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COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL

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3.2 Consciousness of Sin and Individual Responsibility

The intellectual currents that since the late Umayyad period worked against the certainty of attaining Paradise are primarily summarized in the sources under the heading Qadariyya. In this movement people came together who maintained that each person is himself responsible for the evil he does; one cannot attribute it to God. God calls man to do good; thus, He may also direct him towards good and give him help. Consequently, man is still chosen; but he is also free to reject being chosen. And above all he is addressed as an individual; he must fend for himself and as such is responsible before God. This approach, as already indicated, was especially refined upon in Başra; in Syria, where the Qadariyya likewise appeared, it had rather the character of a political party.¹ This is explained by the fact that in Başra the Qadarites were, for the most part, ascetics; consciousness of sin shaped the intellectual climate of the entire city. *Taqwā* as a religious ideal was there gradually replaced by *zuhd*, renunciation of "the world". Even many Khārijites felt moved by an affinity with the spreading pietistic spirit; they believed that the children of the "infidels", though they had to die, would enter Paradise.²

Here one must be on guard against separating too absolutely from one another the political and the religious Qadariyya. In Syria the Qadarites came to light especially during the short caliphate of Yazīd II and the confusion that followed it; at the time almost every religious statement carried with it political overtones. In Başra – and similarly in the Hījāz³ – such a state of affairs was perceptible for a considerably longer time; the early Abbasid period, however, was not quite so favourable to religiously motivated protest movements.⁴ Asceticism was on the whole well-suited to criticizing "the state", which in Syria – at least according to the image one had in Başra of the Syrian Qadariyya – had also meant criticism of the luxury and extravagance of the Umayyads.⁵

1 More on this below pp. 82 ff. and Chpt. B 2.2.2 ff.

2 Ash'arī, *Maq.* 126, l. 8. The Ibādite Rabī b. Ḥabīb also presents in his *Musnad* a *ḥadīth* that expressly prohibits killing the children of the unbelievers (III, 8, no. 791).

3 On this see below Chpts. B 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.2.3.

4 All the same, a part of the Başran Mu'tazila and Medinan Qadariyya participated in the revolt of al-Nafs al-zakiyya (see below Chpts. B 2.2.6.3.2.2 and 4.1.2.3.1).

5 See below p. 153 for Ghaylān al-Dimashqī. Gibb rightly drew attention to the fact that at the time neither friend nor foe yet made a distinction between "the state" and the ruling dynasty (SI 4/1955/6).

was an Ibādīte; but we do know that he did not wish to study theology under him but grammar and lexicography.

I do not know what Khalīl's doctrine of *wahm qadīm* entailed (Jāhiz, *Tarbiṭ* 78, -4). We must consider that the term *wahm* still had positive connotations at that time, meaning simply "imagination" rather than "conceit" (thus frequently in Shī'ite texts; cf. Ibn Bābōya, *Tawhīd* 38, apu. f.; 42, -8 etc.). Interestingly the closest parallels with Khalīl's abovementioned description of transcendence are found in the same Shī'ite environment; they, too, undoubtedly of quite an early date (see ch. D 1.3, beginning, below).

2.2.5.7 The Relation between Sin and Faith

One central point of Ibādīte doctrine has so far been mentioned only in passing: the concept of sin. Here, the heresiographers become more relevant, as this concept was always regarded as distinctive by the non-Ibādīte surroundings, while it was not controversial within the community. It was pure chance that preserved an old document on the subject among Darjīnī's writings, a missive briefly mentioned above, from Abū Sufyān Maḥbūb b. al-Raḥīl to, probably, the community in Yemen during the second half of the second century.¹ His main concern was to protect the community he addressed from the Khārijites' ancient error of alienating followers through excessive rigour. He called for leniency towards sinners and advocated accepting their penitence rather than speculating on their hidden intentions. Whoever wishes to deceive God will have to deal with God alone.² A venial sin becomes a mortal sin only through obduracy on the part of the sinner, in which case it is necessary to cease supporting him (*walāya*).³ Islam is not damaged every time a work of obedience is neglected, and not every infringement of a prohibition leads to unbelief. While there are certain fundamental principles that are indispensable to a Muslim, such as those listed in the "piety verse" of the Quran (sura 2:177): belief in God, in the Day of Judgment, in the angels, the scripture, and the prophets, as well as some practical points such as fasting in Ramadan, the pilgrimage, abiding by contracts, returning entrusted property etc.,⁴ there

1 See p. 232, n. 100 above; also regarding dating difficulties.

2 After sura 2:9. Cf. Darjīnī 281, 12ff.; transl. in Cuperly, *Professions de foi* II 135f. (cf. also *Introduction* 29f.).

