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AL-BAQILLANI'S CONCEPT OF DIVINE
SPEECH IN RELATION TO THE ISSUE OF THE
CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'AN:
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS AL-
TAQRIB WA AL-IRSHAD

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Art
(Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues)

International Institute of Islamic Thought &
Civilization
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AUGUST 2009

ABSTRACT

Based specifically on *al-Taqrīb wal Irshād*, this present study discusses al-Bāqillānī's thoughts on Divine Speech which rejects the concept of the createdness of the Qur'ān. This issue which involves the relationship between *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, includes other related topics such as the speech of God and human beings, characteristics of speech, the origins of languages, and foreign words in the Qur'ān. These aspects have been clarified by al-Bāqillānī in this work in his attempt to develop the legitimacy of the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān in accordance with the theological position of the Al-Ash'arīte school. He was one of those who initiated the intellectual initiative to deepen the level of intellectual discourse on some of the principle foundations in theological thought of the Ash'ari school. In his intellectual undertaking in tackling this issue, he proves that he is not merely a simple compiler and polemist as claimed by the orientalist, Richard Joseph McCarthy. In fact it is clear that he deepened the level of discourse of the school on this issue and advanced further arguments in its favour, thus, providing effective answers to arguments against it in the relevant issues. I believe that this thesis will give prominence to the delineation of al-Bāqillānī's original ideas on this issue of Divine Speech and its uncreated nature in mainstream Islamic theology.

ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الرسالة في فكر أبي بكر محمد بن الطيب الباقلاني وهو أحد المتكلمين الأشاعرة حول مسألة كلام الله تعالى حيث يرد على حجة خلق القرآن. يعتمد هذا البحث على كتاب الباقلاني: "التقريب والإرشاد". و تتناول الرسالة علاقة علم الكلام بأصول الفقه حيث تبحث فيه قضايا مثل كلام الله وكلام البشر، وصفات الكلام، وأصول اللغة، والكلمات الأعجمية في القرآن الكريم. و هذه الملامح العقدية حول مسألة خلق القرآن بينها الإمام الباقلاني حسب ما استقر عليه الأمر في المذهب الأشعري. والباقلاني هو أول من وضع المقدمات العقلية الأساسية على أساس منهج الأشاعرة. وفي هذا الأمر يبرهن الباقلاني أنه ليس - فقط - جامع آراء كما يدعى المستشرق رتشرد يوسف مكارتى اليسوعي بل هو مؤسس هذا المنهج وواضع الحجج العميقة للدفاع عن المذهب. و يؤكد الباحث بأن هذه الرسالة تبين موضع الباقلاني في مسألة خلق القرآن و موضعها من العقيدة الإسلامية و تبرز هذه الرسالة أفكاره الأصلية في مسألة كلام الله تعالى وعدم خلقه وهو الاتجاه السائد عند أغلبية أهل السنة و الجماعة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

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Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

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Ibrahim M. Zein
Dean of ISTAC, IIUM

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Much Hasan Darajat

Signature.....

Date

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**AL-BĀQILLĀNĪ'S CONCEPT OF DIVINE SPEECH IN RELATION TO
THE ISSUE OF THE CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'ĀN:
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS *AL-TAQRĪB WA AL-IRSHĀD***

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to individuals who have helped me working on this study. I am indebted to (Dr) Ustath El-Muhammady for his patient supervision and correction of this thesis during his businesses. His accessibility for meetings in his house even in the night was very valuable time for me to finish this work. To Prof. Dr.Cemil Agdogan, the examiner of this thesis, I am also very grateful for his careful reading and useful criticism.

