A TENTH CENTURY CRITICISM OF THE
DOCTRINE OF THE LOGOS (John 1:1)

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IN the previous two extracts1 from Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī’s Book of Lights (Kitāb al-Anwār) an attempt has been made to illustrate the vast amount of exceedingly interesting and in part otherwise unknown material relating to the history of Old Testament exegesis, contained in that monumental work. The present third extract offers a specimen of al-Qirqisānī’s New Testament criticism, which is no less worthy of attention.

Since neither New Testament exegesis nor the history of Medieval Oriental philosophy come within the field of my studies, I must confine myself here to purely historical observations, in the hope that they might be of use to the Biblical scholar who is not conversant with the history and literature of the Karaite sect. It is not possible in the present embryonic state of Karaite studies to reconstruct a systematic and detailed picture of the history of early Karaism’s attitude towards the New Testament and Christianity — too few early Karaite documents have as yet been discovered and published, and too many are still hidden or are irretrievably lost. But a few hints, mostly culled from al-Qirqisānī’s own encyclopedic work (the oldest detailed source accessible to us at present), are available, and throw at least some measure of light on what the founding fathers of the Karaite church knew, or thought they knew, about the New Testament and Christianity and its adherents.

While the official Karaite story that their schism, with its cardinal earmark of disacknowledgment of the Post-Biblical

Rabbinic tradition, began in the second half of the 8th century after Christ with the secession of Anan from the Rabbinic Synagogue, is not historically true — Anan's princely descent and learning merely furnished a rallying point for numerous dissident sects which were springing up for many years before his time and continued to spring up for years after his death — nevertheless Karaism as a more or less unified anti-Rabbinic movement does seem to date from about the year 800. This fact seems to be in part responsible for the apparent absence in early Karaite literature of any serious imprint of the original conflict between Jewry on the one side and Judeo-Christianity and the later Christian Church on the other. Political circumstances, too, must have accounted for it to some extent, for the early Karaite patres ecclesiae were more or less thoroughly Arabicized (and Persianized as well, in the case of those who, like al-Qirqisâni, lived in the Persian sections of the Muslim empire). They seem to have had but a hazy notion of the countries then under Christian rule — although they occasionally met Frankish Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem — and had thought of Christianity and its adherents mainly as a fellow-minority, tolerated and more or less protected under Muslim law, but a downtrodden minority nevertheless. Al-Qirqisâni's inclusion of the life of Jesus and of a fairly detailed account of Christian dogmatics in his Book of Lights was caused clearly not by any desire to write a comparative survey of all faiths,2 for the work is expressly stated to be nothing more than a treatise on Karaite canon law. To al-Qirqisâni Christianity is only another Jewish sect, founded by Jesus who lived "in the reign of Caesar (Augustus), the king of Rome, to wit, at the time when the Second Temple was yet standing,"

2 To be sure, al-Qirqisâni devotes a chapter to the refutation of the prophetic mission of Muhammad (III.15; my edition, vol. 2, pp. 292-301), but this is the only portion of the work to deal with a non-Jewish faith, and the author himself explains that it forms part of his refutation of the doctrines of the Jewish schismatic Abû 'Isâ al-İsfahâni, who acknowledged the apostolic inspiration of both Jesus and Muhammad (cf. III.16.7; vol. 2, p. 307). In fact, al-Qirqisâni refers for greater detail to a separate work which he had written against Islam (vol. 2, p. 301, lines 4-7). This latter work has not been discovered.
and of whom it is known that “the Rabbinic Jews intrigued against him until they succeeded in putting him to death by crucifixion.” Of Jesus’ own teachings al-Qirqisânî knows comparatively little: “some people say that he claimed the gift of prophecy, while others deny it”— the author himself does not undertake to decide which is true, but his personal preference is clearly with “some Karaites [who] say that Jesus was a righteous man who followed the path of Zadok, Anan, and others.” “He, like the Sadducees, forbade divorce.” He issued no (new) ordinances and imposed no (new) obligations, but said that religion consists solely of humility . . . He did not prohibit any species of food, rather did he allow the consumption of all animals, from the gnat to the elephant.” These few scraps are all that a particularly well informed tenth century Karaite in Mesopotamia and Western Persia knew of Jesus’ life and teaching. Yet one would think that even a hasty perusal of a copy of the Gospels in Arabic (or Syriac) would have supplied al-Qirqisânî with more information than this. We know that Jews in Muhammadan lands in that period had considerable difficulty in gaining access to copies of the Koran, because the Muslim ecclesiastical and secular authorities disapproved of having ‘unbelievers’ handle the Sacred Writ of the Prophet. Was there a similar disinclination on the part of al-Qirqisânî’s Christian neighbors to countenance the reading of the New

