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Managing Editor, *Al-Itqān*
Research Management Centre, RMC
International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +603 6196 5558
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The Early Muslim Discussion on the Problem of the Divine Attributes with an Emphasis on the Mu‘tazilites

Megawati Moris *

Abstract

This paper discusses on the problem of the Divine Attributes by the early Muslim *Kalām* scholars focusing on the Mu‘tazilah. There are three different views on the reasons which led to the discussion. They can be grouped into internal, external and both internal and external factors. The early discussion on this subject can also be viewed from three broad positions. The first group is the rationalistic Mu‘tazilah view of emphasizing God’s transcendence and incomparability (*tanzīh*) above all Attributes; secondly, the Attributists (*Ṣifāī*), Anthropomorphists (*Mujassimīn*) and Comparers (*Mushabbihīn*) who maintained that God possesses all the Attributes mentioned in the Qur’ān and they must be taken literally; and the third which is the middle position between these two groups represented by the Ash‘arī school. This paper investigates the definition and origins of the concept of *Ṣifāt Allāh* and also the thought of three different thinkers in the Mu‘tazilah School to show there are some differences between their views. The paper concludes by reiterating that Allāh provides man the means by which He can be known not only philosophically and theologically but more importantly spiritually by drawing close to Him, and this can be achieved by remembering and calling upon His Names.

Keywords: *Kalām*, Divine Attributes, Mu‘tazilah, transcendence, anthropomorphism.

Introduction: Background to the Discussion on Divine Attributes

Beginnings of the Discussion

Several different views have been put forward by Islamic scholars concerning the beginnings of the discussion on the subject of Divine Attributes among the early Muslims and the factors which led to it. The reason for the diversity in views is due in part to the nature of the early period in Islam in which the beginnings of the discussions on Divine Attributes took place. Early Islamic history not only witnessed rapid territorial expansion and violent political struggles for leadership but also the formation and establishment of various religious and intellectual

* Assistant Prof. Dr. Department of Uṣūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: megawati@iium.edu.my

groups within the Muslim community. Thus, in a period which is characterized by a complex combination and interplay of internal and external factors, a clear and definite picture of any event and the reasons for its occurrence cannot be simply formulated.

The diversity of scholarly views on the subject of the beginnings of the discussion of Divine Attributes in the Muslim community and the reasons which led to it can be grouped into the following three major views:

1. The discussions on Divine Attributes arise from the Islamic Worldview i.e., as a result of the problems and questions confronted by the early Islamic community and the need to resolve them.
2. The discussions on Divine Attributes are the result of the influence of other religious traditions i.e., the Muslim encounter and interactions with representatives of other religions such as Christianity and Judaism.
3. The discussions on Divine Attributes grew out of a combination of both internal need and external influence i.e., it was necessary for the early Muslim community to formulate systematic thought on the subject of Divine Attributes in order to have a correct doctrine of the Divine Attributes consistent with the teachings of Islam, as well as for the purpose of intellectual defense against the criticisms of the representatives of the other religions.

Most of the scholars, who subscribed to the first view mentioned above, are of the opinion that the Battle of Siffin in 657 C.E gave rise to the various sects and politico-religious groups in the Muslim community. The politico-religious position of each group, they maintained, had to be supported by means of rational arguments either for the defense of its position or to win over the opposing side into accepting its views. Some of these scholars also posited the theory that the questions on the contents of faith which prompted controversies within the Muslim community, evolved logically; for example, Wensinck concluded that discussions on freewill and predestination logically called forth the question of Divine Justice and which necessarily led to the discussion of God's Essence and Attributes.¹ However, Gardet supposed that the general problem of the Divine Attributes grew out of the emphasis laid on the Word of God (*Kalām*

¹ A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), p. 58.