I am indeed indebted to Prof. Dr. Ibrahim M. Zein, Dean of International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, IIUM, for his advice and help during my study in this institute. I also extent my deepest appreciation to Prof. Dr. Sayyid Ajmal M. Razak al-Aidruss for his guidance and assistance that contributes towards the completion of this work. To Dr. Syamsuddin Arif and Dr. Sulaeman Mohammed Hussein Boayo, I am also grateful for their help in reading the Arabic text and its discussions. My friends at ISTAC Malki M. Nashir and Fauzi Ogubado were helpful to me in many ways elaborating ideas in this study. Needless to say, I owe more than I could say here to my parents, who always shower me with their prayer. Last but not least, I thank to my wife, Duna Izfanna, for her continued understanding and constant encouragement that contribute to the present work.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The theological position of the Ash‘arīte school is the most acceptable one in the great majority of the Muslim community. This school takes the middle position between the Hanbalites and the Mu‘tazilites in which the former emphasize more on the application of the literalist approach in understanding the statements of the Qur‘ān and the Sunnah, while the latter affirm the more pronounced rationalistic method. The Ash‘arīte theological position stands between those schools which apply the rationalistic way in understanding revelation. A combination of both methods-of applying revelation and reason in a harmonious and appropriate way- makes this school more flexible and correct, and hence acceptable in the Muslim community. This school was established by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī after his conversion to mainstream theological position, away from Mu‘tazilism. The elaboration of the details of the theological position of the school was done by later scholars of the mainstream discourse.

One of the most important figures who developed the Ash‘arīte school is Abū Bakr ibn Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī. He was born in Basrah 338 H/950 A. D,¹ then under the authority of the Buwaihīd rule. For his educational background, it appears from our sources that he was educated in the theological school of Imām al-Ash‘arī. He learned theology from Abū-‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Mujāhid al-Ṭa‘ī.² During his studies, he was a student together with Abū Ishāq al-Isfara‘īnī and Ibn Furāk under

¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inshāf*, ed. Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad Haidar, (‘Alim al Kutub, 1986), 7.

² Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Uthman al-Dhahabī, *Siyār A‘lām al-Nubalā*, ed. Ibrāhīm Zayābiq, (Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-Risālah, 2001), 190; Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Hibātullah bin ‘Asākir al-Dimashqī, *Tabyīn al-Kadhīb al-Muftarī*, (Damascus, 1988), 217.

the guidance of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhili al-Baṣrī.³ Both teachers were adherents of the Ash‘arite school. In Baghdad; he sought knowledge of jurisprudence from an adherent of the Malikite school of jurisprudence, ‘Alī Abū Bakr al-Abharī.⁴ When he became a mature scholar, he was entrusted to be a *qādī* as well as teacher of the Buwaihid ruler ‘Aḍud al-Dawlah. In addition, he used to be sent as a representative of the ruler in a delegation delivering messages to certain courts, like the court of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II. He passed away in 23 Dhu al-Qa‘dah 403 H/5 June 1013 A. D.⁵

Al-Bāqillānī was an important successor of his teachers in the Ash‘arite theology of who laid down the logical premises and presented the significance of the notion of metaphysical principles in theological discourse.⁶ Ontologically, he put philosophical basis which combines knowledge and the thing in itself.⁷ It is known through his definition of knowledge as “cognition of a thing as it is in itself” (*ma‘rifatul ma‘lum ‘ala ma huwa bihi*).⁸ Moreover, he could combine two significant concepts between *jalīl al-kalām* (concepts dealing with metaphysics and attributes of God) and *daqīq al-kalām* (theories dealing with the philosophy of nature).⁹ Hence, it is appropriate for him to be regarded as a philosopher of nature.¹⁰

During his life, he actively participated in various polemics facing his adversaries coming from various groups such as naturalists, astrologers, dualists,

³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād*, ed. Abd al-Hamīd Ali Abu Zunaid, (Beirut: al Resalah, 1998), 28-29. This work is hereafter cited as *Taqrīb*.

⁴ Yusuf Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of Baqillani*, (Beirut, 1966), 6.

⁵ Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tarikh Baghdad*, (Beirut: Darl al Fikr), vol. V, 379; Joel. L. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 78-79.

⁶ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah ibn Khaldun*, (Beirut: Muassasah al ‘alami li al Maṭbu‘at), 465; Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, tran. Franz Rosenthal, (New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1958), 50.

⁷ Duncan B. MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, (Lahore: The Premiere Book House), 200-201.

⁸ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, ed. Imād al-Din Aḥmad Ḥadar, (Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-Kutub al-Tsaqāfiyah, 1987), 25.

⁹ Muḥammad Ramaḍan ‘Abd Allah, *Al-Bāqillānī wa Arāuhu al-Kalamiyyah*, (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Ummah, 1986), 603.