3 Kitâb al-Anwâr, I.2.9 (vol. 1, p. 12).


5 Rajulan sâlihan — the exact equivalent of the Biblical יְשַׁלֵּחַ יְשֵׁנָה.

6 The co-founder (with Boethus) of the Sadducee sect, with whom the Karaites consistently claimed a close kinship (although they resented being called their direct descendants); their high regard for Zadok is exemplified by al-Qirqisânî’s statement that “Zadok was the first to expose [the wickedness of] the Rabbinic Jews, the first to deviate from them, and the first to discover part of the truth” (op. cit., I.2.7 — vol. 1, p. 11).


8 Ibid.


10 For misquoted Koranic verses — owing to citation from memory and inability to consult the written text — in the Book of Lights, see the chapter dealing with Muhammad, III.15 (vol. 2, pp. 292–301).
Testament by outsiders? The available evidence is too scanty. The five New Testament passages cited by al-Qirqisānī are, to be sure, quoted fairly correctly and the genealogy of Jesus, too, is recounted in its proper order; the author knew also that the four Gospels "tell . . . the history of Jesus from its beginning to its end, where he was born, who gave him birth, and (what was the order of) his descent." Al-Qirqisānī tells us, moreover, that he used to engage in friendly theological discussions with "a bishop who resided at 'Ukbara, named Yasū' Sekhā, who was one of their (the Christians') greatest bishops and scholars," and he goes on to testify that "I used to have a very high opinion of (the quality of) his intellect, for I have never seen among the Christian scholars and devotees of (philosophical) speculation anyone less addicted to untruthfulness." It seems reasonable to assume that during these amicable discussions a codex of the Arabic (or Syriac) New Testament was consulted from time to time. Still, all this is too inconclusive to make certain that al-Qirqisānī was able to conduct a systematic study of it.

In maintaining this amicable intercourse with his Christian fellow-theologians, al-Qirqisānī had good historical precedent.

Matthew 1:1 (quoted in one manuscript in the Syriac translation); 1:2 and 5:17 (quoted twice, with considerable variations); Mark 2:23; and John 1:1 (cf. op. cit., vol. 5, p. 041).


13 Ibid. (vol. 1, p. 45).

14 Usquf = ἐπισκόπως.

15 A town on the Tigris, about midway between Baghdad and Samarra; cf. Guy Le Strange, The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate, Cambridge, 1905, p. 50, and map II. The town was also the seat of a considerable Karaite community and the birthplace (or residence) of two eminent Karaite divines, Ismā'il al-'Ukbari and Mishawayh al-'Ukbarī.

16 מָנֵפָה — so written, in Hebrew letters, and so pointed, in the manuscript. Yasū' is the Arabic form of ήησοῦς, the Hebrew ישו, ישו.


18 Astarjib, literally, "regard it as having greater weight."

19 Op. cit., vol. 2, p. 220, lines 10-11. Even a stern Karaite divinity is only human, however, and al-Qirqisānī cannot resist at this point the temptation to add a malicious dig at his Christian confrères: "Whereas the rest of them — lies are their entire capital" (al-buht rās māshīm — rās māl is the regular Arabic commercial term for the principal, as distinguished from the accrued interest).
for it. A young and struggling religion — as Karaism was for a long time after its formal break with the Rabbinic Synagogue — seeks company and invites support from other opponents of the Mother Church. To be sure, here, too, our information is rather scant. Of Anan's own attitude towards Christianity and Christians we know nothing; presumably al-Qirqisānī would have mentioned any clear acknowledgment of the mission of Jesus if Anan had expressed it; on the other hand, he records no saying of Anan that would indicate any condemnation of it, although it is reasonable to suppose that an ascetic and rigoristic mind like Anan's could have felt little sympathy with anyone who differed with him. But we know a little more in this respect about Anan's predecessors and successors. Obadiah, an influential and resolute schismatic and a forerunner of Anan, who lived in the first years of the 8th century at Isphahan in Persia, "acknowledged the prophetic mission of both Jesus son of Mary and the Master of the Muslims (Muhammad), and asserted that each one of the two was sent (by God) to his own people; he urged (his disciples) to read the Gospels and the Koran and to study their commentaries, and he maintained that the religion of the Muslims and that of the Christians are as genuinely inspired (by God) as that of the Jews."

