Chapter XXXII
FAKHR AL-DIN RAZI

A LIFE, SIGNIFICANCE OF THOUGHT, AND WORKS

The intellectual life of Islam after the attacks of Ash'ari and Ghazali upon rationalistic philosophy can be largely described as the gradual transition from the rationalism of Aristotelian philosophy toward the intuitive and illuminative wisdom of the Ikhwan al-Safa and Sufis. Although Islam began to weaken politically and culturally during the later part of the Ahl al-Kalimat, Muslim thought especially in the Shi'ah world continued the process of divorcing itself from the categories of Peripatetic philosophy. One of the most influential and colourful figures in this movement, who played a major role in the attack against the rationalists, was Fakhr al-Din Razi, who is considered

1 For the definition and description of this term refer to chapter on "Shi'ah al-Din Subrahvari Maqul.

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Fakhr al-Din Razi
to be the revivaler of Islam in the sixth/seventh century as Ghazali was in the fifth/eleventh. Razi is in many ways a second Ghazali; in fact, he may without exaggeration be considered to be one of the greatest Muslim theologians. Abu al-Fadl Muhammad ibn Umar, known as Fakhr al-Din Razi and also as Imam Fakhr, ibn al-Khatib, and Imam al-Majhudi (the Imam of the Doctore), was born in Rayy in northern Persia in 543/1150 in a family of scholars who came originally from Tabaristan. His father, Di‘ al-Din, was a well-known scholar in Rayy and was Imam Fakhr’s first teacher. Later, Fakhr al-Din studied philosophy with Muhammad al-Bagawi and Majd al-Din al-Jili (the latter being also the teacher of Shihab al-Din 'Abd al-Qadir Shihab al-Din Subrahvari) and theology with Kamal al-Din Simnai in Rayy and Maragha, and soon became a master of all the sciences of his time including even the mathematical, medical, and natural sciences.

Having completed his formal studies, Imam Fakhr set out for Khwarizm to combat the Mu'tazilites, and from there journeyed to Transoxiana and was warmly accepted at the Courts of the Ghur rulers, Ghayath al-Din and his brother Shihab al-Din. But this stay terminated soon due to the opposition and jealousy of certain scholars and courtiers. Consequently, Imam Fakhr left the Ghur Court for Qazwin, where he taught for a while, and finally settled in Herat where, under the patronage of Khwarizm Shihab al-Din, a special school was built for him. There he spent the rest of his life as a teacher and preacher in comfort and honour among a large number of disciples and students who came from all over the Muslim world to study under him. He passed away at the height of fame and glory in 606/1210.

The career of Imam Fakhr is in many ways a repetition of that of Ghazali’s. Like his great predecessor, he was of the Shi'ah school, well versed in all the sciences and philosophy and yet opposed to many aspects of the Greek heritage, a critic of the Muslim philosophers, and drawn towards Sufism. In theology,

1 According to a hadith, in each century God sends a great sage and scholar into the world to strengthen Islam. Muslim historians, following this hadith, have searched during each century for the fittest person to receive this honor.

2 He was given the title because he doubted so many of the views of the previous philosophers and even of the theologians.

3 In the Wajiz al-Din al-Jili, ibn Khallikin writes that Imam Razi was the greatest authority on the Greek sciences ("alim al-andal’si") in his time. The best sources for the biography of Razi are ibn abi Umayyah, "Taqas al-Ash'ar", ibn al-Qifti, Tahrir al-Hadis, ibn Khallikin, Khulaf al-Wajiz al-Ayyn, Shams al-Din Subrahvari, Nasr al-Ash'ar wa Hanafat al-'Arab, and ibn Tabri al-Din al-Suhb, Tabat al-Shabiyyat al-Kubra.


