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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

THE *SUNNI* POSITION ON SELECTED ISSUES IN
KALAM: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE VIEWS
OF AL-ASH'ARI AND AL-BAZDAWI

BY

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the relationship between revelation and reason in Islamic thought emerged, to some extent, due to the influence of foreign thought and cultures, and as a result of the reaction to the internal development within the Muslim society itself, a feature that was earlier experienced in Judaism and Christianity. There emerged in Islamic thought two contradictory schools of thought, and no reconciliation seemed possible. On one hand, was the group of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and his associates who opposed the use of reason to confirm the revelation. On the other hand, was the Mu'tazilism, whose adherents argued that the truth of Islam and firm religious belief could best be established and defended through the use of reasoning based on the revelation. In the light of this controversy between these two extreme groups, and in lieu of the nature of man, many declined to simply opt for one of these two extreme positions. At this point, two schools of thought emerged offering a middle path, which eventually became the representatives of Sunnism, namely the Ash'arism, which was associated with the Shafi'ite school of jurisprudence, and the Maturidism, which had geographically spread among the Hanafites.

This comparative study is an attempt to explore the similarities and dissimilarities between Ash'arism and Maturidism, with special reference to the views of al-Ash'ari and al-Bazdawi. The study shows that these two schools agreed with one another on the fundamental principles of religious thought. However, there were some secondary and minor disagreements between al-Ash'ari, a Shafi'ite, and al-Bazdawi, a Hanafite, that were arguably triggered by their different juristic affiliation and preference between revelation and reason.

ملخص البحث

برزت على ساحات الفكر الديني في الإسلام إشكالية الصلة بين الوحي والعقل والتي كانت قد شغلت من قبل الفكر الديني في اليهودية والمسيحية على حدّ سواء. وقد جاء ذلك بسبب عوامل عديدة ومتباينة، بعضها يرجع إلى تأثير الثقافات الأجنبية، وأخرى جاءت وليدة التطور الداخلي للمجتمع الإسلامي، والتفاعلات التي نتجت عنها. وقد تقاسم الساحة الفكرية في الإسلام — بادئ ذي بدء — اتجاهان متعارضان لا يمكن التوفيق بينهما بحال: تيار ارتبط منهجيا بالإمام أحمد بن حنبل وتلامذته، ولا يرى أنصاره حاجة لتحكيم العقل فيما ثبت بالوحي الإلهي، وآخر ارتبط بمدرسة المعتزلة التي وجد رجالها، دفاعا عن حقائق الإسلام بوجه المخالفين، ضرورة تأسيس العقيدة الدينية الثابتة بالوحي الإلهي على قواعد من العقل المنطقي. وفي خضم التنافر والاستقطاب الشديد بين هذين الاتجاهين، ولأن الانسان لا يرضى بطبيعته أن يخير بين أمرين نقيضين هما: الاعتقاد في الله تعالى إيمانا وتقليدا، والتأسيس على الاستدلالات العقلية الدقيقة، فقد ظهرت مدرستان متوسطتان صارتا مع الزمن ممثلتان لآراء أهل السنة والجماعة، هما: الأشعرية التي تطابقت بمرور الزمن مع المذهب الشافعي، والماتريدية التي تطابقت جغرافيا مع انتشار الحنفية.

وفي دراستنا هذه، حاولنا التماس نقاط التشابه الأساسية بين المدرستين، وسعينا إلى بيان مواضع الاختلاف الثانوية بينهما، مع التركيز على الأشعري والبزدوي. ولقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أنهما اتفقا في المبادئ الأساسية للفكر الديني، غير أنهما اختلفا في بعض المسائل الفرعية نظرا لتباين انتماءتهما الفقهية وموقفهما من الوحي والعقل.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

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THE *SUNN!* POSITION ON SELECTED ISSUES IN *KALAM: A COMPARISON
BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF AL-ASH'ARI AND AL-BAZDAWI*

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Finally, I state that whatever faults remain in the thesis either in fact or design are my responsibility. May Allah bless all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract (English).....	ii
Abstract (Arabic).....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Abbreviation.....	x
List of Transliteration.....	xii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Research Questions.....	10
Methodology.....	11
Objectives of the study.....	12
Scope of the Study.....	13
Significance of the Study.....	14
Literature Review.....	15