Al-Qirqisānī, who was bitterly opposed to Obadiah and all his works, saw in this ac-

29 The efforts of Muhammad and Luther, in the early stages of their careers, to gain the support of Jewry are perhaps the most outstanding examples of this fact.

30 At least nothing certain; cf. Jewish Quarterly Review New Series 3 (1912/13) 243.

31 Al-Injil = Εὐαγγέλιον, but perhaps used for the New Testament as a whole.

32 Op. cit., I.11.2 (vol. 1, p. 52, lines 8–11); the last sentence of the quotation has been here translated rather freely, as the Arabic is too idiomatic to be turned into good English. The later Arab theologian, Ibn Ḥazm (11th century), asserts further that Obadiah assumed the name Muḥammad ibn Ḥaṣā (Muhammad son of Jesus) and acknowledged the Immaculate Conception of Christ (cf. Jewish Quarterly Review New Series 3 (1912/13) 241–242; Muhammad, too, acknowledged the Virgin Birth, according to al-Qirgisānī, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 302, lines 2–3). Such embellishments by later writers of the original information contained in al-Qirgisānī's authoritative work must always be viewed with distrust, pending better proof.
knowledgment the most mercenary motives of self-interest, but his explanation is naturally suspect, and Obadiah’s honorific surname, Abū ʾĪsā (=“Father of Jesus”), if not assumed by him arbitrarily as a symbol of his mission, indicates that he named his son (or hoped to name him, when and if he were to have a son) after the Christian Savior. A century later, Benjamin al-Nahāwandi (revered by the Karaites as next in rank to Anan), a fair-minded and tolerant soul, originated the theory that God himself created only a single angel, and that it was this angel who in his turn created everything else in the world. The purpose of this theory, which al-Qirqisānī denounced and which gained no footing in Karaite theology, is patently to disassociate the Almighty from the anthropomorphic imputations contained in the Bible, but there can be little doubt that its source is the Philonic-Christian doctrine of the Creative Word. Of another eminent theologian, Daūd ibn Marwān al-Raqqī, surnamed al-Muḵammīṣ (ca. 900), we are told that “he professed originally the Jewish faith, then became converted to Christianity at Nisibis under the influence of a man named Nānā,24 a highly esteemed Christian physician and an accomplished philosopher; Daūd al-Muḵammīṣ acted as his disciple for many years and learned thoroughly the principles and mysteries of the Christian religion, as well as philosophy. But (later) he composed two works attacking the Christians, the which works are widely known; he also translated out of the books and commentaries of the Christians an exposition of the Book of Genesis, which he entitled The Book of Creation, and a commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes.”25 There is no positive contemporary evidence that Daūd al-Muḵammīṣ subscribed formally to the Karaite faith; later Karaite authors counted him (who was the earliest known Jewish thinker to adapt Graeco-Muslim philosophy to Jewish theological purposes) among their coreligionists,26 yet

