

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī’s Sufi Metaphysical Treatment of the Scriptures in *al-Insān al-kāmil*

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This thesis is a study of the Sufi metaphysics of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. early 9th/15th century), focusing in particular on his treatment of the scriptures. It begins with an overview of al-Jīlī’s general Sufi metaphysics, as presented in his influential yet relatively little-studied work, *al-Insān al-kāmil* (*The Perfect Man*). I identify three principal theories within al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics: the theories of universal theophany, the levels of existence, and the Perfect Man. I show how these ideas are grounded in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī, yet are elaborated in a somewhat different way to what we find in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī and his best-known interpreters.

Having thus set out al-Jīlī’s broader intellectual scheme, I subsequently show, through a close reading of chapters thirty-four, thirty-six, and thirty-eight of *al-Insān al-kāmil* (which have not previously been translated into a European language), how he applies that scheme to the most important scriptures universally recognised in Islam: the Qur’an, Torah, and Gospel. As al-Jīlī sees it, these different scriptures constitute different forms of divine manifestation (*tajalliyāt*), and thus reveal different aspects of the divine to differing degrees of completeness. From this idea there emerges a hierarchy of scriptures, as well as a corresponding hierarchy of prophets. At the top of this hierarchy stand the Qur’an, which manifests the simple divine essence itself, and Muhammad, who similarly manifests the divine essence and attributes in the most complete way, and is thus the archetypal Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Below the Qur’an and Muhammad come the Gospel and Jesus and the Torah and Moses, each of them constituting genuine yet limited manifestations of God. This sense of hierarchy is reinforced by al-Jīlī’s discussion of the various forms of knowledge (*‘ulūm*) or mysteries (*asrār*) contained in the different scriptures, and the various doctrines that are subsequently derived from them by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. By insisting on the superiority of the Qur’an, Muhammad and Islam, al-Jīlī remains within the overall framework of the orthodox Sunni Islamic view of sacred history, even while presenting a Sufi metaphysical version of that orthodox narrative. The thesis thus serves as a case study into how an important figure in the Ibn ‘Arabī tradition engages with and develops an important aspect of the Islamic tradition from his particular Sufi metaphysical perspective.

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Introduction

a) The aim & scope of the thesis

This thesis consists of a presentation and analysis of the Sufi metaphysical thought of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. early 9th/15th century), as it is presented in his major work, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma‘rifat al-awākhir wa-al-awā’il* (*The Perfect Man: On the Knowledge of Last Things and First Things*). While generally acknowledged to be one of the most innovative and influential thinkers in the Sufi metaphysical tradition of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), al-Jīlī has nevertheless received relatively little scholarly attention, particularly in English,¹ a gap which I hope to begin to fill with the present study. In the first chapter, therefore, I give an overview of al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics, identifying three theories which I deem to be the basic building blocks of his thought: the theory of universal theophany, which is the idea that the entirety of

¹ There is no monograph on al-Jīlī in English, the only extensive studies of his thought in that language being Nicholson (1921), 77-148, and the doctoral thesis of Lo Polito (2010). Among the brief studies in English of aspects of his thought mention should be made of Iqbal (1908), 150-173; Iqbal (2016); Morris (1986-1987), 3:108-109; Cornell (1998), 208-211; Hoffman (1999), 355-359; Addas (2009). In French, there is the doctoral thesis of Atlagh (2000), the same author’s article on al-Jīlī’s *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm fī sharḥ bi-ism Allāh al-rahīmān al-rahīm* (Atlagh (1992)), the translation of that latter work by Jābir Clément-François (Al-Jīlī (2002)), and the translation of extracts of *al-Insān al-kāmil* by Titus Burckhardt (al-Jīlī (1975)). In German there have been translations and studies of three of al-Jīlī’s more minor works: Ernst Bannerth’s translation of *Marātib al-wujūd* (Al-Jīlī (1956)), Dagmar Mann’s translation of *Risālat Arba ‘in mawṭin* (Al-Jīlī (1970)), and Angelika Al-Massri’s translation of *Sharḥ muskilāt al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (1998) (Al-Jīlī (1998)). In Italian, there is Claudio Marzullo’s recent translation of *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah fī al-ṣifāt al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Al-Jīlī (2015)). In Arabic, there are the monographs of Youssef Ziedan (Ziedan (1988); Ziedan (1998)); the extensive study of Suhaylah al-Tarjumān (Al-Tarjumān (2002), 540-810); Najāḥ al-Ghunaymī’s introduction to his edition of *al-Manāẓir al-ilāhiyyah* (a condensed version of al-Ghunaymī’s three-volume PhD thesis on al-Jīlī written at al-Azhar) (Al-Jīlī (1987), 5-80); Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ’s introduction to his edition of *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah* (Al-Jīlī (1997b), 7-26); and Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm’s introduction to her edition of *al-Nādirāt al-‘ayniyyah* (Al-Jīlī (2004), 7-70). Al-Jīlī’s significance within the history of Sufi metaphysical thought is reflected in his appearance in two of the most-widely read textbooks of Islamic/Arab history: Hodgson (1974), 2:462; Hourani (2013), 177.

phenomenal existence is a manifestation of God; the theory of the levels of existence, according to which the divine manifestation within existence occurs to different degrees of completeness; and the theory of the Perfect Man, which is the idea that the human being is the most complete locus for the manifestation of the divine names, attributes, and essence. I consider how these theories relate to the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, proposing that al-Jīlī’s thought constitutes an elaboration and systematisation of the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, and noting his willingness to disagree at times with his illustrious predecessor.²

The remaining chapters of the thesis focus more specifically on al-Jīlī’s treatment of the three most important scriptures in Islam – the Qur’an (*al-Qur’ān*), the Torah (*al-Tawrah*), and the Gospel (*al-Injīl*) – in chapters thirty-four, thirty-six, and thirty-eight of *al-Insān al-kāmil*.³ I show how the three key Sufi metaphysical theories outlined in chapter one influence and to a large extent determine al-Jīlī’s view of the scriptures, and also consider the extent to which his view is compatible with what I call the Sunni orthodox view of sacred history. By this latter term I mean the most widely accepted Sunni “account of God working through His human agents to accomplish His will,”⁴ which, in its most

² I generally use the term “theories” interchangeably with “ideas” here, while recognising that, in al-Jīlī’s own mind, these were not theories as we would understand the term, but truths arrived at through mystical experience.

³ In chapter thirty-five, al-Jīlī treats one of the other names of the Qur’an, *al-Furqān*, a treatment that I have integrated into my analysis of the chapter on the Qur’an. In chapter thirty-seven, meanwhile, he treats another of the scriptures mentioned in the Qur’an, the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*). Owing to limitations of space, my desire to avoid repetition, and the more peripheral place that this scripture occupies in the Islamic conception of sacred history, I have not dedicated a separate chapter of this thesis to this chapter, though I do refer to it in the course of my analysis of the other chapters.

⁴ Lindsay (1995), 53.

basic form, holds that God has revealed the message of submission (*islām*) to Him, the one God, to different peoples (*umam*), through a series of messengers (*rusul*) and prophets (*anbiyā'*), a process that has culminated with the revelation of the Qur'an, which is believed to have abrogated previous revelations, and to be the complete, universal, and final revelation, with its recipient, Muhammad, viewed as the last and best of messengers, and the religious community that follows him, the Muslims, as the best of religious communities.⁵ I argue that, while al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical perspective leads him in many cases to take some quite distinctive and remarkable positions on the scriptures, he ultimately remains within the framework of the Sunni orthodox view of sacred history, by virtue of his insistence on a hierarchy of scriptures, prophets, and religions, which he expounds in Sufi metaphysical terms. The thesis therefore serves as a case study of the ways in which Sufi thinkers in the Ibn 'Arabian tradition have engaged with and related to Sunni orthodoxy, as well as the ways in which they have viewed other religions and the relationship between those religions and Islam from their Sufi perspective, issues which have been debated from the time of Ibn 'Arabī up to the present.⁶

⁵ For a more detailed overview of the Sunni orthodox view of sacred history, see e.g. Hodgson (1974), 2: 445-455. Use of this term should not be taken to imply that there was a single, unchanging Islamic view of sacred history, which emerges in the same form from all of the different genres of Sunni literature, but rather that there was a common framework in which pre-modern Sunni Muslims of different affiliations and perspectives understood the world and the role of God and His messengers within it. The term "orthodox" is therefore not meant to imply the existence of an officially established creed or set of creeds, as in Christian orthodoxy, but rather of what Jonathan Brown has identified as "elements 'known necessarily as part of the religion'." See Brown (2015), 110.

⁶ For debates over the orthodoxy of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, see Knysh (1999); Chodkiewicz (1999a). For different perspectives on how Ibn 'Arabian Sufis have viewed other religions, see e.g. Keller (1999), 188-190; Chittick (1994), esp. 1-12, 123-176; Cornell (2004).

b) Methodology

As already indicated, the core of the thesis consists of a presentation and analysis of three chapters of al-Jīlī's *al-Insān al-kāmil*. In chapters two to four of the thesis, I undertake a close, almost line-by-line reading of these chapters. I have taken this approach in order to enable us to follow the internal logic of al-Jīlī's ideas, and thus to avoid, as far as possible, reading into the texts any preconceptions of what his views were or ought to have been, or imposing our own questions or an artificial coherence onto the text.⁷ To take an example, while I am certainly interested in how al-Jīlī's treatment of the Torah and the Gospel and the doctrines derived from them by the Jews and Christians informs his view of Judaism and Christianity, and while I acknowledge that al-Jīlī's views might seem to constitute an intellectual basis for an alternative Islamic view of other religions, nevertheless I try as far as possible to avoid imposing on my analysis the preconception, found in much writing on Sufism, that Sufis display greater "tolerance" of other religions than do the followers of other Islamic trends.⁸ This can best be achieved, I believe, by closely following what al-Jīlī himself has to say, rather than by raiding the text for quotations that might support or invalidate our preconceptions. Furthermore, this approach helps to prevent us from reading the text only in light of our own present-day concerns – such as relations between Muslims and followers of other

⁷ In this regard, I have been particularly influenced by Quentin Skinner's exposition of the potential pitfalls of textual analysis. See Skinner (1969), 3-38.

⁸ The commonly held idea of Sufi tolerance is summed up in the statement of van Ess (2013), 31: "Open advocacy of tolerance and praise of pluralism can be found, as is well known, in Islamic mysticism." Ibn 'Arabī Sufism is often cited as a model in this regard. See Schimmel (1975), 271: "Ibn 'Arabī is usually praised as an advocate of religious tolerance, and everyone who tries to underline the "mystical ideal of tolerance" and indifference to exterior forms and rituals quotes his verses."

religions – at the expense of focusing on al-Jīlī’s own principal concern, namely, the explication of his Sufi metaphysical ideas.

In undertaking my close reading of al-Jīlī’s chapters, I pay particular attention to the key terms he uses, the concepts that those terms denote, the particular conceptions that al-Jīlī has of those concepts, and the way in which he arranges them into particular patterns or groups of terms that together make-up a coherent text. I thus attempt to identify the key terms and groups of terms that form the building blocks of his conception of the scriptures, and thereby to elucidate the key features of that conception, all the while keeping sight of the flow of his reasoning. Though this method can, I think, be usefully applied to the interpretation of all texts and systems of thought,⁹ it is particularly applicable to the writing and thought of al-Jīlī, since, in addition to his immersion in the Arabic vocabulary of the Qur’an, Sufism, *kalām* and *falsafah*, he primarily expresses his ideas using the technical vocabulary of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters.¹⁰ This is something that he himself acknowledges in the introduction to the book, where he notes that, in speaking about the divine essence, he is forced to “descend” (*tanazzul*) to the level of “the technical expression of the Sufis” (*al-‘ibārah al-muṣṭalaḥah ‘ind al-ṣūfīyyah*).¹¹ Indeed, I think it possible to see *al-Insān al-kāmil* as a kind

⁹ In adopting this method of textual analysis, I am particularly indebted to Michael Freeden’s description (and advocacy) of the approach to the study of ideologies that is focused upon concepts, for which see Freeden (2003), 48-55, as well as to Toshihiko Izutsu’s approach to the study of Ibn ‘Arabian thought, as developed in Izutsu (1984).

¹⁰ For the vast technical lexicon of Ibn ‘Arabī, see al-Ḥakīm (1981). Under the influence of George Steiner, I am of the view that the key terms used by any author should first and foremost be understood in the context of the particular work in which they appear, for every author arranges his/her terms in a way unique to him/her, thus giving them a (partially) new meaning. See Steiner (1972), esp. 27-28.

¹¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 11. See also *ibid.*, 79-80: “So understand what I have indicated to you in these expressions – indeed, in the whole of this book of mine, since most of the issues

of elaborate lexicon of that technical vocabulary, for each chapter is centred upon one of the key terms of that vocabulary and opens with a definition of the term concerned, usually signalled by the phrase “X is an expression of (‘*ibārah* ‘*an*)...”. In attempting to work out the meaning of the technical terms used by al-Jīlī, I have therefore relied primarily on al-Jīlī’s own definitions of the terms concerned, and subsequently on how the terms are used in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters and, where relevant, in the wider Islamic intellectual tradition. In this way, I both analyse al-Jīlī’s Sufī metaphysics as a self-contained body of thought, and contextualise it with reference to those of his predecessors who may have influenced him.

c) Al-Jīlī’s life & times

Appropriate contextualisation of al-Jīlī’s key terms and concepts requires that we know something about his life and times. Unfortunately, we are somewhat hampered in this respect by the lack of available evidence. Al-Jīlī does not appear in the medieval biographical dictionaries,¹² nor does he appear to have taken on formal students who could write about him.¹³ For this reason, in piecing together the story of his life we are forced mainly to rely on what he tells us in his own writings, a hazardous task, given that his writings constitute Sufī

of this book have no precedent, except for what has been [referred to] in technical language, for there is no way to talk about a form of knowledge except in the technical language of its practitioners.” Ḥājī Khalīfah (1835-1858), 1:181, describes *al-Insān al-kāmil* as “a book on the technical language of the Sufis (*iṣṭilāḥ al-ṣūfiyyah*).”

¹² See Nicholson (1921), 81; Knysh (1999), 248; Atlagh (2000), 16-17. Thus, while his master al-Jabartī appears in the biographical dictionaries compiled by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), al-Sharjī al-Zabīdī (d. 893/1488), and al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), these works make no mention of al-Jīlī.

¹³ See al-Jīlī (2004), 10.

metaphysical literature, not historically-minded autobiography. This absence of firm evidence has produced considerable divergence of opinion in the scholarship on his life. While we can be fairly sure, based on a verse from his long poem *al-Nādirāt al-‘ayniyyah*, that al-Jīlī was born in Muḥarram 767/1365,¹⁴ with regards to his place of birth it has variously been proposed that he was born in Baghdad (in the Jīl district),¹⁵ Yemen (in Abyāt Ḥusayn, a suburb of Zabid),¹⁶ Gilan province in northern Iran,¹⁷ and, most recently, Calicut in Kerala on the Malabar coast of India.¹⁸ Similarly, he is said to have died “after 805 [1402/1403 CE]”,¹⁹ “sometime between 1406 [811 AH] and 1417 [820 AH],”²⁰ between 805/1402/1403 and 829/1425/6 CE,²¹ around 832/1428,²² in 826/1421 [sic] or 832/1428,²³ in 826/1422/3,²⁴ and, most

¹⁴ See al-Ghunaymī, in al-Jīlī (1987), 12-14; Ziedan (1998), 26-27; al-Ḥakīm (2004), 10. This is also the date given by Goldziher (1913), 46; Nicholson (1921), 81; Ritter (1960), 71; Mann, in al-Jīlī (1970), III; Al-Massri, in al-Jīlī (1998), 11; Atlagh (2000), 10; al-Tarjumān (2002), 541-542. Brockelmann (1943-1949), 205, however, puts his birth in 777/1375/6.

¹⁵ Goldziher (1913), 46; Ziedan (1998), 29; al-Tarjumān (2002), 541-542. This view seems to be based on a comment made by al-Jīlī in *Qāb al-qawsayn* that he is “Baghdadi in origin” (*Baghdādī aṣlan*). See al-Jīlī (1987), 11; al-Jīlī (2004), 12; Nicholson (1921), 81. As Marzullo notes, however, *aṣl* refers generically to “origin”, and not necessarily to birthplace. See al-Jīlī (2015), 7.

¹⁶ Al-Ghunaymī, in al-Jīlī (1987), 12; al-Ḥakīm, in al-Jīlī (2004), 12. This view is based on a report related by the Yemeni historian al-Khazraǧī (d. 812/1409) in his *Ṭirāz a‘māl al-zamān* about a Sufī who lived and died in Abyāt Ḥusayn called Ibrāhīm al-Jīlī, whom al-Ghunaymī takes to be al-Jīlī’s father. Al-Jīlī’s father, however, seems to have died in Aden. See Atlagh (2000), 21.

¹⁷ Al-Massri, in al-Jīlī (1998).

¹⁸ Atlagh (2000), 20-21. Atlagh’s view is based on a poem that appears in a colophon of a manuscript of al-Jīlī’s *Ghunyat arbāb al-samā‘* in the British Library (see *ibid.*, frontmatter, 101). ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), author of a commentary on *al-Nādirāt al-‘ayniyyah* and the last chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, also believed al-Jīlī to have been born in India. See Ziedan (1988), 15.

¹⁹ Ḥājjī Khalīfah (1835-1858), 2:1525. This is the last date that al-Jīlī mentions in his writings.

²⁰ Nicholson (1921), 81, following Goldziher (1913), 46.

²¹ Al-Ghunaymī, in al-Jīlī (1987), 18.

²² Ritter (1960), 71. Ritter’s source seems to be Brockelmann (1943-1949), 2:205-206.

²³ Knysh (1999), 429.

²⁴ Ziedan (1998), 26; al-Ḥakīm, in al-Jīlī (2004), 17; al-Tarjumān (2002), 573-575. This view is supposedly based on a comment of the anti-Ibn ‘Arabī Yemeni historian ‘Abd

precisely and most recently, on Saturday, 28th of *Jumādā al-thānī* 811/18 November 1408.²⁵

The resolution of these historical questions is not my primary concern in this thesis. I content myself here with noting that the proposals of Riyadh Atlagh, who suggests that al-Jīlī was born in Calicut in 767/1365, travelled in his youth to Aden,²⁶ made the city of Zabid on the western coastal plain of Yemen his home, and died there in 811/1408, are both the best documented and fit best with what al-Jīlī tells us in his writings and with the fragments of information that can be gleaned from the works of contemporary authorities such as the Yemeni historian Ibn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1481). All that we can say with any degree of certainty about al-Jīlī's life in the present state of our knowledge, I think, is that he lived in the latter half of the 8th/14th century and early 9th/15th century, that his primary place of residence was Zabid, where he joined the community of the prominent Sufi master Ismā'īl al-Jabartī (d. 806/1403), and that he travelled widely in the Islamic world and beyond, visiting Mecca and Medina (in 789/1387/88), Mecca again in 790/1388/89 and 799/1396/97, and Medina again in 802/1399/1400, India (in 790/1388/89), various Persian provinces, including Fars, Azerbaijan, Shirvan and Gilan (in the early 790s/1390s?), Damascus (in Ṣafar 803/September/October 1400), Gaza (in Rabī' al-awwal 803/October/November 1400), Cairo (in Rajab 803/March 1401), and

al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Ahdal, though it seems in fact that Ibn al-Ahdal does not specify al-Jīlī's date of death. See al-Jīlī (2015), 2015.

²⁵ See Hoffman (1995), 366, note 6; Atlagh (2000), 20-21.

²⁶ Journeys between Calicut and Aden, primarily for the purposes of trade, were common in this period, as noted for instance in Baṭṭūṭah (1958-2000), 2:372.

Sana‘a (at the beginning of 805/late 1402).²⁷

In terms of relevant context for my analysis of al-Jīlī’s ideas, attention should be called to the prevalence of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi thought in late Rasūlid Yemen, and Zabid in particular. The Sufi community in Zabid under al-Jīlī’s master al-Jabartī, the leading *ṭarīqah* in Yemen in this period,²⁸ “derived its identity from an enthusiastic allegiance to the teaching of Ibn ‘Arabī and to his later interpreters.”²⁹ We know, for instance, that al-Jabartī instructed his disciples in Ibn ‘Arabī’s two principal works, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, along with the commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* by Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. c. 700/1300), ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 730/1329) and Dā‘ūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350/1).³⁰ Such activity, along with other controversial pursuits such as the holding of *samā‘* sessions,³¹ was facilitated by the close relationship that al-Jabartī and his successors enjoyed with the Rasūlid sultans, particularly al-Ashraf Ismā‘īl (r. 778/1376-803/1400) and his son and successor al-Nāṣir Aḥmad (r. 803/1400-827/1424).³² In this regard, al-Sharjī al-Zabīdī (d. 893/1488) tells us in his biographical dictionary of Yemeni Sufis, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, that al-Jabartī “was without rival among the shaykhs of Yemen with regard to the numbers of

²⁷ See Atlagh (2000), 21-24; al-Jīlī (2004), 13-16; Ziedan (1988), 15-21; Ziedan (1998), 29-30; al-Jīlī (1997a), 189. These are merely the places (apart from Zabid) and dates that al-Jīlī mentions in his writings, and we should not rule out the possibility that he travelled elsewhere or stayed longer in the places that he mentions.

²⁸ Al-Jabartī’s *ṭarīqah*, known as ‘al-Jabartiyyah’, was a branch of the Aḥdalī order, itself a branch of the Qādiriyyah. See al-Ghunaymī, citing Murtaḍā Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790), in al-Jīlī (2004), 34.

²⁹ Knysh (1999), 242; Ziedan (1998), 48-49; Ahmed (2016), 94.

³⁰ See Ibn al-Aḥdal (1964), 214; Knysh (1999), 242-243.

³¹ See al-Zabīdī (1986), 102.

³² See al-Ḥibshī (1976), 45-50; Knysh (1999), 247-248; al-Ziedan (1988), 41-42; Yajima (1976), 154. For the Rasūlids more generally, see Smith (1995); al-Qalqashandī (1913-1922), 5:30-37; Yajima (1976); Joseph Chelhod’s introduction to Ibn al-Dayba’ (1982), 21-24; al-Khazrajī (1983); Chelhod (1984), 2:42-47; al-Jīlī (1987), 20-29; Vallet (2010); Dunn (2012), 108-113; Varisco (2013); al-Jīlī (2015), 21-23.

followers (*attibā'*) and companions (*aṣḥāb*) that he had from among the kings (*al-mulūk*), governors (*al-wulāh*) and scholars (*al-'ulamā'*).³³ This close relationship between the Rasūlid sultans and the Ibn 'Arabian Sufis of Zabid under al-Jabartī meant that the sultans cultivated a personal interest in the work of Ibn 'Arabī. Thus the Yemeni historian al-Khazrajī (d. 812/1410) informs us that, on 9th Jumādā al-awwal 790 [1388], al-Ashraf Ismā'īl “left for the coast, accompanied by a full complement of Sufi shaykhs, in order to listen to the Reviver (*al-muḥy*) [i.e. Muḥy al-dīn Ibn 'Arabī] by the seaside during the night of the 10th.”³⁴

Though the environment for Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysical thought was therefore in many ways felicitous, despite (or perhaps because) of the political support that they received, the pro-Ibn 'Arabī Sufis of Zabid also met with considerable opposition from certain prominent '*ulamā'*,³⁵ including the aforementioned Ibn al-Ahdal,³⁶ the famous Cairene historian and hadith scholar al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497),³⁷ Muhammad b. al-Khayyāt (d. 811/1408), “the principle expert in Yemen on the Muslim tradition and jurisprudence”,³⁸ and [Ibn] al-Muqrī (d. 837/1433), “the greatest poet of the Rasulid epoch”.³⁹ The criticisms made by these scholars, though perhaps partly motivated by politics,

³³ Al-Zabīdī (1986), 101.

³⁴ Al-Khazrajī (1983), 2:167; Vallet (2010), 388.

³⁵ See al-Ḥibshī (1976), *passim*, esp. 95-167; Knysh (1999), 225-269; al-Jilī (2015), 23-32.

³⁶ See Knysh (1999), 234-235; al-Ḥibshī (1976), 101; Chodkiewicz (1999a), 105-109. Ibn al-Ahdal labels Ibn 'Arabī and his followers with almost all of the possible terms of theological abuse known to him, calling them “schismatics” (*māriqīn*) and “extremist *hashwiyyah*, esotericist philosophers, atheist predestinarians, pretend Sufis who attach themselves to the Muslims (*al-hashwiyyah al-ghālīn al-falāsifah al-bāṭiniyyah al-mulāhidah al-jabariyyah al-mutaṣawwifīn al-muntasibīn ilā al-muslimīn*).” Ibn al-Ahdal (1964), 181.

³⁷ See Knysh (1999), 242, 376, note 106; Chodkiewicz (1999a), 114-123.

³⁸ See Knysh (1999), 252-254; al-Ḥibshī (1976), 99.

³⁹ See Knysh (1999), 256-257; al-Ḥibshī (1976), 100.

centred primarily on their belief that the pro-Ibn ‘Arabī Sufis were professing the unity of God and man – a doctrine classified under the terms *ittiḥād* (union) and *ḥulūl* (indwelling) – a position that, in their eyes, constituted associating others with God (*shirk*), and inevitably would lead to antinomianism and the consequent breakdown of social order.⁴⁰ Thus Ibn al-Ahdal, for instance, accuses the Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis of al-Jabartī’s community of such immoral acts as wine drinking and having sexual intercourse with the same woman, their ultimate aim being to “corrupt the religion (*ifsād al-dīn*) and lead the Muslims into error (*idlāl al-muslimīn*).”⁴¹ Partly as a result of the activity of these religious scholars, by the middle of the 9th/15th century the pro-Ibn ‘Arabī Sufis had lost their influence in Yemen, their downfall coinciding with that of the Rasūlids (in 858/1454),⁴² whose own demise was possibly connected to their losing the support of the anti-Ibn ‘Arabī ‘*ulamā*’.⁴³

There are perhaps three important points to take from all of this, with respect to the context in which al-Jīlī was writing. The first is that al-Jīlī did not come to Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought in isolation or in an unmediated way; rather, he was initiated into the Ibn ‘Arabian interpretative tradition of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and his successors, via al-Jabartī’s instruction on the *Fuṣūṣ* and the most important commentaries on that work. This interpretative tradition concentrated principally on the metaphysical aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s

⁴⁰ See e.g. Knysh (1999), 237, 243, 248, 249, 251, 259; al-Jīlī (1987), 33.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Ahdal (1964), 214. Similarly, he accuses Ibn ‘Arabī himself of “not keeping to the limits of the Muhammadan Law (*lam yataqayyid bi-qayd al-sharī‘ah al-muḥammadiyyah*).” *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴² See Knysh (1999), 266-267.

⁴³ See Vallet (2010), 654.

thought, attempting to make Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas accessible to a scholarly elite trained in Ash‘arite *kalām* and Avicennian *falsafah*.⁴⁴ While al-Jīlī’s thought, as we shall see, is marked by several original elements, nevertheless he should be understood within the broad context of that interpretative tradition. Second, the political support given to the pro-Ibn ‘Arabī Sufi community of Zabid in al-Jīlī’s time must have provided him with a considerable degree of freedom to explore and develop the more daring aspects of the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition. This is something that we see on various occasions in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, such as, for instance, in his development of Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea that all individuals, of whatever religion, actually worship the one God of the Qur’an, or at least a manifestation of Him,⁴⁵ or in his view that the Muhammadan Reality appeared in al-Jabartī,⁴⁶ or in his apparent identification of Muhammad’s essence with the essence of God.⁴⁷ Third, however, al-Jīlī must have been caught up in the backlash against Ibn ‘Arabian Sufism in the Yemen of his time. Indeed, we know that he was personally subjected to the criticism of Ibn al-Ahdal, who called him “the most perishing (*ahlak*) of them [i.e. the Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis] in that sea [of unbelief],” and cited the claim of an anonymous legal scholar (*faqīh*) who had travelled with al-Jīlī that al-Jīlī believed in the “lordship” (*al-rubūbiyyah*) (i.e. the divinity) of all things, including mankind, the birds, and the trees.⁴⁸ Al-Jīlī’s awareness of such hostility to him and his group probably explains

⁴⁴ See Morris (1986-1987), 2:752; Dagli (2016).

⁴⁵ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 72, 194-196; al-Jīlī (1997a), 103-104, 252-261.

⁴⁶ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Ahdal (1964), 214. See also al-Jīlī (1987), 17-18; Ziedan (1998), 58; Knysh (1999), 249.

why, although he is often prepared to put forward daring ideas, he also takes care on a number of occasions to explicitly deny that he professes *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*⁴⁹ – and, in one instance, *tanāsukh* (transmigration of souls)⁵⁰ – as well as his tendency in certain instances to explicitly refrain from divulging particular “mysteries” (*asrār*).⁵¹ Our consideration in this thesis of the extent to which al-Jīlī’s conception of the scriptures fits within the framework of the orthodox Sunni view ought therefore to be understood within the context of a debate over his orthodoxy that has been going on since his own time.

Aside from the narrower local context of Zabid, al-Jīlī’s thought ought also to be placed within the wider context of the various tendencies within Islamic thought and piety that marked what Marshall Hodgson called the Later Middle Period (c. 1258-1503). There are three tendencies, I think, that are of particular relevance to us here. The first is the spread of *ṭarīqah* Sufism across the Islamic world, a process that touched all levels of the social hierarchy.⁵² These Sufi orders often played an important role in the socio-political sphere,⁵³ and also often served as conduits for the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabī, whose works were widely read in the Sufi lodges alongside the works of his interpreters.⁵⁴ Despite the ever-present opposition to Sufism, particularly of the Ibn ‘Arabian

⁴⁹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 5, 52, 149, 215, 203, 229, 255. A similar tendency can be perceived in the writings of the later Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi thinker al-Nābulusī. See Sirriyeh (2005), 31.

⁵⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 211.

⁵¹ See e.g. *ibid.*, 260.

⁵² See Hodgson (1974), 2:201-254.

⁵³ See Trimingham (1971), 233-241. For discussions of the political role of the Sufi orders in the Later Middle Period, see e.g. Digby (1990); Eaton (1993), 31-32, 82-94; Potter (1994); Manz (2007), 178-191; Ohlander (2008).

⁵⁴ See Chodkiewicz (1993a), 1-18. For examples, see e.g. Algar (1991); Geoffroy (1999); McGregor (2012).

variety,⁵⁵ among certain sections of the *'ulamā'*, then, it nevertheless seems fair to say that not only Rasūlid Yemen, but also much of the Islamic world (particularly the central and eastern regions), provided a relatively favourable climate for Sufi metaphysical thought in this period.

Second, the Later Middle Period saw belief in the cosmic status of the Prophet Muhammad taken to new levels.⁵⁶ Literature connected to the *mawlid* festival celebrating the Prophet's birthday,⁵⁷ Sufi poetry such as the Persian *mathnavīs* of 'Aṭṭār (d. 589/1221) and Rūmī and the Arabic poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1234) and *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* of al-Būṣīrī (d. 696/1295),⁵⁸ popular biographies of the Prophet like al-Bakrī's (7th/13th century?) *Kitāb al-anwār*,⁵⁹ manuals of prayers devoted to him, like *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* of al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465),⁶⁰ and accounts of dreams in which he appeared, such as al-Zawāwī's (d. 882/1477) *Tuḥfat al-nāẓir wa-nuzhat al-manāẓir*,⁶¹ helped to popularize Sufi and other mystically oriented ideas about the exalted metaphysical status of Muhammad, such as the concept of the primordial Muhammadan Light (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*).⁶² While such ideas were by no means universally accepted,⁶³ it seems fair to say that by al-Jīlī's time, Muhammad had been exalted to such a degree that the majority of Sunni Muslims not only viewed him as the final and greatest of prophets, but

⁵⁵ See Knysh (1999); Chodkiewicz (1999a); Akasoy (2011). 'Afīfī is probably correct when he says, "There has never been in the whole history of Islam another man whose faith has been so much in question." 'Afīfī (1963), 405.

⁵⁶ See Hodgson (1974), 2:250-252; Brown (2015), 227-228.

⁵⁷ See Katz (2007).

⁵⁸ See Schimmel (1985), 177-215.

⁵⁹ See Shoshan (1993), 23-39.

⁶⁰ For al-Jazūlī and his *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, see Cornell (1998), 155-195, 211-213.

⁶¹ See Katz (1996).

⁶² On this idea, see Rubin (1975); Rubin (1995).

⁶³ See Rubin (1995); Knysh (1999), 192-193.

more fundamentally as a cosmically powerful and infallible individual. Al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Man, whom as we shall see he identifies with Muhammad, and his conception of the parallel between the divine essence, the Qur'an, and Muhammad, ought to be understood within the context of this more general trend, which his work probably contributed towards.⁶⁴

Third, Islamic intellectual life in this period was marked by a considerable degree of interaction and crossover between Sufism, *falsafah*, and *kalām*, with respect to the questions that were asked, the terminology that was used, and the individuals who were pursuing these disciplines. I have already noted that many of the interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi metaphysics, particularly those associated with the tradition of al-Qūnawī, interpreted Ibn 'Arabī's works – which already contain a considerable amount of philosophical and theological vocabulary – in such a way as to make them more accessible and acceptable to the *falsafah*- and *kalām*-educated scholarly class. This is reflected in those interpreters' greater interest in the more purely metaphysical aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, particularly his treatment of the nature of existence (*al-wujūd*) and the related problem of the one and the many, rather than in, for instance, the Qur'an-centred storytelling of the *Fuṣūṣ* or his discussion of the inner mysteries of the letters of the alphabet or the pillars of Islam (among many other topics) in the *Futūḥāt*.⁶⁵ Shahab

⁶⁴ For the continuation of Sufi metaphysical notions of the cosmic role of Muhammad, as formulated by al-Jīlī and other Ibn 'Arabian Sufi thinkers, into late 20th century Egyptian Sufism, see Hoffman (1992).

⁶⁵ See Morris (1986-1987); Dagli (2016), 1-6, and *passim*; Akasoy (2011), 242-249. On the storytelling of the *Fuṣūṣ*, see Nettler (2003), 13-16. Ibn 'Arabī's discussion of the letters of the alphabet comes in chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt*, and his discussion of the

Ahmed has termed this tendency to synthesise Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi metaphysics with the metaphysical perspective of *falsafah* (as well as with the Ishrāqī philosophy of Suhrawardī ‘al-Maqtūl’ (d. 632/1191)) “the *Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam*”, a tendency that he deems to have enjoyed considerable influence in pre-modern Islamic thought.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in addition to permeating Sufi thought, Avicennian *falsafah* also left a considerable mark on *kalām* in this period, as was already recognised by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), who proposed that “later” theologians (*al-muta’akhhirūn*) such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), ‘Abd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī (d. c. 716/1316), and unnamed “Persian scholars” (*‘ulamā’ al-‘ajam*), perhaps including ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1356), author of the widely-read theological handbook *al-Mawāqif*, had mixed up *kalām* with *falsafah* to such an extent that the two had become indistinguishable. For our purposes, what matters is that as an educated Muslim al-Jīlī is likely to have been exposed to the works of these scholars, as well as those of other *falsafah*-oriented *mutakallimūn* such as al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274).⁶⁷ While it is difficult to trace a direct line of influence from these thinkers to al-Jīlī, what we can say is that he lived in a period in which the treatment of metaphysical questions such as the nature of existence, the problem of the one and the many, the relationship between God’s essence and attributes, etc., was

pillars of Islam in chapters 67-72. It is notable that al-Jīlī does in fact take forward these aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, as well as the more purely metaphysical elements.

⁶⁶ Ahmed (2016), 31. Ahmed explicitly identifies al-Jīlī as being part of this Sufi-philosophical amalgam. See *ibid.*, 94-95.

⁶⁷ On the thought of the scholars mentioned here, see Eichner (2016); Shihadeh (2016); McGinnis (2016); Dhanani (2016).

part of the intellectual climate of the scholarly elite, and that he had available to him a technical vocabulary that was partly Sufi, partly philosophical, and partly theological.

d) How to classify al-Jīlī as a thinker

Our discussion of al-Jīlī's intellectual context and influences leads us onto the consideration of the question of how to classify him as a thinker. I call al-Jīlī a Sufi metaphysician in the Ibn 'Arabian tradition, a description that calls for some justification and clarification.⁶⁸ There are three elements to this description: "Sufi", "metaphysician", and "in the Ibn 'Arabian tradition". Al-Jīlī ought to be considered a Sufi in three respects. First, he seems to have been formally affiliated to the *ṭarīqah* of al-Jabartī, an offshoot of the Ahdalī branch of the Qādiriyyah.⁶⁹ He refers to al-Jabartī as "my master" (*shaykhī*),⁷⁰ along with many other grand titles,⁷¹ and to 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), the famous eponym of the Qādiriyyah, as "our master" (*shaykhunā*) and "my lord" (*sayyidī*), suggesting he viewed himself as an affiliate of the Jabartī-Ahdalī-Qādirī order.⁷² He also refers in his writings to his participating in the *samā'* sessions at al-Jabartī's mosque, indicating that he engaged in Sufi rituals

⁶⁸ The term "Sufi metaphysics" is applied by Ron Nettler to the thought of Ibn 'Arabī. See Nettler (2003), 3-5. It is also used by Muhammad Iqbal, including with respect to al-Jīlī, and by Marshall Hodgson. See Iqbal (1908), 112ff; Hodgson (1974), 2:230ff.

⁶⁹ On the Qādiriyyah and its offshoots, see Nizami (1991); Ziedan (1991). Al-Jīlī also tells us that he was initiated into the Chishtiyyah while on pilgrimage in Mecca in 799/1397. See Atlagh (2000), 23.

⁷⁰ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, 204-205; al-Jīlī (1987), 168-169.

⁷² Owing to the similarity in their names, some, notably Ḥājī Khalīfah, have thought al-Jīlī to be a lineal descendant of 'Abd al-Qādir. While Ziedan and al-Ḥakīm reject this (see Ziedan (1998), 38; al-Jīlī (2004), 11), Atlagh has found a manuscript of *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm* in which al-Jīlī is referred to as "'Abd al-Karīm b. sibṭ al-shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī". Nevertheless, Atlagh also notes that al-Jīlī usually refers to 'Abd al-Qādir as "our shaykh", without mentioning that he is related by blood. See Atlagh (2000), 10, 20-21; al-Jīlī (2015), 8.

in addition to being a Sufi theorist.⁷³

Second, al-Jīlī's epistemology, which privileges knowledge obtained via some form of religious or mystical experience,⁷⁴ can be called Sufi. On numerous occasions in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, he falls back on his own experience – which he refers to using terms such as *kashf* (witnessing), *shuhūd* (witnessing), *dhawq* (tasting), and *fath* (opening)⁷⁵ – to support the metaphysical claims he is making. Indeed, he claims that most of the contents of the book are a result of such experience, rather than of reading the books of his predecessors or listening to teachers:

[M]ost of what I have set down in this book of mine has not been set down by anyone before me, as far as I know. Nor have I heard an address from anyone about it, as far as I understand. Rather, He gave me knowledge of it, through witnessing Him (*shuhūdihi*) with the eye (*bi-al-'ayn*) from which nothing on earth or in heaven is veiled...None of this is known, except by way of unveiling (*al-kashf*), and we witnessed it with our eyes (*shahadnāhu 'ayānan*), and this was supported by divine revelations (*bi-al-ikhbārāt al-ilāhiyyah*).⁷⁶

Similarly, in his exposition of the manifestations of the divine names, he writes:

I shall mention, of all the ways [of reaching] each [divine] name, only what has occurred to me in my own wayfaring within God (*fī khāṣṣat sulūki fī Allah*). Indeed, everything that I mention in my book, whether I am reporting about someone else or about myself, is what God has opened up to me (*ma fataḥa Allāh 'alayya bihi*) in the course of my wayfaring within God and my going to Him, by means of unveiling (*al-kashf*) and direct witnessing (*al-mu'āyanah*).⁷⁷

⁷³ See al-Jīlī (1987), 31.

⁷⁴ It should be noted that there is considerable debate in modern philosophy and religious studies on the definition of “mystical experience” and the defining features of such experiences. For an overview of those debates, see Gellman (2014).

⁷⁵ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 11, 39, 65, 68, 69, 71-72, 79-80, 100, 125, 193, 210. Ibn 'Arabī uses the same terms to denote his own experiences. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 492-495, 662-665, 863-870.

⁷⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 79-80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 65; Cf. Ibn 'Arabī's claims that both the *Futūḥāt* and *Fuṣūṣ* were products of divine inspiration or revelation (*fath, ilhām, ilqā', tanzīl*), quoted in Chodkiewicz

Al-Jīlī thus indicates that such experiential knowledge is a divine gift. Furthermore, he even suggests that the knowledge acquired through such experience it is on a par with that obtained via prophecy, and thus that its content is the inner meaning of the Qur'an and the other scriptures.⁷⁸ Thus in the chapter on the Torah, he identifies three forms of knowledge: i) knowledge of the religious laws (*'ilm al-sharā'i*); ii) knowledge of "realities" (*'ilm al-ḥaqā'iq*); and iii) knowledge of "the divine mysteries" (*al-asrār al-ilāhiyyah*). All of these, he tells us, are contained in the Qur'an, yet while the first two forms of knowledge are apparent (*ẓāhir*) and propagated (*muballagh*), the divine mysteries are marked by concealment (*al-katm*), obscurity (*al-ghumūd*), and hiddenness (*al-buṭūn*); hence, they need to be read out of the Qur'an via esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Such interpretation, he explains, can only be undertaken by those who have attained the same revealed knowledge as the Prophet, via divine unveiling (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*),⁷⁹ among whom he includes himself. Indeed, in the penultimate chapter of the book, on the seven heavens, he goes so far as to claim that in 800 AH he experienced an ascension, analogous to Muhammad's *mi'rāj*, through the heavens, during which he "saw all of the messengers and prophets", and "had revealed [to him] the realities of things, as they have been since pre-

(1999b), 225; Nettler (2003), 5-6; Abū Zayd (2006), 99-102. See also 'Aḥī (1963), 404.

⁷⁸ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 11: "God opened up (*fataḥa*) knowledge of the Book and Sunna to me." *Ibid.*, 125: "And I have brought together (*jama'atuh*) in these pages all that the Torah contains, according to what God unveiled to us about that (*'alā ḥasb mā kashaḥa lanā Allāh 'an dhālik*)."

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 121. This connection between the knowledge obtained via mystical experience and the knowledge obtained via prophecy underlies the close connection between *walāyah* and *nubuwwah*, on which see below.

eternity and will be forever.”⁸⁰ While it would be a mistake to suppose that the privileging and claiming of this kind of special experiential knowledge is particular to Sufism,⁸¹ nevertheless it seems justified to consider it a key component of Sufi thought. Similarly, al-Jīlī’s claim about the experiential source of *al-Insān al-kāmil* and his esoteric approach to the Qur’an certainly have parallels in other Sufi literature, not least that of Ibn ‘Arabī.⁸²

Third, al-Jīlī uses Sufi technical terminology, as he himself acknowledges.⁸³ Examples of Sufi technical terms that he uses include those taken from the Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi technical lexicon, such as *al-tajallī*, *al-aḥadiyyah* and *al-wāḥidiyyah*, *al-insān al-kāmil*, etc.; those pertaining to mystical experience, as we have just seen; and those pertaining to the spiritual path, such as *al-ṭarīq*,⁸⁴ *al-sulūk*,⁸⁵ *al-riyāḍāt*, *al-mujāhadāt* and *al-mukhālafāt*,⁸⁶ etc., and the mystical states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) along it, such as *al-fanā’*, *al-sulb*, *al-ṭams*, and *al-sahq wa-al-mahq*,⁸⁷ vocabulary that is drawn from the classical manuals of Sufism.⁸⁸ Al-Jīlī’s thought thus ought to be situated within

⁸⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 232. As many scholars have pointed out, the Prophet’s *mi’rāj* functioned as a paradigm for Sufi conceptions of their own mystical experiences. See Sells (1996), 47, and the references in Taji-Farouki (2007), 340, note 49. Thus Ibn ‘Arabī also claims to have undergone his own *mi’rāj*. See Morris (1987-1988).

⁸¹ See e.g. Treiger (2011), on the Avicennian background to al-Ghazālī’s notion of “inspired knowledge”; Ebstein (2014), 21-27, who identifies five different mystical types within medieval Islamic thought.

⁸² For Sufi esoteric approaches to the Qur’an, see Böwering (1979); Böwering (2003); Knysh (2006); Sands (2006); Keeler (2006); Keeler (2011); Nguyen (2012); Knysh (2018), 62-123.

⁸³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 11, 79-80.

⁸⁴ See e.g. *ibid.*, 65-67.

⁸⁵ See e.g. *ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁶ See e.g. *ibid.*, 267.

⁸⁷ See e.g. *ibid.*, 39, 67, 68, 205, 266.

⁸⁸ In this regard, it should be noted that, alongside the works of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, al-Jabartī also taught the classical Sufi manuals, such as the *Risālah* of al-

the context of the pre- as well as post-Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi tradition.

So much for ‘Sufi’; what about ‘metaphysician’? Metaphysics, as ancient and medieval thinkers understood it, is a branch of thought dealing with the most fundamental questions, i.e., those pertaining to the nature of existence and reality or “being as such”.⁸⁹ Like other thinkers in the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition, al-Jīlī is above all concerned with such questions, and in particular, with the ancient question of how and why the many apparent existents of the phenomenal world emerged from a single existent, i.e. God, a question known as the problem of the one and the many.⁹⁰ While other, more this-worldly issues occasionally enter al-Jīlī’s discussions, he ultimately views everything through the prism of this metaphysical question. This can be seen quite clearly in his treatment of the scriptures, which, as we shall see, he believes represent levels of existence. Al-Jīlī’s emphasis on metaphysics, it should be noted, reflects the wider historical context outlined above, that is, the percolation of the metaphysics associated with the *falsafah* tradition into Sufism and *kalām*.

Al-Jīlī’s debt to Ibn ‘Arabī will come out over the course of this thesis, and need not detain us much here. For now, let us merely note that al-Jīlī seems to have viewed himself as being part of the intellectual chain that began with Ibn ‘Arabī and continued through his interpreters. This is indicated by the fact that al-Jīlī often refers to Ibn ‘Arabī as “*al-Imām Muḥyi al-dīn*” (even in passages where he states his disagreement

Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and ‘*Awārif al-ma‘ārif*’ of Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234). See Knysh (1999), 242-243.

⁸⁹ See van Inwagen & Sullivan (2014). Thus Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) defines metaphysics or “the divine science” (*al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*) as the investigation of “the existent *qua* existent” (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*). Quoted in Dhanani (2016), 376.

⁹⁰ See chapter one below.

with him),⁹¹ or sometimes just as “*al-Shaykh*”;⁹² by his decision to write commentaries on three of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works;⁹³ and by a passage in his commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Risālat al-Anwār* in which he reports a vision that he had of Ibn ‘Arabī, in which Ibn ‘Arabī taught him al-Qaṣyārī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*.⁹⁴

It seems justified, then, to call al-Jīlī a Sufi metaphysician in the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition. Speaking more broadly, however, we should also acknowledge that he was a Sunni Muslim intellectual,⁹⁵ who was committed to the truths of the Qur’an and Sunna and the theological and legal doctrines of the post-Qur’anic Sunni tradition. This can be seen in the short creed that al-Jīlī presents the reader with in the preamble to *al-Insān al-kāmil*:

I testify (*ashhad*) that there is no god but God, who is too exalted for these expressions, too holy for His essence to be known through clear expressions or allusions. Every allusion that points to Him turns away from His reality, shunning it, and every expression that leads to Him leads wildly astray from Him. He is as He knows Himself, according to what He requires, and through His essence perfection was completed and made sufficient.

And I testify that our lord Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – who is called the unique one of the unique ones of the Children of Adam, is His servant and greatest messenger, and His honoured prophet, His taught helper, His most resplendent embroidery, His most ancient antecedent, His most

⁹¹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 81, 86, 89, 128. According to Corbin (1993), 30, the title *imām* “in many cases means the head of a school.”

⁹² See e.g. al-Jīlī (1999a), 126, 127.

⁹³ (Chapter 559 of) *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, *Risālat al-Anwār*, and *Kitāb al-Tajalliyyāt*, although Chodkiewicz has called into question the authorship of the last commentary. See Chodkiewicz (1993b), 60.

⁹⁴ See al-Jīlī (2004), 13-14.

⁹⁵ We do not know al-Jīlī’s *madhhab* for sure. According to al-Baghdādī (1951-1955), 1:610, he was a Ḥanbalī. However, if as Atlagh suggests, al-Jīlī was originally from Calicut, we might suppose he was a Shāfi‘ī, Shāfi‘ism being the dominant *madhhab* in the Malabar coastal region (as it was in southern Yemen). Despite the resemblance between aspects of his theory of the Perfect Man and the Shī‘ī conception of the Imam (on which more below), al-Jīlī’s Sunnism does not seem in doubt. See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 12, where he states that knowledge is only true if it comes from the mouth of someone who belongs to “*al-sunnah wa-al-jamā‘ah*”.

upright path, the locus of manifestation for the mirror of the essence, the end point of the names and attributes...the locus of appearance for perfection (*maẓhar al-kamāl*), and the requirement of the [divine] beauty and majesty....May God bless him, his family, and his companions, who took from him his spiritual states, who acted as his representatives in his actions and sayings.

And I testify that the Qur'an is the speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), and that the Real is He who vouchsafed it, and so encompassed it. Through it, the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) descended upon the heart of the Seal of Prophets and Messengers (*khātam al-nabiyyīn wa-al-mursalīn*).

And I testify that the prophets are true, and that the books sent down upon them are veritable, and that belief in all of that is an absolute necessity, and that the grave (*al-qabr*), purgatory (*al-barzakh*), His punishment (*‘adhāb*) are a reality, and that the Hour (*al-sā‘ah*) will come without a doubt, and that God resurrects (*yab‘ath*) whoever is in the grave. And I testify that the Garden (*al-jannah*) is true and the Fire (*al-nār*) is true, and the path (*al-ṣirāṭ*) is true and the holding to account (*al-hisāb*) of the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-nushūr*) is true. And I testify that God wills good and evil (*al-khayr wa-al-sharr*), and in his hand is breaking and compulsion (*al-kasr wa-al-jabr*). So good is through His will, power, satisfaction and decree (*qaḍāhi*), and evil is through His will, power, and decree but not His satisfaction. Good deeds (*al-ḥasanah*) are through His support and guidance, and bad deeds (*al-saya‘ah*) are accompanied by His decree of calamity and delusion for the servant. Whatever good deeds reach you are from God, and whatever bad deeds reach you are from yourself, for there are few [bad deeds] from God. From Him existence began, and to Him the matter will return.⁹⁶

Though undoubtedly inflected with his Sufi metaphysical perspective, particularly with respect to his description of Muhammad's special nature, the articles of this creed are fully in keeping with Sunni orthodoxy, stressing the unity (*al-tawḥīd*)⁹⁷ and incomparability (*al-tanzīh*)⁹⁸ of God, the superiority of Muhammad over other men and the finality of his prophethood,⁹⁹ the special status of Muhammad's family¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 6-7.

⁹⁷ See Gimaret (2000a); Böwering (2002).

⁹⁸ See van Ess (2000).

⁹⁹ See Buhl [Welch] (1993), 368; Rubin (2003a); Friedmann (1989), 49-82.

and companions,¹⁰¹ the nature of the Qur'an as divine speech revealed by God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel,¹⁰² the truth of the pre-Qur'anic scriptures (at least in their original form)¹⁰³ and prophets,¹⁰⁴ the reality of the afterlife and resurrection,¹⁰⁵ and God's determination of man's actions.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, al-Jīlī demonstrates a particular concern to stress the orthodoxy of his views, which for him means that his ideas accord with the Qur'an and Sunnah:

I have only set down in this book that which is supported by the Book of God or the Sunnah of the Messenger of God – May God's blessings and peace be upon him – such that if it appears to [the reader] that something that I say is contrary to the Book and Sunnah, let him know that that is only with regard to his understanding (*min ḥayth mafhūmihi*), not with regard to my intention (*murādī*)....And know that every form of knowledge (*'ilm*) that is not supported by the Book and Sunnah is a form of error (*ḍalālah*).¹⁰⁷

While al-Jīlī, no doubt mindful of the attacks upon him and the pro-Ibn 'Arabī Sufis, displays a certain defensiveness with these remarks, and while the sentiment expressed here may also be something of a trope in Sufi writing,¹⁰⁸ nevertheless they do reflect how in much of his writing he uses the Qur'an and hadith as hooks upon which to hang his ideas. This Qur'an- and hadith-centredness, examples of which we shall see when we come to look at his chapters on the scriptures, accords with his

¹⁰⁰ See Goldziher, van Arendonk, & Tritton (1960); Hodgson (1974), 2:446; Asani (2002); Brown (2018), 150.

¹⁰¹ See Kern (2001), 386-390; Brown (2018), 90-91.

¹⁰² See Madigan (2004a), 438, 441, 445; Rubin (2004), 293.

¹⁰³ See Lazarus-Yafeh (2000a); Adang (2006); Horovitz [Firestone] (2002); Schippers (2004); de Vaux [Anawati] (1971); Griffith (2002a).

¹⁰⁴ See Horovitz (1936); Wensinck (1995); Zahniser (2003); Rubin (2004).

¹⁰⁵ See Waardenburg (2001); Borrmans (2004); Tottoli (2009).

¹⁰⁶ See Gardet (1978a); Karamustafa (2002); Vrolov (2002).

¹⁰⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 11. See also the lines of verse to this same effect in *ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. al-Sarrāj (1914), 5; 'Abdel-Kader (2013), 3; Karamustafa (2007), 71, 89, 103.

view that the knowledge attained through religious experience gives insight into the inner meaning of scripture. Furthermore, it corresponds to the approach taken by Ibn ‘Arabī, whose thought and writing are similarly Qur’an and hadith-centred.¹⁰⁹ Al-Jīlī’s conception of the scriptures should be understood within the context of this commitment to Qur’an- and hadith-centred Sunni orthodoxy, in addition to the context provided by his Sufi metaphysics. In his view at least, these two perspectives, the Qur’anic/orthodox and the Sufi metaphysical, are in perfect harmony.

e) *Al-Insān al-kāmil*

Before turning to a closer reading of the text, a few general remarks about *al-Insān al-kāmil* are in order. While al-Jīlī does not tell us when he wrote the book, we can date its composition with relative precision by process of deduction. We know from the internal evidence of the book that it must have been completed after Rabī‘ al-awwal 800/November/December 1397, for in chapter 61 he mentions a mystical ascension that he underwent on that date, while in Zabid.¹¹⁰ Equally, we know that it was completed before 803/1401, for he refers to *al-Insān al-kāmil* in his *Ghunyat arbāb al-samā‘*, which we can date to that year.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Atlagh has discovered a manuscript of *al-Insān al-kāmil* dated to 5th Dhū al-Ḥijjah 802/27th July 1400.¹¹² This means that al-Jīlī wrote the book when he was in his mid-thirties. We know that by this

¹⁰⁹ See Nettler (2003), 12-13.

¹¹⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

¹¹¹ See al-Jīlī (2004), 25.

¹¹² See Atlagh (2000), 20.

time he had already written a number of works, including *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm fī sharḥ bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*,¹¹³ a short treatise on the esoteric properties of the letters of the *basmalah*, his long Sufi poem in 536 verses, *al-Nādirāt/al-Nawādir al-‘ayniyyah*,¹¹⁴ and a number of no longer extant works, for he refers to these in *al-Insān al-kāmil*.¹¹⁵ This being said, it should also be noted that *al-Insān al-kāmil* was written prior to many of al-Jīlī’s other important works, including *Ghunyat arbāb al-samā’*,¹¹⁶ *al-Manāẓir al-ilāhiyyah*,¹¹⁷ *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah fī al-ṣifāt al-Muḥammadiyyah*,¹¹⁸ *Qāb al-qawsayn fī multaḳā al-nāmūsayn*,¹¹⁹ *Sharḥ mushkilāt al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*,¹²⁰ and *Marātib al-wujūd*,¹²¹ among several others.¹²²

While *al-Insān al-kāmil* cannot be considered a mature work of al-Jīlī’s, therefore, nevertheless it is the work upon which his fame and significance in the history of Sufi metaphysical thought largely rest. The widespread influence of the book can be seen in the large number of surviving manuscripts, particularly in the libraries of the former Ottoman Empire;¹²³ in the existence of a number of commentaries on different parts of the book, including a commentary on the final chapter by the prominent early modern Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi thinker ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-

¹¹³ For this work, see Atlagh (1992); al-Jīlī (2002); Lo Polito (2010), 138-270.

¹¹⁴ Al-Jīlī (2004).

¹¹⁵ See Atlagh (2000), 65; al-Jīlī (2004), 24.

¹¹⁶ On which, see al-Jīlī (2004), 25, 37-43; Atlagh (2000), 99-103. A critical edition of the *Ghunya* is being prepared by Claudio Marzullo for his PhD at the University of Naples.

¹¹⁷ Al-Jīlī (1987). See also Atlagh (2000), 93-98.

¹¹⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997b); al-Jīlī (2015). See also Atlagh (2000), 104-110.

¹¹⁹ See Nabḥānī (1998), 1:1494-1520; Atlagh (2000), 104-110; Addas (2009). This is the tenth part of al-Jīlī’s huge work in forty parts, *al-Nāmūs al-a‘ẓam wa-al-qāmūs al-aqdam fī ma‘rifat qadr al-nabī*, the majority of which is lost. See al-Jīlī (2004), 28.

¹²⁰ Al-Jīlī (1998); al-Jīlī (1999a). See also Atlagh (2000), 152-161; Morrissey (2016).

¹²¹ Al-Jīlī (1999b). See also Atlagh (2000), 142-151.

¹²² For the most complete list of al-Jīlī’s works, see Atlagh (2000), 26-27.

¹²³ See Morris (1986-1987), 3:108; Atlagh (2000), 16, 78-83; al-Jīlī (2004), 24-28.

Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731);¹²⁴ in its translation into a number of Islamicate languages, including Javanese,¹²⁵ Turkish,¹²⁶ and Urdu,¹²⁷ in the presence of long quotations from the book, representing the position of “the Sufis” on various matters, in the widely read 18th century Indian dictionary of philosophical and Sufi technical terms, *Kashshāf Istilāḥāt al-Funūn*,¹²⁸ and in its provocation of several important intellectual controversies, involving such prominent and diverse figures as the Medinan Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi thinker Aḥmad al-Qushashī (d. 1071/1660/1) and the aforementioned al-Nābulusī (the latter defending al-Jīlī’s position on non-Islamic religions against the criticisms of the former),¹²⁹ the Algerian military leader and Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi thinker, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī (d. 1300/1883),¹³⁰ and the 20th century Sudanese shaykh of the Burhāniyyah *ṭarīqah*, Muhammad ‘Uthmān al-Burhānī (d. 1983).¹³¹

There are, I would suggest, two key reasons for this enduring and geographically widespread influence. First, although the book is ostensibly devoted to the theory of the Perfect Man, nevertheless, as we shall see, it serves as a fairly comprehensive and systematic overview of Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics and terminology more generally, treating topics such as the different levels of existence, the nature of the divine

¹²⁴ See Ziedan (1988), 66; Atlagh (2000), 91-92; al-Jīlī (2004), 23-24. Sirriyeh (2005), 24, notes that “*al-Insān al-kāmil* (*The Perfect Human*) was among the Sufi writings that made a deep impression on the young ‘Abd al-Ghanī.”

¹²⁵ See Woodward (2010), 174.

¹²⁶ See al-Jīlī (2004), 24.

¹²⁷ See Lo Polito (2010), 42.

¹²⁸ See e.g. Tahānawī (1963), 270-271, 816, 1270, 1311-1312, 1746.

¹²⁹ For this controversy, see Akkach (2007), 107-108. For al-Qushashī, see Johns (1986). For al-Nābulusī, see Sirriyeh (2005); Akkach (2007); Akkach (2010); Ghazzī (2012).

¹³⁰ See ‘Abd al-Qādir (2004), 1:228-229, 2:289; Weismann (2001), 67-68. For ‘Abd al-Qādir, see McDougall (2014). For the two aspects of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s career and the limitations of the literature on him, see Woerner-Powell (2017).

¹³¹ See Hoffman (1992), 617; Chodkiewicz (1999a), 95.

essence, and the different categories of divine names and attributes. As already mentioned, al-Jīlī's method is to begin his treatment of each key concept by providing a definition (or multiple definitions) of the corresponding key term. This being the case, *al-Insān al-kāmil* is well suited to serve, as Trimmingham has put it, as a “mediating work” in the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition, i.e. as a key to Ibn ‘Arabī's ideas and technical terms.¹³² Second, it seems that Sufī masters encouraged their disciples to study *al-Insān al-kāmil* because al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Man provided a metaphysical basis for their own claims to *walāyah* (divine friendship or sainthood). Such, at least, was one of the criticisms leveled at al-Jīlī by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, who deemed this profusion of claims to *walāyah* as a pernicious phenomenon.¹³³

As for the structure of the book, *al-Insān al-kāmil* is made up of sixty-three chapters divided (by al-Jīlī himself) into two sections,¹³⁴ the first of which, broadly speaking, treats the divine essence and attributes and the levels of existence pertaining to them (as well as the scriptures, which, as we shall see, are connected in al-Jīlī's thought to the levels of existence), while the second deals with various Qur’anic concepts and images (e.g. the Throne (*al-‘arsh*), the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), the Lote Tree of the Furthest Bounds (*sidrat al-muntahá*)); the faculties (*qiwá*) of Muhammad (e.g. the heart (*al-qalb*), the imagination (*al-khayāl*), etc.) and the angels that correspond to them; the Perfect

¹³² Trimmingham (1971), 161.

¹³³ See al-Jazā’irī (2004), 2:289; Weismann (2001), 66-69. ‘Abd al-Qādir nevertheless describes al-Jīlī as “the great imam, the knower of God (*al-‘arīf bi-Allāh*),” and declares that he himself is “not [even] a drop in the ocean (*qaṭrah min baḥr*) of Imam al-Jīlī,” a sign of the continued reverence for al-Jīlī within Ibn ‘Arabian Sufism up to the modern period. See al-Jazā’irī (2004), 2:289, 1:228.

¹³⁴ Atlagh, however, does not believe this twofold division to be original to the text. See Atlagh (2000), 65.

Man; eschatology (*ashrāt al-sā‘ah*); cosmology (*al-sab‘ al-samawāt*); and the different religions (*adyān*) and their forms of worship (*‘ibādāt*).¹³⁵ The book thus moves in a general way from the more abstract and metaphysical to the more concrete and this-worldly – i.e., from the higher to the lower levels of existence – though it should be kept in mind that the Sufi metaphysics underlies everything, even those topics that might usually be deemed unconnected to metaphysics.

In terms of style, meanwhile, *al-Insān al-kāmil* is a prose work interlaced with a fairly considerable amount of poetry, somewhat like *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* or the *Lamā‘āt* of the Ibn ‘Arabian Persian Sufi writer Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289). The poetry generally restates or foreshadows the ideas found in the prose: for instance, after explaining the relationship between God and creation through the analogy of water and ice, al-Jīlī quotes a few lines from his *al-Nādirāt/al-Nawādir al-‘ayniyyah* in which he uses the same analogy. Aside from the poetry, al-Jīlī’s writing on what are at times quite abstract metaphysical topics is made more vivid by his use of storytelling, whether recounting his own personal experiences, such as his meeting with “one of the strange ones of the east” (*gharīb min ghurabā’ al-sharq*),¹³⁶ or expressing the nature of the divine essence through the story of “the bird of holiness (*ṭayr al-quds*)”,¹³⁷ or explaining the reason for religious difference through the

¹³⁵ Claudio Marzullo divides the two large sections into four subsections: 1) the key concepts of Sufi metaphysics; 2) the manifestation of the divine word (in the scriptures); 3) cosmology; and 4) the Perfect Man, astronomical symbolism, and other religions. See al-Jīlī (2015), 16-17.