Allāh) which arose from the discussion of the nature of the Qur'ān i.e., whether the Qur'ān is created (*makhlūq*) or uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*).¹

The scholars who subscribe to the second view mentioned above, comprise mainly of Orientalists who adamantly assert that the interest in and discussions on Divine Attributes among Muslims are motivated by their discussions on the nature of religion, prophecy and God, with representatives of other religious traditions and did not originate from within Islam itself. These scholars, for example, Wolfson, also theorized that the Muslim doctrine of Divine Attributes and its vocabulary on the subject are derived from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.²

The scholars who subscribe to the third view state that Muslims in the first Islamic century were already confronted with questions on faith and works and their inter-relations. The subject on the Nature of God and His Attributes were already important to the Muslims who needed to have a correct understanding of God in order to worship Him in a proper way and perform their duties as God's servants.³ These scholars maintained that the problem of the Divine Attributes together with other issues such as freewill and predestination, the nature of the Qur'ān etc. later became crystallized and systematized into the science of *Kalām*. Furthermore, scholars who subscribe to the third view mentioned above, such as S. H. Nasr for example, believe that the debates held between Muslims and the followers of the other religions—especially Christians, Mazdaeans and Manichaeans all of whom had developed philosophical and theological arguments for the defense of the contents of their faith—motivated the Muslims to develop a rational system of their own for the purposes of the intellectual defense of Islam. They also consider Greek Philosophy to play an important role in the Muslim community since it provided the intellectual apparatus and vocabulary for discourse on the subject.⁴

Some of the Different Prevailing Views of the Early Muslims on the Subject of Divine Attributes

The first systematic school of *Kalām* known as the Mu'tazilah developed a theological system based on the emphasis of the use of reason (*'aql*) and the

¹ Louis Gardet. "Ilm al-Kalām" in *Encyclopedia of Islām*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), p. 1142.

² For an in-depth discussion of this thesis, see Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 112–132.

³ Sachiko Murata and William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*. (New York: Paragon House, 1994), p. 244.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Theology, Philosophy and Spirituality" in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*. (New York: Crossroad Publications, 1991), p. 396.

importance of human freewill. They possessed a rationalistic concept of the Unity of God (*al-tawhīd*) and as a result, emphasized God's Transcendence and Incomparability (*tanzīh*) above all other Attributes. They denied the possibility of knowledge of God's Nature and subsequently of the reality of His Attributes.¹ The Mu'tazilite rationalistic outlook and interpretation on the subject of the Divine Attributes in particular, and of the other religious doctrines of Islam in general, brought strong opposition from the strict followers of the Ḥadīth (*muḥaddithūn*) and the jurists (*fuqahā'*). It was from among these orthodox groups of Muslims that there emerged the Attributists (*Ṣifātīn*), Anthropomorphists (*Mujassimīn*) and the Comparers (*Mushabbihīn*), all of whom maintained that God possesses all the Attributes mentioned in the Qur'ān and those Attributes such as God having Hands, Eyes and Ears, and "Sitting upon His Throne" must be taken literally.²

A middle position was charted by Abu'l Hassan al-Ash'arī, founder of the Ash'arite School, between the extreme views of the rationalistic Mu'tazilites on the one hand and the literal Attributists and Anthropomorphists on the other. In agreement with the Attributists and Anthropomorphists, al-Ash'arī and his followers affirmed the existence of the Attributes of God but claimed that God's Attributes are unique and different from those of created beings and should not be compared to them. On the subject of the "anthropomorphic" Attributes of God contained in the Qur'ān, the Ash'arites maintained that although God possesses them, they however should not be conceived of or understood in a literal manner; instead, they should be accepted "without asking how" (*bilā kaifa*) and "without drawing any comparison" (*bilā tashbīh*).³ In this way, the Ash'arites managed to avoid the extreme views of the Mu'tazilites, the Attributists and Anthropomorphists.

Discussion on the Divine Attributes

Definition and Origins of the Concept Ṣifāt Allāh

Issues and questions concerning the Nature of God are commonly stated and expressed in terms of the Names (*asmā'*) and the Attributes (*ṣifāt*) "by which God has described Himself in the Qur'ān" (*waṣafa bihā nafṣahu*).⁴ In other words, the nouns (*asmā'*) and adjectives (*ṣifāt*) used by God in

¹ S. H. Nasr, "Theology", pp. 397–398.

² M. Abdul Hye. "Ash'arism", M. M. Sharif (ed.) in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), pp. 226–227.

³ M. Abdul Hye. "Ash'arism", p. 227.