3 Ibid. 281, 5ff. = Cuperly 134.

4 In more detail in ch. D 0 below.

consequently divine grace could not be merely a theoretical or concrete possibility, but had to be realised of necessity. The sources frequently follow this directly with the argument Bishr put forth in his defence: the proofs of God's grace are infinite; there is no such thing as most beneficial, as they are all equally beneficial (*ṣalāh*).³¹ He was thus referring to God's infinite freedom, demonstrating why he wished to remove God's willing to the eternity before the beginning of time and to separate it from actual events.

Bishr had not lost the round, however much later commentators spoke of his having recanted. He continued to have followers beyond his death, such as Ja'far b. Ḥarb, who only modified his ideas to the extent that unbelievers who become believers through divine grace alone do not deserve reward for their conversion.³² We also find numerous arguments which clearly date from later discussions.³³ Petitionary prayers were cited; they only make sense if we expect God to give us proof of his grace.³⁴ Above all Bishr's school appears to have relied on God's omnipotence. Passages such as 42:27 were adduced as proof that God has the power to create disaster (*mafsada*) to a degree that everyone would be affected; but he should consequently also have the power to create that which is beneficial in such quantity that everyone may achieve salvation.³⁵ This had always been the crux of the matter.

1.4.3.1.1.3 Faith and Sin

This, once again, was only one side of the matter. God is not only 'benevolent', and he does not give unlimited credit. The purpose of the *altāf* is not to help a human obey the commandments at a certain moment; in fact, in these instances Bishr did not use the word *lutf* but spoke of *walāya* 'friendship, support': God grants a human his friendship if the human is a believer. This is complemented by the 'enmity' God displays against unbelief and sin. This concept pair had a long history, having been used by the Khārijites in Khorasan or Sijistān, and by

31 Thus Ka'bī in Text 36 (cf. the preceding commentary on 35) and Ash'arī in Text 37, d–e. In *Maq.* 250, if., the mysterious 'other' discussed immediately following Abū l-Hudhayl (at 249, 14f.) is once again Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir. I do not think that Brunschvig's discussion of the issue (in: SI 39/1974/12 = *Etudes* I 240) shows the difference clearly enough. In addition, the *aṣlah* theory is not expressed in Ḍirār b. 'Amr's writings, although he may have anticipated the concept of *lutf* (cf. Text xv 36, d).

32 Text 37, c, with commentary. Cf. ch. C 4.2.2.1 below.

33 Thus in Mānkdim, ShUKh 521, apu. ff.

34 Ibid. 524, –5ff.

35 Ibid. 524, 7ff.; cf. also earlier 523, ult. f. Even Ash'arī adopted Bishr's approach for dialectical reasons (*Ibāna* 56, 8ff.).

4.1 Sin and Penitence

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Just as faith was imagined as a dot of light within the heart, so it was believed that sin caused a black mark on a human's heart. It will disappear if one repents, or it may spread until it darkens the entire heart.¹ This was probably an idea originating with ascetic circles; it presumed that faith may disappear altogether as the result of evil actions.² In such a case the human would have become accustomed to sin or, as the Quran said, God would have sealed his heart.³ Some Mu'tazilites did indeed believe the two to be the same,⁴ although the Quranic statement had referred on the unbelievers alone; the ascetics transferred it onto the sinners.⁵ At this point a corrective was required, and penitence (*tawba*) was apposite. This, too, was a genuinely Quranic term; it occurs as a verb as well as a noun and a participle.⁶ However, the Quran did not speak of the practice of penitence; indeed, transgressions were not interpreted primarily as incurring moral guilt at all. Wherever it showed how wrongdoing should be corrected in a concrete way, it was from the legal point of view; reparation was not achieved by penitence but by atonement.⁷

Penitence came into its own in the context of the relationship between humans and God. The point in such a case was not for the human to perform a particular action, but rather to change his behaviour altogether: to return to God. This was the corollary of the original eschatological kerygma: penitence as μετάνοια before the imminent Judgment.⁸ This explains why God then does the same thing: he turns back toward the human in his mercy. The idiosyncrasy of Quranic usage has always been pointed out: namely that the verb *tāba* may be used to refer to God as well as to humans.⁹ It does not describe a

