other ruler the power which might lead him to act unjustly. On the other hand, Sunnis, 'Twelver' Shi'is and Isma'ilis each in their own way wanted an authority which could both uphold the law and maintain the order of society; once the first age was over, the consequence of this was the *de facto* separation between those who maintained the law (for Sunnis the '*ulama* and for Shi'is the hidden *imam*) and the men of the sword who had the power to enforce temporal order.

THE POWER AND JUSTICE OF GOD

The question of human authority was in a sense a reflection of more fundamental questions which sprang from the Qur'an: questions about the nature of God and His dealings with mankind, about His unity and justice.

The God of the Qur'an is transcendent and one, but the Qur'an speaks of Him as having attributes – will, knowledge, hearing, sight and speech; and in some sense the Qur'an is His Word. How can the possession of attributes be reconciled with the unity of God? How, in particular, can those attributes which are also those of human beings be described in terms which preserve the infinite distance between God and man? What is the relationship of the Qur'an to God? Can it be called the speech of God without implying that God has an attribute of speech similar to that of His creatures? These are problems of a kind inherent in any religion which believes that there is a supreme God who reveals Himself in some form to human beings. For Christians, the revelation is that of a person, and the basic theological question in the early centuries was that of the relationship of this Person with God; for Muslims, the revelation is a Book, and the problem of the status of the Book is therefore fundamental.

The question of the nature of God leads logically to that of His dealings with men. Two impressions were certain to be left on the mind of anyone who had read the Qur'an or heard it being recited: that God was all-powerful and all-knowing, but that in some way man was responsible for his actions and would be judged by God for them. How could these two statements be reconciled with each other? Once more, this is a problem inherent in a monotheistic faith: if God is all-powerful, how can He permit evil, and how can He justly condemn men for their evil deeds? To put it in broader terms: is man free to initiate his own acts, or do they all come from God? If he is not free, can it be just for God to judge him? If he is free, and can therefore be judged by God, will he be judged by some principle of justice which he can recognize? If so, is there not a principle of justice determining God's acts, and can God then be called all-powerful? How will Muslims be judged: by their faith alone, or by faith together with verbal expression of it, or also by good works?

Such questions are implicit in the Qur'an and confronted anyone who took it seriously, but systematic thought about them involved not only a text to consider but a method of doing so: a belief that knowledge could be attained by human reason working according to certain rules. This belief in reason rightly directed had formed the intellectual life of the regions into which Islam spread, including Hijaz; there are traces of dialectical reasoning in the Qur'an itself. It is not surprising therefore that, perhaps by the end of the first Islamic century or the seventh century AD, the earliest extant documents show it being applied to the elucidation of the Qur'an in Hijaz, Syria and Iran. The first groups which can be called schools of thought appeared: those who argued that man has free will and creates his own acts, and those who maintained that he has no free will, and also that God has no attributes which He shares with men and by which He can be described.

In the middle of the second Islamic century (the eighth century AD) there emerged a school in a fuller sense, of thinkers with clear and consistent views of a whole range of problems; but of course to call them a school does not imply that they all had exactly the same ideas or that their ideas did not develop from

one generation to another. These were the Mu'tazilis (or 'those who keep themselves apart'). They believed that truth could be reached by using reason on what is given in the Qur'an, and in this way they reached answers to questions already posed. God is One. He has no attributes which belong to His essence. In particular, He has no human attributes; the Qur'an could not have been spoken by Him – it must have been created in another way. God is just, and so bound by a principle of justice; man must therefore be free, for to judge men for acts they are not free to commit would not be just. If human acts are free and subject to judgement, it follows that faith is not enough without good works; a Muslim who is guilty of grave faults cannot be called either an infidel or a true believer, but has a position in between the two.

At the same time, however, there was emerging another way of looking at these problems, one more cautious and more sceptical about the possibility of reaching agreed truth by reason, and more conscious too of the danger to the community of carrying rational argument and disputation too far. Those who thought in this way placed the importance of maintaining the unity of God's people above that of reaching agreement on matters of doctrine. For them, the word of the Qur'an was the only firm basis on which faith and communal peace could be placed; and the Qur'an should be interpreted, in so far as interpretation was necessary, in the light of the habitual practice of the Prophet and his Companions, the *sunna*, as transmitted to later generations. This was a mood which must have existed from an early time, but by its nature it tended to crystallize into a body of doctrines rather later than the more speculative schools. The person most responsible for formulating the mood was Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), who himself was persecuted under Ma'mun. The only stand to be taken is on the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet, and these show us that God is all-powerful, and His justice is not like human justice. If the Qur'an ascribes attributes to Him, they must be accepted as divine attributes, not on the analogy of human ones, and without asking how they inhere in Him. Among these attributes is the Qur'an. It is His speech, because the Qur'an itself says so; and it is uncreated, for 'nothing of God is created, and the Qur'an is of God'. Man should respond to God's Will by acts as well as faith. This concept of a God who judges in mysterious ways may seem a harsh one, but implicit in it is a kind of assurance of some ultimate divine care for the world, even if its ways are not those of men, and that what has happened in their history is part of God's Will for them. With this body of ideas Sunnism becomes articulate.