¹³⁶ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 13ff.

¹³⁷ See *ibid.*, 26ff.

story of how Adam's descendents split apart (*iftaraqat*) after his death.¹³⁸

All of these features, along with his aforementioned use of the Qur'an and hadith, can be seen to a greater or lesser degree in the chapters on the scriptures, to which we shall turn after first looking at al-Jili's Sufi metaphysics more broadly.

¹³⁸ See *ibid.*, 254.

Chapter One: An Overview of al-Jīlī's Sufi Metaphysics

Al-Jīlī's treatment of the scriptures, which is the focus of the later chapters of this thesis, does not appear in a standalone work, but rather constitutes one section within his presentation of his Sufi metaphysics in *al-Insān al-kāmil*. For that reason, his conception of revelation and prophecy can only be properly understood within the context of his broader Sufi metaphysics; hence I devote this first chapter to a descriptive analysis of his metaphysical worldview, as presented in *al-Insān al-kāmil* and al-Jīlī's minor works. As in the later chapters, this analysis is built upon the key terms that al-Jīlī uses and the concepts that they denote, although the more general nature of the discussion here prevents me from reading the text as closely as in those other chapters. I divide my presentation into three sections, which correspond to what I consider to be the three basic issues of *al-Insān al-kāmil*: a) the problem of the one and the many; b) the levels of existence; and c) the Perfect Man.

a) The problem of the one & the many

The basic issue underlying al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysics is the metaphysical problem of the one and the many.¹³⁹ As stated above, this problem runs something like: if the source of existence is one, then how can we explain the existence of multiplicity in the phenomenal world?¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 125: "The gist of Jīlī's philosophy, as I understand it, is the notion of One Being, which is One Thought, going forth from itself in all the forms of the universe..."

¹⁴⁰ Plotinus states the problem in the *Enneads*: "...how from the One, if it is such as we say it is, anything else, whether a multitude or a dyad or a number, came into existence,

The question can also be reformulated in more theological language: if God is one, then how can we explain the multiplicity of His creatures? While al-Jīlī does not express the problem in these exact terms, it is, as we shall see in this chapter and throughout this thesis, the relationship between the one (God) and the many (created beings or existents) that animates his intellectual project.¹⁴¹ In his preoccupation with this question, and the solutions that he proposes for it, al-Jīlī thus establishes himself firmly within the intellectual tradition of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters,¹⁴² and, more generally, within the Neoplatonic tradition, loosely conceived.¹⁴³

Key to al-Jīlī’s attempt to explicate the issue of the one and the many is the concept of divine manifestation or theophany (*tajallī*, *zuhūr*).¹⁴⁴ This concept, which is close – though not identical – to the Neoplatonic concept of emanation,¹⁴⁵ is perhaps the key concept in the

and why it did not on the contrary remain by itself?” Quoted in Adamson (2002), 137. See also Wildberg (2016): “How is it possible to explain the world’s emergence from a single divine principle of consciousness?”

¹⁴¹ While al-Jīlī, as we shall see, uses both theological and philosophical vocabulary, it is the former that dominates. Thus in the introduction to the book he states that the thing sought for (*al-maṭlūb*) is the Real, i.e. God (*al-ḥaqq*) (and not ‘the One’). See al-Jīlī (1997a), 11.

¹⁴² On the problem of the one and the many in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, see Nettler (2003), 7-11.

¹⁴³ The Neoplatonic background to al-Jīlī’s thought can be seen in his use of certain technical terms – e.g. the first intellect (*al-‘aql al-awwal*), the universal intellect (*al-‘aql al-kullī*), the universal spirit (*al-naḥs al-kullī/al-kullīyyah*), etc. (see esp. al-Jīlī (1997a), 145-149; al-Jīlī (1999b), 27-29); in his conception of different worlds (see below); in his conception of man as a microcosm (see below); in his occasional references to the defilement of the body and the lower world in contrast to the purity of the spirit and the afterlife (see e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 152, 195, 200-201); and in the high esteem in which he holds Plato (see *ibid.*, 188-189). This loose affiliation to the Neoplatonic tradition is largely a consequence of his adoption of the Sufi metaphysical perspective of Ibn ‘Arabī. For the Neoplatonic background to Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, see Rosenthal (1988), 5; Ebstein (2014).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 125.

¹⁴⁵ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 49, where he writes of the divine “manifestation-emanation” (*al-fayḍ al-tajallī*). Ibn Sīnā also uses the term *tajallī* in the sense of emanation, for which see Goichon (1938), though it is with Ibn ‘Arabī that it becomes a key technical term. The Ibn ‘Arabian conception of *tajallī* is not identical to the concept of emanation in the sense that the manifestation of the divine does not occur through a fixed series of

Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters,¹⁴⁶ of which, as we have seen, al-Jīlī can be considered one. For al-Jīlī, as for Ibn ‘Arabī, it is through *tajallī* that the one becomes the many, or put another way, that the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), i.e. God, emerges into creation (*al-khalq*). As al-Jīlī, following Ibn ‘Arabī, sees it, this process of *tajallī* encompasses reality in its entirety. He tells us that God’s “perfection (*kamāluhu*) appears in every part of and every individual within the world”;¹⁴⁷ that “in every existent the essence of God exists”;¹⁴⁸ that “there is nothing in existence but You”;¹⁴⁹ that “the attributes of [divine] glory (*awṣāf al-majd*) are flowing (*sāriyah*) through all existents”;¹⁵⁰ that “every living thing is in His life”;¹⁵¹ that “the Real was given free rein in all things that you see, which are thus manifestations of the Designer (*tajalliyyāt al-ṣāni’*)”;¹⁵² that “existents in their entirety are loci for the appearance of the beauty of the Real (*mazāhir jamāl al-ḥaqq*)”;¹⁵³ that, when God declares in the Qur’an, “There is no god but Me,” (Q 20:14) what He means is, “There is nothing but Me”;¹⁵⁴ and similarly that the true meaning of the *shahādah* is, “There is nothing in existence but God (*lā fī al-wujūd shay’ illā Allāh*)”;¹⁵⁵ that a hadith that relates how God descends to the heaven of the lower world (*samā’ al-dunyā*) in the last third of the night is an

hypostases (the One, the Intellect, the Soul, etc.), as in the Neoplatonic doctrine, though as we shall see presently, God’s existence *does* descend through a series of “levels”. On this point, see Izutsu (1984), 43-44; Netton (1989), 269-280; al-Attas (1970), 72-73.

¹⁴⁶ Thus Ibn Khaldūn calls Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis “the people of manifestation” (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*). See Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:89; Ibn Khaldūn (2017), 60.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 51.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 266, or as he also puts it: There is no existence for anything but God (*lā wujūd li-shay’ illā Allāh*)."

allusion to “the appearance of the Real in every particle of existence (*ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq fī kull dhurrah min dhurrāt al-wujūd*)”;¹⁵⁶ that “He is manifest (*mutajjallin*) in everything that is transmitted, conceived, understood, imagined, heard, and seen”;¹⁵⁷ that “the Lord (*al-rabb*) has a complete face (*wajh kāmil*) is every existent”;¹⁵⁸ and that “He is with the entirety of existence.”¹⁵⁹ Owing to al-Jīlī’s emphasis in these statements and in many other places upon the all-encompassing nature of the divine manifestation, I call this key theory the theory of universal theophany.¹⁶⁰

What does it mean, we might ask, for God to become manifest in all of creation? To answer this question, it is helpful to consider some of the other key terms that al-Jīlī uses to describe the relationship between the divine and the created. God, he tells us in various places, is the source or essence (*‘ayn*),¹⁶¹ origin (*aṣl*),¹⁶² reality (*ḥaqīqah*),¹⁶³ spirit (*rūḥ*),¹⁶⁴ primordial matter (*hayūlā*),¹⁶⁵ inner nature (*bāṭin*),¹⁶⁶ meaning (*ma‘nā*),¹⁶⁷ or substance (*jawhar*)¹⁶⁸ of creation. Looking from the other

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 132. The hadith is recorded in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:479; Muslim (1995), 6:32-33 (no. 758); Tirmidhī (1998), 1:464-465 (no. 446). For the debates among Sunni hadith scholars over its potentially anthropomorphic content, see Brown (2018), 193-194.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 142.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁶⁰ Certain scholars have described the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers – including al-Jīlī – as pantheistic (see e.g. Nicholson (1921), 141; ‘Affī (1939), xi) or monistic (see e.g. Nicholson (1921), 140; Rosenthal (1988), 6; Knysh (1999), 281, note 28), while Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters are above all associated with the theory of “the unity of existence” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). I generally avoid using these terms, since although al-Jīlī believes God to be manifest in the entirety of existence, nevertheless this does not mean, as we shall see presently, that God and creation are identical.

¹⁶¹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 5, 22, 52, 103, 104, 142; see also al-Jīlī (1999a), 115. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of the same term, see e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1988), 106.

¹⁶² See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 51, 177.

¹⁶³ See e.g. *ibid.*, 5, 130.

¹⁶⁴ See e.g. *ibid.*, 150-151; Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 68-69.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 31, 51.

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. *ibid.*, 66, 142; Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 68.

¹⁶⁷ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 61; see also al-Jīlī (1999a), 115.

¹⁶⁸ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 59.

perspective, he proposes that creation is the form (*ṣūrah*),¹⁶⁹ speech (*kalām*) or words (*kalimāt*),¹⁷⁰ locus of appearance (*maẓhar*),¹⁷¹ or locus of manifestation (*majlā*)¹⁷² of God. These expressions all point to a relationship of underlying existential unity between God and creation. At the same time, they suggest that this relationship is characterised by both sameness and difference. God is within creation and gives it its existence, in other words, yet He is not identical to it.

Al-Jīlī expresses this relationship of sameness yet difference in various ways. For instance, he writes that “everything is of one kind (*naw‘ wāḥid*), yet differs with the difference in its faces (*bi-ikhtilāf wujūhihi*).”¹⁷³ “You were never reached (*mawṣūl*),” he says in a poem addressing God, “nor was there decisive separation (*wa-lā faṣl qāṭi*).”¹⁷⁴ Perhaps his most vivid articulation of the relationship between God and creation or the one and the many comes in the analogy that he draws with water and ice: “The world (*al-‘ālam*),” he says, “is like ice (*al-thalj*), and the Real – Glory be to Him and may He be exalted – is the water (*al-mā*) that is the origin (*aṣl*) of that ice.”¹⁷⁵ This analogy captures rather well the sense of essential, ontological unity yet formal difference between God and creation. Using more theological language, al-Jīlī expresses the same idea in terms of the need to synthesise (*jam‘*) God’s incomparability (*al-tanzīh*) and comparability (*al-tashbīh*) to creation. Thus in the chapter on *tashbīh* (chapter 11) he says that, though God can

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. *ibid.*, 18; 23; see also al-Jīlī (1999), 115; Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 69.

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 88. For this idea in Ibn ‘Arabī and Andalusian Neoplatonism, see Ebstein (2014), 33-76.

¹⁷¹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 97.

¹⁷² See e.g. *ibid.*, 93.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

be viewed as comparable to creation if we look at the manifestation of His attribute of beauty (*al-jamāl*), nevertheless “there is no doubt that when God – May He be exalted – appears in the form of His beauty, He retains the incomparability that He deserves. So just as you give the divine honour what it deserves in terms of incomparability (*al-tanzīh*), so too give it what it deserves of the divine comparability (*al-tashbīh al-ilāhī*).¹⁷⁶ Later in the same chapter, he interprets the phrases “neither of the east nor the west” (*lā sharqiyyah wa-lā gharbiyyah*) and “light upon light” (*nūr ‘alā nūr*) of the famous light verse of the Qur’an (Q 24:35) as indications of the need to synthesise the “lights” of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*.¹⁷⁷ In proposing this synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*, al-Jīlī is closely following the example of Ibn ‘Arabī, whose advocacy of this view is among the key features of his thought.¹⁷⁸

While God and creation are ontologically related, therefore, they are not identical. Perhaps the main reason for this – as suggested by some of the terms and expressions cited above – is that creation depends on God for its existence, meaning that the relationship is an unequal one. While God possesses true or absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*, *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*),¹⁷⁹ is absolutely self-sufficient (*ghani*) in the perfection of His essence,¹⁸⁰ and possesses “complete life” (*al-ḥayāh al-tāmmah*) – defined as life that exists through itself – creation, by contrast, stands in

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁷⁸ See Izutsu (1984), 48-67; Ahmed (2016), 90. For al-Jīlī’s development of this Ibn ‘Arabī theory in his commentary on the *Futūḥāt*, see Morrissey (2016). For his exposition of the same idea in his poem *al-Ayniyyah*, see al-Jīlī (2004), 48.

¹⁷⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 68. On this concept in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, see Nettler (2003), 9-11; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1133.

¹⁸⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 99. This is one of the traditional most beautiful names of God, being derived from the Qur’an (e.g. Q 2:263, 2:267, 6:133).

“need” (*iḥtiyāj, iftiqār*) of God for its existence,¹⁸¹ receives its attributes from God as a loan (*‘āriyah*),¹⁸² and has no choice in any of this.¹⁸³ In the language of *kalām*, God is eternal (*qadīm*) and creation is originated (*ḥādith*).¹⁸⁴ Within this context, it becomes clear that God and creation are as different as they are the same. While God is universally manifest in creation, therefore, it would be wrong to say without qualification that God is creation or that creation is God. In taking this view, al-Jīlī is again following Ibn ‘Arabī, who expressed the relationship of sameness yet difference via his pithy phrase, “*huwa lā huwa*,” which denotes how God is “it [creation] and not it” and creation is “Him [God] and not Him.”¹⁸⁵

b) The levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*)

Thus far we have considered the relationship between the one and the many or God and creation as if that relationship were static or fixed. For al-Jīlī, however, this is not the case. Rather, for him the nature of the relationship depends upon perspective (*i‘tibār, wajh, jihah*) – specifically, upon which of the levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*) you look at.

While the idea of a hierarchy of ontological levels is broadly Neoplatonic,¹⁸⁶ the more immediate context for al-Jīlī’s theory of the levels of existence is the Ibn ‘Arabī theory of the divine “presences” (*ḥaḍrāt*). This term appears in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, where it is

¹⁸¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 87, 108. This is a Qur’anic idea: see Q 35:15. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s expression of the same idea, see Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 105-106.

¹⁸² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 51, 90.

¹⁸³ See *ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁴ See e.g. *ibid.*, 100, 108.

¹⁸⁵ See Nicholson (1921), 152; Chittick (1989), 4. See also Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 106: “He [i.e. God] is our ipseity (*huwiyyah*) and not our ipseity.”

¹⁸⁶ For the classic discussion of this idea in Western thought, see Lovejoy (2001).

often used as a synonym for “worlds” (*‘awālim*), so that “the spiritual, imaginal, and corporeal “worlds” are...referred to as “presences”.”¹⁸⁷ This usage was adopted and developed into a systematic theory by Ibn ‘Arabī’s leading disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, and his followers.¹⁸⁸ Al-Qūnawī and the thinkers in his tradition, such as the famous commentators on the *Fuṣūṣ* Mu’ayyad al-Dīn al-Jandī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī and Dā’ūd al-Qayṣarī, elaborated a system of five or sometimes six¹⁸⁹ *ḥaḍrāt* to explain the emergence of the many from the one, or as they put it, the “entification” (*ta’ayyun*), “descent” (*tanazzul*), or “manifestation” (*tajallī*) of the divine existence.¹⁹⁰ Though al-Qūnawī and his followers each put forward a slightly different variation (or number of variations) on this scheme, they differed not so much on the actual properties of the levels, as on questions of perspective and terminology, such as whether the divine essence (*al-dhāt*) in its absolute simplicity ought to be classified as a *ḥaḍrah* or what to call the level of the essence that is qualified by names and attributes. Because it is more straightforward than some of the other schemes, we might take al-Qāshānī’s exposition of the *ḥaḍrāt* as our guide. Below, I have summarised his scheme in descending order, going from the least to the most qualified and visible levels. I have also included details from the

¹⁸⁷ Chittick (1989), 4.

¹⁸⁸ For a detailed discussion of this theory as it was developed by al-Qūnawī and his followers, see Chittick (1982). On the more systematic approach of al-Qūnawī and his followers, see e.g. Chittick (1978), 44; Chittick (2004), 26. For a slight corrective to Chittick’s position, see Todd (2014), 49.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Qūnawī’s student Sa‘īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1300), for example, specifies six *ḥaḍrāt*. See Chittick (1982), 116-120.

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 125, note 9.

schemes of the other key thinkers in the Qūnawī tradition for comparison.¹⁹¹

1) **The presence of the essence (*ḥaḍrat al-dhāt*)** – “the unseen of the unseen” (*ghayb al-ghayb*), or unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*). In identifying the divine essence as the first presence, al-Qāshānī is breaking with the example of al-Qūnawī, al-Farghānī and al-Jandī, who consider the essence to be above the *ḥaḍrāt*, and identify the first presence as that of the divine knowledge (*al-‘ilm*). Al-Farghānī (and following him al-Qayṣarī) does call the first level the presence of unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*), which denotes the level where the essence is not qualified by names and attributes, yet seems to distinguish this from the absolute essence *per se*. Al-Qāshānī, however, appears to elide this distinction.¹⁹²

2) **The Presence of the Attributes and Names (*ḥaḍrat al-ṣifāt wa-al-asmā’*)** – the presence of divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*). Al-Farghānī calls the second presence that of qualified oneness (*al-wāḥidiyyah*), a term denoting the unity that is qualified by names and attributes. Al-Farghānī’s terminology was adopted by al-Qayṣarī. Most

¹⁹¹ The following is based on *ibid.*, *passim*. See also Izutsu (1984), 11.

¹⁹² However, in one of his lexica of Sufī technical terms, al-Qāshānī identifies *ḥaḍrat al-aḥadiyyah* with “the manifestation of the essence alone to itself” (*tajallī al-dhāt waḥdihā li-dhātihā*), implying that the essence at the level of *al-aḥadiyyah* is distinct from the utterly unmanifest and unqualified simple essence. See al-Qāshānī (1992), 173. This reflects how the use of technical terms by Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters is marked by a certain fluidity.

- of these thinkers also identify this as the presence of spirits (*al-arwāḥ*) and the spiritual kingdom (*al-malakūt*).
- 3) **The Presence of the Acts (*ḥaḍrat al-af'āl*)**, that is, of lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*).
 - 4) **The Presence of the Images (*ḥaḍrat al-amthāl*) and Imagination (*al-khayāl*)**. For al-Qūnawī and al-Jandī (who do not identify the essence as a presence), this is the third presence.
 - 5) **The Presence of the Senses (*ḥaḍrat al-ḥiss*) and the Visible (*al-shahādah*)**. For al-Qūnawī, this is the fourth presence. Al-Jandī calls this the world of bodies (*'ālam al-ajsām*), and al-Qayṣarī the world of the kingdom (*'ālam al-mulk*). The other thinkers (i.e. other than al-Qāshānī) also tend to identify a presence below that of the phenomenal world, namely **the Presence of the Perfect Man (*ḥaḍrat al-insān al-kāmil*)**, who synthesises all of the levels within himself.¹⁹³

There is little doubt that al-Jīlī would have been exposed to this scheme of al-Qāshānī's and those of the other interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī, for we know, as noted above, that his *shaykh* al-Jabartī used the commentaries of al-Qāshānī and al-Qayṣarī on the *Fuṣūṣ* – in which these schemes are outlined – when instructing his disciples in that work.¹⁹⁴ As we shall see presently, the scheme of the five presences left its mark on him, both terminologically and conceptually. Nevertheless, it is notable

¹⁹³ See Chittick (1982), 122-123; Izutsu (1984), 11-20.

¹⁹⁴ See Ibn al-Ahdal (1964), 214; Knysh (1999), 242-3.

that at no stage in *al-Insān al-kāmil* does al-Jīlī merely reproduce the scheme of the five presences or a scheme like it; nor does he do so in any of the other works of his that I have looked at. Rather, al-Jīlī puts forward a scheme that, while grounded in the earlier conception, is marked by a degree of originality. Terminologically, where al-Qūnawī and his followers speak most often of the *ḥaḍrāt* and *‘awālim*, al-Jīlī, though he does use those terms,¹⁹⁵ speaks more often of the “levels of existence” (*marātib al-wujūd*). This term occasionally appears in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī,¹⁹⁶ and is sometimes used by al-Qūnawī and his followers to denote the particular levels within the more general presences or worlds.¹⁹⁷ As Chittick notes, the term “carries a more philosophical and less religious connotation” than *ḥaḍrāt*,¹⁹⁸ though this should not be taken to mean that al-Jīlī is more philosophically minded than al-Qūnawī and his followers; indeed, the opposite is probably true.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, al-Jīlī sometimes uses terms such as “loci of witnessing” (*mashāhid*) and “loci of viewing” (*manāẓir*), which connote religious experience, as synonyms for *marātib al-wujūd*.²⁰⁰

Conceptually, where al-Qūnawī and his followers identify five or six major levels of existence, al-Jīlī identifies forty. It might therefore be argued that he is merely adopting al-Qūnawī’s usage of the term *marātib*

¹⁹⁵ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 123, 155, 214; al-Jīlī (1999a), 128; al-Jīlī (1999b), 19, 20, 22, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Chittick (1989), 14.

¹⁹⁷ Chittick (1982), 109.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ For the impact of Avicennian philosophy on the thought of al-Qūnawī and al-Qāshānī in particular, see Morris (1986-1987), 2:751-756. Morris sees al-Jīlī’s thought as being grounded more “in his own spiritual insight and experience” than in *falsafah*, though, as has already been noted, al-Jīlī was well-versed in the commentary tradition of al-Qūnawī and his followers. See *ibid.*, 3:108.

²⁰⁰ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 61

to denote the particular levels within the *ḥaḍrāt*. It is true that in al-Jīlī's system the worlds of the invisible (*al-ghayb*) and the visible (*al-shahādah*) overarch the forty levels.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, these two realms also overarch the five presences of al-Qūnawī and his followers,²⁰² and as will become apparent, many of al-Jīlī's *marātib* correspond terminologically and conceptually to the *ḥaḍrāt* of the Qūnawī tradition. As such, al-Jīlī's scheme can be considered an elaboration and refinement of that earlier scheme.²⁰³ This elaboration, it should be noted, was influential in later Ibn 'Arabian thought; the famous Bosnian commentator on the *Fuṣūṣ*, 'Abd Allāh al-Bosnawī (d. 1054/1644), for instance, similarly identifies forty levels of existence, making direct reference to al-Jīlī's scheme.²⁰⁴

Al-Jīlī's clearest and most systematic presentation of the forty levels of existence comes not in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, but in a late work that is specifically devoted to the topic, which is known by the title *Marātib al-wujūd*.²⁰⁵ This work indicates that al-Jīlī's overarching perspective accords with that of al-Qūnawī and his followers. He begins his

²⁰¹ See e.g. *ibid.*, 69, 214-215.

²⁰² See Chittick (1982), 115.

²⁰³ This accords with the view of Morris (1986-1987), 3:108, note 92: "...one of the important features of Jīlī's independent philosophic contribution...has to do with his subtle analysis and multiplication of distinctions concerning the "intermediate" conditions and states of being".

²⁰⁴ See al-Bosnawī (1996), esp. 3, 6, 13, 16, 20, 29, 47, 49, 56, for the direct references to al-Jīlī's *Marātib al-wujūd*. Al-Bosnawī's description of al-Jīlī as "the gnostic of his time ('*ārīf zamānihi*), the majestic, realising shaykh (*al-shaykh al-muḥaqqiq al-jalīl*), who tasted the tastes of the forms of knowledge of the levels and the path (*al-dhā'iḳ adhwāq ma'ārīf al-marātib wa-al-sabīl*), the possessor of exalted taste (*ṣāhib al-dhawq al-'ālī*)," (*Ibid.*, 6.) is another sign of the high esteem in which al-Jīlī was held in later Ibn 'Arabian Sufi thought.

²⁰⁵ On the dating of the work, see Ziedan (1988), 70. Al-Jīlī also identifies the existence of forty levels in his first work, *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm fī sharḥ bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (see Atlagh (1992), 177), to which he directs the reader of *al-Insān al-kāmil* who wishes to learn more about the forty levels (see al-Jīlī (1997a), 219). This indicates the constancy of al-Jīlī's general metaphysical outlook over the course of his life.

exposition of the ontological levels with existence in its simplest, least qualified and perceptible form, which he identifies as the existence of the pure divine essence, and progresses down through the more qualified and perceptible levels, ending with the Perfect Man, who synthesises all of the levels.²⁰⁶ As we have just seen, while al-Qūnawī and his followers, with the notable exception of al-Qāshānī, tend to consider the simple divine essence as being above the levels – a view that al-Jīlī refers to in the *Marātib*²⁰⁷ – they agree with al-Jīlī that the divine essence constitutes the origin of existence and is utterly invisible. And like al-Jīlī, they tend to identify the Perfect Man as the last and most comprehensive of the levels – again, with the exception of al-Qāshānī. In addition, al-Jīlī adopts several of the key terms and concepts used by al-Qūnawī and his followers, such as the distinction between “unqualified oneness” (*al-aḥadiyyah*) and “qualified oneness” (*al-wāḥidiyyah*) (a distinction made particularly explicit by al-Farghānī),²⁰⁸ or the identification of the level of “divinity” (*al-ulūhiyyah*) as the level where the divine names and attributes appear (as in al-Qāshānī’s scheme).²⁰⁹

All this being said, al-Jīlī’s scheme is also more elaborate than those of the earlier thinkers – as one would expect, given that he identifies forty rather than just five or six levels. A key element of this elaboration, I think, is his integration of different frames of reference into a single scheme. Where al-Qūnawī and his followers put forward a scheme largely using the key Sufī metaphysical vocabulary of Ibn ‘Arabī,

²⁰⁶ See al-Jīlī (1999b), 15-54.

²⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 16.

²⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, 19.

adding a few key terms from the lexica of *falsafah* and *kalām*, al-Jīlī integrates in a more complete way terms and concepts from Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics (e.g. *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*, *al-aḥadiyyah*, *al-wāḥidiyyah*, *al-huwiyyah*, *al-barzakhiyyah*, *al-insān al-kāmil*), philosophy (e.g. *al-hayūlá*, *al-‘aql al-awwal*, *al-‘aql al-fa‘‘āl*, *al-naḥs al-kulliyyah*), theology (e.g. *al-dhāt*, *al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt*), the Qur’an (e.g. *al-‘arsh*, *al-kursī*, *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*, *umm al-kitāb*, *al-qalam*, *al-rūḥ*) and the sciences (e.g. the planets, the orbits, the elements, the humours, minerals, plants). It might therefore be said that al-Jīlī’s conception of the levels of existence, being a comprehensive overview of all phenomena known to him, is less narrowly metaphysical and abstract than the schemes of al-Qūnawī and his followers. In this integration of different fields and perspectives, al-Jīlī perhaps comes closer to Ibn ‘Arabī than any of the latter’s other interpreters, though he shares with al-Qūnawī and his followers a systematic mindset, which is less apparent in Ibn ‘Arabī.

Al-Jīlī’s conception of the levels of existence underlies the whole of *al-Insān al-kāmil*. As he would later do in *Marātib al-wujūd*, in the earlier work al-Jīlī progresses through the levels of existence, beginning with the divine essence and ending with the Perfect Man. However, it is fair to say that *al-Insān al-kāmil* is a less schematic work than *Marātib al-wujūd*, for he also interweaves long discussions of other topics (e.g. God’s incomparability and comparability, the scriptures, the end times, and other religions) into his presentation, which he does not do to nearly so great an extent in *Marātib al-wujūd*. Moreover, his presentation of the levels of existence in *al-Insān al-kāmil* is less straightforward than in

Marātib al-wujūd. For example, sometimes he includes the divine essence in his scheme (as in the *Marātib*), and sometimes not.²¹⁰ More significantly, he presents us with different conceptions of the highest level of existence below the simple essence, which differ according to the different “perspectives” (*i‘tibārāt*). In one respect, he tells us, the highest level is that of unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*), for it is the least qualified and perceptible of the levels other than the simple essence itself; hence he calls it “the first of the descents of the essence” (*awwal tanazzulāt al-dhāt*), “the first of its manifestations” (*awwal tajalliyyātihā*), and “the highest of the loci of manifestation” (*a‘lā al-majālī*).²¹¹ In other respect, however, the highest level is that of divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*), for it is the divinity – i.e., God as *Allāh* – that gives all of the levels of existence their reality, and which thus encompasses all of the levels. “Divinity is higher than unqualified oneness,” he writes in the chapter on qualified oneness (chapter 6), “because it gave unqualified oneness its reality, since it is the nature of divinity to give everything that possesses reality its reality. So it [divinity] is the highest of the names and the most encompassing (*ajma‘*) of them, and the most glorious and exalted, and its superiority (*faḍl*) to unqualified oneness is like the superiority of the whole (*al-kull*) over the part (*al-juz‘*).”²¹² In another instance, meanwhile, al-Jīlī indicates that it is in fact the level of all-mercifulness (*al-raḥmāniyyah*) that is “the greatest locus of appearance

²¹⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 42.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 49; see also *ibid.*, 42. The question of what constitutes the “greatest name” (*al-ism al-a‘ẓam*) is one that preoccupied al-Jīlī’s predecessors ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and al-Jabartī. ‘Abd al-Qādir declares unambiguously that the greatest name is *Allāh*, while al-Jabartī is more enigmatic on the subject. See al-Jīlānī (1990), 244; al-Zabīdī (1986), 105.

and the most general and most perfect locus of manifestation (*al-maẓhar al-a‘ẓam wa-al-majlā al-akmal wa-al-a‘amm*),”²¹³ since it can also be said, from an Ibn ‘Arabian perspective, that it is the divine mercy (*al-rahmah*) that gives phenomenal realities their existence. These re-workings of the levels of existence, in which the existence of God as *Allāh* or *al-rahmān* is deemed to be higher than the less qualified levels, perhaps reflect the ultimate dominance of the Qur’anic, theological and Sufi frameworks, in al-Jīlī’s thinking, over the philosophical, more purely metaphysical perspective.²¹⁴ It is with this more personal God, in other words, rather than an attribute-less Neoplatonic One, that al-Jīlī, as a practicing Sufi and committed believer, is ultimately concerned. More generally, the shifting conceptions of the levels of existence reflect how al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics is not a rigidly fixed system; rather, it constitutes an attempt – at least according to his own claims – to put into words insights attained through own religious experience. Given this experiential basis to his thought, perspective is all-important, for through the different perspectives one can attain different insights into how the one becomes the many.

Al-Jīlī, as we shall see, identifies the highest levels of existence with the different forms of revelation or scripture.²¹⁵ For this reason, it is the highest levels of existence – in particular, those expressed in terms of the divine names and attributes – that concern us most here. In what follows, therefore, I shall give a brief overview of al-Jīlī’s treatment of

²¹³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 52.

²¹⁴ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 98, where he ascribes the fact that al-Jīlī “enthrones Allah in the seat of the Absolute” to his being “a mystical theologian”.

²¹⁵ See also al-Jīlī (1997a), 42.

the highest levels in *al-Insān al-kāmil*. It is worth going into this treatment in some depth, because, first, the treatment of the levels of existence in *al-Insān al-kāmil* is detailed and complex, and second, his treatment of the scriptures in *al-Insān al-kāmil* ought to be placed within the context of his treatment of the levels of existence in that same work.²¹⁶

1) The Essence (*al-dhāt*) – The essence of God is a pure existent (*mawjūd mahḍ*). This means that its existence is real, necessary, and absolute – unlike the existence of created things, which is “attached to non-existence” (*mulḥaq bi-al-‘adam*). It is imperceptible (*lā tudrak*), for it has no essence (*dhāt*), name (*ism*), shadow (*ẓill*), trace (*rasm*), spirit (*rūḥ*), description (*wasf*), qualification (*na‘t*), or mark (*wasm*) – in short, it is incomparable (*munazzahah*). For this reason, no expression (*‘ibārah*) or allusion (*ishārah*) can capture it,²¹⁷ and it is called “the invisible aspect of unqualified oneness” (*ghayb al-aḥadiyyah*), “the cloud/blindness” (*al-‘amā*),²¹⁸ “the first

²¹⁶ There is some degree of overlap in what follows with Nicholson (1921), 94-103. However, in his exposition of the main ideas of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, Nicholson does not lay such great emphasis on the concept of the levels of existence, nor does he always treat the levels in the same order as al-Jīlī, as I have tried to do.

²¹⁷ Cf. al-Jīlī (1997a), 11: “...we shall speak about His essence in accordance with what the expression of the created world (*al-‘ibārah al-kawniyyah*) can bear, and we must descend (*al-tanazzul*) in our speech, in accordance with the technical expression of the Sufīs (*al-‘ibārah al-muṣṭalahah ‘ind al-ṣūfiyyah*).” For the imperceptibility of the essence in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī and his leading interpreters prior to al-Jīlī, see Izutsu (1984), 23-38.

²¹⁸ This term is taken from a hadith, in which Muhammad is asked where God was before He created the world, and he responds, “In a cloud (*fī ‘amā*).” It is recorded in Ibn Mājah (1998), 1:183-184 (no. 182); al-Tirmidhī (1998), 5:186 (no. 3109); Ibn Hanbal (1993), 4:16 (no. 16169). The term is used by Ibn ‘Arabī to denote “the self of the All-Merciful” (*naḥs al-raḥmān*), “the Real through which creation occurs” (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*), “absolute imagination” (*al-khayāl al-muṭlaq*), “the ‘isthmus’ (*al-*

locus” (*al-maḥall al-awwal*),²¹⁹ “the self of the self of God” (*naḥs naḥs Allāh*), and “the reality of realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq*).²²⁰ At the same time, however, everything is latent within it, for the entities (*a’yān*) of all names and attributes depend on it, and the lower levels of existence are to it like the stars are to the sun, a dew drop is to the sky, or a drop is to the sea. Thus, from another perspective, one can say that it has two accidents (*‘araḍān*) – sempiternity (*al-azal*) and everlastingness (*al-abad*);²²¹ two descriptions (*waṣfān*) – the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) and creation (*al-khalq*); two qualifications – pre-eternity (*al-qidam*) and origination (*al-ḥudūth*);²²² two names (*ismān*) – lord (*al-rabb*) and servant (*al-‘abd*); two faces (*waḥḥān*) – the apparent (*al-zāhir*) or the lower world (*al-dunyā*) and the hidden (*al-bāṭin*) or the other world (*al-ukhrā*); two connecting principles (*ḥukmān*) – necessity

barzakh) that “stands between God and nothingness and shares in the attributes of both”, “the level of the Perfect Man” (*martabat al-insān al-kāmil*) and “the reality of realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq*). See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 820-826; Chittick (1989), 125-130.

²¹⁹ This term seems sometimes to have been used in *falsafah* as an alternative to *al-muḥarrrik al-awwal* to denote the Aristotelian notion of the Prime Mover. See Rosenthal (1943), 57.

²²⁰ The term *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq* was earlier used by Ibn ‘Arabī to denote “an intelligible reality that synthesises, in its essence, all the intelligible quiddities of the Real and creation,” and which is thus “the origin of the world” (*aṣl al-‘ālam*). As noted just above, like al-Jīlī Ibn ‘Arabī sometimes uses it synonymously with *al-‘amā’*. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 345.

²²¹ For the standard distinction between *azal* and *abad*, see Tahānawī (1963), 143: “[*Al-azal*] is the continuation of existence in the past (*dawām al-wujūd fī al-māḍī*), just as *al-abad* is its continuation in the future (*dawāmuḥu fī al-mustaqbal*).”

²²² *Qidm* and *ḥudūth* are typically presented as opposites in Islamic theology, the former being applied to God and denoting, like *azal*, anteriority (*masbūqiyyah*) to creation, and the latter being applied to creation. See Tahānawī (1963), 1305; Arnaldez (1986a).

(*al-wujūb*) and possibility (*al-imkān*),²²³ two perspectives (*i'tibārān*) – being “lost”/“absent” (*mafqūdan*) to itself, and “found”/“existent” (*mawjūdan*) to another, and being lost/absent to another and found/existent to itself; and two forms of knowledge (*ma'rifatān*) – first being necessary (*wujūbiyyatuhu*) and then being negated (*salbiyyatuhu*), and first being negated and then being necessary. Based on this, we can say that the essence is utterly simple, unqualified, and unknown in itself, yet complex, qualified, and known in its manifestations, which exist within the simple essence in a state of latency. The essence, in other words, synthesises both the one and the many, or both God and creation.²²⁴

2) Divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*) – The name *Allāh* can only be applied to the essence of the One whose existence is necessary (*dhāt wājib al-wujūd*), i.e. God.²²⁵ At the same time, all the names and attributes, and thus all manifestations (*tajalliyyāt*), are beneath it, and it can therefore be called “the prime matter of all perfections”

²²³ The distinction between God and creation in terms of necessity and possibility is a typically Avicennian one. See McGinnis (2009), 160-177. This terminology was adopted by Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters (see Izutsu (1984), 166-168; Chittick (1989), 80-82), and is used by al-Jīlī on several occasions. See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 42-43.

²²⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), chapter 1 (*fī al-dhāt*), 26-29, and chapter 9 (*fī al-'amā'*), 55-58.

²²⁵ *Wājib al-wujūd* is the classic Avicennian term for the first cause (*al-'illah al-uwlā*), i.e. God. Ibn Sīnā defines *wājib al-wujūd* as the one being the non-existence (*'adam*) of which is impossible (*muḥāl*), which exists without recourse to another being (*al-ladhī yakūn wujūduhu min dhātihi lā min ghayrihi*), and from which all possible beings (*al-mumkināt*), i.e. all other existents, derive their existence (*wujūd mā siwāhu yajib bihi*). See Goichon (1938), 417-418; McGinnis (2009), 163-168; Adamson (2013). The term was taken on by Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 53; Izutsu (1984), 167; Chittick (1989), 12; Todd (2014), 88.

(*hayūlá al-kamālāt kullihā*).²²⁶ This can be seen in the letters of the name *Allāh*: the first *alif* denotes *al-aḥadiyyah*, the first *lām* denotes *al-jalāl*, the second *lām* denotes *al-jamāl*, the second *alif* (the dagger *alif*) denotes *al-kamāl*, and the *hā'* denotes *huwiyyat al-ḥaqq*, which is the entity of man (*'ayn al-insān*).²²⁷ As a consequence of the comprehensive quality of the name *Allāh*, it can be said that the level of divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*) encompasses all the realities of existence (*jamī' ḥaqā'iq al-wujūd*) and preserves (*ḥifẓ*) them at their respective levels. Divinity thus encompasses both the Real and creation (*al-ḥaqq wa-al-khalq*) – i.e. all the divine levels (*al-marātib al-ilāhiyyah*) and ontological levels (*al-marātib al-kawniyyah*) – and gives every level of existence its reality. For this reason, it should be regarded as the highest of the loci of appearance of the essence (*a'lá maẓāhir al-dhāt*) and the best (*afḍal*) of the manifestations of the essence to itself and to others. It is, in other words, the second level of existence. The manifestation of divinity cannot be perceived or spoken of in detail (*fī al-tafṣīl*), because it is impossible for it to be finite, and that which is infinite

²²⁶ *Hayūlá* is another term taken from the vocabulary of *falsafah*, in which context it denotes “the first or most basic matter from which composite or more complex material things are built, or, in other words, what is in potency to being any of the various kinds of physical things that we see around us.” McGinnis (2009), 55. See also Goichon (1938), 413-414. Again, it was adopted by Ibn 'Arabī and his followers. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 124-125; Chittick (1989), 89.

²²⁷ Al-Jīlī undertakes the same esoteric interpretation of the letters of the name *Allāh* in his *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm fī sharḥ bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*. See Atlagh (1992), 184-185.

cannot be perceived in detail. Nevertheless, the Real may become manifest through it (*yatajallī bi-hā*) in a general way (*‘alā sabīl al-kullīyyah wa-al-ijmāl*).²²⁸ This manifestation is revealed to the Perfect Men (*al-kummal*), who differ in their share (*ḥaẓẓ*) of that manifestation. These Perfect Men know *Allāh* not through rational thought (*al-‘aql, al-fikr*), for He cannot be known in this way, but rather through divine unveiling (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*),²²⁹ which gives them a pure taste (*al-dhawq al-mahḍ*) of the divine manifestation (*al-tajallī al-ilāhī*).²³⁰

3) Unqualified Oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*) – The level of unqualified oneness is a locus for the manifestation of the essence (*majlā al-dhāt*). Indeed, it can be viewed as “the first of the descents of the essence (*awwal tanazzulāt al-dhāt*) from the darkness of the cloud (*min ẓulmat al-‘amā*) into the light of the loci of manifestation (*ilā nūr al-majālī*),” and “the highest of the loci of manifestation”, for every other level is more particular than it. Though it constitutes the beginning of the simple essence’s descent

²²⁸ Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 69: “Whoever in his knowledge synthesises the declaration of God’s incomparability and the declaration of God’s comparability, with the two descriptions, in a general way (*‘alā al-ijmāl*) – because it is impossible to do so in a detailed way (*‘alā al-taḥṣīl*), since one cannot encompass all of the forms of the world – knows Him generally (*mujammalan*), not in a detailed way, like he knows himself generally, not in a detailed way.”

²²⁹ Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī’s letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in which he explains that while rational thought (*fikr*) can produce knowledge of God’s existence (*wujūd Allāh*), it cannot produce knowledge of God Himself, because the intellect (*‘aql*) limits Him, and that by contrast, mystical witnessing (*mushāhadah*) allows one to know God’s essence or quiddity (*māhiyyah*). See Rustom (2014), 16-17, 20.

²³⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), chapter 2 (*fī al-ism muṭlaqan*), 30-37, and chapter 4 (*fī al-ulūhiyyah*), 42-47.

into phenomenality, therefore, nevertheless “neither the names, nor the attributes, nor any of its effects have any appearance within it.” Rather it is a name for the simplicity of the essence (*ṣarāfat al-dhāt / maḥd al-dhāt al-ṣarf*) that has been purified of (*mujarradah / munazzahah*) all attributes, names, allusions, connections, and perspectives. In other words, it signifies the divine essence in its state of incomparability (*al-tanzīh*) and hiddenness (*al-buṭūn*). It is thus never possessed by the created, being particular to God.²³¹

- 4) Qualified Oneness (*al-wāḥidiyyah*)** – The level of qualified oneness is the level at which the divine essence takes on the names and attributes. It is thus termed the “differentiation” (*furqān*) of the essence, for it is at this level that multiplicity begins to appear. Nevertheless, at this level all of the divine names and attributes are united, such that one can say that the Avenger is the same as the Bounteous (*al-muntaqim ‘ayn al-mun‘im*), etc. This unity of the attributes is because the essence is in all of them, and they are all in the essence. For this reason, at the level of *al-wāḥidiyyah*, the one and the many are united: it is “the locus of the synthesis of the difference in the attributes” (*majma‘ farq ṣifātī*); “everything within it is one and multiple (*al-kull fī-hā wāḥid mutakaththir*); it is

²³¹ See *ibid.*, chapter 5 (*fī al-aḥadiyyah*), 47-48. See also *ibid.*, 22, 49, 77.

“an expression of the reality of multiplicity in unity, without being scattered” (*‘ibārah ‘an ḥaqīqat kathrah fī waḥdah min ghayr mā ashtātī*). It is below the levels of divinity and unqualified oneness, because it is more qualified than they are, yet it is above all of the other levels, because of its synthetic nature.²³² Moreover, in its hidden, invisible (*bāṭin*, *ghayb*) aspect it is called ipseity or “He-ness” (*al-huwiyyah*),²³³ and in its apparent, visible (*ẓāhir*, *shahādah*) aspect it is called egoicity or “I-ness” (*al-aniyyah*).²³⁴

5) All-Mercifulness (*al-raḥmāniyyah*) – For al-Jīlī as for Ibn ‘Arabī, the divine mercy (*al-raḥmah*) is the source (*aṣl*) of existence, i.e. the vehicle for God’s existentiation (*ījād*) of the realities latent within Himself.²³⁵ “The first mercy (*awwal raḥmah*) by which God had mercy upon existents,” says al-Jīlī, “was His giving of existence (*wajada*) to the world from Himself.” It is on account of this existentiating mercy that the Sufis speak of the “pervasiveness” (*sarayān*) of the divine existence in creation. For this reason, the level of all-mercifulness is defined as the level of “making the realities of the names and attributes appear” (*al-ẓuhūr bi-ḥaqā’iq al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt*). In this sense, all-mercifulness is like divinity, for

²³² See *ibid.*, chapter 6 (*fī al-wāḥidiyyah*), 49-50.

²³³ See *ibid.*, chapter 26 (*fī al-huwiyyah*), 101-102. For this concept in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Qāshānī, see Lala (2017), 79-218.

²³⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), chapter 27 (*fī al-aniyyah*), 102-105.

²³⁵ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 177.

they both bring creation into existence. Indeed, all-mercifulness is a more specific (*akhaṣṣ*) form of divinity, the relationship between them being like that of rock candy to sugar cane. Thus while the name *Allāh* encompasses all of the divine names, the name *al-raḥmān* stands between the names of the essence (*asmā' al-dhāt*) – i.e. those names that belong to God alone – and the names of the self (*al-asmā' al-naḥsiyyah*) – i.e. those names like the Powerful (*al-qādir*), the Knowing (*al-‘ālim*), the Hearing (*al-samī‘*), which have “their face turned towards created beings” (see below). Indeed, the seven letters of *al-raḥmān* correspond to the seven names of the self.²³⁶ As for the relation of the name *al-raḥmān* to the name *al-raḥīm*, the former is more general (*a‘amm*), because as *al-raḥmān* God grants mercy – i.e. gives existence – to all things, whereas as *al-raḥīm* He grants mercy only to “the people of felicities” (*ahl al-sa‘ādāt*), i.e., He grants mercy in the more conventional sense to those whom He saves.²³⁷

6) Lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*) – This is the level of the divine names that require a counterpart in creation, and which are likewise required by that counterpart. The lord (*al-rabb*), in other words, requires an object of lordship (*marbūb*),

²³⁶ As with the name *Allāh*, Jīlī undertakes the same esoteric interpretation of the letters of the name *al-raḥmān* in his *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm*. See Atlagh (1992), 184-185.

²³⁷ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 7 (*fī al-raḥmāniyyah*), 50-57. See also *ibid.*, 38-41.

i.e. a servant (*‘abd*), in creation, in order to be lord.²³⁸ The same applies to the names of the self (on which see below), for the Knower requires something to know (*al-‘alīm yaqtaḍī al-ma‘lūm*), the Powerful requires something to have power over (*al-qādir yaqtaḍī maqdūran ‘alayhi*), etc., and to other names, such as the King (*al-malik*), the Sustainer (*al-qayyūm*), etc. At the level of lordship a connection (*nisbah, ṣilah*)²³⁹ between God and creation is thus established.²⁴⁰ This connection is defined by mutual dependency, even if the divine retains its superiority over creation (the lord or king being superior to the servant or subject, for instance).²⁴¹

7) The Attributes of the Self (*al-awṣāf/al-ṣifāt al-nafsiyyah*)²⁴² – Al-Jīlī deals with each of the seven attributes of the self in a separate chapter, the order with which he deals with them reflecting their order in the

²³⁸ This is an idea taken from Ibn ‘Arabī. See for instance the passage from the *Futūḥāt* quoted in Netton (1989), 276: “God, from the point of view of His essence (*dhātihi*) and His existence, is in no need of creation, [but] from the point of view of His being [its] Lord (*rabb*), He undoubtedly seeks those over whom He rules (*marbūb*).” See also Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 81: “We have made him, through our being an object of divinity (*bi-ma‘lūhiyyatinā*), a god (*ilāhan*). So He is not known until we are known.” This Ibn ‘Arabian notion may in turn be rooted in the Avicennian concept of the “relation” or “addition” (*iḍāfah*), which Ibn Sīnā defines as “the idea whose existence is in relation to another thing (*wujūduhu bi-al-qiyās ilā shay’ ākhar*), and which does not have existence without that other thing, like paternity (*al-ubuwwah*) in relation to sonhood (*al-bunuwwah*).” Goichon (1938), 197. See also *ibid.*, 420.

²³⁹ For the Ibn ‘Arabian concept of *nisbah*, see Chittick (1989), 52; Nettler (2003), 79, 159, 167.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī’s statement, “Lordship is the relationship (*nisba*) of the He-ness [*al-huwiyyah*] to an entity, but the He-ness in Itself does not require any relationship.” Quoted in Chittick (1989), 135.

²⁴¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 8 (*fī al-rubūbiyyah*), 53-54.

²⁴² Ibn ‘Arabī uses the term “attributes of the self” to denote those attributes of an existent that are required for it to continue to exist. See Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 3:334-335.

hierarchy of existence.²⁴³ **i) Life (*al-ḥayāh*):** God possesses “complete life” (*al-ḥayāh al-tāmmah*), which al-Jīlī defines as “the existence of a thing for itself”, in contrast to the “additional life” (*ḥayāh idāfiyyah*) that belongs to creation, which he defines as “the existence of a thing for something else”. God’s life appears in creation as a single and complete (*wāḥid tāmmah*) life, but created beings differ in their manifestation of it: at the top of the hierarchy, the Perfect Man manifests the divine life in a complete way, followed by the highest angels, then ordinary human beings, angels, and *jinn*, then other animals, and finally plants and minerals. This constitutes what might be described as al-Jīlī’s conception of the chain of being.²⁴⁴ **ii) Knowledge (*al-‘ilm*)** – God’s knowledge is the nearest attribute to His life. As al-Jīlī sees it, God’s knowledge of Himself and of His creation is one and the same. In this regard, he criticises Ibn ‘Arabī for suggesting that the objects of God’s knowledge (*al-ma‘lūmāt*) give Him knowledge from themselves.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Whereas al-Jīlī specifically identifies only four attributes of the self (life, knowledge, will, and power) in *Marātib al-wujūd*, the remaining three being subsidiary to the primary four, here he identifies seven, in accordance with the dominant *kalām* conception, for which see Gimaret (1997a).

²⁴⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 16 (*fī al-ḥayāh*), 78-80. Cf. al-Jīlī (1999a), 117-118.

²⁴⁵ Al-Jīlī is reacting here against statements such as that found in Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 83-84: “[The divine] knowledge is a connection depending on the thing known (*al-‘ilm nisbah tābi‘ah li-l-ma‘lūm*). And the thing known is you and your states. So knowledge has no trace (*athar*) within the thing known, but the thing known has a trace in knowledge.” and *ibid.*, 131: “God’s knowledge (*‘ilm Allāh*) of things is in accordance with what is given to Him by the things known (*al-ma‘lūmāt*), as they are in themselves.” Cf., however, the statement in the *Futūḥāt* quoted in Chittick (1989), 38: “...He [i.e. God] knows the things only through His knowledge of Himself, and His self (*nafs*) is His knowledge.” For al-Jīlī’s criticism of Ibn ‘Arabī on this point, see al-Attas

Rather, says al-Jīlī, God knows the objects of knowledge via a form of knowledge that originates in him (*bi-‘ilm aṣlī minhu*).²⁴⁶ **iii) Will (*al-irādah*)** – Al-Jīlī sees the divine will as a manifestation of the divine knowledge, for God’s act of willing constitutes “the designation of the objects of His knowledge with existence”. There is no cause or reason for God to will the creation of existents; rather, the will to create is “a simple free choice of God’s” (*maḥḍ ikhtiyār ilāhī*). In this regard al-Jīlī again criticises Ibn ‘Arabī, this time for supposedly saying that God cannot be called one who acts through free choice (*mukhtār*), because He acted in accordance with what the world demanded.²⁴⁷ The divine will does not just bring things into existence, meanwhile. It also becomes manifest in created beings. In this respect al-Jīlī identifies nine loci of appearance for the divine will in creation, which aid individuals in their quest for God. These are (in ascending order): i) inclination (*al-mayl*), ii) passion (*al-*

(1970), 78-79. For ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s defence of Ibn ‘Arabī’s position against al-Jīlī’s criticism, see al-Jazā’irī (2004), 1:228-229, 2:289; Weismann (2001), 67-68. Despite his criticisms, ‘Abd al-Qādir nevertheless concludes that, “in the reality of the matter, there is no difference (*lā ikhtilāf*) between the two shaykhs over who it is who knows.” Al-Jazā’irī (2004), 1:229.

²⁴⁶ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 17 (*fī al-‘ilm*), 81-83.

²⁴⁷ Al-Jīlī identifies the *Futūḥāt* as the place where Ibn ‘Arabī makes this argument. I think he has in mind a passage in which Ibn ‘Arabī states that God created the world “without thinking or arranging [it]” (*min ghayr tafakkur wa-lā tadabbur*) (Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992) 1:167.). For a discussion of this passage, see Mahmoud (2007), 111. Ron Nettler has similarly noted that, in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ‘Arabī sets out how God’s actions are determined by the nature of the fixed entities of existents, with the important caveat that, because the fixed entities are manifestations of God, it follows that “[i]f God is ‘compelled’, it is His own nature which ‘compels’.” Nettler (2003), 214-215. This being said, Ibn ‘Arabī *does* call God *al-mukhtār* in the *Futūḥāt* (see e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 1:248) while in the passage discussed by Mahmoud he stresses the involvement of the divine will (*al-irādah*) in the creative process.

wala’); iii) ardour (*al-ṣabābah*); iv) infatuation (*al-shaghaf*); v) desire (*al-hawā*); vi) ardent desire (*al-gharāmah*); vii) love (*al-ḥubb*); viii) affection (*al-wudd*); and ix) passionate love (*al-‘ishq*).²⁴⁸ At this last station (*maqām*) of the human will, lover and beloved disappear, and there remains only love, which is the simple divine essence. Al-Jīlī’s conception of the will thus incorporates what might be called his theory of the stages of mystical love.²⁴⁹ **iv) Power (*al-qudrah*)** – God’s power consists in His ability to give existence to that which does not exist (*ījād al-ma’dūm*), i.e., to bring things from a state of hiddenness (*al-buṭūn*) to one of appearance (*al-ẓuhūr*).²⁵⁰ Once again, in defining *al-qudrah* in this way, al-Jīlī explicitly sets himself against Ibn ‘Arabī. For Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jīlī tells us, God’s power consists in His ability to bring things from “intellectual existence” (*wujūd ‘ilmī*) – i.e. existence in His knowledge – into “visual existence” (*wujūd ‘aynī*) – i.e. existence in the phenomenal world.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Cf. al-Qushayrī (2001), 348, “Love (*al-maḥabbah*), in the language of the religious scholars (*al-‘ulamā’*) [but not the Sufis], is the will (*al-irādah*).” Ibn ‘Arabī also defines love as “a particular connection of the will (*al-ḥubb ta‘alluq khāṣṣ min ta‘alluqāt al-irādah*).” Quoted in al-Ḥakīm (1981), 302.

²⁴⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 18 (*fī al-irādah*), 84-86. For an alternative Sufi theory of the stages of mystical love, see Tahānawī (1963), 1484-1485.

²⁵⁰ This definition appears to be somewhat contradictory, in that the term “hiddenness” (*al-buṭūn*) seems to imply unmanifested existence, rather than non-existence.

²⁵¹ This may be a reference to Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *al-a’yān al-thābitah*, the prototypical forms of existents that exist in God’s knowledge prior to their being made manifest in the phenomenal world, for which see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 831-839. It should be noted, however, that in the very first line of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī declares that God “gave existence to things from non-existence (*min al-‘adam*) and from the non-existence of it [i.e. of non-existence].” Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992, 1:41. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of terms *wujūd ‘aynī* and *wujūd ‘ilmī* in the sense indicated by al-Jīlī, see respectively *ibid.*, 1:208, 1:240, and Rundgren (1993), 341.

As al-Jīlī sees it, by contrast, God brought things first from non-existence (*al-‘adam*) into His knowledge (*al-‘ilm*), and then from His knowledge into the visible realm (*al-‘ayn*). God’s power to bring the non-existent into existence in this way establishes His lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*) and indicates that God has primary existence (*al-wujūd al-awwal*), while phenomenal existents, being in need of Him, have secondary existence (*al-wujūd al-thānī*).²⁵² v) **Speech (*al-kalām*)**: God’s speech primarily represents His phenomenal existence (*al-wujūd al-bāriz*), for it is the act of giving phenomenal existence to the “letters” (*aḥruf*) – i.e. the latent entities of possible things (*a’yān al-mumkināt*) – that exist undifferentiated in His knowledge; hence it is also termed the manifestation of God’s knowledge (*tajallī ‘ilmihi*). This conception of the divine speech as a creative – or rather, existentiating – act is grounded in the recurring Qur’anic motif that when God desires a thing to come into existence, He simply says to it “Be!” and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*) (see e.g. Q 2:117, 3:47, 3:59).²⁵³ This is a key verse for Ibn ‘Arabī as well,²⁵⁴ and the idea of existents as “words” (*kalimāt*) of God is also

²⁵² See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 19 (*fī al-quḍrah*), 86-87. Regarding the reason for al-Jīlī’s objections to Ibn ‘Arabī, Weismann suggests that “‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī’s endeavor to safeguard the notions of the omniscience, free will, and omnipotence of God may have been intended to ward off the adversarial condemnations of orthodox theologians.” Weismann (2001), 68. It is indeed noteworthy that in all of his criticisms of Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jīlī demonstrates a concern to stress the distinction between God and creation.

²⁵³ This statement also appears in the hadith. See Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:470-471.

²⁵⁴ See Chittick (1989), 444, s.v. “Be (*kun*)”.

taken from Ibn ‘Arabī, as al-Jīlī himself acknowledges.²⁵⁵

In addition to seeing the speech of God as phenomenal existence and His words as existent beings, al-Jīlī understands the divine speech in two other senses. In the first sense, it corresponds to the divine command (*amr*) to worship Him, a form of speech that comes from the level of divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*). According to al-Jīlī’s Sufī metaphysics, all existents respond to this command with worship (*al-‘ibādah*) and obedience (*al-ṭā‘ah*) – a point that, as we shall see below, he expands upon later in the book. This idea is connected to the sense of the divine speech as a creative principle, since all creatures, in receiving existence, assent to the divine speech. Indeed, al-Jīlī connects the universal assent to this form of speech to the precedence of God’s mercy over His wrath, mercy also being connected, as we have seen, to the existentialisation of phenomenal beings. There is also, however, a narrower sense in which the divine speech can be understood. This is the divine speech contained in the scriptures (*al-kutub*) sent down by God to His prophets or in the direct conversations (*al-mukālamāt*) that He has with them. The commandments (*al-awāmir*) contained in this form of speech, which comes from the lower level of lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*) and is in human language (*bi-*

²⁵⁵ On existents as “words” in Ibn ‘Arabī, and the possible Ismā‘īlī roots of this idea, see Ebstein (2014), 53-57.

lughat al-ins), are met with both obedience and disobedience (*al-ma‘ṣiyah*).²⁵⁶ The free choice (*al-ikhtiyār*) of individuals to respond positively or negatively to this form of speech thus allows for the justice of the divine punishment (*al-jazā’*) and reward (*al-thawāb*) to be preserved. Al-Jīlī’s exposition of the divine speech thus captures both his tendency to view all acts of worship as the worship of the one God, on the one hand, and his conception of a hierarchy of responses to the divine word, on the other. The tension between these two positions, as we shall see, runs through his chapters on the scriptures.²⁵⁷ **vi) Hearing (*al-sam’*)** – God’s hearing is also a manifestation of His knowledge: it denotes “the Real’s knowledge of things, through their speech (*kalām*), without a mirror.” This “speech” of existents can be either actual speech (*talaffuẓ*, *manṭiq*) or a spiritual state (*ḥāl*): God “hears” both, just as He hears His own speech. In addition, there is also a second type of hearing, which al-Jīlī calls “the second hearing/listening” (*al-sam’/al-istimā’ al-thānī*). This denotes the “teaching of the Qur’an” (*ta’līm al-Qur’ān*) to those unique individuals who are singled out to receive the manifestation of the divine

²⁵⁶ Al-Jīlī’s distinction between these two forms of divine speech corresponds with Ibn ‘Arabī’s distinction between “the creative command” (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), which all existents obey, and “the prescriptive command” (*al-amr al-taklīfī*), i.e. the command to follow the religious law, which some obey and others do not. For this distinction, see Chittick (1994), 141-142.

²⁵⁷ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 20 (*fī al-kalām*), 88-90.

essence, and whom al-Jīlī variously calls “the people of the essence” (*al-dhātīyyūn*), “the unique ones who attain realisation” (*al-afrād al-muḥaqqiqūn*), and, based upon a *ḥadīth qudsī* that he quotes, “the people of the Qur’an” (*ahl al-Qur’ān*), “the people of God” (*ahl Allāh*) and “God’s elect” (*khāṣṣat Allāh*). These terms all denote the Perfect Men. The second type of hearing, then, is that which God loans (*a’āra*) to His perfect servants, who are thus able to “hear” – i.e. to know – the true meaning of the Qur’an. The archetype of such Perfect Men is Muhammad; hence those who attain this status are called “Muhammadan people of the essence” (*al-dhātīyyīn al-Muḥammadiyyīn*), and their station is “the station of the Beloved” (*maqām al-ḥabīb*) – *ḥabīb Allāh* being a common Islamic title for Muhammad. Below this level of Perfect Men, meanwhile, is the level of those who receive the manifestation not of the essence itself, but only that of the attributes of the divine self. These individuals are taught not the Qur’an – which, as we shall see, al-Jīlī considers a manifestation of the essence – but rather the Furqan – which, as already noted, is an expression of the qualified oneness of God, or the essence qualified by names and attributes. The model for such individuals is Moses; hence they are called “the Mosaic people of the self” (*al-naḥsiyyūn mūsawīyyūn*), and their station is “the

station of the One Spoken To” (*maqām al-kalīm*), i.e. Moses.²⁵⁸ Here we see the integration, in al-Jīlī’s thought, of the scriptures, the prophets, and the concept of the divine manifestation within creation, which will be a key theme in the remaining chapters of this thesis.²⁵⁹ **vii) Sight (*al-baṣar*)** – God’s sight denotes “His witnessing of the objects of [His] knowledge” (*shuhūdihi li-al-ma’lūmāt*). Like several of the other attributes of the divine self, then, God’s sight is also a form of His knowledge: “The locus of His knowledge is the locus of His eye (*maḥall ‘ilmihi maḥall ‘aynihi*).” Thus, though His knowledge and sight are two attributes (*ṣifātān*), nevertheless they are one thing (*shay’ wāḥid*). Just as nothing is outside of God’s knowledge, so too is nothing veiled from His sight, though He only gazes upon things if He wills; hence God’s gaze (*naẓar*) is considered an act of divine mercy (*raḥmah ilāhiyyah*). Within man, meanwhile, the ordinary vision of the eye is called *baṣar*, while the vision of the heart is called *baṣīrah*. Those who possess the latter possess the divine attribute of sight: they see the realities of things, and nothing is veiled from their sight.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Compare this to Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion that the spiritual realities (*ḥaqā’iq, laṭā’if*) of one (or more) of the prophets are revealed to “those who attain among the friends of God (*al-wāṣilūn min al-awliyā’*),” such that some friends of God are “Mosaic in their locus of witnessing” (*mūsawī al-mashhad*), others are “Christic” (*‘isawī*), etc. See Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 4:114-115.

²⁵⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 21 (*fī al-sam’*), 90-92.

²⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, ch. 22 (*fī al-baṣar*), 92-93.

8) Beauty (*al-jamāl*) – God’s beauty, says al-Jīlī, denotes God’s most exalted names and most beautiful attributes (*awṣāfīhi al-‘uliyā wa-asmā’ihi al-ḥusnā*). More particularly, it denotes the divine attributes of mercy (*al-rahmah*), knowledge (*al-‘ilm*), kindness (*al-luṭf*), grace (*al-ni‘mah*), generosity (*al-jūd*), sustaining (*al-razzāqīyyah*), creating (*al-khallāqīyyah*), benefit (*al-naḥ*), etc. There are also some names, such as *Allāh*, *al-rabb*, and *al-rahīmān*, which are names of beauty from one perspective, and names of majesty (*al-jalāl*) from another perspective; hence they are called “shared” (*mushtarakah*) names or attributes. Moreover, there are two types of divine beauty: i) that which pertains to His inner meaning (*ma‘nawī*), i.e. to the meanings of the most beautiful names and most exalted attributes, the witnessing of which is particular to God alone; and ii) that which pertains to His outer form (*ṣūri*), which is the beauty seen in the world (*al-‘ālam*) and the creatures (*al-makhlūqāt*) within it. On account of this latter type of beauty, it can be said that the divine beauty or goodness (*al-ḥusn*) is present in the original nature (*aṣālah*) of all existents, while ugliness (*al-qubḥ*) is only a matter of perspective, i.e. is non-essential. All things that are qualified by

existence, of whatever type, therefore, are forms or loci of manifestation of the divine beauty.²⁶¹

9) Majesty (*al-jalāl*) – Like God’s beauty, God’s majesty denotes another category of His names and attributes. In this case, it denotes attributes such as grandeur (*al-‘uẓmah*), greatness (*al-kibriyā’*), eminence (*al-majd*), praise (*al-thanā’*), etc. There are thus four categories (*aqsām*) of divine names/attributes: i) the attributes of beauty; ii) the attributes of majesty; iii) the attributes shared between beauty and majesty, which are also called the attributes of perfection (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*); and iv) the essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyyah*), which are those that qualify the divine essence alone.²⁶² All existents are loci of manifestation of (an aspect of) God’s beauty, because they attain existence by receiving God’s mercy – which is an attribute of beauty. While God’s majesty is also manifest in creation, it does not embrace all existents in the way that God’s beauty does. This, says al-Jīlī, is the mystery of the hadith: “My mercy precedes My wrath,” – a key scriptural source for the Ibn ‘Arabian theory of ontological mercy.²⁶³ As for the names and attributes of perfection, some of them – such as *al-rabb*, *al-raḥmān*, *al-malik*, etc. – are manifest in creation as a whole, others –

²⁶¹ See *ibid.*, ch. 23 (*fī al-jamāl*), 93-95.

²⁶² See *ibid.*, 96-97, where al-Jīlī sets out various examples of these four categories of divine name in tabular form.

²⁶³ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 177. The hadith is recorded in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 2:303; 4:457; Muslim (1995), 17:57 (no. 2791).

such as *al-baṣīr*, *al-samīʿ*, *al-khālīq* and *al-ḥakīm* – apply to all existents, but not in all of their aspects, and others – such as *al-ghanī*, *al-ʿadl*, *al-qayyūm*, etc. – are attached to the names of the essence and thus do not require existents to appear in their form. This diverse array of names and attributes is reconciled in the Perfect Man – or as al-Jīlī calls him here, the perfect servant (*al-ʿabd al-kāmil*) – who is “a locus of appearance for all of these names, whether they are shared [between majesty and beauty] or not shared, whether they are essential, majestic, or beautiful.”²⁶⁴

This fairly detailed exposition of al-Jīlī’s conception of the levels of existence helps us to understand his response to the problem of the one and the many and his conception of the relationship between God and creation. Simply put, as al-Jīlī sees it, existence originates in the divine essence. This essence is utterly one, simple, and unknowable. However, as al-Jīlī notes in the introduction to *al-Insān al-kāmil*, God is not just His essence; rather, as in the dominant *kalām* conception, He possess an essence, names and attributes.²⁶⁵ This being the case, as those names and attributes become manifest, so too does the unity of God emerge into multiplicity. This process begins with the level of *al-aḥadiyyah*, at which the names and attributes, while not outwardly apparent, are latent within the divine essence, and continues through the levels of *al-wāḥidiyyah*, *al-ulūhiyyah*, *al-raḥmāniyyah*, etc., at

²⁶⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), ch. 21 (*fī al-jalāl*), 95-99.

²⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, 11.

which the divine is increasingly qualified by names and attributes, and increasingly manifest. It is through the progressive manifestation of the different names and attributes at the different levels, therefore, that the one becomes the many. The multiplicity of the phenomenal world, therefore, is a consequence of the multiplicity within the Godhead, i.e., the multiplicity within the names and attributes.

It bears repeating, therefore, that al-Jīlī's conception of the relationship between the one and the many or God and creation is not static. Rather, the nature of the relationship depends on which level of existence that you look at. At the level of the simple essence, for instance, the one is utterly separate from the many, while at the lower levels the unity of God seems to a certain extent to be obscured by the multiplicity of His names and attributes. We must therefore emphasise again the importance of perspective (*i'tibār*) for al-Jīlī, for whom the levels of existence are not merely an abstract theory, but in fact constitute levels through which those who wish to know God must progress.²⁶⁶ The *marātib*, in other words, are not only levels at which God becomes increasingly manifest, but also stations (*maqāmāt*) – to use the classical Sufi term – on the path to God.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, chapters 13-14 (*fī tajallī al-asmā', fī tajallī al-ṣifāt*), 64-76. In the chapter on the manifestation of the names, al-Jīlī explains that those who receive this form of manifestation progress *down* through the levels of existence. In the following chapter he explains that those who receive the manifestation of the attributes, by contrast, progress *up* through the levels.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 125-126: "The Divine *tajallī*, in respect of the person to whom it is made, may be called an illumination, for it is the light whereby the mystic's heart has vision of God. Accordingly, the ontological descent from the Absolute and the mystical ascent or return to the Absolute are really the same process looked at from different points of view." In this regard, it is notable that al-Jīlī claims to have personally experienced the different forms of *tajalliyyāt*. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 65, 68, 71-72, 73-75. It should also be noted that just as al-Jīlī outlines forty *marātib al-wujūd*, he also outlines forty "dwelling places" (*mawṭin*), i.e. stations on the path, in his *Risālat Arba'ūn mawṭinan*. See al-Jīlī (2004), 31.

For this reason, the perspective of any two individuals on the relationship of God and creation may differ, depending on their respective levels of spiritual and intellectual attainment. The highest degree of attainment, of course, is that of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), who in receiving the manifestation of all the divine names and attributes – indeed, of the divine essence itself – realises the truth of universal theophany, and thus makes the many one again within himself.

Al-Jīlī's theory of the levels of existence reveals him to be a relatively systematic thinker. This systematic approach is manifest both in the general concept of a hierarchy of levels and in his fondness for typologies, such as his division of the names and attributes into four categories. Such an approach marks him out from Ibn 'Arabī, whose writing is characterised by a more fluid quality.²⁶⁸ This being said, we can also see that al-Jīlī's theory of the levels of existence is not rigid. As we have seen, he goes back and forth between *al-aḥadiyyah* and *al-ulūhiyyah* when identifying the highest level below that of the simple essence, while the levels are interdependent to a significant degree: for instance, the level of God's majesty can only be fully understood in relation to that of God's

²⁶⁸ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 88: "Ibnu 'l-'Arabī would be better known to us, if he had written more briefly, lucidly, and methodically. In all these respects, Jīlī has the advantage: we can say of the *Insānu 'l-kāmil* what cannot be said of the *Futūḥāt 'l-Makkiyya* or the *Fuṣūṣ 'l-ḥikam* – that the author is not so difficult as the subject." Afifi (1966), 26: "In [*al-Insān al-kāmil*], Jīlī treats the problem of existence (*al-wujūd*), and defines the philosophical and Sufi technical terms that he has borrowed from Ibn 'Arabī in such a way as to bring him closer to adopting a scientific method (*al-minhaj al-'ilmī*) than his master." Burckhardt in al-Jīlī (1975), 7: "Comparé à l'enseignement d'Ibn 'Arabī, celui de Jīlī est à certains égards plus systématique; il comporte une architecture dialectique plus apparante, ce qui est plutôt un avantage pour le lecteur peu familiarisé avec cet aspect du Soufisme." On the complexity of Ibn 'Arabī's writing style, see Afifi (1963), 404-405; Nettler (2003), 2-3.

beauty, and vice versa. In this regard, while al-Jīlī is a more systematic thinker than Ibn ‘Arabī, he is perhaps less systematic than al-Qūnawī and his followers, particularly al-Qāshānī.

However systematic it may be, it is clear that al-Jīlī’s theory of the levels of existence is, in general terms, largely in keeping with the Sufī metaphysical worldview of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters. Similarly, the technical terms that he uses to express this theory are also taken from the lexicon of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. This being said, he also displays a considerable degree of originality and independence, not least in his willingness to openly contradict “the Imam” – as he calls Ibn ‘Arabī – on several occasions.²⁶⁹ Al-Jīlī’s Sufī metaphysics can therefore be considered an examination, elaboration and systematisation of the Sufī metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī. This tendency is also manifest in al-Jīlī’s exposition of the final and perhaps the most important level of existence in his scheme, that of the Perfect Man. It is to this, and to al-Jīlī’s view of man’s relationship to God more generally, that we now turn.

c) The Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*)

As the title of *al-Insān al-kāmil* suggests, the human being, and in particular the Perfect Man,²⁷⁰ occupies a central place in al-Jīlī’s Sufī

²⁶⁹ See Morris (1986-1987), 3:108: “Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) was undoubtedly both the most original thinker and the most remarkable and independent mystical writer among the figures we have discussed in the “school” of Ibn ‘Arabī (or of Qūnawī).” See also ‘Afīfī (1969), 26, who describes al-Jīlī as the follower of Ibn ‘Arabī “who came closest to originality (*al-aṣālah*) and invention (*al-ibtikār*),” and Ziedan (1988), 63-64, on al-Jīlī’s “independence” (*istiqlāliyyah*).

²⁷⁰ The Ibn ‘Arabīan emphasis on the perfection of man may have Avicennian roots, though for the Avicennian philosophers man’s ultimate perfection consists in the

metaphysics.²⁷¹ Indeed, at the beginning of chapter 60, which is devoted to the Perfect Man, al-Jīlī states: “This chapter is the basis (‘*umdah*) of the [other] chapters of this book; indeed, the whole book, from beginning to end, is a commentary (*sharḥ*) on this chapter.”²⁷² In placing man at the centre of his metaphysics in this way al-Jīlī is not doing anything radically new.²⁷³ In the opening chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*, for instance, Ibn ‘Arabī makes clear the centrality of mankind within his conception of the divine manifestation within creation: creation is a mirror that allows God to see Himself, and Adam, the first and archetypal man, is the “polishing of that mirror”, and the spirit that gives life to the shapeless form of the universe.²⁷⁴ Man is thus to God like the pupil (*insān*) is to the eye. He is His viceregent (*khalīfah*) upon earth and the seal on the treasure chest that is the world, whose presence ensures the preservation of the world.²⁷⁵ Similarly, for al-Qūnawī and his followers (except al-Qāshānī), as we have seen, the presence of the Perfect Man synthesises all of the higher presences. This being said, there seems to be a difference of emphasis in al-Jīlī’s thought, for unlike those earlier thinkers he explicitly builds his Sufi metaphysics around his theory of man.

perfection of the intellect, rather than in becoming a locus for the divine manifestation. See Goichon (1938), 226, 275; Ahmed (2016), 15-19.

²⁷¹ For the centrality of man in al-Jīlī’s thought, see the titles of some of his lost works, e.g. *al-Mamlakah al-rabbāniyyah fī al-nash’ah al-insāniyyah* (*The Lordly Kingdom in the Human Organism*), *Insān ‘ayn al-wujūd wa-wujūd ‘ayn al-insān al-mawjūd* (*Man is the Source/Very Nature of Existence and Existence is the Source/Very Nature of Existent Man*). See also al-Jīlī’s statement in *al-Kamālāt al-‘ilāhiyyah* that man is “the goal of existence” (*al-maqṣūd min al-wujūd*), quoted in al-Tarjumān (2002), 546. Al-Ḥakīm calls al-Jīlī “the specialist (*sahib al-ikhtisas*), in the history of Islamic mysticism, on this topic [i.e., the topic of the Perfect Man].” See al-Jīlī (2004), 52.

²⁷² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 207.

²⁷³ For the centrality of man within Sufi metaphysics in the Later Middle Period more generally, see Hodgson (1974), 2:225-226

²⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 48-49.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

While al-Jīlī's views on the human being are scattered throughout the book, it is in chapter 60 that we find the fullest expression of those views. Though the title of the chapter indicates that the Perfect Man is Muhammad, he begins the chapter with a discussion of mankind in general. All humans, he explains, are essentially one: "Each individual in this human race is a copy (*nuskhah*) of the other in his perfection," such that any two individuals are "like two mirrors facing one another" (*ka-mir'ātayn mutaqābilatayn*).²⁷⁶ In other words, all humans possess an identical original nature, which is perfect. Elsewhere in the book, he elaborates on this point, explaining that in their original nature (*aṣālah*), all humans are forms of the divine beauty and goodness (*ṣuwar ḥusnihi wa-jamālihi*),²⁷⁷ and are primordially disposed (*maḥfūrūn*) to obedience (*al-tā'ah*) and worship (*al-'ibādah*) of God.²⁷⁸ Al-Jīlī draws this notion of the inherent perfection of man out of Q 95:4 – "We have created man in the best form (*fī aḥsan taqwīm*)".²⁷⁹ More generally, his theory of human nature is grounded in the orthodox Islamic view that the primordial

²⁷⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 207. This latter phrase seems to be rooted in a hadith that is the focus of one of al-Jīlī's other works, *Sirr al-mutamakkin fī ma'nā qawlihi 'al-mu'min mir'āt al-mu'min* (The believer is the mirror of the believer). This hadith is recorded in al-Tirmidhī (1998), 3:387 (no. 1929).

²⁷⁷ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 94.

²⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, 88, 103-104, 252-253.

²⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 192. He also cites Q 41:11, 51:56, 2:213, and 11:56, and the hadith, "Everyone will find it easy [to do] what they were created for," in support of his theory that man's primordial disposition is to worship God. See *ibid.*, 252-3. For the hadith, see Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:252. In anticipation of our discussion of the parallel between al-Jīlī's notion of the Perfect Man and the Shī'ī theory of the Imamate in the next chapter, it might be noted that Q 95:4 is taken by Shī'ī exegetes to refer to the Imams. See Brown (2015), 171.

disposition (*fiṭrah*) of human beings is to be in a state of submission to God.²⁸⁰

What differences there are between individuals, al-Jīlī goes on to say in chapter 60, are not essential, but rather accidental (*bi-ḥasab al-‘ārid*).²⁸¹ Yet while all human beings are thus inherently perfect and the same, nevertheless there are differences between individuals in their manifestation of that perfection. Most fundamentally, there is a distinction between those who possess perfection in potential (*bi-al-quwwah*), and those who possess it in actuality (*bi-al-fi‘l*), i.e. who manifest it in the phenomenal world.²⁸² The capacity to manifest perfection, in fact, is the defining quality of the Perfect Men (*al-kummal*), a group, al-Jīlī tells us, which is limited to certain of the prophets and friends of God (*al-anbiyā’ wa-al-awliyā’*). While these individuals embody the fact that man is created in the best form, other humans, he tells us earlier in the book, embody the sentiment expressed in the verse that immediately follows Q 95:4 – “Then We sent him back as the lowest of the low (*asfal al-sāfilīn*)” – for they are qualified by the blemishes of human nature (*al-danas al-basharī*), i.e., human needs and base desires. Though these blemishes may well be accidental, they are nevertheless what the ordinary human being,

²⁸⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 192. On the concept of *fiṭrah*, see Macdonald (1965); Hoover (2016).

²⁸¹ For the same idea expressed by al-Qūnawī, see Todd (2014), 138. For Ibn Sīnā the term *‘ārid*, which is not necessarily synonymous with *‘arad*, denotes, “that which a thing has been described by, but which the thing need not always be described by (*huwa al-ladhī qad wuṣifa bihi al-shay’ illā annahu laysa yajib an yuṣaf bihi al-shay’ dā’iman*).” See Goichon (1937), 219.

²⁸² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 207. See also *ibid.* 78. This distinction between potentiality and actuality goes back to Aristotle. See Cohen (2016). It is commonly used in *falsafah* (see e.g. Goichon (1938), 277, 338; Rahman (1958), 13), which is presumably the medium through which it reached al-Jīlī.

whom al-Jīlī calls “the perfect animal man” (*al-insān al-kāmil al-ḥayawānī*),²⁸³ displays. This is in contrast to the true Perfect Man, who has been purified (*tazakká*) of those blemishes and exchanged mortal needs for “divine matters” (*al-umūr al-ilāhiyyah*), and thus possesses the requisite “receptivity” (*qābiliyyah*) to manifest the divine names and attributes in the world.²⁸⁴

This is not to say, however, that all Perfect Men manifest the divine names and attributes to the same degree; rather, says al-Jīlī, “they differ (*mutafāwitūn*) in perfection, so among them is the perfect (*al-kāmil*) and the more/most perfect (*al-akmal*).”²⁸⁵ It is not just that mankind is divided into ordinary humans and Perfect Men, therefore, but there is also a hierarchy of perfection among the Perfect Men. This brings al-Jīlī to the crux of the chapter and of his theory of the Perfect Man more generally, which is his view that Muhammad is the most perfect of the Perfect Men,²⁸⁶ and in fact, the one true Perfect Man:

²⁸³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 78. The distinction between *al-insān al-ḥayawānī* and *al-insān al-kāmil* is taken from Ibn ‘Arabī. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 156-158; Takeshita (1987), 109-113; Ziedan (1998), 124-127.

²⁸⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 151-152; 192. See also al-Jīlī (1999b), 10, where, having stated that everyone knows God to the extent of his receptivity, says “and how great is [the distance] between the receptivity (*qābiliyyah*) of the perfect one among the people of God and the receptivity of the disciple who is a seeker.” Shahab Ahmed probably gets it right when he says, in relation to the theory of the Perfect Man, “While very, very few human beings are the completely perfect human, all human beings are potentially *perfectable* or *complete-able*”. Ahmed (2016), 79 [italics his].

²⁸⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 207. See also the poem in *ibid.*, 178.

²⁸⁶ See also al-Jīlī (1997b), 325, where he says that Muhammad “has been designated with the “greatest most-perfectness” (*al-akmalīyyah al-kubrā*), which no one else has access to”; and al-Jīlī (1999b), 7, where he calls Muhammad “[God’s] greatest locus of appearance and His most pre-eternal, all-encompassing locus of manifestation and his last, most noble messenger (*māẓharuhu al-a‘ẓam wa-majlāhu al-muḥīt al-aqdam wa-rasūluhu al-khatam al-akram*).” This concept of Muhammad’s “most-perfectness” (*al-akmalīyyah*) is not original to al-Jīlī, being found in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī’s earlier interpreters. See e.g. al-Qāshānī (1992), 162; Tahānawī (1963), 251. The Neoplatonic Jewish thinker Philo (d. 50 CE), it might also be noted, describes Moses in an analogous way as “the greatest and most perfect man”. See Kugel (1998), 545.

None of [the Perfect Men] was specified (*yata‘ayyan*) with what Muhammad was specified with in this existence, in terms of the perfection that was apportioned to him in his being made unique (*infirādihi*). His morals (*akhlāq*), spiritual states (*aḥwāl*), actions (*aḥwāl*), and some of his sayings (*aqwāl*) testify to this on his behalf. So he is the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), and the remainder of the prophets and friends of God and the perfect ones are attached (*mulḥaqūn*) to him in the way that the perfect is attached to the more perfect, and are connected (*muntasabūn*) to him in the way that the good is connected to the better. But wherever the term ‘Perfect Man’ in its absolute sense occurs in my writings, I only mean by it Muhammad, out of propriety for his most exalted station (*maqāmihi al-a‘lā*) and his most resplendent, most perfect locus (*maḥallihi al-akmal al-asnā*)...For he is the Perfect Man by unanimous agreement (*bi-al-ittifāq*), and none of the perfect ones have the character (*al-khulq*) or morals (*al-akhlāq*) that he had.²⁸⁷

Properly speaking, therefore, the term ‘Perfect Man’ applies only to Muhammad. While other individuals can be called perfect ones or Perfect Men, theirs is a perfection of the second order; indeed, al-Jīlī’s claim that they are “attached” or “connected” to Muhammad suggests that their perfection derives from that of Muhammad.²⁸⁸ In accordance with his earlier identification of the Perfect Men as those who possess perfection in actuality, al-Jīlī states that the perfection of Muhammad is made manifest in his character, deeds, words, and spiritual condition, which are superior to those of all other Perfect Men.

Al-Jīlī’s conception of Muhammad as the ideal Perfect Man shares much with the view of Ibn ‘Arabī.²⁸⁹ Just as al-Jīlī identifies Muhammad

²⁸⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 207-208.

²⁸⁸ See also his description of the relationship between Muhammad and the prophets and friends of God in his *al-Sirr nūr al-mutamakkin fī ma‘nā qawlihi: ‘al-mu‘min mir’āt al-mu‘min’*: “The prophets and messengers...are to Muhammad like chamberlains (*al-hujjāb*), because they pass before him in the lower world, just as the chamberlain passes before the king. And the Muhammadan friends of God (*al-awliyā’ al-muḥammadiyyīn*)...are to Muhammad like the servants (*al-khadam*) and the elect (*al-khawāṣṣ*) who surround the king.” Quoted in al-Jīlī (1987), 26. This simile seems to be taken from Ibn ‘Arabī. See Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 4:66.

²⁸⁹ For overviews of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of the Perfect Man, see Izutsu (1984), 218-283; Takeshita (1987).

as the “most perfect” (*al-akmal*) among the Perfect Men, so too does Ibn ‘Arabī, in his chapter on Muhammad in the *Fuṣūṣ*, describe him as “the most perfect existent in this human race” (*akmal mawjūd fī hādha al-naw‘ al-insānī*).²⁹⁰ Similarly, while al-Jīlī describes how the other prophets and friends of God are “attached” to Muhammad and later calls them Muhammad’s “viceregents” (*khulafā’*), Ibn ‘Arabī, citing a famous hadith,²⁹¹ states that Muhammad was a prophet before Adam was created, thus suggesting that the prophets who (in the orthodox view) came before Muhammad were in fact his successors.²⁹² These parallels would appear to indicate that, as we would expect, the *Fuṣūṣ* served as an important source for al-Jīlī’s ideas.

Al-Jīlī further elaborates on the superiority of Muhammad over all other Perfect Men, and on the nature of his relationship with those others, in the course of his discussion of the concept of the spiritual Pole (*al-quṭb*). This is another important concept drawn from the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, for whom it represents the individual at the head of the hierarchy of the friends of God, around whom the entirety of existence revolves. It is, moreover, one of the names of the Perfect Man, as indicated by al-Jīlī here.²⁹³ Al-Jīlī begins his discussion by stating that there is only one Pole from the beginning of existence until its end

²⁹⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 214.

²⁹¹ This hadith is recorded in Ibn Ḥanbal (1993), 4:66 (no. 16605), 5:374 (no. 23203), 5:59 (no. 20546).

²⁹² Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 214.

²⁹³ For the concept of *al-quṭb* in the work of Ibn ‘Arabī and later Sufī thought, see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 876-878, 909-911; al-Tahānawī (1963), 2:1327-1330; Hodgson (1974), 2:228-229; Chodkiewicz (1999b), 89-98; al-Qāshānī (1992), 162; Ernst (2010), 134-136. The term appears in the formative period of Sufism, as well as in classical Sufi texts such as Hujwīrī’s (d. 465/1072) *Kashf al-mahjūb*. See Hujwīrī (1911), 438, s.v. “*Quṭb*”; Ziedan (1998), 160-163; Ebstein (2014), 130. For the pre- and early-Islamic roots of the concept and term, see Jamil (1999).

(*mundhu kāna al-wujūd ilā abad al-abadīn*), a notion that he takes from Ibn ‘Arabī.²⁹⁴ The “original name” (*ismuhu al-aṣlī*) of this Pole, he tells us, is Muhammad.²⁹⁵ This is in keeping with what we have just seen: if the title of Perfect Man applies, properly speaking, only to Muhammad, then so too should the title of Pole, which is one of the names of the Perfect Man. However, while, from this perspective, Muhammad is the one and eternal Pole, from another perspective, al-Jīlī goes on to say, the Pole appears in diverse “forms” (*ṣuwar*), “garments” (*malābis*) or “bodies” (*kanā’is*) in every age. From this latter perspective, the Pole has many names, for in every age he is known by the name of the particular “garment” in which he appears. Al-Jīlī is here referring to the Perfect Men other than Muhammad, i.e., the other prophets and friends of God. Indeed, he gives an example from his own experience of how Muhammad takes on the form of these other Perfect Men: “I met with him [i.e. Muhammad] – May God bless him and grant him peace – when he was in the form of my master, Shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn Ismā‘īl al-Jabartī. I did not know that he was the prophet, but I knew that he was the shaykh. This was among the loci of witnessing (*mashāhid*) in which I witnessed him in Zabid, in the year 796.” In a similar way, al-Jīlī says, a disciple of al-Shiblī (d. 334/945) once recognised that Muhammad had appeared in the form of his master, and said, “I testify that you are the Messenger of God.”²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 3:356, where, in the title of chapter fourteen of the *Futūḥāt*, he declares that “the Pole is one from when God created him” (*al-quṭb wāḥid mundhu khalaqahu Allāh*).

²⁹⁵ Again, Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 3:360: “The one Pole (*al-quṭb wāḥid*) is the spirit of Muhammad (*rūḥ Muḥammad*).”

²⁹⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

Al-Jīlī's identification of these Sufi masters with Muhammad needs to be understood in relation to the Ibn 'Arabian concept of the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah*), a term that al-Jīlī in fact uses here.²⁹⁷ For Ibn 'Arabī, the Muhammadan Reality denotes not Muhammad the man, but rather the eternal spirit or light of Muhammad, which existed, as indicated above, even prior to the creation of Adam.²⁹⁸ Indeed, this eternal spirit is "the starting point (*mabda'*) and origin (*aṣl*) of the creation of the world, because it is the light (*al-nūr*) that God created before everything, and from which he created everything."²⁹⁹ Al-Jīlī adopts this usage of Ibn 'Arabī's, identifying the Muhammadan Reality with the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) through whose light God created the world.³⁰⁰ Significantly for our purposes, he also identifies it with the Pole.³⁰¹ Returning to chapter 60, then, we can say that the one, eternal Pole or Perfect Man is the Muhammadan Reality, and that the Perfect Men who appear in different ages are loci in which that Muhammadan Reality appears; or as al-Jīlī puts it, "They are his viceregents (*khulafā'uhu*) in the apparent [realm] (*fī al-ẓāhir*), and he [i.e. Muhammad] is their reality (*ḥaqīqatuhum*) in the hidden [realm] (*fī al-*

²⁹⁷ This concept has precedents in the thought of the early Muslim mystics al-Ḥakīm Tirmidhī (d. 255/869) and Sahl Tustarī (d. 283/896) (see Karamustafa (2007), 42-47), with both of whose ideas Ibn 'Arabī engaged directly. See Abrahamov (2014), 53-62, 85-90; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 27-34, 53-55.

²⁹⁸ Hence he also calls it *al-rūḥ Muḥammadī* and *al-nūr Muḥammadī*. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 347-349. For the concept of the Muhammadan Light, see Rubin (1975).

²⁹⁹ Al-Ḥakīm (1981), 348. See also 'Afīfī (1939), 66-101; Izutsu (1984), 236-238.

³⁰⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 152; Ziedan (1998), 112.

³⁰¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 152. Referring to a number of hadiths about the first created thing, al-Jīlī also identifies the Muhammadan Reality with the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*), the Command of God (*amr Allāh*) and the Most Exalted Pen (*al-qalam al-a'lā*). See *ibid.*, 152-155. These identifications, along with the creative function of the Muhammadan Reality, have led Nicholson and others to identify the Muhammadan Reality as the Islamic version of the *logos*. See Nicholson (121), 87, 104ff; Jeffrey (1959-1960). For the New Testament's conception of the *logos*, see 1 John: 1-4; 1 Cor. 8:6.

bāṭin).³⁰² This is a development of Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion that each of the prophets draws on the Muhammadan Reality: “Every one of the prophets, from Adam to the last prophet, took from the lamp of the Seal of Prophets (*miskhāt khātam al-nabiyyīn*), even if the existence of his ‘clay-form’ (*tīnatihi*) came later, for he [has always been] existent through his reality (*bi-ḥaqīqatihi*).³⁰³

Al-Jīlī’s use of the concept of the Muhammadan Reality should not lead us to think that he conceived of the true Perfect Man only as an abstract metaphysical principle. Indeed, he seems to have had a strong sense that Muhammad the man was the ideal human being; hence he tells us not only that the original name of the Pole was Muhammad, but also that “his *kunyah* was Abū al-Qāsim, his description (*waṣf*) was “servant of God” (*‘abd Allāh*), and his honorific (*laqab*) was “the sun of religion” (*shams al-dīn*),³⁰⁴ thus calling attention to the identity of the Muhammadan Reality with Muhammad the historical figure. Similarly, he does not say that he saw the Muhammadan Reality in al-Jabartī, but rather that he saw “the Prophet” (*al-nabī*), again emphasising that it is Muhammad the prophet who appears in the forms of the different Perfect Men.

Al-Jīlī’s insistence that Muhammad is the only individual to whom the title of Perfect Man can properly be applied – or at least, the most perfect of the Perfect Men – reflects the special reverence that he has for

³⁰² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 211. The connection between the Perfect Men and Muhammad is illustrated by al-Jīlī’s use of the term *mi‘rāj* to describe the Perfect Man’s (and his own) spiritual ascent. See Ziedan (1998), 162.

³⁰³ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 63-64. See also Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 3:356-360, where Ibn ‘Arabī informs the reader that the Muslim *awliyā’* share in the perception (*idrāk*) and knowledge (*‘ilm*) of the Prophet, though they are not themselves given a new law (*sharī‘ah*), and so are bound by the law of Muhammad.

³⁰⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

the prophet of Islam.³⁰⁵ This reverence is in keeping with the more general trend within Islamic piety and literature during the Later Middle Period (c. 1250-1500 CE) towards increased focus on the cosmic status and function of the Prophet.³⁰⁶ Of more significance for our purposes, it reflects al-Jīlī's belief in the clear superiority of Muhammad over the other prophets (and friends of God), and connected to that, of the Qur'an over the other scriptures. This aspect of al-Jīlī's thought reflects how his Sufi metaphysics is situated within the framework of the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history, according to which Muhammad is the best, most universal, and final prophet, and the revelation that he brought the best, most universal, and final revelation. This idea will recur again and again in our discussion of his treatment of the scriptures in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

At the same time, al-Jīlī's suggestion that Muhammad is manifest in other individuals, including individuals in his own time, takes him into what, from an orthodox Sunni perspective, would probably be considered dangerous territory. Indeed, al-Jīlī explicitly pre-empts the charge of heresy in this respect: "May you not imagine (*tatawahham*)," he says, "that there is anything of the doctrine of transmigration (*madhhab al-tanāsukh*) in what I say."³⁰⁷ Certainly, his theory has the potential to

³⁰⁵ This reverence is evident in many of al-Jīlī's other works, such as *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah fī al-ṣifāt al-muḥammadiyyah*, in which he gives a detailed exposition of how Muhammad embodies each of the divine attributes (see al-Jīlī (1997b), esp. 64-314; al-Jīlī (2015), 84-160), *Qāb al-qawsayn fī multaḳā al-nāmūsayn* (For which see Hoffman (1999); Addas (2009); Nabhānī (1998), 1:1494-1520), and *Sirr al-nūr al-mutamakkin* (see Nabhānī (1998), 1:1521-1525)

³⁰⁶ Hodgson (1974), 2:446. For examples from Islamic literature and ritual, see Schimmel (1985); Katz (2007).

³⁰⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 211. *Tanāsukh* is used in the heresiographical literature both for the doctrine of metempsychosis or the transmigration of spirits, and for the doctrine found

undermine the dominant view that prophecy had been sealed with the death of Muhammad,³⁰⁸ for if Muhammad can still appear within other individuals, this would suggest that prophecy in a sense continues within those individuals. In this regard, al-Jīlī's position, like most aspects of his thought, can be considered an elaboration upon an idea of Ibn 'Arabī's, namely the notion that divine friendship or sainthood (*walāyah*) – which carries on after the death of Muhammad – is a “general” type of prophecy (*nubuwwah 'āmmah*), in contrast to the narrower “specific” or “legislative” prophecy (*nubuwwah khāṣṣah/al-tashrī'*), i.e. prophecy that involves the receipt and propagation of a new religious law (*sharī'ah*) – which is sealed with Muhammad's death.³⁰⁹ Indeed, in the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, al-Jīlī picks up and elaborates on this Ibn 'Arabīan idea more explicitly. Though he acknowledges that “the gate of legislative prophecy has been closed with Muhammad” (*nubuwwat al-tashrī' ...qad insadda bābuhā bi-Muḥammad*), he also identifies a number of famous Sufī figures, including Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874/5), al-Junayd (d. 279/910), 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), and Ibn 'Arabī as “prophets of divine friendship” (*anbiyā' al-walāyah*), a term that he adopts from Ibn 'Arabī.³¹⁰ In this way, he makes it clear that a

in so-called “extremist” (*ghulāt*) Shī'ism that the divine element transmigrates from one Imām to another. See Gimaret (2000b).

³⁰⁸ The doctrine of the sealing of prophecy is rooted in Q 33:40. For the various possible interpretations of this idea, and the eventually dominant view in Sunnism, see Friedmann (1989), 49-82.

³⁰⁹ See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 62-64; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1038-1053; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 50-51, 114-115; Friedmann (1989), 71-76; Nettler (2003), 142-145; Abū Zayd (2006), 60-72; al-Qāshānī (1992), 114 (who distinguishes between what he calls *nubuwwat al-ta'rīf* and *nubuwwat al-tashrī'*). This theory was subject to the criticism of Ibn Taymiyyah, among others, for whom it posed a threat to the uniqueness of prophecy. See Akasoy (2011), 234-235.

³¹⁰ See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1053; Ibn 'Arabī (1972-1992), 356-364. For Ibn 'Arabī, the Muslim “prophets of divine friendship” are like the Hebrew prophets other than Moses

certain type of prophecy does continue after Muhammad's death, albeit that these "prophets" are embodiments of the Muhammadan Reality, and do not bring a new revelation or law. Such a view undoubtedly constitutes a challenge to the orthodox Sunni conception of post-Muhammadan history, for it suggests that sacred history is an ongoing reality, at least from the perspective of the "realisers" who are able to recognise (or indeed become) the Perfect Man of their age.³¹¹ While this is not necessarily to say that al-Jīlī contradicts the orthodox Sunni view, it does show us how his Sufi metaphysical perspective at times leads him into a creative engagement with the Islamic tradition, and explains in part why al-Jīlī and other Ibn 'Arabian Sufis came under attack from certain religious scholars.

Thus far we have looked primarily at the question of who the Perfect Man is. Al-Jīlī also tells us about the Perfect Man's nature and function. We saw above how, in the view of the interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī, the Perfect Man synthesises all of the levels of existence within himself. We also noted that this view was adopted by al-Jīlī, who identifies the Perfect Man as the fortieth and last of the levels of existence, and outlines in *Marātib al-wujūd* how all of those previous levels are manifest in the Perfect Man. This idea is connected to the notion, which is found in Ibn 'Arabī as well as in earlier Islamic thought, particularly the *Epistles* of

(such as Aaron), in that they preserve (*yaḥfiẓūn*) the law given to the chief prophet of their religious community, rather than bringing a new law.

³¹¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 255. On this conception of sacred history in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī, see van Gelder (2017), 120; Brown (2018), 114.

the Brethren of Purity, that man is a microcosm of the universe, on the one hand, and of the divine, on the other.³¹²

Al-Jīlī expands upon this idea in chapter 60 of *al-Insān al-kāmil*: “Know that the Perfect Man,” he writes, “receives (*muqābil*) all of the existential realities (*li-jamī‘ al-ḥaqā’iq al-wujūdiyyah*) in himself.” By this al-Jīlī means that the Perfect Man is a microcosm of both God and creation: “He receives the higher realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-‘alawīyyah*) in his subtle nature (*bi-laṭāfatihi*), and the lower realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-sufliyyah*) in his coarse nature (*bi-kathāfatihi*).”³¹³ Al-Jīlī then proceeds to set out in detail how the different parts of the universe correspond to the different elements – or as al-Jīlī calls them, “subtleties” (*raqā’iq*) – within man. Thus he describes how almost all of the created levels of existence (as outlined in his *Marātib al-wujūd*), including those of the Qur’anic concepts (*al-‘arsh*, *al-kursī*, *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, *al-qalam al-‘alā*), the different ‘orbits’, the seven heavens, the four elements, and the different kinds of angels, animals, *jinn*, and humans, are embodied within one of the Perfect Man’s faculties (*qiwā*), humours, body parts, or some other of his “subtleties”.³¹⁴ Al-Jīlī thereby presents us with what can be described as an anthropocentric view of the created world.

Furthermore, the Perfect Man, as al-Jīlī sees it, not only synthesises the created levels of existence, but is also a “perfect copy” (*nuskhaḥ kāmilah*) of God,³¹⁵ meaning that the higher, divine levels of existence are also manifest within him. Al-Jīlī makes brief reference to this in

³¹² See Takeshita (1987), 74-108; Izutsu (1984), 218-246; Chittick (1989), 16-30; Abū Zayd (1983), 157-175; Abū Zayd (2006), 80-81, 230-237.

³¹³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 212.

³¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 211-212.

³¹⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 89-90.

chapter sixty: “Know that the Perfect Man,” he writes, “is he who deserves (*yastahiqq*) the essential names (*al-asmā’ al-dhātiyyah*) and the divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ilāhiyyah*) on account of his original nature (*aṣālah*).”³¹⁶ All of the names and attributes, in other words, including those of the divine essence – which properly speaking belong to God alone – and of the divine self are manifest in the Perfect Man; hence the Perfect Man enjoys what al-Jīlī calls “the joy of divinity” (*ladhdhat al-ulūhiyyah*).³¹⁷ Like Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jīlī derives scriptural support for this idea from the hadith, “God created Adam according to His form (‘*alā ṣūratihī*’),”³¹⁸ and from the Qur’anic identification of *al-walī* as one of the divine names: “‘And God is the Friend (*al-walī*),’ (Q 42:9) meaning, the Perfect Man.”³¹⁹ In chapters twelve to fifteen, meanwhile, al-Jīlī gives a more detailed exposition of this idea, setting out how the friend of God (*al-walī*) receives first the manifestation of the divine acts (*tajallī al-aḥl*), then the manifestations of the divine names (*tajallī al-asmā’*) – from the least to the most specific – then the manifestations of the divine attributes (*tajallī al-ṣifāt*) – from the most to the least specific – and finally becomes the locus of manifestation of the essence itself (*majlā al-dhāt*). Not all friends of God, however, progress through all of these

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

³¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 83. He also refers to the variant that Adam was created “in the form of the All-Merciful” (‘*alā ṣūrat al-rahmān*’). See *ibid.*, 36. This hadith and its variants appear in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:165-166; Muslim (1995), 17:147 (no. 2841). For the ways in which it has been used and interpreted, see Kister (1993), 137-138; Takeshita (1987), 15-17. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of this hadith in the same way as al-Jīlī, see e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 199, 216.

³¹⁹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 36. Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 64, citing Q 42:28: “The other friends of God [than the seal of divine friendship] are only friends of God after they have attained the conditions of divine friendship (*al-walāyah*), in terms of being qualified by the divine qualities (*al-akhlāq al-ilāhiyyah*), for God – May He be exalted – is called ‘the Friend, the Worthy of Praise (*al-walī al-ḥamīd*)’.”

levels.³²⁰ Those who stop at the manifestations of the attributes, for instance, are called *ṣifātiyyūn*, while those who attain the manifestation of the essence are called *dhātiyyūn*. It is the latter who embody the Muhammadan Reality most fully and who therefore deserve to be called Perfect Men.³²¹ Indeed, elsewhere in the book al-Jīlī suggests, in keeping with his view that Muhammad is the only true Perfect Man, that Muhammad is the only individual to receive the manifestation of the essence.³²² As we shall see, this hierarchy among the friends of God, and his identification of Muhammad in particular as the locus of manifestation for the divine essence, has relevance for al-Jīlī's conception of the hierarchy of the scriptures and prophets.

Al-Jīlī's Perfect Man thus emerges as a "synthetic being" (*kawn jāmi'*), to use Ibn 'Arabī's phrase,³²³ meaning that his level of existence, as in the schemes of Ibn 'Arabī's earlier interpreters, synthesises all of the other levels of existence, both created and divine. To return to the overarching issue of his Sufi metaphysics, the fact that, as he sees it, the Perfect Man is a microcosm of both the divine and created realities indicates that al-Jīlī's conception of the relationship between the one and

³²⁰ It should also be noted that in chapter sixty, al-Jīlī sets out how the Perfect Man must pass through three intermediary stages or "isthmuses" (*barāzikh*) before reaching "the conclusion" (*al-khitām*) and finally "the end" (*al-nihāyah*), an idea that also indicates a hierarchy of attainment among the Friends of God. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 213-214.

³²¹ See *ibid.*, 77-78.

³²² See *ibid.*, 194, where he explains that only Muhammad has access to the eighth heaven, "the paradise of the essence" (*jannat al-dhāt*), an idea that is perhaps drawn from the standard accounts of the *mi'rāj*, in which Muhammad alone is said to pass through the seven heavens and beyond, bypassing the other prophets on his way. See e.g. Sells (1996), 47-56. It is possible that when al-Jīlī suggests that the Perfect Man receives the manifestation of the divine essence, he means the essence in its state of unqualified oneness – the second least qualified level – rather than the true nature of the quiddity of the essence, which, as we have seen, is beyond manifestation.

³²³ See Ibn 'Arabī, 48. See also *ibid.*, 55, 199, and the passages from the *Futūḥāt* quoted in Takeshita (1987), 110, and al-Qūnawī's definition of the Perfect Human quoted in Tahānawī (1963), 281.

the many is ultimately a circular one. To begin with,³²⁴ existence is one, being that of the utterly one and perfectly simple divine essence. This single existence subsequently becomes outwardly (if not inwardly) multiple, via the manifestation of the divine names and attributes and, following that, of the created realities. Yet the process does not end there, for this multiple existence becomes one again in the person of the Perfect Man, who synthesises all of the multiple realities within himself, or as al-Jīlī puts it, “sees the multiple things of existence (*muta‘addidāt amr al-wujūd*) in his essence.”³²⁵ When the Perfect Man receives the manifestation of the divine essence, then, he is in a sense closing the circle, with the multiplicity of phenomenal existence returning to the unity of the essence.³²⁶ In this regard, while the level of the Perfect Man is the fortieth and final level of existence in al-Jīlī’s scheme, it also takes us back to the first level. The one and the many are thus reconciled in the Perfect Man.

Conclusion

Al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics can be considered an elaboration upon that of Ibn ‘Arabī. Broadly speaking, he adopts the position of Ibn ‘Arabī on the relationship between the one and the many or between God and creation, a position that defines the relationship between those two poles in terms of the manifestation (*tajallī*) of the one God in the created many

³²⁴ Despite the language used here, this process of manifestation and return should probably not be understood in a linearly temporal sense. On this point, see (in relation to the essentially similar process described by Ibn ‘Arabī) Izutsu (1984), 152.

³²⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 213.

³²⁶ This conception of history follows the idea – common in Islamic philosophy and anchored in the Qur’an – of “the origin and the return” (*al-mabda’ wa-al-ma‘ād*), according to which all things begin and end with God. On this idea, see Chittick (2012), 233-258, 259-266. Al-Jīlī in fact uses this phrase. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 69.

– i.e., the theory of universal theophany. This being said, basing his metaphysics on the same claim to experiential knowledge made by Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Jīlī also displays a willingness to dispute certain statements of Ibn ‘Arabī’s. More importantly, his Sufi metaphysics is more systematic than Ibn ‘Arabī’s, a point reflected in al-Jīlī’s propensity to express his ideas in terms of classifications and hierarchies. This can be seen most clearly in his conception of the levels of existence, a theory that, while principally grounded in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, can also be considered an elaboration of the schemes put forward by Ibn ‘Arabī’s leading interpreters, such as al-Qūnawī, al-Qāshānī, and al-Qayṣarī. Moreover, while al-Jīlī’s conception of the Perfect Man is also drawn from Ibn ‘Arabī and those interpreters,³²⁷ he goes further than they do in placing the Perfect Man at the centre of his Sufi metaphysics, and in insisting and elaborating on the point that, properly speaking, the true Perfect Man is Muhammad.³²⁸

The overall impression given by al-Jīlī is of the strong sense in which the unity of God underlies the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, or, seen from the other perspective, of how the multiplicity of the phenomenal world is latent within the unity of God. In other words, the many proceeds from the one through a hierarchy of manifestations, which in turn produces a hierarchy of phenomenal realities. This idea

³²⁷ On the correspondences between Ibn ‘Arabī’s and al-Jīlī’s theories of the Perfect Man, see Ziedan (1998), 129-130.

³²⁸ Note, for instance, that although Ibn ‘Arabī describes Muhammad as the “most perfect” (*akmal*) human being in his chapter on Muhammad in the *Fuṣūṣ* (see Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 214), he does not use the term *al-insān al-kāmil* in that chapter. Indeed, one gets the sense from the *Fuṣūṣ* that it is Adam, as the father of mankind, whom Ibn ‘Arabī deems to be the archetypal Perfect Man. Thus out of the seven occasions in which Ibn ‘Arabī uses the term *al-insān al-kāmil* in the *Fuṣūṣ*, four of these are references to Adam. See Takeshita (1987), 50.

provides the overall framework for all aspects of his thought, including his conception of the scriptures, to which we now turn.

Chapter Two: The Qur'an

I begin my reading of al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical conception of the scriptures with an analysis of chapter thirty-four of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, which is devoted to the Qur'an (*al-Qur'ān*), the scripture revealed to Muhammad and which is held by Muslims to be the word of God (*kalām Allāh*) and the most perfect and final scripture. The Qur'an is the first of the scriptures to which al-Jīlī devotes a specific chapter in *al-Insān al-kāmil*.³²⁹ This is notable, because his treatment of the scriptures is otherwise chronological. Thus chapter thirty-six is dedicated to the Torah (*al-Tawrāh*), chapter thirty-seven to the Psalter (*al-Zabūr*), and chapter thirty-eight to the Gospel (*al-Injīl*). His decision to put the Qur'an first reflects a theme that runs through this section on the scriptures, namely his view that the Qur'an is superior to the other scriptures and, connected to that, that Muhammad is superior to the other prophets. This view, of course, is fully in keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history. At a more metaphysical level, moreover, it reflects an idea that we saw in the previous chapter, namely that Muhammad, as the eternal Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*), was chronologically prior to all of the other prophets. From this Sufi metaphysical perspective, then, the Qur'an, which Muhammad embodies,

³²⁹ This being said, it is not the first chapter devoted to the topic of revelation: chapter thirty-three is on the Mother of the Book (*Umm al-kitāb*), the "heavenly book" that is "the source (*aṣl*) and totality (*jumla*) of all revelations, including the Qur'ān." Wisnovsky (2002), 412. Though, as we shall see, al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical treatment of this scriptural archetype serves to give context to his treatment of the Qur'an and the other scriptures, I have not dedicated a specific chapter to it, because my primary interest here is in al-Jīlī's treatment of the scriptures that, in the Islamic understanding, were revealed to the prophets and thereafter propagated to their respective peoples.

can be seen as an almost eternal scripture, as well as one that was revealed in a specific time and place.

These preliminary remarks reflect the nature of al-Jīlī's treatment of the Qur'an (and the other scriptures). As will become clear, he displays relatively little interest in more mundane matters that were traditionally of interest to Qur'anic exegetes, such as the particular historical circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the grammar of Qur'anic Arabic, or which verses abrogate which (*al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh*), showing much greater concern for the metaphysical signification of the revelation of the Qur'an and Muhammad's role as messenger. In this way, he integrates the Qur'an into his overall Sufi metaphysics. At the same time, his conception of the Qur'an ought also to be understood within the general framework of the orthodox Islamic view of sacred history, according to which the revelation received by Muhammad is superior to all others, and thus final, on account of its comprehensiveness and perfection.³³⁰ In what follows, I attempt to bring out these key elements of al-Jīlī's conception of the Qur'an by undertaking a close reading of key extracts from chapters thirty-four and thirty-five.

a) The metaphysical meaning of the Qur'an

Know that the Qur'an is an expression of the essence (*al-dhāt*), in which all of the attributes disappear (*yaḍmaḥill*). For it [the essence] is the locus of manifestation (*al-majlā*) that is called "unqualified oneness" (*al-aḥadiyyah*).³³¹

³³⁰ This claim to comprehensiveness is first made by the Qur'an itself. See e.g. Q 5:3, 6:38.

³³¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 116.

After some opening lines of verse that introduce the reader to his Sufi metaphysical conception of the Qur'an, al-Jīlī begins the prose section of the chapter with a clear statement of that Sufi metaphysical conception. The Qur'an, he tells us here, corresponds to the divine essence (*al-dhāt al-mahḍ/al-sādhaj*) in its state of not being qualified by names or attributes. Indeed, in the poem that immediately precedes this line, he calls the Qur'an "a simple essence" (*dhāt mahḍ*).³³² The Qur'an, in other words, is a part of God, and the essential part at that. While al-Jīlī does not use the term here, this means that the Qur'an, as he sees it, is uncreated, in accordance with the orthodox traditionalist-Ash'arite conception.³³³ Yet whereas that orthodox conception views the Qur'an as identical with one of God's attributes – specifically, that of speech (*al-kalām*) – al-Jīlī, from his Sufi metaphysical perspective, goes much further and identifies it with the very essence of God. The implication of this identification is that, with the revelation of the Qur'an, God in fact revealed His essence within the created world. This, as we shall see, is what al-Jīlī seems to believe, in apparent contradiction of the orthodox position that the divine essence is unrevealed and unknowable.³³⁴

However, al-Jīlī also indicates here that, when he calls the Qur'an an expression of the essence, he does not mean the hidden, utterly unmanifest aspect of the essence, but rather the essence at the "locus of

³³² *Ibid.*, 115.

³³³ For the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an in Islamic theology, see Martin (2001).

³³⁴ As we saw in chapter one, al-Jīlī also indicates that the divine essence is indescribable and hidden, at the same time as he suggests that it is describable and manifest. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 26-29. Such a paradoxical position is not deemed to be problematic in Ibn 'Arabian Sufism; indeed, Ibn 'Arabī deems paradox-induced "perplexity" or "bewilderment" (*ḥayrah*) to be a means of uncovering metaphysical truths. See Ḥakīm (1981); Izutsu (1984), 68-87; Ahmed (2016), 278.

manifestation” (*majlā*) of unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*).³³⁵ The term *majlā* that he uses here is synonymous with *martabah* (as in *marātib al-wujūd*), signifying a theophany or level of existence. Al-Jīlī’s conception of the Qur’an, then, ought to be understood in terms of his Sufi metaphysical theory of the levels of existence. We saw in the previous chapter that, according to this theory, the term *al-aḥadiyyah* denotes either the second or third of the levels of existence, depending on whether one privileges the level of divinity above that of *al-aḥadiyyah* on account of the divinity’s giving each of the other levels its existence. Regardless, the level of *al-aḥadiyyah* is the second level in terms of being unqualified and unlimited; indeed, it is the level of absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), i.e. the all-encompassing, unlimited existence of the essence.³³⁶ Above it is only the interior aspect of the essence, or what he calls, among other names, “the absolute unseen” (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*). *Al-aḥadiyyah* is therefore both the level at which the essence, as al-Jīlī notes again here, remains unqualified by any names or attributes, but also at which it begins to turn towards phenomenality, being “the first of the descents of the essence (*awwal tanazzulāt al-dhāt*) from the darkness of the cloud (*min ḡulmat al-‘amā*)” into the light of the loci of manifestation (*ilā nūr al-majāli*).³³⁷ Al-Jīlī’s use of the term in this way, it should be noted, seems to correspond more closely with the usage of al-Farghānī and al-Qayṣarī, who, as we noted in chapter one,

³³⁵ See also *ibid.*, 42, where he makes the same connection between the Qur’an and unqualified oneness. In his identification of the Qur’an with *al-aḥadiyyah* (and with the essence) al-Jīlī seems to have a precursor in al-Qāshānī, who in his commentary on Q 76:23 identifies the revelation of the Qur’an with “*al-tajallī al-aḥadī al-dhātī*.” Al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:372.

³³⁶ See al-Jīlī (1999b), 17. For this term in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī, see al-Hakīm (1981), 1133.

³³⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 47. See also *ibid.*, 77.

identify *al-aḥadiyyah* with the unqualified essence, but not with “the unseen of the unseen” (*ghayb al-ghayb*), i.e. the utterly hidden, interior aspect of the essence, which is the position of al-Qāshānī.³³⁸

The Qur’an, as an expression of *al-aḥadiyyah*, therefore, does not represent the essence in its state of utter hiddenness, but rather in its outward aspect. The hidden aspect of the essence, meanwhile – or as al-Jīlī puts it in chapter thirty-three, “the quiddity of the true nature of the essence” (*māhiyyat kunh al-dhāt*) – is represented not by the Qur’an, but by the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*).³³⁹ This makes sense, if we remember that the Mother of the Book, in the orthodox Islamic conception, constitutes the unrevealed heavenly archetype of the Qur’an and other scriptures, while the Qur’an, of course, *is* revealed in the phenomenal world. Even though the Qur’an represents the unqualified essence, then, it must necessarily represent the unqualified essence turned towards manifestation. Al-Jīlī’s conception of the Mother of the Book and the Qur’an can thus be considered a recasting of the orthodox conception in Sufi metaphysical terms.

We might well ask about the rationale for this recasting of the concept of scripture in Sufi metaphysical terms. While al-Jīlī’s identification of the Qur’an with the absolute existence or unqualified oneness of the divine essence is certainly idiosyncratic, it perhaps has

³³⁸ See Chittick (1982), 116-123. In one of his lexica of Sufi technical terms, al-Qāshānī comes close to al-Jīlī’s definition of *al-aḥadiyyah*, with the notable exception that he does not suggest that the term denotes any turn towards phenomenality. See al-Qāshānī (1992), 51: “‘The Unqualified One’ (*al-aḥad*) is the name of the essence from the perspective of its being pure of the multiplicity of the attributes, names, and entifications. And ‘qualified oneness’ (*al-aḥadiyyah*) is [the essence] from the perspective of the elimination of everything.” However, as noted above, al-Qāshānī elsewhere implies that *al-aḥadiyyah* denotes the manifestation of the essence to itself, suggesting that the difference between him and al-Jīlī is not a rigid one.

³³⁹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 113.

roots in the connection made by the Qur'an and the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition between the revelation that is the Qur'an and the revelation that is creation. The Qur'an itself suggests a parallel between scriptural revelation – what Toshihiko Izutsu calls linguistic or verbal communication between God and man – and the revelation in nature – non-linguistic or non-verbal communication³⁴⁰ – by using the term *āyah* to denote both forms of revelation. *Āyah*, in other words, denotes both a unit of scriptural revelation (see e.g. Q 2:106, 3:13, 10:1, 12:1, 13:1), and a “sign” in the phenomenal world, among which are natural phenomena, man, animals, and inanimate objects (see e.g. Q 11:64, 13:2-3, 41:53, 51:20-1). These different forms of *āyah*, moreover, have the same function, namely to direct man to believe in and worship God, and the possible responses to them are therefore the same: either belief (*al-īmān*) and the declaration that they are true (*al-taṣdīq*), or unbelief (*al-kufr*) and the declaration that they are false (*al-takhdhīb*).³⁴¹ The Qur'an's coupling of God's linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication to man in this way led several medieval exegetes to point out “[t]he parallel (or even the identity) between the revelation of the Qur'ān and the creation of the universe.”³⁴²

One can therefore see a conceptual basis, rooted in the Islamic tradition, for al-Jīlī's identification of the Qur'an with a particular level of existence. Indeed, prior to al-Jīlī, the identification between the Qur'an and phenomenal existence had already been developed by thinkers in the

³⁴⁰ See Izutsu (1964), 142-215. Abū Zayd speaks in this regard of “ontological language” (*al-lughah al-wujūdiyyah*). Abū Zayd (2006), 93.

³⁴¹ See Izutsu (1964), 133-147; Rahman (1989), 47-50; Abrahamov (2006); Madigan (2004a).

³⁴² Rahman (1989), 49.

Ibn ‘Arabian tradition.³⁴³ Ibn ‘Arabī himself speaks of the world as a “written book” (*kitāb maṣṭūr*) or “the great book” (*al-kitāb al-kabīr*),³⁴⁴ while ‘Azīz Nasafī (8th/14th century), a Persian Sufī metaphysician who was influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī, “compared Nature to the Quran in such a way that each genus in Nature corresponds to a *sūrah*, each species to a verse, and each particular being to a letter.”³⁴⁵ In chapter thirty-three of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, al-Jīlī puts forward a similar scheme to Nasafī’s, proposing that, in addition to the Qur’an corresponding to absolute existence, the *sūrahs* of the Qur’an denote the “essential forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-dhātīyyah*) of existents, the *āyahs* God’s “bringing together” or “synthesis” (*jam‘*) of things, the words (*al-kalimāt*) “the realities of entified created beings” (*ḥaqā’iq al-makhlūqāt al-‘ayniyyah*), and the letters (*al-ḥurūf*) several different things: the dotted letters represent the fixed entities (*al-a‘yān al-thābitah*), i.e. the prototypes of existents that exist in the divine knowledge;³⁴⁶ the five undotted letters that do not join to other letters (*alif*, *dāl*, *rā’*, *wāw* and *lām*) represent the five “requirements of perfection” (*muqtaḍayāt kamāliyyah*), which are the divine essence and the four key attributes of the divine self (life,

³⁴³ See Abū Zayd (1983), 263-295. Within the Christian tradition, meanwhile, Augustine (d. 430) draws a similar connection between scripture and the world, writing in his commentary on the Psalms, “Let your book be the divine page, that you may hear it. Let your book be the world, that you may behold it.” Quoted in Brown (2015), 82. The appearance of this idea in the work of both Augustine and Ibn ‘Arabī (and his followers) may reflect how both thinkers are indebted both to Neoplatonism and to a prophetic scriptural tradition.

³⁴⁴ See Abū Zayd (2006), 100; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 951-952. For the correspondence between existence and the Qur’an in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Abū Zayd (1983), 263-295.

³⁴⁵ Nasr (1978), 2, note 2.

³⁴⁶ For the Ibn ‘Arabian concept of *al-a‘yān al-thābitah*, see ‘Afīfī (1969b); al-Ḥakīm (1981), 831-839; Izutsu (1984), 159-196.

knowledge, power and will);³⁴⁷ and the nine undotted letters that do join to other letters represent the five requirements of perfection and the four elements.³⁴⁸ While the particulars of these correspondences do not much concern us here, these identifications do indicate that, in al-Jīlī's mind as in Nasafī's, the different elements that make up existence exist in parallel to and are represented by the different elements that make up the Qur'an, and vice versa.³⁴⁹ While this notion is expressed in Sufi metaphysical terms, i.e. through the use of Ibn 'Arabian terms such as *al-aḥadiyyah*, *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*, and *al-a'yān al-thābitah*, it is grounded, I think, in the identification of the two forms of revelation or divine communication made by the Qur'an. This reflects al-Jīlī's approach more generally, which, as we shall see throughout this thesis, is to adopt the Qur'anic or post-Qur'anic Islamic view and give it a Sufi metaphysical interpretation.

b) The revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad

The Real – May He be exalted – sent it [i.e. unqualified oneness] down (*anzalaha*) upon His prophet, Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – so that he would be the locus for His unqualified oneness to be witnessed (*mashhadahu*) among [created] beings. The meaning of this sending down (*al-inzāl*) is that the exalted, unqualified one reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-aḥadiyyah al-muta'aliyyah*), in its dispersal (*dharāhā*), appeared in its perfection (*bi-kamālihā*) in his [i.e. Muhammad's] body (*fī*

³⁴⁷ For the idea that these four attributes are the basis for the remaining three of the seven attributes of the divine self (the other three being sight, hearing, and speech), see al-Jīlī (1999b), 22-23.

³⁴⁸ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 114.

³⁴⁹ In their development of these conceptions, al-Jīlī's and Nasafī's conceptions are perhaps influenced directly by Ibn 'Arabī, who in one instance identifies the letters (*ḥurūf*) with individual realities (s. *ḥaqīqah mufradah*), and the words (*kalimāt*) of God with human beings (see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 320), and more generally identifies the divine words with existents (*mawjūdāt*) (see Ebstein (2014), 53) or their fixed entities (*al-a'yān al-thābitah*) (see Izutsu (1984), 163). I have not come across in Ibn 'Arabī's work, however, a systematic presentation of the correspondences between the different elements of the Qur'an and the different elements within existence, as in the writings of al-Jīlī and Nasafī.

jasadihi). So it came down (*nazalat*) from its highest point (*awjihā*), despite the impossibility of [it] coming down and of ascending to it (*ma'a istiḥālat al-nuzūl wa-al-'urūj 'alayhā*). But since his body attained realisation of all the divine realities (*taḥaqqāqa jasaduhu bi-jamī' al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*), and since he was the one locus of manifestation of the names (*majlā al-asmā' al-wāḥid*), through his body, just as he was, through his ipseity (*bi-huwiyyatihi*), the locus of manifestation of unqualified oneness (*majlā al-aḥadiyyah*), and through his essence (*bi-dhātihi*), the essence itself (*'ayn al-dhāt*), for this reason he – May God bless him and grant him peace – said, “He sent down the Qur'an to me as a single whole (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*),” expressing his realisation (*taḥqīq*) of all of that in a corporeal, total, universal way (*taḥqīqan dhātiyyan kullīyyan jismāniyyan*).³⁵⁰

This passage contains some very important insights into al-Jīlī's conception of revelation (both of the Qur'an and more generally) and his view of Muhammad. The concept of revelation is indicated here by the term *inzāl* and its verbal form *anzala*. This is the most common verb for the revelation of scripture in the Qur'an, appearing on 188 occasions (though never as a verbal noun, the second form *tanzīl* being preferred). In keeping with its denotation of “sending down”, in the Qur'an it is only ever used of communication from God to man, and, in accordance with what we saw in the previous section, it is used of non-linguistic as well as linguistic forms of divine communication (see e.g. Q 2:57, 24:43, 30:49).³⁵¹ Al-Jīlī, who uses the term *anzala* to denote the revelation of all of the different scriptures treated in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, seems to have both scriptural or linguistic revelation and the manifestation of the divine existence – i.e. non-linguistic revelation – in mind when using the term. Indeed, in this instance the object of *anzala*, being grammatically

³⁵⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 116.