5 Although not a great Sufi figure like Ghazali, Imam Razi was nevertheless sympathetic towards Sufism, especially in the later period of his life. Suhb, op. cit., p. 35, writes that Razi was himself a Sufi, and some of his poems and frequent quotations from the Sufi masters like Ba'li and also Sa’in certainly point in this direction.
in which he followed the Ash'arite school, he was certainly influenced by Qasīlī and Imām al- žarrān in philosophy. He came under the influence of his compatriot, Muhammad Zākariyya Rāzī, as well as Ibn Sina, and in
physics his master was without doubt Abu al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. Like a
series of anti-Aristotelian philosophers before him, Imām Fākhr tried to reconcile religion and rational philosophy by reliance upon ideas derived
more from the Timaeus of Plato than the Physics of Aristotle.6

Imām Fākhr’s main role in the intellectual life of Islam was to support
the orthodox policy of the Caliphate of his time to suppress rationalist philosophy in
favour of theology. In the unified view of Islam, politics, religion, and
intellectual life have never been divorced, so much so that the political struggle
of minorities in the Caliphate, whether they were opposed to Arab domination
on, like the Shi‘a, to the ‘Abbasid Caliphate as Islam, was reflected clearly in
the intellectual and religious activities of the period. As the Caliphate
supported the orthodox Sunni theologians against the rationalists, the philo-
osophers sought refuge in the Qur’an and the Hadith. This was also the opinion
of the central authority of the Caliphate. So we see such figures as Ibn Sina and
Khwājah Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī seeking favour of rulers opposed to the authority of
Baghdādī, and especially of Shi‘a princes.7 And, on the other hand, there
appeared a series of great scholars and sages, mostly theologians and Sufis,
whom the most important were Qasīlī, Imām Fākhr, and the Sufi masters
like Shihāb al-Dīn Umar Subkawarī, who lifted their pen in support of the
Caliphate and used both theology and Sufism in order to combat rationalistic
philosophy.8 The works of Imām Fākhr were above all else dedicated to this
cause. Sunni theology reached its height in his works and weakened considerably
with the fall of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate, which came to an end about fifty
years after his death.
The writings of Fākhr al-Dīn Rāzī, of which nearly a hundred are known,
deal almost with every aspect of Muslim intellectual life and include all the
sciences of his time.9 Some of these, like the commentary on the al-
Iṣbāḥāt wa-t-Tahdhib of Ibn Sina and upon his ‘Uṣūl al-Dīnawāh and the
Maksūbīyah al-Maṣūmīyah, are written as criticisms of Muslim philosophers,

6 For an outline of the ideas of the group of Muslim thinkers who were influenced by
Platonic physics, see S. Pines, Beziehungen zur platonischen Mysterien, Berlin, A.
Heine GmbH, Grundzüge, 1936.
7 It is far from accidental that the philosophy and the sciences
which were connected with the Greek heritage flourished especially in the fourteenth
century when most of the Muslim world was governed by the Shi‘a Rasmūs and Fārābī

8 The opposition of this group to Greek philosophy was primarily against its
rationalistic and Averroistic aspects. The cosmological and certain metaphysical
debates of the Greeks were not only not criticized but were also openly accepted
by them. So we see the Qasīlī using Hermetic symbolism or a Fākhr Rāzī writing
numerous treatises on the cosmological sciences.
9 For a bibliography of his works, see Shihāb, op. cit., pp. 33-40 and Imām Fākhr’s

especially Ibn Sina, and on general problems of philosophy.10 Others deal with
the many branches of the intellectual sciences including logic, mathematics,
metaphysics, and the natural and the esoteric sciences.

Still another set of books deals with theology, of which the most famous are
the Kītāb al-Arba‘īn wa-Uṣūl al-Dīn, Laihārī’s al-Bayyina, and the Muḥājib,
a classic among writings on the Kāfīr. Fākhr al-Dīn also wrote a large number
of works on particular sciences, like the commentary upon the syntax of
Zamāshīrī, Kītāb al-Sirr al-Muṣaffa‘ al-‘Arabī on astrology and astronomy, Masnūd
al-Ghūṣi’s on history, the commentary upon the Qīmāt or Qanāt of Ibn Sina,
and many other treatises dealing with medicine, geometry, physics, Sufism,
agriculture, theology, etc. Besides these writings, Imām Fākhr composed a
large number of works on the purely Islamic sciences of exegesis and juris-
prudence, of which the most famous are the Ma‘ṣūmī ‘Uṣūl, the voluminous
commentary upon the Qur’an, and the Mu‘ṣūmīya ‘Uṣūl wa-Farīd on the principles
of jurisprudence. Throughout these writings the character of Imām Fākhr as a
critic and “doubter” is evident. His criticism not only of the philosophers,