- 1 Kulīnī, *Kāfi* II 271 no. 13; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd* 504 no. 1441; Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb* I 113, –7ff./transl. Gramlich 377, and WKAS II 1395 b s. v. *lumza*, each with further instances.
- 2 We must bear in mind that Ibn al-Mubāraks text speaks of *nifāq*, and is thus focussed on an attitude rather than an action.
- 3 Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes* 19f.; the expression is Biblical (cf. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* 30).
- 4 Ash'arī, *Maq.* 259, 5.
- 5 Thus already Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's *Risāla* (cf. *Anfänge* 60); structured into a system by the Bakriyya (see vol. II 128 above).
- 6 Cf. the lexical studies by S. Wilzer in: *Der Islam* 33/1958/71ff. and, independently, by Denny in: *Journal Am. Acad. of Religion* 47/1979/649ff. Regarding the words Aramaic roots see Ahrens in: *ZDMG* 84/1930/27, and Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary* 37.
- 7 Thus of course especially in the Medinan suras; cf. e.g. 4:92, 5:89, or 58:3f.
- 8 This eschatological connection is still present in some early exegeses of sura 6:58; cf. e.g. Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* ³XII 252 no. 14212.
- 9 Wilzer 72; Jeffery 95; in detail Rahbar, *God of Justice* 155ff., with the list of instances *ibid.* 437ff. It is important that the word takes a different preposition in these cases: *ilā* for humans, and *'alā* for God.

Regarding the philological discussion cf. also Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī, *Furūq* III, 15ff.; on the development in general Gimaret, *Theories* 8ff. and 337ff. It is worth noting that Yaḥyā b. 'Adī was of the same opinion as 'Abd al-Jabbār (in the treatise edited by Pines and Schwarz in *Festschrift Baneth*; cf. p. 70, pu. ff., and 72, 13ff.). It seems that he was influenced by Mu'tazilites; being a Christian he had not actually wanted to approach the issue, and he does not understand the terminological use of *iktisāb* (ibid. 64ff.).

4.1.2.1.1.6 Faith and Sin

We have already said that 'Abbād followed Hishām al-Fuwaṭī in his definition of faith.¹ However, he reimagined the associated theory of sin by introducing the concept of 'distance' (*tafriqa*). This enabled him to assess the heathen. Abū l-Hudhayl's theory that it was possible to perform 'works of obedience' the objective of which was not God did not make sense to him;² someone who does not know God performs every action as an unbeliever.³ Belief 'for God's sake' is possible only once one has 'belief in God'. However, there are heathen who have recognised God through reason (such as e.g. the Ḥanīfs); with every 'work of obedience' they perform they gain some 'distance' from others who in other things have the same status.⁴ They cannot claim a reward, but they have a certain advantage, which may ultimately pay off. 'Abbād seems to have called them *ahl al-'afw*, potential candidates for God's mercy. They are even able to become rationally aware of this very 'distance' as it is a component of rational theology; everyone who thinks can come to the conclusion that God will treat evildoers different from those who do not incur any guilt. However, only a Muslim will learn from the revelation what form God's retribution will take.⁵

The term 'distance' may be used in the case of a Muslim, too; namely when he is a believer but commits a minor sin.⁶ This does not make him a *fāsiq*, but he has a different status from someone who has not sinned at all. 'Distinctive'

1 See p. 22 above.

2 *Maq.* 430. 7f.; also vol. III 273f. above.

3 Text 91, d.

4 Text 95, b.

5 Text 95. The meaning of *ahl al-'afw* may be inferred from the relation between the statements 94, a, and 94, b. I have assumed consequently that 95, b, also refers to an unbeliever who has already recognised God.

6 Text 95, a.

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the central position. It contested the Mu'tazilites' claim to be Ḥasan's heirs, forcing them not only to distance themselves from the ancient extremes, the *manzilatayn*, which did not really have many followers in Basra, but also to explicitly refute the *munāfiq* solution. Consequences of this could be felt in the accounts of an alleged debate between Wāṣil and 'Amr, or in the doxographical texts which now listed, and then rejected, three, sometimes even four, divergent positions. By that time scholars had grown accustomed to ascribing the individual *asmā'* to the respective *aḥkām*, a method that had probably evolved during the discussion concerning the concept of faith,⁵⁴ but now also applied to the new issue by the Mu'tazilites.⁵⁵ In this way the question had become entirely independent.

