



AMR BE MA'RŪF

AMR BE MA'RŪF, Arabic *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-monkar* “enjoining what is proper or good and forbidding what is reprehensible or evil,” one of the principle religious duties in Islam. The Qur'ān addresses the Muslims stating “You are the best community brought forth for mankind, enjoining what is proper and forbidding what is reprehensible and believing in God” (3:110). It describes Moḥammad as practicing this toward the People of the Book (7:157), represents Loqmān as commending it to his son (21:16), and admonishes the Muslims to exercise it (3:104), placing it on a level with prayer and almsgiving (22:41). Although the formula could be interpreted to refer to the preaching of faith in God and the precepts of Islam to the infidels and to the *ḡhād* in order to reduce them to obedience (see Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. M. Šāker, Cairo, 1374-/1955-, VI, pp. 90ff., XIII, p. 165), it came soon to be understood primarily as a duty of Muslims to induce their fellow Muslims to live and act in accordance with the Qur'ān and the religious law and to refrain from acts objectionable under the *šarī'a*. In particular the Kharijites proclaimed it as a slogan in their censure of the unlawful and unjust conduct of the Muslim rulers and of the Muslim community at large supporting them, justifying their armed revolt and struggle to enforce adherence to the divine law. Against their advocacy of violence, Ḥasan Baṣrī (d. 110/728) espoused it as a principle of moral admonishment of the rulers and members of the Muslim community. Though he, too, vigorously denounced the evil conduct of the caliphs and governors, he rejected any armed revolt or resistance, holding that a genuine *taḡyīr al-monkar* (abolition of evil) could come about only through repentance (*tawba*), not through the use of force (see H. H. Schaeder, “Ḥasan



al-Baṣrī: Studien zur Frühgeschichte des Islam,” *Der Islam* 14, 1924, pp. 50, 57; H. Ritter, “Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit I: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,” *Der Islam* 21, 1931, pp. 50-52, 66). The question whether and to what extent force is to be used, especially against the unjust government, became a key issue in the interpretation of the duty of *amr be ma'rūf*, dividing those ready to revolt in order to restore justice and the rule of the *šarī'a* and those preferring to preserve the internal peace of the Muslim community, even if it meant bending to the force of the oppressors.

In its Kharijite interpretation, the principle was commonly espoused by Islamic movements of revolt, even those of Sunnite character, and by movements seeking to restore the rule of the law in time of civil war and the breakdown of regular government. It figures prominently in Ibadite creeds and theological treatises (see A. de C. Motylinski, “L'Aqida des Abadhites,” in *Recueil de Mémoires et de Textes publiés en l'Honneur du XIV Congrès des Orientalistes*, Algiers, 1905, pp. 509, 521). The creed of 'Āmer b. 'Alī Šammākī (Jabal Nafūsa, 8th/14th century) affirms: “We hold that enjoining what is proper and forbidding what is reprehensible to the best of one's ability is obligatory at all times.” The founders of the Mu'tazilites, initially a reformist movement ready to resort to the sword if necessary, adopted the principle as one of the basic points of its missionary program. According to Aš'arī (*Maqālāt*, p. 278), all Mu'tazilites except Ašamm taught that ordering what is proper and forbidding what is reprehensible is obligatory with the tongue, hand, and sword, according to one's ability. They held that the Muslims are obliged to remove the unjust ruler or pretender by force if they are able to do so. As the Mu'tazilites later were reduced to a theological school, they lost much of their interest in the principle without, however, changing their doctrine in substance. Under it, they commonly discussed also the question of the imamate and repentance. Abū 'Alī Jobbā'ī affirmed that the obligatoriness of the principle rested on reason, not merely on revelation, while his son Abū Hāšem held this to be true only in the case of someone being pained by the evil act of another, while in all other cases it rests exclusively on revelation. The qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār supports the latter view (*Šarḥ al-oṣūl al-ḳamsa*, ed. 'A. 'Oṭmān, Cairo, 1384/1965, pp. 742-44). 'Abd-al-Jabbār further maintains that in respect to *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf* the mere enjoining, without the use of constraint or force, is sufficient, while in *al-nahy 'an al-monkar* prevention, if necessary by beating or fighting, is incumbent (*Šarḥ*, p. 745). Among the Shi'ites, the Zaydites, who made revolt against the illegitimate government a cornerstone of religion, championed the duty of *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-monkar*



in its Kharijite interpretation. It figured regularly in the official call for allegiance and support (*da'wa*) which Zaydite 'Alid pretenders to the imamate issued at the outset of their career and, with the adoption of Mu'tazilite theology, was discussed as one of the basic points of the creed (see C. van Arendonk, *Les Débuts de l'Imāmat Zaidite au Yemen*, tr. J. Ryckmans, Leiden, 1960, index, s.v. *al-amr bil-ma'rūf*). Zaydite doctrine affirmed that the duty was incumbent on every Muslim subject to the law, if necessary with the use of the sword, whether an Imam is present or not (see R. Strothmann, *Das Staatsrecht der Zaiditen*, Strassburg, 1912, pp. 92ff.; Ebn al-Mortaḏā, *al-Baḥr al-zakḳār*, Cairo, 1368/1949, V, pp. 464-67).