24 The Latin Nonnus.
26 Notably, the Karaite 15th century chronicler Ibn al-Hītī, Jewish Quarterly Review 9 (1897), 432, 436; Daūd al-Muḵammīṣ is mentioned by earlier Karaite authorities, too.
later Rabbinic writers of unswerving orthodoxy set their seal of approval upon him by quoting from his works — evidently they had no knowledge of any black marks upon his record. Still, al-Qirqisānī’s testimony about a scholar who was his older contemporary and practically his neighbor cannot be set aside without documentary proof of a decisive nature, and one must also not lose sight of the fact that Karaism at that time (first half of the 10th century) was still in a very fluid state, and embraced an infinite variety of deviators from the orthodox Rabbinic path. Assuredly Daūd al-Muḵammīṣ was no Rabbinic fundamentalist, and certainly he was an outstanding representative of the religious liberalism (if this be the right word) prevailing in that period among a considerable group of eminent divines of all three faiths. That there were other Karaites who revered Jesus as a “righteous man”, we have the testimony, quoted above, of al-Qirqisānī himself — a testimony which was undoubtedly based on personal knowledge and the reliability of which is scarcely subject to doubt.

But once these Karaite liberals passed from the person of Jesus and his own opposition to Jewish orthodoxy, to some of the main doctrines of official Christianity, such as the divine nature of the Son as a member of the Trinity and the eternity of the Logos, their reaction became one of uncompromising negation, not so much on theological grounds, as on those of pure logic. Theologically, the problem presented no difficulty to them: Jesus himself was not responsible for these doctrines — “it was

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27 Cf. on Daūd al-Muḵammīṣ, I. Ginzburg’s paper in Zapiski Kollegii Vostokovedov (Memoirs of the Committee of Orientalists at the Asiatic Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences) 5 (1930) 481-506, where the earlier literature is also given. Ginzburg, too, considers the Rabbinic use of Daūd’s works as proof of his orthodoxy. To reconcile this view with al-Qirqisānī’s explicit statement, it has been proposed to translate his expression tanaṣṣara (“he became converted to Christianity”) “he came into intimate scholarly contact with Christians” — an interpretation which does grievous violence to the regular use and meaning of the Arabic word. On the contemporary “liberal” appreciation of all monotheistic religions as mere variant manifestations of the same Divine Truth, see Friedlaender’s remarks in the Jewish Quarterly Review New Series 3 (1912/13) 235 ff.
Paul who invented and published the religion which the Christians now profess, and it was he who invested Jesus with a divine nature."28 Again St. Paul and St. Peter issued new regulations of their own not found in the Gospels, and more was added to that by the members of the Nicean council.29 In other words, as the Karaites saw it, the later Christians fell into the same error as did the Rabbinic Jews, who perverted the meaning of God's Holy Writ by adding to it the willful and unauthorized modifications and innovations contained in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Well educated and liberal Christians, like the aforementioned Nānā and Yasū' Sekhā, knew this themselves—so presumably argued the Karaite divines—that is why they limited themselves to purely philosophical argumentation in their defence of these doctrines against Karaite questioning, for "in their view, logic is a basic tool for the derivation of the truth."30 It was, therefore, up to their Karaite opponents to meet them on the same ground of pure logic, and the present extract from the Book of Lights is a good specimen of the result. There is little or no appeal in it to Scriptural authority, and the doctrine of the Logos is rejected because it is regarded as illogical, rather than heretical, and because its acceptance allegedly leads, by dialectical development, to conclusions which are contrary to reason.

It is a pity that in this case the principle of audiatur et altera pars cannot be observed, at least at present, and that we are compelled to reconstruct the substance of the Christian divines' arguments solely from al-Qirqisānī's quotations—a procedure notoriously short of historical reliability. That Christian works in refutation of Karaite polemics existed, seems to me highly probable; one can only hope that remnants of them will some day be restored to our all too scanty store of information on this whole highly important yet mostly obscure period.

30 Op. cit., vol. 2, p. 187, lines 5–6; it was the view of al-Qirqisānī, too, for that matter.
[DISCOURSE III]

CHAPTER 3

CONCERNING THEIR [THE CHRISTIANS'] DOCTRINE
OF THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF THE WORD

(I)... this. What would be your opinion if one should say... [that] one who is not moving and is incapable (of movement) [is nevertheless potentially moving], and that one who is not walking and is incapable (of walking) is (nevertheless potentially) walking? Would there be any difference between him and you? This argument applies to all who assert that the Word of God is co-eternal with Him, such as Ibn Kilāb and others.