10 For a history of Muslim theology, especially of the Sufi school, see Shihāb
al-Mu‘īnī, Tūsī’s al-Ghāzālī, tr. M. Fākhr’s al-Ghāzālī, tr. Fākhr Rāzī’s al-
Ghāzālī, tr. L. Gardet, et al., Introduction à la Philosophie du monde, Librairie
famous of his theological works, the Muṣṣalāt, which became a classic sourcebook on the Kalām almost from the moment of its composition.18 Here, Imām Rāzi divides theology into four parts (arkhān): Preliminaries, Being and its divisions, rational theology (iḥlāṣāt), and traditional questions (fayālāt). The preliminaries include the principles of logic, the sufficiency of demonstration (dal'īl) to prove the existence of God, and the obligation upon each believer to prove God’s existence.19 The section on Being and its divisions considers the questions of Being and Non-Being, attributes of Being, the negation of modes between Being and Non-Being, the relation of the One to the many, cause and effect, etc. Rational theology, which is interlaced with passages from the Qurʾān concerns the Necessary Being. His attributes and acts and the divine names. Finally, the traditional questions, which are exclusively scriptural, concern prophethood, eschatology, the Imamate, the faith, and other related subjects. As a whole, therefore, Imām Rāzi’s theology combines the transmitted or traditional elements of revelation (fayālī) and the intellectual and rational evidence concerning religious and metaphysical questions (iḥlāṣ) into a science which takes into account the problems of religion while participating in many of the discussions of philosophy.

In the method and problem of theology, Imām Rāzi followed the Aḥṣarites. As he writes in his Kitāb al-Arba’īn: “We (the Aḥṣarites) believe that God is neither body nor substance, and that He is not in space; yet, we believe that we can see God.”20 To show his independence of judgment he goes on to assert: “Our companions (the Aḥṣarites) have given an intellectual reason for the possibility of seeing God, but we have brought twelve objections against it which cannot be answered. Therefore, we only say that we can see God by appealing to transcendent ideas.”

Imām Rāzi also criticizes Aḥṣarī on the question of atomism which is such an essential aspect of the Aḥṣarī theology. Rāzi rejected atomism in his earlier works like the Muḥtiṣal al-Maghjūspīya and wrote his Kitāb al-jannak al-Fard to refute it, but in later works like the great Qur’ānic commentary, the Dakhīlah al-Ghāṣib, he accepted it once again. (Atomism does not play a major role in his theology as it does in the system of other Aḥṣarīs like Biqṭānī.) This change of position occurs also in the rejection of infinity, the void, and the plurality of worlds in the earlier writings and their acceptance in later works like the Maqūṣūtī.21

There are several points in Imām Rāzi’s theology which are of special interest in so far as his particular point of view is concerned. One relates to the

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18 The theological masterpieces, the Taʾrīḫ, of Khwāja Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the [Jāhān Naṣr al-Dīn Tūsī, who is the greatest of the

20 For a more detailed discussion of this work, see L. Gardz and M. M. Anawati, pp. 103-64.

21 In all Muslim theology it is considered obligatory upon each Muslim to prove the existence of God according to his intellectual ability. See P. Schram, “Nature et arguments de la foi,” Études Traditionnelles, Vol. 54, Dock. 1953, pp. 34-63.

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question of faith in which he joins most theologians in regarding faith as the necessary and sufficient requirement for being saved. Hell is not for those who have committed evil acts accidentally but for the indecisive who have no faith. Man is of course responsible for his work but ultimately all is determined by the divine will. Imām Raḥiḍ is very emphatic in his determinism and overthrows even the theory of acquittal (fardā) of the Aʿrānites. His Qurʾānic commentary is full of arguments for determinism, which he defends more openly and ably than any other theologian. God is the creator of both good and evil, faith and impurity; benefit and injury; all these qualities are decreed by the determination of the divine will (qādiʿa) as qādara. Yet, none of the divine acts can be considered to be inappropriate or blameless since God is the creator and ruler of the world, and whatever He does in His kingdom is His own affair and is as such appropriate.

