The Qurʾanic Word *Rūḥ* and Its Restricted Interpretations: An Analysis of Classical *Tafsīr* Tradition and Sufi Thought

by

Peter Edwin Laffoon

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Master of Arts by Research

Center for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

School of Philosophy, Theology, and Religion

College of Arts and Law

October 2019

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to uncover a fuller meaning of the Qur'anic word *rūḥ* through a critical analysis of classical *tafsīr* tradition and Sufi thought. This paper challenges the prevailing scholarly opinion that *rūḥ* must be interpreted through the lens of the classical *tafsīr* tradition. I demonstrate the classical Islamic exegetes stayed within a restricted interpretation grid for *rūḥ* because of theological concerns—rooted in the fear of conflating *rūḥ* or Jesus with God. This limited how *rūḥ* was understood and conceived. This restricted interpretation grid has substantially impacted later exegetes, philologists, and Islamic scholars, further limiting the scope of meanings of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. In addition, this paper proposes that Sufi thought regarding *rūḥ* is paramount for disclosing a fuller meaning. I introduce four distinct, Sufi understandings of *rūḥ* that are a sharp contrast from the restricted interpretation grid of the classical exegetes and offer a different lens for interpreting the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. This paper recommends a more critical reading of classical *tafsīr*, as well as a broader acceptance of the different Sufi understandings. This more fully illuminates the meaning of *rūḥ*, thereby significantly effecting Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic thought, and Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the professorial staff at University of Birmingham for guiding and directing me through this Master of Research program. Dr. Richard Todd was my primary supervisor, and he proved to be an invaluable repository of information on the subject matter. His strong, academic acumen was displayed during our meetings, as he would introduce relevant, secondary literature and identify unnecessary digressions. I would also like to sincerely thank Dr. Deryn Guest, Dr. Yafa Shanneik, and Dr. Oliver Scharbrodt, who assisted me when Dr. Todd had to take an unexpected leave of absence. Dr. Scharbrodt took over as my temporary supervisor, and his patience, availability, and eye for detail were crucial as I completed the final stages of my dissertation.

Second, I would like to thank certain individuals who helped me along the way. Shannon Bachelor was the first person to dialogue with me about the common ground between Christianity and Islam. He also read my dissertation and provided valuable insight. I am very grateful to Dr. Martin Whittingham, Dr. Gabriel Reynolds, and Dr. Joshua Ralston, who took the time to read my initial proposal and dissertation and offer constructive feedback and practical suggestions. I am also greatly indebted to Khaled Snowber, Israa al-Oudat, and Hanan Qudah at the Qasid Arabic Institute in Amman, Jordan. I began my research on the Qur'anic *rūḥ* at Qasid, and their extensive knowledge and patient instruction equipped me to read, translate, and analyze classical, medieval, and modern Islamic exegetical documents in Arabic. In addition, I would like to extend thanks to Iyad Abu Rabea, who processed my ideas with me in Arabic and helped me accurately translate the works of Ruzbihan al-Baqli, al-Jili, and Ibn 'Arabi. Cody Nelson and Ben

Horn are also deserving of appreciation as they read over the early stages of my dissertation and greatly encouraged me in my writing and the direction of my thoughts.

Third, I am extremely grateful to the Spalding Trust. They helped me fund this research as part of their mandate to promote intercultural understanding through the comparative study of religions.

Fourth, I cannot begin to express my deep thankfulness and gratitude for the steadfast support and help of my amazing wife, Ana, and our five wonderful kids: Jed, Ilse, Joel, Abe, and Nove. My wife had a profound belief in my thesis and writing abilities that encouraged me daily. In addition, she tirelessly copy edited my paper for the conventions of language, syntax, grammar, and spelling. Her unparalleled excellence as an editor was crucial to the success of my dissertation. I love you, darling.

Lastly, and most importantly, all praise and honor is due to God. He brought new life to me by His Spirit and saved me by His Word. My prayer is this dissertation will lead to a more shared understanding of the concept of spirit among Christianity and Islam, offering a framework for fruitful dialogue.

Note on Transliteration

For words, book titles, and article titles written in non-Latin alphabets, I follow the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) system of transliteration. Diacritics will not be added to personal names, place names, or words found in the Merriam–Webster's dictionary.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Background 1
Thesis and Methods 5
Literature Review 7

2.0 ***Rūḥ* in the Classical Sunni *Tafsīr* Tradition** 15

2.1 *Rūḥ* and Jesus 23
2.2 *Rūḥ* and Adam 46
2.3 *Rūḥ* and *Amr* 55
2.4 *Rūḥ* and Angels 67
2.5 *Rūḥ* in Other Contexts 75
2.6 Summary of *Rūḥ* in the Classical Sunni *Tafsīr* Tradition 81

3.0 ***Rūḥ* in Sufi Thought** 85

3.1 Al-Hallaj 88
3.2 Al-Ghazali 99
3.3 Ibn ‘Arabi 109
3.4 Al-Jili 118
3.5 Summary of *Rūḥ* in Sufi Thought 130

4.0 **CONCLUSION** 135

5.0 **BIBLIOGRAPHY** 147

INTRODUCTION

Background

There is much about the Qur'an that is unknown—from the cryptic letters that open twenty-nine suras (chapters), to ambiguous verses (*ayāt mutashābiha*), to indistinct vocabulary throughout the text. The Qurʾan encourages people to contemplate its meanings (Q 4:82, Q 47:24), describing itself as a veiled book (*kitāb maknūn*) (Q 56:78). Not all of its meanings are obvious. A prime example of this is the mystery surrounding the word *rūḥ.* Q 17:85 says, "[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit (*rūḥ*). Say, 'The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge.'"[1] This verse exemplifies the questions and perplexity regarding the nature of *rūḥ*,[2] its role, and its relationship to God. Most Islamic exegetes say it is created, describing it as a material intermediary—such as Gabriel or a super angel, an immaterial force—such as an electric current or strong wind, a subtle matter or vapor that enters the body—giving it life, or an impersonal energy transmitted by God for inspiration. Whereas a few others conceive of *rūḥ* as uncreated, describing it as a divine attribute of God—similar to the word of God (*kalām Allāh*) or the life of God (*hayyāt Allāh*), the essence of God (*dhāt Allāh*), or as a circumlocution for God—utilized to convey God's nearness and involvement with the world without compromising His transcendence. The word *rūḥ* comes from the Arabic root (*r-ū-ḥ*) and is used twenty times in the Qurʾan in the singular feminine form. It has the same cognate as the Hebraic word *ruach* (r-w-ch), the Judeo-Aramaic word *ruha* (r-w-h), and its Syriac descendant

---

[1] Ali Quli Qarai, trans., *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English* Translation, 6th ed. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018). I have chosen to use this translation of the Qur'an for each Qur'anic verse unless otherwise specified in the footnotes.

[2] For ease, readability and to avoid confusion, I have elected to use the word *rūḥ* to mean *rūḥ* and *al-rūḥ*, unless otherwise noted.

ruha (r-w-h), being predominately feminine in all Semitic languages.[3] It is used in various contexts in the Qur'an, and often its meaning is vague and obscure. Islamic exegetes have offered many possible meanings and interpretations for *rūḥ*—both complimentary and contradictory. These meanings include, but are not limited to: inspiration, the Qur'an, victory, breath, wind, Gabriel, strength, mercy, omnipotence, Jesus, created soul, honorific title, revelation, a being that appears as a man but is neither man nor angel, and a superior angel. There are also several instances where exegetes, such as al-Tabari (310 AH/923 CE), were noticeably silent about the possible meaning of *rūḥ* and would say that only God knows.[4] This silence might have been for fear of saying something that compromised the concept of God's unity (*tawḥīd*), or because *rūḥ* was considered to be part of the knowledge of the unknown (*'ilm-al-ghayb*).

The Islamic jurist and theologian, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (251 AH/855 CE), once said, "Whoever says the word '*rūḥ*' is created (*makhlūq*) is a heretic; whoever says that it is eternal (*qadīm*) is an unbeliever."[5] Ibn Hanbal, one of the most revered intellectual figures in Islamic history,[6] talks about *rūḥ* in a way that seems to converge the ideas of created and uncreated, admitting "in some manner the eternity of *rūḥ Allāh* ."[7] This is similar to the way in which Ibn Hanbal talks about *kalimat Allāh* (the word of God) as a divine attribute of God. This idea, however, was not reflected in early exegesis. *Rūḥ* was understood solely as *muhdath* (created),

[3] Thomas J, O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* (Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948), 10. "Breathing" and "the blowing of the wind" are also both indicated by the root (r-w-h) in all three of these Semitic languages.
[4] Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir, Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari: Jami al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, ed. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1997), XXVII, 51.
[5] Louis Massignon, *La Passion d'al-Hosayn-Ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj, Martyr Mystique de l'Islam: Exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922: Etude d'histoire Religieuse* (Paris: Geuthner, 1922), 664.
[6] Ibn Hanbal was part of *ahl al-hadith*, a group of early scholars that rejected speculative theology and were extremely suspicious of the use of reason. Ibn Hanbal achieved notoriety for the role he played in overturning the *mihna* (inquisition) of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun that imposed the Mu'tazila doctrine of the Qur'an being created. Ibn Hanbal refused to accept this doctrine, saying instead that the Qur'an is the uncreated, eternal word of God. As a result, he was put in jail and tortured.
[7] Massignon, *La Passion*, 661.

and not *qadīm* (eternally existing)—thereby impeding it from potentially being a divine attribute of God. There seemed to be a fear among the classical exegetes that if *rūḥ* was attributed to God, it might cause a plurality within God jeopardizing God's unity (*tawhīd*), or have potential anthropomorphic overtones threatening God's transcendence.

There also appears to be a theological concern among the early exegetes pertaining to the relationship between *rūḥ* and Jesus. There are seven verses where *rūḥ* is used in conjunction with Jesus. Three verses say Jesus was strengthened by the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*), two verses regard the account of Mary's miraculous conception, one verse concerns the annunciation to Mary, and the final verse designates Jesus as "a spirit from Him" (*rūḥun minhu*).

Early Arab Christian theologians, such as Theodore Abu Qurra (221 AH/825 CE) and the unknown author of *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd* (On the Triune Nature of God),[8] appropriated Jesus's Qur'anic titles of *rūḥ Allāh* and *kalimat Allāh* in their attempts at a more irenic, contextualized approach. They referred often to the Qur'an's identification of Jesus as God's "word" and "spirit" in order to emphasize the uniqueness and divinity of Christ.[9] The interpretive attempts of the Arab Christian theologians, however, ran counter to the classical Islamic exegesis of *rūḥ*. *Rūḥ* is usually seen as Gabriel, even in some contexts where it is implausible.[10] Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh* is often interpreted as being an honorific title, because Jesus is a soul created by and belonging to God.[11]

[8] Margaret Dunlop Gibson, ed., "Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd," *Studia Sinaitica* 7, 74-107. London, 1899.
[9] J. Scott Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an: A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Qur'an in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), 91-92.
[10] Sara Tlili, "From Breath to Soul: The Quranic Word Ruh and Its (M)isinterpretations," in *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 11.
[11] Muhammad Fakhr al-Din ibn al-'Allama Diya al-Din 'Umar al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr Al-Razi, Al-Mushtahir bi-l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, ed. Khalil Muhya al-Din al-Mais (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), Q 2:87.

One might say the works of Abu Qurra and *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd* are examples of Christians proof-texting the Qur'an. However, the later exegesis of these verses by Tabari, Razi, and other classical Islamic exegetes was certainly affected by this type of Christian-Muslim dialogue and polemics. The potential theological implications of Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh* likely caused the exegetes to interpret *rūḥ* differently. An examination of their exegesis is necessary to determine whether it was hampered by theological concerns.

The classical Islamic exegetes stayed within the same interpretation grid for most verses concerning *rūḥ*—considering it to be either Gabriel, a super angel/metaphysical creature, a created soul, divine inspiration transmitted by God, or by remaining silent and not offering any interpretation. This interpretation grid had a systemic effect on the understanding of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* that extended to medieval and modern Islamic exegetes, philosophers, and the philologists who compiled the great Arabic lexicons. This effect is represented in the progressive change in meaning from the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya* period, where *rūḥ* meant "breath," to the post-Qur'anic period where it is used interchangeably with the word "soul" (*nafs*).[12] The Qur'anic *rūḥ* became equated with *nafs* in spite of it never being used in the Qur'an with the meaning of soul.[13]

The evolution of the meaning of *rūḥ*, the many contexts in which it is presented, the various definitions attributed to it, the occasional silences, the potential theological concerns, the conflicting traditions, and the contradictions among early exegetes cause the intended meaning of *rūḥ* to be difficult to decipher. Gabriel Reynolds says most Islamic scholars have the opinion that a reliable reading and hermeneutic of the Qur'an is formed through an in-depth reading of

[12] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 20.
[13] Duncan B. Macdonald, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam," *The Muslim World* 22, no. 1 (1932): 26; Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 20; O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 11.

Qur'anic exegesis.[14] The problem is, if the original exegesis does not capture the full meaning, it affects all subsequent scholarship.

Islamic thought is not monolithic, however, and the views of the classical Islamic exegetes were not the last definitive interpretation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. Within the mystical branch of Sufism, there are several mystics and thinkers who conceived of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* in ways that are a stark departure from the limitations of the classical exegetes. These mystics and thinkers were not hampered by the same theological concerns, but rather were emboldened in their contemplation of *rūḥ* because of the emphasis and uniqueness bestowed on it in the Qur'an.

Thesis and Methodology

This paper challenges the dominant, scholarly notion that the Qur'anic *rūḥ* must be interpreted through the lens of classical Sunni exegesis. My thesis states: classical, Islamic exegetes were limited by theological concerns in their interpretation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*—afraid of conflating *rūḥ* with Jesus or God, which restricted the senses in which the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was understood and conceived. Sufi thought on the Qur'anic *rūḥ* includes different understandings outside the restricted interpretation grid of classical exegetes; these insights are imperative for illuminating the meaning of this enigmatic term.

I intend to test my thesis by researching the concept of *rūḥ* on several platforms and utilizing the following methods. I begin by conducting a literature review of all the relevant, secondary research regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. I give a brief description of each study, acknowledge respective strengths and advances made, as well as identify any deficiencies or

[14] Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2009), 252.

limitations. To conclude this section, I determine the gaps in research in order to establish the originality of my thesis and the necessity of my study.

Following the literature review, I introduce section one, in which I focus on the understanding of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* in classical Sunni exegesis (*tafsīr*). I have chosen to examine the commentaries of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi (685 AH/1286 CE), and al-Razi (543 AH/1149 CE) regarding each of the twenty times *rūḥ* is used in the Qur'an. I group the majority of the verses into four sense groups: *rūḥ* and Jesus, *rūḥ* and Adam, *rūḥ* and *amr* (command or affair), and *rūḥ* and angels. The remaining three verses I put in a separate category entitled *rūḥ* in other contexts. I conduct a systematic analysis by providing a detailed account of the exegetical opinions of these three, classical, Sunni exegetes regarding *rūḥ* for each of the twenty verses. Then, I offer a substantive discussion for each verse regarding the varied opinions and exegetical methods of the classical exegetes, as well as a textual analysis to derive other possible interpretations.

In section two, I investigate the writings of several Sufi mystics and thinkers pertaining to the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. When I began my research, I studied the opinions of the major Sufi exegetes, such as al-Tustari (283 AH/896 CE), al-Baqli (595 AH/1209 CE), al-Qushayri (465 AH/ 1072 CE), and al-Jilani (561 AH/1166 CE), thinking they would offer new understandings of Qur'anic *rūḥ* since their interpretations took into account both the exoteric (*zāhir*) and inner (*bātin*) senses of the Qur'an. Instead, they followed the same interpretation grid set by the classical Sunni exegetes, while glossing it in more figurative and esoteric language. These exegetes did not question the validity of the classical exegetes' interpretations. They seem to have had either similar theological concerns to the classical exegetes or to have accepted the set interpretation grid in order to attach Sufi thought to classical Sunni orthodoxy. A further study of the corpus of Sufi literature revealed, however, several key Sufi mystics and thinkers—al-Hallaj (309 AH/922

CE), al-Ghazali (406 AH/1111 CE), Ibn ʻArabi (543 AH/1148 CE), and al-Jili (829 AH/1424 CE)—who conceived of *rūḥ* outside of the restricted grid of the classical Sunni exegetes. My study looks at each of their views in turn, noting new, potential meanings and understandings of *rūḥ*. I determine if these interpretations are accordant with the Qur'anic portrayal of *rūḥ*, and I contrast these new meanings and understandings with the limited interpretation grid used by the classical Sunni exegetes. I then raise questions as to how the application of these distinct Sufi understandings might affect the standard interpretation of the verses concerning *rūḥ*. In my conclusion, I summarize my findings from section one and section two. Then, I highlight the impact and value of my study, and offer future recommendations.

Literature Review

A close look at the literature regarding the Qur'anic word *rūḥ* reveals gaps and deficiencies. First, several studies rely on a chronological arrangement of the Qur'an. The first person to utilize this method in their analysis of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was T. J. O'Shaughnessy in *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit* (1947). O'Shaughnessy said there is a progressive development in the mind of Muhammad in his understanding of *rūḥ*, and this development is evident from a chronological reading of the Qur'an.[15] He divides the Qur'anic revelations into four periods—first, second, and third Meccan periods, and the Medinan period. Since the Qur'an is not arranged chronologically, he uses the chronology of Nöldeke and Blachere in an attempt to divide the twenty uses of *rūḥ* into these four periods. Nöldeke advanced his arrangement in

[15] O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 16.

Geschichte des Qorâns (1860)—basing it on the prior arrangement of Gustav Weil in *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (1844).[16] Both of these arrangements were formed from the *Sīra Nabawiyya* (Biography of the Prophet Muhammad). Nöldeke and Weil believed each chapter (*sūra*) of the Qur'an, in its entirety, can be placed in a specific point in the Prophet's life.[17] Their arrangement was based on the same premise of Islamic tradition that the Qur'an is to be interpreted in light of the biography of Muhammad.[18] Blachere's arrangement, proposed in *Introduction au Coran* (1959), was compiled on a literary basis, independent from the *Sīra Nabawiyya* and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), because he believed the reports in Islamic tradition were unreliable.[19]

O'Shaughnessy theorizes *rūḥ* has four sense groups that correspond to the four periods of Qur'anic revelation. In the first Meccan period, *rūḥ* is a personal being set above the angels. In the second Meccan period, *rūḥ* is an impersonal thing originating with God and bringing life to the human body. In the third Meccan period, *rūḥ* is from the command (*amr*) of the Lord. In the fourth period, Medinan period, *rūḥ* is identified as the spirit of holiness and is used in both a personal and impersonal sense. O'Shaughnessy's usage of a chronological arrangement of the Qur'an was common at the time, as most scholars believed the *Sīra Nabawiyya* was a trustworthy source of historical information. In like manner, C.G. Mylrea in *The Holy Spirit in the Qur'an* (1910), W.G. Shellabear in his brief article entitled "The Meaning Of The Word Spirit As Used In The Koran" (1932), and James Kritzek in his short chapter entitled "The Holy Spirit in Islam"

[16] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 4.
[17] Ibid., 4.
[18] Ibid., 8.
[19] Ibid., 10.

(1975), used similar chronological arrangements as the basis of their analysis of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.

The reliability of this method, however, has been questioned by several scholars, including Richard Bell. In *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Bell says,

> In the great bulk of the Qur'an there is either no reference to historical events, or the events and circumstances to which reference is made are not otherwise known. In regard to such passages there are often differing traditions, and as often as not the stories related to explain them turn out, when critically examined, to be imagined from the passages themselves. . . There is, in effect, no reliable tradition as to the historical order of the Qur'an.[20]

The Qur'an does not advocate any chronological arrangement nor is it possible to extrapolate a timeline from it. Several decades after the first volume of Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns*, Henri Lammens contended that the *Sira Nabbawiyya* was originated and advanced by the Islamic community in order to explain the Qur'an.[21] Lammens maintains that the *Sīra Nabbawiyya* was a result of exegesis (*tafsīr*)—making it ill-suited to explain the Qur'an.[22] Wansborough concurs, saying a chronology of the Qur'an based on the *Sīra Nabbawiyya* is specious, because the stories within it have no historical authority.[23] O'Shaughnessy, Shellabear, and Kritzek utilize the chronological arrangement of the Qur'an in order to substantiate their claim that there is a progressive development in the meaning of *rūḥ* in the Qur'an. The questionable reliability of the chronological arrangement, however, makes the conclusions they draw debatable.

Second, a couple of studies suffer from implicit bias. One example of this is O'Shaughnessy's investigation of the development of *rūḥ* in the Qur'an. O'Shaughnessy begins

---

[20] Richard Bell and W. Montgomery Watt. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh U.P., 1970), 100.
[21] Henry Lammens. "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad was Composed," in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000), 181, cited in Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 9.
[22] Lammens, *The Koran and Tradition*, 181, cited in Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 9.
[23] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 12.

with the presupposition that Muhammad fabricated the ideological content of his message. He draws extensively from the writings of Judeo-Christian and Gnostic sects, revealing a strong parallel between them and the Qur'anic verses on *rūḥ*.[24] He says Muhammad was strongly influenced by these sources, borrowed extensively from them, and remade the accounts in a form and style that suited his purposes and assuaged the needs of his growing number of followers. To call similarities between the Qur'an and Judeo-Christian and Gnostic writings "extensive borrowings," however, is naive. Reynolds says, "the Qur'an isn't so much borrowing from any particular work, but rather emerging from a religious culture in which these traditions were discussed and elaborated."[25] The implicit bias and polemical rhetoric in O'Shaugnessy's study undermine his argument. Another example, though less polemical, is Shellabear's short article. He theorizes that the confusion, uncertainty, and varied explanations of scholars and Islamic exegetes regarding *rūḥ* in the Qur'an is because *rūḥ* is a foreign word. *Rūḥ* is a "loan word" from the Hebrew language, and had never been used in Arabic prior to the Qur'an.[26] In order to safely infer the meaning of *rūḥ* in the Qur'an there must be an investigation of the usage and understanding of *ruach*—the Hebrew cognate of *rūḥ*—in the Old Testament, and *rūḥa*—the Syriac cognate of *rūḥ*—in the New Testament.[27] Shellabear's suggestion of drawing from the Judaic and Christian understandings of *ruach* and *rūḥ* is well-founded. Reynolds says the Qur'an's relationship to its Biblical subtext is like "the relationship of homily and scripture,"[28] in that the Qur'an frequently uses a single word or phrase to allude to a larger Biblical story.[29]

[24] Much of it was built on the work of Tor Andrae, who investigated Syrian ecclesiastical writings.
[25] Gabriel S. Reynolds and A.Q. Qarai, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 2018), 9.
[26] W. G. Shellabear, "The Meaning of the Word 'Spirit' as Used in the Koran," *The Muslim World* 22, no. 4 (1932), 356.
[27] Ibid., 356-357.
[28] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 233.
[29] Ibid., 233.

However, Shellabear's assertion that *rūḥ* was not used in Arabic prior to the Qur'an is dubious. Several of the classical exegetes, including al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Zamakhshari (538 AH/1144 CE), cite poetry and pre-Qur'anic expressions where *rūḥ* was used in the sense of "breath" or "wind." The word *rūḥ* is Semitic in origin and shares cognates with Syriac, Hebrew, and Aramaic. It is not simply "loaned" from these languages, but the understanding of these cognates can aid in the attempt to uncover the meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.

Third, many of the previous studies on the Qur'anic *rūḥ* cannot be considered conclusive because they lack in detail and depth, in their presentation of the views of the earlier Islamic exegetes, and in their engagement of these opinions through analysis and discussion. One example of this is Duncan Macdonald, who utilizes the Qur'anic exegesis of *rūḥ* in his two-part article entitled, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam" (1932). He cites opinions from classical exegetes, medieval exegetes, and Sufi exegetes in order to demonstrate the progression in the interpretation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, and the stark difference between the Qur'anic usage of *rūḥ* and its immediate, post-Qur'anic usage. He says the meaning of *rūḥ* before the Qur'an was restricted to "breath," "wind," "odor," or "rest."[30] The Qur'an introduced the meaning of *rūḥ* as "spirit," and the subsequent exegesis of the Qur'an contrived an additional meaning of *rūḥ* as "created human soul." Macdonald says this additional meaning diverted the speculation of Islamic exegetes to the understanding of the human soul and life after death.[31] This persisted until Sufi exegetes began questioning anew the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. Macdonald mentions several Sufi

[30] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit in Islam I," 25.
[31] Ibid., 34-36.

exegetical opinions regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ* and suggests a further investigation of Sufi exegesis regarding *rūḥ* will reveal new potential meanings and understandings.[32]

Macdonald's research is a great survey of the historical progression of meaning regarding *rūḥ*. However, outside of an in-depth analysis regarding the entanglement in meaning of *rūḥ* with *nafs* (soul), his work is cursory in nature. He cites the opinions of Islamic exegetes from each period sparingly—giving a semblance of their views, but lacking in depth, he does not mention all of the verses in which *rūḥ* is used, and only gives concise remarks.

Another example is C. G. Mylrea and Iskandur al-Messih in *The Holy Spirit in the Qur'an*. Mylrea divides *rūḥ* in four categories: *rūḥ* identified with angels—especially Gabriel; *rūḥ* identified with creation—especially man; *rūḥ* identified with inspiration; and *rūḥ* identified with Jesus.[33] He bases this division on the exegetical opinions of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, *tafsīr* al-Jalalain by al-Suyuti (911 AH/1505 CE), al-*Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhshari, and the chronological arrangement proposed by Theodor Nöldeke. Mylrea cites the interpretations of three exegetes for each of the twenty verses where *rūḥ* is used and offers remarks regarding them. Mylrea's research demonstrates the divergence of opinions among classical Islamic exegetes regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, however, his remarks are very brief, not constructive, and polemical.

Fourth, some of the previous studies are too narrow in their focus, leaving key questions and notions unaddressed. One example of this is Sara Tlili's chapter, "From Breath to Soul: The Qur'anic Word *Rūḥ* and its (M)isinterpretations." Tlili examines the Qur'anic exegesis of *rūḥ* to note the progressive change in the meaning of *rūḥ* from "blown breath" to "soul." She illustrates

[32] Duncan B. Macdonald, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam," *The Muslim World* 22, no. 2 (1932): 165-168.
[33] G. C. Mylrea and Iskandur 'Abdu'l-Masíḥ, *The Holy Spirit in Qur'án and Bible* (London: Christian Literature Society for India, 1910), 1-10.

this by looking at the exegesis of *rūḥ* by three different exegetes in three eras—al-Tabari's classical exegesis, al-Qurtubi's (671 AH/1273 CE) medieval exegesis, and Ibn Ashur's (1394 AH/1973 CE) modern exegesis. There is a clear progression from *rūḥ* being a mysterious metaphysical being, such as Gabriel or a fantastical super angel, to it becoming a comprehendible life force setting humans apart from animals.[34] She attributes the initial meaning to the theocentric worldview of the classical exegetes that emphasizes God's omnipotence and human limitations, and purports the change happened due to an anthropocentric trend among exegetes of the medieval and modern eras emphasizing the uniqueness of humans.[35] She says the Islamic exegetes utilize flawed interpretative strategies to appropriate human ends, resulting in an inability to find the true meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.[36]

Tlili offers strong evidence that there is a clear distinction between the Qur'anic *rūḥ* and *nafs* by pointing out the problems in the classical, medieval, and modern exegesis of *rūḥ.* Her study is a step towards a more profound understanding of *rūḥ*, however, it leaves many questions unanswered and notions unaddressed. Like the classical exegetes, Tlili never questions whether *rūḥ* could be something other than created. She refers to the original meaning of *rūḥ* as "breath", theorizing it to be an inanimate object God made supernatural. That it could be a divine attribute of God is never considered. Tlili insinuates the exegetes may have been affected by dogmatic or political considerations, however, this is never explored.

[34] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 22.
[35] Ibid., 21.
[36] Ibid., 23-24.

The questionable reliability of methodology, lack of detail, scant analysis, polemical tone, implicit bias, and narrow focus have limited the scope and scale of previous studies—causing the question of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* to remain insufficiently explored.

1.0 *Rūḥ* in the Classical Sunni *Tafsīr* Tradition

This section focuses on the understanding of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* in the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. I examine the *tafsīr* because of its utmost significance in the religious and intellectual history of Islam. *Tafsīr* is the exegesis or explanation of the Qur'an and, for the majority of Muslims, it is the lens by which the Qur'an is understood—to the degree that much of what Muslims believe is written in the Qur'an is actually from *tafsīr*.[37]

The classical period of *tafsīr* is generally assumed to have begun around 300 years after the death of the prophet Muhammad and to have ended around the end of the 6th century AH/ 13th century CE.[38] I have chosen to investigate the Sunni *tafsīr* of the classical period for several reasons. First, most of the exegetical works written during the pre-classical period are either no longer in existence or have not yet been edited—making a study of that period for the purpose of this research unfeasible. Second, the Qur'anic commentaries of the medieval and modern periods of *tafsīr* are often compilations based, almost entirely, on classical commentaries. I researched the medieval and modern period *tafsīr* of al-Qurtubi, al-Suyuti, Ibn Kathir (774 AH/1373 CE), al-Shawkhani (1250 AH/1839 CE), al-Jalalayn, al-Biqa'i (885 AH/1480 CE), al-Nisaburi (405 AH/1014 CE), Ibn Ashur, al-Tantawi (1410 AH/2010 CE), and al-Sharawi (1398 AH/1998 CE) and found their interpretations of *rūḥ* to be within the same interpretation grid as the classical Sunni exegetes. Third, the classical Sunni *tafsīr* has had a larger impact on later Qur'anic exegesis, and on the overall understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an in the Islamic world at large, then its Shi'ite counterpart. Fourth, after researching the classical Shi'ite commentaries

[37] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E. B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harper One: 2015), 1657.
[38] Neil Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60.

of al-Tabarsi (548 AH/1153 CE), al-Tusi (669 AH/1274 CE, al-Qummi (314 AH/919 CE), and the medieval Shi'ite commentary of al-Kashani (625 AH/1429 CE), I determined the classical Shi'ite exegesis regarding *rūḥ* did not depart from the restricted interpretation grid of the classical Sunni exegetes—thereby deeming its inclusion in this study unnecessary.

Within the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, I extensively researched the commentaries of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi, al-Mawardi (454 AH/1058 CE), al-Maturidi (342 AH/944 CE), al-Baghawi (516 AH/1122 CE), Ibn al-Jawzi (510 AH/1116 CE), Ibn Atiyya (545 AH/1151 CE), and al-Zamakhshari in order to determine if any of the classical exegetes offered variant opinions regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. My research revealed all of the major classical exegetes followed the same restricted interpretation grid. Space does not allow me to cite the individual opinions of all of the classical exegetes. For this reason, I have chosen to specifically examine the commentaries of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi. Their commentaries are among the foremost exegetical commentaries of the period, are still widely read and relied upon today, are reflective of the views of the body of classical exegetes, and are representative of the three major approaches in the classical Sunni tradition—traditional, philological, and philosophical.

Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari's commentary is the pre-eminent example of the traditional approach in classical Sunni *tafsīr*. Al-Tabari was an eminent Muslim historian and theologian, acclaimed for his vast knowledge on varied subjects and prodigious output in his writing. Al-Tabari's commentary, *Jāmiʿal-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (The Commentary on the Qurʾan), is the earliest surviving, major commentary of the Qurʾan.[39] Al-Tabari's exegesis is

[39] It is a 3000 page compilation and arrangement of the first two and a half centuries of Muslim exegesis, and has been praised for its comprehensiveness and detail. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 42.

primarily *tafsīr bi 'ma'thūr* (exegesis based on tradition) because of the extraordinary number of exegetical hadiths he integrates. For each individual passage, al-Tabari records traditions and views of earlier authorities or contemporary scholars.[40] In his attempt to catalog as many traditions and reports as possible, he often admits opposing views and cites conflicting traditions from the same source. This allows the reader to become aware of the amount of disagreement in early Islamic interpretation of the Qurʾan.[41] He also inserts his own opinion, which is an evaluation of all the traditions he mentions. Al-Tabari attentively lists the chain of transmission (*isnād*) for each hadith; however, a closer inspection reveals some faulty chains of transmission (*asanīd*). This happens when someone is referred to without being named, or the person being referred to has a bad reputation, or names in the chain of transmission are missing.[42] Additionally, al-Tabari's exegesis occasionally suffers from his atomistic exegetical method—he tends to read each verse independently of context and parallel passages.[43] These issues notwithstanding, al-Tabari's commentary is widely esteemed. Al-Tabari's commentary has served as a major authority for more than a thousand years for numerous Islamic exegetes and is a prime example of *tafsīr bi 'ma'thūr*, making its incorporation in this analysis essential.

Nasir al-Din Abu al-Khair 'Abdullah b.'Umar al-Baydawi's (685 AH/1286 CE) commentary is a significant example of the philological approach in classical Sunni *tafsīr*. Al-Baydawi was a Muslim theologian, scholar, and jurist known for his broad learning. This is exemplified in the large number of books he wrote on diverse subjects such as Qur'anic exegesis, law, jurisprudence, history, scholastic theology, grammar, and from his position as chief judge in

[40] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 60.
[41] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 103.
[42] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 71.
[43] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 107.

the city of Shiraz.[44] His most well-known work is his commentary, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* (The Lights of Revelation and Secrets of Interpretation). The foundation of al-Baydawi's commentary is a compilation of earlier scholarly works. He draws most heavily from al-Zamakhshari's landmark exegetical commentary, *al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl* (Unveiling of the Realities of the Revelation).[45] Al-Baydawi does not merely copy their work; he often adds his own additional comments. Al-Baydawi uses the method of phrase-by-phrase exegesis, and his exegetical content displays his wide-ranging knowledge.[46] His commentary is an example of the philological approach because of the employment of Arabic grammar in exegesis, the inclusion of *qira'at* (variant readings), and his commentary's conciseness—condensing a copious amount of information from various sources into a compact commentary.[47] Al-Baydawi received some criticism for places where he failed to remove al-Zamakhsari's Mu'tazilite views; however, al-Baydawi's commentary is one of the most studied exegetical commentaries, and is considered by many to be one of the most widely read and most important.[48] Al-Baydawi's emphasis on the role of grammar in Qur'anic exegesis, along with his incorporation of numerous, varied sources, make his classical Sunni commentary an indispensable addition to this examination of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.

Abu ʾAbdullah Muhammad b. Umar b. al-Husayn at-Taymi al-Bakri at-Tabaristani Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's (543 AH/1149 CE) commentary is the chief example of the philosophical

[44] Oliver Leaman. *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2006), 117.
[45] Ibid., 117.
[46] Ibid., 117.
[47] Ibid., 117-118.
[48] Walid Saleh. "Al-Bayḍāwī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam Volume* 3, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudron Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

approach in classical Sunni *tafsīr*. Al-Razi was a Muslim theologian and scholar who is renowned for his erudition in philosophy and theology. His commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (The Keys to the Unseen), is a colossal work of 32 volumes that has been both celebrated and criticized.[49] Taqi al-Din b. Taymiyah (728 AH/1328 CE) criticized it, saying it contains "everything but *tafsīr*."[50] Others have praised al-Razi for his unique method and arrangement and his employment of both *tafsīr bil' ra'ī* (exegesis by opinion) and *tafsīr bi 'ma'thūr* (exegesis by tradition). Al-Razi divides his exegesis of every passage into a series of questions. He then subdivides each question in order to address the full array of differing interpretations.[51] He methodically addresses the questions one at a time by listing various answers and solutions drawn from grammarians, philologists, and the founders of different legal schools.[52] Al-Razi eschewed the previous methods of *tafsīr*, relying instead on a philosophical approach. In his commentary, al-Razi often cites the views of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the early trusted authorities. However, unlike al-Tabari, he does not usually include the *asanīd* (chains of transmission). Another notable aspect of al-Razi's commentary is the incorporation of reports from the early commentaries of al-Kalbi and Muqatil b. Sulayman, and from the Mu'tazilite exegesis of Abu Muslim and 'Abd' al-Jabbar[53]—despite his clear anti-Mu'tazilite stance and staunch support of Ash'ari Sunnism in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Al-Razi's unique philosophical and analytical approach makes him a necessary inclusion in the study of classical Sunni exegesis regarding *rūḥ*.

