

Preface

The intellectual relationship between the Mu'tazilite school of thought and Shi'ism, which constitutes, as the late Prof. Macdonald noticed, "the great mystery of Muslim history", was referred to by many classical as well as modern scholars. The different opinions expressed by them on this complicated subject can be reduced to two theories.

Those who maintain that Shi'ism has elaborated its theology on a basis borrowed from the intellectual system of the Mu'tazilites, to which the Shi'ah divines affiliated themselves during the fourth century of the Hijra. This theory seems to be very old in origin, since as early as the fourth century some, such as ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, wrote a refutation of it. Among the Sunnite theologians ash-Shahrastani, Ibn Taymiyyah and ad-Dawani supported it. Recently both Goldziher and Adam Mez have also championed it.

Contrary to this is the theory advanced by the Shi'ite theologians themselves who resented the whole aspersion of borrowing, and were engaged in intellectual controversies in an effort to repudiate it, directing their fiercest attacks against this so-called "false allegation". They were not content with this negative refutation but also alleged that the whole Mu'tazilite system was itself a product of the teachings of the infallible Imams, which were transfused into Mu'tazilite philosophy through the tuition which the early Mu'tazilite doctor, and the founder of the whole school, Wasil ibn 'Ata' received from Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah. [1](#)

It is easy in this respect to explain and comprehend the concern of the Shi'ah divines on the grounds that to them the whole structure of their authoritative system was based on and indeed derived from the direct intuition which the infallible received from God without any extraneous support.

Nevertheless, a critical investigation based on comparative research will soon disclose that the transformation of the Shi'ite theology from a literal, traditional stand to a rational and allegorical interpretation of the revealed law, was primarily inspired by critical and rational Mu'tazilite tendencies.

I am convinced that a critical comparison of the Imamiyyah Creed as stated for the first time by Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi in his 'Aqaidu 'l-Imamiyyah, with Tashih l'tiqadati 'l-Imamiyyah which was

compiled by his pupil Abu 'Abdillah ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, which is the core of my thesis, will demonstrate that the reconstruction, refinement and reexamination which is visible in al-Mufid's work, marked a new orientation towards a critical methodology first inaugurated by the Mu'tazilite. Hence it is essential that my work should be studied along with Prof. A.A.A. Fyzee's *A Shi'ite Creed*.

My thesis, as it stands, consists of three parts. In Part One, I have dealt with the author, his works and the times in which he lived, since it is my opinion that the Buwayhid regime in which he lived, provided a milieu in which Mu'tazilite teachings permeated Shi'ite theology. I have prepared a complete list of his works, published, extant in manuscript, and unknown to us except by name, to show the position which he enjoyed and the important role he played in Shi'ite thought. I was very lucky in my visit to an-Najaf, al-Kazimayn and Karbala', where I found many valuable manuscripts not recorded in the standard catalogues.

In Part Two I have prepared a critical translation of *Tashih I'tiqadati 'l-Imamiyyah*, with amendments and notes. I have based my translation on the published text which is based in turn on three different manuscripts. I have made use of a fourth copy which exists at the India Office Library under the number 2057.

I have referred to them respectively by the letters (T) for the published text, and (N) for the India Office manuscript. In Part Three, I have commented on a selection of topics relevant to my thesis. In some cases detailed and somewhat lengthy explanations were unavoidable so that the different stands of the various schools should be made clear and their inter-relations and mutual impact easily discerned. Three general observations also are to be noticed:

- a) I have restricted my research to the intellectual relationship between the Mu'tazilite school of thought and the Ithna'Ashariyyah school of the Shi'ah; thus wherever the word Shi'ah is used generally, they are meant by it.
- b) Since this thesis deals with controversial subjects and terminology, it was very difficult to rely only on one of the approved translations of the Qur'an; consequently I have made use of all the standard translations.
- c) Some of the terms which occur in the text or the commentary were too long to be explained in footnotes; I have separated them in Appendices which appear at the end of the work.

I take this opportunity to express my high esteem and deep gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. A. J. Arberry, whose encouragement and instruction was the source from which I drew my inspiration. My sincere thanks are also due to my friend, Miss. J. Thompson, of the Oriental Department, University Library, for her generous and unstinted assistance throughout the work in correcting my English. My gratitude is also due to Mrs. Virginia Barnes who bore the difficulty of typing the thesis. Lastly, I would like to express my thanks to the Iraqi Government for the scholarship which paved the way for my higher education.

April 1965,
'Irfan 'Abdu 'l-Hamid
Cambridge University.

¹. This relationship though referred to frequently (see Ibnu 'l-Murtada, al- Munyah, p.5), is not admissible since Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah died in 79 or 80 AH, the very year in which Wasil was born. Some sources substitute Abu Hashim 'Abdullah, the son of Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah for his father (ash-Shahristani, al-Milal, vol. 1, p57). Even, if this were so, the personal relationship should not be stressed too far; as it would be rash to assume their teachings are necessarily similar.

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/emendation-shiite-creed-shaykh-al-mufid/preface#comment-0>