CHAPTER TWO: LIFE AND WORKS OF AL-ASH'ARI AND AL-BAZDAWI

AL-ASH'ARI.....	27
Life.....	27
Political and Intellectual Development in Baghdad.....	36
Al-Ash'ari's Method in <i>Kalam</i>	40
The Progress of Ash'arism.....	47
AL-BAZDAWI.....	53
Life.....	53
Political and Intellectual Development in Samarqand.....	59
Al-Bazdawi's Method in <i>Kalam</i>	63
The Progress of Maturidism.....	72

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONCEPT OF GOD: THE DIVERGENCE OF AL-ASH'ARI'S AND AL-BAZDAWI'S

INTRODUCTION.....	77
LIST OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD	
The Act of Creation (<i>Takwini</i>) and the Created Being (<i>Mukawwani</i>).....	80
The Attribute of Will (<i>Iradah</i>).....	98
The Attribute of Speech (<i>Kalam</i>).....	113

The Seemingly Anthropomorphic Verses	(<i>Tashbih</i>).....	127
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CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONCEPT OF MAN: THE DIVERGENCE OF AL-ASH'ARI'S AND AL-BAZDAWI'S

INTRODUCTION.....	143
SELECTED ISSUES RELATED TO THE CONCEPT OF MAN	
Freewill and Predestination (<i>Qada' and Qadar</i>).....	145
Faith (<i>Iman</i>).....	163
Prophethood (<i>Nubuwwah</i>).....	182
CONCLUSION.....	198
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	203

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of the abbreviations used for the main works frequently referred to in footnotes.

Al-Arba'in - Al-Arba'in fi Usui al-Din by Muhammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn Husayn Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

Al-Farq - Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq by 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi

Al-Ibanah - Al-Ibanah 'an Usul al-Diyanah by 'Ali Ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari.

Al-Luma'-Kitab al-Luma' fi al-Radd Ahl al-Zaigh wa al-Bida' by 'All Ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari.

Al-Mawaqif- Al-Mawaqif fi Ilm al-Kalam by 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Ahmad al-Iji.

Al-Milal- Al-Milal wa al-Nihal by Muhammad 'Abd al-Karim Ibn Abu Bakr al-Shahrastani.

Al-Musayarah - Al-Musayarah fi 'Ilm al-Kalam wa al-'Aqd'id al-Tawhidiyyah al-Munjiyyahfi al-Akhirah. by al-Humam, al-Kamal.

Al-Rawdat al-Bahiyyah- Al-Rawdat al-Bahiyyah fi ma bayn al-Ashd'irah wa al-Mdturldlyyah by Hasan Ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin Ibn Abi Udhab.

Al-Tamhid- Al-Tamhidfi al-Radd 'aid al-Mulhidah al-Mu'attilah wa al-Rafidah wa al-Khawarij wa al-Mu'tazilah by Muhammad Ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani,.

Al-Taqdis - Asas al-Taqdis fi 'Ilm al-Kalam by Muhammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn Husayn Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

Al- Tawhid- Risalat al- Tawhid by Muhammad 'Abduh.

Al-Tawhid - Kitab al-Tawhid by Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Maturidi.

Jawharat al-Tawhid - Jawharat al-Tawhid ma'a Hasyiyyatuha Tuhfat al-Murid by Burhan al-Din Ibn Harun al-Laqqani.

Kitab al-Iqtisad ~ Kitdb al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad by Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali.

Maqalat - Maqalat al-Isldmiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Musallin by 'Ali Ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari.

Muhassal - Muhassal Ajkar al-Mutaqaddimin wa al-Muta 'akhirln min al- 'Ulamai wa al-Hukama' wa al-Mutakallimin by Muhammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn Husayn Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

Nihdyat al-Iqddm - Kitdb Nihdyat al-Iqddm fi 'Ilm al-Kalam by Muhammad 'Abd Karim Ibn Abu Bakr al-Shahrastani.

Nuzum al-Fara'id - Nuzum al-Fara'id wa Jam'u al-Qawa'id by 'Abd al-Rahlm Ibn 'Ali Zadah.