[49] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 64.
[50] Al-Safadi, *Biography of al-Razi*, 4:254, cited and quoted in McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 68.
[51] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 69.
[52] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 72.
[53] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 72.

I examine the opinions of these three exegetes for each of the twenty verses *rūḥ* is used in the Qur'an. I divide the majority of the verses into four sense groups. The first sense group is *rūḥ* and Jesus and is comprised of seven verses. Three verses say Jesus was strengthened by *rūḥ al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit) (Q 2:87, Q 2:253, Q 5:110), two verses regard the account of Mary's miraculous conception (Q 21:91, Q 66:12), one verse concerns the annunciation to Mary (Q 19:17), and the final verse designates Jesus as "a spirit from him" (*rūḥun minhu*) (Q 4:171). The second sense group is *rūḥ* and Adam and consists of three verses (Q 15:29, Q 32:9, Q 38:72). All three of these verses pertain to the creation of Adam and how the blowing of/from *rūḥ* is related to it. The third sense group is *rūḥ* and *amr* (command) and has three verses (Q 17:85, Q 40:15, Q 42:52). One verse is the reply of the Prophet Muhammad to the question about *al-rūḥ*, and the other two verses speak of the means by which God's servants, including the Prophet Muhammad, receive revelation. The fourth sense group is *rūḥ* and angels and contains four verses (Q 16:2. Q 70:4, Q 78:38, Q 97:4). These verses speak of the angels and *rūḥ* as ascending and descending between heaven and earth, standing before the throne of God on judgement day, and inspiring God's servants. The final three verses do not fit within any of the four primary sense groups, so I put them in a sub-section entitled *rūḥ* in other contexts. The classical exegetes tended towards atomistic exegesis—interpreting single verses, sentences, and even single words independent of the context.[54] Dividing the twenty verses into these four sense groups, however, discloses the allusions and references in the Qur'an to different verses in similar contexts. This brings clarity to ambiguous verses (*ayāt mutashābiha*), where the meaning of *rūḥ* is vague and elusive.

[54] Reynolds says this atomism may have been prompted by the format of *tafsīr* in which the Qur'an is approached little by little in canonical order, *sūra* by *sūra*, verse by verse. Reynolds, Biblical Subtext, 223.

For each verse, I begin by offering a detailed account of the exegetical opinions of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi. Listing all of the different opinions for each verse does lend to repetition and monotony, and a summarized table of the various exegetical opinions would read more fashionably. However, it would sacrifice subtle variations, evolving nuances, progressions in interpretations, and intriguing similarities among the commentators. *Tafsīr* is viewed by many Islamic and Western scholars to be the key to unlocking the Qur'an's meaning; this view often lends to an uncritical reading. Reynolds, however, suggests that the classical exegetes and their authorities were influenced by legal, mystical, sectarian, political, and theological factors that were present in the early Islamic community.[55] In addition, there are several examples of the classical exegetes having no understanding of certain elements or specific vocabulary in the Qur'an.[56] Lawrence Conrad comments on this:

> Even words that would have been of great and immediate importance in the days of Muhammad himself are argued over and guessed at, sometimes at great length, and with no satisfactory result. We might expect that comparisons of the work that proceeded in different regions would show that the scholars of the Hijaz had a better record in arriving at likely or compelling solutions, since their own forefathers, the first Muslims, would have known the truth of the matter and passed it down through their descendants. But this is not the case. Confusion and uncertainty seems to be the rule, and at the centre of it all, is a written text in which textual anomalies could not be solved, and for which oral tradition offered no help, and for which clarifying context was unknown[57]

After painting a full exegetical portrait for each verse, I offer a critical reading of the *tafsīr* of al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi by providing a specific analysis of the various opinions and exegetical methods. I draw attention to implausible or odd interpretations, faulty

[55] Ibid., 19.
[56] Reynolds gives nine case studies on certain elements and specific vocabulary from the Qur'an that the early exegetes were unable to accurately interpret due to lack of understanding and comprehension. See Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 39-200.
[57] Lawrence Conrad, "Qur'anic studies: A historian's perspective," in *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'an*, ed. Manfred Kropp (Beirut: Ergon, 2007), 13.

reasoning, potential theological concerns, strange silences, and contradictions between the early authorities and the commentators. In addition, I pull from several different sources to have access to greater knowledge so that I can more critically examine the work of the classical exegetes and explore other interpretations. Salwa El-Awa comments on the need for knowledge in deciphering the Qur'an, "If recipients of the Qur'anic text lack access to the knowledge they need to process the meanings of its language, they are unlikely to succeed in uncovering the intended meanings."[58] First, I conduct a textual analysis of specific verses from the Qur'an by using the method of intertextuality. This involves looking at the frequent occurrences of a specific word in the Qur'an in order to explain the usage of that word in ambiguous contexts. Ibn Taymiyya considered this to be a good exegetical method when he said, "What is stated in a general way in one place is explained in detail in another; what is stated briefly in one place is explained at length in another."[59] Second, I look at relevant secondary literature. This encompasses work from Western academics on specific verses or vocabulary as well as different interpretations and thoughts from other Islamic exegetes and Muslim academics. Third, I often mention parallels regarding *rūḥ* between the Judeo-Christian and Gnostic writings and those in the Qur'an. In doing so, I am not insinuating the Qur'an is "borrowing" from these writings. Instead, I am suggesting the large number of parallels is evidence of the harmony between the Qur'an and Biblical literature. Correspondingly, Reuven Firestone contends that the Qur'an "contains so many parallels with the Hebrew Bible and New Testament that it could not possibly exist without

[58] S.M. Salwa El-Awa, "Linguistic structure," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (London: Blackwell, 2006), 67.
[59] M.A.S. ʿAbdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, (Oxford University Press, UK, 2005), XXX.

its scriptural predecessors as subtexts."[60] In a similar manner, Reynolds argues that the Qur'an often sounds similar to the Bible,[61] because within the Qur'an "there is a frequent recourse to allusions that would be familiar with a Biblically-minded audience."[62] I provide a Biblical subtext for some of the Qur'anic verses that appear to be alluding to prior scripture regarding *rūḥ* in an effort to bring clarity and greater understanding to different elements and the overall context.

1.1 *Rūḥ* and Jesus

I. "Certainly We gave Moses the Book and followed him with the apostles, and We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit [*rūḥ al-qudus*]."[63] Q 2:87

Al-Tabari says there is a debate among the exegetes regarding the identity of *rūḥ*. He cites reports from diverging viewpoints saying *rūḥ* is either the angel Gabriel, the *Injīl* (Gospels),[64] or the name by which Jesus would raise the dead. According to al-Tabari, the most correct interpretation for *rūḥ* in this context is Gabriel. Al-Tabari also cites several reports regarding the meaning of *al-qudus* (holy), saying it is God and is the same as the name for God, *al-Quddūs*.[65]

[60] Reuven Firestone, "The Qur'an and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of their Relationship," in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 3.
[61] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 233.
[62] Ibid., 233.
[63] Qur'an 2:87.
[64] Al-Tabari says this is similar to how the Qurʾan is referred to as *rūḥ* in Q 42:52. The *Injīl* and the Qurʾan are considered to have brought life to religion; the word *rūḥ* is attached to them metaphorically. Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 2:87.
[65] Ibid., Q 2:87.

Similarly, al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* could be Gabriel, the *Injīl*, or the great name of God by which Jesus raised the dead. Al-Baydawi agrees with al-Tabari that the most likely meaning for *rūḥ* is Gabriel. Additionally, al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* could be the spirit of Jesus. There are three reasons he gives as to why this might be the case. First, it is a description of his purity. This is based on a Hadith in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, stating Jesus was not touched by Satan at his birth.[66] Second, it is an honorific title from God. Third, it is because he was born in a pure way without human regeneration.[67]

Al-Razi mentions the same possible interpretations as al-Tabari and al-Baydawi, but he expands further as to why *rūḥ* might be Gabriel. First, the word "holy" was used descriptively for Gabriel as a way to honor him. Second, Gabriel brought life to religion, by inspiring the prophets, in the same way in which *rūḥ* brings life to the body. Third, angels are spirit-like creatures, and Gabriel was the most complete and perfected angel. Fourth, Gabriel was a pure creation from God's command, not from an intermediary. Al-Razi also concurs with al-Baydawi that God is *al-qudus* (the Holy One), and the spirit of Jesus is attributed to God to give Jesus honor and show how great Jesus is. *Rūḥ al-qudus* is a special designation of closeness and dignity attributed to Jesus, similar to *Kaʿbat Allāh* (the house of God),[68] or *nāqat Allāh* (God's she-camel).[69] All of these possibilities are metaphorical because *rūḥ* is a wind that repetitively exits out of the human being as exhalation. These things were named *rūḥ* because they resembled

[66] Bukhari, *Hadith*, 4.506.
[67] Nasir al-Din abu Sa'id 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Shirazi al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi, al-musammā Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988), Q 2:87.
[68] Qur'an 2:125.
[69] Qur'an 7:73.

it—bringing life to a person. Al-Razi concludes in an analogous fashion to al-Tabari and al-Baydawi that the most likely meaning is Gabriel.[70]

This verse is one of four instances in which the Holy Spirit is mentioned. In three of those instances, the Holy Spirit has a clear association with Jesus, always with the expression, "We confirmed [supported or strengthened] him with the Holy Spirit." The phrase in the Qurʾan for "the Holy Spirit" is *rūḥ al-qudus*. This phrase is an example of an *iḍāfa* structure, which has two nouns and often indicates possession. All of the classical exegetes interpret this phrase as meaning the spirit was a possession of God. The first word in an *iḍāfa* structure is called *al-muḍāf*, and the second word is called *al-muḍāf ʿalayhi*. *Al-muḍāf* has two grammatical types. First, it can depict possession. Examples of this in the Qurʾan include: *kaʿbat Allāh* (house of God), *nāqat Allāh* (God's she-camel), and *rasūl Allāh* (messenger of God). The second grammatical type is when *al-muḍāf* depicts an attribute. Examples of this in the Qurʾan include: *kalām Allāh* (God's speech), *'ilm Allāh (*God's knowledge), and *qudrat Allāh* (God's power). These Qur'anic examples of the two types of *al-muḍāf* show not everything attributed to God in an *iḍāfa* structure denotes possession. The only way to know if something is God's attribute or God's possession is to know the meaning of the *muḍāf*, and whether it can exist independently or not. The problem is if there is a disagreement about the meaning of a *muḍāf* and its ability to exist independently. This question was the cause of major theological controversy in the formative years of Islam because of how it revolved around the nature of God and His attributes. The Hanbalites and Ashʿarites said God has divine attributes *qā'imūn bi dhātahi* (subsisting in Him). The Mu'tazilites said this is *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism—humanization or attributing

[70] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi,* Q 2:87.

human characteristics to God) and is *kufr* (idolatry) in Islam.[71] The Hanbalites and Ashʿarites replied that the Mu'tazilites are committing *tashbīh* for likening God to man by denying that God's speech is eternal.[72] The debate extended to including verses from the Qurʾan that attribute body parts to God. God is said to have hands, a face, a side rib, a shin, and eyes. One verse says God created Adam with his hands (Q 38:75), and another verse says, "wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Q 2:115).[73] The Mu'tazilites said these verses—and others where body parts are attributed to God— must be understood metaphorically. God's hands represent *qudra* (power) or *ni'ma* (grace), His face represents *dhātahi* (His essence), His eyes represent His *ʿilm* (knowledge), and His *istawa* (settlement) upon his throne represents his dominance.[74] If these verses were understood in a literal manner, the Mu'tazalites would have considered it *tajsīm* (corporealism—the view that God has a physical, tangible presence) and *tashbīh* , both of which Mu'tazalites considered *kufr*. They said the Islamic doctrine of *mukhālafa* (divine otherness) precludes divine corporeality and anthropomorphism.[75] This rejection of all anthropomorphism is based on Q 42:11, which says *laysa kamithlihi shay'un* (nothing is like Him).[76] However, this verse was interpreted differently by the Ashʿarites and Hanbalites. They were concerned with the authority of scripture, so they saw revelation as superior to logic. The Hanbalites said to deny God's human form is *kufr*, however, God's anthropomorphism is not like that of man.[77] The Ashʿarites admitted God's anthropoid form as well, but they said the modality of it is unknown.

---

[71] "Anthropomorphism," *Merriam-Webster.com*, December 1, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com.
[72] Wesley Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 1 (2009): 31.
[73] Qur'an 2:115.
[74] Zulfiqar Shah, "A Study of Anthropomorphism and Transcendence in the Bible and the Qur'an: Scripture and God in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions," (PhD diss., University of Wales, 1997), 327.
[75] Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies," 19.
[76] Qur'an 42:11.
[77] Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies," 31.

They used the phrase *bi la kayf* (without knowledge of how) in their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses, to show they simply accepted the verses as they are without asking how or why.[78] This formula affirmed the anthropomorphic expressions and divine attributes of God and showed God's immanence.

One aspect of God not debated to the same degree as others is *rūḥ Allāh*. It was assumed to be a created possession, despite no Qurʾanic evidence for it being created. Unlike hands, eyes, face, shin, and side rib, *rūḥ* is non-corporeal (not relating to a physical body). It was considered by many early Muslim scholars of *kalām* to be an immaterial spirit existing within humans and animals. In addition, angels were called *rūḥani*, because they were ethereal and immaterial. Tlili contends that, "Early Muslim understanding rested on two flawed premises. First, they assumed that *rūḥ* and *nafs* (soul) were homonyms (*ism mushtarak*); second, they discounted or deemphasized several senses in which the word *rūḥ* occurs in the Qurʾan."[79]

There was also a fear among the early Islamic exegetes that if *rūḥ* was attributed to God, it might cause a plurality within God, potentially impeding upon His transcendence and the idea of *tawhīd*. The exegetes were eager to remove the idea that God has a spirit. The answer was to use a "theological safeguard" to take the place of *rūḥ*.[80] The early exegetes interpreted *rūḥ* as a metaphysical being (i.e. Gabriel or a super angel), emphasizing the greatness of God,[81] and later exegetes interpreted it as a created soul, emphasizing the uniqueness of humans. Both of these interpretations were attempts to make sense of *rūḥ* while maintaining its aura of mystery. The

[78] Shah, "Anthropomorphism and Transcendence," 340.
[79] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 3.
[80] Daniel Madigan, "Revelation," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Volume IV, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Brill, 2004), 445.
[81] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 21.

importance, for classical exegetes, of both interpretations lies in *rūḥ* being understood as *muhdath* (created), and not *qadīm* (eternally existing).

The anthropomorphic (knowledge, power, speech, etc.) and corporeal (hands, eyes, face, shin, side-rib) terms associated with God in the Qurʾan were subject to a variety of interpretative methods in order to reconcile revelation and reason. The insistence on *rūḥ* being understood as created, however, limited the scope in which *rūḥ* was conceived of by the early Islamic scholars of *kalām*. If *rūḥ* had been subject to these same interpretive methods, it would have resulted in other possible interpretations. First, using the Mu'tazalite method of *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation), *rūḥ* could have been perceived as God's strength, power, life, or knowledge. Second, using the Hanbalite interpretative method, God could have a *rūḥ* (but one far different than the *rūḥ* of man or animals). This same reasoning was used to explain Qurʾanic verses where man is said to have some of the same attributes of God (i.e. 30:19, *hayy* meaning "life;" 51:28, *ʿilm* meaning "knowledge").[82] The difference, however, is God's attributes are eternal and perfect, but man's are created and have imperfections. Third, using the Ashʿarite interpretative method, God could have had a *rūḥ bi la kayf* (without knowledge of how). This would have upheld God's transcendence, while also allowing for a new way of understanding the way in which God operates and is immanent.

There is a tension within Islamic exegesis between God's otherness and the affinity between God and humanity.[83] Netton observes, "The God portrayed in the Qurʾan has both a transcendent and an immanent aspect. On the one hand, 'Like Him there is naught,' and on the

[82] Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies," 33.
[83] Bell and Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 100.

other hand, God announces in His revelation: 'We indeed created man, and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.'"[84] In the Qurʾan, *rūḥ* animates inanimate matter, travels inconceivably long distances and time spans,[85] brings down inspiration from Heaven, strengthens Jesus to do miraculous acts, supports believers, is of the *amr* (divine command) of God, and plays a key part in three major contexts—creation, prophecy, and the Day of Judgement (*yawm al-dīn*).[86] *Rūḥ* seems to be an extraordinary force, bridging the temporal to the eternal and the natural to the divine. It also could be perceived as the way in which God is both transcendent and immanent.

II. "These are the apostles, some of whom We gave an advantage over others; of them are those to whom God spoke and some of them he raised in rank, and We gave Jesus, son of Mary, manifest proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit [*rūḥ al-qudus*]."[87] Q 2:253

Regarding this verse, al-Tabari says to refer to his exegesis from al-Baqarah 2:87, and again says the correct interpretation is Gabriel.[88] Al-Baydawi does not comment on the meaning of *rūḥ* for this verse. However, al-Razi gives three possible meanings here for *rūḥ*: first, Gabriel; second, the name by which Jesus raised the dead; third, the pure spirit (not made through human reproduction) that God blew into Jesus.[89]

This is the second verse highlighting the unique relationship between Jesus and the Holy

[84] Ian R. Netton, *Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Cosmology* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 22.
[85] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 8.
[86] Sells, Michael. "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 2 (1991): 253.
[87] Qur'an 2:253.
[88] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 2:253.
[89] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 2:253.

Spirit. Al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi agree it was this "strengthening" from the Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to do miracles. The Hanafi jurist and exegete, Al-Maturidi, added to this interpretation, saying *rūḥ al-qudus* is Jesus's blessed spirit that was given to him by God in his infancy. It gave Jesus divine inspiration to call people to the worship of the one true God, and it empowered him to raise the dead and heal the sick.[90] Reynolds says this expression might reflect the Christian idea of the Holy Spirit as the *paraclete* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In Greek, *parakletos* means, "called to the side of," or idiomatically, "advocate."[91] Reynolds says the Qurʾanic phrase *rūḥ al-qudus* is similar to the Syriac *ruha d-qudsha*, and also to Sabaean (South Arabian) Christian inscriptions, such as the one at the Ma'rib dam in 541 CE, which refers to the Holy Spirit as *rh qds*.[92] Macdonald has a similar assertion, saying, "the coincidence between *rūḥ al-qudus* and the Christian doctrine of the Holy Ghost cannot be accidental."[93] The Qur'an appears to be referencing the Christian idea of the Holy Spirit, however, there are deep underlying differences in the way *rūḥ al-qudus* is understood by Islamic exegetes and the way in which the Holy Spirit is understood by Christian theologians. In both Islam and Christianity, *rūḥ al-qudus* acts as a bridge between the heavenly world and humanity; however, Christianity identifies the Holy Spirit as uncreated and divine—emphasizing God's immanence and personal activity in the world, whereas Islam identifies *rūḥ al-qudus* as a created intermediary—emphasizing God's transcendence.

[90] Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah: Tafsīr Maturidi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 333/944), Q 5:110.
[91] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 57.
[92] Ibid., 57.
[93] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit in Islam I," 28.

III. “O People of the book! Do not exceed the bounds in your religion, and do not attribute anything to God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only an apostle of God, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him [*rūḥ minhu*].”[94] Q 4:171

Al-Tabari says there is a debate among the exegetes as to the interpretation of the phrase *rūḥ minhu* and lists the five differing opinions: first, “a breath from Him,” because Jesus was created by a breath from Gabriel by God’s command;" second, “life from God,” because God caused life in Jesus by the word *kun* (be); third, “a mercy from Him,” because Jesus guided those who follow him, believe in him, and trust in him to the right way; fourth, a created soul from God;[95] fifth, Gabriel. Al-Tabari concludes by saying all five interpretations are close to the right answer.[96]

Al-Baydawi gives two possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse: Jesus was called *rūḥ* because he came into being by a special intervention of God, or Jesus was called *rūḥ* because he raised the dead and brought life to people’s hearts.[97]

Al-Razi gives five possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse: first, the noble, lofty spirit of Jesus, attributed to God in an honorific way; second, a mercy from God; third, the breath of Gabriel since *rūḥ* means breath in pre-Islamic Arabic and *minhu* shows that Gabriel’s breath was from the command and permission of God; fourth, Jesus is associated with *rūḥ*, because he was clean and pure coming from the breath of Gabriel at God’s command; fifth, *rūḥ* is attributed to Jesus because he was the cause of creative life in their religion.[98]

---

[94] Qur’an 4:171.
[95] This is based on a report from the Prophet’s companion, Ubayy ibn Ka’b. Al-Tabari reports that Ubayy ibn Ka’b says, “God took the seeds of the children of Adam, turned them into souls, shaped them, and made a covenant with them. Jesus’s soul was one of those souls and it is the soul that God sent to Mary. Jesus’s soul talked to her, then entered her (womb), and caused her to be pregnant.” Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 4:171
[96] Ibid., Q 4:171.
[97] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 4:171.
[98] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 4:171.

Early Arab Christian theologians, such as the unknown author of *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd* and Theodore Abu Qurra, produced original works referring to Jesus's Qurʾanic titles of *kalimat Allāh* (the word of God) and *rūḥ minhu* in their attempts at a contextualized, apologetic theology. They equate the Qurʾan's identification of Jesus as God's "word" and "spirit" with the uniqueness and divinity of Christ in the Bible.[99] Even the polemical writer, John of Damascus, emphasizes the obvious linguistic parallel this terminology presents for Christians. Bridger says these works were written during the first several centuries of Christian-Muslim interaction, when methodologies of interpreting the Qurʾan "had yet to obtain widespread Muslim consensus since the purported sayings and reports of Muhammad were still in the process of being canonized."[100] Thus, it is clear that one of the Arab Christian theologians' reasons for using the Qurʾan was to affect how Muslims interpreted it.[101]

Al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi would have been aware of these Christian attempts to influence how the Qurʾan was interpreted, and the difference between their interpretations and that of the early Arab Christian theologians for both *kalimat Allāh* and *rūḥ minhu* is noteworthy. Regarding Jesus being referred to in the Qur'an as *kalimat* Allāh, the classical exegetes and *mutakallimūn* (Islamic theologians) had a theological concern. This concern was a result of their considering *kalām Allāh* to be an uncreated, divine attribute of God and therefore the Qur'an—which is called *kalām Allāh* —is the uncreated speech of God. However, regarding Jesus the same exegetes and *mutakallimūn* maintained that he is the product or consequence of *kalimat Allāh* (the word of God). They saw him as a creation rather than divine revelation. There is

[99] Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, 91-92.
[100] Ibid., 69.
[101] Ibid., 69.

however, one interesting notation by Al-Maturidi in his Qur'anic exegesis. He says Jesus was created by the sending of the word of God, but there is no mention of what Jesus was before he came into being. Adam was formed from dirt, Eve from a rib, and the rest of humanity from sperm. There is a clear change from one state to another state, except for Jesus.[102] Al-Maturidi says this a distinguishing characteristic of Jesus,[103] and only God knows why.[104]

There also seems to be an underlying, theological concern among these early exegetes that *rūḥ* or Jesus might be conflated with God. Al-Tabari's exegesis of this verse is evidence of this. We know from other works of Al-Tabari that he, his contemporaries, and his authorities did believe humans and animals had *arwāh* (the plural of *rūḥ*, meaning "souls").[105] However, he never associates this understanding of *rūḥ* as a created soul with the Qurʾanic *rūḥ*—except for this one verse. Here, he mentions a report from Ubayy ibn Ka'b, a close companion of the Prophet, saying *rūḥ* is a created soul. The attribution of this report to Ubayy gives it credibility; however, upon closer examination, its attribution is doubtful.[106] First, it seems odd the interpretation of the *rūḥ* as "soul" appears here, instead of other contexts where it would fit much better (i.e. God blowing from/of *rūḥ* into Adam and God blowing from/of *rūḥ* into Jesus).[107] If Ubayy thought of the Qurʾanic *rūḥ* as soul, this idea would have been common among the early authorities and would have appeared more frequently than it does.[108] Second, the report of Ubayy is given

[102] Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr Maturidi*, Q 4:171
[103] Cory Block suggests that "Jesus is thus the physical manifestation of the spoken revelation of God not unlike the Qur'an itself. This may explain why the *Injil*, though listed in the Qur'an with the Torah and Qur'an as al-kitab is not referred to in the Qur'an directly as *kalām Allāh* or *kalimat* Allah*,* yet the *Injil* is only listed in the Qur'an as a*l-kitāb*." Cory Block, "Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends," PhD Diss., (University of Exeter, 2011), 93.
[104] Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr Maturidi*, Q 4:171
[105] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 15-16.
[106] Ibid., 13.
[107] Ibid., 13.
[108] Ibid., 14.

anonymously without a *sanad* (order of transmission).[109] The lack of a *sanad* makes the report of Ubayy weak (*ḍa'īf*) and is therefore considered unreliable. After citing the report of Ubayy, al-Tabari refers to the pre-Qurʾanic meaning of *rūḥ* as breath. However, this is the only verse in which he brings up this pre-Qurʾanic meaning. Lastly, al-Tabari cites an interpretation of *rūḥ* as Gabriel despite its implausibility.[110] Al-Razi cites the possible interpretation that *rūḥ minhu* means a breath from Gabriel, but al-Tabari takes it further by insisting on *rūḥ* being Gabriel. This is in spite of the verse clearly implying that Jesus is *rūḥ* and presumably precluding the identification of the interpretation of *rūḥ* as Gabriel. O'Shaughnessy says Tabari's interpretations of *rūḥ* as Gabriel and *rūḥ* as created illustrate the tendency in classical Islam to naturalize the supernatural and to represent the spiritual in material guise.[111] These three interpretations of al-Tabari challenge the Christian idea of Jesus's divinity and the Christian concept of the trinity within the Qurʾan. The citing of an anonymous tradition, the mentioning of extra-Qur'anic material, and the implausible suggestion of Gabriel in this verse all suggest al-Tabari's exegesis was affected by a theological concern—the fear of conflating *rūḥ* or Jesus with God.

Al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, and al-Razi's exegeses of *rūḥ* contradict the interpretive attempts of the Arab Christian theologians. *Rūḥ* is almost always seen as Gabriel, even when it requires a circuitous interpretation process.[112] The title of Jesus being God's spirit is often interpreted as meaning he is a soul created by and belonging to God in spite of the fact, as Duncan MacDonald says, "*rūḥ* never occurs in the Qur'an with the meaning soul."[113] This seems to suggest the critiques of the Qurʾan and the utilization of the Qurʾan in the apologetic theology of the Arab

[109] Ibid., 14.
[110] Ibid., 14.
[111] O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 10.
[112] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 10.
[113] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit in Islam: I," 26.

Christian philosophers made al-Tabari, al-Baydawi, al-Razi, and their authorities aware of the possible theological implications of Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh*, and potentially shifted the internal Islamic discourse.

IV: "When, God will say, O Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit [*rūḥ al-qudus*], so you would speak to the people in the cradle and in adulthood; and when I taught you the Book and wisdom, the Torah and the Evangel, and when you would create from clay the form of a bird with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird with My leave; and you would heal the blind and the leper with My leave, and you would raise the dead with My leave."[114] Q 5:110

Al-Tabari says the correct interpretation of *rūḥ* is Gabriel and to refer to his prior exegesis from Q 2:87.[115] Similarly, al-Baydawi and al-Razi list Gabriel as a possible interpretation. In addition, al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* could be the words that bring life to the religion, eternal life for people, purification from sins, or support for people.[116] Al-Razi gives one other possible interpretation. He says *rūḥ* could be the personal spirit attached to Jesus. This is because Jesus's spirit was pure, light, and of high honor.[117]

Baydawi's exegesis of *rūḥ al-qudus* in this verse is unique. It builds upon other interpretations of *rūḥ* being the *Injīl* or the name of God which raises the dead. The interpretation he mentions speaks of the *rūḥ al-qudus* as divine inspiration—the *rūḥ al-qudus* comes into the heart of a prophet and gives him revelation. Muhammad received the divine inspiration from *rūḥ*

[114] Qur'an 5:110.
[115] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 5:110.
[116] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 5:110.
[117] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 5:110.

al-qudus later in life (Q 16:102), whereas Jesus received it in the womb. This is what enabled Jesus to "speak to the people in the cradle and in adulthood" [118] (Q 5:110). This interpretation also corresponds with Q 16:2 and Q 40:15, where the *rūḥ* of the *amr* (command) of God is sent to God's servants so they will warn people that God is one and there is a coming Day of Judgement. One addition in the Jesus narrative, however, is the interpretation that the *rūḥ al-qudus* also enabled Jesus to raise the dead. This shows the ability of *rūḥ* to animate inanimate matter. It plays this role when God creates the form of a man from clay and breathes *min rūḥihi* (of/from his *rūḥ*) into him and he comes to life. The story of Jesus in Q 5:110 parallels the story of the creation of Adam. Jesus creates the form of a bird from clay and breathes into it and animates the inanimate matter. The Qurʾanic proviso of *bi-idhni* (with My leave) is included twice in this story to show that Jesus, the son of Mary, did not do this on his own. Maybe instead, the bird was created and brought to life by the inbreathing power of *rūḥ al-qudus* that continually strengthened Jesus.

V. "Thus, did she seclude herself from them, whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit [*rūḥana*] and he became incarnate for her as a perfect human."[119] Q 19:17

Al-Tabari and al-Baydawi agree the correct interpretation of *rūḥ* in this verse is Gabriel.[120] Neither al-Tabari or al-Baydawi alluded to a disagreement among the exegetes as to the meaning of *rūḥ* in this verse.[121] Al-Razi, however, says there was disagreement among the exegetes. He says the majority opinion is the angel Gabriel, but then cites two Mu'tazilite

[118] Qur'an 5:110.
[119] Qur'an 19:17.
[120] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 19:17.
[121] Al-Tabari cites the report of al-Suddi, who said that *rūḥ* appeared to Mary as a well-proportioned man of average height. Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 19:17

opinions. The first opinion is from Abu Muslim, who says it was Jesus who appeared to Mary as a man, and then his *rūḥ* entered into her and formed into a baby in her womb. The second opinion is from Abu Haywa, who had a different reading of the word. He read and interpreted the word as *rawh*, which is different than "*rūḥ*." It corresponds to the verse where Joseph's father says not to despair of *rawh Allāh* (Q 12:87), and to the verse where the *muqarribūn* (close ones of God) go to *rawh* and *rayhān* (bounty) when they die (Q 56:89). *Rawh* is interpreted in the first context as "mercy," and the second context as "refreshing." Abu Haywa's reading meant God's mercy or refreshing appeared to Mary as a man. Al-Razi says the Mu'tazilites probably used these interpretations, since they objected to the idea of an angel appearing in human form. They said this occurrence could lead to cases of mistaken identity and cast doubt on eye-witness testimony. They also had trouble reconciling how Gabriel's huge body could shrink to the size of a human being. Al-Razi himself says Gabriel is more likely.[122]

The standard Islamic opinion on the identify of *rūḥ* in this verse is Gabriel. However, there is no clear evidence to support that position. In verse nineteen, the *rūḥ* says of himself that he would bestow the child upon her. However, there is a variant to this verse. Instead of *li'ahaba la-ki*, "that I may bestow upon you," Abu Amr reads *li'yahaba la-ki*, "that he may bestow upon you." Despite it being a canonical variant, al-Tabari rejects it. Ibn Kathir,[123] however, accepts both readings and says they are both necessary. Ibn Kathir also cites a report by Ubay bin Ka'ab saying:

> The spirit of Jesus is one of the group of spirits with whom [God] took a pact in the time of Adam [Q 33:7 and Q 7:172]. It is he, that is to say the spirit of Jesus, who presented

[122] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 19:17.
[123] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 163.

> himself to her in the form of a perfect human being. So she conceived the one who addressed her and he became incarnate in her [entering her through her] mouth.[124]

This report was traced back to a single *isnād* (chain of transmission). Ibn Kathir considers it hideous and most likely contrived by Christians.[125] Also noteworthy is an apocryphal writing called the *Epistula Apostolorum* (Letter of the Apostles). The *Epistula Apostolorum* is written in the form of a letter from the disciples describing the events of Jesus's life and concludes with a conversation between Jesus and the disciples.[126] In an excerpt of the conversation, Jesus tells his disciples,

> At that time I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to [the virgin] Mary and spoke with her, and her heart received [me]; she believed and laughed and I, the Word, went into her and became flesh; and I myself was servant for myself, and in the form of the image of an angel.[127]

The early Islamic exegetes may have been aware of the *Epistula Apostolorum*, and this could be the reason why a similar idea is suggested by Ubay bin Ka'ab.

Two other interpretations for this verse revolve around the word *tamaththala*. *Tamaththala* is a form five verb in Arabic, and it is a *hapax legonmenon*, meaning it is used only once in the Qurʾan.[128] It can carry the meaning of "to appear," "to imitate," "to resemble," "to be like," and "to be similar to." It also carries the meaning of "to take on the appearance of." However, this definition was a later addition formed to support the exegesis of Gabriel taking on the appearance of a man. All of the classical exegetes utilize this later definition in their exegesis.

---

[124] Abu al-Fida' 'Imad Ad-Din Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Kathir al-Qurashi Al-Busrawi Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Riyadh, Darussalam, 2000), Q 19:17.
[125] Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 161.
[126] Ibid., 157.
[127] Ibid., 157.
[128] "Tamaththala," Quranic Arabic Corpus, November 11th, 2018 http://corpus.quran.com/wordmorphology.jsp?location=(19:17:8).

However, there are other possibilities. First, it could allude to the idea the *rūḥ* came to Mary in a vision. The fact she secluded herself from the people lends support to this idea as well as the usage of *tamaththala*. If it means the *rūḥ* assumed the likeness of another thing, this would likely have happened in a vision.[129] If she was truly secluded from her people, this would be a logical solution. Second, *tamaththala* is paired with the preposition *la* and the attached pronoun *ha*, meaning "to her" (in reference to Mary). Read together, the phrase means, "it appeared to her or it resembled to her." This does not mean the *rūḥ* necessarily took on a new appearance as a *bashsharan sawwiyyan* (well-formed man). It likely means it seemed to Mary as if the *rūḥ* was a man. This might fit with one of the classic interpretations of *rūḥ* for several other verses—it looks like a man; however, it is not a man and it is not an angel.[130] Ruzbhihan al-Baqli, in his commentary of the Qur'an entitled *'Arā'is* al-*bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* (Brides of the Evidence in the Facts of the Qur'an), says *rūḥ* resembled "a well formed man" to Mary, but in reality it was the *qudus* (Holiness) of *dhāt Allāh* (essence of God).[131] Al-Baqli says *rūḥ* descended in the light of God's *ṣifāt* (attributes) and *libās* (clothed) itself in *al-afʿāl* (the acts) of the beautiful form made desirable to her.[132] *Rūḥ* resembled a well-formed man to Mary, because it was a mirror for the *tajallī* (manifestation) of the essence and attributes of God. Kristin Sands, in her explanation of al-Baqli's exegesis for this verse, says *tajallī Allāh* (the self-disclosure of God) is always *iltibās* (clothed or made ambiguous) in a similar manner, and she gives the example of Moses asking to see God in Q 7:143,[133] "He (God) said 'You (Moses) shall not see Me. But look at the

[129] ʿAbdullah Yusef Ali, *The Qur'an Translation* (Asir Media, 2002), Q 19:17.
[130] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 78:38.
[131] Ruzbihan al-Baqli, *'Arā'is* al-*bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* (Lucknow, 1898), Q 19:17.
[132] Ibid., Q 19:17.
[133] Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 108.

mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.' So when his Lord disclosed (*tajallī*) Himself to the mountain, He leveled it, and Moses fell down swooning."[134] Like Moses, Mary did not see God directly. Instead, she saw Him in the level of reality visible to her, as a well-formed man.[135]

In addition, the word *irsāl* means God "sent" the *rūḥ*. There is no verse in the Qurʾan that uses the word *irsāl* to denote angels being sent by God. There are several verses, however, that use the word *nazzala*, which means "to be sent down," signifying angels are sent from heaven to earth. The word *nazzala* also is used for "revelation." The word *irsāl*, however, means "to send" or "discharge" and does not carry the same meaning of descending or revelation. The word *irsāl* is used for demons, winds, prophets, messengers, and humans. It is never explicitly used for angels. There is one verse where messengers come to Abraham and tell him they were sent by God for Lot's community (Q 11:69-73). The Islamic exegetes interpret these messengers to be angels, yet this is not stated in the Qurʾan. The same account of the messengers is in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:2-22), and some Christian exegetes believe the three messengers were representative of the trinity (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit).[136]

In verse nineteen, it says *fa-hamala* which means "she conceived." The *fa* in Arabic supports the idea of order, and also has a sense of immediacy. This means Mary conceived right after the *rūḥ* told her he would give/bestow to her a baby (*li'ahaba la-ki*). This is similar to the Biblical account. In the book of Luke, Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her she will conceive. However, he says this will happen when the Holy Spirit comes on her, and the power of the Most

[134] Qur'an 7:143.
[135] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 108.
[136] Procopius of Gaza. Commentary on Genesis XVIII in *PG* 87, col. 364a-b, cited from: Grypeou, Spurling, *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden–Boston, 2009), 190.

