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## SOME EARLY ISLAMIC SERMONS

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The purpose of this article is to look at some of the early sermons of Islam from the point of view of their ethical and historical content, and the light they throw on the various personalities who delivered them. The sermons are taken from Ibn Qutaiba's 'Uyūn al-'Akhbār ('Sources of Information'). Obviously no more than a very small fraction of the sermons delivered is represented in 'Uyūn al-'Akhbār, but the selection given affords an interesting cross-section of the differing forms of content and different historical personalities.

Abu Muḥammad 'Abdullah ibn Muslim ibn Qutaiba lived from 828 to 899, and those who have written biographies of him agree that he was one of the most erudite and cultured Arab scholars. 'Uyūn al-'Akhbār, which is his chief work, is divided into ten books, each dealing with a given subject. Each heading includes quotations from the Tradition, the sayings attributed to and about Muḥammad, and from literary and historical sources. Ibn Qutaiba allowed himself certain liberties with his material, which he at times abridged or altered to gain greater effect: this fact must be borne in mind when remarks are being made about the style of the sermons – certain of the pleasing features may be due not necessarily to the skill of the preacher, but to the editing of Ibn Qutaiba.

As we look at some of the sermons, some historical and biographical information will be given about the principal personalities quoted, as this will often help to put the content of a sermon into a more interesting personal context and perspective.

Before giving the sermons of others, Ibn Qutaiba states that he himself has studied the sermons of the Prophet, Muḥammad.

In the sixth century of the Christian era, Arabia was riddled with idolatry and paganism, although both Judaism and Christianity were known and practised to a certain extent. In the wealthy trading city of Mecca, in about 570, Muḥammad was born. Orphaned early in his life, his childhood passed uneventfully, although it may well have been marked with a certain sense of insecurity, as he tended animals around Mecca. As a young man, he was given a commission to supervise a trading caravan going to Syria, and this occupation would bring him into contact with Christians and Jews, and with the wider ideas of a more civilized society.

At about the age of forty, now secure in a happy marriage, Muḥammad spent much time thinking about God and man, and eventually felt himself called to preach about God. So Muḥammad proclaimed his message in the face of a stubborn, and indeed at times uncomfortable and dangerous, opposition. He was not at first the preacher of a new faith, but concentrated on the basic truths of monotheism, such as the Jews and Christians accepted. It was only later in his mission that a new faith developed, and Islam adopted its characteristic features.

Inspired as not many other men have been, Muḥammad preached from about 610 until his death in 632. In the early part of his ministry, while he was at Mecca, his message, as revealed by the Koran, is firm and simple, stressing the unity of God, and laying emphasis on the Last Judgment, when the dead would be raised and everyone judged by his actions in the present life, and the pious would go to Paradise and the wicked to Hell. In the later part of his mission, after the flight from Mecca to Medina in 622, Muḥammad became more of an earthly potentate and had to direct his activity also into secular channels. Consequently, much of the later revelation deals with matters of legal, social and political interest, and religious fervour is less noticeable. Muḥammad's character may have deteriorated somewhat through the acquisition of power, but there can be no doubt of his sincerity as far as his fulfilling God's purpose was concerned: this was an end to which he continually strove, even if his means of attaining it were sometimes not of the most honourable.

While not giving any of them in their entirety, Ibn Qutaiba quotes what was the standard beginning of the majority of Muḥammad's sermons. Although Muḥammad was an inspired man, and parts of the Koran are of incomparable beauty, the quotations given by Ibn Qutaiba are almost platitudinous in their content, and by no means stimulating.<sup>1</sup> 'Praise be to God. We praise Him, we ask Him for His help, we believe in Him, we put our trust in Him, we ask Him for forgiveness, we turn repentant to Him, we seek refuge in God from the evil of our souls and from the wickednesses of our deeds. He whom God guides aright cannot be led astray, but him whom God lets go astray none can guide aright. I testify that there is no god but God in His unity, who has no partner.' This is in fact an adaptation of the opening Sura, or chapter, of the Koran: while it contains many truths, and while it is the most frequently recited Sura of all, it is

<sup>1</sup>In the translations, certain words have been added in places to make more intelligible what in Arabic may be a very concise phrase. Such words will not normally be put in square brackets unless they are added by way simply of commentary or clarification.

far from being among the most impressive.

More interesting is part of one particular sermon, which runs as follows: 'Oh people, there are signposts for you, so follow your signposts, and there is a goal for you, so try to attain your goal. For the believer is between two fears: between a fixed term [part of his life] which has passed, which he does not know what God will make of it, and between a fixed term [the other part of his life] which remains, which he does not know what God has decreed in it. So let the servant of God prepare for himself from himself, and from this world for the next, and from his youth before old age, and from his life before death. He who holds fast to the spirit [of the teaching and example] of Muḥammad, for him shall what is after death be pleasing, and there is no abode after the life of this world except Paradise or Hell.' We see here the traditional stress of Islam on man's 'fixed term': God has predestined all things, and man's actions are ordained in the Heavenly Book, which decrees what is to happen.

The new faith had already started to spread to a limited extent during Muḥammad's lifetime, but it was under his successors that an Arab empire was established. The death of Muḥammad in 632 presented a temporary crisis for the theocratic state of Islam in the form of a succession problem, but this was resolved by prompt action, and Abu Bakr became the first Caliph, or 'Successor' (of Muḥammad). Abu Bakr and his three successors, 'Umar ibn al-Kharrāb, 'Uḥmān ibn 'Affān and 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, are known as the Rāshidūn, or Orthodox Caliphs. Under the first three of these the new faith spread and an Arab empire grew rapidly. While there can be no doubt that many of the new Muslims were genuinely religious and pious, it must also be admitted that the lure of booty and the pleasures of Paradise (the automatic prize of him who fell in battle fighting for Islam, and the picture of which they understood in purely material terms) were the motivating factors which drove many others, on whose hearts and lips Islam sat but lightly.

Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq was the father-in-law of Muḥammad, and one of the first people to become a Muslim. On the death of Muḥammad, he was appointed the first Caliph. As Muḥammad had left no provision for succession after his death, Abū Bakr was virtually imposed on the community as leader by what amounted almost to a coup d'état. He was an old man when he assumed office and was renowned for his simplicity and piety. In office, however, he proved himself to be quite aggressive, and it was under him that the Muslim armies started their conquests, most of the Arabian peninsula being brought under the control of Medina in his short Caliphate.

Valuable light is thrown on the character of Abū Bakr in his short sermon when he was appointed Caliph. It is of interest to note, even before we look at the sermon, that Abū Bakr climbed the pulpit, but then came down one step from the place where the Prophet used to stand: thus started the tradition whereby, since that time, the sermon should not be delivered from the top step of the pulpit, a place which Muḥammad alone was worthy to occupy. Abū Bakr said: 'I was given charge of governing you, but I am not the best man among you. But God sent down the Koran and the laws of the Prophet. So know, oh you people, that the wisest thing of all is piety, and the most stupid thing is impiety. . . . I am an imitator, but not an initiator, so if I do well, then help me, and if I deviate somewhat, then strengthen me. This is what I have to say, and I ask almighty God for forgiveness for me and for you.'

A later sermon, containing a simple but relevant message, confirms and elucidates this initial view of Abū Bakr's character. We see the old gentleman almost begging his audience to pity and help him. He was a simple old man with a big responsibility, and this sermon, with its quiet, pleading tone, stands in marked contrast to some of those by later rulers, whose tone was forceful and almost bullying. 'Verily the most miserable of people in this world and the next are rulers. . . . What is the matter with you people? You are swift to speak ill words. The ruler, when he governs, God makes him shun what is in his own hand and makes him desire what is in another man's hand. He diminishes part of his life and infuses anxiety into his heart. He is envious of a little and vexed with a lot, he is disgusted with opulence and the pleasure of beauty is severed from him. He does not make use of example, nor does he rely on trust. He is like a defective coin and a deceptive mirage, outwardly cheerful but inwardly sad. When his breath stops and his life ebbs away and he dies, God settles his account, and God's reckoning is severe and He gives little pardon. Is it not the case that it is the poor who receive mercy? The best ruler is he who believes in God and governs in accordance with the Book of God and the law of His Prophet.'

As was stated above, Abū Bakr was a very pious, simple man, and another of his sermons contains a simple but pointed message. 'I enjoin upon you the fear of God in His unity, and that you praise Him as He deserves, and that you mix desire with fear, and importuning with requesting, for God praised Zachariah and his family, when He said [through the Koran]: 'They used to vie in good deeds and call upon Us, out of longing and fear.' Then know that God has bound your souls with His truth, and therefore has taken your oaths, and has purchased from you what is small

and transient for what is large and eternal. This is the Book of God, given to you, whose wonders do not pass away and whose light is not extinguished: so believe it, and accept the advice it gives, and draw enlightenment from it against the day of darkness. Then know that your comings and goings in the morning and evening are in a fixed term, knowledge of which has been hidden from you, and if you are able to do something that may not be accomplished unless you are doing it for God, then do it, for you will certainly not be able to do it except for God. Strive in gentleness, and [beware of being] a people who fixed their terms for others and forgot their own souls: and how many of you will be like them. So make haste, and be saved. Verily, behind you is a questioner whose course is swift, so make haste.' We have here a clear illustration of one of the dominant themes of quite a number of the sermons, the exhortation to beware and be good, and with emphasis placed on God's power.

As Abū Bakr was an old man, 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb was already the power behind the throne (although, it must be stressed, in the most upright way — there was no question of his using his power and influence for his own ends). He was nominated by Abū Bakr to be his successor, and so became Caliph on the latter's death in 634, and ruled for ten years. Stern and strict, he was the undoubted master of the empire, which expanded rapidly during his Caliphate, and was held in deserved respect by his commanders. Although he was the supreme master, his power in no way corrupted him, and he led a frugal life. Like his predecessor, 'Umar, too, was a very pious and deeply religious man.

Ibn Qutaiba gives us only one of 'Umar's sermons, but even from this one example we can discern glimpses of his piety and frugality. 'Read the Koran, that you may become acquainted with it, and act in accordance with it, so that you may be among its people. The truth of the possessor of truth was not made eloquent so that it might be used in rebelling against God. Did not I lower myself from the wealth of God with the role of defender of the orphan? If I were rich, I would refrain from unlawful pleasures, and if I were poor, I would eat in a gentle way as a young bedouin kid would: by nibbling and not be chewing.'

The third Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, was already an old man of seventy when he assumed office. A venerable figure, he was sincerely religious, modest and amicable, and affectionate in his manners when dealing with his subjects. When he assumed office the empire was largely at peace, and although further conquests did follow during his Caliphate, from 644 to 656, it was mainly a period of consolidation.