Risdlah fi Istihsdn- Risdlahfi Istihsdn al-Khawdfi 'Ilm al-Kaldrm by 'Ali Ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari.

Sharh Asma' - Sharh Asma' Allah al-Husna li al-Razi/ Lawami' al-Bayyinat fi al-Asma'wa al-Sifat by Muhammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn Husayn Fakhr al-DIn al-Razi.

Tabyin Kadhib - Tabyin Kadhib al-Muftarifi ma Nusiba ila al-Imam Abi al-Hasan al-Ash 'ari. By 'Ali Ibn al-Hasan Ibn Asakir.

Muqaddimah - Muqaddimah li Ibn Khaldun by 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun.

Usul al-Din - Kitdb Usul al-Din by 'Abd al-Qahir Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi.

Usui al-Din - Kitab Usui al-Din by Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Bazdawi.

Usul al-Khamsah - Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsah by 'Abd al-Jabbar Ibn Ahmad..

TRANSLITERATIONS

System of Transliteration of Arabic Characters

Consonants

ء	'	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	'	ي	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh	ر	r
ف	f				
ة	h	ة	t (in the case of construct state)		
ال	(Article) al				

Long vowel

آ	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Short vowel

_____a
_____u
_____i

Diphtongs

او	aw	وو	uww (final form ū)
اي	ay	يي	iyy (final form ī)

Some exceptions from following the system of transliteration occur in this thesis are on:

1- The titles of books. The titles are maintained as they are aimed by the authors. For example:- Nihayatu Iqdam fi Ilmi '1-Kalam and not Nihayat al-Iqdam fi Ilm.

2- The Malay names. The names are remained as they are written though originally were Arabic word. For example:- Harun in Harun Nasution and not Harun.

3- The name of places. The names of places are written in accordance to the famous and commonly used spelling. For example:- Beirut.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The approach to issues in *kalām*¹ has undergone a number of fundamental shifts as a result of successive social and religious crises. The shift was from a traditionalist approach to a rationalist understanding. Eventually, the shift found a middle course between the two. This later paradigm shift was formulated by orthodox scholars and was designated as the school of ‘the people of the *Sunnah* and the consensus of community’.² The later shift took place during the early decades of the 4th Century A. H. It is to this period that this current study will refer. During this era of cogency and uniformity, there arose a mediating school of thought which later dominated Islamic society and consolidated its position on issues in *kalām*.

The growth of this mediating school in the historical progress of Islamic thought was inevitable as a direct response towards the extreme rationalistic attitude of the

¹ The science of *kalām* involves arguing with logical proofs in defense of articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 458. See also ‘Abd al-Rahmān Aḥmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, n.d.), p. 7; Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), vol. 3, p. 34; F. A. Klein, *The Religion of Islam*, (Dublin: Curzon Press Ltd & Humanities Press Inc., 1979), p. 37; T. J. De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983), p. 42; and Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic History*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), p. 105.

² This term will be used alternatively with the English word ‘*Sunni*’. There is no precise Arabic term referred to this connotation. However, the nearest equivalent is the phrase *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*, ‘the people of the *Sunnah* and the consensus of community’. It is only towards 1100 A.H., that this phrase was widely accepted, and it includes all those whom we would call *Sunni*. Previously, it had a different sense and referred to only one of the present *Sunni* groups. W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1985), p. 59. See also Jalāl Muḥammad Mūsa, *Nash’at al-Ash‘ariyyah wa Taṭawwaruhā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1975), pp. 15-17; Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam*, (Indonesia: Penerbit Universitas (UI-Press), 1986), p. 61; and Abū al Muẓaffar al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Azhariyyah lī al-Turāth, 1999), p. 129.

