

Sainthood Between the Ineffable and Social Practice:  
Jesus Christ in the Writings of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī  
and Later Sufism  
by  
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Near Eastern Studies)  
In the University of Michigan  
2019

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“Reality is perplexity, perplexity is anxiety and movement, and movement is life  
... no stillness, no death. Only being and no nihility!”  
[Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*]

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## Dedication

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

May Divine Blessings, Prayers and Salutations be upon our Master Muhammad, His Family,  
Companions and Inheriting Saints,

For the sake of God, the Ever-Eternal, giver of Muhammadan Lights in breaths of Christic  
fragrance that transform hearts to loving artists!

To the principle of Divine Praise, Beloved Muhammad, you are the beginning and end of  
inspiration ... You are the Word, Spirit and Breath!

To my loving parents, Zohair and Sawsan ... What words can express gratitude for your  
unconditional love, sustenance and care?

To my guide and embodiment Prophetic Light, Mawlana Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani and  
Mawlana Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, you are the ink, pen, hand and spring of my creativity!

To my beloveds, Fatima and Zahra, you prove to me every day the boundless frontiers of  
Muhammadan Beauty and Divine Mercy!

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Alexander Knysh who believed that a Muslim student with a Master's Degree in Computer Science has enough passion to obtain a Doctoral Degree in Islamic Studies. Since being accepted at the Middle Eastern Studies Department, seven years ago now, Professor Knysh has mentored me kindly yet vigorously, inculcating in me more than just a nuanced understanding of Islam, Sufism and Ibn al-ʿArabī, he has also helped transform me into a writer with a conviction.

My gratitude also goes to the rest of my committee members. What can I say about my dear friend, brother and mentor Professor Rudolph (Bilal) Ware! Between our timeless *munājāt*, intimate conversations, about Shaykh al-Akbar, Sīdī ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh and Shaykh Aḥmadū Bāmbā, I have found in Professor Ware a kindred spirit and mirror through which I can witness the sacred task of the academic.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Professor Andrew Shryock since my first year as a graduate student. The two courses I have taken with him, alongside the countless hours of *musāmarāt*, informal discussions, about everything from Sufism to Johnny Cash, have engraved in me the art of thinking critically and perceiving the spirits of lingering questions.

The single course I have taken with Professor Paul Johnson on *Theorizing Religion* has shown me the limitless ways to contemplate the mystical experience. Professor Johnson's openness and brilliant guidance helped me to undertake the seemingly indomitable task of engaging Ibn al-ʿArabī meaningfully with contemporary theory.

Professor Michael Bonner's perspectives on Islam have been a tremendous source of knowledge and guidance to me prior to even beginning my studies at the University of Michigan. Thenceforth, his direction and advice to engage the Judeo-Christian heritage of al-Andalus has opened new frontiers for my research into the Greatest Master's Christ.

I must also thank my parents, Zohair and Sawsan, who tirelessly worked to keep me focused on completing this dissertation while also taking care of my new family. In this regard, my wife Fatima and beloved daughter Zahra remain the continuous light of inspiration and support in my life. While my wife has been my spring of motivation in all things, my daughter has helped me appreciate the necessity of a child's innocence in approaching the unknown of history.

My ink, pen and creative hand of inspiration is my guide Mawlana Shaykh Hisham Kabbani. His wife, Hajja Naziha, and him have taken me as their son and shown me the light in all things; for that, I'm forever indebted. I must also thank my dear friend and brother in *ṭarīqa*, Kamau Ayyubi and his family who constantly help me to perceive the perplexity of my life as harmonious colors on a canvas with a narrative that ends in a good way. Likewise, Ismail and Tazeen, you are

embodiments of the artist in me and have helped me appreciate the necessity of embracing music as a language of expression, even in an endeavor as academic as this dissertation.

Mention must also be made of my high school English teacher, friend and mentor Ryan Goble who just recently obtained his own doctoral degree in education. I thank him for single-handedly introducing me to the nuanced contours of contemporary American history and culture and for continuing to be a creative spring in my life and work.

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## List of Abbreviations

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s <i>al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya</i> (Meccan Openings)	<i>FM</i>
Ibn al-‘Arabī’s <i>Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam</i> (Bezels of Wisdom)	<i>FH</i>
Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī’s <i>al-Ibrīz</i> (Pure Gold)	<i>IB</i>
‘Alī b. Ḥarāzīm’s <i>Jawāhir al-Ma‘ānī</i> (Jewels of Meanings)	<i>JM</i>

## System of Transliteration for Arabic Letters

’ ء	z ز	q ق
b ب	s س	k ك
t ت	sh ش	l ل
th ث	s ص	m م
j ج	ḍ ض	n ن
ḥ ح	ṭ ط	h ه
kh خ	ẓ ظ	w و
d د	‘ ع	y ي
dh ذ	gh غ	ة <small>in construct state: t</small>
r ر	f ف	

The article: al- and l- (even in front of sun letters)

Short vowels	Long vowels	Diphthongs
u ُ	ū و	aw َو
a َ	ā ا	ay َي
i ِ	ī ي	iy َي
Nunation		uww ُو
an ْ		
in ِ		
un ِ		

## Abstract

This dissertation investigates the various portrayals of *ʿĪsā b. Maryam* (Jesus son of Mary) in the thought of the Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) and later Sufism, specifically the teachings of two celebrated North African mystics, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1719) and Aḥmad al-Tījānī (d. 1815). After discussing the organization and methodology of the research in the Introduction, chapter two explores the corpus of secondary references on Jesus in Islam and Ibn al-ʿArabī studies. Thenceforth, chapters three and four delve into Christ’s presence in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Meccan Openings* and *Bezels of Wisdom* respectively. The results of this analysis is then used to gauge the son of Mary’s depictions in the teachings of al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī; all the while situating Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own image in these later mystics’ Weltanschauungs. Lastly, the concluding chapter synthesizes the results from chapters three, four and five in an attempt to answer some overarching questions regarding the importance of Jesus for Sufi mystics like Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī. In this regard, the emphasis in this final chapter pertains not only to the concepts in these saints’ writings, but the contexts in which these concepts arise and insights that they provide into the unique pedagogical and writing styles of these Sufi authors. It is in this last sense that the dissertation contributes to the ongoing research in Sufi intellectual history by also considering the religious concerns and approaches of Sufi figures in Islamic history.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other.

- Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

In *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad criticizes Geertz's approach to religion as being a "modern, privatized Christian one because ... it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than as constituting activity in the world."<sup>1</sup> Instead, Asad proposes that "religious symbols ... cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial."<sup>2</sup>

Social discourse and practice shapes Asad's entire approach to religion. By placing the emergence of religious symbols within the network of power and work in daily human interactions, he removes a certain aura of mystique from Geertz's 'metaphysic.' Instead, he places this otherworldly element of religion at the center of Foucault's 'subject' who is a product of power relations. There, even "thought ... is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave."<sup>3</sup>

Marshall Hodgson, in the introduction to his famous work *Venture of Islam*, seems to agree with Asad's and Foucault's approaches by stating that religion includes "such events and acts as

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<sup>1</sup> Asad, *Genealogies*, 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 327.

form human cultural institutions on the level of public action.”<sup>4</sup> However, he also emphasizes the importance of “special visions of individuals [that] can be crucial. For they prove to be the mainsprings of creativity at the interstices of routine patterns, when exceptional circumstances arise and something new must be found to do.”<sup>5</sup> It is also these ‘mainsprings of creativity’ that lead Hodgson to claim that the religious impulse is “ninety per cent wishful thinking ... [which] is, indeed, rooted deeply in us... Humans live by their illusions: our very words, it has been said, point to what is in fact not there.”<sup>6</sup> This artistry of illusion, Hodgson highlights, springs from our need to make sense of this mundane existence of ours in some larger paradigm; a canvas wherein each of our individual lives constitutes a particular color that adds to the drama of humanity.

In a sense, then, Hodgson is telling us that our religious impulse motivates us to engage in a continuous process of what Levi-Strauss calls ‘intellectual bricolage.’<sup>7</sup> In order to explain away our ‘wishful illusions,’ we constantly forge stories from a limited set of tools around us. Perhaps, as Geertz would concur, these woven narratives can eventually overpower their audience; due to their “aura of factuality.”<sup>8</sup> They escape the boundaries of cognition and imagination and enter the arena of social circulation through written and oral transmission, where they become part of a larger process of collective bricolage, in the hands of scholars and devoted laity alike.

This joint conversation between Hodgson and Levi-Strauss presents a more plausible approach to comprehending that mystical frontier of religion which ventures into the unknown.

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<sup>4</sup> Hodgson, *Venture of Islam I*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>7</sup> Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 11. It is in the manner that Levi-Strauss defines and utilizes ‘bricolage’ and ‘bricoleur’ that I will continue to use it as well throughout the dissertation. The author states: “The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage.’”

<sup>8</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

Beyond Geertz's rigid dichotomy or Asad's overwhelming discursivity of power relations, there needs to be a more nuanced dialogue at the juncture between social phenomena and the sudden instinctual yearnings in particular individuals who usher forth institutions, disciplines and power structures that support and propagate these personal reflections and impetuses.

What remains to be explored is the particular mechanism through which the religious impulse is transformed into a tangible agency in the social sphere. Here, I am not particularly interested in a distant theorization from the outside, but rather a closer understanding of how people, who deem themselves religious, might construe the importance of the metaphysical and other – worldly – components of religion in their lives. In other words, what exactly compels us to engage the unknown? What makes it so attractive?

In *Crossing and Dwelling*, Thomas Tweed provides us with one suitable explanation for the role of mythical bricolage in the religious experience. He states that “religious women and men make meaning and negotiate power as they appeal to contested historical traditions of storytelling, object making and ritual performance in order to make homes (*dwelling*) and cross boundaries (*crossing*). Religions, in other words, involve finding one's place and moving through space.”<sup>9</sup>

These series of dwellings and crossings require us to have a conception of the individual and social reality of religion that is all about movement, not stasis. In other words, even in thought, humans who experience religion are in a constant state of traversal, between one dwelling and the next. Religion, then, is not simply about deserting the physical world for a metaphysical one nor solely a strict life of virtuous activism in order to bring God into the world. Rather, this mythical bricolage is about placing oneself at the seam between the known and unknown. There lies the

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<sup>9</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 74.



network of legitimacy and authenticity for belief in the metaphysical and sacralization of the social phenomena.

The world of the Muslim mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, was one where Muslims wove various narratives from the socio-political dwellings in their surroundings in order to cross the threshold into some larger unknown, in this case, divine providence.<sup>10</sup> In that milieu, religious scholars (e.g. jurists, theologians or Sufi shaykhs) negotiated their power and legitimacy, as representatives of God, by either becoming pious advisors and diplomats for rulers or heads of *madrasas* (religious schools) and *khāniqās* (Sufi lodges). Most often, though, they fulfilled a multitude of these roles simultaneously.

However, the garb of political diplomat or righteous teacher never alternated easily for such individuals. As scholars left the courts of the caliph and went back to their *murīds* (students) in the Sufi lodge or school, traces of their previous engagement always lingered in the vicinity. Thus, for example, the auspicious gifts that the 13<sup>th</sup> century Muslim polymath ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) received during a diplomatic assignment to the Ayyubid court in Cairo and Damascus became a source of polemics upon his return to Baghdad: how can a pious and God-fearing Muslim scholar and mystic like al-Suhrawardī accept such lavish presents from corrupt rulers?<sup>11</sup>

Be that as it may, for all the precarious engagements that figures like al-Suhrawardī were involved in, his cunning lay in the ability to render each of these vocations as a dwelling from

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<sup>10</sup> The term Islamdom was introduced by Hodgson in *Venture* as a reference to those geographic territories ruled by Muslims in pre-modern times. Ibn al-‘Arabī spent the first half of his life in Iberia and North Africa – where he was born – and second half of his life in central Islamdom (Anatolia and seat of the Abbasid caliphate). Therefore, Eastern and Western Islamdom are particularly pertinent in his case.

<sup>11</sup> Erik Ohlander, *Sufism*, 97.

which he and his supporters could always cross over to God. For al-Suhrawardī specifically, this meant that his service for the ‘Abbasid caliph, as a diplomat, was itself a faithful adherence to the prophet Muḥammad’s imperative that the caliphate should remain exclusive to the tribe of Quraysh, of whom the ‘Abbasids were a clan. Similarly, by architecturally organizing his Sufi lodge into public and private quarters, al-Suhrawardī transformed the space from a simple worldly dwelling to a mythological return of Muḥammad’s community. There, among the most advanced *murīds*, the figure of the Shaykh becomes an embodiment of the Prophet of Islam himself.

Fortunately, what we know about Ibn al-‘Arabī’s life allows for an even easier perception of dwellings and crossings. Born in Murcia, Spain, this Muslim mystic spent his entire life journeying from one town, teacher and locale to the next. However, this fact alone does not make Ibn al-‘Arabī particularly unique; for *ṭalab al-‘ilm* (traveling in search for religious knowledge) was the norm for any individual at the time who sought to become a religious scholar. What makes Ibn al-‘Arabī unique, however, is that he always kept the memories of his journey as an ever-expanding toolbox for his very own ‘intellectual bricolage.’

For example, Abū-l-‘Abbās al-‘Uraybī, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s first teacher, remains a recurring name in the latter’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (FM)*, a work that Ibn al-‘Arabī authored in the second half of his life. In other words, places, events and people never leave the Andalusian mystic. Instead, they always seem to find new roles to play here and there in his works. In this light, the same Abū-l-‘Abbās whom Ibn al-‘Arabī disagreed with at a young age about the identity of the

spiritual *quṭb* (pole)<sup>12</sup> returns in the *FM* as an example of a *walī* (Muslim saint) who was also *ʿīṣawī* (a spiritual inheritor from Jesus).<sup>13</sup>

We find the figure of Christ in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought portrayed in a similar fashion as well. The Muslim mystic paints numerous portraits of ʿĪsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary). Each of these depictions allows Ibn al-ʿArabī to cross back and forth from the dwelling of Jesus's flesh to some cosmic phenomenon in an ongoing vast mystical narrative. In the *FM* alone, a multivolume set, Jesus exchanges the garb of teacher, prophet or saint for that of the Word of God, seal of sainthood and Messiah.

However, like the rest of Ibn al-ʿArabī's memories that linger and leave their traces in the rest of his writings, the various images of Jesus in this Muslim mystic's works are not alter egos as much as various angles from which to view Jesus's unique and incomprehensible essence. For example, his portrayal as *kalimat Allāh* (Word of God) is inseparable from his virgin birth or status as a messianic seal of sainthood. In the Akbarian bricolage, these various images are synchronous events in an unfolding mystical narrative.

Moreover, like any character in a myth, the importance of Jesus lies precisely in how his own tale attaches and converses with the other elements of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. It is here that we perceive the most fascinating aspect of this mystic's appropriation of Christ: the son of Mary, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, is a microcosmic human analogue of larger macrocosmic realities in the universe.

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<sup>12</sup> The term *quṭb* is widely circulated among Sufis and refers to a spiritual status, in a cosmological hierarchy of saints, held by a specific person during every age.

<sup>13</sup> See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulfur*, 51, 62. The term *ʿīṣawī* (Jesus-like) was introduced by Ibn al-ʿArabī to refer to *awliyāʾ* (Muslim saints) who, during their spiritual journeys towards God, inherited particular traits and dispositions from specific prophets. In this case, *ʿīṣawī* saints are ones who inherit from Jesus. Ibn al-ʿArabī also stated that there are inheritors from every prophet. Thus, there are *mūsawī* (Moses-like) and *yūsufī* (Joseph-like) saints, just to mention a few.

It is because Jesus is able to embody, within his own being, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysic that he plays such an important role in the other-worldly component of the latter’s thought.

The numerous crossings that Ibn al-‘Arabī undertakes from the microcosmic dwelling of Jesus’s body to the macrocosmic abode in the celestial realms aligns with Geertz’s congruence between “a style of life and metaphysic.” Of course, that style of life for the Muslim mystic is not a material existence completely separate from the world of spirits and mythology. On the contrary, like al-Suhrawardī and other Sufis, Ibn al-‘Arabī sought to perceive the entire physical realm as a *barzakh* (isthmus) and *‘ālam khayāl* (imaginal realm) where spirits and bodies interacted constantly.

If the sacred bodies of saints and prophets, like Abū-l-‘Abbās al-‘Uraybī and Jesus, correspond in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s world to the macrocosmic reality of the universe, then his writings are also a liminal textual space where he could bring these two worlds together. Temporality in all its shades (e.g. past, present, future and even timelessness) as well as ontological realms (e.g. physical or spiritual dominions) collide in the deafening singularity of ink on paper.

As soon as the reader finds himself in a familiar place, such as a cemetery in Murcia, Spain,<sup>14</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī lifts the curtain in the next line to reveal a meeting he had with Jesus, presumably still at the same location, where he repented and “learned the way” at the hands of this prophet.<sup>15</sup> From there, each word on paper corresponds to vast distances that we are forced to travel, either back to the time of Jesus’s conception and his virgin birth or in his future return as the Messiah during the end of times.

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<sup>14</sup> See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulfur*, 36. In his own words, this is where the Sufi mystic had his first *khalwa* (seclusion), inside an open tomb, and continued to repeat formulas of *dhikr* (divine remembrance) until he received his first *fath* (spiritual opening).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

As one pursues this journey through the *FM* and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s second most important work, *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam (FH)*, it becomes clear that the contours of Christ’s image do not necessarily develop over time from ambiguity to clarity. Rather, the son of Mary begins with an already multi-faceted persona that constructs, over time, intricate connections with other aspects of his character and the larger ideas and motifs of the work itself.

With this background in mind, this dissertation investigates this rich portrayal of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, specifically in his seminal works the *FM* and *FH*. After exploring the various mentions of Christ in these two monographs, there will be a survey of the presence of the son of Mary in the writings of Sufi mystics who came after the Andalusian mystic. These are prominent Muslim authors in their own right who also happened to inherit the Greatest Master’s heritage and creatively appropriated his contributions for the purposes of their *Weltanschauungen*.

The organization of the dissertation facilitates the accomplishment of this task, beginning with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and culminating with the contributions of Sufi mystics after him. In this introductory section, chapter 1, I explain the background and motivation behind this research, its structure, methodological considerations as well as the various limitations in terms of breadth and depth. I also posit a few key questions that will be answered in the concluding chapter, using the results of the ensuing analyses.

In Chapter 2, ‘Literature Review,’ I discuss some of the seminal works that have been published in recent decades on the topics of Jesus in Islam and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. In this regard, the monographs that focus on the presence of Christ in the Andalusian mystic’s writings will be given precedence. Thenceforth, I will highlight the shortcomings in these various contributions and current state of research in Ibn al-‘Arabī studies, as well as the significance of this dissertation in addressing these limitations.

In Chapter 3, I explore the presence of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s magnum opus the *FM*. Due to its voluminous nature, the investigation will be restricted to the first quarter of the work, encompassing the first 100 *fuṣūl* (divisions). This discussion will also be classified under four separate motifs: physiology and kinship, the *mi‘rāj* (ascension) narrative, saintology and the esoteric dimensions of *sharī‘a* (divine law). Thenceforth, in the conclusion of this chapter, I will attempt to synthesize the results from these different themes into a holistic portrayal of Jesus in the *FM*.

In Chapter 4, I focus on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s second most important work, the *FH*. In contrast to our restricted investigation in the *FM*, here we will examine all the mentions of Jesus in the various chapters of this monograph. To this end, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first is a close reading of the specific segment in the *Bezels* pertaining to Jesus, while the second addresses his mentions in the other portions. After these two analyses, in a similar fashion to the previous chapter, I will attempt to make sense of the results in tandem with the findings from chapter 2.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the presence of Jesus in the writings of Sufi mystics after Ibn al-‘Arabī. Specifically, I focus on the contributions of two prominent Moroccan Sufi mystics, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1719) and Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815). For each of these figures, I will not only survey the mentions of Christ, but the presence of Ibn al-‘Arabī himself in their teachings. This in order to decipher the extent of the latter’s influence on later Sufism, both generally and as pertaining to Jesus specifically. I will also revisit here our previous understanding of the Akbarian Christ in an attempt to synthesize his image with that found in later Sufism.

In chapter 6, the conclusion, I provide a comprehensive summary of the results from chapters 3, 4 and 5. The focus here will be to analyze the portrayal of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s

thought alongside those emerging in the writings of the later Sufis discussed in chapter 5. The purpose of this synthesis is to ascertain whether the Andalusian mystic's contribution in this area was matched by his successors or perhaps he remains the 'Greatest Master' whose spiritual insight and prolific eloquence is still unsurpassed in Islamic history. Lastly, I will conclude this final chapter with some brief remarks concerning possible, and necessary, areas of future research that emerge from the results of this dissertation.

There are also two appendices provided at the end of this research. The first, Appendix A, is titled "Akbarian Christology" and presents a comprehensive outline of the role that Jesus plays in Ibn al-'Arabī's Weltanschauung. This summary is organized using philosophical categories (e.g. ontology, epistemology, soteriology, eschatology) that are borrowed from Chittick's seminal expositions *Sufi Path of Knowledge* and *Self-Disclosure of God*.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of such an outline is to provide a reference for readers unfamiliar with Ibn al-'Arabī's thought on some key terms and ideas that concern Jesus. Prior to this however, at the end of this chapter, I introduce this topic as a brief introduction into this Akbarian worldview.

As for Appendix B, it presents some preliminary remarks regarding ethnography and its use in some of the chapters of this research. Specifically, I highlight in this addendum the first-hand observations and research I have done throughout my graduate studies while attending gatherings of Sufi *dhikr* (remembrance) sessions in the United States and abroad. All the while, I try to provide a summary of the different Muslim groups in America who espouse some form of Sufism and how Ibn al-'Arabī's thought is appropriated by them. Although this topic does not

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, Chittick did not coin these terms. However, he was the first to utilize them while discussing Ibn al-'Arabī's thought and they have since then gained circulation among specialists.

pertain directly to the focus of this dissertation, it provides a suitable foundation for future areas of research that will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

As for the methodology underpinning this research, it can be situated within two main disciplines. First, my academic and classical training in Islamic studies and Sufism motivates me to focus on the textual heritage of Ibn al-‘Arabī and later Sufi mystics. This means that my exploration of Christ’s image in the Andalusian mystic’s thought and later Sufism mostly follows other surveys of Islamic intellectual history.<sup>17</sup> This also includes a particular attention to what I like to call mystical philology: a careful analysis of the use of Arabic terms and concepts in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and later Sufis. This is an examination that is cognizant of these figures’ meticulous and intentional use of this language in order to convey their enigmatic teachings to the reader.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside this toolset from Islamic studies, I am also keen to include various theoretical considerations from my graduate training in religious studies. This focus is evident in the paradigms mentioned above, such as Tweed’s *Crossings and Dwellings*. Aside from these works, the religious studies’ perspective also emerges in my interest to decipher a particular religious sensibility that is not normally part of a survey on Islamic intellectual history. This is discussed later on in this chapter below, when I focus on the central questions guiding this research. For now, it is sufficient to state that this dissertation’s attentiveness to the figure of Jesus goes beyond a mere development of ideas in Sufi texts, but rather aims at the myriad ways in which this prophet

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<sup>17</sup> A good example in this category is my own advisor, Alexander Knysh’s groundbreaking survey of Sufi history, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*.

<sup>18</sup> As will become clear from the following two chapters, Ibn al-‘Arabī is particularly invested and masterful in this creative use of Arabic to render the perplexing nature of spiritual realities to the reader in a comprehensible poetic language.



facilitates channeling the ineffable unseen into the world of written mystical experiences and their accompanying social practices.

Transitioning to the various shortcomings of this research. There are limitations in scope that naturally arise due to the time restraints and space available for completing any doctoral dissertation. This is compounded by the fact that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings, especially the *FM*, remains an indomitable work that defies a comprehensive analysis or summary. Taking all of this into consideration, many of the ensuing points were going to be, at one point in time, an actual component of this dissertation, yet were put aside due to the above-mentioned restrictions.

In order to fully appreciate the reasoning behind putting aside these side projects, I would like to discuss a brief history of the development of this research: its initial motivation, various stages of maturity and culmination in its current form. My journey with Ibn al-‘Arabī began early during the summer of 2012 whilst devoting myself fully to applying to various doctoral programs in Islamic studies and reading a massive amount of literature in this field. This strict regimen was meant to compensate for my lack of familiarity with the academic study of Islam since my only graduate training until that point had been in the sciences.

However, as a devout Muslim who is classically trained in the Islamic sciences, I had a preliminary understanding of Sufi writings and developed an interest in the notion of intelligence in Sufism, arising from my Masters’ research in computer science and Artificial Intelligence. Thanks to the encouragement and guidance from my advisor, professor Alexander Knysh, I was given the task to write a bibliographic survey on the current state of research on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought for the prestigious *JMIAS* (Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society) even prior to beginning my first year of graduate studies at the University of Michigan.

Soon after commencing my graduate studies and becoming exposed to a variety of approaches in the humanities, some of which are squarely within the field of Islamic studies while others belong to other disciplines in the humanities (i.e. comparative literature, anthropology or religious studies), I became interested in other areas of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought which I felt make a more fruitful research focus for my dissertation. In this regard, my first transition away from the topic of intelligence was towards the contextual problem of pedagogy and the unique ways in which the Andalusian mystic conveyed his teachings to his immediate circle of disciples.

Most importantly, I was interested in how the Greatest Master’s life could serve as an example of the unique model of embodied knowledge and instruction for which Sufi mystics are well-known throughout history. This shift in interest, away from the actual content of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings and more towards the way in which it is disseminated remains a constant motif in my research in the shaykh’s writings, as evident in this dissertation. Thus, throughout the ensuing chapters, I will have cause to point out the significance of Jesus in the context of this unique Sufi pedagogy, both in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings and those mystics after him.

Contemporaneous to my studies in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, Sufism and Islam generally, my exposure to other disciplines in the humanities has encouraged me to weave certain theories within this dissertation as catalysts to help us better understand and appreciate the sophisticated presence of Jesus in Sufism. These conceptual frameworks have already been mentioned above (i.e. Geertz, Foucault and Tweed). Specifically Tweed’s *Crossing and Dwelling* will remain a constant thread throughout the ensuing chapters. Thenceforth, in the concluding chapter, the preliminary findings of this dissertation will be situated within Tweed’s framework.

Prior to my exposure to Tweed, or any of the other figures mentioned above, my initial attraction to such theoretical paradigms emerged as a result of reading Ian Almond’s *Sufism and*

*Deconstruction*, a comparative study between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of language. The fruitful comparisons I perceived between the Greatest Master’s vision of the Qur’ānic language’s infinite meanings, as an instance of God’s unbounded knowledge, and Derrida’s similar emphasis on the ‘undecidability’ of a particular text’s meaning, or its ‘deferral,’ allowed me to better appreciate the importance of *logos* in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought as both, a central motif in his teachings and pivotal tool in conveying them, through the example of an embodied Word of God (i.e. prophet or saintly guide).

It was at this juncture that the figure of Jesus son of Mary emerged as a most suitable example of the synthesis between content and pedagogy in the Andalusian mystic’s writings. Not only does Christ have a seminal place in the shaykh’s thought, but his central role is intimately intertwined with, and due to, the ways in which Jesus helps Ibn al-‘Arabī convey his metaphysics to readers. In other words, the son of Mary is mentioned and appropriated by Ibn al-‘Arabī not merely because he is a prophet with a unique physiology, but due to the fact that his bodily composition and twin roles, historical and eschatological, facilitates the discussion and understanding of abstract metaphysics.

Once I had decided on this topic, I proposed a rather expansive trajectory for the dissertation which I presented during the prospectus defense. That initial vision involved situating the exploration of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Jesus in-between his portrayal in the writings of the celebrated Sufi reformer Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and contemporary practices of the Bā‘alawy Sufi teachers in the valley of Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen. Specifically, my interest was in the different ways in which al-Ghazālī’s and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings were disseminated within this scholarly Sufi community. I had hoped to situate the image of Jesus within the conservative preaching of al-

Ghazālī's works and more rarefied ecstatic experiences surrounding the Andalusian mystic's concepts.

However, as soon as I began investigating the contours of al-Ghazālī's Jesus, I recognized that it is a monumental task that deserves its own research. Alongside the scarcity of mentions of Christ in the gatherings and writings of the Bā'alawy Sufi mystics, and even less so the metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī, both these hurdles motivated me to put aside this discussion of Jesus in the antecedence and subsequence of the Andalusian mystic's milieu. Instead, I decided to begin the dissertation with a general survey on Andalusian Sufism, which influenced the intellectual and spiritual background of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought. Thenceforth, I ventured to discuss the Akbarian<sup>19</sup> Christ to conclude, afterwards, with a study of this prophet's mentions in later Sufism.

And so, I undertook researching and writing two chapters on the son of Mary in the writings of Sufis after Ibn al-'Arabī. The first, focusing on the individual mystics mentioned above,<sup>20</sup> yielded a massive 200-page study that forced me to also put aside writing an earlier chapter on the Andalusian background and instead begin the dissertation outright with Ibn al-'Arabī's thought. After that, I finished writing the second chapter on the post-Ibn al-'Arabī Jesus, centering on this prophet's mentions in the writings and practices of select Sufi brotherhoods, specifically the Akbarian school of commentators, Shādhiliyya, Tijāniyya and Naqshbandiyya. However, the resulting – larger – 300 pages of that analysis led me to also not include most of it in the main body of the dissertation for the sake of brevity and focus.

Taking all these modifications into consideration, I present now the precise objective behind this dissertation and how it sets it apart from other approaches in academia. Indeed, there

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<sup>19</sup> The term Akbarian is a reference to Ibn al-'Arabī's celebrated title *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master).

<sup>20</sup> See page 12.

are many possible ways to investigate the presence of Jesus in the writings of a Sufi mystic like Ibn al-‘Arabī. These include a focus on the socio-political or religious factors that motivated the Andalusian mystic to pay special attention to the son of Mary, since the former was born and spent the first half of his life in the Iberian Peninsula, where Christianity was widespread. Alternatively, one could pursue a genealogical study to try and situate the Akbarian Jesus within the various intellectual schools in Iberia, both Islamic and otherwise. Lastly, another common approach would be to investigate Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Christ in light of a larger Islamic ‘Christology’ rooted in the Qur’ān, prophetic narrations and later traditions.

In lieu of all these methods, I have chosen to undertake a textual study of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh’s and Aḥmad al-Tījānī’s writings, all the while situating their teachings within Tweed’s religious studies framework of *crossing* and *dwelling*. There are important reasons that merit such an approach. First, regarding the Akbarian Jesus, the academic research on Ibn al-‘Arabī still suffers from comprehensive surveys that seek merely to outline the major concepts in his teachings, without having a complete picture of the myriad ways in which these ideas are presented or the nuanced methods that the Sufi mystic utilizes to discuss and analyze them.

Thus, for instance, one finds that the major contributions in Ibn al-‘Arabī studies, such as William Chittick’s *Sufi Path of Knowledge* and *Self-Disclosure of God* or Michel Chodkiewicz’ *Seal of Saints* follow a familiar pattern where the author translates an excerpt from the Andalusian mystic’s *FM* or *FH* and offers his own commentary on the ideas presented there. Moreover, alongside Chittick and Chodkiewicz, many of the specialists who contribute to the ongoing research on the Shaykh’s life and thought espouse some kind of devotion to his teachings. This either appears in the form of *religio perennis*: the belief that Ibn al-‘Arabī was a universalist who

held that all religious traditions are valid and – ultimately – sanctioned by God.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, we have authors who wish to rebuttal this perspective by emphasizing instead the Andalusian mystic’s strict adherence to *sharī‘a* (Islamic law) and conviction in the supremacy of the prophet Muḥammad’s rank.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the research on Jesus in Islam has suffered from a similar setback. Undoubtedly due to the tumultuous political situation today, evident in the appearance of fundamentalist Islamic groups like Dā‘ish (ISIS) and al-Qā‘ida whose violence has devastated some of the oldest Christian communities in places like Mosul, Iraq, and the inverse rise of Islamophobia in North America and Europe has led to an overwhelming number of studies on the Muslim son of Mary written by devoted Muslims or non-Muslims who have an explicit interest in interfaith. As will become clear in the ‘Literature Review’ chapter, this approach has unfortunately resulted in a wide assortment of biases that hinders from an objective appreciation of Christ’s Islamic persona.

Taking all of this into consideration, the task of researching the image of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings faces compounded obstacles. The only pertinent contributions to this specific area of study, also discussed in detail in chapter 2, are a set of articles presented at an annual conference of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society (MIAS) that focused entirely on the presence of Jesus and Mary in the Shaykh’s writings. However, many of the perspectives found in these papers revisit motifs that had already been elaborated upon in previous works (i.e. Christic inheritance, Jesus and the Qur’ān), without – again – connecting these various strands together, situating them

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<sup>21</sup> Chittick espouses such a conviction clearly in *Imaginal World*.

<sup>22</sup> The most recent work in this genre is Gregory Lipton’s *Rethinking Ibn ‘Arabī*, which was unfortunately published after this dissertation was completed and, so, could not be included in the ‘Literature Review’ section.

within the larger intellectual narrative wherein they appear or highlighting the Sufi mystic's unique rhetorical style which he uses to discuss them.

With this in mind, in this research, I present a more holistic portrayal of the Akbarian Jesus that considers the various aspects of his image in the massive *FM* and all of his mentions in the *FH*. This portion of the dissertation by itself provides new insights into the presence of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, since it considers motifs that have not been discussed in detail in any previous contribution, such as the esoteric aspects of *sharī‘a*. Beyond this addition, however, I also synthesize these various depictions into an overarching narrative involving Tweed’s notions of *crossing* and *dwelling*. In turn, this extends the importance of the discussion on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Jesus into the more universal discourse on saints, in all religious traditions, and the myriad of ways in which they translate a particular metaphysic into social practice.

This presentation of the Akbarian Jesus, in light of Tweed’s framework, also contributes to a much-needed area of research involving Islamic and religious studies. Almond’s *Sufism and Deconstruction* – mentioned above – alongside previous works, such as Peter Coates’ *Ibn ‘Arabī and Modern Thought*, have merely scratched the surface of the Andalusian mystic’s sophisticated writings and its pertinence to many theoretical paradigms in the contemporary philosophy of religion, of which Tweed is a prime example. In this light, this dissertation undertakes a first, much needed step towards a more thorough engagement between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and discourses on the mystical experience in the academy.

Lastly, this research also highlights another area of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought rarely discussed prior to this point: the nuanced rhetorical tools which the Andalusian mystic utilizes to convey his teachings to readers. It is worthwhile noting here that the convoluted and intricate style of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writing, coupled with the large number of works he authored, has contributed somewhat

to some of the shortcomings mentioned above in the current research on his thought. Specifically, the fascination with the organic nature of his expositions, which deviates from the clarity of expressions or neat classifications found in philosophical treatises, but at the same time betrays the purely *shatḥī* (controversial) expressions of ecstatic mystics has led many to linger on his style without taking into consideration the actual content of his statements and how it harmonizes with this unique penmanship. With this in mind, in the ensuing discussions, I not only take into consideration *what* Ibn al-‘Arabī says about Jesus, but also *how* he discusses the son of Mary, all the while trying to highlight both, the influence of the rhetorical style on the portrayal of Jesus and the inverse manner in which Christ’s mythic image facilitates such a presentation.

In the final chapter, I venture into more details about those possible areas of research presented above that emerge from this dissertation. For now, I conclude our discussion of the omissions and limits of this research and transition to some key questions to keep in mind in the ensuing analyses, which be discussed in detail in that final chapter. Our central concern will be to better understand the full contours of Christ’s image in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. Although our focus is restricted to a portion of the *FM* and entire *Bezels of Wisdom*, in exclusion to many other works, I hope to culminate this investigation with a holistic portrait of Jesus that accurately represents his presence and importance in the Andalusian mystic’s larger *Weltanschauung*.

First, pertaining to the topic of Jesus specifically in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, our main focus will be to answer the question: *What are the various aspects of Jesus’ image in the Andalusian mystic’s writings?* This is strictly a content-oriented, as opposed to ‘contextual,’ objective. This includes all the various terms and concepts which Ibn al-‘Arabī focuses on whilst discussing the son of Mary (i.e. ‘Word of God,’ ‘Spirit of God,’ Mary). This will also be a concentrated attempt



to ascertain, as much as possible, the contours of the life and character of the Akbarian Christ. In turn, this will provide a foundation for discussing the subsequent questions below.

Second, we will try to situate this Akbarian Christ within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung. Although, as mentioned above, the full extent to which the son of Mary fits within the Andalusian mystic’s prophetology is outside the scope of this dissertation, this will nevertheless be discussed whenever Jesus is mentioned alongside other prophets in certain excerpts. Alongside this theme, we will also focus on Christ’s role in any other motif within which Ibn al-‘Arabī has chosen to discuss him extensively. For instance, there is a prominent role which the son of Mary plays in the Shaykh’s elaboration upon *bāṭin al-sharī‘a* (esoteric dimensions of the Law). In this, and other cases, we will try to deduce the reasons for the presence of Jesus in these specific areas of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought.

The results of the first and second investigations above allow us to synthesize our understanding of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Jesus with his portrayals by later Sufi mystics. To reach that destination, however, we must first explore the Sufi Jesus after Ibn al-‘Arabī’s time. To this end, the third question concerns the figure of Christ specifically in this subsequent corpus: *What are the various roles which Jesus plays in the writings of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh and Aḥmad al-Tijānī?* As in the first category, we are not concerned here with how Jesus fits in the larger narratives of these authors and their writings. Rather, our concern is simply to understand the contours of his image in each of these intellectual settings.

Thenceforth, the fourth query situates the results from the above investigation within the larger Weltanschauung of each of these authors. As in the second question, we will attempt here to decipher the reasons why Jesus is mentioned in the particular contexts in which these authors have chosen. *How does Christ assist these mystics in conveying their teachings to readers and*

*establish their legitimacy as authentic Sufi mystics with a unique – and unprecedented – kashf (unveiling)?* Also, we will compare and contrast the different ways in which each of these Sufi authors appropriated the image of Jesus, taking into consideration any knowledge we have of their sociopolitical and religious motivations.

The fifth and final category brings together the above results into a central question: *To what extent has Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayal of Jesus influenced later Sufism? Could it be said that this Akbarian portrayal was surpassed by later Sufi mystics, or does it remain unprecedented in its creativity and richness? How does this Christic portrayal harmonize, depart or overlap with the presence of Ibn al-‘Arabī himself in these works? Lastly, what can we say from our understanding of the Akbarian Christ and his counterpart in later Sufism about the role which the son of Mary plays in Sufi history generally, beginning with Ibn al-‘Arabī?* Of course, there are many other important questions which could be posited here. However, these few are hopefully sufficient and comprehensive for the scope of this dissertation.

The last point to discuss in this chapter is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics which animates his entire thought generally and his discussion on Jesus specifically. As mentioned above, the following remarks serve as a supplement to Appendix A, which can be found at the end of this research and which further highlights the presence of Christ in the Andalusian mystic’s thought. Of course, the outline provided here also complements the ensuing analyses in chapters 3 and 4, both of which holistically represent the Greatest Master’s key themes and rhetorical style.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will neither inundate this portion of the dissertation or Appendix A with references of the concepts and terms I mention there. If the reader would like to find out more about these motifs, they should refer to Chittick’s *Sufi Path of Knowledge and Self-Disclosure of God*, both of which make for excellent references on Akbarian thought and an index that includes the pages where these terms could be found in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s original Arabic writings.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung is often referred to as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Oneness of Being). The Andalusian mystic himself never used this term. Rather, it was coined by his foremost disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), who only used it twice. The term then gains some currency with later figures in the Akbarian school, such as Sa‘īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 1300). However, the figure who apparently – and inadvertently – gave this term much more importance than it had during Ibn al-‘Arabī’s time is his polemicist detractor Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that Ibn al-‘Arabī himself did not coin this term, it does highlight a significant aspect of his thought. Chittick provides the following translation of an excerpt from the former’s writings where he reveals his conviction in the ultimate unity of reality:

Nothing has become manifest in *wujūd* through *wujūd* except the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), since *wujūd* is the Real, and He is one.

The entity [‘*ayn*] of *wujūd* is one, but its properties [*aḥkām*] are diverse.

Number [‘*adad*] derives from the one that accepts a second, not the one of *wujūd* [*al-wāḥid al-wujūd*].

All *wujūd* is one in reality; there is nothing along with it.<sup>25</sup>

The Andalusian mystic presents a vision of the universe here that accommodates no ‘truly’ existent being alongside God. Ultimately, any multiplicity in this creation is an illusion that appears as such to those who have received a *kashf* (unveiling) and are able to view reality as it truly is.

As Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions, the actual process through which the Single, Absolute and Real Being (i.e. Divine Essence) translates into the plethora of cosmic variation and diversity is known as *tajallī* (manifestation/theophany). From the original source of God’s Essence emerge certain *asmā’* (Names) through which the Essence may be described. However, the Essence remains ultimately Unknowable and beyond the limitation of any single Name. A similar association exists

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<sup>24</sup> See William Chittick, “Rūmī and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*”, 72-80.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

between the Names and the *ṣifāt* (Attributes) which emerge from the meanings of these Names. For instance, from the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* (The Most-Merciful) comes the Attribute of *raḥma* (mercy), as does *lutf* (gentleness/subtlety) also appear from the Name *al-Laṭīf* (The Most-Gentle/Subtle).

In turn, it is these Divine Attributes that facilitate the coming-to-be of all the created things in the universe. Each of these created objects can be reduced to, what Ibn al-‘Arabī calls, an ‘*ayn thābita* (immutable entity). In simple terms, one can say that an entity’s ‘*ayn thābita* is the entity itself as God knows it. This means that the ‘*ayn thābita* contains all the possible forms, predispositions, aptitudes and destiny of the given entity, including whether God had willed for such an object to exist in the physical world or simply remain a potential existent in His Knowledge.

Once the Divine Name *al-Khāliq* (the Creator) dresses an ‘*ayn thābita* with its Attribute of *khalq* (creation), that entity then appears in the physical world in specific forms and for a duration of time that has been predestined for it by God. All the while, this created object, which at this point can be called *makhlūq* (created, or that which is under the jurisdiction of the Name *al-Khāliq*) continues to be a vessel for Divine Manifestations. Alongside its descriptions as a *makhlūq* and *ma‘lūm* (known object), it can also be described as a *mawjūd* (existent thing).

Here, we find a prudent transition from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ontology to his epistemology. A philosophical category that is intimately connected to the former theme etymologically. As will become clear throughout this research, Ibn al-‘Arabī is a master of the Arabic language who is able to undergird his entire thought within what might be called ‘mystical philology’: the author’s novel ability to establish ontological connections between entities and abstract notions in existence

via the etymological relationships between their names and nouns, associations which often exist only in his imagination and mystical vision.

One such connection which Ibn al-‘Arabī utilizes to connect ontology and epistemology can be found in the Arabic root *wajada* (to find/found) from which emerges the ontological concept *wujūd* (Being) and experiential notion of *wajd* (spiritual ecstasy). Ultimately, to find God is to exist truly through His Grace and Light; an experience which is unsurprisingly overwhelming and yielding much *wajd*. One can find parallel relationships in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. Specifically, the author connects the Divine Name *al-‘Alīm* (All-Knower) to the *‘ālam* (created world) and its matrix of *‘alāmāt* (signposts), or the created things that allude to God’s theophanies through their attributes and forms.

Ibn al-‘Arabī also tells us that each created thing in the universe can only manifest a single Divine Name, under whose jurisdiction it remains for the duration of its lifetime in this world. The only exception to this rule is *banī Ādam* (sons of Adam, human beings) who have the potential not only to manifest multiple Divine Names but all of them. In this capacity, human beings participate in the fulfillment of the project mentioned in the narration wherein God says: “I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Thus, I created creation so that I might be known by them.” Once a human being is able to accomplish this objective and manifest the entirety of Divine Names, he or she is known as *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect man) and serve as the polished mirror through which God reflects upon His Perfection.

Ibn al-‘Arabī calls this process *taḥqīq* (self-realization), through which a seeker undertakes a *mi‘rāj* (spiritual ascension) in their own reality, gradually unveiling the various layers and forms that stand between him/her and his/her *‘ayn thābita*. Once in the Divine Presence, the seeker obtains *fanā’* (annihilation) and ceases to exist save in his/her potential being as an object of God’s

Knowledge. Then, he/she is sent back to the physical realm in a station of *baqā'* (subsistence), whence they are simultaneously present with God and creation. Relying upon the well-known prophetic *ḥadīth*, the Andalusian mystic also posits this rebirth as the reception of more vivid Divine Attributes. For instance, whereas prior to their ascension the seeker's sight was merely a theophany of Divine Omnipotence, now God becomes the Sight with which he/she sees.

However, this ability to subsist with both God and creation is not the end. Ibn al-'Arabī presents a higher, somewhat controversial, station known as *qurba* (nearness), during which the seeker becomes the Sight, Hearing, Speech and Power through which God acts in the universe. Such a lofty rank is also described by Ibn al-'Arabī as *maqām al-lā maqām* (station of no-station). The Andalusian mystic presents the figure who holds this position as someone who has obtained all possible saintly stations (i.e. *tawba* (repentance), *ṣabr* (perseverance) or *riḍā* (contentment)), whence they are able to fulfill the obligations required by each rank without being claimed solely by any one of them; hence the name 'station of no-station.'

This creative rendering of the highest possible station that human beings can reach in their journey towards God is very similar to Ibn al-'Arabī's articulation of the relationship and responsibility that human beings have towards Divine Names that seek to exercise power over them. Specifically, the Andalusian mystic states that at any given moment, each human being has a responsibility towards three Divine Attributes: 1) That which is currently dressing him/her with its manifestation. 2) That to which he/she is transitioning and 3) That which seeks to exercise power over him/her but will not actually do so. The diligent seeker must maintain *adab* (proper etiquette) towards all three Names such that not any one of them can claim him/her more than the others.

Let us transition now from the somewhat abstract notions of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought to the embodied figures and archetypes that translate these concepts into social practice. The most central character in the Andalusian mystic’s writings, and who also undergirds his depiction of Jesus, is the prophet Muḥammad. Simply, the Muslim Messenger is the embodiment of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfected human being who has obtained the ranks of *qurba* and *maqām al-lā maqām*. Not only does the Prophet impeccably manifest all the Divine Names and Attributes, but he himself is an Attribute of God; a controversial hypothesis which Ibn al-‘Arabī deduces from the description which the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā’isha, gives of her husband as ‘the walking Qur’ān’ and as one whose ‘character was the Qur’ān.’

Here, we are presented with an important aspect of the prophet Muḥammad in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought: *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (the Muḥammadan Reality). The Andalusian mystic is rightfully credited with giving this notion prominence whence it becomes a central driving force in Sufi thought after him, until the present day. On the one hand, the Greatest Master intends by this term to present the Prophet’s essence as the very light from which the entire universe is created. On the other hand, just as the Qur’ān was revealed in 23 years, in segmented chapters and verses, the ‘walking Qur’ān’ was also unveiled through prophets and messengers beginning with Adam and culminating with Jesus.

In turn, just as each verse of the ‘written scripture’ forms an indispensable and unique component of the whole, so does each prophet also constitute an essential and inimitable aspect of the ‘walking Qur’ān.’ If this appears to a reader who is familiar with Christian thought as a *logos*-centric rendering of the prophet Muḥammad, that is because it is indeed an apt description of the Akbarian – and largely Sufi – portrayal of the Prophet. Essentially, the *khatm al-anbiyā’* (seal of prophets) Muḥammad, in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, synthesizes the Judaic and Christian

understandings of *logos*: he is simultaneously the embodiment of the written law, and its very source, and the spring from which all prophethood and sainthood emerges and is culminated. One may wonder, then, if Ibn al-‘Arabī would rather present the Qur’ān as a ‘written description of the Prophet’, as opposed to Muḥammad being the ‘walking Qur’ān’.

This leads us to the last component of this discussion, pertaining to *walāya* (sainthood). Just as Ibn al-‘Arabī regards prophethood as a fruit of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* and all prophets as processional manifestations of the prophet Muḥammad, so does he depict sainthood as a *wirātha* (spiritual inheritance) from prophethood. Not only do *awliyā’* (saints) inherit knowledge and powers from specific prophets, whence they are attributed to that specific messenger (i.e. *walī ‘īṣawī* (Christic saint), *walī mūsawī* (Moses-like saint) or *walī yūsufī* (Joseph-like saint)), but they also have ranks that parallel the Prophet’s historical role of *khatm al-anbiyā’* (seal of prophethood).

It is here that Jesus emerges in his most creative role in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. As the prophet who immediately precedes Muḥammad’s historical appearance and eschatological Messiah who succeeds the latter’s term in this physical world, Christ presents a particularly suitable example through which Ibn al-‘Arabī expounds upon this aspect of his thought. Specifically, the Andalusian mystic presents the son of Mary as *khatm al-walāya al-‘amma* (seal of universal sainthood). Jesus will fulfill this role during his second coming, after which there will be no more saints on earth, paving the way for the impending apocalypse.

Of course, Ibn al-‘Arabī intends for this position to parallel the prophet Muḥammad’s more superior role of *khatm al-anbiyā’*, which seals and completes the cycle of legislating prophethood. In-between these two ‘seals’, there emerges the enigmatic figure of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood), whose worldly appearance signals the closure of the highest rank available for Muslim saints: *walāya muḥammadiyya* or a sainthood where the



saints inherits directly from the Prophet. After the appearance of this intermediary seal, and until the return of Jesus as the ‘seal of universal sainthood’, there can only be Muslim saints who inherit from Muḥammad indirectly through other prophets.

To further make Christ’s role in this Akbarian saga sophisticated, Ibn al-‘Arabī states that the son of Mary’s second coming will not be in a prophetic capacity, but rather as a Muslim saint, since there cannot be another legislating prophet after Muḥammad’s historical appearance in the world. This distinction between Jesus’ twin personas is further augmented when Ibn al-‘Arabī presents yet another enigmatic entity in his writings known as *rūḥ Muḥammad* (the Spirit of Muḥammad). This archetypal spiritual essence, the Andalusian mystic posits, appears in the physical world in different apparitions, two of whom are the seals of Muḥammadan and universal sainthood. While Ibn al-‘Arabī eventually claims the former of these ranks explicitly for himself, he is also presenting the second appearance of Jesus as an ontologically different entity than his first coming, since it is only in his second coming, as the Messiah, that Christ fulfills the task of sealing sainthood in its entirety.

Much more can be said regarding the position of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and the latter’s overarching metaphysics. However, I hope that the preceding paragraphs furnish us with enough background and questions to cultivate our inquisitive engagement with the analyses in the coming chapters. Although we have only mentioned Jesus above in those remarks pertaining to sainthood and prophethood, it is worthwhile keeping in mind how the son of Mary fits in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s rich ontology and epistemology. With such a motivation in mind, Appendix A at the end of the dissertation will encapsulate many of the intellectual threads presented here and those that will be discussed throughout this research.

This completes the introductory chapter in this research on Jesus son of Mary in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and later Sufism. Before transitioning to the next section, however, let us finish by presenting a final question that captures the essence of all the probes we have presented above. Like the other prompts, I will also attempt to provide an answer for this central query in the concluding chapter. *What can Ibn al-‘Arabī and his successors tell us, through their engagement with Jesus, about the different ways that Sufi mystics have ‘ingested’ and ‘reincarnated’ the being of Christ in their respective lives and missions?* This is ultimately an open-ended inquiry that combines the two intellectual wings guiding the journey of this dissertation: Islamic intellectual history and religious studies.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Since the subject of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings covers a wide range of themes, from prophetology to saintology, the corpus of works discussed in this chapter will be classified into two major categories: 1) Jesus in Islam and 2) Ibn al-‘Arabī studies. It should be noted that this survey is in no way comprehensive, but only a brief outline of the major academic trends pertaining to studying the image of Jesus in Islam and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought.

### Jesus in Islam

A cursory overview of the major works that have been written on ‘Īsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary) in Islam reveals a lacuna in the research on the rich presence of Christ in the writings of Sufi mystics. Instead, one finds mostly dry surveys of the mentions of Jesus and Mary in the Qur’ān and *Hadīth* collations or attempts to apologetically – or polemically – compare the Christ of Islam with that of Christianity or Judaism. All the while, the full extent to which Sufi mystics like Ibn al-‘Arabī engaged with Christ’s persona remains obscure.

The more intimate and creative expositions on this topic tend to be an interfaith effort by either an *‘ālim* (religious Muslim scholar), Christian theologian or a convert from Christianity to Islam who seeks to harmonize between Jesus as son of man and son of God. In these cases, the content leans more towards a subjective appreciation of Jesus’ multifaceted persona than an objective historical analysis. While this provides fascinating insights into their authors’ spiritual experiences, they serve better as sources of textual ethnography than secondary references to be cited in an academic research.

Amidst all these approaches, Jesus in Sufism generally receives brief mentions, of no more than a few pages, in the survey genre. These terse discussions are usually situated adjacent to sections titled “Jesus in *Ḥadīth* Collections” or “Jesus in Shī‘ism.” Such a precarious placement not only obscures the intimate relationship that Sufi mystics have with both the *Ḥadīth* corpus and Shī‘ite ideology, but also leads the uninformed reader to suppose that Sufi mystics relied upon sources of knowledge altogether different from the Qur’ān and *Ḥadīth* to formulate their understanding of Christ, or that their portrayal is altogether different than the Shī‘ite one, both of which are incorrect assumptions.

Ṭarīf Khālīdī’s<sup>26</sup> *The Muslim Jesus* is perhaps the best example of this survey genre. The author begins with an introduction that outlines his methodology and objectives: to mention all the utterances by Jesus or statements about his life and mission in the Muslim sources.<sup>27</sup> Since these excerpts are only categorized by century, book title and author – when applicable – the overall character of the work appears as a massive index of references about Christ in Islam. Although Khalidi divides the excerpts into two sections: the “earliest sayings”<sup>28</sup> and “later sayings,”<sup>29</sup> he opts out of situating them in the intellectual school or milieu from which they emerged; this is excluding the discussion on Jesus in Shī‘ism, which receives only a very short paragraph in the introduction.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, *The Muslim Jesus* remains an important reference for academic research. The detailed citations provide an accessible database for specialists who are invested in a more thorough investigation and analysis of these primary sources; such a critical

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<sup>26</sup> Henceforth Tarif Khalidi.

<sup>27</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 1-8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 31, 39-40.

exploration can be found in Leirvik Oddbjorn's *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. Unlike Khalidi's endeavor, Oddbjorn does not provide a compendium of excerpts about Jesus in the Muslim sources. Instead, the author focuses on formulating a thematic discussion of the different portrayals of the son of Mary. These include "Christ in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*,"<sup>31</sup> "Jesus in Shī'ite Tradition,"<sup>32</sup> "Jesus in Sufism"<sup>33</sup> and "Twentieth Century Tendencies and Discussions,"<sup>34</sup> among others.

The section on Sufism particularly is a tremendous improvement over Khalidi's attempt and provides an important foundation for further research on Jesus in Islamic mysticism. Although each subsection in this part of the book is only about two pages or less, it gives a glimpse of the rich engagements that Sufi mystics have had with the son of Mary. These include "Jesus as the Perfect Man,"<sup>35</sup> "Jesus as Theophany"<sup>36</sup> and "Sainthood and Breath."<sup>37</sup> Oddbjorn also acknowledges that these metaphysical notions emerged because of the experiences of the likes of Ḥusayn al-Ḥallāj<sup>38</sup> (d. 922) and Ibn al-ʿArabī.<sup>39</sup> However, the author neglects to provide a thorough discussion of these two mystics' Weltanschauungs. Ultimately, this shortcoming leads Oddbjorn to – superficially – categorize Ibn al-ʿArabī's and al-Ḥallāj's portrayals as simply 'heterodox.'<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps one of the best contributions to the scholarship on the figure of Jesus in Sufi writings is Alexander Treiger's article titled "Al-Ghazālī's 'Mirror Christology.'" This essay

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<sup>31</sup> Oddbjorn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 86,91.

explores the rich discussion that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a celebrated Sufi reformer and precursor to Ibn al-‘Arabī, had undertaken in his works on the theological implications of Christ’s image in Islam. In this regard, Treiger focuses on a few key works of this Muslim mystic, including *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), *al-Radd al-Jamīl* (The Gentle Response) and others. Thenceforth, author deduces that al-Ghazālī’s portrayal of Christ hearkens to an early Christian, specifically Nestorian, depiction of Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

As the author highlights, al-Ghazālī’s motivation is to situate the Christological notions of the Trinity and divinity of Christ within Islamic theology.<sup>42</sup> To that end, the Muslim thinker describes the heart of Jesus as a polished mirror that reflected the divine light perfectly.<sup>43</sup> Such an impeccable mirror has the power to confound the uninitiated observers, whence they become confused as to whether they are witnessing the mirror itself or the object reflected therein.<sup>44</sup> Naturally, this *ḥayra* (perplexity), is what al-Ghazālī refers to as the reason for the Christian belief in the Trinity and divinity of Christ: the heart of Jesus reflected the divine light so well that his followers became confounded as to whether they witnessed God or His theophanies in the heart of the son of Mary.<sup>45</sup>

Transitioning to Francis Peters’ *Jesus and Muhammad*, this work undertakes a comparative study between the prophetic careers of these prophets. If the subtitle of the work, *Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* is any indication, the author’s motivation is to highlight the similarities and differences between Christ and the prophet of Islam, given the drastically different sociopolitical and religious milieus they lived in. In this regard, Peters provides a humbling admission in the

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander Treiger, “Al-Ghazālī’s ‘Mirror Christology’ and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources,” 699.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 698.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 699.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

introduction that he had labored arduously to make sure that the historical information and analysis is accurate and sympathetic to the audience adherents of both faith traditions.<sup>46</sup>

A cursory reading of *Jesus and Muhammad*, in return, makes one sympathetic to Peters' hard work and detailed exploration of the historical background of Christ's Roman controlled Nazareth and Muhammad's mercantile Mecca.<sup>47</sup> Alongside his critique of the written sources and traditional historiography on both figures, this endeavor certainly makes for a formidable addition to the research on Jesus in Islam. However, as is the case with most – if not all – comparative studies of religious traditions, the author's preconceived notions of each figure's *Weltanschauung* lead him to make some false assumptions that stem from an incorrect understanding of the historical sources.

Unfortunately, it seems as though most of these mistakes are found in the sections discussing the Prophet Muhammad's life.<sup>48</sup> Although these appear as simple historical inaccuracies, such as the author's claim that there were no Jews or Christians living in Mecca during the Prophet's time, they are actually serious fallacies upon which the author constructs his overarching argument.<sup>49</sup> This is regrettable since Jesus and Muhammad both carried out their prophetic missions in religiously pluralistic and literate societies that hosted a wide array of religious ideologies, both monotheistic and polytheistic.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> F. E. Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks – Parallel Lives*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 55 – 79.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 63. The author provides no proof for this statement, as evident in the following excerpt: “There were Jews about in some of the northern oases like Medina and even more to the south in the Yemen, but none installed in Mecca. Nor were there any Christians there.”

<sup>50</sup> The presence of polytheism was mostly prevalent in Muhammad's Arabia; whereas the religious demographic of Nazareth or Jerusalem during Christ's time was mostly Jewish.

This problem is compounded by the author's choice to leave behind his initial promise to adhere to a respectful appreciation of both religious figures and instead resort to hypercriticism.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, readers may find themselves coming to remarks such as "both men were probably very good, but it is unlikely that either of them had any light above their head"<sup>52</sup> and wonder what contribution does such a sentence make in an academic work on Islam and Christianity. To be fair, however, Peters' shortcoming is not unique nor is it symptomatic of comparative studies on religion only but rather many historical studies of early Muslim sources.

A more poetic and meaningful comparative study is Kenneth Cragg's *Jesus and the Muslim*. Unlike Peters, Cragg is not bogged down by interrogating the authenticity of historical facts. Instead, he focuses on the mystery of Jesus Christ, in both Islam and Christianity, and presents this as a single narrative. Although problematic from a historicist's perspective, Cragg is not concerned with minute geographical distinctions between medieval Mecca and Jerusalem. He is unabashed in his conviction that much may be learned of the mystery of the son of Mary by engaging his portrayal from the New Testament<sup>53</sup> and letters of Peter<sup>54</sup> with his other depictions in the Qur'ān<sup>55</sup> and writings of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1328).<sup>56</sup>

Cragg was only able to accomplish such a task by crossing over from the historical figure of Jesus to his representation as a transcendent essence, wherein he embodies and symbolizes the mystery of the divine *logos* impregnating the world. Without a doubt, such a perception of Christ surpasses Christology and allows for widening the discussion into themes of human/divine love

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<sup>51</sup> This methodological premise is mentioned in the "Introduction": "The responsibility is more complex: to understand and accept the fact that these two are not simply figures of history and to respect what each stands for without allowing that respect to prejudice my historical judgment." Ibid, xxiii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 41.



and the perplexity of predestination or free will that are pertinent to all monotheistic traditions throughout history.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, Cragg hearkens to a Sufi concern, vis a vis Ibn al-‘Arabī, surrounding the son of Mary: beyond theological disputes regarding the trinity and human divinity, there is the Andalusian mystic’s singular focus on the human perfection of Muhammad as the perfect mirror to reflect the divine attributes.

It is precisely this metaphysical prism which allows Cragg to transcend the previous author’s infatuation with the sociopolitical differences between Jerusalem and Mecca, and to focus instead on the change of *qibla* (direction of prayer) that occurred, during the Prophet’s career, from the former of these holy cities to the second.<sup>58</sup> This change of direction, Cragg emphasizes, does not reveal a ‘repudiation’ of the holy birth land of Christianity; but rather a culmination of the universal prophetic mission that began with Adam and was sealed by Muhammad.<sup>59</sup> For the Christian devotee, the lover of Jesus, this completion also fully enriching the image of Christ, not only from the New Testament but also from the Last Testament and Qur’ān.

Indeed, this endeavor may be less attractive than that of Peters for specialists who are looking for a conservative historical comparison between the earliest sources of both faith traditions. However, considering the purposes of this dissertation, Cragg’s contribution is a more relevant addition to the corpus of research on Jesus in Islam. The natural disposition towards apologetics, polemics or the search for historical accuracy, encouraged by the contemporary crisis dubbed as ‘Clash of Civilizations,’ has too often distracted from the rich metaphysical significance of Christ in both Christian and Islamic mysticism.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 189, 260.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 13-15.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 14.

An author who tries to combine Peters' and Cragg's approaches is Monā Siddīqī's<sup>60</sup> *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*. As a Muslim academic personally invested in the deeper significance and mystery of Christ in both Christianity and Islam, Siddiqui declares in the introduction that she hopes to share her personal reflections on this subject as well as provide an index of the earliest written sources on the son of Mary in the two faith traditions.<sup>61</sup> While at first, such an approach seems to combine the best of both worlds, it quickly appears to be fraught with problems.

On the one hand, Siddiqui attempts to ask the deep questions, such as: "Is there a place for cross theology in Islam today?"<sup>62</sup> or "How does mercy in Islam compare with Christ's redemption in Christianity?"<sup>63</sup> As the author's subjective journey seems to delve deeper into these century-long debates, either her academic or conservative Muslim self – or both – awkwardly cuts the excursion short by proclaiming outlandishly, for example, that Mary has no place in Islam and is overshadowed by the story of Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

Since the author has omitted the mention of any Sufi authors and their perspectives on Jesus, we might suppose either that she is unfamiliar with their writings – unlikely given her affiliation with the academic community – or that she considers their views antithetical to her mission and has thus opted not to include them. Either way, her sweeping remarks are problematic since they ignore the likes of Ibn al-'Arabī who very much believed in a type of Christic reincarnation and a pivotal importance for Mary.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Henceforth, Mona Siddiqui.

<sup>61</sup> Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 222-223.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>65</sup> This will become clearer in chapters 3 and 4, when we discuss Jesus in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī.

Meanwhile, Neal Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity* emerges as a more moderate historical investigation into the image of Jesus in Islam. At first blush, the author seems to follow in the steps of Cragg and Siddiqui by offering a comparative study between the portrayals of Christ in both faith traditions. However, a thorough reading of this work reveals Robinson's sincere adherence to this comparative approach, more so than his peers. Through all the historical and theological meanderings, the author's genuine concern is to simply highlight the various religious and academic debates surrounding Jesus.

This last point also makes Robinson's endeavor unique among the other works in this genre. Whereas the other monographs restrict themselves to the primary sources in Islam or Christianity, this author has chosen to study the secondary research in the Western academy on the son of Mary as well. Therefore, one finds that reading this work is akin to reading a historiographical survey of all the research on Jesus in the past. Clearly, this has its benefits and drawbacks. Considering the overtly creative, apologetic or polemical nature of many of the other works on Christ in Islam, such a balanced approach is welcome.

There are other factors that make Robinson's work unique and a positive addition to the corpus in this area of research. First, the author includes two chapters on Jesus in Sufism<sup>66</sup> and classical Sufi exegesis.<sup>67</sup> Second, he adds a section devoted solely to the very rich presence of Christ in Shī'ism.<sup>68</sup> The similarities between the crucifixion and suffering of the imams (Prophet Muḥammad's descendants), most especially Ḥusayn, merits an investigation given the insight it provides into the Sufi discourse on Jesus and possible exchange of perspectives between the likes

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<sup>66</sup> Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 787/1385), for example, as representatives of Sufism and Shī‘ism respectively.

Taking all these positive aspects into consideration, this work is not without fault. Robinson’s preoccupation with providing a history of all the research in this area leaves little room for the reader to find out what the author himself believes regarding the overarching narrative of Christ in Islam and Christianity. Another unfortunate drawback of this work, although beyond the author’s power at this point, is its outdated analysis. This is evident in the chapter on Sufism where Robinson discusses the cases of Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj and Ibn al-‘Arabī and questions their importance to the ongoing research on Jesus in Islam, since they are considered heterodox by mainstream Muslims.<sup>69</sup> Fortunately, recent research in the past few decades disavows such views; for it is precisely a figure like Ibn al-‘Arabī, himself an ecstatic Sufi and formidable Muslim scholar, who confounds the delineation between normative sober Sufism and its heterodox ecstatic counterpart.

There have also been many authors, trained in both Christian theology and Islamic studies, who have written about Jesus in Islam. One of the earliest such works is Olaf Schumann’s *Jesus the Messiah*, an impressively well-rounded survey – especially for its time – of the various images of the son of Mary in Islamic thought. This is evident in the author’s deep motivation to go beyond simple dogmatic differences between Christianity and Islam and instead highlight some deeper sociopolitical motivations that may have inspired Muslim thinkers to discuss Jesus.

Originally trained as a Lutheran minister, Schumann went on later to study classical Islam at various prestigious Muslim institutions, including al-Azhar University in Cairo.<sup>70</sup> As an

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 103

<sup>70</sup> Olaf Schumann, *Jesus the Messiah in Muslim Thought*, 31.

ordained minister who lived in Muslim lands, he had seen his share of Muslim-Christian polemical debates and was thus motivated to present a sympathetic image of Jesus in Islam for his coreligionists that would allow them to appreciate Christ as Muslims know and revere him. This is also why Schumann highlights the very worldly conditions that have shaped and influenced Muslim discourses about the son of Mary.<sup>71</sup>

It is this latter point that makes *Jesus the Messiah* a unique addition to the survey genre. Whereas other authors have either omitted contemporary Muslim discussions about Jesus (e.g. Khalidi) or simply added these works for indexing purposes without contextualizing them with the earlier sources (e.g. Oddbjorn), Schumann tries to weave a thread that connects all the various images of Christ from the beginning of Islam until the modern era. Therefore, one can journey in this work from the Qur'ānic<sup>72</sup> to the Mu'tazilite,<sup>73</sup> Sufi,<sup>74</sup> and lastly Modernist<sup>75</sup> son of Mary, all within the span of 200 pages.