High overshadows her (Luke 1:35). The order of the Biblical account corresponds with the order of the Qur'anic account. In Q 3:42-47, a group of angels give Mary the good news (*yubashshiruki*) that she would conceive, but the conception does not happen in this incident. The conception happens later in Q 19:17, when *rūḥ* comes to Mary and she conceives immediately.

VI: "And [remember] her who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her (*fīha*) of Our spirit [*rūḥina*] and made her and her son a sign for all the nations."[137] Q 21:91

Al-Tabari focuses on the phrase *fanafakhna fīha min rūḥina* (we breathed into her of Our spirit). He says there is a debate as to the meaning of this phrase and to refer to his exegesis in Q 66:12.[138] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* here is the angel Gabriel, and the preposition *min* means "from." This would cause the verse to mean, "We breathed into her from Gabriel."[139] Al-Razi says there are two possible interpretations of *rūḥ* in this verse. First, that Gabriel blew the soul of Jesus into Mary. The second interpretation is that God blew the spirit into Jesus in the womb of Mary.[140]

There are two major interpretations for this verse. First, the angel Gabriel breathes the creative life of Jesus into Mary by God's permission. *Rūḥ* is interpreted as Gabriel based on the earlier Qurʾanic verse where Gabriel is seen as the one who brought down the Qurʾan on Muhammad's heart (Q 2:97). This interpretation is questionable, however, because it does not correspond with al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Baydawi's interpretation of the three verses where God breathes life into Adam via *rūḥ*. None of the exegetes mention the possibility of Gabriel being the *rūḥ* that brought life to Adam. Instead, they all say that Adam came to life after the

[137] Qur'an 21:91.
[138] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 21:91.
[139] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 21:91.
[140] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 21:91.

inbreathing of the *rūḥ*. Al-Maturidi, in his Qur'anic exegesis entitled *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, says many Islamic exegetes maintain that Gabriel breathed the spirit into Jesus, however, this is not written in the verse.[141] Al-Maturidi argues that it is not fitting for a statement like this to be said unless someone is certain. He identifies the similarity between this verse and Q 38:72, where God blows into Adam from *rūḥi* (My spirit), and he infers from the two verses that Adam and Jesus were *insha'at* (brought about/engendered) by *rūḥ Allāh*.[142]

The second major interpretation is that God breathed the created soul of Jesus into Mary. This interpretation is also problematic since *rūḥ* never occurs in the Qurʾan with the meaning "soul."[143] Ibn Qayyim (751 AH/1350 CE), in *Kitāb al-rūḥ,* says *rūḥ* is often assigned the meaning of "soul" in the traditions; however, in the Qur'an, the only word for soul is *nafs*. Ibn al-Qayyim's seminal book is considered by many to be essential reading if one is to understand the standard position of Islam regarding *rūḥ*.[144] He maintains that many Islamic exegetes have wrongly applied the meaning of "soul" to the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, and this misinterpretation is a grave error.[145] O'Shaughnessy says *rūḥ* acquired this meaning in post-Qurʾanic classical Arabic when Muslim theologians, exegetes, and philologists were influenced by "doctrinal developments in Islam, Greco-Arabic scholasticism, and unreliable traditions.[146] Similarly, this interpretation is not mentioned in Adam's creation story until much later when the meaning of *rūḥ* and *nafs* (soul) became intermingled.[147] In modern Arabic, these words are often used interchangeably, but this was not the case in the Qurʾan. The key word in this verse is *min*. The word *min* in Arabic can

[141] Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr Maturidi*, 21:91.
[142] Ibid., 21:91.
[143] Duncan B. Macdonald, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam," 22, no. 2 (1932): 156; Macdonald, *Development of the Idea of Spirit I*, 39; and O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 11.
[144] Maconald, "Development of Spirit in Islam I," 40.
[145] Macdonald, "Development of the Idea of Spirit I," 39.
[146] O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 11.
[147] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 1.

carry different meanings depending on whether it is referring to place, origin/birthplace, material, time, is partitive, distributive, comparative, or of agent/cause/reason. Here it could be either material (of agent/cause/reason) or partitive. The Gabriel interpretation would be by agent with the meaning "from" or "by," and the soul interpretation would be material with the meaning "of." The partitive interpretation would carry the meaning "out of" or "some of," meaning, "we breathed into her out of our spirit" or "some of our spirit." This interpretation would be problematic because, in Islamic theology, God is not divisible. Another possible meaning would be that *rūḥ* is a divine attribute of God, similar to *kalām Allāh* (God's word). The majority of Sunni Muslims say there are seven divine attributes (knowledge, power, life, will, speech, hearing, and sight) in Islam. These attributes are not created, and they are other than God's *dhāt* (essence). *Rūḥ* could be the divine attribute of God that gives life both physically and spiritually in the form of inspiration. This interpretation would fit if *min* referred to agent/cause/reason with the meaning of "from" or "by." God blew into Jesus by the divine attribute of his *rūḥ*.

VII: "And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed (*fīhi*) into it of Our spirit [*rūḥina*]. She confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was one of the obedient."[148] Q 66:12

Al-Tabari says *rūḥ* is the angel Gabriel, and that Gabriel blew into Mary.[149] Also he says *fīhi* in this verse refers to the *faraj* (womb) of Mary. Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* was blown into Mary and from this *rūḥ* Jesus was brought into being without any intermediary.[150] Al-Razi cites the

[148] Qur'an 66:12.
[149] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari,* 66:12.
[150] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, 66:12.

report of Ibn ʿAbbas saying Gabriel breathed into Mary and gave life to Jesus. He then draws attention to the participle and attaching pronoun, *fīhi*, and shows how it is different from the corresponding verse where *fīha* is written. This allows for another interpretation which says the spirit was blown into Jesus.[151]

This verse is similar to the preceding one with a slight exception—the preposition *fīhi*. The difference in preposition seems to allude to the inbreathing of the *rūḥ* as the cause for Mary's conception. It is also said, however, in response to Mary's question of how she will have a child, that "God creates whatever He wishes. When He decides on a matter He just says to it 'Be!' (*kun*) and it is (*fa-yakūn*)."[152] (Q 2:47). *Kun* is the creative *amr* (command) of God that is used to bring things into being (36:82). The phrase *kun fa-yakūn* is used eight times in the Qurʾan and refers to the creation of the heavens and the earth, the resurrection on the Day of Judgement, and the creation of Adam and Jesus.[153] These verses are not contradictory; they are complementary. This is also apparent in the creation of Adam. Adam is brought to life by the inbreathing of the *rūḥ*. Q 3:59 says, "Indeed, the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him 'Be,' and he was."[154] Both Jesus and Adam came into being through the inbreathing of *rūḥ* and the word *kun*—the creative *amr* (command) of God, and they are the only two humans associated with either word in their creation. These two contexts emphasize the intimate relationship between *kun*, *rūḥ*, and *amr*. The inbreathing of *rūḥ* in both of these contexts could be the descriptive way of showing how God issues the *amr* through the symbolic word of creation—*kun*. *Rūḥ* has the pre-Qurʾanic meaning of "blown

[151] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, 66:12.
[152] Qur'an 2:47.
[153] "Kun fa-yakuun," Quranic Arabic Corpus, November 28th, 2018, http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?t=3&q=يكون.
[154] Qur'an 3:59.

breath," and the blowing associated with it generates in impact in pre-Qurʾanic usage—enlivening fire and inflating a waterskin or in Qurʾanic usage—animating inanimate matter.[155] It is used in both Adam and Jesus's creations with the word *nafakha*, which means "to blow." *Nafakha* is only used in the Qurʾan in reference to Adam and Jesus's creations, and the trumpets being blown on *yawm al-qiyāma* (Day of Judgement).[156] If *rūḥ* is translated as "blown breath," it would mean, "God blowed into her from/of His breath." This divine breath of God might be a metaphorical way of describing how His *amr* brought both Jesus and Adam to life through the word *kun*. This corresponds with the report of Dahhak that *rūḥ*—in the verse about the creation of Adam—is *amr Allāh*. God willed it and Adam came to life, and his *amr* being enacted was described as God breathing.[157] These interpretations allude to the idea of *rūḥ* being a divine attribute of God.

The strong relationship between spirit (*rūḥ*) and word (*amr*) is also emphasized in Christianity,[158] as demonstrated by the church traditionally referring to the spirit and word as the two hands of God.[159] In *Against Heresies*, the early church father Irenaeus (130-200 CE), says, "There is therefore one God, who by the Word and the Spirit created and arranged all things."[160] Irenaeus saw spirit and word as the direct and immediate agents of God's creative and

---

[155] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 8.
[156] "Nafakha," Quranic Arabic Corpus, December 11th, 2018, http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=نفخ.
[157] Al-Māwardī, *Tafsir al-Mawardi*, Q 32:9.
[158] The combination of "word" and "spirit" is also found among the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, and Israelites. O'Shaughnessy, writes, "In Egyptian religious literature the word of Pharo, called the breath or spirit of his mouth, gives life to his subjects; and with the Babylonians "speaking life" is said to be equivalent to "commanding life," or imparting it by the breathing of the mouth or the word, which is thus regarded as possessed of efficacious power. For a Hebrew, too, breath (or spirit) and word are scarcely distinguished. Hence *debar* (word) and *ruach* (spirit) can be parallel and employed as equivalents, as they actually are in referring to the divine creative act in Psalm 33:6 'by the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth." O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 58.
[159] Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Ashgate, 2002), 50.
[160] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. John Keble (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 20.4.

redemptive work.[161] He did not see them as divine emanations, but instead as co-existent with God since they are divine attributes residing in the essence of God. He said through God's spirit and word, His immanence is revealed.[162]

1.2 *Rūḥ* and Adam

I. "The He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit."[163] Q 32:9

Al-Tabari is silent here regarding the meaning of *rūḥ*. He merely says after the breathing Adam came to life and could speak.[164] Al-Baydawi offers an interesting interpretation of *rūḥ* for this verse. He says *rūḥ* is attributed to Adam as an honorific title because he was an amazing creation bearing a relation to the divine presence. For this reason, there is a saying that says, "the one who knows himself knows God."[165] Al-Razi says God attributes the *rūḥ* to Himself in the same way He attributes the *Kaʿba* to Himself as the house of God. It is in order to give the *Kaʿba* honor. He says the Christians claim the lie that Jesus is the spirit of God and he is God's son. He goes on to say they do not understand every person's spirit is God's spirit, and *rūḥ* is being used as a possession just like my house or my slave.[166]

---

[161] The idea of spirit and word being the two hands of God might be supported by the Qur'an as well. In Q 38:75 it alludes to the idea saying, "He said, 'O Iblis! What kept you from prostrating before what I have created with My [own] two hands?'" The verse says God created Adam with His two hands. The two hands of God could be understood as the inbreathing of *rūḥ* (spirit) and the word *kun*—the creative *amr* (command) of God. Aristotle said the essence of something is known by its capacity to act and its action. Using this as a framework, the essence of God is known by its capacity to act (*amr*) and its action (*kun* and *rūḥ*). According to Ebstein and Baljon, *amr* is the divine command of God, responsible for directing and preserving creation, and carrying out and executing His decrees. Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn Al-ʿarabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Brill, 2013), 35 and J.M.S. Baljon, "The 'Amr' of God in the Koran," Acta Orientalia 23-24 (1958-1959): 7-18. This assertion corresponds with *amr* being God's capacity to act. The action of God's essence is through the word *kun* and *rūḥ*.
[162] Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 52.
[163] Qur'an 32:9.
[164] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 32:9.
[165] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 32:9.
[166] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 32:9.

Al-Tabari's silence draws attention. The same construction—*nafakhna fīhi min rūhina*—was used in a verse about Jesus, where al-Tabari had several interpretations including Gabriel being the *rūḥ*. Here, al-Tabari refrains from providing this interpretation or the interpretation that God put a created *rūḥ* in Adam. Al-Tabari wrote about the concept of *rūḥ al-jasad* (the human spirit) in his interpretation of other verses and clearly believed in the concept. One example of this is seen in his interpretation of Q 2:28, which says, "How can you be unfaithful to God, [seeing that] you were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will make you die, and then bring you to life, and then you will be brought back to Him?"[167] None of al-Tabari's early authorities use the image of *rūḥ* in their explanation of the stages of life and death.[168] They say the first death is when humans were nothing and the first life is when God creates them. The next two stages are death followed by resurrection.[169] Al-Tabari, however, recasts these interpretations by inserting the image of *rūḥ* (soul).[170] He says the first death is the stage where humans existed as sperm before they were given *arwāh* (the plural of *rūḥ*, meaning "souls"). The first life is when God blows the *arwāh* into human bodies, the second death is when God takes the *arwāh*, and the final life is when God again blows the *arwāh* into bodies on the Day of Resurrection.[171] Al-Tabari's insertion of the concept of *rūḥ* into his interpretation of this verse shows that both himself and his audience understood the word *rūḥ* as "soul" and thought of humans as having a *rūḥ* (soul).[172] In spite of this understanding, however, al-Tabari never defines the Qurʾanic *rūḥ* as

[167] Qur'an 2:28.
[168] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 15-16.
[169] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 2:28.
[170] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 15.
[171] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 2:28.
[172] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 15.

soul.[173] The three verses discussing the blowing from/of *rūḥ* into the pre-human clay of Adam would have been a perfect opportunity to introduce it, yet al-Tabari refrains.[174] It is clear that al-Tabari either saw the Qurʾanic *rūḥ* as totally separate from the idea of *rūḥ* as soul, or he had other reasons for not linking the two.[175]

Al-Mawardi, in his exegesis, lists several other interesting possibilities. He cites Abu Rawq al-Hamdani, who says *rūḥ* is God's power or omnipotence. He also cites the report of Dahhak that *rūḥ* is *amr Allāh.* God willed it and Adam came to life, and his *amr* being enacted was described as God breathing.[176] These interpretations allude to the idea of *rūḥ* being a divine attribute of God.

II. "So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit [*rūḥī*], fall down in prostration before him."[177] Q 38:72

Al-Tabari specifies that Adam was already created before God breathed into him from His spirit. Then he cites a sole report from Dahhak saying *rūḥ* is God's power or omnipotence.[178] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* is what caused life to start in Adam, and God attributed it to Himself to give Adam honor and signify the purity of his spirit.[179] Al-Razi gives several possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse. First, he specifies that *rūḥ* is not a part of God. He says *min* is not partitive. Second, he says *rūḥ* is a subtle matter penetrating the body and giving life force. Third, he says it

[173] Ibid., 15.
[174] Ibid., 16.
[175] Ibid., 16.
[176] Al-Mawardi, *Tafsīr al-Mawardi*, Q 32:9.
[177] Qur'an 38:72.
[178] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 38:72.
[179] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 38:72.

is of a highly noble, holy essence. He does mention a heretical sect of Islam named the Hulūliyya, who said this verse shows that the spirit is part of God's spirit. Al-Razi says this is a corrupt saying. God is not part of a compound. The spirit is something created, and only God knows how this breathing took place.[180]

Here, al-Tabari breaks his silence and mentions a report from Dahhak saying *rūḥ* is *qudra Allāh* (God's power). This is one of the attributes that is eternally existing in God. It could be an explanation of how *rūḥ* seems to be a life-giving force. Paired with al-Mawardi's interpretation from the narration of Abu Rawq al-Hamdani that says *rūḥ* is God's power or omnipotence, the possibility of *rūḥ* being an uncreated, divine attribute of God is raised. The report from Dahhak is the only report al-Tabari cites for the three verses discussing the inbreathing from/of *rūḥ* into Adam. This is odd, considering al-Tabari consulted numerous early exegetes for every Qurʾanic verse in his attempt to catalogue as many reports and opinions as possible. Al-Tabari may have chosen to leave out reports and opinions he thought to be sensitive or unsuitable.[181]

Also of note is the second part of this verse, where God tells the angels to fall down in prostration to Adam. Al-Razi begins his interpretation by saying Adam had a special designation as God's *khalīfa* (vicegerent) and as the possessor of a vast amount of knowledge from God. He says there are three questions to ask regarding this action by the angels.

The first question concerns whether only some of the angels prostrated, or if all of them prostrated—including Gabriel, Michael, and the great angel *rūḥ* that will stand before God.[182] Regarding this question, he says the verse clearly shows the correct answer. He cites al-Khalil

[180] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 38:72.
[181] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 16.
[182] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 38:72.

and Sayuti, who say the answer lies in the words *kullahum ajmaʿūn* (all of them at once). If the verse said, "the angels prostrated themselves," it leaves open the possibility some of them did not prostrate. However, the word *kullahum* removes that possibility and clearly shows they all prostrated before Adam. If just *kullahum* was written, it leaves open the possibility the angels prostrated before Adam at different times. The word *ajmaʿūn*, however, removes this possibility and proves they all prostrated together, at the same time.[183] Lastly, the word *illa* (exception) also confirms this understanding, because the only person listed after *illa* is Iblīs (Satan). Therefore, all of the angels prostrated before Adam at the same time, except for Iblīs.

The second question concerns when the prostration took place—whether it was before Adam was created, or after. Al-Razi details that after the blowing of the spirit, it says *fa-qaʿu lahu sajidīn*. *Fa* means immediately, so it clearly shows that after Adam came to life from the blowing of the spirit, the angels prostrated before him. Within this discussion, al-Razi reports some exegetes say Adam was the *qibla* (the direction in which to pray) for the angels. But al-Razi shows this argument has two problems. First, whenever the word *qibla* is used, it has the participle of *ila* (to) before it, which gives a sense of direction. This verse, however, uses the participle *li* (for) instead of *ila*. This clearly shows Adam was not the *qibla* because the prostration was for him, not to him. The second problem is the refusal of Iblīs (Satan) to prostrate to Adam. When asked by God what prevented him from prostrating, Iblīs replied, "I am better than him, You created me from fire and You created him from clay."[184] Iblīs refuses to prostrate because he believes Adam is inferior to him. Iblīs would have no reason to state this if Adam was merely the *qibla*—the direction in which to pray.

[183] Ibid., Q 38:72.
[184] Qur'an 7:12.

The third question concerns the meaning of *sujūd* in this context. Al-Razi says it cannot mean "worship," because worship of someone who is not God is forbidden. He cites an opinion saying it was a method of greeting and exalting Adam, and that it is similar to the occurrence of Joseph's father and brothers falling down and prostrating themselves before Joseph. But al-Razi then cites a Hadith about Muath prostrating before Muhammad and telling Muhammad it is a greeting fit for a prophet. Muhammad tells Muath to stop. Al-Razi cites a second Hadith about Jathliq wanting to prostrate before Ali, and Ali says, "Prostrate to *Allāh*, not to me." Al-Razi then returns to the original meaning of *sujūd*—submission, obedience, and compliance. He cites a pre-Islamic poem and a verse from the Qurʾan to verify this meaning of the word.[185]

In numerous passages of the Qurʾan, classical, medieval, and modern exegetes all interpret the word *rūḥ* to mean "Gabriel." However, according to al-Razi, Gabriel is included in the angels who prostrated before Adam—and the angels prostrated in response to the blowing from/of the *rūḥ* into Adam.[186] Prostration shows submission and obedience—that the object receiving the prostration is greater than the subject prostrating. If the breathing from/of *rūḥ* caused Gabriel to prostrate before Adam—thereby showing Gabriel to be inferior to Adam—it is difficult to understand how Gabriel would be considered the *rūḥ* in later instances. If *rūḥ* means "created soul" in this verse, and Gabriel bows to that created soul, it is also difficult to understand how Gabriel would be considered *rūḥ* in other contexts. If *rūḥ* is interpreted as "God's power" or "omnipotence," it means *rūḥ* is an attribute of God that blew life into Adam. The exact same use of *rūḥ* describes the creation of Jesus. It seems heretical to interpret *rūḥ* as "God's power" in the case of Adam, and as Gabriel in the case of Jesus—equivocating Gabriel to

[185] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 38:72.
[186] Ibid., Q 38:72

a divine attribute of God that could breathe life into being. Some exegetes argue it must be Gabriel regarding Jesus's birth because God would not interact on such an immanent level. However, if God interacts with Adam in this way, then there is nothing precluding Him from doing it with Jesus. If *rūḥ* is interpreted as God's divine inspiration, it means God's divine inspiration was blown into Adam. This would explain Adam's special designation as God's *khalīfa* and his ability to learn the divine knowledge of God. If Gabriel then bows to Adam, it is difficult to understand how Gabriel could be considered to be the *rūḥ* that gives this divine knowledge of God to the prophets. This corresponds to Q 2:34 where God teaches Adam the "names" and the angels respond by prostrating before Adam.

The prostration of the angels to Adam is not mentioned in the Bible; however, there are several traditions in Christian literature, such as the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and the *Cave of Treasures*, that report a similar account of the angels bowing to Adam.[187] The closest to the Qur'anic narrative is the early Syriac Christian tradition from the *Cave of Treasures*, which reads:

> God formed Adam with his holy hands, in His image and in His likeness. When the angels saw the image and the glorious appearance of Adam, they trembled at the beauty of his figure... Moreover, the angels and celestial powers heard the voice of God saying to Adam, "See, I have made you king, priest and prophet, Lord, leader and director of All those made and created. To you alone have I given these, and I give you authority over everything I have created." When the angels and the archangels, the thrones and dominions, the cherubims and seraphins, that is when all of the celestial powers heard this voice, all of the orders bent their knees and prostrated before him. [188]

[187] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 48-49.
[188] Cave of Treasures, 2:12–13, 2:22–5 (R. Oc.) = La caverne des trésors, CSCO 486 (French trans., 487), ed. and trans. S.-M. Ri, Leuven: Peeters, 1987, 17–21 (trans., 9), quoted in Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 50.

Christians believe Adam is the prototype of Jesus, and they said the story of the angels bowing before Adam in the *Cave of Treasures* (and other Christian literature traditions) was a precursor to how all angels will bow before Jesus.[189] Hebrews 1:6 (English Standard Version) says, "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'"[190] Philippians 2:10 (English Standard Version) says, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."[191]

In a similar manner to the Cave of Treasures, the Qur'an promotes the idea that Adam is a prototype of Jesus.[192] This is illustrated in Q 3:59, "Indeed, the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was." This verse is traditionally interpreted by Islamic exegetes as a rejection of the Christian claim that the virgin birth proves the divinity of Christ. Reynolds, however, argues that the context of the larger passage, surrounding this verse, clarifies an intention to venerate Jesus, not lessen his role or importance.[193] He states the "comparison to Adam is the high point of this veneration."[194] In addition, the traditional Islamic interpretation of this verse is odd, because Christians did not usually claim the virgin birth as the proof of the divinity of Christ.[195] Instead, they often pointed out the similarity between the birth of Adam and the birth of Christ because they believed Jesus was the last Adam, as mentioned 1 Corinthians 15:45-48. In the Qur'an, both Jesus and Adam came into being through the inbreathing (*nafakha*) of *rūḥ* and the word *kun*, the creative *amr* (command) of God, and they are the only two humans associated with either word in their

[189] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 48.
[190] Hebrews 1:6 ESV.
[191] Philippians 2:10 ESV.
[192] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 52.
[193] Ibid., 52.
[194] Ibid., 52.
[195] Ibid., 52.

creation. The inbreathing of *rūḥ* differentiated both Adam and Jesus from the rest of creation. Adam had the knowledge of the names (Q 2:34), and Jesus, who also was strengthened by *rūḥ al-qudus*, spoke to the people from the cradle and in adulthood, knew the Holy books, created by His breath, healed the blind and the leper, and raised the dead (Q 5:110).

III. "So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit [*rūḥī*], then fall down in prostration before him."[196] Q 15:29

Al-Tabari is silent here regarding the meaning of *rūḥ*. He says after God breathed from/of His *rūḥ*, Adam came to life.[197] Al-Baydawi describes *rūḥ* here as a subtle vapor penetrating the body and giving life force.[198] Al-Razi says *rūḥ* is wind, so in this instance it is the breath or wind made to enter into the body. He says Adam's *rūḥ* was attributed to God here to give Adam honor.[199]

There are seven verses that mention the angels prostrating before Adam (Q 2:34, Q 7:11, Q 15:30, Q 17:61, Q 18:50, Q 20:116, Q 38:73), suggesting this is an account of major consequence to the Qur'an.[200] In the account in Q 2:34, God teaches Adam all of the names and then Adam informs the angels of the names.[201] Reynolds says the names in this passage represent God's divine knowledge. Adam reveals this knowledge of the divine to the angels, which proves the superiority of man over the angels. God then orders the angels to prostrate before Adam.

---

[196] Qur'an 15:29.
[197] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 15:29.
[198] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 15:29.
[199] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 15:29.
[200] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 39.
[201] Many exegetes maintain that God taught Adam all the knowledge of the universe. The 'names' refers to the name of everything that Adam has learned about the universe.

Reynolds suggests the prostration of the angels before Adam is the fulfillment of God's description of man as his *khalīfa* (vicegerent).[202]

1.3 *Rūḥ* and *Amr*

I. "They question you concerning the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit [*rūḥ*] is of the command of my Lord, and you have not been given of the knowledge except a few [of you]."[203] Q 17:85

Al-Tabari says the exegetes differed regarding the meaning of *rūḥ* in this verse. The most likely meaning is Gabriel, but there is another report from Ibn ʿAbbas and ʿAli Ibn Abi Talib, which says *rūḥ* is one of the angels that has 70,000 tongues, gives praise in 70,000 languages, and from which God creates a flying angel from every praise.[204]

Al-Baydawi gives five possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse: that which brings life to the inner part of a man and guides him, the beginning of a being from God's command, Gabriel, a creature greater than the angels, and the Qurʾan.[205]

Al-Razi begins his exegesis by giving accounts of who was asking about the *rūḥ* and what was their intended question. He believes it was the Jews asking about the essence of the *rūḥ* and if it is *qadīm* (uncreated) or *muhdath* (created). He then gives several possibilities as to the meaning of *rūḥ*: an angel with 70,000 faces, Gabriel (but he says this is unlikely), and a manlike creature, but not a man or an angel,[206] the Qurʾan, and something that cannot be known in full—it is the cause of life and is something the mind cannot comprehend. Al-Razi concludes by saying only God knows the right answer of these.[207]

---

[202] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 40.
[203] Qur'an 17:85.
[204] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 17:85.
[205] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 17:85.
[206] Al-Razi argues there is nothing in the Qurʾan or the Hadith to support this interpretation. Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 17:85.
[207] Ibid., Q 17:85.

This particular verse provides much of the ambiguity regarding the concept of *rūḥ*. Part of the vagueness lies in all of the unanswered questions. First is the question of who is addressing Muhammad. In Ali Ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi's (468 AH/1075 CE) *Asbāb al-Nūzūl* (Reasons of the Revelation), we are informed it is the Medinan Jews who addressed Muhammad. However, there are others who say this verse was given to Muhammad while he was still in Mecca, so it is the Meccans or his followers addressing him.[208] Then there is the question of intentionality. It is possible they were asking about *rūḥ al-jasad* (spirit in the body), about the means by which Muhammad receives revelation, or to compare the *rūḥ* in the Torah to Muhammad's understanding. How one interprets who asked the question and what was intended drastically affects the exegesis.

The interpretation of the reply is also filled with unknown variables. *Al-rūḥ min amr rabbi* is the first half of the reply. The key word here is *amr*,[209] and there is much debate about what it means in this particular context. If *amr* means "affair," it reads "*rūḥ* is of God's affair," and is often taken to mean it is part of *ʿilm al-ghayb* (knowledge of the unknown—which only God knows). If it means "command," it reads "*rūḥ* is by God's command," and is taken to mean it is created by God. The preposition *min*, however, should not be read as "by." This construction is identical to Q 16:2, Q 40:15, and Q 42:52, in which *min* is read "of God's command each time." When read "*rūḥ* is of God's command," a new potential understanding emerges. This

[208] Ali Ibn Ahmed al-Wahidi, *Asbāb al-Nūzūl*, ed. Yousef Meri (Amman: Royal Ahl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 106.

[209] Ary A. R. Crollius says *Amr* is used 165 times in the Qur'an. It is used in various contexts, but it usually appears in connection with God—as *amr Allāh* (will, decree, command, judgement, affair), *amr rabb*i (command or will), or *lillāh al-amr* (all things or affairs are subject to God's will). Ary A. R. Crollius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation in Qur'an and Hindu Scriptures* (Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1974), 58-79. Crollius offers a brief study on the concept of *amr* in the Qur'an and concludes it is an "extremely intricate concept comprehending the whole scale of God's creative and governing dispositions at all stages of their realization." Crollius, *Word*, 70.

understanding connects with the Aramaic *mēmrā* (word) and alludes to the Greek concept of logos or divine intellect—*amr* being the divine intellect,[210] and *rūḥ* being what emanates from the divine intellect as our connection between the eternal and the temporal. Hirschfield argues that this understanding is particularly appropriate in this verse, because the phrase *amr rabbi* forms the exact translation of the Hebraic phrase *mēmrā d'ādônay* (the word of the Lord).[211] The close relationship between *amr* and *rūḥ* is similar to the close relationship between *kalima* (word) and *amr*. It was on the basis of this connection that *kalima* was argued to be an uncreated, eternal attribute of God. Al-Ash'ari (324 AH/936 CE) states this argument when he says:

> We say that God's word (*kalām*) is uncreated, and that He has not created anything without saying to it, "Be!"[212]
>
> The proof is His saying (Q 30:25), "Among His signs is that the heavens and the earth are established by His command." The command (*amr*) of God is His word (*kalām*) and His utterance (*qawl*)…And He says (Q 7:54), "Do not the creation and the command belong to Him?" Everything that was created is included in "the creation" … So, when He says, "Does not the creation belong to Him?" this is referring to all of creation. And when He says, "and the command," He is referring to a command which is something other than all of creation. So, what we have described proves that God's command is not created.[213]
>
> God's command (*amr*) is His *kalām*, and this necessitates that God's *kalām* is uncreated.[214]

Al-Ash'ari's statement was in response to the Mu'tazilites claim that *kalām Allāh* was created. Al-Ash'ari rejected the Mu'tazilite doctrine saying it was *bidʿa* (innovation in the sense of

[210] Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 445.
[211] Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 16.
[212] Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari, *al-ibāna ʿan uṣūl al-diyāna* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1418 A.H. / 1998 A.D.), 16, cited in Joseph L. Cumming, "The Word of God in Islam and Christianity," (New Haven: Yale Center for Faith and Culture, 2004), 2.
[213] Al-Ash'ari, *Ash'ari*, 31, cited in Cumming, *The Word of God*, 2.
[214] Al-Ash'ari, *Ash'ari*, 31, cited in Cumming, *The Word of God*, 2.

heresy).[215] Instead, he said God's *kalām*, like His *amr*,[216] is an uncreated, eternal, divine attribute eternally subsisting in God's essence.[217]

Al-Razi has a similar opinion to al-Ash'ari concerning *amr* that he bases off of two verses. The first verse is Q 7:54: "Look! All creation [*khalq*] and command [*amr*] belong to Him." The second is Q 54:50: "and Our command [*amr*] is but a single [word] like the twinkling of an eye." Al-Razi viewed *amr* as a divine attribute that functions as a mode of God's divine, creative activity. He maintained that God has two modes of divine generation.[218] The first mode is by the power of God (*qudrat Allāh*) which results in creation (*khalq*) and is out of prior material ingredients. The second mode of divine generation is by *amr Allāh* and is *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).[219]

If *amr* is a divine attribute of God, then a similar sentiment could be said of *rūḥ* since *rūḥ* is said to be of *amr Allāh* (of God's command) on four occasions in the Qur'an, and al-Tabari, in his exegesis of Q 66:12, narrates the tradition of al-Dahhak that says *rūḥ* is *amr Allāh*.[220] *Rūḥ*

---

[215] Joseph L. Cumming, "The Word of God in Islam and Christianity," (New Haven: Yale Center for Faith and Culture, 2004), 3.
[216] Al-Razi has a similar opinion to al-Ash'ari concerning *amr* that he bases off of two verses. First, Q 7:54: "Look! All creation [*khalq*] and command [*amr*] belong to Him." Second, Q 54:50: "and Our command [*amr*] is but a single [word] like the twinkling of an eye." Al-Razi viewed *amr* as a divine attribute that functions as a mode of God's divine, creative activity. He maintained that God has two modes of divine generation. The first mode is by the power of God (*qadrat Allāh*) which results in creation (*khalq*) and is out of prior material ingredients. The second mode of divine generation is by *amr Allāh* and is *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Tariq Jaffer, *Razi: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 184-185.
[217] Al-Ash'ari, Ash'ari, 59; Mehmet Ozalp maintains that Said Nursi (1876-1960) and al-Maturidi concurred with al-Razi's perspective, saying *amr* is God's divine creative command. Said Nursi followed the Ash'arite theological perspective that God had seven *sifāt al-thubūtī* (affirmative attributes). Nursi refers to *amr* as *amr al-takwīn* (the creative command) and says it is is a part of the divine attribute of God's speech. Mehmet Ozalp, "God and Tawhid in Classical Islamic Theology and Said Nursi's Risale-I Nur," (PhD Diss., University of Sydney, 2016.), 300. Al-Maturidi argued that God had eight *sifāt al-thubūtī* (affirmative attributes). He said the additional divine attribute is *takwīn* (creation). According to al-Maturidi *amr* is a part of the divine attribute of *takwīn.* Ozalp, God and Tawhid, 276.
[218] Tariq Jaffer, *Razi: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 184-185
[219] Jaffer, Razi: *Master of Quranic Interpretation*, 184-185.
[220] Al-Tabari, Tafsīr al-Tabari, Q 66:12; Another way in which *amr* can be perceived as a divine attribute is through how it reflects God's divine will. This is illustrated in Q 36:82, "If he wills something, his *amr* (command) is nothing other than saying to it 'be!' and it is." Jules Jansenns says both Abu'l-Hudhayl (227 AH/842 CE) and al-Kindi (260 AH/873 CE) interpret *amr* in this verse as God's divine command and identify it with God's divine will. Jules Jansenns, "Al-Kindi: The Founder of Philosophical Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007): 9.

being *amr Allāh* suggests that it is equivalent to *kalām Allāh,* as a pre-eternal attribute of God, belonging to Him and eternally subsisting in God's essence.[221]

The second half of the reply—*ma utītum min al-'ilm illa qalīlā*—is also subject to interpretation. The majority of exegetes interpret it as "God only gave a little knowledge about the *rūḥ*." However, some interpret it as "God only gave a select few knowledge about the *rūḥ*."