(II) Now suppose one who believes in the pre-existence of the Word should ask us thus: 'Do you assert that God's Writ, meaning the Law and the other books, is from God?' To which our reply would be, yes. 'Why,' the questioner would continue, 'do you claim this?' Because, we would answer, it is written that this is the Law of God, and again in the account of the two Tablets (of the Law) [Ex 32:10], 'And the Tablets were the handiwork of God, and the writing was the writing of God,' meaning that it was the handwriting of God, God being the writer, and the Law being the Writ which He had written for His creatures. The writer of the Writ is thus its maker and composer, for the Writ is something other than the writer, and being so, and having been made by no one else, it follows that it was created and made by the writer. 'But surely,' the questioner might go on, 'you do not deny that the Writ must indeed be something other than God, and yet not have been made and created by Him.' [This], we would reply, [is impossible], because the Writ must be either co-eternal with God, or not co-eternal with Him. If it be co-eternal with God, it would [ipso facto] be a god, since only God is pre-existent; and in that case there would be many gods, without number, inasmuch as the Word of God is too numerous to be computed, and all of it would then be pre-existent, for the Christians say that the Word and the [Holy] Ghost are pre-existent with God, which is their evidence that God is a Trinity; consequently he who asserts that a thousand times thousand things, and more, are co-eternal with God does thereby assert the existence of an [equally] incomputable number of gods. If, on the other hand, the Writ is not pre-existent with God, then it must necessarily be something incipient,

31 The fragmentary condition of this paragraph makes the argument set forth in it somewhat obscure; it may possibly refer to a reasoning that since the Word was with God on certain known occasions, it must have been with Him in eternity.

32 I have been unable to find any further information on this, apparently Christian, scholar.

33 Tawrā, i.e., the Tōrāh, or the Pentateuch.
made, and created, in which case its maker, originator, and creator could be no one else but God, which proves that God created it.

(III) Another proof [of it] is this: it is not permissible to say that God is Word, for whosoever says this commits blasphemy, for the Word is something other than He who utters it, and must therefore be His handiwork; and since what is God's handiwork must have been created, originated, produced, and given rise by Him, it follows that God's Word and His Writ, meaning the Law and other books, were indeed created, originated, and produced. Moreover, if God's Word to Moses were pre-existent, then God must have never ceased speaking to Moses, and conversely Moses must never have ceased speaking to God. Since this is absurd, it is clear that God spoke to Moses after having not spoken to him; therefore, His Word to Moses must be incipient, inasmuch as it had come into existence after having been non-existent, and its inceptor was God, the Lord of both worlds.14

(IV) Furthermore, the Word consists of letters and words following one another; this being so, the second letter must follow in the wake of the first one, and the second word in the wake of the first word [and so forth], for the Word can be understood only in its [logical] sequence, inasmuch as if only an [odd] letter from among its components were pronounced, its meaning would not be understood. Therefore, according to the opinion of these men, it would follow that [only] one letter of the Word is pre-existent, while the rest of the letters forming the remainder of the Word are incipient, inasmuch as this rest necessarily comes after this first letter. In other words, only an aleph or a beth15 would be pre-existent, while the rest of the lettering forming the remainder of the Word would be incipient, the which [demolishes] their [entire] view and inevitably [proves that] God's Writ and Word are incipient. In fact, even this single letter cannot be pre-existent, for this reason: since each verse (of the Holy Writ) must be incipient, each aleph [contained in it] must also be incipient; and if each aleph is incipient, then each waw must be incipient, since the like of the incipient cannot be pre-existent.16

(V) Another proof that God's Word and Writ are incipient is the fact that they are heard by the [human] ear, are written by the [human] hand, and are read by the [human] tongue; such things must be incipient and not pre-existent, for if the pre-existent were capable of being heard by the ear, it would