In addition to the author's initial motivation to help his Western Christian readers sympathize with the Muslim Jesus, Schumann also highlights the crucial geopolitical factors, including Western colonialism, that have influenced modern Muslim discourses surrounding Jesus. In this light, after providing an outline of Ibn al-'Arabī's Jesus, the author forwards in time to discuss Christ in the writings of Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905),<sup>76</sup> the famous Egyptian Muslim reformer. Likewise, Schumann also includes 'Abduh's debate with Faraḥ Anṭūn (d. 1922), another well-known figure of the Arab intellectual movement in modernity.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

‘Abduh’s and Anṭūn’s differing motivations, a revitalization of Islamic thought through rational Mu‘tazilism and an infatuation with Western thought and the French revolution, respectively, highlight the intertwining of religion with secularism on the one hand, and Islam with Christianity on the other, in modern Muslim discourses. All the while, the mentions of Jesus in such debates serve as metaphors from which the reader may cross over to deeper discussions about the primacy of philosophy over theology – and vice versa – or the political consequences of Muslim scholars issuing religious edicts declaring Christian beliefs heretical or sound, highlighting the tumultuous integration between mosque and state in newly-born Muslim nation-states.

Meanwhile, A.H. Zahniser’s *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Christianity and Islam* explores the controversy of the crucifixion from the perspectives of both Islam and Christianity. As mentioned in the work’s preface, the author is motivated to start a discussion that can be a catalyst for genuine conversations between ordinary Muslims and Christians.<sup>77</sup> Dedicating this monograph to a Muslim friend who died in an accident in Jerusalem, Zahniser lets the reader know from the outset his personal attachment to the topic at hand.<sup>78</sup>

This emotional investment is evident as the author undertakes not only to outline the classical Muslim perspectives on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ but also his own *tafsir* (exegesis) of these events.<sup>79</sup> Since Zahniser is very clear about his adherence to the Christian views regarding these events, he attempts to overcome a rather indomitable theological bridge by combining his own reading of the Qur’ān,<sup>80</sup> *Ḥadīth*,<sup>81</sup> and exegetical traditions, such as Ibn

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<sup>77</sup> A. H. Zahniser’s *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Christianity and Islam*, xiii.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

‘Ashūr’s interpretation of the Qur’ān,<sup>82</sup> to show that a harmony between the Muslim and Christian approaches is indeed possible.

The problem facing Zahniser’s noble endeavor is one commonly found in other works of this genre. The author’s intellectual investment produces a rather skewed perspective of the evidence at hand. For example, to highlight the importance of the crucifixion in Christianity, the author states that the “death of Jesus does not have much importance in Islam.”<sup>83</sup> This precarious hypothesis is then used to establish a false dichotomy between the significance of a divine prophet’s salvation and triumph of God’s plan in Islam.

Perhaps this problematic conclusion arises due to the author’s sole reliance on classical sources without reference to a wider array of interpretative traditions. Indeed, a cursory reading of Sufī exegetical works, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (FM)* and *Bezels of Wisdom* for instance, would immediately reveal a deeply intimate connection between the Christian and Muslim views on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.<sup>84</sup>

Robert Shedinger undertakes another creative approach to the subject of Jesus in Islam in *Jesus and Jihad*. The author presents his deep affinity to the American Muslim community in the introduction, where he also outlines his vision and mission in this work: to present Christ as a medieval *jihādī*.<sup>85</sup> Such a controversial proposition stems from the author’s belief that the notion of *jihād* has been distorted by Western media and reduced to holy war and violence, whereas in

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 2 no. 4.

<sup>84</sup> As mentioned previously, this will become evident in the ensuing analyses of chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Shedinger, *Jesus and Jihad: Reclaiming the Prophetic Heart of Christianity and Islam*, ix.

Islamic thought it has a wider array of meaning, including spiritual struggle and ‘speaking truth to power’.<sup>86</sup>

Clearly, such an approach enters into the arena of contentious politics, as the author is well aware. However, his own professed affiliation with American Islamic institutions such as IONA (Islamic Organization of North America),<sup>87</sup> betray a biased understanding of Islam that colors the overarching argument throughout the work. Consider, for example, his affinity with Isrār Aḥmad, the founder of *Tanzīm-ī-Islāmī* and follower of the reformist Deobandi school of Islamic theology.<sup>88</sup> Shedinger admires Ahmed’s mission of *da‘wa* and attempt to establish Islam as a cornerstone of every Muslim’s mission in modernity.<sup>89</sup>

The full effects of this reformist agenda emerges early on in the book’s introduction. Statements such as: “The idea that prophets are fortunetellers who speak about the end of days is itself a modern Christian notion ... Instead, they essentially spoke truth to power!”<sup>90</sup> How the author concludes that eschatology is less ‘medieval’ and prominent in prophetic discourses than a modern catchphrase such as ‘speaking truth to power’ is a matter of speculation that nevertheless highlights the problematic nature of this approach.

To be fair, however, the author bases his comparison of an Islam and a Christianity that are beleaguered by modernity with their pristine medieval counterparts on a novel notion he terms the ‘prophetic heart.’<sup>91</sup> According to this construction, prophetic figures such as Muhammad and Jesus were driven by a deep concern for human suffering and turmoil that motivated them to rectify

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 44, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, ix.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>91</sup> The first use of this term can be found in the work’s introduction, page 5.



injustices. It is the absence of this ‘prophetic heart’ which Shedinger describes as the root cause for modern faith being a mere shell of its former classical self.<sup>92</sup>

The notion of a ‘prophetic heart’ does hearken to powerful mystical motifs common to both Islam and Christianity.<sup>93</sup> However, this prevalence also raises an important question regarding Shedinger’s use of this term. Clearly, the question at hand is not whether the Prophet Muhammad or Christ perceived ‘speaking truth to power’ as a pivotal component of their mission. Rather, did they understand this task to be a burden upon the individual’s self, or a continuous abandonment of self-ish will in exchange for divine providence from the great spiritual beyond? Is ‘liberation theology,’ which Shedinger seems to advocate for in this work, not also a very modern religious response to the medieval power of the Church? What are the underlying metaphysical foundations governing projects such as ‘speaking truth to power’ and eschatological ‘fortunetelling’?

If Shedinger’s endeavor precariously juxtaposes the Muslim Jesus alongside the Christian one, Geoffrey Parrinder’s *Jesus in the Qur’an* seems to have the opposite effect: it softens some of the contentious edges of Christian thought regarding Christ in relation with Islam in such a way that the portrayals of the son of Mary in both traditions appear to be one and the same. Unlike Shedinger, and much like the other authors mentioned so far, Parrinder’s approach focuses on what he calls the ‘source texts,’ and not later traditions which he regards, with support from contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Muḥammad ‘Izza Darwāza (d. 1984) and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (d. 1956), as interpretive sources that need to be criticized extensively.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Lopez-Baralt’s fascinating study “Saint John of the Cross and Ibn ‘Arabī” which provides a glimpse into this recurring motif that is pertinent to the focus of this dissertation.

<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, 9.

In this light, the author relies solely on the Qur'ān and the Old/New Testament for his comparative study. Covering a range of topics from 'names of Jesus'<sup>95</sup> to 'Trinity'<sup>96</sup> and 'Annunciation'<sup>97</sup> in both traditions, Parrinder concludes every chapter with a reflective note that brings any contentious difference between Islam and Christianity to a harmonious end. The author usually accomplishes this by emphasizing the common objective of Christ's mission in both traditions as a 'conduit of Divine mercy' over and above any discrepancies in the various technical terms used in the Qur'ān and the Old or New Testament.

In this light, the response to the query of Mary in the book of James, regarding giving birth to the 'living God,' to be in a manner like all women, is brushed aside by Parrinder in favor of the angel's response that the power of the Lord will instead 'overpower' her.<sup>98</sup> This literary move allows the author to establish this 'divine intervention' as akin to the Qur'ānic proclamation of *kun* (Be!); a similarity more crucial, in the mind of the author, than the distinctly divine and human natures of Christ implicitly present in both scriptures.

Such creative choices are coupled with anecdotes, such as the one highlighting the importance of the perennial spirit of Islam and Christianity over and above any 'technical' differences between them. In that chapter, Parrinder concludes by mentioning a story cited by Azraqī that the prophet Muḥammad, during the conquest of Mecca, ordered the destruction of all the idols and paintings near the *ḥaram* (sanctuary) except for a painting of Mary carrying the infant

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 70.

Jesus.<sup>99</sup> It is such creative textual hermeneutics that make Parrinder's work a unique addition to the textual studies in this genre of research.

Axel Takacs' twin articles, "Becoming the Word" and "Mary and Muhammad" are perfect examples of the comparative genre in the academic research on Jesus in Islam. In the first, the author compares the sacrament of the Eucharist in Christianity with Islamic *dhikr* (divine remembrance), all the while exploring the importance of the *logos/kalima* (divine Word) in both traditions. Even though he does not explicitly situate the discussion within Sufism, his reasoning for undertaking this comparative journey, namely that "the manifestations of the Divine Light in this world ... refract as a prism refracts light in every direction ... Yet, there is a thread that weaves in and out of these faiths," hearkens to Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī-l-i'tiqādāt* (the Real that is created through creeds).<sup>100</sup>

In the second entry, "Mary and Muhammad," Takacs offers a unique comparison between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the prophet Muḥammad as two carriers of *logos/kalima* (the divine Word). His intention is to situate this similarity between Mary and Muḥammad within the transcendent, immaculate and 'virginal' nature of both figures in their respective traditions. In a similar fashion to the first article, Takacs does not explicitly situate his discussion within Sufi thought. He also acknowledges that his elevation of the status of Mary may seem controversial to many non-Catholic Christians.<sup>101</sup> One wonders, however, whether the author knows that his elevation of the status of the prophet is similarly controversial to some Muslims.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>100</sup> Axel Takacs, "Becoming the Word," 40.

<sup>101</sup> Axel Takacs, "Mary and Muḥammad: Bearers of the Word – Their Roles in Divine Revelation," 223.

The importance of these articles, even though they are not directly related to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, is that they offer a glimpse into the rich metaphysical comparisons inherent in the figure of Christ when situated within Islamic thought. In this regard, Takacs provides the motivation for undertaking the research in this dissertation specifically and the incentive to explore the wide array of portrayals of Jesus in the writings of other Sufi mystics generally. The author also encourages the inclusion of Mary, alongside Christ, as an important archetype in mysticism. This in turn allows for the concomitant consideration of Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, or other female figures in his life, as other quintessential mystical symbols.

A more creative comparative effort can be found in Nancy Roberts’ “Imitatio Christi.” The author situates the figures of Christ and Muhammad within Sufism. She focuses specifically on the notions of *jamāl* (divine beauty) and *jalāl* (divine majesty). The creativity of this endeavor emanates from the author’s open acknowledgment of her personal experiences as a convert from Christianity to Islam in formulating the perspectives she presents in her writing. She also utilizes various references, such as scriptural references, to argue for both traditions’ emphasis on divine mercy over wrath. All the while, Roberts focuses on *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ), *imitatio Muhammadi* (imitation of Muhammad) and eventually *imitatio Dei* (imitation of the Divine) as the central path to achieving this prerogative of mercy over wrath and manifesting divine *jamāl* fully.

During this fascinating exposition, Roberts also openly states that, although now a convert to Islam, she still finds a bigger place in her heart for Jesus than Muhammad. Such a statement would not usually have any repercussions upon the integrity of an academic piece of writing. However, in this case, the author relies upon this subjective judgment to further claim that unlike Christ, who was divinely immaculate, Muhammad was fallible and should therefore be approached

by Christians like the other Hebrew prophets who were “prone to waywardness.”<sup>102</sup> Although Roberts’ intent here is to rectify the image of the prophet Muḥammad in Christian eyes, her subjective appraisal of the Prophet lessens the accuracy of the comparative narrative in the article.

Muslim authors have also written about Jesus in Islam from varying perspectives. Mahdī Muntazir Qā’im’s *Jesus through the Qur’ān and Shī’ite Narrations* is one such work that explores the image of the son of Mary in the Shī’ite tradition. In a similar fashion to Khalidī’s endeavor, this author enumerates all the statements involving Christ found in the compendia of Shī’ī Ḥadīth, or *akhbār* (news of the imams). In this regard, one finds much overlap between the utterances found in this corpus and those from the Sunnī sources, particularly those spoken by Jesus himself concerning asceticism and renunciation of the world.

Instead, the unique Shī’ite portrayals are found in the secondhand statements, attributed to the imams concerning Jesus.<sup>103</sup> Here, one finds fascinating comparisons between Jesus and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the cousin of the Prophet, as two *awṣiyā’* (trustees/sg. *waṣī*) of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>104</sup> The most recurring and prominent comparison is that between Christ and Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, on the occasion of their martyrdom and symbolic significance of their suffering and redemption.<sup>105</sup> Although the general Muslim scholarly consensus considers the crucifixion to be a historical fallacy, Shī’ite narrations seem to adopt it as a foundation to propel and support the magnitude of Ḥusayn’s death.

Just as Muntazir Qā’im’s work highlights the presence of Jesus in Shī’ism, Nurbakhsh’s *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis* explores the various images of Christ in Sufi thought. Beginning with

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<sup>102</sup> Roberts, *Imitatio Christi*, 247.

<sup>103</sup> Mahdī Muntazir Qā’im, *Jesus Through the Qur’ān and Shī’ite Narrations*, 66-240.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 112, narration no. 1.3.7.

the sayings of the son of Mary in the Sufi literature,<sup>106</sup> the author transitions to discussing the figure of the mystic Jesus from various aspects,<sup>107</sup> These include his qualities and characteristics,<sup>108</sup> stories and mystical theories surrounding his physiology and symbolic uses of his name by Sufi authors.<sup>109</sup> The first section, concerning the statements attributed to Jesus in Sufi literature, has a very similar structure to Khalidi's *Muslim Jesus*. A simple index of utterances with author, work title and page number show the mentions of the son of Mary in major Sufi monographs, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb* (Nourishment of the Hearts) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's *Mathnawī*.

This structure is replicated in the entire first half of the book. Often, an entire page will contain only single quote of two or three lines only by a single author. Certainly, this is an aesthetic and stylistic choice on the part of Nurbakhsh. However, a cursory reading of many of these excerpts reveals a larger narrative intended by the original authors, pertaining to divine love and self-purification, that Nurbakhsh chose not to include. In turn, this leaves the reader in confusion as to the full significance and meaning of these quotes. It is only in the second half of the work that Nurbakhsh combines citations with some explanations, especially in the section on the mystical theories surrounding Jesus in Sufism.

### *Ibn al-'Arabī Studies*

A detailed bibliography of the secondary academic sources written about Ibn al-'Arabī during the past few decades can be found in "An Endless *Tajallī*" and "Ibn 'Arabī."<sup>110</sup> There, I

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<sup>106</sup> Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 47-129.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 47-61.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 129-152.

<sup>110</sup> Ali Hussain, "An Endless *Tajallī*" and Knysh and Hussain, "Ibn 'Arabī."

discuss in detail the seminal contributions to the research on the Andalusian mystic, including William Chittick's *Sufi Path of Knowledge and Self-Disclosure of God*, Michel Chodkiewicz' *Ocean without Shore* and *Seal of Saints*, Henry Corbin's *Alone with the Alone* and others. In turn, the works discussed in this section are restricted to those published after these two entries were authored. These newer works cover a wide range of themes, ranging from translations and expositions to comparative studies and personal memoirs.

Perhaps the largest recent translation effort has been Eric Winkel's attempt to render Ibn al-ʿArabī's entire *FM* in English. Using, as reference, the recent critical edition of the *FM* published in 2010 by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṣṣūb, Winkel has "worked to understand, translate, and convey the vision of the Shaykh al-Akbar."<sup>111</sup> What makes this endeavor unique is that Winkel has chosen not to divide his translation according to the same classification of the original Arabic edition, in 12 volumes. Instead, each of the 560 chapters, ranging from a couple to hundreds of pages, receives its own booklet. This allows for a better appreciation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thematic narrative in this encyclopedia of mystical theophany.

The reliability of Winkel's effort can be measured probably only after the entire translation has been completed, so that one may assess the consistency in the words used to render Ibn al-ʿArabī's key terms and concepts in English. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, we may analyze a translated excerpt from the early chapters of the *FM* pertaining to the esoteric dimensions of *ṣawm* (fasting). The particular passage at hand is worthwhile investigating since it pertains to Jesus, his mother Mary and will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.<sup>112</sup> Overall, Winkel maintains

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<sup>111</sup> "About the Project," The Futuhat Project, 2017, <http://www.thefutuhat.com/about/>

<sup>112</sup> See chapter 3, page 53.

the integrity of the original Arabic. With that being said, the author's creative interpretive approach sometimes obscures the Andalusian mystic's writing style.

For instance, after explaining Mary's regimen of fasting (i.e. fasting two days in a row and breaking her fast on the third day), Ibn al-'Arabī states: "This is the condition of whoever is overwhelmed by their soul: they have been dominated by their divinity. Thus, they should treat it like Mary treated her soul in this form, so that *talḥaq bi-'aqlihā* [she can catch up] to her intellect."<sup>113</sup> Even though the author's pronoun is clearly feminine, in reference to Mary attaining harmony through her intellect, Winkel instead translates this sentence as "so that he could catch up to her intellect," presumably in reference to the one whose 'soul has overwhelmed him.'<sup>114</sup>

Still in the same passage, one also finds a rather odd choice of words by the translator for some of the Arabic terms in this work. This is especially noteworthy since these are rather generic phrases that do not require sophisticated English renderings. For instance, Winkel translates the term *yufṭir* (to break one's fast) as 'to open,' as found in the statement: "It is like Jesus son of Mary, her son, because he used to fast *dahr* and not open."<sup>115</sup> Likewise, he renders the term *rabbihā* (her lord) as her Cherisher.<sup>116</sup> Notwithstanding his specific reasonings for using such terms, in the specific context of this passage, the normative translation seem to suffice.

If Winkel has chosen peculiar English renderings for the above terms, in other cases he has altogether neglected to provide a translation. Take for instances the term *kanaf*, which Ibn al-'Arabī uses in the sentence: "God has *ḥarrama 'alayhi kanafah* [forbidden upon him His/his *kanaf*]

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<sup>113</sup> Muḥammad Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* II, 401.

<sup>114</sup> Eric Winkel, *Mysteries of the Fast: Book 9*, 185. It is also worth noting that while it is possible that this discrepancy is due to the different edition of the *FM* which Winkel is relying upon, he does not provide any alternative wordings in this case, as he does in other instances.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.



that covers him”<sup>117</sup> and which means protection or shield. Instead, the translator provides the awkward recursive rendering: “God has held back from such a person His shielding *kanaf* with which He covers one.”<sup>118</sup> Although the adjective ‘shielding’ alludes to the meaning of the term, the fact that the original Arabic term is left intact leaves the reader wondering what it actually means.

The last noticeable problem with Winkel’s translation effort appears in his neglect to account for the myriad of possible readings of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s statements; a strategy which the latter uses intentionally to demonstrate the metaphysical fecundity in the concepts he is discussing. Consider, for instance, the Andalusian mystic’s concluding sentence in this section: “This is a verse whose outward meaning reflects the actual state of affairs and the interpretation of which leads to *dhamm* [defamation].”<sup>119</sup> The translator, in turn, renders it as follows: “Any interpretive process (any non-literal reading) of the verse would be attached to error.”<sup>120</sup>

It is certainly possible that Ibn al-‘Arabī intended to associate *dhamm* (censure) with the act of *ta’wīl* (interpretation) itself, as Winkel does. However, it is also possible – and perhaps more likely – that the Andalusian mystic meant that the Qur’ānic verse at hand, pertaining to the *kufr* (disbelief/covering) attributed to Christians and their controversial beliefs surrounding Christ (i.e. Trinity and divinity of Jesus) will most likely yield an understanding that blames this community for their convictions and accuses them of heresy. Again, notwithstanding the validity of Winkel’s translation, this rendering we provide here seems to harmonize more with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own words in this context.

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<sup>117</sup> Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* II, 401.

<sup>118</sup> Eric Winkel, *Mysteries of the Fast: Book 9*, 187.

<sup>119</sup> Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* II, 401.

<sup>120</sup> Eric Winkel, *Mysteries of the Fast: Book 9*, 187.

Another important addition to the corpus studies on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought is Binyamin Abrahamov’s *Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Sufis*. The author attempts to situate the Andalusian mystic within his intellectual milieu by discussing the major Sufi thinkers whom the latter mentions in his works, particularly the *FM*. Abrahamov not only provides an index of citations from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, but also investigates the extent of the Andalusian mystic’s engagement with these figures.

Many of the findings coincide with what the academic community already knew of the influences on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, such as his disagreement with Ḥusayn al-Ḥallāj<sup>121</sup> or reverence towards Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb (d. 1193 or 1198).<sup>122</sup> However, what emerges as a novel contribution in Abrahamov’s research is his emphasis on the presence of other pivotal Sufis in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings, most auspiciously Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 874-875 or 848-9).<sup>123</sup> Such an affiliation highlights Ibn al-‘Arabī’s affinity towards ecstatic Sufism, in contradistinction to his portrayal as a sober gnostic or philosopher, simply because he opposed the likes of al-Ḥallāj.<sup>124</sup>

Abrahamov also highlights Ibn al-‘Arabī’s engagement with the writings of the prominent 11<sup>th</sup> century Muslim thinker Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111); an area of research hitherto largely unknown and unexplored.<sup>125</sup> The author shows that the Andalusian mystic’s disagreements with

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<sup>121</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Sufis*, 91.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>124</sup> See James Morris, “Ibn al-‘Arabī and his Interpreters: Part 1 – Recent French Translations,” 2. Morris describes the contributions of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s son in law, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1328) and Western specialists who expounded upon the latter’s philosophical project, such as Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993) in his *Sufism and Taoism*, as a “focus on a single ‘representative’ text and interpretive perspective, most often the philosophical, conceptual analysis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* ... These works, because of their comprehensiveness, maturity and faithful reflection of a long tradition of commentary, provide an ideal starting point for the study of Ibn ‘Arabī. However, relying solely on the *Fuṣūṣ* - or more specifically, on the scholastic tradition of commentary focusing primarily on the systematic metaphysical underpinnings of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought – ultimately gives a one-sided and highly misleading image of the Shaykh’s writings, his historical influence, and his own character and personality.” (page 2-3).

<sup>125</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Sufis*, 117.

this Sufi reformer do not revolve around ecstatic Sufism or openly discussing spiritual realities, as some might expect.<sup>126</sup> Rather, it seems as though Ibn al-‘Arabī was more discontented with his predecessor’s perspective on divine names and how they’re theologically related to the divine essence and attributes.<sup>127</sup>

These new insights into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s textual engagement with Sufi thought highlight the importance of the sociopolitical factors that influence and shape the development of metaphysical or theological discourses. It constructs new possible connections between these philosophical concerns and the larger communal concerns that may have triggered their emergence. In this regard, Abrahamov’s contribution is crucial; at the least because it facilitates a more thorough investigation into each of the aforementioned Sufi thinkers whose thought Ibn al-‘Arabī had creatively appropriated.

In *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, Sa‘diyya Shaikh<sup>128</sup> undertakes an intricate journey into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s understanding of gender and the feminine subject. Beginning with a genealogy of these concepts’ development prior to the Andalusian mystic’s time,<sup>129</sup> the author then outlines Ibn al-‘Arabī’s general approach to human physiology and gender.<sup>130</sup> Thenceforth, the mystical significance of masculinity and femininity is highlighted in his cosmology and creation story of

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<sup>126</sup> Such an expectation surely arises from al-Ghazālī’s disclaimer in the introduction to his voluminous work, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences): “The intention of this book is to outline ‘ilm al-mu‘āmalā [science of worldly dealings] not ‘ilm al-mukāshafa [science of unveilings] for which there is no permission to expound upon in books, even though it is the ultimate objective of seekers and goal of truthful ones.” Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn I*, 14. Of course, al-Ghazālī does explore – somewhat – Sufi metaphysics in other works, such as *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (Niche of Light). However, this treatise did not nearly receive the attention that the *Iḥyā’* has throughout history. The same cannot be said about Ibn al-‘Arabī, whose voluminous encyclopedia of metaphysics and ‘ilm al-mukāshafa, *FM*, became more widely circulated than his treatises on ‘ilm al-mu‘āmalā, such as *Kunh mā lā budda li-l-Murīd minh* (What is Indispensable for the Seeker).

<sup>127</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Sufis*, 118.

<sup>128</sup> Henceforth, Sa‘diyya Shaikh.

<sup>129</sup> Sa‘diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality*, 35-60.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 95-140.

Adam and Eve.<sup>131</sup> Shaikh then directs the conversation in a chapter titled “Witnessing God in Women” pertaining to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perspective on the divine feminine.<sup>132</sup> Lastly, the author ends with a reflection on the importance of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perspectives on femininity for Islamic feminism and gender issues in contemporary Islamdom.<sup>133</sup>

In chapter six, titled “Witnessing God in Women,”<sup>134</sup> Shaikh delves into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mystical interpretation of the conception of Jesus and the breathing of the divine *kalima* (Word) into Mary. With a clear motivation to present the Andalusian mystic as a medieval feminist of sorts, the author highlights Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of the birth of Christ as a complement and culmination of the divine project of creation, which began with the birth of Eve from Adam.<sup>135</sup> Thus, just as humanity appeared through the birth of a woman from a man; it is completed, at a specific cycle of time, with the birth of Jesus from Mary.

Amidst this intricate explanation, Shaikh is drawn specifically to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s placement of Jesus and Mary in the archetypal roles of Eve and Adam, respectively. This leads the author to conclude that Ibn al-‘Arabī views the cosmic roles of men and women as complements rather than a hierarchy of superiors and inferiors.<sup>136</sup> This conclusion certainly has some truth and, in this sense, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy* successfully sheds light on this important aspect of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. However, it is also true that Shaikh is selectively perceiving – and perhaps projecting – the feminist agenda in the Andalusian mystic’s writings while neglecting other aspects of his

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 141-172.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 173-202.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 203-232.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 195. The author’s agenda is evident in the following statement: “In addition to **subverting** and **transforming** the gender significance of the Eve/Adam myth with his multiple versions of the story, Ibn ‘Arabī presents the reader with completely different creation models, including Jesus’ birth from the Virgin Mary, that further **undermine gender norms.**”

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

thought that problematize such a project. For example, Ibn al-‘Arabī clearly declares in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (*FH*) that Christ’s *tawāḍu‘* (humility) is an inheritance from his mother, Mary, since women have the attribute of *sufī* (lowliness).<sup>137</sup>

There are also two works that focus on the Andalusian background of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. The first of these, Michael Ebstein’s *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, situates the Greatest Master and his writings within the Ismā‘ilite school of Shī‘ism and its influence on Andalusian Sufism. The author tries to accomplish this task by charting an intellectual genealogy, from Ismā‘ilite roots to Ibn al-‘Arabī, of various notions such as the Word of God,<sup>138</sup> esoteric mythologization of letters,<sup>139</sup> saintology,<sup>140</sup> humanology,<sup>141</sup> *al-insān al-kāmil*<sup>142</sup> and the parallel worlds of microcosm and macrocosm.<sup>143</sup> In each of the chapters devoted to these motifs, Ebstein traces a development from the ‘Arabic Neoplatonist Philosophy’ followed by Ismā‘ilite teachings and culminating in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought.

Overall, the reader is left with the indelible imprint that the novel philosophical contributions of this branch of Shī‘ism had a definite influence on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Weltanschauung*. In the case of Jesus specifically, his name appears – unsurprisingly – in the chapter on the ‘Word of God and the Divine Will.’ Unfortunately, the son of Mary is not mentioned once in the subsections on the Neoplatonist or Ismā‘ilite traditions. Rather, Ebstein focuses on the notion of *logos* in these two schools, thenceforth presenting Christ as the quintessential manifestation of this

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<sup>137</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 140. This passage, and the entire chapter in the *FH* wherein it appears, will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, 33.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>141</sup> I justify the use of this term in Appendix A: “Akbarian Christology”.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

concept in the Andalusian mystic's teachings.<sup>144</sup> Alas! This approach leaves the mistaken impression that Ibn al-ʿArabī is the rare case of a thinker with an inclination towards prophetology in a geographical region otherwise defined by strictly philosophical strands of thought.

Unfortunately, there is an even bigger setback in Ebstein's contribution. In an attempt to prove the Ismāʿīlī roots of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, against all odds, the author makes quite a few problematic assumptions. Consider, for instance, the typology he constructs of the various mystical trends that have influenced and shaped "medieval Islamic mysticism":<sup>145</sup>

1. Sufism. As mentioned above, this mystical movement emphasizes the internal psychological-spiritual dimension of man and his ethical conduct. Man's goal, according to the Sufī perception, is to gain proximity to God and perhaps even unite with Him.
2. Shīʿī-Ismaʿīlī mysticism, whose focal point is 'the friend of God,' the *imām*. The latter is perceived as an indispensable mediator connecting the believer to God and leading him to a personal-mystical encounter with divinity.
3. Philosophical mysticism or mystical philosophy, in which philosophy—especially in its Neoplatonic form—plays a central role. In this type of mysticism, the philosophical-intellectual activity does not function merely as an *ex post facto* rationalistic understanding of the 'pure' mystical experience, but rather forms in itself an integral and central element in this experience: it designates and dictates in advance the nature of the mystical experience, its content, the path leading to it and the interpretation of it once it has occurred.
4. Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism, which combines Shīʿī-Ismaʿīlī mysticism with Neoplatonic mystical philosophy. This Ismāʿīlī type of mysticism is further characterized by a theosophical discourse and by a predilection for the occult sciences, such as the science of letters.
5. Sunnī Andalusī mysticism, as reflected in the writings of Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-ʿArabī. This type is similar to Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism of the mystical-philosophical kind, albeit without its Shīʿī doctrines pertaining to the *imāms*, descendants of ʿAlī and Fāṭima. Ibn al-ʿArabī (but not Ibn Masarra) combined this type of mysticism with his Sufī heritage, thus creating an original synthesis which, in turn, influenced later mystics in both the Sunnī and Shīʿī worlds.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 24-25.

The first precarious aspect of this classification is the author's somewhat haphazard decision to designate the 'internal psychological-spiritual dimension of man and his ethical conduct' as an exclusively Sufi genre that does not belong to any of the other schools of thought. Not only is this type of spiritual ethics part and parcel of all these ideologies, but the same can be said – pretty much – about many of the motifs which Ebstein has proposed can be found in only some groups in exclusion to others.

Second, the author's insinuation, while defining the fifth school of 'Sunni Andalusī mysticism,' that "Shī'ī doctrines pertaining to the *imams*, descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭima" are a strictly Shī'ite enterprise is particularly problematic, for it ignores the rich and sophisticated engagement with the notion of *ahl al-bayt*, in both its historical and archetypal manifestations, in the writings of Sunni Sufi mystics, most auspiciously Ibn al-'Arabī. Although the Greatest Master does regard the path of *walāya* to be open for other than the physical descendants of the prophet Muḥammad, in contrast to most Shī'ite schools, he nevertheless finds the notion of *ahl al-bayt* itself to be of paramount metaphysical significance.<sup>147</sup> Notwithstanding these shortcomings, this work remains a groundbreaking contribution on Andalusian mysticism and Ibn al-'Arabī's intellectual background.

In a similar light, Yūsuf Casewit's<sup>148</sup> *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, also investigates the development of Sufism in the Iberian Peninsula, with a focus on the contributions of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Muslim mystic Ibn Barraḡān (d. 1141). Unlike Ebstein, who restricts his investigation to the intellectual history of Andalusian mysticism, Casewit begins by situating his discussion in the

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<sup>147</sup> For more on the Andalusian mystic's exploration of this concept, see Claude Addas, "The Muḥammadian House – Ibn al-'Arabī's Concept of *Ahl al-Bayt*."

<sup>148</sup> Henceforth Yousef Casewit.

political turmoils of the Iberian Peninsula, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, most importantly the demise of the Murābiṭūn dynasty (1062-1147).<sup>149</sup>

The author then sets out to trace the influences on Ibn Barraĵān's thought, beginning with Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī (d. 931), whom Casewit dubs as the 'first Andalusian *Mu'tabir*,'<sup>150</sup> and transitioning to Ibn Barraĵān's Andalusian contemporaries, Ibn al-'Arīf (d. 1141) and Ibn Qasī (d. 1151).<sup>151</sup> All the while, Casewit continues to situate the mystical heritage of these figures within the aforementioned political context, together with intellectual influences from Eastern Islamdom, most vividly the controversial permeation of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) in the Iberian Peninsula during this time period.

And so, Ibn al-'Arabī finds himself a foreshadowed figure in this narrative of early Andalusian Sufism. A notable difference, in this regard, between Casewit and Ebstein is the former's division of the mystical trends in the Iberian Peninsula that does not rely upon Shī'ite strands, or any Eastern school of thought for that matter. Rather, the author of *The Mystics of al-Andalus* clearly states that "the full-fledged 'Sufi tradition' of the Muslim West, which arose as a distinct and institutionalized movement in the seventh/thirteenth century, was neither imported from the East nor grew steadily out of the renunciatory tradition."<sup>152</sup>

Instead, Casewit posits two distinct mystical trends in al-Andalus, a "praxis-oriented, intensely devotional, renunciatory quest for the divine embodied by the renunciatory tradition of ... later figures such as Abū Madyan (d. 1197) [and Abū-l-Ḥasan] al-Shādhilī (d. 1258)]" and "more

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<sup>149</sup> Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barraĵān and Islamic Thought in the Twelfth Century*, 14.

<sup>150</sup> Casewit defines the term *mu'tabirūn* as 'contemplatives,' in reference to Ibn Masarra's "'ibra 'crossing' into the unseen" (Ibid, 3).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 57-74.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 4.



philosophically inclined and controversial [branch that] saw itself as a distinctive mystical tradition which evolved parallel to the first and drew comparatively little inspiration from Ghazālī and the Eastern Arabic tradition.”<sup>153</sup> It is within this second strand that the author situates Ibn Barrajān as a paragon of “a fully developed mystical philosophy” and also Ibn al-‘Arabī, in whom this school “reached its pinnacle with [his] much more elaborate writings and his likeminded peers.”<sup>154</sup>

This historical and intellectual affinity between Ibn Barrajān and the Greatest Master becomes more evident in the emphasis on various Akbarian concepts that find a precedent in the former’s writings. For instance, as the author states, Ibn Barrajān’s notions of *al-‘abd al-kullī* (Universal Servant) and *al-Ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-khalq* (The Reality Upon Which Creation is Created) “foreground Ibn al-‘Arabī’s worldview to a remarkable degree,”<sup>155</sup> particularly in the case of the first concept, which resembles the Akbarian concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* (Perfect Man).

However, of particular interest to the subject of this dissertation is Casewit’s devoting an entire chapter to Ibn Barrajān’s expertise in the Arabic Biblical tradition. As the author shows, this is not surprising considering the rich Judeo-Christian tradition that thrived in the Iberian Peninsula alongside Islam. In the case of this medieval Muslim mystic specifically, Casewit remarks that he “is likely the earliest Qur’ān exegete in Islamic history to employ the Bible extensively and for nonpolemical purposes in his quest to understand the divine Word.”<sup>156</sup> One would expect, then, that Jesus emerges as a central character in Ibn Barrajān’s metaphysics. Whatever the case may be, Casewit’s investigation in this area – unfortunately – does not yield any fruitful results.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 11. The translations provided are Casewit’s own renditions.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>157</sup> This is evident, at least, from the writings which Casewit focuses on in his work. Undoubtedly, a closer examination of Ibn Barrajān’s interpretations of the scriptural verses pertaining to Jesus specifically would better highlight his engagement with this prophetic figure.

Instead, the son of Mary's name arises only eight times in *The Mystics of al-Andalus*. The first of these concerns the medieval mystic's comparison of Rome and Constantinople to Gog and Magog, the apocalyptic mythic beings who will be slain by Christ the Messiah.<sup>158</sup> The other seven instances all appear in the chapter concerning Ibn Barraĵān's Biblical expertise. In each of these cases, the son of Mary plays a secondary character in Casewit's investigation of Ibn Barraĵān's position on the authenticity of the New Testament and its various Gospels<sup>159</sup> or his scriptural hermeneutics and comparative study between the Biblical and Qur'ānic portrayals of central religious motifs, such as paradise and hell.<sup>160</sup>

It is unfortunate that amidst this otherwise rich study of a pivotal Andalusian mystic and precursor to Ibn al-ʿArabī, who also happened to be a Muslim scholar of the Bible, there is not more attention given to the person of Jesus and the central concepts (i.e. *logos* or *kalima*) that animate his persona in both the Bible and Qur'ān.<sup>161</sup> Aside from this shortcoming, *The Mystics of al-Andalus* emerges as a nuanced and much-needed study of the intellectual background to Ibn al-ʿArabī's rich Weltanschauung. In this regard, this work even surpasses Ebsteins' contribution in its inclusion and focus on the unique sociopolitical climate of medieval Iberia and its appreciation of the region's distinct strand of Islamic mysticism.

Another work that is closely related to the focus of this dissertation is Dobie's *Logos and Revelation*. The author undertakes a comparative study between the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>161</sup> The term *Logos* is only mentioned once in this work, pertaining to Ibn Barraĵān's notion of *al-ʿabd al-kullī* (Universal Servant) and Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-insān al-kāmil* (Perfect Man). Casewit presents the *Logos* as the Christian equivalent of the Neoplatonic First Intellect and 'Sufi Idea' of *al-Ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) which he – somewhat precariously – exclusively associates with Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) and instead posits Ibn al-ʿArabī's version of this notion to be *al-insān al-kāmil*. Indeed, the Andalusian mystic specifically states in the *FM* that “*Al-Maḥfūl al-ibdāʿī* [The creative object] is for us *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* and *al-ʿaql al-awwal* [First Intellect] for others” (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* I, 146).

the 14<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian Meister Eckhart (d. 1328). The endeavor ventures through a wide array of themes, including imagination,<sup>162</sup> revelation,<sup>163</sup> the Word of God,<sup>164</sup> transcendence and the intellect.<sup>165</sup> Throughout, the author maintains a neatly organized approach of discussing Ibn al-‘Arabī’s views on a topic followed by Eckhart’s perspectives.

What this method provides in better readability and organization, it lacks in sophistication and integration. While Dobie displays his expertise in analyzing and understanding both his interlocutors’ Weltanschauungen, the reader is left with the daunting task of qualifying the similarities and differences between their approaches. This chore is made more difficult by the fact that Dobie does not discuss the genealogy of terms used by both mystics. For example, the reader may be precariously tempted to assume an affinity between Ibn al-‘Arabī and Eckhart (i.e., the former’s influence on the latter) since both thinkers utilize the notion of ‘*aql* (intellect),<sup>166</sup> despite the different uses of the term in their drastically varying traditions and milieus.

Unfortunately, this is not the only shortcoming in Dobie’s endeavor. Much like Casewit’s neglect of the metaphysical dimensions of Christ in Ibn Barrajan’s thought, the major problem here is also the absence of any discussion of the son of Mary in the writings of Eckhart and Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>167</sup> This is even more surprising considering the fitting motif of *Logos and Revelation* and its intimate connection with the image of Jesus in both Eckhart’s and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. Putting aside this – rather important – missing component, *Logos and Revelation* highlights the

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<sup>162</sup> Robert Dobie, *Logos and Revelation: Ibn ‘Arabī, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics*, 25.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>167</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning that while Dobie does mention Jesus, in passing, some 14 times throughout this work, there is not a single chapter or section focusing on Christ in both thinkers’ writings. Instead, the author seems focused on the centrality of the son of Mary in Christianity, as “the *Logos* or *Ratio* of all creation made flesh among humanity” (page 255). Unfortunately, this appears as a vacuous statement in the context of this book’s concern since it ignores Ibn al-‘Arabī’s rich engagements with Christ.

importance of comparing the similar portrayals of Jesus in Islamic and Christian mysticism and the possible exchange of concepts and motifs between both faith traditions.

Another recent addition to the research on Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought is Gloton’s *Jesus Son of Mary: In the Quran and According to the Teachings of Ibn Arabi*. Unfortunately, the optimistic title is a bit misleading. The work presents instead a massive index of Qur’ānic verses about Jesus and Mary,<sup>168</sup> ornamented by the author’s own creative interpretations of these excerpts and followed by only a brief 30 pages allocated to a rather superficial discussion of the presence of the son of Mary and his mother in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *FM*<sup>169</sup> and *FH*.<sup>170</sup>

This precarious approach on the part of the author leaves the reader wondering about the connection between the two sections of the work: the massive index of the mentions of Jesus in the Qur’ān and the much smaller discussion of this prophet’s presence in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. Unfortunately, Gloton does not attempt to connect these two strands at all throughout this project, aside from briefly mentioning the importance of Qur’ānic hermeneutics for Ibn al-‘Arabī in the introduction and conclusion.<sup>171</sup> In the end, one gets the impression that Gloton simply wanted an opportunity to explore his abilities at offering an esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān vis a vis the lens of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought.

Another important contribution in this area is the volume dedicated to Jesus in JMIAS (Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society). A collection of six articles – presented at a conference entirely devoted to the Akbarian Christ – explore various aspects of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayal of the son of Mary. In “The Akbarian Jesus,” Jaume Flaquer explores the image of Christ

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 53-309.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 348.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 330.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 328.

as a physical embodiment of divine breath.<sup>172</sup> The Andalusian mystic speaks of Jesus's constant vertical movement, across the seven heavens, and horizontal, as a typical Sufi traveler.<sup>173</sup> From this, Flaquer deduces that the Akbarian Jesus is the archetypal cosmic pilgrim who travels, like God's *kalima* (Word) – from which he is made – across both heavenly and worldly dimensions.<sup>174</sup>

Also included in this volume is Denis Gril's "Jesus, Mary and the Book." The author focuses on an important section in Ibn al-'Arabī's *FM* where the kinship between Christ and his mother is compared to like the relationship between *al-fātiḥa* (the opening chapter of the Qur'ān) and rest of scripture. The Andalusian mystic draws his creative interpretation from the description given to this opening section in the Qur'ān itself as *umm al-kitāb* (mother of the book). Based on this, Ibn al-'Arabī concludes that just as *al-fātiḥa* is part of the Qur'ān yet ordained as the book's mother, so too is Jesus the 'mother' of Mary, even though the former is a part of the latter (e.g. her son).<sup>175</sup>

Meanwhile, Hirtenstein's "Reviving the Dead" explores the central theme of the *ṭsawīyya* (Jesus-like saints) in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought. This notion, discussed in chapters 3 and 4, is one instance of the networks of spiritual inheritance connecting Muslim *awliyā'* (saints) to the divine prophets and messengers who appeared prior to the historical mission of the Prophet Muhammad. In this regard, the *wirātha* (inheritance) from Christ is particularly crucial since the son of Mary was, according to Ibn al-'Arabī himself, the latter's first spiritual teacher.

Hirtenstein focuses on miracle performance as a social aspect of these networks of spiritual inheritance. As Ibn al-'Arabī explains, a sign of the connection between a *walī* (saint) and a prophet

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<sup>172</sup> Jaume Flaquer, "The Akbarian Jesus: The Paradigm of a Pilgrim in God," 2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>175</sup> This excerpt will be revisited in the following chapter pertaining to the portrayals of Jesus in Ibn al-'Arabī's *FM*.

or messenger is the former's ability to perform the given viceroy's miracles. For this reason, Hirtenstein explores the extent of the Andalusian mystic's Christic inheritance by focusing on his performance of miracles, especially resurrecting the dead, both spiritually and physically. The importance of such an endeavor lies beyond highlighting a theoretical concept, but also in the extent to which it highlights the stature of a *walī*, with his followers, as a spiritual inheritor and embodiment of a particular prophet like Jesus. Such a perception, in turn, heightens the authority that such *awliyā*' have as representatives and carriers of prophetic sources of inheritance.

Zachary Markwith continues Hirtenstein's project by examining two other social manifestations of the *ṭsawīyya* in "Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn 'Arabī." By looking at the lives of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 680)<sup>176</sup> and Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922),<sup>177</sup> the author focuses on more than just miracle performance, but also the archetypal Christic sacrifice that reappears historically through the embodied performance of these mystics.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, by creatively attributing the first of these figures, Ḥusayn – the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad – to his mother Fāṭima,<sup>179</sup> Markwith establishes the premise for comparing this daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Markwith also extends his analysis to the writings of other Sufi mystics, such as Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 1230)<sup>180</sup> and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273).<sup>181</sup> Such a contextualization brings to life the significance of Ibn al-'Arabī's contribution and his influence on later Sufism. Markwith also pays attention to the crucial notion of *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood).<sup>182</sup> According to Ibn al-

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<sup>176</sup> Zachary Markwith, "Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn 'Arabī," 93.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 87.

‘Arabī, Jesus is one of four seals central to the story of creation: 1) the seal of Prophethood, Muhammad 2) the seal of Muhammadan sainthood, Ibn al-‘Arabī himself 3) the seal of universal sainthood, Jesus and 4) the seal of humanity, a brother and sister twin to be born in China at the end of time [sic!].<sup>183</sup>

As I show later on in chapter three, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vision of the return of the son of Mary as a Muslim saint and seal of sainthood has a crucial sociopolitical importance because it highlights the Andalusian mystic’s conservative leanings as a Muslim scholar who lived in the Iberian Peninsula during a period often, but not always, described as ‘convivencia’ (harmonious coexistence among the three faith traditions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity). Since Ibn al-‘Arabī is also depicted as a medieval perennialist of sorts, who believed in the validity of all creeds, Markwith successfully highlights the trends in his thought that problematize such a representation. Indeed, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, Christic sanctity can only be appreciated, understood and embodied from within the Muhammadan Islamic niche.<sup>184</sup>

### Conclusion

The collection of works in this chapter highlight some key characteristics and problems with current research on Jesus in Islam generally and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought specifically. These issues go beyond the mere dearth of extensive studies on the rich portrayal of Christ in Sufism generally and the Andalusian mystic’s writings specifically. More importantly, these gaps reveal a bias in the authors’ varying approaches to studying the image of the son of Mary in Islam. As we have seen, this often times stems from subjective assumptions that color each researcher’s approach to Jesus through either a religious or secular lens.

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<sup>183</sup> This notion will be discussed in chapter 3. However, for a more detailed investigation, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of Saints*.

<sup>184</sup> This last statement is one of the central arguments in chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

Of course, the academic community across all disciplines in the humanities has come to terms, somewhat, with the fact that observer bias is inevitable. Whether one approaches the focus of this dissertation with an emphasis on the classical textual sources, the social dynamics that carried them, religious zeal that produced them or political motivations that molded their circulation, ultimately some sort of intellectual anchor has to be chosen in exclusion of others as we approach the persona of the Akbarian Jesus. Thus, while a textual study marginalizes a thorough understanding of the social practices that implement a given discourse, a religious studies approach focuses more on the doctrinal motivations that drive religious actors to shape societies, more than just the political and economic factors that influence such convictions.

Stemming from a vested interest in the religious studies approach to the topic of Jesus in Sufism, the following chapters attempt to address some of the shortcomings highlighted in this section. The intellectual character of these ensuing analyses can be surmised from the critical remarks directed towards Shedinger's *Jesus and Jihad* and Siddiqui's *Christian, Muslims & Jesus*. In turn, this dissertation seeks not only to provide new insights into Ibn al-ʿArabī's thematic discussion of Jesus but also to outline his underlying motivations in his exploration of Christ's persona that necessarily differ from the modern inclinations presented above.

This is not to say that the liberation theology which Shedinger espouses and subjective perennialism of Takacs and Roberts have no place in academic discourse or that they inherently distort the image of Jesus in Islam. Rather, there is a subtle nuance in the mystical experience visible in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and others like him that has not been given its due right in academic research and which makes for a drastically different interpretive lens than the strictly



legalistic, grammatical, socio-historical and/or political approaches that are so predominant today in traditionally Muslim conversations<sup>185</sup> and academic discourses.

So, it is with this motivation in mind that we conclude this chapter by delving deeper into the criticism directed towards Shedinger's *Jesus and Jihad*. As stated above, this author is convinced that the emphasis on the signs of the last days (i.e. 'eschatology') in prophetic discourse amounts to 'fortune-telling' and is very much a modern obsession of the 'religious folk' and believers. Instead, Shedinger believes that the prophetic mission focused mainly on "speaking truth to power!" and rectifying injustices in the world. The brief response I offered above to this hypothesis is that it ignores the underlying the distinct metaphysical foundations governing these projects of 'speaking truth to power' and eschatological 'fortunetelling.'

As will become clear in chapter 3, Ibn al-'Arabī's various mentions of the son of Mary in his works, such as *FM*, are not entirely independent. Rather, they mesh together to form an overarching ontological, epistemological, soteriological and anthropological apparatus all of which converges in two central motifs: the supreme status of the Qur'ān as *kalāmullāh* (God's speech) and the light of the Prophet Muḥammad (*nūr Muḥammad/al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*) as the first created entity that also forms the basic metaphysical unit from which the rest of the universe is formed.

Thus, any *jihād* which Ibn al-'Arabī's Christ practiced must be approached through these two prisms. So how might the Andalusian mystic have approached such a notion? An inverse way to answer this question is, how might the Shaykh have responded to Shedinger's claim? Anyone familiar with Ibn al-'Arabī's discursive methods knows that a type of mystical philology is always

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<sup>185</sup> Please refer to Appendix B for more on this topics.

at the forefront in his writings.<sup>186</sup> In this light, he would probably have begun by relating the statement “speaking truth to power” to the Arabic terms for truth and power, namely *ḥaqq* and *qudra*, respectively.

The polyvalence of meaning inherent in the Arabic word *al-ḥaqq*, an exploration for which Ibn al-‘Arabī himself may be credited, already sheds a light on the fecundity of the metaphysical concepts at hand. Harboring both a sense of ‘truth’ and of ‘right/responsibility,’ it firmly establishes certain social duties; a fact that Shedinger would agree with. However, the Andalusian mystic would have further highlighted the word’s indispensable connection with both *ḥaqīqa* (reality) and the Divine name *al-Ḥaqq* (the Real), to emphasize its root residence in a Divine providence above and beyond any metaphorical manifestation or trace in the human social sphere.

This is also where the notion of *qudra* (power) may be viewed in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *mashhad* (mystical vision): any display of power on earth is a mere trace or *tajallī* (manifestation) of divine *qudra* that emanates from His name *al-qadīr* (All-Powerful). However, as Ibn al-‘Arabī also informs us, this transmission and emanation of a divine attribute from the realm of *lāhūt* (divinity) to *nāsūt* (humanity) requires the mediation of an *insān kāmil tāmm* (Perfect and Complete Man) (e.g. the Prophet Muḥammad) who is the only human mirror able to impeccably manifest all the divine attributes. The presence of Jesus in this paradigm, alongside all divine prophets and messengers, provides a glimpse into that Muḥammadan mirror.

Naturally, one may enquire how does this sophisticated mystical system alter Shedinger’s claim that Christ’s *jihād* was essentially ‘speaking truth to power’? After all, he seems to agree with Ibn al-‘Arabī in this regard. The departure between the two figures comes in the former’s

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<sup>186</sup> This notion of mystical philology will also be a central motif guiding the narrative of chapters 3 and 4.

bifurcation between ‘social justice’ and the eschatological project, which Shedinger considers to be ‘fortune-telling.’ For the Andalusian mystic, perceiving and understanding the signs of the physical world’s inevitable end are absolutely essential for perfecting one’s social duty.

For just as the worldly traces of power and truth are ultimately rooted in the Divine Essence, so must the human being necessarily come to terms with the end of the world, as well as his own temporal life, in order to be able to submit to God’s Will. Only with such a transformation can someone become a completed and perfected instance of the *insān kāmil* and an agent of transformation in the world, because he/she have undergone their own Judgment Day. After *fanā*’ (annihilation) in the divine presence, they are perfected with *baqā*’ (subsistence), a type of spiritual immortality decorated with a dress of divine names and attributes, such as *ḥaqq* and *qudra*.

What this leaves us with is a central question that drives the motivation behind this research: how much of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung can be understood if his life is reduced to its sociopolitical dimensions without the metaphysical context that undergirds all his writings? This is an all-too-crucial problematic that has been brought to the forefront by Shahāb Aḥmed in his masterful work *What is Islam?*<sup>187</sup> Specifically, Aḥmed highlights the lack of appreciation, among academics, for the beliefs of a Muslim like Ibn al-‘Arabī and how these beliefs influence his/her thought and view of the world. In other words, whereas most Islamicists are interested in the sociopolitical factors that might have influenced the Andalusian mystic, what Aḥmed’s work

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. Aḥmed, *What is Islam?* pg. 303-304. Specifically, the author states that: “My point is not that ‘whatever Muslims say or do is Islam,’ but that we should treat whatever Muslims say or do as a potential site or locus for the expression and articulation of being Muslim/ Islam— and look at each of those statements with eyes wide open to how they are meaningfully formed and informed by the value of Islam/ Islamic.” And many other statements where the author emphasizes the importance of taking the ‘natives’ understanding’ into account when doing academic research on Islam.

and this research alike pursue is a deeper question: how did Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics mold his perception of his milieu, including a prophetic figure like Christ

### Chapter Three: Jesus in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*

Throughout the eight volumes of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*FM*), there are approximately 170 mentions of Jesus. While some of the 560 chapters in this work specifically focus on Christ, or *ʿīṣawī* (Jesus-like) saints, the mentions of the son of Mary are generally spread uniformly throughout this large monograph. Moreover, there does not seem to be any apparent connection between a specific chapter's theme or focus and the portrayal of Jesus therein. Sometimes, a single section will even venture into all the various facets of his persona.<sup>188</sup>

Notwithstanding the sporadic nature of these mentions, they can be classified under a few major themes. Before we delve into each of these, an important reminder is in order. As mentioned, these various groupings should be considered as various aspects of Christ's persona. In other words, there is a tremendous overlap between these different strands that does not allow for a clear categorization. Be that as it may, these different intersections will allow us to understand how Jesus, as a character, fits into Ibn al-ʿArabī's massive narrative.

These main themes are as follows: the physical composition and kinship relationships of Jesus, *mi ʿrāj* (ascension) narratives, *walāya* (sainthood) and esoteric dimensions of *sharīʿa* (divine law). Of course, each of these groupings includes multiple sub-categories that should be adumbrated separately. In the ensuing paragraphs, we will explore each of these themes in sequence, as they appear in the *FM*. Thenceforth, at the end of each section, there will be some

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<sup>188</sup> A few scholars tried to reason through Ibn al-ʿArabī's organization of the *FM*. Chodkiewicz's *Ocean without Shore* posits an esoteric classification of the work based on the Qurʾān. On the other hand, Chittick in *Sufi Path of Knowledge* seems to dismiss any underlying principle in Ibn al-ʿArabī's organization of the work and thinks it should be regarded as an organic stream of consciousness.

cursory remarks regarding the overarching portrayal of Christ that emerges from those specific passages. This will come together in a comprehensive summary at the end of chapter to make sense of Jesus in the entire *FM*.

Lastly, with a few exceptions, the excerpts analyzed in this chapter are restricted to the first hundred sections or so from this massive work. There are two key reasons for this approach. First, already with such a relatively small selection of chapters, the resulting large number of mentions and the rich diversity of these portrayals makes a comprehensive survey of all 170 mentions of Christ impossible, due to the restriction of time and space. Second, many of these discussions, particularly those pertaining to Jesus and *walāya* (sainthood), appear in close proximity to one another in the early chapters of the *FM* and, therefore, constitute a unique narrative surrounding Christ's eschatological role in establishing the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad.

*The Physical Composition of Jesus and Kinship:*

The first substantial mention of Jesus in the *FM* epitomizes Ibn al-‘Arabī’s multifaceted portrayal of the son of Mary.<sup>189</sup> Here, in chapter 5, titled “The Secrets of *Bismillāh al-Raḥman al-Raḥīm* [In the Name of God, Most-Beneficent, Most-Merciful] and *al-Fātiḥa* [The Opening],” the Andalusian mystic draws a creative analogy between Christ’s relationship with his mother Mary, on the one hand, and the intimate symbiosis between *al-Fātiḥa*, the opening chapter of the Qur’ān, with the scripture as a whole, on the other:

Therefore, it [*al-Fātiḥa*] is the opening of the *kitāb* (book); because the book is an allusion to the creativity of its author ... The name ‘Opening’ is also fitting since *kitāb al-wujūd* [the book of being] started with it. Therefore, He [God] established

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<sup>189</sup> The first actual – though brief – mention of Jesus in this work is in the introduction, where the author uses the son of Mary as proof against the *ḥulūlī* (one who adheres to union between God and His creation): “It is not necessary that when the *dalīl* [signpost/proof] is absent that the *madlūl* [signified/that which is proven] also becomes invalid. Thus, the statement of the *ḥulūlī* that: ‘Had God resided in something, as He resided within Jesus, then [that thing] would be able to resurrect the dead!’” *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* I, 76.

the Opening as a metaphor and established the *kitāb* [Qur'ān] after it and made it [the Opening] a *miftāḥ* [key] for it [Qur'ān].

Also reflect over its description as *umm al-Qur'ān* (the mother of the Qur'ān); for the mother is the site of coming-to-be and creation. [In this regard], the existent thing in it [the Opening] is the Qur'ān...

Thus, when you look upon Jesus and Mary, may peace be upon them, and the cause of existence between them, something will become clear to you that contradicts your senses: the mother is Jesus and the son, who is the Qur'ān, is Mary.<sup>190</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabī shatters the distance of history and brings three different temporalities in close proximity to one another: the 'opening' of *wujūd* (existence/being), the conception and birth of Jesus and unfolding narrative of revelation. With this, he presents some sacred symbols of Islam (i.e. Jesus, God's uttered words and His eternal speech) as allusive stepping stones into the unknown for his readers. These various elements have been intricately woven within Ibn al-'Arabī's narrative in order to keep his audience in a constant state of traversal and movement, from the tangible to imperceptible and present moment to timelessness; all within the comfort of ink on paper.

Continuing his comparison of Jesus to divine speech, Ibn al-'Arabī also discusses the reality of Jesus as *kalimat Allāh* (the Word of God) in some 14 different places in the *FM*. In all these instances, the author remarks that just as Jesus is the Word of God, so is the rest of the cosmos also His Words. However, there is one particular instance in chapter 198 where the author distinguishes between Jesus as *kalimat Allāh* (the Word of God) and God's other *kalām* (divine speech): "God said: 'and His *kalima* (Word) which he sent to Mary' and it [the *kalima*] is naught

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 172.

but the *‘ayn* (essence) of Jesus; He did not send to her [anything] except that. For had the divine Word that was sent to her been like His speech to Moses, she would have perished.”<sup>191</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī seems motivated here to clarify his position in an ongoing theological debate regarding the true nature of divine speech in Islam.<sup>192</sup> By distinguishing between the *kalimāt* (pl. of *kalima*) and *kalām* (speech) of God, the author is able to simultaneously maintain that the entire cosmos is a matrix of God’s uttered words and also to preserve His transcendence as ultimately unknowable, per the transcendent origin of His speech. By itself, this excerpt demonstrates one of the rare occasions where Ibn al-‘Arabī somewhat agrees with the doctrines propagated by normative Islamic theological schools.<sup>193</sup>

However, as is usually the case with the Andalusian mystic, there are multiple facets from which to understand the concepts in his writings. In chapter 360, he further elaborates on this notion of Jesus as *kalimat Allāh* (the Word of God):

And He said regarding Jesus peace be upon him that he is: ‘His Word which He sent to Mary’ and He also said about her: ‘she believed in the *kalimāt* (Words) of her lord’ and they [these Words] are nothing other than Jesus. He made him as Words [plural] for her because he is abundant from the perspective of his outward and inward composition. Thus, every part of him is a Word ... It is like a human being when he utters the various letters that form one word that is intended by the speaker who seeks to create these words; so that he might express through them what is in his soul.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* IV, 44.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. The author describes in detail the earliest debates between Muslims and Christian theologians in the newly conquered Muslim territories between the mid-7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. Figures like John of Damascus debated his Muslim interlocutors on the nature of Jesus in Christianity and the Qur’ān in Islam. ‘Why do Muslims hold Jesus to be created and their revelation uncreated, even though both are regarded as Words of God?’ The impact of these debates cannot be overestimated; for they were a catalyst in the emergence of numerous Muslim groups, such as the Mu‘tazilites and People of Hadith who, respectively, supported or opposed the idea of a created Qur’ān.

<sup>193</sup> Elsewhere in the *FM*, Ibn al-‘Arabī lashingly criticizes the Ash‘arite and Mu‘tazilite theological schools for their belief that divine attributes should be understood metaphorically. Instead, Ibn al-‘Arabī insists that human beings are in actuality a metaphor for God, not the other way around.

<sup>194</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* V, 418.



In a sense, Jesus is a mediating *barzakh* (isthmus) and pedagogical tool to convey a particular understanding to the reader. Just as the son of Mary is a microcosmic analogue for the process of creation, now the Andalusian mystic places Christ's physiological composition, as Word of God, between the human act of speech and divine creation.<sup>195</sup>

Transitioning to chapter 7, titled "Regarding Knowing the Origins of Human Bodies," Ibn al-'Arabī constructs a creative typology of bodily compositions based on the special kinship between Mary and Jesus on the one hand, and Adam and Eve on the other. He states: "This chapter is concerned with the origination of human bodies and they are four types: 1) the body of Adam 2) the body of Eve 3) the body of Jesus and 4) the body of the rest of humanity."<sup>196</sup> The Andalusian mystic elaborates, some pages later, on the exact differences between these various compositions and bodily types:

As for the human being, his creation has varied according to four types. The creation of Adam does not resemble the molding of Eve. Likewise, the creation of Eve is not similar to the coming-to-be of the rest of the sons of Adam. Meanwhile, the creation of Jesus, peace be upon him, differs altogether from what we have mentioned ...

[This is because] Adam is [created] from mud, Eve from a rib, Jesus from the blowing of a spirit and the [rest of] sons of Adam from lowly water.<sup>197</sup>

The author situates the distinction between Adam, Eve, Jesus and rest of the human species within their physiological composition. One can presume that such a categorization serves two purposes: 1) to emphasize the divine proclamation in the Qur'ān that "Indeed! Your creation and resurrection

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<sup>195</sup> In this regard, Ibn al-'Arabī also uses Jesus as an analogy for writing. In chapter 195 he states: "Another matter is His statement regarding Jesus that he is: 'the Word of God.' A word is a collection of letters ... and then He said that He gave him the *injīl* (gospel) with which He intends the rank of his [Jesus's] being, from the perspective that he is a word. For a *kitāb* (book) is a collection of attached letters, in order to form a word ... so it is for this reason that He gave him the book." In this way, Ibn al-'Arabī presents Jesus as both a spoken and written story. More importantly, the Muslim mystic is keen to highlight the double significance of this Christic narrative: divine creation, human speech and writing are analogous processes of a creativity and creation. See Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* IV, 25.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, I:191.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 193.

is like the creation and resurrection of one soul” (31:28) and 2) to render these three persons (Adam, Eve and Jesus) as archetypes alongside their historical personas.

Three chapters later, in a section titled “Regarding Knowing the Cycle of *Mulk* [Dominion],” Ibn al-‘Arabī further expounds on what distinguishes each of these body types from one another:

So he created Jesus from Mary and, thus, Mary was in the rank of Adam and Jesus in the rank of Eve. Therefore, just as there was a female created from male, there was also a male created from female. Thus, he sealed [the matter] in a similar manner to the way he began it: he [ended] by creating a son without a father, just as Eve was without a mother. So, Jesus and Eve were siblings and Adam and Mary were parents for them.<sup>198</sup>

Using such an intricate typology based on kinship, Ibn al-‘Arabī is able to collapse the beginning of creation and its culmination, with the coming of Muḥammad, into a single moment. However, it remains unclear what Ibn al-‘Arabī exactly intends with the last statement: are Jesus and Eve siblings and children of Mary and Adam? or does the story of one birth simply parallel the other?<sup>199</sup>

In the rather lengthy chapter 69, titled “Regarding the Secrets of Prayer,” Ibn al-‘Arabī returns to this similarity between Jesus and Eve, but this time for the purposes of highlighting the resemblance between Adam and Mary, as unique instances of *maḥall al-takwīn* (site of formation):

Women are *maḥall al-takwīn* (the site of human formation) because they are closer to *al-mukawwīn* (God who forms) – or *mukawwan* (one who is formed) – and, therefore, they are worthier to be the site of formation than men. This even though formation did occur in men once, which is the coming-to-be of Eve from Adam. Otherwise, the general rule is for the more common occurrence [through normal reproduction]. Moreover, He has made the formation of Eve from Adam parallel to

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>199</sup> Of course, it is also possible that Ibn al-‘Arabī used an ambiguous sentence structure in this last fragment as a rhetorical tool to convey both senses of the kinship relationship between Jesus and Eve, on the one hand, and Adam and Mary, on the other. In general, paradoxical and nebulous pronoun use and sentence structure is a strategy often used by Ibn al-‘Arabī in order to shift the attention of his readers away from a rationalistic understanding of God and more towards experiencing that supra-rational *dhawq* (spiritual taste) of the divine presence and cosmos realities. Cf. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* and Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* and Morris, “Rhetoric and Realization in Ibn ‘Arabi.”

the formation of Jesus from Mary, without a man. Other than that, the general rule is that women are the site of formation.<sup>200</sup>

And so, just as Jesus is Eve's sibling through their special births, Mary and Adam also resemble one another, as a result of the unique ways they gave births to the former pair. The distinction of their respective *maḥall al-takwīn* (site of formation) emerges in Mary's reception of Gabriel's breath and Eve's emergence from Adam's rib.

In another fascinating excerpt, Ibn al-ʿArabī offers a different genealogical network between Adam and Eve on the one hand, and Jesus and Mary, on the other. In this instance, the author presents a masterful mythic narrative situating the births of Jesus and Eve within a cosmic phenomenon:

We are the children of night and day. Whatever happens in the day has day as its mother and night as its father, because they have the right of giving birth to it. And whatever is born at night has night as its mother and day as its father, because they have the right of giving birth to it. Likewise, our state will remain in this life, so long as night and day overwhelm each other. Indeed, we are children of one mother and father with those who are born in the same day or night especially. Whoever was born in the next night or day is like us, but not our siblings; since the night and day have been renewed and so have our parents...

On Judgment day the night will reside in the abode of hell and day in paradise. Thus, even though they will not be in union, there will still be births occurring in hell and paradise. Indeed, this is a parable for Eve's birth from Adam and Jesus from Mary. This is the way birth will occur in the hereafter, just as God has shown us in Jesus, Mary, Eve and Adam. For on that day, creation and coming to be is not from a marriage between night and day ... but instead, they will be equals and together it will be one day, the day of the hereafter.<sup>201</sup>

The protagonists in this act of Ibn al-ʿArabī's narrative (Adam, Eve, Jesus and Mary) are mythologized and made as emblems of the celestial realms. More importantly, the orbits of the

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<sup>200</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* II, 228.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, VI:367.

heavens themselves are also eloquently embodied in a web of human interactions and cycles of reproduction.

In a similar creative light, Christ reappears in chapter 70, titled “Regarding the Secrets of Alms,” where the Andalusian mystic presents his unique birth as an archetypal rendering of the human soul and its twin parents, body and spirit:

[These parents] are the ones who govern the human body and his partial faculties. This human soul is the child of his natural body, which is its [the soul’s] mother, and the divine spirit, its father. This is why this soul says in its conversation with God: “Our lord and the lord of our lofty fathers and lowly mothers.”<sup>202</sup>

The author begins by creatively presenting the relationship between the human being’s spiritual and physiological dimensions in a harmonious familial structure. Even though he regards both body and spirit to be the two parents of the human soul, his emphasis on the spirit’s active ‘fatherly’ role reveals the author’s attempt to root the human being’s reality within the spiritual realm. In this vision, the *jism* (natural body), and in turn the entire material realm, becomes a passive receptacle for spiritual manifestations, while the *nafs* (soul) plays the role of a *barzakh* (isthmus) between the two spheres.

As mentioned, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s objective behind this analogy is hardly restricted to the human being himself. Rather, since the Andalusian mystic emphasizes, throughout the *FM* and his other writings, the significance of the ‘son of Adam’ as *al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr* (small universe) and microcosm of the larger cosmos, then it should be understood that his motivation is to present the *nafs* (soul) of the cosmos as a *barzakh* between the *jism* (body) of the material world and *rūḥ* (spirit) of the higher realms in their entirety. In such a conceptual framework, whatever events and

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, II:291.

transactions occur in this larger macrocosmic universe also necessarily happen within the smaller microcosmic reality of the human being.

