

## Chapter 1:

---

# Fī taṭlīṭ Ḍāllah āl-wāḥid

The first text to be considered is also the earliest extant Arab Christian apologetics, Fī taṭlīṭ Ḍāllah āl-wāḥid. When in 1899 Margaret Dunlop Gibson published a text and translation of this document based on a manuscript from the Convent of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai, she introduced the treatise to the English-speaking world under the title “On the Triune Nature of God.” This name is infelicitous because the term “nature” (Arabic *dāt* or *ṭabīʿāh*), with all its philosophical implications, does not appear in the Arabic title. The term *taṭlīṭ*, which comes from the word for three, has no exact equivalent in standard English, but could be translated “threeness” or perhaps “trinity.” Thus a more precise rendering of the Arabic would yield a title for the treatise such as “On the Trinity of the One God,” or perhaps even “On the Fact That the One God Exists as Three.” For the sake of brevity, this treatise will hereafter be referred to simply as Fī taṭlīṭ.

Both the identity of the author and the precise date of the treatise’s original composition are unknown. Samir Khalil Samir, in an examination of the manuscripts from which Gibson produced her text and translation, detected (on a page that Gibson seems to have found illegible) a reference to the Christian religion having “stood firm . . . and erect for seven hundred and forty-six years.”<sup>1</sup> Samir argues that, depending upon whether one uses the Incarnation, the advent of Jesus’ preaching, or the paschal events as one’s starting point, this reference would yield a date of composition between 737 and 771, making it the earliest-known Christian document in Arabic, and possibly even the sole surviving Arabic Christian document from the Umayyad period.

---

1. Samir Khalil Samir, “The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity,” *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 61.

In order to provide context for the Trinitarian doctrine found in this treatise, it will be useful to note some of the stylistic and terminological characteristics of the text. Perhaps most importantly, the treatise demonstrates a familiarity on the part of the author with the text of the Qurʾān and a strong commitment to using much of the same terminology. There are at least eight direct Qurʾānic quotations or citations in the treatise, and the rest of its text is veritably saturated with Qurʾānic expressions and turns of phrase. So closely does *Fī taṭlīṭ* track with Qurʾānic terminology, in fact, that different readers could legitimately argue about what “counts” as a Qurʾānic citation. They could also perhaps argue about whether the author’s constant use of such terminology is a reflection of the religious idiom available to him, or reflects a consciously employed strategy on his part. It is not necessary to impose such a dichotomy on the author’s motivations, however, since both considerations must have been factors in the writing of the text. On the one hand, as Sidney Griffith points out, the religious vocabulary of the Arabic language in the eighth century “had already been co-opted by Islam,”<sup>2</sup> and the author’s unstructured and flowing style suggests an easy familiarity with the Qurʾānic vocabulary and conceptual range. Samir goes so far as to describe the unnamed author as “impregnated with the Qurʾānic culture.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, as will be shown below, the author pursues a consistent strategy of putting the vocabulary of this Qurʾānic culture to work for his apologetical enterprise. The religious idiom of his time and place has become for him not merely a given fact of his cultural milieu, but also “a new idiom in which [his] faith must be articulated if it is to carry conviction.”<sup>4</sup>

A second noteworthy facet of the style in which *Fī taṭlīṭ* is written is an almost complete lack of discernible structure. Far from being a formal academic work, the treatise almost seems written according to “stream of consciousness,” as various arguments, quotations, analogies, and associations occur to the mind of the anonymous author. Indeed, so loose and flowing is its composition that one could reasonably hypothesize that the treatise as we now have it is the written record of a speech or sermon, although there is no historical or textual reason to believe this to be the case. Whether intentionally or otherwise, this style is particularly suited to a document that draws so heavily on the Qurʾān (“Recitations” or “Readings”), itself a collection of texts that were originally oral proclamations. Perhaps, as with the issue of Qurʾānic vocabulary described above, the style of *Fī taṭlīṭ* both reflects the cultural norms to which the author was accustomed and constitutes one aspect of his conscious apologetical strategy.

---

2. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 19.

3. Samir, “The Earliest Arab Apology,” 108.

4. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 57.

A third characteristic of the treatise is its strong scriptural orientation. Besides its Qurʾānic citations already mentioned, the text includes some eighty-one biblical quotations, including in its scope Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel (in its longer form), Ezekiel, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Malachi, Baruch, and the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. This is in part a reflection of the early stage of Christian-Islamic encounter during which it was written. Samir has suggested what he calls “periodisation” of Christian apologetical works of the Abbasid era, in which he argues that the first stage included works with a purely “biblical-homiletical” approach.<sup>5</sup> This heavily scriptural way of writing gradually gave way to a purely logical-philosophical method by the beginning of the tenth century, with a combination of the two methods being predominant during the middle and late ninth century. Besides being an indication of the treatise’s early date, the strongly scriptural orientation of Fī taḥlīl is in part due to the question of religious legitimacy at the heart of the Christian-Muslim theological encounter. As will be shown below, the Qurʾān explicitly claims to reaffirm the central message of all true prophets throughout history, including the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus. Thus one of the central issues at stake in Christian-Muslim dialogue was which of the two religious traditions was faithful to the common source material that both claimed, particularly the writings of the prophets. In writing about the Trinity, then, the author of Fī taḥlīl had to demonstrate that Trinitarian doctrine was not a novelty that postdated Christ, but instead one aspect of an authentic understanding of the entire scriptural heritage.

### “GOD AND HIS WORD AND HIS SPIRIT”

Although the text begins with the conventional formulation, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God,”<sup>6</sup> the author quickly turns to a Trinitarian formulation that is less familiar. Instead, the phrase “God and His Word and His Spirit” is used throughout the text. The apologetical strategy employed by the treatise is twofold: first, to ground a Trinitarian formula in terminology that emphasizes the oneness of God in a way that the more commonplace “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” does not; and second, to appropriate Qurʾānic terminology to such a degree that the Muslim reader will be put upon the horns of a dilemma, namely, either rejecting

5. Samir, “The Earliest Arab Apology,” 110–13.

6. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1899), 2.

terminology that is used in the Qurʾān itself, or affirming the reasonableness and theological integrity of Trinitarian doctrine.

As with many ancient theological texts, the treatise at hand begins with a doxological passage that not only praises God for the divine attributes but also invokes blessing and guidance for the author's project. In this opening doxology, the author makes his first attempt at the apologetical strategy described above:

Verily [the angels] adore Thee, and set their seal to one Lord, that men may know that the angels adore God and His Word and His Spirit, one God and one Lord. We worship Thee, our Lord and our God, in Thy Word and Thy Spirit. . . . We do not distinguish God from His Word and His Spirit. We worship no other god with God in His Word and His Spirit. God shewed His power and His light in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Gospel, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God and one Lord.<sup>7</sup>

In this wonderfully concise passage, the author has managed to accomplish four things related to his apologetical strategy. First, he draws upon the Qurʾānic usage of the terms “Word” and “Spirit” and subtly aligns this usage with the biblical sense of the terms. Second, by use of the relative pronoun “His” (which in the Arabic text is actually a suffix appended to the terms “Word” and “Spirit”), he recasts the Trinity in such a way that the accusation that Christians worship three gods is obviated. Third, by invoking “the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Gospel,” the author draws upon the Qurʾānic claim that the Qurʾān affirms these earlier revealed texts.<sup>8</sup> If it can be shown from these earlier texts, goes the implied argument, that God is to be worshipped “in His Word and in His Spirit,” and the Qurʾān can be shown to use these words in a similar way, then one must conclude that the Trinitarian understanding of God is theologically tenable. Fourth, building upon these previous points, the author presents an implied challenge to Muslims: how is it that God can be distinguished from his Word and his Spirit, with no worship being offered to the latter two?

---

7. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 2–3; “wa-ānamā yusbaḥūn tuḥt wa yuḵtamūn bi-rabb wāḥid li-yʾalim al-nās ān al-mulāḥkah yusbaḥūn li-lah wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi, ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Fa-lak nʾabad rabbunā wa ālāhunā bi-kalamatika wa rūḥika.... Lā nafraq ʾAllah min kalamatīhi wa rūḥhi wa lā nʾabad mʾa ʾAllah bi-kalamatīhi wa rūḥhi ālah ākar. Wa-qud bīn ʾAllah āmirhi wa nūruhi fī āt-tūrāah wa-al-ānbāʾ wa-al-zabūr wa-al-ānjīl ān ʾAllah wa kalamatīhi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid..”

8. See Qurʾān 3:3, 3:48, 3:65, 3:93, 3:184, 4:163, 5:43–46, 5:66–68, 5:110, 7:157, 9:111, 16:44, 17:55, 21:105, 26:196, 35:25, 48:29, 57:27, and 61:6.

## THE USE OF “WORD” IN THE QUR’ĀN

In order to understand the apologetical strategy employed by the treatise at hand, one must be aware of the way the terms “Word” and “Spirit” are employed in the Qur’ānic text. There are three passages employing the term “word” (*kalimah*) that are of particular importance because they explicitly apply the appellation to Jesus Christ. Surah 3 includes a description of an angelic announcement to Zakārīya (= Zacharias), somewhat in parallel to the account found in Luke 1:5-22, albeit without the miraculous details of Zacharias and Elizabeth’s advanced ages. Verse 39 of this surah says of Zakārīya, “The angels called to him as he was standing praying in the holy of holies, saying: God proclaims to you glad tidings of Yahya [= John], attesting to a Word from God; and also noble, set apart, a prophet among the righteous.” As one might expect from a text that describes Zakārīya’s encounter with angels and the announcement of Yahya’s upcoming birth, this same surah contains a passage in parallel to the Annunciation scene from the Gospel of Luke. Verses 45 and 46 read:

Lo, the angels said, “O Mary, God proclaims to you glad tidings of a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, eminent in this world and the next, and among those close [to God]. He will address the people in infancy and in maturity, and be counted among the righteous.

The third passage that uses “Word” in reference to Jesus is perhaps even more notable, in that it has ironically become both a Muslim “proof-text” in denial of the divinity of Jesus and, for the author of the present treatise as well as other Christian writers, one of the key Qur’ānic citations in support of Trinitarian doctrine. Surah 4:171 says:

O People of the Book! Do not exceed proper bounds in your religion, and do not say about God anything but the truth. Indeed, the Messiah Jesus son of Mary is a messenger of God, and His Word sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers. Do not say “Three”: cease; it will be better for you, for indeed, God is one God. He is beyond having a son, and unto Him are all things in the heavens and on earth. God suffices as the Doer of things.

There are three elements in this passage that will become important in the way that the anonymous author at hand attempts to build his case for the Trinity. The first, of course, is the Qur’ānic assertion that Jesus is a “Word from

God,” in this instance joined with the assertion that he is also a “Spirit from God.” The second is the implication that, by affirming Trinitarian doctrine, the Christians have undermined the oneness of God. The third is the suggestion that, if God had a son, it would imply some insufficiency or lack in God himself. Rather than shrinking from these challenging claims, the author of the treatise engages their theological implications and actually builds his case on them. In doing so, he lays down one of the principles that will become a basic and recurring aspect of the early Arabophone Christian response to Islam; namely, reaching into Islamic sources and theological discourse and making what would otherwise be challenges to Christian doctrine the raw materials of the Christian apologetical strategy.

In order to contextualize these three key passages, one must take into account the other Qur’anic uses of the term “word” in relation to God, and in doing so, three closely related terms must be included: the singular *kalimah*, the plural *kalimāt*, and the word *kalām*, which could be translated “speaking.” When the Qur’anic use of these terms is analyzed, four characteristics of the divine word or speaking emerge. First, the divine word participates in the divine attribute of eternity: it is unchangeable, inexhaustible, infinite. Second, the divine word establishes a relationship between God and humankind. Third, the divine word guides humankind, bringing persons out of their ignorance into a right way of conducting themselves. Fourth, the divine word is associated with judgment and eschatological punishment.

Surah 6 contains two verses that express the immutability of God’s word. Verse 34 of this surah speaks of the patience and perseverance of the various prophets of God in the face of the rejection of their message and asserts that “there is no one [or nothing] that can alter the words of God.” Later in this same surah, this same assertion is repeated and the immutability of God’s word(s) is associated with his nature. The changelessness of the divine word results from God’s omniscience: “The word of your Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. There is no one [or nothing] that can alter His words; He is the One Who Hears and the One Who Knows.” As in Christian theology, this quality of the divine word as unchangeable is linked with the idea of its being unbounded or unlimited. Surah 18:109 expresses the infinity of the divine word(s) thus: “Say: ‘If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, then the sea would be depleted before the words of my Lord were depleted, even if we were to add another [sea] like it as reinforcement.’” Surah 31:27 contains a very similar description of God’s words: “And if indeed upon the earth, all the trees were pens, with the sea to supply them [as ink], and after it seven [more] seas, the words of God would not be depleted, for God is powerful and wise.”