³⁵¹ See Izutsu (1964), 153; Wild (1996), 146; Madigan (2004a), 443. Al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) argues that it is its being “sent down” (*munazzal*) that makes a book revelation or scripture in the Qur'anic sense. See Friedmann (2003), 82.

feminine, cannot be the Qur'an, but must rather be *al-aḥadiyyah* or the divine essence.³⁵² *Inzāl*, then, appears to be near synonymous here with *tajallī*, i.e. the key Sufi metaphysical concept of the manifestation of the divine existence. This interpretation is supported by the fact that among the several other terms that al-Jīlī uses to denote the manifestation of the divine existence are *nuzūl* and *tanazzul*, which have the same root as *inzāl* and likewise denote “going down”.³⁵³ In fact, earlier in the book al-Jīlī uses these terms in the context of the manifestation of the essence at the level of *al-aḥadiyyah*: we already saw above his definition of *al-aḥadiyyah* as “the first of the descents of the essence” (*awwal tanazzulāt al-dhāt*),³⁵⁴ while elsewhere he says that *al-aḥadiyyah* is the level where the “simple, pure essence (*al-dhāt al-sādhaj al-ṣarf*) descended (*nazalat*) from its simplicity and purity”.³⁵⁵ The use of these terms in this way indicates that, in al-Jīlī's mind, the levels of existence are a vertical scheme: just as scriptures are sent down from God to creation, so too does the existence of the simple essence come down to the lower levels of existence. Furthermore, as he sees it, these two processes are complementary, or perhaps even one and the same. Muhammad, in other words, not only receives the words of the Qur'an from God, but also the manifestation of God's unqualified oneness. Al-Jīlī's conception of *inzāl*, therefore, comes closer to the etymological meaning of the English term

³⁵² The third person singular feminine pronominal ending is ambiguous, though given that unqualified oneness is the level of the essence turned towards manifestation, the meaning remains the same either way.

³⁵³ Ibn 'Arabī also uses the term *tanazzul* in this way. See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī (1972-1992), 4:210, 4:212; Chittick (1998), 114; and the title of his *al-Tanazzulāt al-Mawṣiliyyah*. As noted in chapter one, Ibn 'Arabī's earlier interpreters also employ *tanazzul* to the same effect. See Chittick (1982), 125, note 9.

³⁵⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 47.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

“revelation”, i.e., God’s “unveiling” of Himself, than does the orthodox Islamic notion of *tanzīl*.³⁵⁶

In the remainder of the above passage, al-Jīlī explains what it means for Muhammad to receive the manifestation of *al-aḥadiyyah*. His view is summarized in the statement that Muhammad, in receiving *al-aḥadiyyah*, thus became the “locus of witnessing” (*mashhad*) of that unqualified oneness within the phenomenal world. Al-Jīlī often uses the term *mashhad* in his writings to denote a place or instance where an individual attains a mystical vision or witnessing (*shuhūd*): for instance, he says that his vision of the Prophet in al-Jabartī was among the *mashāhid* in which he witnessed in the Prophet.³⁵⁷ This might therefore suggest that in describing Muhammad here as a *mashhad* of *al-aḥadiyyah*, al-Jīlī is indicating that individuals are able to experience a vision of the divine at this level of existence by beholding the Prophet. This, I think, is one of his intended meanings here.

The other, complementary idea being expressed here is that Muhammad’s receiving the manifestation of *al-aḥadiyyah* enables God Himself to witness His unqualified oneness manifest within creation. This idea, that the Perfect Man (for that, of course, is what Muhammad is), is the locus in which God is able to witness Himself and the world, is a key one in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi metaphysics. In the famous first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*, for instance, Ibn ‘Arabī describes the world as a mirror in

³⁵⁶ This conception of revelation accords with Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd’s understanding of the Ibn ‘Arabī conception of revelation: “The divine language becomes manifest (*tatajallā*) – in the view of the Sufis – in all of existence; so it is not limited to the Qur’anic discourse. It becomes manifest in all of existence, because existence is the words of God written on “the horizons” and the Qur’an is the words of God written in the codex.” Abū Zayd (2006), 91.

³⁵⁷ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

which God can see himself, and identifies Adam, the first Perfect Man, as “the very polishing of that mirror” (*‘ayn jalā’ tilk al-mir’āh*), who thus enables God to witness His own essence. Moreover, playing on the double meaning of the word *insān* (which can mean both man and pupil of the eye), Ibn ‘Arabī says that man was so called because “through him, the Real gazes upon His creation (*yanẓur al-ḥaqq ilā khalqihī*), and has mercy upon them,”³⁵⁸ an idea that al-Jīlī in fact repeats almost word for word in *al-Insān al-kāmil*.³⁵⁹ In the *Futūḥāt*, meanwhile, Ibn ‘Arabī defines the Pole (*quṭb*) – which, as we have seen, is one of the names of the Perfect Man – as “the place of the Real’s gaze upon the world (*mawḍi‘ naẓar al-ḥaqq min al-‘ālam*),”³⁶⁰ a definition that was taken up by his later interpreters.³⁶¹ When al-Jīlī describes Muhammad as a *mashhad* of unqualified oneness, then, he probably also has this role of the Perfect Man as a vehicle for God’s vision of Himself and His creation in mind.

As al-Jīlī understands it, therefore, God reveals His unqualified oneness in the person of Muhammad, so that He can see Himself and so that people can see Him. So while, on the one hand, God in His essence or unqualified oneness is imperceptible and transcendent – an idea denoted here by the terms *al-muta‘āliyyah* and *ma‘a istiḥālat al-nuzūl wa-al-‘urūj ‘alayhā* – on the other hand, God’s essence is knowable and immanent – as expressed by the phrase *nazalat min awjihā* – by virtue of its being manifest in Muhammad. What we appear to have here, then, is

³⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 49-50.

³⁵⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 230.

³⁶⁰ Al-Ḥakīm (1981), 912.

³⁶¹ See e.g. al-Qāshānī (1992), 162; Tahānawī (1963), 1327-1330.

al-Jīlī's typically Ibn 'Arabian notion of the synthesis of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*. Yet, as is generally true of Ibn 'Arabian thought, including that of al-Jīlī, the emphasis seems here to be on *tashbīh*, given the lengths to which al-Jīlī goes to detail the different ways in which Muhammad can be considered a divine *mashhad*.

Let us turn, then, to consider these different aspects of Muhammad's being a *mashhad*. Al-Jīlī identifies three aspects of the Prophet that receive different types of divine manifestation or embody different aspects of God. The first is Muhammad's body (*jasad, jism*),³⁶² which, says al-Jīlī, is the locus for the manifestation of *al-aḥadiyyah*, for his realisation of all of the "divine realities" (*jamī' al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*), and, what is more, for the manifestation of the names (*al-asmā'*). Taking each of these in turn, it can therefore be said that Muhammad is *mashhad al-aḥadiyyah* in his physical being, i.e. not as the spiritual principle known as the Muhammadan Reality. This is important, because it is confirmation that, for al-Jīlī, Muhammad is the archetypal Perfect Man not only as the Muhammadan Reality, but also and more importantly as Muhammad the man who lived in a particular time and place. Second, while it is always difficult to know exactly what al-Jīlī means by the term *ḥaqā'iq*, we might suppose that he is using the term *al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah* here in a similar sense as he uses the terms *al-ḥaqā'iq al-haqiqiyyah* and *al-ḥaqā'iq al-'alawiyyah* when he says, in the context of his discussions of the Perfect Man's microcosmic nature, that

³⁶² While he refers here on three occasions to Muhammad's *jasad*, elsewhere al-Jīlī uses the terms *jasad, jism, badan, jirm* and *haykal* in an apparently interchangeable way. See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 151. For the nuances of meaning of these terms as they are used in the Qur'an, hadith, and the philosophical tradition, see Gril (2006); De Boer (1965), 555.

the Perfect Man “synthesises the realities of the Real and the realities of creation (*al-jāmi‘ li-al-ḥaqā’iq al-haqqiyyah wa-al-ḥaqā’iq al-khalqiyyah*),”³⁶³ and “receives the higher realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-‘alawiyyah*) in his subtle nature (*bi-laṭāfatihī*), and the lower realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-sufliyyah*) in his coarse nature (*bi-kathāfatihī*).”³⁶⁴ If this is the case, then al-Jīlī’s intended meaning here is that Muhammad’s body is a microcosm of all of the upper levels of existence, which is to say, the levels that take their names from the different divine attributes. If this interpretation is correct, then al-Jīlī’s statement that Muhammad’s body is a locus of manifestation for the divine names is a repetition of the same idea, albeit with the added information that he is the “one” (*al-wāḥid*) such locus of manifestation. This can be understood in two senses, I think. The first and more obvious meaning is that Muhammad’s body is the only locus of manifestation for the divine names. This idea would seem to accord with al-Jīlī’s view that the term Perfect Man properly speaking only applies to Muhammad, Muhammad’s body thus being superior to all other bodies. The second sense in which *al-wāḥid* can be understood relates to its calling to mind the level of existence of *al-wāḥidiyyah* or “qualified oneness”. This, it will be remembered, is the level at which the divine names and attributes are differentiated within the divine essence. The suggestion here, therefore, is that Muhammad’s body is the locus of manifestation for both *al-aḥadiyyah* and *al-wāḥidiyyah*, i.e. of both the unqualified divine essence and the essence qualified by names and attributes. Whether this is what the term *al-wāḥid*

³⁶³ Al-Jīlī (1999b), 53-54.

³⁶⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 212.

signifies or not, it is nevertheless clear that, in al-Jīlī's view, Muhammad's body is a comprehensive locus for the manifestation of both of the fundamental aspects of God, that is, His essence and attributes.

Muhammad's body, then, is extremely important to al-Jīlī's conception of the divine manifestation; indeed, al-Jīlī's position here seems to come close to incarnationism, i.e. a view of Muhammad that is analogous to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ.³⁶⁵ His repeated denials that he professes the indwelling (*ḥulūl*) of God in man or union (*ittiḥād*) between them,³⁶⁶ as well as his explicit rejection of *tajsīm*³⁶⁷ and his criticism of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation in the chapter on the Gospel (which we will look at in chapter four), perhaps indicate his awareness of the resemblance of his view of Muhammad to the Christian view of Jesus.³⁶⁸ Whether we accept al-Jīlī's claims that he does not profess *ḥulūl* or *tajsīm* hinges upon how we understand the key concepts *mashhad* and *majlā*: when he says that Muhammad's body is a locus in which God's unqualified oneness becomes manifest and in which He can be witnessed, is he saying that Muhammad's body is fully divine, or merely that it is somehow a reflection of the divine existence? As we saw in chapter one, al-Jīlī's overall view seems to be that God and man – specifically, the Perfect Man – are both identical and yet somehow distinct. Although, in the case of Muhammad, this distinction becomes extremely blurred, it

³⁶⁵ For the different Christian expressions of this doctrine, see McGrath (2016), 273-282.

³⁶⁶ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 5, 52, 149, 215, 203, 255

³⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 144.

³⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 130.

nevertheless is still just about discernible, for while he says that Muhammad's body is the locus of the divine manifestation, he does not make the inverse statement, that God is the locus of Muhammad's appearance.

We will have an opportunity to refine these remarks when we come to look at some of the later sections in this chapter. For now, let us stress the importance that al-Jīlī attaches to Muhammad's body. This emphasis on the corporeal dimension is an important part of al-Jīlī's broader Sufi metaphysics, in particular his theory of the Perfect Man. As suggested above, according to al-Jīlī's notion of the Perfect Man as a microcosm, man's body parts and organs are loci in which the realities of the universe appear in microcosmic form. Thus, to give some examples, in al-Jīlī's view the Perfect Man's heart embodies the divine throne, his four humours the four elements, his bodily fluids the seven seas, and his hair and nails the plants.³⁶⁹ The body of the Perfect Man, therefore, is a summary of the entire cosmos, and thus a vehicle through which one can gaze upon, and so come to know, reality.³⁷⁰ This ties in with al-Jīlī's conception of the body of Muhammad, the archetypal Perfect Man, as a *mashhad* in which God can witness Himself and His existence, and man can witness God. This emphasis on and valorisation of the body of the Perfect Man emerges in other ways in al-Jīlī's writings. Like Ibn 'Arabī, he often quotes or alludes to the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* describing the

³⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, 211-212.

³⁷⁰ As al-Jīlī puts it in his commentary on the *Futūḥāt*, the body is "the most complete of the loci of manifestation, in terms of outward appearance, among the created levels." Al-Jīlī (1999a), 177. In chapter eight of that commentary, al-Jīlī gives an overview of his conception of the body. That conception is marked by two opposing tendencies, namely the tendency to view the body as a microcosm, and the tendency to see it as being trapped in the material world. See *ibid.*, 171-190.

manifestation of the divine attributes in the body parts and corporeal actions of the servant who draws near to Him through supererogatory acts of worship (*al-nawāfil*): “When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which grasps, and his foot with which he walks.”³⁷¹ Similarly, and again like Ibn ‘Arabī, he often quotes or alludes to the hadiths, “God created Adam in His form (‘*alā ṣūratihī*),”³⁷² and “I saw My Lord in the form (*fī ṣūrat*) of a beardless youth.”³⁷³ Given that man’s body (*jasad*), as al-Jīlī sees it, “is his form” (*ṣūratuhu*),³⁷⁴ it follows that these hadiths respectively indicate that man’s body is somehow modelled on the divine image, and that God appears in the body of certain individuals. Likewise, as we saw in the previous chapter, he views the bodies of the Perfect Men as loci for the appearance of the Muhammadan Reality.³⁷⁵ And the terms he uses to express his and other Perfect Men’s attainment of mystical experience – *kashf*, *dhawq*, *shuhūd* – suggest that such experience has a corporeal dimension, or at least is analogous or close to bodily experience.

³⁷¹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 131, 215, 269, 278. This hadith is recorded in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:231. For interpretations of this hadith by Sufi authors, see Graham (1977), 173-174; Schimmel (1978), 43. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of it, see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 773, Chittick (1989), 126, 325-330.

³⁷² See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 83. This hadith is recorded in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:165-166; Muslim (1995), 17:147 (no. 2841). For interpretations of this hadith, see Kister (1993), 137-138; Takeshita (1987), 15-17. For Ibn ‘Arabī, this hadith is an indication that Adam – who stands for mankind as a whole – possesses the “divine viceregency” (*al-khilāfah al-ilāhiyyah*) (see Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 4:179), and is therefore a key scriptural source for his theory of the Perfect Man, as it is for al-Jīlī.

³⁷³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 58, 59, 142. This hadith does not seem to appear in the six books, and its authenticity was debated by Sunni hadith critics. Those who supported its authenticity, such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605), generally proposed that the hadith refers to a dream of the Prophet’s, while those who rejected its authenticity, such as Tāj al-dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), proposed that it was a fabrication of extreme Sufis. See Brown (2012), 380; Brown (2018), 103-104.

³⁷⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 151.

³⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 210.

Al-Jīlī thus presents us with an ultimately positive conception of the body of the Perfect Man. In his view, while the material and sensual attachments of the body certainly need initially to be overcome through Sufi practices and austerities,³⁷⁶ once an individual has attained the station of Perfect Man his body is no longer to be viewed in negative terms but, on the contrary, should be regarded as a locus of theophany and of the appearance of the spiritual reality of the Prophet, and a microcosm of the larger cosmos. Such a positive conception of the body of the Perfect Man reflects a more general tendency within Sufism in the Later Middle Period to view the body of the *walī* as a sacred object.³⁷⁷ Al-Jīlī's particular focus on the qualities of the body of Muhammad, meanwhile, reflects the considerable interest shown by the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition in the Prophet's body, a tendency exemplified, for instance, in several of the stories in the *Sīrah* tradition (e.g. the "cleaving of the chest" (*shaqq al-ṣadr*) episodes, the prophet's bodily *mi'rāj*, the seal of prophecy (*khātam al-nubuwwah*) appearing between his shoulders), the descriptions of his bodily attributes in hadith collections and works such as Imām al-Tirmidhī's (d. 279/892) *al-Shamā'il*, al-Bayhaqī's (d. 458/1066) *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's (d. 554/1149) *al-Shifā'*, and Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *al-Wafā' bi-al-aḥwāl al-Muṣṭafā*, and the quickly established (if controversial) cult of

³⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 151: "If spiritual matters (*al-umūr al-rūḥāniyyah*) are predominant in a man, through constant true thought (*al-fikr al-ṣaḥīḥ*), reducing food, sleep, and speech (*iqḷāl al-ṭa'ām wa-al-manām wa-al-kalām*), and abandoning matters that are entailed by humanness (*al-bashariyyah*)". then his body (*haykaluhu*) acquires spiritual grace (*al-luṭf al-rūḥī*)...." This renunciant tendency has been a feature of Sufi piety since the beginnings of Sufism. See al-Sarrāj (1914), 11-12; Melchert (1996); Melchert (2015).

³⁷⁷ For some examples of this tendency from the later middle and early modern periods from North Africa, Persia, and India, see Kugle (2007); Bashir (2011).

relics of the Prophet.³⁷⁸ Furthermore, like al-Jīlī, the Islamic tradition draws a connection between revelation and the Prophet's body, with its description of the first Qur'anic revelation's tremendous physical effect on Muhammad.³⁷⁹ Al-Jīlī's conception of the Prophet's bodily manifestation of the divine unqualified oneness, and his connecting this to the revelation of the Qur'an, can therefore be seen as an elaboration, in Sufi metaphysical terms, of those traditional ideas, albeit that this elaboration leads him to some quite bold and (from an orthodox perspective) dangerous conclusions.

While al-Jīlī places great emphasis on Muhammad's body here, this is not the only aspect of Muhammad that constitutes a locus for the manifestation of God's unqualified oneness. Muhammad's *huwiyyah*, al-Jīlī tells us, is also such a locus of manifestation. This poses the question of what al-Jīlī means by the term *huwiyyah*.³⁸⁰ The word *huwiyyah* was introduced into Arabic by the early translators of Aristotelian philosophical texts, as a way of translating the Greek *ōn* (being) and *eīnai* (to be). It is commonly used in early *falsafah* (3rd/9th century) to denote a variety of meanings connected to the existence of God,³⁸¹ yet in the later work of Ibn Sīnā and others it comes primarily to denote the "ipseity", identity, quiddity (*māhiyyah*) or essence (*dhāt*) of God.³⁸² The term was picked up by Ibn 'Arabī, for whom it principally refers to the utterly

³⁷⁸ See Gril (2006).

³⁷⁹ See *ibid.*; Madigan (2004a), 441.

³⁸⁰ I have chosen the translation "ipseity" as it is a direct (Latin) equivalent of *huwiyyah*. "He-ness" would also work in this regard, but is an ugly term. As indicated below, *huwiyyah* may also have the sense of "identity", as in modern Arabic, though this does not so directly capture how the term is an abstract noun derived from the third person singular pronoun.

³⁸¹ See Adamson (2002), 125-130; Adamson (2007), 56-57, 63; Lala (2017), 74-76.

³⁸² See Adamson (2007), 62-63.

hidden aspect of the divine essence.³⁸³ This usage was adopted by Ibn ‘Arabī’s leading interpreters, such as al-Qāshānī, though in integrating the term into his conception of the levels of existence, al-Qāshānī indicates that it denotes the hidden essence that is nonetheless turned towards phenomenality, as in al-Jīlī’s conception of *al-aḥadiyyah*, rather than the inward aspect of the essence.³⁸⁴ Al-Jīlī adopts and elaborates upon these conceptions. In chapter twenty-six of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, which is devoted to *al-huwiyyah*, he defines the term as “[God’s] unseen aspect, the appearance of which is impossible (*ghaybuhu al-ladhī lā yumkin zuhūruhu*),³⁸⁵ though from the perspective of [its being] the whole of the names and attributes (*bi-i’tibār jumlat al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt*).” In this sense, he goes on, *al-huwiyyah* is like “the hidden aspect of qualified oneness” (*bāṭin al-wāḥidiyyah*).³⁸⁶ Al-Jīlī’s conception of the divine *huwiyyah* thus shares more with al-Qāshānī’s than Ibn ‘Arabī’s, it denoting, in his usage, the unseen (*ghā’ib*) aspect of the divine essence, but the unseen aspect turned towards the appearance of the names and attributes, rather than the absolutely hidden dimension of the essence.

While the term *al-huwiyyah* is thus most commonly used – by the philosophers and Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters – with respect to God, nevertheless it is also occasionally used by all of these thinkers with respect to created existents, particularly human beings,³⁸⁷ as in al-Jīlī’s reference here to the *huwiyyah* of Muhammad. By analogy with al-Jīlī’s

³⁸³ See Lala (2017), esp. 40-41, 79, 104-105; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1120. Lala also provides a useful list and analysis of the synonyms that Ibn ‘Arabī uses for *al-huwiyyah*, which include ‘*ayn*, *dhāt*, *naḥs*, and *rūḥ*. See Lala (2017), 89-104.

³⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, esp. 40-41, 210-215.

³⁸⁵ An alternate reading, recorded in Tahānawī (1963), 1746, is “‘*aynuhu*” (His essence).

³⁸⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 101.

³⁸⁷ See Lala (2017), 77, 80-81, 159; al-Jīlī (1997a), 47.

definition of the *huwiyah* of God, it can be said that Muhammad's *huwiyah* is his unseen, inner nature, and more specifically that aspect of his inner nature that incorporates all of his attributes. Moreover, *huwiyah*'s connotation of "identity" (*tashakkhush*)³⁸⁸ suggests that *huwiyat Muḥammad* also has the sense of Muhammad's character, or what al-Jīlī elsewhere calls *al-khulq wa-akhlāq*.³⁸⁹ The significance of both senses of *huwiyah* is that they indicate that the term stands in contrast to *jism*. Muhammad, al-Jīlī seems to be saying, is a locus of manifestation for the unqualified oneness of God in both his physical features and acts *and* his (non-physical) character and identity, i.e., in both his *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects. Again, this accords with al-Jīlī's conception of the Perfect Man as a microcosmic figure, the idea being not only that the Perfect Man incorporates all realities within his being, but also that all aspects of his being, both manifest and hidden, are the locus of manifestation for those realities. In Ibn 'Arabian terms, this means that Muhammad is a "synthetic being" (*kawn jāmi'*) in the sense of his manifesting *al-aḥadiyyah* in both his inner and outer aspects.

The above discussion would suggest that Muhammad is a locus of manifestation of the second level of the divine existence – that of *al-aḥadiyyah* – but not of the first level of existence – the divine essence in its utterly unqualified nature or "the quiddity of the true nature of the essence". This would fit with the idea that the essence at the highest level of existence is beyond all manifestation and perception. However, al-Jīlī goes on to undermine this impression of a clear distinction between the

³⁸⁸ See Tahānawī (1963), 1745-1746.

³⁸⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 208.

divine essence in its most exalted, unqualified state and Muhammad, by including the cryptic remark that, through his essence (*dhāt*), Muhammad was “the essence itself” (*‘ayn al-dhāt*). Again, this poses the question of what al-Jīlī means by the term *dhāt*. As in the case of *al-huwiyyah*, the term *al-dhāt* is often used – by the philosophers, theologians, and Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis – with reference to the essence of God.³⁹⁰ When al-Jīlī writes that Muhammad’s essence is “*‘ayn al-dhāt*” here, then, it is to the divine essence that the latter term refers. In the first chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, which is devoted to *al-dhāt*, al-Jīlī defines this divine essence as that upon which all of God’s names and attributes depend, the implication being that the essence in itself is free of qualification by names and attributes. This divine essence, he goes on, is a “pure existent” (*mawjūd maḥḍ*), which is to say, in Ibn ‘Arabian terms, that it possess “absolute existence” (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), the implication again being that it is free of any qualification or limitation. By contrast, the essence of created things (*dhāt al-makhlūqāt*) – and here it should be noted that he does use the term *dhāt* in relation to non-divine beings – is “an existent attached to non-existence” (*mawjūd mulḥaq bi-al-‘adam*), which is to say in Ibn ‘Arabian terms, that it possesses “limited” or “possible” existence (*al-wujūd al-muqayyad, al-wujūd al-mumkin*).³⁹¹ Al-Jīlī thus

³⁹⁰ Thus Tahānawī’s entrance on “*al-dhāt*”, for instance, is almost entirely devoted to the divine essence. See Tahānawī (1963), 816-818. This is not to say, however, that *dhāt* was not also used of created beings. For examples of this from philosophical literature, see Faultless (2012).

³⁹¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 206. For the distinction between *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* and *al-wujūd al-muqayyad/al-mumkin* in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1133. In the background to this distinction lies Ibn Sīnā’s notion of God’s essence as that which must necessarily exist (*wājib al-wujūd*), in contrast to other existents, which are merely possible existents (*mumkin al-wujūd*), on which see Goichon (1938), 381-383, 417-418; Adamson (2013).

sets up a clear distinction between the essence of God and the essences of His creatures, as in the orthodox Sunni conception.³⁹²

This clear distinction is considerably blurred, however, by al-Jīlī's apparent identification here of the divine essence with the essence of Muhammad. Muhammad, al-Jīlī seems to be saying, is not marked by limited or potential existence like other created beings, but is in fact, in his essence, a pure, unqualified being like God Himself. This apparent identification of the Muhammadan and divine essences ought to be put in the context of al-Jīlī's notion of the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah*), for it seems to me that when he writes here of Muhammad's *dhāt*, it is the Muhammadan Reality – the immaterial spirit or light of Muhammad – that he has in mind.³⁹³ As we saw in chapter one, in his chapter on the Perfect Man al-Jīlī attributes to this Muhammadan Reality the ability to become manifest (*mutajallin*) in the forms of phenomenal existents, specifically, the other Perfect Men or Poles.³⁹⁴ This capacity is analogous to that of the divine essence to make its existence manifest within the phenomenal world, a point highlighted by al-Jīlī's use of the term *tajallī*, a term usually applied to the process of divine manifestation, with respect to the Muhammadan Reality. This shared capacity of the Muhammadan and divine essences to become manifest in phenomenal existents makes sense if one proposes, as al-Jīlī seems to do in the passage under discussion, that those two essences are identical.

³⁹² See Tahānawī (1963), 816-817, for the dominant Ash'arī view that "His essence – May He be exalted – is distinguished from all other essences."

³⁹³ It should be noted in this regard that *al-ḥaqīqah* is one of the synonyms commonly given for *al-dhāt*. See *ibid.*, 685.

³⁹⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 210-211.

Taking this idea to its logical conclusion, might it therefore be said that Muhammad, according to al-Jīlī's conception, is in fact divine? In this passage and in the chapter on the Perfect Man (as well as in his other writings),³⁹⁵ al-Jīlī does appear to go further than Ibn 'Arabī and his other main interpreters in blurring the distinction between God and the Prophet. It is certainly true that those earlier thinkers utilise, like al-Jīlī, the concept of the Muhammadan Reality to assign to Muhammad a special cosmic significance, specifically, with respect to his role in the creation and preservation of the world and the appearance of prophets and friends of God.³⁹⁶ Nevertheless, they tend to retain the sense of a distinction between the Muhammadan Reality and the simple divine essence. Thus al-Qāshānī, for instance, in his commentary on the chapter on Muhammad in the *Fuṣūṣ*, identifies Muhammad as the "first self-determination" (*awwal ta'ayyun*) of the essence, noting that the essence at the level of *al-aḥadiyyah* (which, it should be remembered, constitutes the first level of existence, i.e. the level of the simple essence, in his scheme) lies above the level of Muhammad.³⁹⁷ In his Qur'an commentary, meanwhile, al-Qāshānī draws a clear distinction between the absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) and the "relational" or "additional" existence (*al-wujūd al-idāfī*) of Muhammad, the Perfect

³⁹⁵ See e.g. Lo Polito (2010), 159/208, for the passage in *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm* where al-Jīlī recounts his vision that the Prophet was both qualified by the attributes of the divine self and was "the unseen essence itself" (*'ayn al-dhāt al-ghā'ib*).

³⁹⁶ See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 347-349; Izutsu (1984), 236-238.

³⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, 237; al-Qāshānī (1992), 82. Ibn 'Arabī, al-Qāshānī and al-Qayṣarī also identify the Muhammadan Reality with the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*) (see *ibid.*; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 348-349; Rustom (2005), 60), as in fact does al-Jīlī, as we shall see below.

Man.³⁹⁸ Similarly, al-Qāshānī's student al-Qayṣarī, while going so far as to state that Muhammad's station, the station of "divine synthesis" (*al-jam'iyyah al-ilāhiyyah*), is the locus of appearance for the name *Allāh*, nevertheless also notes, like his teacher, that the level of *al-dhāt al-aḥadiyyah* lies above it.³⁹⁹ While the earlier interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī thus indicate that the Muhammadan Reality can be identified with the second level of existence, they stop short of suggesting, as al-Jīlī seems to here, that the Muhammadan Reality is identical to the first level of existence, i.e. the simple divine essence itself.⁴⁰⁰ It might therefore be said that al-Jīlī's more exalted conception of the Prophet represents a new stage in the development of Ibn 'Arabian Sufī metaphysical thought.

As is often the case with this type of Sufī metaphysical thought, however, al-Jīlī in other places appears to put forward a different view, namely the more common Ibn 'Arabian conception of the Muhammadan Reality as the first created thing or the first manifestation or self-determination of the essence. Thus, on several occasions he follows Ibn 'Arabī, al-Qāshānī and al-Qayṣarī in identifying the Muhammadan Reality with the Neoplatonic concept of the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*),⁴⁰¹ which is one of the names for the first self-determination of

³⁹⁸ See Lala (2017), 163-164, 211. See also Izutsu (1984), 240-241, citing Ibn 'Arabī and al-Qāshānī making the same point.

³⁹⁹ See Rustom (2005), 58.

⁴⁰⁰ Similarly, 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī identifies the "degree of the Prophet Muhammad" with the second level of existence, which in his scheme is that of the divine attributes. See Sirriyeh (2005), 24. This would suggest that al-Jīlī's blurring of the divine and Muhammadan essences did not catch on, even among those such as al-Nābulusī who were heavily influenced by his thought.

⁴⁰¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 146, 155; al-Jīlī (1999b), 27.

the essence, but not of the simple essence itself.⁴⁰² In the same vein, he often quotes a series of three (uncanonical) hadiths that state respectively that the first thing God created was the Pen (*al-qalam*), the Intellect (*al-‘aql*) and the Spirit (*rūḥ*) of Muhammad, indicating again that the Muhammadan Reality, which is synonymous with “the Muhammadan Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-muḥammadī*) constitutes the first self-determination of the divine essence, and underlining that it is created and not eternal.⁴⁰³ Furthermore, it is not entirely clear from the passage under discussion whether al-Jīlī identifies Muhammad’s essence with the divine essence in its utter simplicity, i.e. the first level of existence, or, like al-Qayṣarī, with the divine essence at the level of *al-aḥadiyyah*, the second level of existence and the first descent into phenomenality. Al-Jīlī thus leaves just about enough room for ambiguity on the matter to allow his readers to believe that he maintains a distinction between God and Muhammad. It nevertheless seems valid to say that he goes as far as it is possible to go here without explicitly stating that Muhammad is a fully divine being. Indeed, we have seen that he identifies Muhammad with the highest two levels of the divine existence in the three different aspects of his being, namely in his body or *ẓāhir* aspect, his ipseity or *bāṭin* aspect, and his essence or spiritual aspect.

⁴⁰² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 164, where he identifies *al-‘aql al-awwal* with *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, “the locus of His self-determination and descent (*maḥall ta‘ayyunihi wa-tanazzulihi*).”

⁴⁰³ See *ibid.*, 146; al-Jīlī (1999a), 73-74. According to Jonathan Brown, these hadiths were rejected by medieval hadith collectors, “even those...known for their laxity. Belief in [their] truth persisted, however, especially among Sufi scholars.” Brown (2015), 228. Thus we find one version of this hadith quoted in the orthodox *tafsīrs* of al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr, (see al-Qurṭubī (1997), 18:196 (Q 68:1); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1354 (Q 68:1)), as well as in al-Ījī’s *al-Mawāqif*, while al-Ījī’s commentator al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) mentions all three variants. See Dhanani (2016), 392, 396, note 11.

Al-Jīlī connects Muhammad’s synthesis of the highest levels of the divine existence in the different aspects of his existence to a hadith that states that the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad “in a single whole” (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*). Interestingly, the apparent meaning of this hadith directly conflicts with what the Qur’an itself says about its own revelation, to the extent that the same language is used to denote two opposing positions: Q 25:32 has the unbelievers asking why the Qur’an was not sent down in a single whole (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*). Yet while the hadith quoted by al-Jīlī here is not canonical,⁴⁰⁴ a similar idea is found in a widely quoted hadith reported on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/678/8), which al-Jīlī quotes later in the chapter, and according to which the Qur’an was revealed “with a single push” (*daf‘atan wāḥidatan*) to the lowest heaven, and then subsequently revealed in stages to Muhammad.⁴⁰⁵ Al-Jīlī in fact goes further than this, however, for the hadith that he quotes indicates that the Qur’an was revealed all at once *to Muhammad*. While the full significance of this notion will become clearer in the following sections, what matters here is that al-Jīlī connects the language of the hadith to the idea that Muhammad manifested the divine in a comprehensive way, that is, *jumlatan* or *ijmālan*, or, in Ibn ‘Arabian terms, that he is a perfect *kawn jāmi‘*. The hadith thus indicates that Muhammad is the Perfect Man; indeed, earlier in the book, al-Jīlī makes this connection explicit: “There is no one in the entirety of existence for whom being comprehensive (*al-jumlah*) is valid, except for the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), and [Muhammad] –

⁴⁰⁴ See Cornell (1998), 344, note 55.

⁴⁰⁵ See Böwering (2003), 349-350.

Blessings and peace be upon him – alluded to this idea when he said, “He sent down the Qur’an to me as a single whole.”⁴⁰⁶

Al-Jīlī’s quotation of the hadith in the present passage serves the further function of bringing us back from the discussion of Muhammad’s nature to the consideration of the revelation of the Qur’an, to which this chapter is ostensibly devoted. More specifically, it indicates that these two topics are in fact interrelated, for Muhammad’s being a locus of manifestation for the unqualified oneness of God in his body and ipseity, and the very nature of the divine essence in his essence, indicate something significant about the relationship between the Muhammad and the Qur’an. Al-Jīlī’s conception of the nature of this relationship can be expressed in terms of the following syllogism: if the Qur’an, as he indicated at the beginning of the chapter, is an expression of *al-dhāt* and *al-aḥadiyyah*, and if Muhammad’s body and ipseity are loci of manifestation for *al-aḥadiyyah* and his essence is identical to *al-dhāt*, then it would seem to follow that Muhammad and the Qur’an are somehow identical, for they both manifest the same thing.

Strange as this idea may seem, it may in fact be taken as a Sufi metaphysical elaboration of an orthodox Sunni tradition, namely, a saying attributed to ‘Ā’ishah, who is said to have replied to a question about Muhammad’s character (*khuluq*) with the answer that his character was the Qur’an (*khuluquhu al-Qur’ān*).⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, in the *Futūḥāt* Ibn ‘Arabī cites this tradition to make the same point that al-Jīlī is suggesting

⁴⁰⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 98.

⁴⁰⁷ This tradition is recorded in Muslim (1995), 6:23-26 (no. 746). The Qur’anic exegetes connect this tradition to Q 68:4: “And truly you have a great character (*khuluq ‘azīm*).” See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 18:198 (Q 68:4); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1355 (Q 68:4).

here, and in more explicit terms: “It is as if the Qur’an,” he concludes from the saying of ‘Ā’ishah, “had taken on a bodily form under the name of Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allāh,” and continues, “One who has not lived at the time of the Prophet but desires to see him, should contemplate the Qur’an for there is no difference between the act of contemplating it and the act of contemplating the Envoy of God.”⁴⁰⁸ And while al-Jīlī does not explicitly cite the saying of ‘Ā’ishah here, he does quote it in his *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah* to make the same point as he is making here: the saying, he says, is “an allusion to the truth of [Muhammad’s] realisation of the divine perfections (*al-taḥaqquq bi-al-kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah*), because the Qur’an is only an expression of the perfections of God.”⁴⁰⁹ Al-Jīlī seems to be inviting the reader to draw the same conclusion in the passage of *al-Insān al-kāmil* that is under discussion. This reflects his more general Sufi metaphysical conception of revelation as a phenomenon that involves the levels of existence, the scriptures, and human beings (specifically, the prophets or Perfect Men). Each of these three categories, as loci of the divine manifestation, corresponds existentially with each of the others. This is of relevance for al-Jīlī’s conception of the hierarchy of scriptures, for it allows us to construct a series of corresponding hierarchies of the levels of existence, scriptures, and prophets. At the top of these hierarchies stand, respectively, *al-aḥadiyyah*, the first and least qualified form of divine manifestation, the

⁴⁰⁸ Quoted in Addas (2009), 1:68; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 71, note 38; Chittick (1989), 241-242. Ibn ‘Arabī also uses the term “little Qur’an” (*Qur’ān ṣaghīr*) to denote the Perfect Man, and in one instance even identifies himself with the Qur’an and the seven oft-repeated verses (*al-sab‘ al-mathānī*), i.e., the *Fātiḥah*. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 908; Abū Zayd (2006), 48-49.

⁴⁰⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997b), 228.

Qur'an, the scripture that expresses the divine essence in the most complete way, and Muhammad, the prophet or Perfect Man who embodies the essence in the most complete way. This is a theme that runs through al-Jīlī's chapters on the scriptures, as we shall see.

c) The two aspects of the Qur'an – *al-Qur'ān al-karīm* & *al-Qur'ān al-hakīm*

And this is what is expressed by “The Generous Qur'an” (*al-Qur'ān al-karīm*), because He gave him [i.e. Muhammad] comprehensiveness (*al-jumlah*), which is the complete generosity (*al-karam al-tāmm*), because He spared nothing from it; rather, He poured forth (*afāda*) everything (*al-kull*) into it, out of the essential, divine generosity (*karaman ilāhiyyan dhātiyyan*).

As for “The Wise Qur'an” (*al-Qur'ān al-hakīm*), it is the descent of the divine realities (*tanazzul al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*) through the ascension (*'urūj*) of the servant up to the attainment of realisation (*al-tahaqquq*) of them in the essence, step by step, according to what is required by the divine wisdom (*al-ḥikmah al-ilāhiyyah*), of which the essence is a consequent. This is the only path to something [like this], for He does not permit the possibility that someone might attain realisation of all the divine realities through his body from the first moment that he is brought into existence. However, he whose primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) is disposed towards divinity (*majbūlah 'alā al-ulūhiyyah*) rises up through them [i.e. the divine realities] and attains realisation of them, according to what is unveiled (*yankashif*) to him of them, one [reality] after another, according to the divine ordering. And the Real has alluded to the explanation of that when He said: “We have sent it down in stages (*nazzalnāhu tanzīlan*).” (17:106) This effect is neither cut off nor does it cease, rather the servant continues the ascent (*taraqqin*) in such a manner, and the Real continues with the manifestation (*tajallin*), since there is no way of exhausting that which does not end, because the Real in itself does not end.⁴¹⁰

We have thus far seen that, in al-Jīlī's view, God's sending down of the Qur'an to Muhammad constitutes the manifestation of His unqualified oneness within the Prophet. The Qur'an, therefore, represents

⁴¹⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 116.

the comprehensiveness and unity of the divine essence at the level of *al-aḥadiyyah*. In this section, al-Jīlī both elaborates upon this idea and introduces a new element into his conception of the Qur'an, namely, that the revelation of the Qur'an constitutes the manifestation of the differentiated divine attributes, in addition to the manifestation of the comprehensive, simple essence.

These two aspects of the Qur'anic revelation are represented, as al-Jīlī sees it, in two of the different names by which the Qur'an is known, *al-Qur'ān al-karīm* and *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*. Both of these are names that the Qur'an assigns to itself,⁴¹¹ hence al-Jīlī's discussion here can be viewed as a Sufi metaphysical exegesis of those terms. The adjectives *karīm* and *ḥakīm*, it should also be noted, are also among the attributes that the Qur'an assigns to God, meaning that the Qur'an "reflects the attributes of the one who sent it down",⁴¹² a notion that supports al-Jīlī's conception of revelation as the self-manifestation of God. Let us look, then, at how he integrates each of these names of the Qur'an into that conception.

The term *al-Qur'ān al-karīm* is generally understood by the exegetes and in the wider Islamic tradition to mean "the Noble Qur'an".⁴¹³ Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), for instance, notes three different views on why the Qur'an is described as "*karīm*" – namely, because it is uncreated (*ghayr makhḷūq*), because of what it contains by way of "noble

⁴¹¹ For *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, see Q 56:77, as well as Q 27:29 ("*kitāb karīm*"). For *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, see Q 36:2, as well as Q 3:58 ("*al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*") and Q 31:2 ("*al-kitāb al-ḥakīm*").

⁴¹² Mir (2003), 513.

⁴¹³ See *ibid.*: "The Qur'ān is "noble" because it comes from a noble source, and, being noble, it deserves to be treated with reverence."

traits (*karīm al-akhlāq*) and the meanings of things”, and because “He declares the one who memorises it to be noble (*yukarrim ḥāfiẓahu*) and the one who recites it to be great” – all of which make much more sense if *karīm* is understood to mean “noble”.⁴¹⁴ In this regard, *karīm* is generally taken to be synonymous with ‘*aẓīm*, meaning that it is generically “great”.⁴¹⁵ Al-Jīlī, however, seems to understand the term in the more particular sense of “generous”. This secondary meaning of *karīm* goes back to the *Jāhiliyyah*, generosity being connected to nobility “since, in the old Arab conception of human virtue, extravagant and unlimited generosity was the most conspicuous and concrete manifestation of a man’s nobility.”⁴¹⁶ In the context of this passage, however, the generosity being spoken of is not that of a human being but of God, his generosity consisting in His not leaving anything out of the Qur’an. For al-Jīlī, therefore, the name *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* does not merely indicate the Qur’an’s greatness, but more specifically points to its comprehensive nature,⁴¹⁷ an idea that he expresses using the key term *al-jumlah*. We saw this same term in the hadith that he quoted in the previous section, which he used to signify the comprehensive nature of Muhammad. This alerts us once again to the correspondences between the levels of existence, the scriptures, and the prophets, for each of the divine essence at the level of unqualified oneness, the Qur’an, and

⁴¹⁴ See al-Qurṭubī (1997), 17:193 (Q 56:77).

⁴¹⁵ See *ibid.*; Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1292 (Q 56:77).

⁴¹⁶ Izutsu (1964), 43. See also Izutsu (1959), 76-79.

⁴¹⁷ Al-Jīlī’s interpretation of the name *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* may have a precursor in al-Qāshānī’s commentary on Q 56:77, where he explains that the term denotes how the Qur’an is “a comprehensive form of knowledge (*‘ilm majmū’*), which has eternal nobility and honour (*karam wa-sharaf qadīm*) and a high value (*qadr raft’*).” Al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:296 (Q 56:77). The interpretations of both authors may be connected to the etymological association of the root *q-r-r’* with “gathering together” (see Lane (1984), 1:2502), an association exploited by Ibn ‘Arabī. See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 70.

Muhammad, as al-Jīlī sees it, is defined by comprehensiveness. These correspondences in turn reflect al-Jīlī’s conception of revelation, a conception indicated here by his use of the term *afāda* – a term that connotes the “emanation” (*fayḍ*) of the divine existence – to denote God’s revelation of the Generous Qur’an.⁴¹⁸

This Sufi metaphysical conception of revelation also applies to al-Jīlī’s treatment of the term *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*, as is indicated by his use of the term *tanazzul* – a term which, as we have already seen in this chapter and as al-Jīlī indicates here, is another synonym for the divine *tajallī* – to denote the revelation of this aspect of the Qur’an. Yet, whereas the revelation of the Qur’an as *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* denoted the manifestation, emanation, or descent of the comprehensive divine essence, the revelation of the Qur’an as *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm* denotes the descent of what al-Jīlī calls “the divine realities” (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-ilāhiyyah*). As we saw earlier in this chapter, this latter term seems to denote, in al-Jīlī’s usage, the divine or “higher” levels of existence, i.e. those levels that are associated with one of the divine names or attributes. It therefore follows that what the Qur’an reveals as *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm* is not the divine essence but rather the divine names and attributes. The connection of this idea to the adjective *ḥakīm* is not immediately apparent, though it may have something to do with the association made by Ibn ‘Arabī in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* between the different forms of “wisdom” (*ḥikmah*) and the divine attributes.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, this Neoplatonic term is sometimes used in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi metaphysics as a synonym for *tajallī*.

⁴¹⁹ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 57-58 and *passim*. The majority of exegetes tend to interpret the term *al-ḥakīm* in *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm* to mean “firmly established” (*muḥkam*), i.e.

The key distinction between the two names or aspects of the Qur'an – i.e. their being manifestations of, respectively, the divine essence and the divine names and attributes – leads to two further important distinctions, connected to the process through which the divine revelation or manifestation occurs, and the individual who receives it. Dealing first with the process of revelation, we have seen already that *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, being an expression of the comprehensive essence, denotes the Qur'an that was revealed “as a single whole” to Muhammad. Yet al-Jīlī indicates in this passage that this is not the only way that the Qur'an was revealed, for he quotes a Qur'anic verse (17:106) that indicates, at least according to the dominant exegetical view, that the Qur'an was in fact revealed in piecemeal fashion, as in the traditional understanding of the process of revelation.⁴²⁰ This gradual process of revelation is represented, then, by the name *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*. This makes sense, if we remember that *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* is an expression of the divine names and attributes, which, according to al-Jīlī's general Sufi metaphysical theory, gradually appear as God descends through the levels of existence. Furthermore, the notion of piecemeal revelation reflects the multiplicity of the divine names and attributes, in contrast to the unity of the divine essence. Al-Jīlī thus proposes that the Qur'an was revealed in two different ways to Muhammad, in order to capture how

prone to no falsehood. See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 15:10 (Q 36:2); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1104. Interestingly, al-Qāshānī understands the name *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* to be an allusion to the Qur'an's – and Muhammad's – comprehensiveness, i.e. in much the same way as al-Jīlī understands the name *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*. See al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:163 (Q 36:2).

⁴²⁰ For the exegetical association of the verb *nazzala* with the idea of revelation in stages, see al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 336 (Q 3:3): “If you say, “Why is it said, “He sent down (*nazzala*) the Book,” “and He sent down (*anzala*) the Torah and Gospel?”” I would say, “Because the Qur'an came down in gradations (*munajjaman*), while the [other] two books came down all at once (*jumlatan*).”

Muhammad received the manifestation of both the utterly one and simple essence and the multiple, differentiated divine names and attributes. His distinction between the two names of the Qur'an and the different ways in which they are revealed can therefore be viewed as an attempt to solve the problem of the one and the many in terms of the revelation of the Qur'an.

Moreover, the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* differs in another way from that of *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, in that it involves not only the descent or manifestation of the divine names and attributes, but also a corresponding "ascent" (*'urūj, taraqqin*) of the individual through the divine levels of existence. This idea is in keeping with al-Jīlī's conception of the levels of existence not only as loci in which the divine existence becomes manifest, but as stations (*maqāmāt*) on the path to God. It suggests that revelation is not only a one-way, downward process (from God to man), but that it is a two-way process involving human activity, presumably, the self-purifying activities of the Sufi path. This is not necessarily out of keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception of the process of revelation: the Prophet is traditionally said to have engaged in religious devotions prior to receiving the first Qur'anic revelation, and is also famously said to have experienced an ascension (*mi'rāj*) through the heavens on his Night Journey.⁴²¹ Indeed, the etymological connection between *'urūj*, one of the terms that al-Jīlī uses here to denote the process of individual ascent through the divine realities, and *mi'rāj* suggests that he might have the story of the

⁴²¹ See Madigan (2004a), 443. For the *mi'rāj*, see Sells (2001).

Prophet's ascension in mind here. This being said, there also seems to be an indication here that individuals other than the Prophet are capable of undertaking this spiritual ascent and thereby receiving the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*. What indicates this is al-Jīlī's use here of the generic term "*al-'abd*", meaning "the servant" or most basically "the (human) individual", and the phrase "the one whose primordial nature is disposed towards divinity", to refer to the individual who ascends through the levels of existence. Given that al-Jīlī is normally very clear when he is talking about the Prophet – for instance, through his use of one of the common salutations – it seems likely that these terms do not refer specifically to Muhammad.

Who, we might then ask, is capable of undergoing this ascent through the divine realities, or put another way, who is it that can receive the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*? The answer to this question lies in uncovering what al-Jīlī means by "the one whose primordial nature is disposed towards divinity (*fiṭratuhu majbūlah 'alā al-ulūhiyyah*)."⁴²² According to the traditional Islamic view, the *fiṭrah* of all human beings – indeed, of all creatures – is to be in a state of submission to God.⁴²² Applying his Sufi metaphysical outlook to this idea, in the last chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil* al-Jīlī states that all individuals are "primordially disposed" (*maftūrūn, majbūlūn*) to the worship of God (*'ibādat Allāh*) by virtue of their original nature (*al-aṣālah*)."⁴²³ Does this mean, then, that

⁴²² This idea is grounded in the famous hadith: "There is no child who is not born according to the primordial nature (*'alā al-fiṭrah*). But then his parents make him a Jew (*yuhawwidānihi*), a Christian (*yunaṣirrānihi*) or a Zoroastrian (*yumajjisānihi*)." This hadith is recorded in Bukhārī (1862-1908), 1:348; Muslim (1995), 16:169-173 (no. 2658). See also Macdonald (1965), 932; Hoover (2016).

⁴²³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 252.

the primordial nature of all human beings is disposed towards divinity, and thus that all humans can ascend through the divine realities and receive the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*? This is essentially the same question that we saw in the previous chapter, namely, whether all humans are Perfect Men. As we saw there, al-Jīlī's view seems to be that while all individuals are perfect "in potential" (*bi-al-quwwah*), nevertheless only certain people are capable of realising and manifesting that perfection "in actuality" (*bi-al-fi'l*).⁴²⁴ The same, then, can be said with regard to question of who is able to undergo the ascent through the divine realities. While all individuals may have the potential to reach this spiritual level, nevertheless only certain individuals possess, in Ibn 'Arabian terms, the requisite "receptivity" (*qābiliyyah*) or "preparedness" (*isti'dād*) to actually do so.⁴²⁵ These individuals, we can validly presume, are the Perfect Men, for it is they who are disposed to receiving the divine manifestations in the most complete way.

This notion that the Perfect Men are capable of receiving the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* has important implications for our understanding of al-Jīlī's conception of revelation and of sacred history more generally. If the revelation of the Qur'an consists not only of *wahy* and *tanzīl* in the traditional sense – i.e. revelation of the divine word to Muhammad through the intermediary of the angel Gabriel⁴²⁶ – but also of what al-Jīlī calls here *taḥqīq* and *kashf* – i.e. the mystical experience of

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴²⁵ For these concepts, see Chittick (1989), 91-94; Izutsu, 33-35. For al-Jīlī's definition of them, see Hoffman (1999), 355-356.

⁴²⁶ See Madigan (2004a), 439-442.

the Perfect Men⁴²⁷ – then it would seem to follow that the gates of revelation are not closed with Muhammad, with the Qur’an continuing to be revealed to the Perfect Men, up to al-Jīlī’s own time. In this case, sacred history, as al-Jīlī understands it, would be an ongoing phenomenon, as in the Ibn ‘Arabian notion of *walāyah* as “general prophecy” (*nubuwwah ‘āmmah*), which was mentioned in chapter one.⁴²⁸ This being said, it should also be remembered that, in al-Jīlī’s view, the Perfect Men are in fact forms in which the Muhammadan Reality becomes manifest; hence, even when an individual other than Muhammad receives *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*, it might still be said that it is Muhammad who is the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation. Moreover, al-Jīlī suggests that it is only Muhammad who receives the revelation of the Qur’an as *al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, which is the more complete form of the Qur’an. While his distinction between the two aspects of the Qur’an thus leads him into dangerous waters, from an orthodox perspective, nevertheless this should not lead us to overlook his insistence on the superiority of Muhammad over all other individuals.

It is difficult, I think, for us to comprehend fully what al-Jīlī means when he talks about the different natures of *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* and *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*. What should be emphasized is that he is not talking about two different scriptures, but rather two different aspects of the same scripture.⁴²⁹ This being the case, the fundamental role of the

⁴²⁷ For Ibn ‘Arabī’s identification of the station of the Perfect Man (*maqām al-insān al-kāmil*) as the station of *taḥqīq*, see Chittick (2004), 33.

⁴²⁸ For this notion, see Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 62-64; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 50-51, 114-115; Friedmann (1989), 71-76; Nettler (2003), 142-145.

⁴²⁹ Though al-Jīlī’s identification of these two different Sufi metaphysical aspects of the Qur’an is unusual, the notion that the Qur’an possesses several aspects (*dhū wujūh*) was

two different names is to show that the Qur'an represents both the unity and simplicity of the divine essence, on the one hand, and the multiplicity of the divine names and attributes, on the other. Al-Jīlī's rationale for highlighting the two different names, then, lies in his desire to draw attention to the comprehensive nature of the Qur'an, for true comprehensiveness entails not only being all-encompassing, like the divine essence, but also being detailed, like the divine names and attributes. Al-Jīlī's discussion of these two names of the Qur'an – and of some of the Qur'an's other names later in this chapter and in the following chapter – ought therefore to be placed within the context of his concern to show that the Qur'an, as the most comprehensive scripture, stands at the top of the hierarchy of scriptures. In demonstrating this concern, he adopts the orthodox Islamic view of sacred history, but expresses it, as we have seen, in Sufi metaphysical terms.⁴³⁰

d) The comprehensiveness of the Perfect Man

So if you were to say, “What is the benefit of him saying: “He sent down the Qur'an to me as a single whole”?” we would say, “That [benefit] has two aspects. The first aspect is with respect to the effect (*al-ḥukm*), because the perfect servant (*al-'abd al-kāmil*), if God manifests Himself to Him through His Essence, is affected (*yuhkam*) by what he witnesses (*yashhad*), which is that he is the whole (*jumlah*) of the essence that does not end, and that it [the essence] has descended upon him without leaving its locus (*maḥall*), which is its rank (*al-makānah*). The second aspect is

a common one in Islamic thought from earliest times. See Böwering (2003), 346. There may, furthermore, be a precedent for his identification of two different aspects of the Qur'an in the work of the Andalusian Sufi (and influence upon Ibn 'Arabī) Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), who distinguishes between the Qur'an as *al-Qur'ān al-'azīm* and as *al-Qur'ān al-'azīz*, for which see Casewit (2017), 223-226.

⁴³⁰ In so doing, he is following the lead of the earlier interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī. In several places in his commentary on the Qur'an (e.g. his commentary on Q 2:185, 36:2, 15:8), for instance, al-Qāshānī expresses the comprehensiveness (*jam'*, *ijmāl*) of the Qur'an in metaphysical terms. See e.g. al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:90 (Q 2:185), 2:163 (Q 36:2).

with respect to the exhaustion of the remnants of humanness (*istifā' baqāyāt al-bashariyyah*), and the disappearance of the traces of createdness (*idmihlāl al-rusūm al-khalqiyyah*), in their completeness, because of the appearance of the divine realities (*al-haqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*), through their [leaving their] effects (*āthār*) on every limb of the body (*kull 'aḍw min a'ḍā' al-jism*). So the whole (*al-jumlah*) is connected to his saying [i.e. the hadith] according to this second aspect, and its meaning is the passing away of all of the defects of createdness (*dhahāb jumlat al-naqā'is al-khalqiyyah*) through the attainment of realisation of the divine realities (*al-tahaqquq bi-al-haqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*).⁴³¹

We have thus far seen that al-Jīlī's conception of the Qur'an centres upon his view that the Qur'an is a comprehensive scripture – understood in metaphysical terms to mean that it is an expression of the divine essence and attributes – and, subsequent to that idea, his notion that the recipient of the Qur'anic revelation – Muhammad, or, in the case of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, the Perfect Man more generally – is a comprehensive being. In this section, al-Jīlī elaborates upon this connection between the comprehensiveness of the Qur'an and the comprehensiveness of the Perfect Man, through an explanation of the key term used to express the notion of comprehensiveness, namely, *al-jumlah*. As we saw earlier in the chapter, he draws this key term from a hadith in which Muhammad declares that he received the Qur'an “as a single whole” (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*); hence the section can be viewed as a kind of commentary on that uncanonical hadith.

There are two aspects, al-Jīlī tells us, to the comprehensiveness of recipient of the Qur'anic revelation. How we understand the first aspect depends in part on how we interpret the key term *ḥukm*. This is a polysemic term that is subsequently often difficult to translate. In

⁴³¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 116-117.

common usage, it most often denotes either “category” or “judgment”.⁴³² In the technical lexicon of Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics, however, the term *aḥkām* is often used synonymously with *āthār*, *nisab* or *idāfāt* to denote the “effects” or “determining properties” of the divine names within the phenomenal world.⁴³³ While it is possible to read the terms *ḥukm* and *yuhkam* here as “category” and “categorise”, we can do somewhat more with the meaning if we take the terms in their Ibn ‘Arabian senses. If we read *ḥukm* as “effect”, then the implication of the hadith is that the individual who receives the revelation of the Qur’an “as a single whole” bears the trace or effect of this revelation in his person. Since the Qur’an, as we have seen and as al-Jīlī again indicates here, represents the simple, comprehensive, and eternal divine essence, it follows that such an individual will similarly embody these traits, this being the “effect” of the revelation. The point being made, then, is that not only does the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation “witness” (*yashhad*) the comprehensive divine essence, but he also bears the trace of that comprehensiveness, through his being a locus of manifestation for the essence, an idea that we saw developed in the earlier part of this chapter. In this way, al-Jīlī indicates that the subjective mystical experience of the Perfect Man and his objective nature are two sides of the same coin.

The second aspect of the comprehensiveness of the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation is not so much a different aspect but rather an elaboration upon the first. The revelation of the Qur’an as a single whole,

⁴³² See Lane (1984), 1:617; Schacht (1960).

⁴³³ See Chittick (1989), 39.

al-Jīlī tells us, indicates the complete transformation of the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation from human to quasi-divine being. According to my reading of the key terms used here, this transformation takes place at three interconnected levels: the ethical, the physical, and the metaphysical. The first key expression used to signify this transformation is *istīfā’ baqāyāt al-bashariyyah*.⁴³⁴ In chapter fifty of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, on the Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī explains that *bashariyyah* “entails the sensual desires (*al-shahawāt*) upon which this [human] body (*jasad*) is based, and the things to which [his] nature (*ṭab’*) is accustomed,” the individual’s task being to pass beyond this “base humanness” (*ḥaḍīd al-bashariyyah*) and attain a state of “spirituality” (*rūḥiyyah*).⁴³⁵ The term *bashariyyah* is therefore connected, in al-Jīlī’s understanding, with the notion that human nature is sinful and concupiscent,⁴³⁶ *shahwah* being a Qur’anic term associated with an unhealthy desire for food, material possessions, and (illicit) sex.⁴³⁷ To say, therefore, that all remnants of the *bashariyyah* of the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation pass away is to indicate, at least on one level, the ethical purification of that individual, i.e., his leaving behind the sinful desires of ordinary mortals. Such a notion is in keeping with the doctrine of the sinlessness or infallibility

⁴³⁴ Cf. the similar language used by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) in reference to the Prophet, whom he describes as “a soul purified of the fleshly human condition (*bashariyyat*) and beyond this world.” Quoted in Lewisohn (1999), 325.

⁴³⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 151-152.

⁴³⁶ Although the Qur’an contains several scattered references to the Fall of Adam and Eve, it is often said that there is no doctrine of original sin in Islam. See Johns (2002), 173. However, like many Sufis, al-Jīlī indicates that man possesses a base nature (*ṭabī’ah naḥsāniyyah*) that is susceptible to Satan and which needs to be overcome through spiritual exercises, an idea which he connects to Adam’s eating the fruit (*al-ḥabbah*) from the Garden. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 185-186, 194-195, 206-207.

⁴³⁷ See e.g. Q 3:14, 7:81, 27:55, 52:22, 56:21, 77:42. Ibn ‘Arabī, it should be noted, connects the term *bashar* with man’s “animality” (*ḥayawāniyyah*), a term that likewise connotes sinful behaviour. See Izutsu (1984), 183.

(*‘iṣmah*) of the prophets, which had become orthodoxy in Sunni Islam by al-Jīlī’s time. Indeed, since, the dominant later Ash‘arī position was that the prophets were sinless from the moment that their prophetic missions began,⁴³⁸ al-Jīlī’s view that, upon his receiving the Qur’anic revelation, the sinful human traits of the recipient are effaced, therefore constitutes a development of that orthodox Sunni position in Sufī metaphysical terms.

In addition (and connected) to the transformation at the ethical level, the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation also appears to undergo a physical transformation. Aside from connoting man’s sinful nature, *bashariyyah* is sometimes also connected to the physical aspect of man, in part due to its etymological association with the Arabic word for skin (*basharah*).⁴³⁹ Al-Jīlī in fact defines *bashariyyah* in chapter fifty as “the things that are entailed by [man’s] form (*ṣūrah*),”⁴⁴⁰ indicating that the sinful nature of man is connected to his corporeality. To say that the remnants of *bashariyyah* disappear from the recipient of the Qur’an, therefore, is also to suggest that his physical form undergoes a transformation. This is confirmed by the other phrases that al-Jīlī uses in this section. Thus when he refers to *idmiḥlāl al-rusūm al-khalqiyyah*, he is apparently indicating the disappearance of the outward signs of the individual’s createdness, i.e. his human body, *rasm* denoting a physical mark or trace (*athar*).⁴⁴¹ When juxtaposed with al-Jīlī’s indication earlier

⁴³⁸ See Madelung (1978), 183.

⁴³⁹ See Berjak (2006), 115.

⁴⁴⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 151.

⁴⁴¹ See Lane (1984), 1:1085. See also al-Jīlī’s use of the term (adopted from Ibn ‘Arabī) *‘ulamā’ al-rusūm* to denote those religious scholars who are concerned only with external forms, which in the context of man would be the body. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 131. The Avicennian understanding of *rasm* as “description” could also apply here, in the sense that Muhammad can no longer be *described* as being created. See Goichon (1938), 143.

in the section that the “effect” (*ḥukm*) of the divine essence leaves its mark on the recipient of the Qur’an, this would appear to indicate that his body ceases to be marked by human traits and instead is marked by the signs of divinity. This physical aspect of the transformation is made explicit and given greater definition by al-Jīlī’s statement that the created traces that disappear from the recipient’s body are replaced by the “divine realities” (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-ilāhiyyah*) – a term that I have thus far interpreted as denoting the divine attributes – which leave their effects (*āthār*) on “every limb of the body”. Once again, the use of a term denoting physical effects or traces underlines the physical aspect of the transformation being described here. The bodily members of the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation thus constitute loci for the manifestation of the divine attributes, a notion that clearly accords with al-Jīlī’s earlier discussion of how the Prophet’s body is a locus of manifestation for the divine names, and with his broader conception of the Perfect Man’s body parts as a microcosm for the higher levels of existence.

This physical transformation of the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation can be seen as an earthly reflection of a metaphysical transformation, which is to say, of a change in the recipient’s essential nature. This metaphysical transformation is indicated by al-Jīlī’s statement that “all the defects of createdness” (*jumlat al-naqā’iṣ al-khalqiyyah*) pass away. While the term *naqā’iṣ* might well indicate ethical or even physical defects, it more basically connotes the absence of completeness or perfection, *naqṣ* being an antonym of *tamām* and

kamāl.⁴⁴² What al-Jīlī seems to be implying, therefore, is the recipient's transformation from being an ordinary human being, with all the defects that accompany createdness, to being a Perfect Human (*insān kāmīl*). In receiving the perfect and complete Qur'anic revelation, in other words, the individual becomes capable of realising his own essential perfection and completeness. This realisation of perfection is indicated by the Ibn 'Arabian phrase *al-taḥaqquq bi-al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*, a phrase that is nearly identical to that which al-Jīlī uses in the *Kamālāt* in the context of Muhammad's identity with the Qur'an, and which denotes the highest stage of mystical attainment in Ibn 'Arabian Sufism.⁴⁴³

It remains for us to ask again whom al-Jīlī has in mind here. On the one hand, he again uses the generic term *'abd* – in this instance as part of the term *al-'abd al-kāmīl* – to denote the individual who undergoes the transformation just described.⁴⁴⁴ This would appear to indicate that he has in mind the Perfect Men in general here, which would be in keeping with his earlier indication that the Perfect Men are capable of receiving the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, and with his more general conception of the Perfect Men or *awliyā'* as channels for continued communication between God and man, even after the sealing of legislative prophecy. On the other hand, Muhammad is obviously the messenger who receives the Qur'anic revelation; Muhammad is also the

⁴⁴² See Lane (1984), 1:2841-2842.