As expected, the author begins to support this proposition with sufficient scriptural references, from which he can then return, once again, to the human being's microcosmic entity and its symbolic divine composition. It is at this point that Ibn al-ʿArabī finds in Jesus and his mother Mary suitable archetypal representatives of this familial human composition:

[God also has said:] “If I form him and breathe in him from My spirit” [(15:29)] and “Mary guarded her private part and thus, We blew in her from Our spirit.” [21:91] Thus, Jesus peace be upon him was her son and she his mother. A soul was blown in the molded body from the spirit. Therefore, the body is a mother and the source of the blow/breath is a father.<sup>203</sup>

Christ and his mother provide the ideal corroborative evidence for Ibn al-ʿArabī's discourse here. The Qur'ānic narrative of the Annunciation of Jesus to Mary, wherein God states that ‘He breathed the spirit into her,’ perfectly fits the author's description of the bodily mother and her reception of the breath from the fatherly spirit. However, the Andalusian mystic adds another important pivot to his already rich analogical paradigm: the relationship between body/soul/spirit and mother/son/father is now extended with a third set: Mary, Jesus and the enigmatic fatherly source of the spiritual breath.

And so, Ibn al-ʿArabī is indirectly presenting, first, the material realm, and human body by extension, as an instance of the *maryamī* (Mary-esque) aspect of creation. Second, he is also positing the human soul, and the soul of the universe, as the *ʿīṣawī* (Christic) *barzakhī* (liminal) aspect of the microcosm/macrocosm. Finally, the human spirit and spiritual realm, in its entirety, are presented as the enigmatic fatherly source. Clearly, the author is careful not to refer to God, or

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

divine essence, as the father figure in this instance, lest he be accused of following Trinitarian Christology.<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, the Andalusian mystic undertakes the project of trying to explain the significance of Christ's birth, without a biological father, in the grand scheme of this cosmic narrative:

However, this child [Jesus] is like the orphan who has no father, because his intellect did not rule his being. So, he is akin to the one who has no intellect, like the young child who has no father to teach or discipline him. Instead, he is reared by his vegetational soul, which is his body, and whatever righteous balance God had originally given it. In this way, Christ's inward and outward faculties developed in the utmost of purity and equilibrium.<sup>205</sup>

Instead of situating the son of Mary squarely within the spiritual world, Ibn al-‘Arabī attempts to posit the former's purified body as his metaphysical father. As will become clear in the next chapter, this portrayal of Jesus as an ‘orphan’ contends with the author's sentiment in the *Bezels of Wisdom*, wherein he presents Gabriel as the son of Mary's father. In this excerpt, however, the Andalusian mystic seems focused on the unique archetype that Christ represents in light of the human soul's liminal station between its twin parents, the body and spirit.

Notwithstanding this discrepancy, the rich analogy presented here contains many hidden layers that altogether eloquently summarize Ibn al-‘Arabī's rich engagement with Jesus. Taking this microcosmic role of Christ into consideration, alongside the previous portrayals mentioned

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<sup>204</sup> It should be noted that Ibn al-‘Arabī explicitly exonerates Trinitarians in the *FM*: “As for *ahl al-tathlīth* [people of the Trinity], then salvation is hoped for them. This is due to what the trinity contains of *fardiyya* [individualization/oddity of number]. Since oddity is one of the traits of the One, they are *muwahhīdūn tawhīd tarkīb* [those who affirm oneness compositely]. Therefore, it is hoped that they will be enveloped by *al-rahma al-murakkaba* [composite mercy].

Indeed, this is why they are called *kuffār* because they hid the second within the third whence the second became between the one and third like *al-barzakh* [isthmus]. So, perhaps the people of the Trinity will be with those who affirm *tawhīd* in *ḥaḍrat al-fardāniyya* [the presence of individualization/oddity of number], but not *ḥaḍrat al-wahdāniyya* [the presence of oneness].

This is how we witnessed them in *al-kashf al-ma‘nawī* [intelligible unveiling]. We could not distinguish between those who affirm oneness and the people of the Trinity save in the presence of individualization, for I did not see even their shadow in oneness. Instead, I perceived their entities in individualization and those who affirm oneness in the presences of *wahdāniyya* [oneness] and *fardāniyya* [individualization].” *Ibid*, V:256.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, II:291.

above, we now have a somewhat holistic portrayal of Jesus as an archetype of the inevitable liminality permeating *wujūd* (reality/being/existence) at all levels. As a child born from the marriage of body and spirit, the son of Mary embodies the universe in its entirety, as the *barzakh* lingering between *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute being, God) and *al-‘adam al-muṭlaq* (absolute non-existence).<sup>206</sup>

However, Jesus also represents – on the microcosmic level – the human soul, itself also a *barzakh* between a natural bodily mother and ethereal spiritual father. According to the above mentions that situate Jesus within divine and human acts of speech, one wonders if the Andalusian mystic would also regard Christ as an archetypal embodiment of divine creativity (i.e. Word of God) that inspires and guides the human being throughout his/her lifetime. In this regard, Jesus’ conception, as the Word and Spirit of God, is never a distant historical moment. Rather, it is constantly remembered through his miracle performance, where he re-ignites his own annunciation by resurrecting the dead and breathing life into molds of clay.

As Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes multiple times in the *FM*, Jesus is not the only creation of God who is His Word. Rather, ‘all of creation are God’s Words that never cease to exist’.<sup>207</sup> Thus, one could say that the entire universe is reenacting and undergoing a macrocosmic annunciation and vice versa: Christ embodies and performs the divine creative process. Of course, in this case, Mary also represents the pivotal role of the material realm, the human body, and the canvas of human creativity upon which divine inspiration descends. However, we are still left with the

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<sup>206</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī uses this terminology multiple times throughout the *FM*. See, for instance, the book’s *Muqaddima* (Introduction), on page 7. As mentioned in Appendix A, ‘Akbarian Christology’, these terms are discussed in detail in William Chittick’s seminal works *Sufi Path of Knowledge* and *Self-Disclosure of God*.

<sup>207</sup> See page 4.

important question regarding the identity of the enigmatic fatherly spirit who is absent in the *FM* yet present in the figure of Gabriel in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam (FH)*.<sup>208</sup>

Indeed, this is only one of many ways of trying to make sense of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s elaborate narratives surrounding Jesus, Mary and the entirety of creation in the *FM*. Much more can and will be said about the overarching portrait of Christ in this work; for now, however, it suffices to say that Jesus’s significance for Ibn al-‘Arabī is more than a mere historical figure, with a prophetic past and saintly eschatological future. Rather, the son of Mary represents an ever-present aspect of creation, on both the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. In the conclusion, we will attempt to address what this overarching Christic presence means in terms of a possible ongoing and cosmic annunciation, prophetology, saintology and eschatology.

These snippets from the *FM* have shown us that the body of Jesus, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, is both a bricolage to itself as well as a tool, among many others, for a much larger story. Between miracle performance, divine utterance and kinship, the son of Mary seems always to fill the role of a cosmic archetype. As the distance of history collapses when Jesus and Eve are made into siblings under

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<sup>208</sup> In this regard, it is worthwhile pondering why Ibn al-‘Arabī regards Jesus as an orphan in this excerpt from the *FM* while presenting him contrastingly as Gabriel’s son in *FH*? A possible explanation for this disparity can be gleaned by anyone who is familiar with the Andalusian mystic’s writings. By proposing two opposing possibilities for a single question, he is possibly attempting to convey the perplexing reality of *wujūd* which cannot be neatly described nor comprehensively understood by the rational human mind.

The author of the *FM* would also state that Jesus is indeed an orphan, from a certain perspective, and the son of the angel Gabriel, from another. How this relates to the larger macrocosmic Christic presence can also be situated in-between the two poles of orphan-hood and spiritual paternity. From the perspective that the macrocosmic Christ is an orphan, we could easily situate this within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s emphasis of the entire creation’s *faqr* (poverty); or as he describes it in his *ṣalawāt faydiyya* (Overflowing Prophetic Benedictions): “It has not smelled a whiff of existence, much less to be existent!” In other words, from this perspective, the universe is an orphan precisely because it has no self-standing kinship to *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute being, God).

On the other hand, from the perspective that this entire theater of creation is a matrix of theophanies (i.e. divine manifestations), it is thoroughly rooted in these spiritual parents, which Ibn al-‘Arabī presents as the divine names. This *wajh al-khāṣṣ* (special direction or connection between a created thing and divine name) is precisely a parental kinship of sustenance; whereby the son (i.e. created thing) sustains its designated divine name with the ability to manifest itself (i.e. mercy, creativity, power, life, knowledge, etc.) upon the vessel of the material body and liminal soul. While each of these divine names plays a ‘Gabriel-esque’ fatherly role for the Christic soul of each created thing, the absolutely unknowable divine essence, which remains *muṭlaq* (absolute) and unknowable from creation, renders those same created children – ultimately – orphans in the grand scheme of things.



the parenthood of Mary and Adam, the reader is thrust once again, after crossing the metaphor, back into the procession of history in order to find God within the human microcosm.

As we transition into the other mentions of Jesus in the *FM*, two important questions arise: 1) what exactly does Jesus and his flesh represent in the reader's own microcosm as the latter seeks to cross over from the *i'tibār* (consideration) of Ibn al-'Arabī's narrative to the *'ibra* (significance)? 2) what are the socio-political implications of such a project in a Muslim community? In other words, are Ibn al-'Arabī's motivations here simply pietistic or do they serve some other purpose? These are the overarching queries that help guide the ensuing analysis.

#### *Mi'rāj (Ascension) Narratives*

One of the most important discussions of Jesus in the *FM*, overlapping somewhat with the theme of *walāya* (sainthood), is in various first and second-hand accounts of the *mi'rāj* (ascension) during which Ibn al-'Arabī describes a *walī*'s celestial journey to the divine presence in a manner that echoes the prophet Muḥammad's own ascension. James Morris explores these "at least four separate longer narratives" in "The Mi'rāj and Ibn 'Arabī's Own Spiritual Ascension."<sup>209</sup> Two of these appear in the *FM*, chapters 167 and 367 respectively and will be the focus in this section. The others are found in two shorter works: *Kitāb al-Isrā'* (The Book of Ascension) and *Risālat al-Anwār* (The Treatise on Lights).

In chapter 167, titled "Regarding Knowing the Alchemy of Happiness," the son of Mary appears in a second-hand account of the ascension where a certain *tābi' muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan follower) is followed by a *ṣāhib nazar* (one who engages in rational reflection) on a celestial journey through the seven heavens. During each stage, the 'Muḥammadan follower' is

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<sup>209</sup> James Morris, "The Mi'rāj and Ibn 'Arabī's Own Spiritual Ascension: Chapter 367 of the *Futūḥāt* and *K. al-Isrā'*," 1.

greeted by the prophet who resides in that heaven, while the rational thinker is forced to converse with a – lesser – planetary/angelic guardian of that realm. From this perspective, this excerpt vividly illustrates Ibn al-‘Arabī’s critical attitude towards rational reflection and its detrimental effects on *taḥqīq* (spiritual self-realization).

The prophets who reside in each heaven in this rendition of the *mi‘rāj* closely resemble the prophet Muḥammad’s own celestial journey, as described in *ḥadīth*: Adam, Jesus and John the Baptist, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses and Abraham in the first to seventh heaven respectively.<sup>210</sup> With this in mind, we focus on the second heaven as the main stage in this narrative where Jesus plays a significant role. First, the ‘Muḥammadan follower’ arrives in the presence of ‘the cousins,’ the son of Mary and John the Baptist:

They reveal to him the authenticity of the message of the teacher, God’s messenger [Muḥammad] prayers and blessings be upon him, through the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān. This is because this presence is that of *al-khiṭāba* [oration], *al-awzān* [poetic meters], *ḥusn mawāqī‘ al-kalām* [the beauty of appropriate speech], *imtizāj al-umūr* [the mixture of affairs] and *zuhūr al-ma‘nā al-wāḥid fī-l-ṣuwar al-kathīra* [the appearance of one meaning in a multiplicity of forms]. He also receives the *furqān* [clear criterion for understanding] and the understanding of *kharq al-‘awā‘id* [breaking of habits].

He also comes to know from this presence the ‘*ilm al-sīmiyā*’, which pertains to working with letters and names as opposed to vapors, blood and other things [i.e. as in ‘*ilm al-kīmiyā*’ (Alchemy)]. He also come to know the honor of words, *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* [the most encompassing of speech] and reality of *kun* [Be!] and its designation as *kalimat al-amr* [the word of command], not the past, future or *ḥāl* [state that is bound time].

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<sup>210</sup> This narrative is mentioned in the two most authentic *ḥadīth* compendiums of Bukhārī and Muslim. In Bukhārī’s version, the following sequence of prophets are mentioned:

“Gabriel took off with me until we reached the lowest heaven, whence he knocked on the gate. It was then said: ‘who is this?’ He said: ‘Gabriel’ [Then it was said:] ‘Who is with you?’ He said: ‘Muḥammad!’ [Then it was said:] ‘Has he already been invited?’ He said: ‘Yes!’ ... Then it was opened, [I found] Adam inside. Gabriel said: ‘This is your father Adam’ I greeted him, and he said; ‘Welcome with the righteous son and prophet.’

Then he [Gabriel] took me to the second heaven ... therein, I found John the Baptist and Jesus, the cousins ... Then, he took me to the third heaven ... therein, I found Joseph ... Then, he took me to the fourth heaven ... therein, I found Idrīs [Enoch] ... Then, he took me to fifth heaven ... therein, I found Aaron ... Then, he took me to the sixth heaven ... therein, I found Moses ... Then, he took me to the seventh heaven ... therein, I found Ibrāhīm [Abraham].” (Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 652-653).

[From this heaven also, one comes to know] the appearance of the two letters from this word, even though it is composed of three. [He also understands] why that third *barzakhiyya* [liminal] ‘word,’ between the letter *kāf* and *nūn*, which is the spiritual *wāw*, was removed. This is the letter which gives [the realm] of *mulk* [dominion] the power to exercise influence upon the formation of created things. One also comes to know, from this presence, the secret of *takwīn* [formation].<sup>211</sup>

Already from the first few sentences of this rather long introduction; the reader can glimpse the aura of Christ in this second heaven of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *mi‘rāj*. It is hardly a coincidence that the Andalusian mystic places the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān (i.e. divine speech) and *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* (the most encompassing of words/speech) in the same heaven where Jesus, who is *kalimat Allāh* (the word of God), resides.

This Christic connection becomes more vivid as Ibn al-‘Arabī focuses on the knowledge pertaining to the divine command *kun* (Be!), which also emerges from this heaven. This is directly related to the son of Mary, who is described in the Qur’ān as being formed through this divine command and who embodies it through his performance of miracles. Aside from these apparent similarities, however, the Andalusian mystic’s mention of the prophet Muḥammad’s divine grant of *jawāmi‘ al-kalim*,<sup>212</sup> as one of the ‘treasures of Gnosis’ found in this realm, is equally important because it alludes to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s placement of Christ’s rank and unique physiology under the auspices of *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality).

Likewise, the author of the *FM* seems to identify the son of Mary with the hidden – pronounced but not written – letter ‘*wāw*’ in the divine creative command *kun*, between the *kāf* and *nūn*. Just as Christ is a *barzakh* (liminal interstice) between the physical and spiritual realms,

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid, III:412.

<sup>212</sup> This *ḥadīth* is found in the compendium of Muslim: “I have been preferred above the [other] prophets through six [things]: I have been given *jawāmi‘ al-kalim*, I have been granted aid through fear, bounties of war have been made licit for me, earth has been made a pure place of prostration for me, I have been sent to all of creation and prophets were sealed by me.” (Al-Nīsābūrī, Muslim. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 237).

so is this hidden ‘*wāw*’ a *barzakh* between the ontological realms of *mulk* (dominion/spirit) and *nāsūt* (physical presence of human beings). Any familiar reader of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings can tell that the significance of this analogy is that it intentionally identifies Jesus with this hidden and liminal aspect of divine creation. With a little creative license, we can even say that such an identification harmonizes with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s understanding of *kufr* (disbelief/concealment), as pertaining to Christology and the divinity of Jesus: the *kufr* (concealment) of God’s spirit within Christ’s form is reflected in his linguistic sibling, the hidden *wāw* in *kun*!

These allusions to Christ’s harmony with this heaven’s station become clear in the next passage where Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions the son of Mary explicitly in the context of *takwīn* (formation) and specifically the aforementioned emphasis on divine permission in Christ’s miracle performance:

From this heaven one also comes to know [how] Jesus resurrects the dead and formation of a bird [from clay], whence he blew in it [and it came to life]. One also comes to know, from this heaven, whether the coming-to-life of this clay-bird was by God’s permission or the molding of Jesus.

As for the molding of the bird and blowing in it, that is through God’s permission. Also, it is known from this heaven with which action of the tongue is His statement: “With My permission [or] with God’s permission” attached? And whether the active agent in this regard is [His statement]: “*Yakūn*” [to become] or “*tanfukh*” [to breathe]. As for *ahl Allāh* [the people of God], the active agent is *yakūn*, while for those who establish *al-asbāb* [causes], and the people of *aḥwāl* [spiritual states], the active agent is *tanfukh*.

Thus, whoever is admitted into this heaven and meets with Jesus and John the Baptist will undoubtedly come to know all of this. However, this does not happen for the *ṣāhib al-naẓar* [the one who engages in rational reflection].<sup>213</sup>

As soon as the author introduces Jesus in this narrative, he immediately situates the latter within the discourse on *takwīn* and miracle performance. In contrast to the previous selections, however,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya III*, 412.

Ibn al-‘Arabī distinguishes here between the various components of Christ’s miracles, specifically resurrecting the dead and giving life to a bird of clay. Whereas in other instances, the author’s *kashf* (unveiling) yields the understanding that God is the only one who has power to create, trivializing all *asbāb* (physical causes) involved in this process, here the author posits that this ‘*āmil* (active agent) is the created thing’s actual coming-to-be: *yakūn*.<sup>214</sup> It is interesting also that – so far – the Andalusian mystic has not presented Christ’s own unique physiology as a factor in his association with this heaven.

Thenceforth, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s elaborates further on the special knowledge forbidden to the *ṣāhib al-naẓar*; all the while, he posits a creative ontological reason for the affinity between Jesus and John the Baptist and their residence in this specific heaven:

What I mean by the knowledge that the *ṣāhib al-naẓar* does not receive is the *dhawq* [spiritual taste] of this knowledge’s reality. Moreover, Jesus is the spirit of God and *Yaḥyā* [John the Baptist] has *al-ḥayāt* [life]. Thus, just as Spirit and Life are never separated from one another, so are these two prophets, Jesus and John the Baptist, never apart from one another, due to what they both carry of this secret.

Jesus has been given ‘*ilm al-kīmiyā*’ [science of alchemy] in two ways. [He was given] *al-inshā*’ [formation], which is his forming a bird from clay and blowing into it with his breath. In this way, the form appeared through the process of molding with two hands while [life] and flying occurred through the blowing, which is *al-naḥās* [breath].

As for the second way, that pertains to *izālat al-‘ilal al-ṭāri’a* [removal of accidental shortcomings]. Instances of this are Jesus’ curing the blind and leper, sicknesses that occurred to them when they were in the womb, which is part of the duty of *takwīn* [coming-to-be].

Through [learning this], *al-tābi*’ [the Muḥammadan follower] obtains knowledge of ‘*ilm al-miqdār*’ [the science of divine measure/decreed] and *al-mīzān al-ṭabī’ī wa-*

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<sup>214</sup> See, for instance, the following excerpt from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*: “Moreover, He did not attribute the ability of blowing breaths, as means of giving life, aside from Jesus, save Himself, either through *al-nūn* [(i.e. *naḥaknā*, ‘We blew’)] or *al-tā*’ [(i.e. *naḥakhtu*, ‘I blew’)]; the latter being the second-person pronoun. Lastly, even though it is known, through scripture, that such abilities were granted to these prophets; it is not known – through scripture – whether it was granted solely to them. Rather, this is only known through *kashf* [unveiling] and cognition.” (III:79) As will become clear in the following chapter, this position is like that found in the chapter on Jesus in the *FH*.

*l-rūḥānī* [the natural and spiritual balance], due to Christ's own acquiring of these two disciplines.<sup>215</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī provides a novel explanation for Christ's and John the Baptist's simultaneous presence in the same heaven. As is expected from the Andalusian mystic, for whom language and etymology are an essential foundation and springboard for discussing metaphysics, the son of Mary's Qur'ānic description as *rūḥ Allāh* (spirit of God) and John the Baptist's very name in Arabic (*Yahyā* or the one who comes to life) allows the author of the *FM* to situate their kinship within the archetypal inseparability between the Spirit and Life.<sup>216</sup>

At this point, the author expands the list of disciplines that are granted to the ‘Muḥammadan follower’ upon his/her interaction with Jesus and John the Baptist in this heaven. The author presents a catalog here that highlights his holistic perception of Christ's image, as the hidden *barzakh* in the divine creative command, and a universal archetype of the human microcosm:

From this heaven, the soul of this ‘Muḥammadan follower’ also obtains *al-ḥayāt al-ilmīyya* [knowing life], through which hearts are resurrected, evident in His statement: “Give the example of the one who was dead, and We resurrected him.” [(6:122)]

Indeed, this is a *ḥadra jāmi‘a* [encompassing presence] that includes everything; also present there is the angel who is assigned the affair of *al-nuṭfa* [sperm] in the sixth month [of pregnancy]. From this presence, also, comes the sustenance to orators, writers but not poets. Since Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, was given *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* [most encompassing of speech], he was addressed from this presence.

It was said: “We did not teach him [Muḥammad] poetry” [(36:69)] because he was sent *mufaṣṣilan* [with the task of explaining affairs in detail] while *al-shi‘r* [poetry] is from *al-shu‘ūr* [premonition/sensation] and serves the purpose of *al-ijmāl* [summary/outline], which is not *al-tafṣīl* [explaining in detail] and the opposite of *al-bayān* [clarification].<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 413.

<sup>216</sup> One also wonders, in this regard, whether Ibn al-‘Arabī would further emphasize that just as Jesus and John the Baptist are cousins, so are the pair ‘Spirit and Life’ metaphysical cousins.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

Ibn al-‘Arabī extends the Christic role of the ‘life-giving breath’ to the spiritual path and resurrection of hearts on the one hand, and to the inspiration of oration and speech, on the other. This, in combination with the aforementioned excerpt where the Andalusian mystic explicitly compares Jesus, as *kalimat Allāh* (Word of God) with human speech,<sup>218</sup> leaves us with the powerful realization that the Akbarian son of Mary symbolizes creativity in two important senses: 1) he embodies divine creativity, as an instance of God’s speech, and 2) he is an archetype of a Christic principle: the very process of oratory eloquence in human beings.

The author then transitions to discussing other disciplines emerging from this ‘life-giving breath’ that emanate from this heaven of Christ; disciplines that specifically pertain to alchemy and spiritual states:

From here, also, one comes to know the fluctuations of affairs and spiritual states that are granted to those destined to have them. Moreover, whatever appears in the world of elements from apparent names, then it comes from this heaven. As for meanings, they come from another presence. However, if they do come into existence, then only their spirits emanate from this heaven, not the essences of their forms that carry their spirits.

Therefore, if one obtains knowledge of these existents and how quickly they come to life, he/she might not accept [that knowledge] for a long time, since that is from the specific knowledge of Jesus, not what is revealed in this orbit or rotation of its planet. Indeed, it belongs to the private divine path that falls outside the boundary of natural science since the latter requires relative ordering.<sup>219</sup>

With this, Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes his discussion on the second heaven of Jesus in chapter 167 of the *FM*. The final types of knowledge that are granted to the ‘Muḥammadan follower,’ mentioned in these paragraphs, also fall within the realm of *takwīn* (formation) and the Christic notion of ‘life-giving breath.’

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<sup>218</sup> See page 3.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

Before transitioning to the second *mi 'rāj* narrative in the *FM*, it is worthwhile to reflect on the eclectic motifs mentioned in the preceding excerpts of this celestial journey in the third person. Indeed, this is a kaleidoscopic vision that establishes the Qur'ānic description of Jesus (*kalimat Allāh*, 'Word of God') and the Arabic name of his cousin, John the Baptist (Yaḥyā), as the foundation for an all-permeating Christic presence, found in the resurrection of diseased spiritual hearts, the eloquence of orators and the 'coming-to-be' of things in the world.

The second narrative of the *mi 'rāj* appears in chapter 367, titled "Regarding Knowing the Fifth Station of *Tawakkul* [Divine Trust]." In contrast to the first account, this version is presented from a first-hand perspective and places the reader squarely within Ibn al-'Arabī's own experience of this mythic journey. This is clear from the introductory remarks, which appear prior to the actual details of the journey:

God decreed to take me on a night journey, in order to show me His signs in His names from my names. Indeed, this is the share of our inheritance from the [prophetic] *isrā'* [nightly journey].

He removed me from *makānī* [my place], mounted me upon the *burāq* [mythic creature] of *imkānī* [my ability] and immersed me within *arkānī* [my disposition]. Then, I could not even see my earth that accompanies me.<sup>220</sup>

As is expected from the author, he interweaves his enigmatic writing style with etymological prowess in order to convey the metaphysical interconnectedness of this cosmic journey with his own inner universe; a point which he poignantly states at the end of this narrative: his *mi 'rāj* took place within his own being.

Thenceforth, Ibn al-'Arabī announces his arrival in the second heaven in a similar manner as that found in the first narrative:

Then, I saw Jesus – peace be upon him – in the second heaven; alongside him I found his cousin Yaḥyā [John the Baptist], peace be upon him. In this way, life

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, VI:77.



came to be ... Since the *al-ḥayāt al-ḥaywāniyya* [animal life] accompanies the spirit, I found John the Baptist with a living spirit [Jesus].<sup>221</sup>

The author reiterates his earlier emphasis on the metaphysical resemblance between Jesus and John the Baptist, emerging from their names and Qur'ānic descriptions. However, whereas in the first account Ibn al-'Arabī associates these two figures with *al-ḥayāt al-ṭabī'iyya* [natural life], here he connects them using the philosophical term, 'animal life.'

At this point, the author introduces an aspect not found in the previous excerpt. He questions Jesus and John the Baptist on various aspects of their physiologies, ranks and residences in this heaven:

Then I greeted them, and said to him [Jesus]: "What were you given above us in such a way that God has called you the 'Spirit' that is appended to Him?" He said: "Have you not seen who it is that has given me this gift?" I did not understand his statement, so he said: "Had it not been for this, I would not have been able to resurrect the dead."

I said to him: "We have seen some who resurrect the dead whose form is not like yours." He replied: "None of those you refer to was able to resurrect the dead except according to the amount they inherit from me. Indeed, they have not stood in my station as I have in the rank of the one who granted me this ability. For the one who granted me this, by whom I mean Gabriel, did not set foot in a place save that it became living. I, on the other hand, do not have this ability. Instead, for us, we form images, using a special mold, and *al-rūḥ al-kull* [universal spirit], is the one who handles the affairs of the spirits of those images."<sup>222</sup>

The first conversation Ibn al-'Arabī has with Jesus in this heaven pertains directly to the latter's physiology and his Qur'ānic description as *rūḥ Allāh* [God's spirit]. In contrast to the previous excerpts discussed above – and the predominant sentiment in the *Bezels of Wisdom* – the author here presents Gabriel, not God, as the one who grants the son of Mary the ability to resurrect the dead.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Upon concluding his conversation with Jesus, the Andalusian mystic immediately directs his attention to Yaḥyā (John the Baptist):

Then I turned my face towards John the Baptist, peace be upon him, and said to him: “I have been informed that you will slaughter death when it is brought forth on the day of Judgment and is placed between paradise and hell. The residents of both abodes will see it in the form of a lamb.”

He said: “For I am Yaḥyā [the living one] and my opposite cannot remain, alongside me, in the eternal abode. Therefore, death must be removed, and I be the one who removes it.” I said to him: “You’re truthful in what you have alluded to. However, in this world there are many people named Yaḥyā.” He said: “Yes but the rank of primacy in this name belongs to me. For everyone who *yahyā* [lives], from those who came before [me] and will come later, they do so through me. This is because God has not given my name to anyone before me. Thus, every Yaḥyā has followed me in my appearance; they have no choice in this affair.” He [Yaḥyā] made me understand something I did not know beforehand.<sup>223</sup>

Both Jesus and John have their Qur’ānic appellations situated within unique spiritual stations granted only to them. In the case of the latter, Ibn al-‘Arabī extends John’s superiority above all those who share his name and attribute of life from among the human race. Of course, this itself reveals Ibn al-‘Arabī’s conviction that anyone named ‘Yaḥyā’ is – somehow – granted the aura of *ḥayāt* (life), from John the Baptist’s niche.

Thenceforth, the author presents a question to both cousins pertaining to their Qur’ānic descriptions found in chapter 19 “Maryam”:

I then said: “Praise be to God who brought you together in one heaven, so that I can ask you about a single affair and receive the answer in a single presence. You both have been especially granted *salām al-Ḥaqq* [greeting of/from the Real],” for it was said about Jesus that he said in the cradle: “Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die and the day I’m resurrected alive.” [(19:33)] and it was said about John the Baptist: “Peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies and the day he is resurrected alive.” [(19:15)]; thus, Jesus spoke about himself regarding the divine greeting, while God Himself spoke of His salutations upon John the Baptist.

[So, I asked them]: “Which rank is more complete?” He replied: “Are you not from the *ahl al-Qur’ān* [the people of the Qur’ān]?” I said: “Yes, I’m from the people of the Qur’ān.” He said: “Then, look at how God has brought me and my cousin

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

[Jesus]. Did He not describe us as being from *al-ṣāliḥīn* [the righteous]?” [(3:39)] I said: “Yes!” He said: “And did He not also say about Jesus, my cousin, that he is from the righteous just as He described me? This came while Jesus was still in the cradle, in order to prove the innocence of my aunt [Mary]. When he [Jesus] spoke *nakira* [using the indefinite form of the adjective] he let them know that he was merely conveying God’s message.”

I said to him: “You are truthful, but Christ’s greeting upon himself was *salām al-ta’rīf* [definite greeting], while God’s greeting to you was indefinite and the latter is more universal.” He replied: “This is not the *ta’rīf* [definition] of *‘ayn* [essence], but rather of a *jins* [genus]. Thus, there is no difference between it and [the other definite] greeting. In this way, he [Jesus] and I are equal in both, divine greeting and righteousness. We received the latter through a *bushrā* [glad tiding], while Jesus received it from angels.”<sup>224</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī presents a remarkable situation where amidst this mythic celestial journey, he engages the spirit of John the Baptist in a detailed debate regarding Qur’ānic grammar; a deliberation that culminates in this prophet’s triumphant ability to convince Ibn al-‘Arabī that both he and Jesus are equal in the sight of God.<sup>225</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī then continues to ask John the Baptist more questions regarding his portrayal in the Qur’ān:

Then I asked him: “Instruct me, may God give you benefit, why were you [described as] *ḥaṣūr* [celibate]?” [(19:15)] He said: “This is a trace from the *himma* [intentionive power] of my father [Zechariah], who contemplated Mary the ‘Chaste,’ when she isolated herself from men. When he entered upon her, while she was in seclusion, he was dumbfounded by her state and asked God to give him a child like her. Thus I was born like her, celibate and apart from women. Indeed, this is not a trait of perfection, but rather simply a trace from the intentionive power. Instead, one finds the essence of perfection in reproduction itself.”

I said to him: “But marriage in paradise does not yield any children!” He replied: “Do not say that! Indeed, there will necessarily be reproduction there. This appears in the form of a breath that exits from the wife during ejaculation, since sperm in that abode takes the form of wind, just as it takes the form of water in this world. In this way, this wind appears in the form according to which the intercourse

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 78-79.

<sup>225</sup> It is worthwhile noting that John the Baptist’s sarcastic query directed towards Ibn al-‘Arabī: “Are you not from the people of the Qur’ān?” is most probably alluding to the Andalusian mystic’s own superior rank and awareness of John the Baptist’s response beforehand, in which case this prophet asked the Sufi mystic in order to inform unaware readers.

occurred between the spouses. Some of us witness this, while others do not. This is the same in the *dunyā* [this world]: there is an *‘ālam ghayb* [unseen realm] for those for whom it is veiled, while it is *‘ālam shahāda* [witnessed realm] for those who perceive it.”<sup>226</sup>

This is a remarkable conversation between Ibn al-‘Arabī and the spirit of John the Baptist occurring in the mythologized spiritual journey of the *mi‘rāj*. The interweaving of thoroughly bodily discourses (e.g. sexual intercourse and ejaculation) within an opposing supra-bodily setting of metaphysics perfectly encapsulates the Andalusian mystic’s constant attempt to synthesize the worlds of body and spirit by raising the importance of the former and rooting it in the realm of the latter: all bodily transactions have definitive spiritual origins and significance. Aside from this overarching motif, it is also worthwhile highlighting the – hardly coincidental – description of otherworldly ‘sperm’ as taking the form of wind and breath.

First, this convergence of sperm, as the basic fluid of human reproduction, with breath necessarily pays homage to John the Baptist’s cousin, Jesus, and his own life-giving breath. Second, given that John has already informed Ibn al-‘Arabī that he exercises specific powers in the afterlife, ones that necessitate death’s own demise, his description here of the human sperm’s unique form in that abode alludes to this prophet’s possible agency in this bodily change: since John the Baptist is the paragon of life, he exercises direct influence on the manifestations of human life in the abode of eternal life.<sup>227</sup> Altogether, these selections have, so far, eloquently revealed the synthesis between the personas – and archetypes – of Jesus and his cousin in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung; a convergence that performs Christ’s *barzakhī* physiology, between the realms of body and spirit.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>227</sup> Thereby playing an analogous role to the one performed by his cousin Jesus in this physical realm.

Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes his sojourn in this second heaven by asking John the Baptist one final question, the response to which harmonizes the various threads and motifs the Andalusian mystic has presented us with thus far in this second *mi ‘rāj* narrative:

I said to him [Yahyā]: “Is this your heaven?” He said to me: “No, rather I fluctuate between Jesus and Aaron. I’m with this one and that one; likewise, with Joseph and Idrīs – peace be upon them.” I said to him: “Why have you specifically mentioned Aaron aside from the other prophets?” He said to me: “Due to the sanctity of *nasab* [lineage]. I have only come to Jesus because he is my cousin, so I visit him in his heaven.

Then I come to Aaron because my aunt is his sister, in religion and lineage.” I said to him: “But he is not her brother, for there are many centuries and places between them.” Then he said to me: “God has said: ‘We sent to Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ’ [(7:73)], what is this brotherhood? Do you think he is the direct descendant of Thamūd from his parents, and that is why He referred to him as their brother? [No!] rather, He named the tribe [according to the name of its ancestor] Thamūd and Ṣāliḥ is a descendant of Thamūd; therefore, he is their brother without a doubt.

Thenceforth, He introduces the kinship of *dīn* [religion]. Have you not seen the *aṣḥāb al-ayka* [the Companions of the Tree]? They were not from Madyan, whereas [prophet] Shu‘ayb was from there. Thus, He said about Shu‘ayb that he is the brother of Madyan: ‘And [He sent] to Madyan their brother Shu‘ayb’ [(11:84)]. However, when the mention of the Companions of the Tree came, He said: ‘Shu‘ayb said to them’ [(26:176)] and did not say ‘their brother’ because they are not from Madyan like him.

Likewise, my visits to them [Jesus and Aaron] are due to kinship. Although, I am closer to Jesus than to Aaron.”<sup>228</sup>

John provides Ibn al-‘Arabī with a thoroughly Qur’ānic response that delineates his relationship with Aaron, the brother of Moses. This scriptural rejoinder reveals a kinship typology that surpasses the boundary of blood. Indeed, the Andalusian mystic’s conversation with the prophet Abraham in the seventh heaven, found in this same *mi ‘rāj* account, establishes yet another kinship type, explicitly described by the prophet Abraham as the ‘Brotherhood of Milk,’ connoting paternal and fraternal connections based on knowledge and learning.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Stephen Hirtenstein’s “The Brotherhood of Milk: Perspectives of Knowledge in the Adamic Clay” discusses this meeting, and its significance in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Weltanschauung*, in detail.

We can summarize all these motifs presented in these *mi'raj* narratives under the heading of 'spiritual realities of embodied forms and bodily connections.' The familial relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist – and by extension, between John the Baptist and his father Zechariah and his aunt Mary – is immediately rendered by Ibn al-'Arabī as a bond that transcends, yet is prudently represented by blood. The fact that the son of Mary and John the Baptist are cousins allows the author of the *FM* to emphasize the connection between the traits of 'Spirit' and 'Life.' Likewise, through an exploration of the Qur'ānic delineation of fraternal ties, John the Baptist convinces Ibn al-'Arabī that he can, indeed, be Aaron's brother; notwithstanding the many centuries separating them.

And so, in both these *mi'raj* narratives, Ibn al-'Arabī further sediments his portrayal of Jesus as an indispensable component of the entire universe's metaphysical reality and function in a spiritual seeker's journey to the divine presence. Christ's – and John's – residence in the second heaven is not only harmonious, but actually inseparable from that sphere's designation as the source of oration, alchemy and science of letters. For all of these disciplines have an important trait common with the son of Mary's unique composition: they all embody and perform divine creativity and the 'coming-to-be' of things in the world. Altogether, the figures of Jesus and John the Baptist, the celestial second heaven, the physical world and the paradisiacal afterlife coalesce to represent Ibn al-'Arabī's holistic vision of pure *wujūd* (Being), beyond any form or designation.

#### *Walāya (Sainthood)*

In general, the notions of prophethood and sainthood are closely related in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings. In the context of Jesus specifically, the first concept aims to place the son of Mary, and the rest of God's prophets and messengers, under the jurisdiction of the *sharī'a* of Muḥammad as the seal of the prophets. The second notion seeks to elevate Jesus by granting him the post of *khatm*

*al-walāya al-muṭlaqa/al-‘amma* (seal of absolute/universal sainthood): a unique status that the son of Mary will occupy upon his return, as the Messiah, and after whom there will be no more saints in the world.

The first mention of Jesus under this heading can be found in chapter 10, with the rather lengthy title “Regarding Knowing the Cycle of Dominion ... and the Rank of the Epoch between Jesus and Muḥammad, peace be upon them, Known as *Zamān al-Fatra* [the period between two prophets]”:

Know, may God grant you victory, that it has been narrated that the prophet, prayers and blessings be upon him, said: “I am the master of the sons of Adam, without pride!” ... In another narration he says: “I am the master of the people on the day of judgment!”<sup>230</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the author begins by relying upon the canonical Islamic sources. Specifically, he references a well-known *ḥadīth* that establishes the superior rank of the Prophet, not only after his appearance and the emergence of Islam, but a pre-eternal supremacy that predates even the coming of Adam, the first prophet and the father of humanity.

Thenceforth, the author ventures, as usual, to elaborate upon this textual reference and interpret it through his creative metaphysical lens:

Thus, *siyāda* [mastery] and *sharaf* [nobility] have been granted to him above and beyond anyone else from the human race. He, peace be upon him, also said: “I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay!” What he means by this is that God granted him special knowledge and informed him, while he was still a spirit, of his superior rank.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya I*, 207.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

The author presents the Prophet's claim to prophethood, prior to the physical creation of Adam, as an allusion to his reception of special knowledge while he was in the world of spirits; a grant, which Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes was only given to the prophet of Islam.

It is at this point that Jesus emerges to perform his usual role in these Akbarian discourses: as an exemplar and pivotal proof for Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysical hypothesis and esoteric scriptural – or *ḥadīth* – interpretation:

Therefore, all the other prophets in this world are his deputies, from Adam to the last of them [Jesus], peace be upon them. He [Muḥammad], prayers and peace be upon him, elaborated upon this station multiple times. Among them is his statement: “If Moses were living, he would have no choice but to follow me!” He also said regarding the second coming of Jesus son of Mary at the end of times: “He will grant us safety,” which means that he will rule us according to the *sunna* [custom/sharīʿa] of our prophet, peace be upon him, break the cross and kill the pig.<sup>232</sup>

The author focuses on the eschatological superiority of the Prophet, pertaining to the supremacy of his divine law and custom from his time until the day of Judgment. Clearly, by quoting the Prophet's statements about Moses and Jesus specifically, the Andalusian mystic wants to emphasize the *naskh* (abrogation) of Judaism and Christianity, respectively, through the advent of Islam and coming of its Prophet. In this regard, Ibn al-ʿArabī elaborates particularly on the son of Mary's rule at the end of time and his judging according to this Muḥammadan *sharīʿa*.

In order to complement this discussion on the eschatological superiority of the Prophet, Ibn al-ʿArabī transitions to discussing the equally important historical significance of the Muḥammadan rank, in light of the coming of previous prophets and messengers:

Moreover, if Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, had been sent during the time of Adam then the rest of the prophets and people would have been *ḥissan* [empirically] under the ruling of his sharīʿa until the day of judgment. This is why no one else was sent generally [to all of creation] save him especially.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



This is why he is the king and master. Every prophet other than he was only sent to a specific tribe. Hence, none of their scriptures and messages encompassed the others save his alone, prayers and blessings be upon him. Therefore, from the time of Adam, peace be upon him, to the age of Muḥammad's prophethood, prayers and blessings be upon him, and the day of judgment, his dominion and superiority in the hereafter is established above and beyond the other divine messengers.

Thenceforth, his spirituality is present alongside the spirituality of every other prophet and messenger. In this way, spiritual sustenance reaches them from that pure spirit, each according to the divine laws and knowledge that he brings forth during his historical term as a prophet.<sup>233</sup>

As readers we are left wondering if the Prophet was indeed sent during the time of Adam, then what need is there to send all the other divine messengers? The answer to this question emerges in the presentation of all these divine viceroys as Muḥammad's deputies. The final paragraph also returns the reader to the emphasis on the Prophet's pre-temporal superiority in the world of spirits, prior to his historical appearance. In this instance, however, this discussion of spiritual superiority is made more vivid than in the first paragraphs, by the reference to the spirits of other prophets, who are permeated and marked with the Muḥammadan station.

Naturally, this presentation of the countless divine vicegerents – each of whom brought a different scripture and commanded a different community of devotees – as deputies of the Prophet, makes them somewhat similar to the generation of the *ṣaḥāba* (prophetic companions) and later Muslim scholars and saints who are also deputies of Muḥammad within his Muslim – and larger human – community. Acknowledging this sentiment, Ibn al-ʿArabī provocatively entertains such an equivocation, but with important stipulations:

Also, his legislation for ʿAlī [b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661)], Muʿādh [b. Jabal (d. 639)] and others who were present during his historical appearance is similar to the [ruling] of Ilyās [Elias] and al-Khaḍir, peace be upon them, and Jesus, peace be upon him, during his second coming...

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

He [Christ] will rule according to the law of Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, in his [Muḥammad's] community, as has been ordained in the sources. However, since his appearance did not precede [the other prophets] in this material world, each scripture and law was attributed to the one for whom it was revealed. In reality, it is the law of Muḥammad; even though he was not physically present then, now and during the second coming of Jesus, peace be upon him.<sup>234</sup>

The author constructs a poignant analogy between the *ṣaḥāba* (Companions) of the Prophet and other prophets who preceded him historically. Whereas *sharī'a* distinguishes between *awliyā'* (saints), simple *mu'minūn* (believers), and lawgiving *anbiyā'* (divine prophets), here the entire array of divine messengers and Muslim saints are collectively regarded as Muḥammadan followers who inherit from the niche of the prophet of Islam.<sup>235</sup> Notwithstanding these provocations, the image of Jesus emerges here as yet another *barzakh* between the historical/prophetological past and the eschatological/saintological future. However, it is the son of Mary who was granted the special rank of appearing physically, as a prophet, prior to the coming of Muḥammad, and again – also physically – as a Muḥammadan saint, after the latter's physical passing.

In this regard, these first mentions of Christ in the context of *walāya* in the *FM* already pay homage to his overarching image in this voluminous work. Specifically, the son of Mary continues to play the pivotal role of embodying Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics. Just as he impeccably performs the unceasing condition of the cosmos, as the Word of God, and eloquently animates an essential bodily archetype, of a child born without a father, so does Christ highlight the different relationships of prophets and saints, throughout time, to the prophet Muḥammad's body and spiritual reality, both preceding and following the latter's historical appearance.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Indeed, the Andalusian mystic may even propose that since *ṣaḥāba* like ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Muʿādh b. Jabal were chosen by God to accompany the prophet Muḥammad in both body and spirit, they have a higher rank than those divine messengers, prior to him, who only met him in spirit and inherited solely from the cosmic Muḥammadan Reality.

This motif, surrounding the historical and spiritual superiority of the prophet Muḥammad, continues in chapter 14, titled “Regarding Knowing the Secrets of Prophets, by whom I mean *Anbiyā’ al-Awliyā’* [The Prophets of Saints], and the Perfected Poles of previous Nations, from Adam to Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him.” This section is particularly crucial in the overarching narrative of *walāya* (sainthood) in the *FM*, since it is here that the author first associates Jesus with the rank of *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood):

Know, may God assist you, that the *nabī* [prophet] is the one to whom an angel comes with revelation from God. This revelation contains legislation through which the prophet worships God by himself. If he is sent [in order to preach it] to other than himself, then he is a *rasūl* [messenger]. In both cases, the angel comes to him with revelation.<sup>236</sup>

The author begins by providing his own distinction between a *nabī* (prophet) and *rasūl* (messenger): a topic which has been the subject of debate throughout Islamic history, especially among Sufī mystics.<sup>237</sup> In combination with his emphasis that the *malak* (angel) descends upon both prophets and messengers, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s exploration here of these concepts serves as a foundation for the ensuing focus on the prophet Muḥammad’s mission and superior rank.

As expected, Ibn al-‘Arabī introduces the figure of Jesus as corroborative evidence of the prophet Muḥammad’s superiority. As before, the son of Mary appears in his Messianic capacity, as a Muslim saint. However, the author now adds to this repertoire of roles the central concept of *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood):

However, this is a door which has been closed with the coming of the messenger of God [Muḥammad], prayers and blessings be upon him. Thus, there is no way for someone to worship God through a divine law that abrogates this Muḥammadan legislation.

This is why Jesus, peace be upon him, when he returns will not rule save through the law of Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him. Moreover, he [Jesus] is

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>237</sup> A.J. Wensinck, “Rasūl.”

*khātim al-awliyā'* [seal of saints]. Indeed, it is from the nobility of Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, that God has sealed the sainthood of his community, and *al-walāya al-muṭlaqa* [absolute sainthood], with an honored prophet and messenger, through whom this entire station is culminated.

Thus, on the day of Judgment, Jesus will have two resurrections: he will be sent with the other messengers, as a divine emissary, and will be with us also, as a saint and follower of Muḥammad, prayers and salutations be upon him. God has ennobled him and Ilyās [Elias] with this rank, above and beyond the rest of prophets.<sup>238</sup>

The author only briefly mentions Christ's rule according to the Muḥammadan *sharī'a*. Instead, his focus seems to be on the son of Mary's role as *khatm al-walāya*. This concept is mentioned consistently throughout the rest of the *FM* and Ibn al-'Arabī's other writings. During the course of its development, there emerge at least two different types of 'seals of sainthoods' which the Andalusian mystic discusses.<sup>239</sup> For now, he situates Jesus within this larger notion of *walāya muṭlaqa* (absolute sainthood) and the smaller circle of *walāyat hādhihi-l-umma* (the sainthood of this Muslim community, thereby emphasizing Christ's status, during his second coming, as a member of the Muḥammadan community).

The author then elaborates on the importance of this dual status of Jesus, as prophet and seal of saints, with respect to the nobility of the Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood and his community. The presentation of Christ's twin resurrections, with the prophets and the saints, creatively embodies the overarching *barzakhī* (liminal) narrative surrounding the son of Mary throughout the *FM*. Alongside his role as a vertical *barzakh*, between the realms of body and spirit, Jesus also adds to his repertoire the unique ability to mediate between the historical poles of past prophethoods and eschatological sainthoods.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> These being *khatm al-walāya al-muṭlaqa* (seal of absolute sainthood) and *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood).

Transitioning to other aspects of *walāya* that tether Christ to the prophet Muḥammad’s spiritual reality, Ibn al-‘Arabī also expounds upon the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad by situating it as the undergirding force animating and governing, not only the spiritual hierarchy of saints, but even other prophets and messengers. Specifically, the Andalusian mystic focuses on the highest post of *quṭb* (pole):

As for *al-quṭb al-wāḥid* [the one pole], that is *rūḥ Muḥammad* [spirit of Muḥammad], prayers and blessings be upon him, who is the sustainer of all prophets and messengers, peace be upon all of them, and also [sustains] poles since the beginning of the human formation until day of judgment. He was asked, prayers and peace be upon him: “When were you a prophet?” He replied: “Ever since Adam was still between water and clay.”<sup>240</sup>

By identifying this singular spiritual pole with the spirit of the prophet Muḥammad, Ibn al-‘Arabī gives the reader an expected dose of his creative linguistic style. Although it seems that he is simply referring to the actual spirit of the Muslim prophet, corroborated by the prophetic statement at the end, the Andalusian mystic is also attempting to render this spiritual power an entity by itself, tethered to the physical body of the prophet Muḥammad but that also transcends that historical appearance.

This enigma of the Muḥammadan spirit flourishes fully in the next few paragraphs where the author discusses some of the ways in which the entity has interacted with the manifestations of sainthood in this physical existence on earth:

His [the spirit of Muḥammad] name was *mudāwī al-kulūm* [healer of wounds] because he has full knowledge of the wounds of *hawā* [desire/love], as well as *ra’y* [personal opinion], *dunyā* [lowly life], Satan and the ego. He knows this in every prophetic and saintly tongue.

His gaze was initially directed toward the place of his bodily birth, in Mecca and Shām [Levant]. However, his gaze has now shifted to a land of extreme heat and dryness which none of the children of Adam can reach in their bodies; except that

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 231.

some have seen it while they were in Mecca, without leaving their place, whence the earth was folded for them.<sup>241</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī identifies *rūḥ Muḥammad* (spirit of Muḥammad) with *mudāwī al-kulūm* (healer of wounds), whom the author also presents as one of the ‘perfected spiritual poles’ from previous nations.<sup>242</sup> He also augments the sense of enigma surrounding the relationship between this Muḥammadan spirit and the actual physical appearance of the Prophet by situating the former’s bodily birth in both, Mecca and Shām (Syria). Moreover, by describing this connection between body and spirit as a ‘spiritual gaze,’ Ibn al-‘Arabī alludes to a possible independent agency through which this Muḥammadan spirit has to choose its various bodily apparitions.

Although it seems that his selection of this specific pole (*mudāwī al-kulūm*) is arbitrary since the Muḥammadan spirit sustains all poles, prophets and messengers, the final paragraph wherein the son of Mary finally appears provides some insights into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s reasoning behind this choice:

We have taken numerous knowledges from him [the spirit of Muḥammad] in different ways. This is because this *rūḥ muḥammadī* [Muḥammadan spirit] has multiple appearances in the world. The most perfected of these [forms] is in *quṭb al-zamān* [the pole of the age], *al-afrād* [singular ones], *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadī* [the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood] and *khatm al-walāya al-‘amma* [the seal of universal sainthood] which is Jesus, peace be upon him.<sup>243</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī begins by returning to establish the authenticity of his own *kashf* (unveiling) which has allowed him to interact directly with the ‘spirit of Muḥammad’ and to receive countless knowledges. Thenceforth, he concludes some other bodily appearances within which this entity has made itself known in the world, including, most significantly, Jesus the son of Mary.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> This occurs in this same chapter of the *FM*, prior to the quoted passage.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 231-232.

There are two key insights and summarizing threads in this short final paragraph. First, by mentioning his personal engagement with *rūḥ Muḥammad*, Ibn al-‘Arabī inevitably inserts himself as a character in the grand narrative of *walāya* which culminates in the twin figures of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood) and *khatm al-walāya al-‘amma/al-muṭlaqa* (seal of universal/absolute sainthood), with the latter being Jesus. Although the historical, physical, identity of the former post remains ambiguous at this point, with only the auspicious spiritual figure of *rūḥ Muḥammad* as its occupant, the Andalusian mystic’s eventual claim to be that very seal, in combination with these initial accounts of learning from this same *rūḥ Muḥammad*, highlights the importance of the author’s presence in this discourse as a personal and historical embodiment of this otherwise thoroughly metaphysical exposition.

Second, there is a subtle, yet significant, connection between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s recurring mention of the *quṭb* (spiritual pole) known as *mudāwī al-kulūm* (healer of wounds) and his inclusion of Jesus as *khatm al-walāya al-‘amma*. For there is an intimate link between the Qur’ānic presentation of the son of Mary as *kalima* (divine word) and the term *kalim* (wound): like ink wounds on a blank sheet of paper, so do the infinite words of God, including Jesus, imprint themselves upon the empty canvas of creation.<sup>244</sup> Thus, it is very likely that the author of the *FM* intends to allude to this etymological connection between Christ and the *mudāwī al-kulūm* (sg. *kalim*) by mentioning them both in this excerpt.

This leads us to ponder the exact relationship between these two figures. Are they one and the same person? Of course, as Ibn al-‘Arabī states, both historical apparitions are bodily garments for the same spiritual being: *rūḥ Muḥammad*. Thus, from this metaphysical perspective, the son of

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<sup>244</sup> Maurice Gloton discusses this linguistic detail in “The Qur’ānic Inspiration of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Vocabulary of Love.”

Mary and the *mudāwī al-kulūm* are certainly one and the same entity. However, there are still more possible – and nuanced – interpretations for this association. Given that *rūḥ Muḥammad* appears gradually in this procession of historical appearances, it seems that these various manifestations complement and complete one another: a symbiosis eloquently embodied by the *kalima* of Jesus and the *kalim* of *mudāwī al-kulūm*. In other words, the role of the latter is to heal whatever ‘metaphysical’ wounds are brought upon the cosmos through the coming of the former archetype.<sup>245</sup>

It is also possible that like Ibn al-‘Arabī, this spiritual pole *mudāwī al-kulūm* was an *‘īsawī* (Christic) saint who inherited from the son of Mary the imprint of the divine *kalima* in his ‘secret’ and carried out the task of providing prophetic and saintly healing of the resulting *kulūm* (wounds). This is significant because it highlights the perplexing complementarity and synthesis, on the one hand, between the *kalima*, *kalim* and *dawā’* (medicine) in a single figure like Jesus and, on the other hand, the supplementary division of these entities into two or more distinct figures. This partition is also evident in the entity of *rūḥ Muḥammad*, who singularly manifests in multiple historical apparitions. Of course, this is the story of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) that unfolds through the lives and missions of all prophets, messengers and saints and, ultimately, the divine essence which originally ushered in this ongoing project of creation.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> I explore this relationship between Jesus and *mudāwī al-kulūm* extensively in an article titled “Jesus and Enoch in the *Barzakh* of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī: Role playing and Myth weaving in the Drama of Creation,” published in *JMIAS* (Journal of the Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society). There, I explore the connection in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *FM* and *FH* between Jesus and *Idrīs* (Enoch), in light of this harmonizing of homonyms between *kalima* and *kalim*. As a summary, it suffices to say that in this Akbarian prism, the ‘metaphysical’ wounds brought forth by a divine *kalima*, such as Jesus, are healed through the inscription of *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *ma’rifā* (gnosis) embodied in the *Idrīsian* (Enochesque) archetype; especially since the latter’s name derives from the same Arabic root *darasa* (to study or to wear out).

<sup>246</sup> Unfortunately, the full contours of this very rich concept that is central to Sufi thought and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings could not be discussed in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it was elaborated upon briefly in chapter 1, pages 26-28, and revisited in Appendix A, ‘Akbarian Christology’.



And so, as is always the case in the Andalusian mystic's writings, we are left with many interpretations of a rich discourse surrounding the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and those special saints who inherit his spiritual states and secret knowledge. In a similar fashion to the rest of the Shaykh's expositions, it is less constructive to attempt to pinpoint one particular approach as the most valid than simply to view the entire gamut of scenarios as a conceptual 'hall of mirrors' through which the author is able to express and convey to the reader what is ultimately an ineffable mystical experience: one where he himself plays a recurring seminal role individually as a student, and collectively as the eschatological figure of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood).

Lest readers assume that Ibn al-ʿArabī is repeating himself profusely in these passages, the author tries to distinguish his discourse in the following excerpt, in chapter 24 titled: "Regarding a Gnosis about Cosmic Affairs", concerning the Prophet's mythic 'banners of praise,' from previous ones by rendering it as a necessary transition to discussion of the *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood), the second most important role in Akbarian *walāya*:

Although everyone at the time, from Adam and his descendants, is under his [Muḥammad's] banner. That is his general banner, while our concern here is regarding the *liwā' khāṣṣ* [special banner], designated specifically for his community.

Likewise, for the *walāya muḥammadiyya* [Muḥammadan sainthood], particularly allocated for this divine law revealed to Muḥammad, there is a distinct *khatm* [seal] who is at a lower rank than Jesus, peace be upon him, since the latter is a messenger. He [the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood] was born during our time and I have personally seen him, met him and perceived the *'alāma khatmiyya* [sign of seal-hood] in him.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya I*, 281.

The author cleverly sets apart his recurrent discussion here, on the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad above other prophets on the Day of Judgment, by imagining an altogether different *liwā' khāṣṣ* (special banner) designated specifically for the Muslim community, under which Christ has the aforementioned *afdaliyya* (superiority). It is also within the smaller circle of this elect community that we find the 'seal of Muḥammadan sainthood,' an equally important concept in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings as the 'seal of universal sainthood,' resurfaces.

The brief and rather vague first mention of this figure above, which merely describes him as a bodily apparition of *rūḥ Muḥammad* (the spirit of Muḥammad), contrasts with the detailed portrayal provided here. In this regard, the two bits of information given in this passage synthesize nicely with the above excerpts. First, like the rest of God's saints and all members of the Muslim community, this 'seal' is also beneath the rank of Jesus. However, this also brings us to the perplexing proposition that these two seals have different rankings even though they are both bodily apparitions or manifestations of the same spiritual entity, *rūḥ Muḥammad*.<sup>248</sup> Second, Ibn al-ʿArabī also reveals more details about his meeting with this 'seal of Muḥammadan sainthood,' whereas previously he simply stated that he received 'knowledges' from *rūḥ Muḥammad*, the spirit animating the body of this figure. He also confirms meeting the actual embodied apparition of the 'seal' and perceiving the sign of *khatmiyya* (seal-hood) in him.<sup>249</sup>

Indeed, this narrative which hosts the first mentions of the 'seal of Muḥammadan sainthood' heightens the complexity and richness of Christ's presence in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought,

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<sup>248</sup> Be that as it may, such perplexity is most probably intended by the author.

<sup>249</sup> Although Ibn al-ʿArabī does not elaborate upon this sign in detail, it is most probably a reference to the sign of *khatm al-nubuwwa* (seal of prophethood) which is narrated to have been located between the Prophet's shoulders. This is found, for instance, in the compendium of Muslim, wherein a companion states: "I saw a *khātim* [ring] in the back of the messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him that looked like a pigeon's egg." (Al-Nīsābūrī, Muslim. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1102).

even beyond its current depth and breadth. The most visible role that Jesus plays here is to emphasize the superiority of the Prophet, his divinely-revealed law, and his inheritors or saints. At a deeper level, however, there is a visible overlap between the twin variations of the ‘seal’ wherein the son of Mary’s rank fluctuates between his superiority, as a prophet-turned-follower of Muḥammad, and his – apparently – lower rank than the ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood,’ as a Muslim saint during the end of days. What augments the convoluted nature of this relationship is the entity *rūḥ Muḥammad*, whom Ibn al-‘Arabī presents as the spiritual essence of both seals and their historical bodily forms.

We transition now to chapter 36, titled “Regarding Knowing the *‘īsawīyyūn* (Christic saints), their Poles and Origins,” where Ibn al-‘Arabī expounds upon an important aspect of his thought: the notion of *wirātha nabawīyya* (prophetic inheritance) which renders some saints, for instance, *‘īsawīyyūn* (Christic or Christ-like) or *mūsawīyyūn* (Moses-like). Considering the focus of this research, we will analyze the first initial paragraphs of this chapter surrounding those mystics who specifically inherit from Jesus. Using a familiar theme from the previous passages, the Andalusian mystic begins by emphasizing the superiority of the *shar‘* (law) of the prophet Muḥammad:

Know, may God aid you, that the law of Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, contains all the foregoing divine laws, which no longer have any jurisdiction in this world, save what has been decreed in the Muḥammadan law. It is due to the affirmation found in this Muḥammadan law of those previous laws that we may worship God through them, because Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, had decreed them, and not the special prophet who legislated them in his time. This is why the messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him, was given *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* [the most encompassing of speech].<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 337.

Ibn al-‘Arabī provides more details on the superiority of the Muḥammadan law and how this relates to the *naskh* (abrogation) of previous prophetic legislations. What is remarkable in the foregoing is that the author provides a new interpretation for *naskh*, one where these previous laws are not necessarily halted or regarded as impermissible to follow. Rather, he proposes to view them through the prism of this new Muḥammadan law: if any of them coincide with the new legislation they can be applied as authentically Muḥammadan rituals.

Of course, Ibn al-‘Arabī proclaims that, since the advent of Islam, following and applying such laws from previous faiths that are harmonious with the ‘Muḥammadan law’ makes them, ipso facto, Muḥammadan. This facilitates his ensuing introduction of the concept of *wirātha* (inheritance) as pertaining to Muslim scholars and saints:

Thus, if *al-muḥammadī* [the Muḥammadan follower] performs some act [of worship], and everyone who is *mukallaf* [commanded] today from among the human beings and *jinn* is *muḥammadī*, since there is no law today save this Muḥammadan law; this worshipper will necessarily receive an opening in his heart, through his worship, of one of the paths of the previous prophets. If this is opened for them, then they are attributed to the originator of that legislation and are described as *‘īsawī*, *mūsawī* or *ibrāhīmī* [Abraham-like].<sup>251</sup>

If the author’s claim that it is permissible for Muslim scholars and saints to worship God through previous divine legislations seems somewhat controversial, then his addition here that all human and spiritual beings during his time who adhere to the *taklīf* (obligation) to follow some divine legislation are considered *muḥammadī* may appear even more provocative for some conservative readers. Nevertheless, the author perceives the interaction between one of these *muḥammadan* worshippers and previous legislations to be inevitable, whence they are attributed to the respective previous law they are inheriting from.

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

Next, the Shaykh provides some reasons why such a mechanism of *wirātha* exists. In this regard, he situates the variety of possible inheritances within the countless types of Muslim saints and ultimate expansiveness of the prophet Muḥammad’s own prophethood:

This is due to the realization of what they have been distinguished in regarding knowledges and spiritual stations; all of which are under the care of the law of Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him. In this way, they [the inheriting saints] are set apart from each other, through these relationships, so that it becomes known that they did not inherit from Muḥammad, prayers and blessings be upon him, save what they would have received from Moses, or any other prophet, if he had been alive and the saint had followed them.<sup>252</sup>

Therefore, the myriad of knowledges and rulings that different saints receive from various prophets are like rivers that all flow from the Muḥammadan ocean. Through the large number of these streams and their immense diversity, the magnitude of the ocean may be somewhat understood. Of course, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, these rivers of knowledge and wisdom are not mere metaphysics; rather, they are embodied vividly in the saints who necessarily perform this diversity in every generation.

In a sense, the son of Mary’s presentation in the preceding excerpt reiterates much of what we have come to see so far in the *FM*. Most importantly, Christ facilitates Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explanation of his complex metaphysics to the reader. In this specific case, the Andalusian mystic uses the son of Mary’s twin roles of prophet and Muḥammadan saint to explore the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad’s life, legacy and community and also the intricate ways in which Muslim saints after him – and even those non-Muslim saints before him – continue to inherit various spiritual states, knowledges and secrets from him.

In another sense, Christ’s appearance in these passages differs from those previous excerpts, mainly due to the introduction of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

Muḥammadan sainthood), a saintly station that complements and supplements Jesus' eschatological role of *khatm al-walāya al-muṭlaqa/al-‘amma* (seal of absolute/universal sainthood). In this regard, the son of Mary's eschatological significance extends beyond his imminent historical return, as the messiah and Muḥammadan follower, to appear also as a standard according to which the 'seal of Muḥammadan sainthood' may be compared and perceived as above all other saints; just as the prophet Muḥammad occupies a rank higher above all other divine messengers and prophets.

It is here, at the juncture between the hemispheres of prophethood and sainthood, that Jesus' importance shines in this area of Ibn al-‘Arabī's thought. In a similar manner to the pivotal *barzakhī* (liminal) role the former plays as an embodiment of the threshold between the worlds of bodies and spirits, the son of Mary also epitomizes the meeting place between the oceans of *nubuwwa* (prophethood) and *walāya* (sainthood). Of course, Christ's ability to perform this role does not originate in Ibn al-‘Arabī's thought; rather, it is thoroughly rooted in the main Islamic sources and in the communal imagination where his historical prophetic mission from the past is coupled with his awaited messianic return in the future.

Nevertheless, it is Ibn al-‘Arabī's ability to transform these twin missions of Jesus into altogether different versions of this figure that makes his presentation novel. Foregrounded by the earlier discussion on the spiritual entity *rūḥ Muḥammad*, who will imminently appear in the bodily forms of the two seals, Ibn al-‘Arabī had already, at that point, begun to separate the 'reality' of the historical Jesus-the-prophet, the 'Word of God,' from this later appearance whose inner dimensions contrastingly allude to this enigmatic 'spirit of Muḥammad.' In this regard, it is not clear whether Ibn al-‘Arabī regards this secondary Jesus the Messiah as of a completely different physiological composition than the former version.

Let us conclude this section on Jesus and sainthood in the *FM* by exploring the excerpts where the Andalusian mystic openly claims the station of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood) for himself. In the above discussed passages, the author’s interaction with this post was always in the third person, thereby rendering the ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood’ as one of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachers, as opposed to the Shaykh himself. In the next few passages, however, this separation between the Greatest Master and Muḥammadan seal dissipates as the former explicitly identifies himself as the holder this post.

The earliest such association appears in verses of poetry which Ibn al-‘Arabī includes at the beginning of chapter 43, titled: “Regarding Knowing a Group of the Pious Poles and the General Occupants of this Station.” Not only does the Andalusian mystic identifies himself as the ‘seal,’ in this verse, but he also mentions Jesus in conjunction with this role: “I am the seal of sainthood without a doubt, of the inheritance of the Hashemite, alongside *al-Masīḥ* (Christ).”<sup>253</sup> Although Ibn al-‘Arabī presents himself as simply ‘the seal’; his allusion to the ‘inheritance of the Hashemite,’ a reference to the prophet Muḥammad’s clan of Banū Hāshim, solidifies the author’s status as a *wārith muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan inheritor).

In contrast to the indirect references in these verses, a later excerpt appears to be more explicit – and creatively so – of the author’s prophesied role as this seal of Muḥammadan sainthood. This emerges in chapter 65, titled “Regarding Knowing Paradise, its Abodes, Ranks and all that pertains to this Topic”:

I had a dream which I perceived as glad tidings from God, because it is identical to a *ḥadīth nabawī* [prophetical narration]. Through this, the messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him, gave us a parable of his rank among the other prophets, peace be upon them.

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 370.

He said, prayers and blessings be upon him: “My example and the other prophets is like a man who erected a wall and completed it save for one brick. I am that brick and, thus, there is no messenger or prophet after me.” In this way, he [the Prophet] presented prophethood as a wall and the prophets as the brick through which this wall stands.

Indeed, this analogy is of utmost eloquence since the wall alluded to here cannot appear save through its bricks. In this way, the Prophet, prayers and blessings be upon him, was the seal of prophets.<sup>254</sup>

The Andalusian mystic relies upon a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the prophet Muḥammad emerges as the last necessary component in this protective fence of prophethood, whence Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes that Muḥammad is the *khātim al-anbiyā’* (seal of prophets).

With this textual foundation in place, the author transitions to his own vision that intimates this prophetic dream yet creatively extends its imagery at the important threshold between prophethood and sainthood. In many ways, this *manām* (dream) embodies Ibn al-‘Arabī’s subtle relationship between prophets and saints and the provocative nuances he adds to this interaction:

I was in Mecca during the year 599 (1203 C.E.), when I saw in a dream the Ka‘ba built from bricks of silver and gold; one brick of silver and another of gold. It was seemingly completed, and nothing remained to be built in it.