Al-Wahidi writes in his *Asbāb al-Nūzūl* that the question about *rūḥ* was the third question posed to the Prophet.[222] The Prophet was also asked about the *Ahl al-Kahf* (the companions of the cave) and *Dhu'l-Qarnayn* (Alexander the Great). Al-Razi recounts that when asked these questions, the Prophet replied that he will tell them tomorrow. However, the Prophet did not say "God willing," so revelation was suspended for forty days. Then, after forty days revelation was sent down and he answered the first two questions.[223] For the third question about the *al-rūḥ*, however, the Prophet gave a cryptic answer.[224] Al-Baydawi agrees with this saying the Prophet left the subject of the *rūḥ* obscure because he was unable to expound on it.[225] Al-Kashshaf related a report from ibn Abu Barida that concurs, saying, "The Prophet died without knowing what *rūḥ*

---

[221] The Qur'anic relationship between *rūḥ* and *amr* is similar to the relationship between *ruach* and *dabar* in the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:2-3, the *ruach* of God was hovering over the waters, God spoke (*dabar*), and there was light. Regarding this, Amos Yong says, "the divine breath's (*ruach*) presence and activity is that through which the creative word of God is uttered. From this Spirit (*ruach*) and utterance (*dabar*) comes forth order out of chaos or nothingness." Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*, (Ashgate, 2002), 35. Then, Psalm 33:6 (English Standard Version) says, "By the word (*dabar*) of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath (*ruach*) of His mouth all their host." Yong says both of these verses are emblematic of how "God's creative work conjoins the spirit (*ruach*) and the word (*dabar*)." Ibid., 35. Additionally, in Ezekiel 2:1, the spirit (*ruach*) of God enters Ezekiel when God speaks to him and the spirit (*ruach*) sets Ezekiel on his feet. In each of these verses the divine word (*dabar*) is accompanied by the spirit (*ruach*) and the spirit generates an impact. Yong comments on this impact, saying the spirit (*ruach*) is the *dunamis* (power) of life. Ibid., 35. This same impact is seen in pre-Qur'anic usage in—enlivening fire and inflating a water skin—and in Qurʾanic usage— animating inanimate matter, bringing life to people's hearts by divine revelation, empowering Jesus to do miracles, strengthening believers, and in being a light to guide Muhammad and other prophets on the straight path.
[222] Al-Wahidi, *Asbāb al Nūzūl*, 106.
[223] Al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Razi*, Q 17:85.
[224] Mylrea and 'Abdu'l-Masíḥ, *The Holy Spirit in Qur'an and Bible*, 22.
[225] Ibid., 20.

is."[226] These statements from al-Razi and al-Baydawi along with the report recounted by al-Kashshaf, highlight the seemingly inscrutable essence of *rūḥ*.

Al-Tabari's interpretation for this verse seems strained. He does not mention *rūḥ* as "breath" or "soul." Instead, *rūḥ* is heavily emphasized as "angel," and al-Tabari abstains from citing his own interpretation of *rūḥ*. He says he has already discussed *rūḥ* in other passages. However, the context here is different than anywhere else in the Qurʾan.[227] In this context, it seems the Prophet was being asked about how he received revelation. If he received it from Gabriel, one would expect him to clearly state that in his response.

Al-Razi argues against the unknowability of *rūḥ*. He says, "Even minor philosophers and theologians know about *rūḥ*. It would have been demeaning for the Prophet to say he did not grasp this notion. This would have been demeaning for any person, let alone the Prophet, the most knowledgeable of all people."[228] Al-Razi said there is no additional mystery about *rūḥ* that would set it apart from other beings. The essence of it is unknown, but then again, the essence of most things is unknown.[229]

The classical Islamic exegetes' interpretation of *rūḥ* in this verse seems to be constrained due to dogmatic and sectarian considerations regarding their view of God. Their view was the result of Mu'tazalite - Ash'arite controversy regarding God's *tanzīh* (transcendence) and *tashbīh* (immanence), and at its core was the question of God's attributes and the anthropomorphic descriptions of God.[230] Netton says the classical Islamic exegetes operated under two models for

---

[226] Ibid., 21.
[227] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 18.
[228] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 17:85.
[229] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 21.
[230] Nicholas Lo Polito, "'Abd Al-Karim Al-Jili: Tawhid, Transcendence and Immanence," (University of Birmingham. Ph.D. 2010), 131.

interpreting God's attributes and anthropomorphic descriptions of God— the Qur'anic model, and the allegorical model.[231] The Qur'anic model (Ibn Hanbal and Al-Ash'ari) said attributes and anthropomorphic descriptions are to be accepted without questioning their modality (*bi la kayf*) because they are beyond human comprehension.[232] This resulted in "an intellectual cul-de-sac in which acceptance triumphed over analysis and incomprehension over reason."[233] The allegorical model (Mu'tazilites) defined attributes as depictions of God's essence and said anthropomorphic features of God, described in the Qur'an, have a allegorical or metaphorical meaning.[234] The result of this model was God becoming more unknowable, because it limited the possible conceptions of God.[235] These two models shaped a view of God that accounted for His *tanzīh* while limiting His *tashbīh*. This view of God inhibited the classical Islamic exegetes from conceiving of *rūḥ* as a divine attribute of God—the way in which God gives life both physically (animating inanimate matter) and spiritually (divine inspiration). God was incapable of interacting in a personal, active way within the universe.

Al-Mawardi, in his exegesis of the Qurʾan, offers the possible interpretation of *rūḥ* in this verse to mean Jesus, since Jesus is *min amr Allāh.*[236] However, al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Baydawi, do not consider this interpretation. Their interpretation for this verse seems to be a matter of speculation more than a process of remembering preserved traditions.[237] In general, and in this specific verse, they tend to use and stay within the same interpretation grid for most verses

[231] Netton, *Transcendent*, 4-6.
[232] Netton, *Transcendent*, 4.
[233] Ibid., 4.
[234] Ibid., 5.
[235] Ibid., 5.
[236] Abū al-Hasan 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Habīb al-Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wal 'Uyuun Tafsir al-Mawardi*, ed. Al-Sayyid ʻAbd al-Maqsud ibn ʻAbd al-Rahman (Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2012), Q 17:85.
[237] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 22.

concerning *rūḥ*—as Gabriel or a fantastical, metaphysical creature, a created soul, divine inspiration transmitted by God, or by remaining silent and not offering any interpretation.

II. "Raiser of ranks, Lord of the Throne, He casts the Spirit [*rūḥ*] of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes, that he may warn [people] of the Day of Encounter."[238] Q 40:15

Al-Tabari lists several possibilities as to the identity of *rūḥ* in this verse: inspiration, the Qurʾan and the Holy Books, and prophethood. Al-Tabari concludes by saying all of these interpretations are similar.[239] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* in this verse is inspiration.[240] Al-Razi says *rūḥ* has the meaning of inspiration, and he elaborates at length about how inspiration transfers from God to humans and what the effects are.[241]

None of the classical exegetes list Gabriel as a possible interpretation for this verse. It seems the verse is referencing past prophets like Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These prophets received the *rūḥ*—which contained revelation—into their hearts. This revelation gave them knowledge of the divine and strengthened them to warn people about the coming Day of Judgement. This verse seems to imply God's prophets or human messengers were the recipients of some extraordinary, supernatural power from God, filling them with inspiration to know and see things in ways others could not. This power enabled them to change the lives of myriads of people around them.[242]

---

[238] Qur'an 40:15.
[239] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, 40:15.
[240] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, 40:15.
[241] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, 40:15.
[242] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 68.

III. “Thus, have We imbued you with a Spirit [*rūḥ*] of Our command. You did not know what the Book is, or what is faith; but We made it a light that We may guide by its means whomever We wish of Our servants. You indeed guide to a straight path.”[243] Q 42:52

Al-Tabari lists three possibilities here for *rūḥ*: revelation, the Qurʾan, and mercy.[244] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* in this verse is either the angel Gabriel or revelation.[245] Al-Razi says *rūḥ* in this verse is mercy.[246]

To begin, the context of this verse must be understood. The prior verse says, “It is not [possible] for any human that God should speak to him, except through revelation or from behind a veil, or send a messenger who reveals by His permission whatever He wishes.” (Q 42:51) We can glean from this verse the three ways God can speak to a human. The first is *waḥī* (revelation), which happens when God brings inspiration to a prophet’s heart. The second is from behind a veil, which could suggest a vision or the way in which God spoke to Moses. The third is by God sending a messenger, and that messenger revealing whatever God wants. This third way is often interpreted as the way in which the Qurʾan was revealed, and Gabriel is seen as the messenger sent to Muhammad. Luxenberg, however, says this interpretation is due to the exegetes only knowing the restricted Arabic usage of the word *waḥī*, where it means “to give,” “to inspire,” “to reveal.” He believes this word borrows form the Syro-Aramaic word *hawwi*, which has the additional meanings of “to show,” “to indicate,” “to present,” “to announce,” “to

[243] Qur’an 42:52.
[244] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 42:52.
[245] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 42:52.
[246] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 42:52.

communicate," "to teach."[247] Luxenberg and Brockleman, in the Lexicon Syriacum, say these further meanings fit better in several of the Qurʾanic contexts where *waḥī* is used, strengthening the argument of a relationship between the *waḥī* and *hawwi*. In a similar manner to Luxenberg, Daniel Madigan argues that the classical exegetes restricted the interpretation of *waḥī* through the use of Islamic traditions in order to protect "the distance between the divine and human."[248] Madigan says the best meaning for *waḥī* is "communication,"[249] because it encompasses the wide array of use it had in pre-Islamic Arabic.[250] Regarding this verse, Luxenberg says it is also important that we do not automatically assume *rasūl* (messenger) is referring to an angel. It can also be a man, as the title is often used in reference to Muhammad. With these alterations, the verse can be read as follows: "With no man has God ever (directly) spoken except through inspiration or behind a curtain or in that he sends a messenger (apostle such as Muhammad) who, with His permission, teaches/announces/communicates what He wants."[251] The last portion of this verse has been classically understood as the angel Gabriel revealing what God wants. Luxenberg's expanded understanding of *waḥī* stemming from the Syro-Aramaic word *hawwi*, and his reminder that *rasūl* encompasses both an angelic messenger and a prophetic human messenger, opens up other interpretative possibilities. If Muhammad is the one who is teaching what God wants, we can ask how he received the inspiration that enabled him to carry out this

[247] Chris Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (H. Schiler, 2007), 125.
[248] Madigan, "Revelation," 440.
[249] Madigan says *waḥī* was often used to describe the communication of an indistinct message, such as the remnants of a deserted campsite, or the communication of an indiscernible message through sound or gestures, such as the screeching of an eagle, thunder, or the squeaking and clacking of an ostrich. The use of *waḥī* as a type of impenetrable, mysterious communication is complementary to the numerous traditions of Muhammad's revelations being accompanied by physical effects, such as a loud ringing like a bell or a chain, profuse sweating, fainting, etc. Madigan, "Revelation," 439; Madigan maintains to the outside observer *waḥī* seems indecipherable and strange; however, to the receiver, it is full of meaning. Madigan, *Revelation*, 441.
[250] Madigan, "Revelation," 441.
[251] Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic*, 126.

task. The answer is in the following verse, which states that Muhammad did not know what the book was nor what the faith was before being imbued with *al-rūḥ min amrna*. In this verse, as in others, there is a clear indication of *rūḥ* generating an impact/imparting life. In the story of Adam, *rūḥ* animates inanimate matter; here *rūḥ* gives light/life to the ignorance of Muhammad's mind. In this verse, God describes *rūḥ* as a light by which He guides whomever He wills of His servants and the inspiration by which Muhammad will teach others and guide to the straight path. This specific example of Muhammad receiving revelation by *al- rūḥ min amrna* corresponds with the more general verses of Q 16:2 and Q 40:15, which say God sends down/places *al- rūḥ min amrna* on whomever He wills of His servants so that they will warn of the coming judgement day and declare that God is one. In addition, the Arabic word *amr* is translated here as "command." The form of this verse suggests the Qurʾan has an idea of revelation involving the *amr* and *rūḥ*. Arthur Jeffrey in his book on foreign vocabulary in the Qurʾan says: "The whole conception seems to have been strongly influenced by the Christian Logos (Word) doctrine."[252] *Amr* is also used with spirit in a similar fashion in Q 16:2, Q 17:85, and Q 40:15. *Al-rūḥ min amrna* appears to be the mechanism by which God divinely inspires.

In addition, some of the early Arab Christian philosophers, such as Theodore Abu Qurra, Ammar al-Basri, and the unknown author of *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd*, utilized the idea that God can speak to humans from behind a veil in their arguments for why Christ is divine.[253] They described the incarnation as an act of veiling and clothing in a body (*labisa jasad*),[254] maintaining that God's divine word and divine spirit were hidden (*ihtajaba*) behind the humanity

[252] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Brill, 2007), 69.
[253] Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 407.
[254] Gibson, *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd* (On the Triunity of the One God), 88, cited in Awad, Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms, 407.

of Jesus.[255] They argued that, similar to the New Testament, the Qurʾan depicts Jesus as having two identities—a human, created identity, and a divine, uncreated identity. His human identity was *ibn Maryam* (the son of Mary), *ʿabd Allāh* (the servant of God), and *rasūl Allāh* (the messenger of God); his divine identity was *kalimat Allāh* (word of God), and *rūḥ Allāh* (spirit of God).[256] The Qurʾanic proviso of *bi-idhni* (with my leave) is present in nearly all of the accounts of Jesus's miracles, because his *nāsūt* (human nature) was entirely reliant on his *lāhūt* (divine nature). Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ al-qudus* empowered Jesus to raise the dead and brought life to religion or eternal life for people through purification from sins.[257] Jesus's *lāhūt* allowed his *nāsūt* to be continually strengthened by *rūḥ al-qudus*, thereby empowering him to heal the blind and the leper, raise the dead, cast out demons, create a bird from clay, have foreknowledge about what was hidden or unknown to others, have divine knowledge of God, and speak from the cradle and adulthood. In a similar manner, several Isma'ili philosophers of the 10th and 11th centuries, including Ikhwan al-Safa, Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, Abu Hatim al-Razi, Abu Yaqub al-Sijistani and al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, spoke of Jesus having two natures—*lāhūt* (divine nature) and *nāsūt* (human nature)[258]—in their affirmation of the historicity of the crucifixion.[259] The *nāsūt* of Jesus was his physical body and the *lāhūt* of Jesus is referenced in his Qur'anic titles of *kalimat Allāh* and *rūḥ Allāh*. These Isma'ili philosophers maintained that it

[255] Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms*, 407.
[256] Ibid., 407-409.
[257] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 5:110
[258] The view of these Isma'ili philosophers is a minority opinion. The vast majority of Islamic exegetes deny the death and crucifixion of Jesus. Many of them maintain Jesus was raised up to heaven and a substitute was crucified in his place. Additionally, Isma'ili philosophers believed the Prophet Muhammad had a a *nāsūt* (human nature) and a *lāhūt* (divine nature). They said his *nāsūt* was his physical body and his *lāhūt* was the Universal Intellect (*al-'aql al-kulli*), also referred to as the Light of Muhammad (*al- nūr al-Muhammadi*).
[259] Andani, Khalil. "'They Killed Him Not': The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam," (MTS – Islamic Studies – Harvard, 2014), 6.

was only the humanity (*nāsūt*) of Jesus that was crucified on the cross; his divine nature (*lāhūt*), as *kalimat Allāh* and *rūḥ Allāh*, was unaffected and could not be killed or crucified.[260] The contemporary Islamic scholar, Mahmoud Ayub, agrees with this perspective, saying:

> The Qur'an is not here speaking about a man, righteous and wronged though he may be, but about the Word of God who was sent to earth and returned to God. Thus, the denial of killing of Jesus is a denial of the power of men to vanquish and destroy the divine Word, which is forever victorious[261]

1.3 *Rūḥ* and Angels

I: "On the day when the Spirit [*rūḥ*] and the angels stand in an array. None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right."[262] Q 78:38

Al-Tabari says there is disagreement among the authorities as to the meaning of *rūḥ*. He gives six possibilities for the meaning in this verse: first, an angel that is greater than the heavens, the earth, and all the angles;[263] second, a creation of God that looks like a human (having legs and arms and eating and drinking) but is neither angel or human; third, the angel Gabriel; fourth, a representative of all mankind; fifth, the collective spirits of all mankind; sixth, the Qurʾan. Al-Tabari concludes by saying *rūḥ* is God's creation, but only God knows what it really is.[264]

Al-Baydawi gives three possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse: an angel representative of all of the spirits, Gabriel, or a creature greater than all of the angels.[265] Al-Razi lists all of the

[260] Andani, "The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam," 8; Syriac Christians also often used the terms *nāsūt* and *lāhūt* in their description of Jesus's two identities. The *nāsūt* and *lāhūt* were seen as two distinct identities that do not merge or intermix, but instead exist in union.
[261] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion," *The Muslim World*, (1980): 70.
[262] Qur'an 78:38.
[263] Al-Tabari says this angel praises God 12,000 praises a day and out of each praise God makes an angel. Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 78:38
[264] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 78:38.
[265] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 78:38.

possible interpretations mentioned by al-Tabari. Al-Razi's opinion is that the correct interpretation of the seven is the angel Gabriel.[266]

This verse is referring to *yawm al-qiyāma* (Day of Judgement), when all will come before God.[267] The numerous interpretations listed allude to the early Islamic authorities' confusion regarding the identity of *rūḥ*. There are fantastical interpretations such as a super-angel greater than the heavens and a metaphysical creature greater than all the angels.[268] There are also Judeo-Christian interpretations such as *rūḥ* looking like a man, but it being neither a man nor an angel. This later interpretation is similar to Daniel 7:13 (English Standard Version), "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him."[269] There also is a similarity between this passage and Matthew 25:31-33 (English Standard Version), which says:

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.[270]

Q 89:22 parallels Q 78:38 and might clarify it. It says, "And the Lord has come and the angels rank upon rank."[271] This verse is also talking about the Day of Judgement. The difference

---

[266] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 78:38.
[267] O'Shaughnessy contends that this verse is very similar to the writings of St. Ephraem, which state, "The knowledge of the angles to the knowledge of the spirit is as a little twinkling… The angels… these great ones learn at the suggestion of the spirit. Gabriel, head of the angels, and Michael, endowed with power, perceive not that the hour is at hand of the coming of God… There stand the ranks of the spirits and the ranks of the chief angels; … all their [angels] ranks are mingled together in great fear; the spirit will descend from heaven to purify the wickedness of the earth." In both the writings of St. Ephraem and Q 78:38, the spirit is clearly superior to the angels. O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 18.
[268] This interpretation is similar to Micaiah's vision in 1 Kings 22:19-21 (English Standard Version), "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord."
[269] Daniel 7:13 ESV.
[270] Matthew 25:31-33 ESV.
[271] Qur'an 89:22.

between the two verses is, in Q 78:38, the *rūḥ* and the angels are in ranks, and in Q 89:22, the Lord is coming, and the angels are in ranks. In al-Razi and al-Baydawi's interpretation of this verse, however, they say the Lord cannot be referring directly to God because, in the Islamic creed, God is placeless.[272] They give five possibilities as to what "the Lord" could refer to: first, the *amr* (command) of God coming for the accountability and judgement of people; second, the overpowering force of God for punishment; third, the glory of God; fourth, the presence of God; fifth, the greatest angel of all angels. These interpretations would all correspond with *rūḥ* in Q 78:38.[273] Of particular interest is the possibility of it being the *amr* of God, since the *rūḥ* is said to be of *amr Allāh*, and the interpretation of "the Lord" being the glory of God. The imagery in Q 89:22 and Q 78:38 is analogous to Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1:26-28 (English Standard Version), which says,

> …seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.[274]

Ezekiel's vision of the likeness of a man with brightness around him seated above the likeness of a throne is very similar to the classical Islamic interpretation of *rūḥ* looking like a man but being neither a man nor an angel. Additionally, Ezekiel's assertion that it is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord is strikingly similar to the classical interpretation of Q 89:22, where "the Lord" is said to be the glory of God.

---

[272] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 89:22; Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 89:22.
[273] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 89:22; Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 89:22.
[274] Ezekiel 1:26-28 ESV.

II: "The angels and the Spirit [*rūḥ*] ascend to Him in a day whose span is fifty thousand years."[275] Q 70:4

Here, al-Tabari does not give any reports from authorities. He says *rūḥ* is the angel Gabriel.[276] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* is either the angel Gabriel because of God's favor on him, or it is a creation greater than the angels.[277] Al-Razi says *rūḥ* is either a great light that is the closest light to God, or it is the angel Gabriel.[278]

Rūḥ is almost always used in connection with three key contexts— creation, prophecy, and *yawm al-dīn* (Day of Judgement).[279] This verse is talking about *yawm al-dīn*. This event is both a second creation and a second revelation. Everything hidden within the earth, within mankind, and within the knowledge of God will be revealed. This event is seen as happening in the future; but from the divine view, this secret has already been revealed.[280] The mediator between this temporal view and the eternal view is the *rūḥ*. In this verse, the angels and the *rūḥ* ascend together to God for *yawm al-dīn*. It parallels Q 32:5, "*yudabbir al-amr* (He directs the command) from the heaven to the earth; then it ascends toward Him in a day whose span is a thousand years by your reckoning."[281] The similar ascension of both *rūḥ* and *amr* on *yawm al-dīn* illustrates the intimate relationship between *rūḥ* and *amr*.

[275] Qur'an 70:4.
[276] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 70:4.
[277] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q70:4.
[278] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 70:4.
[279] Sells, "Spirit," 254-255.
[280] Ibid., 255.
[281] Qur'an 32:5.

III. “Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. And what will show you what is the Night of Ordainment? The night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months. In it, the angels and the Spirit [*rūḥ*] descend by the leave of their Lord with every command. It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn.”[282] Q 97:1-5

Al-Tabari says the exegetes differ as to the meaning of *rūḥ* in this verse. However, the only interpretation he offers is *rūḥ* meaning Gabriel, and he fails to cite the reports of any authorities in support of this interpretation.[283] Al-Baydawi does not offer any interpretation for the meaning of *rūḥ* in this verse.[284]

Al-Razi, however, gives eight possible interpretations for *rūḥ:* first, a great angel that can eat the heavens and the earth in one bite; second, a type of angel that the rest of the angels do not see except on the *layla al-qadr* (the Night of Ordainment); third, a creation of God that eats and wears clothes, but is not angel or human; fourth, Jesus, because Jesus is called *rūḥ* (Q 4:171); fifth, the Qurʾan; sixth, God’s mercy;[285] seventh, the honored scribes that record the good deeds and bad deeds; eighth, Gabriel. Al-Razi thinks Gabriel is the most likely of the possibilities.[286]

Surat al-Qadr is one of the most loved and best-known passages in the Qurʾan and is traditionally seen as when God sent down the Qurʾan to the prophet Muhammad. This interpretation is based on the traditions related through Ibn ʿAbbas and al-Sha’bi. Western academics, however, have raised several other possibilities based upon the passage’s similarity to Luke 2:13-14, which says, “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly

[282] Qur’an 97:1-5.
[283] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 97:4.
[284] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 97:4.
[285] Al-Razi says this is a possibility since there is a variant reading where *rūḥ* is read as *rawḥ* (mercy). Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 97:4,
[286] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 97:4.

host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"[287] The first possibility, suggested by Richard Bell, is this passage was influenced by the Christian nativity story.[288] One possible source might have been Ephrem the Syrians' hymn *De Nativitate 9*"from the early 4th century manuscript *Hymns to Childbirth*.[289] This hymn follows Luke 2:14, emphasizing the peaceful nature of Jesus's birth and the reconciliation that takes place between heaven and earth.[290] A second possibility, raised by Christoph Luxenberg and Guillaume Dye, [291] is the Qurʾan is alluding to the descent of Jesus—whom the Qurʾan describes as a "word from God" and a "spirit from God"—from heaven to earth.[292] This would correspond with al-Razi's possible interpretation of Jesus being *rūḥ*. Al-Razi also lists a unique interpretation of the phrase *min kulli amri* (with every command). He says it means "on behalf of all mankind."[293] Using this interpretation, along with al-Razi's interpretation of Jesus as *rūḥ*, would make the verse read, "The angels and Jesus descend by the leave of their Lord on behalf of all mankind." Reynolds says "the language of this *sura* with its reference to angels (v. 4) and a peaceful night (v. 5) indeed seems to bear some similarity to Luke's account of the birth of Christ."[294] A third possibility, postulated by Michael Sells and Samuel Zinner, is *Surat al-Qadr* alludes directly to the descent of the Qurʾan to Muhammad, and indirectly to the descent of the "spirit" to Mary during the annunciation and nativity of Christ.[295] Zinner says the

[287] Luke 2:13-14, ESV.
[288] Bell and Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 563-564.
[289] Phillipus J. Botha "Ephrem the Syrian's Hymn on the Crucifixion 4," HTS Theological Studies 71, no. 3 (2015). 1-21.
[290] Ibid., 1-21.
[291] Christoph Luxenberg, "Noel dans le Coran," in *Enquêtes sur l'Islam: En hommage à Antoine Moussali*, ed. Anne-Marie Delcambre and Joseph Bosshard (Paris: Editions Desclee de Brouwer, 2004), 117-138; Guillaume Dye, "La Nuit du Destin et la Nuit de la Nativite," *Figures Bibliques en Islam*, (2011): 107-169.
[292] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 919.
[293] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, 97:4.
[294] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 919.
[295] Samuel Zinner, *Christianity and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype* (London: Matheson Trust, 2010), 213-218.

word “it” in Q 97:1, “Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment,” is the Arabic pronoun *hua,* which can mean “him” or “it." He claims this pronoun refers indirectly to Gabriel and directly to the Qurʾan or the *Logos* (the word of God).[296] In verse four, Zinner then draws attention to the phrase *tanazala al-malaʾika wa-l-rūḥ fīha* (the angels and the *rūḥ* descend in it).[297] He says the word “it” is the Arabic pronoun *hiyya*, which can mean “her” or “it.” He reads the verse as “the angels descend, and the spirit enters into her.” He maintains that “her” may refer to the “night,” or it may allude to Mary.[298] He says this corresponds with Q 66:12, in which God breathes of His spirit into Mary.[299] Sells, on the other hand, claims the allusions to the descent of the Spirit to Mary are apparent when one explores the multidimensionality of meaning in *Surat al-Qadr* as generated by the four modes of discourse: semantic, acoustic, emotive, and gendered.[300] Lastly, a fourth possibility, suggested by Sinai,[301] is this passage was a deliberate re-working of the symbolism of the Christian nativity story to illustrate the final nature of the Qurʾan that surpasses all previous revelations.[302]

IV: “He sends down the angels with the Spirit [*rūḥ*] of His command to whomever He wishes of His servants: ‘Warn [the people] that there is no god except Me; so be wary of Me.’”[303] Q 16:2

[296] Zinner’s claim that the pronoun *hua* directly refers to *Logos* is in reference to John 1 when the word of God becomes flesh in Jesus.
[297] Zinner, *Ontology*, 214.
[298] Ibid., 214.
[299] Ibid., 214.
[300] Sells, “Spirit,” 231.
[301] Nicolai Sinai, "'Weihnachten im Koran' oder 'Nacht der Bestimmung'? Eine Deutung von Sure 97," *Der Islam* 88, (2012): 11–32.
[302] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 919.
[303] Qur’an 16:2.

Al-Tabari lists several possibilities for *rūḥ* in this verse: inspiration, prophethood, and mercy.[304] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* here could either be inspiration or the Qurʾan. He gives the reason that both of them bring life to the dead heart and to the ignorant mind. Al-Razi says *rūḥ* is either revelation—the words of God and his warning—or Gabriel.[305] Al-Razi says revelation is the more preferable interpretation.[306]

This verse brings out a different nuance in the relationship between the *rūḥ* and the angels. In prior verses, the *rūḥ* and angels have ascended and descended together, and stood on the Day of Judgement. In this verse, however, the angels are sent down with the *rūḥ* of God's command. This verse directly parallels Q 40:15, which says, "He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes, that he may warn [people] of the Day of Encounter."[307] Seeing these two verses in conjunction makes it clear that the *rūḥ* of God's command is what inspires His servants to become warners, not the angels. In Q 40:15, the spirit of His command is cast down without the angels, and in Q 16:2 the angels are sent with it. These verses evoke a meaning of *rūḥ* as a supernatural force that comes from God's divine *amr*, entering into the hearts of the prophets, filling them with divine revelation, and inspiring them to warn people about the coming Day of Judgement. Rahman says this *rūḥ* is "the Agency of all being and life and is the guarantee that whenever the human race sinks into the moral morass of its own follies, there is always hope for its rescue and renewal."[308]

---

[304] Al-Tabari cites a report from Mujahid saying angels do not descend without the *rūḥ*, and a report from al-Rabea' Bin Annas, saying every word God says is a spirit from Him. Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 16:2,
[305] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 16:2
[306] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 16:2.
[307] Qur'an 40:15.
[308] Fezlur Rahman, and Ebrahim Moosa, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 68.

1.4 *Rūḥ* in other contexts

I. "Say, the Holy Spirit [*rūḥ al-qudus*] has brought it down duly from your Lord to fortify those who have faith and as guidance and good news for those who submit [to God]."[309] Q16:102

Al-Tabari says *rūḥ* here is Gabriel, and he has already proven this in other places. He cites the authority of Muhammad bin Kaab to support this interpretation.[310] Al-Baydawi gives the sole meaning of Gabriel for *rūḥ*. He says God added the title of "holy" to Gabriel because he is a pure creation.[311]Al-Razi says *rūḥ* in this verse is the angel Gabriel for the same reasons he gave earlier regarding *rūḥ al-qudus* (in Q 2:87).[312]

The Holy Spirit here is said to be the bearer of the revelation to Muhammad. In other verses, the bearer who brought revelation to Muhammad is called the *rūḥ al-amīn* (Q 26:193), Gabriel (Q 2:97), and *al-rūḥ min amrihi* (Q 42:52). Traditionally, Islamic exegetes have interpreted this verse, along with Q 26:193, through the lens of Q 2:97 in order to build the case for *rūḥ* being an honorific title for Gabriel. However, there is a strong case for this verse being interpreted through the lens of four other verses that maintain the mystery and ambiguity of *rūḥ*. The first verse is Q 16:2, which says God sends down angels *bi-l-rūḥ min amrihi* (the *rūḥ* of his command). Mujahid commented on this verse saying angels do not descend from heaven without the *rūḥ*. The second verse is Q 40:15, which says God casts down *al-rūḥ min amrihi* to whomever he wills of his servants. The third verse is Q 42:52, which says God inspired Muhammad with *al-rūḥ min amrihi*. The fourth verse is Q 26:193, which says *al-rūḥ al-amīn* brought the revelation down on Muhammad's heart. Reading those four verses together, rather

[309] Qur'an 16:102.
[310] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 16:102.
[311] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 16:102.
[312] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 16:102.

than in isolation, makes it clear that *rūḥ* is God's unique agent for bringing divine revelation to his servants. Daniel Madigan maintains that the classical exegetes interpreted the Holy Spirit as Gabriel so he would function as a "theological safeguard," because "if the prophet had dealings only with Gabriel and not with God directly then the absolute transcendence and immateriality of God is safeguarded."[313] If *rūḥ* is a divine attribute of God, however, this makes God immanent.

II: "This is indeed [a Book] sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit [*rūḥ al-amīn*] upon your heart (so that you may be one of the warners) in a clear Arabic language."[314] Q 26:193

Al-Tabari cites reports from Ibn ʿAbbas, al-Dahhak, Qatada, and Ibn Jereej saying *rūḥ* in this verse is the angel Gabriel. In support of this interpretation is another Qurʾanic verse which says the angel Gabriel brought it down on his heart (Q 2:97).[315] Al-Baydawi says *rūḥ* here is the angel Gabriel, who was called the faithful, because he was faithful to carry out the delivery of inspiration from God to Muhammad.[316] Al-Razi says *rūḥ* in this verse is the angel Gabriel and he gives some of the same reasons he gave in his interpretation of Q 2:87 as to why Gabriel is given the descriptive title of *rūḥ*.[317]

The similarity between this verse and Q 2:97 is the foundation of the understanding of *rūḥ* as Gabriel. Q 2:97 says, "Say, 'Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel [should know that] it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of God, confirming what has been [revealed]

[313] Madigan, "Revelation," 445.
[314] Qur'an 26:191.
[315] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, 26:191.
[316] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, 26:191.
[317] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, 26:191.

before it, and as a guidance and good news for the faithful.'"[318] There are a couple subtle differences, however, between the two verses. In Q 2:97, *nazzalahu 'ala qalbika bi-idhn rabbika*, means "he (Gabriel) caused it (the Qurʾan) to descend on your heart by the permission of your Lord." In Q 26:193, it says *nazala bihi al-rūḥ al-amīn ala qalbak*, which means, "the trustworthy spirit descended with it (the Qurʾan) on your heart."[319] First, in Q 2:97, Gabriel is causing the Qurʾan to descend, whereas in Q 26:193, *al-rūḥ al-amīn* descends with the Qurʾan. Second, in Q 2:97, Gabriel does this action by God's permission. In the Qurʾan, this phrase functions as a proviso, meaning this could not have been done without God. However, in Q 26:193, this proviso is not written. Maybe this is alluding to the trustworthy spirit being a divine attribute of God rather than a created intermediary.

Fazlur Rahman says angels are mentioned frequently in the Qurʾan and are given a variety of roles as God's agents, but they are never described in the Qurʾan as the agent of revelation.[320] In fact, there are multiple occasions in the Qurʾan—including Noah's people (Q 23:24), the people of Ad and Thamūd (Q 41:14), and all those to whom a prophet was sent (Q 14:10)—where unbelievers demand God send revelation to humans through angels as a sign, and not through human prophets.[321] The Prophet Muhammad was often asked that an angel be sent down upon him as a sign (Q 6:8-9, 91, 111, 158; Q 14:9-11; Q 15:7; Q 17:94-95; Q 22:75; Q 23:24), to which the Qurʾan would reply, "We do not send down the angels except with due reason, and then they will not be granted any respite."[322] (Q 15:8). The repeated repudiation of

[318] Qur'an 2:97.
[319] Qur'an 26:193.
[320] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 66.
[321] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 227.
[322] Qur'an 15:8.

these demands for an angel to descend upon Muhammad or the other prophets should cause us to consider whether the Trusted Spirit mentioned in this verse, or the Holy Spirit mentioned in Q 16:102, should be identified as Gabriel.[323]

Also relevant is the question of what "heart" means in this context. The word *qalb* (heart) is used 132 times in the Qur'an. It has a range of meaning, but the general sense behind it is "the human faculty of perceiving God." This is reflected in the hadith saying, "Earth and heaven do not contain Me, but the heart of My believing servant containeth Me."[324] This hadith shows that the power of containing and comprehending God is in the heart.[325] Some believe this is achieved through contemplation. Al-Tirmidhi builds on this concept and demonstrates the relationship between *rūḥ* and *qalb* in his interpretation of Q 56:88: "Then if he be of those brought near, then ease (*rawh*), abundance (*rayhan*), and a garden of bliss."[326] Citing a hadith from Aisha, Tirmidhi says this verse can be read either "*rawh wa rayhan*" or "*rūḥ wa rayhan*." Tirmidhi maintains that "whoever reads '*fa-rūḥ wa rayhan*' supports the view that the *rūḥ* is something lofty from God's affair. The *rūḥ* comes into the heart and by means of it the heart finds peace in God. By means of *rūḥ* a person finds pure remembrance of God."[327] In addition, he contends that the *rūḥ* coming to the hearts of the prophets resulted in them possessing divine knowledge of God.[328]

---

[323] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 67.
[324] Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, cited in Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Library of Alexandria, 1978), 115.
[325] Nicholson, *Studies*, 115.
[326] Qur'an 56:88.
[327] John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi - an Annotated Translation with Introduction* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 147.
[328] Ibid., 147.

