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The Imamis' position on Non-Imami hadith

From this urgently needed study of ours it appears that those of the Imamiyyah, who were accused of corporealism and anthropomorphism, whether correctly or not, were accused on the basis of their belief in hadith which had leaked over to them from the non-Imami sects, and we have given examples bearing witness to this. These hadiths themselves were what led others to corporealism and anthropomorphism, knowingly or unknowingly; in this their views concurred, or at least those of their views which are narrated, although it is not proved that they, or some of them, believed in them.

As a single example of the effect of these hadiths on the environment of the Imamiyyah, in addition to the examples already given, there is what as-Saduq narrates with a chain of authority originating with Ya'qub as-Sarraj, who stated:

I said to Abu 'Abdillah, peace be upon him: 'Some of our followers claim that Allah has a form like human form, and they also say that He is, in this form, beardless, with short, curly hair [refer to what has been stated previous-ly].' Abu'Abdillah, peace be upon him, fallen to the ground, prostrated, and then he raised his head and said: 'Praise be to Allah Who does not resemble anything, Who is not perceived by vision, and not bound by knowledge. He did not beget, because a son would resemble his father; He was not begotten, for whoever was before Him would resemble Him.'¹

There is another factor, and it suffices that we mention just one piece of evidence for it without comment or explanation. This is what came from Ibn Abi 'Umayr Muhammad ibn Ziyad al-Azdi al-Baghdadi (d. 217/832), the famous Imami Traditionist and scholar, concerning what al-Kishshi narrated from al-Fadl ibn Shadhan:

He questioned Abu Muhammad ibn Abi 'Umayr, saying to him: 'You have met the non-Imami shaykhs, but how is it that you have not heeded them?' He said: 'I listened to them; however I saw that many of our followers had heard knowledge from the 'ammah (non-Imamis) and from the khassah (the elite-Imamis), and that they had been confused to the point where they narrated a non-Imami hadith from Imami sources and vice versa. I dreaded the thought of becoming confused, so I abandoned this and focussed on that' [i.e., 'I stopped narrating non-Imami hadith and confined myself to Imami hadith']²

These two factors, in addition to others, explain the confidence which emanated from the Imams, peace be upon them, and which their partisans had in taking their beliefs and rulings from them, as well as the reliance upon the truthful and trustworthy people who narrated on their authority. May Allah forgive our brothers for explaining it as a rupture between Muslim brethren, and transforming it into an indictment, to be added to the other indictments against us!

It is clear from this study of ours that the adversaries of the Imamiyyah, no matter how their views differed or their beliefs varied, did not cease to behave towards the Imamiyyah as they did, or as it was claimed they did, concerning what was between them. I have presented many examples of this, and have refrained from commenting on them.

However, here I will relate the opinion of a non-Imami writer concerning one of the most famous books on treatises and sects, to which Muslims of all periods have accorded a high status among all books on the subject. The book is *al-Farq bayna 'l-firaq wa bayanu 'l-firqatin-najiyah minha* by Abu Mansur, 'Abdu 'l-Qahir ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, al-Ash'ari, ash-Shafi'i (d. 429/1038), and in the same vein, his other book *al-Milal wa 'n-nihal*, both in print; and another book of no less importance, if not as successful, being *al-Milal wa 'n-nihal* by Abu 'l-Fath, Muhammad ibn 'Abdi 'l-Karim ash-Shahristani (479/1086–548/1153). Fakhru'd-Din ar-Razi, the famous theologian and commentator, says of the book *al-Milal wa'n-nihal* by ash-Shahristani:

It is a book which, it claims, relates the doctrines of the world, but it is not relied upon because it draws Islamic beliefs from the book called *al-Farq bayna 'l-firaq* by Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi, and this teacher was severely bigoted against those who differed in belief and scarcely presented their beliefs in a truthful fashion. ash-Shahristani, then, drew the beliefs of the Muslim sects from this book, and for this reason slandered their honour in the process.³

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Before concluding the investigation, I must say a word concerning the role of the Mu'tazilah in this area. The Mu'tazilah were confronted from the beginning by two sorts of adversaries: one group were followers of hadith and the sunnah, or those who were called al-Hashwiyyah and an-Nabitah by the Mu'tazilah, and the second group were the theologians who differed with them in their views. The Traditionists did not confront the Mu'tazilah with the weapons of theology and debate and join the battle of argument with argument, but rather confronted them with accusations of heresy and unbelief, and the charge of atheism and going beyond the legitimate bounds of the religion.