¹⁰ Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1987), 127.

Magians, Christians, Jewish scholars, and Mu'tazilites.¹¹ One of the issues raised in such polemics was the createdness of the Qur'ān; he strongly rejected this concept especially in facing the Mu'tazilite theologians. His contemporary Mu'tazilite opponent, *Qādī* 'Abd al-Jabbār, defended the idea through his main works, *al-Mughnī*¹² and *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*.¹³ In refuting this idea, al-Bāqillānī creatively used al-Ash'arī's arguments and developed them further against the Mu'tazilites. By such endeavour, he was praised by Ibn Taymiyya as "the best of the Ash'ari *Mutakallimun*, unrivalled by any predecessor or successor."¹⁴

The issue of the createdness of the Qur'ān is one of the important issues which was continually debated amongst Muslim theologians. This was part of the issues concerning the nature of God dealing with His attributes. The controversy regarding the subject became centralized in the discussion of the Qur'ān which is the first source of Islam, and this led to many other implications. In addition, this issue involves discussions concerning the concept of time and eternity as well. This was one of the important philosophical questions during the time of al-Ash'arī.¹⁵ Muslim theologians had put right fundamental principles vis-à-vis this issue with their strong standpoint concerning those principles. Such important discussions are still relevant and applicable in our own times.

So far there are a number of studies on al-Bāqillānī, among which are done by Yusuf Idris and von Grunebaum. The former is concerned with al-Bāqillānī's ideas while relying only on his *al-Tamhīd* in the work entitled *Political Doctrine of al-*

¹¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Tamhīd*, 66-93.

¹² Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tauḥīd wa al-'Adl*, ed. Taufīq al-Ṭawīl & Saīd Zéyīd, (Egypt: al-Muassasah al-Miṣriyyah al-'ammah, 1965).

¹³ 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthman, (Egypt: Maktabah al-Wahbah, 1965).

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, "al-Bāqillānī," 959.

¹⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, "Early Discussion about The Qur'an," *The Muslim Word*, vol. 40, 1950, 27.

Bāqillānī.¹⁶ Ibish concluded that al-Bāqillānī, as a sunni Ash‘arite jurist, tried to defend the Imamate concept against the attack of the Khārijites and Shī‘ites, due to the fact that in his time the political background was dominated by those sects. Hence, his theory is good solely in one perspective of one school, while from other point of view it is regarded as otherwise. Al-Bāqillānī’s foundation for this issue lies in his conception of the *ummah*, to him, the internal and external life of the *ummah* are regulated by the *Sharī‘ah*.¹⁷

The next work is carried out by von Grunebaum. His work is focused on literature especially in the domain of Arabic poetry. He translated al-Bāqillānī’s criticism of Imru’u al-Qais’ *Mu‘allaqa*.¹⁸ His presentation describes that al-Bāqillānī sternly criticised a number of his poems which the author took from selections of the parts dealing with poetry in *I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān*. However, Grunebaum does not provide much notes and commentaries on this issue, he simply let the text speaks to the readers. So, they will weigh and consider its contents according to their own understanding.

Some other works are also done by some researchers. They studied al-Bāqillānī’s contribution to Islamic intellectual heritage including his concept of Divine Speech. One of the important studies done is the one by Richard Joseph McCarthy. He was the earliest among orientalist to have initiated research on this theologian in the work *Al-Baqillani: The Polemist and Theologian*.¹⁹ Having studied him, he concluded that al-Bāqillānī was simply a polemist in the al-Ash‘arite school, who propagated Ash‘arism. Moreover, he did not have profound metaphysical

¹⁶ Yusuf Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of al Baqillani*, (Beirut, 1966).

¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

¹⁸ Von Grunebaum, “Al Bāqillānī: Criticism of Imru’ ul-Qais’ Mu‘allaqa,” in *Introduction to Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. Ilse Lichtenstadter, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1974), 322-339.