III: "[For] such, He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him [*rūḥun minhu*]. He will admit them into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever]."[329] Q 58:22

Al-Tabari does not cite any reports from authorities regarding *rūḥ*. He merely says it strengthens the believers with evidence from God and light and guidance.[330] Al-Baydawi gives four possible meanings for *rūḥ* in this verse: first, light of the heart that comes from God; second, the Qurʾan; third, victory over one's enemies; fourth, the conscience of the faithful, because it causes life in one's heart.[331] Al-Razi gives four possible interpretations for *rūḥ* in this verse: first, victory over one's enemies; second, the conscience of the faithful; third, the grace of heaven; fourth, the greatest and highest rank of grace.[332]

This is the second instance of the phrase *rūḥun minhu* (a spirit from Him). The other instance is in reference to Jesus being called *rūḥun minhu*. Here, however, God says He will strengthen numerous people with His spirit, which implies that His *rūḥ* is omnipresent. *Rūḥ* being omnipresent would preclude the identification of *rūḥ* as Gabriel, because God alone is omnipresent. Also, the order of this verse seems to be relevant. First, faith is written on their hearts, then they are supported by God's spirit. The result of this is God admits those supported by His spirit into gardens where water flows, and they will stay forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him, and they are the people of God and will be successful. This verse seems to be in harmony with John 14:15-17 and 14:26 (English Standard Version):

> If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world

[329] Qur'an 58:22.
[330] Al-Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Tabari*, Q 58:22.
[331] Al-Baydawi, *Tafsīr al-Baydawi*, Q 58:22.
[332] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 58:22.

> cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.[333]
>
> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.[334]

In the Qurʾan and the New Testament, spirit (*rūḥ* in the Qur'an and *pneuma* in the New Testament) is spoken of as an advocate that will strengthen believers continually and keep them in an intimate relationship with God.[335] This understanding of *rūḥ* is also echoed in the Old Testament by the Hebraic word *ruach* in Ezekiel 36:25-27 (English Standard Version),[336] which says, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit [*ruach*] I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit [*ruach*] within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."[337] In his commentary on Q 58:22, the translator Yusef Ali says:

> Here we learn that all good and righteous men are strengthened by God with the holy spirit. If anything the phrase used here is stronger, "a spirit from Himself." Whenever anyone offers his heart in faith and purity to God, God accepts it, engraves that Faith on the seeker's heart, and further fortifies him with the divine spirit which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of God.[338]

Ali's description of *rūḥun minhu* is very similar to the New Testament description of the promised Holy Spirit in John and the Old Testament description of the promised spirit in Ezekiel.

---

[333] John 14:15-17, ESV.
[334] John 14:26, ESV.
[335] In the Syriac New Testament, the word for spirit is *rūḥa*, which is a cognate of *rūḥ*.
[336] *Ruach* is a cognate of *rūḥ*.
[337] Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV.
[338] Ali, *The Qur'an Translation*, 1518.

Ali sees it as the divine spirit of God that supports and strengthens anyone who gives their heart in faith to God.

1.6 Summary of *Rūḥ* in the Classical *Tafsīr* Tradition

This section determined that the classical Sunni exegetes' freedom to contemplate regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was limited by theological concerns and it seems to have restricted the senses in which the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was interpreted. The classical Sunni exegetes stayed within the same interpretation grid for most verses concerning the Qur'anic *rūḥ*—considering *rūḥ* to be either Gabriel, a super angel/metaphysical creature, a created soul, divine inspiration transmitted by God, or by remaining silent and not offering any interpretation. These were considered to be acceptable interpretations, because considering variant interpretations might have raised theological concerns. These concerns were rooted in the fear of conflating *rūḥ* or Jesus with God due to potential anthropomorphic overtones that might impede upon God's transcendence and theological implications of Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh*.

This section also demonstrated that the "acceptable interpretations" of the exegetes were often the product of problematic exegesis. This is particularly evident in the exegetes' repeated identification of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* as an individual agent or personality, such as Gabriel. *Rūḥ* was often interpreted as Gabriel, even when it required a "tortuous interpretative process,"[339] because it acted as a "theological safeguard."[340] Gabriel bridged the temporal to the eternal and the natural to the divine in creation, revelation, and judgement day, thus protecting the absolute

[339] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 11.
[340] Madigan, "Revelation," 44.

transcendence and immateriality of God.[341] Gabriel as *rūḥ* also mitigated the potential theological implications of Jesus being *rūḥ minhu*, his being strengthened by *rūḥ al-qudus*, and the breathing from/of *rūḥ* into Jesus. The interpretation of *rūḥ* as Gabriel, however, is questionable. First, the Qur'an never explicitly states that *rūḥ* is either Gabriel or an angel. Second, all of the angels, including Gabriel, prostrated before Adam after the breathing from/of *rūḥ*. If the breathing from/of *rūḥ* caused Gabriel to bow down before Adam—thereby showing Gabriel to be inferior to Adam—it is difficult to comprehend how Gabriel would be regarded as *rūḥ* in later occurrences. Third, the identification of Gabriel as the *rūḥ* that blew into Jesus is contradictory, because none of the classical exegetes even mention the possibility of Gabriel being the *rūḥ* that brought life to Adam. Al-Maturidi concurs, saying numerous exegetes identify Gabriel as the *rūḥ* that brought Jesus to life; but this is not appropriate, because it is not written in the verse.[342] Fourth, angels are never described in the Qur'an as agents of revelation.[343] In fact, the Qur'an repeatedly repudiates demands for an angel to descend upon Muhammad or other prophets.[344]

Another interpretation resulting from problematic exegesis is *rūḥ* as created soul. This interpretation helped explain certain ambiguous verses such as Q 17:85, and it precluded erroneous interpretations for the several verses where personal pronouns are attached to *rūḥ*, and the verses concerning *rūḥ* and Jesus. The earliest exegete, al-Tabari, never defines the Qurʾanic *rūḥ* as soul;[345] however, al-Razi does extensively. According to al-Razi, God attributes *rūḥ* to Himself in a similar way to *kaʿbat Allāh* (the house of God),[346] or *nāqat Allāh* (God's she-

[341] Ibid., 44.
[342] Al-Maturidi, *Tafsīr Maturidi*, 21:91.
[343] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 66
[344] Ibid., 67
[345] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 15.
[346] Qur'an 2:125.

camel), because *rūḥ* is a created possession of God.[347] In Razi's opinion, God blew a created spirit into both Adam and Jesus, and Jesus's spirit is attributed to God in an honorific way.[348] The absolute transcendence of God is protected and the Christian claim that Jesus is the spirit of God and therefore divine is nullified—because every person's spirit is God's spirit.[349] *Rūḥ* as created soul is a precarious interpretation, however, since according to Macdonald, O'Shaughnessy, and Tlili, *rūḥ* never occurs in the Qurʾan with the meaning "soul."[350] Ibn Qayyim emphatically echoes this same point in his *Kitāb al-rūḥ*. Although *rūḥ* is often used with the meaning of "soul" in the Islamic traditions, the only word for soul in the Qur'an is *nafs*.[351] Numerous Islamic exegetes have exegeted verses concerning *rūḥ* incorrectly because of this crucial misinterpretation.[352]

These two major interpretations preserved the supreme transcendence and immateriality of God and minimized the potential implications of Jesus being *rūḥ minhu*; however, the repeated dependence on them caused the classical exegetes to diminish or deemphasize several senses in which *rūḥ* is portrayed in the Qur'an. *Rūḥ* expresses the creative, revelatory, and empowering engagement of God with His creation throughout the Qur'an. This is demonstrated in *rūḥ* animating inanimate matter, ascending and descending between Heaven and earth, filling the prophets with divine revelation and inspiring them to warn others, supporting the believers, and strengthening Jesus to perform miracles. The Qur'anic depiction of *rūḥ* along with the reports of al-Dahhak and Abu Rawq al-Hamdani—identifying *rūḥ* as *qudrat Allāh* and *amr Allāh*—suggest

[347] Al-Razi, *Tafsīr al-Razi*, Q 32:9.
[348] Ibid., Q 2:87
[349] Ibid., Q 32:9.
[350] Macdonald, "Development of the Idea of Spirit II, 156; Macdonald, "Development of the Idea of Spirit I", 39, and O'Shaughnessy, *Meaning of Spirit*, 11.
[351] Macdonald, "Development of the Idea of Spirit I", 39.
[352] Ibid., 39.

the Qur'anic *rūḥ* is not merely a created intermediary, a created soul, a created immaterial force, or a created impersonal energy; instead, *rūḥ* can be perceived as an uncreated, divine attribute of God.

2.0 *Rūḥ* in Sufi Thought

In this section, I will examine the works of several Sufi mystics and thinkers in order to uncover their interpretations and understandings of *rūḥ*. Initially, I extensively researched the opinions of many of the major Sufi exegetes such as al-Tustari, al-Baqli, al-Qushayri, and al-Jilani in an effort to uncover new understandings and interpretations of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. These exegetes wrote in a more esoteric and figurative style; however, they followed the same restricted interpretation grid of the classical Sunni exegetes. It seems they either had theological concerns pertaining to the interpretation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, or they were affected by the preceding work of other exegetes. This assertion is reflected in *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-Tasawwuf* by Abu Nasr 'Abdullah B. 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi (383 AH/988 CE). This book is an encyclopedic source of the sayings and thought of early Sufi mystics and ascetics and a depiction of the history and thought of classical Sufism (700 A.H. - 1000 A.H.). In one section, al-Sarraj discusses those who err regarding the concept of *rūḥ*. He says there are many who speculate regarding the nature of *rūḥ*, and those who do go away from the truth, because God has declared it is beyond human comprehension.[353] Al-Sarraj lists ten ways in which Sufi individuals and heretical sects have erred regarding *rūḥ*: first, the *rūḥ* is a light from the light of God; second, the *rūḥ* is a life from the life of God; third, the *rūḥ* is created but the *rūḥ al-qudus* is from the essence of God; fourth, the *rūḥ* is eternal and immortal and does not suffer punishment in the hereafter; fifth, the *arwāḥ* (spirits) of the *kuffār* (heretics) are created, but the *arwāḥ* of the elect are uncreated; sixth, there is a transmigration of *arwāḥ*; seventh, *kuffār* (heretics) have one *rūḥ*, Muslims have three *arwāḥ*, and prophets and saints have five *arwāḥ*; eight, *rūḥ* is created of light; nine, *rūḥ* is a spiritual

[353] Abú Nasr 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Sarráj al-Tusi, *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-Tasawwuf*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1914), 120.

essence created of the heavenly kingdom (*al-malakūt*), and it returns to *al-malakūt* when it is purified; tenth, there are two *arwāḥ*, one divine and the other human.[354] Al-Sarraj says all of these erroneous doctrines are the result of forbidden speculation as specified in Q 17:85, "*al-rūḥ* (the spirit) is of God's command, and he has only given you a little understanding."[355] Al-Sarraj says orthodox Sufis believe all *arwāḥ* are created, and there is no connection or relationship between God and *rūḥ* outside of *rūḥ* being God's possession and subject to His will.[356]

Kashf al-Mahjūb (Revelation of the Veiled), by 'Ali B. Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri (474 AH/1077 CE), portrayed classical Sufi thought regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ* in a similar fashion. Al-Hujwiri says there are some who say *rūḥ* is eternal (*qadīm*), worship it, regard it as the sole agent and governor of things, and call it the uncreated *rūḥ* of God. This view is held by the Shi'ites and Ismāʿīlis and the two Sufi sects called the Hulūlis and the Sayyaris.[357] The Hulūlis say *rūḥ* is an eternal attribute of God. Al-Hujwiri says this idea is problematic, because an eternal attribute of God cannot possibly become an attribute of his creatures. If his life could become the life of his creatures, then his power could become their power. How can an eternal attribute stand by a non-eternal object? The eternal has no connection with the non-eternal, and the doctrines of the heretics who affirm this are false.[358]

Al-Sarraj and Al-Hujwiri attempted to tie early Sufi thought regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ* to classical Sunni interpretations in order to show how Sufism was fully accordant with mainstream Islamic belief and practice. They purported that views beyond this scope were heterodox, and

[354] Al-Sarraj, *al-luma*, 120.
[355] Qur'an 17:85.
[356] Al-Sarraj, *al-luma*, 120.
[357] Ali U. Al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *Kashaf al-Mahjūb*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1911), 263.
[358] Ibid., 264.

maintained that those carrying them are in grave error.[359] However, Sufi thought is not homogenous. There were several eminent Sufi thinkers and mystics who interpreted the Qur'anic *rūḥ* in ways outside of the interpretation grid used by the classical Islamic exegetes and early *mutakallimūn* and the set boundaries imposed by Sufis such as al-Sarraj and al-Hujwiri and prominent Sufi exegetes such as al-Tustari and al-Qushayri. These Sufi thinkers and mystics were not, however, anomalies. They were representative of a stream within Sufism willing to question fixed and established concepts, because they understood the progressive relationship between '*ilm* (knowledge) and *hayra* (wonderment). Yahya al-Qawami al-Shirazi (1050 AH/1640 CE) best describes this when he says,

> Wonderment has a beginning, and an end. Between the two wonderments knowledge is revealed. When men reach learning and tradition and authority, however, they do not pass into reality, because of their understanding and the proofs of their sciences. Beyond that (knowledge), wonderment within wonderment becomes manifest, and one never comes out of that wonderment.[360]

In this section, I examine the writings of several of these prominent Sufis—al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and al-Jili—in order to uncover their interpretations and understandings of *rūḥ*. I give a brief background of each of these exegetes, describe how their specific views differ from the classical understanding of *rūḥ*, explain how they arrived at these unique interpretations, and consider the possible implications. I have chosen these particular Sufis because of the unique interpretation each of them offers regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. These interpretations include the Qur'anic *rūḥ* as the means by which a mystic achieves *ittiḥād* (union) with God (al-Hallaj), the first creation of God by which the world is created (al-Ghazali), a divine attribute of God (Ibn

[359] Al-Sarraj, *al-luma*, 120.
[360] Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (State University of New York Press, 1985), 35.

'Arabi), and the essence of God (al-Jili). These Sufi understandings are starkly different than the classical Islamic interpretations of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. The intention of this paper is not to declare them the final, definitive interpretations of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. However, this paper does suggest these Sufi understandings are compatible with the Qur'anic depiction of *rūḥ* and widen the scope of meaning that was limited by the classical Sunni exegetes. These distinct understandings were disregarded and marginalized by mainstream Islamic theology because of traditional, theological concerns; nonetheless, the inclusion of these understandings is essential for further illuminating the meaning of the inscrutable, Qur'anic *rūḥ*.

2.1 Al-Hallaj

One of the first Sufis to go beyond the imposed, speculative limitations on the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (244 A.H. /858 C.E.). Al-Hallaj's life and thought is illustrative of the manifold views within Sufism. He was a Sufi mystic who gathered both disciples and enemies throughout the Islamic world in his lifetime—eventually ending with imprisonment, torture, and execution for the charge of heresy. He is regarded by some, such as Ibn Taymiyya, as a threat to Islamic orthodoxy, and to others, such as al-Rumi, as a "supreme lover of God."[361] The controversy surrounding al-Hallaj stems from his stated goal of *ittiḥād* (union) with God through *fana*' (annihilation of self), and his *shāthhiyat* (ecstatic sayings) that occurred during his times of mystical union with God. Some examples of al-Hallaj's *shāthhiyat* are as follows:

"I have seen my Lord with the eye of my heart, and I said: who are You. He said: You."[362]

[361] Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj* (Curzon Press, 1995), XII.
[362] Ibid., 71.

"I am the truth."[363]

""I find it strange that the Divine Whole can be borne by my little human part."[364]

Al-Hallaj saw these *shāthhiyat* as the result of divine illumination from *rūḥ Allāh*, in which *rūḥ Allāh* speaks through him and makes him the *shahid ani* (present eternal witness) of His divine love.[365] These statements were deemed heretical by some who said al-Hallaj was claiming to be God. In general, however, Sufis believe al-Hallaj was not claiming to be God. Instead, they say his ego had been annihilated and *rūḥ Allāh* was speaking through him. Ibn Attar expressed this when he pointed out that when the burning bush said to Moses, "I am God," it was not the bush speaking, but God manifesting through it.[366] He says, in the same way, it was God speaking through the voice of the annihilated al-Hallaj. The concept of *fana*' and the ecstatic sayings by al-Hallaj were not new to Sufism. They were part of a highly developed and systematized Sufi mystical tradition.[367] The thoughts and actions of al-Hallaj were a natural progression that had been building in the Sufi mystical tradition. His *zuhd* (ascetism) was in the tradition of Hasan of Basra, his *tawakkul* (complete trust in God) was in the manner of Muhasibi, his *shawq* (yearning) for intimacy with God and deep love for God was in the tradition of Rabi'a,

---

[363] Louis Massignon and Herbert Mason. *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 67.
[364] Mason, *al-Hallaj*, 70.
[365] Massignon and Mason, *Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. 15.
[366] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 72.
[367] This is indicated by al-Tusi in *Kitāb al-Luma' fi'l-Tassawuf,* cited in Ernst, *Ecstasy*, 12, when al-Tusi says:

> *shāth* in Arabic means "movement" . . . The flour-sifting house is called "the shaking house (*al-mishtāh*)" because they shake the flour so much, above the place where they sift it, and sometimes it spills over the edges from so much shaking. Thus, *shāth* is a word derived from movement, because it is the agitation of the intimate consciences of the ecstatics when their ecstasy becomes powerful. They express that ecstasy of theirs by an expression that the hearer finds strange—but he will be led astray to his perdition by denying and refuting it when he hears it, and he will be safe and sound by avoiding its denial and by searching out the difficulty in it by asking someone who really knows.

.

his usage of the concepts of *fana*' (annihilation) and *baqa*' (subsistence) were akin to that of Dhul' al-Nun and al-Nuri, and his practice of *sukr* (intoxicated mystical love) and subsequent *shāthhiyat* were similar to Bayezid Bistami, [368] who said *subḥanī* (Praise to Me or to God in me) and *Ma aʿzama sha'nī* (How great is my majesty!).[369]

Al-Hallaj's goal was to lead his followers to ultimate unity with God's essence by means of love. The foundations of Hallaj's goal are rooted in his theory of *Huwa Huwa* (He, He), which Nicholson recounts in *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*:

> Hallaj explains the matter thus: Before all things, before the creation, before His knowledge of the creation, God in His unity was holding an ineffable discourse with Himself and contemplating the splendor of His essence in itself. That pure simplicity of His self-admiration is Love, which in His essence is the essence of the essence, beyond all limitations of attributes. In His perfect isolation God loves Himself, praises Himself, and manifests Himself by Love. And it was this first manifestation of Love in the Divine Absolute that determined the multiplicity of his attributes, and His names. Then God, by His essence in His essence, desired to project out of Himself His supreme joy, that Love in aloneness, that He might behold it and speak to it. He looked in eternity and brought forth from non-existence an image, an image of Himself, endowed with all His attributes and all His names: Adam. The Divine made that form to be His image unto everlasting. God saluted it, glorified it, chose it, and in as much as He manifested Himself by it and in it, that created form became *Huwa*, *Huwa*, He, He![370]

Al-Hallaj affirmed the transcendence of God, however he also conceived of God as immanent in creation and accessible to man. Hallaj used the Syriac Christian terms of *nāsūt* (humanity) and *lāhūt* (divinity) to designate there are two natures, and to classify creation and God's immanence in creation.[371] On a grand scale, the whole of the created cosmos is *nāsūt*, and God reveals his *lāhūt* to creation through mankind. On a small scale, as Adam is *huwa huwa* (He, He), there is in

---

[368] Mason, *al-Hallaj*, 82.
[369] Ibid., 66-67.
[370] Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism: Three Lectures Delivered in the University of London* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30-31.
[371] O.H. Thompson, "Al-Hallaj, Saint and Martyr," *The Muslim World* 19, no. 4 (1929): 392.

every human being (*nāsūt*) a trace of God (*lāhūt*). This trace of God enables the created to reach the uncreated. In addition, al-Hallaj employed the term *hulūl* (incarnation) to describe the union of the *lāhūt* with the *nāsūt*. This word usually has a negative connotation in mainstream Islamic theology because of its association with the Christian doctrine of incarnation.[372] Al-Hallaj, however, used it to help explain how "man is essentially divine."[373] He alludes to this in his book *Kitāb-Al-Tawasīn* when he says, "Glory to Him who revealed in His humanity (in Adam) the secret of His radiant divinity. And then appeared to His creatures visibly in the shape of one who ate and drank (Jesus)."[374] Al-Hallaj said God created Adam in His own image, then "God projected from Himself that image of His eternal love, that God might behold Himself as in a mirror. Hence, He made angels worship Adam in whom as in Jesus, He (God) became incarnate."[375]Al-Hallaj says the *lāhūt* (divinity of God) cannot unite with the *nāsūt* (humanity of God) except through the *hulūl* (incarnation) of *al-rūḥ al-ilāhi* (the Divine Spirit). This view greatly contrasted with the views of the early Ashʿarite, Mu'tazilite, and Hanbalite *mutakallimūn* (theologians). Al-Hallaj alluded to these traditional views in his *Kitāb-al-Tawasīn*, where he gives a re-telling of Iblīs's refusal to obey God's divine command and prostrate before Adam. Al-Hallaj presented Iblīs as a pure monotheist, affirming God's transcendence by refusing to obey God's divine command and prostrate before Adam because Adam is an unclean, material, lowly creature.[376] Iblīs's extreme internalization of God's transcendent holiness led Iblīs to believe God is inaccessible and made him unable to accept God's creativeness in manifesting

[372] Ibid., 392.
[373] Nicholson, *Islamic Mysticism*, 193.
[374] Nasrollah S. Fatemi, *Love, Beauty, and Harmony in Sufism* (Associated University Presses, 1998), 160.
[375] Ibid., 160.
[376] Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 21.

himself in Adam. Iblīs's action sends the message that humans can never attain God's presence much less be one with Him. Humanity's true position is one of separation from God and *infirād* (solitude).[377] Wilcox says about this re-telling, "Satan may be an allegory for the 'sober' Sufis who reject *tawhīd* for their refusal to obey the immanent Divine Command over the transcendent Divine Law."[378]

According to al-Hallaj, the error of Iblīs and of the "sober" was they saw monotheism and blind devotion as superior to love. Instead, Al-Hallaj saw love as "a primordial divine grace without which you would not have learned what the book is nor what faith is."[379] Al-Hallaj said the calling of God's love calls man to desire,[380] and this leads man to adhere to ascetic practices, fill his heart with pious works, persevere through the loss of pleasures, and deny himself desires. This person becomes one of the *muqarrabūn* (those who are drawn closer to God). Gradually the distance between the lover and the Beloved recedes, until the carnal nature of the lover is purified. When there is no carnal nature (ego) left in him,[381]

> *rūḥ Allāh* (the spirit of God), by whom Jesus the son of Mary was born, descends into him. He becomes 'he whom everything is obeyed (*al-muṭā*ʿ)'; he wants nothing more than what carries out the commandment of God; every act of his from that time onwards is God's act, and every commandment of his is God's commandment.[382]

Al-Hallaj refers to this state as *sahū*, permanent wakeful union with God, and says it is beyond a state of trance or ecstasy. This last and final union—which he calls *'ain al-jami'*—is affected by

---

[377] Ibid., 22.
[378] Andrew Wilcox, "The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā' and Baqā' in Early Sūfism," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011), 114.
[379] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 72; The poet Rumi also believed God's love was the starting point, saying in his poetry, "not a single lover would seek union, if the Beloved were not seeking it." Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 72.
[380] Massignon, *Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 107.
[381] Ibid., 40.
[382] Ibid., 40.

God's essence, not just his attributes, and man retains control of his faculties and personality because they have been consecrated, perfected, and brought into their fullness.[383]

According to al-Hallaj, *ittiḥād* with God happens when one's carnal ego is annihilated (*fana*') and *rūḥ Allāh* enters him. God's will becomes man's will and God words become man's words. One of al-Hallaj's names for *rūḥ* is *al-rūḥ al-nāṭiqa* (the speaking spirit). He viewed it as the active intellect of God with which he would frequently converse. Many of his poems are conversations between his *rūḥ* and *al-rūḥ al-nāṭiqa*. Some examples of this are:

"His Spirit is my spirit, and my spirit is His Spirit; what He wants, I want; and what I want, He wants."[384]

"Thy Spirit has mingled itself with my spirit like the wine one mixes with pure water. Whence, if a thing touches Thee, it touches me! Behold, 'Thou' art 'I' in every state"[385]

These poems are illustrative of al-Hallaj's belief that *rūḥ Allāh* enabled him to have intimate conversation and communion with the presence of God. Geoffrey Lampe articulates this idea well in *God as Spirit*, saying, "to speak of the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit is to speak of a transcendent God becoming immanent in human personality, for in his experience of inspiration and divine indwelling man is brought into communion with God's real presence."[386] Al-Hallaj saw *ittiḥād* with God as the chief goal of mankind.

He also saw Jesus as the paramount example of the mystical union between man and God. Other prophets and saints became filled with *rūḥ Allāh* through gradual transformation and the denial of their carnal self. The Qur'an, however, presents Jesus as *rūḥ Allāh* and a pure *kun* (word/being) from birth. Al-Hallaj said Jesus had a permanent union with the divine *kun*.

---

[383] Thompson, "Saint and Martyr," 391.
[384] Mason, *al-Hallaj*, 72.
[385] Ibid., 72.
[386] Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Clarendon Press, 1977), 61.

Ruzbihan al-Baqli advocated a similar perspective, saying God gave some of *rūḥ* to the prophets, but to Jesus he gave the fullness of *rūḥ*.[387] Al-Baqli expounds on this in his commentary on Q 19:17, saying,

> the breath of the union of *azal* (eternity) came to her (Mary) and the sun of the witnessing of holiness rose upon her. When she (Mary) witnessed the rising of the *tajallī* (manifestation) of the eternal, its lights shown and its secrets reached her *rūḥ* (spirit) and her *rūḥ* was impregnated by *rūḥ al-ghayb* (the unseen spirit). She became pregnant with the great Word and the light of the highest Spirit.[388]

Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus endowing Jesus with the fullness of *rūḥ*. This interpretation is similar to the Biblical narrative in Luke 1:35 (English Standard Version), which says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."[389] Al-Qushayri agrees, saying Jesus was a man born absolutely poor of himself in regard to God, since he alone has never had another agent of individuation other than the spirit of God. Al-Wasiti concurs as well, referencing Q 5:110, which says, "I strengthened you (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit to speak to people in the cradle and in adulthood."[390] Al-Wasiti says, "one can only be friends with God if they are friends with the spirit from the beginning and the one who is a friend of God's spirit was with God in his very beginning."[391] Al-Hallaj also believed all of the miracles of Jesus were the result of the strengthening of *rūḥ al-qudus*. Ruzbihan al-Baqli believed this as well, saying in his exegesis of Q 5:110 that the strengthening of *rūḥ al-qudus* enabled Jesus to heal the sick, raise the dead, and know what people were doing in secret.[392] In addition, al-Hallaj attributed great importance to the role of Jesus in *yawm al-qiyāma* (the

---

[387] Al-Baqli, *'Arā'is* al-*bayān*, 4:171.
[388] Al-Baqli, *'Arā'is* al-*bayān*, vol 2. p. 7, in Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 109.
[389] Luke 1:35 ESV.
[390] Qur'an 5:110.
[391] Al-Baqli, *'Arā'is* al-*bayān*, 5:110.
[392] Ibid., 5:110.

Judgement Day). He said there would be two thrones set up on Heaven and Earth and *rūḥ* would be present in the human form of Jesus.[393] Jesus would be the "seal of the saints,"[394] chosen to display the light of the glory of the Divine Essence.[395] Al-Hallaj believed Jesus—as a pure *kun* and *rūḥ Allāh*—was chosen to manifest the light of the glory of the divine essence.

In classical Islamic understanding, Jesus's unique titles of *kalimat Allāh* and *rūḥ Allāh* were restricted in their possible interpretations due to the fear of conflating Jesus with God. Jesus was *kalimat Allāh* because he was created by the word *kun* (be), and he was *rūḥ Allāh* because he was either a created soul or was created by the breath of Gabriel. Al-Hallaj, however, refers to God as a divine *kun* (word) and as *al-rūḥ al-nātiqa* (the speaking spirit), thereby identifying God and His *kun* (word) and His *rūḥ* (spirit) as one.[396] Stemming from this idea, al-Hallaj says Jesus, being a pure *kun* and being filled with *rūḥ Allāh*, had permanent union with God from birth. The classical Islamic understanding of Jesus being *kun* was built on the premise that *kun* is equivalent to the word *khalaqa*, meaning "to create."[397] Therefore, Jesus was created by the word *kun.* This premise is flawed, however, because there is a difference between "creating" and "being." The

---

[393] Massignon, *Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 15.

[394] The way in which al-Hallaj writes about Jesus's role in *yawm al-qiyāma* is similar to the writings of the 10th century Melkite, al-Majdalus. Elif Tokay cites and quotes from al-Majdalus's *Commentary on the Nicene Creed*, saying al-Majdalus, in his explanation of Jesus's role in *yawm al-qiyāma*, quoted from the Qur'an (Q 75:22-23): "On that day there will be radiant faces, looking at their Lord." Majdalus adds

> He [God] will *yazharu* (appear) to those who believed in Him in this world on *yawm al-qiyāma* (the judgement day) *bi-ru'yat al-sūra* (in the image of) which He (God) was seen in this world. When they see Him (God) on the day of resurrection in the form of Christ. He will appear as *rabban wa-masīhan wa-dayyānan* (Lord and Christ and Judge) and they will realize that form is *ru'yat Allāh* (the vision of God) and the image of His eternity and the mirror of His eternal essence

Elif Tokay, "The Relationship Between the Holy Spirit and Human Perfection in the Baptismal Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus: Examined with Reference to Christian Arabic Literature," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 39, (2018): 81

[395] Thompson, "Saint and Martyr," 388.

[396] This identification was similarly made in the Melkite Arabic text *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd* (On the Triune Nature of God), which says, "We praise you O God, and we adore you in your creative Word, and your holy, life giving Spirit, one God, and one Lord, and one Creator. We do not separate God from his Word and his Spirit." Gibson, ed., *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd*, 75

[397] 'Abdulla Galadari, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 111-112.

verse often cited in support of the classical understanding is Q 3:59, which says, "Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam; He created (*khalaqahu*) him from dust, then (*thumma*) said to him, 'Be!' and he is (*kun fa-yakūn*)."[398] The two key words in this verse are "*thumma*" and "fa." *Thumma* means "after a while." Whereas the word *fa* means "immediately." So God created Adam from the dust, then there is a passage of time (*thumma*) before God says, "Be," and immediately (*fa*) he is. *Thumma* indicates God saying *kun* is not a direct consequence of God creating (*khalaqa*) from the dust, whereas *fa* shows "the becoming" (*yakūn*) is a direct consequence of the word *kun* (be).[399] Adam was formed by dust, and ʾAbdulla Galidari says it is likely Jesus's physical body was formed by dust through Mary. However, both Adam and Jesus were generated by God through *takwīn* (being).[400] *Kun* is the uncreated, creative *amr* (command) of God used to bring things into being (Q 36:82), and the phrase *kun-fa-yakūn* is only used in reference to the coming into being of Adam and Jesus. In addition, *rūḥ* is said to be of the *amr* of God, and Adam and Jesus were the only two people to come into being by the breath of God's *rūḥ.* Galidari says Adam and Jesus were spiritually *takawwan* (given being) by God, not physically *tawallad* (given birth) by God, and says it is similar to Jesus's differentiation between being "born of the spirit" and "born of the flesh."[401] Jesus says in John 3:5 (English Standard Version), "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."[402] Adam and Jesus are *takawwan* (given spiritual being) by God through *kun* and the inbreathing of God's *rūḥ.* God is spirit and gives birth to spirit in Adam and Jesus. They are also

[398] Qur'an 3:59.
[399] Galadari, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, 112.
[400] Ibid., 112.
[401] Ibid., 112.
[402] John 3:5 ESV.

tawallad since Adam was made from dust and Mary gave birth to Jesus. The rest of humanity, however, is merely *tawallad* (born physically of the flesh) and is in need of a spiritual birth.

Al-Hallaj advocates the idea of humanity needing a spiritual birth through his concept of *ittihād*. God's love for even the feeblest and filthiest of humanity puts within mankind a desire to draw close to God. When the carnal nature in man is purified, *rūḥ Allāh* (the spirit of God), enters into him. Al-Hallaj's idea of *ittiḥād* (unity) with God by *rūḥ Allāh* is similar to the Eastern Orthodox concept of *theosis*, which advocates the restoration of the divine likeness that humanity lost[403]—thereby reconciling and uniting man with God and enabling him to manifest God's attributes. This restoration is made possible by repentance, ascetism, the denial of one's ego and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.[404] This is best described in Romans 8:12-14 (English Standard

---

[403] Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were removed from the garden, estranged from their creator, and subject to pain, sorrow, and death. This resulted in humanity losing the divine likeness.

[404] Maximum the Confessor explains the concept of *theosis* further, saying:

> A sure warrant for looking forward with hope to deification of human nature is provided by the Incarnation of God, which makes man God to the same degree as God Himself became man … Let us become the image of the one whole God, bearing nothing earthly in ourselves, so that we may consort with God and become gods, receiving from God our existence as gods. For it is clear that He Who became man without sin (Hebrews 4:15) will divinize human nature without changing it into the Divine Nature and will raise it up for His Own sake to the same degree as He lowered Himself for man's sake. This is what St. Paul teaches mystically when he says, "that in the ages to come he might display the overflowing richness of His grace.

Maximum the Confessor, *The Philokalia, Volume 2: The Complete Text.* Edited and Translated by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware. (New York, Macmillan, 1982), 178. Maximus and other early church fathers championed the idea that through the Holy Spirit, a sinful human being can become "perfect just as God is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), and "be holy as God is holy" (1 Peter 1:16). Similar to al-Hallaj's process for *ittiḥād*, *theosis* begins with purification. This involves repentance and an adherence to ascetic practices. Following purification is the step of illumination. Gregory Palamas says the Holy Spirit is the "doer" in the process of deification. Christian mystics become more like God as they deny themselves through repentance and asceticism and are, in turn, filled with the light of the Holy Spirit. Following illumination, the Christian mystic enters into *theosis*. Gregory Palamas in George A. Maloney, *The Undreamed Has Happened: God Lives Within Us* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press. 2003), 173. Clive S. Lewis best describes this in *Mere Christianity*, saying:

> The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.

Clive S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: Comprising the Case for Christianity, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality* (Simon & Schuster, 1996), 174-175.

Version): “So then brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”[405] Similar to al-Hallaj, Paul says one’s ego or flesh must be removed, and, in place, God places the Holy Spirit. Many Sufis and early fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church described these two ideas in an analogous fashion comparing them to a blazing iron put in a fire. The iron acquires all the elements of the fire (heat, light, etc), while still remaining, at its core, iron.[406] Al-Hallaj describes this further in his poetry saying, “the breath of the Spirit breathes in my skin, my thought.”[407] Then, man’s faculties and personality are consecrated, perfected, and brought into their fullness. Al-Hallaj says about this, “And You (God) became the personal consciousness within my inmost self.”[408] Here al-Hallaj alludes to God as spirit, enabling man to reach his full potential. When *rūḥ Allāh is* placed in man, it frees him and enables him to be and do what he was created to be and do. This is fleshed out further in 1 Corinthians 3:17 (English Standard Version), “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.”[409] Classical Islamic exegetes restricted the Qur’anic *rūḥ* to the created realm—thereby impeding it from playing a unifying role between Creator and creation. Al-Hallaj, however, conceives of the Qur’anic *rūḥ* as God’s creative personal presence that enables created man to unite with Creator God. This idea of unity is alluded to in Q 58:22, “and whom He has

[405] Romans 8:12-14 (ESV).
[406] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 72.
[407] Mason, *al-Hallaj*, 72.
[408] Ibid., 72.
[409] 1 Corinthians 3:17 ESV.

strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God's side, and God's side will be the one to prosper."[410] The divine support of God's spirit results in eternal, mutual pleasure between God and man.

2.2. Al-Ghazali

Al-Hallaj's belief that union (*ittiḥād*) between Creator God and created man was possible by means of *rūḥ Allāh,* had a significant impact on Sufi thought. One of the people affected by his ideas and *shāthhiyat* (ecstatic sayings) was Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (505 A.H./ 1111 C.E.). Al-Ghazali believed *rūḥ* was created, however he saw it as the first creation of God and the means by which the world was created. This belief was a stark departure from classical Sunni Islamic thought.

