



**THE MU‘TAZILITE CONCEPTION OF *AL-TAWHĪD*:  
A CRITICAL RE-EVALUATION AND  
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the significance of the Mu'tazilite conception of *al-tawhīd*. It aims at exposing the efforts of the exponents of the Mu'tazilite school in defending the purity of the Islamic faith and to prevent it from being influenced by foreign elements which can affect its purity and strike at the very root of the monotheistic faith of Islam. Based on the historical analysis from available literatures, the study attempts to interpret and reconstruct the available information to look at the whole issue. Analysis of the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawhīd* is based mainly on the exposition of the theory by leading Mu'tazilite scholars. This thesis also analyzes the place of the Mu'tazilite views and method in later theological schools. Finally, it exposes the relevance of the spirit of Mu'tazilism to the so-called Neo-Mu'tazilite modernists with special reference to Prof. Harun Nasution. This study finds that the Mu'tazilite school played a positive role in the development of Islamic thought and the establishment of the true philosophy of religion. The development of the school can be divided into two: first, when the school consisted of heterogeneous theologians with various directions of thought, then, consisting of uniform ideas which provided the school with a recognized doctrinal frame and united the ideas into an amalgamation as what has been found in 'Abd al-Jabbār's doctrines. This study also finds that it is unfortunate that the Mu'tazilites received two main negative representations: the classical unfavourable image as displayed by books on sects and doctrines mainly from Ash'arite writers as people who utilized excessive human reasoning in religious problems which was a continuation of hostility as a result of Mu'tazilite harsh enforcement of their doctrines through involvement in politics. The modern image is created by the orientalist who were influenced by the European philosophy of Enlightenment and Rationalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The wrong usage of Western terms has damaged the image of the Mu'tazilites who had an undeniable role in defending Islam. The contemporary modern Muslim figure Harun Nasution, who claimed himself to be a Neo-Mu'tazilite, leaned more towards Western Liberalism than to the spirit of classical Mu'tazilism. Indeed, this is another blow to the image of the Mu'tazilites.

## ملخص البحث

هذه الرسالة استهدفت الإحاطة بجهود مدرسة المعتزلة ورجالها في الدفاع عن صفو العقيدة الإسلامية في التوحيد وحفظها من التصورات الغربية التي حاولت النفاذ إلى بُنيتها وحرفها عن حقيقتها وأصالتها الربانية. ودراستنا حاولت قدر الممكن والمستطاع بيان الدور الإيجابي للمدرسة في تطوير أبنية الفكر الديني في الإسلام وتأسيس فلسفة صحيحة للدين، ومع ما شاب هذه المحاولات من مظاهر سلبية عارضة لقسوة المواجهة الفكرية وتعقيداتها التي خاض غمارها رجال المعتزلة ضد التيارات التحريفية التي حاولت تشويه عقيدة التوحيد في الإسلام آخذين في الاعتبار مراحل تطور المدرسة من: جمع غير متألف من المتكلمين، ضم اتجاهات فكرية تفتقر إلى الوحدة والنسقية والانسجام إلى: بنية فكرية موحدة اتخذت صيغة مدرسة لها إطارها الفلسفي المميز وتتسم بقدر كبير من النسقية والوحدة والانسجام، كما هو واضح من موسوعة قاضي القضاة عبد الجبار الهمداني. وبناء على هذا التمييز بين المرحلتين فقد حاولنا في هذه الدراسة بمجتهدين يتجاوز معطيات صورتين سلبيتين عن المدرسة وتعاليمها، الصورة القديمة التي قدمها كتاب الفرق والمقالات من الأشاعرة عن المدرسة، آخذين بنظر الاعتبار في هذا الخصوص، القاعدة المحكمة المستفادة من تاريخ الفكر الديني العام والتي مفادها (( أن تحديد المعالم المذهبية في الفكر الديني يتم عادة من خلال موقف سلمي مناهض ونقيض للآخر المخالف)) ثم الصورة الحديثة التي قدمها المستشرقون المتأثرون " بفلسفتي الأنوار الأوروبية ومعطيات الفلسفة العقلية الأوروبية " في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وأوائل القرن العشرين عن المدرسة ووصفها بأنها " مدرسة عقلية " بالمفهوم الغربي أقرت بالمرجعية المطلقة للعقل الإنساني واستقلاله في الكشف عن الحقيقة، وأن رجال المدرسة مثلوا تيارا للفكر الحر في الإسلام مع ما ينطوى عليه مثل هذه المصطلحات الغربية من سوء تقدير وفهم للمدرسة ودورها البناء في خدمة العقائد الإسلامية. وقد حاولت الدراسة أيضا متابعة التيار المعاصر في الفكر الإسلامي الذي يزعم أنصاره، من غير حجج وبيانات أنهم " المعتزلة الجدد " في حين أنهم مثلوا - كما حاولت الدراسة بيانها - صديقات ورجع للترعات الليبرالية المستقاة من الفكر الغربي المسيحي، وهو بهذا الاعتبار تشويه من نوع آخر لجهود المعتزلة البناء في الدفاع عن صفو العقيدة الإسلامية وحمايتها، وصيانتها من الشذوذ والتحريف.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of ‘Amilah binti Awang Abd Rahman has been examined and is approved by the following;