According to Imām Raḥiḍ, God's attributes and names must be interpreted symbolically (biʿuṣūl) in order to be understood. He follows the method of Imām al-Harāsim in applying biʿuṣūl to the Qurʾān, especially to those verses in which God is attested with both such anthropomorphic qualities as sight, hearing, etc. This does not mean that Raḥiḍ tries to overcome the rational difficulties of certain of the principles of faith by biʿuṣūl, as did many of the philosophers. For example, on the question of resurrection, unlike the philosophers who believed only in the resurrection of the soul, Imām Raḥiḍ asserts that at resurrection God will create for each soul the same body, made of the same elements as those it possessed in this life.

On the question of knowledge and the process of reasoning, Imām Raḥiḍ is of the view that reason is neither the cause of which knowledge is the effect nor the source which produces knowledge. There is an invisible succession between the two; God creates a reasoning which knowledge follows necessarily. He accords a definite value to the rational faculty; his aim in theology is in fact to create a science which combines and harmonizes reason and revelation, 'aqīdah and usul. In his Qurʾānic commentary he calls those who have succeeded in integrating these two elements the Muslim sages (muhallā ʿulāmāʾīyāt), and praises them greatly. His own importance in Muslim theology lies in his success in establishing the school of philosophical Kudūn, already begun by Ghazālī, in which both intellectual and revelational evidence played important roles.

C PHILOSOPHY

The importance of Imām Raḥiḍ in philosophy lies more in his criticism of the philosophers than in the establishment of a new school. Influenced by the writings of Ghazālī, he studied philosophy to such an extent that he became

68 Many theologians before Raḥiḍ considered this relation between reason and knowledge to be causus (fardās), but he explicitly rejects this notion.

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A History of Muslim Philosophy

D

THE SCIENCES

There have been very few Muslim theologians who have had as much knowledge of the mathematical and natural sciences as Imam Razi. His pre-occupation with the sciences is itself of great interest, because usually the Sunni theologians and doctors of Law shunned any discipline outside the sphere of the strictly religious sciences. Imam Razi, on the contrary, studied all the non-religious sciences, that is, the sciences inherited from the Greeks, and was considered by many of his contemporaries to be the greatest authority of his time on them. There is hardly a science in which he did not compose a treatise—although he never occupied himself with the study of nature in the manner of Ibn al-Haytham or Biruni. His main importance in the sciences was in considering their principles and their relation to theology and to the spirit of Islam's revelation.

A field in which Imam Razi excelled is medicine, a discipline the mastery of which he hardly expected from a theologian. He wrote several treatises on health, pulse, and anatomy, and a medical encyclopedia entitled al-\textit{Jami' al-Kabir} or \textit{al-Tibb al-Kabir} which he never completed. His most important medical work was his commentary upon the \textit{Qan\text{"u}n} of Ibn Sina, which he often criticized, basing himself on the opinions of Galen and the Muslim physicians, especially Muhammad Zakariya Razi. The commentary is sufficient evidence that Imam Razi did not learn medicine by reading one or two manuals but studied it thoroughly and was well versed in it. He was in fact famous in Herat for his ability and exactitude in diagnosis.

Imam Razi also wrote several treatises on geometry, astronomy, agriculture, politics, history, and comparative religion. Also of interest are his works on the esoteric sciences (\textit{wujud gharbi}), to which he devoted much attention. There remain among his writings treatises on theology (\textit{talim}), grammar (\textit{raml}), phonology (\textit{fehlan}), astrophysics, and other similar subjects. It is curious that Imam Razi wrote all these treatises, although he was opposed to certain of these subjects like astrology which he attacked throughout his writings. He was, however, more sympathetic to the study of esoteric sciences than either the theologians or the philosophers, as is illustrated by his defence of alchemy against the charges of Ibn Sina.