⁴⁴³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 193, where he calls those who reach the seventh level of heaven, the highest level except for that reserved for Muhammad alone, "*ahl al-taḥaqquq bi-al-ḥaqā'iq al-ilāhiyyah*". See also Addas (2010), 1:69, where she identifies the synonymous phrase *al-taḥaqquq bi-akhlāq Allāh* with "the supreme union". For Ibn 'Arabī's use of the term *taḥaqquq*, see Chittick (1998), xxiv.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibn 'Arabī uses the term *al-'abd al-kāmīl* as a synonym for *al-insān al-kāmīl*, particularly in the context of his discussion of the aforementioned hadith according to which God is the tongue, hearing, sight, etc. of the servant who draws near to him. See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 773-774.

speaker of the hadith quoted here, on which this passage is effectively a commentary; and al-Jīlī's discussion here of the bodily transformation of the recipient of the Qur'anic revelation fits with his earlier statement that Muhammad's body was the locus for the manifestation of God's unqualified oneness. Furthermore, in his *al-Kamālāt al-ilāhiyyah*, al-Jīlī specifically links the transformation indicated here to Muhammad: "There as no prophet among the prophets," he writes, "who did not manifest humanness (*al-bashariyyah*), except Muhammad, for his humanness was made non-existent (*ma'dūmah*), and there was no trace (*athar*) of it."⁴⁴⁵ The Prophet, he goes on to say, was marked by "the absence of created remnants (*al-baqāyā al-khalqiyyah*) within him, in every respect, because of his realisation of the perfections of the Real, in every respect," for God "concealed his [Muhammad's] existence through His existence, and His perfection appeared within him without indwelling (*hulūl*) or an explanation of how (*takyīf*). So He appears in the human form of the human organism (*nāsūt al-haykal al-insānī*), effacing the effects of humanity and humanness (*aḥkām al-insāniyyah al-bashariyyah*)."⁴⁴⁶

It would thus appear that, while the transformation from human to quasi-divine being is potentially attainable by other human beings, the archetypal – or perhaps the only – figure who has achieved this transformation is Muhammad. And if the other Perfect Humans do receive the Qur'anic revelation in some sense, then we can assume that they only do so in their capacity as loci in which the Muhammadan

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997b), 231.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 232.

Reality appears. Underlying all of this, once more, is the question of who can be called a Perfect Human. Al-Jīlī's answer, as we know, is that the title and all that goes with it only apply, properly speaking, to Muhammad, other individuals being perfect only by virtue of their attachment to the Prophet, the most perfect individual. That al-Jīlī here links this idea to the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad is significant in that it reflects how his Sufi metaphysical notions are ultimately grounded in orthodox Islamic conceptions, such as the idea that the superiority of Muhammad over all other men derives from his being the Qur'anic messenger. This is true even when, as in his description of the transformation undergone by Muhammad here, al-Jīlī comes close to going beyond – or maybe even goes beyond – the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy.⁴⁴⁷

e) The two aspects of the Qur'an – scriptural sources & other names

And a hadith has been related from the Prophet in which he says: "He sent down the Qur'an with a single push (*daf'atan wāḥidatan*) to the heaven of the lower world (*samā' al-dunyā*), then the Real sent it down in cut up *āyahs* after that." This is the meaning of the hadith: the sending down of the Qur'an with a single push to the heaven of the lower world is an allusion to the essential realisation (*al-taḥqīq al-dhātī*), and the descent of the cut up *āyahs* is an allusion to the appearance of the traces (*āthār*) of the names and attributes, along with the ascent of the servant (*taraqqī al-'abd*) to the realisation of the essence (*al-taḥqīq bi-al-dhāt*), in a gradual way (*shay'an fa-shay'an*).

And when He – May He be exalted – says: "And We have given you seven oft-repeated [verses] (*sab'an min al-mathānī*) and the Great Qur'an (*al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*)," (Q 15:87) the Qur'an here denotes the totality (*jumlah*) of the essence, not

⁴⁴⁷ Al-Jīlī's awareness that he is entering into dangerous territory with this conception of Muhammad is indicated by his pointed denial that he is professing *ḥulūl* in the passage of the *Kamālāt* quoted above.

from the perspective of the descent (*al-nuzūl*), nor from the perspective of the [high] rank (*al-makānah*), but from the perspective of the absolute, essential utter oneness (*muṭlaq al-aḥadiyyah al-dhātiyyah*), which is the absolute ipseity (*muṭlaq al-huwiyyah*) that synthesises all the stages, attributes, affairs and perspectives (*al-marātib wa-al-ṣifāt wa-al-shu'ūn wa-al-i'tibārāt*), and which is expressed as “the simple essence with the totality of the perfections” (*al-dhāt al-sādhaj ma'a jumlat al-kamālāt*). For this reason he attached the word “great”, because of this greatness. And the seven oft-repeated [verses] are an expression of that which appeared upon him in his bodily existence (*wujūdihi al-jasadī*), through his realisation (*al-taḥaqquq*) of the seven attributes (*al-sab' al-mathānī*).

And when He – May He be exalted – says: “The All-Merciful (*al-raḥmān*): He taught the Qur'an,” (55:1-2) it is an allusion to the fact that the servant, when the All-Merciful manifests Himself to him, finds a merciful enjoyment (*lidhdhah raḥmāniyyah*) within himself, and acquires by this enjoyment knowledge of the essence (*ma'rifat al-dhāt*), and so achieves realisation of the realities of the attributes. So the one who taught him the Qur'an was the All-Merciful, and were this not the case, there would be no way to reach the essence without the manifestation of the All-Merciful, which is an expression of the totality of the names and attributes (*jumlat al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*), since the Real – May He be exalted – does not teach except by way of His names and His attributes.⁴⁴⁸

This long passage, with which the chapter on the Qur'an concludes, recapitulates much of what we have seen in the preceding sections of the chapter. In particular, al-Jīlī here goes over the idea again that there are two aspects of the Qur'anic revelation, namely, the revelation or manifestation of God's essence at the level of unqualified oneness, and the revelation or manifestation of God's names and attributes, and the corresponding notion that the nature of the recipient of the Qur'anic revelation is determined by these different forms of revelation. What sets this section apart is that al-Jīlī identifies some more names of the Qur'an

⁴⁴⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 117.

that denote these two different types of divine manifestation, and grounds the idea in a number of scriptural passages.

The first such scriptural passage is a hadith that, as already mentioned, is reported on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās. This hadith, or variants thereof, is commonly used in the Qur’anic exegetical literature to indicate the idea that the Qur’an was sent down as a single whole from the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) to the lowest heaven on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*), and then revealed in stages to Muhammad, in the lower world, over a period of about twenty-three years.⁴⁴⁹ Al-Jīlī exploits this traditional notion of a two-stage process of the Qur’anic revelation – the first as a complete whole, the second in gradual stages – for his own Sufi metaphysical notion of how the Qur’an represents two different aspects of the divine manifestation, namely, the manifestation of the essence, and the manifestation of the names and attributes.

Thus al-Jīlī tells us that the first part of the hadith, about the Qur’an being revealed “with a single push” (*daf‘atan wāḥidatan*), indicates what he terms *al-taḥqīq al-dhātī*,⁴⁵⁰ a term that denotes the attainment of knowledge of the essence,⁴⁵¹ an accomplishment that constitutes the human response to the manifestation of the essence (*al-tajallī al-dhātī*). It can therefore be said that al-Jīlī understands the term *daf‘atan wāḥidatan*

⁴⁴⁹ See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 20:120 (Q 97:1); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1433 (Q 97:1); al-Suyūṭī (2011), 91-94; Madigan (2004b); Böwering (2003), 350.

⁴⁵⁰ In the same context, al-Qāshānī writes of *al-shuhūd al-dhātī*. See al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:418 (Q 97:1).

⁴⁵¹ For al-Jīlī’s use of the term *taḥqīq*, see e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 79-80, where he speaks of his attainment of “a faith of realisation” (*īmān taḥqīq*), which he links to *kashf*; and *ibid.*, 94, where he describes his “realisation” that ice (which stands for creation) is nothing but water (which stands for God). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of the same term, see Chittick (1998), xxiv; Chittick (2004), 33; Chittick (2012), 107.

to be synonymous with the aforementioned *jumlatan wāḥidatan*, for both denote the manifestation of the divine essence to and within the recipient of the Qur’anic revelation, i.e. Muhammad. Taking the correspondences further, it can also be said that the first part of the hadith denotes the revelation of what al-Jīlī calls *al-Qur’ān al-karīm*.

By contrast, the second part of the hadith, which tells of how the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad in “cut up verses” (*āyāt muqaṭṭa’āt*), denotes the manifestation of the differentiated divine names and attributes within Muhammad (or the Perfect Man more generally). The correspondence between this idea and what al-Jīlī said earlier in the chapter is indicated by his use of the term *āthār*, a term that we have already come across (along with its synonyms, in the Ibn ‘Arabian lexicon, *aḥkām* and *rusūm*) in the context of al-Jīlī’s description of the physical effect that the manifestation of the divine names and attributes had on the body of Muhammad. The correspondence is further reinforced by al-Jīlī’s reference to the “ascent” (*taraqqī*) of the recipient of this Qur’anic revelation, a notion that we already came across in his discussion of the revelation of *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*, the form of revelation that represents the manifestations of the divine names and attributes. While the first part of the hadith denotes the revelation of *al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, therefore, the second part evidently denotes that of *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*.

The hadith just discussed is not the only scriptural source, as al-Jīlī sees it, for his theory of the two aspects of the Qur’an, nor are *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* and *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm* the only two names for those different

aspects. Al-Jīlī also cites Q 15:87 here, which apparently refers to two forms of revelation – or perhaps, two aspects of the same form of revelation – given to Muhammad, called *sab‘an min al-mathānī* or *al-sab‘ al-mathānī* and *al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*. In their commentaries on this verse, the majority of exegetes take these terms to denote the same thing.⁴⁵² Yet there is some disagreement on what this single thing is, which centres upon the different ways of understanding the term *sab‘an min al-mathānī*. There are three principal views, namely, that it denotes: the seven verses of the *Fātiḥah*, the opening *sūrah* of the Qur’an; the seven longest *sūrahs* of the Qur’an (*al-sab‘ al-ṭuwal/ṭiwāl*); or the Qur’an as a whole, which is made up of seven different kinds of passage (commands, prohibitions, declarations of good news, warnings, examples, enumerations of blessings, and information about former ages).⁴⁵³

Al-Jīlī, working on the Ibn ‘Arabian principle that every letter and word of the Qur’an has some special significance, does not go along with the view that the two terms denote the same thing. As he reads it, the term *al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* denotes the Qur’an as a whole, specifically, in its capacity as a comprehensive embodiment of the simple divine essence (*al-dhāt al-sādhaj*).⁴⁵⁴ In this regard, it is synonymous, in al-Jīlī’s

⁴⁵² See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 10:51-54 (Q 15:87); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 730 (Q 15:87). Some scholars, including al-Bukhārī, however, understand *al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* to relate to the rest of the Qur’an. For this and other interpretations of the verse, see Rubin (2003b).

⁴⁵³ See al-Qurṭubī (1997), 10:51-54 (Q 15:87); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 730 (Q 15:87); Ali (1946), 652, note 2008; Tahānawī (1963), 966-967; Rubin (2003b).

⁴⁵⁴ See also al-Jīlī (1997a), 91, where he states explicitly: “The Great Qur’an (*al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*) is the essence (*al-dhāt*).” Similarly, in *al-Kaḥf wa-al-raqīm*, he identifies *al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* with “the unseen essence” (*al-dhāt al-ghā‘ib*) that Muhammad became identified with. See Lo Polito (2010, 159/215). As noted above, the earlier Andalusian

understanding, with *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, a correspondence that is underlined by his use of the term *jumlah* once again here, and by his reference again to how this aspect of the Qur'an represents the manifestation of *al-aḥadiyyah*.

As for *al-sab' al-mathānī*, al-Jīlī's understanding of the term emerges most fully from the opening of the chapter on the *Fātiḥah* (chapter forty) of *al-Insān al-kāmil*: "Know that the Opening of the Book (*Fātiḥat al-kitāb*)," he writes, "is the seven oft-repeated verses (*al-sab' al-mathānī*), which are the seven attributes of the [divine] self (*ṣifāt al-naḥsiyyah*), which are life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, sight and speech."⁴⁵⁵ At the exoteric level, it can therefore be said, *al-sab' al-mathānī* denotes the *Fātiḥah*, while at the esoteric level, it denotes the seven attributes of the divine self.⁴⁵⁶ These two levels of meaning are also present in the passage under discussion here: exoterically, the term denotes a form of revelation that was given to Muhammad, an act of revelation that, from an esoteric Sufi metaphysical perspective, denotes the manifestation of the seven attributes of the divine self within the Prophet. This being the case, *al-sab' al-mathānī* is synonymous with *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, a correspondence underlined by his repetition here of the notion that this form of revelation leaves its mark on the recipient's bodily existence (*wujūdihi al-jasadī*), and his use again of the term *taḥaqquq* to denote the realisation experienced by the individual who receives this revelation.

Sufi exegete Ibn Barrajān conceives of *al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* in a similar fashion, also grounding his conception in Q 15:87. See Casewit (2017), 223-226.

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 133.

⁴⁵⁶ For al-Jīlī's treatment of these attributes, see *ibid.*, 78-93, a section that was set out in chapter one of this thesis.

Al-Jīlī's interpretation of Q 15:87 reflects his more general exegetical approach, which is to read his Sufi metaphysical theories out of select Qur'anic verses or hadiths. It also reflects what may be his debt to earlier followers of Ibn 'Arabī, or at least, the existence of a shared Ibn 'Arabian perspective on this verse. Al-Qāshānī, in his commentary on this verse, similarly identifies the "seven oft-repeated" with "the seven attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-sab'*) that were affirmed of God – May He be exalted – which are: life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, and speech." Furthermore, he goes on to explain that the term *al-mathānī* denotes how "the affirmation [of these attributes] was repeated for you [i.e. Muhammad], first, at the station of the heart's existence, at the moment of your taking on His traits (*'ind takhalluqika bi-akhlāqihī*) and being qualified by His attributes (*wa-ittiṣāfika bi-awṣāfihī*), so they were for you; and second, at the station of endurance (*al-baqā'*) in the Real existence, after the annihilation in the declaration of unity (*al-fanā' fī al-tawḥīd*)."⁴⁵⁷ Like al-Jīlī, then, al-Qāshānī not only identifies the term *al-sab' al-mathānī* with the seven attributes of the divine self, but also views the revelation of these seven verses to Muhammad as an indication of Muhammad's becoming a locus for the manifestation of these attributes. And the similarities do not end here, for al-Qāshānī subsequently glosses *al-Qur'ān al-‘aẓīm* as "the essence that synthesises all the attributes" (*al-dhāt al-jāmi‘ah li-jamī‘ al-ṣifāt*),⁴⁵⁸ in anticipation of al-Jīlī's interpretation of the term as "the simple essence with the totality of the perfections" (*al-dhāt al-sādhaj ma‘a jumlat al-kamālāt*).

⁴⁵⁷ Al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:279 (Q 15:87).

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Furthermore, al-Qāshānī was not the only Ibn ‘Arabian thinker prior to al-Jīlī to interpret the verse in this way. Muhammad Wafā’ (d. 760/1359), the eponym of the Egyptian Wafā’iyyah *ṭarīqah* who lived just after al-Qāshānī and was influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī, puts forward a very similar interpretation in a treatise titled *Nafā’is al-‘irfān*.⁴⁵⁹ While we cannot say for certain, in the present state of our knowledge, whether al-Jīlī had read al-Qāshānī’s Qur’anic commentary or Muhammad Wafā’s treatise, the correspondence between these three thinkers’ interpretations of Q 15:87 should remind us that, though many of al-Jīlī’s ideas and interpretations may appear original to us, this may be as much a product of our unfamiliarity with the literature that al-Jīlī was immersed in as it is an indication of genuine originality.

The final scriptural passage cited in this section is Q 55:1-2. This pair of verses is normally taken in its apparent sense to mean that God taught Muhammad the Qur’an, the use of the divine name *al-rahīmān* sometimes being connected to the idea that this teaching of the Qur’an was an act of mercy (*rahmah*).⁴⁶⁰ Al-Jīlī, however, interpreting it through the prism of his Sufi metaphysics, reads the verse as an insight into the relationship between the two aspects of the Qur’an. Simply put, in his interpretation, one has to first receive the manifestation of the divine names and attributes, i.e. the revelation of *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm* or *al-sab‘*

⁴⁵⁹ See Addas (2009), 2:9. Addas notes that she has “never encountered an analogous interpretation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings that relates directly to the verse in question”. Ibn ‘Arabī does, however, connect the verse, and specifically the term *al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm*, to the notion that Muhammad’s character was the Qur’an. See Chittick (1989), 241. For Muhammad Wafā’ and the Wafā’iyyah, and the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī upon them, see McGregor (2004).

⁴⁶⁰ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1275 (Q 55:1): “[God] – May He be exalted – informs us that, out of His grace (*faḍlihi*) and mercy (*rahmatihī*) for His creation, He sent down the Qur’an to His servants.”

al-mathānī, before one receives the manifestation of the divine essence, i.e. the revelation of *al-Qur'ān al-karīm* or *al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*. This is an idea that appears on several occasions earlier in *al-Insān al-kāmil*.⁴⁶¹ To understand how al-Jīlī connects it to Q 55:1-2, we have to go back to his definition of *al-raḥmāniyyah*. As we saw in the previous chapter, al-Jīlī defines *al-raḥmāniyyah* as the level of “making the realities of the names and attributes appear (*al-zuhūr bi-ḥaqā'iq al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*),”⁴⁶² a definition connected to the Ibn 'Arabian notion that it is through His mercy (*raḥmah*) or “All-Merciful breath” (*al-naḥas al-raḥmānī*) that God gives phenomenal existence to things.⁴⁶³ It is on account of *al-raḥmāniyyah*'s role in the manifestation of the names and attributes, then, that al-Jīlī can here define the name *al-raḥmān* as an expression of “the totality of the names and attributes (*jumlat al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*).”⁴⁶⁴ Returning to Q 55:1-2, then, if we understand the name *al-raḥmān* to denote the divine names and attributes, and the term *al-Qur'ān* to denote the divine essence (as al-Jīlī defined it at the beginning of this chapter), then we get the meaning, “The divine names and attributes taught

⁴⁶¹ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 21: “[T]here is no way to know the Real (*ma'rifat al-ḥaqq*) – Glory be to Him and may He be exalted – except through His names and attributes. For the servant witnesses Him (*yushāhiduhu*) initially in His names and attributes, in an absolute way (*muṭlaqan*), and then ascends (*yarqī*) to know the essence (*ma'rifat al-dhāt*), attaining realisation [of it] (*muḥaqqiqan*).” See also *ibid.*, 30: “There is no way (*sabīl*) to know (*ma'rifat*) the Real – Glory be to Him and may He be exalted – except by way of His names.”

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁶³ See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 177; Izutsu (1984), 116-140.

⁴⁶⁴ Compare al-Qāshānī's interpretation of Q 55:1, in which he says that the name *al-raḥmān* “is mentioned here, because of the universality of its attribution (*li-'umūm waṣfiyyatihi*), which encompasses the attributes that are beneath its meaning...” Lest the reader should think that that al-Jīlī's interpretation of the Qur'an is wholly based on that of al-Qāshānī, it should be noted that al-Qāshānī puts forward a different interpretation of Q 55:2, interpreting the term *al-Qur'ān* here to mean “human preparedness” (*al-isti'dād al-insānī*). See al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:184 (Q 55:1-2). Uncovering the precise nature of al-Jīlī's engagement with al-Qāshānī's *tafsīr* would require a separate study.

[Muhammad, or mankind] the divine essence”,⁴⁶⁵ hence al-Jīlī is able to draw from these Qur’anic verses the idea that one can only reach the essence by going through the names and attributes, or, it might be said, one can only receive the revelation of *al-Qur’ān al-karīm* if one has first received the revelation of *al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*. While al-Jīlī clearly has the metaphysical notion of the manifestation of the essence, names, and attributes in mind here, this might also be taken as an indication of how to read the Qur’an, the implication being that you have first to read the Qur’an as a collection of separate passages before you are able to see it as a comprehensive whole.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how al-Jīlī refers to the two aspects of the Qur’an using a number of different names. Before concluding, let us briefly consider one final name of the Qur’an that fits into this twofold conception, namely, the Furqan (*al-Furqān*), to which al-Jīlī in fact devotes a separate chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil* (chapter thirty-five). From a root connoting separation and distinction, the term *al-Furqān* is used in the Qur’an in various ways: sometimes it denotes the Qur’an itself (see e.g. Q 25:01, 2:185), sometimes the Torah (see Q 2:53, 21:48), while at others it apparently refers to that which distinguishes the saved community of believers from the unbelievers (see e.g. Q 8:41, where, according to the dominant interpretation, it refers to the battle of Badr).⁴⁶⁶ These interpretations are related, for they all

⁴⁶⁵ See also al-Jīlī (1997a), 90, where al-Jīlī writes of the “the All-Merciful’s teaching of the Qur’an (*ta’līm al-raḥmān al-Qur’ān*)” to those who will attain the manifestation of the essence.

⁴⁶⁶ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 574 (Q 8:41): “The day of *furqān*: the day on which God distinguished (*faraqa*) between truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and falsehood (*al-bāṭil*), which was the day of Badr.”

connote that which distinguishes truth from falsehood.⁴⁶⁷ It was commonly held to be one of the most significant names of the Qur'an.⁴⁶⁸

As such, it does not come as a surprise that al-Jīlī displays considerable interest in the name *al-Furqān*.

Al-Jīlī's understanding of the term, and how it fits into his notion of the two aspects of the Qur'an, emerges from the opening of chapter thirty-five. He opens the chapter with a poem, which begins: "The attributes of God (*ṣifāt Allāh*) are a *furqān*, while the essence of God (*dhāt Allāh*) is a *qur'ān*."⁴⁶⁹ He elaborates on this in the opening lines of the prose section that follows the poem:

Know that the Furqan is an expression of the reality of the names and attributes (*'ibārah 'an al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*), in their different varieties (*'alā ikhtilāf tanawwu'ātihā*). From the perspective of it [i.e. the Furqan], every attribute and name is distinguished (*tatamayyaz*) from the others, so distinction (*al-farq*) occurs in the self of the Real, with respect to His most beautiful names and His attributes.⁴⁷⁰

He goes on to describe in more detail how the divine names and attributes are different from one another and, related to this, how some are better than others. While the details of these distinctions and hierarchies do not concern us here, it is clear from this that the name *al-Furqān* corresponds with those names of the Qur'an that point to God's names and attributes, i.e., *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* and *al-sab' al-mathānī*, while the name *al-Qur'ān*, when taken without qualification, indicates, like the names *al-Qur'ān al-karīm* and *al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, the divine essence. *Al-Qur'ān*, in other words, is the name for the comprehensive

⁴⁶⁷ See Ali (1946), 29, note 68 (Q 2:53), 73, note 192 (Q 2:185), 926, note 3053 (Q 25:01).

⁴⁶⁸ See Mir (2003), 507-508.

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 117.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

aspect of the Qur'an, and *al-Furqān* the name for the detailed aspect.⁴⁷¹

Taken together, they indicate the Qur'an's status as the most comprehensive form of scripture, for it embodies both the divine essence and attributes.

By way of summing up the correspondences indicated by al-Jīlī between the different names of the Qur'an and the different aspects of God across this chapter, we can draw the following table:

Comprehensiveness (<i>al-jumlah</i>)	The Essence (<i>al-dhāt</i>)	Unqualified Oneness (<i>al-aḥadiyyah</i>)	The Qur'an (<i>al-Qur'ān</i>)	The Generous Qur'an (<i>al-Qur'ān al-karīm</i>)	The Great Qur'an (<i>al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm</i>)
Distinction (<i>al-tafṣīl</i>)	The Names and Attributes (<i>al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt</i>)	Qualified Oneness (<i>al-wāḥidiyyah</i>) / All-Mercifulness (<i>al-raḥmāniyyah</i>)	The Furqan (<i>al-Furqān</i>)	The Wise Qur'an (<i>al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm</i>)	The Seven Oft-Repeated (<i>al-sab' al-mathānī</i>)

Overarching all of the elements of the above table are God – of whom all of the elements constitute manifestations – and His Prophet, Muhammad – in whom all of the elements are manifest. In this respect, we find that

⁴⁷¹ This conception of the distinction between *al-Qur'ān* and *al-Furqān* is found in the works of Ibn 'Arabī and his earlier interpreters, though it does not seem to have been developed to the same degree. See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 70; Chittick (1989), 364; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 908.

al-Jīlī's discussion of scripture ultimately leads us back to the key points within his Sufi metaphysics, namely, the nature of God as both incomparable or transcendent (in His essence) and comparable or immanent (within His manifestations at the different levels of existence), and the nature of the Perfect Man, Muhammad, as a synthetic being, who unifies the divine and the created.

Conclusion

Al-Jīlī's chapter on the Qur'an reveals much about his general conception of revelation. The Qur'an, as he sees it, is not merely a book of revelation; it is also an expression of God's manifestation in the phenomenal world, its different names, as the above table shows, representing different aspects of the divine manifestation. Furthermore, the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad is an indication that Muhammad is the perfect locus for this divine manifestation, followed by those individuals who embody the Muhammadan Reality. The chapter thus constitutes an elaboration of al-Jīlī's key Sufi metaphysical theories of universal theophany and the Perfect Man, expressed in terms of the Qur'anic revelation. This tendency of al-Jīlī's to use the scriptures as a way into his broader Sufi metaphysics can be seen throughout the chapters under discussion in this thesis, as will become apparent.

This is not to say, however, that the Qur'an, in al-Jīlī's view, functions merely as a symbol for something else, with no intrinsic significance of its own. As he sees it, the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad is an exceptionally significant event, constituting the

moment when God revealed Himself most fully to His creation and when man correspondingly attained his fullest perfection. The chapter therefore not only deals with the general theories of universal theophany and the Perfect Man, but also indicates the unique place of the Qur'an and Muhammad within these theories. If we were to try to sum up the nature of this uniqueness, we could say that it lies in the comprehensiveness or perfection of the Qur'an and Muhammad, for they both constitute a comprehensive manifestation of God's essence and His names and attributes. In this way, the chapter tells us something about al-Jīlī's views of the Qur'an and Muhammad, as well as about his general Sufi metaphysics.

Throughout the chapter, al-Jīlī flirts with ideas that might well be described, at least from an orthodox Sunni perspective, as heterodox.⁴⁷² This is particularly true of his depiction of Muhammad, whom he describes in such exalted terms as to almost blur the boundary between divinity and humanity. This can be seen in his identification of Muhammad's essence with the divine essence, of Muhammad's body as the locus of manifestation for God's unqualified oneness, and of Muhammad with the Qur'an. These notions bear some resemblance to ideas found in Twelver Shī'ī thought, where similar traits are ascribed to the Imams: for instance, the notion that the Imam is the "speaking Qur'an" (*Qur'ān nāṭiq*),⁴⁷³ or that the bodily organs of the Imams are

⁴⁷² "Heterodoxy" should here be understood in relation to my definition of Sunni orthodoxy in the introduction.

⁴⁷³ For this doctrine, see Ayoub (1988); Amir-Moezzi (2016).

identical to those of God.⁴⁷⁴ Furthermore, al-Jīlī's apparent indication that other individuals than Muhammad, i.e. the Perfect Men more generally, are able to receive a form of Qur'anic revelation, also bears a close resemblance to the Shī'ī notion that the channel of access to the divine source remains open after Muhammad's death, through the Imams, who know the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'an.⁴⁷⁵ It is not surprising, in this context, that Ibn 'Arabian Sufis like al-Jīlī were often accused of being crypto-Shī'īs.⁴⁷⁶ This is not to suggest, however, either that al-Jīlī was secretly a Shī'ī, or that he was directly influenced by Shī'ī thought; indeed, the Zaydī branch of Shī'ism, to which al-Jīlī, being based principally in Yemen, was probably most exposed, does not view the Imam in such exalted metaphysical terms,⁴⁷⁷ and was, moreover, actively hostile to Ibn 'Arabian Sufism.⁴⁷⁸ What the parallels between al-Jīlī's view of Muhammad and Shī'ī ideas about the Imams may reflect, other than the possible shared origins of certain Sufi and Shī'ī metaphysical ideas relating to the cosmic status of man,⁴⁷⁹ is what Hodgson terms "the moulding of Islam as a whole in a Shi'itic direction"

⁴⁷⁴ See the hadiths of the Imams quoted in Amir-Moezzi (1994), 45-46; Amir-Moezzi (2011), 105, 112. And on the Twelver Shī'ī view of the Imam more generally, see Amir-Moezzi (2011), 103-306; Pierce (2016).

⁴⁷⁵ See Ayoub (1978), 57-58.

⁴⁷⁶ See Knysh (1999), 192-193; Ebstein (2014), 111. Thus Ibn Khaldūn, for instance, identifies the Ibn 'Arabian theory of the Pole (*qutb*) with the Shī'ī theory of the Imamate, and the Sufi notion of the *awliyā'* with the Shī'ī notion of the "chiefs" (*al-nuqabā'*) who represent the Imams in their absence. See Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:93-94.

⁴⁷⁷ See Kohlberg (1976), 91.

⁴⁷⁸ See al-Ḥibshī (1976), 53-66; Madelung (1999).

⁴⁷⁹ The key conceptual and semantic building blocks of both the Sufi metaphysical theory of *walāyah* and the Shī'ī doctrine of the Imamate are already discernible in the Umayyad conception of the caliphate. See Crone & Hinds (2003), esp. 24-42. Jamil (1999) has shown how the key elements of this conception have their origins in pre-Islamic Arabian ideas.

during the Middle Periods.⁴⁸⁰ Looking outside of the Islamic tradition, meanwhile, al-Jīlī's view that the divine existence appears in the body of Muhammad has obvious resonances of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation,⁴⁸¹ though there are also important differences, such as al-Jīlī's indication that the humanity of Muhammad is somehow effaced (in contrast to the orthodox Christian doctrine that Christ is both fully human and fully divine), and the absence of a clear redemptive role for Muhammad as Perfect Man. Again, however, it is not too difficult to see how the critics of Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics discerned Christian influences in that body of thought.⁴⁸² While this is again not to say that al-Jīlī was directly influenced by Christian thought, the criticisms do reflect how he at times pushes the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy.

This being said, for the purposes of this thesis, what is most important is that the overall view of sacred history – at least up to and including the revelation of the Qur'an – that al-Jīlī puts forward here is in keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception, even if it is expressed in Sufi metaphysical terms. For al-Jīlī, the Qur'an, being an expression of the divine essence at the level of unqualified oneness, constitutes the most complete form of divine manifestation, while Muhammad, being the recipient of the manifestation of the divine essence, constitutes the archetypal Perfect Man. These ideas can be seen as Sufi metaphysical elaborations of the orthodox Islamic view that the Qur'an is the best of

⁴⁸⁰ Hodgson (1955), 2. A similar argument been made by Valerie Hoffman, who proposes that the centrality of the Prophet and his family within modern Egyptian Sufism (perhaps under the influence of Ibn 'Arabian ideas) is possible evidence in support of Hodgson's statement. See Hoffman (1992), 615.

⁴⁸¹ Muhammad Iqbal goes so far to say that, with his theory of the Perfect Man, al-Jīlī "reproduces the Christian doctrine of the Trinity". Iqbal (2016), 95.

⁴⁸² See Knysh (1999), 95, 292; Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:85-86.

scriptures and Muhammad the best of messengers. They provide the reference point for al-Jīlī's conception of the other scriptures and prophets, which, as we shall see in the following chapters, he deems to be inferior to the Qur'an and Muhammad.

Chapter Three: The Torah

Having begun his presentation of the scriptures with the Qur'an, in chapter thirty-six of *al-Insān al-kāmil* al-Jīlī moves back in time, presenting us with his conception of the Torah (*al-Tawrāh*), of the prophet who received that scripture, Moses (*Mūsá*), and of the people to whom it was propagated and by whom it is held sacred, whom he variously calls "Moses' people" (*qawm Mūsá*), "the Jews" (*al-Yahūd*), and "the Children of Israel" (*Banī Isrā'īl*). As with his presentation of the Qur'an and the other scriptures, al-Jīlī's presentation of the Torah is determined to a large extent by his Sufi metaphysics. In addition, this Sufi metaphysical conception of the Torah ought to be placed within the framework of the Qur'anic and post-Qur'anic Islamic view of the Torah, and of the orthodox Sunni view of sacred history more generally.

The Qur'an mentions the Torah by name on eighteen occasions, all of them traditionally dated to the Medinan period, that is, subsequent to Muhammad's encounter with the Jews of that city.⁴⁸³ There are also several references, from both periods of revelation, to the "Book" (*al-kitāb*) of Moses (see e.g. Q 2:53, 2:87, 6:154). Other terms used in apparent reference to the Torah include the Furqan (*al-furqān*) (see Q 2:53, 21:48),⁴⁸⁴ a term which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is elsewhere applied to the Qur'an itself (see Q 25:01, 2:185), "the scrolls"

⁴⁸³ Adang (2006), 300.

⁴⁸⁴ The modern Qur'an translator and commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953) understands *al-kitāb* and *al-furqān* to denote two separate things given to Moses, respectively, "the written Book" and "other signs", though he acknowledges that other commentators conflate the two. See Ali (1946), 29, note 68 (Q 2:53).

(*al-ṣuḥuf*) (see Q 53:36-37, 87:19),⁴⁸⁵ and, in the context of Moses' retreat on Mt Sinai, "the tablets" (*al-alwāḥ*) (see Q 7:145), a term which as we shall see is central to al-Jīlī's conception of the Torah. The name *al-Tawrāh* itself is often mentioned together with the Gospel (*al-Injīl*) (see e.g. Q 3:3, 3:48, 3:65), these being the scriptures of the oft-mentioned "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), and the latter being presented as a confirmation of the former (see e.g. Q 3:50, 5:46). The Qur'anic presentation of both of these scriptures is marked by an element of ambivalence: on the one hand, they are said to have been "sent down" (*anzala*) by God, are understood to exist within the same archetypal, heavenly book (*umm al-kitāb*, *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) as the Qur'an, which thus confirms the message contained in them (see Q 3:3, 26:196, 29:47), and are said to be "guidance and light" (*hudā wa-nūr*) (see e.g. Q 5:44, 6:91); on the other hand, the Qur'an portrays the Jews and Christians as having not properly observed (see e.g. Q 2:85, 62:5, 5:44, 5:65-6), concealed (see Q 3:187, 6:91) or tampered (see e.g. Q 2:75-9; 4:46; 5:13) in some way with the true content of the revelations of Moses and Jesus. The Qur'an thus proposes that the Torah and Gospel that are presently in the possession of the Jews and Christians are different from the true revelations given by God to Moses and Jesus, and presents itself as an abrogating confirmation of the earlier scriptures.⁴⁸⁶

This Qur'anic attitude towards the Torah was adopted and often used in the post-Qur'anic Sunni Islamic tradition as the basis for polemic

⁴⁸⁵ Again, Ali understands *al-ṣuḥuf* to be distinct from *al-Tawrāh*, believing it to refer to "some other book or books now lost". See *ibid.*, 1449, note 5110 (Q 53:36).

⁴⁸⁶ For the Qur'anic references in this paragraph, and more detailed discussions of the issues presented here, see Adang (2006); Schöck (2003); Rubin (2003c); Saleh (2016).

against the Jews. According to Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, four “somewhat contradictory and overlapping arguments” used by medieval Muslim polemicists against the Torah can be identified, all but one of which (the third argument) are based upon the Qur’an: i) *tahrīf*, the allegation that the Jews had falsified the true scripture revealed to them by Moses; ii) *naskh*, the idea that the Qur’an had abrogated the Torah; iii) absence of *tawātur*, that is, the failure of the Jews to reliably document the transmission of the Torah; and iv) Muslim Biblical exegesis, whereby prophecies of Muhammad’s coming were read out of the Torah.⁴⁸⁷

These arguments, and the underlying orthodox view that the Torah is both a genuine yet imperfect and in some places false scripture, provide the overall framework for al-Jīlī’s conception of the Torah. That being said, he is not writing polemic here, and we shall see that his Sufi metaphysical perspective leads him to adopt a relatively benevolent, and at times even positive view of the Torah, Moses, and the Jews, albeit with his insistence on the superiority of the Qur’an, Muhammad, and the Muslims always in the background. As in other chapters, in what follows I undertake a close reading of al-Jīlī’s chapter, elucidating his main ideas by focusing upon the key terms that he uses.

a) The revelation & propagation of the Torah

God – May He be exalted – sent down (*anzala*) the Torah to Moses in nine tablets (*alwāḥ*), and commanded him to propagate (*yuballigh*) seven of them and to leave two tablets, because intellects (*al-‘uqūl*) could scarcely accept (*taqbal*) what was in those two tablets. So had

⁴⁸⁷ See Lazarus-Yafeh (1992), 19-49. For *tahrīf*, see also Lazarus-Yafeh (2000); Adang (1996), 223-248; Saleh (2016), 413. For *naskh*, see also Adang (1996), 192-222. For *tawātur* as it is used in hadith studies, see Zysow (2013), 7-50; Brown (2018), 107. For Biblical predictions of Muhammad, see also McAuliffe (2003); Schmidtke (2011).

Moses revealed them (*abrazahumā*), what he had requested would have been destroyed, and not a single man would have believed him. So those two were particular (*makhṣūṣān*) to Moses – Peace be upon him – and not to anyone else among the people of that time (*ahl dhālik al-zamān*).⁴⁸⁸

Al-Jīlī begins his presentation of the Torah by identifying two stages in the process by which the Torah was revealed. The first stage, signalled by the key term *anzala*, constitutes the vertical dimension of revelation, that is, God’s “sending down” of the Torah to His prophet, Moses. As we have already seen, this is the term that the Qur’an most commonly uses for the revelation of the scriptures, both Qur’anic and pre-Qur’anic, including the Torah. As such, al-Jīlī’s use of it here establishes the Torah as a genuine divine revelation, as in the Qur’anic conception. The second stage in the revelatory process, denoted by the key terms *yuballigh* and *abraza*, meanwhile, constitutes the horizontal dimension of revelation, that is, Moses’ proclamation of the divine revelation to his people (*qawm*), the Children of Israel. This is also a Qur’anic concept: in Q 5:67, for instance, God instructs the Messenger (Muhammad) to “propagate (*balligh*) what has been sent down (*unzila*) to you,” and goes on to warn him, “if you do not do that, then you will not have propagated His message (*mā ballaghta risālatahu*).” The same notion of the prophets’ propagation (*tablīgh*) of the divine message (*al-risālah*) (which has been “sent down”) is also found in several other verses (see Q 7:62, 7:68, 33:39, 46:23). Al-Jīlī’s notion of the two-stage revelation of the

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 118-119.

Torah, with Moses as the hinge between the two stages, can therefore be seen as an extrapolation of a Qur’anic notion.⁴⁸⁹

Yet while the Qur’an seems to imply that the message propagated by a messenger to his people is the same as that sent down to him by God, al-Jīlī here identifies an important distinction between what we might call the “revealed Torah” and the “propagated Torah”. This distinction centres upon the notion that the Torah is made up of “tablets” (*alwāḥ*). This is a Qur’anic idea (see Q 7:145) that is probably rooted in the Biblical image of the “tablets of stone” (*luḥōt ha-’eḥen*) on which the Ten Commandments were written (see Exodus 24:12).⁴⁹⁰ According to al-Jīlī’s conception, the number of tablets differs between the revealed Torah and the propagated Torah, the former containing nine, and the latter only seven. The reason for this discrepancy lies in the exalted nature of the wisdom contained in the two tablets that God commanded Moses to keep to himself. This wisdom, al-Jīlī indicates, is too exalted for intellects (*al-’uqūl*) to comprehend, a sentiment that fits with the Ibn ‘Arabian notion of the intellect as a limited tool of understanding,⁴⁹¹ and which implies that the wisdom concerned can only be understood through supra-rational means, i.e., mystical experience or, as in the case of Moses, divine revelation. Since Moses’ people had not attained such

⁴⁸⁹ In this regard, Mohammed Arkoun writes of how the Qur’an “establishes an arena of communication between three grammatical persons, a *speaker* who articulates the discourse contained in the Heavenly Book; a first *addressee*, who transmits the message of the enunciation as an event of faith; and a second *addressee*, *al-nās* (the people), who constitute the group...” Arkoun (2006), 64 [italics his].

⁴⁹⁰ Many Qur’anic commentators identify the term *alwāḥ* with the Torah as a whole, as al-Jīlī does here. See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 7:248 (Q 7:145); al-Maḥallī & al-Suyūfī (2002), 177 (Q 7:145). At the same time, as we shall see the Ten Commandments motif was not absent from discussions of the tablets in the *tafsīr* tradition.

⁴⁹¹ See Izutsu (1984), 31; Chittick (1989), 159; Rosenthal (1988), 9-10.

insight, God commanded Moses not to propagate the two tablets, for fear that if he did so, no one would believe in his message.⁴⁹²

Underlying all of this, I think, is the key Sufi metaphysical concept of completeness or perfection (*al-kamāl*). While the revealed Torah is complete (*kāmil*), and Moses, as the leading figure – or, it might be said, the Perfect Man – of his age, possesses the requisite understanding to receive the complete Torah, the propagated Torah is incomplete (*nāqis*), owing to the imperfect spiritual capacity of Moses' people. This places the Torah in an inferior position to the Qur'an, which, as was made clear in the previous chapter, is defined above all by its comprehensiveness and perfection, in al-Jīlī's view. Al-Jīlī's position here can be viewed as a Sufi metaphysical elaboration or reworking of the orthodox Islamic view that while the original message of the Torah is fully in keeping with the perfect message of the Qur'an, the actual scripture possessed by the Jews is defective, hence the need for further revelations in the form of the Gospel and then the Qur'an. Where al-Jīlī differs from the orthodox position is in ascribing this defectiveness not to the Jews' tampering with the scripture (*tahrīf*), but rather to God's instruction to Moses not to propagate all of the tablets that were revealed to him. In this way, it might be said that al-Jīlī adopts a more charitable stance towards the Jews and Judaism, albeit while indicating that the incompleteness of the revealed Torah was necessitated by their limited understanding.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² It might be noted that we also find in Jewish mysticism the idea that there are esoteric mysteries within the Torah that are only accessible to a mystical elite. See Gruenwald (1980), 178-179; Dan (1988), 224.

⁴⁹³ It should be emphasised that I am here talking about al-Jīlī's view of the Jews in the context of his conception of sacred history, and not of his stance towards Jews in his own time.

If the rationale behind his identification of a discrepancy in the number of tablets of the revealed Torah and the propagated Torah is fairly clear, the source of al-Jīlī's view that the revealed Torah consisted of nine tablets, and the propagated Torah of seven, is not so apparent. Again, his discussion of the number of tablets ought to be placed within the context of the wider Islamic tradition, for the Qur'anic exegetes also display an interest in this question in their commentaries on Q 7:145. The commentary tradition is by no means unanimous on the number of tablets revealed to Moses, with most medieval commentators mentioning the existence of three different opinions, namely that the Torah consisted of ten, seven, or two tablets.⁴⁹⁴ Al-Jīlī's view that the propagated Torah consisted of seven tablets might therefore be taken as an affirmation of the second opinion. What, though, of his view that the revealed Torah consisted of nine tablets? While this view does not, as far as I know, appear in the major *tafsīrs* written before al-Jīlī's time,⁴⁹⁵ there is a precedent for it in the popular collection of "tales of the prophets" (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) made by al-Tha'labī (d. 427, 1035/36), *Arā'is al-majālis*.⁴⁹⁶ This might indicate that the nine tablets motif has its origin in the so-called *Isrā'īliyyāt*, i.e., the traditions of Jewish or Christian provenance that were incorporated into *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, though I have found no Jewish antecedent for the motif.⁴⁹⁷ It is also possible that the nine tablets

⁴⁹⁴ See e.g. al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 2:157 (Q 7:145); al-Rāzī (1981), 14:246 (Q 7:145); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 532 (Q 7:145).

⁴⁹⁵ The Ottoman commentator Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1127/1725), who like al-Jīlī was a Sufi metaphysician in the Ibn 'Arabian tradition, says that there were nine tablets. See Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī (1870), 1:340 (Q 7:145). It is possible that he in fact took this from al-Jīlī, given the influence of *al-Insān al-kāmil* upon Ottoman Sufi thought.

⁴⁹⁶ See al-Tha'labī (2002), 336.

⁴⁹⁷ The originator of the report, according to al-Tha'labī, was a certain 'Urwah b. Daylam al-Lakhmī, about whom I have not been able to find any information, but

motif is connected to the reference in Q 17:101 to the “nine signs” (*ayāt*) given to Moses. Though, in the context of that *sūrah*, this seems to refer to the plagues sent upon Egypt, commentators have often associated this verse with Q 7:145, and there is a *ḥadīth* in which Muhammad defines the nine signs as commandments revealed to Moses, thus linking the verse to the tablets motif.⁴⁹⁸

While these parallels may be suggestive, it is still not exactly clear how al-Jīlī could have got from these earlier sources to his position that the revealed Torah consisted of nine tablets, and the propagated Torah of seven. I have, however, identified a couple of more direct precedents for his position. First, there is the following report attributed to Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), a scholar known for transmitting many *Isrā’īliyyāt*: “It is reported that the tablets of Moses were nine. And two of them were removed (*rufi’a*), and seven remained.”⁴⁹⁹ This report is quoted by al-Suyūṭī (who lived after al-Jīlī, but preserved a lot of earlier material) in his commentary on Q 7:150-151, in a passage that tells the story of Moses’ anger on seeing the golden calf. This would suggest that the notion that the Torah originally consisted of nine tablets, but now consists only of seven, is connected to the Biblical story of Moses breaking the (two) tablets out of anger on seeing the golden calf (see Exodus 32:19).⁵⁰⁰ While al-Jīlī makes no reference to the story of the

whose *nisbah* indicates that he may have been a member or descendant of the predominantly Christian Lakhmid dynasty.

⁴⁹⁸ See Brinner (1986), 68-69.

⁴⁹⁹ See al-Suyūṭī (1990), 3:236 (Q 7:150).

⁵⁰⁰ Other exegetes, it should be noted, also discuss this Biblical theme, and connect it to the idea that the Torah in its present state is incomplete. See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 19:261 (Q 85:22). Abdullah Yusuf Ali, however, lays emphasis on the fact that the Qur’an, unlike the Old Testament, does not tell us that Moses broke the tablets in his anger, arguing, “There is a touch of disrespect (if not blasphemy) in suggesting that

golden calf here, it is possible that this story underlies his sense of the incompleteness of the propagated Torah and, specifically, his view that two of its tablets are missing. The second precedent, meanwhile, comes from the *tafsīr* of al-Qāshānī, a work that seems to have influenced al-Jīlī, as we saw in the previous chapter. In his commentary on Q 15:87, al-Qāshānī interprets the term *al-sab‘ al-mathānī* as a reference to the seven attributes (*al-sab‘ al-ṣifāt*) of the divine essence – or what al-Jīlī calls the attributes of the self (*al-ṣifāt al-naḥsiyyah*) – an interpretation, it will be remembered, that al-Jīlī adopts in his chapter on the Qur’an. Significantly for our purposes here, al-Qāshānī goes on to say that Moses was given not seven but nine attributes – the other two being “the heart” (*al-qalb*) and “the spirit” (*al-rūḥ*) – owing to his attaining “the station of one who speaks [with God]” (*maqām al-kalīm*).⁵⁰¹ While there is no reference to the tablets here, there is nevertheless a clear parallel with al-Jīlī’s view that nine tablets were revealed to Moses and only seven to his people, a parallel reinforced by the fact that al-Jīlī, as we shall see presently, associates the tablets with certain divine attributes. While al-Jīlī’s specific view that the Torah consists of nine tablets that were revealed to Moses, who was ordered to propagate only seven of them, seems to be without direct precedent (at least in those sources which he seems to have drawn upon elsewhere), nevertheless we can see how he may have arrived at this view by weaving together various traditions from the

God’s Messenger broke the tablets in his incontinent rage, as is stated in the Old Testament.” See Ali (1946), 385, note 1116 (Q 7:150). Ali’s comments perhaps reflect the greater emphasis on the infallibility (*‘iṣmah*) of the prophets in late medieval and modern Islam than in either earlier Islamic thought or the Jewish and Christian traditions.

⁵⁰¹ See al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:379 (Q 15:87).

exegetical and tales of the prophets literature, and elaborating them in accordance with his Sufi metaphysics.

b) The contents & material of the tablets

The tablets that he was commanded to propagate contained knowledge of the first and the last (*'ulūm al-awwalīn wa-al-akhirīn*), with the exception of the knowledge (*'ilm*) of Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – and the knowledge of Abraham, and the knowledge of Jesus – Peace be upon them – and the knowledge of the heirs of Muhammad (*warathat Muḥammad*). So the Torah did not include this, out of regard for the specialness (*khuṣūṣiyyatan*) of Muhammad and his heirs, and by way of honouring (*ikrāman*) Abraham and Jesus – Peace be upon them. And the tablets were made of stone marble (*ḥajar al-marmar*), by which I mean the seven tablets that Moses was commanded to propagate, in contrast to the two tablets, which were made of His light (*min nūrihi*). And for this reason their hearts hardened (*qasat qulūbuhum*), because the tablets were made of stone.

And all that the tablets contained was seven types of divine requirements (*al-muqṭaḍayāt al-ilāhiyyah*), in accordance with the number of tablets. So the first tablet was light (*al-nūr*), and the second tablet was guidance (*al-hudā*). God – May He be exalted – said: “We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light, through which the prophets could judge.” (Q 5:44) And the third tablet was wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), and the fourth tablet was the faculties (*al-qiwā*), and the fifth tablet was judgment (*al-ḥukm*), and the sixth tablet was servanthood (*al-'ubūdiyyah*), and the seventh tablet was the clarification of the path of happiness from the path of misery (*wuḍūḥ ṭarīq al-sa'ādah min ṭarīq al-shaqāwah*), and making plain which of them is better. So these are the seven tablets that Moses – Peace be upon him – was commanded to propagate. As for the two tablets that were particular to Moses, the first tablet was the tablet of lordship (*lawḥ al-rubūbiyyah*), and the second tablet was the tablet of power (*lawḥ al-quḍrah*).⁵⁰²

The Qur'an refers only very briefly and in very general terms to the contents of the tablets given to Moses, speaking of how God wrote an “admonition” (*maw'izān*) and a “detailed explanation” (*tafṣīlan*) of all things on them (see Q 7:145). In the post-Qur'anic tradition, it was

⁵⁰² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 119.

commonly thought that the tablets contained some form of legal code,⁵⁰³ while some commentators suggested that the tablets contain narrative material as well as law.⁵⁰⁴ We will look in more detail at al-Jīlī's understanding of the contents of the Torah later in the chapter. For now, let us consider how he categorises the material contained in the propagated and revealed Torahs. The key terms in this regard are *'ilm/ulūm* and *al-muqtaḍayāt al-ilāhiyyah*. With regards to the former, al-Jīlī indicates that the “knowledge” contained in the propagated Torah pertains to “the first and the last” (*al-awwalīn wa-al-ākharīn*), a phrase that is usually used with respect to the knowledge contained in the Qur'an, and which seems generally to denote the knowledge acquired by all people in all ages, both in the past and the future.⁵⁰⁵ This would appear to indicate that the propagated Torah is a comprehensive scripture, like the Qur'an. Furthermore, the *'ilm al-awwalīn wa-al-ākharīn* evokes the phrase used in the title of *al-Insān al-kāmil, ma'rifat al-awākhir wa-al-awā'il*, suggesting that what may be meant here is metaphysical knowledge of the kind contained in *al-Insān al-kāmil*. However, this sense that the Torah provides a comprehensive overview of key metaphysical ideas is subsequently undermined by al-Jīlī's mentioning of various forms of *'ilm* that it does not contain, specifically, the knowledge possessed by Muhammad, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad's “heirs” (*warathah*) – by which he probably means those Muslim Perfect Men or friends of God who lived after Muhammad and

⁵⁰³ See e.g. al-Ṭabarī (1999), 6:57-59 (Q 7:145); al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 2:158 (Q 7:145); al-Rāzī (1981), 14:246-247 (Q 7:145).

⁵⁰⁴ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 492 (Q 7:145).

⁵⁰⁵ See e.g. al-Zarkashī (1984), 2:181-182.

embodied the Muhammadan Reality.⁵⁰⁶ This highlights once again the incompleteness of the propagated Torah, particularly vis-à-vis the Qur'an, given the specialness of Muhammad's knowledge. Al-Jīlī's conception of the *'ulūm* contained in the propagated Torah thus reflects his broader stance towards that scripture, which is that it is a genuine, yet defective, form of divine revelation – a stance that is in keeping with the orthodox Islamic view.

While *'ulūm al-awwalīn wa-al-ākharīn* seems to indicate a general kind of knowledge, the term *al-muqṭaḍayāt al-ilāhiyyah* denotes something more specific. *Al-muqṭaḍayāt* is a term that appears fairly regularly in al-Jīlī's thought, where it most often denotes the necessary corollaries of a particular existent's nature.⁵⁰⁷ When qualified, as here, by the adjective *al-ilāhiyyah*, then, it indicates those things that are a necessary product of God's nature. This includes both the divine attributes and those properties of created beings that are necessitated by God's nature. To take as examples the requirements listed here, "guidance" (*al-hudā*), "wisdom" (*al-ḥikmah*), and "judgment" (*al-ḥukm*) are all divine attributes, yet they are also things that man possesses, on account of the requirement of the divine attributes to become manifest in the phenomenal world. Similarly, we know from al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Man as a microcosm that man's "faculties" (*al-qiwā*) are

⁵⁰⁶ For the *awliyā'* as heirs of Muhammad in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī, see al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1193-5; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 47. In the introduction to the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī declares himself to be a *wārith*, in the context of explaining that he received the book directly from the Prophet. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 48. The idea that the Sufis are the true heirs of the Prophets is already found in al-Sarrāj, for which see Karamustafa (2007), 68.

⁵⁰⁷ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 90, 115, 119; al-Jīlī (1999a), 118, 253.

determined by God's nature,⁵⁰⁸ while the "servanthood" (*al-'ubūdiyyah*) of creation, as al-Jīlī understands it, is a necessarily corollary of the "lordship" (*al-rubūbiyyah*) of God.⁵⁰⁹ While we will look at the details of these divine requirements in more detail later in the chapter, what matters for now is that al-Jīlī's proposal that each of the seven tablets of the propagated Torah corresponds to a particular divine requirement means that the propagated Torah can tell us something about God's nature. Again, this is in keeping with the notion that the Torah is a genuine, divinely revealed scripture.

This being said, we cannot get away from the incompleteness of the propagated Torah. In this instance, this incompleteness is indicated by al-Jīlī's reference to the contents of the two additional tablets contained in the revealed Torah. These two tablets are also named after two of God's attributes, and particularly exalted attributes at that. *Al-rubūbiyyah*, according to his scheme of *marātib al-wujūd*, occupies the sixth level of existence, and indicates both the superiority of God over His creation (God being the one who is "Lord"), yet also the ontological connection (*nisbah*) between God and creation, on account of the dialectical relationship between the Lord and His servants, each of whom stand in mutual need of the other in order to be so called.⁵¹⁰ *Al-qudrah*, meanwhile, is one of the seven attributes of the divine self, and denotes God's power to bring things from non-existence into phenomenal

⁵⁰⁸ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 89-90, 211-212.

⁵⁰⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 53-55; al-Jīlī (1999b), 20-21. This is an idea that he adopts from Ibn 'Arabī. See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 90-94.

⁵¹⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 53-55, 68.

existence.⁵¹¹ In fact, as al-Jīlī sees it, these two attributes are connected, for it is owing to God's power (*al-qudrah*) to bring things into existence that His lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*) appears.⁵¹² The tablets of *al-rubūbiyyah* and *al-qudrah*, it can therefore be surmised, tell us much about God's nature. For them to be kept back from the propagated Torah thus indicates the defectiveness of the propagated Torah when it comes to revealing God's nature, and the incapacity of its audience, the Jews, to comprehend these fundamental aspects of God's nature. In this sense, while the revealed Torah is relatively complete (though even then, it is not as complete as the Qur'an, which reveals God's nature at the higher level of *al-aḥadiyyah*), the propagated Torah is a less complete form of scripture. Once again, then, we see that al-Jīlī's view of the Torah, like that of the orthodox Islamic tradition more generally, is marked by a certain ambivalence.

This impression is further reinforced by al-Jīlī's discussion of the material from which the tablets were made. Again, his interest in this topic reflects the concerns of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition more broadly. As with the question of the number of tablets, the Qur'an commentators acknowledge that there are multiple views on the material of the tablets. Among the materials suggested are green emerald (*zumurrudah khadrā'*), chrysolite (*zabarjad*), wood (*kashab*), hard and solid rock (*ṣakhrāh ṣammā'*) that God softened for Moses, and wood from the lote-tree of paradise (*sidrat al-muntahā*).⁵¹³ Though the

⁵¹¹ See *ibid.*, 86-87.

⁵¹² See *ibid.*, 86.

⁵¹³ See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 7:248-249 (Q 7:145); al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 2:157-158 (Q 7:145); al-Maḥallī & al-Suyūfī (2002), 177 (Q 7:145).

commentators thus include multiple possibilities for the material of the tablets, al-Jīlī's view that the tablets of the propagated Torah were made of marble (*al-marmar*) does not appear to have a strong basis in the *tafsīr* tradition, which seems more inclined to identify the material of the tablets with a precious gemstone. Indeed, we find closer parallels to al-Jīlī's position in Jewish literature. As noted above, the account in Exodus refers to the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written as "tablets of stone" (Exodus 24:12, 31:18), though in the rabbinic tradition this stone is commonly identified with the sapphire of God's throne.⁵¹⁴ Of more relevance for our purposes is a comment made by the author of the 13th century CE foundational Kabbalistic text the *Zohar*, who identifies the tablets of Moses with the "stones of pure marble" mentioned in an enigmatic saying of Rabbi Akiva (d. 137 CE), one of the founding figures of the mishnaic tradition.⁵¹⁵ In a similar vein, the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (d. 1291 CE) notes in his *Sefer ha-ḥeshek* that "the numerical value of two tablets of stone (*shene luḥot 'avanim*) is 891, which is identical with stones of pure marble (*'avne shayish tahor*), and they denote the good and evil inclinations."⁵¹⁶ While there is no indication that al-Jīlī was familiar with these Jewish mystical texts, the parallel between his position and that of the Jewish thinkers might suggest an ultimately common source, indicating that al-Jīlī's view on the material of the tablets may have been taken from the *Isrā'īliyyāt*.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁴ Berenbaum & Skolnik (2007), 19:425.

⁵¹⁵ See de Manhar (1980), 136-137. For the saying of Rabbi Akiva as quoted in the Babylonian Talmud, see Swartz (2007), 203.

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Idel (1989), 44.

⁵¹⁷ This being said, the marble motif does not seem to appear in the tales of the prophets, where we might expect to find *Isrā'īliyyāt*. See e.g. al-Tha'labī (2002), 336,

Whatever the source for al-Jīlī's view, its significance lies in what the stone marble represents, namely, the hardening of the Children of Israel's hearts. This is a Qur'anic motif with Biblical roots.⁵¹⁸ The Qur'an links the hardening of the hearts of Moses' people to their idolatry in the golden calf episode: "Then your hearts were hardened (*qasat qulūbukum*) after that. They were like stone (*ka-al-ḥajārah*), or even harder (*aw ashadd quswatan*).” (Q 2:74) Elsewhere (Q 57:16), the believers are advised not to become “like those who were previously given the book (*al-ladhīna uwtū al-kitāb min qabl*), whose hearts were hardened with the passing of the ages (*fa-tāla ‘alayhim al-amad fa-qasat qulūbuhum*), many of whom were those who do bad (*fāsiqūn*).” The commentators tend to link the hardening of the hearts motif to the recalcitrance, moral degeneracy, and lack of knowledge of the Children of Israel.⁵¹⁹ In his commentary on Qur'an 2:74, for instance, al-Qurṭubī says that the phrase “your hearts hardened” denotes how they were “devoid of adherence and submission to the signs of God (*khulūwhā min al-inābah wa-al-idh ‘ān li-ayāt Allāh*).”⁵²⁰ This definition seems particularly to denote the Jews' non-adherence to revelation (the “signs” of God), an association that has Biblical antecedents (see e.g. Zechariah 7:12). The Sufī exegetes, meanwhile, link the phrase to attachment to bodily desires and lack of knowledge. Thus al-Qāshānī explains the same verse: “Your hearts

where it is reported that the tablets were made from the lote tree of paradise, which was made of green emerald.

⁵¹⁸ In the Bible, the motif occurs most prominently with respect to Pharaoh's refusal to free Moses' people (see Exodus 4:21, 7:13-14, 8:15-32).

⁵¹⁹ Jewish exegetes, by contrast, tend to interpret the motif in terms of God's stripping of free will from the individual(s) whose heart is said to be hardened. See ben Yashar (1997).

⁵²⁰ Al-Qurṭubī (1997), 2:500 (Q 2:74). Abdullah Yusuf Ali similarly suggests that the motif refers to the sinner. See Ali (1946), 37, note 82 (Q 2:27).

hardened,’ because many bodily pleasures and matters clung to them (*bi-kathrat mubāsharat al-umūr wa-al-lidhdhāt al-badaniyyah*), and because they were clothed in the attributes of the lower self (*mulābasat al-ṣifāt al-naḥsānī*),”⁵²¹ while the comparison with stone denotes how their hearts “have not been imprinted with knowledge (*‘adam ta’aththurihā bi-al-naqsh al-‘ilmī*).”⁵²²

All of these notions probably underlie al-Jīlī’s conception of the hardening of the Children of Israel’s hearts. Based on what he says about their inability to comprehend the contents of the two tablets reserved for Moses, it seems likely that he primarily understands the hardening of the hearts motif in terms of Moses’ people’s limited capacity to comprehend the divine wisdom. In Ibn ‘Arabian terms, it might be said that their hard hearts represent their lack of “receptivity” (*qābiliyyah*) or “preparedness” (*isti’dād*) for the divine revelation in its fullness. This lack of spiritual receptivity is connected to their being trapped in the material world, which is here represented by the stone marble, one of the hardest material substances.⁵²³ The two additional tablets contained in the revealed Torah, by contrast, are made of light (*al-nūr*), an immaterial substance and one of the attributes of the divine essence, in al-Jīlī’s scheme, and which thus represents access to the higher, divine (and immaterial) levels of existence.⁵²⁴ Since Moses was not commanded to propagate these two

⁵²¹ Al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:62 (Q 2:74).