I kept looking at it and its beauty. Then I turned to the *wajh* [lit. face/side] between the Yemeni and Levantine corners, but closer to the Levantine junction. There, I found the place of two bricks, silver and gold, missing from the wall. These belonged to the top two rows: a golden brick was missing from the highest row and a silver one from the next line.

Then, I saw myself as the *‘ayn* [essence/identical with] these two bricks. In this way, the wall was completed, and nothing was missing from the Ka‘ba. I stood there gazing, fully aware that I was simultaneously gazing and being the essence of these two bricks, without a doubt. I was certain that they are identical with my essence.

I woke up, expressed gratitude to God almighty and began to interpret my dream. I saw that my rank among the followers of my types [saints] is like the [station of the] messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him, among the prophets,

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 480.



peace be upon them. I also hoped that I would be among those through whom God seals sainthood.<sup>255</sup>

Already in the first few sentences of this account, the Greatest Master reveals his creative reformulation of the Prophet's dream. Whereas the latter simply mentions a generic wall as representative of prophethood, Ibn al-'Arabī uses the Ka'ba, itself a pivotal metaphor in Sufism and the Shaykh's writings, as the architectural similitude to prophethood.

Not only do the four walls/sides of the Ka'ba extend the dimensionality of the single wall in the Prophet's dream, but the different colored bricks of silver and gold also ornament this metaphor in metals and colors that, ostensibly, represent sainthood and prophethood respectively. In this way, the author creatively redraws the Prophet's dream as a story of not only *khatm al-nubuwwa* (seal of prophethood), but also *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood). Undoubtedly, the overlap between these two spheres of prophethood and sainthood in the imaginal walls of the Ka'ba and the author's imprint upon it can be seen as a provocative infringement – by uninitiated readers – by a *walī* (saint) upon the domain of legislating prophethood.

Indeed, it seems that such a controversial interpretation is at least partially intended by the Greatest Master. Although the explicit message in this dream is that the position of seal of sainthood, which Ibn al-'Arabī was granted, is intimately intertwined, parallels and actually emanates from the prophet Muḥammad's august station as *khatm al-anbiyā'* (seal of prophets), the Andalusian mystic also wants to emphasize the commonly shared inheritance between prophets and saints through his colorful portrayal of the Ka'ba's walls. This hypothesis is corroborated by the previously investigated excerpts where the author delves into the intricate web of *wirātha*

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 480-481.

(inheritance) connecting legislating prophets and their follower-saints, as well as his use of poignant terms, such as *anbiyā' al-awliyā'* (prophets of, or among, saints).

Alongside all of this, of course, there is the crucial lavishing of the status of *khatm al-walāya* upon Ibn al-‘Arabī himself, which the author explicitly proclaims at the end of this account. The various threads of this dream, and how it relates to the Prophet’s own vision, all highlight the significance of this narrative for the author’s self-portrayal. First, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ornamented imprint upon the wall of prophethood and sainthood in the imaginal Ka‘ba establishes his legacy within both these spheres of divine revelation. Second, as the *khatm al-walāya* who closely resembles the Prophet’s rank among prophets, the Andalusian mystic is also alluding to his attainment of the station *al-wārith al-muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan inheritor): one who has surpassed all other spiritual abodes and who receives knowledge directly from the Prophet’s reality.

This last assertion is supported with the verses of poetry discussed above, where the author situates his own position as *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood) within ‘inheriting from the Hashemite’ prophet Muḥammad. In this regard, the placement of Jesus’ function of ‘seal of universal sainthood’ on an equal footing alongside Ibn al-‘Arabī’s role as ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood’ highlights the multi-layered similarity and relationship between the Greatest Master and the son of Mary. Alongside the latter’s role as the former’s first teacher and serving as a suitable pedagogical tool for conveying the nuances of metaphysics to readers, Christ’s role of ‘seal of universal/absolute sainthood’ also mirrors Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own mission as ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood.’ Of course, in this last instance, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s pivotal function also pays homage to the prophet Muḥammad’s own station of *khatm al-anbiyā'* (seal of prophets).

And so, all the preceding excerpts surrounding Jesus and *walāya* in the *FM* contribute to these nuanced analogies connecting Ibn al-‘Arabī, the prophet Muḥammad and Jesus son of Mary. First, Christ recurrently emerges in the preceding excerpts as an advocate for the supremacy of the ‘Muḥammadan law’ and the prophet Muḥammad’s superior rank among other prophets. The son of Mary is able to fulfill this role precisely because of his twin function as a historical prophet and eschatological Messiah. Second, interwoven within these two Christic presences, past and future, there are also the two portrayals: Jesus as the past prophet, who was ‘followed’ by a specific community, and the future saint who will ‘follow’ the Muḥammadan law and who will rule Muslims according to this *sharī‘a*.

Amidst these two temporal poles emerges the enigmatic figure of *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya*, who remains unknown initially but conclusively settles on the bodily image of Ibn al-‘Arabī himself. In a sense, this progressing narrative, throughout the chapters of the *FM*, during which the ambiguous identity of the ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood’ slowly materializes, is itself performed within the author’s discussion of *rūḥ Muḥammad* (spirit of Muḥammad), the mysterious spiritual entity that reappears throughout history in various bodily apparitions, including – most importantly – the two seals of universal/absolute sainthood (i.e. Jesus) and Muḥammadan sainthood (i.e. Ibn al-‘Arabī).

Alas, these various threads do not necessarily simplify Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of this topic, but rather raise a slew of important, yet unanswered questions. Most pertinently, considering the intimate connection between Jesus and the Andalusian mystic, as teacher/student and complementary seals of sainthood, and the single spirit, *rūḥ Muḥammad*, which animates both their bodies, does the author of the *FM* actually regard himself as the very ‘reincarnation’ of the son of Mary, but in a different body? Alternatively, does the entity *rūḥ Muḥammad* only animate

the bodily functions of the ‘seals’ but not the entire life of the saint? This last point should be well considered, since the Andalusian mystic himself insinuates that the *rūḥ Muḥammad* only works through Jesus in his capacity as ‘seal of sainthood’ but not as historical prophet.

We also present the following hypothetical question: will Christ’s return as a Muslim saint include a following of *murīds* who will regard him as a *murshid* (guide), akin to the Shaykhs in Sufī *ṭuruq* (brotherhoods)? All of these queries remain unanswered after our preceding investigation of the *FM*. Nevertheless, it is clear that Christ’s role in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of *walāya* is as rich and nuanced as the other discourses pertaining to the son of Mary unique physiology, and his kinship relationship with his mother Mary and cousin John the Baptist. In the next few pages, we will culminate our exploration in this chapter with an investigation of some mentions of Jesus that emerge from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s creative exploration of the esoteric dimensions of *sharī‘a* (divine law) in the *FM*.

#### *Esoteric Dimensions of Sharī‘a (Divine Law)*

The mentions of Christ in the *FM* under this heading also appear in a myriad of discourses. The first such instance emerges while Ibn al-‘Arabī is discussing the esoteric aspects of the legalistic prohibition against touching the Qur’ān while in *janāba* (state of major impurity):

The scholars of *sharī‘a* have differed regarding the permissibility of the *junub* [one in a state of *janāba*] to touch the Qur’ān; some have allowed it while others have forbidden it. [The reality] of this is that the entire universe is *kalimāt Allāh* [words of God]. God, may He be exalted, has said about Jesus, peace be upon him: “And [he is] His Word which He sent to Mary.” He, may He be exalted, has also said: “The words of God are not extinguished.” He, may He be exalted, has also said: “The good *kalim* [words] ascend to Him and He raises the righteous actions.” *Kalim* is the plural of *kalima*, and God says to something, when He decrees it [to be], ‘*Kun!*’ and that thing will be dressed in *takwīn* [coming-to-be] and it comes to be. Thus, existence has a *raqq manshūr* [outstretched parchment] and the world has a *kitāb maṣṭūr* [lined book]. Rather, it is *marqūm* [marked] because it has two aspects:

one that seeks loftiness and the divine names, while the other desires lowliness, which is nature.<sup>256</sup>

It remains unclear what the exact relationship between the description of Jesus as ‘Word of God,’ and the cosmos, scriptural, characteristic of being an ‘outstretched parchment’ and ‘lined book.’ We can venture a guess and say that Christ, like the entire universe, also has two aspects: the son of Mary’s ‘outstretched parchment’ pertains to his spiritual reality, blown into Mary by Gabriel, while his lowly ‘lined book’ refers to his bodily form.

In order to clarify this ambiguity, Ibn al-‘Arabī continues to elaborate further on the relationship between this Christic representation of the human being, as an instance of God’s unceasing Words, and the legalistic censure against touching a physical copy of the Qur’ān while in a state of major impurity. In a rather long metaphysical excursus, the author ventures into varying, apparently disparate, motifs that relate nevertheless to the image of Jesus as Word of God:

Thus, the matter, as we have mentioned is, an outstretched parchment wherein the essences of created things is a lined book. He [human being] consists of God’s words that do not cease. Therefore, His [God’s] house is erected, its roof is lifted high, sanctuary forbidden, and His command is heard. So, where can this servant go when he is but part of the letters of this Qur’ānic codex?<sup>257</sup>

The author begins by extending Christ’s Qur’ānic description, as God’s Word, to each member of the human species. He also attempts to synthesize these created words of God, in the flesh, with the letters of the Qur’ān itself, thereby revisiting his recurrent association of scripture, as the small microcosm, with the universe, as the large macrocosm.

Although he does not mention this explicitly in this excerpt, Ibn al-‘Arabī does insinuate elsewhere in the *FM* that the legal term *janāba* (major impurity) is related to the theological notion of *janāb al-ḥaqq* (side of the Real), in which case the spiritual dimension of *janāba* (major

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 551.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 552.

impurity) is a transgression against divine propriety. *Janāba* is a sin precisely because one admits *al-aghyār* (others) into one's heart.<sup>258</sup> This notion, regarding admitting unwanted *aghyār* to the 'Side of the Real,' as pertaining to the Qur'ānic codex, becomes clear in the next few paragraphs where the author seemingly changes his position regarding the inward and outward states of *janāba*:

We were forbidden from traveling to the land of an enemy while carrying the Qur'ān. In this case, he called the codex a Qur'ān due to the outward manifestation of the scripture in it. On the other hand, he did not forbid the carriers [memorizers] of the Qur'ān from traveling to enemy territory, even though it was protected inside them; just as it is in the codex. This is due to its inward residence in their hearts.

Have you not seen how the Prophet, prayers and blessings be upon him, was not deterred by anything from reciting the Qur'ān, not even major impurity? This is because the Qur'ān appears, during recitation, in uttered letters which the Real foretold is His speech.

This is why He told His prophet, prayers and blessings be upon him: "Grant him [the polytheist] safety until he listens to divine speech." [(9:6)]. And so, the messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him, recited the Qur'ān to him. Thus, it is impermissible for the one with major impurity, who [in this case] is the stranger, to obtain what is due to the Real.

Indeed, distance regarding spiritual realities and limits can never contain nearness. On the other hand, the one who is separated in physical distance can nevertheless be in close proximity to another spiritually. In this way, just as the lord cannot be a servant, so the servant cannot be a lord. This is because the servant is in his essence a servant, just as the lord is in his essence a lord.<sup>259</sup>

Admitting *al-aghyār* to the inner seat of one's heart is reflected here in Ibn al-'Arabī's physical example of traveling to the 'land of the enemy.' However, while the author emphasizes the legal prohibition against carrying the physical Qur'ānic codex to such places, he convolutes the

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<sup>258</sup> This can be seen in the same chapter, 68: "And so I have opened up for you the *i'tibār* [metaphor] according to the *sharī'a*, and it is the *jawāz* [passage] from the form which manifests its property in *al-ḥiss* [the sensory domain] to what is interrelated in your essence, or at *janāb al-Ḥaqq* [the Side of the Real], from among that which indicates God. This is the figurative meaning of the metaphor. It is like You have crossed over the wadi when you have forded it and traversed it." (Ibid, 524)

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 552-553.

discourse somewhat by insinuating that one's inward Qur'ān, located in the heart, is not included in this ruling. And yet, Ibn al-'Arabī offers a third interpretation of this relationship between inward and outward *janāba* by stating that the polytheist, whom he describes as a 'stranger,' is soiled by his major impurity of unbelief and, therefore, prohibited from personally holding and reciting the Qur'ān.

Altogether, Ibn al-'Arabī's main point is made clear in the last few sentences above, that spiritual *janāba*, or distance, disallows any possible nearness to God, while, on the other hand, physical separation can be easily overcome through spiritual proximity to a pious servant of God or to God Himself. This, however, does not completely elucidate the relationship between the bodily and spiritual dimensions of *janāba* and how they pertain to the outward and inward versions of the Qur'ānic codex. To this end, Ibn al-'Arabī provides one final paragraph where he adumbrates the contours of this analogy:

Thus, the servant cannot be described using any of the Attributes of the Real, in the same way that the Real is characterized by them and vice versa. This is why one in a state of major impurity can never touch the Qur'ānic codex.<sup>260</sup>

Thus, the objective here is to render spiritual *janāba* as distant from *janāb al-Ḥaqq* (the Side of the Real), or *ghurba* (estrangement). Ironically, however, this occurs when the servant departs from his/her own attributes of servanthood and chooses instead to engage those descriptions that are only suitable for God and His lordship. In this regard, admitting these 'other' attributes of lordship into a heart designated for servanthood, as in the case of the polytheists, renders the person to a spiritual state of *janāba*, in such a way that they are not allowed to recite the Qur'ān.

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 553.

However, the pertinence of the son of Mary to this entire narrative remains to be seen. Christ appears only once at the very beginning of this large excerpt, in order to corroborate the Andalusian mystic's view that the entire universe consists of God's created Words. Even though Jesus is absent from the later paragraphs, his significance is implicitly alluded to throughout the author's exploration of the spiritual dimensions of *janāba* and *ṭahāra*. The most evident role which the son of Mary plays in this exposition, per his direct mention in the first paragraph, is as a clear instance of God's created Words.

Ibn al-ʿArabī grounds this perspective in Jesus' explicit Qur'ānic description as *kalimatu Allāh* (Word of God). Beyond this, however, there is also a series of other portrayals that emerge in the above passages. First, as Ibn al-ʿArabī transitions from Christ's depiction as a particular instance of God's created Word to the entire human race as an entire matrix of these divine utterances, the son of Mary also becomes transformed into a trans-historical archetype of each human being's status as *kalimatu Allāh*: a motif which we have seen recurrently in this chapter. In many ways, this portrayal of Christ as 'Word of God' represents the earliest and most basic template upon which more complex archetypal roles are later built in this voluminous work.

In another excerpt, found in in chapter 72, pertaining to the 'Secrets of Pilgrimage,' Ibn al-ʿArabī returns to the relationship between Adam and Jesus, vis a vis their unique births, as an esoteric symbol of the *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) ritual of *ḥajj* (pilgrimage):

*Ṭawāf al-Qudūm* [circumambulation of arrival] complements *ṭawāf al-wadāʿ* [circumambulation of farewell], since it is like the [divine] names *al-Awwal* [the First] and *al-Ākhir* [the Last]: "Indeed, the example of Jesus, in the sight of God, is that of Adam." [3:59]

And so, *dawrat al-mulk* [the cycle of dominion] ended, while *ṭawāf al-ifāda* [circumambulation of expiation/exhaustiveness] "between them is a *barzakh* [isthmus], so they do not transgress [against one another]. So, which of the bounties of your Lord do you deny?" [55:20]



The ‘circumambulation of arrival’ brings out the pearls of Gnosticism from the rituals while the ‘circumambulation of farewell’ brings out – or is – the corals, ‘so which of the bounties of your Lord do you deny?’

Therefore, the *ṭawāf al-ziyāra* [circumambulation of visitation] has a relationship with the circumambulations of arrival and farewell since it can [potentially] compensate [for any shortcomings in] them.<sup>261</sup>

Here, we once again encounter Ibn al-‘Arabī’s poetic interweaving of disparate conceptual threads into a new mystical narrative. The placement of the verse on Adam and Jesus in this context appears suddenly and its relevance to the topic at hand is initially difficult to ascertain. By the end, however, it becomes clear that the author is invested in taking a bodily ritual (i.e. pilgrimage) and exploring its metaphysical significance. Specifically, the figures of Adam and Jesus appear as mediations, or to use Ibn al-‘Arabī’s term, a *barzakh* between the bodily circumambulations and the twin rewards of ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘corals’ that result from combining divine names.

Continuing with these mentions of Jesus in the *FM*, under the rubric of the esoteric dimensions of *sharī‘a*, another mention appears in chapter 71 on “The Secrets of Fasting.” Here, the author weaves an even more novel narrative that begins with the fasting of prophet Dāwūd (David) and culminates with the fasting of Jesus as a sign intimately related to his unique physiology:

The fasting of Dāwūd, peace be upon him, consisted of his fasting one day and breaking his fast the next; in this way, you combine between your rights and your lord’s. However, others saw that the right of God is worthier and did not perceive equality between what is due to Him and what is due to the servant and, in turn, fasted two days and broke their fast the third day.

Indeed, this was the fasting of Mary, peace be upon her: for she saw that men have a degree above her and thus she said: “Perhaps I can make this second day [of fasting] as a compensation for this higher degree,” and so it was. Because of this, the Prophet – prayers and salutations be upon him – testified for her perfection, just as he did for men. This is because, since she knew that the testimony of two women is equal to that of only one man, and she decided to fast two days as compensation

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid, II:480-481.

for men's single day of fasting, she obtained the station of men and was equal with Dāwūd in reward for this act of worship.<sup>262</sup>

In these introductory paragraphs, Ibn al-ʿArabī situates Mary's fasting within the context of Islamic jurisprudence and the higher rank of one man's testimony, since this equals the witness of two women.

From this, the Andalusian mystic transitions to highlighting the consequences of Mary's arduous fast and her superior rank upon the physiology of Christ and the latter's own fasting regimen.

Likewise, the one overwhelmed by his soul is – in reality – overwhelmed by his/her divinity. He/she should, therefore, treat it [their soul] in the same manner that Mary treated her soul, in such a way that she was able to become attached [instead] to her intellect. Indeed, in this is a beautiful allusion for whoever understands it: if it was perfection for her to reach the degree of men, then it is more complete for her to follow the station of her lord.

This was the affair of her son, Jesus son of Mary, who fasted *al-dahr* [entire lifetime] and did not break his fast<sup>263</sup> and also stood up the entire night in prayer and never slept. Outwardly, he appeared in this world [through the power] of the name *al-Dahr* [aeon], in his mornings, and in the name *al-Qayyūm* [the Constant], 'who is not taken by whim or sleep,' during his nights. It is for this reason that claims of divinity became attached to him.

Thus, it was said that God is Jesus son of Mary, which had never been said about a prophet before him. At most, it was said about al-ʿUzayr that he is the 'son of God,' but not God Himself. Therefore, look at the effect of this attribute [fasting] from behind the veil of the unseen upon the hearts of those veiled among the people of unveiling, whence they said that 'God is Jesus the son of Mary.'<sup>264</sup>

The Greatest Master displays the breadth of his knowledge and creativity in these few paragraphs by connecting together seemingly unrelated threads. He renders the fasting of Mary (fasting two days and eating on the third) as both an allusion and catalyst for her liberation from the ego and

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 400-401.

<sup>263</sup> The author here does not intend to say that Jesus never ate, but that not a single day went by that he did not fast from sunrise to sunset.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 401.

attachment to the intellect. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī seems to also make the case that Mary’s arduous fasting facilitated her journey towards a different, ‘good,’ *ulūhiyya* (divinity) of the lord.

It is in this second sense that Ibn al-‘Arabī presents Jesus as a figure who has two roles in this narrative. First, as Mary’s son, Christ inherits the perfection of his mother, specifically her attachment to the intellect and journey towards God. Second, Jesus’ fasting is even more difficult than Mary’s (i.e. fasting the entire *dahr*), in which case the claims of his divinity are grounded not only in his unique physiology but also in his – more arduous – fasting that makes the manifestation of his inner divinity more vivid and poignant. However, what the author leaves unaddressed is the possible influence of Mary’s motivation to reach the station of Dāwūd – and of men generally – by implementing a more difficult fasting regimen: was Jesus affected by his mother’s femininity and did he thus seek a higher rank through this act of worship?<sup>265</sup>

Yet another discussion of Jesus surrounding *sharī‘a* appears in chapter 69, titled “Regarding Knowing the Secrets of Prayer and Its General Principles.” Ibn al-‘Arabī revisits the ‘cousins,’ Jesus and John the Baptist, in order to expound upon the spiritual aspects of the Islamic funeral procession and prayer.

Accompanying a funeral procession is like going intently for a prayer with a congregation. Some have stated that the *sunna* [custom of the Prophet] is to walk in front of it [funeral procession], while others have stated that walking behind is better.<sup>266</sup>

As expected of Ibn al-‘Arabī, he begins by establishing creative connections between the legal ruling at hand with another aspect of Islam. Here, this connection pertains to walking to prayer in congregation. However, lest the relationship between these two rulings seems haphazard, the

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<sup>265</sup> As will become clear in the next chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī does indeed state in the *FH* that Jesus inherited a feminine side from his mother, evident in the latter’s command to his followers to “turn the other cheek” and the Qur’ānic description of Christians that “they pay the poll-tax in humility” (9:29).

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 220.

author quickly highlights the act of walking or marching as a pivotal element common to both rituals.

Thenceforth, Ibn al-‘Arabī begins to explore other aspects of the harmony between these two practices and also ascend beyond their physical aspects towards the metaphysical dimensions:

What I advocate is that one walks behind the procession, prior to the funeral prayer, such that he keeps the corpse in front of him as will be the case during prayer. Thenceforth, he should walk in front of the body out of service to the deceased, in order to deliver them to their abode, the grave; all the while having a good opinion of God that He has accepted the intercession for the deceased during the prayer and that the grave will a garden of paradise for them.

Indeed, God has recommended that His servant have a good opinion of Him when He said: “I am as My servant thinks of Me. Thus, let him think well of Me!”<sup>267</sup>

The Andalusian mystic’s usual inclination to incorporate and harmonize opposite tendencies emerges here in eloquent legalistic diplomacy. Instead of taking either side of the legal positions regarding marching behind or in front of funeral processions, he brings the two approaches together and places the actual funeral prayer as a *barzakh* between them.

It is here also that the core similarity between these two rituals, funeral procession and walking to a congregation prayer, emerges clearly: just as prayer significantly bifurcates the funerary ritual into two portions (e.g. first towards the mosque and then the grave) so also does it serve the important role of being the ultimate goal of all believers who walk towards the mosque to pray in congregation. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s motivation is to ascend beyond the physical forms of these rituals to their metaphysical objective. We perceive the first glimpses of this final destination in his introduction of the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī*: “I am as My servant thinks of Me. Thus, let him think well of Me!”

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

The narrative's progression, at this point, facilitates the author's mention of Jesus and John the Baptist as corroborative evidence for the prerogative to have a good opinion of one's lord:

It is also narrated that God was asked: "Who is more beloved to You: Jesus or John the Baptist, peace be upon them?" God replied: "The better of them is he who thinks better of Me!" meaning Jesus. This is because fear was John the Baptist's overwhelming state.<sup>268</sup>

It is not a coincidence that both these prophets represent aspects of life, spirit and creation. By stating that Jesus is more beloved to God than *Yahyā*, John the Baptist, Ibn al-'Arabī is perhaps also positing a divine preference for the spirit, and its power to give life, over life itself. It is also probable that through such a preference, the Andalusian mystic establishes a priority for a deceased person's need for this life-giving-power of the spirit, as they transition to its supra-material realm.

In other words, it seems as though Ibn al-'Arabī is advocating for a Christic, as opposed to a *Yahyawī* (John the Baptist-esque), approach as one transitions from this abode to the hereafter. The final paragraph in this excerpt, however, moves the reader to an altogether different spiritual dimension of the funeral procession, which for Ibn al-'Arabī, also has an effect on the bodily actions taking place during this ritual:

Moreover, it is good manners that one does not ride anything during the funeral procession, out of respect for the angels, since they accompany the funeral procession as long as there is no wailing. If, on the other hand, there is wailing, the angels will leave. If that [wailing] happens, then you have a choice, to either ride or walk; for indeed, the deceased is in his bier like a person being carried on a throne.<sup>269</sup>

The author's creative positioning of the legal status of riding an animal (e.g. camel or horse) during a funeral procession within the spiritual reality of the angels accompanying the deceased in their coffin highlights an important point regarding Ibn al-'Arabī's view on *sharī'a* that is abundantly

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

clear from the preceding excerpts: the maxims of divine law are rooted in the occurrences of the spiritual realm and are under its jurisdiction, not vice versa. This is explicit in the Andalusian mystic's deduction that if there is wailing during a funeral procession, then that necessarily means that the angels accompanying the deceased have departed; at which point, it is not reprehensible for someone to ride an animal on the way to the grave.

In this same section, concerning funeral processions, Ibn al-ʿArabī returns to Jesus as a suitable example to support his creative esoteric interpretations of sharīʿa. This time, the author mentions Christ alongside his mother Mary instead of John the Baptist, in the context of exploring the appropriate position for men and women during a funeral prayer in congregation:

They [scholars] have differed regarding the organization of men and women, if they gather to pray the funeral prayer together. Some have advocated for the men to stand behind the imam [leading the prayer] while the women stand [immediately] behind the *qibla* [direction of Mecca. (i.e. either in front of the imam and behind the bier or in front of the bier facing, immediately facing the *qibla*).

Others have stated the opposite [(i.e. women behind the imam and men behind the *qibla*)]. Others still have preferred that only men should pray over deceased males and only females over deceased females.<sup>270</sup>

As before, the author begins by highlighting the different opinions of the legal scholars regarding the topic at hand. By mentioning all these views, he not only furnishes his subsequent discourse with the necessary legal foundations, but also establishes his own familiarity with the topic as a scholarly reference.

Thenceforth, he begins to discuss his own legal opinion on this matter. Once again, unsurprisingly, Ibn al-ʿArabī is preparing the reader for an imminent metaphysical shift that still requires a few textual and intellectual transitions in between:

What I say in this regard is that if there are two men present in the congregation, then one of them should be behind the imam while the other behind the *qibla*.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 227.

Meanwhile, the women can stand between them. If there is only one man, then he should stand behind the imam. Although, if he were to stand behind the *qibla*, it is preferable.

Either way, there has not been a definitive ruling in *sharī'a* regarding any of this for us to halt at. Indeed, we searched thoroughly in order to find such an explanation but could not find anything. However, it has been narrated from some of the *ṣaḥāba* [prophetic companions] that they used to place men immediately behind the *qibla* and women behind the imam. When asked about this, they would say it is the *sunna*, which is why it is my preference as well.

Moreover, I'm also more inclined to forward men closer to the *qibla*. Indeed, when the prophet, prayers and blessings be upon him, buried the martyrs of *Uḥud*, he used to place the greater among them closer to the *qibla* but buried them altogether in one grave. Thus, to prefer the better person by bringing them closer to the *qibla* is a higher rank since they are closer to God according to *sharī'a*, and God knows best.<sup>271</sup>

The paragraphs at hand present a multitude of opinions. On the one hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī begins by advocating for men to stand behind both the imam and *qibla*, with women standing in between them. Thenceforth, whilst referencing the prophetic generation, the author also prefers the approach of placing men immediately behind the *qibla* and women behind the imam. Eventually, he only provides a reasoning for the second of these opinions: since men are of a higher rank than women, they should be closer to the *qibla* than the latter.

Undoubtedly, this strategy of befuddling the reader with a plethora of seemingly contradictory legal opinions is meant to help one transition to the ultimate goal: the spiritual reality behind these legal maxims and bodily rituals. With this in mind, Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces this metaphysical objective in the following paragraph:

‘The Inner Dimension’: Know that women are *maḥall al-takwīn* [(the vessel or site or creation)]. Therefore, they are closer to *al-mukawwin* [the creator] and have a higher priority to be closer to the *qibla* than men. This even though *takwīn* [creation/formation] did take place in men, but for only once, when Eve was formed from Adam. Thus, the ruling is for the predominant divine ordinance, which is that women are the site of creation. Moreover, this creation of Eve from Adam has been complemented by the formation of Jesus from Mary without a man.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 227-228.

The purpose behind this is so that every child is born upon the *fiṭra* [primordial instinct], since they come to us while having been recently in the presence of their lord; just as the messenger of God, prayers and blessings be upon him, when he described rain, that it was recently in the presence of its lord.<sup>272</sup>

The emergence of this esoteric reality of women as *maḥall al-takwīn* is contemporaneous with the introduction of yet another metaphysical-legal opinion: that women actually have a higher priority to be closer to the *qibla* than men. To this end, the author mentions Jesus and Mary as an example that harmonizes with Eve's birth from Adam and detracts from the possibility that men could be regarded as *maḥall al-takwīn* alongside women.

Ibn al-ʿArabī culminates this discussion with a statement on the purity of children, as being recent arrivals from the divine presence and presents this as a reason for women's spiritual superiority. With this conclusion, the author leaves us with two opposing results. On the one hand, he seems to prefer men over women when it comes to standing closer to the *qibla*, a position supported by *sharīʿa*. On the other hand, the spiritual reality of women, as *maḥall al-takwīn*, grants them a higher esoteric rank than men and makes them worthier of proximity to the *qibla* than their male counterparts. In between these contending positions, Ibn al-ʿArabī's mission to harmonize between the male and female cosmic roles is eloquently accomplished. For just as Adam was *maḥall al-takwīn* for Eve, a symbol for men's higher *sharīʿa* rank above women, likewise, Christ's emergence from Mary confirms women's higher spiritual rank over men.

Also in this chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabī revisits the son of Mary, albeit in a different context. This time, Christ appears amidst an exploration of the legalistic prohibition against *naḥkh* (breathing or blowing air) during prayer.

‘Regarding Blowing Air during Prayer’: some have detested it, others required that a person repeat his/her prayer [if they breathe loudly] while others still distinguished between a heard [loud] and unheard [silent] breath.

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 228.



Know that this [distinction between loud and silent breaths] pertains to whether [the breath] is speech or what appears as such. Either way, it is not considered acceptable by consensus.<sup>273</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī begins with the legal dimensions of ‘blowing air while praying’ and establishes a connection between ‘blowing air’ and ‘speech’ that allows for a nice transition to his ensuing mention of Jesus and the esoteric dimensions of this legal ruling.

Clearly, the son of Mary presents a particularly suitable example for discussion here, since both the notions of *nafkh* (blowing air) and *kalām* (speech) are pivotal concepts that animate both the Qur’ānic and the Akbarian portrayals of Jesus:

‘The Esoteric Dimension’: Jesus, peace be upon him, is present with his lord in every state. Even his breathing the spirit in the bird did not disturb his presence with his lord; for his breathing [the spirit] occurred by permission of his lord.

Thus, how can he be given permission to do something that veils him from being present with his lord? Christ, and the rest of creation, are commanded to keep the Real between their sights and hearts; just as they are under His gaze. Indeed, this is *al-murāqaba* [practice of active attentiveness] from both sides.

Therefore, whoever considers *al-nafkh* [blowing air] to be a substitute of *kun* [the divine command: Be!], they will also regard it [*nafkh*] as speech. On the other hand, whoever does not consider it as such, but only as a *sabab* [cause for the divine creative command, *kun*, to be carried forth], then they do not regard it [*nafkh*] as speech. According to this position, [God’s statement]: “With my permission” is attached to: “It will become a bird,” not “you breathe in it.”<sup>274</sup>

The son of Mary symbolizes for Ibn al-‘Arabī an ideal purity who satisfies the requirements of *sharī‘a* and creatively embodies the various juristic rulings discussed here. In this case, Christ’s simultaneous presence with God and breathing the life-giving spirit into dead human bodies and molds of clay leads the author to conclude that, metaphysically, blowing air in no way invalidates one’s essential prayer (i.e. presence with God), contrary to the juristic ruling.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. The various scriptural references Ibn al-‘Arabī quotes at the end of the excerpt are all from (5:110).

What is remarkable in this brief excerpt is the author's complete departure from the legal premises with which he began his discussion. By the end of his excursus, it becomes clear that he is not interested in using Christ as an example of the spiritual dimensions of *nafkh* and *kalām*, in order to explain the legal bodily rulings against *nafkh* during prayer. On the contrary, the metaphysical pertinence of Jesus in this regard proceeds in the opposite direction, that of permitting *nafkh* since it cannot disturb one's continuing presence with God. Therefore, the reader is left with the impression that it is this metaphysical or esoteric dimension of *nafkh*, while one is in the divine presence, that interests Ibn al-'Arabī, and not the legal ruling pertaining to blowing air during the five daily prayers.

Of course, the author is also exploring the consequences of regarding *nafkh* as speech, part of the divine creative command *kun*. Either way, Christ emerges as a suitably embodied example that comprehensively facilitates and elucidates Ibn al-'Arabī's discourse. In this regard, as before, Jesus eloquently satisfies the condition of practicing *nafkh* while remaining in God's presence, not only through his miracle performance, but also – more importantly – in his own physiological status as Word of God and breath from the Holy Spirit. As was the case during the above discussion on *tahāra* and *janāba*, here also, Jesus not only demonstrates the ability of being continually aware of God but is himself a physiological embodiment of such a lofty state.

In the following chapter, titled “Regarding the Secrets of *Zakāt* [Almsgiving],” the son of Mary emerges as corroborative evidence to support the author's novel comparison between *amwāl* (material wealth), *nufūs* (souls) and the similarity between them:

God said: “Those who *zakkāhā* [to purify their souls] have prospered.” [(91:9)] Therefore, *zakāt* is obligatory for souls just as it has been made obligatory for material wealth. Buying and selling has also been prescribed for the soul like wealth.

As for His saying, may He be exalted: “Do not purify your souls, for He knows best who has gained God-consciousness” [(53:32)], this means that God does not accept the *zakāt* of someone who attributed their soul to their own selves. Indeed, He said: “Do not purify your souls!” and, thus, attributed them to you. In other words, if you believe that you have ownership of your souls [then do not attempt to purify it].<sup>275</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s meticulous attention to and reverence for the language of the Qur’ān yields some truly innovative understandings of its verses that serendipitously facilitate his metaphysical expositions. His proposition that *zakāt* (alms) is due upon both souls and material wealth is clear enough from the scriptural narrative since it is thoroughly grounded in the etymological connection between *zakāt* and *tazkiya* (purification). In this regard, paying the alms is a means for purifying one’s wealth. What Ibn al-‘Arabī is focused on, however, is the inverse and subtler *zakāt* of the soul, through which it can also be purified.

The Andalusian mystic provides an unexpected novel reading of the verse: “Do not purify your souls, for He knows best who has obtained God-consciousness.” Whereas exoteric exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr interpret “do not purify your souls” as meaning “Do not praise, show gratitude or give yourselves excuses,”<sup>276</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī takes an alternate route by paying close attention to the term *anfusakum* (your souls). The author finds the particular grammatical form of this term indicative of a divine warning for human beings not to claim ownership of their souls. Such a metaphysical shift elevates the analytical register of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discourse from the Ethical to the Spiritual.

Thenceforth, the author continues to elaborate upon this metaphysical divine ownership of the human soul. By voicing his perspective through a divine address, Ibn al-‘Arabī also allows for

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>276</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 527.

reconsideration of the rhetorical style of the Qur'ānic verse. Specifically, God's statement: "Do not purify your souls" emerges as an altogether different type of ethical prohibition:

This is because [God is emphasizing that]: "The *zakāt* is for Me, and you are mere trustees of your souls. If you claim to have a right in them, or that you have given Me what belongs to you or I have asked you what does not belong to Me, even though the reality is contrary to this, then do not *tuzakkū* purify [pay alms] for your souls!"

"Indeed! I have only asked what is Mine, not yours. When the veil is lifted in the hereafter, you will come to know whether your souls, upon which I prescribed *zakāt*, is Mine or yours; even though your knowledge of the affair will not be beneficial then."

This is why He said: "Do not purify your souls" and attributed them to you, even though they are His. Have you not seen Jesus, peace be upon him, how he attributed his soul to his own self, according to its reality as such, and also to God, according to its reality as such? He said: "You know what is in my soul, but I do not know what is in Your soul!" [(5:116)]<sup>277</sup>

As always, the figure of Jesus appears in Ibn al-'Arabī's discourses as an exemplary supporter of the latter's creative approach to the Qur'ān. Also unsurprisingly, Christ highlights the enigmatic and initially incoherent aspect of the Andalusian mystic's discussions. In this case, whereas the author begins by emphasizing the need for human beings to attribute their souls to their rightful owner, God, he presents the son of Mary as an *'ārif* (Gnostic) who correctly attributed his own soul to both himself and God.

In order to clarify this ambiguity, the Andalusian mystic continues to elaborate on the metaphysical depth of Christ's statement, situating it within his own mystical *Weltanschauung*:

[He said: "I do not know what is in Your soul"] from the perspective that he [Jesus] [has no control over his soul's] existence. And yet, God is also present from the perspective that your soul belongs to you. This is because the soul, even though it is one, appears different according to the different attributions and relationships. This is why there is no contradiction between His statement: "Do not purify your

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 254-255.

souls” and “they have prospered those who purify it!” For ‘souls’ here [in the first verse] means *amthālukum* [your likenesses].<sup>278</sup>

The author provides yet another interpretation of a verse that departs from the normative exegeses. Christ’s address to God in the Qur’ān: “You know what is in my soul, but I do not know what is in Your soul” seems tantamount to a comparison between the divine all-encompassing knowledge of human souls and our complete ignorance and unawareness of God’s ipseity. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī posits the interpretation that the son of Mary, and all human beings by extension, only know their own selves from the perspective of their weakness, not as God created these souls and knows them. In other words, Jesus is no longer distinguishing between his soul and God’s but equating his self with the divine ipseity. Undoubtedly, this is a rather controversial proposition that allusively supports certain Christological beliefs, such as the divinity of Jesus.<sup>279</sup>

In many ways, the preceding excerpts reiterate the ongoing trends we have already seen throughout this chapter. First, the son of Mary continues to support and embody Ibn al-‘Arabī’s sophisticated metaphysics to the reader. In the case of these excerpts specifically, Christ embodies the *zakāt* (alms) due on human souls and the spiritual reality lingering behind the legal ruling on blowing breaths and speaking during prayer. Second, these specific passages highlight Jesus’ ability to embody the theoretical concepts which Ibn al-‘Arabī brings to the forefront in his discussion. This is particularly vivid in the unique physiology of his soul (i.e. divine breath) which elucidates the actual reality of all human souls as properties and emanations of God.

All of these excerpts emphasize the perfectly intertwined nature of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung. His tendency to propose contradictory preferences for both men and women, as

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> This has already been discussed above, pertaining to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s exoneration and vindication of the Trinity and Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus. See page 81 no. 204.

pertaining to each gender's proximity to the Creator and *qibla*, becomes harmonized once his twin lens for the *ẓāhir* (outward) and *bāṭin* (inward) of the *sharī'a* is taken into consideration. In actuality, each of these aspects of the divine law and spiritual realm seems also to contain an exoteric/esoteric or complementary dimension. Thus, the superiority of men, according to *sharī'a*, is supplemented by their need for women to exercise this higher rank. Likewise, the lofty status of women in the spiritual realm, as *maḥall al-takwīn*, necessarily requires the participation of men in the procreative process.

### Conclusion

The preceding analyses have yielded a large and wide array of mentions of Christ that merit the four motifs under which we have chosen to categorize them. Even though there are many more discussions surrounding Jesus in the *FM*, from the small data set investigate here, it is clear that the son of Mary plays a seminal role in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, perhaps more so than any other prophetic figure, with the exception perhaps of the prophet Muḥammad himself. It would also be correct to say that the full extent to which the Andalusian mystic utilizes and molds Christ's image, at least in this work, remains a viable topic of research beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>280</sup>

In the sections pertaining to the physiology of Jesus, *mi'rāj* narratives and esoteric dimensions of *sharī'a*, Ibn al-'Arabī seems mainly interested in two aspects of Jesus. The first pertains to his unique physiology as a *barzakh*, or hybrid, between the bodily form inherited from his mother Mary and the divine breath/Word of God received from the angel Gabriel. The second has to do with his birth to a mother, Mary, but no father. In between these two motifs, Jesus emerges to validate the Andalusian mystic's various intellectual journeys. On the one hand, Christ

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<sup>280</sup> In this regard, the extent to which Christ plays the most significant role in Ibn al-'Arabī's prophetology is of course a disputable claim pending more research into the narratives of each prophetic figure in the *FM*. This area of study and others will be discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.

allows the Greatest Master to distinguish between God's *kalām* (uncreated eternal speech) and *kalimāt* (created Words), and to emphasize the intimate relationship between divine and human creativity. On the other hand, the unique importance of the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Fātiḥa*, within the entire scripture, also allows Ibn al-'Arabī to invert the mother/son relationship between Jesus and Mary. Likewise, Christ's kinship with John the Baptist, *Yaḥyā*, opens the door for the author to extend a type of cousin-ship between the 'Spirit' and 'Life.'

Combining all of these – and many other – portrayals, we are left with very few ways to harmoniously summarize the discussion on Christ's physiology in the *FM*. Reiterating what we have already mentioned above, the son of Mary's physiological presence at the threshold between the realms of body and spirit makes him a unique pedagogical tool for the Greatest Master to convey to the reader a sophisticated metaphysics which is itself rooted in the spiritual realm. Ultimately, then, Christ's importance for Ibn al-'Arabī transcends the former's own birth and body; rather, it extends to the archetypal *barzakh* and divine breath which the Andalusian mystic repeatedly states is an indispensable part of creation's spiritual reality.

Transitioning to the section on sainthood, many of the same trends found in the discussion on Christ's physiology and kinship reappear here in a new light. Whereas Jesus lingers, in the first instance, at the threshold between the realms of bodies and spirits, here Christ fluctuates between the spheres of prophethood and sainthood. Moreover, alongside assisting Ibn al-'Arabī in conveying difficult metaphysical concepts pertaining to prophethood and sainthood, the son of Mary also supports the author's mission of establishing the unquestionable superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and Islam above other prophets and religions. In this regard, the constant presence of Christ across the spectrum of *nubuwwa* and *walāya* is complemented by *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) which sustains and animates both frontiers.

The presence of Jesus in this discourse on sainthood also differs from the previous discussion on his physiology as regard the significant role that Ibn al-‘Arabī himself plays in this narrative. We are presented here with three key concepts which the author introduces in the preceding excerpts that are quintessential in his vision and presentation of *walāya*: *khatm al-walāya al-muṭlaqa/al-‘amma* (seal of absolute/universal sainthood), *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood) and *wirātha rūḥāniyya* (spiritual inheritance). As is the case with almost all other notions in his Weltanschauung, Ibn al-‘Arabī grounds these three spiritual/metaphysical concepts within the embodied presence of prophets and saints.

Early on in the *FM*, Ibn al-‘Arabī explicitly grants Jesus the rank of ‘seal of absolute/universal sainthood,’ a role which the son of Mary will occupy and execute upon his second return as the Messiah. In this regard, the Andalusian mystic emphasizes that Christ will not return as a legislating prophet, but as a Muḥammadan saint whose arrival will signal the closure of the gate of sainthood on earth: hence his description as the ‘seal of absolute sainthood.’ As for the post of ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood,’ the author of the *FM* creatively introduces this enigmatic figure in stages that intimate a descent from the subtle spiritual realm to tangible bodily sphere. Whereas initially this *khatm* appears to be an unidentified bodily apparition of *rūḥ Muḥammad* (spirit of Muḥammad), whom Ibn al-‘Arabī engages with in the third person, in the end he is revealed as the Andalusian mystic himself.

And so the mysterious entity *rūḥ Muḥammad*, which is undoubtedly an allusion to the ‘Muḥammadan Reality,’ straddles and sustains both wings of *walāya*: the seal of universal and Muḥammadan sainthoods. In this way, Ibn al-‘Arabī situates himself as the figure who parallels the son of Mary in the unfolding signs of the end of days. This mirroring between the Shaykh and Christ appears most vividly when the author presents *rūḥ Muḥammad* as the singular spiritual



entity animating both bodily apparitions of the seals; in other words, the spirit of the Prophet, his reality, is what moves the bodies of Jesus the saint and Ibn al-‘Arabī. We wondered above whether this entails that the Greatest Master is presenting himself as a ‘spiritual reincarnation’ of Christ or perhaps that the returning saintly Christ is not the same, physiologically, as the historical prophet described in the Qur’an as the ‘Word of God.’

Of course, what allows Ibn al-‘Arabī to propel himself and other Muslim saints to the same rank as a prophet like Jesus are a series of textual references wherein the Prophet himself presents the scholars of his community as equivalent to the prophets of previous nations. The Greatest Master creatively uses these narrations as a foundation for his notion of *wirātha*, or spiritual inheritance that connects the spirits of prophets to living Muslim saints. Sustained by the all-encompassing rank of the ‘Muḥammadan law,’ Muslim saints have access to the divine legislations of all previous prophets, through the niche of the prophet Muḥammad. In turn, Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes that each Muslim saint must necessarily travel along the path of one of these previous prophets, before reaching the station of inheriting from the prophet of Islam directly.

However, like the convoluted workings of most of his writings, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s delineation here between the inheritance that comes from pre-Islamic prophets and that which descends from the prophet Muḥammad directly is really an illusion that dissipates under the overwhelming power of the ‘Muḥammadan Reality,’ and the abrogation of previous divine legislations which the Shaykh recurrently mentions has been the state of affairs ever since the historical appearance of the prophet Muḥammad. Therefore, inheriting from prophets like Jesus, Moses or Joseph is ultimately inheriting from the prophet Muḥammad, albeit indirectly or through a partial mirror. Only the completed and perfected *wārith Muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan inheritor) is the one who is able to directly receive knowledge and divine inspiration from the spirit of the Prophet directly.

However, as the author insinuates, the rank of *wārith Muḥammadī* has been sealed with the appearance of the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood. In other words, Ibn al-‘Arabī is the last saint to reach this rank.

And so, the Greatest Master’s eschatological role includes preparing the path for Christ’s eventual return as the Messiah, being a Muslim saint, and becoming the seal of absolute sainthood. In one sense, this intimates the gradual revelation of the Qur’ān in the course of 23 years upon the heart of the prophet Muḥammad or, more esoterically, the measured unfolding of the physical apparition of the Prophet himself within the embodied stages of all the previous divine envoys. In this procession, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jesus emerge as the last two, and the most significant stages that will prepare the universe for its transition to the afterlife. As will become clear in the next chapter, this is indeed Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perspective in his second most important work, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (FH)*.

In “Death and the World of Imagination,” William Chittick emphasizes the quintessential role of *khayāl* (imagination) in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s eschatology.<sup>281</sup> Although this concept is too vast to be included in this dissertation, we can surmise in the context of our discourse that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s role, as a ‘seal of Muḥammadan sainthood’ and precursor to Christ’s return as ‘seal of universal sainthood,’ is to furnish the necessary foundation for Sufī seekers to journey, with the rest of the universe, through the imaginal realm to the afterlife. Undoubtedly, the overwhelming magnitude of the signs of the apocalypse and the severity of the final judgment requires ample preparation by Muslim saints. In this light, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings are also important for the looming return of al-Mahdī (the rightly guided one) who will, alongside Jesus, usher forth the struggle of divine justice against evil in the final days of this world.

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. William Chittick, “Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Eschatology.”

Bringing together these two major themes surrounding Jesus in the *FM*, regarding his physiological and temporal liminality, we are left with the conclusion that Christ's importance in this work revolves around one central pivot which we have highlighted throughout the preceding discussions: the son of Mary's liminal physiology between the realms of bodies and spirits, combined with his dual role as a historical legislating prophet and eschatological saint, makes him a particularly suitable candidate for describing and explaining various metaphysical concepts in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings. This is the case because those notions emanate from the spiritual realm wherein Christ's subtle composition also emerges. Thenceforth, through the mediums of language and Jesus' imaginal body, these ideas can be translated and communicated to readers who may not have 'tasted' these *ḥaqā'iq* (spiritual realities).

In order to better understand these various roles which Jesus performs in Ibn al-'Arabī's *FM*, we introduce the visual diagram below (figure 1) which illustrates the vertical and horizontal dimensions of these Christic functions. In the first instance, the son of Mary channels the ineffable metaphysical and spiritual realities into the tangible and expressible forms of worldly communication. In the second instance, Christ mediates between the historical epoch of prophethood, which preceded the physical appearance of the prophet Muḥammad, and future eschatological period during which the son of Mary will play another significant role as the Messiah and Muslim saint. Ultimately, all of the preceding portrayals of Jesus fall under one or both of these categories.

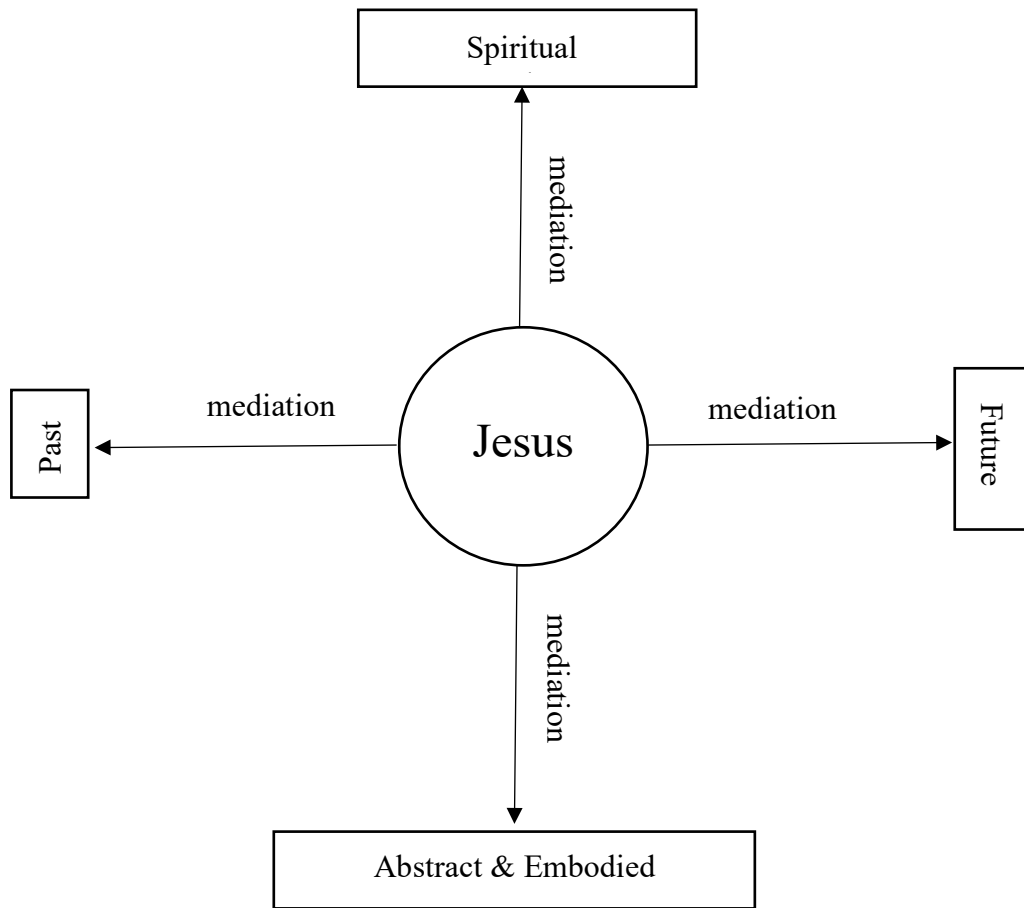


Figure 1: The various mediations of Jesus in the *FM*

As we transition to the next chapter, which focuses on the presence of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s second most important work the *FH*, we will have cause to revisit this diagram in order to gauge the currency of the findings in this chapter. Specifically, we will decide whether these twin mediations of Christ, vertical and horizontal, recur in the Andalusian mystic’s other works and the writings of other Sufi mystics who came after the Greatest Master. In this last instance, it

is worthwhile knowing whether Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayal of Jesus had any influence on later Sufism, as much as other pivotal concepts in his writings.

## Chapter Four: Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*

### Introduction

*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (*FH*) is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s second most important work, alongside the voluminous magnum opus *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*FM*). Like *FM*, the *FH* was also authored while the Andalusian mystic was traveling extensively across Eastern Islamdom. The author relates in vivid detail the initial inspiration for this work in its introductory preface:

I saw the messenger of God, prayers and salutations be upon him, in a joyful vision which I was made to see during the last ten days of [the month of] Muḥarram in the year 627 [Hijrī or 1229 C.E.] in the city of Damascus. In his hands, prayers and blessings be upon him, was a book; he said to me: “This is the book of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, take it and go out to the people so that they may find benefit in it.” I replied: “We hear and obey the commandments of God, His messenger and those who have been put in authority over us.”<sup>282</sup>

The very inception of *FH* is a mythologized interaction between Ibn al-‘Arabī and the prophet Muḥammad’s spiritual reality. This is hardly a simple aesthetic detail surrounding the composition of *FH*. Rather, it is a narrative that colors the entire spirit of the work.<sup>283</sup>

In many ways, *FH* is a summation of the major themes that animate Ibn al-‘Arabī’s entire Weltanschauung, as outlined in the *FM*. However, in contrast to the latter work’s enigmatic and convoluted structure, *FH* is neatly divided into twenty-seven chapters, each of which has a similar title structure: the author associates the name of a prophetic figure with a particular type of wisdom. Beyond this similarity in the headings of the chapters, *FH* still exhibits some degree of mystery in three main ways. First, it is not immediately clear why each of these wisdoms have been associated

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<sup>282</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 47.

<sup>283</sup> Of course, this is also an important motif that is prevalent throughout the *FM*, especially as pertaining to the mentions of Jesus in that work. This much is clear from the previous chapter’s investigation.

with the given prophet. Second, although Adam and Muḥammad take the center stage in the first and last chapters respectively, many of the other sections in-between do not follow the usual sequence of these prophets' historical appearances, as found in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* narrations. Lastly, the second to last chapter explores the life and mission of a mysterious person named Khālid; who was purportedly a pious man and lived in the time period between Jesus and Muḥammad but was not himself a prophet.

The section on Jesus appears in the middle of the work, chapter 15, under the heading: *Faṣṣ Ḥikma Nabawiyya fī Kalima 'Īsawiyya* (The Bezel of a Prophetic Wisdom in a Christic Word). It is preceded by the discussion on the prophet Ezra (chapter 14) and followed by Solomon (chapter 16). There seems to be a subtle relationship between the adjacent chapters and prophets mentioned therein. This is not surprising since the author claimed he received the book directly from the Prophet; thus, its structure must have some significance. Ibn al-'Arabī mentions this last point specifically at the end of the first chapter on prophet Adam:

When God, may He be exalted, had shown me, in *sirrī* [my secret], what He had deposited in this imam and greatest father [Adam], I put forth in this book what He defined for me, not what I deemed appropriate. For, in reality, [such knowledge] cannot be contained in a book or the currently existing world. Thus, what I witnessed I have put forth in this book, as the messenger of God, prayers and peace be upon him, had defined in it for me...<sup>284</sup>

Moreover, the bezel of every wisdom pertains to the [divine] Word with which it is associated. In this way, I have halted at the mentions of these wisdoms, in this book, according to what has been defined in *umm al-kitāb* [lit. the 'mother of book'].<sup>285</sup> Thus, I followed the command of what was drawn out for me and halted at what was defined for me. If I were to try and increase above that, I would not be able to. Indeed, the [divine] presence forbids that, and God is the One who grants facilitation; there is no Lord but He.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>285</sup> This can either be a reference to the entire Qur'ān or only its first chapter, titled *al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening).

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 58.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s insistence on the *Bezel*’s divinely ordained – Muḥammadan – order serves as a necessary backdrop through which the entire discourse of the monograph should be viewed and analyzed.

After reading the *FH* in both its original Arabic and numerous English translations, I have perceived a certain metaphysical narrative that seems to govern the entire spirit of the work, and which I would like to offer here as a preliminary lens prior to delving into the specific chapter on Jesus. This is hardly my own conception since it is supported by the author’s own concepts which he reiterates countless times through the work itself. It is also an approach that highlights his repertoire of various rhetorical tools and stylistic choices. Lastly, as mentioned above, it is a narrative that encompasses Ibn al-‘Arabī’s more verbose and vast vision that unfolds in the *FM*.

The key insight to this ‘secret’ of the *FH* is revealed to the reader in the first few sentences of the final chapter, on the prophet Muḥammad. There, the author describes the reason for associating the Prophet with *al-Hikma al-Fardiyya* (Singular Wisdom):

His wisdom is singular because he is the most perfect existent from among this human species. This is why the affair [of creation/this book] is begun and sealed with him. He was a prophet while Adam was still in-between water and mud. Moreover, he was, even in his elemental make-up, *khātām al-anbiyā’* [seal of prophets] and the first of the three singular ones. Thus, whatever other superiority these *afrād* [singular ones] have obtained emanates from this fact [that Muḥammad is the first of them].

Therefore, he – peace be upon him – is the clearest proof of his lord. He was also given *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* [the most encompassing of speech], which are the *musammiyāt* [named realities] of the names which Adam was taught.<sup>287</sup>

The co-incidence between the prophet Muḥammad’s Qur’ānic designation as *khātām al-anbiyā’* (seal of prophets) and central imagery behind the title of *FH*, the *khātim* (ring), is the fact that the Prophet’s status, as ‘seal of prophets,’ also encompasses his spiritual reality which contains and

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 214.



accommodates all the ‘prophetic bezels of wisdoms’ that ornament Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vision in this work.

In this way, the Prophet’s role not only as the seal, but also most complete and perfect of prophets is intimated by his image in this work as the ring that inherently contains and accommodates the bezels of all previous prophets and saints. This is corroborated by the seminal importance of *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung. As the underlying fabric of the entire cosmos, the Prophet’s spiritual essence also undergirds the entire array of archetypes of various prophets and saints.<sup>288</sup> This allows us to posit the progression of figures in the *FH* as possibly a narrative of the Prophet’s own gradual appearance in the world; beginning with Adam and culminating with the synthesis of his own perfected and complete physical body.

In other words, the association of every prophet with a wisdom focuses on the specific aspect of the Muḥammadan reality which appeared in the physical world through the life and mission of the given divine messenger. In the case of Jesus, as will be discussed momentarily, this aspect happens to be *nubuwwa* (prophethood). Naturally, one may wonder why Ibn al-‘Arabī dictates that the Prophet’s appearance needs to happen gradually, spanning the 26 figures mentioned in the *FH*? The answer to this query is – possibly – found in an *athar* (related saying) attributed to Muḥammad’s wife ‘Ā’isha who stated that the Prophet was a “walking Qur’an” or that “his manners were the Qur’an.” This, in turn, animates a large portion of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own reverence of the Islamic prophet and his intimate metaphysical connection with the Qur’an.

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<sup>288</sup> This was discussed in the previous chapter.

Thus, just as the uttered divine revelation was revealed over the span of 23 years, so would Ibn al-‘Arabī perhaps concur that the prophet Muḥammad also emerged throughout the course of history in the varying persons of divine prophets and messengers. Ultimately, this seems to be the message behind *FH*’s organization and development through the chapters towards the culminating section which discusses the metaphysical perfection, completion and seal-hood of the Prophet of Islam. In this regard, the appearance of Jesus on the historical stage, immediately preceding the coming of Islam and prophet Muḥammad, highlights the unique significance of the son of Mary in this Muḥammadan narrative.

With this in mind, we begin our close reading of the chapter on Jesus in the *FH*.<sup>289</sup> Our ensuing discussion will consist of two parts. First, we will investigate the presence of Christ in the central chapter focusing on his life and mission. Second, we will explore any mentions of Jesus in the other chapters of this work. As in the previous chapter, we will provide a summary of the findings at the end of each of these two sections. We will also revisit the diagram we introduced in the previous chapter, pertaining to Jesus’ various acts of mediation in the *FM*, and gauge its viability and relevance to the outcomes of this chapter.

“The Bezel of a Prophetic Wisdom in a Christic Word”

As is common in many chapters of this work, the *FM* and other writings by Ibn al-‘Arabī, he begins with some verses of poetry that summarize his ensuing focus and approach in the chapter:

From the water of Mary or breath of Gabriel  
In the form of a human created from clay

The spirit was formed in a purified essence  
Made of nature, which it regarded as a prison

For that reason, his residence was extended  
Within this world, it was for more than a thousand [years]

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<sup>289</sup> All the translations provided henceforth are my own unless otherwise noted.

He is a spirit from God, no one else; Thus,  
He resurrected the dead and formed birds from clay

This so that he can have a lineage from his lord  
Through which he may affect the lofty and low

God has purified his body and exalted him  
In spirit, and made him an example of creation<sup>290</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī begins, with these verses, by focusing on a theme prevalent in the *FM*: the unique bodily composition of Jesus. Already from the first verse, the reader meets the Andalusian mystic’s recurring emphasis on Christ’s dual physiology: spiritual and physical. By situating these two aspects within Mary and Gabriel, respective representatives of the physical and spiritual realms, Ibn al-‘Arabī returns to discourse in the *FM* surrounding Jesus’ physiology.

The author immediately begins his commentary on these verses by exploring the special characteristics of spirits and how they manifest in the life and miracles of Jesus:

Know that from the special characteristics of spirits is that they do not touch something save that it comes to life and life flows through it. It is for this reason that *al-Sāmiriyy* [Samaritan] took a handful from the ‘trace of the messenger,’ who is Gabriel peace be upon him, the spirit.

The Samaritan was aware of this fact. Once he knew that he [the messenger] is Gabriel, he perceived that whatever he stepped upon and touched would come to life. Thus, he took a handful from the trace of the messenger and threw it upon the calf, whence it made the sound of a cow.

Had he thrown this upon another form, then the sound of that form would have been attributed to it, such as a camel, sheep or goat ... In this way, we call the life that flows in things the *lāhūt* and *nāsūt* in reference to the vessel wherein this life resides. Therefore, the *nāsūt* was honored due to that which resides within it.<sup>291</sup>

By relying on a well-known story from the Qur’an, Ibn al-‘Arabī is following a familiar strategy whereby he utilizes the canonical Islamic texts as a foundation for his ensuing metaphysical

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<sup>290</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 138.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

discourse. A conversation, we might add, that creatively challenges any literal reading or normative interpretation of the original textual reference. In this case, Ibn al-‘Arabī situates the power to give life in the spirit, a proposition which reminisces of his novel presentation of the relationship between the prophetic cousins, Jesus and John the Baptist, in the *FM*.<sup>292</sup>

With this foundation in place, the Andalusian mystic is ready to begin discussing Jesus and the unique interaction between his Mary-esque body and Gabriel-esque spirit:

When *al-rūḥ al-amīn* [the trusty spirit], which was Gabriel, presented itself to Mary ... she imagined that he was some ordinary man who desired to lie with her. Accordingly, she sought refuge from him in God ... Thus, she attained to perfect presence with God ... Had he blown into her at that moment, Jesus would have turned out too surly for any to bear, because of his mother’s state.

Thenceforth, when he said to her: “Indeed, I am the messenger of your lord” who came to “to give you the glad tiding of a righteous child,” she became expanded away from that constriction and her chest found ease.

At that moment, he blew Jesus in her: in this way, Gabriel was transmitting the Word of God to Mary just as a messenger transmits the speech of God to his community. This is corroborated by His statement: “And he [Jesus] is His Word, which he sent to Mary, and a spirit from Him.”<sup>293</sup>

Gabriel emerges as the constant character migrating from the earlier story of the Samaritan to this narrative surrounding the miraculous birth of Jesus. However, the significance of Gabriel does not merely reside in his power to give life, but in the sensitive awareness which this ‘trusted spirit’ has of the equally important role that Mary has in the birth and formation of Jesus. Thus, not only does the temporary human form of Gabriel affect Jesus’s bodily image, but also Mary’s *ḥāl* (state) of tranquility – or fear – also facilitates the formation of Jesus in a balanced human composition.

The author continues and delves deeper into the role that Gabriel and Mary play in the formation of the bodily composition of Jesus. This time, Ibn al-‘Arabī extends the bodily and

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<sup>292</sup> See chapter 3, page 41.

<sup>293</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 138-139.

spiritual effects of these two ‘parents’ into the prophetic life of Christ and his ability to perform miracles:

Thus, desire flowed through Mary and the body of Jesus was created from a *mā’ muḥaqqaq* [realized water], from Mary, and *mā’ mutawahham* [imaginal water] from Gabriel. The latter flowed through the humidity of that blowing because blowing air that comes from an animalistic body is humid, due to the element of water that constitutes such a form.

Thus, the body of Jesus was formed from imaginal and realized waters. Then, he emerged in the human form as a result of his mother and due to the human form in which Gabriel appeared, so that his birth occurs according to *al-ḥukm al-mu’tād* (expected norms).

In this way, Jesus was able to resurrect the dead because he is a divine spirit; with the power to bring to life being an attribute of God and blowing the air the act of Jesus. This just as blowing [Jesus’ spirit] was from Gabriel while the Word belongs to God. Thus, Christ’s ability to resurrect the dead was a realized one, from the aspect that occurred through his breath just as he appeared in the image of his mother.

However, his ability to resurrect the dead was also imaginal, in the sense that it appeared to be from him while in reality it was from God. In this way, he combined through his reality upon which he was created, as we have said, from imaginal and realized waters. From the realized aspect, it was said about him: “He [Jesus] resurrects the dead.” On the other hand, according to the imaginal path, it was said: “You blow in it [clay bird] and it becomes a bird with God’s permission.” Indeed, the active agent resides in *yakūn* [becomes], not His statement “*tanfukh*” [to blow air].<sup>294</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes, in this excerpt, an important motif which we have highlighted previously: for the Andalusian mystic, the son of Mary’s unique physiology manifests and is thoroughly performed in his life and mission; most ostensibly in his miracle performance. The author also continues to rely upon the Qur’ān as his textual foundation from which he creatively deduces his metaphysics. In this case, the two scriptural descriptions of Christ’s ability to grant

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

life are posited by Ibn al-‘Arabī as allusive references to the imaginal and realized aspects of Jesus, embodied by Gabriel and Mary respectively.

The Andalusian mystic continues to expound upon the significance of Christ’s *barzakhī* (liminal) body in lieu of his miracle performance. In this regard, the author situates his argument within the sophisticated language of the Qur’ān and his mastery of this scriptural terminology:

Although, it is possible that the active agent is *tanfukh* [you blow air]; in which case the [clay mold] becomes a bird from the aspect of its sensual bodily form. This is the same for “you cure the blind and leper” and all that is attributed to him, God’s permission and the permission given by substitution, such as his statement in scripture: “My permission and God’s permission.”

In this case, if the active agent pertains to “*tanfukh*,” then the one who blows the breath [Jesus] is given permission to do this and the bird comes to life, through the blower’s act, by God’s permission. On the other hand, if the blower performs this act without permission, then the formation of the bird occurs through the bird by God’s permission. In this latter sense, the active agent is “*yakūn*” [becomes].

Indeed, if the affair did not include these two aspects, realization and imaginalization, then this image [clay bird] would not have accepted these two aspects. Rather, it has these two aspects precisely because *al-nash’a al-‘isawiyya* [Christic composition] grants this.<sup>295</sup>

Just as there are two descriptions of Jesus’ ability to grant life in the Qur’ān, alluding to his imaginal and realized origins, Ibn al-‘Arabī also deduces an even more nuanced differentiation pertaining to the actual active agent that grants life in Christ’s miracle performance. In one instance, when blowing the breath is performed through permission, the coming-to-life should be attributed to the divine consent. On the other hand, when blowing the breath is performed without permission, then the coming-to-life is attributable to the verbal command *kun* (Be!) and its verbal form in the present tense, *yakūn* (to become). Either way, the actual coming to life is not attributed to the one who blows the breath outwardly, Jesus.

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 140.

With this creative comparison between Christ's physiology and miracle performance in place, the author expands this conceptual framework to also include the son of Mary's behaviors and character traits:

In turn, Jesus emerged with a tremendous humbleness such that it was ordained upon his community that they "pay the tax while abased" and that if one of them is hit on his cheek, they would turn the other cheek to the one who hit them. They also do not attack their transgressors nor seek justice against them.