Of particular interest to the history of Muslim sciences is the scientific

encyclopedia of Imam Razi, the \textit{Jami' al-\text{"U}lam}. This work offers a good source for the names, definitions, scope, and major principles of the various Muslim sciences. Imam Fakhr begins a discussion of traditional religious sciences such as theology, jurisprudence, dialectic, comparative religion, inheritance, will and testament, Qur\text{"a}nic commentary, and reading of the Qur\text{"a}n and Hadith; and then passes on to the linguistic sciences dealing with grammar, syntax, etymology of words, proseody and poetic metre, and, after that to history. Having considered the transmitted (\textit{na\text{"u}f}) sciences, he devotes the rest of the book to the intellectual (\textit{na\text{"u}f}) sciences which include natural philosophy, interpretation of dreams, physiology, medicine, anatomy, pharmacology, the science of the occult properties of things, alchemy, theology, agriculture, geometry, science of weights, arithmetic, algebra, optics, music, astronomy, astrology, metaphysics, ethics and its various branches, and even chess and other games. Imam Razi describes the principles, scope, and major problems of each science. Despite the fact that his discussion is always general and characteristic of an encyclopedia and never penetrates too deeply into any single science, the work is perfect evidence of his vast erudition and encyclopedic knowledge. In this respect Imam Razi is similar to the Ima\text{"u}m and the later Twelver-Imam Shi\text{"a}h theologians of the Safavid period many of whom, like \textit{Has\text{"a}} Baha al-Din \text{"Am\text{"a}}, took great interest not only in philosophy but also in all the cosmological and mathematical sciences. Imam Fakhr's importance in the Muslim sciences is, therefore, mostly in bringing closer together the theological and cosmological traditions which until his time had been far apart, and in studying nature with a view to discovering God's wisdom in creation, as was done by many other Muslim scientists.

In this case, as in so many others, he advanced upon a path already trodden by \textit{Has\text{"a}}.

E

COMMENTARIES UPON THE QUR\text{"A}N

Imam Razi's fame in the Muslim world lies as much in his commentaries on the Holy Qur\text{"a}n as in his theological works. He was greatly devoted to the Qur\text{"a}n from childhood and studied Qur\text{"a}nic commentary with his father. His study of all the other sciences by no means reduced his love for the Qur\text{"a}n. As he wrote in old age: "I have experienced all the methods of theology and all the ways of philosophy, but I did not find in them the benefit

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26 His historical works include Kit\text{"a}b \textit{Paj\text{"u}l al-Gh\text{"a}lib} and Kit\text{"a}b \textit{Man\text{"a}fi\text{"u}l-\textit{Jami'}} (\textit{Shaf\text{"i}}), and his work on comparative religion, the \textit{Lug\text{"a}}\text{"u}t \textit{Faruq al-Mus\text{"a}limin w-al-Muf\text{"a}lif\text{"i}}

27 See Y. Moussaud, \textit{La physiognomie arabe et le Kit\text{"a}b al-Fer\text{"a}lsh de Fakhr al-Din al-Razi}, Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1939.


29 See \textit{Muhad\text{"a}}\text{"u}l... p. 214.

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which could equal the benefit I derived from the reading of the exalted Qur‘an."20

Imām  Rāzī’s Qur‘ānic commentaries include the Taṣawwur al-Ra‘īsh, Taṣawwur Sārat al-Baqarah, A‘nā’ Allāh al-Humma, and Ra‘īsh fi al-Tanbīh ‘ala bi‘l A‘rār al-Muqavā‘ah fi al-Qur‘ān, which last is a theological commentary combined with hadīth ideas in which metaphysics (taḥlikyā‘) is based on the chapter ‘Aynā’ (al-‘Aqīdah, prophecy on the chapter al-‘Aqīdah, resurrection on the chapter al-‘Aqīdah, and the recording of human actions on the chapter al-‘Aqīdah. The most important of Imām Rāzī’s commentaries is the voluminous Ma‘ṣū‘ih al-Qurān, known as the “Great Commentary” (Taṣawwur al-Kalb), which was collected and organized by ibn al-Qā‘im and Siyāṭ after his death. This work is the most important theological commentary ever written on the Qur‘ān. Imām Rāzī makes this also an occasion to expand his encyclopedic knowledge in that he intermingles history, geography, and other branches of knowledge with the commentary of the Qur‘ānic text wherever possible. He mentions and praises often in this work the Muslim sages who combine intellectual principles with the principles of Islamic revelation. He also analyzes the stories of the Qur‘ān and interprets their theological and metaphysical meanings. Despite its volume and the number of topics which do not seem very relevant to the immediate subject-matter, the Ma‘ṣū‘ih is an impressive theological Qur‘ānic commentary. In its intellectual interpretation and the combining of ‘aqīd and sa‘īd, of reason and authority, and in the understanding of the sacred Scripture it remains one of the major commentaries upon the Qur‘ān.