⁵²² *Ibid.*. See also al-Qushayrī (1968), 1:112 (Q 2:74); al-Qurṭubī (1997), 2:500 (Q 2:74).

⁵²³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 151-152, where he indicates that the goal of the spiritual path is to leave behind the limitations of the material world and attain access to “the world of spirits” (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ*).

⁵²⁴ See *ibid.*, 96. Similarly, for Ibn ‘Arabī, light is one of God’s names, and the starting point of creation (*mabda’ al-khalq*) and of perception (*mabda’ al-idrāk*). See al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1081-1087.

tablets of light, however, the Children of Israel do not have such access. Like his discussions of the number of tablets and their contents, therefore, al-Jīlī's discussion of their material reflects the ambivalent position that his Sufi metaphysics leads him to when thinking about the Torah and the Jews.

c) The superiority of Muhammad, his revelation, and his religion

Thus none of Moses' people became perfect (*lam yukmal aḥad min qawm Mūsá*), because he was not commanded to reveal (*ibrāz*) [all of] the nine tablets. So none of his people became perfect after him, nor did any of his people inherit from him (*lam yarithhu*). This was unlike Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – who did not leave out anything, but rather propagated it [all] to us (*ballaghahu ilaynā*). God – May He be exalted – said, “We have left nothing out of the book.” (Q 6:38) And He said, “And We have set out everything in detail.” (Q 17:12)

For this reason his religious community was the best of religious communities (*millatuhu khayr al-milal*), and he abrogated, with his religion, all religions (*wa-nasakha bi-dīnihi jamī' al-adyān*), because he was given all that they were given, and added (*zāda*) to that that which they were not given. So their religions were abrogated (*fā-nusikhat adyānuhum*) due to their incompleteness (*li-naqṣihā*), while his religion became known for its perfection (*shahara dīnuhu bi-kamālihi*). God – May He be exalted – said, “Today I have perfected (*akmaltu*) for you your religion and completed (*atmamtu*) for you My favour.” (Q 5:3) And He did not send down this verse to a prophet other than Muhammad. If He had sent it down to anyone [else], he would have been the Seal of Prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*). But that is only valid for Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – so it was sent down to him. Thus he was the Seal of Prophets, because he did not omit any form of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), guidance (*hudā*), knowledge (*ilm*) or mystery (*sirr*), but indicated it and alluded to it, in accordance with what was fitting for the prophets [to reveal] of that mystery....

So he left no entry point (*madkhal*) for anyone, and was unique (*istaqalla*) in the matter, and sealed prophecy (*khatama al-nubuwwah*), because he left out nothing that was needed, but rather brought it [all]. And none of the Perfect Men (*al-kummāl*) who came after him found anything worthy of indicating that Muhammad had

not already indicated. So such a Perfect Man follows him (*yatba 'uhu*), as he indicated, and becomes a follower (*tābi'*) [of his]. So the category of legislative prophethood (*nubuwwat al-tashrī'*) was cut off after him, and Muhammad was the Seal of Prophets, because he brought perfection, while no one else had brought that.⁵²⁵

This passage gives us a direct insight into al-Jīlī's view of the relationship between Islam and other religions. The passage hinges upon the key dichotomy between perfection or completeness and imperfection. As we have already seen, the propagated Torah is incomplete, since it is missing two of the tablets of the revealed Torah. Here al-Jīlī invites the reader to extrapolate from that idea the notion that the religion (*dīn*) in which the Torah is held sacred, i.e. Judaism, and the religious community (*millah*) who hold it sacred, i.e. the Jews or the Children of Israel, are similarly imperfect. He reinforces this point, moreover, by contrasting the imperfection of the revelation, religion, and religious community or people of Moses – and, indeed, of all pre-Muhammadan prophets – with the perfection of the revelation, religion, and religious community of Muhammad.

In keeping with the centrality of the completeness-incompleteness dichotomy, the most important key terms of this passage are those of the root *k-m-l*. As we know, the concept of *kamāl* lies at the heart of al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysics, denoting in particular the perfection or completeness of the Perfect Man, a perfection that resides in his being a perfect locus for the manifestation of all of the divine attributes, a being that synthesises all of the levels of existence, and a microcosm of the larger cosmos. When al-Jīlī says here then that none of Moses' people became

⁵²⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 119-120.

perfect after him, he seems to be suggesting, on the one hand, that Moses was a Perfect Man, and on the other, that none of the Jews can be considered Perfect Men. This interpretation is supported by al-Jīlī's subsequent statement that none of Moses' people inherited (*yarith*) from him, since the "heir" (*wārith*) of Muhammad, as we have seen, denotes in al-Jīlī's Ibn 'Arabian lexicon the post-Muhammadan (Muslim) Perfect Man. Here we see al-Jīlī's ambivalent stance towards the Torah and Jews integrated into his Sufi metaphysics, specifically, his theory of the Perfect Man. The implication seems to be that the station of Perfect Man is accessible only to those within the fold of Islam.⁵²⁶

If the Torah, Judaism, and the Jews – along with all other earlier scriptures, religions, and religious communities – are marked by imperfection (*naqṣ*), the Qur'an, Islam, and the Muslims are, by contrast, marked by perfection (*kamāl*). We have already seen this idea elaborated in metaphysical terms, with respect to the perfection of the Qur'an as a representation of the comprehensive divine essence. Here, al-Jīlī grounds it in the Qur'an and in a number of key traditional notions within post-Qur'anic Islamic thought. The scriptural basis for the notion of the perfection of Muhammad's revelation and religion, as al-Jīlī sees it, consists in three Qur'anic verses (Q 5:3, 6:38, and 17:12) that, according to the most common interpretation, denote the completeness of the Qur'an, and the perfection and supremacy of the Islamic religion more

⁵²⁶ In keeping with the orthodox Islamic view (which arises out of, for example, Q 3:84 and Q 42:13), in al-Jīlī's view the pre-Muhammadan prophets can also be considered Muslims (in the sense that they submit to God); hence they are able to attain the status of Perfect Men.

generally.⁵²⁷ Verse 5:3 is particularly significant for al-Jīlī, it seems, because of the use of verbs of the two key roots – *k-m-l* and *t-m-m* – denoting perfection and completeness.

The perfection of the revelation and religion of Muhammad indicated by the Qur'an has a number of important corollaries for the relationship between Islam and other religions. First, it means that the Muslims, because they have the best scripture and the best religion, are the best religious community, an idea here indicated by the term *khayr al-milal*. Both this term and the idea behind it are also Qur'anic, for the term evokes the statement in Q 3:110: "You are the best community (*khayr ummah*) send out to mankind." Indeed, the Qur'anic term *khayr ummah* was often recast in the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition as *khayr al-umam*,⁵²⁸ a term that al-Jīlī uses in the final chapter of the book to make the same point being made here.⁵²⁹ Al-Jīlī's explicit declaration of the superiority of the Muslims over other religious communities here and in that final chapter is a clear sign of his commitment to the orthodox Islamic perspective on sacred history and the relationship between Islam and other religions.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷ See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 6:60 (Q 5:3), where he interprets "Today I have completed for you your religion" to mean "I have caused your enemies to perish for you, and your religion to appear over all religion", and defines "religion" (*dīn*) as "an expression of the religious laws (*al-sharā'i*) that He legislated and revealed to us." See also *ibid.*, 5:385 (Q 6:38), where al-Qurṭubī notes that the phrase "We have left nothing out of the Book" has been interpreted to mean that nothing was left out of either the Preserved Tablet or the Qur'an. And see *ibid.*, 10:200 (Q 17:12), where he interprets the phrase "We have set out everything in detail" to refer to "the precepts of religious obligation" (*aḥkām al-taklīf*).

⁵²⁸ See e.g. *ibid.*, 4:167 (Q 3:110); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 250 (Q 3:110).

⁵²⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 260, where he also connects the superiority of the Islamic community to the perfection of the Islamic religion, which he describes as "the most perfect of religions" (*akmal al-adyān*). In that last chapter, al-Jīlī generally uses the terms *ummah/umam* and *millah/milal* interchangeably.

⁵³⁰ This commitment is shared by Ibn 'Arabī. See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 70, where he describes the community of Muhammad as *khayr al-umam*, and *ibid.*, 156, where he

Second, and following on from the first point, the perfection of Muhammad's revelation and religion mean that they abrogate all previous revelations and religions. Again, al-Jīlī's use of the key term *naskh* reflects his commitment to the orthodox Islamic paradigm of sacred history. While the Qur'an uses the term *naskh* in reference to Qur'anic verses that abrogate other Qur'anic verses (see Q 2:106), as noted earlier in this chapter the term and concept were transposed by medieval Muslim writers into the different context of interreligious polemic. In this polemical context, *naskh* denotes how previous revelations and religious laws (particularly those of the Jews and Christians), though appropriate for their time and place, have been abrogated by the revelation and religious law of Muhammad.⁵³¹ And though this is not the Qur'anic denotation of *naskh*, nevertheless this idea can be read out of the Qur'an (see e.g. Q 13:38).⁵³² While I do not think that al-Jīlī's primary aim is a polemical one here, nevertheless his use of the concept of *naskh* to denote this same idea reflects how, like the Muslim polemicists, he views sacred history in terms of Islam's supercession of previous religions.⁵³³

Third, if the Qur'an is complete, then there is no need for further scriptural revelation after it. This means in turn that Muhammad, the

declares that "there is no better community" than the Muhammadan community (*fa-mā afdaluhā min ummah*). See also Maybudī (2015), 207 (Q 7:145), where Qur'an 3:110 is also quoted to establish the superiority of Muhammad's community over Moses', in the context of the Qur'anic account of the revelation of the Torah to Moses.

⁵³¹ See Lazarus-Yafeh (1992), 35-41; Adang (1996), 192-222; Burton (2001).

⁵³² See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 705 (Q 13:38-39): "Every book that He sent down from heaven has a set period (*muddah maḍrūbah*) in God's eyes, and a specified measure (*miqdār mu'ayyan*), and for this reason "God erases what He wills" of them, and "confirms" [them], meaning, until all of them were abrogated (*nusikhat*) by the Qur'an, which God sent down to His Messenger."

⁵³³ Ibn 'Arabī also expresses the superiority of Islam over other religions in terms of *naskh*. See Keller (1999), 189.

recipient of the Qur’anic revelation, is the final messenger, an idea denoted here by the terms *khātam al-nabiyyīn* and *khatm al-nubuwwah*. The former is another Qur’anic term (see Q 33:40), which is most commonly interpreted to mean that Muhammad was the last prophet and messenger, an idea that is central to the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history.⁵³⁴ Taken together with *naskh*, it means that Muhammad is superior both to all who came before him and all who come after him, for both are rendered superfluous by his perfection. Al-Jīlī’s use of the concept of *khatm al-nubuwwah* thus again reflects his commitment to the orthodox paradigm. However, his Ibn ‘Arabī Sufi metaphysical perspective also leads him to develop this concept in what might be considered an unorthodox direction. As we saw in chapter one, al-Jīlī adopts Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion that what is sealed with Muhammad is specifically legislative prophecy (*nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*), i.e. prophecy that involves the prophet receiving a new religious law (along with the esoteric truth), while so-called general prophecy (*nubuwwah ‘āmmah*), which involves receiving the esoteric truth but not a new scripture or religious law, continues among the *awliyā’* or Perfect Men. Al-Jīlī refers to this same idea here, indicating that the category (*ḥukm*) relevant to the discussion of the sealing of prophecy is that of *nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*, thus potentially leaving open the possibility that a non-legislative prophet might come after Muhammad. In this sense, al-Jīlī’s position does seem

⁵³⁴ On the history of the interpretation of *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, see Friedmann (1989), 49-82. For the orthodox view, see e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1061 (Q 33:40): “This verse is a clear stipulation (*naṣṣ*) that there is no prophet after him, and if there is no prophet after him, then there is no messenger after him”. See also Ali (1946), 1119, note 3731 (Q 33:40): “When a document is sealed, it is complete, and there can be no further addition. The holy Prophet Muhammad closed the long line of Apostles. God’s teaching is and will always be continuous, but there has been and will be no Prophet after Muhammad.”

to differ somewhat from the orthodox view. At the same time, he also makes clear that the post-Muhammadan “prophet”, i.e. the *walī* or Perfect Man, is not so much a prophet in his own right as he is a “follower” (*tābi‘*) of Muhammad. This term seems to be meant to imply not chronological succession, but succession in terms of being a representative (*nā‘ib*) or viceregent (*khalīfah*) of Muhammad, terms which, as we saw in chapter one, al-Jīlī uses later in the book to denote how the Perfect Men are embodiments of the Muhammadan Reality.⁵³⁵ From this perspective, it could be said that Muhammad remains the final prophet, in al-Jīlī’s conception, for the later prophets are only prophets by virtue of their being loci in which Muhammad becomes manifest.

While the orthodoxy of this notion might be questionable, al-Jīlī nevertheless displays a commitment to the orthodox paradigm that views the Qur’an as the best of scriptures and Muhammad as the best of messengers. It is this idea, as this section demonstrates, that governs his view of the Torah, for if the Qur’an is the most perfect scripture, the Torah (like the other scriptures) must necessarily be imperfect by comparison.

d) Jesus’ religion’s abrogation of Moses’ religion & the errors of Jesus’ people

So if Moses – Peace be upon him – had been commanded to propagate the two tablets that were particular to him, He would not have sent Jesus after him, because Jesus propagated the mystery (*sirr*) of those two tablets to his people. For this reason, from his first step, Jesus revealed the [divine] power (*al-qudrah*) and lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*), namely [through] his speech in the cradle. And he cured

⁵³⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 211.

the blind man, and brought the dead to life. And he abrogated (*nasakha*) the religion of Moses, because he brought what Moses had not brought. But when he revealed the effects of that, his people fell into error (*dalla*) after him, and they worshipped him (*'abadūhu*), and said, "He is the third of three (*thālith thalāthah*) (Q 5:73), and he is the Father, the Mother and the Son." They called these the three hypostases (*al-aqānīm al-thalāthah*), and his people split into sects (*iftaraqū*) over that. For some of them say that he is the Son of God (*ibn Allāh*), and they are called the Melkites (*al-mulkāniyyah*) among his people. And others say that he is God (*Allāh*) who has come down (*nazala*) and taken the son of Adam, and returned, meaning that he took on the form of Adam (*taṣawwara bi-ṣūrat Ādam*), and then returned to his exalted nature (*ta'ālīhi*). And they are called the Jacobites (*al-ya'āqibah*) among Jesus' people. And others say that God, in Himself, is an expression of three – a Father, who is the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-quḍs*), a Mother, who is Mary, and a Son, who is Jesus – Peace be upon him....

And the knowledge that Jesus brought was an addition (*ziyādah*) to what was in the Torah, namely the mystery of lordship and power. He revealed this, and for this reason his people became unbelievers (*kafara*), because the disclosure (*ifshā'*) of the mystery of lordship is unbelief (*kufr*). If Jesus had concealed (*satarā*) this knowledge, and propagated it to his people in coverings (*qushūr*), expressions (*'ibārāt*) and lines of allusions (*suṭūr ishārāt*), as our prophet did, his people would not have fallen into error (*dallū*) after him. What was needed for the subsequent perfection of religion (*kamāl al-dīn*) was the knowledge of divinity and the essence that the Prophet brought in the Furqan and Qur'an, which we have already discussed in relation to the essence and attributes. And God synthesised (*jama'a*) that in a single verse, which was, "There is nothing like Him; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing," (Q 42:11) where "There is nothing like Him," is connected to the essence, and "He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing," is connected to the attributes.⁵³⁶

Having indicated the deficiency of the Torah vis-à-vis the Qur'an – and thus of Judaism vis-à-vis Islam – al-Jīlī goes on to set out the deficiency of the message of Moses vis-à-vis that of Jesus. This time, it is the relationship between the Torah and the Gospel that is defined by abrogation (*naskh*) (in this instance, of the former by the latter), an idea that is in fact of Late Antique Christian origin.⁵³⁷ In Islamic thought, "[t]here is some divergence of opinion whether it was Islam that

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁵³⁷ See Lazarus-Yafeh (1992), 35.

abrogated both Judaism and Christianity, or first Christianity abrogated Judaism and then Islam abrogated Christianity.”⁵³⁸ The latter view, which al-Jīlī puts forward here and which is supported by Sunni authorities like al-Qurṭubī,⁵³⁹ appears to find support in Q 5:82, which describes the Jews and the polytheists as “the most inimical of people (*ashadd al-nās ‘adāwatan*) towards those who believe,” and the Christians as “the nearest of them in love (*aqrabahum mawaddatan*) for those who believe.”

Al-Jīlī’s basis for proposing that Jesus’ religion abrogated that of Moses is not this Qur’anic verse, however, but rather the Qur’anic motifs of Jesus’ miracle working, specifically, his speaking in the cradle (see Q 3:46, 5:110, 19:29), and his healing the blind and the leper and reviving the dead (see Q 3:49). These motifs, which are rooted in the canonical and apocryphal Gospels,⁵⁴⁰ form a key part of presentations of Jesus in the Islamic tales of the prophets and other post-Qur’anic literature.⁵⁴¹ Significantly for our purposes, they also appear in several places in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, where they represent the miraculous, God-like powers of the Perfect Men.⁵⁴² More specifically, al-Jīlī indicates here that these miracles of Jesus’ constitute his manifestation of the divine attributes of power (*qudrah*) and lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*). The rationale behind this is

⁵³⁸ Friedmann (2003), 23.

⁵³⁹ See al-Qurṭubī (1997), 13:149 (Q 27:16): “Every prophet who came after Moses, whether they were sent out or not, followed the law of Moses (*sharī‘at Mūsá*), until the Messiah – Peace be upon him – was sent out, for he abrogated it [i.e. the law of Moses] (*nasakhahā*).”

⁵⁴⁰ See e.g. Mark 8:22-25, Matthew 20:29-34, Luke 18:35-43, John 9:1-12 (healing of the blind), Mark 1:40-45, Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 5:12-16, Luke 17:11-19 (healing of lepers), Mark 5:21-42, Luke 7:11-17, John 11:1-44 (reviving the dead), Syriac Infancy Gospel 1:2 (speaking in the cradle).

⁵⁴¹ See e.g. al-Tha‘labī (2002), 646, 648, 657, 661.

⁵⁴² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 152, 269, 278.

that, if *qudrah*, as indicated above, constitutes God's power to bring things from non-existence into existence, and *rubūbiyyah* denotes both God's power over creation and the link between God and creation, then Jesus' miracle working can be viewed as a manifestation of that divine power and that connection between God and creation in the phenomenal world. The significance of this here is that *al-qudrah* and *al-rubūbiyyah* are the names of the two tablets of the revealed Torah that Moses was commanded not to propagate to his people. By revealing these two divine attributes through his miracles, then, Jesus effectively propagated the two extra tablets of the revealed Torah; hence al-Jīlī speaks here of his bringing an "addition" (*ziyādah*) to the Torah. Jesus' revelation, therefore, is more complete than Moses', and thus abrogates it. Al-Jīlī's view here thus indicates a conception of sacred history according to which the divine message propagated to mankind, and thus religion (*dīn*) as a whole, is marked by increasing completeness over time, culminating in the Qur'an and Islam.⁵⁴³ This is a conception that, as noted above, is common in orthodox Sunni Islam.

This being said, as al-Jīlī sees it, just because a particular revelation is more complete than another it does not necessarily follow that the people to whom it is propagated will get closer to the truth. We saw above the idea that, if Moses had propagated the complete revealed Torah to his people, then not a single person would have believed him, indicating that the completeness of a revelation can potentially lead people away from the truth, if they do not possess the requisite spiritual capacity to bear its

⁵⁴³ This being said, al-Jīlī considers the Psalter to be less complete than the Torah, even though it was revealed after it. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 127.

contents. This, in fact, is how al-Jīlī views the situation of the Christians, who, he indicates here, were led into error (*ḍalāl*) and unbelief (*kufr*) on account of their inability to comprehend the mysteries of divine power and lordship that Jesus revealed to them. Such error and unbelief specifically consists in the Christians' false doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. Since al-Jīlī puts forward a detailed critique of these doctrines in the chapter on the Gospel, which we will look at in the following chapter of this thesis, we shall not linger on this point here, nor look at his treatment in this chapter of the Qur'anic narrative of God's interrogation of Jesus (see Q 5:116-119), which he also repeats in the chapter on the Gospel. For now, let us briefly consider what his discussion of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation here reveal about his knowledge of Christianity and his overall conception of sacred history.

Al-Jīlī displays some limited knowledge of Christian doctrine and terminology here. There is much truth to his claim that the source of the Christian schisms can be found in different interpretations of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It was disagreements over Christology and the Trinity that provoked the first seven Ecumenical Councils, and which led to the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western churches in 1054 CE.⁵⁴⁴ In his use of the technical term *aqānīm* to denote the hypostases or persons of the Trinity, meanwhile, al-Jīlī displays some knowledge of Christian theological vocabulary.⁵⁴⁵ Likewise, al-Jīlī's discussion of the Christological doctrines of the three Christian denominations mentioned

⁵⁴⁴ See Louth (2013), 60-65; McGrath (2011), 16-18, 247-249.

⁵⁴⁵ For the use of this term in Arab Christian theology, see Griffith (1982); Griffith (2002b), 32, 180, 184-185.

here – the Melkites, Jacobites, and an unnamed group – indicates that he had some awareness of internal Christian theological debates and internal Christian divisions.

This being said, his discussion also features several misunderstandings of the precise nature of these divisions, and fails to capture the essential differences between the denominations. Thus he defines the Melkite position as the belief that Jesus was the Son of God (*ibn Allāh*), yet this term is used by all of the major Christian denominations, whatever the differences of interpretation between them. Furthermore, this definition does not reflect any awareness on al-Jīlī's part of the Melkites' adherence to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, i.e. the diaphysite doctrine of Christ "as one person in two perfect natures, divine and human."⁵⁴⁶ Likewise, his definition of the Jacobite position does not really capture the fact of that church's adherence to the anti-Chalcedonian, miaphysite or monophysite doctrine of "one nature of God the Word incarnate" adopted by the Jacobites' eponym, Jacob Baradeus (d. 578 CE).⁵⁴⁷ Rather, al-Jīlī's statement that, according to the Jacobites, God "took on the form of Adam" (*taṣawwara bi-ṣūrat Ādam*) echoes his own Sufī metaphysical conception of the ability of the Muhammadan Reality "to take on every form" (*taṣawwur bi-kull ṣūrah*).⁵⁴⁸ Similarly, his definition of the Trinitarian doctrine of the unnamed group, whom we might expect to be the Nestorians, given that the three Christian denominations most often identified by medieval Arab Muslim authors

⁵⁴⁶ See Louth (2013), 57. For an overview of the early history and doctrines of the Melkites, see Griffith (2008), 137-139.

⁵⁴⁷ See Noble & Treiger (2014), 9. For an overview of the early history and doctrines of the Jacobites, see Griffith (2008), 134-136.

⁵⁴⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 210.

are the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and the Melkites,⁵⁴⁹ bears little relation to the characteristic Nestorian emphasis on the distinction between Christ's divine and human natures.⁵⁵⁰ Rather, al-Jīlī's notion that this group professes a Trinity of the Holy Spirit, Mary, and Jesus is probably drawn from the Qur'anic presentation of Christian doctrine, as I shall argue in chapter four. While al-Jīlī's discussion of the different Christological and Trinitarian doctrines of the different Christian denominations thus reflects a degree of interest in and awareness of Christianity as a living and internally diverse theological tradition, nevertheless it also displays the limitations of his knowledge of that tradition. Indeed, it seems likely that everything he says here is based upon the common knowledge available to him as an educated medieval Muslim, rather than upon a direct engagement with Christian texts or individuals, or indeed with Islamic anti-Christian polemical texts, which tend to be more informed about the Christologies of the different Christian denominations of the Islamic world.⁵⁵¹

More significant, for our purposes, than the question of how much al-Jīlī knew about Christian doctrine is the question of how his understanding of Christian doctrine affected his conception of sacred history. As indicated above, as he sees it, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, in all of their various interpretations, constitute error (*ḍalāl*) and, even more than that, unbelief (*kufṛ*). This is the orthodox Islamic view, grounded in the Qur'an, which states that those who say that God

⁵⁴⁹ See Griffith (2008), 8, and e.g. al-Warrāq (1992), 47-48; Reynolds (2004), 37, 204; Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 1:480.

⁵⁵⁰ See Noble & Treiger (2014), 9; Griffith (2008), 131-134; Louth (2013), 62.

⁵⁵¹ See e.g. al-Warrāq (1992); al-Warrāq (2002); Reynolds (2004); Siddiqui (2013), 106-112.

is Jesus son of Mary and that God is “the third of three” – i.e. who believe in the Incarnation and the Trinity – have fallen into unbelief (*kafara*) (see Q 5:17, 5:73).⁵⁵² As we shall see in detail in chapter four, however, al-Jīlī’s understanding of the Christians’ error and unbelief is somewhat different to the dominant orthodox view. In his view, the Christians made the fatal mistakes of limiting the divine manifestation to Jesus alone, and failing to balance their declaration of God’s comparability to creation (specifically, to Jesus) (*tashbīh*) with a recognition of God’s incomparability (*tanzīh*), as in the Ibn ‘Arabian doctrine that we saw in chapter one.⁵⁵³ These mistakes, he indicates here, were a consequence of Jesus’ revealing openly the mysteries of lordship and divine power, for this led the Christians to identify with Jesus with God, a position he identifies as an “absolute declaration of [God’s] comparability [to creation]” (*muṭlaq al-tashbīh*),⁵⁵⁴ i.e. a profession of *tashbīh* without *tanzīh*.

If we apply this Sufi metaphysical idea of the need to balance *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* to al-Jīlī’s conception of sacred history, we can draw out the following narrative. First, the Jews emphasised *tanzīh* at the expense of *tashbīh*, because the propagated Torah was missing the two tablets that revealed the *tashbīhī* aspect of God’s relationship with creation. This deficiency of the Torah necessitated the revelation of the Gospel to Jesus, who was tasked with revealing the truth of *tashbīh* through his miracles, and who thus abrogated the revelation of Moses. Nevertheless, because

⁵⁵² On the imputation of *kufr* (and *shirk*) to Christians in orthodox Islamic thought, see Hawting (1999), 82-84; Friedmann (2003), 57.

⁵⁵³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 60-61.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

Jesus revealed the truth of *tashbīh* openly, his people, who did not possessed the requisite understanding or spiritual preparedness to comprehend this truth, were led astray, adopting the other extreme to that of the Jews, namely absolute *tashbīh*. This in turn necessitated the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad, to restore the balance of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, and thus abrogate the (falsified) religion of Jesus.

This restoration of the balance between *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* has been achieved, al-Jīlī indicates here, thanks to the way in which the Qur'an addresses its listeners, specifically, through its allusive language, such that it can only be fully understood by those who are able to comprehend the truths of both *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*. This is a point that will be developed in the following section. Moreover, the Qur'an leads its audience to profess the synthesis of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* because, as we saw in the previous chapter, it represents both the incomparable divine essence (*al-dhāt*) (as *al-Qur'ān*, *al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, and *al-Qur'ān al-‘azīm*) and the comparable divine names and attributes (as *al-Furqān*, *al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, and *al-sab‘ al-mathānī*) – here denoted by the term (*al-ulūhiyyah*), the level of existence that contains all of the names and attributes.⁵⁵⁵ Finally, al-Jīlī states that this Qur'anic synthesis of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* also emerges from a verse of the Qur'an: "There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (Q 42:11) This verse is often used by Ibn ‘Arabī for the same purposes, the first half of the verse denoting, in his reading, the incomparability of God (*tanzīh*) with respect to His essence, and the second half, which refers to two of

⁵⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, 42-47.

God's names, denoting His comparability (*tashbīh*), which pertains to His attributes.⁵⁵⁶ Al-Jīlī, who was certainly familiar with this Ibn 'Arabian interpretation,⁵⁵⁷ has the same idea in mind here.

All of this resonates with the traditional notion that Islam constitutes a middle path between the excesses of Judaism and Christianity, an idea that is fairly common in orthodox Sunni thought (being often derived from Q 2:143),⁵⁵⁸ the only difference here being that al-Jīlī expresses it in Sufi metaphysical terms. Indeed, this moderation can also be framed in terms of his key Sufi metaphysical concept of comprehensiveness. Unlike the revelations of Moses and Jesus, the revelation of Muhammad advocates the comprehensive synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*,⁵⁵⁹ hence al-Jīlī can talk here of the “perfection of [Muhammad's] religion” (*kamāl al-dīn*). It is this principle, as we have already seen and will continue to see in this thesis, which underlies al-Jīlī's conception of sacred history and governs his view of the superiority of Islam over Judaism and Christianity.

e) Moses' & Muhammad's concealment of the mystery of lordship

If Moses had propagated what Jesus had propagated to his people, his people would have accused him (*yattahimūnahu*) for killing (*qatl*) Pharaoh, for he said, “I am your lord the most exalted,” (Q 79:24) and the disclosure of the mystery of lordship gives nothing but what Pharaoh claimed. But Pharaoh did not possess that by way of

⁵⁵⁶ See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 70; Ibn 'Arabī (1988), 502, note 11; Izutsu (1984), 62.

⁵⁵⁷ See al-Jīlī (1999a), 118-120.

⁵⁵⁸ See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 2:149 (Q 2:143), “I.e. this [Islamic] community did go to the extremes (*lam taghlu ghuluww*) of the Christians regarding their prophets, nor did they have a limited view (*qaṣṣarū*) of their prophets like the Jews.” See also the statements by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Taymiyyah on Islam as a middle path between Judaism and Christianity quoted in Saleh (2001), 57. For other classical interpretations of this verse, see Talbi (1996), 11-31. For a contemporary attempt to frame *wasāṭiyyah* as central to Islam, see Kamali (2015).

⁵⁵⁹ This point is also made by Ibn 'Arabī, for which see Izutsu (1984), 62.

realisation (*bi-tarīq al-tahqīq*), so Moses fought him (*qātalahu*) and was victorious over him. So if Moses had revealed anything of the knowledge of lordship in the Torah, his people would have become unbelievers (*kafara*) and accused him for fighting (*muqātalat*) Pharaoh.

So God commanded him to conceal (*katm*) that, just as He commanded our prophet Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace – to conceal (*katm*) things that others could not comprehend, according to the hadith transmitted from him, in which he said: “On the night that I was made to travel by night (*usriya bī*) I was given three forms of knowledge (*‘ulūm*): a form of knowledge that I was obliged to conceal (*katm*), a form of knowledge that I chose to propagate (*tablīgh*), and a form of knowledge that I was commanded to propagate.” The form of knowledge that he was commanded to propagate was the knowledge of the religious laws (*‘ilm al-sharā’i*), and the form of knowledge that he chose to propagate was the knowledge of the realities (*‘ilm al-ḥaqā’iq*), and the knowledge that he was obliged to conceal was [that of] the divine mysteries (*al-asrār al-ilāhiyyah*). God has deposited (*awda’a*) all of that in the Qur’an. That which he was commanded to propagate is apparent (*zāhir*), and that which he chose to propagate is hidden (*bāṭin*), for he says, “We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in their selves, until it is clear to them that it is the truth/the Real (*al-ḥaqq*),” (Q 41:53) and, “We only created the heavens and the earth and what is between them for the truth/the Real (*al-ḥaqq*),” (Q 46:3) and, “He has subjugated for you all that is in the heavens and on earth, from Himself,” (Q 45:13) and, “I breathed into him of My spirit.” (Q 15:29, 38:72) In all of this there is an aspect that points to the realities (*al-ḥaqā’iq*), and an aspect that points to the religious laws (*al-sharā’i*). It is like [something] being coiled up (*al-taḥayyuz*), for whoever’s understanding was divine (*ilāhiyyan*), had that propagated to him, and whoever’s understanding was not at that level and who was among those who, if they had been surprised by the realities, would have denied them (*ankarahā*), did not have that propagated to him, lest it would lead to his falling into error (*ḍalālathihi*) and his misery (*shaqāwatihi*).

And the form of knowledge that he was obliged to conceal was deposited (*muwda’a*) in the Qur’an by way of esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*), due to the obscurity of the concealment (*li-ghumūd katmihi*). This is only known by the one who has first been elevated to (*ashrafa ‘alā*) the same form of knowledge, by way of divine unveiling (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*), then hears (*sama’a*) the Qur’an after that, for he knows the place where God deposited some of the knowledge that the Prophet – May God bless him and grant him peace – was obliged to conceal. And there is an allusion to this when He says, “Only God knows its esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīlahu*).” (Q 3:7) According to

the reading of he who stops here, he who understands its esoteric interpretation in himself is the one called God, so understand!⁵⁶⁰

While Jesus, as we saw in the previous section, disclosed the mystery of lordship to his people, causing them to fall into error, al-Jīlī here emphasises that both Moses and Muhammad concealed that mystery. He uses the same key term, *katm*, for the actions of both prophets. This term, which is an antonym of the term used for Jesus' disclosure of the mystery (*ifshā'*), is from the same root as *kitmān*, an important term in the various branches of Shī'ī Islamic thought, in particular, where it is used as a near synonym for *taqiyyah*, the principle of dissimulation in the profession of one's beliefs for the sake of self-preservation and the protection of the mysteries from the uninitiated.⁵⁶¹ Both of these aspects of *katm/kitmān*, which are also found in Sufi thought,⁵⁶² are of relevance here. Moses' *katm* of the mystery of lordship, al-Jīlī indicates, was motivated by the fact that, if he had revealed that mystery, his people would have accused him for killing or fighting Pharaoh, the idea being that, if they had known that the Lord becomes manifest in man, they would then have accepted Pharaoh's claim to be Lord (*rabb*), and hence would have condemned Moses for his opposition to him. While this Pharaonic claim to lordship does have a certain truth to it from an Ibn 'Arabian perspective, in the sense that, in accordance with the theory of universal theophany, all

⁵⁶⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 121-122.

⁵⁶¹ See e.g. the statement of Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022): "*Taqiyyah* is the concealing of the truth (*kitmān al-ḥaqq*), and covering up belief about it, and concealing it (*mukātamah*) from ones opponents...." Al-Mufīd (1983), 115. See also Strothmann (2000), 134-136; Clarke (2005); Ebstein (2010), 304-312. In the Qur'an, it should be noted, the root *k-t-m* generally connotes immoral deception, for which see Khan (2008), 56. For those looking in from the outside of the esoteric traditions, this negative connotation generally holds true. Thus Ibn Taymiyyah (1995), 13:141, for instance, declares (Shī'ī) *taqiyyah* to be "the slogan of hypocrisy" (*shi'ār al-nifāq*).

⁵⁶² See Abū Zayd (2006), 89-121; Ebstein (2010), 329-342, argues for the direct impact of this Shī'ī practice on Ibn 'Arabian Sufism.

individuals are loci for the divine manifestation, nevertheless properly speaking it is untrue, for Pharaoh did not attain “realisation” (*taḥqīq*) of the mystery of lordship himself.⁵⁶³ In other words, Pharaoh was not a complete locus for the manifestation of the divine lordship, for he was not a true realiser (*muḥaqqiq*) or Perfect Man.⁵⁶⁴ In concealing the mystery of lordship, therefore, Moses both protects himself from the accusations of his people, and protects his people from falling into what would be, even from an Ibn ‘Arabian perspective, an error. Similar motivations, as we shall see presently, are at work in Muhammad’s propagation and concealment of aspects of the Qur’an.

While both Moses and Muhammad conceal the divine mysteries, however, the nature of their *katm* is different. As we have seen, Moses was given nine tablets of the Torah, and ordered to propagate seven and conceal two of them, meaning that the propagated Torah is incomplete. Muhammad’s propagation and concealment of the knowledge contained in the Qur’an, al-Jīlī explains here, works in a different way. Based on a hadith about Muhammad’s night journey (*al-isrā’*) that appears not to be canonical,⁵⁶⁵ al-Jīlī identifies three levels of knowledge (*‘ilm*) contained in the Qur’an. At the most exoteric, apparent (*ẓāhir*) level, the Qur’an contains knowledge pertaining to religious laws (*‘ilm al-sharā’i’*), which

⁵⁶³ In the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn ‘Arabī (in)famously suggests that Pharaoh’s claim to be Lord was true. See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 210-211. In the *Futūḥāt*, however, he places Pharaoh among the four groups of the damned, “who will remain eternally in hell...because he entertained pretensions to divinity (*idda’a al-rubūbiyah li-nafsihi wa-naḥāhā ‘an Allāh*).” See Ormsby (2005), 472, citing Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 4:393. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s controversial views on Pharaoh more generally, particularly on the question of his conversion to monotheism at his death, see Ernst (1985); Knysh (1999), 158-161; Lane (2001), 210-229.

⁵⁶⁴ As we saw in the previous chapter, in the chapter on the Qur’an al-Jīlī associates the attainment of *taḥqīq* with the station of the Perfect Man. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 116-117.

⁵⁶⁵ I have not found any reference to this hadith either in the six canonical books or in the other widely cited Sunni hadith collections.

Muhammad was commanded to propagate, presumably because such laws are universal, which is to say that they apply to all of mankind. At the esoteric, hidden (*bāṭin*) level, the Qur'an contains knowledge pertaining to what al-Jīlī calls “the realities” (*‘ilm al-ḥaqā’iq*),⁵⁶⁶ which Muhammad chose to propagate. As we saw in the previous chapter, al-Jīlī uses the term *ḥaqā’iq* to denote the (higher) levels of existence, hence *‘ilm al-ḥaqā’iq* can be understood to mean metaphysical knowledge. In keeping with the dominant Sufi view of the Qur'an,⁵⁶⁷ al-Jīlī thus identifies *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* aspects of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic verses quoted here (Q 41:53, 46:3, 45:13, and 15:29/38:72) exemplify these two levels of meaning. At the exoteric level, they denote God's power and majesty over His creation (Q 41:53, 46:3), and His granting of life and favour to man (Q 45:13, 15:29/38:72),⁵⁶⁸ truths that underpin the universal religious laws. At the esoteric level, they appear to denote the fundamental metaphysical truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man, as al-Jīlī indicates in his interpretations of some of these verses elsewhere in the book (as, for instance, in the chapter on the Gospel, as we shall see below),⁵⁶⁹ interpretations that he shares with other Sufi authors, including Ibn ‘Arabī.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. al-Sarrāj (1914), 5-6, who identifies “the knowledge of the realities of faith” (*‘ilm ḥaqā’iq al-īmān*) with the knowledge of the Sufis.

⁵⁶⁷ See Sands (2006), 7-13; Abū Zayd (2006), 89-98.

⁵⁶⁸ For exoteric interpretations, see e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 15:325 (Q 41:53), 10:24 (Q 15:29); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1204 (Q 45:13), 726 (15:29).

⁵⁶⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 130-131; see also *ibid.*, 121, 150.

⁵⁷⁰ See e.g. Sands (2006), 44, 173, note 77; Keeler (2006), 188; Abū Zayd (2006), 97; Silvers (2010), 47, 63; Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 49, 69, 216; al-Qāshānī (2001), 2:242 (Q 46:3), where he interprets the term *al-ḥaqq* to refer to “the everlasting, utterly one, fixed absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-thābit al-aḥadī al-ṣamadī*), through which everything exists”.

While the *ẓāhir* meaning is universal, this *bāṭin* meaning, as al-Jīlī sees it, is accessible only to certain spiritually advanced individuals, for it is wrapped up like a coil (*al-taḥayyuz*). The rationale behind this is similar to the rationale behind Moses' concealment of the two tablets, namely, self-preservation and the protection of the uninitiated. Thus al-Jīlī explains that the *ḥaqā'iq* are hidden in the Qur'an to prevent those who do not possess sufficient "understanding" (*fahm*) – or, in Ibn 'Arabian terms, preparedness (*isti'dād*) and receptivity (*qābiliyyah*) – from explicitly denying or perhaps even stating their disapproval (*inkār*) of those metaphysical truths.⁵⁷¹ One aim of hiding some truths in the Qur'an, then, is to preserve the Qur'an and Muhammad from slander. The other aim, al-Jīlī states explicitly here, is to protect those who do not understand those truths from falling into error (*ḍalālah*) and misery (*shaqāwah*). These terms, which are both Qur'anic, seem to carry soteriological significance: *shaqāwah*, in al-Jīlī's usage, is usually the state of those condemned to hell, as opposed to *sa'ādah*, the state of those in paradise,⁵⁷² while *ḍalāl* can generally denote "a state of perdition".⁵⁷³ Their function here seems to be to establish an implicit contrast between the Muslims and the Christians. While Muhammad hides certain metaphysical truths to protect his people from the error that leads to the hellfire and the misery that being in hell entails, so al-Jīlī's argument goes, Jesus reveals them openly, thus exposing his people to

⁵⁷¹ See Lane (1984), 1:2849: "*ankarahu*: He denied, or disacknowledged it...He disapproved it, he disliked it, he deemed it, or declared it to be bad, evil, abominable, or foul..."

⁵⁷² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 182-183, 261. This usage is rooted in the Qur'an. See e.g. Q 11:105-108.

⁵⁷³ See Lane (1984), 1:1798.

such a terrible fate. In other words, the Muslims are spared the punishment of hell, on account of the way in which the metaphysical truths are hidden in the Qur'an, while the Christians enjoy no such protection, given that the metaphysical truths are revealed openly in the Gospel. This clear soteriological distinction fits with what al-Jīlī says in the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, where he indicates that all Muslims will be made “happy” (*su‘adā’*) – i.e. granted the “happiness” of those who are saved – by virtue of their “following Muhammad” (*bi-mutāba‘at Muḥammad*),⁵⁷⁴ while declaring that “all of the other communities (*umam*) that are opposed to them [i.e. to the Muslims], after the prophethood of Muhammad and his being sent with the message (*ba‘thi bi-al-risālah*), whoever they are, will be in error, miserable, and punished with the hellfire (*ḍāllin shaqīy mu‘adhdhab bi-al-nār*), just as God – May He be exalted – has informed [us].”⁵⁷⁵ Though, in the context of that final chapter of the book, al-Jīlī proceeds to somewhat mitigate the harshness of this soteriological picture by adopting the Ibn ‘Arabian notion that the suffering of those condemned to hell will ultimately be alleviated,⁵⁷⁶ nevertheless the evident exclusivism of his soteriology reflects, once again, his adherence to the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history.

Returning to the topic of Muhammad’s concealment of the divine mysteries, we find that in al-Jīlī’s scheme Muhammad was given a third type of knowledge, which lies on an even deeper plane than the *bāṭin*

⁵⁷⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 261.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ See *ibid.* For Ibn ‘Arabī’s expression of this idea, see Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 4:327-329; Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 107-108; Chittick (1994), 113-115; Khalil (2013), 62-67.

level, namely that of the divine mysteries (*al-asrār al-ilāhiyyah*). Significantly, al-Jīlī tells us that these mysteries *are* deposited (*muwdaʿ*) in the Qurʾan, only that they are deposited in an obscure way (*ghumūd*), such that they can only be drawn out of the Qurʾan via esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*). In contrast to the mysteries revealed to Moses, therefore, those revealed to Muhammad are in fact contained in the Qurʾan that he propagated to his people. In other words, whereas the divine mysteries are truly absent from the propagated Torah, they are in fact present in the Qurʾan, but concealed. The significance of this is that Muhammad's concealment of the mysteries revealed to him does not undermine the completeness of the Qurʾan, which, as we know, is a key notion within al-Jīlī's conception of the Qurʾan. Thus while none of Moses' people, as al-Jīlī stated above, are able to attain perfection, on account of the incompleteness of their scripture, the same does not apply to Muhammad's people, who are able to know the divine mysteries from the Qurʾan, provided that they are capable of *taʾwīl*. Muslims, then, are capable of becoming Perfect Men, whereas Jews are not. As for the Christians, they were exposed to the mysteries, yet were incapable of *taʾwīl*, hence, like the Jews, they too cannot become Perfect Men, and, as we have just seen, are apparently condemned to the misery of the hellfire.

Al-Jīlī's notion that certain Muslims are able to uncover the divine mysteries deposited in the Qurʾan via *taʾwīl* poses the question of what he means exactly by the term *taʾwīl*, and who is able to undertake it. *Taʾwīl* is a Qurʾanic term, in which context it most often denotes "explanation or interpretation of a dream or an event" (see e.g. Q 12:6,

12:21, 12:36, 12:37).⁵⁷⁷ It was generally used in the first Islamic centuries, and sometimes in the medieval period, as a synonym for *tafsīr*, i.e. the interpretation of the Qur'an, yet it also acquired another technical meaning in Shī'ī and Sufī thought, namely, the uncovering of the inner, esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning of the Qur'an.⁵⁷⁸ Going by what al-Jīlī says here, for him *ta'wīl* seems to denote the uncovering of the level of meaning even below that of the *bāṭin*, namely the level of the *asrār*. As he sees it, *ta'wīl* appears to work according to a two-stage process. First, the interpreter must have already accessed the same level of knowledge, i.e. the truths represented by the divine mysteries, such as the mysteries of lordship and power that have been discussed in this chapter. Such knowledge, al-Jīlī indicates, can only be obtained via “divine unveiling” (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*). While the precise meaning of this latter term is somewhat unclear, we saw in the introduction that al-Jīlī uses it to denote the divinely given and quasi-prophetic experiential knowledge attained by those who reach the summit of the Sufī path. He therefore seems to be implying here that *ta'wīl* can only be undertaken by those who have already undergone a religious experience analogous to prophetic revelation. This suggests, on the one hand, that the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an is merely a confirmatory process for the spiritually advanced individual, rather than the initial source of that individual's knowledge of the divine mysteries. This is potentially significant, in that it would seem to imply that esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an is not a

⁵⁷⁷ Poonawala (2000), 390; Gilliot (2002), 100; Chittick (1989), 199; Tahānawī (1963), 376-377.

⁵⁷⁸ See Poonawala (2000), 391-392; Böwering (2003); Sands (2006), 7-13. For the history and development of Sufī exegesis of the Qur'an, see Böwering (1991); Knysh (2006). For examples, see Sands (2006), 65-135; Böwering (2003), 354-356.

necessary condition of achieving Sufi “realisation” (*taḥqīq*). On the other hand, al-Jīlī’s description of the necessary conditions for *ta’wīl* indicates that the knowledge attained via *kashf* is in perfect harmony with the Qur’an, a point that al-Jīlī explicitly makes earlier in the book.⁵⁷⁹

The second stage in the process of *ta’wīl*, meanwhile, involves “hearing” (*sam‘*) the Qur’an, suggesting perhaps the *ta’wīl* is undertaken in a setting where the Qur’an is recited out loud, such as a Sufi gathering, a suggestion supported by the fact that the Sufi community of Zabid of which al-Jīlī was a part was known for holding *samā‘* sessions.⁵⁸⁰ We might therefore imagine *kashf* and the resulting *ta’wīl*, as al-Jīlī understands them, to be connected to mystical experiences resulting from Sufi rituals.⁵⁸¹ Alternatively, we might imagine these experiences to occur in more everyday settings, which is to say, wherever the Qur’an is recited.⁵⁸²

Al-Jīlī’s presentation of the process of *ta’wīl* tells us quite a bit about who he deems to be capable of undertaking *ta’wīl*. Both his suggestion that *ta’wīl* can only be undertaken by those who have experienced *kashf*, and his situating *ta’wīl* in the context of the audition of the Qur’an, imply that *ta’wīl* is the preserve of spiritually advanced Sufis. This supposition is supported and refined by his citation of Q 3:7,

⁵⁷⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 11. For Ibn Taymiyyah’s critique of the notion that the knowledge attained via *kashf* can accord with the revealed knowledge of the Qur’an, see Sands (2006), 53.

⁵⁸⁰ See al-Jīlī (1987), 31; al-Jīlī (2004), 35; Knysh (1998), 257.

⁵⁸¹ For the link between *samā‘*, the recitation of the Qur’an, and ecstatic experience in Sufism, see Kermani (2015), 297-303.

⁵⁸² For the phenomenon of ecstatic states brought on by hearing the Qur’an recited in an everyday setting, as recounted in Sufi literature, see *ibid.*, 303-311.

which states that only God knows *ta'wīl*.⁵⁸³ Employing a kind of *ta'wīl* himself, al-Jīlī takes this to mean that *ta'wīl* can only be undertaken by “the one called God” (*al-musammá bi-Allāh*), by which he seems to mean those individuals who are loci of manifestation for the name *Allāh* and all the other divine names that come under that name. If this is the correct interpretation of al-Jīlī’s use of the verse, then this means that only the Perfect Men, who are the loci of manifestation for all of God’s names, can undertake *ta'wīl*.⁵⁸⁴

We have seen that al-Jīlī presents us in this section with both a theory of *ta'wīl*, and a theory of the levels of knowledge contained in the Qur’an. It is possible to identify certain precursors and parallels of these theories in earlier Sufi literature. For instance, al-Jīlī’s connection of *ta'wīl* to the audition of the Qur’an may have a precursor in the classical Sufi notion of reciting or listening to the Qur’an with “the presence of the heart” (*bi-ḥuḍūr al-qalb*), i.e. in a mindful way, such that the esoteric meaning of the Qur’an is opened up.⁵⁸⁵ Indeed, as Knysh puts it, “the recitation of the Qur’ān...was an indispensable part of quotidian Ṣūfī life”; hence, “[i]n most cases, esoteric interpretations of the Qur’ān by the...Ṣūfīs were the fruits of many years of incessant recitation in an attempt to grasp and “extract” its hidden meaning (*istinbāṭ*).”⁵⁸⁶ Al-Jīlī’s description of the process of *ta'wīl* here might therefore be read as a

⁵⁸³ For early theological debates regarding whether *ta'wīl* is the preserve of God, see Abū Zayd (1993), 141-163.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:118 (Q 3:7), where he interprets the same phrase to mean, “The knowers know through His [i.e. God’s] knowledge (*al-‘ālimūn ya’lim bi-‘ilmihī*),” implying, like al-Jīlī, that certain advanced individuals can undertake *ta'wīl* by virtue of their being loci for the divine manifestation.

⁵⁸⁵ See Sands (2006), 30-34.

⁵⁸⁶ Knysh (2006), 141. See also al-Sarrāj (1914), 12: “The Sufis also have something that distinguishes them (*takhṣīṣ*) from the other classes of people of knowledge, which is their use of verses recited from the Book of God.

codification of a longstanding Sufi practice. Likewise, many Sufi commentators also indicate, like al-Jīlī, that it is through receiving *kashf* that an individual acquires the ability to undertake *ta'wīl*.⁵⁸⁷

As for his theory of the levels of knowledge contained in the Qur'an, there are again some parallels in classical Sufi exegesis, most notably, the theory of the four levels of meaning – usually, the apparent (*ẓāhir*), hidden (*bāṭin*), normative or moral (*ḥadd*), and anagogical (*maṭla' / muṭṭala'*) – set out by such pioneering Sufi commentators as Sahl Tustarī (d. 283/896) and al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), based on statements attributed to the Shī'ī Imāms 'Alī (d. 40/661) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and the famous early exegete Ibn 'Abbās.⁵⁸⁸ Al-Jīlī, of course, identifies only three levels, and while they include the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, his third level seems to imply a deeper level of meaning than that proposed by the earlier Sufi commentators. A more direct influence might be Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the levels of knowledge set out in the introduction to the *Futūḥāt*. Like al-Jīlī, Ibn 'Arabī identifies three levels of knowledge, namely i) “theoretical, intellectual knowledge” (*al-'ilm al-'aqlī al-naẓarī*), which is based upon a fallible type of discursive thought (*fikr*); ii) “knowledge of states” (*'ilm al-aḥwāl*), which is based upon direct sense perception; and iii) “knowledge of the mysteries” (*'ilm al-asrār*), which is above the level of the intellect (*fawq ṭawr al-'aql*)

⁵⁸⁷ See e.g. Sands (2006), 10, 11, 23, 40, 162. One of the great Persian Sufi commentaries, that of Maybudī (fl. early 6th/12th century), meanwhile, is titled *Kashf al-asrār*. See Maybudī (2015); Keeler (2006).

⁵⁸⁸ See Böwering (2003), 351-352. As Böwering points out, there is a parallel here with the four senses of scripture identified in medieval Christian and Jewish Biblical exegesis, for which see Synan (2003). For Tustarī's commentary, see Böwering (1980); Tustarī (2011). Ibn 'Arabī, it should be noted, quotes the tradition about the four levels in the *Futūḥāt*. See Chittick (1989), 364.

and...is particular to the prophet and friend of God.”⁵⁸⁹ While Ibn ‘Arabī does not explicitly connect these three levels of knowledge to the Qur’an, and while his “intellectual knowledge” and “knowledge of states” may not correspond exactly to al-Jīlī’s “knowledge of the religious laws” and “knowledge of the realities”, the fact that they both put forward a threefold scheme, with knowledge of the “mysteries” at the deepest level, suggests that al-Jīlī may well have had in mind Ibn ‘Arabī’s scheme, with which he would have no doubt been familiar.⁵⁹⁰ More generally, it can be said that al-Jīlī’s notion of different levels of knowledge – and thus different levels of knowers – reflects the hierarchical conception of knowledge and society that was widespread in pre-modern Islamic thought, among not only among Sufis, but also jurists, theologians, and philosophers.⁵⁹¹

Leaving aside his possible sources of inspiration, what is important for our purposes is that al-Jīlī’s hierarchical conception of knowledge pertains not only to the distinctions between Muslims – in terms of their ability to interpret the Qur’an – but also to the distinctions between the different scriptures – in terms of the levels of knowledge that

⁵⁸⁹ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 1:139-140. See also Abū Zayd (2006), 105-106, for another threefold scheme put forward by Ibn ‘Arabī in this context, namely his discussion of the creeds of the masses (*‘aqīdat al-‘awāmm*), of the elect of the people of God (*khawāṣṣ ahl Allāh*), and of the “quintessence of the elect” (*khulāṣat al-khawāṣṣ*).

⁵⁹⁰ A threefold scheme – submission (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), and doing good (*ihsān*) – is also found in the famous “hadith of faith” often quoted by Sufi authors, and may lie in the background to both Ibn ‘Arabī’s and al-Jīlī’s schemes. For the hadith, see al-Bukhārī (1862-1908), 1:21; Muslim (1995), 1:141 (no. 8); Ibn Mājah (1998), 1: 88-89 (no. 64); Brown (2018), 197-198. In the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, it should be noted, al-Jīlī identifies seven levels within Islam, of which *islām*, *īmān*, and *ihsān* constitute the first, second, and fourth respectively (going from lowest to highest). See al-Jīlī (1997a), 263-264.

⁵⁹¹ See Brown (2015), 222-223; Ahmed (2016), 167-168, 368-372. As Jonathan Brown points out, such a conception is not limited to Islamic thought. For the hierarchical conception of society in pre-modern Europe, and its metaphysical basis in the idea of the Great Chain of Being, see Taylor (2007), 127-129; Dreyfus & Kelly (2011), 13-14.

they contain – and the different religious communities – in terms of their ability to correctly interpret the knowledge contained in their respective scriptures. Unlike the Torah, the Qur'an that Muhammad propagated to his people contains the divine mysteries. And while the Gospel does contain certain divine mysteries, the Christians are unable to comprehend those mysteries, and so fall into error and unbelief. By contrast, the divine mysteries in the Qur'an are concealed in such a way that those Muslims who cannot comprehend them do not realise that they are there, and so do not fall into error and unbelief, while those Muslims who do possess the requisite spiritual capacity – i.e., the Perfect Men – are able to read them out of the Qur'an, through *ta'wīl*. Al-Jīlī's theories of *ta'wīl* and the levels of knowledge thus once again emphasise the superiority of the Qur'an and the Muslims over the other scriptures and religious communities.

f) The metaphysical meaning of the Torah

Know that the Torah is an expression of the manifestations of the attributive names (*al-asmā' al-ṣifātiyyah*), which is the appearance of the Real – Glory be to Him and may He be exalted – in the Real loci of manifestation (*al-maẓāhir al-ḥaqqiyyah*), for the Real – May He be exalted – set up the names as guides (*adillah*) to His attributes, and made His attributes a guide (*dalīl*) to His essence in His loci of manifestation and in His appearance in His creation through the names and attributes. Nothing else is possible, because creatures were fashioned (*fuṭirū*) in accordance with simplicity (*'alā al-sadhājah*), so creation is empty of all the divine meanings. Nevertheless it is like a white garment on which is printed that which it receives (*mā yuqābiluhu*). So it is called the Real, through these names, so that they [the names] would be guides for creation to His attributes, and so that creation would know through them the attributes of the Real.

Then the people of the Real (*ahl al-ḥaqq*) were guided to Him, so they were like a mirror (*mir'āh*) to those names, and the names appeared within them, as did the attributes, and they witnessed

(*shāhadū*) themselves in terms of the essential names (*al-asmā' al-dhātiyyah*) and the divine attributes that were imprinted on them. So when they call upon God – May He be exalted – they are the ones called upon by this name. And this is the meaning of Torah, for the linguistic meaning of Torahness (*al-tawriyyah*) / “double entendre” (*al-tawriyah*) is “carrying the meaning to the further of its two significations” (*ḥaml al-ma'ná alá ab'ad al-mafhūmayn*)...⁵⁹²

As we saw in the previous chapter and will see in the forthcoming chapters, each of the scriptures, as al-Jīlī sees it, represents a metaphysical truth, specifically, a certain type of divine manifestation. The Torah, he tells us here, represents the manifestation of what he calls “the attributive names” (*al-asmā' al-ṣifātiyyah*). As we know, central to al-Jīlī’s Sufī metaphysics is the traditional theological distinction between God’s essence, attributes, and names. In al-Jīlī’s view, there is a hierarchy among these three elements of the Godhead.⁵⁹³ He indicates in this passage that within this hierarchy, the lower elements point to the higher ones, or as he puts it here they are a “guide” to or “proof” of (*dalīl ‘alá*) that aspect of God that lies above them in the hierarchy of the divine existence.⁵⁹⁴ This notion helps us to understand that what al-Jīlī means by *al-asmā' al-ṣifātiyyah* is those divine names that guide us to the divine attributes. The term might therefore be taken to mean all of the divine names, since all of God’s names are an expression of a particular attribute (thus *Allāh* is an expression of *al-ulūhiyyah*, *al-raḥmān* of *raḥmah* or *al-raḥmāniyyah*, etc.). However, the term *al-asmā' al-ṣifātiyyah* also has a more technical sense, which al-Jīlī seems to be

⁵⁹² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 122.

⁵⁹³ Hence, as he explains in chapters thirteen to fifteen of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, the spiritually advanced individual first receives the manifestations of the names, then the manifestations of the attributes, and finally becomes a locus of manifestation for the essence. See *ibid.*, 64-78.

⁵⁹⁴ See also *ibid.*, 11, where he uses the term *dalla* to express the relationship between the names and the divine essence.

employing here, and which we can identify if we take into consideration what he means by the term “the essential names” (*al-asmā’ al-dhātiyyah*), which he also uses here. Earlier in the book, al-Jīlī uses the term “the essential names and attributes” (*al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah*) to indicate those divine names and attributes, such as *Allāh*, *al-ḥaqq*, *al-aḥad*, *al-wāḥid*, etc., which can only be used of the divine essence.⁵⁹⁵ The essential names, in other words, are guides to the divine essence, or to those attributes that can only qualify the divine essence. Returning to the meaning of *al-asmā’ al-ṣifātiyyah*, then, it can therefore be said that this term denotes those names that guide us to the non-essential attributes of God. In other words, it denotes all those names other than the names of the essence, coming lower in the hierarchy than that latter category of names. In terms of the levels of existence, it represents the divine levels – here signified by the term *al-maẓāhir al-ḥaqqiyyah* – of *al-raḥmāniyyah* and below, i.e. those levels beneath those that describe God’s essence (*al-ulūhiyyah*, *al-aḥad*, *al-wāḥidiyyah*).

As we shall see in the following two chapters, this distinction between the attributive and the essential names has significance for al-Jīlī’s conception of the hierarchy of scriptures, for while the Torah, as he explains here, is an expression of the manifestations of *al-asmā’ al-ṣifātiyyah*, the Gospel is an expression of the manifestations of *al-asmā’ al-dhātiyyah*. This means that the Gospel is a more complete expression of God’s nature than the Torah, an idea that accords with what we have already seen in this chapter regarding the relative completeness of the

⁵⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, 96.

two scriptures (since the Gospel contains those mysteries that Moses was ordered to keep out of the propagated Torah). The Qur'an, meanwhile, as an expression of the essence itself, stands above both scriptures in the hierarchy. Thus we see how the hierarchy of divine names and attributes is mirrored in the hierarchy of scriptures. This is an example of the broader Ibn 'Arabian notion that the nature of the phenomenal world, including the multiplicity and hierarchies contained within it, is determined by the nature of God, as per the theory of universal theophany. It is a particularly significant idea for the purposes of this thesis, since it demonstrates how al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical theories (here, the theories of universal theophany and the levels of existence) lead him to a position that is consistent with the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history.

Furthermore, in addition to telling us something about God's nature, al-Jīlī also indicates here that the Torah reveals the true nature of man. As we know, according to al-Jīlī, although man is primordially perfect, only the Perfect Men realise this perfection in actuality, by becoming loci for the manifestation of the divine names and attributes. He refers to this idea here, only instead of using the term *al-insān al-kāmil* or *al-kummal*, he refers to "the people of the Real" (*ahl al-ḥaqq*). This term, along with the synonymous "the people of God" (*ahl Allāh*), is used by Ibn 'Arabī "to refer to the highest of God's friends", i.e. the Perfect Men.⁵⁹⁶ Both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Jīlī derive the term from the *ḥadīth qudsī*, "The people

⁵⁹⁶ Chittick (1998), 6. See also Abū Zayd (2006), 95, quoting Ibn 'Arabī's definition of *ahl Allāh* as "those who know Him by way of the divine gift" (*al-'arīfīn bihi min ṭarīq al-wahb al-ilāhī*). On the synonymity of *ahl al-ḥaqq* and *ahl Allāh* in the lexicon of Ibn 'Arabī, see Chittick (1989), 400, note 3.

of the Qur'an are the people of God and His elect (*ahl al-Qur'ān ahl Allāh wa-khāṣṣatuhu*).⁵⁹⁷ According to al-Jīlī's interpretation of this hadith, which he puts forward in chapter twenty-one, the term *ahl Allāh* refers to "His servants who are specified for His essence" (*'ibādihi al-makhṣūṣīn bi-dhātihī*), i.e. those individuals who receive the manifestation of the divine essence.⁵⁹⁸ As we saw in the previous chapter, the receipt of the manifestation of the essence is the privilege of the Perfect Man; hence the terms *ahl Allāh* and *ahl al-ḥaqq* are clearly synonymous with *al-kummāl*.

This being said, al-Jīlī here seems to be referring to a different class of Perfect Men than in chapter twenty-one. While there he discussed how the people of God are loci for the manifestation of the divine essence, here he mentions only that they are loci for the manifestation of the divine names and attributes. They are, he says, mirrors for the divine names;⁵⁹⁹ they have the divine names and attributes imprinted on them;⁶⁰⁰ and they are called by the divine names.⁶⁰¹ While the Perfect Man's becoming a locus for the manifestation of the divine names and attributes is a central part of al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Man, nevertheless it is not the only part, for the archetypal Perfect Man, Muhammad, is also a locus for the manifestation of the divine essence.

⁵⁹⁷ See Chittick (1998), 6; al-Jīlī (1997a), 90. For this hadith, see Ibn Mājah (1998), 1:206-207; Ibn Ḥanbal (1993), 3:160, 3:161, 3:306.

⁵⁹⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 90.

⁵⁹⁹ This image of creation as the mirror for the divine names, with man as the "polishing of that mirror", is famously used by Ibn 'Arabī at the beginning of the *Fuṣūṣ*. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 48-49.

