Jesus according to Ibn al-‘Arabī and Christian scholars

Jeong Jae Yoo

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Jesus According to Ibn al’Arabī and Christian Scholars

A Thesis Submitted to
Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degrees of Master of Arts

By
Yoo Jeong Jae

Under the supervision of Dr. Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad
Jesus According to Ibn al-’Arabī and Christian Scholars

A Thesis Submitted by

Yoo Jeong Jae

To the Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

February / 2013

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts

Has been approved by

Dr. Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad
Thesis Committee Advisor
Professor, Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations, the American University in Cairo

Dr. Michael Reimer
Thesis Committee Reader
Professor, Department of History, the American University in Cairo

Dr. Adam Talib
Thesis Committee Reader
Assistant Professor, Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations, the American University in Cairo

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, for all the help he has given me in this work; to my two readers Dr. Michael Reimer and Dr. Adam Talib for providing me with constructive comments.
ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Jesus According to Ibn al-’Arabī and Christian Scholars

By: Jeong Jae Yoo

Supervisor: Dr. Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad

Despite the differences between Islam and Christianity, Islam is the only non-Christian religion in the world, which requires its adherents to believe that Jesus is one of the prophets of God. Ibn al-’Arabī, one of the Sufi mystics of the 12th century, wrote an entire chapter devoted to Jesus in his book, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, translated as the Bezels (or Seals) of Wisdom. In this chapter, Jesus is characterized by five names that most clearly explain his attributes. These names are ‘the Spirit of God’, ‘the Word of God’, ‘the Breath of God’, ‘the Mercy of God’, and ‘the Slave of God’. Each of these names represents an important characteristic that Ibn al-’Arabī wishes to convey about Jesus as the Seal of the general Sainthood, his most famous notion manifested in all of Ibn al-’Arabī’s writings.

Christian scholars such as Thomas Aquinas, St Anselm of Canterbury and Meister Eckhart – who lived during the same period - wrote a considerable amount on Christian doctrines. These writers discussed crucial topics such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, the Judgment day, the angels, and more. This thesis is a comparative study of Jesus as portrayed by Ibn al-’Arabī and the three Christian scholars: analyzing and comparing the embedded meanings of the five names mentioned above. It can be concluded that all of the differences between Ibn al-’Arabī and Christian scholars derived from fundamentally divergent perspectives on the deity of Jesus Christ. Although there are some superficial similarities, there is not any significant similarity between the two sides.
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INTRODUCTION
Despite the differences between Islam and Christianity, Islam is the only non-Christian religion in the world, which requires its adherents to believe in Jesus as one of the prophets of God. Ibn al-’Arabī (d. 1240 A.D.), one of the Sufi mystics of the 12th century, wrote an entire chapter devoted to Jesus in his renowned book, Fuṣūṣ al-hikam, translated as the Bezels (or Seals) of Wisdom. As the final work of Ibn al-’Arabī, it is considered to have the summary of his abstruse doctrines. In this thesis, the chapter fifteen on Jesus, “The Wisdom of Prophecy in the Word of Jesus”1 will be discussed in depth.

Before discussing Ibn al-’Arabī’s view on Jesus, it is important to understand the Islamic perspective in general. As stated above, Islam is the only non-Christian religion that accepts Jesus as a prophet of God. The Islamic belief requires Muslims to believe in the virgin birth, the miracles, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, they disagree on the most significant aspect of the Christian Jesus, his deity. Muslims reject the deity of Christ and events related to it, such as the crucifixion and the resurrection. There are several verses in the Quran, explicitly rejecting the doctrine of Trinity as shirk2 (polytheism), one of the gravest sins in Islam.3

As a Muslim, Ibn al-’Arabī shares similar views. The role of Jesus in his life is significant and unique. At the core of Ibn al-’Arabī’s writings, lies the idea of the ‘Seal of the Saints’ and all other concepts are but facets of it.4 Michel Chodkiewicz, a French philosopher, explains this doctrine extremely well in his book, Seal of the Saints. The doctrine dictates that there are three Seals. The first seal is the Seal of the Prophets who is Muhammad. The second seal is the Seal of the general Sainthood, who is Jesus Christ. The last seal is the Seal of the Muhammadan Saint, who is Ibn al-’Arabī himself. This

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1 The translation is of R.W.J. Austin, The Bezels of Wisdom (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980) 174 was used for the title of chapter 15.
2 The Quran 4:171, 5:76.
3 The Quran 4:116
doctrines of the Seal of the Saints is considered scandalous to most people even to this day for he was accused of arguing that he was superior to the prophets and messengers.

It is also imperative to delineate which Christian belief is to be compared with Ibn al-’Arabi’s thoughts. “A Christian view” would be too general; ranging from the majority of the groups who espouse general doctrines announced at the Council of Nicaea (held in 325 AD) to those “heretics” denying defining doctrines. For a fruitful comparison, which encompasses the majority of Christian opinion and remains historically accurate, two conditions need to be met. First, the scholars to be compared had to be Christian scholars from a similar period, from the 12th and 13th centuries. Since both Islam and Christianity have evolved, it would not be historically accurate to compare Ibn al-Arabi’s understanding of Christianity to modern evangelical Christianity. Second, I have selected the orthodox Christians who hold on to the traditional tenets upheld by the 1st Nicene Council in 325 A.D. Historically, although there were many groups who espoused different teachings, the agreement made at Nicaea serves to this day as the cornerstone of the Christian religion.

The most prominent Christian scholar to satisfy both conditions was Thomas Aquinas, revered as one of the greatest Christian scholars by both Protestant and Catholic believers. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 A.D.) adheres to the general characteristics of Jesus laid out by the Nicene Creed. Aquinas adamantly sticks to the Sonship of Christ; his deity, salvation through Christ, and his resurrection are pivotal doctrines in the Creed. The notions of other prominent Christian scholars from the same period will also be included in the study in order to broaden its scope. A Christian scholar from a similar period by the name of St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109 A.D.). In his treatise, “Monologion” and “Proslogion”, he also writes about the Trinity and the deity of Christ. The third scholar is Meister Eckhart (d. 1329 A.D.), who also wrote considerable amount on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, I used the following transliteration system:

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Rules of Application:

1. The long vowels romanized َّ, َّ and َّ, respectively.
2. (tā’ marbūtah) in the construct state was romanized t; otherwise it was romanized h.
Chapter 1: The Muslim Jesus

Constant reports on Islam-Christian conflicts often give people an impression that the two religions are hostile to each other. Although Christianity wholly rejects Islam, Islam accepts considerable amount of Christianity, some Muslims even accepting the authenticity of the Bible. In addition to this, Jesus is highly revered by Muslims as one of their prophets. In fact, Muslims are obligated to revere Jesus more than they ought to revere other Muslim prophets.

Jesus’ significance in Islam has produced innumerable volumes of Islamic books on Jesus Christ. It would be an insurmountable task to discuss the Muslim Jesus in the allotted space. Because of divergent ways of interpreting their Holy Scriptures, the two religions enjoy wide spectrum of beliefs. In this chapter, the general comparison between the two religions was conducted by comparing their Scriptures; for Islam, the Quran and the hadīth, and for Christianity, the Bible. The translations of the hadīth accounts were borrowed from Tarif Khalidi’s book, The Muslim Jesus.

The Virgin Birth

The story of Jesus begins with his conception in both the Quran and the Bible. There are only minute differences between the two accounts. They both capture the essence of the event i.e. the virgin birth. The Quran begins the story with Mary’s encounter with the Angel Gabriel (Jibril).

Behold! the angels said: “O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God; "He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous." She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: God createth what He willeth: When He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is! "And God will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel, "And (appoint him) an apostle to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "'I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird,
breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by God's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe;.

Interestingly, the Quran does not contain any information about the birth of Muhammad; whereas, the birth of Jesus Christ is recorded quite vividly, even more vivid than the Christian accounts. The story of the Virgin Birth highlights two important points: Mary’s character and the miraculous nature of the conception.

In this passage, Mary sounds intimidated when the Angel Gabriel appears before her. Her first response is, “I seek refuge from thee to (God) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear God.” In another part of the Quran, it says that the Angel Gabriel appeared before her as ‘a man in all respects’. The reason Mary is intimidated, according to Ibn al-’Arabī, is because she thought the man before her would force her to have intercourse with him. By examining how Mary sought refuge to God, Mary’s righteous character can be deduced from the passage. When Angel Gabriel informs her that she will conceive a child, Mary is perplexed, for she was chaste. The Quran testifies to her virginity:

And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.

The Virgin Birth began when God [We] breathed ‘His Spirit’ into Mary through Gabriel. It is this very reason that Jesus is called ‘the Spirit of God’ in the Quran and the writings of Ibn al-’Arabī. The notion of ‘the Spirit of God’ and ‘the Breath of God’ will be further elaborated in the upcoming chapters. The analyses of these notions are utilized by Ibn al-’Arabī as crucial means to explain the human side of Jesus.

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Although there are some liberal Christians who sought to ‘demythologize’ Jesus Christ in order to construct a faith more palatable to modern men and women,\(^{11}\) the majority of conservative Christians believe in the virgin birth to this day and the Bible attests to this notion quite clearly. In the Gospel of Luke, the author writes:

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God." And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."\(^{12}\)

Again, the crux of the story is the virgin conception of Jesus. At the conception, the Angel Gabriel appears before Mary and informs her that she will conceive a child even though she is a virgin. Then Gabriel adds that the child will be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Besides the narrations on the future ministry of Jesus, the two accounts are almost identical. A similar story also appears in the Gospel of Matthew,\(^{13}\) which affirms the Christian perspective on the Virgin Conception. Despite the theological rift between the two religions, they both seem to agree on two things: the virginity of Mary when she conceived Jesus Christ and the role of the Spirit of God in the conception.

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\(^{13}\) New American Standard Bible, Matthew 1:18-21.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
The Birth

Then, the Quran skips to the scene where Mary is giving birth.

So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): "Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!"

The Quran explains that Mary retired to a remote place, probably out of shame that she was pregnant before marriage and to conceal her pregnancy from her neighbors. Then, she endured labor pains and gives birth under a palm tree. The account is too vague to postulate the exact location of the birth.

At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: "O Mary! truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!" But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of God: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet.

When Mary brought the baby before the townspeople, they began to criticize her - an anticipated response towards a woman who is pregnant before her marriage. Then, Mary points to Jesus, who is only an infant at the time, and Jesus begins to preach to the people. Ibn al-'Arabī deduces from this event that Jesus was born with full intellectual capacity. This is the first miraculous event in the life of Jesus aside from his birth.

The Bible does not contain the story of infant Jesus preaching to people. According to the Christian accounts, Jesus was born in a stable in the city of Bethlehem. Although some scholars argue that ‘a remote place’ mentioned in the Quran is Bethlehem, it would be arduous to prove the exact location. Because of King Herod’s plan to kill Jesus, his parents hid from the king. Frustrated and anxious, Herod kills all

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the first-born males in Bethlehem and its vicinity.\textsuperscript{17} Then, the Bible mentions just one event in Jesus’ childhood and skips to his adult days.

\textbf{The Childhood}

The only record of Jesus’ childhood mentioned in the Bible is when he and his parents travel to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. On their way back, Mary and Joseph realize that they left Jesus in Jerusalem. At the time, the Feast of the Passover was one of the most celebrated holidays. It is plausible that Jesus and his parents were joined by their relatives in addition to a massive number of people. Due to an enormous number of people, Jesus’ parents could have assumed that Jesus was with the crowd. When they go back to Jerusalem to look for Jesus, they find him in the temple, listening and answering questions with the rabbis. Jesus says to his parents: “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?”\textsuperscript{18} For Christians, this anecdote records the first time Jesus calls God ‘My Father’, implying his divinity and status as the Son of God.

In the Quran, besides the story of infant Jesus preaching to the people who criticize his mother\textsuperscript{19}, the clay bird story is the only record of his childhood.

\begin{quote}
I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

The bird story in the Quran is considered to have originated from the story in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.\textsuperscript{21} Unlike the story in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, which does not mention any intervention from God, the story in the Quran signifies the humanity of Jesus by adding the phrase, ‘by God’s leave’. For Ibn al-’Arabī, this story reveals the

\textsuperscript{17} New American Standard Bible, Matthew 2:16.
\textsuperscript{18} New American Standard Bible, Luke 2:49.
\textsuperscript{21} The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, M.R. James-Translation and Notes, I. 3. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas records a similar story. When Jesus was five years old, he animates twelve clay birds he made on the Sabbath day. The story in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas is considered to be the original source of the story in Islam.
mechanism of Jesus’ miracles, which is utilized to define the source of his power. Two principles can be deduced from the story. The first principle is that when Jesus breathed into the bird, the bird received life, which shows the relationship between the breath and life. The second principle is that Jesus performed the miracle “by God’s leave.” In other words, the permission of God plays an imperative role in Jesus’ performing miracles.

The Divinity of Jesus Christ

The divinity of Jesus Christ poses the most significant rift between the two religions. In Islam, the doctrine of the Trinity is rejected as shirk (polytheism). The Quran firmly rejects the Trinity especially the Sonship of Jesus Christ. The phrase ‘the son of Mary’, which often follows Jesus, affirms the Islamic perspective that Jesus is a human prophet.

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.

Here, Jesus is presented as one of the apostles of God, a notion Ibn al-’Arabī also develops in his books. Ibn al-’Arabī elevates Jesus to the highest position of the saints i.e. the Seal of the general Sainthood, with the exception of the Prophet Muhammad. Included in the word ‘apostle’, is the fact that all the apostles are humans. Jesus is depicted in the Quran as a human apostle; thus the Muslims wholly reject the doctrine of the Trinity.

The divinity of Jesus Christ is also rejected in many hadīth accounts. Jesus is often referred to as ‘the Spirit of God’, ‘the Word of God’, or ‘the Prophet of God’, but never as ‘the Son of God’. Even though there are several aḥādīth similar to the stories of

22 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran, 005.076 states, “They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.”
the Bible, the stories that suggest the divinity of Christ are absent. Some of the ahadith explicitly highlight the humanity of Christ. In one hadith translated by Tarif Khalidi in his book, The Muslim Jesus, it is written:

John and Jesus met and John said, “Ask God’s forgiveness for me, for you are better than me.” Jesus replied: “You are better than me. I pronounced peace upon myself, whereas God pronounced peace upon you.” God recognized the merit of them both.24

It would be a quite shocking experience for a Christian to read this hadith. The inferiority of Christ is implied when Jesus admits that John is better than he is. Although it is not specified in which aspect John is better than Jesus, it is unimaginable for God to be inferior to a mere human being. Therefore, the above hadith is only comprehensible in the minds of Muslims or those who do not accept the divinity of Jesus Christ. There is another hadith, similar to the one mentioned above, that was recorded by Ibn Abi al-Dunya:

Jesus said to John, “You smile as if you feel secure.” John said to Jesus, “You frown as if you are in despair.” God revealed, “What John does is dearer to Us.”

In this hadith, unlike John who is smiling and feeling secure, Jesus is frowning and gloomy due to his ascetic life.26 Then, God tells Jesus and John that what Jesus is doing is less pleasing to God. This hadith is often used to criticize excessive asceticism, which borders on despair; nonetheless, the hadith is also making an important point. If Jesus were God, it would be impossible for John to be dearer to God than him. Another hadith recorded by Ibn Abī al-Dunya demonstrates Christ’s humanity even more lucidly.

Jesus said, “The world existed and I was not in it, and it shall exist and I shall not be in it. All I have are my days which I am now living. If I sin in them, I am indeed a sinner.”

25 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 120.
26 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 120.
27 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 114.
Two notable points can be inferred from this hadīth. First, Jesus admits his mortal nature, saying that he has limited living days. Second, Jesus suggests the possibility of sinning. By nature, God cannot sin. He would have to judge Himself if He commits sin. For Muslims, these two attributes are decisive indicators of Jesus’ humanity.

The Bible, on the other hand, is widely known to be the Holy Scripture of Christians who believe in the divinity of Christ. Contrary to popular belief, there are many verses in the Bible that suggest Jesus’ humanity. First, Jesus suggests that he only speaks and teaches in accordance to the will of God. This implies that the teachings of Jesus originate from God. Jesus also asserts that he cannot do anything on his own, expanding his impotency to all of his actions. The reason the Bible contains such a dichotomous view of Jesus is because he is both perfectly God and perfectly human.

The Gospel of John is singled out as the Gospel with the most number of references to the divinity of Jesus Christ. The first verses in the Gospel of John state the following:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being.

Here, the Word is Jesus Christ and it is explicitly stated that ‘the Word was God’, which affirms the divinity of Jesus Christ. Word of God is an important concept even in the Quran and Ibn al-’Arabī’s books. His existence ‘in the beginning’ also implies his primordial nature, which suggests his divinity to Christians. However, Ibn al-’Arabī and some Muslim scholars argue the primordial nature of Muhammad, more precisely the Muhammadan Reality (ḥaqīqa Muhammadiya); but they claim that Muhammad too is a

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creation, not God. The next verse, ‘all things came into being through Him’, also suggests Jesus’ divinity in the eyes of Christians. This verse refers back to the first chapter of Genesis, where God creates the universe by His Word. That Word incarnate in a human form is Jesus Christ. Creating the cosmos by the Word is also an important concept for Ibn al-’Arabī. He calls Jesus the Word of God (kalimat Allāh) several times in his books; Jesus is called the Word of God in the Quran as well.