F

JURISPRUDENCE (FIQH)

Although primarily occupied with theology, Imām Rāzī occasionally devoted himself to jurisprudence as well. The few works like al-Ma‘ṣū‘ih fi al-Uṣūl al-Fiqh, al-Ma‘ṣū‘ih, and Usūl al-Ma‘ṣū‘ih bear evidence to his mastery of jurisprudence which he interpreted according to the school of the exegetics. As already mentioned, he belonged to the Ḡāfi‘i school of which he was considered to be one of the ‘alāmā‘ and authentic interpreters. Imām Rāzī was particularly well versed in the principles of jurisprudence (Uṣūl), which he treated in a manner similar to theology. This subject has, in fact, never been able to divorce itself from Ḡāfi‘i, and is still studied almost as if it were one of its branches. The importance of Imām Rāzī in Ḡāfi‘i’s jurisprudence lies more in his contribution to the theoretical principles of Fiqh than in their actual application embodied in the ġūḍāt of the various Ḡāfi‘i ‘alāmā‘.

Following the example of Ḡāfi‘i, Imām Rāzī became a dialectical theologian and, as his works testify, excelled in dialectics. He was famous for his eloquence in persuasion and argumentation, for the quickness of his intelligence and keenness of wit. These gifts were combined with a rhetorical power which made him the most famous preacher in Herat. Hardly would a scholar dare enter into debate with him; those who took sides against him would soon feel the thrust of his dialectical and rhetorical weapons. The Khātūn was borne ample evidence of these traits. In its pages one sees Imām Rāzī as a tiger who pounces mercilessly upon his helpless adversary and has little regard for softness in discourse. Much of his energy throughout life was spent in attacking bitterly the small sects which arose against the main orthodox, such as the Kharrāmīyah, who probably finally poisoned him.21 As the Shāhīd al-‘Imām of Herat, his main duty was to preach and defend Islam; and he took the opportunity of using his remarkable gifts of rhetoric and dialectic in a manner which made him one of the most famous of Muslim preachers.

Imām Rāzī had also the gift of poetry, and many verses both in Arabic and Persian are attributed to him. As in the case of so many other sages like Khātūn, poetry became for Imām Rāzī the vehicle for the expression of gnosis and the form of “ignorance” which lies above all formal knowledge. In a quatrain in Persian he writes:

“...my heart was never deprived of science;
There is little of the mysteries that I did not understand.
For seventy-two years I thought night and day,
Yet I came to know that nothing is to be known.”

H

SUPRISM

There is little doubt that Imām Rāzī was sympathetic to Sufism, especially in later life, when he wrote most of his poems like the one mentioned above. Moreover, many of his works are, like his Qur‘ānic commentary, full of Sufistic ideas, and in his Lata‘if al-Bayyinat he outlines the degrees of knowledge.

20 There is a story told of Imām Rāzī’s opposition to the Ḣamis. He used to attack them bitterly in public, accusing them of having no proofs for their doctrines. One day one of their agents, posing as a student, found Imām Rāzī alone in his library, pulled out a knife and pointed it to his chest saying, “This is our proof.” Henceforth, Imām Faḥrī never attacked the Ḣamis in public. One day the disciples asked him why he no longer spoke against this group— the group which he had opposed so bitterly before. He replied, “Because I have seen their proof.” This story appears in nearly all the biographies of Imām Faḥrī which we have already mentioned and is characteristic of his wisdom in public life.