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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.

Name: 'Amilah binti Awang Abd Rahman

Signature..... Date .....

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# TRANSLITERATION

## Consonants

ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ع	'
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ء	a
ض	ḍ	ي	y

### Long Vowels

اى̄ = ā

و̄ = ū

ي̄ = ī

### Diphthongs

او̄ = aw

اي̄ = ay

يى̄ = iyy (final form ī)

وو̄ = uww (final form ū)

### Short Vowels

ا = a

و = u

ي = i

اَ in pause form = ah

اِ in construct form = at

The exceptions from following the system of translation occur in this thesis are on the title of articles and books. In this case, the writer maintains the title as they appear in the writings. This involves both English and Malay references. For example:-

Major Themes of the Qur'an and not Major Themes of the Qur'ān  
Menyeru Pemikiran Islam Mu'tazilah and not Mu'tazilah.

Some of the titles even apply different transliteration which is maintained by the writer. For example:-

Abu 'l-Hudhayl al-'Allaf and not Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf  
Nihāyatu 'l-Iqdām fī 'Ilmi 'l-Kalām and not Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām

Since the local usage is more important to be acknowledged, in the case of several Malay names, though they are taken from Arabic word, transliteration is not applied.

For example:-

Harun in Harun Nasution and not Hārūn  
Madjid in Nurcholish Madjid and not Majīd  
Rasyidi in H M Rasyidi and not Rashīdī

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

These abbreviations are specially related to the main references of this thesis.

- Arba'in* - *Al-Arba'in fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* by Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī
- Faḍl al-I'tizāl* - *Faḍl al-I'tizāl wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī
- Farq* - *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq* by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī
- Firaq* - *Firaq wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī
- Fiṣal* - *Al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* by Ibn Ḥazm
- Ibānah* - *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* by Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī
- Intiṣār* - *Al-Intiṣār fi al-Raddi 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-Mulhid* by al-Khayyāt
- Irshād* - *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭi' al-Adillah fi Uṣūl al-I'tiqād* by Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwainī.
- Luma'* - *Al-Luma' fi Raddi 'alā Ahli al-Ziyaghi wa al-Bida'* by Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī.
- Maqālāt.* - *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn* by Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī
- Mawāqif* - *Al-Mawāqif fi 'Ilm al-Kalām* by 'Aḍud al-Dīn āl-Ījī
- Mughnī* - *Al-Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī
- Milal* - *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī
- Munyah* - *Al-Munyah wa al-Amal fi Sharḥ al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā
- Muḥiṭ* - *Al-Muḥiṭ bi al-Taklīf* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī
- Nihāyat* - *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām* by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī
- Shāmil* - *Al-Shāmil fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* by Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwainī
- Sharḥ* - *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī
- EI* - *The Encyclopedia of Religion*
- ER* - *The Encyclopedia of Religion*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the Muslims has been affected by disintegration and disunity since as early as just after the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) decease. This is supported by many writers, either Muslims or non-Muslims, when they relate the history of the Muslims with the famous Prophetic Tradition, “My community will be divided into seventy three sects but only one of these will be saved, others will perish,” narrated by Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, al-Tirmidhī and several others<sup>1</sup>. They tend to recall the indecent happenings which remind Muslims of the hostility and enmity among them.