There are numerous other verses in the Bible that indicate the divinity of Christ. Jesus says in his own words: ‘I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.” Although some Muslim scholars argue that Jesus’ statement does not necessarily mean he is God, the reaction from the Jews hints at the blasphemous nature of his statement. There would be no reason to stone Jesus, if saying, ‘I and the Father are one’, meant anything else. Jesus also makes himself equal to God in other parts of the Bible. At the time of Jesus, calling God ‘Father’ was a prevalent practice. If so, it arouses more questions as to why the Jews would stone Jesus for saying something mundane. This must imply that when Jesus said, “my Father”, it meant something drastically divergent and blasphemous to the Jews. Abnormally belligerent reaction from the Jews proves the gravity of Jesus’ sin, which could only be understood if he had

31 Ibn al-’Arabī quotes a hadīth by the Prophet: “I was a prophet while Adam was between clay and water.” He deduces from this hadīth that the Prophet was primordial, existing before the universe. The hadīth was translated by The Islamic Texts Society in the article “The Muhammadan Reality”, accessed February 21, 2013, http://www.its.org.uk/be/be_094662139X.html
34 From “Avinu Malkeinu,” last modified 2007, http://www.torah.org/learning/dvartorah/5770/yomkippur.html#. The word “Father” is utilized to invoke God in Jewish accounts prior to the time of Jesus Christ. In the prayer for the Days of Awe, the prayer known as Avinu Malkenu, which is based on the prayer that Rabbi Akiva recited during a drought. When he recited “Our Father, Our King, we have no king but You. Our Father, Our King, for Your sake have mercy on us!” the rain immediately began to fall. Invoking God as ‘Father’ can also be found in the Book of Isaiah of the Old Testament Chapter 63:16. Isaiah states, “For you are Our Father though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.” The New American Standard Bible translation was used for the verse in Isaiah.
committed blasphemy. In addition, Apostle John clearly explains that the Jews wanted to kill him for making himself equal with God.

Lastly, the Nicene Creed\(^{35}\), which is the cornerstone of the Christian belief also asserts the deity of Jesus Christ.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.\(^{36}\)

The entire doctrine of the Trinity is summarized in the above sentence. Jesus is the Son of God, and truly God at the same time. He is begotten not created. The fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity lies here: the deity and the Sonship of Jesus Christ. Because of the dual nature of Jesus Christ, the verses that attest to the human side of Jesus are often utilized to attack the Trinity. It is imperative to look at these verses in the context of the Christian Bible, the goal of which is to make people believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

**Prophet of the Children of Israel**
As mentioned above in the previous section, Islam insists that Jesus was not God, but a prophet with a message specifically for the children of Israel. Therefore, in the strict

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Arius was an elder in Alexandria, Egypt, in the early 300’s. He taught that Jesus or the Son was a creation of the Father. This made the Son not God. The Bishop of Alexandria questioned him for his heretical view; but he stuck to his position and was excommunicated by the Council of Egyptian bishops. He moved to Nicomedia, where he wrote letters to various bishops defending his position. Finally, the Emperor Constantine summoned a council of Bishops in Nicaea and repudiated Arius. In order to minimize further disputes in theology, in 325 A.D., the Bishops composed the first draft of the Nicene Creed.

\(^{36}\) The Nicene Creed [Modern Wording Translation], [http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm](http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm)
sense, Christianity is only a religion for the Jews. The Quran asserts that Jesus is an apostle to the Children of Israel.\(^{37}\)

According to the traditional Islamic belief\(^{38}\), the prophets of God were sent to every nation to preach the message of God. The advent of the Prophet Muhammad sealed the prophethood; thus making Islam the last universal religion. Therefore, Jesus, who is regarded as one of the prophets sent by God, preached a message confined to the children of Israel. Interestingly, several verses in the Bible support the Islamic claim. In the Gospel of Matthew, King Herod reads,

> And you, Bethlehem, Land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for our of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.\(^{39}\)

Here, King Herod is referring to the Old Testament prophecy,\(^{40}\) which explicitly states that the Messiah will be sent for the children of Israel. In another place, Jesus commands his disciples to preach the Gospel to the “house of Israel”.

> Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”\(^{41}\)

He explicitly says not to go to the Gentiles and to the Samaritans. These statements can be construed by Christians as temporary and symbolic. Although during the life of Jesus, he commanded in such a way, after his death, the disciples received a revelation that the Gospel should be preached to the entire nation.\(^{42}\) For Christians, Israel and the Israeli

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\(^{40}\) New American Standard Bible, Micah 5:2. “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.” These prophecies are considered by the Christians as prophecies referring to Jesus, the foretold Messiah.

\(^{41}\) New American Standard Bible, Matthew 10: 5-7.

people symbolize the Christian church and individual Christian believers. Therefore, Israel should not be interpreted literally as people residing in Palestine, but everyone, both Jews and gentiles, who believes in Jesus Christ. In addition, Paul the Apostle teaches the churches that Jesus died for the Gentiles too. He also claims that he was elected to be the apostle of the gentiles by God.\(^{43}\) Jesus also entered Samaria to preach the Gospel: first to a Samaritan woman and then to the entire village.\(^{44}\) In other instances, he heals a demon-possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman.\(^{45}\) Therefore, Christians claim that Jesus’ command to preach the Gospel only to the house of Israel is both provisional and symbolic.

**The Death and the Resurrection**

Another difference between the two religions is their belief about the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Quran teach Muslims that Jesus did not confront death; thus there is no need for the resurrection.

> That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God"; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is Exalted in Power, Wise.\(^{46}\)

According to the Quran, Jesus was neither killed nor crucified. Instead, he was raised up by God until the Judgment Day, not confronting death. In Christianity, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ serve as the most important aspects of the Gospel. All four Gospels contain vivid records of the crucifixion and the resurrection, not to mention the repeated references to the resurrection and crucifixion in the Epistles of the

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Peter receives a vision from God commanding him to eat “unclean” food, prohibited to Jews at the time. Peter, in Acts chapter 10, interprets this vision as God commanding Peter and others to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles as well.

\(^{43}\) New American Standard Bible, Galatians 1: 15-16 states “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”

\(^{44}\) New American Standard Bible, John 4:4-42.


Apostles. The Bible attests to the general Christian belief that Jesus was crucified by the Romans motivated by the pleas of the Jews; then, after three days, he resurrected and after spending forty days with his disciples, he ascended into the Heaven. On the other hand, the absence of these events in the Muslim accounts is reasonable, for accepting these events is equal to acknowledging the fundamental aspects of the Gospel.

The Miracles
Excluding the divinity of Jesus Christ and the events such as the crucifixion and the resurrection which attest to the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Muslim Jesus and the Christian Jesus share similarities; one of them is Jesus’ ability to perform miracles.

I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! Thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave.

These verses list various miracles performed by Jesus: giving life to a bird, healing the blind and the lepers, and raising the dead. By adding ‘by My leave’ after each miracle, the Quran implies that the source of the miracles is God not Jesus. Ibn al-’Arabī makes a similar point in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. By illuminating the function of the Spirit of God, Ibn al-’Arabī asserts that the power to perform miracles originates from God.

Because the entire New Testament is devoted to Jesus Christ, his miracles are recorded in detail. In the Gospel of Mark, there is a story of Jesus healing the blind:

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48 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran, 005:113
49 This notion will be discussed further in following chapters. To briefly explain this, Ibn al-’Arabī argues that Jesus is merely an instrument of Allāh, through whom Allāh performs such miracles.
And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him … Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly.\textsuperscript{50}

Throughout the Bible, however, Jesus heals several blind people. Therefore, it is difficult to determine exactly which blind person the Quran is referring to. The Bible also narrates an anecdote of Jesus healing the leper.

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed.\textsuperscript{51}

Finally, the miracle of Jesus raising the dead, also discussed in depth in Ibn al-’Arabi’s writings, is recorded in the Gospel of John:

When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go.\textsuperscript{52}

One of the disciples of Jesus, John, wrote in his Gospel that there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.\textsuperscript{53}

Interestingly, both the Quran and the Bible point to God as the source of Jesus’ power. They both agree that Jesus receives power from God to perform these miracles. In the Gospel of John, John records:

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} New American Standard Bible, Mark 8:22-25.  
\textsuperscript{51} New American Standard Bible, Mark 1:40-41.  
\textsuperscript{52} New American Standard Bible, John 11:43-44.  
\textsuperscript{53} New American Standard Bible, John 21:25.  
\textsuperscript{54} New American Standard Bible, John 5:19.
According to the above verse, Jesus merely imitates what God does, which he would not do, if he were God. He also informs his disciples that his power is not confined to him only; that if his disciples were to believe in Jesus, they could perform the same miracles or even greater ones. He says,

    Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.55

The above verse needs to be understood in the context of another verse, John 14:16.56 Here, Jesus is pre-informing the disciples of his ascension. The disciples are already concerned about losing their leader; and, Jesus assures them with the above verse. Jesus’ remark was probably shocking even to his disciples because most of them considered miracles as the evidence of Jesus’ divinity. The fact that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ could perform such miracles indicates that the power does not originate from himself. In fact, in other parts of the Bible, other disciples such as Peter and Paul perform miracles that were as miraculous as the ones performed by Jesus.57

**Eschatology**

Islam and Christianity both believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. In Acts of the Bible, Luke records:

    This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.58

    He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.59

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56 New American Standard Bible, John 14:16. “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;”
57 New American Standard Bible, Acts 19:11-12. “God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.” In contrast to the miracles performed by Jesus where he had to actually notice the sick and the possessed, Paul did not even have to know about the needy. Everyone touched by Paul’s handkerchiefs or aprons were healed.
After his resurrection, Jesus spends forty days teaching his disciples, after which God raises him up into the Heaven. Christians believe that Jesus did not die and is still at the right hand of God, interceding for Christians until the Judgment Day. The second verse also shows that early Christians believed in the return of Jesus. The two Aramaic words, *Marana tha*, translated as ‘the Lord comes’ according to the King James Version dictionary, was used as a farewell among early Christians, which indicates their yearn for the return of Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed also states,

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

The Nicene Creed also asserts the reality of the second coming and its purpose, which is ‘to judge the living and the dead’. There are plenty of other verses that indicate the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the second coming is to judge the people. This affirms the Christian belief that he is God. Interestingly, the Quran also believes in the return of Jesus Christ on the Judgment Day.

Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is Exalted in Power, Wise; And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them.

These two verses provide two important points: that God had raised up Jesus and he is returning on the Day of Judgment. Ibn al-’Arabī also clearly states that the Seal of the general Sainthood i.e. Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day and seal the general sainthood.

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60 New American Standard Bible, Romans 8:27.
Another interesting notion is that, in both Scriptures, Jesus does not know the exact date of the Judgment Day. In a hadīth recorded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, it is written:

Whenever the Hour was mentioned, Jesus used to cry out in anguish like a woman.64

They ask thee about the (final) Hour - when will be its appointed time? Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): None but He can reveal as to when it will occur."65

In the first hadīth, it says that Jesus is ‘crying like a woman’. This intimates that Jesus is helpless on the Judgment Day. The second verse from the Quran suggests that God is the only One who knows the exact date of Judgment Day. Almost identical verses can be found in the Bible:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.66

In both the Quran and the Bible, Jesus does not seem to know the exact day of the Judgment.

Love and Humbleness

Even non-Christians are aware of the famous verse, “God is Love.”67 Love is highlighted in the Christian religion as the most important commandment that ought to be obeyed. Although Jesus is depicted as a loving person in Islam, he is more known as a humble and ascetic person.

Although there are not many verses in the Quran referring to Jesus as a humble and ascetic person, there are numerous ahādīth attesting to these characteristics. In a short hadīth, Jesus says:

Jesus said, “Why do I not observe in you the best of worship?” They said, “What is the best of worship, Spirit of God?” He said, “Humility before God.”

Jesus singles out humility as the best of worship before God. Humility can be perceived as humbleness in character. On the other hand, Jesus’ humble life is recorded in a hadīth: “Jesus has left behind nothing but a woolen garment, a slingshot, and two sandals when he was raised to heaven.” Another hadīth also suggests his humble lifestyle: he ate leaves of the trees, dressed in hair shirts, and slept wherever he could. Not only did he not have a house, but he also did not save money or food, saying “each day brings with it its own sustenance.”

Another notable aspect of Jesus is his adoration for asceticism. In the Bible, there is no implication that Jesus had such fondness. On the other hand, in Islam, Jesus is portrayed as a lover of asceticism, even excessive at times. In one hadīth, he stresses the importance of fleeing from the world.

Jesus was asked, “Teach us one act through which God may come to love us.” He answered, “Hate the world and God will love you.”

Fleeing from the world is the beginning of asceticism. Jesus also says in another hadīth, “Love of the world is the root of all sin.” Another short hadīth that hints Jesus’ hatred of the world is, “Be a guest in this world and make the mosque your home.” It is true that in the Bible, Jesus teaches his disciples to flee the world. However, it does not mean fleeing from the world physically, but protecting oneself spiritually from the influence of the world.

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68 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 71. cited: Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Zuhd, p. 95 (no.312).
69 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 94. cited: Hannad ibn al-Sariyy (d. 243/857), Kitab al-Zuhd, no.553.
71 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 118.
Conclusion

Despite the fact that Jesus is not God in Islam, he still holds tremendous importance. The disagreement on the nature of Jesus Christ causes the two religions to interpret various events in different ways; and they differ in accordance with their belief. Jesus Christ also holds great importance in the life of Ibn al-’Arabī. The next chapter discusses how Jesus Christ, both personally and through others, had influenced his life.
Chapter 2: Ibn al-'Arabī and Jesus Christ

Introduction

Ibn al-Arabi, a Sufi mystic, philosopher, poet, and sage, was born on the twenty-seventh of Ramadan in 560 Hegira, or the seventh of August in 1165 A.D. in Murcia, Spain. His full name is Muhammad b. ‘Alī b. Muhammad Ibn al-'Arabī al-Tā’ī al- Ḩātimī, which indicates his Arab lineage. His massive influence on Sufism and Islamic thought can be inferred from his epithet, al-Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master).

His spirituality was evident even from an early age. Abū al-Walīd ibn Rushd, a prominent Islamic philosopher also known as Averroes, expressed his desire to meet with Ibn al-'Arabī in person to his father, who was a close friend of Ibn Rushd. Ibn Rushd heard how Ibn al-'Arabī received a revelation from God. Later in his life, Ibn al-'Arabī becomes a prominent teacher and writes many books and treatises including the famous Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah [The Meccan Revelations] and Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam [The Bezels of Wisdom]. These two books along with others became the foundation of his teachings and doctrines, such as the doctrine of the Perfect Man and the Seal of the Saints.

The Abbāsid Period

75 R.W.J. Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 2.

“I was at the time a beardless youth. As I entered the house the philosopher rose to greet me with all the signs of friendliness and affection, and embraced me. Then he said to me, “Yes!” and shoed pleasure on seeing that I had understood him. I, on the other hand, being ware of the motie for his pleasure, replied, “No!” Upon this, ibn Rushd drew back from me, his color changed and he seemed to doubt what he had thought of me. He then put to me the following question, “What solution have you found as a result of mystical illumination and divine inspiration? Does it agree with what is arrived at by speculative thought?” Then, Ibn al-'Arabī replied, “Yes and No. Between the Yea and the Nay the spirits take their flight beyond matter, and the necks detach themselves from their bodies.” At this Ibn Rushd became pale, and I saw him tremble as he muttered the formula, “There is no power save from God.” This was because he had understood my allusion.
Historically speaking, Ibn al-’Arabī’s life occurred toward the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. During the Abbasid period, there was an abundant amount of debates between Christians and Muslims regarding various topics of Christianity. Although there is no direct proof that Ibn al-’Arabī was aware of these debates at the time, it is highly improbable that such an erudite person was oblivious to the issue. In fact, it can be postulated from his writings that he was aware of the debates. In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he presents a polemical attitude against Christianity, offering his refutation against the doctrine of the Trinity.  

During the early Abbasid period, there were two main types of Muslim opinion regarding the Gospels. The first group accepted most parts of the Gospel. They regarded the Gospels as a genuine record of the teachings of Jesus. However, they believed that the followers of Jesus especially Paul of Tarsus interpreted the Gospels in an erroneous way. The second group accepted small parts or none of the Gospels, arguing that the most part of the Gospels are fraudulent. They blame Christians for interpreting the Gospels literally, instead of understanding the context.

‘Alī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī is a Muslim convert during the Abbasid period, who claims to have been converted at the age of 70. Al-Ṭabarī understands Christianity from the inside and accepts the bulk of the Gospels. He wrote a polemical work called, “Refutation of the Christians (*Radd ōlā al-naṣārā*), in which he argues that Jesus did not think of himself as the Son of God in an exclusive sense but included himself among his disciples as children of God. Al-Ṭabarī was trying to teach Christians to return to the original teachings of Jesus and admit that their tenets had taken them extremely far from their master’s true teachings.

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76 Ibn al-’Arabī argues in chapter, “The Wisdom of Prophecy in the Word of Jesus” of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* that Christians were misguided for they believe in the deity of Christ. Certainly, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is not a polemical work; but it contains several passages that contain polemical views about Christianity.