¹⁹ R. J. McCarthy, *Al-Baqillani: The Polemist and Theologian*, (Ph. D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1952). This work is hereafter cited as *al-Baqillani*.

foundation in his thoughts, yet he was an industrious compiler of some ideas before him. Many elements discussed by him had already been dealt with in al-Ash‘arī’s works,²⁰ including the discussion of the createdness of the Qur’ān. However, McCarthy’s simplistic way of looking at the man and his role is based on limited manuscripts, as he himself admitted, which are not complete.²¹ Moreover, his scholarly editing of *al-Tamhīd* was obviously influenced by prejudice as is shown by the fact that he omitted one important chapter of *al-Tamhīd* on the *Imamah*.²² He studied in a general way regarding his life and thoughts. Hence, his attempt is not deep and comprehensive. The discussion employed by McCarthy on the subject of the createdness of the Qur’ān only relied on and summarized from the contents of al-Bāqillānī’s work *al-Insāf*. So, this is not adequate, for this does not provide ample arguments of al-Bāqillānī’s rejection of the createdness of the Qur’ān. There are some significant points which are stated in his other works. Furthermore, McCarthy’s work sometimes does not explain the status of some *hadiths* used by al-Bāqillānī in his arguments,²³ whereas status of such traditions could help to indicate the strength of his arguments. Otherwise, this will create doubts and confusion in readers especially those who are not familiar with *hadīth* methodology and its literature.

Another important research on al-Bāqillānī is the one done by Muhammad Ramaḍān ‘Abd Allāh.²⁴ This work is much better than McCarthy for he presented the issue of the createdness of the Qur’ān as well as other issues systematically. His division of the work into several chapters enables us to recognize topics easily

²⁰ *EI*, new edition, “al Bakillani,” 958-959.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² Information about this omission is noted by Kambis Ghaneabassiri in his recent article “The Epistemological Foundation of Conceptions of Justice in Classical Kalām: Study of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *al-Mughni* and Ibn al-Bāqillānī’s *al-Tamhīd*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 19:1, 2008.

²³ R. J. McCarthy, *al-Baqillani*..., 209.

²⁴ Muhammad Ramaḍān ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Bāqillānī wa arāuhū al-Kalāmiyyah*, (Baghdad, Maṭba‘ah al-Ummah, 1986).

discussed by the author. The discussion on al-Bāqillānī's rejections on the createdness of the Qur'ān is divided into topics like: difficulties of speech, the reality of speech, his defence of the eternity of the Speech of God, and his position concerning the anthropomorphists who likened God to man (*al-Mushabbihat*). This work is a doctoral thesis in Arabic. Unfortunately all sources in this research only rely on Arabic works which do not cover comprehensive explanations leaving out some other secondary sources written in other languages. Further, his study of al-Bāqillānī's thoughts regarding theological matters are only limited to his two main works *al-Tamhīd* and *al-Inṣāf*, the same as employed by McCarthy. So, those works do not provide complete configuration of his ideas on the subject. Perhaps, others sources, during their research process, were still in the form of manuscripts.

There are other works dealing with the issue of the createdness of the Qur'ān, even if they are not focused on al-Bāqillānī's position on the matter. The nature of these studies is varied. It is noteworthy to mention that Peters did good work on his research on the issue of the createdness of the Qur'ān focusing on 'Abd al-Jabbār, a contemporary of al-Bāqillānī, the latest important figure of Mu'tazilism in his time in the work entitled *God's Created Speech*. In this attempt, the author relied on 'Abd al-Jabbār's works like *al-Muḥīt*, *al-Mughnī*, and *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. His work is well done for his discussions are nicely arranged into proper chapters describing the theme comprehensively. He breaks down his discussions into: the Qur'ān and other forms of Divine Speech, speech in this world, the quality of speaking, temporality of God's speech and its attributes. Peters' delineation ends up with the conclusion that 'Abd al-Jabbār held the view of the createdness of the Qur'ān in opposition to al-Bāqillānī's position of its uncreated nature. Moreover, 'Abd al-Jabbār always used

arguments through the science of Arabic grammar or the structure of the Arabic language,²⁵ as he was much influenced by philologists.