Mu‘tazilites and the extreme traditionalism of the Ḥanbalites. The most influential attempt to form a middle path on issues in *kalām* was notably preceded by a group of scholars such as ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Sa‘īd al-Kullābī (d. 239),³ Abu‘Abd Allāh Ḥārith Ibn Asad al-‘Anazī al-Muḥasibī (d. 243)⁴ and Abu‘al-‘Abbās al-Qalāisi.⁵ However, this was during a time when they did not claim to construct any orderly school of thought. Thus, it is the historical rise of the mediating school of thought that is the subject of this study.⁶

This study will concentrate on a period almost a century later, when the systematic mediating position of thought was established. Similarly to the previous middle position, these schools of thought were instituted as a reaction to the extreme

³His name was mentioned by the later *Sunnī mutakallimūn* such as al-Juwaynī, al-Subkī and Ibn Taymiyyah, suggesting that he was the prominent leader of the *Sunnī* thought during his time. His most influential contribution in *kalām* was his elaboration of the doctrine of the attributes of God. It was doubtless the group of al-Kullābī who al-Ash‘arī allied himself with when he deserted Mu‘tazilism. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p. 58. See also his, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Oxford: One world publication, 1998), p. 286; and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Tamhīd li Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah*, (n.p: Lujnah al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, n.d.), p. 291; and Tāj al-Dīn, ‘Abd al-Wahhab Ibn ‘Alī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā*, (Cairo: ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Halabī wa Shurakah, 1964), vol. 2, p. 51.

⁴Al-Muḥasibī was born around the year 164 AH at Baṣrah. He came to Baghdad and there he received his early education. His great contribution as a *mutakallim* was when he made use of the science of *kalām* to refute Mu‘tazilite doctrines. See Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahzīb al-Tahzīb*, (New Delhi: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā’irat al-M‘ārif al-Niḥāmiyyah, 1907), pp. 134-136; and Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 57-58.

⁵ It should be noted that it is shown that Abu‘al-‘Abbās al-Qalāisi is Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahḥnān Ibn Khalīd whom is contemporary to al-Ash‘arī. Hereby, he whom is concerned must be elder than al-Ash‘arī because it is believed that he was the imām of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* during the lifetime of Abu‘Alī al-Thaqafī (d. 939), see Watt, *The Formative*, p. 287. See also Muḥammad ‘Abd Karīm Ibn Abū Bakr al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 75-83; Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhirah, 1960), pp. 18-19; Ishaq Musa‘ad & Kenneth Cragg, *The Theology*, (New York: Books for Libraries, 1980), pp. 36-37; Muḥammad Mūsa, *Nash‘at al-Ash‘ariyyah*, pp. 37-82; and ‘Irfān ‘Abd Ḥamīd Fattāḥ, *Dirāsāt fi‘al-Firaq wa al-‘Aqā‘id al-Islāmiyyah*, (Jordan: Dār al-Bashīr, 1997), p. 147.

⁶ For the detailed description of this earliest group of the *Sunnī* thought, see ‘Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār, *Nash‘at al-Fikr al-Falsafī fi al-Islāmī*, (Cairo: Dār al-Maārif, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 265-296; and Muḥammad ‘Alī Abū Rayyān, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Falsafī fi al-Islām*, (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍat al-‘Arabiyyah, 1973), p. 197.

rationalism of the Mu‘tazilites on the one hand and the extreme literalism of the Ḥanbalites on the other. The mediating schools of Ash‘arism and Māturīdism are regarded as a turning point in the historical progress of Islamic thought.⁷ Initially, these schools of thought grew privately and did not come out into the open for fear of public criticism. But gradually, their position gathered strength and began to spread to different places in the Muslim world.⁸ In Mesopotamia the mediating school is represented by Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash‘ari (d. 324) and in Samarqand by Abu-Manṣūr al-Maturīdī (d. 333).

Ash‘arism,⁹ as formulated by al-Ash‘ari started by creating a symbiosis of literalism and rationalism between the two diametrically opposed schools of the Mu‘tazilites and the Ḥanbalites. The Mu‘tazilite scholars showed their preference for reason as the sole criterion for understanding truth and reality. The Ḥanbalite group was opposed to the use of *kalām* in defending or explaining religious dogma. They also condemned any discussion of *kalām* and labelled it disparagingly as an innovation.¹⁰ In expending great effort to establish his mediating school of thought, al-Ash‘ari gave priority to revelation rather than reason. Although the application of *kalām*, in his view, is permissible, it is restricted by the fact that its application has to be abandoned if it is

⁷ Watt, *The Formative*, p. 303.

