderabad, 1353.

- al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad, Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsīyah, Cairo, 1323-1327. (A commentary on Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī's al-Risālah al-Shamsīyah)
- al-Sanūsī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf, Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn, printed in the margin of Muḥammad al-Dasūqī's Ḥāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn, Cairo, n.d. (al-Sanūsī's own commentary on his Umm al-Barāhīn)
- al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar, Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyah, translated by Earl Edgar Elder under the title A Commentary on the Creed of Islam, New York, 1950. (A commentary on Najm al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī's al-'Aqā'id)
- al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar, Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyah, Cairo, 1358/1939.
- al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, Istanbul, 1277. (al-Taftāzānī's own commentary on his *al-Maqāṣid fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*)

Wensinck, A.J., The Muslim Creed, Cambridge, 1932.

* * *