Another work dealing with the createdness of the Qur'ān is an article written by Wilfred Madelung, entitled "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Qur'an." In this attempt, the author approaches the subject differently. He does it through his discussion of the historical context which elucidates important figures in this issue since the rise of the theme during the time of al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, who had been executed by the Umayyad Caliph Hishām (d. 125/743). The discussion also included another main figure, Imam Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, during the *Miḥna* order initiated by al-Ma'mūn (d. 833) and ending it with the effort of al-Mutawakkil (d. 861). The article is concluded by the mention of the information that the doctrine of the uncreated nature of the Qur'ān is established in the Sunnite creed due to the performance unequivocally affirmed by Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal.²⁶ However, this study only gives a general discussion about the issue and does not even rely on any of al-Bāqillānī's works.

The next study of the createdness of the Qur'ān is the one carried out by W. Montgomery Watt in the article entitled "Early Discussion about the Qur'an."²⁷ In this work, he could illustrate the issue comprehensively in the said article. He starts with his doubt concerning the main account of the genesis of the createdness of the Qur'ān in the doctrine of the *Jahmiya*. He finds another source, as a representative theory, which said that during the time of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (175 A. H) this problem emerged. However, the doctrine was still hidden until the death of the caliph. Watt

²⁵ J. R. T. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 421.

²⁶ Wilfred Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, (Britain: Ashgate Variorum, 1985), 505-525.

²⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, "Early Discussion about The Qur'an," *The Muslim Word*, vol. 40, 1950, 27-105.

also illustrates the debate between the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theologians which ended with the victory of the latter. In this attempt the author solely referred to Ash'arī's arguments in the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin* and *al-Ibānah* without taking into consideration the works of theologian after him.

Another study on the createdness of the Qur'ān is done by Wolfson, yet even he is not directly concerned with al-Bāqillānī's concept of the nature of the Divine Speech. In this work, entitled *Philosophy of Kalam*,²⁸ he tried to present the issue in 69 pages dealing with its origins, problems around the issue, debates amongst the various schools of theology, and some terms used in the discussions about the theme of the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'ān. Although this work starts with the discussion of the background of Kalām in quite a broad manner, again the author does not mention any single reference of al-Bāqillānī and his ideas. Yet, he exclusively mentions some great figures from various schools who were involved in this discourse as Madelung had done.

The foregoing exposition and literature review suggests that the issue on the createdness of the Qur'ān has been approached from many perspectives. However, there are few works dealing with al-Bāqillānī's concept as their main subject in explaining the issue. We, therefore, prefer to propose a different way to present his ideas notably on the issue of Divine Speech. This thesis would concentrate on his special work *al-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād* which has not been used by previous studies. Al-Bāqillānī in this work explained the issues around the createdness of speech in relation the Qur'ān in a different way. He elaborates the discussion on the issues in relation to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and its relevance to the discussion concerning the attributes of God. He

²⁸ Harry Austyn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 263-303.

also discusses this topic in other works, *al-Tamhīd* and *al-Inṣāf*, but therein the discussions are focused on its relationship to the ideas in *kalām*.

Both texts are also used in this research as supplementary references to present a full picture of al-Bāqillānī's ideas on the issue of the non-created nature of Divine Speech. Moreover, as our additional sources, we will utilize some secondary sources either done by Muslims or non-Muslims (Orientalists) whom we consider useful and present fair approaches. The present study tries to analyse, translate, paraphrase, comment, and summarize the ideas of al-Bāqillānī on this theme. Hopefully, this work will give clarifications and present a humble contribution regarding al-Bāqillānī's thoughts especially on the problem of the creation of speech in relation to the Qur'ān as well as the uncreated nature of Divine Speech itself.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF THE *MIḤNA* AND THE CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'ĀN

A. THE *MIḤNA* ORDER

The createdness of the Qur'ān had become one of the central issues among Muslims during the Abbasid period notably under the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. It became the hot issue, since somehow it became loaded with the political agenda. Previously, this also had happened during the time of the Umayyad Caliph Hishām (724-743) who put to death al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, due to his dissemination of the notion of the createdness of the Qur'ān.¹ This view had not become something of much concern to Hārūn al-Rashīd (born in 766) when he was the caliph. He supported the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and their supporters, while the Mu'tazilites, during his reign, lost their popularity.² Perhaps, during this period he concentrated on the development of his people and the community.