The controversy between the rationalists and the followers of Ibn Hanbal continued for a long time, and the lines of argument changed. Later Mu'tazili thinkers were deeply influenced by Greek thought; gradually they ceased to be important within the emerging Sunni community, but their influence remained strong in the Shi'i schools of thought as they developed from the eleventh century. A thinker who broadly supported the 'traditionalist' position used the method of rational discourse (*kalam*) to defend it: al-Ash'ari (d. 935) held to the literal interpretation of the Qur'an, but maintained that it could be justified by reason, at least up to a certain point, and beyond that point it must simply be accepted. God was One; His attributes were part of His essence; they were not God, but they were not other than God. Among them were those of hearing, sight and speech, but they were not like the hearing, sight and speech of men; they must be accepted 'without asking how' (*bila kayf*). God is the direct cause of all that happens in the universe, and is not limited by anything outside Himself. At the moment of action He gives men the power to act; He wills and creates both what is good and what is evil in the world. The proper response of man to God's revealed Word is faith; if he has faith without works he is still a believer, and the Prophet will intercede for him on the last day.

In Ash'ari's thought there is an emphasis on the importance of not quarrelling in religion, and also of accepting the rule of the *imam* or caliph and not revolting against it with the sword. There were differences of opinion which persisted, however: about the legitimacy of a metaphorical as against the literal interpretation of the Qur'an; about the precise sense in which the Qur'an is 'uncreated' – does this refer to

the text itself, or only to the transmission of the text to men? – and about the necessity of works as well as faith. Such differences, however, did not usually lead to conflict within the Sunni community.

THE *SHARI'A*

Except by implication, the Qur'an does not contain within itself a system of doctrines, but it does tell men what God wishes them to do. It is above all a revelation of His Will: what men must do to please Him, and how they will be judged on the last day. It contains some specific commands, for example in regard to marriage and the division of a Muslim's property after death, but these are limited, and for the most part God's Will is expressed in terms of general principles. Commands and principles concern both the ways in which men should worship God and those in which they should act towards one another, but to some extent this is an artificial distinction, for acts of worship have a social aspect, and acts of justice and charity are also in a sense directed towards God.

Reflection upon the Qur'an and the practice of the early community soon produced general agreement upon certain basic obligations of the Muslim, the so-called 'Pillars of Islam'. These included the oral testimony that 'there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God'. Secondly, there was ritual prayer, with certain forms of words repeated a certain number of times with particular postures of the body; these should take place five times a day. Other 'Pillars' were the giving of a certain proportion of one's income for specified kinds of work of charity or public benefit; a strict fast, from daybreak to sunset, throughout a whole month of the year, that of Ramadan, ending in a festival; and the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, at a fixed time of the year, involving a number of ritual acts, and also ending in a festival celebrated by the whole community. To these specific acts was also added a general injunction to strive in the way of God (*jihad*), which might have a wide meaning or a more precise one: to fight in order to extend the bounds of Islam.

From the beginning, however, more was needed than an agreement about the essential acts of worship. On the one hand there were those who took the Qur'an seriously and believed that it contained by implication precepts for the whole of life, since all human acts have significance in the eyes of God and all will be taken into account on the Day of Judgement. On the other there were the ruler and his deputies, needing to make decisions on a whole range of problems, and both their own convictions and the terms in which they justified their rule would lead them to decisions which at the very least would not be in contradiction of what the Qur'an was taken to mean or imply.

In the period of the first caliphs and the Umayyads, therefore, two processes took place. The ruler, his governors and special deputies, the *qadis*, dispensed justice and decided disputes, taking into account the existing customs and laws of the various regions. At the same time, serious and concerned Muslims tried to bring all human acts under the judgement of their religion, to work out an ideal system of human conduct. In doing so they had to take into account the words of the Qur'an and to interpret them, and also the transmitted memories of the community: how the Prophet was supposed to have acted (his habitual behaviour or *sunna*, increasingly recorded in 'traditions' or *hadiths*); how the early caliphs made decisions; what the accumulated wisdom of the community believed to be the right way to act (the *sunna* of the community).

These two processes were not wholly different from each other. The caliph, governor or *qadi* no doubt would modify existing customs in the light of developing ideas of what Islam demanded; the scholars would introduce into their ideal system something taken from the inherited customs of their communities. During the early phases, however, they remained broadly separate. Within each process, moreover, there were different tendencies. Given the way in which the empire was created and administered, the customs