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Part 13: High level of the Logic of Islam

A scholar going deep into the study of the questions concerning monotheism, is filled with wonder when he finds that the special logic adopted in this respect by the Holy Qur'an and next to it by the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, especially Imam Ali is so different and higher not only from the logic of that time but also from that of the later period when scholastic theology had developed and philosophy was flourishing. What the Qur'an and the hadith say about destiny and the freedom or constraint of human will, is an example of that logic.

This in itself proves that the Holy Qur'an has sprung from a source which does not belong to this world and that the Holy Prophet who received the Qur'an looked at the realities from quite a different angle. Similarly the knowledge of the logic of the Qur'an which the Holy Family had was different from what the others had.

Where the ideas were too high to be grasped ordinarily, the other people were bewildered, but the Imams described them very clearly and in a realistic manner. It is not surprising that even the Shi'ah theologians were unable to digest this information properly.

When one looks at the statements and comments of such eminent scholars such a Sheikh Mufid, Sayyid Murtadha, Allamah Hilli, Allamah Majlisi in their books of theology and their commentaries on hadith, one notices that they have not been free being influenced by the ideas of the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilities. Their way of thinking is often close to that of either of them. That is why they have been compelled to explain away many Qur'anic verses and the hadiths. Anyhow, this short-coming does not lower the position of these eminent scholars. None else in their position could do better, for the comprehension of the special logic of the Holy Qur'an is confined to the spiritual leaders trained in the school of this Holy Book. Others have been able to enter this circle gradually by going deep into the relevant questions and the constant study of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, especially Imam Ali.

Some of our contemporary scholars have shown sufficient ability to analyze the social questions. But when they take up such problems as that of fate and destiny, they are as much bewildered as the scholastic theologians. For instance, we can mention the name of the Egyptian writer, Ahmad Amin who has written the Fajr al-Islam, the Zuh'l al-Islam, the Zuhr al-Islam and the Yaum al-Islam.

Ahmad Amin has to a great extent evinced his ability to discuss and analyze social questions, but as far as the question of fate is concerned, he has proved as helpless as the scholastic theologians. Towards the end of his book, Fajr al-Islam he has, in a special chapter, discussed the question of predestination and freedom of will, but on the whole it appears that according to him a belief in destiny means predestinarianism. Hence he is not prepared to believe that the hadiths regarding destiny are authentic. Similarly he is unable to believe that the Nahj al-Balaghah is a collection of the sermons and letter of Imam Ali. Of course, he is not blame, because it is due to his lack of knowledge that he is so skeptic. As a rule it may e said that no scholar, whether a European, an Egyptian or an Iranian. Whose knowledge is confined to social sciences is in a position to express an opinion on the history of Islamic knowledge.

Whenever the European historians or the orientalists have expressed an opinion about the question of fate, they have either described Islam as a religion of predestination or have claimed that the doctrine of fate and destiny is not found in the Qur'an and that it was created later by the scholastic theologians.

An orientalist says: "The cardinal principles of Islam are as follows: God is One: Muhammad is His Prophet .... The theologians have preached that Allah has foreordained the fate of everybody and that His Will is unchangeable. This doctrine is called *jabr* (predestination; literally compulsion).....".

Gustav Le Bon, in a defending way says that in this respect the Qur'an has not said anything more than what the other sacred Books say. After quoting verses of the Qur'an and making certain remarks he adds"

"Islam has been accused of having a belief in fate, but this charge is as baseless as all other charges. We have already put the Qur'anic verses on this subject before our readers. They say no more than what is written in this respect in our sacred Book. All philosophers and schoolmen are of the view that all events are preordained and totally unchangeable. Luther, who was a reformer, himself has written: "All available evidence in the sacred Book is repugnant to the theory of liberty. This evidence is found in many places of the Scripture. It may be said that all sacred Books are full of such indications".

After referring to the belief in destiny as prevalent among the ancient Greeks and the Romans, he says "It is clear that Islam has not given more importance to this question than other religions. Islam has not given to it even as much heed as some of the contemporary scholars".

Gustav Le Bon admits that a belief in fate amounts to a belief in predestination and a refutation of freedom of will. But he says that such a belief is found in all religions and most of the philosophical systems.

In his History of Civilization, after giving a gist of the Qur'anic verses on the comprehensiveness of Divine Knowledge and Will and referring to a well-know hadith found in al-Bukhari's al-Sahih, Will Durant says that "Belief in predestination is a part of the Islamic way of thinking".