Several different sources mention the causes which led to the emergence of the debate on the notion of the createdness of the Qur'ān in Muslim intellectual scene. One of the reasons for the rise of the debate on this issue possibly could be traced back to the work of John of Damascus entitled *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni* which appeared during the time when Syria was under the Muslim rule in 635 A.C.

¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, (Beirut: Dar Ṣādir, 1979), vol. V, 263; Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, (London: MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1937), 430; Wilfred Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, (Brookfield USA: Ashgate, 1985), 505.

² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 387.

Some orientalists, like Duncan Mc Donald and Wolfson,³ assert that the debate on the notion emerged because of the influence of Christian beliefs mentioned in the work of John of Damascus. Therein, it is elucidated that the Divine attributes are real and eternal including the word of God. These attributes were also used in “Christianity as descriptions of two of the three persons of the Trinity.”⁴ It explains the three different Personalities of God in the Christian faith which, to them, are equated to the attributes of Allah, The God of Muslims. Furthermore, those orientalists claim that some arguments used by the the Murji’ites and the Qadarites are quite similar to those held by John of Damascus and the Greek Church, including some of their concepts like the rejection of eternal punishment, emphasis of the goodness of God, and His love for His creatures,⁵ while, Van Ess maintained that this doctrine had emerged during the time of Umar II.⁶

Watt expresses a different view with regard to the origin of the createdness of the Qur’ān among Muslim theologians.⁷ He admits that the source of this doctrine is vague, even some sources state that al-Ja’d ibn Dirham was the main figure who has been executed, because of this principle. He also disregarded the view that the notion was transmitted from a passage of the work of John of Damascus. Since there was no clear proof describing the dogma as a heresy among the Muslims by the time of John of Damascus (d. in 750), in his time, this idea was declared less than heretical in nature.⁸

³ Duncan Mc Donald, *The Development of Muslim Theology*, (London: Darf Publisher Limited, 1985), 131-132; Harry Austin Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 237-240.

⁴ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 238.

⁵ Duncan Mc Donald, *The Development...*, 132.

⁶ Josef Van Ess, “Umar II and Epistle Against the Qadariya,” *Abr Nahraini*, vol. 12, (1971-1972): 23.

⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Edinburgh: The University Press Edinburgh, 1973), 243-244. This work is hereinafter cited as *The Formative*; Hinds, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 7, The Miḥna. This work is hereinafter cited as *EI*, The Miḥna.

⁸ Watt, *the Formative*, 243.

Watt proposes another possible cause for the rise of this doctrine, that is, it is connected with the internal factor of the Muslim understanding of the conception of the Divine Decree (*al-Qadar*). In the Qur'ān, there are many verses mentioning the existence of the heavenly Preserved Tablet (*al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*)⁹ being the ultimate source of the Qur'ān which is being revealed on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*).¹⁰ If these verses were understood to mean that the Qur'ān was pre-existent in the heavenly Preserved Tablet, then the assumption is that events are predestined.¹¹

From such different views the main factors causing the rise of this doctrine are still unclear. The present researcher suggests that most probably this notion of the createdness of the Qur'ān originated from outside influences which are assimilated by some innovators (*ahl al-bid'ah*) in their process of understanding Islamic theology. A number of important and definitive works done by Muslim scholars rejected the notion of the createdness of the Qur'ān since they actually lived within the society discussing such issues and were actively involved in refuting the theological errors. They wrote deliberately to disprove the Jahmiite erroneous notions, including the notion of the createdness of the Qur'ān.¹² This intellectual and theological enterprise was undertaken to give support to the mainstream theological discourse and worldview.

When al-Ma'mūn was at the head of the Abbasid caliphate (813-833), he himself was involved in debates on the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān, and

⁹ Al-Qur'ān 85:21-22.

¹⁰ Al-Qur'ān 97:1.

¹¹ Watt, *the Formative*, 244.