Sunnism, supporting the unity of the Muslim community (*jamā'a*) under the established caliphate, opposed the Kharijite interpretation of the obligation of *amr be ma'rūf* and was generally more reserved in dealing with it as a religious duty, though never denying its obligatoriness. Sunnite *feqh* works did not normally treat it at all. Though the brief creed of Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-Feqh al-akbar*, affirms it, reflecting the critical attitude of the early Morḗ'a towards the Omayyad government, later Sunnite creeds rarely refer to it. Ebn Taymīya, representing a Sunnite traditionalist outlook, mentions it in his *al-'Aqīdat al-wāseṭīya*, but characteristically adds immediately the duty to carry out the pilgrimage, Holy War, and communal prayer on Fridays and holidays with the rulers, be they virtuous or profligate (*fossāq*; Ebn Taymīya, *Maḡmū'at al-rasā'el al-kobrā*, Cairo, 1323/1905, I, p. 405). Sunnite *kalām* works more often include a chapter on *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-monkar*. That this was due to the influence of the Mu'tazilite precedent was recognized by the Ash'arite Jovaynī, who in his *Ketāb al-eršād* (ed. M. Y. Mūsā and 'A. 'A. 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1369/1950, p. 368) remarks that the subject was traditionally treated by the *motakallemūn* among the *oṣūl*, though it belonged more properly to the concerns of the scholars of the law.

While prevention of *fetna*—civil war and rebellion against the established government—was a major concern of Sunnite doctrine, it did not restrict *amr be ma'rūf* to verbal admonition. A well-known tradition of the Prophet affirmed: "If one of you sees something reprehensible, let him correct it with his hand. If he is unable to do so, with his tongue. If he is also unable to do so, with his heart. This is the minimum of faith." In accordance with this Hadith, Aḡmad b. Ḥanbal in his responses to questions stated that he was hopeful that anyone correcting in his heart something reprehensible witnessed by him would be saved, but someone using his hand was more virtuous. Manual



actions recommended by him were the throwing down of chess games, if the players would not heed orders to quit, and the breaking of lutes and drums. He does not seem to have envisaged the use of arms (see Abū Dāwūd Sejestānī, *Masā'el al-Emām Aḥmad*, 2nd ed., Beirut, n.d., pp. 278-80). The use of force, especially of arms, in executing the communal duty of *amr be ma'rūf* was mostly considered as restricted to the government. In its public aspects, this duty, also known as *ḥesba* (q.v.), since the early 3rd/9th century came to be vested in particular in an official called *moḥtaseb*. The function of this official, who had previously been known as the *ṣāḥeb al-sūq*, supervisor of the market, now was most specifically identified with the active pursuit of *amr be ma'rūf* in public.

While the use of force in fulfilling the duty against an unjust ruler and officials was mostly excluded, verbal admonition and preaching to them was considered particularly meritorious. The Prophet was quoted in a relevant Hadith as stating: “The most excellent of the martyrs of my community is someone who stands up to an unjust imam, enjoining him to do what is proper and forbidding him from what is reprehensible, and is killed by him for that. He is a true martyr; his place in paradise will be between Ḥamza and Ja'far.” Minor currents in Sunnism authorized stronger action against the ruler violating the law. Thus the Andalusian Zahirite Ebn Ḥazm argued that anyone inviting to fulfill the duty of *amr be ma'rūf* and acting in accordance with the Qur'ān, Sunna, and justice cannot be considered a rebel (*bāḡī*), and that every Muslim is entitled to offer armed resistance to transgressions of the ruler against himself, particularly in respect to his lawful property (Ebn Ḥazm, *al-Moḥallā*, ed. M. Ḳ. Harrās, Cairo, 1964, XI, pp. 119-20).