In the Qur’an’s teaching, the divine word or speaking also effects a relationship between God and humankind. Just after Adam’s expulsion from the primeval Garden, “Adam received from his Lord words, for [God] turned toward him. For He is the One Who Turns [in forgiveness], the Merciful.”

Later in the unfolding of revelation, the divine words establish a special place for Abraham in the economy of God's activity in the world: "When Abraham was put to the test by his Lord by means of some words, he fulfilled them. God said: 'I will make of you a leader to the people.' Abraham said: 'And from my offspring?' God said: 'My covenant does not benefit evildoers.'" In another passage the divine word is represented as coming to other faithful people throughout the history of revelation and assuring them of overcoming the world's resistance. Surah 37:171-73 says that "Our word has already come to Our servants, the ones sent [by Us], that they would be victors, and that Our forces would be triumphant."

According to the Qur'ān, the divine word or speaking not only establishes a relationship between God and human beings; it also brings them out of ignorance and teaches them how to act. Surah 14:24-25 says:

Do you fail to see how God sets down a proverb [or "parable" or "lesson"]? A good word is like a good tree, having its root fixed and its branches in the heavens; it bears fruit at all times, by permission of its Lord. And God sets down proverbs [parables/lessons] for the people, so that they may bring them to mind.

The nascent Muslim umma (community) is commanded in the Qur'ān to take this principle into account in their treatment of pagans when engaged in battle: "If one of the polytheists appeal to you for refuge, take him into protection until he hears the word of God, then bring him to a secure place. That is because they are a people who do not know [about God]."

The Qur'ān also associates the divine word or speech with judgment and eschatological punishment. Surah 10:96-97 describes the twofold function of God's word in relation to those who resist it. The divine word both affords an opportunity for becoming a servant of God, as described above, and then becomes a word of judgment that is effected against those who resist it: "Those against whom the word of your Lord has proved true do not have faith, even if every sign came to them, until they see the painful punishment." Surah 11:118-19 issues an equally dire warning, this time associating the word of God with a judgment directed not at those who lack faith, but at those who are committed to disputing with one another. By being more concerned with disputation than anything else, these evildoers have made impossible the achievement of unity among humankind. The word of God is here represented as a primordial judgment against such people:

If your Lord had willed, He could have made the people into a single united community; yet they will not stop disputing [with one another], except for those upon whom your Lord had mercy.

And it was for this that He created them, and the word of your Lord is fulfilled: “I will fill Hell with the jinns<sup>9</sup> and humankind together.”

Surah 40:5-6 compares the unbelievers of Muhammad’s time with those of previous generations who resisted the message of the various prophets sent to them, and asserts that the primordial judgment described in the passage above has already been accomplished upon them:

. . . Every people planned to take hold of the prophet sent to them, and quarreled vainly in order to refute the truth, yet *I* took hold of *them*, and what consequences! In this way was the word of your Lord proved true upon those who did not believe: they are associates of the Fire.

Thus the author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* had a rather rich body of Qur’ānic uses and connotations of the terms *kalimah*, *kalimāt*, and *kalām* to draw upon in his own use of the term “Word of God” as an appellation of the second Person of the Trinity. As noted above, there are three different passages in the Qur’ān that use the term “word” in reference to Jesus, and perhaps most importantly, no other person is described in the Qur’ān as being a “word from God.” It is certainly true that the Qur’ānic text nowhere associates the various other uses of the term *kalimah* described above with the person of Jesus. Furthermore, since as has already been noted, the various surahs of the Qur’ān are not presented in any chronological or thematic order, but simply according to their respective lengths, it is impossible to trace any development of the Qur’ānic usage of the word group *kalimah/kalimāt/kalām*, in the way that one might trace the way in which the Old Testament phrase “word of the Lord” may have influenced the use of *Logos* in the Johannine literature of the New Testament. Yet the lack of obviously systematic use of these terms should not obviate the point here addressed. As previously described, the author of the present treatise seems to have deeply imbibed Qur’ānic terminology, such that the apologetical opportunity presented by the various resonances of *kalimah*, *kalimāt*, and *kalām* in the Qur’ān was not lost on him. If, indeed, according to the Qur’ān, Jesus (and no one else) is a “word from God,” then the other Qur’ānic senses of this term are by no means irrelevant.

---

9. The jinns, from which comes the English term “genie,” are a class of spiritual beings mentioned several times in the Qur’ān. They are not to be identified precisely with angels and are described in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* as “a category of created beings believed to possess powers for evil and for good.” The Qur’ānic treatment of the jinns reduced them considerably from the power they were accorded in pre-Islamic Arab folklore. *The Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), vol. 3, 43–49.

## THE USE OF “SPIRIT” IN THE QUR’ĀN

Equally important for the task at hand is the Qur’ānic use of the term “spirit.” In some cases, the Qur’ānic use of this term clearly refers to angels.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, the text uses the expression “My spirit” or “His spirit” in reference to God, but in the context of God’s creation of the first man as a living being: “He formed him, and breathed into him from His spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Beyond these two categories of use, however, there are several other Qur’ānic usages of “spirit” in reference to God that must have been intriguing for the author at hand, some of which he even quotes or strongly alludes to, as will be shown later.

There is a group of three passages that speak of Jesus having been “supported with the Holy Spirit.” The first reference appears in a verse (2:87) that condemns the historical response to messengers sent by God:

We gave Moses the Book, and sent messengers after him. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit. Is it not the case that when a messenger comes to you with what you yourselves do not like, you become haughty, then a part of them you accuse of being liars, and another part of them you kill?

In a somewhat similar verse much later in this long surah (2:253), the text commemorates the favors bestowed by God on various messengers and then singles Jesus out for particular recognition, using the same terminology as the verse above: “We preferred some of those messengers over others; among them were some to whom God spoke, and others, We exalted to greater rank. We gave clear proofs to Jesus, son of Mary, and supported him with the Holy Spirit. . . .” Elsewhere in the Qur’ān (surah 5:110), Jesus is represented as being addressed by God on the Day of Judgment, and once again the same terminology that appears in the two passages above is used:

Some day God will gather the messengers, and will say to them: “What was the reply that you received?” . . . Then God will say: “O Jesus, son of Mary, recall my favor toward you and your mother, as I supported you with the Holy Spirit, so that you addressed the people in infancy and in maturity, and as I taught you the Book and the Wisdom, and the Law and the Gospel; and as you create out of clay the shape of a bird, by My permission, and you breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by My permission, and heal the blind and the lepers, by My permission, and as you raise the dead, by My permission; and as I held back the Children of Israel from you when you

10. See, for example, surahs 19:17 and 78:38.

11. Surah 32:9; see also 15:28–29 and 38:72.

gave to them clear proofs, but those who did not believe said, “This is nothing other than obvious sorcery!”

Just as the Qur’ān refers to no person other than Jesus by the term “word,” so no other prophet is described as having been “supported by the Holy Spirit.” Equally striking for the author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* is the fact that this third reference is followed immediately by descriptions of Jesus breathing life into a bird made out of clay,<sup>12</sup> performing miraculous healings, and even raising the dead. More will be said about this later, but for now it should be noted that this passage combines the unique reference to Jesus having been “supported by the Holy Spirit” with the exercise of life-giving or life-restoring powers, a link that will play a key role in the apologetical strategy of the author being considered.

In addition to the three passages just described, there are two other Qur’ānic passages that describe the spirit of God as having played a unique role in the conception of Jesus. Surah 21, titled “The Prophets,” consists in part of a recitation of God’s interaction with various prophets and the virtues they demonstrated. Verse 91 of this surah says: “And [there was] she who remained chaste: so We breathed into her from our Spirit, and We made her and her son a sign to all creation.” A second passage that uses very similar terminology is found in surah 66. This surah ends with a set of verses (10–12) that contrast two faithless women (the wives of Noah and Lot) with two faithful women (the wife of one of the Pharaohs, and Mary). Verse 12 describes Mary thus: “Mary, the daughter of ‘Amrān, she who remained chaste, so We breathed into her body from our Spirit, and she believed in the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was one of the obedient ones.”

Another group of Qur’ānic passages describe a special role for the Spirit in bringing revelation to humankind. One of these passages is particularly noteworthy because the text of *Fī taṭlīṭ* strongly alludes to it. Surah 16:101–2 reads:

When we substitute one sign in place of another (and God knows what He sends down), they say, “You are an inventor,” but most of them do not know. Say: the Holy Spirit brought it down from your Lord in truth, in order to establish those who have faith, and as a guide and glad tidings to those who submit [to God].

---

12. This passage appears to have been influenced by the so-called “Gospel of Thomas,” or by an oral tradition about Jesus that either preceded and inspired this apocryphal gospel, or that developed from it. In the Gospel of Thomas, the child Jesus is criticized for forming sparrows out of clay on the Sabbath; he responds by clapping his hands and commanding the birds to come to life, whereupon they fly away.

The author of Fī taqlīṭ was at least somewhat cognizant of this passage, because he misquotes the latter portion of it as “the Holy [Spirit] has brought it down a mercy and guidance from thy Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Surah 40:15 shows that this coming down of the Spirit with guidance is no one-time event, but something that takes place in various times and places: “The One exalted above all ranks, Lord of the throne: by His decree He sends the Spirit upon those among His servants whom He wills, to warn of the Day of Meeting.” Terminology similar to both of these passages is found in surah 42:51-52, which teaches that some form of mediation is necessary for divine revelation. The term “spirit” is used here to indicate the means by which revelation comes down:

It was not given to any human being that God speak to him, except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger for the revelation, by God’s permission, of what God wills. For He is exalted and wise. And in this way We have inspired you, by Our decree, with a Spirit. You did not know what the Book was, nor what faith was. But We have made it a light, by which to guide those among our servants whom We will. . . .

This passage is linguistically somewhat complex, and the various existing translations of the Qur’ān do not agree on its exact rendering.<sup>14</sup> The translation given here is intentionally literal in order to make clear the use of the term “Spirit” in the passage. Since the point at stake is how the terminology of the Qur’ān was mined for the “raw material” of the Christian apologetical response, it would be mistaken to take one’s cue from latter-day translations that may themselves be at pains to avoid terminology that has been used by Christian apologists.

There is another passage in the Qur’ān that uses the term “spirit” in reference to God in a way that is different from any other Qur’ānic use. Surah 58:22 declares that:

You cannot find a people that believe in God and the Last Day, being on friendly terms with those who turn aside from God and his messengers, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their fellow clansmen. For such as those, [God] has written faith in their hearts, and supported them with a Spirit from Himself. . . .

---

13. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 5; “tanazaluhu rūḥ al-quḍs min Rabbak riḥmah wa hadā..”

14. E.g., Pickthall translates the first part of verse 22 as “We inspired in Thee (Muhammad) a Spirit of our command,” while Shakir introduces even more of an interpretive gloss by rendering the same phrase as “thus did We reveal to you an inspired book by Our command.”

The terminology of this last phrase differs from the description of Jesus having been supported only by the substitution of the phrase “a Spirit from Himself” for the phrase “the Holy Spirit.” This is the only Qur’ānic reference to anyone other than Jesus being supported by God’s Spirit, and upon careful examination of the text, the two references are somewhat different. The passages previously described associated the support of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with his production of “clear proofs,” specifically the life-giving or life-restoring miracles. Those passages also, given their context, associate the support of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with his special status as a messenger of God. The present passage seems to be in a different category, since it speaks of faithful people being supported by a “Spirit from God” not in relation to any special role or ministry, but as a special gift protecting them from defection due to natural ties of kinship and affection.

In summary, the use of the term “Spirit” in the Qur’ān is by no means systematic or perfectly consistent. But there were a number of uses that were directly relevant for the project of casting Trinitarian theology in Qur’ānic terms. The text of the Qur’ān seems to associate God’s Spirit with Jesus in a unique way, since no other prophet is said to have been “supported by the Holy Spirit,” and since this support is particularly associated with the life-giving or life-restoring miracles of Jesus. Additionally, the Qur’ān associates God’s Spirit with the conception of Jesus in a way that also seems unique, since through it Jesus and his mother became “a sign for all creation.” Lastly, the Qur’ānic text seems to assign to God’s Spirit the double role of bringing about or mediating divine revelation and then supporting those who believe in that revelation in such a way that they are made able to transcend their natural ties of affection in order to be faithful.