¹² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa al-Zanādiqah*, ed. Ismā'il al-Anshārī, (Saudi Arabia: Research Center and Da'wa Departement, n. y), 25-44; Abū al-Ḥussain Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Malātī, *al-Tanbih wa al-Rad 'ala Ahl al-Ahwa' wa al-Bida*, ed. Sven Dederling, (Istanbul: Maṭba'ah al-Daulah, 1936), 95-101; 'Abd Qāhir ibn Ṭahir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq baina al-Firaq*, ed. Ṭaha 'Abd al-Raūf Sa'ad, (Egypt: Muassasah al-Ḥalabī wa Shirka li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'); Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥy al- Din 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Ashriyyah, vol. 1, 1999), al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Inṣaf*, ed. Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥaidar, (Beirut: 'Alim al-Kutub, 1986), 117-197.

gave support to this notion. By instituting the great trial (*Miḥna*), supported by the Mu'tazilites, he defended his stance. The trial was to test the stand of the 'ulamā' whether they wanted to agree with this notion or otherwise. Those who disagreed were imprisoned because they adhered to the principle as taught by Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad ibn Nūh al- Idjlī, rejecting the position held by the caliph; this was unfortunate, for the caliph, under the influence of the Mu'tazilites, tried to change the mainstream theological position of the Sunnites on the uncreated nature of Divine Speech,¹³ which was the mainstream position among Muslims even before the reign al-Ma'mūn. Possibly, his move was more political than theological in nature and it was oppressive. This policy of the *Miḥna* itself gave negative image with regard to his authority notably in the religious domain.

Some hypotheses show that the motive of the *Miḥna* has a clear background. First of all, the caliph was close to and influenced by some Mu'tazalite leaders especially the school of Baghdad, who were always invited to the court of the caliph discussing theological issues. Some of them like Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir, Abū Ma'n Thumāma ibn Ashras al-Numayrī, Ibn Abī Du'ād, and al-Iskāfī were involved in such sessions. Most of the leading officials were men of Mu'tazilite sympathies. By virtue of that, those figures exercised their influence on the exercise of the caliphal authority and the formulation of the state policies. It is apparent that, with the exercise of the *Miḥna* in relation to almost all the members of the 'ulamā' there was official pressure on them to hold the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān, opposing the view of the traditionists who held the position of the uncreated nature of the word of God.¹⁴

Another hypothesis is that, the Caliph al-Ma'mūn was very loyal to the Shī'ites. It is recorded in history that al-Ma'mūn tried to support the members of the

¹³ *EI*, The *Mihna*, 3.

¹⁴ Watt, *The Formative...*, 221-224; Hitti, *History...*, 429.

Shī'ite community by stating that 'Alī was the most appropriate person to lead the community after the death of Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the only proper group that can lead Muslims after the Prophet was the member of the house of 'Alī.¹⁵ Furthermore, it is claimed that al-Ma'mūn espouses same ideas as are found in Shī'ism at least in four ideas; “the *mut'a* marriage, the caliph's partiality toward the 'Alids, the format of the *takbir* ritual, and the imamate.”¹⁶ Somehow, this can be traced from the position of the Mu'tazilites who gave precedence to 'Alī in relation to the post of the *imām* after the Prophet, rather than to Abū Bakr, 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb and 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. Apart from this, to the Mu'tazilites, their chain of transmission (*sanad*) in Arabic language and grammar goes back to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Then one school of Shī'ism, that of the Twelvers, (*Ithna 'Ashariyyah*), made use of the Mu'tazilite theological principles and rationalistic methods to combat Ash'arites and their successors such as al-Bāqillānī, Imām al-Haramayn, al-Ghazālī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī which eventually led to the victory of the latter.¹⁷ Consequently, their existence became very restricted and confined in certain Muslim countries like Egypt, al Jazair, and Tunisia.¹⁸

In addition to the above observations, Nawas rejects both hypotheses which mentioned the caliph's closeness to the Mu'tazilites and the Shī'ites, and asserts that the motive of al-Ma'mūn in instituting the *Miḥna* was to exert the authority of the caliphate. This view is in line with that of other scholars-Lapidus, Crone, and Hinds-

¹⁵ Watt, “Early Discussions About the Quran,” *Muslim World*, vol. 40, (1950), 34; al-Tabarī, *The History of Tabari*, trans. C.E. Bosworth (The reunification of the Abbasid Caliphate, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 61.

¹⁶ John A. Nawas, “Re-examination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mūn's Introduction of the *Miḥna*,” *International Journal Middle Eastern Studies*, 26 (1994), 617. This work is hereinafter cited as *Re-examination*.