⁸ See Earl Edgar Elder, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. xv; and Louis Gardet & M. M. Anawati, *Falsafat al-Fikr al-Dīnī Bayna al-Islām wa al-Masīhiyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm lī al-Malāyīn, 1967), p. 106.

⁹ See Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-‘Arabī, 1996), pp. 163-175; Aḥmad Maḥmud Ṣubḥī, *fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām Dirāsāt Falsafah lī Ārā’ī al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, (Alexandria: Muassasat al-Thaqāfat al-Jāmi‘ah, 1992), p. 43; and al-Maghribī, *al-Firaq al-Kalāmiyyah al-Islāmiyyah*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1995), p. 268.

¹⁰ De Boer, *The History*, p. 13.

found to be against revelation.¹¹ His incisive accentuation on this matter of integration between revelation and reasoning was probably due to the strict *Sunnī* perception at that time.

This thought of al-Ash‘arī had extensive diffusion in Iraq and extended to Egypt and Maghrib and attracted many disciples.¹² After half a century, there was a great contribution to this middle school of thought by al-Bāqillānī (d. 403)¹³, influenced by the criticism of Māturīdism, who made use of a certain conception of the Mu‘tazilites. Later, towards the middle of the 5th Century A. H, another notable contribution to this school was a change in approach by Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505). It should be noted that during al-Ghazālī’s era, Greek philosophical logic and metaphysics were incorporated into the teaching of Ash‘arism.¹⁴

Another *Sunnī*-school of thought, paralleling Ash‘arism, is Māturīdism.¹⁵ It was very similar in its basic outlook to Ash‘arism. Māturīdism established another *Sunnī* approach, whose main aim was to mediate between the traditional and rational perspectives. Its system is based on harmonizing the tradition and reason of both extremes. Both reason and revelation occupy a very important place in the Māturīdites’ *kalām*. Because of this philosophical underpinning, the school took an

¹¹ A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957), p. 22.

¹² However, historical reports prove that they did not declare themselves to belong to this school of thought.

¹³ The date of his birth is unknown but he was born in Baṣrah.

¹⁴ Elder, *A Commentary*, p. xvi.

¹⁵ Al-Maghribī, *al-Firaq al-Kalāmiyyah*, p. 328.

intermediate position between Ash‘arism and Mu‘tazilism. These three schools, despite the similarities, were in conflict with each other from time to time.

It can be observed that while al-Maturīdī¹⁶ in the East engaged himself in opposing the Mu‘tazilites in general and particularly in Central Asia, al-Ash‘arī in Iraq took a prominent part in resisting the Mu‘tazilites of Baghdad. Māturīdism, in contrast to Ash‘arism, did not garner much interest among the other groups of thought for about a century. This may be because the Māturīdites' works of this time focused on condemning and criticizing the thoughts of Ash‘arism. The purpose of doing so was possibly to attract the attention of the people. In other words, they attempted to show themselves as a more superior *Sunnī* school than Ash‘arism. They asserted that their alternative approach was more comprehensive in acquiring the truth. Thus, they concentrated less in offering clearer explanations of their new thought. However, with al-Bazdawī's appearance (d. 493), Māturīdism gained ground. Al-Bazdawī's works and thoughts provided greater clarity and vitality to the Māturīdites. This current study is largely based on his work.

Through analysis and argument, this study investigates the similarities and differences of opinions of both schools while discussing certain issues in *kalām*, with particular reference to al-Ash‘arī and al-Bazdawī, a well-known proponent of Māturīdism. The study begins with providing historical sketches of their lives. Their background was of

¹⁶Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Maḥmūd. Born in Māturīd or Māturīt, in the Rabad, now a village in Samarqand, Transoxiana. The date of his birth is given as before 248. He died in Samarqand in 333 and was buried at Jakardiza, a burial place for the *‘ulamā’* and the notables.