The conflict among Islamic theological schools is one feature which substitutes the history of Muslims. The nature of the discussions which is dogmatic enhances more antagonism and opposition to take place than other fields. The seriousness of the conflict was up to the extent of blaming the oppositions as unbelievers. The main reason for that was their failure to differentiate between Islam and Islamic thought.<sup>2</sup>

Method of studying the history of the Muslims should be changed to enhance towards ummatic consciousness. The division of Muslims into schools should be perceived

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<sup>1</sup> This Prophetic Tradition has been manipulated by many groups to show their particular group is the best and to degrade others. This Prophetic Tradition also comes with several wordings. See *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d), Tradition no. 4596, 4597, 4/197-198; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d), Tradition no. 3991, 3992, 3993, 2/1322; *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d), Tradition no. 2640, 2641, 5/25. For a comprehensive explanation on the issue see the editorial Introduction by Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī in Abū al-Muzaffar al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn wa Tamyīz al-Firqah al-Nājiyah ‘an al-Firaq al-Hālikīn*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, 1999), pp. 3-8; also Muḥammad Sayyid Aḥmad al-Muyassar, *Muqaddimah fī al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1997), pp. 35-57.

<sup>2</sup> For the distinction between ‘Religion’ and ‘Religious Thought’ refer unpublished notes prepared by Prof. ‘Irfān ‘Abd al-Ḥamid Fattāḥ for Major Themes of World Religions for Ph.D. program at the Department of Usuluddin, Kulliyah of IRKHS, IIUM, p. 12.

positively by them. The Muslims should perceive the division into schools as alternatives available for them. This is also as a result of invaluable efforts of the classical scholars. It is indeed unfortunate that Muslims continuously highlight the clashes among themselves in the past and present, and perceive the divisions according to schools and sects as one obstacle for them to develop progressively. It is not the time to declare the credibility of one's school while blaming others for their unacceptable doctrines without comprehending their circumstances and motives.

This thesis specifically examines on Mu'tazilism which denotes "school of those who separate themselves, who stand aside". The history of the movement can be comprised into three different phases: the incubation period before the third century; the astonishing and heterogenous group propagating a variety of individuals sometimes with contradictory ideas permeating the intellectual life at the 'Abbāsid court; and finally, several centuries of scholastic systematization channeled into two branches of Baṣṣrian and Baghdadian schools.<sup>3</sup> It had become dominant in the 3<sup>rd</sup> A.H. and early 4<sup>th</sup> A.H. century. It persisted in certain areas until the Mongol invasion in the 7<sup>th</sup> A.H. century. Then, the followers gradually decreased and the school formally disappeared.

The Mu'tazilite's basic teaching comprises of five *uṣūl* (pillars or principles): *al-tawḥīd* (God's unity), *al-'adl al-Ilāhī* (justice of God), *al-wa'd wa al-wa'īd* (the promise and the threat), *al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn* (the theory of intermediate state for the grave sinful Muslim) and *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (the obligation of every believer to command the good and forbid the evil). Consequently, the Mu'tazilites are also known as '*Ahl al-tawḥīd wa-al-'Adl*' (the

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Van Ess, Mircea Eliade (edit.), "Mu'tazilah", in *Encyclopedia of Religion (ER)*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7/20.

advocates of God's Unity and Justice).