### THE USES OF “WORD” AND “SPIRIT” IN FĪ TAQLĪT

When the text of Fī taqlīt is analyzed carefully, it becomes clear that the author of the treatise strove to use the terms “Word” and “Spirit” in ways that would be consistent with traditional Christian Trinitarian theology, and yet would also hew closely to the Qur’ānic uses of these terms described above. As described above, the Qur’ān repeatedly suggests that the Word of God participates in the divine attributes of unboundedness and immutability, which in turn suggest the quality of eternity. Although the question of the eternity of God’s Word was a matter yet to be completely settled in Islamic theology, the presence of these texts was sufficient for the author of Fī taqlīt to seize upon this aspect of the Qur’ān and make it a key part of his presentation. By the time of his writing, of course, the co-eternality of the Persons of the Trinity was undisputed Christian doctrine, so this was perhaps the easiest aspect of the two traditions to correlate.

The author’s first representation of the Word of God as participating in the divine attribute of eternity comes early in the treatise, as he describes the creation of the universe as an action that God accomplished through his Word and the animating power of his Spirit:

It is written also in the beginning of the Law, which God sent down to His prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Then he said, “The Spirit of God was upon the waters.” Then He said, by His Word, “Let there be light”; and there was light. . . . Then He said, “Let us create man after our own image and likeness.” So God shewed in the beginning of the book which He sent down to His prophet Moses, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God, and that God . . . created all things, and gave life to all things by His Word and His Spirit. We do not say three Gods . . . but we say that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God and one Creator.<sup>15</sup>

As is typical with this author, he succinctly accomplishes several things in this short passage. By referring to Moses as a “prophet,” he subtly invokes the prophetology of the Qurʾān and joins this usage with the Qurʾānic image of a book being “sent down” from God to his messenger. He is also careful to include the line in which God speaks in the plural, “Let us create,” which later in the treatise he will align with the similar Qurʾānic usage. Not only does the author speak of God creating by means of his Word and his Spirit; he boldly proclaims that God, his Word, and his Spirit are “one Creator.” This is a key consideration because, later in the treatise, the author is keen to show that this unique attribute of God, the ability to create, was resident in his Word even after that Word appeared on the earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Shortly after this passage, the author of Fī taḥlīṭi addresses this issue of the eternity of the Word of God, and simultaneously takes up one of the main points on which the Qurʾān seems explicitly to oppose Christian doctrine—the concept that God could beget. He writes:

We do not say that God begat His Word as any man begets; God forbid! but we say that the Father begat His Word as the Sun begets

---

15. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 3–4; “Wa maktūb āḍḍān fī rās al-taūrāah ālati ānzalahā ʿAllāh ʿalā Mūsā nabīhi fī ṭūr Sīnā: badū ḵalaḵa ʿAllāh al-samā wa al-ard̄ tum qāl rūḥ ʿAllāh kān ʿalā al-māāah. Tum qāl bi-kalimatīhi yakūn nūr fakān nūr.... Tum qāl naḵlaḵ ānsān ʿalā šibhunā wa tamṭālunā faḻad bīna ʿAllāh fī āwal kitāb ānzalahu ʿalā nabīhi Mūsā ān ʿAllāh wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥi ālah wāḥid wa ān ʿAllāh ... ḵalaḵa kul šāi wa āḥīā kul šāi bi-kalimatīhi wa rūḥi wa lasnā naḻl ḵalaḵā ālāha ... walākinā naḻl ān ʿAllāh wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥi ālah wāḥid wa ḵaliḻ wāḥid.”

rays, and as the mind begets the word, and as the fire begets heat; none of these things existed before what was begotten of them. God . . . never existed without Word and Spirit, but God was ever in His Word and His Spirit; His Word and His Spirit were with God and in God before He made the creatures. We do not say how this is. Verily everything relating to God is majesty and might. . . .<sup>16</sup>

In drawing upon these classical metaphors for the Trinity, familiar to any student of patristic theology, the author of *Fī taḥḥīṭ* applies them to the specific question at hand, the relationship between God and his Word. As already shown, the Qur'ānic data are fraught with the tension between the absolute uniqueness of God and the apparent eternality of his Word, with the result that the Muslim is put upon the horns of a theological dilemma: whether to posit at least two eternally existing entities, and if not, what to make of the Qur'ānic terminology. The author at hand is able to draw upon both this inherent tension in Islamic theology and the traditional Christian metaphors for Trinitarian life and draw his ringing conclusion: God exists eternally with and in his Word. Furthermore, in an impressive rhetorical flourish, he asserts that the obscurity of this way of existing is based in the very fact that he is talking about God. Since “everything relating to God is majesty and might,” one should not be surprised at a conclusion that affirms both the Qur'ānic data and the traditional Christian language, and yet is not completely comprehensible. The reason this way of arguing is so impressive is that the author manages to turn an Islamic way of thinking about God into a tool for his apologetical strategy. The Qur'ānic emphasis that God is completely apart from and different from his creation means that we should not be surprised if we must conclude that his mode of existence is something quite unfamiliar to us. While the Muslim may assert that God does not beget because he is beyond such human ways of acting, the author of *Fī taḥḥīṭ* argues that this very “otherness” of God means that perhaps he “begets” eternally in a way that human beings can only dimly understand by way of analogy. As will be shown later, other Arabophone Christian authors take a similar approach to the Qur'ānic objection to begetting with reference to God.

Much later in the treatise, the author returns to this question of the eternality of God's Word and applies it more explicitly to the person of Jesus

---

16. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 5; “Wa lasnā naqūl ān Āllah walada kalamatihi kamā yalad āhid min al-nās, m'aād Āllah: walākinā naqūl ān al-Āb walada kalamatihi kamā talad al-šams al-š'aā'a wa kamā yalad al-ʿaql al-kalimah wa kamā talad al-nār al-sakūnah. Lam yakun šaī min hāwalā qabal alaḍī walada minhu. Wa lam yakun Āllah ... dūn kalimah wa rūḥ walākin Āllah mundu qat bi-kalimatihī wa rūḥhī wa kānat kalimatihī wa rūḥhī ʿand Āllah wa bi-llah qabal ān yaklaqa al-kalāṭiq. Lā naqūl kaif yakūn ḍalak fa-ān kul šaī min āmr Āllah ʿazmah wa jabrūah....”

Christ. Returning again to the supposedly agreed-upon common source for Muslims and Christians, the Old Testament prophets, the author of Fī taḥqīq quotes Isaiah:

Isaiah also prophesied by the Holy Ghost about the birth of the Christ, saying, “A Maiden shall be with child, and shall bear a son and He shall be called Emmanuel, the interpretation of which is ‘Our God with us.’” The Maiden is the Virgin who is of the race of Adam. She gave birth to the Christ, Emmanuel, God of God, and mercy to His creatures. We do not hear of one man from Adam till this our day who was called “God with us” or who was called the Word of God. He was born of a Virgin without any man touching her.<sup>17</sup>

Here the author very cleverly connects the Old Testament prophecy with the Qur’ānic terminology about Jesus. Having already explored the idea that God exists eternally in and with his Word, he is able to present this prophecy as the link connecting God’s presence in his Word, the virgin birth (an event affirmed by the text of the Qur’ān), and the Qur’ānic description of Jesus as “a word from God.” His implicit argument runs thus: there is only one person in Christian tradition who is considered Emmanuel, “God with us.” Similarly, there is only one person referred to by the text of the Qur’ān as a “word from God,” and it is the same person, Jesus Christ. Since God exists eternally in and with his Word, then, saying that Jesus is a Word from God and saying that he is God-with-us amount to the same thing.

The treatise at hand also draws upon the second Qur’ānic characterization of the Word of God; namely, that it establishes a relationship between God and humankind. This concept is a particularly easy one for the author to appropriate from Islam and apply to Christian theology, of course, since the existence of the Logos Christology meant that a very similar understanding of God’s word was already present in Christian doctrine. In drawing upon this idea common to the two traditions, the author draws a contrast between the salvific power of God’s word as present in the preaching of the prophets, and the power of God’s Word incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. By drawing this contrast, he is able both to draw upon the common wellspring of prophetic teaching, and to issue an implicit critique of Islam, since Islam was

---

17. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 18; “Wa tanbā Ās’āiā āḍḍān bi-rūḥ al-qadas ‘alā milād al-masīḥ wa qāl al-baṭūl yakūn li-ha ḥabal wa talad ibnān wa yusmā ‘Āmānwīl tarjamatihi m’anā Ālahunā. Fa-al-baṭūl hīa al-‘adrān alatī hīa min ḍarīah Ādam hīa waladat al-masīḥ Āmānwīl ālah min Āllāh wa raḥmah li-ḵuluquhi. Wa lam nasm’a bi-āḥid min al-nās min Ādam ilā yūmnā ḥaḍā yusmā m’anā Āllāh āu yusmā kalimah Āllāh. Wa wulida min ‘adrān min ḡīr yamsaha baṣar..”

dependent on the preaching of another prophet, rather than the more powerful and efficacious action of God's Word present in person. He writes:

The work of Satan and his error appeared in every nation and every people. They worshipped fire and images and beasts and trees, and served living things and sea-monsters and every beast of the earth. God was not content with this for His creatures. . . . When the prophets of God saw this, that the children of Adam were lost, and that the Devil had conquered them, and that no man could save the race of Adam from error and destruction, the prophets and apostles of God entreated God and asked Him to come down to His creatures and His servants, and to preside in His mercy over their salvation from the error of the Devil.<sup>18</sup>

Immediately following this passage, the author quotes or paraphrases Isa. 64:1, Ps. 80:1, Ps. 107:20, Hab. 2:3, Ps. 118:26-27, and Ps. 50:3, and argues that each of these prophetic passages refers to the coming of God the Word in the person of Jesus Christ.

In this passage, the author appeals to a particularly Islamic description of the condition of humankind before being redeemed. The problem as described here is not violence or lack of charity among men, nor an interior tendency to sin. Rather, the problem to be solved consists essentially in the fact that human beings have been duped into worshipping all manner of created things, the singular evil that Islamic tradition came to describe as *širk*, the "association" of created things with divinity.<sup>19</sup> By describing the human need met by Christ in this way, the author has subtly aligned the mission of Christ with the Qur'ānic concept of how the Word of God establishes a relationship between God and humankind. According to the Qur'ān, the Word of God establishes a saving relationship by leading human beings to the worship of the one true God. For the author of *Fī taḥḥīṭ*, the Word of God as present in

---

18. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 10, "Wa zahara 'amal Iblīs wa ḡalālathi fī kul āumah wa kul qaūm. wa 'abadūā āl-nār wa āl-āšnām wa āl-dūāb wa āl-bašar wa 'abdūā āl-hīwān wa āl-hītān wa kul dūāb āl-ārḡ. Fa-lam yurḡā Āllah haḡā li-kuluquhi.... Falamā rāī ḡalak ānbīā Āllah ān banī Ādam qud halakūā waḡad ḡalaba 'alīhum āl-šīṭān wa lam yasta'ā āhid min āl-nās ān yaḡlaḡ ḡariah Ādam min āl-ḡalālah wa āl-halkah raḡaba ānbīā Āllah wa rusuluḡu ilā Āllah wa sālūh ān yanzal ilā kuluquḡu wa 'abāduḡu fa-yatūlā bi-raḡmatiḡi ḡalāsuḡum min ḡalālah āl-šīṭān.." It should be noted that the use of "apostles" in Gibson's translation should not be taken to refer to Christ's apostles, which would render the usage anachronistic. She has simply translated the Arabic term *rusul* (the "sent ones" of God) by its familiar Greek equivalent.

19. The term *širk* does not appear in the Qur'ān, but forms of the verb from which it is taken, *šaraka*, appear many times in the Qur'ānic text to describe idolatry.

the preaching of the prophets did not accomplish this, for the prophets themselves both begged God to come in person and declared that he would do so. Furthermore, by the selection of the particular prophetic passages that the author uses, he is making an implicit argument for understanding the Word to be divine; while most of the passages used refer to God himself coming, Ps. 107:20 refers to the entity that comes to achieve salvation as God's Word. By asserting that "no man could save the race of Adam from error and destruction," the author simultaneously affirms the Qur'ānic principle that only the Word of God can establish the salvific relationship between God and man, and implicitly critiques Islamic soteriology. Since the preaching of the prophets was insufficient to turn the tide of human idolatry, and since the Qur'ān claims to reaffirm and continue the prophetic mission, the author seems to argue, how could simply following the Qur'ān be salvific? For the author of Fī taṭlīṭ, the Word of God had to come in person, and this was accomplished by the appearance on earth of Jesus Christ.

A bit later in the treatise, the author introduces terminology that is more explicitly Christian to align the saving mission of Christ with the Qur'ānic understanding of the Word of God. He begins to write of the work of Christ in terms of mediation, while coupling this concept with a specifically Qur'ānic characterization of how this mediation is achieved.