Although 'Uthmān was undoubtedly pious, he was in some ways a weak

character, dominated by his greedy relatives, and the fact that members of the 'Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe were appointed to most of the high positions in the empire caused considerable unrest, aggravated by the fact that the 'Umayyads had been relatively late converts to Islam, and their morals even at this time often left much to be desired. This unrest, fanned by comparative idleness on the part of the troops, and the resurgence of inter-tribal friction, led to a revolt and the eventual murder of 'Uthmān by fellow Muslims.

Only a few days after the murder of 'Uthmān, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib was pressed to assume the Caliphate. A cousin and the son-in-law of Muḥammad, 'Alī was one of the very first people to become a Muslim, and during the early days he has distinguished himself in battle fighting for the cause of Islam. Older now, his impetuous nature had moderated somewhat, and he was at this time, 656, by far the most prominent Muslim alive.

On becoming Caliph, 'Alī unfortunately made several early mistakes. He attempted to dismiss 'Uthmān's nominees from their high positions, but although they had been the objects of complaint under 'Uthmān, they now became, following his murder, the injured party. If 'Alī had left them in office, at least temporarily, he certainly could not be accused of nepotism, as he was not an 'Umayyad, but belonged to the Hāshmite clan of the Quraysh tribe. It was also suggested that he was too slow in attempting to bring 'Uthmān's murderers to justice: in fact, he was probably undecided as to what steps to take immediately.

Most of 'Alī's Caliphate was taken up with a civil war, principally against the 'Umayyad governor of Syria, Mu'āwiyā, a civil war in which 'Alī was loath to embark, and several times he attempted to resolve matters by diplomacy before being forced to engage in battle. After an eventual uneasy and unsatisfactory division of the empire, 'Alī was murdered in 661.

The sermons we have of 'Alī show two different tones. He was a pious man, and we see in one sermon a simple but relevant message to the people, and again the theme of death and fixed terms appears. 'This world has fled and has announced its farewell, and the next world has approached and is on the point of arising. Today is the training ground and tomorrow is the race. Is it not the case that you are at the moment in days of hope, after which is death? So he who is remiss in the days of his hope before the coming of his death, his work is lost. So therefore work for God in love just as you work for Him in fear. For I can see only Paradise where he who seeks it may lie, and only Hell where he who flees it may lie. Him whom truth does not profit, falsehood injures, and him whom guidance

does not make straight, confusion leads astray. You have been ordered to be on your way, and have been directed to provisions. The greatest fear I have for you is following your own inclination and the length of the period of hope.'

By contrast with this quiet tone, we also see 'Alī using stronger language as he reprimanded the people after the murder of 'Uthmān, although there is still a strong religious element in his words. 'Oh people, you have the Book of God and the law of your Prophet. Let no accuser accuse anyone except himself.... He who was rushed upon has passed away, he was cut down and has perished. The right and the left are misleading, the centre is the main way. The well traced road is the continuing existence of the Book and the influence of Prophecy. Verily God has disciplined this nation with two disciplines: the whip and the sword, and there is no clemency with them as far as the leader is concerned. So conceal yourselves in your houses, and put right your dissensions, for repentance is behind you. Whoever refuses to associate with the truth shall perish. There have been matters in which you have leaned on me, for which, as far as I am concerned, you were neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. By God, if I wish to say something, then I shall certainly say it. May God forgive what has passed. Look, and if you do not know, then remain in ignorance, but if you do know, then tell others. There is truth and there is falsehood, and they are applicable to everyone.'

Even stronger is the tone of another sermon of 'Alī, delivered when one of his agents was killed, in which one can almost visualise him sneering contemptuously at the people. The Arabs have always been a very proud people, boasting about their own prowess and valour, and for their pride to be hurt is a sore wound. So here we see 'Alī catching them where it hurts most by making them feel small. At the same time we see his own typically Arab pride emerging as he rubs salt into their wound by recalling his own achievements – and yet his own pride does not strike us as being at all offensive. 'How surprising is the diligence of these in their falsehood and your remissness where the truth is concerned. Shame on you and sorrow when you have become a target which is aimed at, you are attacked and do not attack in return, you are raided and do not raid back, and God is rebelled against and you are content [i.e. you do not care]. If I order you to go against them in the heat, you say: "It is such heat of summer – give us a delay until the heat has passed." And if I order you to go against them in winter, you say: "Give us a delay until the winter has passed, this is the season of bitter cold." All this is a fleeing from the heat and the cold, but how much more, by God, shall you

flee from the sword, you likenesses of men but not really men. With the minds of babies and the intellect of women, you have misrepresented my views with rebellion and desertion, until the Quraysh said: "Ibn Abī Tālib is brave, but he does not know a thing about war." Curse them! Is there a single one of them who has a greater stamina in war or longer experience than I? I started in war when I had not yet reached the age of twenty, and here I am now and I have passed sixty, but there are no views for one who is not obeyed.'

With the murder of 'Alī in 661, the period of the Rāshidūn ended and the 'Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs began. The 'Umayyads were descended from the same tribe as Muḥammad, but from a different clan, and as Muḥammad preached his message they had been his most bitter opponents. Although there were some pious and religious Caliphs among the 'Umayyads, the majority of them were worldly, and used religion only as a convenient tool at times.

The murder of 'Alī left Mu'āwīya the sole and undisputed ruler of the Arab empire. The first Caliph not chosen for his pre-eminence in the religious sphere, he was the founder of the 'Umayyad dynasty, and proved himself to have a number of excellent qualities as a statesman. When he became Caliph, the administration of the empire was decentralized, the anarchic nature of the former nomads was manifesting itself again, and there was general instability and lack of unity, since the murder of 'Uthmān and the civil war which followed had weakened the religious and moral bond which held the Muslims together. Mu'āwīya's solution to the problem was to start changing the theoretical theocracy of Islam into an Arab monarchy, in which the unifying bond would be neither religious nor purely moral, but the loyalty of the Arabs to their accepted head, regarding his authority rather as an extension of that of the former tribal *sheikh*. Following this style of authority, therefore Mu'āwīya was a good organizer, and from his time onwards the various provinces had judges, treasurers and commandants of police, in addition to governors.