⁴ Richard Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), p. 10.

the Qur`ān to describe Himself. Implicit in this is the belief that the Qur`ān is The Word of God (*Kalām Allāh*) which is revealed to man and in which God describes Himself as testified by the Qur`ānic verse:

“To Him (*Allāh*) belong the Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmā’ al-Ḥusnā*)” (59:24).¹

Thus, the *ṣifāt* have only one source which is the Qur`ān and no Divine Attribute can be affirmed if it is not stated explicitly in the Qur`ān or inferred by way of immediate consequence (*tafwīd*).²

Although there was agreement among the *mutakallimūn* on the Qur`ānic origin of the concepts of *ism* and *ṣifah*, however, there were differences in opinion and variations in the usage of these two terms. First, the word *ṣifah* which comes from the verb *waṣafa* “to describe” is not found in the Qur`ān. However, the verbal noun *waṣf* (description) occurs once in *Sūrah* 6:139 and the imperfect of the verb in the sense of “to ascribe or uphold a description; to attribute with the idea of falsehood” occurs thirteen times.³ In other words, its usage is always with reference to something untrue which impious people say about God. The true or laudable terms by which God is described in the Qur`ān are never referred to in the Qur`ān by the verb *waṣafa* or its derivatives, rather they are referred to only as “the most beautiful names” (*al-`asmā’ al-ḥusnā*).⁴

Second, is the problem of the Arabic grammatical classification of the term *ism* and *ṣifah*. The Arab grammarians divided words (*kalām*) into three categories: verb (*fi`l*), noun (*ism*) and particle (*ḥarf*). *Ism* includes among others, verbal noun (*maṣdar*), participle and attribute (*al-ṣifah al-mushabbahah*) which is the adjective or participle of adjectival value. Thus, disagreements arose over the fact that the word “*ṣifah*” did not specifically occur in the Qur`ān and also whether *ism* in the participle and adjectival form render the same meaning. By a deliberate process of linguistic and ontological analysis, the *mutakallimūn* distinguished the *ism* and the *ṣifah* by stating that the *ism* designates God in so far as He is

¹ Louis Gardet, “Allāh” in *Encyclopedia of Islām*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), pp. 406, 408.

² Although another consensus emerged among the *Mutakallimūn* to use human reason (*‘aql*) to formulate the Divine Names and Attributes not stated explicitly in the Qur`ān or Ḥadīth under more strict and predetermined rules. See Louis Gardet, “God: God in Islām” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 33.

³ For example, 6:100, 23:91, 37:159, 37:180 and 43:82 of the Qur`ān. See Georges Anawati, Mary Danner, (trans.) “Attributes of God: Islamic Concepts” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 512.

⁴ Harry Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 118.

qualified, for example, the Knowing (*Allāhu ‘Alīmun*), the Powerful (*Allāhu Qādirun*), and the attribute in the entity (*ma‘na; shay’*) in the Essence of God which allows one to say that God is Powerful (*al-Qādir*) or Knowing (*al-‘Alīm*).¹ In their discussions on the determination of the reality of the Divine Attributes, the *mutakallimūn* used the terms *ma‘nā, shay’* and *ṣifah* interchangeably as a description of anything existing in a subject.² From the discussions among themselves and with those of the other schools of thought, the *mutakallimūn* also distinguished between the Divine Essence and the Attributes.³

The Mu‘tazilite View

The Mu‘tazilites

The Mu‘tazilah School was founded at Basra in the first half of the 2nd/8th century by Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131 A.H/748 C.E) and ‘Amr ibn Ubayd (d. 144 A.H/761 C.E). Both were originally disciples of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Several explanations have been given of the name “Mu‘tazilah” but the generally accepted one is its derivation from the fact that the group “separated itself” (*i‘tazala*) from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s group due to its conception of “sin” and “sinner”. What sets the Mu‘tazilites apart from their contemporaries was their extreme stress upon reason (*‘aql*) as the fundamental determinant of how the Word of God (*Kalām Allāh*) should be interpreted and defined. They were innovative in their vindication as to what may be considered to be the rationality behind God’s ways and which they sought to demonstrate or explain intellectually without contradicting or repudiating the Qur’ān.⁴ Among their prominent thinkers were Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allaf (d. 227 A.H/841 C.E), Mu‘ammar ibn ‘Abbad (d. 210A.H/825 C.E) and Abū Hāshim ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 321 A.H/933 C.E) and their ideas on the subject of Divine

¹ Georges Anawati, “Attributes of God: Islamic Concepts”, p. 513.

² From Abu’l Hassan al-Ash‘arī in *Kitāb Maqālat al-Islamīyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, quoted by Harry Wolfson in *Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 117.