Ibn Hazm (d.1064 A.D.) is another writer during the Abbasid period, who belongs to the latter category of the Muslim scholars. His “Book of the Classification of Religious Communities, Sects and Creeds” is presented in four volumes, the second of which contains diatribes against the veracity of the Bible. Ibn Hazm asserts that the Bible was written by writers, who did not rely much on actual witnesses of Jesus Christ. He argues that the true gospel was lost, with only fragments of it remaining in the modern gospels.\(^79\) Obviously, these fragments are in perfect coherence with the Muslim accounts of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament, which signify the deity of Christ, is either manipulated or misrepresented by the disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Ibn Hazm only accepted those parts of the Gospels that are coherent with the Islamic notion of Jesus.

These two categories encompass most opinions of Muslim writers at the time. Although it is uncertain which category Ibn al-‘Arabī would identify himself with, it can be inferred from his writings that he was certainly aware of the issue. In \(Fuṣūṣ\) al-hikam, Ibn al-‘Arabī attempts to identify the core of the problem of Christianity. Ibn al-‘Arabī states that the Christians attributing the miracle of ‘reviving the dead’ to Jesus instead of realizing his true form as the son of Mary is the root of all the problems.\(^80\)

**His Mentor**

Although Ibn al-‘Arabī had met many people during his life, one of the most influential teachers was Abū al-‘Abbās al-‘Uryābī. Ibn al-‘Arabī recalls his teacher being Christic (‘īsāwī) at the end of his life. On the other hand, Ibn al-‘Arabī confesses that he began as an ‘īsāwī in the beginning, became mūsāwī (Moses-like), then hūdī (Hud-like), and Muḥammadan at the end.\(^81\) In various parts of his books, Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions ‘īsāwī and Muḥammadan saints. Ibn al-‘Arabī shows his master’s proximity to Jesus: ‘My

\(^80\) Austin, \(Fuṣūṣ\) al-hikam, 178.
master Abū al-ʿAbbās al-ʿUryābī was on the foot of Jesus (ʿala qadam ʿIsa)’. These ʿīsāwī saints are not Christians; however, they claim to experience spiritual relationship with Jesus through the intermediary of Muhammad. In other words,

The ʿīsāwī saints play a very crucial role in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings. He devotes an entire chapter of the Futūḥāt to solely explain these ‘Christ-like’ saints. At the outset, the ʿīsāwī saints were applied to the direct disciples of Jesus. Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that these disciples possess two inheritances that are unique to them: one inherited directly from Jesus and the other inherited through the intermediary of the Prophet Muhammad. The necessary condition for the ʿīsāwī saints is that they realize the oneness of God. In other words, they have to reject the divinity of Jesus Christ. Ibn al-ʿArabī states:

Christians fashion representations of the divinity and turn towards them in order to worship, because the very existence of their prophet proceeded from a Spirit who clothed himself in a form; and so it is to this day in his community. But then came the Law of Muhammad, which forbade symbolic representations. Now Muhammad contains the essential reality of Jesus and the Law of Jesus is encompassed within his own.

Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī is criticizing Christians for cherishing a representation of the Divinity, which is Jesus. As stated in the previous chapter, Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God, which was breathed into Mary by Angel Gabriel. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī argues that Jesus is merely a physical representation of the Spirit. The Christians misconstrued this and began to worship Jesus. Then, Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces the Law of Muhammad, which forbade worshipping symbols. The arrival of the Law of Muhammad, which obviously happened after the advent of Jesus, rectified distorted messages and restored the true monotheism. The first and the foremost requirement for any ʿīsāwī saints it that they accept this notion; thus, these ʿīsāwī saints are by no means Christians and any arguments suggesting Ibn al-ʿArabī’s conversion or support for Christianity should be negated.

82 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 77.
83 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 75.
84 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 76.
Another attribute of īsāwī saints that distinguishes them from other types of saints is that they inherit ability and characteristics of Jesus. Some of the īsāwī saints possess the ability to walk on water, but they do not possess the ability to fly through the air. Jesus’ ability to walk on water has been inherited to these saints; whereas Muhammad’s nocturnal Ascension has been inherited to Muhammadan saints. The īsāwī saints can also be distinguished through their spiritual energy, which operates effectively on men and on things – a probable allusion to the power of Jesus to heal the blind and the lepers and to bring the dead back to life. Finally, the last attribute of īsāwī saints is their love and gentleness. Although all who profess religion must attain these characteristics, the Christic saints are singled out for their compassion and humbleness.

Ibn al-’Arabī also adds that there are īsāwī saints even to this day. He gives several examples. The first example is ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamandhānī, who was a disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazālī. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, he was accused of being a heretic (zindiq) and was hanged at the age of thirty-three, the same age as Jesus. Many Sufi writers have often said of him: his source was Jesus. Another interesting example was Ahrār, who said of himself as īsāwī and explains that he has inherited the ability to ‘quicken hearts’, a distinctive ability of Jesus. A very recent example of an īsāwī saint is Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Alawi, who died in 1935, and his face bore a Christ-like stamp which struck several of his European visitors.

The Christic or īsāwī saints are those who became a Muslim; yet inherit from Jesus through the intermediary of Muhammad. The īsāwī saints are those Muslim saints who bore similarities with Jesus Christ, as depicted in the Quran and ahādīth. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, each saint resembles one of the prophets at each moment of the saint’s

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86 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 82.
87 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 79.
life. For example, Ibn al-‘Arabī confesses that he began as an ‘īsāwī, then became mūsāwī (Moses-like), then hudī (Hud-like) and finally Muhammadian. At each point of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s life, he resembled one of these prophets of God. When someone is called ‘īsāwī, it means that the saint has a particular attribute of Jesus that is unique to Jesus such as asceticism, life-giving power, appearance or even the age of death. Because these ‘īsāwī saints claim to inherit spiritual blessings from Jesus through the intermediary of Muhammad, they do not necessarily conform to the historical Jesus recorded by the Bible.

**Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jesus**

In early days of his life, Ibn al-‘Arabī names two persons as his teachers: his terrestrial teacher, Abū al-‘Abbās al-‘Uryābī and his celestial teacher, Jesus Christ. Ibn al-‘Arabī confesses that Jesus’ guidance had started even before he met his first terrestrial master. In various parts of his writings, Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions Jesus as his first master. Due to the nature of autobiographical confession, there is no way to prove the validity of his claim; but, Ibn al-‘Arabī recalls the moment of his conversion in several parts of the Futūḥāt:

‘It was at his hands’, he states in the Futūḥāt, although without dating the event, ‘that I was converted (‘ala yadihi tubtu): he prayed for me that I should persist in religion (din) in this low world and in the other, and he called me his beloved. He ordered me to practice renunciation (zuḥd) and self-denial (tajrid)."

Ibn al-‘Arabī speaks as if Jesus were alive next to him. Because Ibn al-‘Arabī claimed to have the ability to recall spirits from heaven, it is plausible that Jesus could have been the first one to visit Ibn al-‘Arabī. As the word ‘conversion’ implies, this event marks a decisive moment in the life of Ibn al-‘Arabī, renouncing the world and seeking God. Although Ibn al-‘Arabī did not date his conversion experience, it probably took place in his early years, not long after his first revelation. Reinforced by repeated conviction and

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89 Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 83-86.
91 Although the word ‘tubtu’ was translated as converted, this really means ‘I repented’.
encouragement from Jesus, Ibn al-`Arabī decides to repent of worldly life and renounce all material possessions and fully enter the Sufi path. Ibn al-`Arabī’s renouncement of the world reveals Jesus’ influence, because Jesus is the symbol of asceticism in Islam. Ibn al-`Arabī also adds:

However, at that time, I had no [terrestrial] teacher to whom I could entrust my affairs and hand over my possessions.\(^{92}\)

At the time, it was a popular practice to entrust one’s belongings to one’s shaykh. Ibn al-`Arabī confesses that he did not have a terrestrial teacher to entrust his belongings to; therefore, he entrusts all of his belongings to his father. At the time of his conversion when Ibn al-`Arabī was fighting to enter the Sufi path, the Spirit of Jesus was the only one there to guide him.

Ibn al-`Arabī’s claim to an intimate relationship with Jesus is also revealed in his confession. He confesses that he became an ʿīsāwī saint when he was converted. Claude Addas, the author of the *Quest for the Red Sulphur* explains how Ibn al-`Arabī became ʿīsāwī.

He [Ibn al-`Arabī] declares that thanks to the spiritual influx (ruhaniyya) of Jesus he obtained at the start of his wayfaring the station of the famous Qadib al-Ban, who through his imaginal strength (quwwat al-khayal) had the power to assume any form he desired. Elsewhere he states specifically that in his own case he only assumed either human or angelic forms, never the form of animals.\(^{93}\)

In the Quran, Jesus is given several names and attributes: the Spirit of God, the Word of God, the Breath of God and the Mercy of God. Because Jesus was represented in various forms, assuming a representation was a unique ability that only ʿīsāwī saints could attain. Inferring from the above text, Ibn al-`Arabī probably attained this ability when he was converted at the hands of Jesus.

**Conclusion**

\(^{92}\) Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 39.

\(^{93}\) Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 47.
Ibn al-’Arabī established a unique relationship with Jesus. In fact, Jesus served as one of the most important role models in Ibn al-’Arabī’s life, being his first teacher and helping him at his conversion. Even Ibn al-’Arabī’s first terrestrial teacher, Abu al-‘Abbas al-‘Uryabi, was heavily influenced by Jesus; however, the role of Jesus is not confined to these.
Chapter 3: Seal of Sainthood

The doctrine of the Seal of Sainthood is at the heart of Ibn al-'Arabi’s writings. Because this doctrine deeply permeates the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi, it is impossible to grasp the depth of his thoughts without understanding the Seal of Sainthood. Michel Chodkiewicz’s book, Seal of the Saints, does a tremendous job garnering notions that are disseminated through Ibn al-'Arabi’s writings and organize them thoroughly to explain the doctrine with lucidity.

The Origin

The first person to speak about the Seal of the Saints is Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi94, a Sufi mystic who is a forerunner of Ibn al-'Arabi. Although Al-Tirmidhi initiated the notion of the Seal, it is Ibn al-'Arabi who developed the doctrine and boldly claimed himself as the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood.

The title, ‘the Seal of the Saints’ (khatm al-awliyā’) or ‘the Seal of the Sainthood’ cannot be found in the Quran. Therefore, it was treated as bid’a (innovation) by many critics of Sufism and condemned as such by many to this day. The scriptural backing of

94 The biography of Hakim Tirmidhi is from: Bernd Radtke, “A Forerunner of Ibn al-'Arabi: Hakim Tirmidhi on Sainthood,” Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, Vol VIII, (1989): http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/hakimTirmidhi.html. Hakim Tirmidhi was born around 820 in Khorasan, and died at the beginning of the fourth century of the Hegira. He was descended from a family of theologians. At the age of thirty, upon his return from Mecca after the pilgrimage, he devotes himself to mysticism. He becomes an extremely prolific writer in this field. According to his pupil Abu Bakr al-Warraq, he had been a disciple of al-Khadir, the immortal itinerant initiator, who used to visit him every Sunday. His view on problem of walāya led him to be accused of being a mutanabbi. The major part of his writings have been preserved and have had a considerable influence on the development of Sufism. His best known work, kitāb khatm al-awliyā’, which means 'The Book of the Seal of the Saints’ was only known through quotations from Ibn al-'Arabi’s Futūhāt Makkīyya, but their manuscripts were discovered in Istanbul. Ibn al-'Arabi wrote two commentaries on the part of this book. One is a short version in a separate treatise; a second, more extensive one, forms part of the second volume of the Futūhāt al-makkiyya. These texts were sources of inspiration for Ibn al-'Arabi, who took it as a basis for developing his own ideas.
the doctrine is a hadīth that states that the ulama’ and the awliyā’ are the heirs of the prophets. A verse in the Quran also buttresses the doctrine of the Seal of the Saints:

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of God, and the Seal of the Prophets: and God has full knowledge of all things.

The two verses mentioned above are combined to serve as the doctrinal basis of the Seal of the Saints. The logic behind this is that since Muhammad is the Seal of the prophets, awliyā’, as heirs of the prophets, must have a Seal too. Although al-Tirmidhī was the first one to come up with these notions, he is silent about the exact person of the Seal of the Sainthood. Ibn al-’Arabī, on the other hand, answers the questionnaire of al-Tirmidhī and promotes himself as the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood.

Definitions
Islam asserts that prior to Islam, there were prophets sent by God to preach to their designated community to repent, believe and submit to the one true God. This notion is alien to other monotheistic religions such as Judaism, which considers themselves as the only legitimate religion and Christianity, which negates all the previous and subsequent religions except for Judaism. Islam, on the other hand, accepts that God sent prophets to every nation, even if their message was distorted into different religions. The Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the last of the generation of the prophets prior to him. That is why he is called ‘the Seal of the Prophets.’ Ibn al-’Arabī develops the doctrine of the Seal of the Sainthood from this notion and asserts the presence of the three Seals, their roles and their identity.

Walī and awliyā’ are used as singular and plural form of a word, saint. Although the exact translation of the word, saint, should be from the root, q.d.s., the role of the

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95 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 116.
97 The questionnaire formulated by al-Tirmidhī was considered important by Sufi mystics because they believed that the person who knew the answers to all of the questions was the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints, the perfect heir of the prophet Muhammad.
saints from other religions is similar to the role of *awaliya’* in Islam. The primary meaning of *w.l.y.* is proximity or contiguity, and this gives rise to two further meanings. One of the meanings is ‘to be a friend’, and the other is ‘to direct’, ‘to govern’, ‘to take in charge’. Thus, a *walī* is a friend, ‘he who is close’, but is also ‘he who assists’ and ‘he who disposes’.

Examining places where the words, *walī* and *awliyā’*, appear in the Quran may elucidate their definitions. Their occurrence in the Quran is ubiquitous: appearing two hundred and thirty-two times in twelve different forms. One of the examples is a verse 10:62, which carries a positive meaning: “Behold, verily on the friends [saints] of God there is no fear, nor shall they grieve.” An identical statement can be found in the Quran 2:38, where God speaks to Adam. These two verses indicate that the establishment of the sainthood (*walāyah*) coincided with the onset of the humanity.

On the other hand, *al-walī* is one of the names of God; and for Ibn al-’Arabī this is of great importance. “God is the *Walī* of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light.” The Muslim exegetes attempted to classify the different meanings of *Walī* manifested in the Quran. Muqātil detected ten meanings, which can be reduced down to two. The first definition is directly related to the idea of friend or proximity. The second meaning is ‘protector’ or ‘governor’. The perfect coexistence of these two definitions unify the meanings of the word *Walī*: simultaneously being one who is close, the beloved, he who

100 Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 21.
is protected, taken in charge and the protector, the patron, and the governor. Studying how the word was used in *ahādīth*, especially *ahādīth qudsiyā*,\(^{108}\) can also broaden the perspective.

One *ḥadīth* narrates that the *walī* is a pious person devoted to prayer and service of the Lord with humble character.

The most enviable of My *awliyā’* close to Me is a believer whose possessions are few, whose joy is prayer, who accomplishes the service of his Lord to perfection and obeys Him in secret. He is obscure among men and no one points at him.\(^ {109}\)

The following *ḥadīth* provides important information about the *walī* as well. According to the *ḥadīth*, the piousness and devotedness of *walī* is so great that the prophets and the martyrs envy his proximity to God.

> Know that God has servants who are neither prophets nor martyrs and who are envied by the prophets and martyrs for their positions and their nearness to God … on the Day of Resurrection thrones of light will be placed at their disposal. Their faces will be of light … These are the *awliyā’* of God.\(^ {110}\)

There are abundant amount of other *ahādīth*, which signify *walī*’s extraordinary relationship with God. The two verses, “I declare war on him who is my *walī*’s enemy,”\(^ {111}\) and “among My servants, My *awliyā’* are those who remember Me,”\(^ {112}\) are good examples. These *ahādīth* all attest to the one truth: *Walī* holds a position near God of which even the most devout prophets and messengers of God envy.

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\(^{108}\) *Ḥadīth* accounts in which God Himself speaks in the first person through Prophet Muhammad.


In explaining the nature of walīyāh, one of the most striking and controversial aspect is that walīyāh does not have to be a Muslim. Ibn al-'Arabī quotes the verse 2:257 in the Quran, “God is the Walī of those who have faith.” According to Ibn al-'Arabī, ‘faith’ here is not confined to monotheistic believers (muwaḥḥidūn), but it extends to the polytheist (mushrik). The reasoning is that the latter’s faith, no matter what its idol may be, there is no object in this universe, but God. Therefore, even if a polytheist is worshipping an object, he is indirectly glorifying God. More surprisingly, Ibn al-'Arabī adds that with divine assistance, a polytheist can triumph over the believer in the usual sense (al-mu'min al-muwahhid). Ibn al-'Arabī gives proof by quoting the Quran 7:172, when God makes the children of Adam testify by asking, “Am I not your Lord?” Ibn al-'Arabī argues that since God asks them to bear witness to God’s lordship (rabubiyya) not to His unicity, even if an unbeliever is a polytheist, he can be a walī. He adds that ‘Allah’s walīyāh is universal and extends to all His creatures inasmuch as they are His servants’, whether or not they desire it. Ibn al-'Arabī narrates an anecdote about a man, who lived his entire life as a Christian, but moved up to the ladder of the noble saint, the moment he professed shahada. Ibn al-'Arabī narrates:

The next day, when I sat down before the shaykh to study with him, I begged him to explain to me what I had seen. He replied, ‘As regards the place, it is Nihawand. As for the six people whom you saw there, they were the noble abdāl. The man who was groaning was the seventh of them, and when he was on the point of death I came there to be present for it. As for the man whom I made to say the two shahadas, he was a Christian, an inhabitant of Constantinople. God had ordered me to put him in the place of the badal who had died. He came to me, made a profession of Islam before me, and now is one of them.’