Despite the high praise which Mu'āwīya justly deserves as a ruler, some of the temporal aspects of his rule and character brought adverse criticism, in particular from some of the historians, who saw him as the first king in Islam, an abhorrent title which implied a purely temporal sovereignty. Though his piety may perhaps occasionally be suspect, he was nevertheless one of the best of the 'Umayyad rulers, who left to his successors an example of clemency, energy and great statesmanship.

Ibn Qutaiba unfortunately records only one sermon of this great ruler. Quite strong in parts, it contains some quiet, rather moving sentiments

later, and has a very effective last sentence. 'Oh people, we have indeed come upon a time of deviation from the right course, a serious period, in which the doer of good is counted as being a doer of evil, a time in which the unjust man increases in pride, we do not profit by what we have come to know, nor do we ask about what we are ignorant about, and we do not fear the Day of Judgement until it comes upon us. People are of four sorts. There is the person whom nothing will prevent from causing dissension in the earth but self-indulgence, weariness of his intensity and the smallness of his resources. Then there is the person who unsheaths his sword, assembles his horses and infantry, and makes known his evil designs. He has got ready and destroyed his religion for worldly vanities, and he seizes his opportunity either through a troop of horsemen which he leads or a pulpit into which he climbs, and how bad are these two aspects which you seek as a prize for yourself, instead of what God [wants you to have]. [Third] there is the person who seeks the life of this world with the deeds of the next (but does not seek the next world with the deeds of this): he has humbled himself and slowed his steps, tucked up his garment and adorned himself for fidelity, and has adopted the fear of God only as a means for rebellion. And [fourth] there is the person whom meanness in his heart and severance from his cause hinder from doing the wish of the ruler, and whose situation falls short of his hope, and who finds the name of contentment sweet, and who is adorned with the dress of an ascetic, and still there is for him neither starting-place nor place of return. And so there remain the men whose eyes remembrance of the return has lowered and fear of a crowd has caused their tears to flow. They are among a frightened runaway, and someone afraid and concealed away, and a muzzled mute, and one who prays sincerely, and someone hurt through loss of a child, whom piety has made humble and weakness has enveloped. They are in a brackish sea, their mouths are dried and their hearts ulcerated, they have been warned until they are tired, oppressed until they are weak, and killed until they are few in number. So let this world in your eyes be smaller than a grain of acacia and the clippings of wool, and be warned by him who was before you, lest he who comes after is warned by you. Shun this world as blameworthy, for it has shunned those who were more passionately devoted to it than you.'

Mu'āwiya's successor was his son Yazīd, who ruled from 680 to 683. He was a shallow character, renowned for his frivolity and dissipated pastimes. Much of his Caliphate was taken up with fighting, not by him personally, but as a result of those who were opposed to him.

One of the most notable features of his Caliphate was the massacre of

Ḥusayn at Kerbala. 'Alī, whom we met above, was both the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, and his children were therefore direct descendants of the Prophet. One group of people argued that the Caliphate should remain in the family of 'Alī and his descendants, thereby ensuring that the Caliphs would be direct descendants of Muḥammad, and these people were known as the Shī'a, or "party." The massacre of Ḥusayn, the son of 'Alī and the grandson of the Prophet, at Kerbala gave a new significance to the word Shī'a, and those who supported 'Alī and Ḥusayn now became THE Shī'a. Still existing today as one of the sects of Islam, the Shī'a proved to be a disruptive element during the 'Umayyad Caliphate, and one of the factors which brought about its overthrow. We will see the Shī'a mentioned later.

We have already seen a sermon couched in mildly strong language, as delivered by 'Alī. In a similar vein is one by 'Utba ibn Abī Sufyān, the governor of Miṣr at the time of Mu'āwīya and Yazīd, and the firm-handed son of a famous warrior father – even if the latter's efforts were initially directed against the Muslims before his conversion. As well as stating some simple basic facts, 'Utba talks firmly to his subjects, although his tone moderates later. 'Oh people of Miṣr, our remonstrance has lasted a long time: you are at the spears' edges and the swords' points, so that we have become a bone in your uvulas which makes your throats swallow, and dust in your eyes on account of which your eyelids blink. When the nakedness of the truth was hard upon you as something binding, and the bonds of falsehood were removed from you as a freedom, you spread the news about [the death of] the Caliph and wanted to weaken the authority, you mixed the truth with falsehood, and your oldest compact with it is new! So gain your souls, since you have forfeited your religion. This is the book of the Commander of the Faithful,<sup>2</sup> with cheering news about him and a new promise from him. Know that our authority will be over your bodies as well as your hearts, so set aright for us what is apparent, and let us entrust you to God in what is hidden. Show good openly, even if you conceal evil, and you shall indeed reap what you sow. We trust in God and ask for His help.'

Another sermon of 'Utba is again in mildly strong terms, and in it, in a good simile, he stings his audience with a reproach and leaves them in no doubt as to his policy for dealing with them. 'Oh people of Miṣr, praise of the truth sits lightly on your tongues and you do not do it [i.e.