¹⁷ Ahmad Ibn Yahya al Murtadha, *Firāq wa Tabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*, Ed. 'Ali Shamī al-Nasharī & 'Iṣam al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Alī, (Dār al-Maṭbu'ah al-Jam'iyyah, 1972), 14-16.

¹⁸ Zuhd al-Jarr Allah, *al-Mu'tazilah*, (Beirut: al-Muassasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirasah wa al-Nashr), 229.

who base their arguments on four different documents. First is the *Risālah al-Khāmis*, written around 813 A.D. to enhance the authority of the Abbasid caliphs. Second, there is a letter appointing ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā as al-Ma’mūn’s heir, written around 817 A.D. The third is the document containing the *Miḥna* order, while the last document is the caliph’s will itself. These sources have been studied to shed light on his comprehensive conception of the caliphate which was then applied by him throughout his life. Al-Ma’mūn asserted some claims which cemented his position as a caliph. To him, the caliph is the representative of God and the Prophet, and so all his orders must be regarded the same as the orders of God and the Prophet. He mentioned in his first *Miḥna* letter, that the order was entrusted to him with “hidden knowledge, as well as political power.” Nevertheless, Nawas admits that he himself cannot recognize precisely why al-Ma’mūn adhered to this doctrine. He is convinced that al-Ma’mūn fundamentally has a certain kind of thought regarding the caliphal institution which must be invested with such an exalted and powerful authority which was “unquestioned, unlimited, and shared with no one else.”¹⁹ In other words, he describes that al-Ma’mūn was an absolute autocratic ruler in his caliphal position.

Latest research about the *Miḥna* indicates a number of elements different from the above. Hurvitz concludes the the main motive of al-Ma’mūn coming up with the *Miḥna* order, as a spokesman of the *mutakallimun*, was to express an act of self-defense. It is proved by the work of al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Risālāh fī Nafy al-Tashbīh* (Refutation of anthropomorphism) in which he explained the *Miḥna*’s origins and its historical background. He blames all previous researchers in that they only rely on the “single person” narratives, that only describe the Hanbalis role and their heroes to oppose the *Miḥna*, and they most likely accept without questioning their historical background.

¹⁹ Nawas, *Re-examination*, 624.

Their main sources are works of Ḥanbali-Sunnī narrative reported by Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 266) and Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq (d. 273). Both were Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s relatives and students. Another Sunni source used by modern researchers is the work of al-Tabarī *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*. In this account, al-Tabarī has narratives similar to Ḥanbali-Sunnī one that emphasized “the nexus between policy and personality.” According to Hurvitz, the valid source is like the one he is using, being the work of a scholar dealing with *kalām*, even though he is a Mu‘tazilite, giving the historical background of the relevant events. To him, the *mutakallimūn* saw it as an “intellectual and political developments such as inter-factional strife among the *ulama*.” On the other hand, according to Hurvitz the *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists) misunderstood messages that merely focused on “the outcome of court intrigue...they emphasize the initiative of any single individual.”²⁰ However, to the present researcher, the position taken by the *ahl al-Hadīth* (the traditionists), reflecting the mainstream narrative, has the authority of ummatic consensus backing it.

In addition to his arguments, he concludes that from al-Jāḥiẓ’s work it appears that the traditionalists employed *rijāl* literature in their endeavour to prove their position in this way, and they succeeded in rejecting the validity of the position of the Mu‘tazilites, Shī‘ites, Khārijīs, and other followers of *kalām* even before the *Miḥna*. He assumes, in this attempt, that the traditionalists spread slander and rumour, and use “negative professional assessments.” That is why the *mutakallimūn* actively supported the *Miḥna* according to the caliph’s position.²¹ However, Hurvitz’s assumption above is wrong, because the *muḥaddithūn*’s work on the *rijāl* literature apparently was meant to control the quality of the narrator (*rāwī*) of *ḥadīth* and this became the general

²⁰ Nimrod Hurvitz, “Miḥna as Self-Defense,” *Studia Islamica*, vol. 92 (2001), 95.

²¹ *Ibid*, 110.