For some scholars, the approximate date of al-Māturīdī's birth was about three decades before al-Ash‘arī, the fact which indicates that the former must have already started the *Sunnī* thought long before the latter declared his orthodox adherence after forty years of his pure rational Mu‘tazilites' view in *kalām*. ‘Abd al-Karīm Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Manṣūr al-Sam‘ānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), vol. 4, p. 202.

great importance in the formation of these orthodox schools. There are other circumstances that affected the development of both positions on issues in *kalām*, particularly political circumstances. The study then explores the concept of God and man in accordance with concepts developed by both *Sunnī* schools. The study will offer a suggestion that both *Sunnī*-schools have already successfully formed their own image, exclusively from the rationalistic Mu‘tazilite and the traditionalistic Ḥanbalite.

Al-Ash‘arī and al-Bazdawī deserve to be studied for several reasons. As for al-Ash‘arī, he is the founder of Ash‘arism and was a foremost *mutakallim*¹⁷ who tried to defend *Sunnī* doctrine by applying the Mu‘tazilite method. In doing so, he went against his early educational experience as an adherent of the Mu‘tazilite school of Baṣrah. Consequently, his break with the Mu‘tazilites at the age of forty marked the foundation of his subsequent career as an eminent *mutakallim* of a mediating school. Thus, he became the eponym of the school of thought. There is no reason to doubt that he was a prolific writer who analytically discussed the issues in *kalām* in his works. He discussed the main issues in *kalām* in his remarkable works of *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*,¹⁸ *al-Luma‘ fī al-Radd ‘alā Ahl al-Zaigh wa al-Bida‘* and *Maqālat al-*

¹⁷ The Arabic word *mutakallimūn* signifies those who engaged in the science of *kalām* (*‘ilm al-kalām*). Thus, the *mutakallimūn* are those who were devoted to a demonstrated truth as to upholding, with the aid of resources of their rational dialectic on issues in *kalām*, the articles of their traditional religious credo. Corbin, *History*, p. 105.

¹⁸ The text of al-Ash‘arī’s *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* which is referred to in this study was published Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, Cairo, 1985. The other text of al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* will be referred to in this study was translated by Klein Walter C., English title: *The Elucidation of Islam Foundation*, American Oriental Society, New Haven, Connecticut, 1940. It is believed that in *al-Ibānah*, while discussing the main problems in *kalām*, al-Ash‘arī promulgates his basic principles of theology by distinguishing the Ash‘arites from the Mu‘tazilites against the use of *kalām*. Al-Ash‘arī immovably replies the question, justifying its use. Though he is strict as an adherent to the Ḥanbalite view, he is Shafī‘ite rather than a pure Ḥanbalite. Then, it goes on to deal in no particular order with the themes in *kalām*, all of them developed in the light of his new orientation.

Islamiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Muṣallin,¹⁹ which inspired the members of the school.²⁰

These works show that al-Ash‘arī was an open-minded *mutakallim* and, as a result, he is highly regarded.

In contrast to al-Ash‘arī, al-Bazdawī, a prominent scholar of Māturīdism who lived about a century later, deserves to be studied for his great contribution to the growth of the school. This distinguished contribution is his initiative to rephrase some thoughts of al-Māturīdī that were too complicated to be comprehended by laymen. Besides, al-Bazdawī also presented his thoughts independently. His most remarkable doctrine in expounding his *kalām*, as compounded in *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, was highly regarded by the Māturīdites. As the earliest commentator of the thought of al-Māturīdī, al-Bazdawī’s contribution was prominent in promoting the growth of the Māturīdite thought. Al-Bazdawī has a right to be compared with al-Ash‘arī, for as a representative of Māturīdites of Bukhara, he inclined himself towards al-Ash‘arī. However, it should be noted that al-Bazdawī is also the first Māturīdite who fully exposed the differences between Ash‘arism and Māturīdism. Previously, none of the Māturīdites observed such differences. Last of all, as a descendant of the early Māturīdites, who received their education from al-Māturīdī himself, al-Bazdawī’s thoughts on the Māturīdites are truly authentic.²¹

¹⁹The text of al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Muṣallin*, referred to in this study, was edited by Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut: Maktabat al-‘Aṣriyyah, 1969).

²⁰ These three texts will be referred to in this study as they are considered basic texts on the history of Islamic thought.