The Christ is Mediator between us and God; [He is] God of God and [He is] Man. Men could not have looked towards God and lived. God willed mercy to His creatures and honour to them, and the Christ was between us and God, the God of God, and a Man, the judge of men by their deeds. Thus God was veiled in a Man without sin, and shewed us mercy in the Christ, and brought us near to Him.<sup>20</sup>

By asserting that "men could not have looked towards God and lived," the author brings together the Old Testament terror of looking upon the divine<sup>21</sup> with the typically Qur'ānic characterization of God as wholly apart from his creation. As described earlier, the veil is a Qur'ānic usage having to do with how God speaks to a human being. Here once again the author of Fī taṭlīṭ appropriates this image and applies it to the humanity of Christ. So in his typically succinct fashion, the author has brought together three distinct ele-

---

20. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 13, "Wa āl-Masīḥ hūa āl-wasiṭ bīnunā wa bīn Ḍāllah ālāhān min Ḍāllah wa ānsān. Lam yakun yastaṭī'a āl-nās yanzarūn ilā Ḍāllah wa yaḥīṭūn. Fa-ārād Ḍāllah raḥmah bi-kuluquhu wa karāmah lahum. Fa-kān āl-Masīḥ bīnunā wa bīn Ḍāllah ālāhān min Ḍāllah wa ānsān āl-dīān li-lnās bi-ā'amālihim. Fa-la-ḍalak aḥṭajaba Ḍāllah bi-ānsān min ḡīr kaṭāḥa fa-raḥamanā bi-āl-Masīḥ wa qarabanā ilīhi.."

21. See, for example, Gen. 32:30, Exod. 33:20, and Isa. 6:5.

ments of terminology or imagery: that of mediation, taken from the Christian tradition; that of the impossibility of a human being looking directly upon God and surviving, a notion common to the two traditions; and the idea of the Word of God addressing humankind from behind a veil, taken from the Qurʾān. By his close alignment of these disparate elements of expression, the author is able to speak about the saving work of Christ in a way that is faithful to Christian tradition and yet aligns with a Qurʾānic way of understanding how the Word of God establishes a relationship between God and humanity.

The author returns to this same way of speaking about the salvific work of Christ later in the treatise, grounding his argument once again in the theoretically common ground of Old Testament prophecy:

Jeremiah the prophet prophesied . . . by the Holy Ghost, saying, “This is our God, we will worship no God but Him. He knew all the paths of knowledge, and gave them to Jacob His servant, and to Israel His saint. After this He looked upon the earth and mixed with the people.” We do not know that God looked upon the earth or mixed with the people except when He appeared to us in the Christ, His Word and His Spirit. He veiled Himself in flesh, He who is not of us. Men saw Him and He mixed with them. He was God and Man without sin. It was He who knew the paths of good and of knowledge and of judgment, and who taught them and made them to spring up to those who follow His command and His word.<sup>22</sup>

Here the author has chosen to cite a prophecy that combines a very Qurʾānic description of God (the One who knows all things) with a description of God’s action that is quite unknown and even contrary to the Qurʾān (mixing with his creation). The question that is ever operative behind these prophetic citations, of course, is which tradition, Christian or Islamic, is the faithful heir of the prophets. The tension between the two different characterizations of God present in the prophecy (knowing all things and mixing with his creation) would have been obvious to the Muslim reader. The author then cleverly uses two different Qurʾānic expressions to argue that the tension is resolved in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God, communicating the divine knowledge and thereby establishing the divine-human relationship,

---

22. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 28, “Wa tanbā Ārmīā āl-nabī ... bi-rūḥ al-quḍs wa qāl haḍā ālāhunā lā nʾabad ālah ḡīruhu. ‘Alama kul subul āl-ʾalm wa āʾaṭāhā Yʾaqūb ʾabduhu wa Īsrāīl ṣaḡīthu. Bʾad haḍā ʾalā āl-ārḍ ārā wa āl-nās kālāṭ.ʾ Wa lā nʾalam ān Āllah ārā ʾalā āl-ārḍ āw kālāṭ āl-nās ilā ḥīn āʿanā bi-āl-Masīḥ kalimatihī wa rūḥhī. Fa-āḥtajaba bi-āl-jasad alaḍī līsa minnā. Fa-rāhu āl-nās wa kālāṭahum wa kān ālah wa ānsān min ḡīr kaṭīah. Wa hūa ālaḍī ʾalama subul āl-kīr wa āl-ʾalm wa āl-ḥukum wa āʾalamahum wa nabatahum li-man ātabʾa waṣāṭihī wa qūluhi..”

and yet this Word appears to humanity in a way that is in keeping with the Qurʾānic principle: the Word of God is veiled in the flesh of Jesus.

This passage serves as an excellent segue to the third Qurʾānic characterization of the Word of God through which the author of Fī taṭlīṭ expresses his Trinitarian doctrine, namely, that the Word of God guides humanity out of its ignorance and into a right way of believing and acting. More will be said on this point later, when we turn to the way in which the author attempts to bridge the soteriological differences between the Qurʾānic text and the Christian tradition. For now, the point to note is that the author of Fī taṭlīṭ, in his treatment of Christ's salvific work, attempts to describe in a way that is largely compatible with how the action of the Word of God is described in the Qurʾān.

The alignment of Christian doctrine with this particular Qurʾānic characterization of the Word of God begins early in the treatise. In one of his first references to the salvific mission of Christ, the author writes of God that

He is the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, one God and one Lord; but in the Christ He saved and delivered men. We will shew this also if God wills, how God sent His Word and His light as mercy and guidance to men and was gracious to them in Him. There came down to Adam and his race from heaven no Saviour from Satan and his darkness and his error. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Taken in the context of the treatise, it is clear that the last line of the passage cited means that there came no merely human entity with the ability to turn humankind away from its error. Rather, the Word of God was the only entity that could turn humankind away from its error and to the worship of God. This is a point on which the two traditions are largely in agreement, and thus provides the author with a relatively easy way to align the work of Christ with the Qurʾānic data about the Word of God.

Later on in the treatise, the author quotes the prophet Isaiah to support this characterization of the work of Christ:

He said by the Holy Ghost about the Christ, "There shall come from Zion the Saviour, and shall turn away error from Jacob." He also said by the Holy Ghost, "There shall be also from the root of Jesse [one who] shall stand as a chief of the nations, and the nations shall trust in Him." Verily Jesse begat David the prophet; Mary the

---

23. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 6–7; "Hūa āl-Ābu wa āl-Ībn wa Rūḥ al-Quds ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Āmā fī āl-masīḥ fa-ḳalaṣa āl-nās wa najāhum. Fa-sa-ānbīna ḍalak ān šā ʾĀllah kif ārsala ʾĀllah kalimatihī wa nūruḥi raḥmah li-lnās wa hadā wa min ʿalīhum bihi. Wa lam nazala min āl-samā ḳalās li-Ādam wa ḍarātihī min Īblīs wa ḳalamatihī wa ḳalālatihī.."

good was from the race of David . . . and from her was born the Christ, Word and Light of God, on whom the nations trust; He was their Hope and their Saviour from error. Isaiah said also by the Holy Ghost, “There is no angel and no intercessor, but the Lord will come and save us”; because it was more suitable that no angel and no intercessor could save us, until He appeared to us in the Christ and saved us, and He led the nations . . . and was gracious to them in guidance.<sup>24</sup>

The author of *Fī taṭlīl* is clearly trying to align the prophetic traditions, the Qur’ānic concept that the Word of God leads humankind out of error and ignorance, and the mission of Christ. As will be shown later on, the author ultimately realizes that he cannot limit his description of the work of Christ to leading humankind out of error without doing damage to the Christian understanding of redemption. Later in the text, he will attempt to bridge the gap between Christian and Qur’ānic soteriology and will skillfully weave together the concepts of the two. For now it suffices to note that the author represents the salvific work of Christ as consisting chiefly in leading humankind out of error concerning God, thus aligning Christ’s ministry with the Qur’ānic characterization of God’s Word.

As presented in the Qur’ān, this error consists largely in the commission of idolatry. The author of *Fī taṭlīl* again aligns prophetic testimony from Isaiah with the idea that the Word of God leads humankind out of error, and applies this concept to the work of Christ:

Isaiah also prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, “Behold, the Lord sitting upon a light cloud, and He will come to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be shaken.” The Christ went into Egypt clothed with pure flesh from Mary whom God purified. . . . Then He it was who shook the idols of Egypt and brought to nought the work of the

---

24. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 17; “Qāl bi-Rūh āl-Quds ‘alā āl-masīh yāū min Ṣahīūn āl-muklaṣ wa yaṣraf āl-ḡalālah ‘an Y’aqūb wa qāl āīḡān bi-Rūh āl-Quds wa yakūn min āṣal Āīṣī yaqūm raīs āl-āūmum ‘alīhu yatūkalūn wa ān Āīṣī hūa wālad Dāūd āl-nabī wa Marīam āl-ḡibah min ḡarīah Dāūd ... wa minhā wulida āl-masīh kalimah Āllah wanūruhu ālaḡī ‘alīhu yatūkal āl-āūmum wa kān rajāhum wa kalāṣuhum min āl-ḡalālah. Wa qāl Āṣ’āīā āīḡān bi-Rūh āl-Quds lā malak wa lā ṣafī’a walākin al-Rabb yāū fa-yaḡlaṣunā min ājal ānahu āhaqa bihi ānahu lam yastaḡa malak wa lā ṣafī’a ān yaḡlaṣunā ḡatā āḡlan’a bil-masīh wa ḡalaṣanā wa hadā āl-āūmum wa tasalaḡa ‘alīhum.....” Regarding the first sentence of this passage, the NRSV renders the relevant phrase as “he will come . . . to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.” The anonymous author appears to be working from the Septuagint or from some version of the Old Testament derived from it. The Masoretic text does not as easily align with his method of argument.

Devil through it, and led them away from the error of Satan to the truth of God and His merchandise; and He has made His light to dawn in their hearts. Look, when was Egypt saved from the worship of idols and the error of Satan, save when the Christ trod it in His mercy and appeared to them in His light?<sup>25</sup>

Here the text of Isaiah provides the author with an opportunity to align his often-cited “error of Satan” very specifically with the primary form of sin with which the Qur’ān is concerned; namely, the trespass upon the unique honor due to God that is committed by the worship of idols. Out of all the many ways that the salvific work of Christ may be expressed (reconciliation between God and humankind, the demonstration of a perfect life of justice and charity, vicarious atonement for sin, the giving of the Holy Spirit, etc.), the author has chosen to express Christ’s work quite narrowly as the vanquishing of idols. By characterizing the mission of Christ in this way, the author of Fī taḥḥīq accomplishes two things simultaneously. First, he perfectly aligns what Christ accomplished with the Qur’ānic understanding of what is done by the Word of God; i.e., bringing humankind out of ignorance and into the worship of the one God. Second, using the same rhetorical technique noted earlier, he turns on its head the fundamental Muslim objection to Christian doctrine, namely, that the worship of Christ compromises the oneness of God. Rather than creating an idol in competition to God, he seems to argue, the mission of Christ overturned the worship of idols—exactly what a careful student of the Qur’ānic text would expect the Word of God to do.

The author also represents the work of Christ in conformity with the fourth characteristic of the Word of God as represented in the Qur’ān, namely, that it is associated with eschatological judgment. Blending descriptions of the earthly ministry of Christ and images of his role in judgment, he writes:

He wrought every sign among the children of Israel, and other people, and rewarded men in wisdom and righteousness. He rewarded those who believed in Him with everlasting life and the Kingdom of Heaven, and He rewarded those who rejected Him and did not believe in Him with contempt and sore punishment. Look

---

25. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 23; “Tabanā Āš‘āā āḍḍān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl ḥaḍā āl-Rabb qā‘ad ‘alā saḥāb kaḥḥāh wa yātī Miṣr wa yazalzalu āūṭān Miṣr. Faqad ḍaḡala āl-masīḥ ilā Miṣr lābas jasad ṭāhar min Marīam ālatī ṭāharahā Ḍāllāh.... Tūm ḥūa ālaḍī zalzala āūṭān Miṣr wa ābṭala ‘amal āl-ṣīṭān minḥā wa ḥadāḥum min ḍalālāh Īblīs ilā ḥāḡ Ḍāllāh wa tajāratihī wa āṣraḡa nūruḥu fī ḡalūbuhum. Fa-ānzar matā ḡalaṣat Miṣr min ‘abāḍah āl-āūṭān wa ḍalālāh Īblīs ilā ḥīn waṭāḥā āl-masīḥ bi-raḡmatihī wa āḡ‘ahum bi-nūruḥi?.”

how it corresponds with the strength that is in the works and signs of the Christ which are written in the Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

It is highly noteworthy that this description of Christ's meting out just deserts to both the faithful and the faithless is bracketed by references to his "signs." Few terms could be more laden with Qur'anic significance than this term, "signs" (*āyāt*). In the conceptual world of the Qur'an, signs are the guarantee of true prophethood; Jesus in particular was given by God the ability to "produce clear signs"; the individual verses of the Qur'an are referred to as "signs"; and finally, the Qur'an itself in its entirety is regarded in Islam as the sign par excellence of God's salvific activity in the world. Furthermore, it is the individual's response to these signs—faith and submission to God's will on the one hand, or rejection of the signs (and by extension, of God) on the other hand—that determine his ultimate destiny. Thus in this passage the author of *Fī taṭlīl* describes the eschatological role of Jesus in a way that is emphatically Qur'anic. The passage is a kind of word picture, at the center of which is the Word of God determining the eschatological destiny of human beings based on their response to him; surrounding the Word are the signs wrought by him, the response to which becomes the measure of each person's standing before God. It is a passage that is particularly striking in its ability to combine fidelity to the Christian doctrinal tradition with Qur'anic imagery and language.