Al-Ghazali is a renowned figure in the Islamic world. By his early thirties he was considered to be an eminent legal scholar, and he was appointed to the highest educational post in the 'Abbasid empire. He became the rector and professor of the Nizamiyah college in Baghdad.[411] While teaching, he wrote one of his more famous works, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers), which was a scathing critique of the Neoplatonic cosmology and Peripatetic philosophy of al-Kindi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina.[412] However, after four years of teaching, al-Ghazali had a spiritual crisis. In his autobiography, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*

[410] Qur'an 58:22.
[411] Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali and David Buchman, *The niche of lights = Mishkāt al-anwār* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), XXII.
[412] Ibid., XXII.

(Rescuer from Misguidance), al-Ghazali says he came to realize that the knowledge of God requires more than just rational speculation.[413] He left his academic position and renounced the world in order to purify his heart so he would have a greater awareness of the Divine and become closer to God. Al-Ghazali used this experience, along with his prior knowledge of law, theology and philosophy, to write his masterpiece, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revivification of the Religious Sciences).[414] Al-Ghazali said many of the practices, traditions, and beliefs of Islam were misunderstood by its followers. He said the practice of following the shari'a (Islamic law) must be combined with a sincere desire to know and love God in this life.[415]

Al-Ghazali's synthesis of orthodox Sunni theology and Sufi mysticism may have contributed to his nuanced view of the Qur'anic *rūḥ,* which differed starkly from that of Islamic Ash'arite Sunni theology. Al-Ghazali maintained *rūḥ* is not a *jism* (body) within the human body as water in a glass, nor is it an *'arad* (accident) in a substance as knowledge is in the brain.[416] Instead, *rūḥ* is a *jawhar* (substance) existing in itself, because it knows itself and its Creator. It is a non-material *mawjūd* (entity) that has no specific location, is not joined to bodies, and is not specified by directions.[417] In *al-Risāla al-Laduniyyah* (Treatise on Direct Knowledge of God), al-Ghazali clarifies his position further concerning *rūḥ*, saying it is *quwwa ilahiyya* (divine power) like *al-'aql al-awwal* (the first reason) and *al-lawh* (the tablet) and *al-qalam* (the pen). He says all of these are uncomplicated substances, separated from matter, and they can only be attained

[413] Ibid., XXIII.
[414] Ibid., XXVI.
[415] Ibid., XXVI.
[416] M.A.A Tahanawi, M. Wajīh, A. Haqq, G. Qadir, *Dictionary of the Technical Terms Used in the Sciences of the Musalmans*, 2 vols. (Biblio Verlag, 1980), 547 cited in Macdonald, Development of Spirit II, 154.
[417] Tahanawi, *Dictionary of Technical Terms*, 547 cited in Macdonald, Development of Spirit II, 154.

by reason, not by the senses.[418] Al-Ghazali is not saying the human *rūḥ* is the same as God, because God is *qā'im* (self-subsisting) and everything besides God subsists by him. Al-Ghazali's conception of *rūḥ* greatly differed from that of the *mutakallimūn*.[419] The Hanbalites could not conceive of such an *mawjūd* (entity) even in the case of God, because for them a *mawjūd* must be something you can point at. The Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites could conceive of such a *mawjūd*, but for them it can only be *Allāh*. They saw locality as the distinction between created entities and God.[420] The *mutakallimūn* held to the doctrine of *mukhālafa* that said God was totally other from all of creation. Al-Ghazali, however, said the only point of difference is God is *qā'im* (self-subsistent) (Q 2:256, Q 3:1, Q 20:110), and all of his creatures are dependent on Him. God's existence is absolute, and the rest of creation's existence is contingent on God.[421]

Al-Ghazali interprets Q 17:85, "*al-rūḥ* is of the *amr* of my Lord,"[422] to mean spirits are separate from other created, material things. Similar to al-Razi, al-Ghazali maintains spirits are the result of the world of divine command (*'alam al-amr*), whereas created material things are the result of the world of creation (*'alam al-khalq*). Spirits are substances that are not subject to direction, space or form and they have no dimension or measure.[423] Al-Ghazali says *rūḥ Allāh* is a manifestation of God and the means by which God connects with all existing spirits—from those controlling various spheres to man. In particular, there is a unique affinity between *rūḥ Allāh* and the human *rūḥ*, because the human *rūḥ* is the bridge by which man contacts God.[424]

[418] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit II," 157.
[419] Ibid., 155.
[420] Ibid., 155.
[421] Ibid., 156.
[422] Qur'an 17:85.
[423] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit II," 156.
[424] Ibid., 156.

In his book, *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (The Niche of Lights), al-Ghazali further elaborates on this concept. This book is organized around an explanation of the light verse from the Qur'an (24:35) and a hadith related to this verse, sometimes called the "veils hadith."[425] The light verse reads:

> God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well-nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will. And God strikes similitude for men, and God has knowledge of everything.[426]

The "veils hadith" reads as follows: "God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the august glories of His face would burn up everyone whose eyesight perceived Him."[427] *Mishkāt al-Anwār* consists of three chapters. The first chapter explains the meaning of the first sentence of the light verse: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth."[428] Buchman says al-Ghazali presents "an ontology, epistemology, cosmology, and psychology based upon the teaching that the real light is God and everything else called light is a metaphor."[429] Thus, all of creation is merely the manifestation of God's light. In the second chapter, al-Ghazali states that the goal of human existence is to achieve nearness to God. This is achieved through our souls being transformed and an increase in our knowledge of the universe, ourselves, and God.[430] Al-Ghazali elaborates on the concept of *miththal* (similitudes) by saying all things in the visible world are a similitude of things existing in the unseen world. In the third chapter, he gives an

[425] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, XVII.
[426] Qur'an 24:35.
[427] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, 1.
[428] Ibid., 1.
[429] Ibid., XXXII.
[430] Ibid., XXXIII.

exegesis of the veils hadith. There are three kinds of people veiled among God's creatures: those by darkness alone, those by light among the darkness, those by pure light. Within these three kinds of people, there are a multiplicity of types.[431] In addition, there is another kind of people that has "arrived" and is no longer veiled. This last chapter is what I will focus on in this sub-section, because it pertains to the subject matter for this research.

Al-Ghazali asserts that those who are veiled by pure light are broken down into three types. The first type is those who come to know the meaning of God's attributes (speaking, desiring, powerful, knowing, etc.) and think ascribing names to God is different than ascribing them to human beings. They know God in relation to His creation and see God as the mover and governor of the heavens.[432] The second type ascends beyond the first and realizes there is multiplicity in the heavens, the mover of each heaven is an angel, and all of these heavens are enveloped in another celestial body that is moved by the Lord.[433] The third type ascends further, saying God is too Holy to put these celestial bodies into movement by direct contact—there must be an angel to do this. The Lord moves everything by his *amr* (command), not direct contact. This allows God to retain his transcendence.[434] All of these three types are veiled by pure light, but there are some who are not veiled. These are *al-wāṣilūn* (those who have arrived), and al-Ghazali says regarding them:

> To them it has been disclosed that, the one who is obeyed [*al-muṭāʿ*] is described by an attribute that contradicts sheer oneness and utmost perfection. [This] belongs to a mystery which is beyond the capacity of this book to unveil. [It is also disclosed] that the relationship of this one who is obeyed [*al-muṭāʿ*] is that of the sun among the lights. Therefore, they have turned their faces from the one who moves the heavens, from the one who moves the furthest celestial body, from the one who commands moving them, to Him who originates the heavens, who originates the furthest celestial body, and who

[431] Ibid., 44.
[432] Ibid., 50.
[433] Ibid., 50.
[434] Ibid., 50.

> originates the one who commands moving the heavens. They have arrived at an existent thing that is incomparable with everything that their sight had perceived. Hence, the august glories of His face—the First, the Highest—burn up everything perceived by the signs and insights of the observers. Thus, they find Him too holy for and incomparable with all that we described earlier.[435]

In this last section, al-Ghazali introduces an incredible, unseen being that commands the moving of the heavens. The relation of this being to God is of pure light to the sun, or elemental fire to a glowing coal. This being is called *al-muṭāʿ* (the one who is obeyed), because the angels move the multiple worlds of the cosmos by his authoritative command. In describing *al-muṭāʿ*, Buchman asserts, "God's single reality is too incomparable to be directly involved with these angels, so an intermediary is necessary."[436] As God's intermediary, *al-muṭāʿ* orders only what God commands.[437] Al-Ghazali does not mention the identity of *al-muṭāʿ,* stating, "it belongs to a mystery which is beyond the capacity of this book to unveil."[438] This was a cause of concern for some, and encouraged speculation from others. Critics, such as Ibn Rushd, suggest al-Ghazali followed the emanation theory of the neoplatonists, similar to al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. Ibn Rushd drew attention to the passages describing the ascending heavenly spheres that each have an angel or soul in charge, leading up to *al-muṭāʿ*, who receives the *amr* of *Allāh* and transforms it into physical contact (*mubāshara*). He said *al-muṭāʿ* was the first emanation from God.[439] Subsequently, there are descending emanations of angels and souls for each heavenly sphere. Gairdner, however, disputes the claim of Ibn Rushd by demonstrating al-Ghazali never used the technical vocabulary of the doctrine of emanation—terms such as *ṣadara*, *ṣudūr*, or *fāḍa min*.

---

[435] Ibid., 51.
[436] Ibid., XXVIII.
[437] Ibid., XXVIII.
[438] Ibid., 51.
[439] Ibid., XXVIII.

Gairdner also pointed out al-Ghazali wrote *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), which was a strong critique of Neoplatonism and the emanation theory of Ibn Sina and al-Farabi.[440] Frank Griffel maintains that al-Ghazali's attitude toward Neoplatonism is complex. Griffel asserts that:

> Al-Ghazali adds upon it another layer of creation. The being that bestows existence on others and that is obeyed (*al-muṭāʿ*) by the movers of the spheres is the first creation of the real God. In fact, the real God does little more than to create this *al-muṭāʿ* and to continuously emanate being onto him. The *al-muṭāʿ* mediates God's creative activity, converting it into "the command" (*al-amr)* by which means the creation of heavens and earth unfolds.[441]

Although al-Ghazali was a vocal critic of Neoplatonism, he adopted aspects of the Neoplatonist cosmology of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina with its "spheres, movers, and the first being."[442] However, al-Ghazali did not follow the emanation theory of the Neoplatonists in its entirety. A-Farabi and Ibn Sina saw *al-muṭāʿ* as the God from whom the world emanates,[443] whereas al-Ghazali states *al-muṭāʿ* is the first creation and God emanates being onto him so that *al-muṭāʿ* creates the rest of the universe.

Besides criticism, al-Ghazali's character of *al-muṭāʿ* has received much and varied speculation. Zaehner hypothesizes *al-muṭāʿ* must have been either the angel Gabriel or Muhammad.[444] Massignon speculates "*al-muṭāʿ* is the pole (*qutb*)—the human through whom God gives existence to the universe."[445] According to the developed doctrine, this *qutb* (pole) was an earthly mystic of supreme attainment, who during his lifetime administered the affairs of

---

[440] Ibid., XXVIII.
[441] Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Cosmology in the Veil Section of His Mishkāt al-Anwār," in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tvzi Langermann (Brepols, 2009), 44.
[442] Ibid., 44.
[443] Ibid., 44.
[444] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, XXVIII.
[445] Ibid., XXVIII.

the heavens and the earth.[446] This doctrine was first held in a rudimentary form by traditionalist, conservative Hanbalites, and was later espoused in a developed form in al-Hujwiri's *Kashf al-Mahjūb*.[447] Nicholson says *al-muṭāʿ* may have been the pole (*qutb*), however it would not have been the "ordinary, hierarchical *qutb* doctrine current among Sufis of 5th Century AH."[448] He says it would have been a hypostatized *qutb* similar to the *logos* doctrine from *al-Insān al-Kāmil* by al-Jili.[449] Al-Jili identified *rūḥ* with *al-qutb* and said *rūḥ* is *al-ʿaql al-awwal* (the first intelligence), the manifestation of God's essence (*rūḥ al-qudus*), and the means by which all of the cosmos was created. Nicholson says this might be an explanation of the mysterious character of *al-muṭāʿ* whose nature is left obscure.[450] Gairdner and Wensinck agree with Nicholson, saying *al-muṭāʿ* is *rūḥ* from the Qur'an.[451]

There is support for *al-muṭāʿ* being a hypostatized *qutb* in another passage of *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, where al-Ghazali talks about the final end of a person's ascent:

> This is alluded to in God's words: "I become the hearing by which he hears, the seeing by which he sees, and the tongue by which he speaks." When He is his hearing, his sight, and his tongue, then He alone hears, sees, and speaks. This is alluded to in His words: "I was sick and you did not visit me," and so on to the end of the hadith. Hence, the movements of this person who has realized God's unity come from the heaven of this world. His sensations, like hearing and seeing, come from a higher heaven, and his rational faculty is above that. He climbs from the heaven of the rational faculty to the utmost degree of the ascent of the creatures. The kingdom of singularity completes the seven levels. Then he sits upon the throne of oneness and from it governs the affairs of the levels of his heavens.[452]

[446] Al-Ghazali, A.H., and W.H.T. Gairdner. *The Niche for Lights* (Dodo Press, 2010), 25.
[447] Ibid., 26.
[448] Nicholson, *Studies*, 111
[449] Ibid., 111.
[450] Ibid., 111.
[451] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, XXVIII.
[452] Ibid., 21.

Al-Ghazali says the final end of the ascent is the kingdom of singularity. In this statement by al-Ghazali, there are two key actions by the one who ascends, bringing certainty to the idea he is *al-muṭāʿ*, and that *al-muṭāʿ* is *rūḥ*. First, the one who ascends sits on the throne of oneness (*yastawi ala ʻarsh al-waḥdāniyya*). The Qur'an states seven times that God sat/established Himself on the throne (*istawa ala al-ʻarsh*), and each time this phrase is used in conjunction with creation. The traditional way the *mutakallimūn* dealt with this expression is best summed up by Malik bin Anas (179 AH/795 CE) in his explanation (*sharḥ*): "God's sitting on the throne is known, but its modality is unknown. Belief in it is obligatory, but inquiry into it is an innovation."[453] In other words, we are required to believe in this, however we have no knowledge of what it means, and it is better not to attempt to find the answer. Al-Ghazali, however, thought these verses about God "sitting Himself upright on a material throne" or God being "spatially above" humans were not to be taken literally. Al-Ghazali says we need to look at allegorical interpretations. He says the well-trained scholar speculates about God's relationship with the throne.[454] According to the philosophical interpretation, the throne is a reference to the outermost and highest celestial sphere.[455] Inspired by this reading, al-Ghazali ponders whether the "throne" is a possible reference to *al-muṭāʿ* (the one who is obeyed)—the being mediating God's creative activity. Al-Ghazali considers the throne to have a special relationship with God.[456] He says God disposes freely (*yatasarrafu*) in the whole world and governs the affairs (*yudabbir al-amr*) from the heavens, down to the earth through the mediation of the throne (*al-ʻarsh*)[457] Ghazali illustrates

[453] Binyamin Abrahamov, "The 'Bi-lā Kayfa' Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology," *Arabica* 42, no. 3 (1995): 42.
[454] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 267-268.
[455] Ibid., 267-268.
[456] Ibid., 268.
[457] Ibid., 269.

the relationship between God and his throne with a comparison. God is related to His throne in the way that a human's "heart" (*qalb*)—meaning human soul—is related to the human's brain (*dimagh*).[458] If a human wants to create a sculpture, build a house, or compose a text, he or she needs to have a prior plan (*sūra*) in his or her brain. Humans cannot generate anything without the mediation of the brain. Similarly, God may not create without the mediation of the "throne."[459] Ghazali says *al-muṭāʿ, al-ʿarsh, al-ʿaql al-awwal* (the first intellect), and *al-lawh al-mahfūz* (the well-guarded tablet) are all references to one and the same being—the first creation, which creates the whole universe and governs its affairs.[460] Also in *Maʾārij al-Quds* (The Stairs of Jerusalem), the unknown author—who is believed to be al-Ghazali— refers to this same being as *al-mubdaʾ al-awwal* (the first creation) and *rūḥ al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit).[461] Al-Ghazali's identification of *al-ʿarsh* as *al-muṭāʿ* opens up the possibility of *al-ʿarsh* being the *rūḥ*.[462]

Second, the one who ascends governs the affairs by means of command (*yudabbir al-amr*) of the levels of the seven heavens. This phrasing is similar to what al-Ghazali says about *al-muṭāʿ*—that he moves everything in the heavens by means of command. In addition, this phrase is used four times in the Qur'an, always in reference to God. Two of the times it is used in conjunction with God (establishing Himself on the throne) '*istawa ala al-ʿarsh*. One example of

[458] Ibid., 270.
[459] Ibid., 270.
[460] Ibid., 280.
[461] Ibid., 280.
[462] This idea has support from the commentary of Genesis 1:2 by the acclaimed, medieval, French Rabbi, Shlomo Yitzchaki (1105 AH), known as Rashi. Genesis 1:2 (English Standard Version) says, "Now the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God [*Rūach Elohīm*] was hovering over the face of the water." Rashi comments on this verse, "*The Spirit of God* moves—the royal throne stands in the air and is moved over the face of the waters by God's breath and His word, like a dove hovering over its nest." Rashi interprets the Spirit of God (*Rūach Elohīm*) as the royal throne. Elazar, Touitou, "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1—6 in the Context of Judeo-Christian Controversy." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 61 (1990): 159-83, 173.

this is Q 10:3: "Your Lord is indeed God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then settled on the Throne, directing His command."[463]

Al-Ghazali's cosmology presented in *Mishkāt al-Anwār* is representative of Neoplatonism. It emphasizes God's unknowable, transcendent nature and posits that God's immanence is revealed to the rest of creation indirectly through the first creation (*al-muṭāʿ*).[464] This first creation mediates God's creative activity by means of the *amr* from which the various spheres and movers of the heavens and the earth unfold.[465] Al-Ghazali's neoplatonic cosmology, along with his identification of *al-muṭāʿ* and *al-arsh* as *al-rūḥ*, were a stark departure from mainstream Islamic theology, and from the classical interpretation grid used for the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. Ghazali views *al-rūḥ* as created, however he sees it as a kind of intermediary entity between God and the rest of creation, carrying out God's will and executing His decrees by means of the *amr*.

2.3 Ibn 'Arabi

Al-Ghazali's belief that *rūḥ* was the first creation and the means by which the world was created, was a significant shift from classical Islamic thought. It attributed extreme importance to *rūḥ* and led to increased speculation as to its nature, role, and relationship with God and mankind. Much of that speculation came from the distinguished Sufi mystic and exegete, Muhya al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-'Arabi (638/1240). Ibn 'Arabi is one of the most prolific Sufi

[463] Qur'an 10:3
[464] Netton, *Transcendent*, 4.
[465] This understanding of *rūḥ* is similar to a 1st or 2nd century understanding of *Logos* in John's prologue. David Bentley Hart, says *Logos* was understood at that time as "secondary god" or "expressed divine principle." *Logos* proceeded from God and mediated between Him and creation. David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (Yale University Press, 2017), 550. Hart says it was understood as "at once the Most High God's manifestation of Himself in a secondary divine moment, and also the pervasive and underlying rational power creating, sustaining, and governing the cosmos." Hart, New Testament: A Translation, 551.

writers—having written around 700 different works. His two most well-known works are *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya* (The Meccan Revelations) and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Bezels of Wisdom). He is commonly referred to as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the greatest master) because of both the quantity of his writings and their depth and originality.[466] Ibn 'Arabi perceived of *rūḥ* as an uncreated, eternal divine attribute of God. This perception of *rūḥ* expressed God's immanence in the world without compromising His transcendence.

Ibn 'Arabi said the essence of God is unknowable and unrelated to any created being. He calls this *aḥad*. It represents the transcendent nature of God. Ibn 'Arabi also says God is immanent in his nature, which he calls *wāḥid*. It is the way in which God relates to His creation and reveals Himself.[467] In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Bezels of Wisdom*)*, Ibn 'Arabi said about this dichotomy, "If you insist only on His transcendence you limit Him and if you insist only on His immanence you limit Him. If you maintain both aspects you are right."[468] This concept is explained through his cosmology, which begins with the statement, "There is nothing in *wujūd* but God" (*laysa fi'l-wujūd illa Allāh*)—meaning God alone truly exists, and everything else is passing (*fānya*).[469] *Wujūd* is the philosophical term for God meaning "existence" or "consciousness," and the Qur'anic term for *wujūd* is *raḥma*[470]—as evidenced by God being referred to as *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* (the All-Merciful and Compassionate) numerous times. Q 17:10 says, "Say, 'Invoke "God" (*Allāh*) or invoke "the All-Beneficent" (*al-Raḥmān*).

---

[466] James E. Royster, *Have This Mind: Supreme Happiness, Ultimate Realization, and the Four Great Religions—an Integral Adventure* (Balboa Press, 2014), 259.
[467] Mohd Sani, Badron, "Ibn al-'Arabi on the One Who Is Transcendent (al-Ahad) and Immanent (al-Wahid)," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 12, n. 1 (2011), 65.
[468] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (Yale University Press, 2013), 179.
[469] William C. Chittick, "The Anthropology of Compassion," Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, Volume 48, 2010. 1.
[470] Ibid., 1.

Whichever [of His names] you may invoke, to Him belong the best names.'"[471] God is *al-Raḥmān* (the All-Merciful), because it is in His infinite being and consciousness to overflow from Himself—goodness, manifestation, and creativity—to all things.[472] Ibn 'Arabi says the way in which God gives of Himself is by speaking. He refers to Q 18:109 and Q 31:27 to illustrate the Qur'anic theme of God creating the universe through speech.[473] God's words are the forms of possible things, infinite,[474] and never become exhausted.[475] Breath is the substance of speech, and God, like humans, speaks by articulating His breath. A person's words are nothing but his breath, and his breath is nothing but himself. So also, God's words are nothing but His breath, and His breath is Himself.[476] So without God's breath there would be no words and, therefore, there would be no creation. Ibn 'Arabi says *al-nafas al-raḥmān* (the breath of the All Merciful) breathes being (*wujūd*) into all things, thereby giving birth to the universe and manifesting God's divine names and attributes (*ṣifāt*) so they would no longer be hidden in His own essence.[477] *Nafas al-raḥmān* is therefore a divine mercy because, just as *nafas al-raḥmān* undergirds all of the cosmos,[478] "My mercy (*raḥmati*) embraces all things"[479] (Q 7:156). Ibn 'Arabi often refers to *nafas al-raḥmān* as *al-rūḥ al-kullī* (the Universal Spirit), because it gives life to everything through breath or blowing. Through *al-rūḥ al-kullī* things are blown into every form, whether

[471] Qur'an 17:10
[472] Chittick, "Compassion," 1.
[473] Ibid., 2.
[474] Ibn 'Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*, (Beirut: Dar al-Sidr, 1911), IV.166.34.
[475] Ibid., III.556.9.
[476] Chittick, "Compassion," 2.
[477] William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-"Arabi's Cosmology* (State University of New York Press, 1998), XXVI.
[478] Ibid., XXVI.
[479] Qur'an 7:156

angelic, celestial, elemental, material, or natural; and through *al-rūḥ al-kullī,*[480] all things have life.[481]

Ibn 'Arabi says the root of every spirit is *al-rūḥ al-ilāḥi* (the Divine Spirit).[482] *Al-rūḥ al-ilāḥi* is also referred to as *al-rūḥ al-iḍāfi* or *al-rūḥ al-muḍāf* (the ascribed spirit) because God "ascribes it to Himself"[483] with several pronouns (His, My, and Our). Additionally, *al-rūḥ al-ilāḥi* is called the *yāī* spirit because the letter *yā* is attached to it, which is the pronoun "my."[484] Ibn 'Arabi says God blew into Adam from the divine spirit/ascribed spirit/*yāī* spirit (which is one), and that all spirits born from the divine spirit are called *al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* (partial or particular spirits).[485] These partial spirits are divided into different bodies. Chittick says the dividing of the divine spirit into bodies is analogous to how "windows divide the light of the sun."[486] The light of the sun comes from one entity and, in the same way, all the partial spirits come from one universal spirit.[487] Ibn 'Arabi also referred to *al-rūḥ al-kullī* as "the first lamp." He says the wicks of all the lamps (meaning the angelic intelligences and human rational faculties) are lit by the First Lamp,[488] and:

> Moreover, the First Lamp is not found in any sort of matter, and there is no intermediary between it and its Lord. Nothing else has any *wujūd* (being) save through it and the sorts of matter that receive burning from it, such that the entities of the intellects become manifest. All this is absent from the intellects, or rather, they have no tasting of it. How can that which has no *wujūd* save from a father and a mother perceive the reality of that which has *wujūd* without any intermediary? Since the intellects are incapable of perceiving the First Intellect from which they become manifest, their incapacity to

[480] This corresponds with Psalm 33:6 (English Standard Version), which says, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and by the breath (*ruach*) of His mouth all their host."
[481] Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 273-274.
[482] Chittick, *Self Disclosure*, 271; *al-rūḥ al-ilāḥi* is also called *al-rūḥ al-kullī* (the universal spirit).
[483] Ibid., 271
[484] Ibid., 271.
[485] Ibid., 271.
[486] Ibid., 272.
[487] Ibid., 272.
[488] Ibn 'Arabi*, Futūhāt*, II:66.33, in Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 273.

> perceive the Creator of the First Intellect, who is God, is even greater. For "The first that God created was the Intellect, and it is this from which these intellects became manifest by means of these natural souls. So it is the first of the fathers. In His exalted book, God called it "the Spirit" and He ascribed it to Himself.[489]

Ibn 'Arabi explains the relationship between the ascribed spirit and the partial spirit in his exegesis of God blowing His spirit into man. In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he makes a comparison and analysis between man's desire for woman and God's desire for man. This idea is taken from a hadith, wherein the Prophet Muhammad says, "Three things of this world have been made lovable to me: women, perfume, and prayer in which I find solace."[490] Ibn 'Arabi concentrates on the Prophet's love for women. He says the prophets love was not a willful love; it was divinely endowed. Ibn 'Arabi explains that God created Eve from the left rib of Adam. Men love and desire women, because women are a part of man, and women love and desire men because the part must also love the whole.[491] Ibn 'Arabi recasts this analogy to God. The desire and love between men and women mirror God's desire and love for humanity. God loves man because man is a part of Him. This is based on Q 38:72 and Q 15:29, which say, "I breathed into him of my spirit (*rūḥi)*."[492] God is, in reality, yearning for Himself since the whole loves its part. Ibn 'Arabi says the corollary must also be true—that man desires God because the part loves the whole.[493]

Ibn 'Arabi also compared *al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* (the partial spirit) within man to *al-rūḥ al-kullī* (the universal spirit) of God. He did this by utilizing the concepts pertaining to God's power and

---

[489] Ibn 'Arabi*, Futūhāt*, II:66.33, translated in Chittick, Self-Disclosure, 273.
[490] Ibn 'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. Affifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1946), 272/214; english trans. R.W.J. Austin, *Ibn al-'Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981).
[491] Ibid., 273/215.
[492] Qur'an 38:72 and Qur'an 15:29.
[493] Ibn 'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 273/215-216.

authority. He referred to *al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* as *malik* (king), *khalīfa* (vicegerent), *raʾīs* (leader), and *imām* (leader in a generic sense). *Al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* rules *malakūt al-insān* (the kingdom of man) or *madīnat al-jism* (the city of the body). On a microcosmic scale, *al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* governs (*yudabbir*) man's body. On a macrocosmic scale, *al-rūḥ al-kullī* of God governs (*yudabbir*) the universe, which Ibn 'Arabi also refers to as the body.[494] *Al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* and *al-rūḥ al-kullī* possess knowledge, power, life, speech, etc; whereas the body of the universe and of man are referred to as death, ignorance, and darkness. This dichotomy is reflective of the duality of spirit and matter in Ibn 'Arabi's thought. The spirit is luminous and brings freedom and life, while matter is dark and brings ignorance and death. Any life or luminosity seen in the body of the universe or the body of man is the result of the spirit's activity.[495] Also, Ibn 'Arabi's emphasis on the power and authority of *al-rūḥ al-juzʿī* in man and *al-rūḥ al-kullī* of God is emblematic of the essential role *rūḥ* plays in the connection between God and man.

Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between the ascribed spirit—which is breathed in a partial form into every created being—and the spirit which emanates from *rūḥ al-amr* (the divine command).[496] *Rūḥ al-amr* is given to the prophets and the friends of God as part of the *taʾyid* (divine support).[497] This same support was given to Jesus (Q 2:87, Q 2:253, Q 5:110). *Rūḥ al-amr* gives *taʾyid* (support) through divine knowledge, causing the hearts of God's servants to come alive. Ibn 'Arabi depicts this by citing from Q 6:121, "Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people,"[498] and Q 42:52,

---

[494] Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 206.
[495] Chittick, W.C., "Two Chapters from the *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*," in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi – A Commemorative Volum*e, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (Element: Shaftsbury, 1993), 94.
[496] Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 276-277 and Ebstein, *Mysticism* 136.
[497] Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 225.
[498] Qur'an 6:121.

"Thus have We imbued you with a spirit of Our command. You did not know what the Book is, or what is faith; but We made it a light that We may guide by its means whomever We wish of Our servants."[499] Man is lifeless and ignorant without support from *rūḥ al-amr* and there is a divide between him and God. God gives *rūḥ al-amr* to those who take control of their egotistical self (*nafs*) by denying their selfish passions and then seek after God. God places *rūḥ al-amr* in the hearts of these people and reveals to them a vision of God (*ru'ya Allāh*). Ibn 'Arabi describes *rūḥ al-amr* as "presence from the light of Godliness" (*nūr min huḍra al-rabubiyya*). *Rūḥ al-amr* manifests the divine names of *al-hayy* (the Living) and *al-nūr* (the Light). It manifests the divine name of *al-hayy* because it gives life to dead hearts and it strengthens man with divine power and the ability to perform miracles. It manifests the divine name of *al-nūr* because it gives knowledge to the ignorant and guides man to walk on the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*).[500] Ibn 'Arabi also differentiates between *rūḥ al-amr* and angels, saying:

> The sent down revelation is identical with the spirit, while the one who casts is God, none other. Hence this spirit is not the same as the "angel" but it is the same as the "message." So understand! A spirit like this is not known by the angels, for it is not of their kind. It is a spirit that is not carried, nor is it luminous, while the angel is a spirit in light. This tasting belongs to us and to all the prophets.[501]

Rūḥ al-amr is cast by God without any intermediary (Q 40:15 and Q 42:52).[502] Ibn 'Arabi believed one needed to receive *ta'yid* from *rūḥ* if one wanted to truly know God. This is demonstrated in his writings, where he often uses the blessing, "May *Allāh* support you with a spirit from Him" (*ayyaduka Allāh bi-rūḥ minḥu*).[503]

---

[499] Qur'an 42:52.
[500] Ibn 'Arabi, *Futūhāt*, 966.
[501] Ibid., II:638.2.
[502] Ibid., II:638.2.
[503] Ebstein, *Mysticism*, 136-138; Ebstein says this same blessing was used extensively by the Ismai'li philosophers (al-Qadi, al-Nu'man, and al-Mudhiba), the sufi neoplatonist philosophers (al-Sijistani, al-Kirmani, and Ibn Massara), and by Ikhwan al-Safa

Ibn 'Arabi also spoke about the unique relationship between Jesus and *rūḥ*. He said the creation of Jesus' body was distinct in two ways. First, it was the only body to be formed, from a female without male cause. Second, the formation of the body and the blowing of the spirit are normally two successive events in the creation of a human[504]—the physical body is formed, and then the partial spirit is blown into it (Q 15:29). Regarding Jesus, however, the formation of his body took place at the same moment there was an inbreathing of *rūḥ*.[505] In the opening of Ibn 'Arabi's chapter on Jesus in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he elaborates further saying,

> From the water of Mary or from the breath of Gabriel, In the form of a mortal fashioned of clay, the Spirit came to be in an essence, purified of nature, which you call s*ijjin*...A Spirit from God, not from anything else. Thus, he raised up the dead and made birds from clay...God purified him in body and exalted him in spirit. And made of him a symbol of engendering.[506]

Ibn 'Arabi says Jesus was the embodiment of *nafas al-raḥmān* (the breath of the All-Merciful)—the divine spirit Gabriel had blown into the womb of Mary. The human body of Christ was animated by a divine spirit, which is why Ibn 'Arabi says, "He [Jesus] was half human and half spirit."[507] Jesus appeared as a man because Gabriel appeared to Mary in the form of a man, and Jesus did not have a spirit, but in fact was spirit.[508] Jesus's form is imaginary, in that it is an incarnation of spirit in human form, similar to the jinn and angelic spirits. Jesus was the word of

(the Brethren of Purity) in their epistles. Al-Sijistani, al-Kirmani, Ibn Massara, and Ikhwan al-Safa stressed the difference between ordinary human knowledge—obtained by teaching and learning (*ta'llim*), and divine knowledge—originating in *ta'yid*. They said any believer might obtain divine knowledge by means of *ta'yidat 'utwiyya* (higher support). The Ismailis said the *ta'yid* was only for the prophets and their heirs (the imams), and they referred to them as *al-mua'yyadūn* (the supported). Ebstein, Mysticism, 136-140.

[504] Souad Hakim, "The Spirit and the Son of the Spirit: A Reading of Jesus," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* XXXI, (2002): 3.

[505] Ibn 'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Volume 1, 142.

[506] Ibid., 67.

[507] Ibid., 67.

[508] Ibid., 67-68.

God, the spirit of God, and the slave of God, and these three identities led so disagreement over Jesus's nature.[509] In his poetry, Ibn 'Arabi describes this further:

> Considered in his [particular] mortal form, one might say that he is the son of Mary. Considered in his form of humanity, one might say that he is of Gabriel, while considered with respect to the revival of the dead one might say that he is of God as Spirit. Thus, one might call him the spirit of God, which is to say that life is manifest into whomsoever he blows.[510]

Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh* enabled him to bring things to life by breathing into them. Ibn 'Arabi says, at its essence, *rūḥ* is *al-hayyā* (life), and that life and spirit are inseparable. If a spirit touches a thing or steps on a thing, this thing is brought to life.[511] So Jesus as *rūḥ Allāh* was a carrier of life, and through his blowing, the dead would be resurrected and a clay bird would come to life.

Throughout Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, he perceives of *rūḥ* as *al-hayyā* (life). On a macro scale, God is *rūḥ* (the spirit) of the cosmos and the cosmos is God's body. Any life in bodily things is derived from the spirit.[512] In creation, *al-rūḥ* is *nafas al-raḥmān* or *al-rūḥ al-kullī* and gives life to every form—angelic, celestial, elemental, material, or natural—through its breath or blowing. On a micro scale, *rūḥ* is *al-rūḥ al-juza'i* (the partial spirit) in man. It is born from the Divine Spirit/Ascribed Spirit blown into Adam by God. The partial spirit gives man life and brings life to a mutual desire and love between God and man. The part loves the whole, and the whole loves the part. In revelation, *rūḥ* is *al-rūḥ al-amr* and gives *ta'yid* (support) through divine knowledge that causes the hearts of God's servants to come alive. In Jesus, *rūḥ* enables him to bring things to life by breathing into them, because Jesus is half human and half *rūḥ* (spirit). 'Abd al-Jalil Laknawi affirms the understanding of *rūḥ* as *al-hayyā* in his short treatise, entitled

---

[509] Ibid., 69.
[510] Ibid., 69.
[511] Ibid., 67.
[512] Ibn 'Arabi*, Futūhāt*, III: 317.1.