As the first formal school of dialectical theology<sup>4</sup>, Mu'tazilism gets its image fully based on historical speculation. Unfortunately, Mu'tazilism has been a subject of controversy since the early phase of its emergence and throughout the development of Muslim thought. Most of the times, Mu'tazilism has been treated as the main opposition of Ash'arism and has been the aim of attack and repudiation. In fact, sometimes, it has been regarded as the main obstruction to the development of the 'orthodox' school. Mu'tazilism which generally represents the rationalist approach in Islamic theological system has been perceived to go beyond the limitation which advocates of traditionalism and 'orthodox' could recognize as valid and therefore has been regarded as a group out of 'orthodox' Islam.

The Mu'tazilites have sometimes been referred to negatively as 'free thinkers' or 'pure rationalists' of Islam. The Mu'tazilite image is nothing more than rational inferences in Islamic doctrines. It seems to some people that the Mu'tazilites have no contribution other than to banish the image of Islamic teachings with their extreme rational solutions. As a result, their explanation of Islamic concepts ends up with unacceptable conclusions. They also came out with controversial views in *'Ilm al-Kalām*. This is because of their claim that reason, equal to, or sometimes prior to revelation, is a source for acquiring true knowledge. They were not only content with the declaration of the capacity of reason as a source of true knowledge, but put it on an equal status with the Word of God as a guide to religion and almost neglect the role of

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<sup>4</sup> Mu'tazilism has been regarded as the first dogmatic theological school since it was the earliest group who directly involved in setting dogma or controversial theological problem into a topic for dialectical discussion and argument, offering speculative proofs for the positions it urged.

the Prophet's Traditions.

On the other hand, some recent researches have shown that Mu'tazilism pursued untiring and successful struggle in defense of Islam against external dogmatic challenges, i.e., of Zoroastrianism<sup>5</sup>, Manichaeism<sup>6</sup>, Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism and materialism as well as internal challenges including Jahmiyyah<sup>7</sup>, anthropomorphists<sup>8</sup>, Hashwiyyah<sup>9</sup> and others. The early Mu'tazilite theologians were frequently congratulated for introducing into Islam a certain number of Greek ideas and Greek methods of reasoning and argumentation. They have also responsible in putting forward the creed of Islam in a systematic doctrines.

Therefore, an unbiased and objective assessment is needed to look at the Mu'tazilite's role and contribution with special reference to Islamic theology. Unbalanced discussion on Mu'tazilism is obvious even in the analysis on the meaning of the name '*Mu'tazilah*'. One of the reasons is the lack of historical recollection which amply demonstrates that no Mu'tazilite author had any precise information about the original meaning of the name '*Mu'tazilah*'. As a result, available sources offer a number of explanations only based on secondary guesses and even contradictory to each other. On one side the term '*Mu'tazilah*' is an ascription from others which denotes negative

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<sup>5</sup> Zoroastrianism is originally a monotheistic belief but later became dualistic, founded by Zoroaster, a 7th century BCE Iranian leader. See Gherardo Gnoli, "Zoroastrianism", in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 15/579-590; "Zoroastrianism", in *The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica (EB), Macropaedia: Ready Reference*, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1998), 12/935-936.

<sup>6</sup> Manichaeism is a dualistic religion founded by Mani, an Iranian leader in the 3rd century. See Gherardo Gnoli, "Manichaeism: An Overview", in *ER*, 9/161-170; "Manichaeism", *EB, Macropaedia: Ready Reference*, 7/776.