As with the term "Word," the author of *Fī taṭlīl* seeks to use the term "Spirit" in a way that is faithful to Christian orthodoxy and yet aligns with the usage of this term in the Qur'an. As noted above, one of the Qur'anic characterizations of the Spirit is that it played a special role in the conception of Jesus Christ, a fact that means that this conception is taught by the Qur'an, at least implicitly, to be unique in human history. Drawing upon this aspect of the Qur'anic text, the author of the treatise at hand writes:

He [Habakkuk] prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, "God shall come to Teman, and the Holy One shall be shaded by the wooded mountain." This is the plain and healing prophecy, when God shewed by the tongues of His prophets from what place the Christ should come and from whom He should be born, when His Word and His light should appear to men. Verily Teman is Bethlehem, it is on the right hand of the Holy City. The shady wooded mountain is Mary the Holy, whom God the Holy Ghost overshadowed, and the power of God rested upon her, as the Archangel Gabriel said, when

---

26. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 25; "Wa 'amala kul āyah fī bunī Ḍīr al-ʿArab wa ḡiruhum wa tajāzā al-nās bil-hikam wa al-baz. Jazā min āman bihi hīāh dāimah wa malakūt al-samā. Wa jazā min kafara bihi wa lam yūman bihi hūāb wa 'aḍāb ālim. Fa-ānzar kif wāfaq bi-qūah ālat bi-ā'amāl al-masīḥ wa ātāthi ālat kutiba fī al-ānjil."

Mary said to him, “Whence shall I have a boy, when a man hath not touched me?” Gabriel said to her, “The Spirit of God shall come down upon thee, and the power of God shall rest upon thee.” God agreed to the saying of His Prophet, and His Angel Gabriel when they say this saying about the Christ, and their saying is true.<sup>27</sup>

Obviously building upon the Qur’ānic idea that God’s Spirit was uniquely involved in the conception of Jesus is no great stretch for the author at hand, since this idea is also central to the Gospel. However, his treatment of the subject is noteworthy. Mary’s question to the angel as quoted here follows exactly the wording of the Qur’ānic text in surah 19:20, rather than following the text of the New Testament. The archangel’s response as quoted here, however, is not the text found in the following verse of the Qur’ān (19:21), but instead follows closely the text of the Gospel of Luke. It would appear, then, that the author wanted to draw upon the Qur’ānic account, but the response given by the angel in the Qur’ān would not have sufficed to connect the conception of Jesus with Hab. 3:3. Instead of using either the Lucan or the Qur’ānic text straightforwardly, then, the author has skillfully woven together an account using material from both texts. By doing so, he is able to draw upon the Qur’ānic language concerning Jesus’ conception while at the same time implicitly criticizing the Muslim understanding of this event. While the text of the Qur’ān seems to describe the conception as an act of special creation (see surah 19:35), the inclusion of the angel’s response to Mary from Luke’s Gospel suggests that the event is something quite different. In fact, by using the language of God’s Spirit coming down upon Mary, the author is able to bring to the reader’s mind the Qur’ānic assertion that Jesus was “God’s Word sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him” (4:171).

The prophecy from Hab. 3:3 as quoted here appears to be taken from an Arabic text of the Bible based on the Septuagint, since the second half of the verse differs significantly from the Masoretic text but matches that of the Septuagint. (Since the identity of the author at hand is unknown, it is also possible that he had the ability to read Greek and was working directly from some version of the Septuagint and translating the text given there into Arabic.) As has already been noted, the author’s frequent citation of Old Testament

---

27. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 29; “Tanabā bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl Ḍāllāh min Ṭimnā yāti wa āl-Quds min jabal ās’ar yutiḏalal fa-ḥaḏāḥi āl-nabwah āl-bīnah āl-šāfiḥ hīm bayana Ḍāllāh ‘alā āl-lasnah ānbīāhi min āi makān yāti āl-masīḥ wa miman yawalad āḏ āṭli’a lil-nās kalimatihi wa nūruhi. Fa-ān Ṭimnā hīa Bīt āl-Laḥīm wa hīa ‘alā yamīn Bīt āl-Maqdas. Wa āl-jabal āl-muzīlal āl-ās’ar hīa Marīam āl-Maqdasah ālati zalalahā Ḍāllāh Rūḥ āl-Quds wa ḥal bihā qūah Ḍāllāh kamā qāl Jabrīl rās āl-mulāikah hīm qālat lahu Marīam āina yakūn li ḡalām wa lam yamsanī bašar. Qāl lahā Jabrīl Rūḥ Ḍāllāh ‘aliki yanzala wa qūah Ḍāllāh biki yaḥal. Faḡad wāfaqa Ḍāllāh qūl nabīhi wa mulākūhi Jabrīl hīm yaqūlūn fi āl-masīḥ ḥaḏā āl-qūl wa qūluhum āl-šādaq.”

prophecies is an important element of his overall apologetical strategy. By citing this material which both the Christian and Muslim traditions claim to affirm, he implicitly but insistently poses the question of which tradition is faithful to the prophetic teachings. In this case, he is able to align the prophecy of Habakkuk (at least as rendered in the text he is using) with the words of Mary as given in the Qurʾān and the words of the Archangel Gabriel from Luke 1:35 to highlight the action of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus. By doing so, he deftly aligns his treatment of God’s Spirit with a key element of the Qurʾānic characterization of the Spirit, while at the same time calling into question the Muslim understanding of the conception of Jesus.

Furthermore, it is possible that there is another reason for the author’s particular selection of Hab. 3:3. This is one of the verses that, according to the arguments of some Muslim apologists, prophesy concerning the advent of Muhammad and the establishment of Islam. Working from the Masoretic text, a typical translation of this verse would be, “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.” Some Muslim commentators have seen in these geographic references a description of the origins of Muhammad in the Arabian Desert and as a result have asserted that this among other biblical passages prophesies the advent of Islam. If such an assertion were familiar to the author of *Fī taḥlīl*, he may have been particularly keen to incorporate Hab. 3:3 into the treatise for two reasons; first, by drawing upon the Septuagint text or an Arabic version of the Bible based upon it, he could introduce a quite different rendering of this verse, and second, by connecting the prophecy with both the Lucan and the Qurʾānic accounts of the Annunciation to Mary, he would be able simultaneously to undercut the idea that the passage prophesies the rise of Islam and to call into question the Muslim understanding of Jesus’ conception, as described above.

If indeed Hab. 3:3 was chosen by the author at hand as a source text because it was known to him to be used as a Muslim apologetical source, such a usage would be in parallel to his use of certain Qurʾānic passages. We have already noted that he is particularly concerned to draw upon those texts from the Qurʾān that are generally understood to present the greatest or most explicit challenges to Christian doctrine. In a similar way, if the hypothesis described here is correct, he would be interested in incorporating Hab. 3:3 into the treatise specifically because it was used as a Muslim “proof-text.”

The author of *Fī taḥlīl* also seeks to align his use of the term “Spirit” with the second Qurʾānic characterization, namely, the representation of the Spirit of God as the agent of revelation. In a typical passage, the author draws upon Matt. 22:41–46, and writes:

And the Christ said to them, “How did the prophet David prophesy by the Holy Ghost about the Christ, saying, The Lord said unto

my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put Thine enemies below Thy footstool? If the Christ be the Son of David, then how does David call Him Lord?” The Jews were perplexed, and answered Him not a word. If the Christ were not God of God, He would not have dared to make Himself Lord of David, but the Christ was God of God, He was made flesh of Mary the daughter of David, for she was of the lineage of David, and therefore He was named the Christ. God had promised to David His prophet that the Christ should be of his race. Everything that David the prophet had said happened; verily he spake by the Holy Ghost, who revealed everything to him.”<sup>28</sup>

As with the idea that the Holy Spirit was involved in a unique way with the conception of Jesus, this presentation of the Holy Spirit as the agent of revelation is no great stretch for the author, given the traditional doctrine of revelation. But other elements of the passage suggest that he is consciously trying to appropriate this particular characterization of the Holy Spirit for this apologetical strategy. He uses the term “prophet” in reference to David three different times, drawing upon an appellation that is certainly given to David in the Qur’an<sup>29</sup> but which is not a biblical title for the Israelite king. In fact, in his usage of the Gospel of Matthew, the author of Fī taṭlīṭ goes so far as to ascribe to Jesus himself use of the phrase “the prophet David,” even though the text of the Gospel does not support this. Clearly the author is trying to draw upon the prophetology of the Qur’ān, an important aspect of which is the “Spirit” as the agent of inspiration and revelation, as described in the discussion of surahs 16, 40, and 42, above.

The description the author gives of the mode of prophecy—that David spoke by the Holy Spirit, who revealed everything to him—also seems to partake of the immediacy and directness of the Qur’ānic concept of prophethood. With the biblical treatment of prophecy, the reader often gets the impression that the prophet may have spoken an utterance with a double-meaning, the full sense of which may have not been immediately clear even to the prophet himself. In other cases, the prophet seems completely unaware of the import

---

28. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 16–17, “Fa-qāl lahum kif tanabā Dāūd āl-nabī bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds ‘alā āl-masīḥ: Qāl āl-Rabb lirabbī ājlas yamīnī ḥatā āḍ‘a ā‘adāka taḥt maṣab qadamika. Fa-ān kān āl-masīḥ bin Dāūd fa-kif yad‘aūhu Dāūd rabbān? Fa-‘aṣat āl-yahūd wa lam yajāwābūhu bi-kalimah. Wa laū lam yakun āl-masīḥ ālah min Ḍāllāh lam yajtarā ān yaj‘al nafsīhi rabbān li-Dāūd walākin kān āl-masīḥ ālah min Ḍāllāh tajasada min Marīam bint Dāūd li-ānahā kānat min sabaṭ Dāūd fa-li-ḡalak kān yusimā āl-masīḥ. Wa kān Ḍāllāh wa‘ada Dāūd nabīhi an min ḡarīṭika yakūn āl-masīḥ. Wa kān kul ṣāī takalama Dāūd āl-nabī ānamā takalama bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds āladī kān yūḥī ilīhi kul ṣāī..”

29. See surahs 17:55 and 21:78.

of his utterance, which may even be at cross-purposes with the speaker's intent.<sup>30</sup> The text of the Qur'ān itself is received by Muslims according to a quite different understanding of the mode of prophecy, in which the prophet consciously and passively receives the text that is to be proclaimed (and later written down) directly from God. The author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* seems in this passage to attempt to accommodate David's words to this Islamic sense of how divine revelation occurs, in a way similar to his description of a book having been "sent down" to the "prophet Moses" noted earlier.