³ Since the main focus of these discussions is the question of the reality of the Attributes and their relationship to the Essence i.e., dealing with ontology and which the Mutakallimūn solved based on their metaphysical principles and framework, Josef Van Ess’s statement that “The doctrine of attributes is based not on metaphysics but on grammar” cannot be accurate. See his article, “Mu‘tazilah” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company), p. 226.

⁴ Majid Fakhry, “A History of Islamic Philosophy”. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 47.

Attributes are discussed in this paper since they demonstrated certain differences and variations from the main teachings of the school itself.

The General Mu‘tazilite View

The foremost fundamental thesis of the Mu‘tazilite concerns the Unity of God and the problem of the Divine Attributes and their relation to God’s Essence. It is the source and basis of all of their other theses, and which has also made the Mu‘tazilites to be known as “*ahl al-‘Adl wa al-tawhīd*” (The Partisan of Justice and Unity). The Mu‘tazilites were extreme and vigorous when applying the concept of *tanzīh* (incomparability or transcendence) in relation to God. Anything that evoked the sense of the created in relation to God was vehemently rejected by them and they supported their rejection with certain verses from the Qur’ān such as *Sūrah* 6:103 and 42:9.¹ As a result, they avoided all possible anthropomorphisms and were critical of those who compared God to His creatures. With regards to the anthropomorphic verses (*mutashābihāt*) of the Qur’ān, the Mu‘tazilites asserted that they have to be interpreted symbolically and whenever necessary, to be rejected. For example, they took God’s Hand and His Face to mean His Beauty and Knowledge.²

Their practice of “stripping away” (*ta‘til*) of the Divine Attributes tended to weaken their meanings and eroded their reality in God. To overcome this consequent problem, the Mu‘tazilites suggested that the Attributes exist in God but are identical with His Essence. For example, God possesses Knowledge (*‘ilm*) due to the Attribute of Knowledge and this Attribute is identical with His Essence. Similarly, God is Powerful with His Power (*qudrah*) and Power is of His very Essence. They held this to be true of the essential (*dhatī* or *naḥsī*) Attributes³, such as Knowledge, Power or Life (*ḥayat*).⁴

The other essential Attributes like Hearing (*sam‘*), Seeing (*baṣar*) and Speech (*kalām*) are considered as “other than God” and therefore do not subsist in Him. This is because these Attributes come into being or

¹ See Louis Gardet, “God in Islam”, p. 34.

² A. J. Wensinck, “*The Muslim Creed*”, p. 68.

³ The Essential Attributes are divided into (a) Negative Attributes which emphasize the divine transcendence (Eternity, Everlastingness, Dissimilarities from the created, Subsistence through Himself) and (b) *Ma‘ānī* Attributes that add a concept to the Essence (Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Speech, Learning, Sight, and Perception). See Louis Gardet, “God in Islam”, pp. 33-34.

⁴ Louis Gardet, “God in Islam”, p. 34.

originate when God Acts and cease when His Action ceases.¹ However, the Mu‘tazilites claimed that man cannot understand the real meaning of such Attributes and consequently are to be considered as merely metaphorical expressions of God’s Omniscience and Omnipotence.²

As strict advocates of the doctrine of the Unity of God (*al-tawhīd*), the Mu‘tazilites reserved eternity for God alone and they rejected its application to any entity, decree, revelation or attribute. Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā’ to whom the doctrine of the denial of the reality of God’s Attributes was first ascribed to, asserted, “He who posits a thing and attributes as eternal posits two Gods”.³ The Mu‘tazilite argument against the existence of eternal Attributes in God can be divided into two parts. They are: first that anything which is eternal must be a God, and second, the Unity of God excludes any internal plurality in God even if these plural parts are inseparably united from eternity.⁴ On the Mu‘tazilite conception of the Eternity of God, al-Shahrastani remarked:

The common belief of the sect of the Mu‘tazilites is, that Allah is Eternal (*qadīm*) and that eternity is the most peculiar description of His Essence. They absolutely reject all other eternal qualities, saying: It is by virtue of His Essence that He has knowledge, power and life; not because they are eternal qualities or ideas inherent in Him. For if the qualities should partake of His eternity, which is His most peculiar description, they would partake of His divinity... and they agree upon this, that will and hearing and sight are not ideas inherent in His Essence.⁵

The Mu‘tazilites denial of the eternity of the Divine Attributes and His Decree led them to regard the Qur’ān as created.⁶

Abū al- Hudhayl al- ‘Allaf (d. 227 A.H/841 C.E)

Abū al-Hudhayl who is considered to have systematically formulated the Mu‘tazilite position was well-known for his keen insight in philosophy⁷

¹ Josef Van Ess, “Mu‘tazilah”, p. 225.