This he received from his mother because the woman has the aspect of lowliness and humbleness, due to her being below man in ruling and sensuality. As for his power to resurrect the dead and cure illness, that is from the aspect of the blowing of Gabriel in the form of a human being.

This is why Jesus also resurrected the dead in the form of a human being. Had Gabriel not appeared in the form of a human being, but in another image from the elemental forms of animals, plants or minerals, then Jesus would not have been able to resurrect the dead save when he dresses himself in that form.

Likewise, if Gabriel had appeared in his illuminated form that exceeds the elements – since he can never depart from his nature – then Jesus would not have been able to resurrect the dead until he appears in that natural, illuminated – but not elemental – image, alongside the human form from the side of his mother.<sup>296</sup>

Like his dual *barzakhī* nature in performing miracles, Ibn al-ʿArabī also classifies Christ's various mannerisms and actions according to his twin origins, human and angelic. Interestingly, whereas previously the author had distinguished the ability to resurrect the dead and cure the sick to be itself separable into a human and divine agency, here he attributes it completely to Gabriel. The main point in this and the previous excerpt, however, is that Christ's unique physiology animates his prophetic career.

After this slight digression, Ibn al-ʿArabī is ready to return to Christ's miracle performance and the – not so easily decipherable – *ḥayra* (perplexity) surrounding the latter's ability to resurrect the dead:

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

This is why it was said, as Jesus resurrected the dead, that he is *'huwa lā huwa'* [He/not He, God/not God]. In this way, *ḥayra* [perplexity] befalls the one who contemplates his [Christ's] affair just as occurs to the rational person who reflects upon someone from among the human species giving life to the dead, which is a divine specificity.

This is more so the case when the resurrection that occurs is *ihyā' nuṭq* [resurrecting a being that speaks], not simply *ihyā' ḥayawān* [resurrecting a non-speaking body]. When this happens, the observer remains perplexed due to witnessing a human form with a divine power.

This is why some of them claimed *ḥulūl* [incarnation] regarding Jesus, and that he is God due to his ability to resurrect the dead. This is also why they were attributed to *kufr*, which is *ṣatr* [covering], since they covered God, the One who truly resurrects the dead, within the human form of Jesus. This is why God said: "They have *kafarū* [covered/disbelieved] those who say that God is Jesus son of Mary." [(5:73)]<sup>297</sup>

Ibn al-ʿArabī extends his purely theoretical discourse into the social sphere of Christ's historical community and the ramifications of his miracle performance on his apostles. Of course, even in the context of Jesus' prophetic career and the response of these disciples, the Andalusian mystic does not hesitate to thoroughly ground these worldly events in his metaphysics. In this case, the author presents the Christian belief in Christ's divinity to be a direct result of the latter's *barzakhī* nature and unique physiology which obfuscated and bewildered the onlookers.

Most importantly, Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces his controversial reformulation of the Qur'ānic term *kufr*, which is theologically taken to mean 'disbelief,' and instead renders it as 'to cover,' which is the term's literal meaning in the Arabic language. With this provocative interpretation, the Andalusian mystic proposes a vindication of Christians who adhere to the belief in the divinity of Jesus. It is not considered a form of disbelief, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, but simply concealing God's Essence within the son of Mary's human form. Nevertheless, in the ensuing paragraphs, the author does criticize the early apostles, and later Christians, for having such a conviction:

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 141.



In this way, they have combined an error and *kufir* in the entirety of their speech, not because they stated that he [Jesus] is God or he is the son of Mary, [but for some other reason]. Rather, they affirmed that resurrecting the dead is attributable to God and also affirmed the human form by saying the ‘son of Mary.’ And indeed, he is the son of Mary without a doubt.

Therefore, the listener imagined that they attributed divinity to the human form and made it the essence of that image, which they did not do. Rather, they regarded the divine identity to begin at the human form of the son of Mary and separated between this form and the ruling. However, they did not make the form identical with the ruling.

In this regard, the affair is like that of Gabriel when he appeared in a human form and did not blow any breath, then he blew. In this way, there was a separation between the image and blowing the breath; even though the blowing appeared through this form. Still, since the form existed when there was no breath blown, then this ability does not belong to the form. This is why disputation befell the different sects regarding Jesus: what is he?<sup>298</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī does not really seem interested in elaborating upon the *khata’* (error) of Christians. Rather, he is concerned with the misconceptions that readers of the Qur’ān will have of what Christians actually believe regarding Jesus. In other words, the Andalusian mystic is still remarkably convinced and invested in proving the – relative – innocence of Christ’s early apostles and later religious community of any disbelief or heretical convictions about their prophet.

It is not entirely clear why Ibn al-‘Arabī seems so motivated to prove the innocence of Christians who believe in Christ’s divinity, or at the least to prove the sophisticated nature of their conviction. However, taking into consideration our previous exploration of his vindication of the Trinitarians in the *FM*,<sup>299</sup> there are a few possible reasons for this approach. First, the eclectic milieu during which Ibn al-‘Arabī lived the first half of his life, in Islamic Spain where Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together might have inculcated a sense of universalism in him and appreciation for other monotheistic traditions. In this case, the preceding excerpts can be seen as a

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 141-142.

<sup>299</sup> See chapter 3, page 14.

heartfelt attempt by the author to exonerate a religious community he grew up with in his early childhood.

Another possibility is that vindicating the belief in Christ's divinity is meant to exonerate Sufi Muslims, like Ibn al-‘Arabī, who also believe in the unique physiology of *awliyā* (saints). In a similar light to Jesus, these distinguished persons have gone through rigorous regiments of self-discipline whence their bodies became more spiritualized and subtler than those of the lay masses of people. In combination with their ability to also perform *karāmāt* (miracles), these Muslim saints are – in a way – various reiterations of the Christic archetype. If the Andalusian mystic is successful at proving the validity of believing in Christ's divinity, from a certain perspective, then he could use the same strategy to also present Muslim saints as having a dual physiology, divine and human.

Of course, this controversy surrounding Jesus's physiology is not lost on the author, and he sets out to delineate in the ensuing paragraphs the opinions among the various sects on this issue, which he alluded to in the preceding passage:

Some who contemplated his reality, from the aspect of his human form, said that he is the son of Mary. Others, who reflected upon his imaginal humanity, attributed him to Gabriel. Meanwhile, those who looked at his ability to resurrect the dead attributed him to God in spirituality and called him *rūḥ Allāh* [the spirit of God]. This in reference to the fact that life appears through whomever he blows a breath upon.

Thus, sometimes it is the Real's presence within him that is imaginal, while other times it is the angelic presence. Some other times still it is his humanness that is imaginal. In actuality, he appears to each person who contemplates his reality according to their capacities and dispositions.

Indeed, he is the 'Word of God,' 'spirit of God' and 'servant of God.' These three aspects are granted only to him in terms of his bodily form. This is because every human being is attributed to their biological father, not the one who blows the spirit in their human form.

Note that when God forms the human body, as He states: “When I form him,” He proceeds to blow in the human being from His spirit, whence He attributes this spirit in its essence and existence to Himself, may He be exalted. However, Jesus is not like this because the formation of his body and human form were both subsumed within the breathing of the divine spirit.<sup>300</sup>

It is unclear whether the Andalusian mystic intends to provocatively flirt with Trinitarian tendencies, for it is indeed interesting that he divides the beliefs of the different sects regarding Christ into three categories: human, angelic and divine. From these three perspectives, the author constructs three metaphysical aspects and personas of the son of Mary: as the ‘Word of God,’ Christ’s imaginal divinity is emphasized; as the ‘spirit of God,’ it is his angelic aspect that is apparent and, lastly, as ‘servant of God,’ it is his humanness that emerges as the imaginal aspect. Conclusively, Ibn al-‘Arabī states that this tripartite division is unique to the son of Mary because, only in his case, did all these aspects form through the act of breathing in the divine spirit. In other words, the Andalusian mystic is confirming a certain ‘Trinity’ that is unique to Jesus.

The author then addresses a crucial theological issue that emerges from this discussion and also extends the discourse from the prophetic Jesus to sainthood and the embodiment of the Christic archetype within living, past and present, Muslim saints:

Indeed, all of the existing things are the Words of God which do not cease and emerge as a result of *kun* [Be!], itself the Word of God. Thus, the question is: is the Word attributed to Him, as He is, in which case its reality remains unknown, or does He descend, may He be exalted, to the form of the one who utters *kun*, in which case the utterance becomes the reality of the form to which He descended and within which He appeared?

Some of the gnostics have inclined towards one explanation, while others opted for the other. Others still have been perplexed and do not know the truth of the matter. Indeed, this is an affair that cannot be known save through taste, like Abū Yazīd [al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874)] who blew a breath upon an ant, when he killed it, and it came to life. At that moment, he knew through whom he is blowing the breath; hence, he blew and was *‘īṣawī al-mashhad* [Christic in his witnessing act].

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<sup>300</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 142.

As for the incorporeal resurrection of life, through knowledge, then know that this is the continuous, lofty and light-filled divine life, about which God said: “Give the example of the one who was dead, then We resurrected him and granted him a light through which he walks among the people.” Therefore, every person who resurrects a dead soul through the life of knowledge of God, they have indeed resurrected that soul and it will become a light through which he will walk among the people; meaning among those who resemble him in form.<sup>301</sup>

Ultimately, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s main interest in Jesus’s unique physiology pertains to the divine agency that is acting through the human body. The subtle knowledge emerging from the correct understanding of this divine/human symbiosis is much more important for the author than mere discussions of Christ’s bodily composition or the theological consequences of his special birth. This is not surprising, since correctly and holistically perceiving this interaction between God’s life-giving power and the human form leads, strictly through *dhawq* (spiritual taste), to embodying and performing such Christic miracles; an embodiment which Ibn al-‘Arabī states can be perceived in the celebrated Muslim saint Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī.

And so, the author’s explicit presentation of al-Bisṭāmī as an *‘īsawī* (Christic) saint returns us to the notion of saintly *wirātha* (inheritance) from prophets, which was introduced in the *FM*.<sup>302</sup> There, as now, the Greatest Master situates the relationship between prophets and saints within a particular knowledge that the *walī* receives from the spirit of his teacher-prophet. However, here, Ibn al-‘Arabī specifies that the knowledge inherited from Jesus particularly can only be known through *dhawq* (spiritual taste). Otherwise, the gnostic risks remaining in a dilemma of perplexity, not being able to reach a definitive conclusion regarding Jesus’ ability to resurrect the dead. However, Ibn al-‘Arabī would concur perhaps that perplexity in this issue remains an

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 142-143.

<sup>302</sup> See chapter 3, page 116-117.

indispensable component needed to spiritually ‘taste’ and – non-rationally – comprehend this type of Christic miracles.<sup>303</sup>

As always, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s does not remain at the abstract or theoretical threshold of his concepts. Instead, he wants the reader to understand the necessarily embodied manifestation of his sophisticated metaphysics within bodies of saints like al-Bistāmī. To this end, the author inserts verses of poetry that summarize and convey that perplexing nature of this interaction between God and His creation:

If it were not for us and Him,  
The affair would not have been as it is

Indeed, we are servants,  
And God is our Master

Yet, we are His Essence, so know,  
What you mean when you say: ‘a human being’

So, do not be veiled by human beings,  
For they grant you a proof

Thus, be a Real and creation,  
Whence you can be, through God, a merciful one

And find His creation within Him,  
You will be expansive and fragrant

In this way, we granted Him what appears  
Through us and He gave us

Thus, the affair became divided,  
Through Him and us

Thus, he has resurrected Him who knows  
Through my heart, when He resurrected us

We were universes within Him,  
Essences and epochs

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<sup>303</sup> This is corroborated by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s statement elsewhere in the *FH*: “Reality is perplexity, perplexity is anxiety and movement and movement is life” (Ibid, 200-201).

However, He is not always within us,  
Rather, this is only the case sometimes.<sup>304</sup>

The Andalusian mystic eloquently summarizes his objective behind focusing on the perplexity of Christ's physiology: it is a perfect embodiment of the divine breath and life permeating all human beings. As Ibn al-'Arabī states above, those who gazed upon Jesus with bewilderment perceived him as simultaneously *huwa/lā huwa* (He/not He or God/not God). In actuality, this is the state of the entire cosmos in the Andalusian mystic's writings.<sup>305</sup> In other words, once again, the son of Mary is assisting Ibn al-'Arabī in describing the perplexing metaphysical state of creation to the reader.

Without an embodied example like Jesus, it would be quite difficult for Ibn al-'Arabī to translate these abstract metaphysical concepts into living and historical events that can not only be imagined by his devoted readers, but also tasted spiritually through self-discipline, at which point they may even inherit directly from Jesus. This significance of Christ, as a pedagogical tool, becomes clear in the ensuing paragraphs when the author fully transitions to the Christic principles immanent within the entire universe:

And what proves what we have mentioned regarding the spiritual breath within the elemental human form is that the Real attributed to Himself *al-naḥas al-raḥmānī* [the breath of the most-merciful]. Indeed, it is necessary for every entity attributed with a trait to follow that characteristic in whatever it necessitates. In this case, you know how breaths function within the organs of the breather.

This is why the divine breath accepted the forms of the world. Indeed, He is for them like the *al-jawhar al-huyūlānī* [material essence], which is naught but the essence of nature. Also, the elements are nothing but an image from the images of nature. What is above the elements and born from them is also from the images of nature. However, these are the lofty spirits that reside above the seven heavens.

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>305</sup> As pointed out in chapter 2, 'Literature Review,' Robert Dobie shows in *Logos and Revelation* that this is also Meister Eckhart's conviction pertaining to Christ's metaphysical description as *Logos*. Whether Ibn al-'Arabī was also influenced by this Christian view remains a topic for further research.

As for the spirits of the seven heavens and their essences, these are composed of elements. More specifically, they are made from the smoke of the elements of that heaven. Likewise, the angels in every heaven are formed from the elements of that level. Thus, the ones in the seven heavens are elemental and those above them are natural.

This is why God attributed *ikhtiṣām* [disputation] to them – meaning *al-mala' al-a'lā* [the highest assembly] – because nature is oppositional, just as the opposition among the divine names, or relationships, is a result of the divine breath. Do you not see, then, that the Divine Essence which is transcendent above this ruling is described as “sufficient above the worlds?”<sup>306</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Ibn al-‘Arabī finds the common thread connecting Christ’s unique physiology and creation of the cosmos to be the divine breath animating both entities. As the author elaborates in detail upon the different types of angels, elemental and natural, that reside in the seven heavens and beyond, we are reminded of his *mi‘rāj* (ascension) narratives in the *FM* during which the Andalusian mystic emphasizes the introspective nature of these journeys: they took place within his own soul and essence.

Also, Ibn al-‘Arabī is alluding here to the universal divine breath that animates the countless angels residing in the seven heavens and ‘highest assembly’; the same breath that colors the perplexity of Christ’s physiology. In other words, notwithstanding his departure from Christ’s person as a direct topic of investigation, the author is still alluding to inner workings of the son of Mary’s unique composition. After establishing the correspondence between the latter and his macrocosmic counterpart (i.e. the universe at large), Ibn al-‘Arabī masterfully transitions to this larger cosmic Christ in an attempt to focus on the subtle nuances of the smaller, human Jesus. All the while, it is *nafas al-rahmān* (the breath of most-merciful) that is sustaining this creative analogy.

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 143-144.

The author continues to expound upon the various effects of this *al-nafas al-ilāhī* (divine breath) on the formation of the seven heavens and all the created things that reside there:

This is why the world emerged in the form of the One who created them, which is naught but the divine breath. What is included within it of hotness became elevated. What is included within it of coldness and humidity was lowered. Lastly, what was included within it of dryness became firm and was not shaken. This is because *rusūb* [sedimentation] is specific to coldness and humidity.

Do you not see that when the doctor wants to give the medicine to someone, he looks in the vial? If it has sedimented, then he knows that it is ready and quickly gives it to the sick person, so they can heal. Indeed, medicine sediments due to its natural humidity and coldness.

Thenceforth, God has molded the clay of the human being with His own hands that are oppositional; this even though both of His hands are right hands. This is because nothing can affect nature save what harmonizes with it and its oppositionality. This is why God attributed hands to Himself. Once He created him with these hands, He named him *basharan* due to the *mubāshara* [immediacy] that is fitting for the Divine, through the hands with which He created human beings.<sup>307</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of metaphors, parables and examples is hardly haphazard. Rather, just as Christ’s unique liminal composition intimates the metaphysical condition of the universe, every occurrence in this vast cosmos, including the maturation of medicine for the sick, is also a reincarnation – somehow – of these metaphysical precepts. The Andalusian mystic would probably explain, in this regard, that the sedimentation property of medicine emerges from the attribute of subsidence that is inherent in the elements from which our world is composed. In turn, this trait and many others are rooted, originally, within the divine breath.

However, as stated previously, this is the same divine breath which animates Jesus. Thus, we are left with the conclusion that *rusūb* (sedimentation) is also a trait that is inherent in the son

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 144.



of Mary.<sup>308</sup> One may also say that Ibn al-‘Arabī would like us to perceive a Christic movement in a doctor’s preparation of medicine. As a matter of fact, the Andalusian mystic’s entire objective seems to show that, in terms of its ability to manifest God’s ipseity, the entire cosmos is nothing but a series of *‘īsawī* instantiations. Any process or event in the world that alludes to *al-nafas al-ilāhī* (i.e. displaying hotness, coldness, wetness and dryness) is, ipso facto, symbolic of Christ. In other words, the physical world helps us to understand the uniqueness of Jesus and the latter facilitates conveying the miraculous nature of the former.

At this point, Ibn al-‘Arabī is concerned with the significance of God’s creation of the human being using his ‘two hands.’ Using the first human as an example, the prophet Adam, the author references the Qur’ānic story of *Iblīs* (Satan), his refusal to prostrate to Adam and the metaphysical significance of this disobedience:

From among the proofs of His care towards this human species is that He said to the one who refused to prostrate to him: “What deterred you from prostrating to what I have created with My own Hands? Did you become prideful?” against the one who is like you – meaning of elemental composition – “or were you among *al-‘ālīn* [the lofty ones]?” [meaning] above the elements, which he is not.

What He means by *al-‘ālīn* [lofty ones] is the one who was elevated, through his essence and light-filled mold, above being considered of the elements, even if such an entity had a natural physiology. Indeed, there is no virtue for the human being above other elemental creation save that he was created a human from *ṭīn* [mud/clay]. In this way, he became the most virtuous of all the elemental things which were created without *mubāshara* [immediacy].

In this regard, the human being is higher in rank above the earthly and heavenly angels, while the lofty angels are better than this human species according to the Qur’ānic text.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī might even connect the *safal* (lowliness) that is part of *rusūb* (sedimentation) with the *safal* that is found in the *tawādu‘* (humility) of Jesus, which the author states the latter received from his mother, Mary, since “the woman has the trait of *safal*.” Ibid, 140.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

As always, Ibn al-‘Arabī is able to masterfully situate verses from the Qur’ān within his metaphysical narrative and present these textual references as suitable corroborative evidences for his propositions. In this case, *Iblīs*’s resentment against God’s order to prostrate to Adam is portrayed by the author as stemming from Satan’s misunderstanding of his and Adam’s natures. Whereas God’s rhetorical question to *Iblīs*: “Were you from the lofty ones?” is usually interpreted as “were you among the arrogant ones?” here Ibn al-‘Arabī takes the meaning of the term literally as a reference to those angelic beings that reside above the seven heavens.<sup>310</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī seems satisfied with the foundation he had established and, by way of summary, makes an explicit proclamation on the correlation between the microcosmic human soul and its macrocosmic counterpart, the universe at large:

So, whoever wants to know *al-nafas al-ilāhī* [divine breath], let them know the world; for whoever knows *nafsah* [his soul], they will know their lord through whom they appeared: meaning, the world appeared within *nafas al-rahmān* [breath of the most merciful] through which God *naffasa* [alleviated] what the divine names experienced of the non-existence of their traces. In this way, He showed a bounty upon *nafsih* [His soul] through what He created within *nafasih* [His breath].

Moreover, the first trace for this breath was within this lofty divine ipseity. Thenceforth, the affair continued descending through this general alleviation until it reached the last created thing.

Everyone within the essence of the [divine] breath  
Is like light within the essence of final hours of the night,

And knowledge is through the proof  
Like the skinning of morning for the one who became sleepy,  
In all of this he will see what I have described  
A vision that alludes to the breath,

In this way, he will find comfort from every distress  
Through reciting “‘Abasa,”<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> This seems to be a recurring strategy in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings: to refer to the literal meaning of a Qur’ānic term in order to subvert the normatively understood meaning. In this case, the term *‘ālīn* is interpreted by Ibn al-‘Arabī to mean ‘those who reside in an *‘ālī* (lofty/high) place,’ not a figurative allusion to arrogance.

<sup>311</sup> This is in reference to the 80<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur’ān with the same title.

And He has manifested for the one  
Who came to seek the burning ember,<sup>312</sup>

He saw Him as a fire, while in reality He is  
Light in scriptures and for the guardians at night,

If you have understood my speech  
Then you will know that you are miserable,

If something other than this was sought,  
He would have perceived Him within it and not be defeated<sup>313</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī pays homage to an ancient proclamation uttered by the Oracle of Delphi, Socrates and Plato: “Know Thyself!” It is not only the Andalusian mystic who borrows this Greek maxim, but many Sufi mystics before and after him as well. However, the author does not settle for simply reiterating the sentiment, as he has already done throughout the preceding passages. On the contrary, he relies on one of his most common rhetorical strategies to make this fact vivid: a masterful and creative use of etymology to linguistically embody his metaphysical concepts.

In this way, the three related terms: *nafas*, *nafs* and *tanfīs* enter a celestial marriage in order to reveal the intimate relationship between the divine breath, human soul and expansive movement of creation, whereby the divine names continuously manifest their traces throughout the far reaches of the universe. Of course, the Andalusian mystic also does not hesitate to further support this analogy with more scriptural references. In this case, he uses the Qur’ānic – and biblical – story of Moses, specifically the artifact of the burning bush, as proof of God’s mysterious manifestation within the countless forms of this material world. And yet, Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes by emphasizing the enigma surrounding these divine appearances: *ibti’ās* (misery) and *intikās* (defeat) are

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<sup>312</sup> This is a reference to the story of Moses in the Qur’ān, wherein he states – in one chapter –: “Has the story of Moses reached you? He saw a fire and said to his family: ‘remain here, I have found a fire; perhaps I will bring some burning ember from it or find guidance therein’” (20:9-10).

<sup>313</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 145-146.

inevitable in witnessing such displays, since God’s Essence remains always transcendent and beyond any single theophany.

Ibn al-‘Arabī returns to focus on Jesus and completely shifts his focus away from the relationship between the microcosmic human soul and macrocosmic universe. It seems as though only now does the author actually begin discussing the significance of *al-kalima al-‘isawiyya* (Christic Word), which he associated with *al-ḥikma al-nabawiyya* (prophetic wisdom):

As for this *kalima ‘isawiyya* [Christic Word], when the Real directed His attention to it in the station of “until We know” and He knows, He sought answers regarding what was attributed to this Word, whether it is truth or falsehood, even though He knows beforehand whether it happened or not.

He said to him [Jesus]: “Did you tell people: ‘take me and my mother as god beside God?’” [(5:116)] Indeed, it is necessary to maintain *adab* [manners] while responding for the One who is seeking clarification. This is because when He manifested to him [Jesus] in this station and in this form, wisdom requires an answer through *tafriqa bi-‘ayn al-jam‘* [separation within the essence of union].

Thus, he said, prioritizing *tanzīh* [divine transcendence]: “*Subḥānak!* [Glory be to You!]” In this way, he emphasized the *kāf*, which entails address and dialogue. “It is not for me,” from the perspective that I am myself without You, “to say what I have no right to say,” meaning neither what identity requires nor my essence. “If I had said it, You have known it,” because You are the speaker and whoever says something knows what they have said. You are the tongue with which I speak, just as the Messenger of God, prayers be upon him, has told us on behalf of his lord in the divine proclamation: “I will be the tongue with which he [*walī*] speaks!”<sup>314</sup>

Although it seems that the Andalusian mystic has left behind his previous exploration into the unique physiology of Jesus and the manifestation of God’s breath and names within the son of Mary, traces of this topic remain present in this new direction. The author’s focus on this pivotal verse in the Qur’ānic narrative of Jesus, during which God questions Christ on the day of judgment regarding the – heretical – beliefs of his community, is analyzed by Ibn al-‘Arabī to reveal the scriptural roots for his metaphysical discourse on Christ’s divine aspects. To this end, he interprets

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 146.

the latter's response to God: "It is not my right to say what is not my right to say" to be an allusion to the son of Mary's awareness of his soul's essential non-existence without the spirit from the divine breath.

Also, by referencing the famous *ḥadīth* wherein God appends His own names and attributes to the faculties of the *awliyā'*, Ibn al-ʿArabī is cleverly situating Jesus within the sphere of *walāya*; a theme which we saw is prevalent in the *FM*.<sup>315</sup> It is with this same motif, also, that the author continues his analysis of Christ's response to God:

Thus, He made His Essence identical with the tongue of the speaker and then attributed the speech to His servant. Then, the righteous servant [Jesus] completed his response by saying: "You know what is in my soul," and the speaker here is the Real, while I do not know what is in it.

In this way, He denied knowledge in Jesus' essence, from the aspect that it is his essence, not that he is a speaker with a trace. "*Innaka anta* [Indeed, You]" he utilized [the pronoun] of *faṣl wa ʿimād* [separation and support] in order to emphasize the *bayān* [declaration/clarification] and rely upon it, since no one knows the unseen save God.

In this way, he separated and combined, made singular and multiple, expanded and constricted then completed his response by saying: "I did not say to them save what You ordered me" [(5:117)] First, he negated, alluding to the fact that he is not the one who – really – said it. Thenceforth, he confirmed the statement *adaban* [for reverence] with the Questioner. Had he not done so, he would have been described as lacking knowledge in the science of spiritual realities, and he is exalted above that. This is why he said: "Save what You ordered me" [meaning] You are the speaker through my tongue and You are my tongue.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> The full text of this *ḥadīth* is as follows: "He who is hostile to a friend of Mine I declare war against. My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me, I will surely give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely protect him." (Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1127) This narration is found in multiple *ḥadīth* collections, most prominently the authentic compendium of al-Bukhārī. Due to its authenticity and vivid description of God's intimate relationship with saints, the *ḥadīth* has been called *ḥadīth al-walāya* (the narration about sainthood) by some Muslim saints.

<sup>316</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 146-147.

Ibn al-‘Arabī does not hesitate to creatively interpret the Qur’ānic verses in a way that fits and supports his metaphysics. This is evident in his presentation of God, ultimately, as the speaker in Christ’s own response to the divine: “You know what is in my soul.” Therefore, it is clear that the author wishes the readers to forego their common understanding of these verses, as a conversation between God and Jesus, and instead view it as an inner dialogue between the Divine Essence and His manifestation within the son of Mary.

It is in this light that Ibn al-‘Arabī also emphasizes the perplexing combination of negation and affirmation in Christ’s continuing response to God: “I did not say to them, save what You ordered me.”<sup>317</sup> However, this enigma is only the beginning. Ibn al-‘Arabī also delves even deeper into Christ’s reply to God and deduces some rather controversial conclusions that are, nonetheless, quite common throughout his writings:

Therefore, look at this praise and declaration, how subtle and concise it is. “[I told them to] worship *Allāh* [God]!” [(5:117)] He used the name *Allāh* due to the variety of worshippers in their acts of worship and differences in *sharā’i*‘ (divine laws). He did not specify any one name above another. Rather, he utilized *al-ism al-jāmi*‘ *li-l-kull* [the Divine Name that encompasses all of the laws].

Thenceforth, he said: “My lord and your lord.” It is known that His relationship with one created thing, through His Lordship, is not identical with His relationship to another created thing. This is why he separated by saying: “My lord and your lord,” alluding to both speaker and addressed one.

“Save what You ordered me,” he affirmed that he is commanded, which is naught but his servanthood; for none is ordered save the one from whom fulfilling the command is possible, even if they choose not to obey it. And since the command descends according to each ruling of the different ranks, each entity that appears in a rank is colored with the reality of that level: the rank of *al-ma’ mūr* [ordered one]

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<sup>317</sup> In this regard, it is worthwhile noting that the author offers a highly similar interpretation in the *FM* regarding another verse in the Qur’ān addressing the prophet Muḥammad: “You did not throw, when you threw, but God threw!” (8:17). About this, he remarks: “Thus, from the perspective that he threw, it is truth. Likewise, from the perspective that he did not throw it is also truth. God has said: ‘I am his hands with which he strikes.’ Thus, if you say that the thrower is God, you are truthful and if you say that the thrower is Muhammad, prayers be upon him, you are also truthful” Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* I, 336.

has a ruling which appears in every commanded entity and that of *al-āmir* [one who orders] has a ruling which appears in every one who issues a command.<sup>318</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī is introducing an altogether different topic, also common in his writings, within this already rich narrative on Christ. This pertains to the expansive and universalist spirit that the author believes is inherent within the divine name *Allāh*. Since this name is *al-ism al-jāmi‘*, as Ibn al-‘Arabī states, it subsumes not only all the other names of God but also the religions other than Islam that have appeared and spread on earth according to divine decree.

In this way, Ibn al-‘Arabī is alluding to Christ’s possible reason for responding to God’s query using this particular divine name: in order to invoke the divine’s expansive and inclusive mercy that would – possibly – accommodate the erroneous beliefs of his community; at least in the sense of forgiving their heretical convictions regarding their prophet. Next, the Andalusian mystic delves even deeper to investigate the distinctive relationships that God has with each of these different creeds. Even though the ultimate objective behind this approach has been obscure thus far, the author reveals his intentions in the ensuing paragraphs:

Thus, the Real commands: “Establish prayer.” Indeed, He is the One who orders, the One who is addressed and ordered. Likewise, the servant asks: “My lord, forgive me.” Here, also, He is the One who orders and the ordered Real. In this way, what the Real requests from the servant, through His command, is identical with what the servant orders from the Real through his command.

This is why every supplication is necessarily answered, even though it might be delayed. However, this is no different than when some of those who are commanded to pray do not establish their prayer on time but rather postpone their obedience and pray in some other time, even when they are physically able to perform it. Thus, responding to the supplication is inevitable, even if only through the intention to do so.

Then, he said: “And I was upon them” but did not say upon myself with them, as he said: “My lord and your lord.” “A witness as long as I was among them,” because prophets are witnesses for their nations as long as they reside among them. “Then, when You ceased me”: meaning, took me to You and veiled them from me, and me

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<sup>318</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 147.

from them, “You were *al-raqīb* [the watcher] over them,” in a form other than my matter. Rather, this was through their own matter since You were their sights, which is necessitated by *murāqaba* [watchfulness].<sup>319</sup>

It is worthwhile noting Ibn al-‘Arabī’s incorporation of his commentary on these Qur’ānic verses, presented as Christ’s own words in the first-person, alongside his other statements in a seamless narrative. In a sense, the reader feels as though the author himself is also experiencing the divine address to the son of Mary and, thus, wishes to convey a glimpse of this ecstatic vision to the reader through these stylistic choices.

And yet, it is not this creative methodology that truly captivates our attention in the preceding three paragraphs. Rather, it is the author’s ability to continuously introduce seemingly unrelated topics within an ongoing discourse, all the while providing some truly innovative interpretations of Qur’ānic verses that transcend the bounds of normative explanations. This occurs twice in the above passages. First, the author gives a brilliant admonishment to Muslims who delay their prayer, while being able to perform it physically, by comparing it to God’s postponement of his response to supplications, even though He is perfectly capable of fulfilling them immediately. Second, once again, Ibn al-‘Arabī resorts to a literal rendering of the scripture’s terminology. In this case, the author provocatively portrays God anthropomorphically by hypothesizing that His name *al-raqīb* (watcher) entails that He observes His servants through their own – physical – sights.

The Greatest Master continues expounding upon this motif by deciphering the richness of meaning in each term of this Qur’ānic verse, further highlighting the subtle fluctuation between God’s transcendent Essence and immanent theophany within Christ and the Christian community:

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 147-148.



Thus, the human being's witnessing of himself is the Real's witnessing of him. Moreover, he [Jesus] described God with the name *al-raqīb* because he had already described his own self with *shuhūd*. In other words, he [Jesus] wanted to distinguish between himself and his lord, so that it be known that he is who he is because he is a servant and the Real is the Real because He is the former's lord. This is why he described himself as *shahīd* [witness] and the Real as *raqīb* [watcher].

Thenceforth, he put them [his community] ahead of himself when he said: "I was upon them a witness as long as I was among them," out of altruism and good manners. Likewise, he mentioned them last, alongside the Real, when he said: "[You are] the watcher over them," due to what the Lord deserves of priority in rank.

Also know, that the Real, who is described here as the Watcher, also has the name which Jesus attributed to himself, *al-shahīd* [witness]. This is evident in his statement: "And You are '*alā kulli shay*' [upon everything] a Witness." Thus, he used *kulli* [every] for generality, *shay*' [thing] since it is the most of indefinites and the name 'Witness.' Thus, He is the Witness upon every witnessed thing according to what that thing requires. In this way, he [Jesus] alluded to the fact that [God], may He be exalted, is the Witness upon the community of Jesus when he said: "And I was upon them a witness as long as I was among them." Indeed, it is naught but the testimony of the Real in a *mādda ṭsawīyya* [Christic matter], just as it has been proven that He is his tongue, hearing and sight.<sup>320</sup>

The narrative in these paragraphs is a masterful rhetorical dance between the emphasis on *adab* (proper etiquette) and a novel scriptural exegesis, all in order to deduce countless corroborative evidences for the author's metaphysics. Christ's initial attribution of *shuhūd* to himself and *murāqaba* to God is presented by the author as maintaining the proper differentiation between '*abd* (servant) and *rabb* (lord). However, the son of Mary's later attribution of *shuhūd* to God, thereby eliminating the earlier distinction, is also adopted by the Greatest Master and posited as an allusion to the divine permeation and manifestation within Christ's body and senses.

And so, Ibn al-'Arabī's main motivation in this ongoing discourse is a return to an old motif in the author's overarching narrative surrounding the son of Mary: to highlight Christ's liminal station between the realms of body and spirit, physical and metaphysical, creation and God.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 148.

And yet, as we have mentioned previously, as a prominent Muslim mystic, Ibn al-‘Arabī is cognizant of the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad throughout these entire passages. This is a supremacy that does not merely entail the prophet of Islam’s distinction above Jesus, but his very absorption of the latter’s rank and uniqueness. More than that, not only does the Prophet have all the divine gifts given to Jesus, but he is himself the original vessel of these grants while the son of Mary is a mirror or branch of this all-comprehensive tree of *nubuwwa* (prophethood) and *walāya* (sainthood); a tributary that reflects only certain aspects of the immense root.

It is in this direction that Ibn al-‘Arabī proceeds in these passages, until the end of the chapter. The author begins by explaining why he considers the *kalima* ‘*isawīyya* (Christic Word), which governs and animates his discourse in this chapter, to also be a Muḥammadan Word:

[It is] a Christic and Muḥammadan Word: as for being Christic, this is because Jesus uttered it, as God informs us in His book. As for being Muḥammadan, this is due to its effect on Muḥammad, prayers and salutations be upon him, when he stood an entire night repeating the verse until the dawn of the following day.

“If You *tu ‘adhdhibhum* [punish them], they are Your servants and if You *taghfir lahum* [forgive them], then You are *al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm* [the Most-Exalted, Most-Wise].” Here, *hum* [them] is a third-person pronoun, just as *Huwa* [him] is a third-person pronoun. This just as He has said elsewhere: “*Hum* [They] are the one who disbelieved” [(48:25)], using the third-person pronoun. In this way, the unseen [alluded to by the third-person absent pronoun] is a veil for them from what is desired by the present witnessed reality.

Thus, he [Jesus] said: “If You punish them,” using *ḍamīr al-ghā’ib* [lit. pronoun of the absent/third-person pronoun], which is nothing but their state of being veiled from the Real. This is how God chose to remind them, prior to their attendance in His presence, so when they do come the *khamīra* [yeast] would have already exercised its effect upon the *‘ajīn* [dough] and made it into its likeness.<sup>321</sup>

Each of the three preceding paragraphs demonstrate Ibn al-‘Arabī’s genius. First, the author provides a remarkable reason for the designation of the Word of this chapter as both Christic and

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, 148-149.

Muḥammadan: while the son of Mary uttered these Qur'ānic verses, Muḥammad is the one who was truly affected by it. In other words, Jesus will have spoken the words in this verse, on the Day of Judgment, just so that they can benefit the Prophet during his nightly prayers in this world.

And yet, the animating spirit and objective behind Ibn al-‘Arabī’s statement here is that it was actually the spirit of the Prophet himself who perhaps spoke those very words in the body of Jesus.<sup>322</sup> Be that as it may, in the current conversation, the author presents God as the veiled speaker within Christ’s material body. The hiddenness of this divine spirit is the ‘unseen’ which Ibn al-‘Arabī eloquently states is alluded to by the use of third-person pronouns in the Qur’ānic verse. Of course, this attempt to deduce a metaphysical reality from the linguistic style of the Qur’ān is a common motif in the Andalusian mystic’s writings. However, the author continues to provide a rather enigmatic reason for this Qur’ānic language: so that the *khamīra* exercises its effect upon the ‘*ajīn* and turns it to its likeness, prior to the Christian community’s attendance before God on the day of judgment.

The key, perhaps, to deciphering such a cryptic metaphor resides in remembering the author’s continuous reliance upon etymology as a tool for deducing and establishing a connection between entities in this world, their names and metaphysical realities in the spiritual realm. In this case, his use of *khamīra* (yeast) is – perhaps – an allusion to *khamr* (wine), the spiritual intoxicant responsible for the *ḥayra* (perplexity) surrounding Jesus, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Thus, Ibn al-‘Arabī might be alluding to the unveiling of Christ’s true reality on the Day of Judgment, as an ‘*ajīn* (form/dough) consisting of a human body concealing within it the *khamīra* (yeast) of

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<sup>322</sup> This much is corroborated by our investigation from the previous chapter, wherein Ibn al-‘Arabī situates *rūḥ Muḥammad* (the spirit of Muḥammad) as the entity animating the bodily apparitions of all the *aqtāb* (poles) from previous nations, as well as the seal of sainthood, Jesus. See chapter 3, page 104.

God's Word. In turn, the distinction between the 'yeast' and 'dough,' on that day, has disappeared and only the *khamra* of the *khamīra* remains.

The author does not seem to run out of creative interpretations of the verses at hand. He continues to provide meanings from God's words that, unsurprisingly, defy the explanations given by many exegetes and provoke the normative Islamic sensibility:

"They are Your servants," he singularly focused on this address due to the *tawhīd* [monotheism/oneness of God] which they were practicing. Indeed, there is no humility greater than that of *al-'abīd* [slaves] since they have no agency even within their own selves. Rather, their state is always according to what their master desires to do with them; and He [their master] has no partner who shares His rule over them. This is why he [Jesus] said: "Your servants" and attributed them singularly to God.

What is intended by *'adhāb* [punishment] here: it is their humiliation, which cannot be more than their state of being *'abīd* [slaves]. "And if You forgive them," meaning to veil them from causing the punishment which they deserve, due to their disobedience, to befall them. In other words, You create a cover for them that veils them from such a punishment and protect them from it.

"*Innaka anta* [Indeed, You are] *al-'Azīz* [Most exalted]," meaning the impenetrable one. This name, if the Real grants it to whomever He wills of His servants, then the Real is described as *al-Mu'izz* [the one who grants exaltedness], while the one who is given the name is described as *al-'azīz*. In this way, the one protected by this name becomes impenetrable to the vengefulness and punishment of the Vengeful One and Punisher.<sup>323</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabī bewilders the reader with his unexpected reformulations of this Qur'ānic dialogue between God and the son of Mary. Almost every explanation given in these paragraphs controversially challenges the interpretations given by the consensus of Muslim scholars.

First, the author deduces from Christ's description of his community as *'ibād* (God's servants) that they are already adherents to *tawhīd* (oneness of God), as opposed to believing in the divinity of Christ. Second, the Greatest Master dismisses any possible punishment that may

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<sup>323</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 149.

befall this community that is worse than their current state of being God's *'abīd* (slaves). Here, the author is providing an alternative reading of Christ's address to God: "If You punish them, they are Your servants." Instead of the normative understanding that the son of Mary is humbly admitting that since the Israelites are God's servants, he is free to do with them as He pleases. Ibn al-'Arabī's modification represents the prophet's words alternatively as such: "If You want to punish them, You already have done so by placing them under Your Power and Might."

This subtle reformulation of Christ's response in the Qur'ān continues in Ibn al-'Arabī's emphasis on the divine names which the former utilizes to address God. As is clear from the preceding passages discussed in this chapter, and prevalent throughout his writings, the Andalusian mystic frequently reminds the reader that the use of specific divine names in the Qur'ān, as opposed to others, is not coincidental. Rather, each of these epithets represents a distinct attribute that distinguishes God's relationship with the world from its siblings. In this case, the son of Mary's reference to the name *al-'Azīz* (Most-Exalted) is dissected by the author to reveal a hidden meaning obtainable only through a rigorous linguistic understanding of Arabic etymology.

The Greatest Master points out that when God is called using this name, then He is described, inwardly, by the attribute *al-Mu'izz*, which refers to the one who grants exaltedness and impenetrability. The insinuation here being that *al-'Azīz* becomes, inwardly, the attribute of the Christian community: they are granted exaltedness and protection from any punishment that might befall them due to their mistakes and sins. And so, Christ emerges through Ibn al-'Arabī's creative lens as a master of invoking divine names according to the need of the moment, which is also the required *adab* (proper etiquette) whilst speaking to God. Christ is aware that his community deserves punishment, for no other reason than simply being God's slaves with whom He can deal as He wishes. However, instead of directly asking God to forgive them, which would be a breach

of *adab*, Jesus cleverly invokes the right combination of divine names that result in their vindication.

Much could be said here about the significance of this portrayal of Jesus as someone who knows how to cause changes in destinies through uttering specific divine names. Taking into consideration his three other depictions as the Word of God, divine breath sent to Mary and prophet whose is given the power to grant life through breath, Ibn al-‘Arabī is alluding in these passages to a harmonious overlap between Christ’s unique physiology, his power to grant life through this breath and even affect worldly – and otherworldly – events through breathing or uttering specific divine names.

The author concludes his discussion of Christ’s share in this verse, as the outward speaker, and completely transitions to the prophet Muḥammad’s indulgence in the power of its words throughout the night. As Ibn al-‘Arabī nears the conclusion of the chapter, he also seeks to provide some practical advice for the reader on what to apply from this investigation:

He also returned to the use of the rhetorical tool *faṣl wa ‘imād* [separation and support], as an emphasis for clarification, so that the verse follows his other statements: “*Innaka anta* [Indeed, You are] the Knower of the unseens” and “*Kunta anta* [Indeed, You were] the Watcher over them.” Thus, here he said: “*Innaka anta* [Indeed, You are] *al-‘Azīz* [Most-Exalted] *al-Ḥakīm* [Most-Wise].”

In actuality, this was a question from the prophet, peace be upon him, and his persistence in beseeching his lord the entire night, until the break of dawn. He kept repeating the verse seeking God’s [positive] response. Had he heard the answer during the first iteration, he would not have repeated it. Rather, the Real displayed to him lists of all the reasons for which they deserved to be punished. It was a detailed display, during each stage he would say: “If You punish them, then they are Your servants. If You forgive them, then You are Most-Exalted, Most-Wise.”

Had he seen, during this display, anything that necessitates prioritizing the Real and preferring His side, he would surely have supplicated against them and not for them.

Rather, nothing was shown to him save what they deserved to receive from what this verse grants of submitting to God and exposing oneself to His forgiveness.<sup>324</sup>

As always, the miraculous nature of the Qur'ānic language is highlighted by Ibn al-'Arabī to support his ongoing metaphysical narrative. In this case, the recurrent use, by Jesus, of the emphatic pronoun, otherwise known in Arabic as *faṣl wa 'imād* (separation and support), '*innaka anta,*' is regarded by the author as another proof of the son of Mary's mastery of the proper etiquette in addressing God.

Beyond this, the author all but proves the centrality of the prophet Muḥammad and the significance of the 'Muḥammadan Word' in this chapter, by explicitly stating that this verse which is uttered by Jesus on the Day of Judgment was, in reality, spoken by the prophet Muḥammad. This corroborates what we have mentioned previously, that the Andalusian mystic does not simply believe that Christ and Muḥammad have a share in this verse. Rather, he seeks to present the latter as the original speaker and source of these words, from whom Christ took the inward meaning, outward utterance in order to simply reiterate them on the Day of Judgment on behalf of his people.

In this regard, Ibn al-'Arabī's provocative proposal in the final paragraph, that the Prophet's repetition of this verse is proof that sinners from his community do not, in fact, deserve punishment but rather mercy, also subsumes the mercy and salvation of Christ's own community since they are ultimately Muḥammad's own followers as well. Within this Akbarian prism, Christ's momentous response to God on the Day of Judgment and supplication on behalf of his people is itself a reflection and result of an even more significant event, when the prophet Muḥammad repeated this verse during the course of an entire night and absolved his community (i.e. all of creation) from any form of punishment for their sins in the afterlife.

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 149-150.

In the final few sentences of this chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī provides a pragmatic advice for the reader, who is assumed to be a Sufī seeker, pertaining to the proper way to supplicate to God in their affairs as can be deduced from the Prophet’s repetition of this verse:

It has been narrated that when the Real loves the sound of His servant during supplication, He postpones responding to it so that [the latter] repeats it, out of love not resentment. This is why he [Jesus] used the [divine] name *al-Ḥakīm* [All-Wise] because it refers to the One who places things in their right places and does not do injustice to what their realities and attributes require and need. This is why the order comes with *al-Ḥakīm* first, then *al-‘Alīm* second.

Thus, he [Prophet], prayers and salutations be upon him, had great knowledge from God, may He be exalted, by repeating this verse. In this way, whoever wants to recite this verse, let them do so in this manner. Otherwise, silence is better for them. Moreover, if God has allowed a servant to utter some supplication, then He has done so only because He wants to respond to them and fulfill their need.

Therefore, let no one think that God’s response is too slow to the supplication they have been led to make. Rather, let them maintain the diligence of the Messenger of God, prayers and salutations be upon him, and his repetition of this verse in all their states. Let them maintain this until they hear the response with their ear or hearing; whichever one you so choose, or however God lets you hear his answer. For if He has rewarded you to ask with your tongue, He will let you hear with your ear. On the other hand, if He granted you the meaning of your supplication, He will make you hear with your hearing.<sup>325</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī carries the story of Jesus in this chapter to the only conclusion which his readers expect, in a manner that is applicable and realizable. Between the son of Mary’s momentous meeting with God on the Day of Judgement and prophet Muḥammad’s nightly repetition of Christ’s response to God, there emerges the believer who is instructed by the author to relive these events in ‘all their states.’ In this way, the Greatest Master opens another channel for the devoted seekers to ingest the Christic and Muḥammadan Words and become proper inheritors of both prophets, simply by assiduously repeating their needs to God.

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 150.



Of course, intertwined with this new path to a Christic and Muḥammadan inheritance is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s continuous attempt to ground even his practical advice within a larger metaphysical framework. Thus, the reception of God’s response is distinguished according to the different channels through which it may be received: the faculty of hearing or the actual physical ear. Undoubtedly, the author’s distinction here is an allusion and recourse to the *ḥadīth qudsī* which he quotes earlier in the chapter where God describes His relationship with the *walī*: “I will become the hearing with which they hear.” In this case, Ibn al-‘Arabī is emphasizing that this gift of divine hearing is bestowed upon the faculty, not the physical organ of hearing (i.e. ear). This is why he presents the divine response received through hearing to be a higher degree than the one through the ear, because they reflect the different ranks of petitions to which they are tethered: the supplication in meaning is better than that through the tongue.

And so, the son of Mary emerges in this chapter as another pedagogical tool that helps the author to convey his metaphysical concepts to the reader. In turn, this means that this portrayal is, in many ways, reflective of the son of Mary’s presence in the *FM*. This is not surprising since the work under investigation alludes to many of the concepts in that voluminous magnum opus. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the Andalusian mystic was able to synthesize many of the nuanced discussions prevalent in the larger work, pertaining to Jesus, within the short span of 12 pages here.

Beginning with the exploration of Christ’s physiology and his *barzakhī* status between Gabriel’s angelic spirit and Mary’s physical body, transitioning to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī’s status as an *‘īṣawī* (Christic) saint who is able to perform Jesus’ miracles and concluding with the prophet Muḥammad’s role in this narrative as the very source and origin of the Christic Word in *FH*, we have in these motifs an identical replication of the themes and trends explored in the previous

chapter of this research: Christ's physiology and kinship, saintology and prophetology. Ultimately, in both works, Jesus is an embodied representation of the prophet Muḥammad's superiority and primordially as well as a role model for Muslim saints.

As we transition to the second section, pertaining to Jesus' other mentions in *FH*, we will try and see whether the author remains within the scope of his previous discussion or introduces an entirely new perspective. Since these references to Jesus appear in chapters focusing on other prophets and messengers, it will also be interesting to see whether Ibn al-ʿArabī somehow connects a given prophetic figure and his divine mission with Christ or if the presence of the son of Mary appears only briefly, as a tool to explain a certain metaphysical concept, as is the case in some passages discussed so far in this study.

#### Other Mentions of Jesus in FH

There are only three other mentions of Jesus in *FH*. These are found in the chapters dedicated to prophets *Dāwūd* (David), *Yahyā* (John the Baptist) and *Hārūn* (Aaron). Like the variety of portrayals found in the chapter on Jesus in this work and other mentions in the *FM*, these three discussions differ from one another but also reflect the trends and motifs that we have seen previously in this and previous chapters. In the ensuing paragraphs, we will try to see how similar or divergent these disparate appearances of the son of Mary are with the results of this chapter and research as a whole.

The first mention, found in the chapter titled “The Bezel of a *Wujūdī* [Existential] Wisdom in a Davidic Word,” pertains entirely to the notion of divine *khilāfa* (vicegerency/deputyship). Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes between the varying paths of inheritance from the Prophet Muḥammad:

Indeed, God has deputies upon the earth; these are the messengers. As for vicegerency today, it occurs through the messengers, not directly from God. This is because they [saintly deputies] do not adjudicate save through what the messenger has legislated for them, they do not depart from it.

However, there is a subtlety here which only our likes [saints] understand. This pertains to the ruling of these deputies which had already been legislated for the messenger, peace be upon him. The deputy of the messenger may either adjudicate by transmission from him [the Prophet], prayers and salutations be upon him, or through *ijtihād* [personal discretion], which also originates from him.

Some of us [saints], however, receive it directly from God whereby they become deputies of God as pertaining to that precise ruling. In this case, *al-mādda* [matter of the transmission] will be the same for them as it was for the messenger, prayers and blessings be upon him. Thus, outwardly, such a person is a follower due to the fact that they do not transgress the given ruling. An example of this is Jesus when he descends and rules.<sup>326</sup>

The discourse here clearly falls under the heading of saintology and prophetology. In a similar fashion to his discussion in the *FM* pertaining to *anbiyā' al-awliyā'* (prophets among saints), Ibn al-‘Arabī situates the abilities and spiritual experiences of saints within the scope of the legislation of prophets, particularly the prophet Muḥammad. Although he does not question the necessary mediation of the Islamic messenger between saints and God, he nevertheless insinuates provocatively that deputies – like himself – can still receive a direct inspiration from God regarding a matter which the Prophet had adjudicated.

Thenceforth, by presenting Jesus the Messiah as an example of such a deputy who will receive direct divine guidance to help guide believers at the end of times through Islamic law, Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes Christ’s saintly role during this second coming: no longer as a legislating prophet, but as a seal of sainthood and follower of the prophet of Islam. However, since the author began by associating this special group of deputies with saints of his own rank, he is also drawing an analogy between himself and the son of Mary; at least as pertaining to the latter’s Messianic

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 162-163.

capacity. Both Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jesus are followers of the prophet Muḥammad who are given knowledge of his divine law, directly from God.

Ibn al-‘Arabī continues by elaborating further on this special saintly and divine inheritance as pertains to matters of divine law:

Thus, we say through the tongue of *kashf* [unveiling] that this deputy is the representative of God, while in the outward tongue we describe them as the deputy of the messenger of God. This is why the messenger of God, prayers be upon him, passed on and did not designate a vicegerent after him, because he knew that there would be some among his community who would receive it directly from their lord and, thus, would be deputies of God while fulfilling the laws of *sharī‘a*. Since he knew this beforehand, prayers and salutations be upon him, he did not make the affair constrictive.

Therefore, God has deputies among His creation who take from the *ma‘dan* [spiritual mineral] of the Messenger and also what the other messengers, peace be upon them, have received. However, these deputies also recognize the higher virtue of the messengers since the latter accept an increase [in this spiritual mineral], while the deputy does not receive it, even though the given messenger might be granted it above other messengers before him.

Thus, the deputy does not give anything by way of knowledge or adjudicate laws except what was already legislated specifically for the messenger. In this way, they appear outwardly as obedient followers. This in contrast to messengers. Have you not seen the affair of Jesus, peace be upon him, that when the Jews imagined he would not add to the law of Moses, they believed and affirmed him? However, when he added or abrogated a ruling that Moses had established – since Jesus is a messenger as well – they could not withstand it because he contradicted their belief in him.<sup>327</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī begins by establishing *kashf* (unveiling) as the episteme necessary for understanding and appreciating this *daqīqa* (subtlety) surrounding the direct divine vicegerency of saints. It is also from within this paradigm that the author provides a novel explanation for the first substantial *fitna* (tribulation) in Islamic history: the problem of political succession. By situating *khilāfa* (vicegerency) squarely within the spiritual dominion of *kashf*, Ibn al-‘Arabī cleverly recuses

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 163-164.

himself from declaring who the rightful deputy to the prophet Muḥammad should have been (i.e. Abū Bakr or ‘Alī) and instead grants authority to all Muslim saints as direct deputies of God.<sup>328</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī also reintroduces the crucial distinction between the saint, as a non-legislating prophet, and the actual legislating prophet. The author is aware that granting the *awliyā*’ (saints) a direct line of divine transmission, potentially bypassing the mediation of the Prophet, will appear controversial and heretical to some readers. Therefore, he makes sure to situate this connection within a messenger’s more expansive divine communication, which permits an increase or alteration of a previous viceroy’s legislation.

It is in the context of this distinction between a legislating prophet and non-legislating saint that Jesus again emerges as a suitable embodied example whom Ibn al-‘Arabī can present, as corroborative evidence of his concepts, to the reader. In this regard, the son of Mary’s image in this second set of passages harmonizes nicely with a previous depiction: whereas the earlier mention pertains to the Messianic – saintly – Jesus who is a follower of Muḥammad, Christ in this excerpt appears in his legislative capacity, prior to the physical appearance of the prophet of Islam.

In the final set of paragraphs where Jesus is mentioned in this chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī returns to Christ’s messianic capacity, as a saint at the end of times. Prior to that, however, the author distinguishes further between the various types of *khilāfa* (vicegerency). In contrast to his previous

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<sup>328</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning that Ibn al-‘Arabī does provide an – also clever – explanation in the *FM* for the sequence of caliphs (i.e. Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī). The author presents the order of their rule as divinely ordained: “It had already been established in God’s knowledge that He would make him [Abū Bakr] a deputy on earth. The same can be said about ‘Umar [b. al-Khaṭṭāb], ‘Uthmān [b. ‘Affān], ‘Alī [b. Abī Ṭālib] and al-Ḥasan [b. Abī Ṭālib]. Had anyone become a caliph before Abū Bakr, the latter would have died during the rule of his predecessor. However, it had already been ordained in God’s knowledge that he would become a caliph; this is why he preceded all of them in his vicegerency because he would transition to the *ākhirā* [the hereafter] before any of them. This is the reason behind the order of the deputyships: it was established according to their ages. Thus, anyone whose departure from this life was delayed, also had his rule postponed. As for their virtue above one another, that is delegated to God. Indeed, only He knows their stations.” Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya VIII*, 20.

categorization (i.e. deputyship of God or the Messenger), his classification in the ensuing discussion is temporal and differentiates between the current – exoteric – deputies and their later – eschatological – counterparts, of whom Jesus is a prime example:

Vicegerency today does not have this rank because it only decreases or increases according to the *shar‘* [legislation] that has already been established according to *ijtihād* [scholarly discretion], not that which Muḥammad, prayers and salutations be upon him, was directly given by God.

This is why the deputy might sometime contradict a *ḥadīth* [prophetic narration], so that it might be assumed that this is due to his *ijtihād*. However, this is not the case. Rather, this narration has not been confirmed to be from the Prophet, through *kashf*, for this *imām* [leader/deputy]. If it had been so, he would have ruled according to it. Although these narrations are conveyed from one trustworthy person to another, it is nevertheless not free from *wahm* [whim] or from figurative transmission in meaning only.

Indeed, this may occur at the hands of the deputy today, just as will happen later with Jesus, peace be upon him. When he descends, the son of Mary will abrogate many of the rulings that have been put in place through *ijtihād*, so that the true form of legislation which he [the Prophet] was upon will be known.<sup>329</sup>

The way in which Ibn al-‘Arabī situates the saintly deputies below the legislating messengers has to do with the *ziyāda* (increase) granted exclusively for the legislating divine viceroys, that allows them to add or remove from the laws of previous prophets and messengers.

And yet, this lesser rank of the saintly deputies, when combined with their unique ability to receive a direct transmission from God, allows them to provocatively contradict a prophetic narration, due to their *kashf* (unveiling) which allows them to perceive hidden aspects of the law that the ‘veiled’ *faqīh* (legal scholar) and ‘*ulamā’ al-rusūm* (scholars of outward form) are unable to understand. In other words, the Andalusian mystic compensates for the saintly deputies’ inability to outwardly add or remove aspects of the law by granting them the authority to

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<sup>329</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 164.

circumvent it spiritually. It is in this capacity that Jesus reappears as a prime example of a saint who will have permission to contravene the scholarly *ijtihād* (discretion).

In this excerpt, the Greatest Master has eloquently presented Christ as an embodiment of both aspects of *khilāfa*, prophetic and saintly. In the first set of paragraphs, the son of Mary appears as a legislating messenger who outwardly, modified the law of Moses given to the Israelites. In the end, however, Jesus emerges as the Muḥammadan saint who, although he will be stripped of his previous ability to change divine legislations, will nevertheless use his unveiling to lift apart the apparatus of *ijtihād* put together by exoteric scholars in order to bring out the original state of *sharī‘a* (divine law), as it was revealed to the prophet Muḥammad. In other words, Jesus performs the quintessential task of using his saintly persona to undo the unnecessary additions appended to the Muḥammadan law and return it to the shore of his original prophetic role.

In the second excerpt in *FH* where Jesus is mentioned, which appears in the chapter of *Yaḥyā* (John the Baptist) we return to a discussion similar to those found in the *mi‘rāj* narratives of the *FM*. In both places, Ibn al-‘Arabī explores the similarities and differences between the Qur’ānic portrayals of Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist and the metaphysical consequences of this resemblance.<sup>330</sup> What distinguishes this discourse from the previous one, however, is that here the Andalusian mystic elevates *Yaḥyā*’s persona above Christ’s:

This wisdom pertains to the priority in names, for God named him *Yaḥyā* which means the one through whom *Zakariyyā*’s [Zechariah] memory *yaḥyā* [lives on]. And He also said: “We have not granted his name to anyone before him” [(19:7)], thereby attaining the *ṣifa* [attribute] that did not appear among those before him; specifically, those who left behind a child through whom their memories might live on.

Thus, his name *Yaḥyā* was like *al-‘ilm al-dhawqī* [knowledge of spiritual taste]. This is because Adam’s memory lived on through [his son] *Shīth* (Seth) and Noah’s

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<sup>330</sup> See chapter 3, page 85-97.

through *Sām* (Shem), and likewise for the rest of prophets. However, God had never combined a proper noun with an attribute from Him for anyone except *Zakariyyā*. This is a sign of His care for him since he asked: “Grant me, from You, an inheritor” [(19:5)], thereby prioritizing the name of the Real before mentioning his son ... Due to this, God has honored him, fulfilled his request and granted him [*Yaḥyā*] a name from His attribute so that it can be a memorial for what His prophet *Zakariyyā* had requested.

Thenceforth, He also gave him [*Yaḥyā*] a glad tidings through His greeting of peace upon him the days in which he is born, dies and is resurrected alive. Here also, He uses the attribute of *ḥayāt* [life] which is his name and, thus, makes public His salutations upon him. Even though the spirit’s [Jesus] statement: “Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die and the day I am resurrected alive” [(19:33)] is more perfect from the perspective of *ittiḥād* [union]; this [God’s greeting upon *Yaḥyā*] is more perfect from the perspective of *ittiḥād* and *i’tiqād* [belief] and more sublime in interpretations.

This is because the true miracle in the case of Jesus is *al-nuṭq* [utterance] since his rational faculty was established and he was perfected already at the moment that God made him speak [while in the cradle]. However, it is not necessary for the one who has the ability to speak – in any condition – to be truthful in what they say, in contrast to the [divine] testimony given for *Yaḥyā*. It is from this perspective that the Real’s salutations upon *Yaḥyā* are more sublime, above the suspicion that might appear in Christ’s own greetings for his own self.<sup>331</sup>

The beginning segments of these remarkable passages seem very reminiscent of the *mi’rāj* narratives in the *FM*, particularly regarding the co-incidence between *Yaḥyā*’s name and his esoteric reality – a divine attribute – within his person. Whereas John the Baptist tells Ibn al-‘Arabī this directly during the latter’s *mi’rāj*, the Andalusian mystic here speaks on this prophet’s behalf and emphasizes this rare synthesis of a divine attribute and its proper name within the presence of a single human being.

It is the fact that Jesus was not granted a similar coincidence between his proper name and esoteric reality (i.e. as Spirit or Word of God) that allows Ibn al-‘Arabī to transition from this motif to the two Qur’ānic verses wherein God’s salutations upon *Yaḥyā* is presented as more sublime

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<sup>331</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 175-176.



than Jesus' self-greeting. By explaining this difference in ranks as a result of the possible *iltibās* (confusion) that might arise from interpreting Christ's own speech, Ibn al-'Arabī is perhaps alluding to the *ḥayra* (perplexity) which surrounds the son of Mary's unique physiology and its effect on his miracle-performance, specifically, his ability to resurrect the dead while in human form. In this regard, the Andalusian mystic is referring to another coincidence that is unique to Jesus: the harmony between his enigmatic physiology and the divine's salutations upon him within his own bodily form and through his own tongue.

And so, the Greatest Master makes another eloquent connection between Christ's *barzakhī* reality and Qur'ānic portrayal. Through the very concealment of the divine ipseity within Jesus' own voice, Ibn al-'Arabī finds proof of the ambiguity surrounding this prophet's bodily composition. As he continues, the author further elaborates on other, equally important, signs of Christ's truthfulness that compensate for the possible *iltibās* in his self-greeting:

However, the circumstances allude to his [Jesus] nearness to God and truthfulness. This is corroborated by the fact that he spoke, as a child in the cradle, in order to prove the innocence of his mother. Another testimony is the dry palm tree from which dropped ripe dates without pollination or *tadhkīr* [masculinization], just as Mary gave birth to Jesus without a husband or male companion and without the intercourse known according to custom.

Moreover, if a prophet were to say that my sign and miracle is that this wall shall speak, and it spoke and declared: "You are a liar and not the messenger of God," the miracle would still be valid and proof that he is a messenger of God. No one would pay attention to what the wall utters. Thus, since this was possible in Christ's speech, when his mother pointed to him while he was still in the cradle, the greetings of God for *Yahyā* are considered more sublime, from this aspect.

Indeed, the importance of his [Jesus'] declaration that he is *'abd Allāh* [servant of God] is that it rebuts what was said about him, that he is the son of God, and to affirm his servanthood as some other sects have declared.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 176.

Ibn al-‘Arabī never seems to run out of impeccable analogies and examples from Islamic sources to support his metaphysics. His ability to harmonize between the symbolic significance of the dried palm tree that gave forth ripe dates to his mother Mary, without ‘marriage,’ and Christ’s own virgin birth is no different than his previous synthesis between this prophet’s self-greeting and the permeation of the divine voice, breath and spirit within the confines of his bodily form.

And yet, the author of *FH* is also masterful in obfuscating the reader’s expectations and derailing their line of thinking while reading his writings, perhaps intentionally in order to convey the unexpected and spontaneous nature of divine inspiration which, he claims, undergirds his writings. In this case, Ibn al-‘Arabī suddenly transitions from the emphasis on Christ’s truthfulness back to highlighting the *iltibās* (confusion) inherent in the latter’s self-greeting. By provocatively comparing the son of Mary’s miraculous speech in the cradle with a wall speaking through the order of a prophet but denying the latter’s prophethood, Ibn al-‘Arabī seems to not only allude to the *iltibās* surrounding Christ’s speech as a child or self-greeting, but also Mary’s *nubuwwa*. After all, according to the analogy he provides, Mary is the actual ‘prophet’ who points to the baby Jesus, represented by the ‘wall,’ in order for the latter to speak and prove his mother’s innocence.

While it is rather easy to assume that Ibn al-‘Arabī is controversially accusing Jesus and Mary of imperfection, such a reading would be a great disservice to his thought, especially considering the great reverence afforded to Jesus and Mary that we have seen so far in the other passages of the *FH* and *FM*. A more prudent and productive approach would be to view such provocations as strategic rhetorical moves by the author to make readers appreciate the spiritual subtleties in the story of this prophet and his mother that defy any rational comprehension. Instead, as mentioned previously, Ibn al-‘Arabī opts for the use of metaphors and analogies like those

mentioned in the above passages in order to help his readers cross over from the shore of language to the depths of metaphysics.

The last mention of Jesus in *FH* occurs in the chapter pertaining to Aaron, and is titled: “The Bezel of the Wisdom of Leadership in an Aaron-like Word.” In a similar fashion to his delineation between *Yahyā* and Jesus in the previous excerpt, the author explores the similarities between Moses and his brother Aaron in this chapter; all the while emphasizing each prophet’s unique traits and possible ascendancy above the other:

Know that the existence of Aaron, peace be upon him, emerged out of *ḥaḍrat al-raḥamūt* [presence of mercy], as God says: “And We have gifted him [Moses] from Our Mercy” [(19:53)] ... “his brother Aaron as a prophet.” Thus, his [Aaron] prophethood came from the presence of mercy since he was older than Moses in age, while the latter was older in *nubuwwa* [prophethood].

Since the prophethood of Aaron emerged out of the presence of mercy, he [Aaron] said to his brother Moses: “Oh son of my mother!” [(20:94)], calling him through his mother, not father. This is because mercy belongs to the mother more than the father. Indeed, had it not been for this mercy, she would not have been able to cope with rearing her children...

Thenceforth, know that Moses is more knowledgeable than Aaron regarding the affairs of their followers, because he knew what those among them who worshipped the calf, were really deifying. This stems from his knowledge that God had already decreed that no one should be worshipped but Him: And He does not decree something save that it happens...

Thus, when Aaron said to him what he said, [Moses] returned to the Samaritan and said to him: “What is your story, oh Samaritan?” [(20:95)], meaning in regard to your inclination towards the form of a calf, as opposed to any other image, whence you created this apparition from the jewelry of the people and captured their hearts for the sake of their wealth. Indeed, Jesus said to the sons of Israel: “Oh sons of Israel! The heart of every human being is where his wealth is, so make your wealth in heaven and your hearts will be in heaven as well!” This is why wealth was called *māl*, due to the fact that hearts incline towards it in worship.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 191-192.

Although it seems that the mention of Christ in this excerpt appears as cursory, meant only to support a minor argument in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s narrative and his portrayal of Aaron, a deeper look at the similarities between these two prophets reveals a more significant purpose for the son of Mary’s presence in this chapter.

First, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discernment of Aaron’s reference to his mother, not father, when calling upon his brother Moses, as an allusion to the latter’s ‘merciful’ origins is reminiscent of the author’s emphasis on Christ’s *tawāḍu‘* (humbleness/humility), which he also associates with his mother Mary. In combination Jesus’ lack of a biological father and his attribution to his mother, perhaps the Andalusian mystic views Jesus and Aaron as more similar to one another than other pairs of prophets. This is especially so since the Qur’ān relates the Israelites’ attribution of Mary to Aaron, thereby establishing some kind of relationship between them.<sup>334</sup> And so, synthesizing the different insights which Ibn al-‘Arabī provides us in each of these stories, we may conclude that just as Jesus inherited humility from his mother, since the “woman has *al-safal* (lowliness),” then Aaron is also endowed with this trait. Inversely, the merciful nature of the latter, which “belongs to the mother more than the father,” can also be regarded as an aura that surrounds Jesus.

And yet, it is not Aaron who comprehends the subtleties of the Israelites’ worship of the calf in this chapter. Rather, Ibn al-‘Arabī presents the more *jalālī* (majestic, awe-inspiring) brother Moses as the one who truly understands the Samaritan’s purpose in creating this idol and, in turn, his people’s devotion to it. The central subtlety in this regard, as the author informs us, is the secret of the form (i.e. calf) which the Samaritan *māla* (inclined) towards. The importance of this connection, between *mayalān* (inclination) and *māl* (wealth), is shared between Moses and Jesus,

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<sup>334</sup> “Oh sister of Aaron, your father was not a bad person nor was your mother an adulteress” (19:28).

but not Aaron. And so, on the one hand, we have the shared trait of mercy, through motherhood, which ties the son of Mary together with Moses' brother. On the other hand, the subtle understanding of worshipping God through a variety of forms is a common bond only between Jesus and Moses himself.

This delivers us to a few key conclusions. First, Ibn al-ʿArabī would like us to perceive Jesus as a synthesis, of sorts, between Moses and Aaron: the son of Mary has the lofty knowledge of the first and the merciful disposition of the second. Of course, there are other key connections which we can only mention here in passing here. These include the fact that Jesus is the legislating divine messenger who immediately succeeds Moses and precedes Muhammad. Likewise, as mentioned above, Mary is associated with Aaron through a spiritual and biological ancestry. Second, as was mentioned in the previous chapter whilst discussing Ibn al-ʿArabī's *mi'rāj* narratives in the *FM*, Christ's cousin, John the Baptist, fluctuates between the his kin's second heaven and the fifth sphere of Aaron precisely due to this connection of lineage which the latter prophet shares with John's aunt and Jesus' mother, Mary.

In other words, Ibn al-ʿArabī is not situating Christ within this chapter on Aaron haphazardly. On the contrary, there is a myriad of physical and spiritual connections and motifs, some of which emanate from the Qur'ān and others from Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, which he has in the back of his mind and expects the experienced reader to be aware of whilst reading these excerpts in the *FH*. We also contemplate the metaphysical significance of these ancestral relationships, specifically between Jesus and Aaron. As discussed in the last chapter, the author of

the *FM* perceives the inward reality of the cousinly relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist to be – essentially – the metaphysical harmony between the divine spirit and life, respectively.<sup>335</sup>

And so, we wonder if Ibn al-‘Arabī has in mind another metaphysical reality underpinning the relationship between Jesus and Aaron, given their maternal inclinations and extended family relationship. Perhaps he would like to state that this is, ultimately, a spiritual symbiosis between humility and mercy, represented by Jesus and Aaron respectively. Moreover, the Andalusian mystic might also deduce that these two prophets, and what they represent, also allude to twin facets of some maternal aspect in the divine essence. As seen in the previous chapter, Ibn al-‘Arabī presents the human *jism* (body) and *rūh* (spirit) in gendered terms, as a respective mother and father of the human *nafs* (soul/ego).<sup>336</sup> Since he perceives the physical and spiritual structure of the human being as a microcosmic mirror of the universe at large, the macrocosm, then it is highly probable that the Andalusian mystic would also situate divine humility and mercy to be Christic and Aaron-like auras that are ultimately rooted in God’s ‘motherliness.’

The preceding three excerpts from the chapters on David, John the Baptist and Aaron in *FH* culminate our thorough investigation of all the mentions of Jesus in this pivotal work by Ibn al-‘Arabī. These three sporadic appearances of the son of Mary – outside the central chapter focusing on his ‘wisdom’ in this book – succinctly describe the various motifs that surround Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayal of Jesus in both this work and the *FM*. The *khilāfa* (deputyship) of saints and prophets, the kinship between Jesus and John the Baptist and the archetypal similarity between Jesus and Aaron capture many of the concepts which we have seen throughout the preceding

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<sup>335</sup> See chapter 3, page 85-97.

<sup>336</sup> See chapter 3, page 79. Not to mention that these terms, *jism* and *rūh*, in Arabic are also feminine and masculine, respectively.

analyses. With this, we are now able to conclude our discussion of Jesus in *FH* and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought at large.

### Conclusion

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ability to include many of the motifs, concepts and creative rhetorical tools from the *FM* within the short confines of 200 pages, resulting in a coherent and equally novel formulation, is both a testimony to his genius and emphasis on the currency of certain important ideas that animate his vision of Jesus throughout his entire *Weltanschauung*. It is clear, at this point, that the son of Mary shares many similar traits with other divine messengers and prophets in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s world. And yet, Christ’s unique physiology, as a *barzakh* between the realms of body and spirit, and his twin social roles, as historical prophet and eschatological seal of the saints, makes him doubly important and uniquely significant in the Andalusian mystic’s prophethood.

In terms of similarities, the spiritual bond connecting Jesus and the other prophets in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought is clearly evident in the motivation guiding the structure of *FH*: the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) as the ‘universal soul’ animating all of creation. Most importantly, the Prophet’s spirit and essence encompass and predate the historical appearances of all the prophets, including Jesus. More than that, each of these divine viceroys who came prior to Muḥammad’s historical appearance were merely progressive stages preparing the universe for carrying and hosting *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect man). Thenceforth, after the Prophet’s appearance in the world, the unique dispositions of each prophet and messenger serve as an archetype that sustains and molds the journey of a Muḥammadan saint.

From this perspective, Jesus is no different from any other prophet in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. He, like other *anbiyā’* (prophets) and *rusul* (messengers), also prepared the universe for

expecting and carrying the Muḥammadan mission and, later, served as an archetype for countless *ʿisawī* (Christic) saints. On the other hand, in terms of his unique importance in this Muḥammadan narrative, the son of Mary appears early on in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s career as his first teacher who taught him *zuhd* (asceticism) and delivered him onto the next stage in his journey to the divine presence.<sup>337</sup> This composite physiology and dual religious roles grant Jesus a special importance in the Greatest Master’s thought as a particularly suitable example to convey and corroborate various metaphysical concepts to readers.

Fortunately, both aspects of this dualism, in physiological and religious roles, unfold similarly in the *FH* and *FM*. In the first instance, pertaining to Christ’s physiology, Ibn al-ʿArabī is keenly interested in this prophet’s birth as a mixture of the physical and spiritual realms, represented by his mother Mary and angel Gabriel respectively. In the *FH* specifically, the author focuses on the repercussions which this duality in bodily composition has on Jesus’ miracle performance (i.e. resurrecting the dead) and mannerisms (i.e. humility). We also include here Ibn al-ʿArabī’s various explorations of Christ’s bond with his cousin *Yaḥyā* (John the Baptist) and the consequences of their kinship on the archetypal relationship between the divine spirit and life, which these two prophets respectively represent and embody.

In the second instance, it is also clear that this aspect in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings is intimately intertwined with the son of Mary’s unique physiology. This emerges clearly in *FH* when the author introduces Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī as an *ʿisawī* (Christic) saint whilst discussing the effects of Christ’s spiritual composition on his miracle performance. The *ḥayra* (perplexity) surrounding the son of Mary’s ability to give life to the dead while still in human form means that

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<sup>337</sup> See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulfur*, 39.



only a perfected saint like al-Bisṭāmī can perform the same miracle, through a *dhawq* (spiritual taste) of Christ's true reality. In this way, Ibn al-ʿArabī is able to situate a metaphysical discourse within social praxis.

From this single overlap between physiology and saintology there extend numerous other instances, in the *FH* and the *FM*, where Ibn al-ʿArabī expounds upon Christ's uniqueness as both the immediate historical prophet prior to the prophet Muḥammad, and as the seal of sainthood who will return at the end of times. Although Jesus' title during his second coming, *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood), is not mentioned in the *FH*, Ibn al-ʿArabī nevertheless alludes to this role through his juxtapositioning of the latter's response to God on the Day of Judgment alongside the prophet Muḥammad's repetition of this conversation during his nightly prayer. Likewise, the Andalusian mystic brings the topic of saintology and prophetology to the forefront whilst discussing the *khilāfa* (deputyship) of prophets and saints in the section pertaining to prophet David.

Synthesizing the portrayals of Jesus, in the *FH* and *FM*, we are left with the conclusion that Ibn al-ʿArabī successfully harmonizes the images of Jesus in these two works, using the common motifs and concepts discussed so far. He also accomplished this task by using drastically different stories and examples to support his claims. For instance, the spiritual station of *khatm al-walāya* is not mentioned in *FH*. Inversely, the discussion of Christ's *khilāfa* and abrogation of *ijtihād* during his second coming is nowhere to be found in the excerpts we have explored from the *FM*. And yet, the central task of Christ, as the carrier of the Muḥammadan law, is clearly laid out in both works.

And so, we are left with a series of mediations and tasks which Jesus performs in these two works. Here, we revisit the visual diagram introduced in the previous chapter that describes these

various duties (see figure 2). Jesus in the *FH* harmonizes with his counterpart from the *FM*, with the only difference being the examples and stories which Ibn al-‘Arabī uses to corroborate and explain each set of mediations. Aside from this disparity, Christ’s fluctuation across the vertical spectrum, between the realms of spirits and bodies, is evident in the discussion of his unique physiology, as a mixture of Mary’s human and Gabriel’s angelic natures. Likewise, the horizontal journey that Jesus undertakes from a historical and prophetic past to an eschatological and saintly future is present in the exploration of *khilāfa* (deputyship) and the prophet Muḥammad’s primordial role in voicing Christ’s supplication to God.

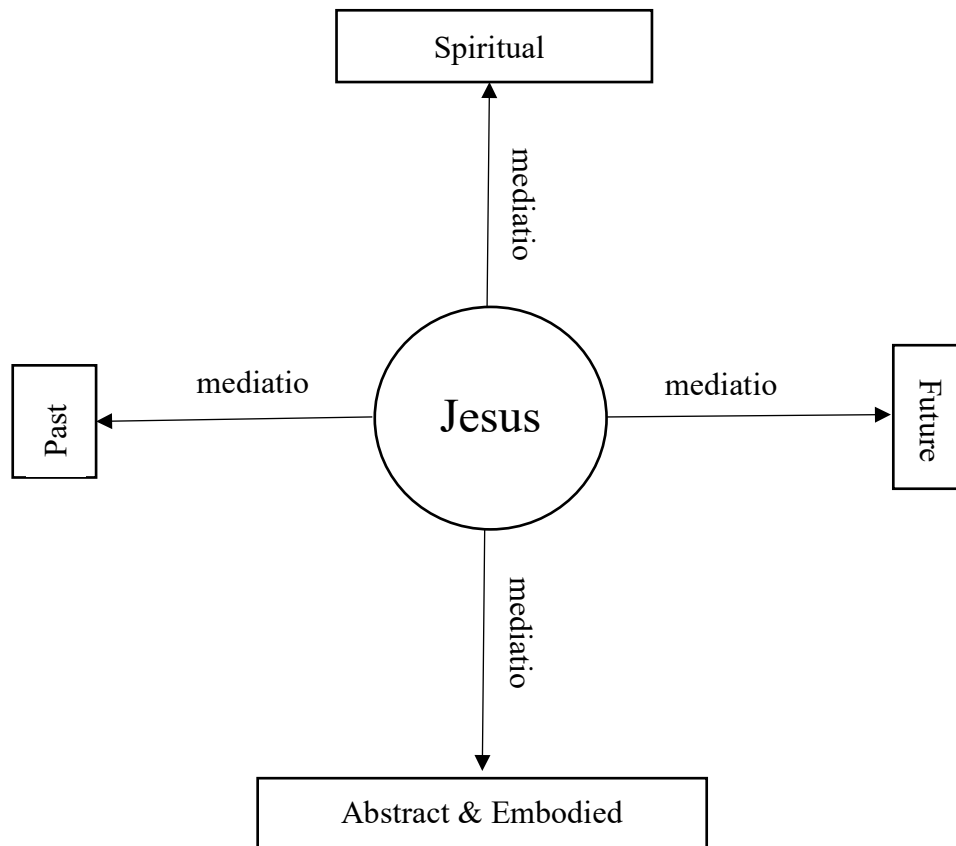


Figure 2: Christ's various mediations in *FH*

The results from this and the preceding chapter remain in our purview as we transition to an exploration of the portrayals of Jesus in the writings of Sufi mystics after Ibn al-‘Arabī. In this

regard, our focus will be on whether Ibn al-‘Arabī’s multifaceted depiction of the son of Mary influenced these later formulations. We will also try to situate the Greatest Master’s own image in these works and see how these authors negotiated his influence on their own Weltanschauungs, with a view toward establishing their legitimacy as a new generation of saints with their own – unprecedented – unveilings and divine inspirations.

## Chapter Five: The Sufi Jesus after Ibn al-‘Arabī

### *Introduction*

Naturally, one wonders about the influence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s immense contributions to later Sufism. Certainly, it has been shown that the impact of his writings and ideas spread far and wide in the Muslim world and, without exaggeration, become part of the theoretical and pragmatic foundation for almost all Sufi thought after him.<sup>338</sup> Having said that, the concern here is regarding Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion of Jesus specifically and how this portrayal shaped subsequent Sufi narratives surrounding this prophet.

The two figures discussed in this chapter, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh al-Ḥasanī (d. 1719) and Aḥmad al-Tījānī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1815), are prominent Sufi mystics who had thriving saintly careers in North Africa, specifically in the sacred city of Fez, Morocco. Given the importance of this central city of Sufism within the life of Ibn al-‘Arabī himself, the contributions of mystics like al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī attest to the longevity of the Sufi tradition generally, and Akbarian thought specifically, in this part of the Muslim world.

While both Sufi authors vary in their motivations and representations of the son of Mary, our objective will be to highlight how the Andalusian mystic’s writings – possibly – helped mold both these narratives. This influence includes, but is not limited to, any adoption of themes from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, such as sainthood and cosmology. In this regard, al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī are particularly appropriate examples to include in this chapter since both of them mention the

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<sup>338</sup> For more on this subject, see Ali Hussain, “*An Endless Tajallī: A Historiography of Ibn al-‘Arabī.*”

Andalusian mystic extensively in their teachings. Of course, the extent to which these discourses concern Christ's image in particular remains to be seen from the ensuing discussion.

There are other key similarities, and differences, between al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī that merit mentioning here prior to delving into their writings. First, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh, who belonged to the Ḥasanid branch of the prophet Muḥammad's family, was not a member of any *ṭarīqa* (Sufi brotherhood) as far as we know. Rather, he appears – from his teachings – to have been a *walī uwaysī* who had a direct connection with the prophet Muḥammad.<sup>339</sup> Al-Tījānī, on the other hand, founded a *ṭarīqa* known by his name that now spans the far reaches of the Muslim world. However, the unique manner in which this brotherhood was formulated and authenticated also alludes to the founder's *uwaysī* character, as will be discussed in detail below.

Second, there is a tremendous similarity in the content and style in which the teachings of these two mystics have been propagated. The central works containing these instructions, *al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz min Kalām Sayyidī al-Ghawth 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh* (The Pure Gold from the Speech of my Master the Succor 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh, *IB*) written by Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī (d. 1743) and *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī wa-Bulūgh al-Amānī fī Fayḍ Sīdī Abī-l-'Abbās al-Tījānī* (The Jewels of Meanings and Attainment of Hopes in the Flood of My Master Abū-l-'Abbās al-Tījānī, *JM*) written by 'Alī Ḥarāzīm Ibn al-'Arabī (19<sup>th</sup> century), are both composed by disciples of these prominent Sufi guides and, in turn, represent an indirect transmission of their teachings.

The importance of this last point cannot be overstated. Ultimately, this means that each mystic's views and motivations are colored and shaped by the voice of the student of theirs who

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<sup>339</sup> This notion, *uwaysiyya*, is discussed in detail below, see page 202 no. 342.

authored these works. As will become clear below, this agency of the student-author emerges in colorful commentaries which each of them adds after conveying the guide's statements. Interestingly, these annotations do not appear in those excerpts pertaining to the son of Mary, but only in those pertaining to Ibn al-ʿArabī. In this way, the Andalusian mystic plays a role in these writings similar to the one that Jesus performs in the *FM* and *FH*: to legitimize, authenticate and establish the superiority of the Sufi mystic whose teachings are the object of dissemination.

It is for this reason that this chapter focuses not only on Christ's image in al-Dabbāgh's and al-Tījānī's teachings but also the Andalusian mystic himself. There is an indisputable significance in Ibn al-ʿArabī's life and writings for the development of Sufism generally and the study of Jesus specifically. This is quintessentially embodied by his unique and creative contributions that mirror the drastic geopolitical upheavals which took place during his lifetime. Born on the cusp of a deluge of Christianization in Iberia and the ongoing crusades in Eastern Islamdom, one can find cursory engagements by Ibn al-ʿArabī with these political developments, and even in his most metaphysical and eschatological ideas that seem so remote from the mundane toils of our physical existence.<sup>340</sup>

Lastly, the teachings of al-Tījānī that are found in *JM* will eventually make their way to the heart of West Africa, in Senegal where the *ṭarīqa* finds its largest following today, through the

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<sup>340</sup> As Addas mentions in *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, Ibn al-ʿArabī advised his friend, the Seljuk ruler Kay Kaus (d. 1220) to undertake strict measures against the Christians living in his kingdom. This was most probably a preventative response by the Andalusian mystic, considering the ongoing crusades at the time.

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, Ibn al-ʿArabī also reveals his stern affirmation of the supremacy of Islam against Christianity while discussing the return of Jesus as the Messiah. He specifically states that the son of Mary will return as a *walī* (saint) and *ṣahābī* (companion) of the Prophet Muḥammad, not as a divine messenger; for there cannot be a prophet after Muḥammad.

This is even more interesting considering the intricate discussion that Ibn al-ʿArabī has of Christian theology and flexibility he displays with concepts like the trinity and divinity of Jesus. For instance, he regards the former idea as viable for no other reason than it regards the Godhead as an odd number, which agrees with the prophetic narration: "God is singular and loves odd numbers!"

efforts of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar b. Sa‘īd al-Fūtī (d. 1864) and later on, Ibrāhīm Niasse al-Kaolackī (d. 1975). It is through the first of these two mystics’ efforts that al-Tījānī’s and al-Dabbāgh’s teachings come together most visibly. In his work *Rimāḥ Hizb al-Raḥīm* (The Spears of the Party of the Most-Merciful), a commentary on *JM*, al-Fūtī relied extensively upon al-Lamaṭī’s *IB* as a reference while offering, in the margins, his commentary on al-Tījānī’s teachings.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1719)

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh al-Idrīsī al-Ḥasanī is an interesting case in Sufī history.<sup>341</sup> A celebrated Sufī mystic from Fez, in modern-day Morocco, al-Dabbāgh is thought to have received all his gnosis through direct divine illumination.<sup>342</sup> This motif predominates in the only available monograph attributable to al-Dabbāgh, *IB*, which is a topically organized collection of lessons and *majālis* (gatherings) that were transcribed by his foremost disciple, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī (d. 1743).

Although this is the only extant work by al-Dabbāgh, his disciple al-Lamaṭī, who compiled the *IB*, included a substantial amount of information about his teacher’s life, including the teachers he studied with, his travels, and the quintessential *fath* (experience of illumination) he received early on in his life.<sup>343</sup> A close analysis of al-Dabbāgh’s actual words reveals the originality of his teachings in many ways. Pierre Lory highlights some instances of this novelty, including:

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<sup>341</sup> Pierre Lory, “‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh.”

<sup>342</sup> Ibid. Generally, such Sufī mystics have been described as *uwaysiyyūn*, or those who follow in the steps of the legendary companion of the prophet Muḥammad, Uways al-Qaranī (d. 657) who never met the Prophet physically but was supposedly able to communicate with him telepathically. In that light, the *uwaysiyyūn* are those Sufī mystics who, like Uways, receive their knowledge from the spirits of deceased Sufī masters. Cf. “Uwaysiyya.” However, this does not fit al-Dabbāgh’s case perfectly since he is presented as having received his inspiration directly from God.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Berndt Radtke, *Pure of Gold from the Words of Sayyidī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh*, 131. “Our Shaykh said-God be pleased with him: ‘Three days after the death of Sayyidī ‘Umar [one of his teachers], I experienced illumination-praise be to God! God made known to me the reality of our souls-praise and gratitude be unto Him! That was on a Thursday, the 8th of Rajab, in the year 1125/31 July 1713. I’d gone out of our house and God the Sublime had bestowed on me four *mawzunās* [money] at the hand of an almsgiver from among His servants. I bought some fish and took it back to our house. My wife said to me: ‘Go to the shrine of Sayyidī ‘Alī b. Ḥirzihim (d. 1164) and bring us some oil to fry the fish with.’ I set off and when I reached the *Bab al-Futūḥ* (The Gate of Openings), a shudder went through me. Then I experienced great trembling and my flesh began to feel very numb and prickly. I went on walking while

Basing his [Qur'ānic] exegesis on the well-known *ḥadīth* of the seven *aḥruf* (letters), al-Dabbāgh explains that every passage in the Qur'ān belongs to one of the seven qualities of Muḥammad's nature: prophethood (*nubuwwa*), apostleship (*risāla*), Adamhood (*ādamiyya*), spirit, science (inspired knowledge, *'ilm*), (*qabḍ*) contraction ... and (*bast*) expansion. With each 'letter' comprising in turn seven parts, he opens the door to a totally esoteric exegesis of the sacred text.

Al-Dabbāgh's sections on the Syriac language (*suryāniyya*) are also unique ... According to him, Syriac is the language of spirits, of the first (Adamic) mankind, and of newborn children.

Al-Dabbāgh also developed an original view on the interpretations of dreams. Dreams are received by the sleeping humans according to the purity of their minds. These minds may know ten possible degrees of darkness according to the gravity of their sins and of their ignorance in matter of faith. Symmetrically, believers may know ten degrees of light according to their virtuous deeds and the clarity of their faith. Hence, the interpretation of every dream has first to take into account the levels of darkness or light in the person of the dreamer.<sup>344</sup>

In relation to this last point, Lory also emphasizes the importance of “the vision of Muḥammad's pure essence as it appears in dreams.”<sup>345</sup> This is a point which al-Dabbāgh discusses in vivid detail

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this was happening. The state increased until I came to the tomb of Yaḥyā b. 'Allāl – God give us profit through him – and that's on the way to Sayyidī 'Alī b. Ḥirzihim's shrine. The state intensified, and my breast began beating so hard that my collar-bone struck against my beard. I exclaimed: ‘This is death, without any doubt!’ Then something came forth from my body that resembled steam from a vessel for preparing couscous. My body began to grow tall until it became taller than any tall man. Things began to reveal themselves to me and they appeared as if they were right in front of me. I saw all the towns and cities and small villages. I saw everything that's on this land. I saw the Christian woman breastfeeding her son and he was in her arms. I saw all the seas and I saw all the seven earths and all the beasts of burden and the creatures found on them. I saw the sky and it was as if I was above it, looking at what it contains. Then behold, there was a great light like sudden lightning that came from every direction. The light appeared above me and below me, on my right and on my left, from in front of me and from behind. An extreme cold from it came over me so that I thought I had died. I quickly lay down face first so as not to see the light. And when I lay down I perceived that my body was all eyes. My eye saw, my head saw, my leg saw, and all my limbs saw. And I looked at the clothes I had on and found that they did not hinder the sight which was spread throughout my body. I realized that lying face down or standing up made no difference. This situation continued with me for a time and then it ceased. I returned to the state I'd been in before. I turned back to the city and was unable to reach the shrine of Sayyidī 'Alī b. Ḥirzihim. I felt afraid for myself and I fell to weeping. Then the state came over me again for a time and then it ceased. So, it would come over me one moment and cease another moment, until it became accustomed to my body. Then, it became absent for a moment, during the day and night. And then it was never absent.”

<sup>344</sup> Pierre Lory, “‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh.”

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.



later in the book, revealing a perception of the prophet Muḥammad highly reminiscent of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discourse on *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality).<sup>346</sup>

I have had two opportunities to visit the *maqām* (tomb) of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh in the cemetery of *Bāb al-Futūḥ* (the Gate of Openings; figures 3 and 4), where the Sufi mystic had his divine illumination, outside the old city of Fez. The architectural organization of the mausoleum complex, consisting of tightly knit tombstones wherein *sīdī*<sup>347</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s tomb stands apart as a large building with a green roof, spatially symbolizes the spiritual and intellectual uniqueness of this mystic’s contribution to Sufi thought in North Africa and the rest of the Muslim world. The small courtyard that surrounds his mausoleum and separates it from the rest of the tombs resembles in its stature the final residence of *sīdī* ‘Alī b. Ḥirzihim (d. 1164), whom al-Dabbāgh was intending to visit when he received his opening.

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<sup>346</sup> Aside from the various excerpts discussed in the previous chapters that allude to this notion, the Andalusian mystic describes *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* elsewhere in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (FM)* as: “And the creative object, which is *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* as we call it, or *al-‘aql al-awwal* [the first intellect] as others [philosophers] perceive it. It is also *al-qalam al-a‘lā* [the highest pen] which God, may He be exalted, has fashioned from nothing” (pg. 71). It is worthwhile mentioning that this is one of the most seminal notions in Sufi thought, and traces of its first formulations can be found long before Ibn al-‘Arabī’s time, to the author of the first mystical exegesis on the Qur’ān, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), who called this notion *al-nūr al-muḥammadī* (the Muḥammadan Light). However, Claude Addas traces the first formulation of this concept to the 6<sup>th</sup> Shi’ite imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), who had a seminal influence on al-Tustarī’s esoteric treatise; see Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*. The textual foundation for this motif has generally been traced to the *ḥadīth* (prophetic narration) where the Prophet Muḥammad is thought to have said: “The first thing that God created is my light.” However, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s introduction of the term *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* seems to have predominated Sufi discourse.

<sup>347</sup> The term *sīdī* is an abbreviated form of *sayyid* (master), which is usually used as a reverential title for *ahl al-bayt*, descendants of the Prophet’s family. However, in many regions of the Muslim world, especially Morocco and North Africa generally, the form *sīdī* is used to address more than just descendants of the prophet’s family, including saints, shaykhs and familial or friendly relations.



Figure 3: Up close, the mausoleum of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh in the cemetery of Bāb al-Futūḥ

Figure 4: From a distance, the mausoleum of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh in the cemetery of Bāb al-Futūḥ

Even though Lory highlights the uniqueness of al-Dabbāgh's life and writings in the history of Sufism, there has not been significant research done on the importance of his contributions to subsequent Sufi thought. The exception to this is two short articles by Bernd Radtke, alongside his published English translation of *IB*.<sup>348</sup> Of course, it remains to be seen how much his individualized illumination, which he claimed he received directly from the divine presence, is itself influenced by North African Sufism, specifically Ibn al-'Arabī's thought.<sup>349</sup>

<sup>348</sup> It is worthwhile noting that Radtke's effort contains some serious translation mistakes that often misconstrue the intended meaning of the original Arabic. A case at point is the following statement in the *IB*: "*Wa man 'alima kayfa huwa al-nabī ... istrāḥa*" (Aḥmad al-Lamaṭī, *al-Ibrīz*, 256) The correct translation for this is: "Whoever knows how the Prophet is [what his reality is], they will find tranquility." Radtke incorrectly renders it as: "And who knows how the Prophet ... is refreshed?" pg. 529.

<sup>349</sup> Another important aspect of al-Dabbāgh that we'll mention in passing here, but which will require more in-depth research, is this Sufi mystic's familial genealogy. As a Ḥasanī *sayyid* (i.e. descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad through his grandson al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib [d. 670]), al-Dabbāgh belongs to a long line of prominent saints who were born and who lived in Fez and the surrounding region in Morocco. Al-Dabbāgh's lineage goes back to the great grandson of al-Ḥasan, Idrīs I who founded the Idrīsīd dynasty in Morocco (Cf. Eustache, D. "Idrīs I"). Idrīs's son, Idrīs II (d. 828) – also known as *al-asghar* (the younger Idrīs) or *al-azhar* (the most luminous) – founded the city of Fez, where he is buried and receives visits from by the city's inhabitants (Cf. Eustache, D. "Idrīs II"). Other prominent North African mystics who also belong to this Idrīsīd lineage include 'Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 1228, cf. Rodriguez Mediano, Fernando. "Ibn Mashīsh, 'Abd al-Salām"), Ibn 'Aḥjba (d. 1809) and Aḥmad al-Tījānī (d. 1815) who was born in Algeria and settled in Fez and was buried there, and who will be discussed later on in this chapter. It is for this reason that the city of Fez has a tremendous significance in Sufi history as the only center of religious

A survey of the various mentions of Jesus in *IB* reveals a portrayal of the son of Mary that aptly represents the various themes Lory mentions above. These revolve around the connection between Christ and the Prophet Muḥammad and their respective spiritual realities. The discussion of *suryāniyya* (Syriac) also emerges in the context of Christ's knowledge and *sūra* (chapter) 19 of the Qur'ān, titled 'Maryam' (Mary), which begins with an instance of the enigmatic *ḥurūf muqatta'a* (disconnected letters), which al-Dabbāgh also considers to be examples of *suryāniyya* in the Qur'ān.

In the first excerpt, al-Dabbāgh mentions Jesus among other prophets while discussing the lofty status of the Qur'ān and its secrets. The Sufi mystic reformulates a famous *ḥadīth* of the prophet Muḥammad per his student al-Lamaṭī:

Then al-Dabbāgh – may God be pleased with him – uttered unveiled higher truths and subtle points of divine insight that minds are barred from grasping. Finally, he said – God be pleased with him: 'The noble Qur'ān contains sanctified lights and Lordly insights and pre-eternal secrets that cannot be sustained. If our lord Moses, who brought the Torah, and our lord Jesus, who brought the Gospels, and our lord David, who brought the Psalms, had lived up to the time of the Qur'ān and had heard it, their only choice would have been to follow the Qur'ān and to imitate the Prophet in his words and to be guided by his actions – God's blessings and peace be upon him! Surely, they'd have been the first to respond to his call, to believe in him, and to fight with the sword in front of him.

I, al-Lamaṭī, would add that a *ḥadīth* with the same meaning as these words has come down from the Prophet – God's blessings and peace be upon him – which says: 'If Moses and Jesus were still alive, they would follow me.' Or however he might have put it, blessings and peace be upon him!<sup>350</sup>

Al-Dabbāgh posits the “sanctified light, lordly insights and pre-eternal secrets that cannot be sustained” of the Qur'ān as the reason why Moses, Jesus and David would have no choice but to follow the prophet Muḥammad. This contrasts with the actual *ḥadīth* (prophetic narration),

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learning and spiritual practice established by a descendant of the prophet Muḥammad (Cf. O'Meara, Simon. “Fez, city of history and art and architecture”).

<sup>350</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz*, 385-386.

mentioned by his student al-Lamaṭī, wherein the Prophet mentions only himself as the object of imitation.

This positioning of the Qur'ān alongside the Prophet, which is not in the original *ḥadīth*, should not be perceived as an attempt by al-Dabbāgh to diminish the status of the prophet. On the contrary, the following mentions of Jesus reveal an intimate congruence between the divine secrets of the Qur'ān and the indomitable spiritual station of the prophet Muḥammad as the master of creation:

In sum, the Friends of God the Sublime who know Him and the rank of God's Prophet behold everything that has been mentioned with direct vision in the same way as they behold all sense perceptions, nay even more powerfully because seeing by means of deeper vision (*baṣīra*) is more powerful than seeing with the eyes (*baṣar*). And so, they behold our lord *Zakariyyā* as well as his states and his stations with respect to God which extend from the lord of existence [the prophet Muḥammad] to our lord *Zakariyyā*. And it is the same with regard to everything mentioned about...our lord [*Yahyā*] [about John the Baptist and his states and his stations, about Mary and her states and her stations, about Jesus and his states and his stations, and about Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, Aaron, Idris, Adam, and Noah, and about every prophet upon whom God has bestowed favors.<sup>351</sup>

Here, it becomes clear that al-Dabbāgh's insertion of the Qur'ān, alongside the person of the Prophet, in the previous excerpt is intended to elevate the latter as an embodied parallel of scripture. In other words, like the Qur'ān, the prophet Muḥammad is also the repository of 'sanctified light, lordly insights and pre-eternal secrets' from which the various 'states and stations' of other prophets, including Jesus, emanate.

Al-Dabbāgh continues with his emphasis on the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad, in comparison to other divine messengers, during a dialectical conversation with his disciple al-Lamaṭī:

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, 444.

One day while speaking with al-Dabbāgh, I made mention of our lord Solomon and the Jinn, the human beings, the demons and the wind that God made subservient to him. And I mentioned what God bestowed on Solomon's father, our lord David, by way of working iron and rendering it soft so that in his hands it was like lumps of dough, and the power that God bestowed on our lord Jesus to cure the blind and lepers, and to revivify the dead by God's permission, and similar things among the evidentiary miracles of the prophets. He [al-Dabbāgh] understood this to mean as if I were saying to him: "The chief of existence is above all of them. Why did something like this not appear on his part? Of course, some evidentiary miracles did appear on his part, but they were of a different kind."

He replied: "Everything that was bestowed on Solomon in his dominion and that was made subservient to David and conferred on Jesus, [all] this and more, God has bestowed on the people of the power of free disposal (*taṣarruf*) in the Prophet's religious community God made subservient to them the Jinn, humankind, the demons, the wind and the angels, indeed everything found in all the worlds. He gave them the power to heal the blind and lepers, and to bring the dead back to life. But this is a hidden, veiled matter which is not visible to men at large lest they devote themselves to these beings and forget their Lord. And this came about for *ahl al-taṣarruf* (the people of the power of free disposal) thanks to the blessing of the Prophet. All of this is due to his evidentiary miracles." He then recounted secrets which minds are incapable of supporting. But God knows best!<sup>352</sup>

There are different layers of meaning operating here, within the nuance of this engagement between master and disciple. First, al-Lamaṭī does not need to specifically state the implicit question in his recounting of various prophets' miracles, including Jesus. Rhetorically speaking, the progression of mentioning these divine messengers one by one with their supernatural performances anticipates the imminent and inevitable discussion about the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad.

Second, al-Dabbāgh's response involves another creative twist, similar to his insertion of the Qur'ānic *i'jāz* (miraculous nature) alongside the Prophet in the *ḥadīth* of the first excerpt. The Sufi mystic does not provide the expected answer that the miracles of all the prophets emanate from the niche of the prophet Muḥammad, a notion which would harmonize with the sentiment of

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid, 602.

the discussion in the first quotation. Rather, he situates those miracles of the pre-Islamic prophets under the jurisdiction of the *ahl al-taṣarruf* (saints with the power of free disposal) from the Muḥammadan community. In turn, this raises the status of these Muslim saints in a way that reminiscent of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discussion on the prophetic inheritance in Islamic saintology.<sup>353</sup>

Third, the last sentence al-Lamaṭī mentions in this excerpt, as a rhetorical farewell to the reader from this particular question, masterfully instills a sense of curiosity and ‘more to be desired’ as regards the intimate relationship between the prophet Muḥammad, the *ahl al-taṣarruf* from his community and previous prophets. The allusive wording given by al-Lamaṭī, that “minds are incapable of supporting” the insights which his teacher gave is a recurrent motif in *IB*.<sup>354</sup> Such a strategy, quite common also in Sufi writings,<sup>355</sup> sustains the looming presence of the ‘unseen’

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<sup>353</sup> As discussed in detail in chapter four and five. Ibn al-‘Arabī held that each *walī* (Muslim saint) necessarily inherits, during their journey towards God, from one or more divine messenger, according to which they gain the appellation ‘*īsawī* (Christ-like), *mūsawī* (Moses-like) or *yūsufī* (Joseph-like). The highest level of such an inheritance is to reach the station of *al-wārith al-muḥammadī* (the Muḥammadan inheritor), who inherits directly from the prophet Muḥammad. This implicitly means that the *walī Muḥammadī* had already culminated their inheritance from all other prophets and, more importantly, that following the steps of any prophet, including the representative prophets of Judaism and Christianity – Moses and Jesus respectively – necessarily means inheriting from the prophet Muḥammad, albeit indirectly. This is because Moses, Jesus and all other prophetic personas themselves inherit from the Muḥammadan niche, according to the Andalusian mystic. The second significance of the answer al-Dabbāgh gives in this excerpt, also pertaining to Ibn al-‘Arabī, is that he situates the metaphysical discourse on miracle-performance within the very social reality of living *awliyā’* (saints), particularly *ahl al-taṣarruf* (people with power of free disposal). In other words, for al-Dabbāgh – and his disciple al-Lamaṭī – this is not merely a theoretical hypothesis but rather a witnessed reality of al-Dabbāgh’s own, and countless other Sufi saints,’ journey towards God and the stations they attained along the way.

<sup>354</sup> A permutation on the sentiment that al-Dabbāgh mentioned various things that the ‘mind cannot grasp, understand or sustain’ is mentioned approximate twelve times throughout the *IB*.

<sup>355</sup> To mention just two examples from the most important writings in the corpus of Sufi thought, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) begins his magnum opus *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) by stating that: “The knowledge through which one can direct oneself towards the hereafter is divided into ‘*ilm al-mu‘āmalā* [knowledge of behaviors/dealings] and ‘*ilm mukāshafa* [knowledge of unveiling] ... The motivation in this book is to discuss ‘*ilm al-mu‘āmalā* only, not ‘*ilm al-mukāshafa*. For there is no permission to put the latter knowledge, through writing, in books; even though it be the end goal of seekers and desire of the gaze of truthful ones.” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4). The second example is from Ibn al-‘Arabī himself and his magnum opus *FM*, which begins where al-Ghazālī ends in the *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* and discusses precisely what the latter did not want to expound upon, ‘*ilm al-mukāshafa*. In the introduction, the Andalusian mystic says: “What we say about *al-Haqq* (the Real), may He be exalted, is that certain things are imperatively attributed to Him, while other affairs should not be attributed to Him. However, we do not say that such a thing is imperative [or possible] for Him. This is the ‘*aqīda* [creed] of *ahl al-ikhtisāṣ* [people of specialization/special ones] from the people of God. As for the creed of *khulāṣat al-khulāṣa* [the epitome of the epitome] as regards God Almighty, this is an affair above this [creed of people of specialization], and which we have dispersed throughout this book. This is due to the fact that most intellects, that are veiled by their

that is simultaneously beyond language and expression, yet incessantly flowing into the context of Sufi discourse.

It would seem, from the preceding excerpts, that al-Dabbāgh's only mention of Jesus is one among many other prophets whose presence merely serves to prove the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad. As will be shown in the excerpts that still remain to be discussed, this Sufi mystic does have a unique perspective on the son of Mary that is not diminished by his conviction in the preeminence of the prophet of Islam.<sup>356</sup> Prior to transitioning to those selections, however, the following passage highlights Christ's distinction as the immediate predecessor of the prophet Muḥammad:

[Al-Dabbāgh] said: "The paradise of al-Firdaws is for this religious community and for whoever has professed God's oneness through divine guidance rather than through the sending of a prophet." I said: "As in the case of Quss b. Sā'ida and Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl." He said: "Did the Prophet testify on their behalf?" At that moment, I did not have an answer at hand. Then I saw in the *Sharḥ Manẓūmat al-Qubūr* [The Commentary on the Poem of Graves] by Ibn Khalil al-Subkī the statement that the Prophet did testify on their behalf that on the Day of Resurrection that they would be resurrected as an entire community by their own.

The words of the text are: "One of the religious scholars says: 'The people of the time period between Jesus and Muḥammad [the people] of (*al-fatra*) are in three categories. The first is someone who perceived God's oneness through his deeper vision (*baṣīra*) and among them is whoever did not enter into a *sharī'a* [divine law], like Quss b. Sā'ida and Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl..." And then he continues after mentioning the other two categories: "As for the first category, the Prophet has said concerning both Quss b. Sā'ida and Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl: "On the Day of Resurrection each will be resurrected as a community on his own."

I then met al-Dabbāgh and presented these words to him. He said: "I wanted to say the same thing, but I was afraid it would be quoted as signifying: 'The Prophet testified that the people of the Age of Ignorance (*al-jāhiliyya*) will enter Paradise.' So, I wanted to test whether the religious scholars have spoken about this. Praise be to God for the existence of their words that agree with mine." He said: "These

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thoughts, are deficient in comprehending it [the creed of the epitome of the epitome] because they have not been emptied yet [of material thoughts]." (Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya I*, 65).

<sup>356</sup> After all, this is also the overarching narrative in Ibn al-'Arabī's Weltanschauung, wherein the son of Mary is situated within a prophetic and spiritual hierarchy underneath the prophet Muḥammad, yet still serves a pivotal role in Islamic saintology, soteriology and eschatology.

persons and their like are among the inhabitants of the paradise al-Firdaws because their belief in God in the midst of their people who were infidels was due to the fact that God the Sublime's immense concern for them made it a necessity that they receive a great light. With that light, they pierced the darkness of unbelief and attained the profession of God's oneness without their having a guide from their own people."<sup>357</sup>

As in the previous excerpt, the intriguing conversation between al-Dabbāgh and his disciple al-Lamaṭī situates Christ within an interesting dynamic of *adab* (etiquette), both in the sense of master-disciple interaction and of al-Dabbāgh's self-presentation as a unique mystic with divine illumination who, nevertheless, never received a formal religious education.

Between the Sufi mystic's initial reticence and eventual spiritual triumph as an authority whose knowledge of the *ahl al-fatra* (people of the period – between Jesus and Muḥammad) is affirmed by the '*ulamā*' (religious scholars), there emerges the first distinctive characteristic of Christ so far in our exploration of *IB*. Al-Dabbāgh highlights the spiritual reality unique to this historical *fatra* (period) between the son of Mary and prophet Muḥammad. One cannot help but wonder if the description of the folks who lived during this age as "perceiving God's oneness through *baṣīra* [inner vision]" is, in al-Dabbāgh's *Weltanschauung*, an allusion to a possible *barzakh* (isthmus) between the realities of Jesus and Muḥammad.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz*, 898-899.

<sup>358</sup> Included here would be the understanding that the prophet Muḥammad's coming culminates the missions and spiritual narratives introduced by preceding prophets, including Jesus. However, more important is the possibility, hinted at by the description of the people of *fatra*, that it is the special status of Jesus, as the immediate predecessor to the prophet Muḥammad, which permeated during this time period and mingled with *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality), in order to produce this ability of witnessing God's oneness through *baṣīra*. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that only the *fatra* between Jesus and Muḥammad is discussed, and not between any previous prophets or the distance separating the prophet of Islam and divine messengers before the son of Mary. Taking all of this into consideration, alongside the previous excerpt where al-Dabbāgh discusses the ability of *ahl al-taṣarruf* to perform prophetic miracles, including those of Jesus, this special status given to the people of *fatra* also lies within the dominion of the *awliyā*' (Muslim saints); in which case, al-Dabbāgh's reticence to mention this fact directly is somewhat unnecessary, since he has already embodied such spiritual stations occupied by the people of *fatra*, as someone who reached God without a guide.



Transitioning to the specific discussions about Christ in the *IB*, the first mention arises in the midst of al-Dabbāgh's fascinating discourse on *suryāniyya* (Syriac) which, as mentioned above, is a foundational and original element in his Weltanschauung. The particular statements concerning Jesus are very terse and concern the precise pronunciation of his name:

I [al-Lamaṭī] asked him [al-Dabbāgh] – God be pleased with him – about the name of our lord Jesus – God's blessings and peace be upon him – ‘*Mashīkhā*,’ whether it contains the letter *khā*’ or *hā*’. He replied: “It contains a *khā*’ and this is a Syriac word that means ‘great’ in their language.”<sup>359</sup>

This should not be perceived as a mere discourse on language; for as Radtke and Kane emphasize, “al-Dabbāgh explains that the language of the Dīwān is Syriac which is the language of the spirits and the angels – except when the Prophet is present and everyone speaks Arabic.”<sup>360</sup> Thus, his description of Jesus as ‘great’ in Syriac is most probably an allusion to his spiritual rank.

Al-Dabbāgh and his student al-Lamaṭī, continue discussing Jesus in the general context of *Suryāniyya* and specifically regarding *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a* (the disconnected letters)/*fawātiḥ al-suwar* (the openings/beginnings of Qur’ānic chapters):

After that I [al-Lamaṭī] asked him about the meaning of *kāf, hā, yā*, ‘*ayn, sād* [the opening of chapter 19, “Maryam”] and he answered me: “It contains a wondrous secret. Everything recounted in the surah of Mary about the story of our lord Zacharias, our lord John, Mary and her son Jesus, Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Idris, Adam and Noah, as well as the whole story recounted in the surah after that, is contained in the meaning of *kāf, hā, yā*, ‘*ayn, sād*. And what's left over of its meaning is still greater than what's mentioned in the surah.”<sup>361</sup>

One finds similar rhetorical strategies in this selection as those found above. Al-Dabbāgh provides his student al-Lamaṭī, and the reader, with a mere *dhawq* (spiritual taste) of what he knows about the secrets of the topic at hand, only to leave them with the conclusion that “what’s left over of its

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<sup>359</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz*, 422.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 437.

meaning is still greater than what's mentioned in the surah." This is indeed a remarkable proclamation by the Sufi mystic, since he is situating the beginning of this Qur'ānic chapter in a well of meaning that surpasses the boundary of scripture and resides in the very transcendent Word of God, from which his interpretation emerges.

The next excerpt returns us to a theme mentioned above and reminiscent of Ibn al-‘Arabī's discourse on Jesus: his pivotal role in the seeker's journey of *tahqīq* (spiritual realization). The context for this emerges in chapter three of the *IB*, where al-Dabbāgh discusses the various stations of darkness and light, which the *murīd* (disciple) traverses during his/her *sulūk* (self-discipline):

As for what he beholds in the second station, the eternal lights are disclosed to him, the [same] way the gloom-laden ephemeral things were disclosed in the first station.<sup>362</sup> Thus, in this station he beholds the angels and the recording angels, the Dīwān and the Friends of God who constitute it. And he beholds the station of Jesus and all who are attached to him and are like him, then the station of Moses and all who are with him, then the station of Idrīs and all who are with him, then the station

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<sup>362</sup> This is what al-Dabbāgh mentions regarding the witnessed things in the first station: "He said: 'As for in the first station, certain things are disclosed to him, among them: 1) acts of God's bondsmen when they're in seclusion, and 2) beholding (*mushāhada*) the seven earths and the seven heavens, and 3) beholding the fire which is found in the fifth earth, as well as other things in the earth and the sky.' And he said: 'This fire is the fire of *Barzakh* because *Barzakh* extends from the seventh heaven to the seventh earth, and the spirits after they leave their physical shapes are located in it in accordance with their ranks. The spirits of the people of wretchedness that are in this fire which has the form of confined dwellings like wells, caves and nests. Its inhabitants are forever engaged in rising and descending. One of them scarcely speaks a single word to you before his abyss causes him to sink downward.' And he said: 'This fire is not Hell because Hell is located outside the globe of the seven heavens and the seven earths. And such is the case with Paradise as well.'

[He continued:] 'And among the things he beholds is 4) the interconnection of the earths with one another, how you emerge from one earth to the other, what distinguishes one earth from the other, and the created beings found in each earth, and 5) beholding (*mushāhada*) the interconnection of the celestial spheres with one another, their relation to the heavens and how the stars are arranged in them, and 6) beholding the satans and how they propagate, and 7) beholding the Jinn and where they dwell, and 8) beholding the course of the sun, the moon and the stars, and the frightful sounds which are like thunderbolts that instantly kill. This is what he hears continuously, and he must not consider any of these things to be important but take everything he sees to be insignificant. Otherwise, his state will come to a halt and his affair will suffer a reversal, because the body at the time of illumination is permeable and is permeated by everything it deems good. Moreover, all these things which he beholds are darkness. If he relies on any of them, he'll come to a halt in darkness and be cut off from God. That's why someone who has not received illumination is on safe ground, whereas the person with illumination is in extreme danger. Now if the body was tempted and distracted from God by things like almonds, raisins and chick peas, not to mention *dirhems* and dinars and women and children, how would he not be tempted after illumination by beholding the translunar and the sublunar world and by satans assisting him in whatever he wishes? There's no protection save in God!' He said: 'Whoever comes to a halt with any of these above-mentioned things, the satans accompany him hand in hand and he becomes one of the magicians and fortunetellers. We beseech God for protection from this! But whomever God shows mercy, He draws him unto Himself and creates within him a longing and heart-felt desire with which he penetrates these veils.'" (pg. 480-481)

of Joseph and all who are with him, then the stations of three of the previous apostles, some of whom were before Idris and others who were after him – but their names are not known among people. If we were to describe the stations of the prophets just mentioned and what an angel looks like as he was originally created, the hearer would hear things his mind could not support.

It is also incumbent on a person to whom these things have been disclosed not to come to a halt with any of them for the reason given previously, i.e. at that time his body is permeable, and if he halts with any of them his body will be permeated by its secrets, so that if he halts at the station of our lord Jesus, for instance, and deems it good, he'll be given its secret to drink and he'll immediately renounce his religion and leave the Muslim community. We beseech God for protection against this!<sup>363</sup>

Al-Dabbāgh provides us with more insights into his individualized pedagogy and rare divine illumination. Perhaps the most powerful statement in the above excerpt is the concluding remark that halting at the station of Jesus, when the seeker is a Muḥammadan follower, can result in leaving Islam altogether. Outwardly, such a proposition may obfuscate, for some readers, the all too important Qur'ānic distinction between the heretical claims regarding Christ's divinity and the son of Mary's actual message.<sup>364</sup>

This becomes even more complicated when one takes into consideration that al-Dabbāgh perceives the same risk to exist when the seeker is traversing the first station: the world of darkness, which includes devils and demons. He states that “whoever comes to a halt with any of these above-mentioned things, the satans accompany him hand in hand and he becomes one of the magicians and fortunetellers.”<sup>365</sup> In turn, one is forced to wonder whether demons and satans have

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 481-482.

<sup>364</sup> The most clear and relevant verses in this regard are found at the end of chapter 5, (The Table Spread), verses 116-118: “And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen. I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness. If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.” Ibn al-‘Arabī offers his own creative interpretation of these verses at the end of the chapter on Jesus in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (FH), which was discussed in detail in chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>365</sup> Refer to n. 184 above.

the same ensnaring effect as a divine prophet, such as Jesus. However, it is only when one reads this excerpt alongside others that it becomes clear that al-Dabbāgh's desire is to emphasize the tremendous weight of the *fath* (divine opening) and its dangerous consequences for the unprepared disciple, more so than the insinuation that a prophet of God, like Jesus, would misguide a follower of the prophet Muḥammad away from Islam.<sup>366</sup>

In the next excerpt, the figure of Jesus appears in a discussion about *ism allāh al-a'zam* (God's greatest name), its hiddenness, power and tremendous weight that can only be carried by a few of God's elect:

And I heard him say about the mightiest name of God Almighty: "It is the completion of one hundred. It is not among the [other] ninety-nine, though many of its meanings are contained in the ninety-nine names. Moreover, it is uttered by the body (*al-dhāt*), not by the tongue. You hear it emerge from the body like the ringing of brass. This is burdensome for the body. The body can only sustain uttering it once or twice in a day." I [al-Lamaṭī] asked: "And why is that?" He replied: "Because it only occurs with complete vision (*mushāhada*) which is something burdensome for this body. If the body utters it, the entire world is terrified, being gripped by fear, reverence and awe."

Al-Dabbāgh said: "Jesus, the son of Mary possessed the power to utter it and he did so fourteen times a day. But God knows best!"<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> This becomes especially clear when one takes into consideration the previous excerpts where al-Dabbāgh states that *ahl al-taṣarruf* (people with power of free disposal), from the Muḥammadan community, have permission to perform the miracles of prophets, including Jesus. This is also evident in the second excerpt where the Sufi mystic describes the stations of all the prophets as having emanated from God, through the prophet Muḥammad's mediation, to their recipients. Simply put, for al-Dabbāgh, Jesus and all the divine prophets prior to Muḥammad are subsumed within his *umma* (community), in one way or another. In which case, the risk facing a seeker in the second station where they witness the "station of Jesus" should be attributed to their own failure, not the son of Mary himself. The second, most crucial point, regarding al-Dabbāgh's emphasis on the danger of the *fath* (divine illumination) for the unprepared seeker can be gleaned from various mentions in the *IB*, such as: "That is why someone who has not received illumination is on safe ground, whereas the person with illumination is in extreme danger-unless God protects him." (pg. 481), "If illumination descends upon the body before the light of power, defect and weakness will occur in the body and will lead to death ... or the disappearance of reason. But if the light of power first descends upon the body, the light of illumination will then descend after it and the body will not suffer harm because of illumination.' I [al-Lamaṭī] asked: 'What is this power?' He replied, while looking at a weak blade of grass: 'If God provided this weak blade of grass with the power we're talking about, it would be able to carry that mountain.' And he pointed to a mountain that was in front of us. 'A person whom God has given success asks God the Sublime to make the light of power descend on him before the light of illumination descends on him. But God knows best!'" (pg. 870) and many other examples.

<sup>367</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Ibrīz*, 732-733. It should be mentioned in passing that the translators' rendition of al-Dabbāgh's unique use of the term *dhāt* in the *IB* only partially reflects the full spectrum of its presence in the work. The Sufi

As usual, there is a rich layering of meaning in al-Dabbāgh's discussion of spiritual realities and how they are intimately connected to prophets and messengers. In this particular excerpt, the Sufi mystic leaves the reader wondering why he believes that Jesus specifically had the ability to recite *ism allāh al-a'zam* (the mightiest name of God) fourteen times a day, whereas other prophets or saints could only utter it twice a day at most.

The final excerpt provides more details for the above discussion on God's mightiest name and Jesus's unique ability to utter it fourteen times a day. Here, al-Dabbāgh reemphasizes the intimate connection between the prophets and the reality of the prophet Muḥammad:

Another time I [al-Lamaṭī] heard him say: "Although the prophets – blessings and peace be upon them – are given to drink of his [the prophet Muḥammad's] light, they do not drink the whole of it. Rather each prophet drinks of it as much as is appropriate for him and has been recorded for him. The revered light possesses many qualities and numerous states and many categories. Each individual prophet drinks a special quality and a special kind." He said: "Our lord Jesus drank of the revered light and he obtained the halting-station of living away from one's homeland. This is a station which causes its possessor to travel and not to be settled in one place."<sup>368</sup>

Thus, alongside the ability to recite God's mightiest name fourteen times a day, al-Dabbāgh also reveals that Jesus inherits from the prophet of Islam the 'halting-station of living away from one's homeland.' As should become clear by now, for al-Dabbāgh, any station or ability given to Jesus or any other prophet for that matter, is not only automatically given to the prophet Muḥammad, but actually emerges from his spiritual reality.

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mystic seems to use this term, *dhāt*, in two senses: 1) its common use as a reference to essence. Such as *al-dhāt al-'aliyya* (the divine essence) in the following: "Sometimes he experiences the vision (*mushāhada*) of the Lofty Essence (*al-dhāt al-'aliyya*). In this vision is a pleasure so great as to be indescribable and cannot be sustained." (pg. 386) and 2) al-Dabbāgh's own unique use refers to an amalgam, of sorts, of the human ego and body, which should go through a process of self-discipline and purification. This is evident in the following: "The purpose of training is to purify the body [and ego] (*al-dhāt*) and cleanse it of its vanities so it becomes capable of carrying the secret." (pg. 614) Unfortunately, the translators have not discussed the nuance of al-Dabbāgh's use of this term and have opted instead to simply translate it in the two different senses, essence and body, as they deem fit.

<sup>368</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Dhahab al-Ibrīz*, 757.

At this juncture, I would like to offer a creative reflection on a possible similarity between al-Dabbāgh's description of this Christic inheritance as "a station which causes its possessor to travel and not to be settled in one place" and Ibn al-ʿArabī's notion of *maqām al-lā maqām* (station of no-station) which he describes in multiple places, such as the following instance in *FM*:

Know that the origin of this divine knowledge is *al-maqām* (station) at which all the gnostics halt which is that there is *lā maqām* (no station), alluded to by God's statement: "Oh people of Yathrib, *la muqāma lakum* [there is no station for you]" [33:13]. Moreover, this station is, definitively, not delimited by any attribute. This is what Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī [(d. 874)] has clarified when he was asked: "How did you wake up?" and he replied: "There is no morning for me nor evening. Indeed, morning and evening are for those who have been delimited by attributes and there is no attribute for me."<sup>369</sup>

It is interesting that the Qur'ānic verse which the Andalusian mystic uses as a basis for this spiritual station itself pertains to a spatial differentiation; specifically pertaining to those Muslims – or hypocrites – who sought permission from the Prophet to return to their houses and not fight alongside him and the other Muslims. Al-Dabbāgh, in a similar light, situates his discussion of Jesus's portion from the Muḥammadan light as that which "forces its possessor to travel and not be limited to one space." In other words, both Sufi mystics present this concept, preliminarily, through the prism of terrain traversal.

The parallel between Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Dabbāgh in this context becomes more intriguing when one considers the following discussion in *FH*, wherein the Andalusian mystic presents the celebrated and controversial mystic al-Bisṭāmī, mentioned above as an instance of a saint who'd reached the station of no-station, as also an *ʿisawī* (Christ-like) saint: "Thus, if God forms the human body ... He blows into him from His spirit and attributes his formation and essence to His own self, may He be glorified. Jesus, however, is not like this affair, for the formation of his body and human form were both subsumed within the spiritual breath ... and this is an affair which

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<sup>369</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya IV*, 23.

cannot be known save through taste, like that of Abī Yazīd [al-Biṣṭāmī] who blew upon an ant, that he killed, and it became alive once again. He knew, at that moment, through Whom he blows so he blew, and this is why he was *‘īṣawī al-mashhad* [Christic in his divine witnessing].”<sup>370</sup>

As discussed above, al-Dabbāgh holds that miracles of the prophets are given to *ahl-taṣarruf* (people with power of free disposal) from the Muḥammadan community, such as al-Biṣṭāmī here in the *FH*, as portrayed by Ibn al-‘Arabī. Since al-Biṣṭāmī is also described by Ibn al-‘Arabī as a saint who has reached the station of no-station; perhaps, then, al-Dabbāgh had in mind this same Akbarian notion of ‘station of no-station,’ which he attributed to Jesus and that appears in a similar Christic-light in the Andalusian mystic’s writings. In other words, perhaps the Shaykh in *IB* perceived the spiritual freedom from being bounded by any saintly station to manifest as a form of *siyāḥa* (constant travel) in the material world, exemplified and performed by the son of Mary.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh and his individualized divine illumination come through clearly in the *IB*’s original use of certain motifs from Sufi thought, including sainthood, prophethood and the esoteric dimensions of language. Amidst the words of this Sufi mystic, Jesus the son of Mary finds himself in a wide variety of portrayals that provide three different insights. First, they reveal a continuing rich conversation about Christ in Sufi circles well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Second, aside from the actual dimensions of Jesus’ image, he also serves as a prophetic and saintly lens through which one can better understand al-Dabbāgh’s crucial status as an early modern Sufi mystic and, finally, the mediation of Christ’s persona, between al-Dabbāgh and his predecessor Ibn al-‘Arabī, alludes to a possible influence by the latter on the former.

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<sup>370</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 142.

In connection with this last point, I would like to spend a few paragraphs discussing al-Dabbāgh's mentions of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the *IB*. Al-Dabbāgh's life and writings merit this special investigation, for a few reasons. First, as mentioned beforehand, there has been no substantial research so far on al-Dabbāgh's thought generally, much less his discussion on Jesus and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. Second, considering the fact that al-Dabbāgh lived and died in Fez, a city that Ibn al-ʿArabī visited and where he experienced his own 'divine illumination,' some 7 centuries prior to al-Dabbāgh's time,<sup>371</sup> then situating both figures' mystical Weltanschauungen in the *IB* will allow for better appreciation of the unique Sufi concepts that have emerged and developed from North African Sufism.

The range and number of discussions pertaining to Ibn al-ʿArabī in the *IB* are diverse and abundant enough to convince one not only of al-Dabbāgh's knowledge of the Andalusian mystic's thought but also that Ibn al-ʿArabī was considered an authority in the mystical sciences by al-Dabbāgh and other Sufis in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Fez. In turn, al-Dabbāgh's reliance upon the Akbarian tradition in this intellectual setting is a proof of the immense knowledge that a mystic like al-Dabbāgh had from past masters.<sup>372</sup> While none of these mentions pertain to Jesus directly, some do revolve around *walāya* (sainthood) and, therefore, highlight Ibn al-ʿArabī's possible influence on al-Dabbāgh's conception of this concept and the role that Jesus plays in it.

In the first excerpt, Ibn al-ʿArabī's name emerges during a question that al-Lamaṭī asks his teacher about a *ḥadīth* that discusses the 'beatific' divine vision on the day of Judgement:

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<sup>371</sup> Cf. Claude Addas, "Ibn ʿArabī in Fez, a Holy City."

<sup>372</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning that al-Lamaṭī describes his master al-Dabbāgh as *ummī* (pg. 116), which literally translates as 'illiterate'; a rendering that the translators of the *IB* insist is incorrect. Rather, they opt for 'unschooled' as a prudent description of al-Dabbāgh. This is based on the fact that al-Lamaṭī discusses certain manuscripts and notes which his master had written at one point in time (pg. 454). Either way, whether al-Dabbāgh was altogether illiterate or just 'unschooled' in a formal religious education, his awareness and discussion of minute details in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought establish his status as a worthy Sufi mystic in his own right, for students and readers in his milieu and later Sufi enthusiasts as well.



And I asked him about the meaning of the following *ḥadīth*: “God the Sublime comes to the believers at the waiting place of the Resurrection in a form they do not recognize, and they seek refuge with God from Him, saying: ‘This is our place until our Lord comes to us and if He comes to us, we’ll recognize Him.’ Then their Lord comes to them in a form they recognize, and they throw themselves down before Him.” What’s the meaning of the first and the second form? Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātimī says in his epistle to Fakhr al-Dīn [al-Rāzī (d. 1210)]: “Only the Friends of God are acquainted with this matter.”<sup>373</sup>

This first mention of the Andalusian mystic in *IB* is clearly within the context of secret esoteric knowledge that only a chosen few are able to understand. A *double entendre* appears in the last sentence, written initially by Ibn al-‘Arabī in a letter to al-Rāzī about this same *ḥadīth* and echoed many centuries later by al-Dabbāgh towards his disciple al-Lamaṭī. The reader is left wondering whether both, Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Dabbāgh, are insinuating that their interlocutors are not ready yet to decipher the secrets of this *ḥadīth*.

In the next long excerpt, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s image continues to be a prism through which al-Dabbāgh’s superior knowledge of the esoteric spiritual realities is established. This begins with a question directed by a jurist in the presence of the Sufi mystic:

What is the divine secret deposited in a separate letter *qāf*, such that one of the knowers of God said about it: “In it the secret of the sphere of the eternal plane (*al-ḥaḍra al-qadīma*) and the contingent plane (*al-ḥaḍra al-ḥadītha*) come together?” Clarify this for us, oh my master. And his purpose with these questions was to test the Shaykh as to whether what was ascribed to him by way of the divinely bestowed sciences was true or not. This jurist had looked in the books of [Ibn al-‘Arabī] al-Ḥātimī and others and had collected questions he thought no one could answer. And these questions he put to the Shaykh. Al-Dabbāgh answered all the questions, despite his being an unschooled layman.<sup>374</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabī and his enigmatic concepts serve as a litmus test of the authenticity of al-Dabbāgh’s *kashf* (unveiling) and *walāya* (sainthood). Al-Lamaṭī’s remark that his teacher was able to respond

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<sup>373</sup> Al-Lamaṭī, *Al-Ibrīz*, 370.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*, 446.

to these queries, even though he was an unschooled layman, alludes to the pristine source of the latter's knowledge: direct divine illumination.

Thenceforth, al-Dabbāgh proceeds to provide his answer to this question. His response starts in the realm of cosmology/cosmogony, after which he states that the two planes Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions pertain to that “of the contingent lights which were created before the creation of the spirits and bodily shapes” and that of the “contingent plane [which] is the spirits and the bodily shapes which came after the eternal plane,” respectively.<sup>375</sup> Then, al-Dabbāgh transitions to the sphere of the science of letters and secrets in the form and meaning of *qāf*, which he says “contains three letters, one called *qāf*, one called *alif*, and one called *fā*’,” the first two of which signify “the Sublime's action in the two planes by means of good and bad, kindness and justice.”<sup>376</sup>

Al-Dabbāgh then culminates this cosmological and linguistic interpretation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's words by situating it within the socially relevant notion of *walāya* and God's friends who are the carriers of secret divine illuminations:

These are God's elite. Thus, this separate letter is an indication of God's elite in both planes, and of the good things He has bestowed on them. This is the secret of the two planes and one of the names of God which is attributed to what He holds dearest among created beings.

So, the *qāf* contains the secrets of apostleship, the secrets of prophethood, the secrets of the angels, the secrets of Friendship with God, the secrets of felicity (salvation), the secrets of Paradise, the secrets of all the lights, and all good things which occur among all created beings. "No one knows the armies of your Lord but He" (74:31). Moreover, it is customary practice in Syriac not to write the *fā*’ (of the *qāf*) which eliminates what precedes it, so that the script and the meaning are alike. That's why you write q [and not *qāf*]. But God knows best!<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 447.

Al-Dabbāgh returns the jurist’s litmus test of esotericism back to its roots in the realm of *awliyā’* *Allāh*, among whom are, of course, al-Dabbāgh himself and Ibn al-‘Arabī. The questioning jurist, in turn, receives more than an answer for his question as to whether al-Dabbāgh is an authentic *walī*: he discovers that he may not be of the same caliber as al-Dabbāgh and the Greatest Master. In this excerpt and the previous one, both the Andalusian mystic and his later successor reside in their own timeless spiritual realm as *awliyā’*, while those who are present in the time of history can only peek into their station through whatever insights these two Sufi masters might choose to give them.<sup>378</sup>

In the final selection, Ibn al-‘Arabī continues to engage in a conversation with al-Dabbāgh from the beyond. This time, the topic of discussion pertains closely to the figure of Jesus in both these mystics’ writings: the difference between *awliyā’* (saints) and prophets. After al-Dabbāgh denies that angels only appear to messengers, his student al-Lamaṭī reintroduces the Andalusian

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<sup>378</sup> It is worthwhile quoting here the rest of this episode where al-Lamaṭī continues his conversation with the questioner: “I, al-Lamaṭī, would add the following. Look at how beautiful this answer is. Moreover, I met with the person who posed the question and I asked him: ‘What’s your view of the Shaykh’s answer?’ He replied: ‘What the Shaykh Zarrūq has said is that the eternal plane is the circle of the *qāf* as written in Arabic, whereas the contingent plane is the loop underneath the circle. The secret contained in this is the reference to the contingent receiving assistance from the eternal, in as much as the loop is joined to the ring which we’ve called the circle and its connectedness refers to the contingent receiving assistance from the eternal. Thus, the surah Qāf refers to the two planes – to the eternal plane by means of its circle and to the contingent one by means of its loop. And the connectedness of the loop to the circle refers to the contingent’s receiving assistance from the eternal.’ I replied: ‘But how far this is from what the Shaykh said. The question was about the meaning of *qāf* which is a word. What you’ve just said has to do with the script, not with the word. The word ‘*qāf*’ has no circle and no loop. Moreover, what you said does not deal with the meaning of the eternal plane and the contingent plane. So, what relation is there between the circle and the eternal plane? And what relation is there between the loop and the contingent plane? If it is merely a matter of connectedness, this exists with regard to the circle of the *mīm* and its loop, and with regard to the *ṣād*, the *dād*, the ‘*ayn*, the *ghayn*, and other letters that contain a circle and a loop.’ The questioner remained silent and did not know what to say. Nor is this opposition on my part to the Shaykh Zarrūq for verily, I seek refuge with God from opposition to him or to any other Friends of God. I discussed with the questioner and followed what he had to say but I’m not informed about the views of the Shaykh Zarrūq and I do not know what they are. Perhaps the questioner reported the sense to me without going into it with precision, and for that reason it met with opposition. But God knows best!” Here, al-Lamaṭī displays impeccable *adab* (courtesy) with the *awliyā’*, including his own teacher al-Dabbāgh and Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 1493); all the while indirectly reprimanding the uncouth jurist. This upstanding disciple provides the necessary – other – portion of the formula that his teacher al-Dabbāgh introduces in the excerpt above: the *walī* has access to special knowledge of God, which the *murīd* (disciple/seeker) does not know yet and must thus maintain him/herself within the boundaries of this discipleship, through *adab* (courtesy) and proper etiquette. Most importantly, whatever the disciple does know, of secret knowledge, from his Shaykh, he gives to others through the filter of this same *adab*.

mystic's words as corroborative evidence for his teacher's stance. However, this time not even the Andalusian mystic is able to encompass al-Dabbāgh's knowledge of this topic:

“As for what was mentioned about the difference between the prophet and the Friend regarding an angel coming down or not, that is not true because someone who's experienced illumination, whether he is a Friend or a prophet, necessarily beholds angels in their bodies the way they really are, as he speaks to them and they speak to him. Indeed, if someone says that the Friend of God does not behold an angel and does not speak to him, this is proof that he has not experienced illumination.”