In a passage that follows a similar apologetical trajectory, the author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* writes:

The faithful Job also prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, "It is the Spirit of God that hath created me, and in His name He reigns over all; it is He who hath taught me understanding." The prophets and saints of God have shewn that God and His Word and His Spirit established all things and gave life to all things, and it is not fitting for any one who knows what God hath sent down to His prophets, that he should disdain to worship God and His Word and His Spirit, one God.<sup>31</sup>

Like David, Job is one of the twenty-five prophets referred to as such in the text of the Qur'ān, and although the author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* does not explicitly call Job "the prophet," by using the closely related verb *tanabā*, he is clearly fitting Job into the Qur'ānic category, as already done with David. As with the passage from Matthew 22/Psalm 110, the author notes that Job prophesies "by the Holy Spirit" and once again characterizes the prophetic mode in a strongly Qur'ānic way, speaking of what "God has sent down to His prophets." Moreover, this passage from *Fī taṭlīṭ* deftly ties together two different characterizations of the Holy Spirit that are part of the author's apologetical strategy. As just shown, the passage appropriates the Qur'ānic understanding of revelation by the Holy Spirit and the closely related Qur'ānic understanding of prophethood; additionally, by citing this particular passage from Job, the author is able to associate with the Spirit the divine prerogative of giving

---

30. See, for example, Jer. 31:15 as treated in Matt. 2:18, or the prophecy of Caiaphas as recounted in John 11:49-51.

31. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 23-24; "Wa tanabā Āyūb āl-ṣadīq āīdān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl Rūḥ āl-Rabb ālaḍī kalaqanī wa bi-ismuhu malaka kul ṣaī. Hīa ālatī t'alamanī āl-faham. Faqad bayana ānbīā Āllah wa āṣfāhu ān Āllah wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi āqām kul ṣaī wa āḥīā kul ṣaī wa līsa yanbagī li-āḥīd y'alam mā ānzala Āllah 'alā ānbīāhi ān yastankaf li-y'abad Āllah wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid.." The citation from Job is either misquoted or taken from a variant text. It fits most closely with the Septuagint, but the phrase "in His name He reigns over all" appears in neither the LXX nor the Masoretic text.

life. Concern for the power of giving or restoring life as represented in the Qur'ān will serve a key function in the author's overall apologetical strategy, as will be demonstrated later. Thus with his usual concision, the author has connected four different strands of thought to serve his apologetical objective: the "prophet" Job, a theoretically common source for both Christians and Muslims; the Qur'ānic concept of revelation, with its emphasis on the role of the Spirit; the theme of life-giving as a divine prerogative; and the implicit question running throughout the entire treatise, namely, how to understand the relationship between God, his Word, and his Spirit.

The author of Fī taṭlīṭ also draws upon the remaining Qur'ānic characterization of the Spirit, namely, a special role of supporting believers in such a way as to maintain their steadfastness in faith. In fact, he uses language similar to that found in surah 58:22 of the Qur'ān not only to characterize the action of the Spirit, but also the relationship between the Word of God and the Spirit of God:

He [Christ] sent to the Apostles the Holy Ghost as He had promised them. If He were like Adam or like any man, prophet or otherwise, He could not decree in Heaven, nor could He go up to Heaven and remain on the earth as Adam remained, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses and the Prophets and the Apostles, all of them. But He is the Word and the Light of God, God of God; He came down from Heaven for the salvation of Adam and his race from Satan and his error. He went up to Heaven where He had been in His honour and His dignity, and filled the hearts of men who believed in Him with strength and the Holy Ghost that they might adore God and His Word and the Holy Ghost in Heaven and in earth.<sup>32</sup>

As with so many passages in Fī taṭlīṭ, the author here combines a number of different elements to support his apologetical strategy. Most importantly for the point at hand, he uses terminology similar to that found in surah 58:22 in order to align the Christian doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the Qur'ānic usage of the term "Spirit." This alignment then allows him to inject an implicit critique of the Muslim understanding of Jesus as one among the prophets, while at the same time presenting a kind of "Trinitarian

---

32. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 14; "Wa ārsala ilā āl-ḥūārīrūn Rūḥ āl-Quds kamā wa'adahum wa laū kān miṭl Ḍadam āū miṭl āḥid min āl-nās nabīān āū ḡīruhu lam yastaṭī'a ān yaqḍī fī āl-samā wa lā yaṭī'a ilā āl-samā wa yabqī fī āl-ārḍ kamā baqā Ḍadam wa Nūḥ wa Ibraḥīm wa Mūsā wa āl-ānbīā wa āl-rusul kuluhum. Walākin kalimah Ḍāllāh wa nūruhu ālah min Ḍāllāh najala min āl-samā bi-kalāš Ḍadam wa ḍarīatīhi min Iblī wa ḍalālatīhi. Wa ṣa'ada ilā āl-samā ḥīṭ kān fī karāmatīhi wa salaṭānīhi wa malā qalūb āl-nās āla īn āmnūā bihi qūah wa Rūḥ āl-Quds li-kīmā yasbaḥ Ḍāllāh wa kalimatīhi wa Rūḥ āl-Quds fī āl-samāwāt wa āl-ārḍ.."

economy” of God’s salvific activity in the world. By mentioning a number of the “prophets” affirmed by the Qur’ān,<sup>33</sup> the author is able to draw a contrast between them and Jesus, in that only Jesus was able to send the Holy Spirit to indwell his followers. By using the appellation “Word of God” again here, the author suggests his Trinitarian economy of salvation: God has sent his Word into the world, and to those who believe in that Word, Jesus sends the Spirit. This economy, while drawing upon the Qur’ānic usages of “Word” and “Spirit” as has been shown here, also stands in contrast to the Qur’ānic economy, in which the precise relationships between God, his Word, and his Spirit are left unclear. Besides this entire schema using the terms “Word” and “Spirit,” the author of *Fī taṭlīl* draws on a number of other Qur’ānic concepts and terms in order to pursue his apologetical strategy.

### THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

As was noted earlier, the author of *Fī taṭlīl* makes a subtle change of syntax in the way that he recasts the Trinitarian formula. He does not refer to “God the Word” or “God the Spirit;” rather, he refers to “God and *His* Word and *His* Spirit” (Āllah wa kalimatīhi wa ruḥḥi). In doing so, he is not only drawing upon the Qur’ānic uses of “Word” and “Spirit” as shown above, but also upon a Qur’ānic principle that one might call “devolved authority.” Although the primary theological emphasis of the Qur’ān is the complete otherness and transcendence of God, there are a number of passages that use the formula “God and His x” to indicate that God’s absolute authority has devolved upon some entity so truly and completely that to resist or disobey that entity is to resist and disobey God.

One such passage is surah 2:285, which says, “The messenger has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and the faithful, each one of them, has faith in God and his angels and his books and his messengers [bi-Āllah wa malāikatihi wa kutubihi wa rusulihi] . . .” The construction of his phrase is highly noteworthy, since the entire string of entities is governed by the preposition *bi-*, which indicates that the object of faith is everything that follows: God, his angels, his books, and his messengers. As previously noted, surah 42:51-52 articulates the Qur’ānic principle of inspiration, in which God speaks to a human being only in a mediated way, through inspiration, a veil, or a messenger. Taken together, these two passages suggest that the mediatory agent through which God communicates with the human being is so closely identified with God’s own authority, that the two cannot be distinguished.

---

33. See, for example, surahs 2:37, 3:84, 4:125, 7:103-4, 11:25, 19:58, 40:23, and 71:1, among many similar references.

Having faith in God's word means having faith in the means by which that word is communicated.

A similar passage appears in surah 7 and applies this principle explicitly to Muhammad himself. Verse 58 of this surah reads:

Say: O people, I am the messenger of God sent to you all, the messenger of Him to Whom belongs lordship of heaven and earth. There is no god but He; He gives life and gives death. So have faith in God and his messenger [bi-Ḍāllah wa rusūlihi], the illiterate prophet, who has faith in God and His words [bi-Ḍāllah wa kalimātihi], and follow him so that you may be guided.

This verse actually serves as a double-example of the principle here explained, since Muhammad is described as exercising faith in both God and his words, and the people are exhorted to exercise faith in both God and Muhammad. Perhaps the most striking example of this “devolved authority” is found in surah 33, a surah that is in part concerned with various practical rules of conduct among Muslim believers. Verse 36 of this surah teaches that, “It is not appropriate for any faithful man or woman, when God and His messenger have ruled upon a matter, to have any choice in their matter. Whoever disobeys God and His messenger certainly goes astray in manifest error.” In this passage, the verb here translated “ruled upon” has for its subject the phrase “God and His messenger,” and there is no distinction whatsoever drawn in the text between the decision-making authority of God and that of his messenger. There is certainly nothing in the text that would allow for a translation such as “when God has ruled upon a matter through His messenger,” or anything of that sort. Instead, the text suggests a single decision-making authority exercised by God and his messenger. Similarly, at the end of the verse, the person who goes badly astray does so by disobeying “God and His messenger,” with the text once again making no distinction whatever between disobeying God and disobeying his messenger.

Clearly the structure of the phrase “God and His Word and His Spirit,” the Trinitarian formula used most often in Fī taḥḥīṭ, draws upon these Qur'anic uses of the formula “God and his x” to denote devolved authority. Having borrowed this structure, the author connects it with another Qur'anic usage that connotes God's absolute authority, namely, the throne of God.

## THE THRONE OF GOD

In the language of the Qur'ān, the throne of God is the ultimate symbol of his authority. Other than actual names of God expressing divine attributes, the throne (‘arṣ in Arabic) is the term most often associated with God's

transcendence. Verses of the Qur'ān that refer to the throne can generally be grouped into three categories. In the first category are verses that mention God's throne in reference to his absolute uniqueness and the fact that there is but one God. In the second are verses that mention God's throne in the context of his identity as the Creator of the entire visible universe. As will be shown later, this is an important association, because the author of *Fī taṭlīl* makes a great deal of the connections between God's role as Creator, the association of creative powers with Jesus, and the association of God's "Word" with the act of creation. In the third category are a couple of verses that make reference to God's throne in the context of specifically denying the idea of God begetting a son.

A typical example of the first category is surah 23:116-17, which proclaims, "Exalted be God, the King, the Truth. There is no god but He, Lord of the throne of honor! Whoever calls upon another god, along with God, has no proof for such a thing. Indeed, his reckoning will be with his Lord. . . ." In a similar passage, Muhammad is instructed to take consolation in God's greatness when his preaching is rejected by those he would like to win to Islam: "So if they turn away, say: God is sufficient for me. There is no god but He, and in Him I trust. He is Lord of the greatest throne" (surah 9:129). A typical example of the second category, those passages that associate the throne of God with his role as Creator, is surah 10:3, which reads, "Truly your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself upon the throne, directing affairs. . . ." Surah 57 includes a very similar passage that associates the throne not only with God's creative powers, but also with his continuing watchfulness over all of his creation. Verses 4 and 5 of this surah read:

He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself upon the throne. He knows what enters the earth, and what comes forth from it, what descends from heaven and what rises up to it. . . . Unto Him is the Lordship of the heavens and the earth, and unto Him are all affairs turned back.

At least one Qur'ānic passage combines both of these concepts, the utter uniqueness of God and his creative power, in conjunction with the throne imagery. Surah 32:4-5 says that, "God is He who created the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, in six days; then He established Himself on the throne. There is none besides Him to support you or intervene for you. . . ."

As mentioned above, there is also a passage in the Qur'ān that makes reference to the throne of God in the context of specifically denying the possibility of God begetting a son. Surah 43:81-82 reads: "Say: if the Merciful

One had a son, then I would be first among his worshippers. Glorified be the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Lord of the throne, from what they ascribe to Him!” As shown above, the image of God’s throne is usually invoked in the Qurʾān as a symbol of his creative power, his absolute uniqueness, or both. In this context, surah 43:81–82 seems to be using the image of the throne to set up an explicit contrast between the God who was capable of creating and administering the visible universe, and a God whose nature would admit of begetting. This contrast suggests two compatible reasons for the importance of the symbol of God’s throne for the author of Fī taḥlīl. First, and most obviously, this contrast stands as a direct challenge to Christian Trinitarian doctrine, and therefore must be confronted directly. Second, as noted previously, using those Qurʾānic texts that seem to issue the most explicit challenges to Christian theology as the raw material for the Christian response seems to be a key component of this author’s apologetical strategy.

The text of Fī taḥlīl returns numerous times to the image of God’s throne, using this image to underscore the relationship among God, his Word, and his Spirit that is being presented. After presenting several Old Testament prophecies teaching that God would come “in person” to save his people,<sup>34</sup> the author of Fī taḥlīl argues that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of these prophecies, and uses the image of the throne to explain how this can be so:

It is He who came down from Heaven a Saviour to His servants. The throne is not divided, for verily God and His Word and His Spirit are on the throne, and in every place complete without diminution. The heavens and the earth and all that is therein are full of His honour.<sup>35</sup>

With his usual concision, the author here accomplishes several things. First, he neatly appropriates Qurʾānic terminology and imagery. Not only does he use the term “throne” here as the symbol of God’s authority, but he

---

34. The prophetic passages cited in this portion of the text include Isa. 64:1, Ps. 80:1–2, Ps. 107:20, Hab. 2:3 (misquoted), Ps. 118:26–27 (also misquoted), and Ps. 50:3. Interestingly, this series of citations also includes the following: “There is no intercessor and no king, but the Lord will come and save us.” This line does not appear to be taken directly from any Old Testament source, but is similar in terminology to both Isa. 59:16 and surah 32:4 quoted above. Both Fī taḥlīl and surah 32:4 use the phrase *lā šafiʾa* (“no intercessor” or “no one to intervene”). Apparently the author was so deeply immersed in Qurʾānic terminology that, when citing scripture from memory, he conflated Old Testament and Qurʾānic verses.

35. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 10; “wa hūa ʾaladī habaṭa min al-samā kalāš li-ʾabādihi. Wa lam fāraq al-ʾarš. Fa-ʾan ʾĀllah wa kalimatihī wa ruḥhi ʾalā al-ʾarš wa fī kul makān tām lā yunṭaqas. ʾĀmtalata al-samāwāt wa al-ʾarḍ wa mā fī-himā min karāmatihī..”

connects it with the term “honor,” as is done in the Qurʾān. Second, building upon the use of the terms “Word” and “Spirit” as described above, he raises the question of how God can be on the throne and yet his Word and his Spirit be absent from the throne. In doing so, he takes up the main Qurʾānic argument against Christian doctrine (that Trinitarian doctrine undermines the oneness of God by associating other entities with Him) and inverts it. If God’s Word and his Spirit are not upon the throne with him, he implies, then the throne—the Qurʾānic symbol of God’s singular authority—is actually divided. Since in the Qurʾān, the throne is associated not only with God’s creative power, but also with his continuing administration of the universe, the terminological flourish “the heavens and the earth and all that is therein” (itself another Qurʾānic appropriation), links the image of the throne with the salvific work of God’s Word. With this adroit combination of terminology, the author argues that the administration of all things described in the Qurʾān is accomplished in part by the Word having come down to save God’s servants. Finally, by placing this passage as the conclusion to a series of Old Testament prophecies, the author implicitly poses the question: Which tradition is the legitimate heir and fulfillment of these prophecies? As mentioned previously, the text of the Qurʾān places great stock in the idea that Islam follows upon and reaffirms the preaching of all true prophets throughout history, including the prophets of the Old Testament.

A bit later in the text, the author again uses the theme of God’s throne to discuss God’s salvific activity in the world, and in this passage he combines Qurʾānic terminology with a more explicit Christian soteriological emphasis:

The Wicked One thought that he would not cease to conquer the race of Adam and weary them, and that no one could save them from his error. It pleased God to destroy him and to trample on him by that Man whom he had tempted and sought to weaken. . . . God sent from His throne His Word which is from Himself, and saved the race of Adam and clothed Himself with this weak conquered Man through Mary the good, whom God chose from the women of the ages. He was veiled in her, and by that He destroyed the Evil One, and conquered and subdued him. . . . He boasts not over the race of Adam, for it was a terrible grief when God conquered him by this Man with whom He clothed Himself. If God were to destroy Satan without clothing Himself with this Man by whom He healed him, Satan would not have found grief and remorse.<sup>36</sup>

---

36. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 11, “Wa zan āl-ḡabīṭ ānahu lā yazāl yaqhar ḡariah Ādam wa yatʿabihum wa līsa yastaṭīʿa āḡad ān yaḡlaṡuhum min ḡalālātihi. Fa-āḡiba Āllah ān yahalākahu wa yaṭīhu bi-ḡadā āl-ānsān alaḡī āṡtana wa āstaḡaʿafa.... Fa-ārsal Āllah min ʿarṡuhu kalimatihu alaṡī ḡā minhu, wa ḡalaṡa ḡarīah Ādam wa labasa ḡadā āl-ānsān āl-ḡaīf al-maḡḡūr min

The author points out that Christians understand the Word of God to be issued from God's throne, the Qur'ānic symbol of God's unique and singular authority. This emphasis is further intensified by the phrase "from Himself" (minhu). If the Word is truly from God, and issues forth from the throne, then it is not possible to speak of it as somehow compromising or competing with God's unique authority. By speaking in this way about the Word of God coming into the world, the author simultaneously expresses a Christian understanding of the relationship between God the Father and God the Word and posits an implicit challenge to the Islamic critique of Trinitarian doctrine. This challenge could be stated as: if the Word of God is an expression of God's own authoritative will, and issues from God's singular and unique authority, in what sense could devotion to that Word be considered a rival to the unique fidelity that is owed to God alone?

Also important in this passage is the author's use of the term "veiled" to describe the relationship between the Word of God and the humanity of Jesus. The reality of Jesus' humanity is emphasized by the reference to "Mary the good," through whom the Word of God was veiled in order to come into the world and defeat Satan. This use of the verb "to be veiled" is significant because it appropriates one of the key terms of the Qur'ānic account of divine revelation and applies it to Jesus. As described above, surah 42:51 teaches that God speaks to humankind only in a mediated or indirect fashion, and one of the ways this occurs is "through a veil." As also noted previously, one of the Qur'ānic emphases about the Word of God is that it brings human beings out of their ignorance and into a right way of acting. By combining the images of the throne, the veil, and the Word, the author of Fī taqlīṭ is able to align Trinitarian doctrine, particularly the Christian account of the so-called "economic" Trinity's activity in the world, with a thoroughly Qur'ānic notion of divine revelation. The Word that came forth from God's throne in order to guide human beings had to be veiled in order to be accessible to humankind, thus the necessity of the humanity of Jesus.

The next passage in which the image of the throne is used seeks to emphasize the perfect unity of action that exists among the persons of the Trinity, or in the terminology of Fī taqlīṭ, among God, his Word, and his Spirit. This passage enumerates the various things that Christ accomplished on the earth, and says that

He taught them to worship God and His Word and His Spirit, one  
God and one Lord. He taught that the Christ did not come down

---

Maṛīam āl-ṭibah ālatī aṣṭafāhā 'alā nisā āl-'aālamīn. Fa-āḥṭajab bi-hā wa āhlaka bi-hu āl-ṣar wa ākbatihu wa kabatihu.... Lā yaftakara 'alā darīah Ādam ṣadīd āl-ḥasarah hīm qaharahu Ḍāllāh bi-ḥaḍā āl-ānsān ālaḍī labasahu. Lau ān Ḍāllāh āhalaka Īblīs min dūn ān yalbasa ḥaḍā āl-ānsān ālaḍī ṭabihu bihi, lam yakun Īblīs yajad al-ḥasrah āl-nadāmah.."

from Heaven for His own salvation, for verily the Word and the Spirit were with God from all eternity, and the angels adored God and His Word and His Spirit, one Lord who makes all holy, but He came down a mercy and a salvation to Adam and his race from Satan and his error. The throne is not divided with God. The God of God was in Heaven ordering things and shewing mercy to His creatures as He willed.<sup>37</sup>

The emphasis that Christ did not come for his own salvation seems in part a reaction to the Qur'anic representation of Jesus appearing before God on judgment day and being judged along with the rest of humankind.<sup>38</sup> This passage, like so many others in *Fī taḥlīl*, very concisely expresses Christian doctrine—that Christ came to effect the salvation of others, but was in no need of salvation himself—while posing an implicit challenge to Islamic belief. For the author of this treatise, the fact that Christ was in need of no salvation consisted not so much in the fact that he led a sinless human life in perfect obedience to the Father, but in his very identity as the Word of God, which was with God from all eternity. Salvation as represented here consists in being with God, and it is not possible for God to exist without his Word, which is co-eternal with Him. Picking up on the Qur'anic identity of Jesus as a “Word from God,” already discussed at length above, the author anticipates a conceptual debate that would later become a critical matter in the development of Islamic doctrine, namely, whether the Word of God could be considered eternal. If eternal, then there would appear to be two distinct eternal entities (God and his Word), which would potentially, from an Islamic point of view, compromise the absolute oneness of God which is so central to the message of the Qur'ān. If, on the other hand, the Word of God is considered not-eternal, then the question is raised as to how God existed from all eternity without his Word, and how that Word came into being at some point without positing mutability in God.

The last sentence of the passage quoted picks up on one of the themes closely associated with the Qur'anic usage of the throne image as described above, namely, the power of God to administer the created world. The author seems to be reacting to an anticipated Muslim critique that if the Word of God were present on the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, then this would cause

---

37. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 12, “wa ā'alamuhum ān ya'abadūn Āllah wa kalimatihu wa rūḥhu ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Wa ā'alam ān āl-masiḥ lam yanzal min āl-samā li-kaḷāš nafsihi laqad kān kalimah wa rūḥ 'and Āllah min qabal āl-dahar. Wa kānat āl-mulā'ikah yasbahūn li-lah wa kalimatihu wa rūḥhi rabb wāḥid yuqadasa kul wa-lakinuhu nazala raḥmah wa kaḷāš li-Ādam wa wa ḍarī'atihu min Iblīs wa ḍalālatihu. Wa lam yufāraq āl-'arš 'and Āllah. Wa kān ālah min Āllah fī āl-samā yadabara āl-āmūr wa yarahama kaḷqah kif yašā..”

38. See surahs 3:55 and 5:109–19.

a theological problem. Either the power of God to oversee and administer the created world would be compromised, or else the “throne” (the singular and unique power of God) would be divided because God’s authoritative Word had left the throne and come down to earth. The author of Fī taṭlīṭ anticipates such a criticism and attempts to undermine it with the bold assertion that, because the throne of God is not divided, the Word of God was simultaneously on earth in the person of Jesus Christ and in heaven, continuing the divine administration of the created world. Certainly this is a somewhat different mode of expression than is typically found in Christian theology, but it would seem to align with the scriptural testimony about the perfect unity existing between Jesus Christ and God the Father.<sup>39</sup> The conclusion of the passage quoted also uses other Qur’ānic terminology to characterize the actions of Jesus Christ in his perfect union with the throne of God. He is said to have been “showing mercy . . . as He willed,” a combination of verbs that are used many times in the Qur’ān to describe the divine activity.

In the final passage of Fī taṭlīṭ that makes use of the throne image, the author is particularly adamant to assert that the unity of God is a Christian doctrine, and to deny any suggestion of Christian polytheism:

Say not that we believe in two Gods, or that we say there are two Lords. God forbid! Verily God is one God and one Lord in His Word and His Spirit. Nevertheless God inspired His servant and prophet David and shewed him that the Christ is the Word and the Light of God when He appeared to men by His grace. Verily He is God of God, though He has put on flesh. He who obeys Him obeys God, and he who is disobedient to Him, God will put below His feet, that men may know that God and His Christ are on a throne and [have] one honour. Nothing of God is without any other part.<sup>40</sup>

This passage brings together a number of terms and concepts that the author of Fī taṭlīṭ has been using throughout the treatise. As he has done before, he combines the terms “throne” and “honor,” just as the Qur’ānic text does, to express the absolutely unique authority of God. He again invokes the Old Testament prophets, in this case particularly represented by David, to suggest that only Christian doctrine regarding the relationship between God

39. See, for example, John 10:30 and John 14:10–11.

40. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 16, “Wa lā taqūl ānā nūman bi-ālāhīn āu naqūl rabbīn. M’āḏ Ḍāllāh. Ānamā Ḍāllāh ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid bi-kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi. Wa-lākin Ḍāllāh āūhī ilā ‘abduhi wa nabīhi Dāūd wa bayana lahu ān āl-masīḥ kalimah Ḍāllāh wa nūruhi āḏ āṭl’a li-lnās bi-rahmatīhi. Fa-ānahu ālah min Ḍāllāh wa ān kān labasa jasad. Fa-man āṭā’ahu faqad āṭā’a Ḍāllāh wa man ‘aṣāhu fa-Ḍāllāh jā’alahu taht qadamīhu li-ya’alam āl-nās ān Ḍāllāh wa masīḥi fī ‘arṣ wa karāmah wāḥida. Wa lisa ṣāī min Ḍāllāh b’āḏuhu dūn b’āḏu..”

and Jesus Christ is faithful to the prophetic tradition, a key point given the Qurʾān's insistence that its teachings are a reaffirmation of previous authentic prophecy. Although the author does not here use the terminology of God's revelation being "veiled," that idea is called to mind by his reference to Christ having "put on flesh" in order to "appear to men." Finally there is another reference to eschatological judgment which, as demonstrated above, is associated in the Qurʾān with God's Word. Having woven together these previously used terms and concepts, the author concludes the passage with his coup de grâce, the declaration that "nothing of God is without any other part." Although the use of the term "part" in reference to God may be shocking to the Western Christian accustomed to speaking of God's absolute simplicity, the author's point is clear: it is not possible to imagine some part of God existing in one mode or place, while some other part of him exists in another mode or place. Rather, Christians believe that, just as the Qurʾān taught, the Word of God must be veiled in order to be accessible to humankind, and when this word took the veil of Jesus' humanity, the perfect unity between God and his Word was not broken or violated.