² Louis Gardet, “God in Islam”, p. 34.

³ From al-Shahrastani *Kitāb al-Milal wa’l-nihāl* quoted by Harry Wolfson in *Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 133.

⁴ Harry Wolfson, “*Philosophy of the Kalām*”, p. 133.

⁵ From al-Shahrastani *Kitāb al-Milal wa’l-nihāl* quoted by A. J. Wensinck in *The Muslim Creed*, p. 75.

⁶ A. J. Wensinck in *The Muslim Creed*, p. 77.

⁷ He was claimed to have a thorough understanding and knowledge of Aristotle; as stated by al-Ash‘arī and Ibn al-Murtaḍā. See R. M. Frank, “The Divine Attributes

and his dialectical ability. His doctrine on the Divine Attributes is considered to be highly articulate and original. In his doctrine on the Divine Attributes, Abū al-Hudhayl sought to affirm the ontological reality of the Attributes as presented in the Qur`ān without it in anyway implying a division or a plurality in God's Being. He argued that although we speak of the Perfections or Attributes of God's Being and predicate them of Him and refer to them as belonging to Him, it should be noted that what is signified by the Attribute is God Himself in the perfection which is His Being. Thus, the statements: "God is Knowing" (*Allāhu 'alīmun*), "God is Powerful" (*Allāhu qādirun*) etc., all have the same meaning in that they do not refer to the presence of distinct and separate Perfections or Acts (*ma'ānī*) in God, rather to God Himself. Abu al-Hudhayl maintained that the Attributes or Perfections of God are distinguished by their objects that we distinguish and in so far as the difference (*ikhṭilāf*) belongs to the objects and not to God, the distinction of Perfections would be merely mental perceptions. Hence, to Abū al-Hudhayl, all the Divine Attributes such as His Hearing, Seeing, Mercy and Beneficence etc. are eternal Perfections of God's Being. However, God's Act of Willing and the creative command "Be" (*kun*) are excluded since they are connected to the temporality of creation. Furthermore, Abū al-Hudhayl asserted that these Perfections of God which are predicated of Him (i.e., Divine Attributes) are not merely the Divine Essence and nothing more.¹ Al-Shahrastani described Abū al-Hudhayl's position by contrasting it to that of al-Jubbā'ī, another leading Mu'tazilite thinker, in the following manner:

The difference between saying "Knowing per se, not by an act of knowing" and saying "Knowing by an act of knowing that is His Essence" is that the former is a denial of the attribute while the latter is the affirmation of the reality of an essence which is itself an attribute or the affirmation of the reality of an attribute that is itself an essence.²

Therefore, although Abū al-Hudhayl affirmed the "proper, entitative reality only of God Himself in the Unity of His Being", he did not at the

according to the Teaching of Abu'l Hudhayl al-'Allaf,". *Le Museon, Louvain*: 82, (1969), pp. 454-455.

¹ R. M. Frank, "The Divine Attributes...", 469.

² From al-Shahrastani *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-nihāl*, quoted by R. M. Frank in "The Divine Attributes...", p. 469.

same time negate the “positive ontological character” of the attributes which are predicated of God.¹

Mu‘ammar ibn ‘Abbad al-Sulami (d .ca.210 A.H/825 C.E)

Mu‘ammar’s ideas generally agree with those of the other Mu‘tazilites but he is singled out for his exaggerated approach in the denial of the Divine Attributes. He maintained that the Essence of God is free from any type of plurality. His view was that belief in the existence of the Divine Attributes as separate from the Divine Essence will lead to the plurality of God’s Essence. Thus, he rejected all the Attributes and concluded that God knows neither Himself nor anyone else because Knowledge is something which is either within God or without God. The former entails that the Knower and the Known are identical which, according to Mu‘ammar, is an impossibility, and the latter implies that the Known is separate from the Knower, which means that there is a duality in the Essence. Mu‘ammar argued that since God’s Knowledge is dependent on and is in need of an “other”, His Absoluteness is thus denied. Since to maintain God’s Knowledge entails a denial of His Absoluteness, Mu‘ammar chose to affirm God’s Absoluteness and denies His Knowledge.²