Rūḥ wa Nafs (Spirit and Soul).[513] He says, "the spirit (*rūḥ*) is the power through which all things have life, because within it creatures find their rest (*rawḥ*) and repose (*rayḥān*)."[514] Ibn 'Arabi's belief that *rūḥ* and *al-hayyā* are inseparable suggests *rūḥ* is a divine attribute of God. *Al-hayyā* is considered generally by Islamic theology to be one of the seven divine attributes of God (knowledge, power, life, will, speech, hearing, and sight). It would also correspond with many early definitions of the Christian trinity, which listed *rūḥ* as *hayyā Allāh* (the life of God). *Rūḥ* being *hayyā Allāh* puts it on a similar level to *kalām Allāh* (the word of God), as a pre-eternal attribute of God, belonging to Him and eternally subsisting in God's essence.[515] Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *rūḥ* as *al-hayyā* throughout his cosmology is a unique contribution to the understanding of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* and opens up new interpretative possibilities.

2.4 Al-Jili

Ibn 'Arabi's unique cosmology and exegesis of the Qur'an exerted a major influence on many notable Islamic mystics, exegetes, and philosophers. One person who was profoundly affected is the Persian, Sufi mystic, ʾAbd al-Karim al-Jili (1424). Al-Jili wrote more than thirty works, but he is best known for his work, *al-Insān al-kāmil fi maʿrifat al-awākhir wa-l-awāʿil*, which was built on Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of the perfect man. I have chosen to examine the works of al-Jili because of the way in which he expounds upon the prior work of Ibn 'Arabi regarding

[513] This treatise is presented as a visionary conversation, where the two participants are *al-rūḥ* and *al-nafs*. It discusses many of Ibn Arabi's ideas pertaining to *wujūd*, fixed entities, and the unknowability of the divine essence.
[514] William C. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* (State University of New York Press, 2012), 173-174.
[515] Cumming, describes *kalām Allāh as* being "in one sense 'with God' and in another sense it 'is God.'" Cumming, "The Word of God in Islam and Christianity, 4.

rūḥ.[516] Al-Jili has a unique perspective concerning *rūḥ* that is outside of the the scope of classical Sunni theology and contrives new possibilities for its Qur'anic interpretation.

Al-Jili differentiates between *rūḥ-al-qudus* and *al-rūḥ*. Al-Jili says *rūḥ al-qudus* is "the Spirit of spirits," and it transcends existence.[517] It is an uncreated, special attribute (*sifa*) and unique aspect (*wajh*) of God (*al-ḥaqq*), in which being (*wujūd*) subsists (*qāma bihi*), and for this reason it must never be subject to the creative word *kun*. *Rūḥ al-qudus* is unlike other *arwaḥ* (spirits) because *rūḥ-al-qudus* is what was *manfūkh* (blown) into Adam by God. The spirit of Adam and all other human spirits are created, but the spirit of God, which is the Holy Spirit, is not created.[518] Al-Jili expresses the idea more clearly when he says, "*rūḥ al-Qudus* and *al-rūḥ* are one spirit viewed as eternal in relation to God, and non-eternal in relation to man."[519] The Holy Spirit is uncreated, holy, pure, and free from any defects.[520] This spirit was alluded to in al-Baqara 2:115, "To God belong the east and the west: so whichever way you turn, there is the face of God (*wajh Allāh*)! God is indeed all-bounteous, all-knowing."[521] According to al-Jili, *wajh Allāh* is *rūḥ Allāh,* and it subsists in being (*qāʾim bi'l wujūd*). *Rūḥ Allāh* is the real self (*nafs*) and face/aspect (*wajh*) of all things, because it establishes being (*wujūd*) in every object of sense and thought. In addition, al-Jili says being (*wujūd*) subsists in the self of God (*nafs Allāh*), and God's

[516] In this sub-section on al-Jili, both *rūḥ* and *al-rūḥ* are used. The *al* delineates between two separate meanings. *Rūḥ* is used as the overall Qur'anic concept of *rūḥ*—the same as I have been referring to throughout this paper. *Al-rūḥ* is used in reference to a distinct concept of al-Jili. He viewed *al-rūḥ* as a separate, created entity, formed out of the essence of God, and through which God created the cosmos. Al-Jili maintained there was a clear delineation between *al-rūḥ* and *rūḥ al-qudus*. *Rūḥ al-qudus* is the uncreated, essence of God and is the same as *wijh Allāh*. In this section, the difference between *rūḥ* and *al-rūḥ* is important.
[517] 'Abd al-Karim ibn Ibrahim Al-Jili, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma'rifat al-awākhir wa-al-awā'il* (Bayrut: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2013), 163.
[518] Ibid., 163.
[519] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 163, quoted in Nicholson, Studies, 109.
[520] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 163.
[521] Qur'an 2:115

self (*nafsahu*) is His essence (*dhātahu*).[522] Therefore, *rūḥ Allāh* is the essence of *Allāh*. Ibn 'Arabi agrees with this assertion in *al- Futūḥāt*:

> A thing is known only through its *wajh* (face), that is, its reality. Everything without which a thing cannot be known is its *wajh* (face)[523]… the *wajh* (face) is the most eminent thing in the manifest domain of the human being, because it is the Presence of all the non-manifest and manifest faculties. The *wajh* of anything is its essence.[524]

Al-Jili identifies *wajh Allāh* as *rūḥ al-qudus*, and both he and Ibn 'Arabi say it is God's essence.

In al-Jilli's writings, there is a clear delineation between *rūḥ al-qudus* and *al-rūḥ*. He regards *rūḥ al-qudus* as the uncreated essence of God, however, *al-rūḥ* is a separate, distinct, created entity. Al-Jili says, that "before the creation, God was in Himself, and the objects of existence were absorbed (*mustaḥlik)* in Him so that He was not manifested in anything."[525] In order to reveal Himself, God created *al-rūḥ* out of His essence.[526] Nicholson says al-Jili considered the created *rūḥ* "as a mode of the uncreated *rūḥ al-qudus*, and as the medium by which God became conscious of Himself in creation."[527] Then, God created all of the cosmos by means of *al-rūḥ*, which is why some Sufis call it *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi* (the truth by means of which the world is created).[528] Al-Jili says *al-rūḥ* has many names to denote its many aspects. These names include *al-qalam* (the pen), *al-haqīqa al-Muhammadiyya* (the reality of Muhammad), *al-'aql al-awwal* (the First Intelligence), *amr Allāh* (the divine command of God), and *al-rūḥ al-ilāhi* (the Divine Spirit).[529] In the presence of God, however, it is only known as *al-*

[522] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 163.
[523] Ibn 'Arabi, *Futūḥāt*, I: 83.29, quoted in Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 91.
[524] Ibn 'Arabi, *Futūḥāt*, II: 684.2, quoted in Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 91.
[525] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, K II. 77 10 foll, quoted in Nicholson, *Studies*, 121.
[526] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 164-165.
[527] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, K II. 12, 6 foll, quoted in Nicholson, *Studies*, 110.
[528] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 164.
[529] Ibid., 167.

rūḥ.[530] He says *al-rūḥ* was created from the light of God,[531] and all angels—including Gabriel, Israfel, and Michael—were created from it, making *al-rūḥ* chief of all the angels. *Al-rūḥ*[532] is given a divine stewardship by God that *al-rūḥ* exerts over the whole universe.[533]

After manifesting His essence in *al-rūḥ* and creating the cosmos by means of *al-rūḥ*, God desired to manifest Himself, via his attributes, to creation. God did this by creating man. Al-Jili says the relation of man to the world is like the relation of the spirit to the body. Like many Sufis, al-Jili struggled with the paradox of how to reconcile God's undeniable transcendence and God's perceived immanence.[534] He believed the answer to this paradox lies within man, because man is a *nuskha* (copy) of God.[535] This belief was based on the following two hadiths, "God created Adam in the image of the Merciful," and "God created Adam in His own image."[536] Man is an entity by himself and is a manifestation of both God and created nature. In this way, man is the link between God and created nature and man fulfills the main objective behind the creation of the universe: God wanting to reveal himself.[537] Al-Jili says every man has a body (*jasad)* which is his form (*sūra*), a created spirit (*al-rūḥ al makhlūq*) which is his meaning (*maʿna*), and a secret (*sirr*) and a divine aspect (*wajih*). The *wajih* can be rendered as *al-rūḥ al-qudus, al-sirr al-ilāḥi*

---

[530] Ibid., 167.
[531] Ibid., 164.
[532] Al-Jili's differentiation between *rūḥ al-qudus* and *al-rūḥ* are similar to Abu-Bakr al-Wasiti and a group of early Sufi mystics known as *al-ruhaniyyūn*. Al-Wasiti said there are two spirits, *al-rūḥ al-jasad* (the vital, created spirit) and *rūḥ al-qudus* (the uncreated spirit) which illuminate the heart. The doctrine of *al-ruhaniyyūn* is best summed up by al-Nabaji's statement that there are two spirits within the mystic who has attained union with God: *al rūḥ al-bashariyya* (the mutable, created human spirit), and *al-rūḥ al-qādima* (the immutable, uncreated spirit). Massignon, Mystic and Martyr of Islam, 662; al-Tusi, Kitab al-Luma, 61. In addition, al-Jili's usage of the phrase "the Spirit of spirits" for *al-rūḥ al-qudus* is similar to al-Rumi's poetry: "Since He is the Spirit of the spirit, there is no escape from Him: I have not seen a single spirit be an enemy to the Friend," and, "Thou art the Spirit of our spirit, the Meaning of the Names, the Existence of all things, the Source of love's tumult." William C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (State University of New York Press), 32. Both al-Jili and al-Rumi believed God had a divine spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) and all mankind had a created spirit (*al-rūḥ al-bashariyya*).
[533] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 166.
[534] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 4-5.
[535] Nicholson, *Studies*, 79.
[536] Nicholson, *Studies*, 79.
[537] Nicholson, *Studies*, 80-81.

(the divine secret) and the existence which circulates in everyone (*al-wujūd al-sārī*).[538] Al-Jili maintains within each man there is a created, non-eternal *rūḥ* that brings meaning to the form, and there is the uncreated, eternal *al-rūḥ al-qudus* that can manifest the divine attributes of God.[539] Whenever a man follows his fleshly sensual being, *al-rūḥ* becomes limited in its absolute spirituality. It comes to be in the prison (*sijjin*) of physical things and physical law. However, if a mystic seeks God, *al-sirr al-illāhi* (the divine secret) in him can be manifested.[540] Al-Jili describes a four-stage process in which this takes place. In the first stage, "illumination of the actions," a person begins to contemplate the scope of God's will (*irāda Allāh*) to the degree that the will of the person becomes entirely identified with the divine will of God.[541] In the second stage, "illumination of the names," the person calls upon any of the divine names of God and continuously contemplates the divine consciousness (*sirr*) until the person obtains annihilation (*fana'*).[542] The concept of annihilation (*fana*') is based on Q 28:88, "Everything is to perish except His face (*wajh Allāh*),"[543] and Q 55:29, "Everyone on it is ephemeral (lasting a very short time), yet lasting is the majestic and munificent Face of your Lord."[544] These verses are interpreted by some Sufi mystics to mean the only real existence is God, and there must be an annihilation (*fana*') of the mystic's ego in order to perceive this. This idea is reflected in four verses in the Qur'an describing those who submit their *wajh* (face/ego/created spirit) to God. The Qur'an says they will have a reward with their Lord (Q 2:112) and be guided (Q 3:20). The

[538] Nicholson, *Studies*, 109.
[539] Nicholson, *Studies*, 109.
[540] Nicholson, *Studies*, 109.
[541] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 142, 276.
[542] Ibid., 142, 276.
[543] Qur'an 28:88.
[544] Qur'an 55:29.

Qur'an also compares them with Abraham, who God took as an intimate friend (Q 3:20), and it says they have grasped the surest handle (31:22). When God desires to reveal Himself to a man by means of His attributes (*ṣifāt*), the *wajh* (ego/face/created spirit) of the man must be submitted to God; then the ego is annihilated (*fana*'), and the creaturely spirit passes away.[545] In exchange, God puts *rūḥ al-qudus* into man. *Rūḥ al-qudus* is a spiritual substance of God's essence which is neither separate from God nor joined to man.[546] In the third stage, "illumination of the attributes," the person becomes connected with God to the degree he begins to display the divine attributes.[547] Al-Jili describes this stage by referencing a hadith saying, "God becomes this person's ear by which he hears, his eye by which he sees, his hand by which he touches and his tongue by which he talks. When this person touches the sick they are healed and when this person bids a thing be, it is."[548] This is possible because the person has been strengthened with the Holy Spirit, like Jesus was.[549] The fourth stage, "Illumination of the Essence," is the climax of divine revelation and is reached when the person moves from illumination of the attributes (*sifāt*) of God to the illumination of the divine essence of God (*dhātihi*).[550] The illumination of the divine essence causes a man to become the "Perfect Unit (*al-fard 'l-kāmil*) and the microcosmic pole on whom the whole order of existence revolves."[551] Al-Jili says this person is worthy of prostration in prayer, is the *khalīfa* (vicegerent) indicated in the story of Adam, and is *al-Mahdi* (the promised redeemer) who will come at the end of times to defeat the Anti-Christ

[545] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 277.
[546] Nicholson, *Studies*, 128; This placing of *rūḥ al-qudus* into man happens without incarnation (*ḥulūl*).
[547] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 142, 277.
[548] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 166.
[549] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 277.
[550] Ibid., 142, 277.
[551] Nicholson, *Studies*, 130.

(*al-dajjāl*). The essences of all things that exist are compelled to obey his command, and he overcomes the sensible world by his power—doing whatever he wills.[552] Al-Jili says this apex of God's revelation and human ascent is achieved only in *al-insān al-kāmil* (the Perfect Man), and it is fully realized in the prophet Muhammad.[553] This level of unity has been experienced by all the prophets and those who have reached *wujūd* (highest level of being), and they were a channel by which their community could come into contact with God.

Al-Jili's portrays *al-insān al-kāmil* (the Perfect Man) as the intersection between creativity and creation. All of the divine names and attributes are manifested fully in *al-insān al-kāmil*, which enables him to reflect God to all of creation. In addition, *al-insān al-kāmil* is a microcosm of all creation, which he reflects to God as a mirror. Nicholas Lo Polito describes al-Jili's idea of the Perfect Man as "the meeting point between God and creation and the link between God's transcendence and God's immanence.[554] In this way, al-Jili's figure of *al-insān al-kāmil* is very similar to the Johaninne concept of *logos* in Christianity. Jesus is the *logos* (Word of God) who reveals God to humanity, and the Perfect Man who reconciles creation to its Creator. Regarding their similarity, Seyyid Hussein Nasr says *al-insān al-kāmil* "is also essentially the spirit which contains all the platonic 'ideas' within itself like the *logos* in the doctrines of Philo who is the 'first born of God' and in whom all the 'ideas' are assembled."[555] The *logos* and *al-insān al-kāmil* are seen perfectly reflecting all the attributes of God, active in

[552] Ibid., 130.
[553] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 277.
[554] Ibid., 232, 286.
[555] Sayyid H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'arabī* (Harvard University Press, 1964), 110.

both the creation of the world and the revelation of God, and the way in which creation and Creator are reconciled.

Al-Jili's interpretation of *wajh Allāh* (the face of God) as *rūḥ Allāh* is also worth commenting on.[556] The interpretation seems to be built on the lexical meaning of *rūḥ* as "blown breath."[557] Breath (*rūḥ*) forms words (*kalām*), and words are the way in which thoughts are expressed. Words come from the mouth and the mouth is a part of the face (*wajh*). The face is often used as a metonymy for a person's presence. [558] If someone sees another person's face and hears their breath, it means he is in that person's presence. When God's face (*wajh*) breathes, He forms words (*kalām*), expresses His will (*irāda*), and His command (*amr*) is revealed. This is why the Qur'an instructs the believers in seven different verses to desire and seek *wajh Allāh*, and are told those who do will be the most successful (*mufliḥūn*) and will enter eternal gardens (*jinat 'aden*) (2:272) (6:52) (13:22) (18:28) (30:38) (30:39) (92:20). The seventh verse (Q 92:20) is set in the context of *Surat al-Layl* (The Night Chapter). The object of this sura is to show that all of men's striving after different objects is in vain and that they will remain stuck in the night (*al-layl*) of their disbelief and ignorance. Only those who strongly desire and seek the face of God (*ibtigha' wajh Allāh)* will come out of the night into the manifesting of the day (*tjalla al-nihār*), and God will be well-pleased with them. This verse demonstrates man needs to turn towards the face of God in order to receive self-disclosure (*tajallī*) from Him. Building upon this

[556] This interpretation is similar to the Hebraic identification of *panim* (face) with *rūach* (spirit). This is based on Psalm 51:11 (English Standard Version), "Do not cast me away from your *panim*, and do not take your holy *rūach* from me," and Psalm 139:7 (English Standard Version), "Where can I go from your *rūach*? Or where can I flee from your *panim*?"
[557] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 5.
[558] Metonymy is a figure of speech consisting of the use of a name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute. "Metonymy," *merriam-webster.com*, March 1, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metonymy.

concept, Ibn 'Arabi says when man realizes he does "not comprehend anything of His [God's] knowledge,"[559] (Q 20:110) his "*wajh* (face) is humbled"[560] (Q 20:111). Then one must seek God for an increase in knowledge through divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*), because he only "comprehends of His [God's] knowledge what He wills"[561] (Q 2:255).[562] There seems to be a clear connection in the Qur'an between seeking *wajh Allāh* and the revealing of His divine knowledge. Q 2:269 echoes this refrain: "He grants wisdom (*ḥikma*) to whomever He wishes, and he who is given wisdom, is certainly given an abundant good, and none takes admonition except those who possess intellect."[563] In addition, the Qur'an uses the phrase *al-kitab wa-l-ḥikma* (the book and the wisdom) nine times, saying God taught it, sent it down, and gave it to Muhammad, Abraham, and Jesus.[564] *Ḥikma* (wisdom) seems to be presented as the divine understanding of what *al-kitāb* (the book) means, and is of equal importance.[565] Mankind is implored in the Qur'an to seek after *wajh Allāh*. This indicates the mechanism of how God reveals His knowledge and wisdom is *rūḥ*. Philosophically, knowledge (*'ilm*) and wisdom (*hikma*) are expressed by breath (*rūḥ*) when words (*kalām*) are formed. God's words reveal His *amr*. Twice, the Qur'an says God sends *al-rūḥ min amrihi* (the spirit of His command) to whomever He wills of His servants so they may be of the warners (Q 40:15 and Q 16:2). Then, Q 58:22 says,

> These are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit (*bi-rūḥihi minhu*). He will let them enter Gardens (*jinat*) graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and

[559] Qur'an 20:110.
[560] Qur'an 20:111.
[561] Qur'an 2:255.
[562] Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 91.
[563] Qur'an 2:269.
[564] "Hikma," Quranic Arabic Corpus, February 19, 2019, http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=حكمة.
[565] God is referred to in the Qur'an as al-*Alim* (all-knowing) and *al-Hakim* (all-wise). These are two of His *asma al-husna* (divine names).

> they with Him. They are on God's side, and God's side will be the one to prosper (*mufliḥūn*).[566]

When people seek *wajh Allāh*, He supports them with His *rūḥ* that inspires them with the divine knowledge of God through self-disclosure (*tajallī*) and strengthens them to be successful in carrying out God's will.

Al-Jili conceived of *rūḥ* as the unifying agent between God and humanity. God, being in essence *rūḥ al-qudus*, manifests His essence in His first creation, *al-rūḥ*, from which he creates the cosmos. Created humanity, however, is unable by itself to comprehend the Creator God because of His supreme transcendence. The only possible way of humanity knowing God is by God revealing Himself. God does this by putting *rūḥ al-qudus* in those who seek him—thereby illuminating His divine names and divine attributes so man can conceive of Him and manifest His names and attributes to the rest of creation. This reaches its culmination in the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), because to Him alone God illuminates His divine essence. Al-Qashani agrees with this, saying *al-insān al-kāmil* is the "image of God," having "verified the realities of the divine names,"[567] and the "shadow of God," having "verified the reality of the presence of the one."[568] Al-Qashani maintains, *al-insān al-kāmil* is "the mediator of grace and assistance, and the link between truth and creation by virtue of His affinity to both."[569] Both al-Qashani and al-Jili identify the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as the mediator between Creator and creation and reconciler of God's transcendence and God's immanence.

---

[566] Qur'an 58:22. This corresponds with Ezekiel 39:29 (English Standard Version), in which God says about the Israeli exiles, "I will not hide my *panim* from them any longer, for I shall pour out My *rūach* on the house of Israel."
[567] 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qashani, David Pendlebury, and Nabil Safwat. *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms* (Octagon Press, 1991), 94.
[568] Ibid., 117.
[569] Ibid., 19.

To summarize, al-Jili saw God as the revealer, *al-insān al-kāmil* as the revelation of God, and *rūḥ al-qudus* as the means by which man perceives God. Al-Jili's conception of God and the way in which God reveals Himself bears some resemblances to the thoughts of Christian theologian Karl Barth. Barth strongly emphasizes that God is both transcendent and operative.[570] Barth says God's transcendence makes it impossible for humanity, by itself, to comprehend God. He says revelation of God can never be initiated by humanity due to the vast divide between Creator and His creation.[571] Instead, revelation must originate from God and come through God in order for the divide to be bridged.[572] Barth said God is operative in His triune nature as revealer, revelation, and revealedness.[573] Similar to al-Jili, God the Father is the "revealer," because it is in His nature to reveal himself to humanity.[574] God the Father reveals himself in Jesus, who is "revelation," and is similar to al-Jili's figure of *al-insān al-kāmil*.[575] The Holy Spirit is the "revealedness" of God that consummates revelation by opening humanity to receive it.[576] The Holy Spirit empowers man's recognition of God and response.[577] For both Barth and al-Jili, God as a supremely transcendent revealer cannot inhabit the material world of "objects."[578] Therefore, God is unable to be known in the world, because God is not a part of it.[579] God

[570] Trevor Hart, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 41.
[571] Ibid., 42.
[572] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine Of God: Volume 1, Part 2*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (T & T Clark, 1957), 44.
[573] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God: Volume 1, Part 1*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (T & T Clark, 1975), 1.
[574] Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (Westminster Press, 1964), 68.
[575] Ibid., 68. There is a functional equivalence between Jesus and *al-insān al-kāmil*, however, there is an ontological difference. Jesus is believed to be the same essence as God, whereas *al-insān al-kāmil* manifests the essence of God.
[576] Ibid., 68-69.
[577] Ibid., 49.
[578] The Arab Christian philosopher, Yaḥya ibn ʿAdi, and the Islamic philosopher, al-Fārābi, describe human-divine communication in an analogous manner to Barth and al-Jili. Tokay says Ibn 'Adi describes God the Father as pure intellect, Jesus as the intellegizing agent, and the Holy Spirit as intelligible. Al-Fārābi describes God as pure intellect, pure intelligible, and pure intellector at the same time. Tokay, "The Relationship between the Holy Spirit and Human Perfection," 69.
[579] Hart, *Cambridge*, 51.

mitigates this through His revelation and revealedness. In the revelation of Jesus, or *al-insān al-kāmil*, the veiled becomes unveiled. The early church father, Athanasius, concurs, saying, "he (Jesus) showed himself in the body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father." Jesus, or *al-insān al-kāmil,* becomes the bridge and meeting point between "the revealer" and humanity. *Rūḥ al-qudus* then tears away the veil to allow the "revelation" and God to become comprehendible to humanity, to enable humanity to manifest God's divine attributes in its actions, and to unite humanity with God.

Al-Jili's ideas concerning the Qur'anic *rūḥ* differ sharply from the classical Islamic exegetes. The classical exegetes insisted upon the created nature of *rūḥ*, whereas al-Jili conceives of *rūḥ al-qudus* as the essence of God, and *al-rūḥ* as the first creation and creator of the rest of the cosmos. The classical exegetes said *rūḥ* could be either inspiration or an angel bringing inspiration. Al-Jili builds upon the idea of *rūḥ* being inspiration and takes it further—saying by the infilling of *rūḥ al-qudus*, man not only receives divine knowledge, but can attain union with God. According to al-Jili, *rūḥ al-qudus* is both the object and the subject. As an object, humanity is implored to seek the face of God (*ibtigha' wajh Allāh)*—meaning, seek *rūḥ al-qudus*. Then, when God places *rūḥ al-qudus* within man, it becomes a subject as God's work within man—empowering man to manifest God's divine attributes and beautiful names. The classical exegetes, however, did not consider *rūḥ al-qudus* to be the object of humanity, nor did they fathom it could become the subject.

2.5 Summary of *Rūḥ* in Sufi Thought

This section determined that al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and al-Jili had expanded thoughts and views regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ* that can best be summarized by encapsulating them into four, primary understandings. The first understanding of *rūḥ* is God's creative, personal presence drawing and enabling man to enter into communion with Himself. Al-Hallaj says this communion (*ittiḥād*) with God occurs when the carnal nature in man is purified, and *rūḥ Allāh* (the spirit of God) enters into man.[580] This understanding proposes new interpretations for two sets of Qur'anic verses. The first set is verses dealing with inspiration (Q 16:2, Q 40:15, Q 42:52). Traditionally, these verses are read as God transmitting divine inspiration to His servants and the Prophet Muhammad by an impersonal energy or the angel Gabriel. This extended understanding of *rūḥ*, however, contends God reveals His creative personal presence as *rūḥ* in order to communicate Himself with His servants and the Prophet Muhammad. God is ushering them into communion with Himself so they may know the straight path and guide others to it. Al-Jili says God placing *rūḥ al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit) in man is the only possible way of created humanity knowing a supremely transcendent God.[581] God illuminates His divine names and divine attributes so man can conceive of Him and manifest His names and attributes to the rest of creation. Schleiermacher describes this infilling of the Holy Spirit in man as the development of God-consciousness, and maintains it is the highest level of human self-consciousness because it is the feeling of absolute dependence on God. [582] The second set is verses dealing with the

[580] Massignon, *Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 40.
[581] Nicholson, *Studies*, 128.
[582] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith Volume One*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 18; Ibid., 17.

relationship between *rūḥ* and Jesus (Q 2:87, Q 2:253, Q 4:171, and Q 5:110). Traditionally, these verses are interpreted as the angel Gabriel supporting Jesus, Jesus being created by a breath from Gabriel, an honorific title for Jesus, or Jesus being a pure created soul. *Rūḥ* as God's creative personal presence, however, brings out other interpretations. Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh* means he had a permanent union with God from birth. This permanent union is referenced three times in his being strengthened by *rūḥ al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit). The continual strengthening of God's personal presence enabled him to raise the dead, heal the sick, blow life into a clay bird, and know what people were doing in secret. Schleiermacher states that Jesus is "the One in whom the human creation is perfected," by contending that Jesus is the Second Adam: "For this Second Adam is altogether like all those who are descended from the first, only that from the outset he has an absolutely potent God-consciousness."[583] Schleiermacher maintains that in Jesus, God-consciousness reached perfection,[584] because Jesus had permanent union with *rūḥ*—the creative, personal presence of God.

The second understanding of *rūḥ* is the first emanation or creation of God that created the whole world, governs the affairs of the heavens and the earth, and the medium by which God became conscious of Himself in creation.[585] This understanding is presented by al-Ghazali in *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, where al-Ghazali refers to *rūḥ* as *al-muṭāʿ* (the obeyed one), and by al-Jili in *al-insān al-kāmil*. The classical Sunni exegetes had restricted the meaning of *rūḥ* in many verses to the angel Gabriel, a super angel, or an impersonal energy that is carried by an angel. Al-

[583] Ibid., 368.
[584] Ibid., 368-369.
[585] Nicholson, *Studies*, 110.

Ghazali, however, says *al-muṭāʿ* is far greater than the angels—illustrated by the angels moving the multiple worlds of the cosmos by its authoritative command.[586] *Al-muṭāʿ* is the intermediary entity between God and the rest of creation, to which the angels are subservient. Al-Jili concurs saying all angels, including Gabriel, Israfel, and Michael, were created from *al-rūḥ*, making *al-rūḥ* chief of all the angels.[587] This different understanding of *rūḥ* also suggests a new viewpoint concerning the relationship between *rūḥ* and *amr*. The classical exegetes considered *amr* to be the command of God that causes *rūḥ* or transmits *rūḥ*. Al-Ghazali, however, conceives of *amr* as the means by which *al-muṭāʿ* mediates God's creative activity, carries out God's will, and executes His decrees.[588] *Al-muṭāʿ* creates the whole universe and governs its affairs (*yudabbir al-amr*). Al-Jili agrees, saying, "*al-rūḥ* exercises a divine guardianship, created in him by God, over the whole universe."[589] Lastly, this understanding of *rūḥ* alludes to the potential role of *rūḥ* in revealing God's immanence. Al-Ghazali's neoplatonic cosmology is similar to classical Sunni exegesis in that it emphasizes God's unknowable, transcendent nature. Al-Ghazali adds to this, however, by saying *al-muṭāʿ*, as the first creation, reveals God's immanence to the rest of creation.[590] God is too supremely transcendent to be directly involved in creation. Instead, God continuously emanates being onto *al-muṭāʿ* so that it stands as the sun among the lights—revealing the attributes of God.[591] Al-Jili concurs, saying God created *al-rūḥ* from his essence in

[586] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, 51.
[587] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 166.
[588] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, 51 and Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Cosmology," 44.
[589] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 166, quoted in Nicholson, Studies, 110.
[590] Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Cosmology," 44.
[591] Al-Ghazali and Buchman, *Mishkat*, 51.

order to reveal Himself to creation.[592] *Al-rūḥ* is more than an angel or a created soul; it is the unifying agent between God and humanity.

The third Sufi understanding of *rūḥ* is the divine attribute of *al-hayyā* (life). Ibn 'Arabi introduces this understanding in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya*, saying that at its essence, *rūḥ* is *al-hayyā* (life).[593] *Rūḥ* is the power of God through which all things are given life—both physically and spiritually. This is a sharp contrast from the classical exegetes' understanding of *rūḥ*. They insisted upon its created nature in an effort to protect God's transcendence, whereas Ibn 'Arabi perceives of Creator God as *al-rūḥ al-kullī* (the universal spirit). God as spirit manifests His divine names and attributes (*ṣifāt*), thereby revealing His immanence and inviting His creatures to find rest (*rawḥ*) and repose (*rayḥān*) in the knowledge of Him. This understanding of *rūḥ* also invites other interpretations for two groups of Qur'anic verses. First, it affects the verses where God breathes into Adam from/of His *rūḥ* (Q 15:29, Q 32:9, and Q 38:72). Traditionally, exegetes have either been silent—saying only that God brought Adam to life—or they have considered *rūḥ* to be a created soul placed into Adam. This created soul is a possession of God that emphasizes the uniqueness of mankind. Ibn 'Arabi, however, says God blew into Adam from *al-rūḥ al-ilāḥi* (the Divine Spirit). He says God loves man because man is a part of Him (*al-rūḥ al-juzʿī*), and man desires God because the part of God in him longs to be united with the whole.[594] *Rūḥ* is the connection between God and man—prompting them towards mutual love and desire. Second, it affects the verses dealing with divine support (*ta'yid*) from God in the form of divine knowledge and the miraculous (Q 16:2, Q 40:15,

[592] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 164-165.
[593] Ibn ʻArabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 67.
[594] Ibn ʻArabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 273/215-216.

Q 42:52, Q 58:22). Classical exegetes said *ta'yid* came from the angels—specifically the angel Gabriel—and is reserved for the prophets alone. Ibn 'Arabi, however, says God gives *ta'yid* by *rūḥ al-amr* (the spirit of the command) without any intermediary,[595] and it is a gift not only for the prophets, but for anyone who is a friend of God. Friends of God are those who deny their selfish ego (*nafs*) and seek after God. God places in them *rūḥ al-amr*, which brings divine revelation—enabling man to know God—and strengthens man with the power and ability to live righteously.

The fourth understanding of *rūḥ* is *wajh Allāh (*the face of God). Al-Jili says *rūḥ al-qudus* is an uncreated, holy, and pure attribute of God that transcends existence and must never be seen as the result of the creative word *kun* (being).[596] It is often referred to in the Qur'an as *wajh Allāh* because *rūḥ Allāh* is the *wajh* (face/aspect) of all things. Therein establishing *wujūd* (being) in every object of sense and thought. This understanding has a major impact on the interpretation of the seven verses referencing *wajh Allāh (*Q 2:272, Q 6:52, Q 13:22, Q 18:28, Q 30:38, Q 30:39, Q 92:20). These verses comprise a Qur'anic exhortation to mankind—imploring them to earnestly seek *rūḥ al-qudus*—and a promise that God will put *rūḥ al-qudus* in those who seek him—inspiring them with the divine knowledge of God and strengthening them to be successful in carrying out God's will. *Rūḥ* was confined by the classical exegetes to the created realm; however, the understanding of *rūḥ al-qudus* as *wajh Allāh* means it is the essence of God. This understanding portrays *rūḥ al-qudus* as the aim of humanity and the means by which mankind knows God, reveals God to others, and can become united with Him.

[595] Ibn 'Arabi*, Futūhāt*, II:638.2.
[596] Al-Jili, *al-insān al-kāmil*, 163.

CONCLUSION

The Algerian Islamic scholar, Mohammed Arkoun says, "Any text, once written, escapes from its author and takes on a life of its own, whose richness or poverty, expansion or desiccation, oblivion or revival, will henceforth depend on its readers."[597] The Qur'anic text speaks of *rūḥ* as animating inanimate matter, traveling inconceivably long distances and time spans,[598] bringing down inspiration from Heaven, strengthening Jesus to do miraculous acts, supporting believers, being of the *amr* (divine command) of God, and playing a key part in three major contexts—creation, prophecy, and the day of judgement (*yawm al-dīn*).[599] The unique way in which the Qur'an speaks of *rūḥ* demands increased reflection and contemplation as to its nature, role, and relationship with God and mankind. The present findings have established, however, that speculation was limited by one its initial readers—the classical Islamic exegetes. The classical Islamic exegetes restricted the senses in which the Qur'anic *rūḥ* was interpreted. They stayed within a set interpretation grid for most verses, saying *rūḥ* is either Gabriel, a super angel/metaphysical creature, a created soul, divine inspiration transmitted by God, or by remaining silent and not offering any interpretation. These interpretations were provided even in cases where they were implausible. Considering variant interpretations would have potentially raised theological concerns rooted in the fear of conflating *rūḥ* or Jesus with God. *Rūḥ* had to be interpreted as *muhdath* (created) not *qadīm* (eternally existing), because of the potential anthropomorphic overtones that might impede upon God's transcendence, and the theological implications of Jesus being *rūḥ Allāh.* The answer was to use a "theological safeguard" to take

[597] Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (University of Michigan, 2009), 157.
[598] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 8.
[599] Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr," 253.

the place of *rūḥ*.[600] The classical exegetes most often interpreted *rūḥ* as a metaphysical being (i.e. Gabriel or a super angel), emphasizing the greatness of God,[601] or as a created soul, emphasizing the uniqueness of humans.[602] However, O'Shaughnessy says it is clear from the context of the Qur'an that *rūḥ* is never found with the meaning of angel or created soul.[603] Both of these interpretations were attempts to make sense of *rūḥ* while maintaining its aura of mystery. The exegetes provided evidence through traditional reports, Qur'anic grammar, and purported logical reasoning of what they believed *rūḥ* to mean, however my research revealed a perplexing array of variant opinions, unusual silences on key points of interpretation, and a "bewildering entanglement of elaborate lines of conflicting traditions all emanating from the same small circle of the Prophet's immediate Companions."[604] The confusion, uncertainty, problematic interpretations, selective exegetical methods, and contradictory accounts of the classical Islamic exegetes indicate they were limited in their freedom to conjecture because of theological concerns, and were in doubt as to the exact meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.

The classical *tafsīr* tradition had a widespread effect on the understanding of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* that extended to both medieval and modern Islamic exegetes, philosophers, as well as the philologists who compiled the great Arabic lexicons. Views beyond the set interpretation grid were considered heretical (*bid'a*), and those suggesting them were considered to be in error. The result has been a limited understanding of *rūḥ* that is too narrow for disclosing a fuller meaning of the Qur'anic text.

---

[600] Madigan, "Revelation," 44.
[601] Tlili, "From Breath to Soul," 21.
[602] Ibid., 21.
[603] Tlili and Macdonald both say *rūḥ* is never found with the meaning of "created soul" in the Qur'an.
[604] Arthur Jeffrey, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, 7.