The story speaks of a person, who was a Christian all his life. The moment he professes the shahadah, he is elevated to one of the abdāl, a walī of a high position. Ibn al-'Arabī

114 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 56. Ibn al-'Arabī’s notion that there is no object in this universe but God is his unique way of looking at the cosmos. This view will be reexamined in following paragraphs.
115 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 56.
117 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 56.
118 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 91. Cited: Tadhafi, Qala’id al-jawāhir, p. 31.
considers Christians to be guilty of shirk (polytheism), since he treats the Trinity as believing in three Gods. Nevertheless, the person’s being a Christian all his life does not appear to deter him from becoming one of the abdāl.

The Three Seals
Ibn al-’Arabī argues that there are three Seals. The first seal is the Seal of the prophets, Muhammad. This is a fact agreed upon by all Muslims. The presence of the two other seals is what makes Ibn al-’Arabī’s doctrine controversial and noteworthy.

The second Seal is referred to by Ibn al-’Arabī as the Seal of the general Sainthood. Shiite commentators on Ibn al-’Arabī typically argue that ‘Ali ibn Abi Tālib is the Seal of the general Sainthood and the Mahdi is the Seal of the Muhammadan Saint. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, however, the Seal of the general Sainthood is Jesus Christ. Ibn al-’Arabī answers a question in Tirmidhī’s questionnaire: ‘Who is he who is worthy to be the Seal of the Saints as Muhammad is worthy to be the Seal of Prophethood?’ He answers the question in two occasions. In Jawab mustaqim, he says in a vague manner:

He who is worthy of this is a man who resembles his father. He is a non-Arab, of harmonious constitution … The cycle of the Kingdom and of Sainthood will be sealed by him. He has a minister whose name is Yahya [i.e. John]. His nature is spiritual as to its origin and human as to its place of manifestation.\(^\text{119}\)

Although the exact name is not mentioned, Ibn al-’Arabī gives hints. The phrase, ‘resembling his father’, implies the unusual birth of Jesus, who was conceived by the direct breath of God. ‘Non-Arab’ indicates his Jewish lineage. Finally, Yahya, who is John the Baptist, is Jesus’ minister in the Quran. In another text, the identity of the Seal of the general Sainthood is clearer:

There are in fact two Seals, one with which God seals sainthood in general and another with which He seals Muhammadan sainthood. ‘Isa [i.e. Jesus] is the Seal of Sainthood in an absolute sense.\(^\text{120}\)

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\(^{119}\) Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 117. Cited: Jawab Mustaqim edited by O. Yahia.
\(^{120}\) Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 118. Cited: Futūḥāt, II, p. 49.
The identity of the Seal of the general Sainthood is not debatable. Ibn al-’Arabī reaffirms elsewhere that it is Jesus. The identity of the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood, however, is ambiguous. In reply to Tirmidhī’s fifteenth question, Ibn al-’Arabī asserts that the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints has the same name as the Prophet i.e. Muhammad and that he does not belong to the Prophet’s lineage. The identity of the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood will be revealed in the upcoming section.

It is rather difficult to identify and separate the role of the two Seals. There are contradictions in Ibn al-’Arabī’s writings. For example, at one point, Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

Muhammadan Sainthood, that is to say the sainthood of the Law revealed to Muhammad, has a particular Seal who is inferior in rank to Jesus because the latter is a Messenger.\(^{121}\)

Ibn al-’Arabī clearly mentions that the Muhammadan Sainthood is inferior to Jesus, who is the Seal of general sainthood. In another part of his writing, Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

As for the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, who is the special Seal of the sainthood of the community, which is visibly that of Muhammad, Jesus himself will be placed under the authority of his office along with Elijah, Khadir and all the saints of God who belong to this community. In this way, Jesus, although a Seal, will himself be sealed by the Muhammadan Seal.\(^{122}\)

In the first part of his writing, Ibn al-’Arabī says that the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood is inferior in rank. In the next passage, he mentions that Jesus is under the authority of the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood. This is even more peculiar considering the fact that the second passage follows right after the first passage. Apparently, the blatant contradiction was not a problem for Ibn al-’Arabī in understanding the role of the two Seals. It appears that the hierarchy of the two is not conspicuous even to the greatest shaykh.

**The Role of Wali**


The position of ṭawālī before God can be compared to the position of ṭabā (prophet) and ṭasīl (messenger). According to Ibn al-’Arabī, the sphere of ṭalāyah (sainthood) encompasses the sphere of ṭubūwwah (prophethood) and the sphere of messengers. Unlike the prophets and messengers whose missions have an end, the sainthood has no end in time. For example, the mission of prophets and messengers ended after the Prophet Muhammad; since after him, there is neither any prophet nor any other legislat ing messenger. On the other hand, the presence of saints has continued even after the death of Muhammad. Therefore, the sphere of saints has to be larger than the sphere of the prophets and messengers, which, however, does not necessarily suggest their superiority.

The role of each type of ṭalāyah, the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood and the Seal of the general Sainthood, can be separated, though in some areas it is vague. Ibn al-’Arabī claims that the Seal of the general sainthood, that is Jesus, will judge and seal the general sainthood. Ibn al-’Arabī writes about the role of Jesus in Futūḥāt:

When Jesus descends at the end of time, he will judge only according to the Law revealed to Muhammad. He is the Seal of the Saints. One of the favours accorded to Muhammad was that the sainthood of his community and sainthood in general should be sealed by a noble Messenger Prophet … On the day of the Resurrection, Jesus will be present in two groups simultaneously: with the Messengers in as much as he is one of them, and with us [i.e. with the Muhammadan community] in as much as he is a saint. This is a station with which God has honoured only him and Elijah, and no other prophet.123

As the Seal of the general sainthood, Jesus will return at the end of time to judge. It is important to note that Jesus will seal the Law of Muhammad, not the Christian Law. This shows that Jesus as the Seal does not in anyway imply his divinity or approval of the Christian doctrine. According to the Islam, Jesus did not confront death and is in Heaven waiting for the Judgment Day to return to the world. It is then he will put a seal to the generation of the saints.

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The role of the Muhammadan Seal is quite perplexing and contradicting at times. First, Ibn al-ʿArabī argues that the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is the most knowledgeable of created beings on the subject of God. He adds that there is not now, and there will not be after him, a being who knows more about God. Ibn al-ʿArabī also uses a mirror to explain another important attribute of the Seal. Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood is the perfect epiphany of God. One of the doctrines of Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that every one of God’s creations on Earth is a manifestation of God, some manifesting God more than others. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Muhammadan Seal is the perfect manifestation of God.

He to whom God is epiphanised sees nothing but his own form in the mirror of absolute Reality (al-Haqq): he does not and cannot see absolute Reality, even though he knows that in it he has perceived his own form… God has made this a symbol of the epiphany of His Essence, in order that he to whom He is epiphanized may know that he does not truly see Him.

The Muhammadan Seal is a mirror image of God. Just as a person sees himself in the mirror, God sees His Essence in the image of the Muhammadan Seal. Ibn al-ʿArabī adds that a person can manifest the image of God better if he is purer and holier, just as a mirror can reflect the image if it is cleaner. In the same way, the Muhammadan Seal can reflect the image of God perfectly because he is also perfectly pure, filled with the knowledge of God.

Another view of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saint aroused much controversy. He argued that the Seal of the Muhammadan Saint existed before the cosmos with the Muhammadan Reality.

In the same way the Seal of Saints was a saint “when Adam was between the water and the clay,” while other saints became saints only when they had acquired all the necessary divine qualities, since God has called Himself the Friend [al-Walī], the Praised One. As for the Seal of Saints, he is the Saint, the Heir, the one whose [knowledge] derives from the Source, the one who beholds all levels [of

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This sainthood is among the excellencies of the Seal of Apostles, Muhammad, first of the Community [of apostles] and Lord of Men as being he who opened the gate to intercession. This latter is a state peculiar to him and not common [to all apostles].

Ibn al-’Arabī refers to the famous hadīth implying the preexistence of the Muhammadan Reality and relates that to the Seal of the Muhammadan saints, arguing that the Seal also existed before Adam. This idea is controversial because it places the Seal at the same level as the Prophet Muhammad, the greatest Prophet in Islam. Ibn al-’Arabī also appears to be claiming that the messengers and the prophets are dependent on the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood; thus arguing that the Seal is superior even to Muhammad. Ibn al-’Arabī appears to be putting the Seal in a unique position, which no men have reached, even the prophets and messengers of God. Another passage written by Ibn al-’Arabī in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam also contains the brick hadīth from Bukhari’s manaqib. Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

The Prophet likened the office of prophet to a wall of bricks, complete except for one brick. He himself was the missing brick. However, while the Prophet saw the lack of one brick, the Seal of Saints perceived that two bricks were missing. The bricks of the wall were of silver and gold. Since he saw himself as filling the gap, it is the Seal of Saints who is the two bricks and who completes the wall. The reason for his seeing two bricks is that, outwardly, he follows the Law of the Seal of Apostles represented by the silver brick. This is his outer aspect and the rules that he adheres to in it. Inwardly, however, he receives directly from God what he appears [outwardly] to follow, because he perceives the divine Command as it is [in its essence], represented by the golden brick. He derives his knowledge from the same source as the angel who reveals it to the Apostle.

Here, Ibn al-’Arabī quotes the famous hadīth, which narrates the importance of Prophet Muhammad as the Seal of the prophets by comparing his role to the missing brick in a wall. Using this story as a comparison, Ibn al-’Arabī argues that the role of the Seal is as important as the role of Prophet Muhammad. He claims that the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood derives from God directly and draws from the same source as the angels. This was considered outrageous to many scholars because it appeared as if Ibn

al-’Arabī was putting the Seal on the equal level with the angels. This rather scandalous notion combined with the idea of the preexistence of the Seal have received much criticism from Muslim exoterists as blasphemous. This concern, however, is somewhat appeased by the last statement, ‘He [the Seal] is one of the perfections of the Seal of the Messengers, Muhammad,’ which proves that the Seal is under the authority of the Prophet.

The Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood is the last person who inherits directly from the Prophet. Just like there were ‘īsawī saints who received spiritual power from Jesus, the Seal of the Muhammadan saint is the epiphany of the Prophet. Ibn al-’Arabī claims that he is the last Muhammadan saint who will seal the generation of these saints.

**The Person of the Seal of the Saints**

The reason the doctrine of Seal of the Saints is important is because Ibn al-’Arabī claims that the seal is himself. Hakim al-Tirmidhī was a forerunner of Ibn al-’Arabī who was also a prominent Sufi scholar. Al-Tirmidhī’s greatest contribution to the doctrine of the Seal of the Saints is his famous questionnaire. The questionnaire was considered imperative by Sufi mystics because they believed that the person who knew the answers to all of these questions was the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints, the perfect heir of the prophet Muhammad. The questionnaire contains 157 questions regarding the divergent aspects of awliyā’.

One of the questions asks about the number of spiritual stations (manāzil) of the saints, to which Ibn al-’Arabī answers that there are two: sensible (hisṣiyya) and spiritual (ma’nawiyya). Another question asks ‘how is the station of the prophets situated in relation to that of the saints?’ Ibn al-’Arabī answers by first explaining what kind of prophethood is meant. He distinguishes between legislative prophethood and absolute prophethood. There are other questions such as ‘what is meant by the ḥadīth: God created creatures in a darkness? What was their condition in darkness?’

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what is meant by the ḥadīth: Allah has one hundred and seventeen qualities? What are these qualities?’ ‘What words will Allah address to the Messengers on the Day of Resurrection?’ ‘What are the Keys of Generosity?’ ‘What is the primordial Name from which all other Names proceed?’ and ‘Where is the door which reveals the hidden Name to created beings?’ These are just a few questions from Tirmidhī’s one-hundred and fifty-seven questions. Ibn al-ʿArabī answers all of them in chapter seventy-three of his book Futūḥāt, proving that he is the legitimate Seal of the Muhammadan Saints.

A statement from Ibn al-ʿArabī also implies that he believed himself to be the legitimate Seal. Highlighting the fact that the Seal and the Quran are brothers, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in the Futūḥāt: ‘I am the Quran and the Seven oft-repeated (al-sabʿ al-mathānī).’ The combination of the two statements leads to one conclusion: Ibn al-ʿArabī is the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints. There are other places in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī in which he explicitly claims to be the Seal.

I had a vision of my self which was of this type, and I received it as good news (bushra) from God, for it corresponded to something the Prophet said when he used a parable to describe his position in relation to the other prophets… While I was in Mecca in 599, I had a dream in which I saw the Kaʿba built of alternate gold and silver bricks. The building was complete; nothing remained to be done. I looked at it and admired its beauty. But then I turned to face the side between the Yemeni corner and the Syrian corner, and I saw, nearer the Syrian corner, a gap where two bricks, one gold and one silver, had not been laid in two of the rows of the wall … Then I saw myself placed in the gap made by these two missing bricks. I myself was these two bricks, by means of which the wall was completed and the Kaʿba made perfect.

Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that he received the vision in 599 A.H. A similar story appears in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, which was written around 627 A.H. (1229 A.D.) In Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, Ibn al-ʿArabī does not mention the name of the Seal. It is peculiar because in a vision he

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129 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 32.
133 R.W.J. Austin, trans., The Bezels of Wisdom, 66-67. The same passage was quoted on pg. 44 fn. 132 of this thesis.
received in 599 A.H., he learns that he is the Seal. In Futūḥāt, which was written between 599 A.H. and 629 A.H., Ibn al-'Arabī writes: “I am, without any doubt, the Seal of Sainthood. In that I am the heir of the Hāshimite and of the Messiah.” The first and the third quotation appear to be suggesting that Ibn al-'Arabī believed himself to be the Seal. In the second passage, which was written the latest, Ibn al-'Arabī does not mention his name as the Seal. It would be impossible to figure out why Ibn al-'Arabī did this.

Although it remains somewhat a mystery, the testimonies of later scholars also attest to the fact that Ibn al-'Arabī considered himself to be the Seal. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), one of Ibn al-'Arabī’s great commentators and defenders in the Ottoman world wrote in one of his poems: “He [i.e. Ibn ‘Arabī] is the Seal of the Saints in his time/ You will find this to be true if you read his Fusūs.” In his book, al-Radd al-matīn, he identified the Seal as the ‘inheritor in full of Muhammad sainthood’ and explains that there have been many Seals, but the last to date is Ibn al-'Arabī. In conclusion, it is safe to conclude that Ibn al-'Arabī claimed himself to be the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood.

**The Attributes of the Seal**

A passage from Tirmidhī, translated by Osman Yahia, offers various nature of the sainthood. In *Khatm al-awliyā’,* Tirmidhī writes:

> “He is a servant whom God has taken into his charge.
> He is under the divine aegis; he speaks through God, hears through God,
> He listens, sees, acts, and meditates through God.
> God has made him famous throughout the world
> And has established him as the imam of created beings.
> He is the keeper of the emblem of the awliyā’
> The surety of the inhabitants of the earth,

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134 Hāshimite is a clan within the tribe of Quraysh, in which the Prophet Muhammad was a member of. Therefore, anyone who is a Hāshimite has a common ancestry with Prophet Muhammad.
The spectacle of the beings of heaven.
Flower of paradise, chosen one of God, object of His gaze,
Mine of His secrets, scourge of His justice,
Through him God quickens hearts,
Through him He guides created beings along the Way,
Through him He enforces the divine laws.
This being is the key to the right direction,
The flaming torch of the earth
Guardian of the registers of the Saints
And their guide.
He alone gives God the praises that are due to Him …
He is the lord of the saints
He is the Wisest of the Wise …”

This passage contains much information about the Seal of the Saints. The first notable information is his servanthood. A servant is a person completely submitted to the order of his owner. In the same way, the Seal is completely submitted to the will of God. Also, the servanthood implies that there is a clear hierarchy between the servant and the owner. In this case, the Seal is under the authority of God.

The second aspect originates from the first: the total dependency on God. Everything the Seal does, he does it through God. Doing something through God means that the Seal cannot do these things without the help of God. The Seal realizes that without the grace of God he cannot do anything. For everyone is sustained and assisted by God every moment of his life, whether he realizes or not, it is the full realization of such help that distinguishes the Seal from ordinary men.

The third attribute is his imamate in the universe. An imam is God’s vicegerent on the Earth. In other words, the Seal is the mediator between the world and God. The imam connects the world to God and the world is not sustained without him. The imam is also a leader figure who leads the human worship of God. He is also described as the most cherished one of God. As the imam, through him, God also does his work. The last important attribute is that the Seal is the justice of God. He is the enforcer, guide and

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perfect manifestation of the Divine Law. The Seal is sinless, which means that he satisfies the perfect justice of God.