14 This world and the one after death.
15 Variant: yod.
16 The wording here is awkward, and the text may be corrupt. The gist of the reasoning seems to me to be this: assuming that one letter is pre-existent, still all the remainder of the Holy Writ must be incipient. Since each verse is thus incipient, and there are many alephs in most verses, all these alephs must be incipient. If the supposedly pre-existent letter is also an aleph, it, too, must be really incipient, since it is in all respects, in form and sound, identical with the admittedly incipient alephs. The same applies to all the other letters of the alphabet.
have been capable (also) of being touched by the [human] hand. As for Ibn Kilāb, he asserted that God's Word cannot be heard; yet notwithstanding this, he claimed that God can be seen by [human] eyes. He was asked, why do you make this claim? 'Because,' said he, '[God's] Word has no voice or letters" to it, and everything devoid of these cannot be heard.' He was then asked, what proof do you have that God's Word has no letters? If he were to reply, 'Because I find that the word of [God's] creatures is a conglomerate of letters; if God's Word were also composed of letters, it would then be similar to the word of others than He; and if His Word were similar to the word of others than He, He, too, would be similar to others than He," the answer would be, surely you do not deny that His Word, although composed of letters, yet is not similar to the word of others than He; just as you say that His Word forms a certain attribute of His, yet is not similar to an attribute of others than He—there is no difference [between these two assertions]. One might say to him further, If you say that God's Word can neither be heard nor be composed of letters, inasmuch as it does not resemble the word of others than He, surely you cannot then deny that He cannot be seen by [human] eyes, since He is neither a substance nor an accident. If you think it possible, nevertheless, that He should be seen, even though He is neither a substance nor an accident, then likewise it should be (possible) for His Word to be heard by [human] ears, even though it does not resemble the word of others than He.

(VI) Another proof that God's Writ and Word, meaning the Law and similar books, are incipient and created, is the fact that if one were to say, there is no god but the Law, he would be asserting thereby that the Law is a god and a creator, even as if he were to say, There is no god but So-and-So, he would be suggesting that this certain person is a god and a creator. The blasphemy of anyone saying this latter thing being self-evident, it is equally evident that he is a blasphemer who takes the Law for a god. Since, then, the Law is not a god, and since all things other than the (one and only) God are incipient and created, it is clear that the Law, too, is incipient and created.

(VII) If one of them were now to ask us thus, 'Tell us about the verse [Ex. 20:2] "I am the Lord thy God," — are the words "the Lord thy God" created?' — we would answer, if you mean by "I am the Lord thy God" [the conception] that the Creator, who is [our] Lord, is God, Heaven forbid that [we should contradict you and say that] He was created, rather [do we believe that] He is pre-existent, eternal, and never-ceasing. What is created, in our judgment, is His statement ["I am the Lord thy God"] and His name ["God"], composed as they are of a number of letters which are heard by [human] ears and are pronounced by [human] tongues. When we say Lord God we mean the Creator's essence, but these two words [in themselves] are words that are heard and are [therefore] incipient and created. In short, what

37 I. e., sounds as represented by letters.
38 Which is anthropomorphism, and in Karaite eyes, sheer blasphemy.
they assert is [in effect] nothing else than that the name is identical with that which it designates, [the which is absurd].

(VIII) Another refutation of their belief is contained in the fact that when we say, 'fire,' what issues from our mouths is the name of fire, and not fire itself. Likewise, when we say, 'heaven and earth and the whole universe,' we do not produce all these out of our mouths, rather do we utter their names, and not that which these names designate. In fact, their assertion that the name is identical with that which it designates, would force them to relinquish their own doctrine, since the Law contains the names of the heavens, of the earth, of asses, swine, men, and other things. If the names of these things are identical with the things themselves, and are neither incipient nor created, then, according to their view, the heavens, the earth, and the rest of the things enumerated above are neither incipient nor created. If they should retort that the heavens, the earth, and the rest, as mentioned above, are created, while their names in God's Writ are not, that would contradict their own doctrine that the names are identical with the things themselves. Therefore, if the names of these things are other than the things themselves, then God's names, too, are other than He. If they should say that while the names of these things are other than the things themselves, God's names are not other than He, their view could be shown to be false from more than one aspect: first, we have [full] knowledge of God, but not of all His names in such languages as we do not know, and those [names] that we do know are surely other than those we do not know. Secondly, when we say, Lord God, these words are God's names made by us, and [this] our handiwork is therefore other than our Lord and Creator; so that whoever denies that God's names are the handiwork of His servants must necessarily also deny that any human being has ever uttered the name of God, [which is absurd].