This same restricted understanding of *rūḥ* affected early Sufi thought, as well. Sufi scholars, such as al-Sarraj and al-Hujwiri, and prominent Sufi exegetes, such as al-Tustari and al-Qushayri, attempted to tie early Sufi thought to classical Sunni theology regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. This had a far-reaching influence on Sufi thought and exegesis; however, my research has shown it was not representative of Sufism as a whole. There were several eminent Sufi thinkers—al-Ghazali, al-Hallaj, Ibn 'Arabi, and al-Jili—who proposed conceptions of *rūḥ* which were a stark departure from the interpretation grid used by the classical Islamic exegetes. They were not encumbered by the same theological concerns, because they had a different view of how God operates. The classical Islamic exegetes limited God's immanence (*tashbīh*) because of fear of constraining God within spatial or other limitations, and they emphasized his transcendence (*tanzīh*), resulting in a restricted definition of God—where God's supreme transcendence prevents Him from interacting with the created universe.[605] The aforementioned Sufi mystics and exegetes said God is transcendent and immanent at the same time.[606] They affirmed God's transcendental nature, while also seeing the fundamental necessity of God being relational in His nature—thereby allowing for relationship between God and creation.[607] They believed God, out of his love and mercy, created the world in order to reveal and manifest Himself. This is based in part on a divine hadith (*hadith qudsi*), which says, "I was a Treasure but was not known, so I loved to be known; I created the creatures and made Myself known to them, so they came to know Me."[608] There is duality and separation within God's creation; however,

[605] Lo Polito, "Tawhid," 62.
[606] Ibid., 68.
[607] Ibid., 136.
[608] Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, 21.

God desires union (*wasl*), not separation (*fīrāq*).[609] This idea is based on Q 5:54, which says, "God will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him."[610] The classical Islamic exegetes believed there was a vast divide between God and His creation. God remained separate. This limited their conceptions of God—rendering Him unknowable. However, al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and al-Jili believed the goal of God's creative activity was not for Himself and His creation to remain separate, but for union between them as there was before creation. This belief enabled these Sufi mystics and thinkers to contemplate interpretations of *rūḥ* outside of the boundaries imposed by the classical exegetes. They interpreted *rūḥ* as God's creative personal presence, the first creation or emanation of God, the divine attribute of life (*al-hayyā*), and the essence of God (*wajh Allāh*), because they viewed *rūḥ* as the means by which mankind knows God, reveals God to others, is empowered to live righteously, and can become re-united with God.

The classical exegetes and their authorities were present at a time when methodologies of interpreting the Qurʾan had not acquired broad consensus, and the alleged sayings and reports of Muhammad had yet to be canonized.[611] As a result, there were numerous legal, mystical, political, theological, and sectarian streams exerting pressure and competing for influence. The influence and pressure of these various streams is particularly evident in the classical exegetes' interpretation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. First, there was external pressure from Christianity, as Arab Christian philosophers were attempting to influence how Muslims interpret the Qur'an.[612] Arab

[609] William C. Chittick, "The Qur'an and Sufism" in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed H. Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria M. Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (HarperOne, 2015), 1746.
[610] Qur'an 5:54.
[611] Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, 69.
[612] Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, 69.

Christian philosophers appropriated Jesus's Qur'anic titles of *rūḥ Allāh* and *kalimat Allāh* in their contextualized, apologetic theology in order to emphasize the uniqueness and divinity of Jesus. Second, there was internal pressure from various Islamic sects.[613] Al-Sarraj, al-Hujwiri, and al-Razi mention the early views of some Shi'ites, Ismāʿīlis, Khawārij, and two Sufi sects called the Hulūlis and the Sayyaris.[614] These groups maintained that *rūḥ* is an uncreated, eternal attribute of God, and regarded it as the sole agent and governor of things. In addition, Ibn al-Qayyim reports that Ahmed Ibn Hanbal and other Hanbalites believed *rūḥ* is neither created nor uncreated.[615] Thirdly, there was major influence from theological currents—stemming from the debate between Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, and Hanbalites concerning God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*). *Rūḥ* was determined to be a created, immaterial spirit in humans and animals or a created intermediary, because if *rūḥ* was attributed to God, it might cause a plurality within God which could potentially impede upon His transcendence (*tanzīh*) and the idea of *tawhīd* (the indivisible oneness of God). The external and internal pressures, along with the influence of competing theological currents, resulted in the classical exegetes adopting a siege mentality,[616] shifting the Islamic discourse concerning *rūḥ*. The classical Sunni exegetes were fearful of the surrounding doctrines of the Christians, Shi'ites, Ismāʿīlis, Khawārij, Hulūlis, and Sayyaris because they conflated *rūḥ* with Jesus or God. The exegetes regarded these views as specious and a result of forbidden speculation. Understandings venturing beyond the restricted interpretation grid of the classical exegetes were heterodox, and those suggesting them were in error.

---

[613] Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, 91-92.
[614] Al-Hujwiri, *Kashaf al-Mahjūb*, 263.
[615] Macdonald, "Development of Spirit I," 39.
[616] Siege mentality is a defensive or overfly fearful attitude. "Siege mentality," *merriam-webster.com*, September 15th, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/siege%20mentality.

This same siege mentality also prohibited the acceptance of the four distinct Sufi understandings—God's creative personal presence, the first creation or emanation of God, the divine attribute of *al-hayyā* (life), and the essence of God (*wajh Allāh*)—of *rūḥ* offered by al-Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and al-Jili. These understandings are marginal within the body of Islamic thought; however, this is not due to faulty exegesis. Rather, it is a result of these understandings not being widely known and not being in agreement with classical *tafsīr* tradition. Their distinct understandings of *rūḥ* correlate with the reports of al-Dahhak and Abu Rawq al-Hamdani (from the *tafsīr* of al-Tabari and al-Mawardi) that identify *rūḥ* as *amr Allāh* (the divine command of God) and as *qudrat Allāh* (the power of God). In addition, their understandings are more accordant with the Qur'an's depiction of *rūḥ.* Rather than a created entity independent of God, the Qur'an portrays *rūḥ* as the creative, revelatory, and empowering engagement of God with His creation. My research suggests these four, distinct understandings of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* are more exegetically accurate and informed than the tendentious opinions of the classical exegetes.

This study has immense value for the field of Islamic studies. The predominant, scholarly notion over the past thousand years has been to interpret *rūḥ* through the lens of classical *tafsīr*. This has affected the way in which numerous medieval and modern exegetes, Islamic philosophers and philologists, and Western academia have understood the nature of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, its role, and its relationship to God. This paper has substantiated my hypothesis that the classical *tafsīr* tradition restricted the Qur'anic *rūḥ* due to theological concerns. *Rūḥ* was restricted to being a created intermediary—such as Gabriel or a super metaphysical creature, a created possession of God—such as a created soul, a subtle, material life force—such as an electric current or a strong wind that brings life to a body, an honorific title, or an impersonal

energy transmitted by God to inspire His servants with revelation. By establishing that the classical Islamic exegetes restricted the meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, my study enables future scholars and Islamic exegetes to read *tafsīr* regarding *rūḥ* more critically, or to interpret *rūḥ* independent of *tafsīr*. In *AI-Kitab wa 'l-Qur 'an: Qira 'a Mu'asira* (The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading), Muhammad Shahrour argues for the latter approach. He says Muslims have been reading the Qur'an with "borrowed eyes for hundreds of years,"[617] and instead "the Qur'an should be read as though the Prophet had just died."[618] A more critical reading of *tafsīr*, or reading the Qur'an without the interference of *tafsīr* tradition, will allow scholars and exegetes to interpret *rūḥ* outside of the restricted interpretation grid. Additionally, the findings of my paper confirmed the supposition of Duncan MacDonald and James Kritzek—that different potential meanings and understandings of *rūḥ* exist within the body of Sufi thought. Both Macdonald and Kritzek gave cursory overviews of Sufi thought regarding *rūḥ*, in which they stressed the necessity of a further investigation. I thoroughly examined Sufi thought regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, disclosing four distinct understandings of *rūḥ*—God's creative personal presence, first creation or emanation of God, the divine attribute of *al-hayyā* (life), and the essence of God (*wajh Allāh*). These understandings are a sharp contrast from the restricted interpretation grid of the classical exegetes and offer a different lens for interpreting the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. Some of these understandings were presented by towering figures (within Sufism, Ibn 'Arabi and within Sunni Islam, al-Ghazali), but their nuanced views concerning *rūḥ* have received only marginal acceptance. If accepted more broadly, significant implications for Islamic thought emerge. First, it would have a substantial effect on Qur'anic exegesis—revealing

[617] Muhammad Shahrour, *AI-Kitab wa 'l-Qur 'an: Qira 'a Mu'asira* (Saql, 2011), 41.
[618] Ibid., 41.

different interpretations for the numerous verses in which *rūḥ* is used. Second, it would influence the Islamic understanding of Jesus, as Islamic exegetes would explore more widely the significance of the correlation between Jesus and *rūḥ*. Third, it would have a major impact on Islamic thought—emboldening both Islamic exegetes and Western scholars to conceive of God, and the way in which God relates to humanity, in a different manner. For these reasons, I recommend future research concentrates on these four expanded understandings of *rūḥ* in order to bring about more fruitful developments in Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic thought, and in Christian-Muslim relations.

This study also has significant value for inter-religious dialogue. The prevailing scholarly perception is that there are major differences between the Islamic and Christian understandings of "spirit." My study, however, reveals these differences are, primarily, a result of the classical *tafsīr* tradition. The classical Islamic exegetes were concerned with Arab Christian philosophers attempts to appropriate Jesus's Qur'anic title of *rūḥ Allāh*, and with the anthropomorphic overtones in both Jewish and Christian theology concerning God. These concerns provoked the Islamic exegetes to develop original and distinctive views regarding *rūḥ* in order to distance the Islamic understanding from Jewish and Christian narratives and doctrines. Mainstream Islamic thought considered the Bible to be corrupt, and therefore an unreliable source for the exegesis of the Qur'an.[619] The early exegetes were in an exegetical double-bind: they needed the Biblical material to make sense of the Qur'an while also distrusting the Bible due to their theological convictions. Their lack of familiarity with the Biblical text hindered their ability to more fully

[619] Some exegetes gleaned from the Isra'iliyyat literature in an attempt to be more familiar with Jewish and Christian traditions; however, the majority of the traditions therein differ greatly from the contents of the Bible. In addition, there was much debate among Islamic exegetes concerning the authority of the Isra'iliyyat traditions, because some of them appeared to be spurious or clearly inaccurate.

uncover the inscrutable meaning of *rūḥ* and the ambiguous verses in which it is found. Reynolds compares the unfamiliarity of Islamic exegetes with the Bible to a Biblical scholar not having knowledge of "the languages, literature, and culture of second temple Judaism and the Mediterranean Roman world."[620] Reynolds says just as the Gospels assume the reader will know the Jewish traditions and scripture, the Qur'an assumes the reader will be familiar with the Jewish and Christian traditions and scriptures.[621] The Qur'an appears to concur with this, saying in Q 10:94, "So if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you ask those who read the Book [revealed] before you."[622] My research mentions many of the parallels between the Qur'anic and Biblical usage of "spirit," suggesting the Qur'an is alluding to prior scripture and advocating the usage of that prior scripture as subtext. In addition, the four, different Sufi understandings of *rūḥ* introduced in my paper have distinct similarities to Christian thought and doctrine regarding God and the Holy Spirit. The removal of the restrictions of the classical exegetes, the numerous parallels between the scriptures, and the introduction of the different Sufi understandings calls for a renewed pneumatological approach in dialogue between Islam and Christianity. William Shellabear attempted this decades ago, contending the genuine meaning of *rūḥ* can only be uncovered by understanding how it is used in the Old Testament and New Testament.[623] However, his article was brief, perfunctory, ignored the classical *tafsīr* tradition entirely, and has no mention of the different Sufi understandings of *rūḥ*. I recommend future researchers conduct an expanded investigation of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* by considering the Biblical

[620] Reynolds, *Qur'an and the Bible*, 2.
[621] Reynold, *Biblical Subtext*, 232.
[622] Qur'an 10:94.
[623] Shellabear, "The Meaning of the Word Spirit," 356.

subtext.[624] The investigation should begin with an in-depth study of the Judaic understanding of the Hebraic word *ruach* from the Old Testament, and the Christian understanding of the Syriac word *ruha* from the New Testament and the Gnostic Gospel accounts. This should be followed by a thorough analysis of the different Qur'anic verses containing *rūḥ* being read with a Biblical subtext. Lastly, the interpretation of *rūḥ* with a Biblical subtext should be compared and contrasted with the interpretation of *rūḥ* through the classical *tafsīr* tradition, and the interpretation of *rūḥ* through the four different Sufi understandings introduced in my paper. Considering the Biblical subtext would further illuminate the meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ* and lead to a more shared understanding of the concept of spirit among the three Abrahamic religions, offering a framework for constructive dialogue. In addition, the Biblical subtext would offer different suggestions regarding the relationship between Jesus and *rūḥ*. This would help to bridge gaps in understanding, reframing the Christian-Muslim encounter through different theological perspectives.

This paper concludes that the confusion, strange silences, divergent opinions and untenable interpretations of the classical Islamic exegetes demonstrate they were in a "theological fog of war" regarding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*.[625] The exegetes were restricted by theological concerns in their freedom to speculate, and felt compelled to develop a distinctive Islamic view of *rūḥ* in order to disassociate themselves from Jewish and Christian traditions and doctrines. In addition, the ambiguous verses in which *rūḥ* was used, the absence of clarifying oral

[624] The concept of the Qur'an having a Biblical subtext and how it might illuminate the meaning of different words, elements, and aspects in the Qur'an is written about at length by Gabriel Reynolds in *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*.
[625] "Fog of War" is a term used to describe the uncertainty of participants in military combat. Sound and vision are often limited in war, resulting in the utter confusion of direction, location, and perspective. "Fog of War," www.yourdictionary.com, May 15th, 2019, www.yourdictionary.com/fog-of-war. Here, I coin the term theological fog of war in order to reflect the uncertainty and confusion of the exegetes regarding *rūḥ* due to their restricted freedom to speculate and lack of access to necessary knowledge.

tradition (hadith), and the exegetes' unfamiliarity of both prior scripture and relevant languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac—made them uncertain as to its exact meaning. The resulting, restricted interpretation grid extended the fog to subsequent exegetes and scholars—enshrouding them in a realm of uncertainty. Concerned with the potential repercussions of proposing variant interpretations, misled by the entanglement of *rūḥ* and *nafs*, and believing the classical exegetes inherited privileged information from the *tābi'un* (the followers of the companions of Muhammad), subsequent exegetes remained within, what they deemed, acceptable orthodoxy. [626] Likewise, Islamic scholars, having the conviction that a "reliable reading and hermeneutic of the Qur'an"[627] should be formed through the lens of *tafsīr*, accepted the restricted grid unquestioningly rather than offering a critical assessment. The result has been a further obscuring of the authentic meaning of the Qur'anic *rūḥ*. This paper has dispelled the exegetical fog surrounding the Qur'anic *rūḥ*, and partly illuminated its meaning through the infusion of four distinct Sufi understandings. In classical Islamic thought, God, in His supreme transcendence, could not interact directly with or appear immediately within the created order. *Rūḥ* as the creative personal presence, divine attribute, or essence of God, however, conveys God's nearness and involvement with the world without compromising His transcendence. From this lens, *rūḥ* can be expressed as God's nearness and involvement with His creation through His inspiring, motivating, strengthening, vivifying, animating, indwelling, and acting in ways which are difficult to analyze and describe in any exact manner. This understanding of *rūḥ* will not only

[626] The *tābi'un* were the generation of Muslims who followed the *Sahaba* (companions of the prophet Muhammad). They received Muhammad's teachings second hand.
[627] Reynolds, *Biblical Subtext*, 252.

have a significant effect on Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic thought, and the field of Islamic studies, but also on the faith and practice of millions of Muslims.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Al-Baqli, Ruzbihan. '*Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-qur'an*. Lucknow, 1898.

Al-Baydawi, Nasir al-Din abu Sa'id 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Shirazi. *Tafsīr al-Baydawi, al-musammā Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988.

Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad and David Buchman. *The Niche of Lights = Mishkāt al-Anwār*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998.

Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya.* Beirut: Dar al-Sidr, 1911.

Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by A. Affifi. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1946; english translation by R.W.J. Austin. *Ibn al-'Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*. Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Shams al-Din Abu ʿAbd Allah Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Ayyub al-Zurʿi l-Dimashqi l-Ḥanbali. *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*. Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1994.

Al-Jili, 'Abd al-Karim ibn Ibrahim. *Al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma'rifat al-awākhir wa-al-awā'il*. Beirut: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2013.

Al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur. *Ta'wīlāt Ahl As Sunnah: Tafsir Maturidi*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 333/944.

Al-Mawardi, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Habib. *Nukat* wa-*al-'uyūn*, *Tafsīr al-Māwardī*. Edited by al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Maqsud ibn 'Abd al-Rahman. Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2012.

Al-Razi, Muhammad Fakhr al-Din ibn al-'Allama Diya al-Din 'Umar. *Tafsīr al-Fakhr Al-Razi, Al-Mushtahir bi-l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Edited by Khalil Muhya al-Din al-Mais. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990.

Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir. *Tafsīr al-Tabari: Jāmiʿal-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*. Edited by Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi. Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1997.

Al-Zamakhshari, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl*. Edited by 'Adil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Ali Muḥammad Mu'awwiḍ. Riayaḍ: Maktabat al-Abaykan, 1998.

Secondary Sources

ʿAbdel Haleem, M.A. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

ʿAbdel-Kader, Ali Hassan. *The Life, Personality, and Writings of al-Junayd*. London: Luzac & Company LTD, 1962.

Abrahamov, Binyamin. "The 'Bi-lā Kayfa' Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology." *Arabica* 42, no. 3 (1995): 365-79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057381.

Adang, Camilla P. *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*. Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill, 1996.

Ali, Abdullah Y. *The Qur'an Translation*. Asir Media, 2002.

Andani, Khalil. *"They Killed Him Not" The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam*." MTS diss. Harvard, 2014. Accessed on July 15th, 2018. https://ismailignosis.com/2013/03/29/the-crucifixion-in-shia-ismaili-islam/.

"Anthropomorphism." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Accessed December 1, 2019. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anthropomorphism.

Arkoun, Mohammed. *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*. University of Michigan, 2009.

Al-Ash'ari, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Isma'il. *Al-ibāna ʿan uṣūl al-diyāna*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998.

Award, Najib George. *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015.

Badron, Mohd Sani. "Ibn al-'Arabi on the One Who Is Transcendent (al-Ahad) and Immanent (al-Wahid)." *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 1, (2011): 47-76. https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/afkar/article/view/5769.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God: Volume 1, Part 1*. Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. T & T Clark, 1975.

- - -. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine Of God: Volume 1, Part 2.* Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. T & T Clark, 1957.

Beaumont, Mark I. "Early Christian Interpretation of the Qur'an." *Transformation* 22, no. 4, (2005): 195-203. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052641.

- - -. "Speaking of the Triune God: A Christian Defense of the Trinity in the Early Islamic Period." *Transformation* 29, no. 2, (2012): 111-127. http://www.jstor.org/stable/90008077.

Bell, Richard and William M. Watt. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*. Edinburgh: U.P., 1970.

Bertaina, David. *An Arabic Account of Theodore Abu Qurra in Debate at the Court of Caliph al-Mamun: Study in Early Christian and Muslim Literary Dialogues*. Catholic University of America, 2007.

Botha, Philippus J. "Ephrem the Syrian's Hymn on the Crucifixion 4." *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1-8. https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3012.

Bridger, Scott. *Christian exegesis of the Quran: A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Quran in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts*. James Clarke, 2016.

Block, C. Jonn. *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations*. Routledge, 2013.

Al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.* 8 Vols. Cairo: Al-Arabi, 1955.

The Cave of Treasures. Syriac version (and French translation): *La Caverne des Trésors*. CSCO 486 (French trans.: 487). Edited and translated by A. Su-Min Ri. Leuven: Peeters, 1987. English translation in E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1927.

Chittick, William C. *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*. State University of New York Press, 2012.

- - -. *Self-Disclosure of God, The: Principles of Ibn Al-'Arabi's Cosmology.* State University of New York Press, 1998.

- - -. *Sufi Path of Love, The: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. State University of New York Press, 1983.

- - -. "The Anthropology of Compassion." *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 48, (2010). Accessed on February 12th, 2019. http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/anthropology-of-compassion.html.

- - -. "The Qur'an and Sufism." In *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, edited by Seyyed H. Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria M. Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom, 1737-1749. HarperOne, 2015.

- - -. “Two Chapters from the *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*.” In *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi – A Commemorative Volum*e, edited by S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, 90-123. Element: Shaftsbury, 1993.

Conrad, Lawrence “Qur'anic Studies: A Historian’s Perspective.” In *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur’an: The Question of a Historio-Critical Text*, edited by Manfred Kropp, 9-15. Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2007.

Corbin, Henry and Bollingen Foundation Collection. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*. Princeton University Press, 1989.

Crollius, Ary A. R. *The Word in the Experience of Revelation in Qur'an and Hindu Scriptures*. Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1974.

Cumming, Joseph L. “The Word of God in Islam and Christianity.” New Haven: Yale Center for Faith and Culture, 2004. Accessed October 21, 2018. http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/wordgodislamchristianity-english_0.pdf.

Al-Dawudi, Muhammad ibn. Ali ibn. Ahmad. *ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*. Edited by Ali M. Umar. Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1972.

Diez, Martino. “The Profession of Monotheism by Elias of Nisbis: An Edition and Translation of the Fifth Session of the Kitab al-Majalis.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28, no. 4, (2017): 493-514. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09596410.2017.1362801.

Guillaume Dye, “La Nuit du Destin et la Nuit de la Nativite.” *Figures Bibliques en Islam*, (2011): 107-169.

Ebstein, Michael. *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿarabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition*. Brill, 2013.

El-Awa, S.M. Salwa. “Linguistic Structure.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 53–72. London: Blackwell, 2006.

Ernst, Carl W. *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism.* State University of New York Press, 1985.

Fakhry, Majid. *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*. Oneworld, 1997.

Farahidi, Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-, and Hindāwī ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd. *Kitāb al-‘Ayn Murattaban ‘alá ḥurūf al-Mu‘jam*. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 2003.

Fatemi, Nasrollah S. *Love, Beauty, and Harmony in Sufism*. Associated University Press, 1998.

Firestone, Reuven. “The Qur’an and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of their Relationship.” In *Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, edited by John C. Reeves, 1-22. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.

“Fog of War.” *YourDictionary.com*. Accessed May 15th, 2019. www.yourdictionary.com/fog-of-war.

Galadari, ʿAbdulla. *Qur’anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

Gamberini, Paolo. "Incarnation at the Crossroad: The Doctrine of the Pre-Existence of Jesus Christ in Dialogue with Judaism and Islam." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 1-2, (2008): 99-112. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021140008091694

Garr, J.D. *Christian Fruit--Jewish Root: Theology of Hebraic Restoration*. Golden Key Press, 2015.

Gibson, M. D., ed. “*Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhīd*.” *Studia Sinaitica* 7, 74-107. London, 1899.

Al-Ghazzali, Abu Hamid Muhammad and William Henry Temple Gairdner. *The Mishkat al-Anwar of Al-Ghazzali*. Forgotten Books, 2008.

Griffel, Frank. “Al-Ghazālī’s Cosmology in the Veil Section of His Mishkāt al-Anwār.” In *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, edited by Y. Tvzi Langermann, 27-49. Brepols, 2009.

- - -. *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Griffith, Sidney H. "The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts: The Development of an Apologetical Argument: Abu Qurrah in the Maglis of Al-Ma'mun." *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999): 203-33. https://philpapers.org/rec/GRITQI.

Hakim, Souad. “*The Spirit and the Son of the Spirit: A Reading of Jesus*.” J*ournal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 31, (2002): 1-28. Accessed on January 9th, 2019. http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/spirit.html.

Hart, Trevor. “Revelation.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, edited by John Webster. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000.

Hart, David B. *The New Testament: A Translation*. Yale University Press, 2017.

Hartwell, Herbert. *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*. Westminster Press, 1964.

“Hikma.” Quranic Arabic Corpus. Accessed February 19, 2019. http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=حكمة.

Hirschfeld, Hartwig. *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an.* London: Royal Arabic Society, 1902.

Al-Hujwiri, Ali U. Al-Jullabi. *Kashf al-Mahjūb*. Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1911.

Husseini, Sara Leila. "Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology." PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011. https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/2799/.

Ibn Kathir, Abu al-Fida' 'Imad Ad-Din Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Kathir al-Qurashi al-Busrawi. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. Riyadh, Darussalam, 2000.

Ibn Manzur, Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn `Alī ibn Ahmad ibn Manzūr al-Ansārī al-Ifrīqī al-Misrī al-Khazrajī Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Fadl. *Lisan al-Arab*. Sader, 1994.

Ibn-Sida, ʻAli Ibn-Ismaʻil, et al. *Al- Muḥkam wa-l-Muḥīṭ al-Aʻẓam*. Maʻhad al-Maẖṭūṭāt al-ʻArabīya, 2011.

Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm and Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari. *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*. Al-Hidayah, 1993.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. Translated by John Keble. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

Isaacs, Marie E. *The Concept of Spirit: A Study of Pneuma in Hellenistic Judaism and Its Bearing on the New Testament*. London: Heythrop College, 1976.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. University of California Press, 1984.

Jaffer, Tariq. *Razi: Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning.* Oxford University Press, 2015.

Jeffery, Arthur. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. Brill, 2007.

Jansenns, Jules. "Al-Kindī: The Founder of Philosophical Exegesis of the Qur'an." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 2, (2007): 1-22. https://doi.org/10.3366/E146535910800003X.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *Spirit and Salvation*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.

Kritzek, James. "The Holy Spirit in Islam." In *Perspectives on Charismatic Renewal*, edited by Edward D. O'Connor, 101-111. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.

"Kun fa-yakuun." Quranic Arabic Corpus. Accessed November 28, 2018. http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?t=3&q=يكون.

Lammens, Henry. "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad was Composed." In *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, edited by Ibn Warraq, 169–187. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000.

Lampe, Geoffrey William Hugo. *God as Spirit*. Clarendon Press, 1977.

Langermann, Y.T. *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*. Brepols, 2009.

Lawson, Todd. The Crucifixion and the Qurʾan: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

Leaman, Oliver, ed. *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*. Routledge, 2006.

Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. Continuum, 2010.

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity: Comprising the Case for Christianity, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality*. Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Lo Polito, Nicholas. "ʿAbd Al-Karim Al-Jili: Tawhid, Transcendence and Immanence." PhD. diss. University of Birmingham, 2010. https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/1193/.

Luxenberg, Chris. *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the* Koran. H. Schiler, 2007.

- - -. "Noel Dans le Coran." In *Enquêtes sur l'Islam: En hommage à Antoine Moussali*, edited by Anne-Marie Delcambre and Joseph Bosshard. Paris: Editions Desclee de Brouwer, 2004: 117-138.

MacDonald, Duncan B. "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam." *The Muslim World 22*, no. 1, (1932): 25-42. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1932.tb02857.x.

- - -. "The Development Of The Idea Of Spirit In Islam." *The Muslim World* 22, no. 2, (1932), 153–168. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1932.tb02874.x.

Madigan, Daniel A. "Revelation." In *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an Volume IV*, edited by Jane McAuliffe, 437-447. Brill, 2004.

Mason, Herbert. *Al-Hallaj*. Curzon Press, 1995.

Massignon, Louis. *La Passion d'al-Hosayn-Ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj, Martyr Mystique de l'Islam: Exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922: Etude d'histoire Religieuse.* Paris: Geuthner, 1922.

- - -. *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Maximum the Confessor, *The Philokalia, Volume 2: The Complete Text.* Edited and translated by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware. New York, Macmillan, 1982.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

"Metonymy." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Accessed January 5, 2019. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metonymy.

Moustafa, Muhammad A. "Upholding God's Essence: Ibn Taymiyya on the Createdness of the Spirit." *Naziriyat* 3, no. 2, (2017): 1-44. dx.doi.org/10.12658/Nazariyat.3.2.M0031en

Mylrea, G.C. and Iskandur 'Abdu'l-Masíḥ. *The Holy Spirit in Qur'án and Bible.* London: Christian Literature Society for India, 1910.

"Nafakha." Quranic Arabic Corpus. Accessed December 11, 2018. http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=نفخ.

Nasr, Sayyid H. *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī.* Harvard University Press, 1964.

Nasr, Seyyed Hussein, Caner .K. Dagli, Maria M. Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary.* HarperOne, 2015.

Netton, Ian R. *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology.* Taylor & Francis, 2013.

Nicholson, Reynold A. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism.* Library of Alexandria, 1978.

- - -. *The Idea of Personality in Sufism: Three Lectures Delivered in the University of London.* Cambridge University Press, 2012.

O'Kane, John and Bernd Radtke, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi-an Annotated Translation with Introduction*. Taylor & Francis, 2013.

O'Shaughnessy, Thomas. *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948.

- - -. *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God*. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948.

Ozalp, Mehmet. “God and Tawhid in Classical Islamic Theology and Said Nursi’s Risale-I Nur.” PhD Diss., University of Sydney, 2016. https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/16372/1/Ozalp_M_God_and_Tawhid_in_Classical Islamic_Theology_and_Said_Nursi%27s_Risale-i_Nur_Final.pdf.

Siddiqui, Mona. *Christians, Muslims and Jesus.* Yale University Press, 2013.

Sinai, Nicolai, "'Weihnachten im Koran' oder 'Nacht der Bestimmung'? Eine Deutung von Sure 97.” *Der Islam* 88, (2012): 11–32. https://www.academia.edu/6692322/_Weihnachten_im_Koran_oder_Nacht_der_Bestimmung_Eine_Deutung_von_Sure_97_Der_Islam_88_2012_11_32.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *Jesus in the Qur’ān*. Oneworld Publishing, 2013.

Pratt, Douglas, Jon Hoover, John Davies, and John Chesworth. *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas*. Brill, 2015.

Qarai, Ali Quli, trans. *The Qur’an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*. 6th ed. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.

Al-Qashani ʿAbd al-Razzaq, David Pendlebury, and Nabil Safwat. *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms.* Octagon Press, 1991.

Rahman, Fezlur and Ebrahim Moosa. *Major Themes of the Qur’an*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Reynolds, Gabriel Said. *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān : The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*. Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.

- - -. “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 72, 2, (2009): 237-258. https://www3.nd.edu/~reynolds/index_files/jesus%20dead%20or%20alive.pdf.

- - -. *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*. Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. London: Routledge, 2009.

- - - and A.Q. Qarai, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018.

- - -. *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context.* Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. London: Routledge, 2008.

Robinson, Neal. *Christ in Islam and Christianity.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

- - -. "Creating Birds from Clay: A Miracle of Jesus in the Qur'an and in Classical Muslim Exegesis." *The Muslim World* 79, no. 1 (1989): 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1989.tb02831.x.

Royster, James E. *Have This Mind: Supreme Happiness, Ultimate Realization, and the Four Great Religions—an Integral Adventure.* Balboa Press, 2014.

- - -. "Personal Transformation in Ibn al-'Arabi and Meister Eckhart." In *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, edited by Yvonne E. Haddad and Wadi Y. Haddad, 158-180. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1995.

Al-Sabbagh, Muhammad. *Lamahat fi 'ulūm al-Qur'an wa-ittijihat al-Tafsīr.* Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islamiyah, 1974.

Al-Safadi, Khalil ibn Aybak. *Kitāb al-wāfī bi-al-wafayāt*. Edited by Sven Dedering. Damascus: Druckerei al-Hashimiyah, 1959.

Saleh, Walid. "Qur'anic Commentaries." In *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, edited by Seyyed H. Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria M. Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom, 1645-1658. HarperOne, 2015.

- - -. "Al-Bayḍāwī." In *Encyclopedia of Islam Volume Three*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudron Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Brill, 2017. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25267

Samir, Samir Khalil. "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)." In *Christian Arabic Apologetics During The Abbasid Period* 750-1258, edited by Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, 57-114. New York, Brill. 1994.

Sands, Kristin. *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam.* Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Sells, Michael A. "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Suras of the Qur'an: Spirit, Gender, and Intertextuality." In *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, edited by Issa Boulatta, 3-25. London: Curzon, 2000.

- - -. "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 2, (1991): 239-259. https://doi.org/10.2307/604017.

- - -. "Spirit." In the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane D. McAuliffe. Washington DC: Georgetown University, Brill. Accessed on September 12, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00193.

- - -. “Ascension.” In the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane D. McAuliffe. Washington DC: Georgetown University, Brill. Accessed on September 12, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00193.

- - -. “Surat Al-Qāria." *Arabica* 40, no. 3 (1993): 403-30. https://doi.org/10.1163/157005893X00183.

- - -. *Approaching the Quran : The Early Revelations*. Ashland, Or.: White Cloud Press, 1999.

“Siege Mentality.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Accessed September 15, 2019. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/siege%20mentality.

Shah, Zulfiqar. “A Study of Anthropomorphism and Transcendence in the Bible and the Qur’an: Scripture and God in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions.” PhD diss. University of Wales, Lampeter, 1997. https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.503600.

Shahrour, Muhammad. *AI-Kitab wa 'l-Qur 'an: Qira 'a Muʾasira*. Saql, 2011.

Spurling, Grypeou. *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity.* Leiden-Boston, 2009.

Shellabear, W. G. “The Meaning of the Word ‘Spirit’ as Used in The Koran.” *The Muslim World* 22, no. 4, (1932): 355–360. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1932.tb03759.x.

Steenbrink, Karela. "Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Writings of Nūr Al-Din Al-Raniri." *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 1, no. 2, (2007): 192-207. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09596419008720934.

Swanson, Mark N. “Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur’an in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies.” *The Muslim World* 88, no. 3-4, (1998): 297-319. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1998.tb03663.x.

Tahanawi, M.A.A., M. Wajih, A. Haqq, and G. Qadir. *Dictionary of the Technical Terms Used in the Sciences of the Musalmans*. Vols. 1 and 2. Biblio Verlag, 1980.

“Tamaththala.” Quranic Arabic Corpus. Accessed October 21, 2018. http://corpus.quran.com/wordmorphology.jsp?location=(19:17:8).

Thomas, David, ed. “Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid.” In *Christian Muslim Relations: A Biographical History*, edited by David Thomas, Barbara Rogema, and Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, 330-333. Brill, 2009.

Thomas, David. *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Thompson, O.H. “Al-Hallaj, Saint and Martyr." *The Muslim World* 19, no. 4, (1929): 383-402. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1929.tb00757.x.

Tlili, Sarra. “From Breath to Soul: The Quranic Word *Rūḥ* and Its (M)Isinterpretations .” In *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson*. Brill, 2017.

Tokay, Elif. “The Relationship Between the Holy Spirit and Human Perfection in the Baptismal Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus: Examined with Reference to Christian Arabic Literature.” *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 39, (2018): 55-87. doi: 10.26570/isad.409839

Touitou, Elazar. "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1—6 in the Context of Judeo-Christian Controversy." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 61 (1990): 159-83. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23508174.

Al-Ṭúsí, Abú Naṣr ‘Abdallah b. ‘Alí al-Sarráj. *Kitāb al-luma’ fi’l-Tasawwuf*. Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1914.

Valkenberg, Pim. *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership*. Rodopi, 2006.

Al-Wahidī, Ali ibn Ahmad. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. Edited by Yousef Meri. Amman: Royal Ahl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008.

Williams, Wesley "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 1, (2009): 19-44. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40593866?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Williams, Wesley. "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad IBN Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 441-463. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879671.

Wilcox, Andrew. “The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ and Baqā’ in Early Sūfism.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1, (2011): 95-118. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530191003794681

Yong, Amos. *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*. Ashgate, 2002.

Zinner, Samuel. *Christianity and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype.* London: Matheson Trust, 2010.