Although it is not explicitly stated in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings, the Seal of the Muhammadan Sainthood is the Perfect Man. In Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, Ibn al-ʿArabī states:

For the Reality, he is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place. Thus he is called insan [meaning both man and pupil], for it is by him that the Reality looks on His creation and bestows the Mercy [of existence] on them... So long as the king’s seal is on it no one dares to open it except by his permission, the seal being [as it were] a regent in charge of the kingdom. Even so is the Cosmos preserved so long as the Perfect Man remains in it.\(^{139}\)

Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the nature and the attributes of the Perfect Man. The description of the Seal and al-insān al-kāmil (the Perfect Man) share many similarities. Just like the Seal, the Perfect Man is the vicegerent of God and the source of God’s mercy. The world is sustained through the mediation of the Perfect Man, who is the most cherished being on Earth.

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\(^{139}\) R.W.J. Austin, trans., The Bezels of Wisdom, 51.
Chapter 4: Jesus in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam

Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam

Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam is one of the most famous works produced by Ibn al-’Arabī. The literal translation of the title is ‘The Bezels of Wisdoms’. An Arabic word, faṣṣ, is the singular form of fuṣūṣ. The faṣṣ means the ‘bezel’ or ‘setting’ in which the gem, engraved with a name, will be set to make a seal ring. The book consists of twenty-seven chapters, each attributed to a prophet in the Quran. By calling his work Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, Ibn al-’Arabī means that each prophet, after whom each chapter is entitled, is the epitome of each kind of wisdom: each prophet being the sign of a particular aspect of God’s wisdom. For example, the first chapter on Adam is entitled, “The Wisdom of Divinity in the Word of Adam.”\(^\text{140}\) Adam’s epitomic characteristic wisdom is ‘Divinity’. In other words, Adam manifests ‘divinity’ more than other Islamic prophets except Muhammad, who is the Seal of the prophets.

Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam is not an ordinary book. Containing abstruse doctrines and notions developed by one of the most erudite scholars of Sufism, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam also boasts its unique birth. Ibn al-’Arabī claims that the book was descended to him from God through inspiration. Ibn al-’Arabī recollects the vision:

I saw the Apostle of God in a visitation granted to me during the latter part of the month of Muharram in the year 627, in the city of Damascus. He had in his hand a book and he said to me, “This is the book of the Bezels of Wisdom; take it and bring it to men that they might benefit from it.” I said, “All obedience is due to God and his Apostle; it shall be as we are commanded.” I therefore carried out the wish, made pure my intention and devoted my purpose to the publishing of this book, even as the Apostle had laid down, without any addition or subtraction.\(^\text{141}\)

At the end, Ibn al-’Arabī even prays to God that he does not include any of his own ideas in the book, emphasizing that the book is the wisdom of God. This notion is buttressed by its enigmatic content and abstruse doctrines. Although the doctrine of the Seal of the Saints permeated the entire book, the doctrine is manifested clearly in the fifteenth

\(^{140}\) The translation according to R.W.J. Austin, trans., The Bezels of Wisdom, 50.

\(^{141}\) R.W.J. Austin, trans., The Bezels of Wisdom, 45.
chapter, devoted solely to Jesus. It is the best chapter to study to understand Ibn al-
’Arabī’s perspective on Jesus, especially as the Seal of the general Sainthood.

Ibn al-’Arabī’s personal relationship with Jesus along with his position as the Seal of the general Saints made the fifteenth chapter of Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam more salient than other chapters of the book. In this chapter, Jesus Christ is described by several names: the Spirit of God, the Word of God, the Breath of God, the Mercy of God, and the Slave of God. The first two names are explicitly used to call Jesus. The third and the fourth names are the Divine names that illustrate the attributes of Jesus. The fifth name, ‘the Slave of God’, demonstrates evident hierarchy between God and Jesus.

The main goal of the fifteenth chapter of the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam is to teach the readers that the power to create belongs to God. The four names listed above are associated with the power to create. By explaining each of these names, Ibn al-’Arabī seeks to prove that God is the source of the divine power not Jesus.

Defining the Spirit (rūḥ)
The majority of the chapter fifteen is devoted to explaining various models and manifestations of the Spirit (rūḥ) and the way it is imparted to the matter and form, especially its role in Jesus’ miracles and his extraordinary ability to raise the dead.

Before the function of the Spirit can be discussed, it is imperative to study the definition of the Spirit defined by the Quran and the aḥādīth. In the chapter of Mary, verse 17, Gabriel is called rūḥuna, which means ‘Our spirit’ - the word ‘our’ referring to God. Instead of saying Gabriel, the Quran uses ‘Our Spirit’ to refer to Gabriel. Sometimes, Jesus is called, ‘the spirit proceeding from Him’. The disciples of Jesus

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142 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran. 019:017. Although in Yusuf ‘Ali translations of the Quran, it is written: “We sent her our angel”, the original text in Arabic says rūḥ, meaning Spirit.

also called him ‘the Spirit of God’ in different *ahādīth.* There are many reasons why the two are called the Spirit of God. When Jesus and Gabriel are called ‘the Spirit of God,’ it does not mean that they are the Spirit of God in essence. More precisely, it means that Jesus and Gabriel are manifestations or representations of God. If the Spirit of God were Gabriel or Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad would have been instructed to answer this question differently:

> They ask thee concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: "The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you. (O men!)

When the Prophet Muhammad was asked by the people concerning the Spirit, he is instructed to give a vague answer. Nowhere in the answer can Jesus or Gabriel be found, which implies that neither of them is, in essence, the Spirit. If Jesus or Gabriel were the Spirit, God would have simply instructed the Prophet to say: ‘the Spirit of God’ is Jesus or ‘the Spirit of God’ is Gabriel. Perhaps, rather than trying to define the Spirit, it is better to examine various forms of the Spirit.

**The Function of the Spirit**

There are several places in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* where Ibn al-’Arabī discusses the function of the Spirit. In the chapter of Noah, Ibn al-’Arabī briefly discusses the function of the Spirit. Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

> The truth is that the Reality is manifest in every created being and in every concept, while He is [at the same time] hidden from all understanding, except for one who holds that the Cosmos is His form and His identity. This is the Name, the Manifest, while He is also unmanifested Spirit, the Unmanifest. In this sense He is,

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145 The Christian Trinity asserts that the Spirit or the Holy Spirit and Jesus are equal and they are both God.

in relation to the manifested forms of the Cosmos, the Spirit that determines those forms.\textsuperscript{147}

Before he introduces this quote, Ibn al-’Arabī begins the chapter severely criticizing those Muslims who claim that God is purely transcendent. He calls them fools and rogues and rebukes them for misunderstanding the core: being like those who believe in part and deny in part. Ibn al-’Arabī explains that God is both Outwardly Manifest and Inwardly hidden (\textit{ẓāhir wa bāṭin}). For example, when someone understands a person, one must understand his inner and outer attributes. God, too, has Manifest and Unmanifest attributes. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, what God manifests and does not manifest is determined by His Spirit. In other words, the Spirit of God determines what to manifest and what not to manifest in God and believers. Ibn al-’Arabī quotes a saying from the Prophet to elucidate this notion:

\begin{quote}
In this connection the Prophet said, “Who [truly] knows himself knows his Lord,” linking together knowledge of God and knowledge of the self. God says, \textit{We will show them our signs on the horizons}, meaning the world outside you, and \textit{in yourselves}, self, here, meaning your inner essence, \textit{till it becomes clear to them that He is the Reality}, in that you are His form and He is your Spirit. You are in relation to Him as your physical form.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

It can be inferred from the passage that God manifests his attributes through human beings both inwardly and outwardly; thus, through the Spirit, God manifests His attributes. Eventually, when a person is repeatedly exposed to the manifestations of God, he will acknowledge that he is ‘His form and He is his Spirit.’ When God declares that He will manifest Himself in a person, they are manifested as inner signs of a devout Muslim. For example, when a Muslim lives a life of prayer, alms-giving and discipline, the person will experience manifestations of godliness and holiness both inwardly and outwardly. An example of inward manifestation could be overflowing mercy towards others; whereas, an outward manifestation could be greater alms-giving.

\textsuperscript{147} R.W.J. Austin, trans., \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 73.  
\textsuperscript{148} R.W.J. Austin, trans., \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 74.
The two types of manifestations are the result of the fullness of the Spirit of God in the believer. The three Seals perfectly manifest both inward and outward attributes of God. Jesus is called the Spirit of God, because he is the incarnate form of the Spirit of God. Thus, one principle can be observed; since, Jesus, who is the Spirit himself, manifests the attributes of God perfectly, the attributes are manifested in a believer in accordance with the amount of the Spirit in them. A similar notion is introduced later on when Ibn al-’Arabī compares the Seal to a mirror. In conclusion, the Spirit of God manifests attributes of God more when the believer is filled by the Spirit more.

Another function of the Spirit revealed in the fifteenth chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is the unveiling of the function of the Spirit, which must begin from the extraordinary nature of the birth and the conception of Jesus Christ. Ibn al-’Arabī commences his chapter with the narration:

> From the water of Mary or from the breath of Gabriel,
> In the form of a mortal fashioned of clay,
> The Spirit came into existence in an essence…
> A spirit from none other than God.\(^{149}\)

The virgin conception of Jesus Christ is asserted as adamantly in the Quran as in the Bible. Normally, the conception of a child begins when the water [womb] of a woman and the seed of a man combine. For Jesus Christ, the water of Mary and the Spirit of God combined; thus, the Spirit of God serving as the seed. This is why the Quran and Ibn al-’Arabī call Jesus, ‘a spirit from none other than God’, equating the Spirit of God and Jesus. The Spirit composes the essence of Jesus.\(^{150}\) Then, Ibn al-’Arabī uses the story of Al-Sāmirī to explain the nature of the Spirit of God.

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\(^{150}\) Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meanings of the Holy Quran*, 004:171. Jesus is described in the Quran as both conceived by the Spirit of God and Spirit of God in essence. When Gabriel breathed in the Spirit of God, the Spirit became a form called Jesus, who is essentially a Spirit as well.
The nature of the Spirit of God is that It gives life. In other words, the Spirit of God has the power to raise the dead. Since Jesus is the Spirit of God, it explains how Jesus performed innumerable miracles. In order to understand the mechanism of the Spirit more precisely, examining the story of Al-Sāmirī is imperative.\footnote{The text from the Quran was translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran. 020.087-020.096. In Exodus Chapter 37-38, the Bible narrates a similar story. When Moses went up to the Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, people of Israel were distressed that their leader disappeared for about forty days. Frustrated in horror, they insinuated and threatened Aaron, the cousin of Moses, to make a God they can worship. Unlike the Quran, the Bible narrates that Aaron was the one who made the golden calf. Also, Ibn al-’Arabī states in Fuṣūṣ al-hikam that the calf bellowed, which appears to imply that the calf was alive. In the Bible, it is clear that the calf was only an object. The Bible also does not appear to suggest Gabriel’s presence or his role in creating the calf.}

The story takes place in the desert with Moses and the people of Israel. Moses climbs up the mountain to ‘meet’ God. Although it is not specified in the Quran, the climbing probably took some time, because when Moses finally meets God, He tells Moses that He tested the people of Israel in his absence. God informs Moses that the people had failed, because of a man named Al-Sāmirī. When Moses disappeared into the mountains, the people of Israel were anxious to have no one to protect them. Al-Sāmirī suggested the people throw their ornaments into the fire to create a calf idol. Furious at Al-Sāmirī, Moses rebukes him and asks what he has to say. Then, Al-Sāmirī gives a peculiar answer that explains the function of the Spirit:

He replied: "I saw what they saw not: so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the Apostle, and threw it (into the calf): thus did my soul suggest to me."\footnote{Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran. 020:096.}

From the Quran alone, it is not certain whether the calf was alive or not. It just says that the image of a calf was brought out by Al-Sāmirī.\footnote{Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran. 020:088.} Judging from this statement alone, the calf could just be an inanimate idol. The verse above, however, is followed by a
statement, “It seemed to low”\textsuperscript{154} which means that it made a sound of a calf. Ibn al-’Arabī elaborates further in \textit{Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam}:

Thus did al-Sāmirī arrogate [to himself] some of the influence of the messenger Gabriel, who is a spirit. When he realized that it was Gabriel, and knowing that all he touched would come alive, al-Sāmirī snatched some of it (his power), either with his hand or with his fingertips. Then he transferred it to the [golden] calf, so that it bellowed, which is the sound cattle make.\textsuperscript{155}

When Al-Sāmirī saw an “Apostle”, he knew it was Gabriel. Because he was aware of the identity of the Apostle and the power of the Spirit of God, Al-Sāmirī snatched the dust that was touched by Gabriel and used it to animate the calf. The same principle can be applied to the conception of Jesus. During the conception, it was not God who appeared before Mary, but Gabriel, who breathed into the womb of Mary. When Mary’s womb was touched by the breath of Gabriel, she conceived Jesus. From these two events, it can be concluded that the Spirit of God gives life.

The purpose of all this is to show that the power to give life comes from the Spirit not Jesus. When Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God, he became the Spirit of God. Just like the ‘dust’ touched by Gabriel gave life to the calf, Jesus, when conceived by the ‘breath’ of Gabriel, possessed the power to give life. By illuminating the mechanism of the Spirit, Ibn al-’Arabī attempts to explain how Jesus performed divine miracles during his life. To further affirm this notion, Ibn al-’Arabī presents the case of Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī. Ibn al-’Arabī says:

When he [Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī] blew on an ant he had killed and it came alive again. At that very moment he knew Who it was that blew, so he blew [into it]. In that respect he was like Jesus.\textsuperscript{156}

Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī is a famous Persian Sufi, famed as the “King of the Gnostics” \textit{(Sultan al-arīfīn)}.\textsuperscript{157} Ibn al-’Arabī claims that Al-Bistāmī could give life to the dead, just

\textsuperscript{155} Austin, \textit{Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam}, 175.
\textsuperscript{156} Austin, \textit{Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam}, 179.
like Jesus, Gabriel and Al-Sāmirī, highlighting the fact that the ability to quicken the dead is not confined to Jesus. If Gabriel, Jesus, Al-Sāmirī, and Al-Bistāmī all possessed the power to quicken the dead, Jesus should not be called God when they are not. Therefore, Jesus is only a representation of the Spirit and the power to give life belongs to the Spirit not Jesus.

Then, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains how the Spirit of God creates life by introducing the concept of actual and imaginal (notional). As mentioned above, Jesus was a combination of the water of Mary and the breath of Gabriel. The water of Mary was ‘actual’ because the actual womb of Mary conceived Jesus. The breath of Gabriel was notional, because in essence, it was the Spirit of God who made Mary conceive not Gabriel or his breath. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, they would be impotent without the power of God working in him. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains how by combining the actual and the notional, the Spirit of God creates life. The same principle can be implemented to the miracles of Jesus. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes:

Thus, bringing the dead to life was attributed to him both actually and notionally. Concerning the former, it is said of him, And He revives the dead, while of the latter, You will breathe into it [the clay] and it will become a bird by God’s leave.  

The clay bird serves as the ‘actual’ in this miracle, just as Mary’s womb was the ‘actual’ in the conception of Jesus. When God creates a life, there is always a physical form to which God breathes in His Spirit. On the other hand, the breath of Jesus is the notional. The breath of Jesus does not contain any power or life. It is the Spirit of God embedded in the breath of Jesus that creates life. Therefore, in reality, Jesus’ breath is only notional.

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The Persian Sufi mystic is famous for his antinomian utterances, such as his claim to have visited the Court of God, his derogatory reference to scholars specializing in traditions of the Prophet as “dead men who narrate from the dead,” his assertion that “I am greater” upon hearing the Muslim call to prayer, “Allāh akbar”, and his claim to have had his own interiorized version of the Prophet’s ascension.

158 Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 176.
and the Spirit of God is the actual actor of the miracle. Ibn al-’Arabī summarizes this in one sentence: “It used to be said of him, when he revived the dead, “it is he and yet not he.”

The name, the Spirit of God, implies several things about Jesus. First, it implies that Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God, which also indicates the virgin birth. Second, Jesus performed miracles assisted by the Spirit of God. This proves another important point: Jesus’ miracles misled Christians to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Lastly, Jesus is the perfect manifestation of the Spirit of God. As the Seal of the general prophethood, Jesus is perfect before the Eyes of God, which enabled the Spirit of God to manifest Itself perfectly through Jesus.