(IX) If one [of them] should ask, 'Since the Law is God's Word, how can that which is from God be incipient and created?' — the answer would run thus: [the concept of] a thing from [another] thing has several variations. One of them is a part of a whole — as we would say [for example], 'the hand is from the man,' meaning that it is a part of him; this [variety of the concept] cannot be applied to God, since He is not subject to partition and division. Another variation is [exemplified by] the expression, 'the fruit is from the tree,' meaning that it grew out of it; this, too, is inapplicable to God, since He is not subject to happenings and attributes applicable to [earthly] bodies. Another [variation] is [represented by] the saying, 'the ointment is from the sesame-seed,' or 'the oil is from the olive,' meaning that it had been expressed and obtained from it; again, God is exalted [far] above such an attribute. We say, further, 'justice is from the just,' or 'action is from the agent,' or 'truth is from the truthful,' meaning that he has produced it and given it

39 Therefore, both groups could not possibly be identical with God himself — one group must be other than God.
40 Since all known names of God are man-made words and parts of man-made languages.
inception. When we say, therefore, that the Word is from God we mean that He has made it and caused it to be. All who profess a religion are agreed in this respect, since the Fatalists assert that evil and unbelief come from God, in the sense that He created them and caused them to happen; while those who believe in the supremacy of justice say that [only] good is from God, in the same sense. The reader of this chapter should not feel annoyed, even if [he should feel that] it has grown somewhat long for him, since the matter (discussed here) has ramifications which require thorough investigation.

(X) If one of them should ask, ‘If God has uttered speech and has spoken to Moses, did He speak [to him] with tongue and lips? If you answer in the affirmative, you assign to Him the attributes of [earthy] bodies. If you deny it, you run counter to the [general] conception of the nature of speech — our reply would be as follows: He who speaks with tongue and lips cannot speak [different words] to two persons at the same time, whereas our Lord is able to address a great multitude of people with different words at one and the same moment, and what He says to one person does not prevent Him from saying something else to another person [at the same time]. In like manner, an earthly agent cannot perform many actions in different places at the same time, nor can he write [one thing] at the same time as he erases [another thing], nor destroy [one thing] while he is creating [another]. Yet God governs the heavens at the same time as He rules that which is underneath the earth; He creates the fruit of the tree at the same time as He gives form to the [animal] embryo, and puts one to death while He gives life to another; He performs actions without [the help of] organs, or movements, or implements; He knows no fatigue, or exhaustion, or interruption, or diversion, while [all] other than He cannot act without movement, interruption, fatigue, and exhaustion. So also does the Word issue from Him without His speaking with tongue and lips and undergoing exertion and movement, even though others than He cannot speak in this manner; likewise He sees things without using the sense of sight, and perceives things without proof or knowledge entering His mind, even though others than He cannot see except through the sense of sight or know except by way of knowledge entering their minds. Likewise, others than God can see only what is in front of them and not what

*Mujabbira*, those who believe in *jabr* = “compulsion,” i.e., that men’s actions are entirely determined by God’s immutable decree, and are not subject to men’s own will and choice; in other words, that men’s deeds, both good and evil, are the work of God, ordained by His inscrutable wisdom.

And men’s free choice of action.

While any evil coming from God is invariably a well-deserved punishment for men’s wickedness, and is therefore really an expression of justice, which is good and not evil.

As the result of the use of the vocal organs in man.

I.e., man.

Literally, “heart” (*qalb*).
is behind them, nor can they see through an obstruction, while God is able to do all these things. In this same manner, others than God can speak only with the tongue, the lips, and the [other vocal organs and cords] by making certain motions; they cannot produce the $h$-sound except from the throat, nor the $sk$-sound except from the edge of the mouth, nor the $m$-sound except from the lips; nor can they combine two sounds [into one], or speak different words to two persons at the same time, yet our Lord is able to do all this at the same time. Furthermore, we say that God produces the Word in others, and not in Himself; the same is true of all His actions; we, on the other hand, are the seat of our own actions, whereas God is not, inasmuch as He is the [eternal] Creator and cannot be described with the attributes of those who are incipient.