<sup>2</sup>'Utba was holding one of Mu'āwīya's books in his hand as he stood in the pulpit.

abide by the truth], but as for the blame of falsehood, you do that, like an ass which carries books whose portage weighs heavy on it, but the knowledge contained in them does not benefit it at all. By God, I will not prescribe to cure you with the sword as long as I can do it with the whip, and I will not go as far as the whip while the lash suffices me: but I will not be slow to use the former if you are not reformed by the latter. "What is done is done, and he who warns is like him who gives good news."

We have already seen examples in previous sermons of both pride and reproach. In a sermon of 'Abdullah ibn Zubair we have both in one sermon. 'Abdullah ibn Zubair was not an Umayyad, and his period of power, from 683 to 692, was mainly occupied in civil wars. He was proclaimed Caliph in the Hijaz during the official Caliphate of the frivolous Yazīd, and in 683 he was recognized by most of the provinces. In 685 'Abd al-Malik became the official Caliph, and he sent his iron-handed general Hajjāj to the Hijaz, where 'Abdullah ibn Zubair had his seat, to put an end to the anti-Caliphate. 'Abdullah ibn Zubair was killed in the siege of Mecca in 692.

His sermon, in which he praises his brother Mus'ab, who was his representative in 'Iraq, and slates and sneers at his enemies, contains some beautiful balance and expression. 'Praise be to God who exalts whom He wills and abases whom He wills. But He shall not abase him who has the truth with him, even if he is just one individual, nor shall He exalt him whose party consists of the friends of the devil, even though he may have all mankind with him. News has come to us from 'Iraq which has both grieved us and rejoiced us: Mus'ab has been killed. As for why this has grieved us, it is the fact that for the death of a relation there is a burn which his relation feels at the misfortune: then after it those who experience it are converted to patience and condolence. As for why this has rejoiced us, it is our knowledge that his death was a martyrdom, and that this is the best thing both for us and for him. Is it not so that the people of 'Iraq are a people of schism and hypocrisy, who sold him for the smallest price they could get for him? By God, we shall not die through *habaj*,<sup>3</sup> we shall only die through being killed in battle, a violent death with spears under the screen of swords, not like the Banū Marwān die. For if a man from them should be killed, it would be in Ignorance [i.e. a non-Muslim] and not in Islam. The world is deprived of the noblest ruler (memory of whom shall not perish, and whose authority shall not be abased): and if it comes to me, let me not take it lightheartedly, and if it is

<sup>3</sup>*Habaj* is the inner bark of a type of thorny bush. Sometimes camels eat this, which causes the formation of fat in their bellies and may prove fatal.

taken away from me, let not weep not for it as if I were a mentally disordered imbecile.'

Under the 'Umayyads there were a number of very firm, iron-handed governors or generals, two of whom were Ziyād and Hajjāj. Ziyād, a former supporter of 'Alī, was won over to the 'Umayyad cause, and was appointed by Mu'āwiya to be governor of Baṣra. Baṣra was a centre of the Shī'a (of whom we made mention above), and Ziyād ruled over it with an unrelenting hand. He was later appointed to be governor of Kufa, and this position made him the absolute ruler of the eastern part of the empire. With a trained bodyguard who acted also as spies and police, Ziyād ruled as a tyrant with a rod of iron, and mercilessly tracked down anyone who dared to favour the cause of 'Alī's descendants or revile the 'Umayyads.

In one sermon of Ziyād we can detect the firm attitude of this ruler, as he shows the people the pattern of what his rule will be. 'Mu'āwiya has said what you already know, and the witnesses have witnessed what you have already heard, and I am a man from whom God protected what the people destroyed, and joined what they cut. We have governed, and we have been governed by governors, we have ruled, and we have been ruled by rulers, and we have found that this matter can only be put right by firmness but without roughness, and by gentleness but without weakness. By God, there is no lie which has more witnesses than the lie of an Imām from a pulpit: so if you hear a lie from me, then blame me for it, and know that there are others like it within me. And if you see me ordering you to do something, then carry it out humbly. By God, I will have many struggles with you, so let every man among you be warned that he may be one of my struggles. By God, I will surely take the healthy with the sick, and the obedient with the rebellious, and him advancing with him retreating, so that your conduct may become straight for me, and so that the speaker may say, "Sa'ad was saved, but Su'aid was killed."<sup>4</sup>

In another sermon of Ziyād we can see even more clearly, from its content and tone, just how firm a governor he was, as he warns the people to beware. 'Food and drink are forbidden me until I make the ground level by destruction and burning. Beware of me at night, for I will not be given a hedgehog as a gift, except I shed its blood. And beware of me with longing after the Jāhiliyya,<sup>5</sup> for I will not find anyone calling after it except I cut out his tongue. You have occasioned certain events, and we have occasioned a punishment for every sin, so whoever drowns anyone, I

<sup>4</sup>This is a well-known Arabic saying.

<sup>5</sup>The age of Ignorance, before the coming of Islam.

will drown him, and whoever bums anyone, I will bum him, and whoever pierces anybody's house, I will pierce his heart, and whoever ransacks a grave, I will bury him in it alive. So restrain your hands and your tongues, that I may restrain myself with you.'