The Breath of God
Another term used to describe Jesus Christ in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam is ‘the Breath of God’. The Breath of God is often mentioned together with the Spirit of God. Ibn al-’Arabī says, “Accordingly, He shaped him, balanced him, and breathed His spirit into him, which is His breath.” The Breath of God is considered almost equivalent to the Spirit. Looking at other parts in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam helps to construct a better picture of the role of the Breath. In the chapter of Shu’ayb titled, ‘The Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu’ayb161, Ibn al-’Arabī discusses the function of the Breath:

The Reality first expressed the Breath, which is called the Breath of the Merciful, from Lordship by creating the Cosmos, which both Lordship and all the Names require by their very nature.162

Similar to the Spirit of God, the Breath of God also has the power to create. Unlike the Spirit of God whose main function was to impart life to ‘individual’ creations such as humans and animals, the Breath of God is associated with creating the cosmos, though individual creations are included in the cosmos. Ibn al-’Arabī also says:

159 Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 177.
160 Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 275.
161 The translation by Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 147 was used.
162 Austin, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 148.
Because of this the Cosmos has been set forth in the form of its Creator, which is nothing other than the divine Breath.\(^\text{163}\)

Ibn al-’Arabī states that the cosmos is ‘nothing other than the divine Breath’, which implies that the essence of the cosmos is the Breath of God. When God was creating the cosmos through His Breath, it made an imprint in the cosmos. In other words, there is a manifestation of the Breath in every creation.

Thus, the gnostic sees things in principle and in forms, so being complete [in his knowing]. If, in addition to that, he sees the Breath [of the Merciful], he is perfect as well as complete [in his knowing]. He sees only God as being that which he sees, perceiving the seer to be the same as the seen.\(^\text{164}\)

Ibn al-’Arabī provides an example: When a person kills another person, people often perceive that the murderer is the former. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, these people are mistaken because they fail to know that it is God in the person who killed the latter. In other words, because God is in everyone, the former and the latter are both simply manifestations of God. The notion assumes that the Breath of God permeated all creations. The true gnostic, therefore, perceives God in everything he sees, because he sees through the creation and perceives it true Reality.

The pervasion of the Breath of the Reality has another dimension. In chapter three hundred and seventy-one of the Futūḥāt, there is a long account of the birth of the cosmos in which Ibn ‘Arabi describes the successive appearance of the forms of beings in the original ‘cloud’ (al-’ama’), which is no other than the “Breath of the Merciful One” (nafas al-Raḥmān).\(^\text{165}\) The first being created through the Breath of God is the ‘divine Calamus’, the ‘first Intellect’, who is also called the ‘Muhammadan Reality’, also known as the ‘universal Holy Spirit’, the ‘point of balance of the divine Names’.\(^\text{166}\)

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\(^{163}\) Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 180.

\(^{164}\) Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 235.

\(^{165}\) Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 68-69.

argues that this Muhammadan Reality (Ḥaqīqa Muhammadiyya) is the Reality out of which all things were created. Ibn al-ʿArabī says in Futūḥāt:

Now there was nothing in the dust that was closer to the light, or more disposed to receive it, than the Reality (haqīqa) of Muhammad, which is also called the Intellect. He [Muhammad] is thus the head of all the universe and the first being to come into existence … And the universe proceeds from his epiphany.167

The Muhammadan Reality existed before God created the cosmos. It is the first creation and the source of all creations. The Muhammadan Reality also appears in the last chapter of Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, in the chapter on Prophet Muhammad. Ibn al-ʿArabī stresses the importance of Muhammadan Reality and its relationship with the Prophet:

He is the most perfect creature of the human race. For this reason things begin with him and will be sealed by him: indeed, he was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay; and then [when he manifested himself] through his elemental form, he was the Seal of the Prophets.168

This passage in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam provides several important attributes of the Muhammadan Reality. First, he is perfect. Although perfection certainly does not mean divinity in Islam, it suggests that the Muhammadan Reality is not an ordinary creation.169

The second attribute is that he existed before Adam. Again, this shows his superiority over all other creations and his preexistence. Third, the Reality of Muhammad is the source of all creations. God created all the other creations through the Muhammadan Reality. The last attribute is that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets. Muhammad could satisfy all of these conditions because although he existed before Adam, he manifested himself in a physical form in 570 A.D. in Mecca. Therefore, the Prophet is the ultimate genus (al-jins al-ʿālī) who contains all other genuses, the supreme father of all creatures and of all men, even though his clay (tīnatuhu) only appeared afterwards.170

168 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 69.
169 Ibn al-ʿArabī is also famous for his elitist view on things. His view is manifested in several parts of writings where he clearly states that only the elite will able to understand his notions. But, Ibn al-ʿArabī also does not in any way intend to debase the non-elites.
170 Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 69.
Jesus is called “the Breath of God” for several reasons. First, just as he was conceived by the Spirit of God, Jesus was conceived by God’s Breath. According to Ibn al-’Arabī, the power of the Spirit and the Breath made it possible for him to possess the power to create. Just like the Breath, which became the source of creations, Jesus, in his ministry, served as the source of life for many people: he healed the blind, lepers and the sick and most importantly, raised the dead. On the other hand, just as Jesus was not the Spirit of God in essence, he is not the Breath of God in essence: the Muhammadan Reality is. If Jesus were the essence, the universe would have been created through him; yet, Ibn al-’Arabī clearly states that the Muhammadan Reality was the essence and the first creation of the Breath, which puts Jesus in a secondary position. This further buttresses Ibn al-’Arabī’s perspective that the power of life does not originate from Jesus, but God.

The Word of God

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”  

The famous John 1:1 is one of few places in the Bible, where Jesus is called the ‘Word of God’. Interestingly, Jesus is mentioned as the Word of God more frequently in Islam. Numerous ahādīth and various verses in the Quran attest to his epithet. Ibn al-’Arabī joins his fellow Muslims saying:

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172 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., The Meanings of the Holy Quran. 004:171. In this verse, Jesus is specifically labeled as ‘His Word’, ‘His’ meaning God’s. In a hadīth translated by Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 159, it is written: “If you wish, you may repeat what the Possessor of the Word and the Spirit [of God], Jesus the son of Mary, used to say: “Hunger is my seasoning.” Here, Jesus is referred to as the Possessor of the Word. This could be interpreted differently from the Word of God, but it has similar implication that Jesus is related to the Word of God. In another rather peculiar hadīth translated by Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 40, it says: “Jesus passed by a cow which was calving in great distress. “ O Word of God,” the cow said, “Pray that God may deliver me.” Here Jesus is also called as “the Word of God” even by a cow. Although the message of the Ḥadīth may not be such, it is possible to infer from the Ḥadīth that even the animals, the creations of God, referred to Jesus as the Word of God.
Thus he is [at once] the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the slave of God, and such a [triple] manifestation in sensible form belongs to no other... All creatures are indeed words of God, which are inexhaustible, stemming as they do from [the command] *Be*, which is the Word of God.¹⁷³

First, it is important to understand why Ibn al-’Arabī calls Jesus the Word of God. When God creates, he speaks. God only needs to speak, “*Be*”, to create the entire cosmos. That is why Ibn al-’Arabī says that all creatures are indeed words of God. Jesus, on the other hand, is a purer form of the Word. How Jesus came to be the Word of God starts with his conception. It was the Word of God who permeated Mary to conceive Jesus Christ.

Gabriel was, in fact, transmitting God’s word to Mary, just as an apostle transmits His word to his community. God says, *He is His word deposited with Mary, and a spirit from Himself*.¹⁷⁴

Jesus is called the Word of God, because the Word of God created Jesus, which is in accordance with the previous quotation, where Ibn al-’Arabī says ‘all creatures are indeed words of God’. Every other man is attributed to his formal father, not to God. The case of Jesus is unique, since his body in human form was included in the Word of God, which is not so of other men.

When an apostle preaches the words of God, he is obligated to preach the exact words, unaltered and uninterpreted. Then, although the words of God are invisible, the people are obligated to obey these words in a visible way. For example, intangible words of God to perform the *salāḥ* becomes ‘tangible’ by physically praying. Similarly, when Gabriel imparted the Word of God to Mary, it was the perfect and intangible Word of God. Then, unlike other human beings, who receive their physical form from their father, Jesus’ form was included in the Word; thus Jesus became the Word in a tangible form, also inheriting the ability to create.

The Word also represents the Law of God. The Words of God usually contain commandments that the commanded ought to obey. As the Seal of the general Sainthood,

¹⁷³ Austin, *Fuşuş al-ḥikam*, 179.
¹⁷⁴ Austin, *Fuşuş al-ḥikam*, 175.
Jesus manifested the Law of God perfectly through his life, which was possible only because he was the Word himself. Ibn al-’Arabī, however, highlights that the true essence of the Word is Muhammadan Reality.

Another important attributes revealed from the name, “the Word of God” is that Jesus in complete obedience to the Law of God. As the Seal of the general Sainthood, Jesus is perfectly submitted to the will of God. As mentioned above, Ibn al-’Arabī mentions the perfect nature of the Seal several times in his books. The Seal is asserted as the “scourge of His justice”, “guidance”, “enforcer of the divine laws”, “key to the right direction” and “flaming torch”, which imply that the Seal represents the justice of God. Jesus, as the Seal, who is the incarnate Word of God, will execute perfect justice of God on the Judgment Day.

The Mercy of God

The Merciful (al-raḥmān) is one of the Names of God. According to Tirmidhī’s questionnaire, the true Seal of the Muhammadan Saint knows what the greatest divine name is. Ibn al-’Arabī chooses “the Merciful” as the greatest name of God. He says:

This is because the divine Wrath, like error, is an accidental [nonessential], all things stemming ultimately from the Mercy, which embraces all things and which has precedence.\(^{175}\)

In another part, Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

His Mercy has precedence over His Wrath, which is to say that mercy is attributed to Him before Wrath. Since every [latent] essence has an existence that it seeks from God, his Mercy must embrace every essence.\(^{176}\)

“The Merciful” is the greatest name of God. Every name of God originates from the name, “Merciful”. For example, the reason God becomes wrathful towards His creations is because they disobey His commandments. A murder could be an example of

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\(^{175}\) Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 130.

\(^{176}\) Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 223.
disobedience. God will show His wrath towards the murderer, but not simply because the murderer disobeyed one of His rules, but because the person committed an action that is contrary to his primary Name, “the Merciful”. The commandments of God are not just a list of things God wants His believers to obey. The commandments are in perfect accordance with the Nature of God, which is the ‘Merciful’. That is why even the commandments that appear rather peculiar should still be obeyed, because of the faith that His commandments are good and merciful. If God is truly merciful, He must despise those things that contradict His Name. For example, a person who adores a child must hate those who murder and rape children. Therefore, when His creations contradict His Nature, “the Merciful”, God becomes “the Wrathful”. Therefore, the name, “Wrathful”, is a responsive attribute of God; whereas “the Merciful” is the natural or primordial attribute of God.

Although Jesus is not explicitly called, ‘the Merciful’, as it is one of the Divine Names, in various parts of Fuṣūṣ al-hikam, Ibn al-’Arabī presents loving, merciful and humble attributes of Jesus. Ibn al-’Arabī writes:

The humility of Jesus was such that his community was commanded that they should pay the poll-tax completely, humbling themselves, that if any one of them were struck on one cheek, he should offer also the other, and that he should not hit back or seek retribution. This aspect [of his teaching] derives from his mother. Ibn al-’Arabī presents two quotations from Jesus to prove his mercy. First, Jesus’ humility is manifest through his command to pay the jizyah. Paying the jizyah implies that the person paying is an inferior or secondary citizen. Commanding his people to pay the tax willingly proves Jesus’ lesson of humbleness and humility. Next, Ibn al-’Arabī refers to one of the most famous sayings of Jesus - if anyone slaps your right cheek, turn the other cheek also – which is the paradigm of love and humility. Ibn al-’Arabī explains how Jesus attained the character of mercy. He writes:

This aspect [of his teaching] derives from his mother, since woman is lowly and humble, being under the man, both theoretically and physically.178

“Humble” and “merciful” are the words that are also shared by the Seal. It is written: “for it is by him that the Reality looks on His creation and bestows the Mercy [of existence] on them.”179 The Seal is the instrument of God’s mercy to His creations. Even though in the case of Jesus, it is not as explicit, Jesus is considered the manifestation of God’s mercy on this Earth; thereby suggesting that through Him, God is representing His mercy.

The Slave of God
The slave of God is another name Ibn al-’Arabi uses to describe Jesus. He explicitly says: “Thus he is [at once] the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the slave of God.”180 The name, “slave of God” offers humanistic attributes of Jesus. Although Jesus is a human in Ibn al-’Arabi’s perspective, the names mentioned above i.e. the Spirit of God, the Breath of God, the Word of God, and the Mercy of God are all names shared by God. The term, ‘slave of God’, is different from these names because it provides an attribute that is confined solely to humans for God can never be a slave.

A slave is a person whose entire being is submitted to his owner. Complete submission and obedience are expected from slaves. A clear hierarchy also exists between the slave and the owner. In order to affirm such attribute of Jesus Christ, Ibn al-’Arabi quotes a dialogue between God and Jesus:

*Did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as gods rather than God? …* Jesus replied, emphasizing the divine transcendence, *May You be exalted … It is not for me … to say what I have no right to say … If, indeed, I said such a thing, You know of it … only what You commanded me to say … [So I said], Worship God… My Lord and your Lord.*181

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178 Austin *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 177.
179 Austin *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 51.
180 Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 178.
Here is a dialogue between God and Jesus without the commentaries of Ibn al-’Arabī. God inquires Jesus whether he commanded his believers i.e. Christians take him as God. Jesus says that the only one to be exalted is You, who is God. Then, Jesus asserts that if he had said something other than he was commanded to say, God would have known. He emphasizes that he preached to worship God, who is his Lord as well as everyone else’s. Since the command descends according to the regime of ranks, Jesus must be in a lower rank than God. Although the chapter is not devoted to Christian readers, Ibn al-’Arabī’s desire to rectify Christians and disprove the Christian theology of the Trinity is evident in this passage.  

One of the most important traits of the Seal is servanthood. It is written: “He is a servant whom God has taken into his charge.” The Seal listens, sees and acts through God, which indicates his total submission to the sovereignty of God. Jesus is called, “the slave of God”, which is a stronger implication of the servanthood. Again, Ibn al-’Arabī’s Jesus contains attributes that are congruent to the traits of the Seal.

**Conclusion**

Ibn al-’Arabī uses various names to describe Jesus: the Spirit of God, the Breath of God, the Word of God, the Mercy of God and the Slave of God. By elaborating the nature of these particular names, Ibn al-’Arabī distinguishes Jesus and God. The Spirit of God gives life to individual creations such as a bird, cow or even a human being. The Breath of God created the cosmos. The Word of God represents both the power to create and the perfect representation of the Law. The Mercy of God manifested in all creations as the act of creating itself is dispensing God’s mercy to His creations. These names were employed to delineate Jesus because Jesus, too, possessed the power to create, lived a perfect life before God, and represented overflowing mercy and love. By revealing the nature of these names, Ibn al-’Arabī proves that Jesus is a mere instrument of God. The

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last name, ‘the Slave of God’, summarizes these names. As a slave who is completely submitted to his Owner, Ibn al-’Arabī argues that Jesus never intended to deify himself.
Chapter 5: Comparison

Introduction
The comparison between Ibn al-’Arabī’s and Christian scholars’ perspective was an arduous task. These scholars use the same terms, but they define the terms differently. For Christian authors, when they say, the Spirit of God, they mean the Holy Spirit, who is a distinct Person of God. When Ibn al-’Arabī calls Jesus, ‘the Spirit of God’, he means that Jesus is a manifestation of God, who is not divine. The same goes for the word, ‘God’. When Christian scholars assert that ‘God’ is eternal, they mean Jesus is eternal at the same time. When Ibn al-’Arabī states God is eternal, he does not mean the same for Jesus. Therefore, every term they used must be precisely delineated in order to avoid misunderstanding. The three scholars to be examined were Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm of Canterbury and Meister Eckhart.

Thomas Aquinas
Thomas Aquinas is one of the most prominent Christian scholars in history. He was born in 1225 in a small town in the kingdom of Sicily. Despite his wealthy and exceptional education background, he joined the Dominicans, the group of mendicant friars, devoted to preaching, studying and living a life of poverty. These people were also well-known for their apostolic zeal and simple life style.

Under different popes and religious institutions, Thomas Aquinas published books, gave advices, taught students and served as a religious authority. The most famous work of Aquinas was Summa Theologica, which is an immense volume of writing on various topics in Christianity. The author discusses concepts such as the Holy Scripture, God, Trinity, creation, good and evil, angels, and the nature of men. The format of the writing is arranged in a way that the author provides answers and refutations to the questions raised by his opponents regarding the concepts mentioned above. The purpose of the work was to refute arguments raised by opponents of Christianity and strengthen the faith of the believers.
Despite his religious background, Thomas Aquinas also believed in philosophy and rational reasoning. Although he was a devout Christian and a great admirer of Christian theology, he was also willing to examine ideas of great thinkers from other religions. He did not exclude the ideas of non-Christian scholars simply because of their faith, but trusted that the imprint of God in human beings enabled them to search for God; however, that does not mean that Aquinas believed in salvation through other religions. He expressed his admiration towards Islamic thinkers such as Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna] (980-1037) and Ibn Rushd [Averroes] (1126-1298), not to mention Aristotle’s profound influence on his thoughts. Perhaps, his hometown Aquino, which had been influenced both culturally and historically by Islam, made Thomas Aquinas more accepting towards the ideas of non-Christian scholars.¹⁸⁴

**St. Anselm of Canterbury**

St. Anselm was born in Aosta, Val d'Aosta (formerly Piedmont) around 1033 and died in Canterbury in 1109. Raised in a noble family, Anselm pursued his studies in France after the death of his mother. In 1060 A.D., Anselm entered the newly formed Abbey of Bec in Normandy. Herluin, the founding abbot of Bec, died in 1078, and Anselm was unanimously elected as the abbot. In March 1093, Anselm was called upon to become an archbishop of Canterbury.