Now let us see what Mr. Dominic Sordell has designed to say in this respect. He has written a book, named “Islam”. In it he says: “From the very beginning of the Islamic era the Muslims were conscious of the contradictions in the Qur’an. According to an available report they even pointed out some contradictions to the Prophet himself who in reply said: “Keep believing in what is worrying you”. Later the Muslims who did not like to accept certain doctrines off-hand, tried to interpret certain words and expressions of the Qur’an. That is how the science of exegesis developed. The first question which attracted the attention of the Muslims was - If man cannot act contrary to what Allah has preordained and still Allah requits him for his good or bad deeds, does that not constitute a contradiction between Allah’s Power and human responsibility? The Qur’an does not answer this question, but the Omnipotence of Allah has been so much emphasized throughout the Qur’an, that no room has been left for human liberty. Thus submission to the Will of Allah prevails over a sense of human responsibility”.

Mr. Dominic Sordell’s book is full of such kind of research.

This is the way of thinking of the orientalists and that is how they derive their conclusions. This instance shows how far they are able to express an opinion in regard to such a question.

It is clear from the foregoing that the question of fate and destiny has been repeatedly mentioned by the Qur'an itself. It is not an invention of the scholastic theologians. Further, it is also clear that a belief in destiny as taught by the Qur’an is poles apart from predestinarianism.

The European orientalists usually extoll the Mu’tazilite for denying destiny. According to the Mu’tazilites a belief in destiny amounts to a belief in predestination.

There is no doubt if we compare the Mu’tazilites and the Ash’arites, we find that the former had considerable independence of thought. Mutawakkil’s suppression of the Mu’tazilites and his official support of the Ash’arites may be regarded as a big tragedy of the world of Islam. But as far as the question of fate and destiny is concerned, the mistake made by the Mu’tazilites was not less grave than that made by the Ash’arites. The orientalists who do not have any deep knowledge of Islam and who are under the impression that a belief in destiny amounts to a belief in predestination are never tired of praying tributes to the Mu’tazilites.

Edward Brown in his ‘Literary History of Persia’ says: “The Qadarites or the Mu’tazilites were more important. They advocated freedom of will or absolute discretion. The best homage which can be paid to the Mu’tazilites is that their ideas were a protest which common sense always makes against unjust orders and rigid teachings. The monotheism”. They said that the Ash’arite belief in the eternal fate meant that Allah had pre-ordained the destiny of everyone, that He punished the people for the sins which He Himself had imposed on them, and that man could not resist his destiny.

This way of thinking of the Mu’tazilites, namely that destiny meant predestination, has received the highest approbation of the orientalists.

Historical Background

The origin of the controversy regarding fate is a point worth discussion. The point is how it was that from the first half or at the most from the second half of the first century the Muslims entered into the discussion of predestination and free will.

Undoubtedly the reason was that the Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic sayings referred to this question. It is a question which naturally attracts the attention of everybody. As it was raised in the Holy Book and as some of the verses expressly supported destiny while some others described man as having liberty, naturally the Muslims had to think over this question and discuss it.

But the orientalists and their lackeys claim that these ideas have some other basis.

As we have already said, some European historians believe that the question of destiny was raised later by the scholastic theologians. Originally Islam preached neither predestination nor free will. Some other orientalists are of the view that the Ash'arite theory based on predestination represents the true teaching of Islam, but the Mu'tazilites did not acquiesce in it as they did not accept many other Islamic ideas which were not in conformity with logic and reason. It were they who for the first time introduced the idea of free will among the Muslims. These orientalists further say that even the Mu'tazilites were not the originators of this idea. They were influenced by the neighbouring nations, especially the Christians.

Edward Brown in the 'Literary History of Persia' says: Von Cromer is of the view that Ma'bad al-Juhani preached the idea of free will in Damascus towards the end of the 7th century is imitation of an Iranian named Sanbawayh.

He further says: "According to Von Cromer, Damascus was the place where the doctrines of the Mu'tazilites developed under the influence of the Byzantine Christian divines, especially John of Damascus and his disciple, Theodorus Abu Kurra".

It appears that in the opinion of Von Cormer even that Iranian who suggested the idea of freedom and liberty of Ma'bad al-Juhani, was himself influenced by the Roman-Christian ecclesiastics.