The most famous iron-handed general of all must surely be Hajjāj. A young schoolmaster who took up arms in support of the 'Umayyads, he was made governor of Arabia after the defeat of the pretender 'Abdullah ibn Zubair, of whom we made mention above, who had held the title and power of Caliph until he was killed in 692. In two years Hajjāj had subdued the Hijaz and Yemen, and in 694 he was sent by the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik to carry out a similar task of subjugation in turbulent and dissatisfied 'Iraq, whose inhabitants were described as 'people of schism and hypocrisy.' Here the Shī'a and Khārijites, another anti-'Umayyad sect, continually made trouble for the 'Umayyads. The unexpected arrival of Hajjāj, in disguise, at the mosque of Kufa, his removal of his disguise and revelation of himself from the pulpit and the fiery oration which he delivered are among the most dramatic and popular episodes told in Arabic literature. Hajjāj told the people in unequivocal terms what his policy would be, and let them know from the very beginning that his would be no kid-glove methods when it came to dealing with a troublesome and disloyal populace. He made known his policy, and he certainly adhered to it! He relentlessly tracked down the enemies of the 'Umayyads, and neither was any head too mighty for him to crush, nor any neck too high for him to reach. Whether his drastic measures were justifiable or not, they certainly succeeded, and he restored order throughout the vast territories of his viceroyalty.

The tone of some of the sermons of Hajjāj and their content leave nothing to the imagination, and the audiences who heard them would be left in no doubt about the attitude and firm policies of their governor. Hajjāj warns his audiences to beware and to be on their guard, frightening them with his threats. It must also be added that, content apart, there is some very fine language in some of Hajjāj's sermons.

The first sermon of his which we have from Ibn Qutaiba is that which he delivered when he entered Baṣra. 'The Commander of the Faithful has cast away his rods before him, and he has found me the most bitter with rods, and the most hard in afflicting people, and he has sent me to you. By God, I shall cut you like the acacia tree, and peel you off like aloes, I shall strike you as one would the sides of a camel, until your conduct is made straight for me, and until the speaker may say, 'Sa'ad was saved, but Su'aid was killed".'

At one point during his governorship, a rumour was spread around that Hajjāj had died. On hearing this rumour, Hajjāj's rejoinder in his sermon was as follows: 'A group of people of 'Iraq, a people of schism and hypocrisy, the devil has set them at variance, and they said, "Hajjāj has died, Hajjāj has died!" Take it easy! Does Hajjāj hope for goodness only after his death? By God, it does not cheer me up that I am not dead, and that I have the life of this world and what is in it. I have not seen God pleased to give immortality except to the lowliest of His creatures, with whom is the devil. The honest servant [Solomon] called God and said, "Lord, forgive me, and give me a kingdom such as no one after me may have." And He gave that, except for immortality. And anyone might be that man! You are all of you that man.'

On another occasion, when Hajjāj wanted to go on the pilgrimage, he left the people with this message: 'Oh people, I want to make the pilgrimage, and I have appointed as my deputy over you this son of mine, and I have commanded him the opposite of what the Prophet commanded the 'Anṣar.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet commanded that their good deeds should be welcomed and that their evil deeds should receive a blind eye: but I have ordered him not to welcome your good deeds, and not to turn a blind eye to your evil deeds. You will be saying after my departure things which only the fear of me stops you from expressing now. You will be saying after I have gone, "God will not give him good company." I shall be quick to give you my reply: "God will not give you a good deputyship."

Ibn Qutaiba quotes two more short sermons of Hajjāj, and they are interesting in that their tone is quite contrary to the tone of those sermons of his which we have already seen. In them there is no frightening warning to the people to beware of Hajjāj himself, but a quiet message containing some simple truths: 'Oh people, guard your private parts, and keep your desires hidden, for they are the weakest things when they are given, and the most rebellious things when they are asked for. I have seen that patience in avoiding crimes against God is easier than patience against the chastisement of God.' And the following sentiments are similar: 'May man set aright his work, may man settle accounts with himself, may man think about what he reads in his register and sees in his balance, may man be restrained in his passion, and be good in his purpose, may he take hold of the rein of his heart as he takes hold of the rein of his camel, and if it leads him to obedience to God, may he follow

<sup>6</sup>The 'Anṣār, or Helpers, were the people of Medina who helped Muḥammad after he was forced to flee from Mecca in 622.

it, but if it leads him to rebel against God, may he refrain from being led.'

In 717 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz became Caliph. Like the previous 'Umar, he was a deeply pious man, who was also a wise and conscientious ruler, even if somewhat financially inept. Under his quiet justice, the various internal feuds that were tearing the empire were calmed. Although the lot of the subject peoples was not unduly harsh, one class of them did have cause for deep resentment, and these were the Mawālī, the non-Arab converts to Islam. Islam stated that theoretically all Muslims were equal, but the Arabs, who set themselves up as an élite ruling aristocracy, had no intention of admitting non-Arabs, even if they were Muslims, to equality. Thus there was by this time considerable discontent in the empire among the Mawālī, not only on account of the high-handed attitude which the Arabs had adopted, but also because the Mawālī were having to pay heavier taxes than they should have been paying, as they were classed as non-Muslims for the purpose of taxation. The pious 'Umar regarded this as wrong, and he decreed that the Mawālī should be taxed as Muslims, and thus pay the lower rate. It was this factor which largely led to the settled atmosphere. (Unfortunately, however, 'Umar's successors were to reverse his policy and reverted to taxing the Mawālī as non-Muslims, with the result that what had previously been smouldering resentment among the Mawālī in the provinces was to burst into flame, and it was to be largely the cause of the eventual overthrow of the 'Umayyad dynasty in 750).

It had also been the practice in the mosques in Syria not infrequently to call down curses upon the head of 'Alī and his descendants. Under 'Umar alone it is said that this practice was discontinued. He forbade it probably not only because he felt it was wrong, but also possibly in an attempt further to heal the feuds which had so often plunged the empire into civil war.