In most of St. Anselm’s writings, he strove to analyze and prove the truths of faith by reason alone. Anselm wrote his first treatise, the *Monologion* (1076), as a response to his monastic brothers who wanted him to put down the ideas they had been discussing over a period of time. The purpose of these conversations and treatise was to teach these monastic brothers to have confirmation in their beliefs in God and faith in Christianity. The *Monologion* is famous because St. Anselm used reason alone to explain the Christian theology, without appealing to the Bible and the writings of the church Fathers.

**Meister Eckhart**

Meister Eckhart (c.1260 - 1327/8) is among the most famous and controversial of Christian mystics. While there is no evidence as to the exact date of Eckhart’s birth, scholars generally agree that he was born around 1260, in Erfurt, Thuringia, which is located in modern day Germany.

Meister Eckhart is often considered as one of the most eloquent preachers of German mysticism. He constructs his most significant doctrine around one central idea: the generation or birth of the Divine Word in the soul.

The Trinity
The doctrine of the Trinity sets Christianity apart from Judaism and Islam. Much like the Islamic shahada, the acceptance of the Trinity is considered one of the essential steps in becoming a Christian. In contrast to importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity, the word ‘Trinity’ does not appear in the Bible. The first time it appeared was in Greek ‘Τριάς’, meaning ‘triad’ or ‘the number three’ in a writing by Theophilus of Antioch. In 325 A.D., about a century later, the council of Nicaea established the doctrine of the Trinity as orthodoxy.

The definition, generally accepted by most scholars, is that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, God is one in essence and three in person. The doctrine of the Trinity presents three fundamental truths: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, each Person is fully God, but there is only one God. The assertion that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons means that the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Jesus is God, but He is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, but He is not the Son or the Father. They are distinct Persons, not three different ways of looking at God. Yet, Christianity also asserts that there is only One God. For many critics and even Christians, the doctrine

of the Trinity appears like a contradiction. That is why many scholars from different eras, including Aquinas, Eckhart and St. Anselm of Canterbury have attempted to explain the Trinity.

The Spirit of God
Thomas Aquinas uses the notion of procession to explain the Trinity. According to Aquinas, procession can be divided into two categories: outward and inward. First, Aquinas mentions two types of outward procession that are employed by some Christian scholars to explain the Trinity. The outward procession normally means visible outward movement. It can be understood as an effect proceeding from its cause, thus whatever proceeds by way of outward procession is necessarily distinct from the source when it proceeds.\(^{186}\) Thomas Aquinas mentions a man by the name of Arius.\(^{187}\) Arius said that the Son proceeds from the Father as His primary creature and that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son as the creature of both.\(^{188}\) Stated differently, the Father is at the essence and the Son and the Holy Ghost proceed from the Father as His creations. Aquinas rejects Arius, claiming that his statement is contradictory to what is said of the Son and the Holy Ghost in the Bible. The Bible says,

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\text{And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.}\]

\(^{189}\)

According to Aquinas, the Bible is lucid about the deity of Christ; therefore, Arius’ argument that Christ is a mere creation is invalid. Another person to explain the Trinity through outward procession is Sabellius, who said that God the Father is called Son in assuming flesh from the Virgin, and that the Father is also called the Holy Spirit in

\(^{186}\) \textit{Summa Theologica}, 194-195.
\(^{187}\) Encyclopedia Britannica, “\textit{Arius}”. Arius was a Christian priest from Alexandria, Egypt, whose teachings gave rise to a theological doctrine known as Arianism, which was severely denounced by the early church for asserting that Jesus Christ was created and finite. The First Council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D., declared Arius a heretic because he refused to admit the formula that Christ was of the same divine nature as the Father.\(^{188}\) \textit{Summa Theologica}, 196.
\(^{189}\) New American Standard Bible, 1 John 5:20.
sanctifying the Christian believers.\textsuperscript{190} In other words, the Father is just taking another ‘form’ or ‘role’ as the Son. He is saying that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the same Person, but the Father takes the role as the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Spirit is just a different way of looking at the Father. Thomas Aquinas again argues that this interpretation is erroneous because several verses in the Bible clearly contradict this notion.

   Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.\textsuperscript{191} “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.\textsuperscript{192}

The Son, the Father and the Helper, understood to be the Holy Spirit by Christian scholars, are all distinct Persons according to the verses above. Not only they have different roles, they are also distinct Persons. Jesus clearly distinguishes Himself from the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Thomas Aquinas rejects the argument that the Son and the Holy Spirit are just another form of the Father. Careful analysis shows that both of these opinions treat procession as an outward act; neither of them considers procession as existing in God Himself. Procession always requires action. For actions corresponding to external matters, there is an outward procession. There must be an inward procession corresponding to the act occurring within the agent.\textsuperscript{193}

   The inward procession is procession occurring within God. It requires whatever proceeds within by an intelligible procession. In fact, the more perfectly the agent proceeds, the more closely it is one with the source from which it proceeds. Therefore, if the agent proceeds perfectly, the proceeded would be identical to the source.\textsuperscript{194} Inward procession applies most conspicuously to the intellect, which remains in the intelligent agent. According to Aquinas, the best example of the inward procession would be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190} \textit{Summa Theologica}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{191} New American Standard Bible, John 5:19.
\item \textsuperscript{192} New American Standard Bible, John 16:7.
\item \textsuperscript{193} \textit{Summa Theologica}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{194} \textit{Summa Theologica}, 196.
\end{itemize}
understanding, expressed as ‘the Word’ and ‘the Love’.

For whenever we understand, by the very fact of understanding there proceeds something within us, which is a conception of the object understood, a conception issuing from our intellectual power and proceeding from our knowledge of that object.\(^{195}\)

It was an act performed by the agent but not passing outside the agent to alter or influence or change anything else. Aquinas occasionally calls such actions “immanent” acts as opposed to “transient” ones.\(^ {196}\) This is how inward procession is different from outward procession. The outcome of the inward procession of God would be the Word. The perfect knowledge of each other between the Word i.e. Jesus and the Father is an example of inward procession.\(^ {197}\)

Thomas Aquinas also lists several functions of the Holy Spirit. The first function he mentions is that the Holy Spirit justifies those who are ungodly.\(^ {198}\) In order to be accepted by God, the believer has to be pardoned for sins and justified their sins in Christianity. Aquinas argues that the function of the Holy Spirit is to do just that: enter the believer, convict his sins and serve as the pledge until the believer’s salvation.\(^ {199}\) Another function introduced by Aquinas is that the Holy Spirit quickens the body of the Church. Aquinas asserts:

Just as in the natural body the various members are held together in unity by the power of the quickening spirit, and are dissociated from one another as soon as that spirit departs, so too in the Church's body the peace of the various members is preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who quickens the body of the Church, as stated in Jn. 6:64. Hence the Apostle says (Eph. 4:3): "Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."\(^ {200}\)

The notion of the Spirit quickening the church should be considered together with the

\(^{195}\) *Summa Theologica*, 196.
\(^{196}\) *Summa Theologica*, 196.
\(^{197}\) New American Standard Bible, Matthew 11:27.
\(^{198}\) *Summa Theologica*, 1535.
\(^{200}\) *Summa Theologica*, 2596.
first function. The Greek word for church is ‘ekklesia\textsuperscript{201}', which means an assembly of the believers. The church is not a building but people. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit justifies the sinners, they become Christians and form the church. Another function of the Holy Spirit is that it serves as the Law in the believers. As previously mentioned, at the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit enters the believer and justifies sins. Then, the Holy Spirit remains in the believer and reminds him of the Law of God. Aquinas states that “what else are the Divine laws written by God Himself on our hearts, but the very presence of His Holy Spirit?”\textsuperscript{202} Thus, the Holy Spirit is in the heart of the believers, reminding the Law of God so that Christians could walk on the true path of righteousness.\textsuperscript{203} By residing in the believer’s heart, the Holy Spirit guides the believer to the narrow path, which will result in bearing the fruits of the Spirit i.e. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.\textsuperscript{204}

Another function of the Spirit is the power to give life. Thomas Aquinas quotes from the Bible:\textsuperscript{205}

\begin{quote}
For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles.\textsuperscript{206}
\end{quote}

The Holy Spirit is the source of all the spiritual gifts including the power to perform miracles. Aquinas’ opinion is identical to Ibn al-’Arabi’s opinion. The case of Jesus, however, is unique to Aquinas: Jesus is both God and human. Therefore, although to a certain extent, Jesus performs the miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus ‘worked miracles by His Divine power.\textsuperscript{207}

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\textsuperscript{202} Summa Theologica, 1478.
\textsuperscript{203} New American Standard Bible, Romans 8:14.
\textsuperscript{204} New American Standard Bible, Galatians 5:22-23.
\textsuperscript{205} Summa Theologica, 1520.
\textsuperscript{206} New American Standard Bible, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.
\textsuperscript{207} Summa Theologica, 1487.
\end{flushright}
St. Anselm has a similar view on the Trinity and the Spirit of God. He explains the concept rather simply in the twenty-third chapter of the *Proslogion*, which is solely devoted to explaining the doctrine of the Trinity. St. Anselm presents the notion of the perfect unity and simplicity. He asserts that each Person of the Trinity shares the divine attributes both equally and perfectly. In the divine unity, the second person of the Trinity, the Son is equal to the first Person, the Father, The Father God is so simple that “there cannot be anything other than what You [God] are, or anything greater or lesser than You in the Word by which You speak Yourself; for Your Word is true [verum] in the same way that You are truthful [quomodo tu verax], and for that reason he is the very same truth as You, not other than You.”

The same principle is applied to the third Person of the Trinity, which is “the one Love, common to You and Your Son, that is, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from both.”

The Spirit, to borrow from St. Anselm’s own words, exists in such a ‘marvelously unique’ and ‘uniquely marvelous’ way of its own. He further argues that if one looks closely at the Spirit, he will realize that it is the only thing that exists, making other ‘real’ things non-existent. This is the doctrine of the degree of being which St. Anselm asserts in his writings. For example, because a person is closer to God than a stone, his existence is greater than the stone’s. Proximity to God is considered greater existence. Similarly, since the Spirit of God is God Himself, his proximity far exceeds the proximity with God enjoyed by humans. For example, if it can be quantified, say zero is considered as a state of non-existence, a stone’s existence is one and a human being’s existence is ten, the difference between these numbers are significant. If, however, the Spirit of God, whose existence is one million comes into the picture, the difference between the human’s and non-existence becomes meaningless.

**Comparison**

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208 St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* 23, p.117, 6.
209 St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* 23, p.117, 6.
Understanding different types of procession is important because it is how Thomas Aquinas explains the concept of the Trinity. Significant parts of the Jesus chapter in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is devoted to explaining the function of the Spirit of God. In doing so, Ibn al-ʾArabī seeks to prove that the divinity of Christ is an error. The crux of the difference between the Ibn al-ʾArabī’s Jesus and the Christian Jesus lies in the deity of Jesus Christ. According to Aquinas, the Son and the Holy Ghost are different persons. They both proceeded from the Father but they are also perfectly God. One could say that in Ibn al-ʾArabī’s perspective, Jesus proceeded from the Father; however, he proceeded ‘outwardly’, meaning Jesus is not identical to the Father. Therefore, Ibn al-ʾArabī’s argument bears similarity to Arius’ argument: the Son is a creation, different from the Father.

Despite such significant difference, the two also share similarities. For example, according to Ibn al-ʾArabī, the Spirit of God manifests both inward and outward attributes of God. The Holy Spirit has a similar function: the Spirit helps the believers to bear righteous fruits in their lives both inwardly and outwardly. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which are in perfect accordance with the nature of God. According to Ibn al-ʾArabī, Jesus, as the Seal and the Spirit of God, manifests these attributes perfectly. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas St. Anselm agree that Jesus manifest these attributes perfectly because he is God and the Holy Spirit in Jesus manifest these attributes through Jesus. Therefore, even if the Muslim Jesus is a human and the Christian Jesus is God, they both demonstrate these divine attributes in their lives.

The lucidity of the Scripture forces the Christian scholars to accept the humanity of Jesus Christ. However, the Christian scholars would only agree partially to Ibn al-ʾArabī’s claim that the ability of Jesus Christ originates from God. Although Jesus may receive the divine power to raise the dead, as one of the Trinity, Jesus Christ is also perfectly God; he is perfectly suitable to perform divine miracles. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that Jesus’ disciples could perform miracles that were as great, if not
greater than the miracles of Jesus. Thomas Aquinas admits that these miracles were performed by the power of the Spirit. For Jesus, however, he adamantly asserts that Jesus had his own divine power.

**The Word of God**

According to Thomas Aquinas, the same type of inward procession can be applied to the Word of God, which can be understood as an intelligible emanation. The simplest way to understand the procession of the Word is by treating it as understanding. For the divine intelligence is the perfection of God, the divine Word is perfectly one with the source when it proceeds, without any kind of subordination.

Then, Thomas Aquinas proceeds to prove that the Word of God is a generation. He presents two categories of generation. The first type is one common to everything subject to corruption; then, generation is nothing but change from non-existence to existence. The second type is when it signifies the origin of a living being from a conjoined living principle, which is properly called birth. By explaining these two types of generation, Thomas Aquinas attempts to explain the begotten nature of the Word in God. He further adds that only what proceeds by way of similitude can be called the generation. For the Word of God, since It is immune from corruption and change, the first kind of generation is entirely excluded. Therefore, the Word of God belongs to the second type of generation, which belongs to all living things. Thomas Aquinas concludes:

So in this manner the procession of the Word in God is generation; for He proceeds by way of intelligible action, which is a vital operation:---from a conjoined principle (as above described):---by way of similitude, inasmuch as the concept of the intellect is a likeness of the object conceived:---and exists in the same nature, because in God the act of understanding and His existence are the same, as shown above. Hence the procession of the Word in God is called generation; and the Word Himself proceeding is called the Son. 211

According to Thomas Aquinas, the Word is a result of inward procession just like the Son. For God understands His Word fully, the perfect Word of God emanating from God,

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211 *Summa Theologica*, 198.
therefore meets the conditions of the Trinity as being an equal to God.\textsuperscript{212} A verse from the Bible also attests to this truth: “Father knows Me and I know the Father.”\textsuperscript{213} The Father knowing the Son and the Son knowing the Father can be considered as understanding each other. Because the Father understands the Son perfectly, the Son proceeds from the Father as the Word.

Another aspect of the Word promoted by Thomas Aquinas is its role as the new Law. The notion of the Word is always associated with the Law. Through the coming of the Word, Jesus Christ, the Old Law has been fulfilled, thus abolished and Jesus Christ, the Word of God became the New Law.

The Word was made flesh,” and afterwards: "full of grace and truth"; and further on: "Of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace." Hence it is added that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Consequently it was becoming that the grace flows from the incarnate Word should be given to us by means of certain external sensible objects; and that from this inward grace, whereby the flesh is subjected to the Spirit, certain external works should ensue. Accordingly external acts may have a twofold connection with grace. In the first place, as leading in some way to grace. Such are the sacramental acts which are instituted in the New Law, e.g. Baptism, the Eucharist, and the like.\textsuperscript{214}

According to Christian theology, before the coming of Jesus Christ, humans were under the authority of the Law, the Old Testament. However, the Word became flesh and fulfilled every commandment of the Old Law perfectly. Therefore, the Word abolished the Old Law by completing it and established the New Law, which is the law of grace and faith.\textsuperscript{215} Therefore, Jesus, as the new Law, serves as the guidance and paradigm for the Christians.

In St. Anselm’s opinion, the Word, is “something like the model of the things to be made, or better said the form, or likeness, or rule.”\textsuperscript{216} The Word is what the Creator

\textsuperscript{212} New American Standard Bible, John 1:1.
\textsuperscript{213} New American Standard Bible, John 10:15.
\textsuperscript{214} Summa Theologica, 1491.
\textsuperscript{215} New American Standard Bible, John 1:17.
\textsuperscript{216} St. Anselm’s Proslogion 23, p.117.
uses to sustain the universe and, “is not something other than the supreme essence,”217 In the Father and the Word, there is distinction, but not difference between them. St. Anselm also elucidates that the Word is not the “likeness of all the things that were made, but rather their true and simple essence,” adding that, “in made things there is no simple and absolute essence but barely some imitation of that true essence.”218 In other words, God created the entire cosmos by His Word: a notion also shared by Thomas Aquinas when he says, “hence also God the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son.”219 The simplicity of the Word is also asserted by St. Anselm when he states that the Word is perfectly simple, and does not consist of several words, but one Word.220 This one Word is ‘Be’, which also appears in the Bible.221

Meister Eckhart is most famous with his mystical doctrine, the doctrine of the divine Word. His view on the Word of God is revealed in his sermon:

He (Jesus) is the Word of the Father… Being perfect in His knowledge and in His power, He is also perfect in His utterance. When He speaks the Word, He speaks Himself and all things in another Person, and gives Him the same nature as He has Himself. In this Word He expresses all rational spirits, (making them) like the Word, in the form in which It abides in Him, but not like the Word in all respects in the form in which they issue forth, as each one is by itself. They have, however, received the power to become like the Word by grace.222

Similar to Thomas Aquinas and St. Anselm, Meister Eckhart believes in the procession of the Word from the Father and his deity. A notable point here is that the Word is congruent to Jesus Christ. The Word also possesses the perfect attributes of God as another Person of God. Also, as the Word, Jesus Christ possesses the perfect knowledge of the Father; and the Word has the power to sanctify the saints.