<sup>7</sup> See pp. 76-80 of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> See pp. 48-57 of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 56-58. of this thesis.

meaning of withdrawal from the majority of the community or from Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah mainly based on the event of Wāṣil's withdrawal from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's circle<sup>10</sup>. On another side, 'Mu'tazilah' represents a group who withdrew themselves from enmity conflict and disobedience.<sup>11</sup> Another view is that the word Mu'tazilah returns to the pious root of the Mu'tazilite leaders like Wāṣil, 'Amr, Murdār<sup>12</sup>, Ja'far ibn Mubashshir<sup>13</sup> and Ja'far ibn Ḥarb<sup>14</sup> who isolated themselves from mundane affairs.<sup>15</sup> The real reasons of the emergence of the Mu'tazilite school have also been doubted; either under-grounded by political reasons, purely religious piety or

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<sup>10</sup> For example both al-Baghdādī and al-Shahrastānī believe that the word 'Mu'tazilah' is an ascription by others to denote withdrawal from the views of majority of the community either from their view on intermediate position for sinner Muslim or from the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. See al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 1998), pp. 94, 98; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1998), 1/55. A similar conclusion also can be derived from the narrations of Ibn Qutaybah in his *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, (Cairo: Tharwat al-'Uqāshah, 1962), p. 483; Ibn Nadīm in his *Fihrist*, p. 30; and Ibn Khalikān in *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, n.d.), p. 209. See William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1978), p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> This was what the Mu'tazilite claim from the historical events mainly based on political interest between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah. For example, al-Nawbakhtī referred Mu'tazilah to political position of some companions, including Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, Usāma ibn Zayd who separated themselves from 'Alī and they abstained from fighting either for or against him. For this, see 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Faḍl al-I'tizāl wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tūnis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1986), pp. 22-23; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *al-Munyah wa al-Amal fī Sharḥ al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, (Beirut: Dār al-Nadā, 1990), pp. 29, 128-130.

<sup>12</sup> Abū Musā 'Īsā ibn Ṣubayḥ al-Murdār (d. 840) was a pupil of Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir. Because of his asceticism, he was called 'the monk of the Mu'tazilites'. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 102; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, 1/48.

<sup>13</sup> Ja'far ibn Mubashshir (d. 848) was the pupil of Murdār. His practices of asceticism was in similar way to Ja'far ibn Ḥarb and known as 'two Ja'far'. They refused all gifts of money from the caliph and also appointments as *qādī*. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 152; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, 1/41, 49; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Munyah*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Ja'far ibn Ḥarb (d. 850) was mainly influenced by al-Murdār, and followed him in asceticism to the extent of giving away all his possessions. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 153-155; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, 1/41, 49; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Munyah*, pp. 73-76.

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the view, see Zuhdī Jār Allāh, *al-Mu'tazilah*, 6th ed., (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirāsah wa al-Nashr, 1990), pp. 11; Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad al-Sayyid, *Madkhal ilā 'Ilm al-Kalām*, (Cairo: Dār Qubā', 2001), pp. 223-226; also the Introduction written by Dr. Fu'ād Sayyid in 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī's *Faḍl al-I'tizāl*, pp. 12-35.

theological interests.<sup>16</sup>

In Malaysia particularly, where inter school practices and studies are considered as foreign, Mu'tazilism has been considered as a topic out of discussion. Mu'tazilism is coupled with over rationalism and neglect of the revelation, thus a deviated school in Islam. As a result, the invaluable spirit and legacy of the classical Mu'tazilism, which is important especially in the development of *'Ilm al-Kalām*, is also neglected.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study extensively examines the Mu'tazilite's contribution to Islamic theology with special reference to theological issues pertaining to the Mu'tazilite conception of *al-tawḥīd* as they were conceived and discussed by the leading thinkers of the Baṣrian school of Mu'tazilism in the classical period of its development. It specifically focuses on its discussion on the attributes of God which reflects their conception of *al-tawḥīd* which is the most important subject of discussion not only in Islam but in all revealed monotheistic religions. The harsh conclusion on the Mu'tazilism, which generally described as negating the attributes of God, should be further clarified.