In the one sermon of 'Umar's which Ibn Qutaiba gives us, we see a quiet message of hope and encouragement, but not without its warning to be good. 'You have not been created in vain, and you shall not be left forsaken. There is for you a place of return in which God will come to judge you and separate you. He who is outside the mercy of God is an unbeliever and is lost, and he is deprived of Paradise, whose breadth is the heavens and the earth. Do you not know that a man is not in safety tomorrow unless he exercises caution today and is afraid, and trades the transitory for the lasting, and little for much, and fear for safety? Do you not see that you are in the spoils of the destroyers, and they will also be there for those remaining after you until they are returned to the

best of the inheritors? Then every day you will be seeing someone who has died depart morning and evening to God, so that you conceal him in a cleft of the earth in the belly of a cleft without a pillow and unarranged: he has abandoned his loved ones and entered into the earth and faced the reckoning. He is bound by his deeds, rich in what he has left and poor in what he has brought forward. So fear God before His protection comes upon you. And I am saying this while I know that not one of you has more faults than I have, so I ask for God's forgiveness and I turn repentant to Him.'

The last 'Umayyad Caliph of whom we have a sermon is Yazīd ibn al-Walīd, the Caliph in 744. Yazīd's predecessor, his cousin Walīd (743-744), was a drunken libertine, and Yazīd led the revolt against him. Yazīd appears to have been of a serious disposition, and although he claimed to be religious, his opinions were unorthodox, as he was a Qadarite. (The Qadarites held the doctrine of man's free-will, whereas orthodox Islam laid stress on predestination, a corollary of the almighty power of God, so strongly emphasized in the Koran).

One of Yazīd's first actions on becoming Caliph was to ban musicians and singers, who were thought of as having an anti-religious influence, and who had been well patronised by Walīd. Indeed, Walīd had been generally reckless in spending public money, and had tried to win support by increasing the pay of the army. Yazīd, careful and conscientious, felt that this rise had been too great and more than the treasury could afford, and so he ordered it to be reduced. This immediately won him the nickname of 'Reduction Yazīd,' by which name he is known in history.

On the whole, the conscientious Yazīd might well have made a successful Caliph and have restored, even if only temporarily, the crumbling fortunes and prestige of the 'Umayyads. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to be able to do so.

The sermon of Yazīd which Ibn Qutaiba gives us is his initial one on becoming Caliph. It resembles rather a 'party political broadcast,' in which Yazīd attempts to justify his actions in leading the revolt against Walīd, and in which he shows his plans for the future. 'Oh people, by God I did not attack [Walīd] joyfully or with recklessness, or coveting the world nor covetous of the sovereignty, nor is there any self-praise in me. I was a misuser of it, if God does not have mercy on me, but I attacked [him because he was] angry with God and His religion, calling upon God and the law of His Prophet, when the signposts of guidance were thrown down, and the light [of truth] of the people of piety was extinguished, and the obstinate oppressor appeared, deeming lawful every forbidden thing,

and embarking on every new doctrine, disbelieving in the day of reckoning. He is the son of my uncle by relationship and my equal in merit. When I saw that, I consulted God in the matter of him and asked Him not to entrust me with myself. I called in this matter concerning him among the people of my province, who answered me, until God gave the servants a rest from him and purified the country of him by His power and His strength, not by my power and strength.

'Oh people, it is for you that I should not put one stone on top of another, or one brick on top of another, and I will not dig a river, or bury wealth, and I will not give it to a partner or child, nor transfer it from one country to another until I have stopped the poverty of that country and the destitution of its people, and if some remainder should be left over, I will transfer it to the country which controls it. I will not confine you in your armies in enemy country, so as to stir you and your families up to rebellion: nor will I lock my door against you while the strong among you are eating up the weak, nor will I constrain other people to bear your tax so as to cause them to emigrate on account of it and to cut off their descendants. It is my duty to provide pay for you every year and an allowance for you every month, so that the condition of all you may be made equal and the best among you may be like the worst among you. If I fulfil my promise to you, then it is up to you to hear and obey and give help and assistance: and if I do not fulfil my promise to you, then you may disown me. Unless you force me to do evil, I will repent for what you have received from me, and if you know anyone who (may stand in my place who) is acquainted with righteousness, let him give himself to you like him whom I gave you, and if you want to acknowledge him as ruler, then I will be the first to acknowledge him as ruler and enter into obedience to him.

'Oh people, there is no obedience to any created thing in disobedience to the Creator. I am saying these my words, and I ask almighty God for forgiveness for me and for you.'

Mention was made above, in connection with Yazīd, of the Qadarite sect of Islam. It might therefore be appropriate to mention here finally a sermon by a member of another Islamic sect, Abū Hamza, who was a Khārijite. Whereas the Qadarite school was the earliest philosophical school of thought in Islam, the Khārijites were the first religio-political sect. During the struggle between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyā, some Kufans, former supporters of 'Alī, who fervently wanted to see the rule of God prevailing, were disgusted by the struggle for worldly power which was being waged, and withdrew their support from 'Alī, thus getting the name of

Khārijites, or 'Seceders.' They then became 'Alī's deadly foes, and in later years frequently rose up in armed opposition to the prerogative which the Quraysh tribe had claimed for themselves that the Caliph should be one of their number. In their efforts to maintain the primitive, democratic principles of Islam, the puritanical Khārijites were responsible for the flowing of much blood in the first three centuries of Islam.