2.2.6.1.7.1 Sin and Penitence

E. Gräf pointed out a parallel with this intermediate status in Christian penitential practice: someone who was not allowed to partake of the Eucharist was regarded neither as Christian nor as non-Christian.¹ This is worth deliberating: in early Islam the problem of salvational status is also linked with that of *tawba*; the quarrel over terms is in reality a debate on the degrees of penitence – “psychologically explicable among puritans”, as Strothmann put it.² But we do not yet know whether the Muslims in Iraq could have known of this Christian distinction. For the time being it would be better to consult the sources regarding Wāṣil's own attitude to sin and penitence.

Unfortunately the traditions on the subject do not form a coherent image. Mānkḏīm said³ that Wāṣil spoke against the idea that penitence was valid even when it related to some of the sins committed; *tawba* to him would have meant a radical turning-back. He might have learnt this from Ḥasan, but he was in the company of other, later Mu'tazilites,⁴ and furthermore involved only as a witness in an argument conducted by Jubḏā'ī and Abū Ḥāshim. Consequently we must be cautious. Of course, we also hear that he regarded even the

54 See vol. I 222f. above regarding Abū Ḥanīfa.

55 A corresponding train of thought is found in one text that refers to Wāṣil (14, b–c); but this, too, appears to have been edited (see p. 309f. below).

1 OLZ 55/1960/397 after Karl Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bußgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum* (Leipzig 1898), p. 239; Gerhard Rauschen, *Eucharistie und Bußsakrament in den ersten sechs Jahrhunderten der Kirche* (2Freiburg 1910), p. 196f.

2 Der Islam 19/1931/215.

3 Cf. ShUKh 797, 3ff., and 794, apu. ff. and 796, 10ff.; also Ibn al-Murtaḏā, *Al-baḥr al-zakḥkḥār* I 149, –5f. (where Wāṣil is not mentioned).

4 Namely Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir (cf. ch. C 1.4.3.1.1.3) and Ja'far b. Mubashshir (cf. ch. C 4.2.1.2).

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CHAPTER 3

3.2.2.2.5 *Ethics. Sin and Faith*

By presuming the existence of a natural moral law¹ Naẓẓām is saying that actions that are good or bad in themselves could not be classified differently even by God. They are contrasted with others that only become good or bad through the revelation. Their qualification (*ḥukm*) is not a matter of reason but purely ordained by God.² This does not mean that ethical commandments are not part of the revelation. God could not **not** have commanded them;³ furthermore, as we have seen, he can never abrogate them.⁴ And of course this does not rule out that in the earthly reality it is always the human who causes evil. While evil may in some cases be made evil because God decrees it, it is only ever **generated** by humans.

Text 227 thrives on the misunderstanding that presents itself here. Ibn al-Rēwandī had claimed that by causing evil to be evil, God actually makes evil; he made use of the fact that Form II can have declarative as well as causative meaning. In this way he gave himself the opportunity of calling Naẓẓām a Ḍirārite; in the view of the orthodox Muʿtazilites Ḍirār's synergism made God the author of sin. Cf. also Text XVII 41 regarding Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir, and XXIII 17–18 regarding Šāliḥ Qubba; p. 132 above and 463 below.

Unfortunately, no catalogue survives of those actions that were covered by the natural moral law according to Naẓẓām. In fact we do not know whether he ever established one; nothing in the titles of his books indicates it. Only in conversation with the Jew Manasseh does he name a few virtues that are 'wise' in themselves: justice, faith, honesty, charity.⁵ It is surprising to find faith named here, but he probably did not mean that faith as an attitude, as belief, is 'natural'. Faith as in religion and worship (*dīn*) was the result of divine guidance in Naẓẓām's eyes.⁶ We must recall that faith to a Muʿtazilite was always knowledge of God and his justice; natural theology had always had its place here.⁷ Consequently Naẓẓām's example of something evil in itself is 'that one does

1 See p. 414 and 429 above. Explicitly stated by ʿĀmirī, *Iʿlām manāqib al-Islām* 118, apu. f.

2 Text 228; 227, a and h.

3 Text 228, b.

4 Text 227, k–l; cf. p. 429f. above.

5 Text 223, d.

6 Text 224.

7 Cf. Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn* 265, 5ff.