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Fakhr al-Dīn  Rāzī

G

DIALECTIC, RHETORIC, AND POETRY
in a manner very similar to the Sufi treatise of Subhawai, Sufi-i Shawkat. He is altogether a theologian with sympathies towards Sufism.

What is difficult for us to discover is whether Imam Razi was a practicing Sufi or not. Certainly Sufism is not so evident in his writings as in Ghasālī’s, and his life, rich in worldly fame and wealth, had none of the ascetic elements of the life of his great predecessor. There is even an extant letter from the master of gnosia, the Asamūlīan Sufi, Shāhān al-Abhar Mubīn al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī, advising Imam Razi to leave dialectic and discursive thought and try to reach the stage of gnosia and contemplation, telling him that in heaven medicine and geometry will do him little good. Moreover, in his writings as in his life, Imam Razi displayed an aggressiveness and fighting quality hardly characteristic of the lives and writings of the Sufis.

Yet, despite all this negative evidence, some of his later writings do show the clear influence of Sufism upon him, and it may be that, because of his social position even after joining the circle of the Sufis, he to a large extent hid his sympathies and affiliations in order to avoid any external pressures. His own poems and his great love for the blind Arab poet bu’Ala’ al-Ma’arrī, the gnomic who often appears like a seer to the uncritical eye, on whose lines he is said to have composed, point to the fact that Imam Razi was not an ordinary theologian but knew that there is another form of knowledge, gnosia, which lies above all rational sciences like theology. Whether he actually participated in this knowledge in an effective way, is a question too difficult to answer from either historical knowledge or internal evidence from his own writings.

There is a poem of Imam Razi which is in itself almost sufficient evidence for his Sufism. In the original Arabic it is so beautiful and effective that hardly any of his biographers has failed to mention it. Written in old age by a man who was the leading scholar and theologian of his day and who enjoyed all the comfort and glory of the life of this world, it is a vivid reminder that beyond the sphere of all human life and knowledge there is another reality which man must seek in order to remain faithful to his own intimate nature. The poem begins with these verses:

“Our souls fare our bodies as if they want to separate from them.

The result of our life in this world has been nothing but pain to others and sin.

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21 See the chapter on “Shahāb al-Dīn Subhawai Magīlī”


23 There is a story told that Imam Razi met the Sufi ‘Ajūn Najīn al-Dīn Kubra in a gathering and boasted of his religious knowledge and said that he knew a hundred proofs for the existence of God. ‘Ajūn Najīn al-Dīn answered, “Is it not enough for one to doubt? God has placed in the heart of the Sufi a light of certainty which dispels all doubt, so that he no longer needs of proofs.” Imam Razi hearing this answer surrendered himself to the ‘Ajūn and was initiated into Sufism.

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Fākhr al-Dīn Rāzi

For all the discussions and debates of our life
We have derived no benefit but senseless noise.
How often have we seen men and kingdoms
All perish quickly and cease to exist?
How was their glory once more exalted than a mountain,
Yet, men perish and the mountain remains the same!"

I

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INFLUENCE OF IMAM RĀZI

The many-sided genius of Imam Rāzi, to which the previous pages bear partial witness, makes him one of the most colourful figures in Islam. Following the example of Ghasālī, by whom he was profoundly influenced and whose retreat in Ṭīb he visited, Rāzi spent a life-time in combating the rationalistic aspect of Greek philosophy. Although not of equal stature to Ghasālī in Sufism and ethics, he, nevertheless, exercised as much influence, especially in theology, as did his more famous predecessor. Possessed of a special gift for posing problems and for analysing philosophical questions, he left an indelible mark upon all later Muslim philosophers, especially upon Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, his pupil, who was the reviver of Muslim philosophy after Imam Rāzi, and was also the most famous of Shi‘ī theologians.