The sermon of Abū Hamza, which starts with a brief historical account of some of the Caliphs, clearly shows what was the attitude of the Khārijites to some of them. Abū Hamza first mentioned the Prophet, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and then went to say: "'Uthmān ruled, and for six years he acted in the way of life of his two companions, though he was inferior to them. Then he acted in the later six [years of his reign in a way] which defeated [the achievements of] the former six, then he died. Then 'Alī ruled, and he did not arrive at any firm resolution concerning the truth, nor did he set up any signpost for it, then he died. Then Mu'āwiya ruled, the curser of the Prophet of God and the son of his curser, who adopted the servants of God as his own property, and the wealth of God as [property of] the state, and His religion as corruption. Then he died, and they cursed him as he had cursed God. Then Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya ruled, Yazīd the drunkard, and Yazīd with the ticks, and Yazīd the sluggard, the sinful in his belly and the effeminate in his private parts.' Ibn Qutaiba tells us that Abū Hamza then continued to relate the Caliphs one by one. When he reached 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz he avoided mentioning him, and then came to Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (this is *not* the same as the Yazīd quoted above, but a previous Caliph). Of him, Abū Hamza said: 'He eats what is unlawful, and wears vestments of a thousand dinars, in which the material has been fretted and the veils torn, friendship on his right and security on his left make him wealthy, until if drink were fully to get hold of him he would cut his clothes, then turn to one of them and say, "Can I not fly?" Yes! Fly to Hell!'

So much for what a Khārijite thought of some of the Caliphs. However, when he comes to mention some of his own Khārijite companions, Abū Hamza's tone is altogether different, although still quite in character. The picture which he gives us is rather touching, even if it is at the same time rather gruesome. 'Young men reaching a mature age in their youth, their eyes tender from [seeing] evil, their feet heavy from [suffering] falsehood, emaciated through worship, jaded through sleeplessness, God looks at them in the middle of the night, their spines bent on account of parts of the Koran [i.e. performing the movements accompanying their prayers], the earth has eaten away their knees and hands and foreheads.

They made light of that in seeking God, so that when they saw the arrows which were aimed, and the lances which were pointed, and the swords which were drawn, and the squadron was assailed by thunder with the shrieks of death, the youth from among them walked straight on, until his legs parted from the neck of his horse, and the beauty of his face was dyed with blood. And the creatures of prey of the earth hastened to him, and the birds of the sky came down on him, and how many an eye was there in the beak of a bird, while its partner wept in the middle of the night from fear of God! And how many a hand separated from its wrist while its partner relied upon it in the middle of the night in bowing down to God!

Having seen various individual sermons, let us now see what general features can be applied to most of them. Most noticeable is the fact that they are short and to the point, although it must again be stressed that abridgement and alteration may well have been effected by Ibn Qutaiba in his editing. Often the first sentence has some force in it, containing a message or idea, which is then expanded and illustrated. The clauses are generally short, and thus the reader's (or perhaps one should more accurately say originally the hearer's) attention is held. By means of these short clauses one gets the impression that the preacher is trying to instil his message into his audience and get it across with some force. To the short clauses must be added the effects of simile, metaphor and, to a less extent, imagery. There are numerous occasions when good balance of words or phrases in the sentence is prominent, and repetition, a device considered good in Arabic, is noticeable. Examples of these devices can be seen in the previous study of individual sermons, but they are often difficult or impossible to represent with justice in translation. To the Arabs these features commended themselves, since the Arabs have infinite pride in their language and in its ability to move and stimulate those who hear it.

Turning to the content of the sermons, we find that this is varied and by no means exclusively of a religious nature. Indeed, there is very little ethical teaching in them, and that teaching which is of a religious nature is mainly general and superficial. But Islamic sermons at that time played a much wider role than one would expect, or indeed tolerate, a church sermon to do now. Not only was the sermon used for spreading religious information, but it served also as a propaganda machine and as a way of providing what might nowadays be classed as 'party political broadcasts.' To view the latter uses as purely secular and therefore unacceptable

would be to impose too strict a limit on the sermons. Islam being a theocracy, church and state were closely linked and perhaps even, theoretically at least, indivisible, and therefore politics might have had a place in sermons. At times, however, the bounds were exceeded – by no stretch of the imagination could some of the fiery sermons of Hajjāj be regarded as being to the greater glory of God.

Turning our attention, however, to those sermons which are of a religious character, let us see what common features emerge from their content and tone. By and large, the same basic facts are reiterated again and again, and the predominant theme may be summarised as 'Beware (of the Judgement) and be good.' Islam as a religion lays much more stress on the power and might of God than on His love, and it is generally true to say that, certainly in the early decades of Islam, a Muslim's feeling towards God was much more one of fear than love. So in the sermons one notices the emphasis placed on God's power, inscrutability and awfulness, and man's virtual ineffectualness without Him. There is, however, a lack of deep theological philosophy in the sermons, although this omission is excusable in two respects, and perhaps even justifiable in the first of the two. First, a sermon in the mosque was not the place for deep philosophy: what was needed was a message that could be understood, and the significance of which could be appreciated – for the preacher to have attempted anything more would have been for him to lose the attention of his hearers, and his message would consequently have been wasted. Second, the preacher could probably not have included any deep philosophy in his sermon even if he had wished. During the first Islamic century the Muslims had been quite content to accept Islam simply, without any wish to argue over points of theology. It was not until the later part of the second Islamic century that they learned how to argue over theological questions.

As a result of the differing purposes and messages of the sermons, so likewise considerable difference in their tone can be noticed. The tone ranges from a plaintive call for help through pleading and admonishing to frightening and threatening. The tone and the content together often throw valuable light on the character of the preacher, and it is in this respect that an otherwise dull content may hold some historical interest.