⁶⁰⁰ This is a different way of expressing the idea, which we saw in the previous chapter, that God's names and attributes leave their "trace" or "effect" (*athar, rasm, ḥukm*) on creation, and most completely on the Perfect Man.

⁶⁰¹ For the same point in Sufi thought more generally, see Chittick (1983), 150. On the manifestation of the divine names within the Perfect Man in al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysics, see al-Jīlī (1997a), 64-67.

As such, the Perfect Men indicated by the Torah seem to be at a level just below that of complete perfection.

Here we hit again upon the difference in rank between the Qur'an, Muhammad, and his people, on the one hand, and the Torah, Moses, and his people, on the other. In the aforementioned chapter twenty-one, al-Jīlī goes on to identify *ahl Allāh* with “the Muhammadan people of the essence” (*al-dhātīyyīn al-Muḥammadiyyīn*). Such people, he explains, hear the recitation of the complete Qur'an, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, represents the divine essence, and are at “the station of the Beloved” (*maqām al-ḥabīb*), i.e. the station of Muhammad, the Beloved of God (*ḥabīb Allāh*). Below them in the hierarchy, he continues, are those he calls “the Mosaic people of the self” (*al-naḥsiyyūn al-mūsawīyyūn*). These people, he explains, hear only the recitation of the Furqan, which, as we saw in the introduction to this chapter, is one of the Qur'anic names of the Torah (see Q 2:53, 21:48), and which also represents in al-Jīlī's conception, as we saw in the previous chapter, the differentiated aspect of the divine essence, i.e. that qualified by names and attributes. This latter group are at “the station of the One Spoken To” (*maqām al-kalīm*), i.e. the station of Moses.⁶⁰² This clarifies the distinction implied in the passage under discussion: while the Muhammadan Perfect Men are loci of manifestation for the divine essence, the Mosaic Perfect Men are loci of manifestation for the divine names and attributes.⁶⁰³ This distinction, we might conclude, is a

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁰³ Given al-Jīlī's earlier insistence that none of Moses' people became perfect after him, it can be assumed that the Mosaic Perfect Men are not Jews, but rather Muslims who do not attain the highest (Muhammadan) rank of perfection.

consequence of the different metaphysical meanings of the Qur'an and the Torah, for while the former is an expression of the divine essence (and the names and attributes), the latter is an expression of the divine attributes alone. Thus, although the Torah does reveal the perfect nature of man, it does not reveal man's perfection to the same extent as the Qur'an does. Once again, therefore, al-Jīlī presents us with a subtle, metaphysically-minded insight into the superiority of the Qur'an, Muhammad, and the Muslims over the Torah, Moses, and the Jews.

Al-Jīlī's insistence on the superiority of the Qur'an over the Torah should not, however, obscure the important point that, in his view, the Torah points us towards fundamental metaphysical truths. Al-Jīlī links this aspect of the Torah to the etymology of the term *al-Tawrāh*. This term, he notes, is etymologically and orthographically connected to the term *tawriyah*, the verbal noun of the second form of *w-r-y*.⁶⁰⁴ This is a technical term in Arabic rhetoric that roughly corresponds to the concept of "double entendre".⁶⁰⁵ For al-Jīlī, then, the very concept of "Torahness" (*al-tawriyyah*), which is orthographically indistinguishable from *al-tawriyah*, signifies the presence of a twofold meaning, i.e. an exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and an esoteric (*bāṭin*) sense. In his understanding, as we know, the esoteric sense of scripture involves knowledge of "the realities", i.e. the metaphysical truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man. It would therefore seem that the Torah, since it signifies the existence of a hidden sense, contains these truths. While this type of etymological analysis is reminiscent of Ibn 'Arabī, whose propensity to explore the

⁶⁰⁴ In Qur'anic orthography, *al-Tawrāh* is usually written as *al-tawriyah*.

⁶⁰⁵ See Bonebakker (2000).

etymologies of key terms in order to come up with esoteric interpretations is well known,⁶⁰⁶ precursors for al-Jīlī's interpretation can in fact be found in Sunni orthodox *tafsīr*. Al-Qurṭubī, for instance, tells us that, "It is said that *al-Tawrāh* is taken from *al-tawriyah*, which is the intimation of a thing and the concealment of something else (*al-ta'arīd bi-al-shay' wa-al-kitmān li-ghayrihi*); for most of the Torah was intimations (*ta'arīd*) and indications (*talwīhāt*), without clear statement or clarification."⁶⁰⁷ Nevertheless, al-Qurṭubī and the other major exegetes prefer another etymological interpretation of *al-Tawrāh*, connecting it to the verb *warā* (to kindle),⁶⁰⁸ an interpretation that fits with the Qur'anic assertion that the Torah is guidance and light (see e.g. Q 5:44, 6:91). Furthermore, al-Jīlī's interpretation does appear to be original (as far as I am aware) insofar as he connects the etymology of *al-Tawrāh* to the notion that it contains hidden metaphysical truths. This notion is an indication of al-Jīlī's more general view that the Torah, like the other scriptures recognised by the Qur'an, genuinely points to the truth, albeit to a lesser degree of completeness than the Qur'an.

g) The contents of the tablets of the propagated Torah

Al-Jīlī concludes the chapter with a discussion of the contents of the seven tablets of the propagated Torah. For reasons of space and clarity, I have not translated this section in full, but rather have summarised what al-Jīlī says about the contents of each of the tablets into key bullet points,

⁶⁰⁶ See e.g. his interpretation of *kufr* in accordance with the association of the root *k-f-r* with "covering up", in Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 141.

⁶⁰⁷ See al-Qurṭubī (1997), 4:9 (Q 3:3).

⁶⁰⁸ See e.g. *ibid.*; al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 1:335 (Q 3:3); Adang (2006), 300.

underneath which I have presented my analysis. Before we look closely at the contents of the seven tablets, it should be noted that, for al-Jīlī, the name of each of the tablets derives from the subject that “dominates” (*ghalaba*) that particular tablet, meaning that other, secondary subjects are also included. He draws a direct comparison between this aspect of the Torah and the names of the *sūrahs* of the Qur’an, thus indicating that the Torah and the Qur’an are analogous forms of revelation. This sense of analogy between Qur’an and Torah is reinforced, as we shall see, by his discussion of the contents of the tablets.

1) The tablet of light (*lawḥ al-nūr*):

- An ascription of qualified oneness (*al-wāḥidiyyah*) and singularity (*al-ifrād*) to the Real, by way of an absolute declaration of incomparability (*al-tanzīh al-muṭlaq*);
- A declaration of what the Real possesses that distinguishes Him (*yatamayyaz*) from creation; a reference to the lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and power (*qudrah*) of the Real, along with all of His most beautiful names and exalted attributes, all in terms of what the Real deserves due to His exaltedness (*ta‘ālī*) and incomparability (*al-tanzīh*).⁶⁰⁹

Al-Jīlī’s identification of the first tablet of the propagated Torah as the tablet of light should be understood with reference to the aforementioned Qur’anic assertion that the Torah is “guidance and light”. This light, as al-Jīlī understands it, represents God’s incomparability and transcendence.⁶¹⁰ This interpretation makes some sense, for like the transcendent God, nothing can truly be compared to light (except for the

⁶⁰⁹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 122-123.

⁶¹⁰ The classical exegetes, by contrast, tend to interpret the “light” in this phrase in terms of the clarification of religious laws. See e.g. al-Ṭabarī (1999), 4:588 (Q 5:44); al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 1:636 (Q 5:44).

transcendent God Himself).⁶¹¹ Indeed, in the chapter on *tanzīh*, al-Jīlī illustrates the incomparable aspect of God with reference to a hadith, according to which, when the Prophet was asked if he had seen God, he replied, “Light is what I see (*nūr anná arāhu*).”⁶¹² Similarly, in the chapter on *tashbīh* he interprets the phrase “light upon light” from the Light Verse of the Qur’an (Q 24:35) as a reference to the two lights of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*.⁶¹³ Light, then, is an important symbol of God’s incomparability and transcendence for al-Jīlī, as it is for Ibn ‘Arabī and many other thinkers.⁶¹⁴

Al-Jīlī’s assertion that the first tablet of the Torah encourages the profession of “absolute incomparability” (*al-tanzīh al-muṭlaq*) is significant because it sets up a direct contrast with the position of the Christians, who profess “absolute comparability” (*muṭlaq al-tashbīh*). Al-Jīlī is alluding here to the aforementioned idea that Judaism and Christianity represent two extremes – respectively, the extremes of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* – in contrast to the middle position represented by Islam (the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*). Al-Jīlī’s identification of the transcendence of God as the dominant key of the Torah is perhaps a reflection of the Biblical accounts (echoed in the Qur’an) of God’s interactions with Moses, which stress the awe-inducing majesty and transcendence of God even while they describe His appearance to Moses (see e.g. Exodus 3, 19, 34). Other Biblical passages – e.g. the assertion

⁶¹¹ This being said, it could also be argued that the symbol of light, being visible, in fact points towards the immanent dimension of God.

⁶¹² See *ibid.*, 58. This hadith is recorded in Muslim (1995), 2:12. It is conventionally employed to indicate that the Prophet did not see God during the *mi‘rāj*.

⁶¹³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 60-61.

⁶¹⁴ See Netton (1989), 303.

that God “dwells in thick darkness” and that the heavens and the earth cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8) – reinforce this sense of divine transcendence, which was carried over into Jewish theological and legal thought.⁶¹⁵

Also of interest here is al-Jīlī’s assertion that this tablet reveals God’s lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and power (*qudrah*), for as we saw above, it was the tablets containing the mysteries of lordship and power that Moses was commanded not to propagate to his people. What al-Jīlī may be indicating here, then, is that the propagated Torah points to God’s lordship and power (for instance, by describing Him as “Lord” and “the Powerful”), but does not reveal the deeper metaphysical truth that these divine attributes are manifested in His creatures. This is another way of expressing the idea that the propagated Torah directs people towards *tanzīh*, at the expense of *tashbīh*.

2) The tablet of guidance (*lawḥ al-hudá*):

- Divine reports to Himself (*ikhbārāt ilāhiyyah li-nafsihi*); forms of knowledge acquired by taste (*‘ulūm dhawqiyyah*); the inspirational light in the hearts of the believers (*al-nūr al-ilhāmī fī qulūb al-mu’minīn*) – for light is essentially an inspirational, existential mystery (*sirr wujūdī ilhāmī*) that surprises the servants of God; it is the light of the divine attraction (*nūr al-jadhb al-ilāhī*) in which the gnostic (*al-‘ārif*) ascends to the exalted loci of witnessing (*yataraqqī ilā al-manāẓir al-‘uliyah*) on the divine path (*al-ṭarīq al-ilāhī*); an expression of the return of the divine light that was sent down into the human body to its locus and place (*rujū‘ al-nūr al-ilāhī al-munazzal fī al-haykal al-insānī ilā maḥallihi wa-makānihi*) – for guidance is an expression of the oneness of the path (*aḥadiyyat al-ṭarīq*) to the most advanced station and the most radiant level, where there is no where (*ḥayth lā ḥayth*) found by the one who receives that light;

⁶¹⁵ See Neusner (2001), 13; Shapiro (2001), 111-112; Stroumsa (2009), 70-72.

- The science of unveiling the conditions of religious communities (*'ilm al-kashf 'an aḥwāl al-milal*), and reports about those who came before and will come after them;
- Knowledge of the [world of] dominion (*'ilm al-malakūt*) – which is the world of spirits (*'ālam al-arwāḥ*); and knowledge of the [world of] sovereignty (*al-jabarūt*), which is the world that governs the world of spirits, i.e. the presence of the holy (*ḥadrat al-quds*).
- Knowledge of the intermediate state (*'ilm al-barzakh*); a reminder (*dhikr*) of the resurrection (*al-qiyāmah*), the [final] hour (*al-sā'ah*), the scale (*al-mīzān*), the holding to account (*al-ḥisāb*), the garden [of paradise] (*al-jannah*), and the fire [of hell] (*al-nār*);
- Reports about an assembly of angels (*jam' min al-malā'ikah*);
- Knowledge of the mysteries (*'ilm al-asrār*) deposited in the forms (*al-ashkāl*), and things like that, through their knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of which the Children of Israel did what they did and performed those miracles (*al-karāmāt*) that they performed.⁶¹⁶

As with previous tablet, al-Jīlī's identification of the second tablet as the tablet of guidance ought to be understood with reference to the Qur'anic description of the Torah as “guidance and light”, this being an indication of the Qur'an-centredness of al-Jīlī's view of the Torah. The guidance contained therein consists, it seems, of various forms of knowledge (*'ulūm*). The first is what we can call mystical knowledge: *hudá*, in this sense, denotes guidance back to the presence of God, in keeping with al-Jīlī's notion that the manifestation (*tajallī*) or descent (*tanazzul*) of God into the world is met by a corresponding ascent (*taraqqī*) of man to God. The mystical quality of this return to God is indicated by al-Jīlī's use of several important Sufī technical terms with strong mystical connotations, such as *dhawq*,⁶¹⁷ *ilhām*,⁶¹⁸ *jadhb*,⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 123.

⁶¹⁷ See al-Qushayrī (2001), 108-109; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 492-495, 662; al-Qāshānī (1992), 181, 323; Tahānawī (1963), 834; Gril (2015).

⁶¹⁸ See Macdonald (1971), 1119-1120; Sands (2006), 86.

⁶¹⁹ See al-Qāshānī (1992), 65, 96; Tahānawī (1963), 554; Keeler (2006), 20; Todd (2014), 138.

manẓar,⁶²⁰ *ṭarīq*,⁶²¹ *ḥayth lā ḥayth*.⁶²² The presence of this mystical knowledge in the Torah means that the Torah, if properly interpreted, can serve as a mystical guidebook. This accords with al-Jīlī's view, outlined in the previous section, that the Torah points to the fundamental metaphysical truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man (even if it does not fully encompass them in its propagated form).⁶²³ It reflects his relatively benevolent view of the Torah, given his belief that mystical attainment constitutes the highest form of religious experience and the surest path to knowledge.

The second form of knowledge contained in the tablet of guidance is what might be called historical knowledge; specifically that pertaining to past and future *milal*. This latter term is used in the Qur'an (see e.g. Q 2:120, 2:130, 7:89, 16:23) and the Islamic tradition (particularly in doxographical works) to denote religious communities.⁶²⁴ It is in this sense that al-Jīlī uses the term in the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, in which he identifies ten basic religious communities (variously called *milal*, *adyān*, *ṭawā'if*, and *umam*), including the dualists (*al-thānawiyyah*), the Zoroastrians (*al-majūs*), and the Brahmans (*barāhimah*), as well as the Jews, Christians, and Muslims,⁶²⁵ and it is

⁶²⁰ See al-Hakīm (1981), 1059-1060; Chittick (1994), 68-70.

⁶²¹ See al-Hakīm (1981), 720-735; al-Qāshānī (1992), 85; Tahānawī (1963), 1133-1134.

⁶²² See Karamustafa (2007), 8; and Corbin (1972), 1, for the analogous Persian mystical concept of *nā-kojā-ābād*, "the land of nowhere".

⁶²³ It is presumably this incompleteness of the Torah's insight into the theories of universal theophany and the Perfect Man that leads the Jews to emphasise *tanzīh* over *tashbīh*, in al-Jīlī's view. The mystical nature of the knowledge contained in this tablet, however, indicates that the *tashbīh* element is by no means wholly absent from the Torah.

⁶²⁴ See Gimaret (1993), 54-55. W.C. Smith, who is known for problematising "religion" and "religions" as concepts (at least prior to the modern period), asks whether *millah* "is not the only word in any language or culture that designates a specific and transferable religion, one as distinct from others, and nothing else." See Smith (1991), 294.

⁶²⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 252-255.

this meaning that he probably has in mind here. Al-Jīlī's proposal that the Torah contains knowledge about past and future nations might be taken as a reference to the "table of nations" (Genesis 10), where *milal* would be taken as a translation of the Hebrew *gōyīm*.⁶²⁶ If this is the case, then it would indicate that he had at least some awareness of the contents of the canonical Torah. However, it seems more likely that al-Jīlī's reference to the historical knowledge of the Torah derives from his conception of the Qur'an, the archetypal scripture, for the language that he uses here echoes that of a hadith about the Qur'an: "The Book of God contains information (*naba'*) about those before and after you (*man qablakum wa-ba'dakum*)."⁶²⁷ This tendency to model his view of the Torah on his view of the Qur'an appears on several occasions in this section, and reflects his sense that the different scriptures are essentially different manifestations of the same phenomenon.

The third type of knowledge contained in this tablet is what might be called metaphysical knowledge, for it pertains to realms beyond the phenomenal world. The terms *al-malakūt* and *al-jabarūt* are found, respectively, in the Qur'an (see Q 6:75, 7:185, 23:88, 26:83) and hadith. They are used (along with *al-mulk*) in the various strands of Islamic metaphysical thought influenced by Neoplatonism, including the Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysical tradition, to denote the different planes of existence.⁶²⁸ Thus al-Qayṣarī, for instance, in setting out his conception of the five divine presences (*ḥaḍrāt*), associates the third presence, that

⁶²⁶ For the table of nations, see Sperber (2007), 15:30-32. In Arabic translations of the Bible, *umam* (a term that al-Jīlī uses interchangeably with *milal*) is most often used to translate *gōyīm*.

⁶²⁷ Recorded in Tirmidhī (1998), 5:29.

⁶²⁸ See Gardet (1960), 350-351.

of “the unseen to which something has been added” (*ḥaḍrat al-ghayb al-muḍāf*), with, on the one hand, “the world of the spirits of dominion and sovereignty” (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ al-jabarūtiyyah wa-al-malakūtiyyah*) – which is the world that is closer to “the absolute unseen” (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*), being “the world of pure intellects and souls” (*‘ālam al-‘uqūl wa-al-nufūs al-mujarradah*) – and on the other, to “the world of archetypal images” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) – which, he tells us, is synonymous with *‘ālam al-malakūt*. He associates the presence of “the absolutely visible” (*al-shahādah al-muṭlaq*), meanwhile, with *‘ālam al-mulk*.⁶²⁹ As can be seen here, al-Jīlī uses the terms *al-jabarūt* and *al-malakūt* in a similar way, i.e. to denote different degrees within the intangible, unseen realm. Indeed, later in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, he identifies *‘ālam al-malakūt*, like al-Qayṣarī, as one of the two kinds of unseen realm (*al-ghayb*), specifically, that which is “set out in detail in the world of man” (*mufaṣṣilan fī ‘ālam al-insān*).⁶³⁰ The significance of this is that it suggests that the Torah contains knowledge of this unseen, metaphysical realm, again reflecting his notion that the Torah contains metaphysical wisdom. Furthermore, since *al-malakūt* is a Qur’anic term and the notion of the different worlds is read out of the Qur’an, it also reflects his tendency to model his view of the Torah on the Qur’an.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ See al-Qayṣarī (1966), 447-448.

⁶³⁰ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 214.

⁶³¹ Interestingly, however, the corresponding Hebrew term *malkhūt* appears in the technical vocabulary of Kabbalah to denote the tenth and last of the divine emanations (*sefirōt*), while the Kabbalists also set out a hierarchy of (four) worlds (*‘ōlamīm*). See Matt (1983), 36; Horwitz (2016), 273-294. Though it is possible that al-Jīlī was aware of Jewish mystical interpretations of the Torah, it seems more likely that his view of the contents of the Torah is based on his reading of the Qur’an through the prism of his Sufi metaphysics.

The fourth type of knowledge contained in the tablet of guidance pertains to eschatology and soteriology. The key terms used here – *al-barzakh*, *al-qiyyamah*, *al-sā'ah*, *al-mīzān*, *al-ḥisāb*, *al-jannah*, and *al-nār* – are all Qur'anic concepts relating to the final judgement, and form a key part of orthodox Islamic eschatological doctrine.⁶³² The use of the term “reminder” (*dhikr*) in this context (among other contexts) is also Qur'anic.⁶³³ Though the actual Torah and the Tanakh do contain eschatological information (see e.g. Deuteronomy 28-31, Isaiah), Biblical eschatology relates more to judgment upon this earth than in the next world, and in light of the terminological parallels, it is likely that al-Jīlī is again modelling his view of the contents of the Torah on the Qur'an.

The assignation of knowledge about some of the angels to the tablet of guidance fits with al-Jīlī's earlier discussion of the metaphysical knowledge contained in this tablet, for *'ālam al-malakūt* is usually said to be the realm of (most of) the angels (while *'ālam al-jabarūt* is sometimes said to be the realm of the elect among the angels).⁶³⁴ Angels appear on several occasions in the actual Torah (see e.g. Genesis 16:7, 16:9-11, 19:1, 22:11, 28:12, Exodus 33:2), where they are referred to by the term *mal'ākhīm*, the Hebrew cognate of the Arabic word, *malā'ikah*, which al-Jīlī uses here. Again, however, it is likely that al-Jīlī's primary source is

⁶³² See e.g. Q 23:100 (*al-barzakh*), 2:85, 2:113, 2:174 etc. (*al-qiyyamah*), 6:31, 6:40, 7:187 etc. (*al-sā'ah*), 101:6-11 (*al-mīzān*), 2:202, 3:19, etc. (*al-ḥisāb*), 2:35, 2:82, 2:111 (*al-jannah*), 2:24, 2:39, 2:80-81, etc. (*al-nār*). See also Smith (2002); Smith & Haddad (2002); Tottoli (2009).

⁶³³ See Sells (2003).

⁶³⁴ See Gardet (1960), 351.

the Qur'an, in which the angels also appear on many (roughly ninety) occasions, rather than the canonical Torah.⁶³⁵

The “knowledge of the mysteries deposited in the forms” is probably the most enigmatic type of knowledge that al-Jīlī identifies in the tablet of guidance. Its presence in the propagated Torah would seem to contradict al-Jīlī’s earlier claim that Moses was commanded to conceal the divine mysteries of lordship and power by not propagating two of the tablets of the revealed Torah. This is especially the case given that, as we saw above, al-Jīlī connects these mysteries to Jesus’ ability to perform miracles, yet here suggests that, on account of the presence of certain unidentified mysteries in the propagated Torah, the Children of Israel were also able to perform miracles. In order to reconcile what al-Jīlī says here with what he says earlier in the chapter, we must presume that the mysteries contained in this tablet are lesser mysteries than those contained in the two concealed tablets. This is perfectly conceivable, given that, according to al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics, God has deposited a particular mystery (*sirr*) or “subtle reality” (*latīfah*) in every individual, which is that person’s “defined portion” (*muḥtadd*) of the divine perfection and the vehicle through which, if he is capable, he returns to God.⁶³⁶ While Moses’ people may not know the mysteries of lordship or divine power, therefore, nevertheless they do possess mysteries within them, which connect them to God. As such, should they come to know these mysteries, then they would be capable of performing miracles, like

⁶³⁵ See Macdonald (1991), 216-219; Webb (2001), 84. For a detailed treatment of the view of angels in the Islamic tradition, with a focus on the hadiths on angels collected by al-Suyūṭī, see Burge (2012).

⁶³⁶ See al-Jīlī (1999a), 71. The use of the term *sirr* to denote the innermost nature of man is common in Sufi literature. See e.g. Keeler (2006), 66.

God Himself. This aspect of the Torah, then, is connected to the mystical knowledge that is also contained by the tablet of guidance. It again reflects al-Jīlī's tendency to read his own Sufi metaphysics into the Torah.

3) The tablet of wisdom (*lawḥ al-ḥikmah*):

- Knowledge of the method of intellectual wayfaring (*al-sulūk al-‘ilmī*), by way of the [divine] manifestation (*al-tajallī*) and tasting (*al-dhawq*) in the divine holy precincts (*al-ḥaṣā‘ir al-quḍsiyyah al-ilāhiyyah*), such as the taking off of the two sandals (*khal‘ al-na‘layn*), the ascent of Sinai (*tarāqī al-ṭawr*), conversing with the tree (*mukālamat al-shajarah*), and the vision of the fire (*ru‘yat al-nār*) in the dark night – for all of these are divine mysteries (*asrār ilāhiyyāt*);
- Astronomy (*‘ilm al-falak wa-al-hay‘ah*), arithmetic (*al-ḥisāb*), botany/dendrology (*‘ilm al-ashjār*), geology (*‘ilm al-aḥjār*), etc.
- Whoever of the Children of Israel masters these sciences is called a monk (*rāhib*), which in their language (*lughah*) denotes the God-conscious man (*al-muta‘allih*) who has abandoned the lower world out of desire for his Master (*al-tārik li-dunyāhu al-rāghib fī mawlāhu*).⁶³⁷

Al-Jīlī's identification of the third tablet of the propagated Torah as the tablet of wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) can be understood with reference to the Qur'an's tendency to pair the various scriptures with *ḥikmah* (see e.g. Q 2:231, 3:48);⁶³⁸ indeed, he also associates *ḥikmah* with the Qur'an (as we saw in the previous chapter), and with the Psalter.⁶³⁹

Like the previous tablet, the tablet of wisdom contains various forms of knowledge. Again like the previous tablet, the most prominent form of knowledge set out here is mystical guidance, as can be seen from al-Jīlī's use of the terms *sulūk*, *tajallī*, and *dhawq*. Interestingly, al-Jīlī qualifies

⁶³⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 123.

⁶³⁸ See Radtke (2006), 483. This association was picked up by the post-Qur'anic tradition, for which see Khalidi (2001), 21.

⁶³⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 125-126.

the type of mystical “wayfaring” explained in this tablet as “intellectual” (*‘ilmī*), a reflection perhaps of how Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis view mystical experience as a cognitive exercise as much as (or more than) a form of ecstasy; hence the profoundly intellectual nature of their writings.⁶⁴⁰ Also of interest here is that al-Jīlī links the mystical guidance contained in this tablet to the Qur’anic accounts of Moses’ conversations with God on Mt Sinai (see Q 7:142-143) and in the “fire” or burning “tree” (see Q 20:9-16, 28:29-30), through his use of the language and imagery of those Qur’anic passages. Moses thus emerges here, as he does elsewhere in *al-Insān al-kāmil*,⁶⁴¹ as a kind of model mystic, an idea for which precedents can be found in earlier Sufi literature. Al-Ḥallāj, for instance, describes Moses as an archetypal wayfarer (*sālik*), and sees the burning bush as a symbol of mystical union.⁶⁴² Similarly, al-Qushayrī takes the image in Q 7:143 of the mountain being made to crumble before Moses Q 7:143 as an indicator that “Moses’s very personality is “erased” in an act of (self-) annihilation in God usually described in Sufism by the term *fanā*’.”⁶⁴³ Likewise, in the Persian Sufi *tafsīr* of Maybudī, Moses is “often [presented] as the mystic in the process of being perfected”,⁶⁴⁴ while within the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition, al-Qāshānī interprets the account

⁶⁴⁰ On this point, see Nettler (2003), 128.

⁶⁴¹ See e.g. chapter forty-one of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, “On Mt Sinai (*al-ṭūr*)”, where al-Jīlī interprets the crumbling of the mountain depicted in the Qur’an (Q 7:143) as an expression of the “annihilation” (*fanā*) and “obliteration and pulverisation” (*saḥq wa-mahq*) of Moses’ self (*nafs*) in God (Al-Jīlī (1997a), 137.). See also al-Jīlī’s description of his encounter with Moses in the sixth heaven in chapter sixty-one, where he describes Moses as “drunk on the wine of the manifestation of lordship (*sakrān min khamr tajallī al-rubūbiyyah*), bewildered by the grandeur of divinity (*ḥayrān min ‘izzat al-ulūhiyyah*): the forms of beings had been imprinted on the mirror of his knowledge, and the lordship of the Judge, the King had become manifest on his egoicity (*tajallat fī iniyyatihi rubūbiyyat al-malik al-dayyān*)”, images which al-Jīlī again links to Q 7:143 (see *ibid.*, 238).

⁶⁴² See Anawati & Gardet (1961), 261-271.

⁶⁴³ Knysh (2018), 75.

⁶⁴⁴ Keeler (2006), 250.

of Moses' ascent to Mt Sinai as an allusion to how he attained "complete, essential witnessing (*al-shuhūd al-dhātī al-tāmm*)" in the course of his wayfaring (*sulūk*), and underwent both annihilation (*fanā'*) and endurance (*baqā'*).⁶⁴⁵ Although Moses is also often depicted as a mystic in Jewish and Christian literature (often with reference to the Biblical story of his ascent up Mt Sinai),⁶⁴⁶ al-Jīlī's view should probably be understood primarily with reference to the prevalence of this motif within the Sufi tradition, his own interpretation of the Qur'anic passages, and his more general Sufi metaphysics.

Along with mystical wisdom, this tablet also contains what might be called scientific wisdom. This is in keeping with one of the standard usages of the term *ḥikmah*, which can mean philosophy or science as well as wisdom.⁶⁴⁷ The sciences listed here were all part of the medieval Islamic scientific tradition,⁶⁴⁸ with which al-Jīlī would likely have been familiar; hence their inclusion in his conception of the Torah once again can be said to reflect his own knowledge, interests, and view on what forms of learning are valuable.⁶⁴⁹

Al-Jīlī's statement that the individual who has acquired the mystical and scientific wisdom associated with this tablet is called a monk, which he defines as someone who has renounced the world and turned their

⁶⁴⁵ See al-Qāshānī (2001), 1:264-265 (Q 7:142-143). For other Sufi depictions of Moses as a model mystic based on this episode, see Johns (1987), 129-133; Keeler (2005), 60-63.

⁶⁴⁶ See e.g. Goodenough (1969), 199-234, esp. 212-218; Idel (1990), 67-68, 72, 95, 209, 227-228; Kugel (1998), 544-546, 635; Barton (2005), 49-50; Knysh (2018), 131.

⁶⁴⁷ See Goichon (1971), 377-378; Lane (1984), 1:617.

⁶⁴⁸ See Pingree (1971); Ragep (2009); Sabra (1971); Kruk (1993).

⁶⁴⁹ This point also holds true for al-Jīlī's depiction in the following chapter of the sciences contained in the Psalter. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 125-126.

attention to God (*muta'allih*),⁶⁵⁰ comes as something of a surprise. *Hakīm*, or else a more usual Sufi metaphysical term for the advanced individual, such as *'ārif* or *muḥaqqiq*, might have been more expected.⁶⁵¹ *Rāhib* is a particularly unusual choice in this context, in fact, since it is a word specifically associated with Christian monks or renunciants.⁶⁵² Al-Jīlī's use of *rāhib* here seems to be dictated by his belief that it is a term used in Hebrew, the language of the Children of Israel. It is possible that he has the Hebrew word *rabī* (rabbi) in mind, in which case this would reflect a certain low level of (imprecise) knowledge of actual Judaism on his part.⁶⁵³ This being said, by connecting the acquisition of the wisdom of this tablet to the renunciation of the world, al-Jīlī appears again to be viewing the Torah in light of his own Sufi position, which is marked by a renunciant form of piety.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁰ This rather uncommon term seems to be rooted in Avicennian thought. Ibn Sīnā proposes that it is the *ta'alluh* of the prophet that distinguishes him from the rest of humanity (see Goichon (1938), 7), while Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl developed the concept of *al-ḥakīm al-muta'allih*, the “wise man, philosopher or theosopher who has become imbued with Divine Qualities and become “God-like.”” Nasr & Leaman (1996), 1:645. While al-Jīlī's use of the term *mut'allih* in conjunction with *ḥikmah* may suggest the influence of Suhrawardī, I have found no evidence of direct engagement with Suhrawardī's thought in al-Jīlī's work. He may have adopted the term from Ibn 'Arabī, who uses it on rare occasions. See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī (1972-1992), 2:175.

⁶⁵¹ Indeed, the Arabic term *al-ḥukamā'* was used by medieval Yemenite Jews “as a collective name for all who engaged legitimate speculation”, meaning “speculation concerning *al-wujūd*”. See Langermann (1995), 339.

⁶⁵² See Lane (1984), 1:1169.

⁶⁵³ In his discussion of the following tablet, however, he uses the usual Arabic word for *rabbi*, *ḥabr/ḥibr*.

⁶⁵⁴ For the origins of Sufism in the Islamic renunciant (*zuhd*) tradition (a tendency that never left Sufism), see Melchert (1996); Melchert (2015). For the renunciant aspect of al-Jīlī's thought, see e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 151. Note also that in his *Risālat Arba'īn mawṭin* al-Jīlī identifies *zuhd* as the sixth of the forty stations (*mawāṭin*) of the Sufi path. See al-Jīlī (1970), 8-10.

4) The tablet of the faculties (*lawḥ al-qiwá*):

- Knowledge of the sending down of the forms of wisdom (*‘ilm al-tanzīlāt al-ḥikamiyyah*) into the human faculties (*al-qiwá al-bashariyyah*). This is a form of knowledge acquired by taste (*‘ilm al-adhwāq, amr dhawqī*). Whoever of the Children of Israel obtains it is a rabbi (*ḥabr/ḥibr*), being at the level of the heirs of Moses (*martabat warathat Mūsá*). Most of what is in this tablet consists of symbols (*rumūz*), parables (*amthāl*), and allusions (*ishārāt*), which God established in the Torah so that the divine forms of wisdom (*al-ḥikam al-ilāhiyyah*) would be established in the human faculties. God indicated that when He said to John, “‘O John, take the book with [all your] might (*bi-quwwah*),’ and We gave him wisdom (*al-ḥikam*) while he was still a boy.” (Q 29:12) This “taking with might” is only for those who know wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and have been guided (*ihtadā*) to the divine light (*al-nūr al-ilāhiyyah*); hence it is for the elect (*al-khawāṣṣ*), not the masses (*al-‘awāmm*).
- The knowledge of signs (*‘ilm al-sīmiyyā*) and of the method of exalted magic (*al-siḥr al-‘ālī*), which is similar to miracles (*karāmāt*), and is so called because it takes place without any tool (*adawiyyah*) or deed (*‘amal*) or utterance (*talaffuz*), but merely through the magical faculties (*al-qiwá al-siḥriyyah*) in man. Things that are only possible in the imagination (*al-khayāl*) seem sensible (*maḥsūs*) and perceptible (*mashhūd*) to the senses. “I myself”, says al-Jīlī, “fell upon that while on the path of monotheism (*‘alá ṭarīq al-tawḥīd*). Had I wanted to take on any form in existence, I could have done so, and had I wanted to do anything, I could have done it, but I knew that it was destructive (*muhlik*), so I abandoned it.”⁶⁵⁵

Like the names of the previous three tablets, the name of the fourth tablet is drawn from the Qur’an. While the term *qiwá* does not itself appear in the Qur’an, nevertheless its singular form, *quwwah*, does appear on thirty occasions, with reference to the strength or power of both God and man. Al-Jīlī thus grounds the name *lawḥ al-qiwá* and the idea to which it refers in one of these Qur’anic verses, specifically, a verse that relates to the prophet John (Yahyá), whose “book”, given that he was one of the Children of Israel, would presumably have been the Torah.

⁶⁵⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 123-124.

Again, the principal form of knowledge contained in this tablet, to which, as al-Jīlī sees it, that Qur’anic verse refers, can be classed as metaphysical knowledge. The notion of “the sending down of the forms of wisdom into the human faculties” should be understood as a reference to al-Jīlī’s key Sufi metaphysical concept of the manifestation of the divine names and attributes within man. As we have seen, he uses the terms *inzāl* and *tanzīl* to denote not only the revelation of scripture, but also the appearance of the divine within the world, while the term *al-ḥikam* (*al-ilāhiyyah*) is used here in the same sense as Ibn ‘Arabī uses it in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, i.e. to denote the divine attributes.⁶⁵⁶ The notion that these attributes become manifest in the faculties (*qiwā*) of man, meanwhile, is spelled out in chapter twenty of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, where al-Jīlī lists all of man’s faculties (e.g. his spirit (*rūḥ*), intellect (*‘aql*), thought (*fikr*), imagination (*khayāl*), etc.), and explains that each of them is a “copy” (*nuskah*) of the divine perfection.⁶⁵⁷ It can thus be said that the tablet of the faculties reveals the key Sufi metaphysical truth of the Perfect Man.

This truth, however, is not uncovered by everyone who reads or hears the Torah; indeed, al-Jīlī explicitly states that this truth is for the elite, not the masses. As with the previous tablets, al-Jīlī connects the metaphysical knowledge contained in the tablet of the faculties with mystical insight, explaining that only those who have attained such insight are able to understand the metaphysical truth contained in the tablet. As with the

⁶⁵⁶ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 57-58 and *passim*.

⁶⁵⁷ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 89-90. See also *ibid.*, 211-212, where he sets out how the faculties of the Perfect Man are microcosms of cosmic realities, which in turn are loci of manifestation for the divine attributes.

previous two tablets, this mystical insight is expressed via the term “taste” (*dhawq*). Such repetition is a sign both of al-Jīlī’s apparent belief in the possibility of a Torah-based, Jewish mysticism, and of his privileging of mystical experience over other ways of knowing.

Where al-Jīlī indicated above that the Children of Israel call the individual who acquires the forms of wisdom contained in *lawḥ al-ḥikmah a rāhib*, here he indicates that the individual who acquires the metaphysical knowledge contained in this tablet, via mystical experience, is called a *ḥabr/ḥibr*. This is the standard Arabic term for “rabbi”, and was also used by Arabic-speaking Jews as “a synonym for educated men and scholars”.⁶⁵⁸ As such, it might be deemed the Jewish equivalent of *‘ālim*. Al-Jīlī in fact seems to have this correspondence between the *aḥbār* and the *‘ulamā’* in mind, for he identifies the *aḥbār* as the “heirs of Moses” (*warathat Mūsā*), a phrase that brings to mind the famous hadith, “The scholars are the heirs of the prophets” (*al-‘ulamā’ warathat al-anbiyā’*).⁶⁵⁹ While the religious scholars use this hadith in support of their own claim to be the only true interpreters of the prophetic legacy, Ibn ‘Arabian Sufis like al-Jīlī take the term *al-‘ulamā’* in this hadith to be a reference to the *awliyā’* and mystics like themselves, whom they deem to be the true “knowers”.⁶⁶⁰ Something similar seems to be going on here: the *aḥbār*, as al-Jīlī sees it, are not the Jewish religious scholars (i.e. the rabbis), but rather the Jewish mystics and friends of God. It is this

⁶⁵⁸ See al-Ṭabarī (1991), 3:46, note 237.

⁶⁵⁹ This hadith is recorded in al-Tirmidhī (1998), 4:414 (no. 2682); Ibn Mājah (1998), 1:213 (no. 222); Abū Dāwūd (2001), 578 (no. 3641).

⁶⁶⁰ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 135; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 1193-5; Chodkiewicz (1993a), 47.

latter group who are the true heirs of Moses⁶⁶¹ and the “elite” who are able to understand the symbols and allusions contained in this tablet, and thus to comprehend the theory of the Perfect Man (at least, insofar as it is set out on this tablet, knowledge of the true nature of the Perfect Man being restricted to those who have access to the complete revealed Torah).

Turning back to the “faculties” referred to in the name of this tablet, it is clear that they not only constitute those faculties of man that receive the manifestations of the divine attributes, but also the magical powers of man.⁶⁶² Despite the condemnation of *sihr* in the Qur’an and hadith,⁶⁶³ belief in various kinds of magic and occult science seems to have been widespread among medieval Muslims, including many philosophically inclined intellectuals (e.g. the Brethren of Purity and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī)⁶⁶⁴ and Sufī thinkers (e.g. Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225 or 629/1232) and Ibn ‘Arabī himself).⁶⁶⁵ Given that magic and the occult were part of al-Jīlī’s intellectual environment, therefore, it does not come as a great surprise that he includes magical knowledge among the contents of the Torah. He specifically mentions two forms of magic in this regard, which he calls *al-sīmiyyā’* and *al-sihr al-‘ālī*. The former term is derived from the Greek *sēmeia*, meaning signs. According to the

⁶⁶¹ These individuals are presumably also the same as those whom we earlier saw al-Jīlī call *al-naḥsiyyūn mūsawīyyūn*.

⁶⁶² The Bible, it should be noted, prohibits various kinds of magic. See e.g. Deuteronomy 18:10-12, 18:9-14 (divination, fortune telling, sorcery, charms, necromancy); Leviticus 19:31, 20:27, Isaiah 8:19 (necromancy).

⁶⁶³ The repeated claim of the unbelievers in the Qur’an that the revelation given to Muhammad is merely “evident magic” (*sihr mubīn*) (see e.g. Q 5:110, 6:7, 10:76) is meant to constitute a belittlement of the revelation. For the strong condemnation of magic in the hadith, see Fahd (1997).

⁶⁶⁴ See *ibid.*; Knight (2016); Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ (2011); Noble (2017).

⁶⁶⁵ See Knysh (2018), 53-57.

classification of the different types of magic put forward by Ibn Khaldūn, who was a contemporary of al-Jīlī's, the term was used by those whom he calls the "extremist" or "later" Sufis (among whom he includes Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters⁶⁶⁶) to denote the esoteric science of letters (*'ilm al-ḥurūf*).⁶⁶⁷ Since al-Jīlī, like Ibn 'Arabī,⁶⁶⁸ displays a particular interest in the science of letters and clearly believes in its efficacy,⁶⁶⁹ and given his tendency to read his own views and preoccupations into the Torah, it seems likely that the science of letters is what he has in mind here.⁶⁷⁰ As for *al-siḥr al- 'ālī*, al-Jīlī indicates that the powers connected to it are like *karāmāt*, which are the miracles of the *awliyā'*;⁶⁷¹ specifically, it denotes the capacity to cause what is usually possible only in the imagination (*al-khayāl*) to occur in the sensible world, which comes down to the ability to do anything one wants. While the identification of "exalted magic" with the miracles powers of the *awliyā'* would seem to fit with al-Jīlī's earlier indication that the wisdom contained in this tablet is the property of the *awliyā'* from among the Children of Israel, nevertheless it is significant that he says only that exalted magic is "like" (*yushbih*) the miracles of the friends of God, which might suggest that they are in fact not identical. Indeed, al-Jīlī's description of his own personal experience of this form of magic is

⁶⁶⁶ For Ibn Khaldūn's attitude towards Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, see Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:87-89; Ibn Khaldūn (2017), 60-62, 67-69; Knysh (1999), 184-196; Morris (2009).

⁶⁶⁷ See Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:171-227.

⁶⁶⁸ See Ibn 'Arabī (1972-1992), 1-231-2:89; al-Ḥakīm (1981), 76-78, 320-322; Ebstein (2014), 97-122.

⁶⁶⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 33-36, 40-41, 114; al-Jīlī (1999b), 89-107; Atlagh (1992).

⁶⁷⁰ As with other elements of the contents of the Torah, it is possible that al-Jīlī had some awareness that the science of letters was practiced in Jewish mysticism, most notably by the thirteenth century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. See Idel (1989), 1-28.

⁶⁷¹ See Gardet (1978b). While the term *karāmāt* is used for the miracles of the *awliyā'*, the miracles of the prophets are usually called *mu'jizāt*.

characterised by a certain defensiveness – for instance, his instance that he encountered it “while on the path of monotheism”, and his profession to have abandoned it – and a sense of the dangers of this magic, summarised in his use of the strong term *muhlik*. This defensive attitude may be a consequence of al-Jīlī’s awareness of the condemnations of *sihr* in the Qur’an and hadith, or of his awareness of the attacks launched by thinkers such as Ibn Khaldūn on Sufis like him, for engaging in magic. While we cannot know for certain al-Jīlī’s true views on magic, his inclusion of this form of knowledge in the Torah, alongside other forms of knowledge that he evidently holds in high esteem, would suggest that he recognised magic as a potentially useful, if hazardous, activity.

5) The tablet of judgment (*lawḥ al-ḥukm*):

- Commandments and prohibitions (*al-awāmir wa-al-nawāhī*) – which are what God imposed (*faraḍa*) on the Children of Israel, and what He made forbidden (*ḥarrama*) for them. It contains the Mosaic legislation (*al-tashrī‘ al-mūsawī*), which the Jews built upon.⁶⁷²

In addition to the metaphysical, scientific, and magical knowledge contained in the other tablets of the Torah, al-Jīlī also indicates here that the propagated Torah contains legal knowledge. Again, he expresses this idea in terms taken from the Islamic tradition. Thus the term *ḥukm* itself is used in the Qur’an to denote God’s “individual ordinances and the whole of His dispensation” as well as the authority of the prophets; whence it “comes to mean the authority, imperium, of the Islamic

⁶⁷² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 124.

government and, on the other hand, the judgment of a *ḳāḍī* on a concrete case.”⁶⁷³

Similarly, the phrase *al-awāmir wa-al-nawāhī* reminds us of the Islamic principle of “commanding the good and prohibiting evil” (*al-amr bi-al-ma’rūf wa-al-nahī ‘an al-munkar*), which is derived from the Qur’an (see e.g. Q 3:110, 7:157, 9:67, 9:71).⁶⁷⁴ The terms *faraḍa* (see e.g. Q 2:197, 24:1, 33:38, 33:50) and *ḥarrama* are likewise Qur’anic (see e.g. Q 2:173, 2:275, 5:72, 5:96), in which context their subject, like here, is God; they were subsequently incorporated by the Islamic legal tradition into the “five categories” (*al-aḥkām al-khamsah*).⁶⁷⁵ Finally, *al-tashrī‘ al-mūsawī* evokes the *sharī‘ah* of Muhammad, though the term *al-tashrī‘ al-Muḥammadī* does not appear in pre-modern Islamic thought, legislation, properly speaking belonging to God alone.⁶⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the terminological and conceptual parallels between Qur’an- and Torah-based law evoked here further strengthen the sense of analogy between the Qur’an and Torah, and between Islam and Judaism more generally.

Al-Jīlī’s identification of legal content in the Torah fits with the common Islamic view that the tablets of the Torah contain legal regulations (*aḥkām*).⁶⁷⁷ This, of course, is a genuine reflection of the contents of the actual Torah: the tablets that Moses brings down from Mt Sinai contain a legal code, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), while two of the five books of the Pentateuch, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, are

⁶⁷³ Schacht (1960). 257.

⁶⁷⁴ For this principle in Islamic thought and practice, see Cook (2000).

⁶⁷⁵ See Schacht (1960); Juynboll (1965).

⁶⁷⁶ See Layish & Shaham (2000), 353.

⁶⁷⁷ See e.g. al-Ṭabarī (1999), 6:57-58 (Q 7:145); al-Zamakhsharī (1947), 2:157 (Q 7:145).

primarily concerned with articulating the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, al-Jīlī's statement that the Jews "built upon" (*baná 'alá*) the law contained in the Torah suggests he may have been aware of the existence of the Oral Torah codified in the Mishnah and Talmud, and the rabbinic literature that builds upon those sources. All that we can say for certain, however, is that al-Jīlī held what was probably a common (and not inaccurate) view among medieval Muslims, that Judaism is, like Islam, a legalistic religion. In this regard, it is notable that while he here identifies legal content within the Torah, in the chapter on the Gospel he makes no mention of legal content in the Gospel or of "*al-tashrī' al-īṣawī*", thus indicating an awareness of the different status of law in Judaism and Christianity.

6) The tablet of servanthood (*lawḥ al-'ubūdiyyah*):

- Knowledge of the regulations (*al-aḥkām*) that are incumbent on creation, such as submissiveness (*al-dhillah*), neediness (*al-iftiqār*), fear (*al-khawf*), and humility (*al-khudū'*), such that he [Moses] said to his people: "If one of you does an evil deed in recompense for an evil deed (*jāzā bi-al-sayyi'ah sayyi'ah*), then he has claimed what Pharaoh claimed of lordship, because the servant does not have the right (*al-'abd lā ḥaqqā lahu*)."⁶⁷⁸ It contains the mysteries of monotheism (*asrār al-tawhīd*), submission (*al-taslīm*), putting one's trust in God (*al-tawakkul*), delegating one's affairs to God (*al-tafwīḍ*), satisfaction (*al-riḍā*), fear (*al-khawf*), hope (*al-rajā*), desire (*al-raghbah*), renunciation (*al-zuhd*), turning to the Real (*al-tawajjuh ilā al-ḥaqq*), renouncing other than Him (*tark mā siwāhu*), etc.⁶⁷⁸

The sixth tablet of the propagated Torah contains what might be called pietistic knowledge, i.e. knowledge of how man should act vis-à-vis the transcendence of God set out in the first tablet, and the religious

⁶⁷⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 124.

laws set out in the sixth. Words of the root ‘-b-d appear some 275 times in the Qur’an, invariably denoting man’s worship of and servitude towards God;⁶⁷⁹ hence it can be said that the name and contents of this tablet are again based on a Qur’anic theme. Moreover, servanthood (*al-‘ubūdiyyah*) is a key concept in classical Sufism.⁶⁸⁰ Once again, therefore, al-Jīlī’s view of the contents of the Torah seems to be determined by his own Sufi perspective. Indeed, “regulations” and “mysteries” that he lists here are all among the stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) of the mystical path outlined in the classical Sufi manuals, such as the *Risālah* of al-Qushayrī or ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī’s (d. 481/1088) *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*. More particularly, they correspond to the practical virtues – the “ways of acting” (*mu‘āmalāt*) and “morals” (*akhlāq*) – which, in the scheme put forward by Anṣārī, are to be cultivated in the early stages of the Sufi path.⁶⁸¹ What al-Jīlī thus seems to be describing here, once again, is a Torah-based renunciant piety (*zuhd*), which might be considered the necessary precursor to the attainment of the mystical knowledge set out in the earlier tablets.

Al-Jīlī here sets up a contrast between this renunciant servanthood promoted by the Torah and the arrogance of Pharaoh, who, as already noted, is said by the Qur’an to have claimed lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*) for himself (see Q 79:24). There seems to be an allusion here to the idea discussed above, namely that the mystery of lordship, the direct antonym of servanthood, is absent from the propagated Torah. Yet where before

⁶⁷⁹ See Hawting (2006).

⁶⁸⁰ See al-Qushayrī (2001), 232-235.

⁶⁸¹ See Anṣārī (1977), 22-29.

al-Jīlī indicated that this was a deficiency of the Torah, here he seems to have a positive regard for the Torah’s valorisation of human servanthood rather than human lordship, i.e. its protection of the Children of Israel from falling into the excessive *tashbīh* professed by Pharaoh and later by the Christians.

Interestingly, the contrast between the humility promoted by the Torah and the arrogance of Pharaoh is expressed via a statement that al-Jīlī attributes to Moses, in which Moses forbids his people to practise retaliatory justice. The idea seems to be that Pharaoh’s claim of lordship leads him to act like the God of justice, that is, to punish wrongdoing with pain and torment. Those who act as humble servants, by contrast, and who thus leave their affairs to God, put their trust in His ultimate punishment of the wrongdoers after death.⁶⁸² What is interesting about this idea is that it appears to directly contradict both the Biblical *lex talionis* (Leviticus 24:20; Cf. Exodus 21:24; Deuteronomy 19:21), and the Qur’anic statement that God “prescribed [in the Torah] for [the Children of Israel]: ‘Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and for wounds retaliation (*al-qīṣāṣ*).’”⁶⁸³ (Q 5:45) Yet the saying that al-Jīlī attributes (without source) to Moses does have a Qur’anic basis; indeed, it is an almost direct quotation of the first part of Q 42:40: “The recompense for an evil deed is an evil deed like it (*jazā’ sayyi’ah sayyi’ah mithluhā*): but whoever forgives and brings about reconciliation (*fa-man ‘afā wa aṣlahā*) has a reward (*ajr*) from God, for

⁶⁸² Al-Jīlī thus seems to propose that Moses advocated something like the theological doctrine of *irjā’*, the “deferral” of the punishment of the sinner to the afterlife, for which see Madelung (1993), 606.

⁶⁸³ On the principle of retaliation in Islamic law, see Schacht (1986).

He does not love the evildoers.” Al-Jīlī thus appears to have taken the message of the latter part of this verse, changed the first half of the verse by adding a negative particle, and put it into the mouth of Moses. The latter part of the aforementioned Q 5:45, it should also be noted, similarly calls for clemency and conciliation. Once again, therefore, it seems that al-Jīlī is modelling his conception of the Torah on the Qur’an (as he interprets it, in accordance with the Ibn ‘Arabian valorisation of mercy). Furthermore, by transposing these Qur’anic affirmations of clemency onto the Torah, and by ignoring and contradicting the Biblical and Qur’anic affirmations of the righteousness of retaliatory justice, he promotes Moses as a model of mercy and pious servanthood, and softens the harshness of the Torah and Biblical law. Again, this is a reflection of his own Sufi metaphysical outlook, in which the attribute of mercy, being the attribute that underlies all of phenomenal existence, is privileged over vengeance and wrath.⁶⁸⁴

7) The tablet clarifying the path of happiness from the path of misery (*lawḥ wuḍūḥ ṭarīq al-sa‘ādah min ṭarīq al-shaqāwah*):

- The path to God (*al-ṭarīq ilá Allāh*); the clarification of the path of happiness from that of misery (*bayyana ṭarīq al-sa‘ādah min al-shaqāwah*), and of what is appropriate (*awlá*) on the path of happiness and what is permitted (*jā‘iz*) on it;
- It was based on the contents of this tablet that Moses’ people invented what they invented in their religion (*ibtada‘ qawm Mūsá mā ibtada‘ū*), out of their own desires (*raghbatan*) and a monasticism that they invented (*rahbāniyyah ibtada‘ūhā*). They derived (*istakhrajū*) those [inventions] via their faculties of thought and their intellects (*bi-afkārihim wa-‘uqūlihim*), not from the word of Moses (*kalām Mūsá*), indeed, [not] from the word of God (*kalām Allah*), for they didn’t take sufficient care over these

⁶⁸⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 88, 93-94, 118, 184. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s conception of mercy, see Nettler (2003), 154-175; Izutsu (1984), 116-140.

things. If they were meant to have derived them from divine reports (*al-akhbār al-ilāhiyyah*) and divine unveiling (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*), God would have decreed (*qadara*) that for them, and if they were meant to have been able to take sufficient care God would have ordered them to do that, through the tongue of His prophet Moses. Moses didn't oppose those things, not out of ignorance (*jahlān*), but rather out of companionship for them (*rifqan bihim*). And since they invented those things, and did not take care of them, they were punished for them (*'uwqibū 'alayhā*).

- Many sciences, including those connected to religions (*adyān*) and bodies (*abdān*).⁶⁸⁵

These are two possible levels on which the concepts of the “path to God” and the “path of happiness” can be understood. The first, more exoteric level relates to soteriology. As noted earlier in this chapter, al-Jīlī often uses the terms *sa'ādah* and *shaqāwah* to denote, respectively, the happiness of the inhabitants of paradise and the misery of the inhabitants of hell,⁶⁸⁶ a usage that is based on the way in which those terms are employed in the Qur'an (see Q 11:105-108) and hadith,⁶⁸⁷ and which is a conventional one in the Islamic tradition.⁶⁸⁸ In this sense, the term *ṭarīq al-sa'ādah* denotes the way to heaven, and this tablet would therefore appear to inform the Children of Israel how to achieve salvation. This meaning would fit with the notion expressed above that the second tablet, the tablet of guidance, contains knowledge about the final judgment, as well as with the idea that the fifth tablet, the tablet of judgment, sets out the divine commandments and prohibitions, adherence to which presumably constitutes qualification for salvation. The significance of this is that implies that the Jews' failure to adhere to the path set out on this tablet, which al-Jīlī makes clear here, means that their

⁶⁸⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 124-125.

⁶⁸⁶ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 182-183, 261.

⁶⁸⁷ See e.g. al-Nawawī (2002), 36/37.

⁶⁸⁸ See al-Attas (1999).

punishment – here signified by the term *‘uwqibū* – consists in their being condemned to hell.⁶⁸⁹ While al-Jīlī does not state this explicitly here, in the final chapter of the book, as we saw above, he does appear to argue that all non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians, will be condemned to hell. Such a view would be consistent with what seems to be the orthodox view, as set out, for instance, in the canonical hadith, “By the one in whose hand is Muhammad’s soul [i.e. God], every Jew or Christian of this community who hears me, [and then dies] without believing in what I was sent, will be among the people of the fire.”⁶⁹⁰

At the deeper, esoteric level, meanwhile, we find that in the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil* al-Jīlī indicates that the happiness of paradise and the misery of hell respectively signify “proximity” (*qurb*) to and “distance” (*bu‘d*) from God.⁶⁹¹ These are key terms in the technical lexicon of classical Sufism, where the former denotes the mystical state of being in God’s presence, and the latter the state of being distant from that divine presence.⁶⁹² In this sense, then, the path to happiness and the path to God denote not merely the path to salvation, but also the path to some form of divine communion. This meaning would fit with what al-Jīlī says above about those tablets that contain mystical guidance, particularly the tablets of guidance and wisdom. If this is the intended meaning, then the Jews’ failure to keep to the path set out on this tablet would imply that they fail to attain the mystical experience to which

⁶⁸⁹ As we shall see in the following chapter, al-Jīlī uses the same term to denote the condemnation of the Christians to hell. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 129-130.

⁶⁹⁰ Muslim (1995), 1:160. The hadith is quoted by the orthodox Sunni exegetes. See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 9:19; Ibn Kathīr (2000), 655 (Q 11:17).

⁶⁹¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 259. The link between *qurb* and *sa‘ādah* is also made by Ibn ‘Arabī. See Chittick (1989), 151.

⁶⁹² See al-Qushayrī (2001), 116-118.

those other tablets point. It should be stressed that the two levels of meaning, the soteriological and the mystical, are not mutually exclusive; indeed, both may be intended here, given that the other tablets are said to contain both soteriological and mystical knowledge.

Significantly, al-Jīlī introduces perhaps his first real criticism of Moses' people in his discussion of this tablet, proposing that they did not keep to the path laid out on this tablet, but rather “invented” (*ibdtada'ū*) certain things that were not based on the divine revelation. The term *ibdtada'ū* connotes the generally pejorative legal-theological category of *bid'ah*,⁶⁹³ a sign that al-Jīlī is adopting a condemnatory tone here.⁶⁹⁴ Al-Jīlī does not give us much indication of what these things that the Children of Israel invented were, save for a reference to monasticism (*rahbāniyyah*)⁶⁹⁵ that echoes the language of the Qur'an, which similarly condemns “a monasticism that they invented (*rahbāniyyah ibtada'ūhā*)” (Q 57:27). There is an important difference between the Qur'anic phrase and what al-Jīlī says here, however, in that the people of whom the Qur'an speaks are the followers of Jesus, not of Moses.⁶⁹⁶ Al-Jīlī's ascription of monasticism to the Jews thus seems to reflect a sense on his part that the various *ahl al-kitāb*, being all Children of Israel, are one and the same, a tendency also reflected in his long digression on Christian doctrine earlier in the chapter. Furthermore, al-Jīlī's notion that Moses'

⁶⁹³ See e.g. al-Qurṭubī (1997), 17:225 (Q 57:27), where he explicitly makes the link between *ibtada'ū* and *bid'ah*.

⁶⁹⁴ On *bid'ah* and *bid'ah* literature, see Robson (1960); Rispler (1991); Fierro (1992).

⁶⁹⁵ On the etymology of this term and the way it was understood in medieval Islam to mean “monasticism”, see Sahner (2017), 158.

⁶⁹⁶ Thus Ibn Kathīr (2000), 1302 (Q 57:27), interprets the verse to mean, “The community of the Christians (*ummat al-naṣārā*) invented it.” See also Sviri (1990); Sahner (2015), for the way in which Muslim exegetes used Q 57:27 in support of their argument about the decadence of Christianity.

people invented a form of monasticism fits with his earlier assertion that anyone of the Children of Israel who acquires the wisdom contained in the second tablet of the Torah is called a “monk” (*rāhib*). Where in that context he seemed to be using the term in a neutral or even positive sense, however, here the tone is unambiguously negative, in keeping with the orthodox Islamic attitude to monasticism, as expressed in the Qur’anic verse just quoted and in the famous hadith, “There is no monasticism in Islam” (*lā rahbaniyyah fī al-islām*); the monasticism of my community is jihad.”⁶⁹⁷ Al-Jīlī’s change of tone here perhaps indicates his desire, having spoken in rather positive terms about the Torah and the Children of Israel, to reaffirm the inferiority of the Jews vis-à-vis the Muslims, and thus to keep within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy. A similar desire can be discerned in the final chapter of the book, where, having alluded to the esoteric “mysteries” (*asrār*), “wisdom” (*ḥikmah*), and “allusions” (*ishārāt*) contained in the Jewish rituals, he states that he will go no further, because he fears that “many of the ignorant (*al-juhhāl*) [Muslims] will be seduced (*yaghtarrū*) by this and so leave their religion (*fa-yakhrijū ‘an dīnīhim*) due to their lack of knowledge of its mysteries.”⁶⁹⁸ Both references to Jewish monasticism, it might also be said, reveal the limitations of his knowledge of actual Judaism and Christianity in both their historical and living forms, monasticism (as the Qur’an suggests) being a practice associated more with the latter than the former.

⁶⁹⁷ See Sahner (2017), 153-156, for the sources in which this hadith appears.

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 260.

While al-Jīlī does not tell us more about what the Children of Israel invented in their religion, the terms he uses to describe this process of invention do tell us something important about the cause and nature of their errors. Rather than relying upon revelation (*kalām Allāh*, *kalām Mūsá*, *al-ikhbārāt al-ilāhiyyah*) or their own direct mystical experience (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*), the Children of Israel invented and “derived” (*istakhrajū*) things via their intellects (*al-afkār al-‘uqūl*). Al-Jīlī is here making an epistemological statement, namely, that revealed knowledge (whether revealed in scripture or via mystical experience) is superior to reason-based knowledge. This accords with his broader Ibn ‘Arabian epistemological outlook: in the chapter on divinity, for instance, he declares that the nature of God “is not known by way of the intellect (*lā yu‘raf bi-tarīq al-‘aql*), nor perceived by thought (*wa-lā yudrak bi-al-fikr*),” but rather via “divine unveiling” (*al-kashf al-ilāhī*) and “pure taste” (*al-dhawq al-mahḍ*).⁶⁹⁹ While the precise meaning of these latter terms, and their relation to intellectual thought, may be somewhat elusive, it is clear that al-Jīlī privileges these more intuitive, experiential ways of knowing over the more purely rational methods of the theologians and philosophers. In this regard, it might be said that al-Jīlī has two groups in his sights here: the Jews, on the one hand, and the rationalist (Muslim) theologians and philosophers, on the other.

Though al-Jīlī does not use the term here or elsewhere in the chapter, it could again be said that his notion that Moses’ people deviated

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43. Al-Jīlī’s epistemological position is fully in keeping with that of Ibn ‘Arabī, for which see e.g. the latter’s account of his meeting with Ibn Rushd, in Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 2:372:3, and his letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, which is translated in Rustom (2014). For Ibn ‘Arabī’s etymologically-based critique of the intellect (*‘aql*) as that which “shackles” genuine understanding, see Izutsu (1984), 31.

from the message of the Torah, preferring the conclusions of their own intellects to the original meaning of the revelation, constitutes his version of the orthodox concept of *tahrīf*, i.e. the notion that the Jews somehow distorted their scripture. The concept of *tahrīf*, it should be noted, can refer both to distortion of the scriptural text itself (*tahrīf al-naṣṣ*), which came to be the dominant view among Muslim scholars, and distortion of the meaning of the text (*tahrīf al-ma'ná*), for instance through false interpretations.⁷⁰⁰ Al-Jīlī's position would correspond to the latter view, which certain orthodox Sunni exegetes do take with respect to the Jews' distortion of scripture.⁷⁰¹ Whether or not he has the concept of *tahrīf* in mind, al-Jīlī's position does accord with the Qur'anic notion that the Jews, along with the Christians, have failed to properly adhere to their scriptures (see e.g. Q 2:85, 5:66), a key notion within the Islamic conception of sacred history, since it is the People of the Book's non-adherence to their scriptures that necessitates the revelation of the Qur'an to lead mankind back onto the straight path.