Abū Hāshim ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 321 A.H/933 C.E)

The general Mu‘tazilite conception of the Divine Attributes was: The Divine Attributes constitute the Essence of God i.e., God possesses knowledge due to the Attribute of Knowledge but this Attribute is identical with His Essence. However, al-Jubbā’ī held that “God is Knowing by His Essence”, “God is Powerful by His Essence” etc. What al-Jubbā’ī meant by the expression “by His Essence” was that God does not need in His Knowing, either an Attribute, which is Knowledge, or a state by which He is Knowing. To solve this point of disagreement between al-Jubbā’ī’s view and the general Mu‘tazilite view on the Divine Attributes his son, Abū Hāshim presented the concept of “state” (*ḥāl*).

Abu Hashim stated that generally, an essence is known by its different state. The states are constantly changing but the essence remains the same. Furthermore, he asserted that “these states are in themselves inconceivable; they are known through their relation to essence. They are different from the essence but are not found apart from

¹ R. M. Frank in “The Divine Attributes...,” p. 469

² Mir Valiuddin, “Mu‘tazilism”, M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. (Weisbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1963), p. 213.

the essence”. Similarly, in God, these states are not found apart from but which the Divine Essence. Thus, “God is Knowing by His Essence” meant that God has the state, which is an Attribute, that is recognizable over and above his being an existing Essence. However, the Attribute can only be known together with the Essence and not apart from it. Al-Jubbā’ī, nevertheless, refuted his theory and argued that the states are really mental aspects which are not contained in God’s Essence but are present only in the perceiver of the Essence.¹

From the above discussion on both the Mu‘tazilites general view of the Divine Attributes as well as that of three of its thinkers—Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allaf, Mu‘ammar ibn ‘Abbad al-Sulami and Abū Hāshim ‘Abd al-Salām—it is evident that the Mu‘tazilite possessed a thoroughly rationalistic conception of God and His Attributes. Their extreme emphasis on God’s Transcendence and particular understanding of His Unity reduced God to an undefinable and abstract idea. Not surprisingly, the Mu‘tazilites’ doctrine of an abstract and impersonal God did not appeal to the larger Muslim community who reacted strongly against their views.

Conclusion

With the passage of time, the debates on the subject of Divine Attributes within the school of *Kalām* became increasingly technical and tedious. While the doctors of each school were busy quibbling on subtleties and details of the Attributes and their mode of being, they missed the very vital as well as profound meaning of the Divine Nature. In all of its fullness and amidst the haze of their rational and dialectical proofs, the message of the Qur’ānic doctrine of God as contained in the first Islamic testimony (*shahādah*): “*Lā ilāha illa Allāh*” (“There is no God but Allāh”), did not become clear. The Islamic doctrine of *al-tawḥīd* states that the Divine Nature is One, beyond all duality and otherness and it is the source of all reality, beauty and goodness and everything that is positive in the Universe. Thus, “there is no reality but the Divine Reality”, “there is no beauty but the Divine Beauty”, etc.²

The Divine Nature consists of God’s Essence and His Names and Attributes which are at once the same as the Essence and distinct from It and also from each other. The Divine Essence is beyond all description

¹ Mir Valiuddin, “Mu‘tazilism”, p. 218.

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 312–313.

and definition but the Names and Attributes represent aspects of the Divine Nature, such as God as the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*), the Forgiver (*al-Ghafūr*), the Just (*al-‘Ādil*), the Giver of Death (*al-Mumīt*) etc. In a way unfathomable to man, God’s Names as revealed in the Qur`ān are inseparable from Him and Leads to Him. That is why the Qur`ān instructs man to call upon God by his Names, and the Prophet advises the Muslims to meditate on God’s Ninety-nine Names. In revealing His Names, God provides man the means by which He can be known not only philosophically and theologically but also spiritually. The Names and Attributes of God not only disclose to man of God’s Nature but also provide the means of worshipping Him, of remembering and drawing near to Him as testified by the Islamic canonical prayer (*ṣalat*), litanies (*wird*) and invocation (*dhikr*) in which man calls upon God by His Names with faith, confidence and trust in His Attributes.

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