

Attributes Of (His) Essence And Of (His) Actions

Says the Shaykh Abu Ja'far (on whom be the mercy of Allah): our belief concerning the attributes of (His) essence is this. Whenever we describe Allah by the attributes of His essence,¹ we only desire by each attribute the denial of its opposite in respect of Him, the Glorious and Mighty. We say that Allah, the Glorious and Mighty, has always been the Hearing One (*sami*), the Seeing One (*basir*), the Knowing One (*'alim*), the Wise (*hakim*), the Powerful (*qadir*), the Glorious (*aziz*), the Living (*hayy*), the Ever-lasting (*qayyum*), the One (*wahid*), the Prior (*qadim*) – for these are the attributes of His essence.

We do not say that He, the Glorious and Mighty has always been the Great Creator (*khallaq*), the One possessed of Action (*fa'il*), Will (*shai'*)² and Intention (*murid*), the Approver (*radi*), the Disapprover (*sakhit*), the Provider (*raziq*), the Bountiful One (*wahhab*), the Speaker (*mutakallim*), – because these are the attributes of His Actions (*a'fal*), and (therefore) they are created (*muhdath*).³ It is not right to say that Allah is always to be qualified by them.⁴

1. Sh. Mufid in Tas. (Mur. ii. 19–20) explains this and says that the attributes of Allah are divided into two classes. In the first class, there is no reference to action –sifatu 'dh-dhat; in the second, they refer to action – a'fal. The distinction is this: in the case of the attributes of the essence, the opposite cannot be predicted of Allah. You cannot say, for example, that He dies (opp. of hayy, ever-living), or is weak (opp. of qadir), or is ignorant; and you cannot describe Him as being anything other than living (hayy), knowing ('alim) and powerful (qadir), whilst you can say that Allah is not a creator today; or that He is not a giver of sustenance to Zayd; or that He is not the revivifier of an actually dead man, and so on. And Allah can be described by such contraries as Allah gives and withholds, causes to live and causes to die, etc.

2. Reading سائياً D ; N err. سائياً

3. N افعال محدثة و هي محدثة D افعال محدثة

4. MC, 206 sqq.; BHA, no. 56, no. 62, nos. 97–99; FC, no. 13, no. 16.

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