### THE POWER TO GIVE OR RESTORE LIFE

As has been noted earlier, the author of *Fī taṭlīṭ* is also quite interested in the Qurʾānic treatment of some of Jesus' miracles, particularly with regard to the ability to give or sustain life. There are two Qurʾānic themes that provide the background of this interest, namely, the unique divine prerogative of creation and the representation of God as the Giver of sustenance.<sup>41</sup> The text of the Qurʾān explicitly sets up a contrast between the power to create as a key attribute of the one true God and the pretensions of idols. For example, surah 13:16 reads:

Say: "Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?" Say: "God." Say: "Do you indeed take others than Him, who have no ability for

---

41. There are at least sixty-nine Qurʾānic passages having to do with God's unique ability to create, with God as the provider of sustenance, or combining these two themes. See, for example, 2:21-22, 2:29, 2:57-60, 2:172, 2:212, 3:37, 8:27, 5:88, 5:114, 6:2-3, 6:73, 6:101-2, 6:142, 6:151, 7:32, 7:54, 7:160, 8:26, 10:31, 10:59, 10:93, 11:6, 11:88, 13:16, 13:26, 14:32, 15:19-20, 15:28, 15:85-86, 16:3, 16:56, 16:72, 16:114, 17:30-31, 17:70, 17:99, 20:81, 22:34, 23:91, 24:38, 25:2, 25:58-59, 27:60-64, 28:57, 28:82, 29:17, 29:60-62, 30:37-40, 34:24, 34:39, 35:3, 36:81, 39:4, 39:52, 39:62, 40:13, 40:62-67, 41:9, 42:12, 42:19, 42:27, 55:14, 45:16, 51:58, 57:4, 59:24, 64:3-4, 67:15, and 67:21.

benefit or for harm, even for themselves?” . . . Do they make for God partners who have created even as He has created, so that their creation and His creation seemed similar to them? Say: “God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Almighty.”

The Qurʾān also links this unique divine attribute of creation with the attribute of providing sustenance to creatures in general and to humankind in particular. For example, surah 40:61-64 describes God as follows:

It is God who made the night for you to rest in, and the light of day so that you may see, for God has favor toward the people; yet most of the people do not give thanks. Such is God, your Lord, the Creator of all things; there is no God besides Him. . . . It is God who made for you the earth as an abode, and the heavens as a canopy; has formed you, and made your forms excellent, and provided you with sustenance of good things. Such is God, your Lord, so glory to God, Lord of all creation.

In addition to describing the power to create as the divine attribute par excellence, and linking this attribute with that of providing sustenance, the Qurʾānic text also draws an explicit contrast between the ability to create and the quality of begetting. Surah 6:101 says, “Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can there be a son for Him who has no spouse? He created all things, and He is the One who knows all things.” Surah 25:1-2 almost exactly echoes the same understanding of God: “Glory to Him who sent down upon His servant the Criterion [i.e., the Qurʾān] as a warning to all creation, He to whom belongs the Lordship of the heavens and the earth. He has taken no son, nor does He have a partner in His dominion. He created all things and decreed their estimation.”

Against this Qurʾānic background, the author of Fī taḥlīl is keen to take advantage of the story of the boy Jesus making live birds from clay, as recounted in surah 3:49. Citing this ability to create, and linking it with both the provision of sustenance and other divine prerogatives, the author writes:

You will find in the Coran, “And he spake and created from clay like the form of a bird, and breathed into it, and lo! it was a bird by permission of God.” He forgave trespasses, and who forgives trespasses but God? He satisfied the hungry, and no one does that nor provides food but God. You will find all this about the Christ in your Book; He gave the Apostles the Holy Ghost, and gave them authority over devils and over all sickness. No one gives the Holy

Ghost but God, He who breathed into Adam, and lo! he was a man with a living soul.”<sup>42</sup>

In this passage the author commits a bit of verbal legerdemain, as he smoothly elides Qur’ānic testimony about Jesus (the creation of the bird) with New Testament references (forgiving sins, bequeathing the Holy Spirit on the apostles, etc.). Upon careful analysis, however, it becomes clear that the author is not merely “playing fast and loose” with his source materials, but creating a dense and tightly interwoven fabric of concepts and allusions. First, he clearly wants to show that even the Qur’ān itself testifies that the attribute that most perfectly expresses God’s utter uniqueness, the ability to create, was in some way resident in the person of Jesus. Second, he carefully aligns the description of the bird’s creation by Jesus with that of Adam by God, calling attention to the parallelism that exists between the Qur’ānic and Old Testament texts. Third, in a way that is not obvious in translation, he has also associated the giving of the Holy Spirit to the apostles with these other two texts. Just as the Greek *pneuma* can be translated either “breath” or “spirit” depending upon context, so also the Arabic term *rūḥ* can be translated with either of these terms. Thus the passage can be understood as a kind of tripartite “frame” consisting of three instances of the breath of life being given (by Jesus to the bird, by Jesus to the apostles, and by God to Adam), with other expressions of divine prerogative (forgiving sins, providing sustenance, and power over devils) interwoven on this “frame.” Furthermore, the frame is so constructed as to refer implicitly to each of the three “books” given by God as they are mentioned in the Qur’ān—the Qur’ān itself, the New Testament/Ānḡil, and the Old Testament/Taūrāh.

The author is probably also drawing upon another Qur’ānic story about Jesus having to do with sustenance. Surah 5:114-15 records a story that must have interested the author of *Fī taḡlīṭ*, both for its apparent echo of certain gospel themes and for its relevance on the question of the identity of Jesus. The passage reads:

Lo, the disciples said: “O Jesus, son of Mary, can your Lord send a table down to us from heaven?” Jesus said: “Fear God, if you are faithful.” They said: “We want to eat from it, and satisfy our hearts, and know that you have told us the truth, and to be among the

---

42. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 12–13; “Wa āntum tajadūn fī āl-Qur’ān wa qāl wa kalaqa min āl-ṭīn kahīah āl-ṭīr fa-nafaḡa fīhi fa-ādā hūa ṭīr bi-ādan Āllah. Wa ḡafara āl-danūb wa man yaḡfar āl- anūb ālā Āllah? Wa ašb’a min āl-jū’a wa līsa y’amal ha ā wa lā yarzaq ālā Āllah. Wa āntum tajadūn kuluhu min āmar āl-masīḥ fī kitābukum wa ā’aṡā āl-ḡūrān Rūḥ āl-Quds wa salaḡahum ‘alā āl-šāṡīm wa ‘alā kul maraḡ. Wa līsa y’aṡ Rūḥ āl-Quds ālā Āllah. Hūa ālaḡī nafaḡa fī Ādam fa-ādā hūa ānsān ḡā nafas ḡīah.”

witnesses thereof.” Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O God our Lord, send down to us a table from heaven, that there may be a feast for us, for the first and the last of us, and a sign from you; and provide sustenance for us, for You are the best provider of sustenance.” God said: “I will send it down to you, and if afterward anyone among you does not have faith, I will punish him with a punishment that I have not applied to anyone in all creation.”

The linkage of the term “sign” with the provision of sustenance in a passage having to do with Jesus and his disciples brings to mind the gospel story found in John 6:1–25. In this passage, Jesus miraculously provides food for a crowd of five thousand people from five barley loaves and two fish. When the crowds later seek him out on the other side of the Sea of Galilee Jesus tells them that, “You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill.” It is quite true that the Qurʾānic story quoted here makes a clear distinction between God and Jesus, and presents the miracle as being requested by Jesus and performed by God, rather than being performed by Jesus directly. Implicit in the passage, however, is the fact that Jesus was able to obtain from God a miraculous provision of sustenance that the disciples were not able to obtain directly. For the author of *Fī taḥlīl*, the point here would be Qurʾānic evidence linking the divine attribute of providing sustenance closely with Jesus, and doing so in a way that distinguishes the prayers of Jesus from those of his disciples.

Furthermore, there is a second reason that the Qurʾānic passage quoted above would have been of particular interest to the author of *Fī taḥlīl*. The story of the table from heaven is followed immediately by a passage that addresses the idea of worshipping Jesus. Verse 116 reads:

And lo, God said: “O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as gods, in place of God?’” He said: “Glory to You! It could not be that I would say what I have not the right to say; and if I had said it, You would have known. For indeed, You know what is in my soul, and I do not know what is in Your soul. For You know the hidden things.

For a Christian theologian interested in how the Qurʾān treats this attribute of providing sustenance, it must have seemed that the Qurʾānic text itself is rather defensive on this point. No sooner is Jesus presented as being able to bring about the provision of a table from heaven in a way the disciples could not, than the text presents him as saying that he should not be worshipped. Given the near proximity of these two things in the Qurʾānic text, it is not surprising that the author of *Fī taḥlīl* lists the provision of sustenance among the divine attributes associated with Jesus. Nor could it have been lost

on him that verse 116 addresses an attitude about Jesus that would have been unknown among orthodox Christians, on two counts. First, the passage suggests that whatever worship is directed to Jesus is a direct replacement for the worship that would otherwise be offered to God. Second, it suggests that the worship offered to Jesus by Christians is offered equally to his mother. Thus this surah associates Jesus with the miraculous provision of sustenance, and then immediately follows up the association with a passage forbidding the worship of Jesus, but doing so in such terms as any orthodox Christian could affirm and agree with.

This point is significant because the theological goal of the author throughout the treatise at hand is to affirm Trinitarian doctrine in a way that emphasizes the oneness of God and is, to the highest degree possible, in keeping with Qur'anic terminology and concepts. In fact, the author of *Fī taḥḥīṭ* sets this whole question of the exercise of the divine prerogative of creation and sustenance of life in a traditional Christian interpretation of the biblical creation account. Early in the treatise he writes:

It is written also in the beginning of the Law, which God sent down to His prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then he said, "The Spirit of God was upon the waters." Then He said, by his Word, "Let there be light"; and there was light. . . . So God shewed in the beginning of the book which He sent down to His prophet Moses, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God, and that God, may He be blessed and exalted! created all things, and gave life to all things by His Word and His Spirit. We do not say three Gods . . . but we say that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God and one Creator.<sup>43</sup>

By interpreting the creation account given in Genesis in this Trinitarian fashion, the author not only grounds his apologetical strategy in the theoretically common ground of the Mosaic books, but also provides an explanation for the association of the divine attributes of creation and sustenance of life with Jesus in the Qur'anic text. Having drawn upon all of the Qur'anic material about the Word of God, as shown above, the author is able to present Jesus as the creative and life-giving Word through which God's distinctive

---

43. Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 3–4; "Wa maktūb āḏqān fī rās āl-Taūrāah ālatī ānzaluhā Āllah 'alā Mūsā nabīhi fī Ṭūr Sīnā badū kalāqa Āllah āl-samā wa āl-ārd. Ṭum qāl Rūḥ Āllah kān 'alā āl-māh. Ṭum qāl bi-kalimatīhi nūr fa-kān nūr.... Fa-qad bayana Āllah fī āul kitāb ānzaluhu 'alā nabīhi Mūsā ān Āllah wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi ālah waḥid wa ān Āllah tabārah wa 'aālā kalāqa kul šai wa āḥīā kul šai bi-kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi. Wa lasnā naqūl ṭalaṭah ālāha ... walākinā naqūl ān Āllah wa kalimatīhi wa rūḥhi ālah waḥid wa kāliq waḥid."

attributes are exercised. The emphasis that God, his Word, and his Spirit are not only “one God” but also “one Creator” is an implicit challenge to surah 5:116 and its suggestion that worship directed to Jesus is “in place of” worship of God. How is it, the author seems to ask, that the Qurʾān can represent the giving and sustaining of life as the divine attributes par excellence, associate them with Jesus, and commend worship of God but forbid worship of his Word, through which these attributes are exercised?

In conclusion, the anonymous author of *Fī taḥlīl ʾĀllah ʾal-wāḥid* called upon a deeply conversant knowledge of the Qurʾān in order to articulate his defense of Trinitarian doctrine. He interwove biblical material, particularly from the Old Testament, with the Qurʾānic uses of the terms “Word” and “Spirit” to build an argument that only a Trinitarian understanding of God could make intelligible both the teachings of the prophets and the expectations of God’s Word and God’s Spirit that could be derived from the Qurʾān. Three aspects of this author’s apologetical technique were to become standard methodology for the other Arabophone Christian theologians to be considered here: placing Muslims in the dilemma of either denying Qurʾānic language about God or else affirming the theological integrity of Trinitarian doctrine; making heavy use of Old Testament material to implicitly but constantly challenge Muslims as to which religious tradition could credibly claim to be the theological heir of the prophets; and inverting Qurʾānic “proof texts” and other elements of Islamic discourse, including the ontological chasm existing between God and His creation, to be the basis of Trinitarian arguments.