The responsibility of every Muslim to practice *amr be ma'rūf* was powerfully reaffirmed by Ḡazālī in his endeavor to renovate the spirit of Islam. In his *Ketāb eḥyā' 'olūm al-dīn* (Cairo, 1356/1937, VII, pp. 4-93), he devoted a lengthy section to this duty, describing it as “the most important pivot (*al-qoṭb al-a'zam*) in religion”; for its realization God had sent all the prophets, but in fact it had become an obliterated sunna. The major conclusions of his discussion may be summarized here, though with due notice that his treatment is in some points more radical than prevalent Sunnite doctrine. *Amr be ma'rūf* is a collective duty (*farḥ kefāya*), established by Qur'ān, Sunna, and consensus, incumbent (*wāḡeb*) on every capable Muslim unless performed by someone else. Thus it is incumbent also on the Muslim sinner (*fāseq*)—against the doctrine of some scholars—though his capability may be more restricted



because his admonishment of other Muslims tends to be ineffective. It is licit for Muslim minors, but not for infidels, since it involves a claim of authority (*tasalloṭ*) and non-Muslims must be kept in a state of humiliation (*doll*). The permission of the ruler or governor is no condition for performing the duty, as some people have maintained. Against the doctrine of his teacher Jovaynī, Ġazālī extends this permissibility to the use of arms and also to the mobilization of gangs of armed helpers (*tajyīš al-joyūš*) without authorization of the ruler, even if it may lead to civil wars (*fetan*).

In the case of rulers, Muslim subjects are obliged and authorized to perform only the two mildest kinds of verbal reproof, namely instruction (*ta'rif*) and admonition (*wa'z, naṣḥ*), because it is prohibited to violate the respect (*karq al-hayba*) due to them. Thus it is illicit to take illegally seized property from a ruler's treasury in order to return it to the rightful owner, to slash the seams of his cloths of silk, or to break the vessels of wine in his palace. Coarse language (*takšīn*) toward the unjust ruler is also forbidden if it may incite to revolt, but is recommended (*mandūb*) if only the speaker is likely to be harmed. Similar restrictions apply to the relationship of a son to his father and mother, but not of a pupil to his teacher.

Incapability annulling the obligatoriness of *amr be ma'rūf* includes to varying degrees fear of loss of life, health, knowledge, property, and reputation. Knowledge that word or action will be ineffective also voids the obligatoriness, though it is still desirable (*yostaḥabb*) in order to display the principles of Islam (*eẓhār ša'ā'er al-Eslām*) if there is no danger of harm. Contrary to the prevalent view, Ġazālī also holds it to be desirable if someone knows that he can prevent something reprehensible even though he himself, but not others, will be harmed. Anyone unable to prevent a *monkar* is obliged to leave and avoid the place where it occurs.

The duty of *amr be ma'rūf* applies to matters recognized as reprehensible by consensus (*ejmā*), not to matters subject to different legal interpretations (*ejtehād*). Thus it is not licit for a Shafe'ite to practice it toward a Hanafite or vice versa in matters where their school doctrine differs. This does not apply to theological heresies, like those of the Mu'tazilites and the Ḥašwīya. These must be censured in towns in which Sunnism is prevalent. In towns in which heretics are present in strength so that censuring them may lead to civil war (*fetna*), it is permissible only with the authorization of the ruler. The duty applies only to open acts witnessed by a Muslim. Spying (*tajassos*) and trying to uncover hidden offenses is forbidden. Thus it is illicit to search someone



hiding something in the shape of a bottle of wine under his clothes or to break into a house on the mere suspicion that a *monkar* is being committed. If, however, there are two reliable witnesses or clear evidence, like music being heard through the walls, it is permissible to do so without asking the permission of the occupant. The duty applies only to the actual prevention of offenses in the present. Punishment for past offenses are a prerogative of rulers. Similarly, measures to prevent putative future offenses, like breaking vessels commonly used for wine, are licit only when ordered by the ruler.

Ġazālī defines five or seven stages of increasing strength in carrying out the duty of *amr be ma'rūf*, reaching from mere instruction and admonition to the use of arms and mobilizing gangs of supporters. Anyone taking up the duty must commence with the mildest forms, and only if ineffective must he proceed step by step to the higher stages. Since the primary purpose is to prevent the *monkar*, it is licit, in using force, to destroy property of the offender or to wound and, unintentionally, kill him. Thus it is appropriate to inflict a wound on someone trying to protect wine from being spilled with his body, and it is licit to fight and kill someone trying to cut his own limb. Here, too, Ġazālī appears to be more radical than the prevalent view expressed in Ebn Taymīya's stipulation that the harm caused by preventing the reprehensible act must not exceed the harm caused by the act itself (Ebn Taymīya, *al-Amr be'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-monkar*, ed. Ş. Monajjed, Beirut, 1396/1976, p. 17).