I, al-Lamaṭī, would add that this is what [Ibn al-ʿArabī] al-Ḥātimī says in the 364th *bāb* [chapter] of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*: “Regarding the difference between the prophet and the Friend of God, a group of our colleagues, among them the imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, are mistaken in their view that an angel comes down to a prophet, whereas the Friend receives inspiration without an angel coming down to him.” And he says: “The correct view is that the difference consists in what the angel brings down with him. When an angel comes down to a Friend, he orders him to follow and obey, and he may inform him about the authenticity of a *ḥadīth* which the religious scholars have declared weak.”

Moreover, he may come down with glad tidings from God and tell him he is among the people of felicity and security, as God has said: ‘For them is glad tidings in the present life and in the hereafter’ (10:64). He goes on to say: “And the cause of their mistake is that they imagine that they include all the paths of God in their behavior. Thus, when no angel comes down to them, they imagine that an angel will never come down to anyone else and that an angel never comes down to a Friend. If they were to hear from a trustworthy person of an angel's coming down to a Friend, they would change their view because they believe in the thaumaturgic gifts of the Friends of God. And indeed, a group did come over to my view after previously believing the contrary.”

This is a summary of his words. Now if you've grasped the Shaykh's words about the above-mentioned difference, then you are aware that what al-Ḥātimī approves concerning the difference is not clear because the gist of the matter is that an angel does not come down to the Friend of God with commands and prohibitions, as he does in the case of the prophet. However, this is not correct. An angel does come down to the Friend with commands and prohibitions, but this does not necessarily mean he brings a *sharīʿa*. There is no *sharīʿa* in the story of Mary. Indeed, the angel comes down to her with a command, even though she was no prophetess – as previously stated. If we were to divulge what we heard on this subject from the Shaykh it would be a miracle for those who seek and a mainstay for people with longing. But this is a secret which must not be divulged.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 479-480.

The image of Ibn al-‘Arabī is utilized simultaneously to legitimize al-Dabbāgh’s teachings and to propel the latter beyond the former’s rank altogether. Beyond the diplomatic nuance regarding the use of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s persona in this excerpt, the actual content of what he says is just as important. It is implicitly understood that the Andalusian mystic and al-Dabbāgh are themselves examples of saints who are visited by angels. Beyond this point, al-Lamaṭī uses Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own strategy<sup>380</sup> to indirectly imply that only al-Dabbāgh has received commands and prohibitions from angels, whereas the Andalusian mystic was not granted such an experience and, thus, deemed it impossible.

There are a few more mentions of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the *IB*. However, the preceding selections accurately summarize the creative use of his persona by al-Lamaṭī and his teacher al-Dabbāgh. Even though none of these mentions concern Jesus directly, save for the last excerpt wherein Mary is mentioned, our findings yield crucial insights into the subtle ways that al-Dabbāgh utilizes images of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jesus. This is not only as a means for expounding upon metaphysics or sacred history, but more importantly a path for the Sufī mystic to present his *walāya* and divine illumination as an authentic – and more superior – channel through which readers may glimpse the ‘unseen.’

In this regard, there are intimate connections between the mentions of Jesus and Ibn al-‘Arabī in the *IB*. For instance, the son of Mary appears as standing proof, among many other divine messengers, of the prophet Muḥammad’s historical and spiritual superiority. Likewise, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mystical theosophy emerges from the past between al-Dabbāgh’s own words as corroborative evidence of the latter’s statements and, in turn, to support his authentic status as a

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<sup>380</sup> This is a reference to the Andalusian mystic’s quoted statement: “And the cause of their mistake is that they imagine that they include all the paths of God in their behavior.”

*walī*. However, as evident in the last excerpt, ultimately it is al-Dabbāgh who exceeds the Andalusian mystic in his ability to receive commands and prohibitions from angels.

In other words, while al-Dabbāgh and Ibn al-‘Arabī are in a league of their own amidst countless other Sufi mystics, the former excels in the rank of his divine illumination. This sentiment also reverberates through some of the excerpts concerning Christ. For it is the son of Mary whom al-Dabbāgh mentions as someone who could utter ‘God’s mightiest name’ fourteen times a day. However, this special rank of Jesus is merely a glimpse of the rank and station of the prophet Muḥammad, from whom the son of Mary also inherited the station of *siyāḥa* (traveling) and liberation from restriction to any one abode. This is an idea that, as we hypothesized, recalls the Andalusian mystic’s station of no-station.<sup>381</sup>

All this leads us to conclude that the relationship between Jesus and Muḥammad in the *IB* is mirrored by a similar affinity between Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Dabbāgh. In each case, the first figure serves as a legitimizing antecedent and catalyst for the latter. The only lacuna left to explore, in this regard, is the exact parallel in the association between the Andalusian mystic and his North African successor that resembles, in any way shape or form, the unrelenting presence of the prophet Muḥammad as the source of Christ’s rank, in his first coming, as a historical prophet, and second coming as the culmination of Muḥammad’s message, whence the son of Mary will be part of the Muḥammadan community.

I propose that this last affair reveals itself prudently in the very transactions that al-Dabbāgh makes with the ‘unseen,’ whereby he can position Ibn al-‘Arabī as a preparation of the fertile ground for the former’s divine illumination. Thenceforth, the superiority of al-Dabbāgh’s

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<sup>381</sup> See page 207.

experiences complete and perfect the visions, concepts and ideas of the Andalusian mystic. If that is the figurative ‘first coming’ of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the *IB*, then his ‘second coming’ is gleaned from the fact that the Andalusian mystic’s reappearance, some six centuries later in the writings of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century mystic, is completely subsumed within the latter’s *walāya*. In other words, Ibn al-‘Arabī in the *IB* is part and parcel of al-Dabbāgh’s Weltanschauung.

Certainly, this appropriation of Jesus and the Andalusian mystic’s thought by al-Lamaḥī and his teacher ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh is not unique. On the contrary, it is emblematic of how Sufī authors have creatively adopted scriptural sources, prophetic narrations, and their past or living peers as catalysts through which to prove their legitimacy as carriers of the banner of *walāya* and also to help them unfold their divine illumination for self-introspection and their readers’ own contemplation. What remains a consistent thread throughout the various components of this project is the ‘unseen’ that lingers before language, that which constantly permeates the world of the Sufi mystic and reformulates his or her language anew. This new terminology, in turn, re-forges the transcendent ‘unseen’ in the collective imagination of Sufis for generations to come.<sup>382</sup>

*Aḥmad al-Tījānī al-Hasanī (d. 1815)*

Aḥmad al-Tījānī (d. 1815), the founder of the *Tījāniyya* Sufī brotherhood, was born in

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<sup>382</sup> In this regard, it is worthwhile clarifying the underlying objectives behind the criticisms that Sufi mystics give their predecessors or contemporaries. The censure that a Sufi mystic, such as al-Dabbāgh, levels against his predecessors, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī, should not be perceived as a simplistic attempt to dethrone another’s mystical inspiration and claim their status or rank within the Muslim community as their own. First, since these Sufis believed in a vast and infinite divine providence that can accommodate all of their stations, illuminations and followers, it is unlikely that they felt the need to replace their predecessors in order to claim some spiritual rank or divine gift. Even as pertaining to certain saintly stations, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī’s celebrated *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood), a rank that he formulated and eventually claimed for himself, which many later Sufi mystics claimed as their own; one finds creative strategies utilized whereby such a rank is not perceived as an end goal, but a window and shore to a vast divine ocean where the station of seal and many other consequential posts open for each generation of mystics communally, and each Sufi individually. The engagement with this rank of seal of Muḥammadan sainthood will emerge throughout this chapter and the next on Sufi brotherhoods. What this conversation will – hopefully – highlight is that the *tanāfus* (competition) between Sufi saints surrounding their respective divine illuminations and saintly ranks is merely another tool they use in order to convey the immensity and unsurpassed nature of their illuminations. This being their primary focus, and any social or political consequence of this *kashf*, while important, remains secondary to that metaphysical and spiritual reality from which they gain their saintly rank.

Algeria and later migrated to the Sufi city of Fez, where he is buried today. The appellation *Tījānī* “comes from the name of the Algerian Berber tribe acquired by [his] family when one of his forefathers married a woman from this tribe.”<sup>383</sup> His life trajectory follows a similar route to his other Sufi contemporaries and then transforms, after his migration to Morocco, into a mystical teaching and order that is truly unique in its social and spiritual organization.

Al-Tījānī’s parents died of the plague when he was only sixteen years old. Thenceforth, he set out in the local vicinity of his hometown in search for knowledge. The places and regions he travelled to on this quest are unsurprising locations for any *tālib ‘ilm* (seeker of knowledge) at the time, such as the first two holy sanctuaries of Islam, Mecca and Medina, Egypt, Tlemcen in Algeria – which was also frequented by Ibn al-‘Arabī – and, of course, Fez. Indeed, this eclectic peripatetic itinerary recalls of the Andalusian mystic’s travels across North Africa and central Islamdom. In other ways, however, al-Tījānī’s career follows a different trajectory from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, for he joined an already existing *ṭarīqa* prior to forming his own Sufi institution. This occurred while he was in Egypt and became a member of the Khalwatiyya Sufi order, of which he was appointed as a *muqaddam* (deputy) by its representative Maḥmūd al-Kurdī (d. 1780).<sup>384</sup>

Sometime during 1789,<sup>385</sup> al-Tījānī fell in bad terms with the Ottoman authorities. As a result of this episode, he permanently moved to Fez. However, it seems as though this tribulation was a veiled form of divine providence; for once he relocated to this city of Sufism in the heart of

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<sup>383</sup> Abun-Nasr, Jamil M., “Al-Tidjānī.”

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> John Willis disputes the accuracy of this date in his work *In the Path of Allah*. Although the author does not make the causes of his disagreement with Abun-Nasr clear, it seems that has to do with the possible birth dates for ‘Umar al-Fūtī (d. 1864), the figure responsible for the spread of the Sufi order in West Africa; as will be discussed shortly. As Willis mentions, al-Fūtī was born around 1794 and later initiated into the Tījāniyya by the Mauritanian representative of the *ṭarīqa* Mawlūd Fal (19<sup>th</sup> century). Willis implicit argument is that al-Tījānī’s migration to Fez must have occurred much earlier than 1789 for his teachings and the order as a whole to spread beyond Morocco to Mauritania by the time al-Fūtī is initiated into the *ṭarīqa* (page 99).



Morocco, his image as the founder of the Tījāniyya was fully developed and immortalized. As Abun-Nasr highlights, the first emergence of the Tījāniyya occurred whilst the founder was still in the oasis of Abī Samghūn in Algeria, “when he announced that the Prophet Muḥammad appeared to him while he was in an awoken state, authorized him to start *tarbiya* [self-discipline], and taught him the *awrād* (litanies) of his *ṭarīqa*.”<sup>386</sup> This direct communication with the Prophet would distinguishes the Tījāniyya from other Sufi orders, until the present day.

The two central litanies which al-Tījānī received from the prophet Muḥammad succinctly describe the former’s mystical Weltanschauung and the overarching focus of the order’s practitioners. Due to this compounded importance, it is worthwhile exploring a translation of these *awrād*, which consist of two *ṣalawāt* (benedictions upon the Prophet), in order to appreciate their rich metaphysical expression which points to possible Akbarian influences. The first, shorter and more well-known of these is *Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥ* (The Benediction of the Opener), which reads:

Oh God, send your prayers upon our master Muḥammad, *al-fātiḥ li mā ughliqa* [the opener for what has been closed], *wa-l-khātim li mā sabaq* [the one who seals what has come before him] and the one who gives aid to the truth through the truth/Real and guides to your straight path and upon those close to him, according to his rank and lofty greatness.<sup>387</sup>

A cursory reading of the content and terminology reveals an acute awareness of Sufi motifs prevalent in works of Muslim saints prior to and during al-Tījānī’s time. First, the descriptors *al-fātiḥ* (opener) and *khātim* (seal) allude to the common perception of the Prophet’s spiritual reality, *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*, as the first thing God created – from which He created everything –

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<sup>386</sup> Abun-Nasr, Jamil M., “Al-Tidjānī.”

<sup>387</sup> There is some controversy involving the originality of this formulation of the *ṣalawāt* which al-Tījānī purportedly received directly from the Prophet Muḥammad. The dispute revolves around an earlier benediction that is very similar in content and style to *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*, found in the most well-known collation of *ṣalawāt* titled *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt* (The Signposts to Goodness) by Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d. 1465), and attributed to the Prophet’s cousin and fourth caliph, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. However, some contemporary Tījānī representatives have tried to use this fact in order to further emphasize the legitimacy of this litany by highlighting its currency among the earliest generation of the Prophet’s companions (“The Divine Flood”).

and the one who encompasses all possible prophetic and saintly dispositions and ranks. Second, in the use of the term *khātim* (seal), one perceives a possible homage to an Akbarian motif and the vast discourse on *khatm al-walāya* (seal of sainthood).

The other important litany received by al-Ṭijānī from the Prophet, which continues to be a central pillar in the order, is *jawharat al-kamāl* (Jewel of Perfection). It is in this second formula of benediction that the creative soil of Ṭijānī metaphysics truly shines through the rich terminology describing the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muḥammad:

Oh God, send your prayers and salutations upon the *‘ayn* [eye/essence] of lordly mercy and the actualized ruby that encompasses the center of comprehensions and meanings. The molded light of universes, the Adamic one with the lordly right! The luminous lightning according to the measures of gains inclining towards all who seek from the oceans and vessels. Your glimmering light with whom You have filled Your universe that surrounds the loci of spaces.

Oh God, send your prayers and salutations upon the *‘ayn* [eye/essence] of the *al-Ḥaqq* [the Real/Truth] from whom become manifest the thrones of realities. The most upstanding *‘ayn* [eye/essence] of gnosi. Your complete and healing straight path.

Oh God, send your prayers and salutations upon the *ṭal‘at al-Ḥaqq bi-l-Ḥaqq al-kanz al-a‘zam* [appearance of the Real/Truth through the Real/Truth and greatest treasure]. *Ifādatika minka ilayka ihāṭat al-nūr al-muṭalsam* [Your effusion, from You to You, and the encompassment of the talismanic light].

May God send His prayers upon him and those close to him; a prayer through which You make us know him!

Not only does the convoluted appendage of adjectives and use of homonyms recall Ibn al-‘Arabī’s linguistic style, but also the reliance upon a vocabulary identical to that found in the Andalusian mystic’s own *ṣalawāt* (benedictions).

Consider, for instance, one of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s shorter formulas of prophetic benedictions, *al-Ṣalāt al-Muṭalsama* (Talismanic Benediction):

Oh God, send your prayers upon the appearance of the *muṭalsam* [talismanic]

essence. The overflowing succor and concealed perfection. The divine principle of beauty and human principle of intimacy and appearance of the *Ḥaqq* [Real/Truth]. The identity of the pre-eternal human being in dispersion of Him who remains. He through whom You established the human natures of separation to the path of the Real/Truth. Send, O God, your prayers through him, from him, within him and upon him and send abundant salutations.

One can almost find a direct correlation between the richness in language and style of this Akbarian litany and al-Tījānī's *jawharat al-kamāl*. Whether it is the recurring use of terms like *muṭalsam* (talismanic), *ṭal'at* (appearance) and – the polysemous – *al-Ḥaqq* (the Real/Truth) or correspondence between the compounded use of prepositions (e.g. 'from You to You'/'through him, from him, within him and upon him'), it is clear that al-Tījānī was well aware of Ibn al-'Arabī's style of writing and mystical expression.<sup>388</sup>

During the ensuing analysis of his statements concerning Jesus, it becomes clear that al-Tījānī's engagement with the Andalusian mystic amounted to more than mere homage to his writing style; rather, the former explicitly mentioned and responded to various claims of the latter. This intellectual dialogue clearly serves the purpose of establishing al-Tījānī's legitimacy as a Muslim saint and as the founder of a new Sufi order unique in its spiritual genealogy. In this regard, al-Tījānī's teachings resemble al-Dabbāgh's *Weltanschauung* and the attempt of his disciple, al-Lamaṭī, to forge a new legacy for his teacher through a creative dialogue with Ibn al-'Arabī's thought.

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<sup>388</sup> This is also explicitly clear in the *JM* where, among Ibn al-'Arabī's numerous mentions in the work, his *ṣalāt fayḍiyya* (Overflowing Benediction), which is considerably longer than the *ṣalāt muṭalsama* yet utilizing the same terminology and expressions, is given by Ibn Ḥarāzīm as proof of the lofty rank of al-Tījānī's own *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. And yet, it should also be mentioned that Ibn al-'Arabī was not the first Sufi mystic to utilize these central Sufi terms in his formulas of *ṣalawāt*. Rather, the earliest such formulation can be found in the celebrated Moroccan mystic 'Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 1228), the teacher of the founder of the Shādhiliyya order Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), whose *ṣalawāt mashīshiyya* are the earliest panegyric to the Prophet that avails itself abundantly of metaphysical motifs. In this light, it is more likely that born Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Tījānī were influenced by Ibn Mashīsh, but since the Andalusian mystic's contributions were a seminal transition in Sufi thought, his utilization of these terms and concepts also probably molded the manner in which al-Tījānī appropriated them.

The uniqueness of al-Tījānī's spiritual lineage has already been mentioned, pertaining to his purported direct interaction with the Prophet, during which he received the various litanies (*ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* and *jawharat al-kamāl*) which were to be recited daily by the devotees.<sup>389</sup> This resulted in a redirection of al-Tījānī's affiliation with the Khalwatiyya toward an entirely new Sufi order, with his name, and a *silsila* (chain of transmission) that surpasses the multi-generational legacies of other brotherhoods, since it claims to emerge directly from the Prophet's presence. This momentous immediate interaction between al-Tījānī and the Prophet, in turn, translates into several distinguishing factors in the formulation of this Sufi mystic's Weltanschauung and the social formation surrounding his saintly career, as will become clear soon.

In this regard, as previously stated, the documented teachings of al-Tījānī reached us in a similar manner to 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh's life and teachings. Much like the latter, the most significant account we have of the former's views is through his student, 'Alī Ḥarāzīm, also available to us only in a single monograph, the *JM*. This highlights a larger symbolic harmony between al-Tījānī and al-Dabbāgh, excluding the former's founding of a Sufi order. First, both Sufi mystics claim direct communication with the Prophet, without going through a multi-generational *silsila* (chain of transmission). Second, the spiritual reality of the Prophet and his lofty rank is a central focus in both figures' divine illumination.

The second, crucial resemblance between al-Tījānī and al-Dabbāgh revolves around their genealogical lineage. While al-Dabbāgh's belonging to *ahl al-bayt* (prophetic household) is

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<sup>389</sup> The routine ritual of reciting these two benedictions eventually came to be known as the *wazīfa* (lit. chore) of the order. This is usually recited daily before sundown or immediately afterwards and consists of the following: reciting a formula of repentance approximately thirty times, followed by *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* fifty times, the testimony of faith *lā ilāha illa Allāh* one hundred times and concluding with twelve iterations of *jawharat al-kamāl*. On Fridays, an Islamic holy day, there is an added portion to the *wazīfa* where the devotees intensely repeat the testimony of faith *la ilāha illa Allāh* during the last 15 minutes before sunset. According to the Islamic lunar calendar, that time marks the transition from Friday to Saturday and is regarded as a special period during which supplications are accepted. This has been observed from attending numerous sessions of the *wazīfa* with multiple Tījānī groups.

established through his being born into a Ḥasanid family, al-Tījānī proclaims this attribution, also through the Ḥasanid line of the patron saint of Fez Moulay Idrīs, “sometime after launching his *ṭarīqa*.”<sup>390</sup> Undoubtedly, such an assertion of a blood relationship to the Prophet mirrors and strengthens the claimant’s ability to directly communicate with the Prophet in an awakened state. However, this also distinguishes al-Tījānī from other Sufi masters in Islamic history. Whereas a mystic’s belonging to the prophetic household is usually a source of his divine illumination and spiritual status, for al-Tījānī, it seems that the opposite is true: the admittance to the prophetic household follows his spiritual encounter with the prophet Muḥammad and develops from that divine illumination.<sup>391</sup>

During my visits to Morocco, I would frequent al-Tījānī’s *maqām* (shrine) as part of an itinerary that also included the mausoleums of Moulay Idrīs II, the patron city of Fez, and ‘Abd

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<sup>390</sup> Jamil Abun-Nasr, “Al-Tidjānī.”

<sup>391</sup> One anecdote, which I heard first-hand from a Mauritanian Shaykh in the Tījāniyya, Muḥammad Zakariyyā al-‘Alawī, highlights the predominant perception of al-Tījānī’s uniqueness, even among the contemporary followers of his *ṭarīqa*. Al-‘Alawī recounts a mythologized account of the origins of al-Tījānī’s lofty rank and widespread reputation among the Sufi notables of Fez. Al-‘Alawī states that when al-Tījānī first moved to this Moroccan sacred city and began spreading his teachings, he was resented by some of the religious scholars who perceived some of his statements as controversial and were – perhaps mainly – upset at the large number of followers who attended his gatherings. Upon complaining to the Moroccan king of this intruding Sufi master who threatens the status quo of Fez, the monarch requested a private meeting with al-Tījānī.

Upon seeing the Sufi mystic and getting acquainted with the breadth of his knowledge, the king was impressed with al-Tījānī’s rank and sympathized with the religious scholars who felt threatened by his presence in Fez. However, the Moroccan monarch wished to give the Sufi mystic an ultimate test of spiritual feat, which – presumably – all before him had failed. The king informed al-Tījānī that one of his royal palaces was possessed by some *jinn* (evil spirit) that has driven mad all those who tried to exorcise it out of the kingly premises. Al-Tījānī was thus ordered to spend a night alone in the palace and try to get rid of the evil spirit. If by the morning he had failed (i.e. driven mad), he would be exiled from Fez.

Al-‘Alawī continues that al-Tījānī spent the night in the king’s private quarters, requesting only a prayer rug, some water and carrying nothing with him save his prayer beads. When morning came, the king sent his guards to check on the Sufi mystic and found him, to their amazement, in the same position as they left him: on his prayer rug making *dhikr* (divine remembrance). They were even more dumbfounded to find out that he seemed to be, still, in a normal mental state. Upon inquiring from him about the fate of the *jinn*, he informed them: “You do not have to worry about the spirit anymore, for he has become Muslim and a follower of my path, the Tījāniyya. I thus ordered him to leave the premises and stop bothering its inhabitants.” When the king heard of this accomplishment, he not only allowed al-Tījānī to continue residing in Fez but granted him the palace in its entirety as his abode and even became a *murīd* (seeker) himself of the Tījāniyya. Al-‘Alawī then concludes by stating that “until this day, all the kings of Morocco are in fact Tījānīs, which you can tell by the distinct style of *tasbīḥ* they carry.” (Personal Communication, 2016).

al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, whose shrine ornaments the well-known cemetery complex of *Bāb al-Futūḥ* (Gate of Openings), directly outside the old city. Much like al-Dabbāgh’s unique status as an *uwaysī* mystic, which projects upon the spatial organization and style of his shrine in *Bāb al-Futūḥ*, a similar architectural embodiment can also be detected in al-Tījānī’s tomb (figure 5), the atmosphere in the vicinity and the way in which it all contrasts with the other tombs in the old city of Fez. Like the other shrines complexed in this old sacred city, a majestically ornamented gate (figure 6) imprinted upon the aging walls of a narrow path lures the passersby to a vast *zāwiya* (lodge) and tomb hiding in a world that seems altogether concealed from the slender alleyway outside it.

As soon as one enters through the ornamented gate, the men are directed to the left while women cross an open veranda to the women’s section on the right. The silence and stillness in the lodge are deafening, excluding the daily sessions when the *wazīfa* is recited. As explained by a visiting devotee, this overwhelming *ḥāl* (spiritual state) of the visitors, whose stillness may be perfectly described by the Arabic proverb: “It is as if birds have built their nests on their heads!” is due to the *jalāl* (majesty) of al-Tījānī himself; a spiritual power that – usually – manifests in constriction and awe in the surrounding environment. Indeed, this can be witnessed in the demeanors of the guests of the entombed Shaykh (figure 7).

Even the daily recitation of the *wazīfa* (figure 8), in the final hours of the afternoon leading up to sunset, allude to the attendees’ conviction that al-Tījānī himself is in attendance. The ceremonious harmony while reciting *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*, *jawharat al-kamāl* or the *shahāda* (testimony of faith) reminds one of an impeccable military parade in its punctuality of rhythm and somber use of melodies. Moreover, these auditory and aesthetic distinctions are neither arbitrary nor unimportant, but rather highly symbolic of the two unique approaches and appropriations of al-

Tījānī's aura.

This North African Tījānī lodge also diverges drastically from the spiritual atmosphere of the other shrines in Fez, most auspiciously Moulay Idrīs's mausoleum. The most visible difference appears as soon as the visitor enters the vicinity of the shrine, whereupon it becomes clear that the separation between men and women in al-Tījānī's lodge is practically non-existent in the vicinity of the city's patron saint, with the only exception being during the five daily prayers. Second, the somber, constricted and awe-inspiring formality of the devotees at al-Tījānī's lodge contrasts with the *baṣṭ* (spiritual expansion) and *jadhḥ* (lit: pull, spiritual ecstasy) of both the visitors and caretakers of Moulay Idrīs.

Thus, whereas the tomb of al-Tījānī is impervious to those who wish to touch it via the surrounding golden fence, a particularly eccentric elder man with a large metal keychain around his neck, containing seemingly hundreds of keys, opens the inner sanctum of Moulay Idrīs's shrine to special visitors, and also demands that the local women and children surrounding the tomb, and seeking the patron saint's aid with various illnesses, go away immediately. Remarkably, this eclectic and raw experience of Sufism at the shrine of Moulay Idrīs resembles the West African Tījānī lodge and shrine of Ibrāhīm Niassa (d. 1975), much more than the final residence of the founder of the Tījāniyya.



Figure 5: (Top left) Tomb of Aḥmad al-Tijānī inside his lodge in the city of Fez.

Figure 6: (Middle left) guests sitting outside the tomb of Aḥmad al-Tijānī.

Figure 7: (Top right) The golden gate into the lodge of Aḥmad al-Tijānī in the city of Fez.

Figure 8: (Bottom) a gathering of murīds inside the lodge for the ritual recitation of waḥīfa.

With the preceding necessary background and portrait of al-Tijānī as a unique early-modern Muslim mystic who established a contemporary *ṭarīqa* unique in its openness to Sufi metaphysics and celebratory rituals, we delve now into this mystic’s portrayal of Jesus in the aforementioned work, *JM*, written by his disciple ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm. A thorough reading of this work reveals a more sophisticated engagement with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh’s thought, as outlined in the *IB*, than what has been alluded to above. First, both Ḥarāzīm and al-Tijānī quote al-Lamaṭī’s teacher as corroborative evidence of the authenticity of al-Tijānī’s divine illumination. In this regard, al-Dabbāgh’s teachings seem to resurface throughout the *JM* as much as Ibn al-‘Arabī and his writings. Second, al-Tijānī utilizes, in a few instances, al-Dabbāgh’s terms that are to be found



verbatim in the *IB*. However, this occurs both in a novel way that distinguishes it from the original setting and without any explicit attribution to al-Dabbāgh.<sup>392</sup>

Third, as pertaining to the presence of Ibn al-‘Arabī in *JM*, it seems that Ḥarāzīm molded an image of his master al-Tījānī that also resembles al-Dabbāgh and the latter’s unique engagement with the Andalusian mystic’s thought. The various ways in which Ibn al-‘Arabī’s concepts and ideas are utilized in the *IB* to, first, establish al-Dabbāgh’s superior legacy and, second, propel the latter as a higher-ranking saint than the Andalusian mystic, is also an apt characterization of al-Tījānī’s engagement with the Andalusian mystic’s Weltanschauung. In *JM*, as in the *IB*, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s honorary title, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master), emerges sometimes to confirm al-Tījānī’s stature, while in some other instances he is under the latter’s critical lens, as a gnostic who committed an error.

Unlike the co-existence of the son of Mary and the Andalusian mystic in the *IB*, which occurred mostly in parallel threads that never crossed, there is one instance in the *JM* where the Andalusian mystic and Christ are actually mentioned in the same excerpt: a literary meeting which alludes to a possible Akbarian influence on al-Tījānī’s perception of Jesus. As in the *IB*, Christ also appears in the *JM* sporadically, in multiple chapters and contexts. In other words, following

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<sup>392</sup> The most explicit instance of this occurs on page 195, wherein Ibn Ḥarāzīm states – in an *Ibrīzian* fashion: “And I asked him [al-Tījānī] about the meaning of His statement: ‘We have given you seven from the pairs and the lofty Qur’an’ [14:87]. He answered by saying that the ‘seven pairs’ are the seven attributes which are the reality of his [Muḥammad’s] inward. [These are] *rūḥ* [spirit], *ādamiyya* [Adamic-hood], *ilm* [knowledge], *nubuwwa* [prophethood], *risāla* [messengerhood], *qabḍ* [spiritual constriction] and *baṣṭ* [spiritual expansion].”

Consider now the following excerpt from the *IB*: “And I asked: ‘What are these seven lights which are referred to as the seven letters?’ He replied: ‘They consist of the letter of prophethood (*nubuwwa*), the letter of apostleship (*risāla*), the letter of Adamhood (*ādamiyya*), the letter of the spirit (*rūḥ*), the letter of science (*ilm*), the letter of contraction (*qabḍ*), and the letter of expansion (*baṣṭ*).’” (page 208, Radtke’s and Kane’s translation).

Since al-Tījānī was born some fifteen years after al-Dabbāgh’s passing, it is highly likely that he was influenced in this, and many other aspects of his thought, by the latter. Most likely, al-Dabbāgh was an inspiration for al-Tījānī not only in terms of his extensive discourse on the Prophetic Reality or secrets of the Qur’an, but also as a role model for the *uwaysī* archetype’s direct experience of God and communication with the prophet Muḥammad.

the portrayals of the Andalusian mystic and al-Dabbāgh, the son of Mary also plays an important role in al-Tījānī's pedagogical strategy of conveying ineffable spiritual realities to his readers.

The first mention of the son of Mary in this work occurs whilst al-Tījānī is narrating one of his meetings with the Prophet in a vision. During this encounter, he states:

I asked him about the *ḥadīth* about our master Jesus: "It has been transmitted from you through two correct narrations. In one of these, you said: 'he will remain for forty after his descent,' while in the other you said: 'he will remain for seven.' Which of these is correct? He said: 'the narration of the seven.'"<sup>393</sup>

Although this might seem like a random question to take place in a mythic meeting between a Muslim saint and the Prophet, it serves a pivotal purpose that transcends Christ's persona as a divine messenger: it attempts to establish al-Tījānī's authority and legitimacy of his *kashf* (unveiling) as a source of legislation in declaring certain *ḥadīth* narrations weak and others valid. Such a view is corroborated by the fact that this specific meeting is preceded by another where the Prophet informs al-Tījānī: "Supplicate and ask God for gnosis or whatever you want and I will say 'amen' for your prayer!"<sup>394</sup> In other words, these visions seek to highlight the superiority of al-Tījānī's divine illumination as an actual source of *tashrī'* (legislation) since it comes directly from the prophetic presence.

The second, also brief, mention of Jesus occurs nearby the reference to Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-Dawr al-A'lā* and the other litanies which were part of al-Tījānī's daily ritual. Among these Ibn Ḥarāzīm also states that:

[Al-Tījānī recited] what was narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, which is 'I bear witness that there is no God but God, singular with no partner and that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger, Jesus is the servant of God, His messenger, son of His servant, His Word which He sent to Mary and a spirit from Him. [I also bear witness] that paradise is truth and hellfire is truth!'<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, 94.

What makes the formula of this supplication significant is the singular mention of Jesus, aside from any other prophet, alongside the prophet of Islam. Perhaps this alludes to al-Tijānī's inheritance from the son of Mary at the particular time period in his life when he received this vision. Although there is no definite proof of this hypothesis, it is worthwhile entertaining such a prospect since the description of Christ given in this supplication is not only thoroughly Qur'ānic, but possibly a reflective mirror of al-Tijānī's own spiritual rank, at least in the imagination of his devotees and readers of the *JM*.

The third mention of Jesus appears in an even more reverential context. Al-Tijānī is given a lofty praise by the Prophet, which the former said occurred "in an awaken state, not while sleeping."<sup>396</sup> The prophet Muḥammad begins by telling al-Tijānī: "You are from the safe ones, and all who see you are also safe; if they die upon faith. Also, all who do good towards you as a service ... all who feed you will enter paradise without judgment or punishment!"<sup>397</sup> After this remarkable grant, the author Ibn Ḥarāzīm interjects to inform the reader that:

After I have written this from what I heard from him ... I ask from the bounty of our master the messenger of God to guarantee me entry into paradise without judgment or punishment ... for me and every father and mother, beginning with those who gave birth to me to the first ones in Islam, paternally and maternally. [I also ask this] for all the descendants of my fathers and mothers, from my immediate parents to the eleventh grandparents. Likewise, for all those who descended from them, from their time until our master Jesus son of Mary will die.<sup>398</sup>

And so, al-Tijānī's *baraka* (grace) breaks through the literary fourth dimension as the author comes to address his audience directly. This textual performance, in turn, allows Ibn Ḥarāzīm to reincarnate his master's unique grant from the Prophet to himself and all those in his circle of

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

acquaintance. More fascinating than this creative act, however, is the presence of Christ and the *JM*, as twin artifacts, in the conversation.

Both the son of Mary, as the embodied Word of God, and *JM*, the textual rendering of the Word's inspiration, serve as references or temporal guarantees of the Prophet's promise. On the one hand, Christ is the uppermost boundary, as the returning Messiah, for the entire progeny of al-Tījānī, Ibn Ḥarāzīm and the descendants of their devotees who will be forgiven. On the other hand, the *JM* emerges as a witness of sorts for all those who have an attachment to al-Tījānī and his disciple, the author of this monograph. This last fact is corroborated by the prophet Muḥammad's response to Ibn Ḥarāzīm, through the medium of his teacher, that "all that [you have asked] in this book, I have guaranteed for you: a guarantee that will not depart from you or them at all; so that both you and all those you have mentioned will be in my company in the loftiest of paradises."<sup>399</sup>

This creative juxtapositioning also provides two important facts about Jesus in al-Tījānī's thought and Ibn Ḥarāzīm's *JM*. First, it alternates the mediative role of Jesus from an embodiment of genealogy to temporality. In other words, the prophetic grant to al-Tījānī entails that those who are related to him are the ones given protection and eternal bliss. The purpose of Jesus in the lifetime of this gift is to dictate its temporal boundary: all descendants of al-Tījānī and his devotees are protected until the return of Christ. Thus, the son of Mary is not the central pivot around which the prophetic grant is dispersed, but he designates its longevity, as an eschatological marker.

Second, in tandem with Christ's role in this narrative, *JM* is the artifact which serves the role of the 'genealogical marker': a timeless trace of both Ibn Ḥarāzīm's and al-Tījānī's saintly presence and spring of their *baraka* that is presented as a database, or record-book that will

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 97.

immortalize the names of all those who have some connection with its author and founder of the Tījāniyya. Like the son of Mary, the *JM* gains a type of life, in this context, that makes it inseparable from the embodied Word of God, Christ; both entities aid al-Tījānī, in different ways, in accomplishing the task of dispersing this prophetic grant on the day of Judgment.<sup>400</sup>

In the next appearance of Jesus in *JM*, we are given more details into al-Tījānī's unique portrayal of the son of Mary. This occurs whilst the latter is discussing the impossibility of a divine prophet or messenger 'carrying the burdens' of prophethood before reaching forty years of age:

No one has power to carry the burdens of that manifestation, due to what human nature has been subjected to of extreme weakness, until they reach forty years of age ... This is also why no one was ever able to prophesize prior to reaching the age of forty.

As for our master Jesus and his being a prophet before age forty, (our answer) is that he was not completely human. Rather, he was composed of two halves: human and spiritual. This is because he was formed from the breath of the trustworthy spirit in this pudendum of his mother. Thus, the weakness of human beings in him became a strength until he was even stronger than other prophets ...

If you say: it entails, then, that he [Jesus] was stronger than him [Muḥammad], the answer is that he was not stronger than him. However, since he [Muḥammad] was completely human, from both sides father and mother, he obtained the weakness of humans but was given atop it the divine power unique to him, which far surpasses the power of Jesus and other than him.<sup>401</sup>

This selection further highlights the doctrinal affinity between the founder of the Tījāniyya and Ibn al-ʿArabī since the latter also emphasizes the son of Mary's bifurcated composition, between body and spirit. Of course, while the Greatest Master is concerned with the effects of this unique

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<sup>400</sup> Indeed, from this point of view, this prophetic grant and the role of *JM* in its dispersal is reminiscent of a dialogue between ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), mentioned by al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. It narrates an incident where ʿUmar kissed the black stone at the Kaʿba while addressing it: "I know that you are a rock that neither harms nor benefits. Had I not seen the messenger of God, prayers and salutations be upon him, kissing you, I would not have done so." Then, ʿAlī says to him: "Indeed, it does harm and benefit!" ʿUmar said: "How so?" to which ʿAlī responded: "Indeed, when God, may He be exalted, took the covenant from the descendants of Adam, He wrote it in a book and fed it to this rock. Thus, it [the black stone] will testify for believers for their trustworthiness and against disbelievers for their denial." (Book 1, page 363)

<sup>401</sup> Ibid, 170-171.

physiology of Jesus on his miracle performance, al-Tījānī is interested in another temporal aspect of this Christic liminality: the ability it provides for one to receive revelation at a young age.

In another excerpt, al-Tījānī reiterates this exact same vision of Jesus, but this time as pertaining to the exclusivity of prophethood to males. Creatively, al-Tījānī addresses - through the tongue of Ibn Ḥarāzīm – a hypothetical counter-argument to women’s inability to hold this status, using the example of Christ and his creation “solely from the water of a female”:

How can Jesus receive prophethood ... how could he bear the weight of the divine presence? (We say): indeed, the power of malehood became complete in him through the breath of the holy spirit in the pudendum of his mother. This breath was representative of God’s [own breath] since it occurred via the divine command. There was no choice in the affair for the [holy] spirit. Thus, through that breath the perfections of divine power flowed, just as they permeated through Adam.

This is the reason for striking of resemblance between them in the verse: “Indeed, the example of Jesus in the sight of God is like Adam” [3:59].<sup>402</sup>

Therefore, the uniqueness of Christ, according to al-Tījānī, resides not only in his ability to receive revelation/prophethood before the age of forty, but also in his capacity to hold that office whilst obtaining his *bashariyya* (humanness) solely from his mother, Mary. In this regard, al-Tījānī adds an important detail to his explanation from the previous excerpt: the breath blown in Mary from the holy spirit was, by proxy, God’s own breath. In this way, al-Tījānī provides a thorough explanation for the secret of Christ’s ‘divine power.’<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>403</sup> It is also interesting that al-Tījānī uses the Qur’anic verse comparing Jesus with Adam as proof of the completion of divine power in both figures. For it should be remembered, per our discussion in chapter 3, that Ibn al-‘Arabī also references this verse, however as evidence for these two prophets’ similar unique bodily compositions: the first born from a mother without a father, while the latter had no father nor mother. Moreover, the Andalusian mystic posits this bodily uniqueness as the very reason for Adam’s and the son of Mary’s respectively opening and closing the cycle of prophets prior to the historical appearance of Muḥammad.

In the second-to-last excerpt containing a mention of Jesus in the *JM*, al-Tijānī returns to a motif predominant in al-Dabbāgh’s divine illumination, as highlighted in the *IB*: the enigmatic language of the spiritual realm:

All of the [disconnected] letters are ancient and eternal via the eternity of the [divine] essence. Moreover, there is nothing in our language that can encompass its eternity. Indeed, what is written through our bodies and envisioned in our imagination is not these letters that we are describing. Rather, these *ḥurūf qudsiyya* [holy letters] are indicated and alluded to by these uttered, bodily and imaginal letters.

For had it not been for these holy letters, one would not have come to know the form of speech, nor would one part of it have been distinguished from the other; nor would we have come to know its meanings. Indeed, distinction comes through letters. An instance of this is His statement: “*Yā ‘Īsā ibn Maryam* [Oh Jesus son of Mary]” [5:112], which is opposing His other statement, may He be exalted: “*Yā Iblīs mā laka allā takūna ma ‘a-l-sājidīn* [Oh Iblīs, why are not among those who prostrate]?” [14:32].

Thus, the difference between *Iblīs* and *‘Īsā* became vivid through the letters, and had it not been for these letters, then each of them [Jesus and Iblīs] would have sustained the other.<sup>404</sup>

This is a truly remarkable creative mythologization of language that is comparable to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own unique engagement with letters and etymology. Whereas al-Dabbāgh merely explores the metaphysical root of these ‘holy letters,’ which he describes as instances of *suryāniyya*, al-Tijānī follows in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s footsteps and engages this language of the spiritual realm more intimately in order to explore its ontological ramifications.

Just as the Andalusian mystic posits letters and words as ‘nations and tribes’; al-Tijānī also finds the relationship, and difference, between letters to be an indication of the named personas alluded to by the names. It is interesting, however, that al-Tijānī chooses to compare *‘Īsā* with *Iblīs* and not *Mūsā*, for instance. For not only is Iblīs (Satan) an antithetical figure to Christ, but Moses is more relatable to the son of Mary both bodily and linguistically. In the first sense, both these

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 192.

figures are divine prophets and messengers. In the second, the Arabic calligraphy of Jesus (عيسى) resembles Moses' (موسى) more than Iblīs' (إبليس).

The last selection pertaining to Christ in the *JM* brings us back to a motif common in all the various discussions on Jesus we have investigated so far, most prominently Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, namely, *walāya* (sainthood) and the crucial role the son of Mary plays in the social and historical reality of this concept, during his first and second comings:

*Walāya* [sainthood] is both *‘amma* [general] and *khāṣṣa* [specific]. As for the general one: it is from Adam until Jesus. As for the specific: it is from the time of the master of existence [Muḥammad] until the [time of the] seal.

What is intended by the specific sainthood is that it refers to the one who has gained the three hundred characteristics of the Real, in their utmost perfection ... This is specific for the master of existence and whoever inherits from him from the *aqṭāb* [poles] of this noble community, until the time of the seal ... [I, Ibn Ḥarāzīm say that] He [al-Tījānī] attributed this [explanation] to [Ibn al-‘Arabī] al-Ḥātimī.

Then he [al-Tījānī] said: “It is not necessary for whoever has this special rank, of being attributed with these manners to the level of perfection, to be higher than [saints] other than them in every way possible. Rather, it may occur that someone who has not gained these [characteristics] to be in a loftier status.” I [Ibn Ḥarāzīm] believe he [al-Tījānī] is referring to himself here and some of the *akābir* [great ones]. For the master of existence informed him that his rank is higher than all the others.<sup>405</sup>

The son of Mary appears in yet another novel narrative of *walāya* by a Sufi mystic, albeit a story of sainthood and lofty ranks that is thoroughly Akbarian in content and style, as al-Tījānī humbly indicates in his attribution.

And yet, al-Tījānī sets himself apart from the Andalusian mystic, who originally expounded upon this formulation of *walāya* by providing an altogether different meaning for the ‘general’ and ‘specific’ sainthood. As discussed previously in chapter 3, Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid, 286.



extensively about *khatm al-walāya al-‘amma* (seal of universal sainthood) and *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (seal of Muḥammadan sainthood). He also assigns the former rank to Jesus and latter to himself. The difference between these two types essentially revolves around the *wirātha* (spiritual inheritance) that a particular saint has. As for ‘universal’ sainthood, it indicates an inheritance from any prophet, excluding a direct connection to the Prophet.

Taking this original interpretation by Ibn al-‘Arabī into consideration, it is interesting to note the following about al-Tījānī’s reformulation: First, the latter changes the temporal organization of both the general and specific sainthood. In the case of the *walāya ‘amma*, it no longer extends until the second coming of Jesus, but rather halts with the historical appearance of the prophet Muḥammad. As for the *walāya khāṣṣa*, al-Tījānī seems to have in mind a similar idea as that presented by Ibn al-‘Arabī, except that the former alludes to the possibility of only one seal who will culminate the narrative of sainthood in human history.

Second, unlike Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Tījānī does not grant Jesus any specific rank as a seal. Given that the former alludes to the existence of only one seal, it is highly likely that he regards himself as someone who has been granted this rank through divine providence. Third, the founder of the Tījāniyya presents a different explanation for the *walāya khāṣṣa* than that provided by the Andalusian mystic. In contrast to the Akbarian notion of prophetic inheritance, al-Tījānī presents *al-akhlāq al-ilāhiyya* (divine character traits) as the litmus test for gauging a saint’s admittance into a special group of saints. One may posit here a parallel between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s diverse array of prophetic dispositions, knowledges and these divine mannerisms. In this case, becoming an Akbarian Muḥammadan saint, and encompassing all the various prophetic inheritances, is equivalent to becoming a representative of al-Tījānī’s *walāya khāṣṣa*, and adopting all three hundred divine characteristics.

And yet, per this last distinction between these two approaches to *walāya*, al-Tījānī seemingly restricts the rank of *walāya khāṣṣa* to only the Prophet and the *aqṭāb* (poles) (i.e. highest-ranking saints); whereas the Andalusian mystic’s only limitation of this type of sainthood is temporal, halting it after the coming of the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood. The last paragraph provides us with a fifth difference between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s and al-Tījānī’s perception of sainthood. Creatively, the Sufi master in the *JM* posits an ambiguous possibility for a rank altogether higher than the *walāya khāṣṣa*. Given that he allocates this type of sainthood only to the Prophet and the *aqṭāb*, it is highly unlikely that al-Tījānī would perceive his unique station as higher than that of the prophet Muḥammad, but certainly loftier than that of the *aqṭāb*.

With this, we conclude our discussion of Jesus in *JM* and transition to the mentions of Ibn al-‘Arabī in this work. The first of these appearances is particularly illuminating since it hosts both the Andalusian mystic and al-Dabbāgh in a discussion on *al-asmā’ al-‘āliya* (lofty divine names), a term which al-Tījānī shows he has inherited from these two mystics:

Then he was asked about what is intended by the *ism khāṣṣ bihi* [the name specific to him].<sup>406</sup> is it the greatest [name] or other than it? He said: “Not [that name], but other than it. This is because each of God’s creations has a name from *al-asmā’ al-‘āliya* [the lofty names]. This is the name through which its [each creation’s] essence is sustained.”

It also has an *ism nāzil* [descending name], which distinguishes it from others [created things]. *Al-Shaykh al-Akbar* [The Greatest Master] said regarding the saying of God: “And He taught Adam all the names” [2:31] that “What is intended is not what the exegetes have explained, that if it were not for this [God teaching Adam the names], Adam would not have had any special rank. Rather, what is intended by *al-asmā’ al-‘āliya* is that there is no created thing in the universe save that it has a name, according to its [created thing] rank in greatness, and through that name does God establish that thing.”

The author of the *Ibrīz* [al-Lamaṭī] said, transmitting from his Shaykh regarding God’s statement: “And He taught Adam all the names” that “what is intended with

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<sup>406</sup> ‘Him’ here refers to *ṣāhib al-waqt* (the master of the age), or the pole of the time, which al-Tījānī discusses immediately prior to this excerpt.

these names are *al-asmā' al-'āliya* [lofty names], not *asmā' nāzila* [descending names]. For every created thing has a lofty and descending name. The descending name is the one that conveys the sense of the named in its entirety, while the lofty name is the one that conveys the origin of the named, from what it was created and to what beneficial destination is it intended. [For instance], what are the various uses of *al-Fās* [axe] and how does the blacksmith make it? From simply hearing its utterance [lofty name], all these exoteric and esoteric knowledges concerning the axe are known.”<sup>407</sup>

Al-Tījānī provides a fascinating genealogy of the development of God’s greatest name from Ibn al-‘Arabī to al-Dabbāgh and finally settling in al-Tījānī’s own Weltanschauung. The Sufi master in *JM* also eloquently situates this term in a narrative wherein the Andalusian mystic provides the foundational definition for *al-asmā' al-'āliya*, as divine names allocated to created things. Thenceforth, al-Dabbāgh further enriches this characterization by distinguishing between an object’s lofty and descending names. Finally, al-Tījānī himself arrives as *misk al-khitām* (the musk of culmination) who ‘seals’ the affair and dispels any confusion, by establishing the difference between *al-ism al-'ālī* [the lofty name] and *al-ism al-a'zam* [the greatest name]; the latter pertaining to the figure of *ṣāhib al-waqt* [master of the age].

Ibn al-‘Arabī also emerges in a chapter where Ḥarāzīm explains his master’s daily rituals, including his recitation of *awrād* (litanies) and *ṣalawāt* (benedictions upon the Prophet). From among these, the author states that “His his litanies include *al-Dawr al-A'lā* [the loftiest cycle/stage] for the Greatest Master and Red Sulfur, Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātīmī.”<sup>408</sup> Indeed, the Andalusian mystic appears here in a ceremonious stature, as the author of a powerful *ruqya* (prayer for protection), *al-Dawr al-A'lā*, which – presumably – afforded al-Tījānī himself some spiritual

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<sup>407</sup> ‘Alī b. Ḥarāzīm, *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī*, 57. It is worthwhile noting that al-Dabbāgh’s use of *Fās* (axe) as an example in the *IB* to explain the meaning of the lofty and descending names is hardly coincidental; for this same term is also the Arabic homonym for the sacred Moroccan city of his residence, Fez. Therefore, the author most probably had a deeper esoteric intention behind questions like: “What are the various uses of *al-Fās* [Fez] and how does the blacksmith make it?”

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

fortification. The acknowledgment of this grant from Ibn al-‘Arabī is evident in the compounded honorific, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar wa-l-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar* (The Greatest Master and Red Sulfur).<sup>409</sup>

The third mention appears in this same chapter, concerning al-Tījānī’s various litanies and rituals. This time, the Greatest Master appears in a discussion of the Prophet’s reality, *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*, which al-Tījānī contends that no saint, much less any prophet or messenger, can grasp or fully understand:

It is just as the Shaykh, *mawlānā* [our guardian/master], ‘Abd al-Salām [b. Mashīsh] said in his *ṣalāt*: “And surrounding him [the prophet], comprehensions have dwindled. Thus, none of us, first or last, have obtained understanding of him.” About this [subject] also, Uways al-Qaranī, said to our master ‘Umar and our master ‘Alī: “You have not seen anything of the messenger of God save his shadow,” to which they responded: “Not even Ibn Abī Quḥāfa [Abū Bakr]?” He said; “Not even Ibn Abī Quḥāfa.” ...

The Greatest Master also said in his *ṣalāt*: “The white pearl from which was formed the red ruby.” What he [Ibn al-‘Arabī] intends with the ‘white pearl’ here is *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* [Muḥammadan Reality], while the ‘red ruby’ is the entire world’s existence. As for what the Shaykh, *mawlānā*, ‘Abd al-Qādir alluded to in his poem with his statement: “Upon the ‘white pearl’ is our meeting,” this is the pearl that existed before the creation of the heavens and earths. Then, He turned it into water; whence the waves of the water twisted and turned for a generation. In every generation was a thousand centuries; in every century a thousand years, within which there were a thousand days. In every day, a thousand hours and in every hour the entire lifetime of this world seventy thousand times ... Then, He molded it into an earth and created the seven heavens.<sup>410</sup>

Here, as in the excerpt above, al-Tījānī masterfully delineates a genealogy of the notion of *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* within which Ibn al-‘Arabī appears as an essential link. This time, however, the Greatest Master appears between two other Sufī masters, ‘Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166).<sup>411</sup> Although al-Tījānī’s own views on the Prophet’s spiritual

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<sup>409</sup> This is significant since Ḥarāzīm places this *ruqya* between the mentions of al-Tījānī’s other, most important, litanies. These include the *shahāda* (testimony of faith) and the formula for *istighfār* (seeking forgiveness) of al-Khaḍir.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>411</sup> Although the presence of mystics central in the Shādhiliyya brotherhood, such as Ibn Mashīsh, was not discussed above, it merits a brief mention here. Indeed, not only Ibn Mashīsh, but also mentions of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī are

reality is absent from this excerpt, his presence as narrator is evident, for he has arranged the various explanations by Ibn Mashīsh, Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Jīlānī to present a journey from the surface to the depths of the Muḥammadan reality. Thus, whereas Ibn Mashīsh simply alludes to the imperviousness of the *ḥaqīqa* with his statement, “and surrounding him, comprehensions have dwindled,” Ibn al-‘Arabī introduces the imagery of the white pearl and the red ruby, as representations of the Prophet’s intimate life-giving power to the universe. Finally, al-Jīlānī – whose historical appearance predates Ibn al-‘Arabī yet postdates him in this narrative – situates these Akbarian metaphors as ontological landmarks in a saint’s journey.

In another performance of becoming *misk al-khitām* (musk of the seal), al-Tījānī offers his own detailed insight into the role of the Muḥammadan reality in the grand myth of creation, after surveying what his predecessors Ibn Mashīsh, Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Jīlānī have already said about the Prophet’s spiritual rank. In this way, the master of the *JM* conclusively appears as a saintly authority and essential link in a line of *walāya* that includes mystics who are prominent not only in their own right, but also and more importantly, foundational figures in the largest Sufi brotherhoods of his time: the Shādhiliyya, the Qādiriyya and Ibn al-‘Arabī himself, whose influence and thought permeated these groups and many others.

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found throughout *JM* multiple times and in various chapters and contexts. In all these various instances, the Shādhilī saints are mentioned with the highest regard, even escaping the polemical criticism which Ibn al-‘Arabī receives from al-Tījānī at one point in the monograph. In one particular excerpt, al-Tījānī even alludes to the fact that al-Mursī was the *quṭb al-aqtāb* (pole of poles) of his time. He states this whilst responding to a question regarding the meaning of al-Mursī’s saying that “for forty years, I have not been veiled from God for even the blink of an eye, and if the messenger of God, God’s prayers and peace be upon him, were to be veiled from me for the blink of an eye, I would no longer consider myself from the Muslims.” Al-Tījānī’s response is that “This special rank is not for al-Mursī alone, but it is for *quṭb al-aqtāb* [the pole of poles] in every age; from the moment they reside upon the throne of *quṭbāniyya* [polehood], there is no veil even between them and the messenger of God, prayers and peace be upon him.” (page 276).

Taking this intimate engagement with the Shādhiliyya in the *JM*, we have nonetheless chosen to highlight the work’s similarity to the *IB* for two main reasons: 1) the style and organization of *JM* is closer to the *IB* than any work in the Shādhiliyya and 2) the *uwaysī* character of al-Dabbāgh finds a more intimate reincarnation in al-Tījānī’s direct communication with the Prophet.

We conclude our discussion of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s presence in *JM* with a final mention where al-Tījānī reprimands the Greatest Master and another Sufi mystic, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1428), for revealing a divine secret in their writings:

Thus, *al-kuffār* [the disbelievers] have not left [the circle] of His love. However, this is in reference to His *al-maḥabba al-‘amma* [general love], for they have no share in the [*al-maḥabba*] *al-khāṣṣa* [special love], through which one is lifted to loftier ranks and exalted. As for the general love, they are indeed within its boundaries and their ultimate destination and return is to it.

Moreover, this will happen in a way which it is impermissible to mention outwardly, since only *al-akābir* [the great ones] can comprehend it. It should be kept under its cover, not to be discussed with *ahl al-zāhir* [the people of exotericism], because their intellects cannot accept it. Rather, He revealed it only to *al-khāṣṣa* [the special ones] through *al-fayḍ al-ilāhī* [the divine flood]. Nevertheless, the Greatest Master and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī both sang many melodies from this affair and were, therefore, struck with beatings and stupefaction as a punishment for them. This is because they have revealed something from *al-‘ilm al-makhzūn* [hidden knowledge].<sup>412</sup>

Taking into consideration al-Tījānī’s overall openness to discussing Sufi metaphysics throughout this work, it is hardly possible that his reprimand of Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Jīlī here is motivated by mere reticent conservatism. Rather, it is more probable that al-Tījānī is following in al-Dabbāgh’s footsteps, since the latter also admonished the Andalusian mystic for declaring that angels do not bring commands and prohibitions to saints, only prophets. The ultimate objective behind al-Dabbāgh’s and al-Tījānī’s reprimand here is to establish themselves as more complete and perfect instances of *walāya* than that which emerged through Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Jīlī and all other Sufi mystics who came before them.

This concludes our investigation of the portrayal of Jesus in Aḥmad al-Tījānī’s teachings. The presence of the son of Mary in *JM*, thoroughly interweaved within al-Tījānī’s larger Weltanschauung, molds our understanding of the latter as a Sufi master who appears to be a

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 135.

product of the heritage of those mystics before him, most auspiciously Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Dabbāgh. In this regard, al-Tījānī provides a novel synthesis of this rich intellectual heritage, its concepts and motifs. All the while, the son of Mary emerges in this mystic’s divine illumination as a conglomerate of the Akbarian and Dabbāghian portraits of Jesus we have seen in this research.

### Conclusion

In the case of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh, his student, al-Lamaṭī, discusses Christ in a series of questions that aim to establish the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad. Most prominently, this appears in the context of miracle performance within which al-Dabbāgh proclaims that the miracles of all prophets, including Jesus, are granted to *ahl al-taṣarruf* (people with the power of free disposal) from the Muḥammadan community. Other mentions include the unique spiritual stations he has inherited from the prophet Muḥammad’s reality, including the light of *siyāḥa* (constant travel) and the ability to recite God’s greatest name fourteen times a day.

Meanwhile, Aḥmad al-Tījānī situates the son of Mary in a creative mystical kaleidoscope reminiscent of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s and al-Dabbāgh’s groundbreaking portrayals of Christ. This is evident not only in the direct references al-Tījānī makes to both these mystics’ works, but also in the wide-ranging contexts in which he appropriates the son of Mary’s image. These include a personal conversation with the Prophet during which al-Tījānī requests clarification about Christ’s residence on earth after his second coming, a discussion on Qur’anic linguistics by comparing the name of Jesus, *‘Īsā*, with Satan, *Iblīs*, and lastly, a thorough discourse on the difference between the Prophet’s and Christ’s unique composition, wherein the latter’s ability to receive divine revelation and prophethood, prior to age forty, is subsumed within the former’s unmatched superiority; a phenomenon which al-Tījānī explains as a result of ‘divine power.’

These various images of Jesus return us to the visual diagram utilized in chapters 3 and 4, found below, depicting a recurring Akbarian motif: the importance of Christ's liminality between the twin poles of unseen and seen. Whether it is the transcendent divine appearance in a finite cosmos, tension between natural decomposition and eternal life of light or permeation of the Muḥammadan reality within [the receptacles] of Muḥammadan saints, both Sufi mystics in this chapter perceive the son of Mary as some sort of mediator. Most importantly, Christ's ability to perform this role is situated within his embodiment of this liminality, between the body and spirit.

This Christic vertical liminality between the physical and metaphysical is paralleled by a temporal movement in which the son of Mary appears in both his historical capacity, as a divine messenger in the first coming, and in his eschatological capacity as a Muḥammadan saint and Messiah in the second coming. Thenceforth, in the embodied presence of Sufi mystics like al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī, who engage these various roles and themselves represent a mirror-image of the Muḥammadan reality, these dimensions of Jesus intersect in an altogether new *barzakh*, where history and social practice meet meta-history and mystical mythology.

Beyond these boundaries of the horizontal and vertical *crossings* and *dwellings*, there are also the different mediums through which movement takes place in these settings. The most obvious mode in which this takes place is the Jesus-like, *barzakhī* body. This is an archetypal corporeal entity and not necessarily tied to the historical figure of Christ. Rather, it receives inspiration from the vertical metaphysical instance of the son of Mary who can be reincarnated within any Sufi saint, through the Muḥammadan reality. As a result, these Muslim mystics become, like Jesus, channels that connect the subtle realm of spirits with dense material sphere of bodies.



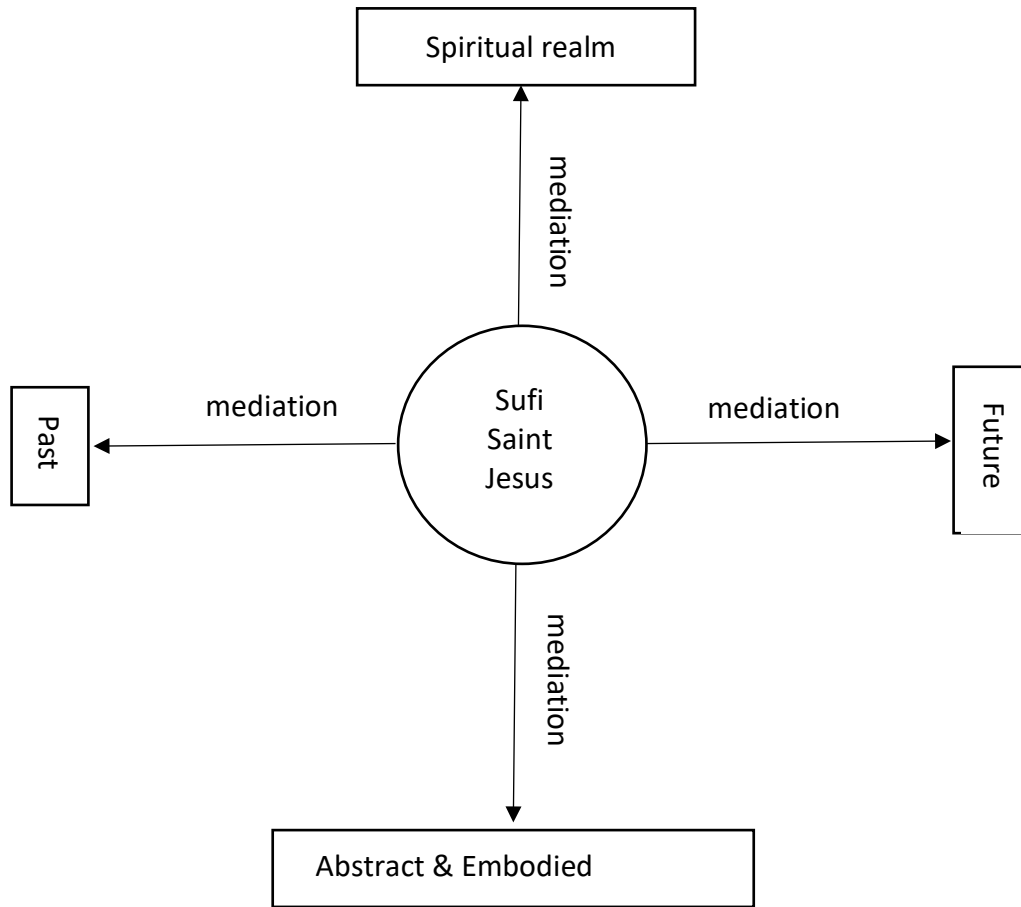


Figure 9: Christ's mediations in the writings of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh and Aḥmad al-Tijānī

Transitioning to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s presence in the teachings of al-Dabbāgh and al-Tijānī, the former’s divine illumination, as surveyed in the *IB*, presents us with an extensive and colorful engagement with Ibn al-‘Arabī. The relationship this unique Sufi mystic had with his predecessor fluctuates between two disparate trends. On the one hand al-Lamaṭī, al-Dabbāgh’s disciple and the narrator of the *IB*, presents the Andalusian mystic as an authenticating catalyst for his master’s direct – *uwaysī* – connection to God and the Prophet. On the other hand, the last excerpt where Ibn al-‘Arabī is mentioned, the Andalusian mystic appears to have a lower rank than al-Dabbāgh since he did not experience the full array of angelic revelation as the latter did. And so, al-Shaykh al-Akbar is subsumed within al-Dabbāgh’s *Weltanschauung* as both a reference and a starting point for the full flowering of the latter’s divine illumination.

Ibn al-‘Arabī also appears extensively in the Weltanschauung of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Here, the Andalusian mystic plays a similar role as in ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh’s teachings, adumbrated by the latter’s disciple al-Lamaṭī in the *IB*. This fact, alongside the detail that al-Tijānī’s teachings, like al-Dabbāgh’s, are presented to the reader through a second-hand experience, that of al-Tijānī’s disciple Ibn Ḥarāzīm, highlights the affinity between the founder of the Tijāniyya and his North African contemporary. In both cases, the Andalusian mystic appears as a simultaneous catalyst for establishing each mystic’s authenticity/superiority and as a pedestal for propelling him above and beyond Ibn al-‘Arabī’s rank, usually through censure or criticism.

Altogether, Jesus and Ibn al-‘Arabī emerge in the teachings of these two Sufi mystics as conduits who facilitate the accomplishment of a central objective: to convey the vastness of divine generosity. As always, however, behind the son of Mary and the Andalusian mystic resides the spirit of *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan reality), the primordial spirit of the Prophet of Islam, who is at once the mediator between God and His creation, prophets and mystics or saints and their devotees. Undoubtedly, behind the loftiest metaphysical expositions on Jesus, it is this ‘Muḥammadology’ which brings together the entire Sufi narrative on the son of Mary, just as the *Logos* underpins the story of creation.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

I would like to begin this final chapter with an ethnographic vignette that, I believe, eloquently performs the depictions and engagements with Jesus we have seen throughout this research. This observation emerges from my visitations to the Sufi lodge of the Naqshbandiyya Ḥaqqāniyya brotherhood in Michigan, led by the prominent Sufi mystic Shaykh Muḥammad Hishām Qabbānī.<sup>413</sup> While the guide was having dinner with some of the disciples, one of the *murīds* requests permission to ask the Shaykh a personal question. Upon receiving an affirmation from his teacher, the student relates a rather remarkable experience which occurred to him a few days beforehand.

On a certain Friday, the narrator was beginning to make *wuḍūʿ* (ablution) prior to performing the obligatory *ʿaṣr* (afternoon) prayer. Just as he was about to begin washing his hands, a *khāṭir* (inner voice/premonition) came to him and said: “You are in need of knowing your master Jesus.” Somewhat puzzled, the narrator decided to finish making his *wuḍūʿ*. Upon completion, the *khāṭir* continued by advising the disciple: “If you want to know *ʿĪsā*, then you should send *ṣalawāt* [benedictions] upon him! ... Use this formula: *allāhumma ṣallī ʿalā sayyidinā Muḥammad abī-l-batūl, allāhumma ṣallī ʿalā sayyidinā ʿĪsā ibn al-batūl* [My Lord! send your prayers upon our master Muḥammad, the father of Fāṭima the chaste; My Lord! send your prayers upon our master Jesus the son of Mary the chaste!?”].

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<sup>413</sup> Henceforth Hisham Kabbani.

Upon hearing this story, Shaykh Kabbani provides a nuanced interpretation of the occurrence and pragmatic course of action to benefit from it:

This is a *wārid ḥaqīqī* [true heavenly arrival] because the name of the Prophet [Muḥammad] is included in the *ṣalawāt* formula; if it was not there, this formula would be tantamount to *shirk* [polytheism], spiritually.