If this view is accepted, we will have to look for a similar historical basis for prayer, fasting monotheism and the belief in the hereafter. Probably the Muslims paid attention to these also because they had found a precedent for them in the Christian circles.

The fact is that the orientalists do not possess enough competence to make an inquiry into the Islamic tenets, nor mostly do they have good intention.

When they try to analyze Islamic concepts or deal with Islamic tenets, mysticism or Muslim philosophy, they put forth such astonishingly absurd ideas that they are often ridiculous. For instance look at the following remarks of an orientalist.

Edward Brown in his Literary History of Persia, vol. 1, quotes the Dutch orientalist as saying in his History of Islam:

“When they (the Mu’tazilites) gave serious thought to the rules of Islam, they advocated only what was reasonable. Thus one of the points which they emphasized was that Qur’an was transient and created, though to say so was against what the Prophet (s) had declared. They said that the eternity of the Qur’an meant a belief in the eternity of two beings, while the correct position was that the Qur’an, which was the word of Allah was His creation. Further, it could not be attributed to His essence, for that was unchangeable.

Thus the basis of revelation was shaken. Many Mu’tazilites openly said that it was not impossible to produce a writing like the Qur’an or even better than that.

This orientalist wants to impress on us implicitly that the Ash’arites had derived their belief in the eternity of the Qur’an from the sayings of the Prophet (s) and that though the Mu’tazilite knew that, they rejected this doctrine because they found it contrary to the dictates of reason and logic. In this very book he says a little further that the eternity of the Qur’an was one of the doctrines of the Ash’arites who faithfully follow the text of the Qur’an.

In fact in the Qur’an there is not even a slightest hint to the eternity of the Qur’an or to its being uncreated, nor there exists to this effect a single hadith acceptable to the Mu’tazilites.

That is why they opposed the idea that the Qur’an was a Celestial Book and that it was revealed.1[1]

Their belief about Allah was purer and more sublime, than that held by the pietists, the adherents to the popular notions and the Ash’arites. The Mu’tazilites never accepted the idea that the Creator of the world could ever appear in a corporeal form. They were not willing to listen to such a thing. There is a hadith, according to which the Prophet said: “Just as you saw the full moon during the Battle of Badr, one day you will see Allah also”.2[2]

He means a report, which is found in the books of scholastic theology and not those of hadith. According to this report the Holy Prophet (s) said: “You will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection as you see the full moon”. The learned orientalist mistook in the report the word, badr meaning the full moon for the Battle of Badr. Then he translated the future tense into the past so that the sentence might give some meaning.

This report has a long story. There are indications that it was once deformed by someone among its transmitters. Then it was again distorted by the scholastic theologians. It is for the third time that the learned orientalist has put it in a ludicrous form. The Qur’an expressly denies the possibility that a human eye can see Allah.

As the pietists took this hadith literally, the Mu’tazilites found it to be a big hurdle in their way and were

compelled to explain it away. They said that man after death would see Allah with spiritual eyes. The Mu'tazilites also denied that Allah was the Creator of the infidels.3 [3]

This is an example of the valuable research of a learned orientalist. Edward Brown; the author of the 'Literary History of Persia' passed it over without making any comments.

We wonder whether we should call it ignorance or a crime. What is more regrettable is that the followers and lackeys of these orientalists, instead of studying the ideas of the East and the Islamic tenets directly, continue to repeat the views of their master parrot-like.

1. There is enough historical evidence to show that the Mu'tazilites were the staunch supporters and defenders of the Qur'an. They fought relentlessly against the heresies of the Zindiqs (atheists) and the philosophers. If as Dozy claims, they did not regard the Qur'an as revealed, why did they take the trouble of defending it?
2. It is an unforgivable mistake of the Ash'arites to believe that human eye will see Allah on the Day of Resurrection. Such an idea is contrary to what the Qur'an has expressly said.

"No eyes can see Him, but He comprehends all vision. He is the Subtle, all Aware". (Surah al-An'am, 6:103)

Anyhow, there is a truth which has been described as "meeting Allah". But there are many hadiths which confirm that this is not a corporeal matter. (For details please see, Murtada Mutahhari, Master and Mastership, ISP, 1980).

3. In history there has not been a single Mu'tazilite who ever said that Allah was not the Creator of the infidels. All that the Mu'tazilites said was that Allah was not the Creator of infidelity, injustice and sin. They never said that He was not the Creator of the infidels, the unjust and the sinners.

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