With the influence they had on the general public, their adversity was transformed into a mere 'physical struggle', in which the Mu'tazilah were compelled to grasp the weapon of authority since they had failed to grasp the weapon of the backing of the general public. The most important manifestations were the tragedies in which the history of the time of the 'Abbasids al-Ma'mun, al-Mu'tasim, al-Wathiq, and al-Mutawakkil (198/813–247/861) abound. The Mu'tazilah were victorious in the first period of the third

caliphate, as they had the authority and the weapons of the sultan on their side.

This is a tragedy, which the historians hold to have been a struggle over the issue of the createness of the Qur'an. However the Mu'tazilah lost their position after the authorities inclined towards their opponent theologians, and they lost the weapon of authority, just as their predecessors had lost the weapon of the general public.

As for their theological adversaries – the most important of these were the Imami theologians – the controversy the Mu'tazilah had with them took place merely in the intellectual arena, since the disputing parties were, as was pointed out, equal in strength, in possession neither of the weapon of the sultan or of the community. Rather, the Mu'tazilah were, with respect to the Imamiyyah, closer to the heart of the sultan and his sympathy, and more able to seek the aid of his influence and arms! Here the Mu'tazilah sought assistance by all reason and means, and pursued every avenue, which facilitated their victory.

It was fear of the public in the first instance, and following that, fear of both the public and the sultan, which shackled the hands of the Mu'tazilah in front of the Traditionists; this did not shackle their hands before the Imamiyyah, and for this reason we do not find in the books of the Mu'tazilah concerned with the Traditionists the offensive accusations, the continual biting criticism, and the bare-faced adversity which we find they have with respect to the Imamiyyah.

I think that what the Mu'tazilah attributed to the Imamiyyah, which others adopted from them, they heard in the first instance from the Traditionists. Muqatil ibn Sulayman settled in Basrah towards the end of his life, and spread his views there,⁴ and so did his contemporary Hammad ibn Salamah al-Basri (88/707–167/784), the mufti and faqih of Basrah, and a famous Traditionist.

He was the one with whom are associated most of the hadith concerning the divine attributes which he used to demonstrate corporealism and anthropomorphism, and which it was said that his confederate 'Abdu 'l-Karim ibn Abi 'l-'Awja', the well-known atheist, inserted in his own books, and which Hammad narrated and defended as true.⁵ Mu'adh al-'Anbari, the qadi and Traditionist of Basrah, and Dawud al-Jawaribi were either from Basrah or had connections with it. The Mu'tazilah took everything from them, but they could not at first ridicule them using these narrations, so they used their statements against the Imamiyyah, attributing them to the Basrans in the first instance, and the using it to ridicule them afterwards.

¹. at-Tawhid, pp. 103–4; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.304.

². al-Kishshi, pp.590–1; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.5, p. 118; Mu'jam rijali 'l- hadith, vol. 14, p.299.

³. Munazarat Fakhru 'd-Din ar-Razi fi bilad ma warai 'n-nahr, ed. Dr. Fathullah Khalif, Daru 'l-Mashriq, Beirut, 1966, with English transl., p.39–99; and see the translation, p.62–99.

⁴. As was previously mentioned, according to adh-Dhahabi 'Basrah is a nest of predestination': Mizanu 'l-i'tidal, vol.3, p.91.

⁵. Ibnu 'l-Jawzi, al-Mawdu'at, vol. 1, pp.37, 100, 122; Ibn Furak, Mushkilu 'l-hadith, p. 169; al-Bayhaqi, al-Asma' wa 's-sifat, p.445; adh-Dhahabi, Mizanu'l-i'tidal, vol.1, p.593; Ibn Hajar, Tahdhibu 't-tahdhib, vol.3, p. 15; as-Suyuti, al-La'ali 'l-masnu'ah, vol. 1, p.25; vol.2, p.468; etc.

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