Also, this *wārid* came to you from the angel assigned to help and perform tasks for *sayyidinā* ʿĪsā, not the latter himself. Otherwise, if it had been *sayyidinā* ʿĪsā himself who had come, you would not have been able to handle it. It would have been too much energy for you to carry.

This *ṣalawāt*, if you recite it ten times a day, will take you to the heaven which *sayyidinā* ʿĪsā was raised to ... take us with you!<sup>414</sup>

The three, rather terse, components of this response encompass the crucial role of a Sufi guide, like Shaykh Kabbani, as someone who is a source of *maʿrifa* (esoteric mystical knowledge) and *tarbiya* (self-discipline), through which a disciple is able to put this gnosis into a ritually applied routine.

First, the Sufi guide establishes the authenticity of his disciple's experience, using some concrete pieces of evidence from the narrative itself. There seem to be two important premises operating within the preamble of the Shaykh's response: 1) affirming the disciple's experience instills a sense of confidence in them, which in turn fortifies their conviction in the authenticity of the *ṭarīqa* and their connection to the Shaykh and 2) this episode also emphasizes, for the disciple who experienced this event, the sophisticated nature of the spiritual realm and the interaction between angels, or spirits of prophets, and human beings. In this regard, simply receiving a *wārid* from this otherworldly realm does not necessitate its validity. Rather, one must gauge the content

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<sup>414</sup> Hisham Kabbani, personal communication, November 2015.

and manner of the *khāṭir* and determine whether it falls within the boundaries of Islam (i.e. *sharī‘a*) or *īmān* (articles of faith/belief).

In the second component of the response, Shaykh Kabbani elaborates upon another nuance of the experience, albeit one that is less related to the *sharī‘ī* (law-oriented) or theological aspects of Islam and more pertinent to *ihsān* (etiquettes of Sufism and perfective beauty). Here, the danger that could have possibly emerged from this mystical occurrence does not necessarily pertain to the identity of the voice behind the *khāṭir* which conveyed the advice to the disciple. By distinguishing between Jesus and *al-malak al-muwakkal bi-khidmatihī* (the angel tasked with serving or performing tasks for him), Shaykh Kabbani is revealing an aspect of *‘ilm al-ghayb* only knowable by saints who have witnessed and interacted with this realm.

In the final short statement of his response, the Shaykh provides both a pragmatic *wird* (litany) for the disciple to apply and a lesson on humility from a Sufi teacher to his student. By assigning a small number of repetitions, only ten, the Sufi guide prudently gives this *murīd* (seeker) a task he can handle. Also, through the grace of the Shaykh, the student will be able to attain the same amount of *baraka* (grace) as if they had done hundreds, or even thousands, of this *wird* daily.<sup>415</sup> The nature of this reward is revealed in the last few words and alludes to the disciple possibly treading a path of *‘īṣawī* inheritance.

Of course, Shaykh Kabbani’s statement to the disciple, that reciting this formula of *ṣalawāt* will elevate the latter to the heaven of Jesus, is not part of the mystical experience itself, but rather an addition by the Sufi guide. This could possibly mean that Shaykh Kabbani is revealing a secret

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<sup>415</sup> The notion that the Shaykh assigns his disciples a small *wird* (litany) while ‘carrying’ the burdens of the shortcomings in their worship, so that they can still receive a full reward – or more –, is a recurring motif in Shaykh Kabbani’s *ṣuḥbas*.

inherent in this specific formula of benediction. Or, more likely, the Naqshbandī guide appended this reward spontaneously to the disciple’s narrative. Such a distinction is imperative, for it highlights that a disciple’s mystical experience, such as this one, only becomes meaningful and efficacious once it has been authenticated and ‘activated’ through the pragmatism and reward of a Sufi guide.

In turn, the Shaykh’s final request that the disciple take his guide with him on this celestial journey both emphasizes the former’s humility and also includes an indirect teaching to his student on the proper *adab* necessary when one is given a divine gift, such as this mystical experience.<sup>416</sup> This statement also conveys the exalted nature of the spiritual realm, such that reaching the heavenly sphere where Jesus resides is a lofty goal even for a Sufi guide like Shaykh Kabbani. Be that as it may, it was clear from this incident, and many others, that these humble aphorisms by this Naqshbandī guide ultimately augmented his persona in his disciples’ perception: they are convinced that any divine gift which they received came through his *baraka* (grace) and spiritual channel.<sup>417</sup>

In many ways, this fascinating interaction between a present-day Sufi guide and one of his disciples, with the son of Mary as the center of attention, reiterates the two sets of mediations we have come across throughout the previous chapters. On the one hand, the communication from Christ, through his guardian angel, to the disciple connects multiple historical epochs (i.e. horizontal mediation): the time of Jesus himself and his mother Mary, the prophet Muḥammad and

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<sup>416</sup> In this regard, Sufi guides like Shaykh Kabbani often quote the proverbial advice: “The righteous vision *tasurr wa lā taghurr* [makes one happy but not arrogant]!”

<sup>417</sup> Shaykh Kabbani himself has often conveyed this fact, indirectly, by creatively comparing *awliyā’ Allāh* (God’s saints) to ‘electricity transformers.’ This is stated clearly in the *ṣuḥba*, aptly titled, “Awliyā’ are Transformers”: “That’s why awliyā’ullāh are like transformers. They get electricity from the main station and it goes through a transformer; the electricity comes at a very high voltage and transformers bring it down to light the house. You cannot get it directly from the main energy source of electricity or the whole house will burn, and all the wires will go off. We are wired!”

his daughter Fāṭima and the student's own contemporary reality. On the other hand, this very act of communication from the spiritual realm where Jesus and his guardian angel reside connects the vertical poles of the physical and the metaphysical. It also transforms the bodily ritual of ablution into a sacred window into the unseen.

Of course, Shaykh Kabbani's role in this narrative also allows him to traverse the horizontal and vertical dimensions of time and space, respectively. In the first instance, the Sufi guide provides a sanctification for the disciple's encounter from the past in a such a way that it becomes a meaningful trajectory for their future *sulūk* (self-discipline). In the second instance, there are the myriad acts of translation during which Shaykh Kabbani transforms the various components of this vision into a practical regimen. Even his delineation between the source of this vision as originating from the guardian angel of Jesus, as opposed to the prophet himself, is transformed into the bodily experience of energy. In culmination, the Sufi guide humbly places himself as part of his disciple's journey as the latter traverses the heavens upward towards the residence of Christ.

Revisiting the visual diagram that we introduced in chapter 3, and to which we append now Tweed's *crossings* and *dwelling*s (see figure 10 below), allows us to appreciate the extent to which Christ's unique physiology and twin historical and eschatological roles have enriched his portrayal in Sufi writings, beginning – most auspiciously – with Ibn al-ʿArabī and extending until our present time. Most importantly, these unique aspects of the son of Mary have granted the ability to perform horizontal and vertical mediations not only to his own mythic persona but also to the Sufi guides who channel, invoke and engage his life and mission in their writings and teaching sessions.

With this in mind, we transition to discussing the results of the preceding analyses regarding the presence of Jesus in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and later Sufism. As outlined in the introductory chapter, we will utilize the set of five key questions to guide our traversal through

the large body of excerpts and figures we have explored in chapter 3, 4 and 5. To reiterate, these five areas are: 1) the image of Christ in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought 2) the role the son of Mary plays in the Andalusian mystic’s Weltanschauung; 3) the portrayal of Christ in the writings of later Sufis 4) his parallel significance in the larger narratives of these contributions and 5) the overarching importance of Jesus in Sufi writings, starting with the Greatest Master and continuing with his inheritors.

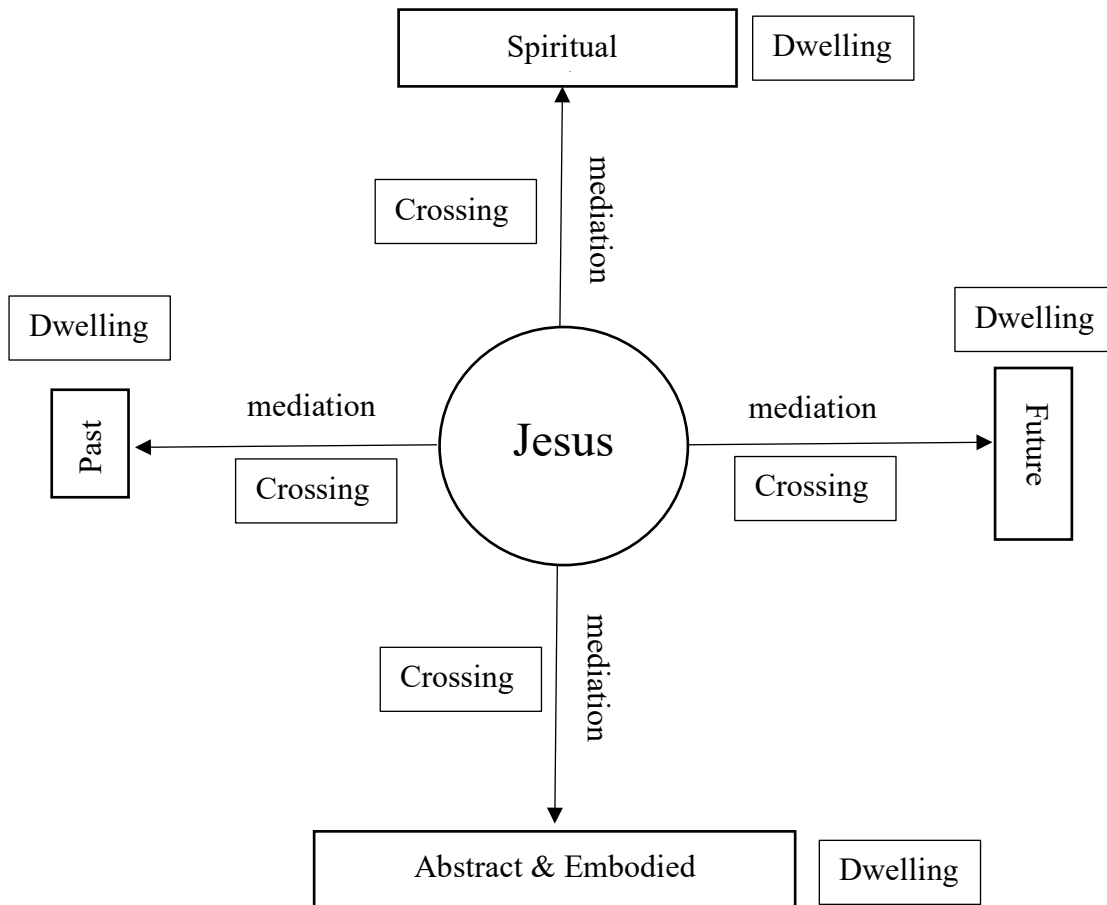


Figure 10: Christ's mediations in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and later Sufis.

We have emphasized previously the consistency of the depiction of the son of Mary between the Andalusian mystic’s two seminal works, the *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (FM)* and *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (FH)*. The common motifs in these monographs revolve around two main pivots. First,



there is Christ's unique physiology, particularly his ontological residence at the threshold between the realms of body and spirit. In parallel to this ontological liminality, there is the second set of twin temporal roles which he performs as a historical legislating prophet and as an eschatological Messiah saint. In the *FM* specifically, Ibn al-ʿArabī further extends each of these themes into expositions on countless topics. In the ensuing paragraphs, we will try to summarize each of these discourses and which category, ontological or temporal, they belong to.

Ibn al-ʿArabī explores the twin aspects of Jesus' spiritual/physical composition in multiple narratives and settings. First, the Greatest Master utilizes this prophet's Qur'ānic status as 'Word of God' in order to emphasize the status of the entire universe as a matrix of such words, *kalimāt Allāh* (Words of God). Commensurate with this comparison is the analogy which the author also draws between this aspect of Jesus, his miracle performance, the divine act of speech, and its human counterpart, from which there emerge countless creative expressions. Enveloped within this discourse is also the etymological connection between *kalima* (Word) and *kalim* (wound); the latter being an inevitable consequence of God's Words imprinting themselves upon the empty canvas of the universe.

Second, Ibn al-ʿArabī elaborates upon the relationship between Jesus and his mother Mary in countless passages. On the one hand, this unique parental kinship symbolizes the relationship between the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Fātiḥa*, and the book as a whole. On the other hand, Christ and Mary represent the human soul as the child born to the motherly body and fatherly spirit. Here also, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses this aspect of Jesus' story to erect an important analogy wherein he perceives a similarity between this Christ's birth, without a father, and Eve's emergence from Adam without a mother. Likewise, he utilizes both Jesus and Eve to draw attention to a subtle

reality in the afterlife: events are born in paradise and hell without a marriage between their celestial parents, night and day.

Third, Ibn al-‘Arabī also focuses on the kinship between Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist. This occurs, most prominently, in the twin *mi‘rāj* (ascension) narratives in the *FM*. As we expect, the author is not merely interested in their biological relationship, but in its metaphysical dimensions. In this regard, Ibn al-‘Arabī emphasizes that Christ’s Qur’ānic image as *rūḥ Allāh* (Spirit of/from God) and John the Baptist’s Arabic name, *Yaḥyā* (lit. the one who comes to life) reveals a similar cousinly relationship between spirit and life; they are inseparable and must coexist within a body in order for it to be alive. In the various passages where the author examines this kinship, he also concentrates on the possible preference which God had for one of these cousins over the other, as evident in their depictions in the Qur’ān.

Fourth, in a series of passages, all of which can be found in the large section of the *FM* concerned with the esoteric aspects of *sharī‘a* (Islamic law), Ibn al-‘Arabī uses Jesus as an evidentiary example to support his elaborations upon the hidden aspects of the Muḥammadan law. These include, for instance, Christ’s pure composition as an embodiment for spiritual health and *ṭahāra* (ritual purity); the fasting of Mary and Jesus, in comparison with that of the prophet David, as proof of their lofty station and rank; and lastly, the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist as corroboration for the secrets in the Islamic ritual of burial and funeral procession. All in all, this particular narrative reveals the extent to which Jesus’ physiology proves a useful pedagogical tool for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s instruction on metaphysics.

The temporal aspect of Christ’s presence in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought pertains to the former’s twin roles as historical legislating prophet and eschatological Messiah-saint. As above, here also the Andalusian mystic utilizes the son of Mary in a variety of contexts and settings. The most

important of these concerns Jesus' most pivotal eschatological title in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings, *khatm al-walāya al-āmma/al-muṭlaqa* (the seal of universal/absolute sainthood), and its counterpart, *khatm al-walāya al-muḥammadiyya* (the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood). Connecting these two figures is the enigmatic entity *rūḥ Muḥammad* (the spirit of Muḥammad) which Ibn al-'Arabī describes as the spirit appearing within the bodily apparitions of both seals. This is all the more significant considering that the Greatest Master eventually presents himself as the seal of Muḥammadan sainthood, thereby raising questions about the extent of his connection with his first teacher, Jesus.

Second, Ibn al-'Arabī is keen to emphasize Christ's Messianic return as a follower of the prophet Muḥammad, not a legislating prophet. From this perspective, the son of Mary will return to establish *sharī'a*, the Muḥammadan law, and abrogate all other forms of legal rulings, including the *ijtihād* (discretion) of Muslim scholars. Ibn al-'Arabī also states that Jesus will have two resurrections on the day of Judgment, one as a legislating prophet, among other divine viceroys, and another as a Muḥammadan follower, among other Muslim saints. It is within this context as well that the Greatest Master discusses the limitations of *walāya* (sainthood) when compared to *nubuwwat al-tashrī'* (legislating prophethood). By highlighting the changes in Jesus' authority, from his ability to alter the divine law as a prophet to his reliance upon *kashf* (unveiling) as a saint-Messiah, the author is able to situate saints beneath the worldly authority and rank of legislating divine messengers.

Third, the Greatest Master also uses the figure of Jesus whilst discussing the various stations of sainthood (i.e. *abdāl* (substitutes), *awṭād* (pegs) and *quṭb* (pole)) within a grand spiritual hierarchy. Here, the son of Mary emerges as a source of inheritance in all three ranks. A significant aspect of each post discussed in chapter three pertains to the cosmological and architectural

topographies which Ibn al-‘Arabī tethers to the seven substitutes and the four pegs, respectively. The former correlation particularly, which attaches each *badal* (substitute) and the prophet from whom they inherit to one of the seven heavens, harmonizes with the *mi‘rāj* narratives wherein Jesus and John the Baptist emerge as residents of the second of these spheres. The second importance of this narrative is that it foretells the fourth and equally pivotal notion of *wirātha* (spiritual inheritance) in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought.

In this final instance, the Andalusian mystic presents Jesus as a prophetic archetype and source of spiritual knowledge for Muslim saints. Thenceforth, these latter inheritors are regarded as *‘īsawīyyūn* (Christic) due to their exhibition of Jesus’ traits (i.e. asceticism) and ability to perform his miracles (i.e. resurrecting the dead). Of course, this aspect of Christ’s persona in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings is not divorced from the discussion on the former’s unique physiology. As the Andalusian mystic explains in the *FH*, the celebrated Muslim mystic Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī was *‘īsawī* and able to resurrect the dead precisely because he knew, through taste, how God’s Spirit brought the dead to life through Jesus’ breath. In this way and others, the Greatest Master thoroughly synthesizes these two parallel narratives surrounding Jesus in his thought: Christ’s twin roles as historical prophet and eschatological Messiah-saint, are intimately intertwined with his bifurcated composition: half angelic spirit and half human body.

Transitioning to the next component of our concluding summary, we may posit two ways in which the son of Mary emerges as an indispensable component of the Greatest Master’s writings. Unsurprisingly, these two aspects correlate with the above mentioned ontological and temporal strands of Christ’s own portrayal in these works. Consolidating the dimensions of this prophet’s presence in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s heritage with the richness of that entire corpus will augment

the cohesive nature of the Andalusian mystic's contributions and central role which Jesus plays therein.

First, Christ emerges in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings as an embodied pedagogical tool who assists the author of the *FM* in visually conveying his subtle and nuanced metaphysical teachings. This appears most importantly and vividly in the son of Mary’s *barzakhī* physiology, at the threshold between the realms of spirits and bodies; a liminality which prudently performs the actual state of the cosmos as it fluctuates between God’s *wujūd muṭlaq* (absolute being) and the world’s *‘adam muṭlaq* (absolute nothingness). From this perspective, the universe at large follows the Christic archetype, just as the son of Mary himself is a microcosm of this larger entity. While this correspondence between microcosmic human being and macrocosmic universe has already been elaborated upon extensively by specialists,<sup>418</sup> the results of this dissertation highlight the specific and unique role which Jesus plays in this analogy.

Naturally, just as Christ’s unique physiology allows Ibn al-‘Arabī to convey the hidden dimensions of the universe, this composition also helps the Andalusian mystic explain to his readers the mirror image of the cosmos inside the human being. We are reminded in this instance of the Greatest Master’s reference, mentioned above, to the relationship between Jesus and Mary as symbolic of the human soul and its motherly spirit. Within this paradigm, we also include the image of Christ’s purified essence, as the ‘Word of God’ and ‘Spirit from Him,’ as the mirror of the *ṭahāra* (ritual purity) that should coexist with the Qur’ān, and as the uttered speech of God, within the heart of the *ḥāfiẓ* (memorizer) of scripture.

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<sup>418</sup> See, for instance, Jane Clark’s “Fulfilling our Potential: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Understanding of Man in a Contemporary Context.”

Next, there is another task that correlates closely with the temporal aspect of the son of Mary's portrayal in the *FM* and *FH*. This pertains to the most superior spiritual and worldly status of the prophet Muḥammad and the unique ability of Jesus to support this loftiness of the Muḥammadan rank. It is clear enough from the preceding investigations that only Christ is able to fulfill this role because he is the legislating viceroy who immediately preceded the coming of the Islamic prophet and the sole messenger destined to return at the end of time as the Messiah. To this eschatological persona, Ibn al-ʿArabī also appends the distinction that Jesus' return will not be in his previous capacity, as a legislating prophet, but as a Muḥammadan follower and seal of sainthood.

Moreover, commensurate with the Christic archetype of inheritance discussed above, here also one can find a more abstract significance for Jesus' historical and eschatological personas. This became most evident during our analysis of the *FH* and the mention of the son of Mary whilst discussing the *khilāfa* (deputyship) of prophet David. Ibn al-ʿArabī was not merely interested in Christ's eschatological role as the Messiah and seal of sainthood. He also utilized the former's twin roles, as legislating prophet and non-legislating saint, in order to draw a larger blueprint of the differences between prophets and saints in terms of legislative authority. Of course, an implicit motivation within this discourse is to authenticate the status of saints, including Ibn al-ʿArabī himself, as inheritors of prophets who can still modify *sharīʿa* through *kashf* (unveiling).

This last point encourages some final remarks regarding the presence of Jesus in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, prior to transitioning to discussing the former's portrayal by later Sufi mystics. The Andalusian mystic's emphasis on Christ's unique physiology, when juxtaposed with his temporal transformation from legislating prophet to non-legislating saint, reveals the author's ultimate objective of augmenting the status of Muslim saints as inheritors of divine prophets who,

like Jesus – or perhaps thanks to him – have a possible path into the realm of prophethood and legislation through *dhawq* (spiritual taste) and *kashf* (unveiling). Ibn al-‘Arabī may also have had in mind an actual physiological transformation which a lay believer goes through on his or her path to sainthood, during which they are adorned, like Christ, with the divine breath and ability to resurrect dead physical bodies and diseased spiritual hearts.

The first figure discussed in chapter five is the celebrated Moroccan saint ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dabbāgh. The different motifs surrounding Jesus’ mentioned in the *IB* closely mirror the son of Mary’s eclectic depictions in the Andalusian mystic’s writings. This pertains to the two central themes of Christ’s unique physiology and twin historical roles which Ibn al-‘Arabī focuses on and that find a relative renaissance in al-Dabbāgh’s teachings. In the first instance, this Moroccan mystic posits Christ’s spiritual essence as being directly affected by the prophet Muḥammad’s spiritual lights. In the second, the son of Mary’s miracle performance and lofty stations are subsumed within the most superior station of the Muslim prophet and his chosen community of saints.

The second figure discussed is another celebrated Moroccan saint, and close contemporary of al-Dabbāgh, Aḥmad al-Tījānī. The teachings of this Sufi mystic, as outlined by his disciple ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm in *JM*, reveal an engagement with Christ that closely resembles al-Dabbāgh’s in the *IB*. First, the son of Mary appears in his prophetic capacity as the divine messenger who immediately precedes the coming of Muḥammad. In this regard also, al-Tījānī focuses on Christ’s ability to receive prophethood prior to reaching the age of forty, a rarity which the Sufi mystic explains is a result of his unique physiology. Lastly, al-Tījānī also alludes to Jesus’ role, as the seal of saints, in the apocalyptic events to take place at the end of days.

It is safe to say that these authors are not as interested in the unique physiology of Jesus as the Andalusian mystic. In neither the *IB* nor *JM* do we find as extensive a discussion of Christ's dual belonging to the physical and spiritual realms as that is found in the *FM* and *FH*. Rather, they are interested in this motif only as a platform from which they can elaborate upon other, more pertinent topics, such as the light of Muḥammad, the son of Mary's social role as a prophet and savior of his community on the Day of Judgment and, most importantly, the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and his community of saints. It is in this last instance that this later Sufi heritage most closely follows Ibn al-ʿArabī's portrayal of Jesus.

Ultimately, for these Sufi authors, Jesus serves a quintessential purpose similar to the one he fulfilled in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *FM* and *FH*: to affirm and embody the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad's worldly and spiritual rank. Al-Dabbāgh presents the Muḥammadan saints as the true recipients of Christ's knowledge, himself included, through the mediation of the prophet Muḥammad. Moreover, the style and content of this message are equally important in the case of al-Dabbāgh since his spiritual instruction is completely voiced through his student and actual author of the *IB*, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī. Another distinguishing factor of this work is the rich engagement that al-Dabbāgh and al-Lamaṭī have with Ibn al-ʿArabī himself. Both Christ and the Andalusian mystic serve an almost identical purpose: Jesus establishes the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad while Ibn al-ʿArabī authenticates al-Dabbāgh's *walāya uwaysiyya* (sainthood) only to be eventually surpassed by his successor in the same work.

Much the same can be said about al-Tījānī's engagement with Jesus in *JM*. Like al-Dabbāgh, the founder of the Tījāniyya speaks in this work entirely through the pen of his disciple, ʿAlī b. Ḥarāzīm. In all the various excerpts, the son of Mary plays an almost identical role as that found in the *IB*, to establish the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and his community of



Muslim saints. As expected, al-Tījānī also situates and mentions Ibn al-‘Arabī in his teachings for this same objective. Similar to the discourse in the *IB*, the Andalusian mystic’s persona in *JM* also emerges, initially, as a pious predecessor who supports and authenticates al-Tījānī’s *walāya*, only to be reprimanded by his successor in the same work for his uncouth behavior in expressing *ḥaqā’iq* (spiritual realities) in writing.

This leaves us with the conclusion that these two Sufī mystics share their predecessor’s motivation to utilize Christ’s image in order to prove the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad and Muḥammadan saints. However, we also notice the absence of the Greatest Master’s nuanced discourse on the son of Mary’s unique physiology, at least at the same level of detail as that found in the *FM* and *FH*. Instead, all the mentions of Christ’s bodily composition quickly dissipate within the prophet Muḥammad’s superior status. From this perspective, Ibn al-‘Arabī surpasses his successors in his nuanced and rich portrayal of Jesus. Nevertheless, it is clear that both al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī have borrowed an aspect of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Christ and interweaved that persona within their own unique narrative in order to prove the superiority of the Muḥammadan saints.

Taking all of the preceding into consideration, we can say that the two aspects of Christ’s persona, namely 1) the temporal bifurcation, between his historical prophethood and eschatological sainthood, and 2) ontological liminality, at the threshold between the realms of bodies and spirits, are a central focus of Sufī mystics in their engagement with Christ. From the expansive spring of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *FM* and *FH* emerge the various appropriations of Jesus which we have seen in the previous chapters. Thenceforth, each of the Sufi authors we have accompanied during this dissertation has addressed the unique physiology of the son of Mary and the dual tasks which he was exclusively given from among all the divine messengers: a legislating prophet

immediately preceding the prophet Muḥammad's historical appearance and the awaited Messiah for the end of time.

In a similar fashion, we can also state that the significance of this prophet in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Weltanschauung* carries over to the corpus of Sufi writings after him. Most prominently, the authors we discussed have all utilized the son of Mary's dual roles as a catalyst to establish the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad's spiritual station and of the lofty rank of his community of saints. However, we also emphasize the difference here between Ibn al-ʿArabī's appropriation of Jesus' image, in this context, and that by later Sufi mystics: whereas the Andalusian mystic pays equal attention to the utility which Christ's unique physiology provides for conveying metaphysical teachings to readers, al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī do not seem as interested with this motif.

Combining both these shared motifs and differences between Ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh and Aḥmad al-Tījānī, it is clear that the Akbarian Jesus who emerges from the *FM* and *FH* remains, overall, richer and more nuanced when compared to the depictions found in these later Sufi writings. At the same time, as we have mentioned briefly above, Ibn al-ʿArabī's influence on these subsequent depictions is not directly apparent from any excerpts. Nevertheless, the explicit mentions of the Andalusian mystic in these works, and their adoption of his concepts and ideas all allude to the likeliness that these later mystics were indeed influenced, one way or another, by Ibn al-ʿArabī's engagement with this prophet.<sup>419</sup>

We end this chapter with the central synthesizing question which we presented in the introductory chapter of this dissertation: *What can Ibn al-ʿArabī and his successors tell us, through*

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<sup>419</sup> And yet, the extent and originality of Ibn al-ʿArabī's contributions in this area remains to be ascertained by further research into Christ's image in the Sufi heritage prior to the Andalusian mystic and his indebtedness to it.

*their engagement with Jesus, about the different ways that Sufi mystics have ‘ingested’ and ‘reincarnated’ the being of Christ in their respective lives and missions?* Given the detailed analyses we have provided in this and previous chapters, we are able to say that this absorption of the being of Christ by Sufi mystics occurs, outwardly and explicitly, through a process of *wirātha* (spiritual inheritance). Meanwhile, inwardly and implicitly, it takes on the form of a subtle politicized discourse during which the historical person of Jesus is abstracted into a timeless archetype that can assist Muslim mystics in legitimizing and authenticating their specific *kashf* (unveiling) and careers as *awliyā’* (saints).

In the first instance, for someone like Ibn al-‘Arabī or Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, the son of Mary is a teacher who appears posthumously, in corporeal form, in order to teach such Sufi mystics lessons in *zuhd* (asceticism) and to guide them in their journey towards the divine presence. Like the son of Mary, they become *barzakhī* (liminal) beings who gain an extended spiritual life in the illuminated presence of knowledge. It is due to this change in their bodily composition that they are then able to perform Christ’s miracles. In other words, just like the son of Mary, Christic saints’ ability to resurrect the dead is a natural consequence of their unique angelic make-up.<sup>420</sup>

In the second instance, Christ’s two roles represent a unique convergence between the two realms of prophethood and sainthood. More specifically, the transformation of Jesus from his prophetic past to saintly future appears both as a possibility for Muslim saints to inherit from divine prophets, and as a demarcation between these authoritative hierarchies, including their differences and similarities. As we saw in the *FH*, this engagement with the son of Mary’s persona is less embodied, especially when compared to the paradigm of *wirātha*. Rather, the figure of Jesus is

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<sup>420</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, “Literature Review,” Stephen Hirtenstein’s “Reviving the Dead” shows that Ibn al-‘Arabī himself was one such *‘īṣawī* saint who was also given the power to revive the dead both physically and spiritually.

immediately transcended/abstracted in order to facilitate a discourse about the metaphysical concepts animating his life and mission, such as *khilāfa* (deputyship), *nubuwwa* (prophethood) and *walāya* (sainthood).

Prior to transitioning to the next component of this last chapter, focusing on the possible areas of further research building upon the results of this dissertation, it is worthwhile to offer some brief remarks regarding the utility of theory in the preceding analyses, particularly Thomas Tweed's twin notions of *crossing* and *dwelling*. As is evident from this and previous chapters, it is clear that the son of Mary facilitates quintessential, temporal and ontological crossings and dwellings for Muslim saints, precisely because he himself traverses the spectrum of both these dimensions. However, we still need to fully understand Tweed's vision and the utility of these concepts, in order to gauge their usefulness for our present conversation and any insight they might provide about the Sufi Jesus which we have not obtained thus far.

Clarifying his distinction between *crossings* and *dwellings*, Tweed states that "religions ... are not only about being in place but also about moving across."<sup>421</sup> Situating this stillness and motion between "the body, the home, and the homeland, and the cosmos,"<sup>422</sup> the author tries to include both the physical and metaphysical destinations of a religious journey. Thenceforth, he further elaborates upon these different tropes and the nature of movement amidst them:

I argue that religions enable and constrain *terrestrial crossings*, as devotees traverse natural terrain and social space beyond the home and across the homeland; *corporeal crossings*, as the religious fix their attention on the limits of embodied existence; and *cosmic crossings*, as the pious imagine and cross the ultimate horizon of human life.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Tweed, *Crossings and Dwellings*, 123.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

We can easily perceive and pinpoint these *terrestrial*, *corporeal* and *cosmic* transitions in our preceding discussion of Jesus in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and later Sufism. Whether it be the *siyāḥa* (worldly travel) which al-Dabbāgh attributes to Jesus (i.e. *terrestrial crossing*), the discourse on bodily *ṭahāra* (purity) within which the *nafs* (soul) emerges as a child of the marriage between the body and spirit, for all of which Jesus is an embodiment (i.e. *corporeal crossing*), or the *mi‘rāj* (ascension) narratives of Ibn al-‘Arabī during which he meets the son of Mary and his cousin John the Baptist (i.e. *cosmic crossing*), it is clear that Tweed’s paradigm – from this perspective – aptly describes the portrayals of Jesus that have emerged from this research.

And yet, two points worth highlighting appear in the above excerpt. First, Tweed’s inclusion of the homeland among his tropes or dwellings directs our attention to its absence from our investigation of the Sufi Jesus, thus presenting the possibility that it might be a useful inclusion to our paradigm of temporal/ontological *crossings* and dwellings.<sup>424</sup> Second, the results of this research lead us to wonder whether these various dwellings are easily separated into the categories within which Tweed presents them, or whether they perhaps they exhibit much more overlap than originally posited and, thus, require further investigation and formulation. Together, these two contentions present themselves as a mirror through which the results of this research can reflect and contend with Tweed’s conceptual framework.

Regarding the first point, the author of *Crossings and Dwellings* describes in detail his vision of the ‘homeland’ trope and how it functions within a religious community, particularly alongside the accompanying process of ‘homemaking’:

The religious also move beyond intimate spaces and kinship relations to imagine the homeland – and the people within and beyond its borders. In other words,

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<sup>424</sup> Indeed, the motif of homeland is prevalent in Sufi poetry, including Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own writings, and has received considerable attention from academic specialists. See Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* and Denis McAuley’s *Ibn ‘Arabī’s Mystical Poetics*.

religions do more than autocentrically orient individuals in terms of bodily axes and personal memory. They do more than situate embodied persons in domestic space and familial history. Dwelling practices also position the religious in longer time frames and wider social spaces.

Homemaking does not end at the front door. It extends to the boundaries of the territory that group members allocentrically imagine as *their* space, but since the homeland is an imagined territory inhabited by an imagined community, a space and group continually figured and refigured in contact with others, its borders shift over time and across cultures.<sup>425</sup>

Tweed makes sure his readers understand that not only is the homeland an imagined metaphor but that the community which constantly tries to construct it is also itself imaginal. This fantastical trait of the ‘homeland’ emerges, as Tweed tells us, from the distance of exile from the physical and worldly homeland. The resulting estrangement from this location of origins ushers in the continuous process of trying to recreate an apparition of one’s native place by using a mixture of faded memories that remains living through the nostalgia of those in diaspora.

The central question, then, for the purposes of our research: *What is the homeland in the narrative of Jesus’ role as a historical prophet, eschatological ‘seal of sainthood’ and liminal being between the realms of body and spirit?* Of course, a physical location of birth is a prudent response to such a query. Therefore, the prophet Muḥammad’s city of birth, Mecca, has received ample imaginalization and mythologization throughout the history of Islamic and Sufi thought as the barren land wherein Abraham left his concubine Hagar and son Ismā‘īl (Ishmael) to God’s care, and where they eventually built God’s house, the Ka‘ba. Of course, the central mythological narrative surrounding Mecca emerged during the prophet’s *mi‘rāj* (ascension), which began from this holy city towards Jerusalem and upwards in the vicinity of the seven heavens.

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 109-110.

However, it is perhaps more worthwhile to contemplate the significance of the spiritual homeland for Sufi mystics like Ibn al-‘Arabī and the later authors we discussed in chapter five. In contrast to this physical world, the *dunyā* (lower abode), the *ākhirā* (hereafter) represents more than a future destination for paradisiacal pleasures. First, it is an ever-present reality that looms over the physical realm of *dunyā*, ready to break through the veils of separation in order to make its presence known to those residents of *dunyā* who are prepared to witness such an unveiling (i.e. saints). Thus, *ākhirā* is not only real, but more existent than the illusory mirage of *dunyā*. Second, it is the true homeland and point of origin for this entire project of creation.<sup>426</sup> This is especially true in the case of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung wherein all the various aspects of *dunyā*, be they mundane or sacred, are situated and rooted within their final cause, *ākhirā*.

From this perspective, the Andalusian mystic and other Sufi mystics we have discussed in this dissertation regard *dunyā* as a type distance from the divine presence of *ākhirā*. This separation is explicitly embodied in the corporeal body of this world which hinders human beings from witnessing their spiritual reality. Of course, since our species is veiled from witnessing its own otherworldly origins, they are even less able to perceive this *ḥaqīqa* (spiritual reality) as it relates to all things around them. The only members of the human race who have been given the ability to perceive this reality are prophets and saints, both of whom have been the protagonists of this research. It is the unique way in which these two groups of divinely-elected human beings perceive

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<sup>426</sup> This is evident in the well-known *athar* (related saying) or *ḥadīth qudsī* (holy prophetic narration) that is widely circulated among Sufi mystics, wherein God says: “I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known. Thus, I created creation so that I may be known by them.” The Qur’ānic proof for this intimate relationship between God and His creation has usually been described as the ‘Day of Alastu,’ in reference to the Qur’ānic verse: “Indeed, your Lord has taken the descendants of the sons of Adam from their backs and made them testify upon themselves: ‘*alastu bi Rabbikum*’ [Am I not your Lord]? They said: ‘Indeed we testify!’ Lest you claim on the day of judgment that you have been heedless of this” (7:172).

the interaction between *dunyā* and *ākhirā* which provides us with the greatest insight into the importance of this ‘spiritual homeland’ in Sufism.

And so, the Greatest Master and his successors are informing us that these two realms of *dunyā* and *ākhirā* are not entirely separate in their *kashf* (unveiling). Rather, every object, event and detail in this world can be a gate into the unseen spiritual reality. Ultimately, then, the spiritual homeland of the Sufis of the *ākhirā* is an ever-present and looming reality. Although the mystic is definitively separated from this ethereal homeland due to his/her corporeal imprisonment in *dunyā*, their very bodies and immediate environment, through a rigorous process of consecration and diffusion of *baraka* (divine grace), allow them to access their native abode and to guide the veiled masses towards the same destination.

All of this leads us to the conclusion that the son of Mary, as the perfect embodiment of the meeting between the realms of body and spirit, is an ephemeral instance of the ‘homeland’ of *ākhirā* making its presence known through a series of embodied performances. Of course, as we have reiterated in this and previous chapters, Jesus himself facilitates the ontological traversal from the physical to the spiritual/metaphysical dimensions, especially in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. However, it remains to be seen how the son of Mary specifically encourages or facilitates a return to such a particular localization/instantiation of the spiritual dimension, the ‘homeland.’

Fully understanding this role of Jesus requires more research than this dissertation allows. Nevertheless, we offer some brief remarks here on this topic. First, Christ’s mediative role alongside his ontological position, between the physical and metaphysical realms, facilitates what we have described above as allowing the ‘homeland’ of *ākhirā* to infiltrate and unveil the illusory nature of *dunyā*. Second, the son of Mary’s dual roles of historical prophet and eschatological Messiah-saint (i.e. temporal mediation) heightens the sense of urgency of a looming apocalypse,



during which the entire universe will transition from *dunyā* to the ‘homeland’ of *ākhirā*. Of course, intertwined with this second contextualization of the spiritual homeland is the path which Jesus opens for non-legislating Muslim saints to inherit from legislating divine prophets and carry forth the burdens of fighting, alongside Jesus and al-Mahdī, against *al-dajjāl* (the anti-Christ) in the main battle of the last days.

Thus, the Sufi Christ’s embodiment of the ‘homeland’ further develops this trope from its original formulation in Tweed’s work. Most poignantly, this abode of origins does not emerge in Jesus’ mystical narrative as separate from the ‘home,’ ‘body’ or ‘cosmos.’ Since all these artifacts, and the entire matrix of creation, can serve as windows onto the unseen (i.e. the spiritual homeland) one cannot distinguish this abode from any other in the *Weltanschauung* of Ibn al-‘Arabī and other Sufi mystics. We may even say that the ‘homeland’ in this genre, as perfectly embodied by Jesus, does not belong to the category of tropes as much as the metaphysical foundation underpinning and animating their agencies in the physical world and in the social practice of Sufism and Islam.

This leads us to the second important point regarding the pertinence of Tweed’s conceptual framework to this research: the shortcomings or insights which the Sufi Jesus highlights in the former’s paradigm of *crossings* and *dwellings*. Continuing from the preceding paragraph, we state that contrary to Tweed’s demarcation between his collection of tropes (homeland, home, body and cosmos), on the one hand, and his differentiation between the twin processes of ‘crossing’ and ‘dwelling,’ the son of Mary in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and later Sufism reveals a more dynamic, overlapping and – to use the Greatest Master’s own term – perplexing synthesis between the collection of dwellings and traversals amidst them. Most importantly, it is the figure of Jesus who synthesizes, within his liminal ontological and temporal existence, these various aspects of Tweed’s project into a novel reinterpretation.

First, as mentioned above, the ‘homeland’ does not exist as a separate artifact in the narrative of the Sufi Jesus. Much the same can also be said about the rest of the tropes in this framework. Indeed, the son of Mary represents the juncture at which the physical body conjoins the heavenly spirit and historical prophethood collapses onto eschatological sainthood. Alternatively, using Tweed’s terminology, we can say that in the Sufi Jesus, the ‘body’ unites with the ‘cosmos,’ which is another instance of the metaphysical homeland. Likewise, the past of legislative prophethood, itself a type of mythic abode of origins in the Islamic ethos, converges with another dimension of the homeland, that being the eschatological end of days and triumph of light against darkness.

Thenceforth, we can also say that Jesus brings together the twin processes of *crossing* and *dwelling*. In the first instance, he facilitates a crossing over from the physical to the metaphysical, and from the historical to the eschatological, through the previously discussed acts of mediation, such as *wirātha* (spiritual inheritance) and archetypal abstraction. In both cases, the Muslim saint who engages, or ‘ingests,’ the being of Jesus undergoes a transformation that intimates the latter’s liminality: from the worldly to the spiritual dominions, all the while constantly extending the boundaries of *walāya* (sainthood) as he inherits from its spring of legislative prophethood. In the second instance as well, Christ eloquently combines the bodily, cosmic, geographical and temporal abodes, as shown above.

As mentioned previously, much more can – and should – be said about the pertinence of conceptual frameworks, from various disciplines in the humanities, to the thought and writings of Sufi mystics like Ibn al-‘Arabī. Not only should *Crossings and Dwellings* itself be the focus of further research, but also the contributions of other thinkers, such as those mentioned in this chapter and the introduction of this dissertation (i.e. Foucault and Hodgson). As we have shown

in the preceding paragraphs, the Greatest Master's Weltanschauung can help elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of these theoretical tools, while the latter can also provide us with unforeseen insights into these medieval writings.

Moving on to the other areas of further research, the choice to not include a discussion of the intellectual background that influenced Ibn al-'Arabī's thought in this dissertation was already mentioned in the introductory chapter. Future research in this area should not only focus on the impact of the Islamic intellectual heritage on the Greatest Master's portrayal of Jesus, but also its Judeo-Christian counterpart which, aside from its obvious relevance to an ecumenical figure like Christ, also had a prevalent and rich discursive tradition in Ibn al-'Arabī's homeland of Andalusia at the time. Alongside this research, there also needs to be an investigation into the developments that took place in the Greatest Master's thought, and his depiction of Jesus, after his migration to eastern Islamdom. Indeed, this last analysis can reveal whether the Andalusian mystic was influenced by the teachings and practices of Sufism in this region of the Islamic world.<sup>427</sup>

Next, pertaining to the Akbarian Christ specifically and to Ibn al-'Arabī's thought generally, there are a few key areas of research that can help us better appreciate the richness of the Greatest Master's engagement with Jesus. First, a larger number of works from the Andalusian mystic's massive corpus needs to be examined for all mentions of the son of Mary. This should include his poetic writings, such as the *Diwan* and the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (Interpreter of Ardent Desires), and also works from the first part of his life in the Iberian Peninsula, such as '*Anqā*' *Mughrib* (The Fabulous Gryphon). Thenceforth, a comparative study can be undertaken, between

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<sup>427</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī himself penned two biographical works, *Rūḥ al-Quds* (Holy Spirit) and *al-Durra al-Fākhira* (Illustrious Pearl) honoring the different mystics he accompanied during the first half of his life in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. As Claude Addas highlights in *Quest for the Red Sulfur*, the Andalusian mystic authored these two works as a response to the drastically different approach to Sufism which he observed in Eastern Islamdom. An approach, we might add, that he did not view reverentially.

this set of monographs on the one hand, and the *FH* and *FM*, on the other hand, to appreciate the different ways in which Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayed Jesus, by contrasting his prose and his poetry or while residing in Andalusia and later on, in Eastern Islamdom.

Second, pertaining to the depictions of Jesus in the *FH* and *FM* specifically, there needs to be a more thorough contextualization of the presence of Christ in these works with their larger narratives. In the case of the *FH*, this should include a comparison between the structure, style and content of the chapter on Jesus, which we analyzed closely in this dissertation, and other chapters in this book. As for the *FM*, the mentions of Christ in the rest of this voluminous encyclopedia need to be analyzed in a similar manner to the close study provided in chapter three. Thenceforth, there should be an attempt to synthesize the various mentions of Jesus from all the chapters, possibly also including a statistical study explaining any correlation between the mention of certain motifs and sections of the book wherein they appear.<sup>428</sup>

Transitioning to the third – and final – area of investigation, this concerns the Sufi intellectual heritage after Ibn al-‘Arabī and the presence of Jesus therein. Beginning with the figures we discussed in chapter five, entire studies can be devoted al-Dabbāgh and al-Tījānī, their writings and portrayals of Jesus. Similarly, separate analyses can also be undertaken regarding the engagement each of these Sufi authors had with Ibn al-‘Arabī and the latter’s influence on their thought. This is a necessary step in order to ascertain the full extent to which the Akbarian tradition had an impact on later Sufi engagements with the son of Mary.

Of course, extending the choice of Sufi mystics covered in chapter five to also include countless other Islamic mystical figures and institutions after Ibn al-‘Arabī’s time will only give

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<sup>428</sup> Special attention should be given here also to how Jesus fits within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s prophetology and whether his depiction of Christ is truly unique when compared to other prophets and messengers.

us a more nuanced understanding of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence on Sufism after his time. This should include longstanding Sufi brotherhoods that have existed since the Andalusian mystic’s milieu, such as the Shādhiliyya, and also more contemporary universalist approaches to Sufism, such as the Inayat Khan brotherhood of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century. All the while not only should Christ’s image be compared with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s in the writings of these groups, but there should also be a wider examination of the sociopolitical factors that shape these orders and which are reflected in their engagement with Jesus and the Andalusian mystic.

This leads us to the last area of possible research in this category, pertaining to our contemporary post-modern context. Undoubtedly, the fall of the Ottoman empire, the emergence of the nation state in its place, and accompanying ideologies such as pan-Arab nationalism during the past few centuries have drastically influenced religious dogma and practice in the Muslim world. This is evident in the rise of fundamentalist philosophies such as Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qā‘ida and – most recently – Dā‘ish (ISIS). Contemporaneous with the emergence of these vehemently anti-Sufi groups, Muslim mystics have had to drastically revise their outward image and their presentation of Islam’s longstanding spiritual heritage. Using the tools born out of globalization and the technological age, many of these neo-traditionalist Sufis have established a strong presence in social media (i.e. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram) which has widened and facilitated the diffusion of *baraka* (divine grace) of Sufi guides across the globe.

Taking all this into consideration, future research needs to address the pertinence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought in modernity, with a specific focus on the Akbarian Jesus. For instance, how have Sufis utilized the Sufi Jesus in order to counter ISIS’s violent attacks against indigenous Christian communities in places like Mosul in northern Iraq? Which Sufi groups have succumbed to the effect of Wahhabi coercion and removed any mentions of Ibn al-‘Arabī, or any Sufi author who

discussed *'ilm al-ḥaqā'iq* (science of spiritual realities), from their teachings and which have resisted this fundamentalist influence and continue to propagate the Andalusian mystic's thought? If Sufi groups who fall under the latter category do exist, then how many of them include Jesus within their discourses and in which contexts? Also, how do the Sufi brotherhoods and thinkers who opt for a more conservative (i.e. Ghazalian)<sup>429</sup> approach view their more ecstatic or esoterically-inclined Akbarian brethren and vice versa?

Just as we began this chapter with an anecdote from the contemporary Sufi mystic and guide of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi path, Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, we also end this research with another story depicting his engagement with the son of Mary and mediating the latter's presence into the gatherings of his congregation. This took place in the month of Ramadan of 2017, during which countless Naqshbandī devotees converged upon their guide's Sufi lodge in Michigan to attend daily *ṣuḥbas* (in the afternoon and nighttime), break their fast and pray the voluntary *tarāwīḥ* prayers after sunset together with the Shaykh.

During one of these afternoon sessions, Shaykh Kabbani briefly mentioned Christ whilst discussing the end of days and the latter's role, alongside the Mahdī, in defeating the anti-Christ. It is not the actual content of the *ṣuḥba* that is relevant here. Rather, it is the manner in which the son of Mary is mentioned and the ecstatic response which it evoked in the attending devotees that is our concern. Instead of discussing Christ in the third person, as soon as Shaykh Kabbani uttered the former's name, he immediately directed his eyes slightly upwards, towards the ceiling, and

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<sup>429</sup> This is a reference to the famed Sufi reformer and predecessor of Ibn al-‘Arabī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who explicitly stated in his magnum opus *Iḥyā' ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) that he will not discuss *'ilm al-mukāshafāt* (science of unveilings), another term for *'ilm al-ḥaqā'iq*. The influence of al-Ghazālī on many Sufi brotherhoods that still exist in our present day and age is indisputable, such as the Bā‘alawiyya *ṭarīqa* found in the Ḥaḍramawt valley in present-day Yemen. Unfortunately, this is also a topic that falls outside the scope of this research. For more information on the Bā‘alawiyya, see Alatas, Ismail Fajrie, “‘Alāwiyya (in Ḥaḍramawt).”

proclaimed: “Peace be upon you! Oh, our master Jesus!” Immediately, all of the attendees ecstatically reiterated the Shaykh’s greeting: “Peace be upon you, our master Jesus!” while some of the *majādhīb* (spiritually sensitive) disciples, involuntarily yelled: “Allah!” and began to cry.<sup>430</sup>

The understanding we have now of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thoughts and writings of Sufi mystics allows us to seriously consider the possibility of such an event occurring during the *ṣuḥbas* of the Andalusian mystic and his successors. Ultimately, our greatest achievement at the end of this dissertation is to be able to decipher the subtle importance of Jesus in this perfectly embodied performance by Shaykh Kabbani: Christ’s liminal uniqueness is not only manifest in his unique physiology but more significantly in the way in which this inimitability transcends his historical body into the present moment. From this perspective, the son of Mary remains, first and foremost, as the ever-living and unfolding Word of God. In this sense, Jesus is also the historical precursor and eschatological completion of the historical appearance of the prophet Muḥammad. The latter being the essential *kalima* embodying *al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality), the guiding spirit of Sufi sacred history.

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<sup>430</sup> Hisham Kabbani, personal communication, November 2015.

## Appendix A

### Akbarian Christology

This section presents an overview of the role which ‘Īsā b. Maryam (Jesus the son of Mary) plays in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung. Due to the massive corpus of writings which the Andalusian mystic authored throughout his life and sophisticated nature of his writings, presenting a comprehensive summary of the portrayal of even a single figure like Jesus in this literature proves to be an indomitable task. With this in mind, the Akbarian Christ will be discussed from the viewpoint of a few – key – philosophical categories: ontology, epistemology, humanology, eschatology, prophetology and saintology.

As mentioned previously, in the introductory chapter, the use of these classifiers is borrowed from William Chittick’s seminal works *Sufi Path of Knowledge* and *Self-Disclosure of God*. These works should also be referenced for a thorough discussion of many of the key Akbarian terms mentioned below, such as ‘*ayn thābita* (immutable entity), *tajalliyyāt* (theophanies), *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute being) and others. Moreover, as discussed in the ‘Literature Review’ chapter, Chittick’s contributions and many others have been discussed in detail in my earlier article “An Endless *Tajallī*: A Historiography of Ibn al-‘Arabī” which was published in Journal of the Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society (JMIAS).



### Ontology:

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perception of being is that God is the only Real Existent Being, while everything else in the universe only exists *majāzan* (metaphorically). The Andalusian mystic also presents the cosmos as an infinite series of *tajalliyyāt* (divine manifestations) that basically consist of a created object’s *‘ayn thābita* (immutable essence) receiving the *libās* (dress) of one of the divine names and attributes, granting it the ability to exist in actuality, alongside its permanent potential subsistence in God’s knowledge.

Within this paradigm, Jesus emerges as one such created object whose being is both metaphorical, when compared to God’s, and a divine manifestation. In this regard, Ibn al-‘Arabī tells us that the Qur’ānic description of Jesus as *kalimatu Allāh* (the Word of God) is an allusion to the fact that all things are also His created Words that do not expire. This possibly means that the Andalusian mystic means to say that Jesus is specifically a manifestation of divine speech.

However, the son of Mary’s unique physiology also allows Ibn al-‘Arabī to utilize the former as an archetype that represents the ultimate reality of the entire cosmos: a *barzakh* (isthmus) that resides between *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute existence or God) and *al-‘adam al-muṭlaq* (absolute non-existence). In this way, not only does Jesus perform the divine creative process (i.e. divine breath followed by the command *kun* (Be!)) but also the spiritual reality of the universe as *huwa/lā huwa* (He/not He), God/not God or partially existent/non-existent.

### Epistemology:

*‘Ilm* (knowledge) and *ma‘rifā* (gnosis) are intimately intertwined, in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings, with the Arabic root *wajada* (to find). In turn, this brings together both epistemology and ontology as overlapping existential processes, since from this same root, *wajada*, also emerges *wujūd* (being). This is why Ibn al-‘Arabī also connects *‘ilm* to *‘alāma* (sign), *‘ālam*

(world/universe) and the divine name *‘alīm* (all-knower): the entire cosmos is a matrix of *‘alāmāt* (signs) that reveal their true reality as divine manifestations, for those who are able to perceive them as such. Therefore, according to this approach, to know something is to perceive it as a theophany.

Once again, Jesus emerges as a confirmation and archetype of this epistemological scheme. For instance, Ibn al-‘Arabī tells us that the second heaven, wherein Jesus and John the Baptist reside, houses the treasuries of all sorts of knowledges that relate somehow to speech and/or writing. These include *khiṭāba* (oration), *simiyā’* (esoteric science of letters) and *awzān* (poetic meters). This is hardly a coincidence considering the placement of Jesus in this same heavenly sphere. Thus, the son of Mary’s status as Word of God and attribute of divine speech makes him a key catalyst to understanding these knowledges.

#### Humanology:

I use humanology in this sense to refer to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vast exploration of the human being’s physiology, psychology and spirituality, and the intimate relationships between these dimensions. Generally, the Andalusian mystic perceives the human composition as consisting of three main components: a *jism* (body), *nafs* (soul) and *rūḥ* (spirit). These three represent the physiological, psychological and spiritual dimensions respectively. In other instances, the Sufi mystic also describes the *nafs* as a child born from the marriage between the motherly *jism* and the fatherly *rūḥ*, while elsewhere he switches this parental role of the *jism* and *rūḥ*.

Notwithstanding this variation, Jesus emerges in few key excerpts of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (FM) as an embodiment of this familial network. Specifically, Ibn al-‘Arabī presents the son of Mary as the symbolic *nafs* (soul) born to his mother Mary, who represents the worldly *jism*. As for the fatherly *rūḥ*, Ibn al-‘Arabī creatively presents, in one instance, the angel Gabriel as one

who occupies this position while elsewhere he invokes the normative Islamic position that Christ had no father. In this case, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses this fact to highlight another aspect of the relationship between the human body, soul and spirit: ultimately, each *nafs* is an orphan if it is attributed to a spirit that is distinct and independent of God’s being.

Eschatology:

The theme of the ‘end of days,’ the Judgment Day, the coming of Mahdī and the return of Jesus, constitutes a central theme in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung. The organic and cohesive aura which colors other aspects of his thought, exemplified by his reliance upon the philosophical notions of microcosm/macrocosm that regard whatever exists and occurs within the microcosmic human body to also take place within the macrocosmic universe, also finds its way in this area of his writings. Thus, the *sā‘a ṣuġhrā* (minor hour) of a human being (i.e. his/her physical death) is merely a microcosmic replica of the looming *sā‘a kubrā* (major hour), when the entire universe will transition from the seen to the unseen realms.

One would expect, then, for the Andalusian mystic to present Christ as another embodied archetype of this eschatological project. However, it seems instead that the former is more interested in the actual role which the latter plays in the apocalypse. The central theme governing this discourse in the Sufī mystic’s writings is the son of Mary’s return as a saint, not a prophet, who will be a *tābi‘ muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan follower) and a member of the Muslim community. Ibn al-‘Arabī then uses this fact to creatively deduce that Jesus will have two resurrections on the Day of Judgment: first as a prophet and second as a Muslim saint from the prophet Muḥammad’s community.

Lastly, it is worthwhile mentioning that this eschatological role of Jesus nicely complements his historical appearance as the divine messenger immediately preceding the prophet

Muḥammad. In turn, Ibn al-‘Arabī alludes to Christ’s liminal existence as a temporal *barzakh* (isthmus) between the historical past and eschatological future, just as he is the interstice between the ontological realms of body and spirit.

Prophetology:

One could very well say that the animating force governing all of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung is the superiority of the prophet Muḥammad’s historical rank and spiritual reality. In the first, the Muslim prophet is *khātim al-anbiyā’* (seal of prophets), who completed and perfected the missions of all previous divine messengers. In the second, he was already designated as a prophet while “Adam was still between water and clay,” as the prophetic narration which the Andalusian mystic likes to quote often states.

However, the Andalusian mystic does not halt at the literal meaning of this narration. Rather, he extends its ramifications by stating that the prophethood and rank of every prophet prior to the prophet Muḥammad is subsumed within the prophethood and station of the latter. In other words, the appearance of all the divine messengers, from Adam to Jesus, are nothing but sequential manifestations of the prophet Muḥammad. Not surprisingly, this recalls the gradual revelation of the Qur’ān over a period of 23 years. In this regard, Ibn al-‘Arabī relies upon the narration attributed to ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife, that he was a ‘walking Qur’ān’ or that ‘his character was the Qur’ān.’

And so, in this procession of prophets and messengers, Jesus emerges as the final stage prior to the historical appearance of the Prophet and, in turn, the completion and perfection of the divine project for human guidance. Of course, Christ is also believed to return, as the Messiah, at the end of times. Thus, the son of Mary’s physical appearance in the world precedes and follows the arrival of the prophet of Islam. Like each prophet, Jesus represents not only a historical stage

leading to the arrival of Muḥammad, but also the emergence of a metaphysical aspect of the latter's spiritual reality. In this regard, the son of Mary embodies the quintessential *logos* (God's Word), as *kalimatullāh*, which – in turn – was completed and perfected in Muḥammad's status as the 'walking Qur'ān.'

### Saintology:

The motif of saintology is intimately intertwined, for Ibn al-'Arabī, with that of prophetology. Most importantly, the Andalusian mystic regards the *awliyā'* (saints) as the inheritors of the *anbiyā'* (prophets). In order to emphasize this intimate relationship between these two groups, he describes the first as custodians of *al-nubuwwa al-muṭlaqa al-'āmma* (absolute and universal prophethood) and the second as holders of *al-nubuwwa al-muqayyada al-khāṣṣa* (special and limited prophethood).

This rather confounding description, which seems to render the prophethood of saints more expansive and authoritative than that given to prophets, becomes clearer when one understands that Ibn al-'Arabī has in mind the authority for *tashrī'* (legislation) which he describes as *muqayyada* (limited) to prophets and messengers. On the other hand, the prophethood granted to saints, which does not include the power to legislate, is – in turn – more universal. This is also because all prophets and messengers are also saints who have been granted this more encompassing sense of prophethood. In other words, according to Ibn al-'Arabī, all legislating prophets are saints but not all saints are legislating prophets.

Jesus emerges as one of the central figures in this paradigm. As mentioned above, the Andalusian mystic holds that the son of Mary's messianic return will be in a saintological, as opposed to prophetic, capacity. This is simply because there can be no other prophet after the coming of the seal of prophets, Muḥammad. Alongside this role, Ibn al-'Arabī also presents the

*ʿisawī* (Christic) mold as one of the central archetypal springs of inheritance for Muslim saints. The Sufi mystic even presents himself and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874) as two instances of these *ʿisawīyyūn* (Christic) saints.

In conclusion, the son of Mary plays a distinct role in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Weltanschauung; one that merits the description of an ‘Akbarian Christology.’ While we have presented the various aspects of this part under separate headings, it is important to remember that each of these categories is intimately related to the other. Thus, Christ’s unique physiological status as the Word of God manifests in his ability to resurrect the dead, itself considered a *kharq al-ʿāda* (breaking of the habitual norms or supernatural occurrence). In turn, this miracle performance which Jesus embodies carries over to the Christic saints who must activate their ‘microcosmic Christ’ in order to reenact the divine creative process, through the power of breath, in the same manner that God created the son of Mary.

## Appendix B

### Ethnographic Remarks

There is a myriad of first-hand ethnographic observations, primary references consisting of the textual corpus taught and propagated by mystics in various Sufi groups and secondary studies by specialists who outline the variegated approaches to Sufi practice in contemporary America.

A pertinent example of the third category is Marcia Hermansen's various contributions on Sufi thought and practice in North America. What she and others call 'fiqhsation', or "the emphasis on *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence]" (Ron Geaves, "A Case of Cultural Binary Fission", 120), aptly characterizes a vivid hesitance by figures like Nūḥ Ḥā Mīm Keller, of the Shādhilī order, or Ḥamza Yūsūf, the dean of Zaytūna College in the United States, to discuss Sufi metaphysics and instead focus on the propagation of the legalistic and rational Islamic disciplines.

In the case of Keller, who is a licensed Shaykh in the Shādhilī order, his spiritual retreats consist of sessions of divine remembrance, teaching texts on law or theology and the *adab* (etiquettes) of the Sufi path. Yūsūf, on the other hand, seems altogether uninterested in collective gatherings of *dhikr* (remembrance), or any explicit espousal of *ṭarīqa* dynamics for that matter. Instead, he is invested in "a revival of philosophy ... [which] is crucial for a restoration of genuine faith fortified with reason and genuine civilization that cultivates care for the common good." ("Is the Matter of Metaphysics Immaterial? Yes and No").

Indeed, these selective approaches contrast with the heritage of these figures' Sufi orders or even their past practices. In the case of Keller, the provocative and ecstatic writings of the Shādhiliyya are marginalized in favor of more ascetically/ethically oriented treatises such as the *Ḥikam* and *Laṭā'if al-Minan* of Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) or rote recitation of the various litanies. Such a hesitance against engaging in metaphysical discourses is vivid in Keller's *Sea Without Shore* wherein the author ostracizes specialists like William Chittick and others who delve into Ibn al-'Arabī's writings and strip them of their Islamic character, in favor of a more perennialist approach.

As for Ḥamza Yūsuf, who does not belong to a *ṭarīqa* but has held numerous sessions of *dhikr* (divine remembrance) and *mawlid* (celebration of the birth of the Prophet) in the early days of his *da'wa* (preaching), upon returning from studying classical Islam in Mauritania. Through the years, however, his focus has shifted from this celebratory aspect of Sufism to the more sober and rational approach embodied in his statement above, and now institutionalized in his educational masterpiece, *Zaytūna* college.

In terms of primary references and ethnographic observations, this is evidenced by attending numerous gatherings in the Naqshbandiyya Ḥaqqāniyya and Tijāniyya Sufi brotherhoods that espouse ecstatic Sufism and metaphysical discourses, on the one hand, and the sober or legalistically-inclined Sufi groups, such as the Bā'alawiyya *ṭarīqa*. As for my observations of the latter group, during the summer of 2013 I was able to conduct a 3-month research in the city of Tarim, in the valley of Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen. This region has been the headquarters of the Bā'alawy Sufi order since the 11th century approximately. As Ismā'īl al-'Aṭṭāš describes, the “Šūfī order [was] first articulated by Muḥammad b. 'Alī Bā 'Alawī (d. 1255).” Later, the brotherhood was remolded by 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1720), who was “motivated by a drive to reform



society [and] successfully reshaped the order from its earlier emphasis on individual devotional efforts into a set of moral and ethical guidelines for both the elite and the masses. He systematized the *ṭarīqa* into a codified set of ethical teachings, on both the individual and social levels.” (“‘ Abdallāh b. ‘ Alawī al-Ḥaddād”).

This ethical project by al-Ḥaddād can certainly be felt throughout the religious schools and gatherings in Tarīm, as it is the overwhelming approach by all the scholars and saints who belong to the Bā‘alawy family. At Dār al-Muṣṭafā, the religious boarding school where I stayed, the daily schedule consisted of intense courses in the usual Islamic disciplines, such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *‘aqīda* (theology), *ḥadīth* (prophetic narrations), *‘ulūm al-qur’ān* (sciences of the Qur’an) and *tazkiya* (ascetic self-discipline). In this regard, the texts that find most circulation in the curriculums and *majālis al-‘ilm* (gatherings of knowledge) include Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 1111) *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī’s (d. 857) *Ādāb al-Nufūs* (The Etiquettes of the Souls), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 996) *Qūt al-Qulūb* (The Nourishment of Hearts) and al-Ḥaddād’s own *Risālat al-Mu‘āwana*, widely known among American members of the order as ‘The Book of Assistance.’

One would be hard pressed to find a single mention of Ibn al-‘Arabī in these gatherings of *‘ilm* (knowledge), much less a discussion of any of his works. Undoubtedly, al-Ḥaddād can be credited for such a marginalization due to the censure against reading the Andalusian mystic’s writings found in his *Book of Assistance*, with the well-known caveat that “we are not afraid of what you cannot understand [of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings and will therefore ignore]; rather, we are afraid of what you think you understand of his words.” Although the appreciation and emphasis on knowledge and learning among the Bā‘alawys means that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works can still be found, alongside even more controversial monographs such as al-Jīlī’s *al-Insān al-Kāmil* or the

Shī'ī thinker Ḥaydar Āmulī's commentary on *FH*, in the local bookstore across the street from Dār al-Muṣṭafā.

This program of “ethical and moral guidelines” can also be found among the Bā'alawy representatives in North America. Alongside the propagation of the ‘usual suspect’ works of al-Ghazālī and al-Ḥaddād, one can also find the teachings of Ḥabīb 'Umar b. Ḥafīdh, the dean of Dār al-Muṣṭafā and Sufi guide in the *ṭarīqa*. Although American Bā'alawys hold celebrations of the *mawlid*, similar to those held in Tarim, and recite Ibn Ḥafīdh's *al-Diyā' al-Lāmi'* (The Shimmering Light), a poetic commemoration of the birth of the Prophet, one can rarely find a mention of Ibn al-'Arabī or any discussion of metaphysics in these gatherings, writings or celebrations.

The case of the Bā'alawy Sufi order, in Yemen and North America, mostly coincides with the contemporary reality of other brotherhoods as well, such as the Shādhiliyya and Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya orders. Consider, for instance, Madina Institute, a center for teaching the traditional Islamic sciences headed by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Nīnawy, a Syrian scholar and Sufi guide in the Shādhilī order. One can find almost the same disciplines and texts taught at his school as those propagated by the Bā'alawys, with similar negligible mentions of Ibn al-'Arabī and his approach to ecstatic Sufism.

On the other hand, my experience attending the gatherings in the Sufi lodges of the Tījāniyya and Naqshbandiyya Ḥaqqāniyya orders contrasts drastically with those of the Bā'alawiyya and Shādhiliyya. First, one is hard pressed to find a class on a particular text in theology or jurisprudence in the gatherings of these brotherhoods, much less an entire curriculum devoted to these disciplines in a systematized manner. Instead, it seems as though the *ṣuḥba* (companionship) of the *walī* (saint), who embodies both the exoteric and esoteric Islamic disciplines, is the main theme undergirding the Tījānī and Ḥaqqānī pedagogies.

Second, whereas Ibn al-‘Arabī is something of a red flag among the Bā‘alawys and modern Shādhilīs, he is still part and parcel of the Ḥaqqānī and Tījānī discourses. In the first instance, the Andalusian mystic is a household name among other celebrated – and provocative – mystics such as Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874) and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). The former of these, of course, is quintessential to the Naqshbandiyya *ṭarīqa* as a link in its *silsila* (“Golden Chain”). As for the Tījānī gatherings, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most ecstatic expressions, such as those found in his *taṣliya* (benedictions upon the Prophet), are harmonious with the terms and motifs in the central litanies of the founder of the *ṭarīqa*, Aḥmad al-Tījānī. These formulas include *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* (the benediction of the ‘opener’) and *jawharat al-kamāl* (the jewel of perfection). For much of the terminology found in such benedictions, especially the latter, is thoroughly Akbarian and highlights this order’s openness to *taḥqīq* (spiritual self-realization) and *ḥaqā’iq* (spiritual realities).

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