This study also searches for the background which stimulates the Mu'tazilite's responses in its concept of *al-tawḥīd*. These external and internal challenges which shaped the development of the ideas of the school should be analyzed. The aims and reasons for the Mu'tazilite stance can also be traced. Such challenges come to their utmost importance when the polemic discussion and argumentation are represented as

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<sup>16</sup> 'Irfān 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Fattāḥ, *Dirāsāt fī al-Firaq wa al-'Aqā'id al-Islāmiyyah*, ('Ammān: Dār al-Bashīr, 1997), pp. 103-113.

the most important method in theological issues during their time, either among theological schools in a particular religion or inter religions. The response to the challenges can also be interpreted differently by different writers and, therefore needs a precise answer.

In discussing the Mu'tazilite conception of *al-tawhīd*, several interrelated theological and philosophical issues are involved. First, the Mu'tazilite theory of God and His attributes to defend the fundamental principle of Islam, *al-tawhīd*. This is also related to their solutions regarding Qur'ānic expressions about God which sometimes are seemingly anthropomorphic. Other issues are how they treated the Qur'ān as created words and their views on the beatific vision of God in the Hereafter.

The question of the unity of God with His numerous attributes was not as simple as it seemed when it was discussed differently by the different exponents of the Mu'tazilite school which will be considered in this thesis. Several common grounds as well as differences should also be highlighted. This divergence occurred especially during the early period of its development with its most characteristic feature of extreme diversity of people and doctrines and added to it a collection of distinguished individuals of colourful personalities rather than continuous and homogenous formation of the school.

In addition, though the external and internal demands and challenges of time are mostly highlighted, the question on the influence and originality of Mu'tazilite theology will also be tackled. Therefore, besides studying Mu'tazilite as obvious participation in the process of the hellenization of Arab- Islamic thought that started in

the 8<sup>th</sup> C.E. century, a closer observation of its genuine contribution preceding any conclusion would be taken.

After the Mu'tazilite school was abandoned, its views and methods received serious opposition and repudiation from the Ash'arite school. An assessment on the real conflict of the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite should be done to find the place of the Mu'tazilite views in the Ash'arite school which has been considered as mainstream of Islamic theology. Therefore, the real picture of the conflict can be clearly presented.

The question of the relevance between classical Mu'tazilism and modern rationalism is also discussed in this thesis. Instead of focusing specifically on the concept of *al-tawhīd*, the relevance is discussed generally as attempts for reviving the Mu'tazilite spirit in this modern world. This is because modern scholars do not concentrate on the discussion of attributes as the classical theologians did, since they find this as not anymore relevant to the modern world. A case study of Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution in the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia, a figure who clearly claimed to revitalize the spirit of Mu'tazilism in South East Asia, is taken for examination. An assessment on this relation can also give clearer idea to identify the ultimate aim of the Mu'tazilites either it was purely rational as has been claimed by the modernists or based on other reasons. General responses from the Muslims to the process of modernization are also examined.

## Research Questions

Based on the problems stated above, the study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What was the significance of the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawḥīd*?
2. How far the Mu'tazilite's views and methods in their discussion on the issues pertaining to their concept of *al-tawḥīd* were in line or against the Ash'arite's concept of God which has been accepted as the mainstream of Islam?
3. How far is the relation between the Mu'tazilites and the modern spirit of rationalism?

## Methodology

This thesis employs an analytical study on the available literatures of related subjects to the Mu'tazilite principle of *al-tawḥīd* and related development of the concept up to the present days. A limited amount of information is also gained through interview sessions. This is especially done pertaining to the contemporary developments related with several relevant information of this study. Sessions of interviews were carried out with Dr. Aiman Fu'ād Sayyid in Cairo, al-Qāḍī Ismā'īl al-Akwa', the founder of Centre for Manuscripts in Ṣana'a, Prof. Abd Aziz Dahlan and Prof. Azyumardi Azra in Jakarta and several others.

The primary pattern of this thesis is basically chronological. In the first part, the challenges of the time on the concept of God which gave birth to the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawḥīd* either from internal or external challenges of Islam will be dealt.

Some issues in other religions and Greek philosophy as well as various sects in Islam are discussed.