Imam Rāzi’s role in Muslim intellectual life, besides establishing the school of philosophical Kādisi begun by Ghasālī, was to intensify the attack against Peripatetic philosophy, thereby preparing the way for the propagation of the metaphysical doctrines of the šāfī‘īs and Sufis who, like Imam Rāzi, opposed the rationalism inherent in Aristotelianism. With the method of doubt in which he was the greatest master in Islam, he analysed and criticized Peripate-
tic philosophy in a way hardly ever equalled by anyone except Ghasālī. Yet, he was a theologian also interested in the cosmological, natural, and esoteric sciences. Imam Rāzi played an important role in bringing theology closer to the sciences and even to Sufism, with which he flavoured his theological works. In the centuries when the Muslim world was turning away from Peripatetic rationalism toward modes of thought more akin to its own spirit, Imam Rāzi played a major role in this transformation. He remains as one of the most arresting figures among Muslim theologians, a figure the power of whose thought spread over the whole Muslim world at the very moment when the Mongol onslaught was putting an end to the Caliphate, to the survival of which his work was to a large extent dedicated.

24 It is of great interest that not only in the Muslim world but also in medieval Christendom and in China many of those who preoccupied themselves with the science of nature, like the Tostō, Ikhān al-Šī‘ī, and the Franciscans, were opposed to philosophical rationalism and accepted some form of esoteric and metaphysical doctrines based on intellectual intuition and revelation.
Political Thought in Early Islam

All Muslims have equal rights in the State regardless of race, colour, or speech. No individual, group, class, clan, or people is entitled to any special privileges, nor can any such distinction determine anyone’s position as inferior.¹

3. The Qur’an (i.e., the Law of God enunciated in the Qur’an and the Sunnah, the authentic practice of the Prophet) is the supreme Law and everyone from the lowest situated person to the Head of the State is to be governed by it.³

4. The government, its authority, and possessions are a trust of God and the Muslims, and ought to be entrusted to the God-fearing, the honest, and the just; and no one has a right to exploit them in ways not sanctioned by or abhorrent to the Qur’an.⁴

5. The Head of the State (call him Caliph, Imam, or Amir) should be appointed with the mutual consulation of the Muslims and their concurrence. He should run the administration and undertake legislative work within the limits prescribed by the Qur’an in consultation with them.⁵

¹ Traduction: “Muslims are brothers to one another. None of them has any preference over the other, except on grounds of piety” (Ibn Katir, Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Amīn, 1932, p. 277).

² Omen, beware, your God is one. An Arab has no preference over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab an Arab, nor a white over a black nor a black over a white, save on grounds of piety” (Ibn Qayyim, Zad al-Madhahib, Matbaha Muhammadi, ‘Ali ‘Abd, Egypt, 1935, iv, p. 31).

³ Whosoever deals with the Son of God, and faces our pledge (direction of prayer), and offers prayer as we offer, and eats of the animal we slaughter, is a Muslim. He has the rights of a Muslim, and the duties of a Muslim (Baghthi, Kith al-Salih, Ch. xxviii).

⁴ A Muslim’s blood is like another Muslim’s blood. They are one as distinguished from others; and an ordinary man of them can offer dhakwah (i.e., stand surety) for their behalf” (Abu Daud, Kitab al-Dhakwah, Ch. xi; Nawa’, Kith al-Qudumah, Ch. x-xiv).

⁵ “A Muslim is exempt from poll-tax” (Abu Daud, Kitab al-Jadhal, Ch. xxiv).

⁶ The Qur’an, iv, 60.

Traduction: “Bread, each one of you is a sheep, and each one is answerable in respect of his flock. And the chief leader (i.e., the Caliph) is answerable in respect of the subjects” (Baghthi, Kith al-Alih, Ch. ii, Kith al-Imam, Ch. v).

⁷ Qur’an, v, 38.

Traduction: “All reports that he asked the Prophet of God (on him be peace), ‘What shall we do if we are faced with a problem after you die about which there is no mention in the Qur’an nor have we heard anything concerning it from your life?’ He answered, ‘Collect those of your people (ummah) that serve God

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¹ Qur’an, iv, 100; v, 44, 45, 47; vii, 3; xii, 40; xxiv, 35; xxxiii, 36.

² Qur’an, iv, 100; v, 44, 45, 47; vii, 3; xii, 40; xxiv, 35; xxxiii, 36.

³ Qur’an, iv, 100; v, 44, 45, 47; vii, 3; xii, 40; xxiv, 35; xxxiii, 36.

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