²¹ The text of al-Bazdawī’s *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, referred to in this study, was edited by Hans Peter Linss, (Cairo: Dar Iḥya al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1963). This doctrine consists of three major discussions of philosophical principles, theological beliefs and political science. Al-Bazdawī discussed ninety-six tenets of Ḥanafite-Sunni-Orthodoxy against the dissenting opinions and teachings of the heretical sects and his description of the heterodox factions in Islam. This text will be a primary reference for this study of him.

Finally, al-Ash‘arī and al-Bazdawī were chosen because although they were struggling to propound their modes of thought, they were able to play a role in mediating between other modes, one of which was extreme rationalism and the other was extreme traditionalism. At that time, there were other scholars of Baṣrah and Samarqand who were putting in great effort to refine their thought. All in all, this situation posed a great challenge to both of them and they were able to play an interesting role in mediating between these two extreme groups.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Islam, debates on issues in *kalām* arose soon after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (P.B.U.H). These disputes were due to differing epistemological viewpoints among the schools of thought. Some schools of thought emphasized reason as a basis for truth and others gave priority to tradition. Within the *Sunnī* school of thought, two notable scholars were al-Ash‘arī and his contemporary al-Māturīdī,²² who attempted to reconcile these two extreme views in order to defend the articles of faith and Islam as a whole.

Concerning these two scholars, several issues in *kalām* may be elucidated and elaborated. Al-Ash‘arī’s system was distinguished by a wish to reconcile the two extremes of these juridical schools and to reconcile the different schools of *Sunnī*. Al-Māturīdī on the other hand, concluded that the endeavours of the al-Ash‘arī school of thought were an unsuccessful attempt at reform and he also criticized their

²² Some contemporary scholars held opposing views. Yet, we do not have absolute references pertaining to this that can be relied on. Thus, it is important for us to learn about the justifications of both those who approved *kalām* or the criticism of those who opposed it.

conservatism and desire to conform. Therefore, al-Māturīdī's school attempted to bring about a renewal and to restore what they considered to be real *Sunnī*. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine extensively the disagreement between these two schools of thought pertaining to the most controversial issues in *kalām*.

Some of the major issues in *kalām* on which both disagreed pertain to God. In discussing the issues of God, some philosophical problems were involved. On the one hand, a discussion of God will jeopardize His eternity and His unique attributes, because if the attributes of God are identical with His essence, His essence must be a homogeneous combination of His attributes. So, if His attributes are not distinct from His essence, the meanings of the different attributes will be the same.²³ On the other hand, a discussion may clarify the relationship between Him and His essence and His actions. To explain the attributes of God in a way that will not imply any idea of resemblance or comparison, several doctrines were introduced by these *Sunnī*-schools of thought. They are the doctrines of absolute difference (*mukhalafah*), without any quality (*bilā-kayfa*) and without drawing any anthropomorphization (*bilā tashbīh*).

In discussing how to establish the nature of the attributes of God, there are a few more controversial problems that will also be discussed in this study. Identifying the characteristics of God's attributes will elucidate several issues pertaining to His absolute Omnipotence; whether God's Omnipotence truly functions according to His Will; whether God's actions are based on rational consideration and purpose; and whether God's knowledge or recognition of His attributes is based on reason or revelation.

²³ M. Abdul Hye, 'Ash'arism', in M. M. Sharif. 'A History of Muslim Philosophy', (Otto Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 228-229.

Both schools affirmed the absolute attributes of God in terms of His absolute existence. So, the question is what is the actual role of free will and predestination (*qaḍā' and qadar*)? Therefore, this research will look at another conflict between both schools; that is, whether reason or revelation should be given preference as a criterion to determine the goodness or badness of man's action. Both schools' understanding of this concept led them to have their own definition on the concept of faith. These differences of position, from another perspective, have a bearing on the concept of the infallibility of the prophets. So, the question is whether the prophets' positions allowed them to commit mortal sin through forgetfulness and whether they have the power of intercession or not.

In order to examine the differences between these two *Sunni*-schools of thought, this study focuses firstly on the position of al-Ash'ari and al-Bazdawī on selected issues in *kalām*, and, secondly, intends to define some differences between them despite their basic agreement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve its objectives, this study proposes to answer the following questions:

1. What are the historical reasons that were responsible for the prevalence of Ash'arism and Māturīdism, both of which ultimately acquired the title of *Sunni*-school of thought?