(XI) If one [of them] should ask, 'But do you not believe that God addressed Moses from the thornbush?'—we would answer, indeed we do, in the sense that He created Word and placed it in the bush; God was the speaker, although the Word was located in the bush, just as in the case of the Ten Commandments, the verses were God's Word, although they were located upon the two Tablets; the Word was God's, and not the thornbush's or the Tablets', even though it was placed in the bush and upon the Tablets. If he should retort, 'But it was the thornbush who said, 'I am God'”—we would reply, 'Nay, God was the speaker of this, in the sense that He produced the Word within the bush by means of His omnipotence, not that He himself took up position in the bush, even as He creates man within the belly of his mother without His setting foot in it himself, as Job expressed it [31:15], 'Did not He that made me in the womb make him?'

(XII) One of them asked the following question: 'Since you assert that the Word from God does take position within a thing, yet that thing does not thereby become the speaker, is it not possible also for this thing to be the seat of movement, color, or composition, without it becoming moving, colored, or composed?' Our answer is this: The difference between these two is that the function of the speaker towards his speech consists in his making it, willing it, being capable of it, and intending it. Now since the thornbush within which the Word had taken place was neither intending, nor willing, nor making [the Word], it did not speak the Word which took up position within it, rather it was God, He who made the Word, who was the speaker of the essence of the Word which took place within the thornbush.

(XIII) Another thing [in this connection] is this: While the thornbush is affected by movement, color, and composition, it cannot speak in the sense of uttering words, nor can it address [anyone] in the sense of saying [something to someone], and having [something] said to it [in reply]. Do you not see that if someone should address words to it, it could not utter words in reply just because someone addressed it? Yet if a mover should give it movement, or

[47] Literally, "uvulae" (lahawāt).
[48] Literally, "soul" (nafs).
if a wielder of color should color it, or a tree-surgeon join one part of it to another, all this would be [perfectly] possible, so that it is clear that the thornbush would become moving by virtue of the movement which was applied to it. On the other hand, it was someone other than the bush who made and spoke the Word which took place within it, just as the writing which someone might inscribe upon it would not make it the writer, even though the writing had taken its position upon it; nor does the Word which had taken place within it make it the speaker, because writing and speaking imply action, and a bush is incapable of action.

(XIV) If one [of them] should say: 'Since you assert that God does give rise to Word in others than He, yet remains thereby the speaker, why could He not give rise to movement, or color, or death in others, yet remain thereby the one moving, being colored, or dying?' — we would answer: this query affects you, rather than us, for a thing is not dying in the sense of making death, or moving and being colored in the sense of manufacturing color and movement. If dying were making death, or being colored making color, then [conversely] that which is incapable of manufacturing movement, color, or death would be incapable of moving, being colored, or dying. Since we observe many things which move, accept coloration, and die, and yet do not make any of these [actions], we must conclude that a thing moves, is colored, and dies, not because it makes [each of] these [actions], but rather by virtue of death, color, or movement taking place within it. The speaker, on the other hand, speaks and orates [only] in the sense of making the Word and the oration, and [conversely] he who does this is the speaker.

(XV) Then we would query him in his turn by saying: Did not God create the writing upon the two Tablets, thereby becoming the writer, and did He not create the voice [from the thornbush], thereby becoming the producer of the voice? It cannot, therefore, be denied that when He creates death He is dying, just as He became the issuer of the voice by creating it; or that when He creates color He is colored, even as He is just when He creates justice; the same [reasoning] applies also to movement. If he should answer, 'It does not follow that He is dying when He creates death, or is colored when He creates color, even as He is just when He creates justice, or is the writer when He creates writing, or is the benefactor when He creates benefaction' — we would say, it likewise does not follow that He is dying when He creates death, even as He is the speaker when He creates the Word.

(XVI) We would say to him further: do you assert that God's Word is His integral attribute, and not one of His actions? Upon his answering, 'Yes,' we would continue: in that case, do say also that the [Holy] Writ is His integral attribute, and not one of His works. If he should reply, 'The Writ cannot be anything but [His] work,' — we would say the same thing about the Word, since any argument which he might use to prove that the Writ was created would apply equally well to the Word, inasmuch as there is no difference between them [in this respect].

This is all that seemed suitable to be said here on this subject.