The Imamite Ši'a as a whole, or a group of it, is commonly accused in Mu'tazilite and Sunnite sources of contravening the consensus of the Muslims by denying the duty of *amr be ma'rūf* during the absence of the Imam. Ġazālī asserts flatly that the Rāfeza prohibit *amr be ma'rūf* until the rise of their impeccable Imam and suggests that they be denied judicial protection of their rights against wrongdoers since it is a form of *ma'rūf* and *nahy 'an al-monkar*. These accusations are unfounded. The Imamite doctrine in the matter closely resembles in substance the Sunnite doctrine and is, if anything, stated more emphatically. Imamite *feqh* works, in contrast to the Sunnite ones, regularly contain chapters on *al-amr be'l-ma'rūf*. Some prominent Imamite scholars, like Shaikh Ṭūsī and Moḥaqqueq Ḥellī, considered it an individual duty (*farz 'ayn*), thus heightening the responsibility of every Muslim for it, while others, like the Šarīf Mortazā, Ebn Edrīs Ḥellī, and 'Allāma Ḥellī, agreed with the prevalent Sunnite and Mu'tazilite thesis that it is a collective duty. Consistent with his aim of strengthening the basis of the duty, Ṭūsī in his *al-Eqtešād*, followed by



‘Allāma Ḥellī and a few later scholars, argued that it was known by reason (*‘aqlan*), though in his *al-Tebyān* he supported the more common thesis, also upheld by Mortazā, Ebn Edrīs, Moḥaqqeḡ Ḥellī, and others, that it could be known only by revelation and consensus. Nor was the Imamite doctrine and practice of precautionary dissimulation (*taqīya*) the exact opposite of the practice of *amr be ma’rūf*, as has been suggested, since the former required hiding specific Imamite beliefs and practices while the later duty applied mostly to matters about which there was a consensus among Muslims and was, moreover, suspended in the case of fear for life and property which was considered justification of the practice of *taqīya*.

In agreement with the Sunnite position, Imamite doctrine holds that *amr be ma’rūf* is not obligatory if someone knows or considers it likely that he or a third party will be harmed or that it will be ineffective. Concerning the use of force, opinion was divided. Ṭūsī maintained in his *al-Nehāya* and *al-Eqteṣād* that the use of force inflicting pain or wounds or loss of life is not permitted without the authorization of the Imam or the ruler of the time. In his *al-Tebyān*, however, he supported the view of Mortazā that it is licit without permission as long as putting an end to the *monkar* and not inflicting harm, is intended. This view was upheld also by Ebn Edrīs Ḥellī. Moḥaqqeḡ and ‘Allāma took an intermediate position, admitting the use of force to the degree of beating the offender but rejecting the use of the sword without the authorization of the Imam. Imamite doctrine prohibits armed rebellion against the unjust ruler before the appearance of the Qā’em (Mahdī) Imam. It considers verbal admonition of the unjust ruler obligatory within the regular condition for *amr be ma’rūf*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

About Sunnite doctrine see also Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-solṭānīya*, ed.

M. Enger, Bonn, 1853, pp. 404-32.

Abū Ya’lā Farrā’, *al-Mo’tamad fī oṣūl al-dīn*, ed.



W. Z. Ḥaddād, Beirut, 1974, pp. 194-98.

Ġazālī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī oṣūl al-dīn*, Cairo, 1344/1925, pp. 84-91.

Jorjānī, *Šarḥ al-mawāqef*, ed.

Th. Soerensen, Leipzig, 1848, pp. 331f.

For Imamite doctrine, relevant *aḵbār* of the Imams are assembled by Ḥorr ʿĀmelī, *Wasāʿel al-šīʿa*, ed.

ʿA. Šīrāzī, Beirut, 1391/1971, VI/1, pp. 393-601.

Ṭūsī, *al-Tebyān fī tafsīr al-Qorʿān*, Naǧaf, 1376-83/1957-63, II, pp. 548ff.

Idem, *al-Nehāya*, Beirut, 1390/1970, pp. 299ff.

Ebn Edrīs Ḥellī, *al-Sarāʿer*, Qom, 1390/1970, pp. 160ff.

Moḥaqqueq Ḥellī, *Sarāʿer al-Eslām*, ed.

M. J. Maǧniya, Beirut, n.d., I, pp. 159ff.

Idem, *al-Moḵtaṣar al-nāfeʿ*, Naǧaf, 1383/1964, p. 143.

Šādeq Maḥdī Ḥosaynī, *Šarḥ tabṣerat al-motaʿallemīn*, Naǧaf, 1382/1962, I, pp. 298-300.

There is no comprehensive study of the subject. Some aspects are treated by I. Goldziher, *Mohammad Ibn Toumert et la Théologie de l'Islam dans le Nord de l'Afrique au XIe Siècle*, Algiers, 1903, pp. 62, 85-102.

A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, pp. 106ff.

W. Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 16-18.

L. Gardet, *La Cité Musulmane*, 4th ed., Paris, 1976, pp. 92, 184-88.