The most appropriate way to demonstrate the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawhīd* is by analyzing the views of the Mu'tazilite leading scholars. The leading scholars of Mu'tazilism involved are Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf, Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām, Abū 'Alī and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī. This concept has gone through refinements and amendments from time to time until it arrived to its most matured form with the final formulation of the concept by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī.

The study becomes more interesting by finding the points of agreement and disagreement between the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite school. The Ash'arites who have been recognized by Muslims as the mainstream of Islamic theology, launched serious attacks on the Mu'tazilites. From one side, the Mu'tazilites were the main opponents of the Ash'arites. From another point, however, undoubtedly the Mu'tazilites who came earlier, had some contributions towards the establishment of the Ash'arite school. An analytical study is done to study the relevance of the Mu'tazilites in other theological schools.

Finally, the relationship between classical Mu'tazilism and modern rationalism is discussed. The discussion examines the extent of relevance of the Mu'tazilism general attitudes to the modern rationalist movements with special reference to the thought of Harun Nasution in Indonesia.

It is important to note that though the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawhīd* closely deals

with its discussion on God's attributes, this study is not an extensive study of the attributes. Moreover, it is difficult to produce a balanced discussion on the Mu'tazilites' attributes of God due to the fragmentary of sources and references available.<sup>17</sup> This study also concentrates less on the philosophical discussion than what the Mu'tazilites used to delve themselves in, because the concept of *al-tawḥīd*, for the purpose of this study, does not require such in-depth philosophical discussion.

The study of Mu'tazilism has, heretofore been severely handicapped especially by the almost complete lack of original material. This is due to the decline of the Mu'tazilite's political fortunes and the intense resistance aroused by its doctrines especially from the mainstream of Islam. However, the classical literatures available from other schools of theology and sectarians will help the researcher in the accumulation of information as well as reflection of their views towards the Mu'tazilite concept of *al-tawḥīd*. The recovery of some works of Mu'tazilite's inspiration will also help this thesis to deal with and analyze their conception of *al-tawḥīd* from the primary source. From the two-side information, it is hoped some neutral conclusions can be extracted from the discussion. Information has to be gleaned also from the descriptions of the contemporary writings especially on the analytical researches on issues in theology.

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<sup>17</sup> Pertaining to the sources, Joseff Van Ess wrote: "They (the sources) are mostly of a doxographical or polemic in nature; they stress certain points and forget about others or take them for granted. They want to show where a certain theologian differed from his colleagues or where he went wrong, but they do not necessarily lead us to the nerve of the system. They shed light on the eccentric fringe, but they give us almost no texts which deal with the center of his thought or which let him speak for himself. And in any case, what we have are only fragments; we are usually not told how they fit together." See Joseff Van Ess, "Wrongdoing and Divine Omnipotence in the Theology of Abū Ishāq An-Nazzām", *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, (Lancaster: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 53.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To find a considerable objective interpretation on Mu‘tazilism through its important principle of *al-tawhīd* and contemporary relevance.
2. To highlight the Mu‘tazilites’ aims in their principle of *al-tawhīd* in encountering the challenges of Christianity, Greek philosophy, dualist religions and others.
3. To present the views of the Mu‘tazilite scholars on the attributes of God and their responses to defend the unity of God by exploring specific views on the matter and how they gave influence to the formation of later theological schools on the conception of God.
4. To explore the relevance of the Mu‘tazilite thinking either in theology or modern Islamic movements.

## **Significance of the Study**

The history of Islamic theology during the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8th and 3<sup>rd</sup>/9th century is primarily a history of the Mu‘tazilites. Unfortunately, study by Muslims on the Mu‘tazilites has been rudimentary. The reason for that are the difficulties faced by any researcher which are best expressed by Van Ess:

Each of the phases presents its own problems for the researcher: the first is badly documented and can only be reconstructed on the basis of later reports, which are frequently distorted and tendentious; the second is better attested but needs detailed monographical treatment; and the third has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Van Ess, “Mu‘tazilah”, in *ER*, 7/20.