218 St. Anselm’s Monologion 31, p.50.
219 Summa Theologica, 316.
220 St. Anselm’s Monologion 30, p.48.
221 New American Standard Bible, Genesis 1:3.
Comparison

Ibn al-’Arabī and the Christian scholars clearly have different understandings of the nature of the Word. When Ibn al-’Arabī calls Jesus, the Word of God, he is, by no means, suggesting the deity of Christ. Jesus is just a manifestation of the Word, by which Jesus performs divine miracles. When the two Christian scholars call Jesus, the Word, they mean he is God, who proceeded from the Father through intelligible emanation. Nonetheless, the two sides have some points in common.

Jesus’ role as the Word of God, however, appears to be similar in both sides. For example, Thomas Aquinas and St. Anselm both agree that the Word of God has the power to create. All things came into being through Him [the Word], and apart from Him [the Word] nothing came into being that has come into being.223 Interestingly, Ibn al-’Arabī’s Word also shares this ability. In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*: “All creatures are indeed words of God … stemming as they do from [the command] Be, which is the Word of God.”224 Ibn al-’Arabī claims that the entire creation came into being through the single word, ‘Be’, which is the notion originated from the Quran.225 One of the reasons Jesus is called the Word of God, as mentioned above, is due to his power to create or raise the dead. Therefore, the two sides both believe that Jesus as the Word possessed the power to create, albeit one is a human and one is God. The two sides also agree that the Word of God is the Law. Ibn al-’Arabī claims that as the Seal, Jesus manifests the perfection of the Law of God. He was also depicted as the enforcer of the divine justice. The Word of God is depicted similarly by Thomas Aquinas. He describes the Word as having perfected the Old Law by becoming flesh.

The Love of God

Thomas Aquinas discusses the Love of God, which is the counterpart of the Mercy of God in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Aquinas distinguishes the Love and the Word into a different category for they are proceeded from God through different means of procession. First,

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223 New American Standard Bible, John 1:3.
224 Austin, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 178.
he argues that there is a difference between the intellect i.e. the Word and the will i.e. the Love. The intellect is made actual by the object understood residing according to its own likeness in the intellect; on the other hand, the will is made actual, not by any similitude of the object, but by its having an inclination to the thing willed.  

In summary, the procession of the intellect or the Word is by way of similitude; whereas the procession of the Love is by way of impulse and movement towards an object. Therefore, the Word proceeding from God is fundamentally different from the Love from God: the two are proceeded from God in different ways. The type of procession for Love supposes Jesus to be a Person who wills to love.

Love and mercy are also associated with Jesus in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. Ibn al-ʿArabī gives an example of the Gospel story of turning the other cheek and Jesus’ command to pay the poll-tax as an act of humility and mercy. This attribute of Jesus originates from one of the Divine names, ‘the Merciful’. Despite the fact that he is known for his mercy, Jesus is merely a manifestation of the Merciful. Mercy proceeds from God into Jesus and is manifested through Jesus. Thus, in a sense, the two scholars both view Mercy as something proceeding from God, but also something distinct from God.

Another important aspect of the procession of Love is that all of God’s willed action is categorized as Love. In other words, everything God does is motivated by His will to love. This aspect of God could be compared to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Mercy of God flowing into all creations. As discussed above, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, creating is an act of love itself. The perfectly self-sufficient God has no reason to create the universe; except He wants to create objects to dispense His overflowing mercy.

In summary, according to Aquinas, Jesus is the perfect Love. All of his actions are motivated by his abundant love. Aquinas states: “Wherefore it is evident that every

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226 Summa Theologica, 200.
227 Summa Theologica, 200.
228 Ibn al-ʿArabī combines the reference to jizyah in the Quran 9:29 with two Bible stories in Matthew 17:24 and Matthew 22:15.
agent, whatever it be, does every action from love of some kind.” In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ‘Merciful’ is one of the Divine names. Since Aquinas believes that Jesus is God, in that sense, Ibn al-ʿArabī and he have the same opinion: God is Love. When it comes down to Jesus Christ, the two differ. Aquinas believes that Jesus himself is the Perfect Love, but Ibn al-ʿArabī believes Jesus to be a manifestation of God’s love. The latter does not have to try to love, because his nature is love. The former, however, is a person who tries to manifest the love of God within himself. In him, there is a degree of love.

St. Anselm also provides an explanation for the Love of God. Just like Thomas Aquinas, who considered Love of God as the Holy Spirit, St. Anselm also believed the Love to be the Holy Spirit. St. Anselm uses the simplicity of God to explain how the Holy Spirit proceeds from God. In explaining how the Word is equal to the Father, St. Anselm argues that God is so simple nothing can be born from God other than what God is. The same can be applied to the Love proceeding out from the Father. There is a “love, one and common to You and Your Son, i.e. the Holy Spirit proceeding from both.” The Holy Spirit, which is pure love, is likewise as great as God, and is entirely God. Anselm concludes, “Love is the same thing as the supreme wisdom, the supreme truth, the supreme good, and whatever can be said of this supreme spirit.”

Comparison
Mercy and love are the attributes often associated with Jesus in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Jesus, as the Seal of the general sainthood, is the perfect manifestation of the Mercy of God. When Ibn al-ʿArabī calls Jesus humble and merciful, however, he does not mean in it in the absolute sense. In other words, merciful is the nature of God. Just like God cannot lie because it is against His nature, God cannot *not* be merciful. Jesus, on the other hand, can be *not* merciful; but, he chooses to be merciful. That is the fundamental difference

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229 *Summa Theologica*, 955.
230 St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* 23, p.117.
231 St. Anselm’s *Monologion* 52, p.65.
232 St. Anselm’s *Monologion* 53, p.66.
233 St. Anselm’s *Monologion* 53, p.66.
between the Christian Jesus and Ibn al-’Arabi’s Jesus regarding love. According to St. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, love is proceeded from God and the Son through inward procession, which results in perfect unity with God and the Son. Therefore, every action committed by the Son is pure and perfect love because it is the Son’s nature.

**The Breath of God**

Thomas Aquinas offers various perspectives on the Breath of God. Aquinas quotes a statement from St. Augustine to explain the function of the Breath. Augustine explains that little children are breathed upon and exorcized in order to expel the devil’s power from them. The breathing is used to exorcise and cast demons out.\(^{234}\) Then, Aquinas reasserts that the Church uses words of command to cast out the devil’s power. Then, he gives an example, “accursed devil! Go out from him.”\(^ {235}\) It can be assumed that when St. Augustine meant ‘breathing’, breathing out the words was inclusive in the idea. Therefore, Aquinas just assumed that the words were used to cast out demons.

> While there are two processions in God, one of these, the procession of love, has no proper name of its own, … for we call the breath and the wind by the term spirit. Now it is a property of love to move and impel the will of the lover towards the object loved.\(^ {236}\)

When the breath is used to cast out demons, it is the power of the Holy Spirit working. The Breath is considered equal to the Holy Spirit. St. Anselm also holds a similar view on the Breath of God. In Monologion, while explaining how the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son, St. Anselm mentions the breath. He explains that the Father alone begot but not created the Son. The Father and the Son alike do not create or beget the Holy Spirit, but somehow breathe out.\(^ {237}\) Therefore, the inward procession occurring within the Father is equivalent to His breath.

\(^{234}\) Summa Theologica, 3228.
\(^{235}\) Summa Theologica, 3228.
\(^{236}\) Summa Theologica, 245.
\(^{237}\) Anselm of Canterbury, Monologion, 67-68.
The Hebrew word for the Spirit is *ruwach*, which means ‘air in motion.’ It is the same word for ‘breath’, which can also mean ‘life’. In other words, the Breath of God is the Holy Spirit. When God creates Adam in Genesis, after He forms Adam from dust, He breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. In another part of the Bible, Jesus breathes on his disciples and says to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit," implying that his breath is the Holy Spirit.

**The Mirror**

The purpose of a mirror is to reflect an object. If the mirror is unclean, it cannot reflect the object as clearly as it should. If the mirror is clean, the object reflected will be identical to the real object. In Ibn al-'Arabi’s writings, the mirror was often used to explain the Seal. As one of the Seals, Jesus is a clean mirror that can reflect the image of the Creator perfectly.

Interestingly, St. Anselm also uses the notion of mirror to explain ‘the mind’ of human beings. He states that since the mind is, of all the created things, the only created thing that can remember, understand and love the Supreme Being, it proves that there is an image of the Supreme Being in the mind. For, the greater and the more the mind loves the Supreme Being, it reflects the truer and clearer image of God. This suggests several things about St. Anselm’s view. First, he believes that the image of God is imprinted in all creations. In order for a human mind to remember and know God, there has to be something of God in the mind of the human beings. Second, the person’s sanctity determines his ability to reflect the image of God by remembering, understanding and loving God. Third, there is a person who can reflect the perfect reflection of God.

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St. Anselm and Ibn al-’Arabī both believe that the human beings have a reflection of God embedded in them. The holier the person, the more he can reflect the image of God. That is why Ibn al-’Arabī’s seal of the Muhammadan Saints could reflect the perfect image of God just as a clean mirror would perfectly reflect an object. Although he does not explicitly say in his writings, Thomas Aquinas, when he implements ideas from Muslim scholars such as Avicenna and Averroes, he is implicitly admitting that these non-Christian scholars have the knowledge of the Truth. Thomas Aquinas believed in the human ability to acquire the knowledge of God through rational reasoning. In St. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas’ opinion, the perfect being who can fully manifest the image of God is Jesus Christ: for Ibn al-’Arabī, the perfect mirror would be the Seals.

The Eternal Being
St. Anselm asserts the primordial nature of Jesus Christ, which would be denied by Ibn al-’Arabī. Although St. Anselm is referring to the Father God when he says ‘the Supreme Being’, it needs to be understood that whatever is applied to the Father is also applied to the Son. St. Anselm states that the Truth cannot have a beginning or an end.

Suppose that Truth had had a beginning, or suppose that it would at some time come to an end: then even before Truth had begun to be, it would have been true that there was no truth; and even after Truth had come to an end, it would still be true that there would no longer be truth. But it could not be true without Truth. Hence, there would have been truth before truth came to be, and there would still be truth after truth had ceased to be.243

By logical reasoning, St. Anselm proves that there must be an ‘Eternal Truth’, which has neither beginning nor the end. The opinion of St. Anselm corresponds to the historical Christian belief: Jesus is co-eternal with God, having no beginning and end.244

244 Various verses in the Bible attest to this truth.
New American Standard Bible, Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This verse shows that God existed before ‘the beginning’, implying God’s eternity.
New American Standard Bible, Revelation 22:13, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The verse in Revelation is spoken by Jesus
Ibn al-’Arabī accepts only part of the notion. He argues that the Muhammadan Reality and the Muhammadan Sainthood existed before the cosmos. They were, however, created by the Breath of God, which suggests that they had a beginning. On the other hand, the Seals do not have an end, for they will co-exist with God forever.

Meister Eckhart also argues the eternal nature of the Trinity.

The beginning, in which God created heaven and earth, is the primary simple now of eternity ... exactly the same 'now', where Himself exists eternally, where also the progress of the divine persons [of the Trinity] eternally was, is, and will be.

For both Christians and Muslims, the eternal nature of God is evident. For Christians, the eternal nature of the Father can be applied to the Son. For Muslims, even the Prophet Muhammad or the Muhammadan Reality is a creation of God, thus having a beginning.

The Slave of God

In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas discussess servanthood in detail. Thomas Aquinas explains that servanthood began with God’s creation of the cosmos. Because the signification of Lord includes the idea of a servant, the moment God created His creations, He became the Lord, the moment He created His creations.²⁴⁵ Considering the fact that the Son is not a creation, Aquinas does not appear to believe in the servant-master relationship between God and the Son.

According to Aquinas, servanthood applies to two types of relationships. The first one is the servant-master relationship among humans. The second type is between God

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²⁴⁵ *Summa Theologica*, 90.
and humans. Aquinas states that “one is said to be helped by a person through whom he carries out his work, as a master through a servant. In this way God is helped by us; inasmuch as we execute His orders.”\(^{246}\) Thus, a servant of God is one who seeks to execute the will of God on this Earth. Furthermore, Aquinas adds that “since a servant is an instrument, as it were, of his master, the servant's action is his master's, just as the action of a tool is the workman's action.”\(^{247}\) If so, the only person possible to execute the will of God perfectly would be the perfect servant i.e. Jesus Christ. In several places in the Bible, Jesus admits that he only acts in accordance with the will of God.\(^{248}\)

The Christian scholars did not write much about the humanity of Christ, probably because at the time of these scholars, the polemicists attacked the humanity of Christ to prove that Jesus Christ was only human. However, assuming from his definition of servanthood, Aquinas would agree that the human side of Jesus would meet the conditions of a perfect servant. Ibn al-'Arabī would agree with the human side of Jesus. Jesus is depicted as a servant of God in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. A clear hierarchy is implied in the servant-master relationship and Jesus and God cannot be in the same rank. All the differences in opinions between the two sides stem from the view on the deity of Jesus Christ.

**Mercy and Justice**

In Chapters 8-11 of the *Proslogion*, St. Anselm answers the question explaining how God can be both merciful and just at the same time. Mercy and justice are attributes that are considered contradictory to each other. However, St. Anselm asserts that God’s Mercy stemming from his Goodness is not something divergent from His Justice. St. Anselm states in Chapter 12: “But certainly, whatever you are, you are not through another but through yourself. Accordingly, you are the very life by which you live, and the wisdom by which you are wise, and the goodness by which you are good to good people and bad.

\(^{246}\) *Summa Theologica*, 181.

\(^{247}\) *Summa Theologica*, 918.

\(^{248}\) New American Standard Bible, Matthew, 12:50, Mark 14:36.
people; and likewise with similar attributes.” Because, it is God’s nature to be merciful and just, all his actions are naturally merciful and just. If God kills a person, his action is still merciful. God cannot contradict his nature. The problem of the coexistence of mercy and justice is called the divine dilemma. To summarize, God desires to forgive transgressors of their sin because he is merciful. However, he cannot justify the wicked without punishing them for their sin. Under Christian Law, everyone is a sinner. Therefore, God has to sentence rightful punishment to everyone. Then, Jesus is presented as the solution for the dilemma. The redemptive work of Jesus atones for the sins of those who believe and God’s justice is satisfied.

In Islam, there is no divine dilemma. On the Judgment Day, the salvation of a person will be determined by weighing his good and bad deeds. Therefore, there is no need for the Messiah who will atone for the sins of his people. Nevertheless, Ibn al-’Arabi’s Jesus still possesses the dual attributes of justice and mercy. As the Word of God, he represents the justice of God. At the same time, as the mercy of God, he represents God’s mercy on human beings. Although Jesus’s redemptive work is denied by Fuṣūṣ al-hikam, these attributes are still promoted as important attributes of Jesus.

Conclusions

Similar to the traditional Islamic belief, Ibn al-ʿArabī rejects the deity of Jesus. Ibn al-ʿArabī makes it clear in several parts of his books that Jesus is not divine. All the other differences between Ibn al-ʿArabī and Christian authors stem from this one fundamental divergence. Interestingly, even with such difference – one Jesus is God and the other is a human – the two share some noteworthy similarities. This was only possible because Ibn al-ʿArabī and Christian scholars had different definitions for ‘the divine’.

For Christians, no human being can be sinless. Therefore, when the Bible attests to the sinless nature of Jesus Christ, it serves as a legitimate reason to call Jesus, God. On the other hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī does not believe that sinlessness equates with divinity. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the three Seals are sinless. That does not, however, mean they are God. Also, when the Christian authors say that Jesus is the perfect Word of God, it means that Jesus is God. On the other hand, Ibn al-ʿArabī also claims that the three Seals are the perfect manifestations of the Word of God: the Prophet and Ibn al-ʿArabī are also called the Quran incarnate. Also, the function of the Spirit of God in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam was not much different from the function of the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrines. Yet, Jesus as the Spirit of God is a human to Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Holy Spirit is a Person of the Trinity. Therefore, because of the two sides define ‘divine’ differently, they can still share similarities.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, his elitist perspective asserts that there are extraordinary human beings who are significantly greater than others. An example would be the primordial nature of Muhammad and the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood. For Christian scholars, it would be unthinkable that a mere human can be with God before the creation. In fact, the first verse of the Gospel of John, 250 which suggests the primordial nature of Jesus Christ, serves as the important evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. In addition, Christian scholars argue that, under God, all humans possess original sin.

Although Ibn al-‘Arabī and the three Christian scholars portray Jesus similarly in some areas, it is still difficult to conclude that Ibn al-‘Arabī was influenced by the Christian theology. It is notable, however, that Ibn al-‘Arabī develops the notion of the Seal of the Saints which puts Jesus in an exalted position as the Seal of the general sainthood. Despite of some superficial similarities between the two sides, Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Christians scholars have fundamentally divergent perspective on Jesus.


New American Standard Bible