This leads onto the question of why Moses' people lost sight of the need to adhere to the divine revelation. In answering this question, al-Jīlī takes care to absolve Moses of any guilt, denying that it was because of his ignorance (*jahl*) that Moses failed to prevent his people's error. Again, there is a parallel here with his treatment of the errors of the

⁷⁰⁰ For this distinction, see Lazarus-Yafeh (2000), 111. *Tahrīf al-ma'ná*, in fact, seems to be what the Qur'an originally intends by the term *tahrīf*. See Reynolds (2010).

⁷⁰¹ See Adang (1996), 229; Ibn Kathīr (2000), 322 (Q 4:46) where he interprets the term *yuhirrifūn* to mean "they interpret the [divine] word incorrectly (*yata'awwalūn al-kalām 'alá ghayr ta'wīlihi*), and do not explain it in accordance with God's intended meaning (*wa-yufassirūnahu bi-ghayr murād Allāh*), intentionally (*qaṣadan*) and for the sake of falsification (*iftirā'*).” See also Ali (1946), 194, note 565 (Q 4:46): “A trick of the Jews was to twist words and expressions, so as to ridicule the most solemn teachings of Faith,” implying that *tahrīf al-ma'ná* is what is meant.

Christians in the chapter on the Gospel, where, following the Qur'an, he insists on Jesus' innocence (*barā'ah*) of any wrongdoing.⁷⁰² This is perhaps an indication that al-Jīlī, in keeping with the dominant Sunni position of his day,⁷⁰³ believed in the sinlessness (*iṣmah*) of the prophets. If Moses is not to blame, then neither, indeed, is free will; rather, al-Jīlī indicates that the Jews' innovations were determined by the divine decree (*qadar*). His use of this latter term indicates that we are again dealing with an orthodox (Sunni-Ash'arite) theological concept, namely the principle of divine determinism (*al-qaḍā' wa-al-qadar*).⁷⁰⁴ This notion, that it is God who leads people astray (and guides others to the truth), is drawn from the Qur'an (see e.g. Q 2:26, 7:186, 35:8),⁷⁰⁵ and affirmed by the orthodox Sunni exegetes.⁷⁰⁶ Al-Jīlī's espousal of it here thus reflects his commitment to the Qur'anic paradigm, and, more generally, his commitment to the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history.

It might be said again by way of concluding this section that al-Jīlī's presentation of the contents of the Torah is evidently modelled on the Qur'an, on the one hand, and on his Sufi metaphysics, on the other. In taking the Qur'an as his model, he is following the orthodox Islamic tendency to conceive of the earlier scriptures in terms of the Qur'anic

⁷⁰² See al-Jīlī (1997a), 129. There is perhaps, however, perhaps an implied criticism of Jesus in the present chapter, in al-Jīlī's assertion that, had Jesus propagated the mysteries to his people in allusions, they would not have gone astray. See *ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁰³ See Madelung (1978), 183.

⁷⁰⁴ See Gardet (1978a); Frolov (2002).

⁷⁰⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 131, where he quotes Q 2:26 when making a similar point about the Christians' errors.

⁷⁰⁶ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 28 (Q 1:7): "He [i.e. God] was the one who led them [i.e. *al-ḍāllīn*, interpreted as a reference to the Christians] into error (*aḍallahum*) with His decree (*bi-qadarihi*)."

paradigm.⁷⁰⁷ A similar tendency emerges from his discussion of Jewish ritual in the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, where he names the Jewish ‘*ibādāt*’ after the five pillars of Islam.⁷⁰⁸ He views the Torah and Judaism, in other words, through an Islamic prism, rather than through direct engagement with the actual Torah or with actual Judaism.⁷⁰⁹ This seems to be typical of most medieval Muslim authors.⁷¹⁰ As for the impact of his Sufi metaphysics on his view of the Torah, this reflects the fairly common tendency among exegetes to interpret the contents of scripture in light of their own views and preoccupations.⁷¹¹ In this case, this tendency manifests itself in the view that the Torah, as a genuine divine revelation, must contain the Sufi metaphysical ideas that, in al-Jīlī’s view, constitute the truth.⁷¹²

Conclusion:

Al-Jīlī’s chapter on the Torah serves as a useful case study of how his Sufi metaphysical outlook determines his view of scripture, and the pre-Qur’anic scriptures in particular. His view of the Torah, Judaism, and the Jews can perhaps best be described as ambivalent. On the one hand,

⁷⁰⁷ See Saleh (2016), 410.

⁷⁰⁸ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 259-260.

⁷⁰⁹ It is notable, for example, that he makes no reference to the names of any of the books of the Bible, nor does he display any knowledge of the terminology of Biblical Hebrew (with the possible partial exception of his discussion of the term *rāhib*).

⁷¹⁰ See Lazarus-Yafeh (1992), 76; Saleh (2014), 289.

⁷¹¹ Consider, for instance, the tendency in the modern scientific age for Qur’an exegetes to undertake so-called “scientific exegesis” (*tafsīr ‘ilmī*), the attempt to demonstrate that the Qur’an foreshadows the discoveries of modern science, on which see Wielandt (2002), 129-131. With respect to the tendency of Sufi commentators to interpret the Qur’an in light of Sufi ideas and concepts, Goldziher describes Sufi Qur’an commentary as eisegesis, i.e. “the reading of one’s own ideas into a text.” See Sands (2006), 1.

⁷¹² Al-Jīlī also suggests in the following chapter that the Psalter, which he deems to be the least complete of the scriptures recognised by the Qur’an, contains Sufi metaphysical knowledge – e.g. “the knowledge of absolute existence (*‘ulūm al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), and the knowledge of the manifestation of the Real within creation (*‘ilm tajallī al-ḥaqq fī al-khalq*)” – indicating that he thinks that all of the scriptures fundamentally accord with his Sufi metaphysical outlook. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 125-126.

the Torah constitutes a genuine revelation or, in Sufi metaphysical terms, manifestation (*tajalli*) of an aspect of God, specifically, of His “attributive names” (*al-asmā’ al-ṣifātiyyah*). Furthermore, the seven tablets of the Torah that Moses was commanded to propagate to his people contain various forms of wisdom that, in al-Jīlī’s worldview, ought to be held in high regard, including theological, metaphysical, mystical, eschatological, historical, and scientific types of knowledge. Unlike the majority of medieval Muslim scholars who discuss the Torah, he does not explicitly indicate that the Jews have corrupted their scripture (*tahrīf*), nor does he use terms such as *kufṛ* and *ḍalāl* to describe the Jews’ theological position, as he does with the Christians, or cite the harsher Qur’anic passages on the Jews (e.g 4:46, 5:41-42, 5:64). Indeed, on the contrary, at times he describes certain unnamed Jews – particularly the intellectual and spiritual elite whom he calls the *ruhhāb* and *aḥbār* – in relatively respectful terms. Moses, meanwhile, though he is not discussed at the same length as Muhammad or Jesus are in the chapters on the Qur’an and the Gospel, emerges as a sinless figure who carried out God’s commandments for the protection of the divine message and his own people, and as a model mystic. In Sufi metaphysical terms, then, Moses is a Perfect Man, even if al-Jīlī does not explicitly call him by this title, which after all is properly speaking the preserve of Muhammad.

This all being said, these relatively positive aspects of al-Jīlī’s portrayal of the Torah and the Jews are counterbalanced by some more negative notions, which are also connected to al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics.

Thus, while the Torah constitutes a form of divine manifestation, it is a less complete type of *tajallī* than the Gospel and the Qur'an, meaning that the Torah represents a lower level of existence than those scriptures. In keeping with this, al-Jīlī indicates that the propagated Torah, i.e. the Torah that is in the Jews' possession, is an incomplete version of the Torah that was revealed to Moses, since it is missing two tablets that point towards two exalted divine mysteries, which Moses' people do not have the requisite spiritual capacity to comprehend. This incompleteness means that while the Torah correctly points to the incomparability and transcendence of God (*tanzīh*), it neglects to balance this perspective, as the Qur'an does and as Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics calls for, with that of God's comparability and immanence (*tashbīh*). This incompleteness of the Torah thus means that none of the Jews (after Moses) were able to become Perfect Men, and that, for the sake of the progress of sacred history, the revelation and law of Moses had to be abrogated by the more complete revelation of Jesus (which was in turn abrogated by the revelation of Muhammad). Finally, the Jews have not even kept to their incomplete scripture, preferring the deductions of their own intellects to God's word, an error that, al-Jīlī indicates, will lead to their punishment and/or their inability to attain mystical proximity to God.

The ambivalence of al-Jīlī's view of the Torah and the Jews is in keeping with the ambivalent view of the wider Islamic tradition, which can be summed up as the view that, while Moses was a genuine prophet and the Torah an originally genuine scripture, the Jews did not keep to this scripture, hence the revelation and religion of Moses were

superseded by that of Muhammad. Al-Jīlī's discussion of the Torah, it can therefore be said, reflects his commitment to the orthodox Islamic view of sacred history. In addition to this, however, his view of the Torah is also determined by his Sufi metaphysical perspective, as can be seen, for instance, in his discussion of the Torah's contents, and in his conception of the Torah as an expression of a type of divine manifestation. These Sufi metaphysical notions give his discussion a certain distinctiveness. Their presence in a chapter ostensibly devoted to the Torah reflects the all-pervasiveness of al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical outlook within his writing, for, as al-Jīlī sees it, it is only through understanding the theories of universal theophany, the levels of existence, and the Perfect Man that one can understand the nature and significance of the Torah and the other scriptures. His position outlined here (and in the other chapters on the scriptures) can therefore be described as a Sufi metaphysical reading of the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history.

Chapter Four: The Gospel (*al-Injīl*)

Chapter 38 of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, the last chapter in the section on the scriptures, deals with the scripture of the Christians – the Gospel (*al-Injīl*)⁷¹³ – and the prophet associated with that scripture, Jesus (‘*Īsá*). As in previous chapters, al-Jīlī’s treatment of the Gospel and of the Christians’ interpretation of it is grounded in his Sufi metaphysics. The chapter thus affords us another opportunity to view him elaborating upon the key idea of that metaphysical system, namely, the theory of universal theophany. As will be seen, this idea provides the grounds for al-Jīlī’s assessment of Christian doctrine, leading him both to criticise the Christians for their failure to recognise the truth, and yet to see the esoteric truth within Christian doctrine.

At the same time, his discussion of the Gospel ought also to be placed within the conceptual framework provided by the orthodox Sunni Islamic view of the Gospel and of sacred history more generally. According to that conception, the Christian scripture does not consist of the four canonical Gospels and other books of the New Testament, written by men under divine inspiration (as in the orthodox Christian conception); rather, it is a single book containing the word of God, mediated through His prophet Jesus, and is thus viewed in an analogous way to the Torah and the Qur’an.⁷¹⁴ There is, therefore, a fundamental conceptual difference between the Christian and Islamic views of the

⁷¹³ For the etymology of *Injīl*, see Jeffrey (1938), 71-72.

⁷¹⁴ See Ali (1946), 286-287; McAuliffe (1991), 180-181; Griffith (2002a). It should also be noted, however, that certain pre-modern Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Rabban (d. 251/865), al-Ya’qūbī (d. 284/898), al-Mas’ūdī (d. 346/957), and al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048), do demonstrate knowledge of the contents of different books of the New Testament. See de Vaux [Anawati] (1971), 1206.

Gospel. In addition, the Islamic view of the Gospel is heavily coloured by the concept of *tahrīf*, i.e., the idea that the Christians had somehow distorted the divine revelation of the Gospel, such that the Gospel as they now possess it is different from the true original scripture.⁷¹⁵

At the heart of the Islamic view that the Christians have distorted the Gospel is the critical Islamic attitude towards the fundamental Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. This attitude is grounded in the Qur'an's assessment that the Christian teaching about Jesus is an affront to the unity of God (see Q 4:171, 5:17, 5:72-78, 5:116-117).⁷¹⁶ Later Muslim theologians developed this critique using logical arguments in polemical debates with Christians.⁷¹⁷ The Islamic Jesus, then, while a prophet held in high esteem, who is given the special titles of Messiah (*al-masīh*) (see Q 3:45, 4:157, 4:171, 4:172, etc.), Spirit of God (*rūḥ Allāh*) (see Q 2:87, 2:253, 4:171, 5:110, etc.) and Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) (see Q 3:45, 4:171), among others,⁷¹⁸ is nevertheless a highly controversial figure.⁷¹⁹ Al-Jīlī's treatment of the Gospel, Jesus, and the Christians, as we shall see, elaborates upon this Qur'anic assessment of Jesus and the Christians' views about him – and in particular upon the Qur'anic presentation and critique of the Trinity.⁷²⁰ It is perhaps because this doctrine is closely tied to the Islamic charge that the Christians have distorted the true message of the Gospel that al-Jīlī

⁷¹⁵ See Lazarus-Yafeh (2000); Lazarus-Yafeh (1992), 19-35; Adang (1996), 223-248; Reynolds (2015), 184; McAuliffe (1991), 111; and see McAuliffe (1991), 168, note 42 for an overview of the other secondary literature.

⁷¹⁶ See Khalidi (2001), 12-13; Reynolds (2015), 187-188.

⁷¹⁷ See Siddiqui (2013), 50, 60-113.

⁷¹⁸ On the titles of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition, see Parrinder (2003), 16-54.

⁷¹⁹ See Khalidi (2001), 12.

⁷²⁰ It should be remembered that he also treated this topic at some length in the chapter on the Torah – an indication of its significance for him. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 120-121.

concentrates upon it in a chapter ostensibly devoted to the Gospel. Indeed it is notable that while he devotes considerable attention to the Trinity, al-Jīlī makes little or no mention in this chapter of many of the standard issues in Islamic discussions of Jesus and the Gospel, including: the annunciation; Jesus' birth, titles, miracles, disciples, asceticism, crucifixion, and ascension; *tahrīf* and *naskh*; and the differences between the Christian denominations. This reflects how al-Jīlī is not primarily engaged here in religious polemic, in the manner of those theologians who wrote treatises against Christianity attacking Christian doctrine on (mainly) rational grounds. Rather, the chapter constitutes one part of his broader presentation of his Sufi metaphysics, and it is this that should be seen as al-Jīlī's primary goal and concern here, as elsewhere in the book. As in previous chapters, in what follows I undertake a close reading of the chapter, which I break down into sections according to the key themes that emerge.

a) The revelation & language(s) of the Gospel

God sent down (*anzala*) the Gospel upon Jesus in the Syriac language (*bi-al-lughah al-suryāniyyah*), and it was recited (*qurī'a*) in seventeen languages (*lughah*).⁷²¹

The opening of the chapter establishes the Gospel, as in the orthodox Islamic conception, as a scripture analogous to the Torah and the Qur'an, that is, as a single scripture that God revealed to a particular prophet in a particular language. The verb that al-Jīlī uses to denote God's revelation of the Gospel – *anzala* (‘*alā*) – is the same as he uses to

⁷²¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 128.

denote the revelation of those other scriptures, and as already noted in previous chapters, is also one of the verbs that the Qur'an commonly uses to denote the revelation of scripture.⁷²² Al-Jīlī's use of this verb with God as its subject thus establishes that the Gospel, like the Qur'an and the Torah is a genuine divine revelation, in accordance with the orthodox Islamic position.

In his chapters on the other scriptures, al-Jīlī made no mention of the language in which those scriptures were revealed. The Qur'an, of course, declares itself to be Arabic (see Q 12:2, 13:37, 16:103, etc.), and it can probably be assumed that al-Jīlī was aware that the Torah was a Hebrew scripture. What is the significance, then, of his explicit declaration that the Gospel was revealed to Jesus in Syriac and then recited in seventeen languages? Though the original language of the canonical Gospels was Greek, "[s]ome early Muslim writers say that the original Gospel was written in Hebrew, or in Aramaic, both of them languages in use in the Jewish community at the time of Jesus,"⁷²³ and Jesus himself is said to have been a native speaker of Aramaic, of which Syriac is a dialect. Al-Jīlī's declaration that the Gospel was revealed in Syriac, therefore, seems to follow on from his adoption of the Islamic conception of sacred history: if Jesus spoke Aramaic or Syriac (it seems unlikely that al-Jīlī would have been aware of a distinction between the two), then it would follow that the revelation that he received would have been in that language, just as the revelation received by Muhammad was

⁷²² As noted in the chapter on the Qur'an, the verb appears 188 times in the Qur'an, and is used of both the Qur'an (e.g. Q 2:185, 12:2, 20:113) and of other scriptures, including the Torah and the Gospel (e.g. Q 3:3).

⁷²³ Griffith (2002a).

in his native tongue, Arabic. In addition, it is likely that al-Jīlī would have been aware of Syriac's status as the liturgical language of several of the churches of the Middle East, and perhaps even of the existence of a Syriac translation of the Bible – the Peshitta – and of Syriac apocrypha; hence it would have been natural for him to assume that the Christian scripture was originally revealed in that language.

While, in all of these respects, al-Jīlī presents the Gospel in an analogous way to the Qur'an, the analogy breaks down with respect to his remark that the Gospel was recited (*qurī'a*) in seventeen different languages. This implies that it was translated into sixteen languages, which are used – along with the original Syriac – by different Christian groups in their worship. According to the orthodox Islamic view, the Qur'an cannot be translated: it is an Arabic Qur'an or else it is not the Qur'an.⁷²⁴ It seems that, according to al-Jīlī, the same cannot be said of the Gospel. There is perhaps in the background here the common idea that the Qur'an surpasses all other scriptures by virtue of the inimitability of its language (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*). As Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) puts it, "Unlike the Gospel, the Torah and the Psalter – which have all been translated into several languages – the Qur'an, in its stylistic perfection, cannot be rendered into any other language, which proves its miraculous nature."⁷²⁵ By highlighting the translatability of the Gospel, therefore, al-Jīlī may be making a subtle point here about its inferiority to the Qur'an.

What, we might wonder, are the sixteen languages other than Syriac in which al-Jīlī believed the Gospel to be recited? I have not found

⁷²⁴ See Welch, Paret, & Pearson (1986), 429; McAuliffe (2003), 108.

⁷²⁵ Quoted in Adang (1996), 170.

any source or parallel for this claim, nor does al-Jīlī suggest here or elsewhere which languages he has in mind. It is known that Arabic translations of the New Testament were made from the 2nd/8th century,⁷²⁶ and it seems highly likely that al-Jīlī would have been aware of the existence of such translations, even if he had not read them. It seems also likely that an educated medieval Muslim like him who had travelled in the Middle East would have been aware of Christian communities who used – besides Syriac – Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Persian, Armenian, and perhaps Latin.⁷²⁷ In proposing these languages, and thinking about what other languages he may have had in mind, however, we are limited to speculation, at least until we know more about al-Jīlī’s life. What we are able to say is that al-Jīlī’s reference to the Gospel being recited in seventeen different languages demonstrates, in addition to his conception of the distinction between the Gospel and the Qur’an, some awareness of the existence of a diversity of Christian communities, and more generally of a lived Christianity on the ground. Nevertheless, al-Jīlī does not elaborate upon this point, instead devoting the rest of the chapter to a discussion of the theoretical place of the Gospel, Jesus, and the Christians within his Sufi metaphysical conception of revelation.

b) The opening of the Gospel

The beginning of the Gospel is, “In the name of the Father, the Mother, and the Son” (*bi-ism al-ab wa-al-umm wa-al-ibn*), just as the opening of the Qur’an is, “In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate”. His people (*qawmuhi*) took this phrase (*hādhā al-kalām*) in its apparent meaning (*‘alā ṣāhirihi*), and so they thought (*ẓannū*) that the Father, the Mother, and the

⁷²⁶ See de Vaux [Anawati] (1971), 1205.

⁷²⁷ On translations of the New Testament, see Allison (2005), 922.

Son were an expression of the Spirit (*al-rūh*), Mary and Jesus. So they then said, “God is the third of three (*inna Allāh thālith thalāthah*).” And they did not know that what was intended by the Father was the name God (*Allāh*), and that by the Mother was intended the true nature of the essence (*kunh al-dhāt*), which is referred to as “the quiddity of realities” (*māhiyyat al-ḥaqā’iq*), and by the Son was intended the book (*al-kitāb*), which is absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), because it is a branch and result of the quiddity of the true nature (*māhiyyat al-kunh*). God – May He be exalted – said, “And with Him is the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*),” (Q 13:39) alluding to what has been mentioned. And this has been previously explained in its proper place.⁷²⁸

After opening the chapter with a more this-worldly focus on the languages in which the Gospel is recited, al-Jīlī moves quickly into more metaphysical territory. The passage – and, in fact, his overall conception of the Gospel – is grounded in what he understands to be the opening phrase of the Gospel. Again, an analogy is drawn – this time explicitly – between the Qur’an and the Gospel. Both scriptures, as al-Jīlī sees it, open with a *basmalah*, that is, with a formula in which the name of God is invoked. The *basmalah* of the Christian scripture, according to his conception, is a Trinitarian formula. Instead of the standard Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, however, al-Jīlī presents us with a Trinity of *al-ab*, *al-umm*, and *al-ibn* – Father, Mother, and Son.⁷²⁹ Furthermore, Jesus’ people (*qawm*) – i.e. the Christians⁷³⁰ – he tells us, make the mistake of taking this phrase in its “apparent” (*ẓāhir*) sense,

⁷²⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 129.

⁷²⁹ He presents us with the same conception of the Trinity in the chapter on the Torah. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 120.

⁷³⁰ I understand the term *qawm ‘Īsā*, as it is used throughout this chapter and in the previous chapter, as a reference to the Christians. Support for this interpretation comes from al-Jīlī’s identification of the Christians as *al-‘Īsawiyyūn* in the final chapter. See *ibid.*, 255. It should be noted that the medieval Muslim exegetes sometimes use the term *dīn ‘Īsā* to denote the original, uncorrupted religion preached by Jesus. See Sahner (2017), 11, and e.g. the title of Ibn Taymiyyah’s *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*.

identifying the Father with *al-rūḥ*, the Mother with Mary, and the Son with Jesus.

Al-Jīlī's description of the Christian Trinity probably derives from the Qur'anic account of Trinitarian doctrine, which suggests that Jesus' people worship Jesus and his mother Mary "as two gods besides God" (Q 5:116). This can be taken to mean that the Christians profess a Trinity of God, Mary, and Jesus, as indicated by al-Jīlī.⁷³¹ Al-Jīlī's suggestion that the Christians identify the Father with the Spirit further complicates matters. Though it perhaps grows out of an awareness on his part that the Holy Spirit is part of the Christian Trinity, it seems more likely to be connected to the role of the divine spirit in the Qur'anic accounts of the conception of Jesus (see Q 21:91, 66:12). This becomes clearer if we look at Ibn 'Arabī's treatment of Jesus' conception in the opening to his chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ*, a passage with which al-Jīlī would have been familiar. There, Ibn 'Arabī tells of how Gabriel, "the Trustworthy Spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), "took on the likeness of a created mortal before Mary (*tamaththala...li-Maryam basharan sawiyyan*)," with the result that "she imagined that he wanted to have intercourse with her, and took refuge in God from him." After Gabriel reassured her that he was a messenger of God who had come to bring her a son, Mary's chest was opened, "desire flowed within [her]" (*fa-sarat al-shahwah fī Maryam*), and Gabriel breathed Jesus into her (*fa-nafakha fīhā... 'Isā*).⁷³²

⁷³¹ An earlier generation of scholars proposed that the Qur'an is here engaging with the Trinitarian doctrine of a heretical Christian sect (see Nicholson (1921), 139), but more recent scholars have rather seen in the reference to Jesus' mother a warning against the excessive veneration of Mary in the eastern Churches. See Ali (1946), 280, note 829; Thomas (2006).

⁷³² Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 138-139.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s retelling of the Qur’anic story thus brings out the role of the Spirit – Gabriel – as the humanlike “father” of Jesus in the Qur’anic account, a usage that seems to feed into al-Jīlī’s conception of the Trinity here.⁷³³

Al-Jīlī’s description of the Christian Trinity as Father, Mother, and Son therefore highlights the strong Qur’an-centredness of his approach. What the Qur’an apparently says about the Trinity, in other words, overrides all else, including any knowledge he might have had of Christian doctrine and practice, which would have made it clear to him that this is not the orthodox Christian Trinity. This Qur’an-centred approach is further underlined by his quotation of the formula that “God is the third of three,” which is cited in the Qur’an as an example of the Christians’ *kufṛ* (Q 5:73).⁷³⁴ Yet while the Qur’an criticises the Christian doctrine of the Trinity on the grounds that it is incompatible with belief in the fundamental doctrine of the unity of God (see Q 4:171, 5:73), al-Jīlī’s criticism is subtler and more metaphysically minded. The Christians’ error, he proposes, consists in their reading the Trinitarian formula too literally. The phrase he uses to denote this literal type of interpretation – *akhada... ‘alā ṣāhirihi* – implies that the Christians are too exoterically-minded, being veiled from the deeper esoteric or hidden (*bāṭin*) truth represented by the Trinitarian formula.⁷³⁵ This idea, it might

⁷³³ See also a verse in the *Futūḥāt*, in which Ibn ‘Arabī calls Jesus “the son of the Spirit” (*ibn al-rūḥ*), which again suggests that the Spirit is Jesus’ father. Quoted in al-Ḥakīm (1981), 217.

⁷³⁴ On the Syriac origin of this phrase, see Griffith (2001), 312-313.

⁷³⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 121. For al-Jīlī’s theory of esoteric scriptural interpretation (*ta’wīl*), as set out in his *Ghunyat arbāb al-samā’*, see the comments of al-Ḥakīm in al-Jīlī (2004), 37: his theory, she says, rests upon “the necessity of the recipient [of scripture] not limiting himself to the apparent meaning of the terms (*allā yaqtaṣir al-mutalaqqī ‘alā ṣāhir al-alfāz*), but rather passing beyond them to their inner meanings

be suggested, constitutes al-Jīlī's Sufi version of the Sunni orthodox concept of the Christians' distortion (*tahrīf*) of their revelation, in a similar way to how his notion that the Jews "invented" (*ibtada'ū*) things in their religion via their intellects could be viewed as his Sufi version of the notion of the Jews' *tahrīf* of the Torah. As in that context, his position here is not the dominant orthodox view that the Christians had in some way falsified the very text of the Gospel (*tahrīf al-naṣṣ*), but rather that they distorted the *meaning* of the scripture (*tahrīf al-ma'ná*) by interpreting it literally.⁷³⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, this conception is not actually beyond the bounds of what can constitute *tahrīf* (indeed, it seems to be what the Qur'an itself means by the term),⁷³⁷ though it should again be stressed that al-Jīlī does not actually use the term here or elsewhere in the chapter.

Al-Jīlī's critique of the Christians on these grounds reflects how, to a certain degree, Christian doctrine here becomes in effect a foil for the elaboration of his own Sufi metaphysical position. In other words, by criticising the Christians for limiting their interpretation of their scripture to its *ẓāhir* sense al-Jīlī is indicating, in keeping with the dominant Sufi approach to the Qur'an, that scripture has a *bāṭin* as well as *ẓāhir* meaning;⁷³⁸ indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, in al-Jīlī's view the Qur'an contains an even deeper level of meaning, that of the *asrār ilāhiyyah*. As we shall see later in the chapter, al-Jīlī compares the

(*bawāṭin ma'ānīhā*).” In line with this view, he implores the reader: “Let not the apparent sense of the term suffice you (*la taktafī bi-ẓāhir al-laḥẓ*), but seek what is behind that.”

⁷³⁶ For this distinction, see Lazarus-Yafeh (2000), 111.

⁷³⁷ See Reynolds (2010); Lazarus-Yafeh (2000); Parrinder (2003), 146; Adang (1996), 223-237; Saleh (2016), 413.

⁷³⁸ On this aspect of Sufi *tafsīr*, see Sands (2006), 7-13; Böwering (2003).

Christians in this regard to those whom he calls '*ulamā' al-rusūm*, i.e., the exoteric religious scholars, who are ignorant of those deeper truths that he, as a Sufi thinker, is able to access. In this way, his version of *tahrīf* can be seen not only as a criticism of the Christians, but also as the assertion of the superiority of his Sufi metaphysical conception of Islam, as part of an intra-Muslim argument against his non-Sufi scholarly opponents such as the anti-Ibn 'Arabian Sufis of Yemen discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

What, then, is the esoteric meaning of the Trinitarian formula that al-Jīlī believes the Christians to have overlooked? Al-Jīlī's interpretation of the opening of the Gospel is grounded in his Sufi metaphysics. Instead of the Spirit, Mary, and Jesus, the three persons⁷³⁹ of the Trinity of the Gospel in fact represent different levels of existence. Indeed, they represent the three highest levels of existence in his scheme. Thus, the Mother denotes what he calls, among other names, "the quiddity of the true nature of the essence" (*māhiyyat kunh al-dhāt*), i.e. the simple divine essence in its utterly unknowable and unqualified state – the highest level of existence.⁷⁴⁰ This brings to mind his similar identification of the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*) with the inner dimension of the essence, which we looked at in chapter two.⁷⁴¹ For al-Jīlī, then, the Mother of the Trinity, like the Mother of the Book, stands for the "mother" of existence, i.e. the source from which all of existence derives. In this regard, al-Jīlī's conception of the Mother of the Trinity is

⁷³⁹ In the chapter on the Torah – but not here – al-Jīlī uses the term commonly used in Christian Arabic theology (and in Islamic polemical texts) to denote the persons of the Trinity – *aqānīm*. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 120.

⁷⁴⁰ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 26, 55-6; al-Jīlī (1999b), 15-17.

⁷⁴¹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 113; Cf. *ibid.*, 42.

somewhat reminiscent of the Christian conception of the *Father* as “the ‘fountainhead’ of the Godhead, the source, cause or principle of origin for the other two persons”.⁷⁴²

Following on from this, the Son, al-Jīlī tells us, represents not Jesus, but rather “the Book” (*al-kitāb*). This identification can perhaps be seen within the context of the Qur’anic conception of Jesus as the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) (see Q 3:45, 4:171), for both terms suggest that the Son is a revelation from God.⁷⁴³ Relying on the same Qur’anic conception, Ibn ‘Arabī draws a similar parallel in his chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ* when he says, “Gabriel was transmitting (*nāqil*) the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) [i.e. Jesus] to Mary just as a messenger transmits the word of God to his community, for He says, “And His Word which He cast into Mary and a spriti from Him (Q 4:171).”⁷⁴⁴ According to al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysical conception, however, the term *al-kitāb* also denotes absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*).⁷⁴⁵ Put in terms of al-Jīlī’s levels of existence, this is the level of “unqualified oneness” (*al-aḥadiyyah*), the level at which the divine essence remains simple and unqualified, yet begins its process of manifestation by taking on qualification within itself.⁷⁴⁶ This association of the Son of the Trinity with the absolute existence of the unqualified essence does have some logic to it. Just as an unborn son is latent within his mother, so too is the unlimited existence

⁷⁴² Ware (1995), 32.

⁷⁴³ On this title of Jesus’, see Parrinder (2003), 46-48.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 139.

⁷⁴⁵ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 113.

⁷⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, 33, where he defines *al-aḥadiyyah* as “the first of the manifestations of the essence within itself, to itself, and through itself (*fī nafsīhi li-nafsīhi bi-nafsīhi*)”; and *ibid.*, 47, where he defines it as “the locus of the essence’s manifestation (*majlā al-dhāt*)”, “the first of the descents of the essence (*awwal tanazzulāt al-dhāt*)”, and “the first of the essence’s appearances” (*awwal ṣuḥūr dhātī*).

or unqualified oneness of God – the second level of existence – latent within His utterly simple essence – the first level. And just as the son subsequently emerges from the mother to be born into the world, so too does absolute existence emerge from the divine essence at the beginning of the process of divine manifestation.

Finally, the term Father, according to al-Jīlī, denotes not the Spirit (as he imagines the Christians to believe), but rather the divine name *Allāh*, which is to say, God at the level of “divinity” (*al-ulūhiyyah*), the divine level that contains within it all the levels of existence.⁷⁴⁷ While the Mother of the Trinity denotes the divine essence in a state of total imperceptibility, and the Son the essence in its unqualified, unlimited existence, the Father represents the essence turned towards the phenomenal world. In this sense, the Father is “lower” (*anzal*) in the hierarchy of existence than the other two persons of the Trinity, because it denotes the divine essence in a more qualified state. In suggesting this hierarchy of Mother, Son, and Father, al-Jīlī is apparently reversing the orthodox Christian doctrine that the Father “begets” the Son and the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father (and, in the Latin west, from the Son).⁷⁴⁸ As we saw in chapter one, however, al-Jīlī also suggests that, from another perspective, divinity is in fact the highest level of the divine existence, because it is God as *Allāh* who gives all levels of existence their reality.⁷⁴⁹ From this perspective, it can be said that al-Jīlī’s conception of the Father somewhat resembles the Christian conception, a

⁷⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 42; Cf. al-Jīlī (1999b), 19. The name *Allāh*, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, synthesises all of the divine names. See Chittick (1989), 302.

⁷⁴⁸ See Louth (2013), 28.

⁷⁴⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 42, 49.

resemblance that is superficially reinforced by his identification of the Father with *Allāh*. Nevertheless, any apparent resemblance between al-Jīlī's interpretation of the Trinity and the Christian view should not obscure the point that his treatment of the Trinity is based primarily on his Sufi metaphysics – in particular, his theory of the levels of existence – and the Qur'anic conception of Christian doctrine, rather than on a direct engagement with actual Christian doctrine.⁷⁵⁰

In summary, the true, metaphysical Trinity, according to al-Jīlī's interpretation, consists of the simple divine essence (*al-dhāt al-mahḍ/al-ṣarf/al-sādhaj*), the absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) or unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*) of the divine essence, and the divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*) of God. This, then, is the esoteric meaning of the opening of the Gospel, as well as of the Qur'anic verse (Q 13:39) that al-Jīlī quotes here: “And with Him [i.e. *Allāh*, God at the level of divinity] is the Mother [i.e. *al-umm*, the simple divine essence] of the Book [i.e. *al-kitāb*, absolute existence, the unqualified oneness of the essence].” Al-Jīlī's metaphysical interpretation of the Christian Trinitarian formula, it should also be noted, parallels his metaphysical interpretation of the

⁷⁵⁰ An interesting parallel can be drawn between al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity and the interpretation of the Trinity put forward by the Indian religious reformer Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762), who was also heavily influenced by the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī. Shāh Walī Allāh interprets the three persons of the Trinity as representing the metaphysical realities that he calls the rational soul” (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*) or “the universal soul” (*al-naḥs al-kuliyyah*), “the heavenly spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-sāmawī*) or “the greatest manifestation” (*al-tajallī al-a'zam*), and “the pure stone” (*al-ḥajar al-baḥt*) or “the pure essence” (*al-dhāt al-baḥt*). See Baljon (1986), 174, note 7. While al-Jīlī and Shāh Walī Allāh do not identify the three persons of the Trinity with the exact same metaphysical realities, nevertheless they both apply an Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysical framework to their reading of the Trinitarian formula.

Islamic *basmalah* elsewhere in his writings.⁷⁵¹ This reflects how al-Jīlī's approach to scripture, whether the Qur'an or any of the pre-Qur'anic scriptures, is determined by his Sufi metaphysical perspective. Just as, in his metaphysical interpretation of the Islamic *basmalah*, he proposes that that formula denotes how all of reality issues from the divine essence,⁷⁵² so too does he here suggest that the Trinitarian formula with which the Gospel begins denotes how existence begins with the simple essence of God, and subsequently descends through the upper levels of the divine existence. In this way, we again can see how al-Jīlī uses the Gospel and Christian doctrine to elaborate his own Sufi metaphysical theory and approach to scripture.

At the same time, there is also a sense in which he is engaging directly with Christian doctrine. As al-Jīlī sees it, by believing that the Trinitarian formula refers to the Spirit, Mary, and Jesus, the Christians make the mistake not so much of associating others with God, but rather, at the more metaphysical level, of possessing a limited understanding of the divine manifestations, the truth of which is revealed to them in their scripture if only they would interpret it correctly. By focusing only on the apparent meaning of the Trinitarian formula, the Christians overlook the fact that the Trinity points not to the three created beings that are apparently indicated, but rather to the highest metaphysical levels of the divine existence. This line of criticism – that the Christians are not so

⁷⁵¹ Al-Jīlī's first book on Sufi metaphysics – *al-Kahf wa-al-raqīm fī sharḥ bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* – is devoted to the metaphysical meaning of the *basmalah*. See al-Jīlī (2002); Ziedan (1988), 57-58; Atlagh (1992); Lo Polito (2010), 138-270. See also al-Jīlī (1999a), 138-139, on the "mysteries (*asrār*) of the *basmalah*".

⁷⁵² See al-Jīlī (1999a), 146.

much wrong as they are limited in their vision – underlies the entire chapter, as we shall see presently.

c) Jesus' self-defence before God

Jesus referred to this [the true meaning of the Trinity] when he said, “I only said to them that which You commanded me” (5:117) to propagate (*uballigh*) to them, which was this word (*hādhā al-kalām*). Then he said, “[I told them] to worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” So it is known that Jesus – Peace be upon him – did not limit himself (*lam yaqtaṣir*) to the apparent meaning of the Gospel (*ẓāhir al-Injīl*); rather, he added clarification and elucidation (*al-bayān wa-al-īdāh*) by saying, “to worship God, my Lord and your Lord,” in order to refute their delusion (*mā tawahhamū*) that he, his mother (*ummuhu*), and the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) were the Lord (*al-rabb*), and in order that Jesus would attain innocence (*al-barā’ah*) in the eyes of God, because he explained it to them.⁷⁵³

As suggested above, the Qur’anic Jesus is a particularly contentious figure. The Qur’anic controversy surrounding Jesus, though it includes the question of the crucifixion, which the Qur’an seems to deny (see Q 4:157), centres principally upon the question of the divinity claimed by the Christians for him – i.e., the doctrine of the Incarnation – and the related doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps the key passage that deals with this question is Q 5:116-119, which takes the form of “an interrogation of Jesus by God.”⁷⁵⁴ In this passage, and elsewhere in the Qur’an, Jesus “is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold of him,” a unique task for a Qur’anic prophet.⁷⁵⁵

Because of the importance of this passage within the Qur’anic critique of Christian Christological doctrine, it is unsurprising that al-Jīlī

⁷⁵³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 129.

⁷⁵⁴ Khalidi (2001), 13.

⁷⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 12.

uses it as a hook upon which to hang his arguments concerning Christian doctrine. Indeed, such is the extent to which this passage is interwoven into al-Jīlī's argument that it could be said that the greater part of this chapter constitutes a quasi-*tafsīr* of the passage.⁷⁵⁶ According to al-Jīlī's interpretation of the Qur'anic passage, in defending himself against the charge that he told his people to worship him and his mother as gods, Jesus states that he only told them the "word" or "speech" (*kalām*) that God commanded him to propagate to them. Since al-Jīlī used the term *kalām* a few lines above to refer to the Trinitarian formula, it is possible that he means here that Jesus claimed to have only taught his people the Trinitarian formula. It seems more likely, however, that the term denotes the true Gospel, which, as a genuine revelation, is the word or speech of God (in accordance with the Islamic conception of revelation), and which opens, as al-Jīlī sees it, with that Trinitarian formula. The Christians' error, as we saw above, consists in interpreting this formula in its literal sense, an error that has led them to adopt the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity of the Spirit, Mary, and Jesus.

Like the Qur'an, al-Jīlī absolves Jesus of responsibility for the errors of his people. While their understanding of the Trinitarian formula was limited to its apparent sense, Jesus "did not limit himself (*lam yaqtaṣir*) to the apparent meaning of the Gospel (*ẓāhir al-Injīl*)."⁷⁵⁶ The use of the terms *lam yaqtaṣir* and *ẓāhir al-Injīl* here sets up a direct contrast between the approach of Jesus and that of his people: as we shall see, it is

⁷⁵⁶ In his chapter on Jesus in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī also uses an extended quasi-commentary on this particular passage as a way of putting forward his conception of Jesus as being both the same as, and different from, God. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 146-149. For Ibn 'Arabī's Qur'an-centred method more generally, see Nettler (2003), 12-16.

their limitation (*ḥaṣr, taqyīd*) of the meaning of the Trinity, that is, their focus only upon its *ẓāhir* meaning, which leads the Christians into “delusion” (*wahm*). Jesus, as a prophet, suffered from no such limitations or delusions. Indeed, he offered his people “clarification and elucidation” (*al-bayān wa-al-īdāh*) of the deeper, metaphysical truth of the Trinitarian formula, when he instructed them to “worship God, my Lord and your Lord”. This clarification, as al-Jīlī sees it, is a denial that the Trinity could possibly be true in its literal sense, that is, in the sense that Jesus, Mary, and God are all gods, with no distinction between God and the created forms in which He becomes manifest.

The aim of Jesus’ clarification of the meaning of the Trinitarian formula, moreover, was not only to guide his people back to the truth, but also to absolve himself of any guilt for their error. Al-Jīlī’s use of the term *al-barā’ah* in this regard conjures up the image of a court of law,⁷⁵⁷ in which God is sitting in judgment upon Jesus – an image that will recur in subsequent sections of the chapter, only with the Christians, rather than Jesus, in the dock. Al-Jīlī’s concern to establish Jesus’ innocence here echoes his earlier discussion of the same issue in the chapter on the Torah, where he declares that “Jesus purified himself of what his people believed (*nazzaha ‘Īsā nafsahu ‘ammā i‘taqada qawmuhu*),” and has him say that “their understanding [of what I said] was not what I intended (*mafḥūmuhum laysa murādī*).”⁷⁵⁸ This concern again reflects al-Jīlī’s commitment to the Qur’anic framework: as well as presenting Jesus’ self-defence in verses 115-119, the Qur’an also speaks of “cleansing”

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. ‘Alī (1946), 277, note 815 (Q 5:113).

⁷⁵⁸ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 120.

(*muṭahhir*) him of the false doctrines of his followers (see Q 3:55).⁷⁵⁹ As we shall see presently, however, al-Jīlī goes further than the Qur'an in not only advocating the innocence of Jesus, but also attempting to mitigate the errors of Jesus' people.

d) The error of Jesus' people & his defence of them before God

They did not stop (*lam yaqifū*) at that which Jesus explained (*bayyana*) to them; rather, they believed in (*dhahabū ilā*) what they understood of (*mā fahimū min*) the word of God (*kalām Allāh*). So when Jesus said in response (*fī al-jawāb*): "I only said to them that which You commanded me," it was a way of excusing his people (*al-i'tidhār li-qawmihi*). He meant, "You are the One who sent them that word, which begins, "In the name of the Father, the Mother, and the Son." So when I propagated (*ballaghtu*) Your word (*kalāmaka*) to them, they construed it (*ḥamalūhu*) in the way that it appeared to them (*'alā mā ṣahara lahum*). So do not blame them (*lā talumhum*) for that, because they [acted] in this regard in accordance with what they knew (*'alā mā 'alimūhu*) of Your word." So their polytheism is monotheism itself (*fa-shirkuhum 'ayn al-tawhīd*), because they acted according to what they knew by virtue of the divine revelation in their selves (*bi-al-ikhbār al-ilāhī fī anfusihi*). Thus they are like "the *mujtahid* who undertakes *ijtihād* and errs (*akhṭa'a*), but who still has a reward from his *ijtihād*." So Jesus – Peace be upon him – excused (*i'tadhara*) his people through that response to the Real when He asked him, "Did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods besides God."?"⁷⁶⁰

Here al-Jīlī elaborates, through the mouth of Jesus, upon the cause of the Christians' error, and explains why this should be counted as a mitigating factor in their favour. As noted above, in al-Jīlī's view the error of Jesus' people resides in their stopping at the apparent meaning of the Trinitarian formula with which the Gospel opens. He repeats and underlines this idea here. The Christians did not take their doctrine of the

⁷⁵⁹ See Khalidi (2001), 12.

⁷⁶⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 129.

Trinity from non-scriptural sources; rather, they “believed in (*dhahabū ilā*) what they understood of (*mā fahimū min*) the word of God (*kalām Allāh*),” and adopted doctrines in accordance with “what they knew (*‘alā mā ‘alimūhu*)” of the divine word. Not understanding Jesus’ explanation of the esoteric, metaphysical meaning of the Trinity, their “understanding” and “knowledge” were conditioned by “the way that [the word] appeared to them” (*‘alā mā ṣahara lahum*). In stressing this point once again, al-Jīlī seems to be making the case, through Jesus, for the sincerity of the Christians’ belief. This is reinforced by the repeated use of the term *i’tidhār* to describe what Jesus – and by extension, al-Jīlī himself – is doing here, namely, offering an excuse (*‘udhr*) on the Christians’ behalf for their false Trinitarian doctrine, and is further underlined by Jesus’ injunction to God not to “blame” (*lā talum*) his people for their profession of that doctrine. Al-Jīlī thus appears to be advocating a clement attitude towards the Christians here.

Indeed, al-Jīlī seems here to go further than merely offering an excuse for or attempting to mitigate the Christians’ errors. Rather, he goes so far as to equate the Christians’ *shirk*, i.e., their ordinarily unforgiveable act of associating partners with God, with *tawḥīd*, i.e., monotheism.⁷⁶¹ The reason he gives for this is that the Christians, in taking the beginning of the Gospel in its outward sense, responded positively and sincerely to the divine revelation (*al-ikhbār al-ilāhī*). While the unbelievers, according to the Qur’anic conception, turn away from the divine revelation, Jesus’ people, by contrast, heed the revelation

⁷⁶¹ The editor of the 1300/1882/3 Cairo edition of *al-Insān al-kāmil* was so scandalised by this expression that he declared it to be, in the words of Nicholson, “an interpolation which only a heretic could have written”. Nicholson (1921), 139-140.

within themselves, and only make the mistake of misinterpreting it – a mistake indicated by terms such as *dhahabū ilā*, *mā fahimū min*, *‘alā mā ‘alimūhu*, and, in the earlier passage, *ẓannū*. In fact, their mistake is not even so much that of misinterpretation as of possessing an interpretation that is limited to the apparent meaning of the words of scripture. For this reason, like the jurist who sincerely makes an independent legal judgment and errs, but is still rewarded (according to the hadith),⁷⁶² they deserve the reward given to sincere believers. It is important to recognise that al-Jīlī’s point here is not that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is correct: he describes belief in the Trinity as *shirk* – perhaps the gravest sin in Islam⁷⁶³ – and in the chapter on the Torah writes of the *kufṛ* of Jesus’ people.⁷⁶⁴ And as we repeatedly seen in this thesis, there is no doubt in al-Jīlī’s mind as to the superiority of Islamic doctrine. Nevertheless, in his interpretation of Q 5:117, a verse that does not appear on the surface to excuse the Christians, he does seem to adopt a more benevolent attitude towards the Christians than do the majority of exegetes and religious scholars.⁷⁶⁵

Al-Jīlī’s apparently more benevolent attitude towards the Christians ought to be understood within the context of his Sufi metaphysical theory of universal theophany. Elsewhere in *al-Insān al-kāmil* al-Jīlī adopts and elaborates upon Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea that because everything in existence, including idols and other “gods”, is a locus for the divine manifestation, whatever one worships one is in fact

⁷⁶² For this hadith, see Schacht (1978), 1101.

⁷⁶³ See Qur’ān 4:48; Gimaret (1997b).

⁷⁶⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 121.

⁷⁶⁵ On the attitude of some of the most important exegetes towards the Christians of the Qur’an, see McAuliffe (1991).

worshipping (an aspect of) God, an idea which we might call the theory of universal monotheism.⁷⁶⁶ The relevance of this Ibn ‘Arabī theory here is underlined by the remarkable similarity between al-Jīlī’s statement that the *shirk* of the Christians is “monotheism itself” (*‘ayn al-tawḥīd*) and a verse by another follower of Ibn ‘Arabī’s, the Persian poet Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. 720/1340), who in the section in his *Gulshan-i rāz* on idol-worship and Christianity writes, “Since unbelief and religion are based upon existence (*chū kufr ū dīn qā’im bi-hastī*), monotheism is idol-worship itself (*tawḥīd ‘ayn-i but-parastī*).”⁷⁶⁷ Al-Jīlī’s identification of the Christians’ *shirk* with true monotheism is also somewhat reminiscent of Ibn ‘Arabī’s proposal, in his chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ*, that the Qur’an ascribes *kufr* to the Christians (Q 5:17, 72) because – and here he exploits the etymological association of the root *k-f-r* with the idea of “covering up” or “concealment” – they “concealed (*satarū*) God, who gave life to the dead, in the human form of Jesus.”⁷⁶⁸ Just as for Ibn ‘Arabī the Christians’ *kufr* is a sign of their belief in God, so too for al-Jīlī is their *shirk* in fact a sign of their monotheism, these being good examples of the tendency of Sufi theorists to employ apparent paradox to uncover higher metaphysical truths.⁷⁶⁹ All of this might well suggest that

⁷⁶⁶ See e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 72: “The Real has a face in every object of worship (*fa-inna li-al-ḥaqq fī kull ma‘būd wajh*)...so only God is worshipped in every object of worship (*fa-mā ‘ubida illā Allāh fī kull ma‘būd*).” See also *ibid.*, 194-196; Nettler (2003), 60-66. For al-Jīlī’s development of this idea, see al-Jīlī (1997a), 103-104, 252-261; Nicholson (1921), 130-133; Cornell (2004), 69-70. Al-Jīlī’s position was the subject of criticism by Aḥmad al-Qushashī (d. 1071/1661), who was otherwise sympathetic to Ibn ‘Arabī thought. Al-Qushashī’s criticisms provoked a defence of al-Jīlī by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī. On this debate, see Akkach (2007), 107-108.

⁷⁶⁷ Shabistārī (2011), 121.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 141.

⁷⁶⁹ Shahab Ahmed has recently argued that paradox is a central feature of Islamic thought (in which he views Sufism as being central), citing as examples the Ibn ‘Arabī notions of “the one, the many” (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*) and creation being “He,

Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics provides an intellectual basis for a more benevolent attitude towards Christian and other non-Islamic doctrines.⁷⁷⁰

Nonetheless, it should again be stressed that al-Jīlī is not advocating an antinomian or relativist approach at the worldly level of religious faith and practice.⁷⁷¹ In the chapter on the Torah, as we have seen, he tells us that Muhammad’s religious community (*millah*) is the “best of communities” (*khayr al-milal*),⁷⁷² while in the final chapter, he states that Islamic rituals are better than those of the People of the Book and that Muhammad’s “religion is the most perfect of religions (*fādīnuhu akmal al-adyān*) and his community is the best of communities (*wa-ummatuhu khayr al-umam*),”⁷⁷³ in addition to proposing, as we have already seen, that Muslims will be saved and non-Muslims condemned to hell.⁷⁷⁴ Rather than implying the equal validity of Christianity and Islam, therefore, he is here taking the implications of his metaphysical theory of

not He” (*huwa lā huwa*). See Ahmed (2016), 389-404. For the role of paradox in mysticism more generally, see Gellman (2014).

⁷⁷⁰ For developments of this idea, see Cornell (2004); Chittick (1994), esp. 1-12, 123-176. Chittick, however, underplays the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical explanation of the underlying truth of different forms of worship is counterbalanced by an insistence on the supremacy of Islam at both the level of real life and in the intellectual realm of sacred history. For criticisms of Chittick’s argument, see C. Keller (2000), 188-190; N. Keller (1996). And for Ibn ‘Arabī’s insistence that the supremacy of Islam be imposed at the worldly level, see e.g. his letter to the Seljuq Sultan of Konya Kaykā’ūs (r. 607/1211-616/1220) urging the strict application of the *dhimmī* laws, cited in Addas (1993), 234-236, and discussed in Abū Zayd (2006), 128-138.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 141: “He is careful to guard against antinomianism.” The accusation of paving the way for antinomianism, it should be noted, was often directed against Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. See Knysh (1999), esp. 13-14, 115, 157, 217-218, 222.

⁷⁷² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 119.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 260. The extent to which Islam remains supreme for al-Jīlī, even while he looks upon other religions in a more benevolent way, is brought out by Cornell (2004), 69-70: “Jili affirms that Islam is the quintessential religion of God...For Jili, religions are not equal in value. However, when the Qur’an commands, “There is no compulsion in religion” (2: 256), this means that even false religions should be respected by Muslims because all religions, including those that are in error, exist by God’s will.” It should however be noted that Cornell’s use of Q 2:256 reflects the usage of modern Muslim inclusivist or pluralist thinkers more than it does al-Jīlī’s own justification for his view of other religions. For an overview of Muslim interpretations of Q 2:256, see Crone (2009).

⁷⁷⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 261.

universal theophany to its logical conclusion.⁷⁷⁵ In this instance, the logical conclusion seems to be that, while the Christians are undoubtedly in error and thus of inferior standing to the Muslims, nevertheless their faith in and worship of the persons of the Trinity does in fact constitute, at the esoteric level, faith in and worship of forms in which God is manifest. In this sense, the Christian doctrine is monotheistic, even if the Christians themselves do not properly understand why it is so.

e) Jesus' request for forgiveness for his people

For this reason he [i.e. Jesus] went on to say, “If You forgive (*taghfir*) them, then You are the Mighty, the Wise (*al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm*).” (Q 5:118) And he did not say, “If You punish them (*tu‘adhhibuhum*), then You are the Severe in Punishment (*shadīd al-‘iqāb*),” or something like that. Rather, he mentioned forgiveness (*al-maghfirah*), requesting (*ṭalaban*) it for them from the Real, as a judgment (*ḥukman*) from Him that they had not departed from the truth/the Real (*lam yakhrujū min al-ḥaqq*), because the prophets (*al-anbiyā’*) – Peace and prayers be upon them – do not ask the Real – May He be exalted – for forgiveness for someone when they know that he deserves punishment (*yastahiqq al-‘uqūbah*). God – May He be exalted – said, “Abraham asked for his father’s forgiveness (*istighfār*) only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he dissociated himself from him.” (Q 9:114) All the prophets [acted] in this way.⁷⁷⁶

Al-Jīlī continues his quasi-*tafsīr* of 5:116-119 by explaining that, in seeking to excuse his people and mitigate their errors in the eyes of God, Jesus’ goal was to attain divine forgiveness for them. This passage, then, deals with the soteriological consequences of the Christians’ belief in the Trinity. Are they, in other words, to be punished or forgiven? It is perhaps helpful in this context to recall the analogy with the court of law

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Nicholson (1921), 140: “Jīlī is simply applying to a special case the monistic doctrine which has been explained already.”

⁷⁷⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 129.

made earlier. Jesus, as his people's advocate or "witness" (*shahīd*) (Q 5:117), is now seeking not to establish his own innocence, but rather to attain his people's acquittal, or at least to lighten their punishment by setting out the mitigating circumstances of their case.

The most important key terms of this passage thus concern forgiveness (*taghfīr*, *al-maghfirah*, *istighfār*), on the one hand, and punishment (*tu'adhdhib*, *al-'iqāb*, *al-'uqūbah*), on the other. One of the questions we must answer, then, is what these two concepts – forgiveness and punishment – signify in this context. At the more exoteric level, they seem to signify, respectively, salvation and damnation, that is, deliverance from or consignment to hell. The Qur'an often uses words of the root *gh-f-r* and *'dh-b* (and, to a lesser extent, *'q-b*) in this way (see e.g. Q 2:284, 5:18, 40:7). And while the term *'uqūbah* is more regularly used – in contrast to *'iqāb* – to denote punishment meted out to wrongdoers in this life,⁷⁷⁷ nevertheless, because al-Jīlī is here discussing the intercession of the prophets on behalf of their communities, it seems likely that it is punishment in the afterlife that is meant here, the concept of prophetic intercession (*shafā'ah*) usually appearing in the context of the Day of Judgment.⁷⁷⁸ If this is the correct interpretation of the terms as they are used here, then it follows that Jesus is asking for his people to be spared the punishment of hell, on account of the mitigating circumstances surrounding their mistaken beliefs about him and his mother. This being said, we will see in the following section that there is also a more esoteric

⁷⁷⁷ See Dien (2000); Tahānawī (1963), 1192.

⁷⁷⁸ See Gimaret (1997c).

and metaphysical aspect to the divine forgiveness requested by Jesus for his people.

While this passage hangs upon the opposition between the key concepts of forgiveness and punishment, it is clear that it is the former that is the dominant perspective here. Jesus first mentions the prospect of divine forgiveness for his people, and links this to two of the divine names: *al-‘azīz* and *al-ḥakīm*.⁷⁷⁹ In this regard, al-Jīlī draws attention to the fact that, while the Qur’anic Jesus connects the possibility of God’s forgiveness of the Christians to two of His names, he does not connect the possibility of God’s punishment of them to a divine name such as the Severe in Punishment (*shadīd al-‘iqāb*).⁷⁸⁰ Rather, as we shall see in the following section, he connects the punishment of the Christians to the idea that they are God’s servants. In drawing attention to this point, al-Jīlī seems to be suggesting that the forgiveness of Jesus’ people, being connected by the Qur’an to the divine names, is better than the option of punishing them. He spells this out more explicitly by stating that, when he requested forgiveness for his people, Jesus knew that this was what they deserved (*yastahiqq*). In drawing a parallel between Jesus’ behaviour in this respect and the behaviour of Abraham and all of the other prophets, al-Jīlī further underlines Jesus’ innocence of any wrongdoing and indicates that he is behaving with total propriety here, while at the same time drawing our attention to the prophets’ role as

⁷⁷⁹ These names, according to al-Jīlī’s scheme, are respectively a name of majesty (*jamāl*) and a name “shared” (*mushtarak*) between majesty and beauty. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 96. This would appear to indicate that the divine forgiveness is not only a consequence of the names of divine beauty, such as the All-Forgiving (*al-ghaffār*), but is also connected to God’s majesty and power.

⁷⁸⁰ This, as we would expect, is one of the names of divine majesty. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 97.

intermediaries on their people's behalf. This notion of Jesus' knowledge that his people deserved forgiveness is further developed in the following section.

f) Jesus' knowledge that his people deserved forgiveness

So Jesus' request (*ṭalab*) for forgiveness (*al-maghfirah*) for his people [was made] in the knowledge that they deserved (*yastahiqqūn*) that, because they were in the right in their selves ('*alá al-ḥaqq fī anfusihim*), even though, in the reality of the matter ('*alá ḥaqīqat al-amr*), they were in the wrong ('*alá al-bāṭil*). For they were in the right in their belief (*mu'taqadihim*) that He is the one to whom their matter ultimately returns (*huwa al-ladhī ya'ūl ilayhi amruhum*), even if they were punished (*mu'āqabīn*) for their being in the wrong ('*alá bāṭilihim*), which is the reality of their matter. For this reason Jesus said, "If You punish them" – and he spoke well (*aḥsana al-talaffuẓ*) when he said after that – "then they are Your servants," (Q 5:118) meaning, they are worshipping You (*ya'budūnaka*), and are not being obstinate (*mu'ānidīn*), nor are they among those who have no master (*mawlá*), because it is the unbelievers (*al-kāfirīn*) who have no master. For they [i.e. Jesus' people] are, in reality ('*alá al-ḥaqīqah*), in the right (*muḥiqqūn*), because God – May He be exalted – is the reality of Jesus (*ḥaqīqat 'īsá*), and the reality of his mother (*ḥaqīqat ummihi*), and the reality of the Holy Spirit (*ḥaqīqat al-rūḥ al-quds*), indeed, the reality of everything (*ḥaqīqat kull shay'*). This is the meaning of the saying of Jesus – Peace be upon him, "then they are Your servants." So Jesus testified (*shahida*) on their behalf that they were the servants of God ('*ibād Allāh*). Let this suffice as a testimony (*shahādah*) for them.⁷⁸¹

As we have just seen, al-Jīlī claims that no prophet would intercede for his community with God unless he knew that his community deserved God's forgiveness. In this section, he explains why the Christians were worthy of forgiveness, and hence why they received the intercession of Jesus. We have seen in previous sections how al-Jīlī seeks to excuse the Christians for their erroneous beliefs by explaining,

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

first, that they went astray not because their faith was insincere, but merely because their interpretation of the divine revelation given to them was limited to its apparent meaning, and second, that in worshipping the persons of the Trinity, they are in fact worshipping forms in which God is manifest. In this passage, al-Jīlī elaborates upon these lines of reasoning for why the Christians should be forgiven.

The key terms of the first paragraph of the above passage, as so often in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, come in pairs of opposites: *maghfīrah* and *mu‘āqabīn*, ‘*alā al-ḥaqq*’ and ‘*alā al-bāṭil*’, *fī anfusihi* and ‘*alā ḥaqīqat al-amr*’. The ideas signified by these key terms are consistent with what we have already seen. In reality, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is false (*bāṭil*), and the Christians therefore deserve punishment (*al-‘iqāb*, *al-‘uqūbah*). At the same time, from the perspective of the Christians themselves, the doctrine is true (*ḥaqq*), for they sincerely worship God in their hearts.⁷⁸² From this perspective, therefore, they deserve forgiveness (*al-maghfīrah*). Even though their being in the wrong is “the reality of the matter”, nevertheless it is the latter aspect – that is, the sincerity of the Christians’ belief – that al-Jīlī chooses to lay the emphasis on; hence his view that they deserve forgiveness. This is in keeping with his Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysical perspective, which stresses the precedence of the mercy and forgiveness of God over His wrath and punishment.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸² Expressed in Ibn ‘Arabian terms, it could be said that the Christians worship the God “created in the religious beliefs” (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq fī al-i‘tiqādāt*) (as opposed to the Real itself). For this concept, see Nettler (2003), 10, and the references cited there.

⁷⁸³ See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 118. For the precedence of the divine mercy over the divine wrath in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 177-180; Nettler (2003), 154-175; Izutsu (1984), 116-140.

In the second paragraph, al-Jīlī again sets up an opposition, this time between those who worship and serve God (*‘ibād Allāh, ya ‘budūnaka*) and are thus in the right (*muḥiqqūn*), and those who are obstinate towards God (*mu ‘ānidīn*), who have no master (*al-ladhīna lā mawlā lahum*), and who are, in short, unbelievers (*kāfirīn*). Noting Jesus’ statement that his people are “Your [i.e. God’s] servants” (*‘ibāduka*), al-Jīlī classifies the Christians among the former group. In this instance, moreover, they are not merely in the right “in their selves” – i.e. from their own limited perspective – but are in fact right “in reality” (*‘alā al-ḥaqīqah*). Al-Jīlī’s apparent contradiction here of what he said in the previous paragraph can be explained if we appreciate that there are, as he sees it, different levels of reality. While the Christians are evidently wrong to profess the doctrine of the Trinity at the exoteric level – that is, at the level of the orthodox Islamic conception of monotheism – at the deeper, esoteric level, as we have seen, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity can be classified as *tawḥīd*, in accordance with the theory of universal monotheism. He here spells out the logic underlying this idea more explicitly: if God is the inner reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of all phenomenal beings, then it follows that the three persons of the Trinity are in fact outward forms of the divine reality or, as he puts it later in the chapter, loci for the divine appearance (*maẓāhir*).⁷⁸⁴ From this Sufi metaphysical perspective, then, when the Christians worship the three persons of the Trinity, they are in fact worshipping forms of God; hence they can truly be called God’s servants (*‘ibād Allāh*) and deemed to be “right”.

⁷⁸⁴ Compare al-Jīlī’s language here to his explanation in the chapter on the Psalter of how God is “the reality of Solomon” (*ḥaqīqat Sulaymān*). See al-Jīlī (1997a), 128.

While this passage may therefore serve as another good example of how al-Jīlī's Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysical perspective could serve as the theoretical basis for a more benevolent attitude towards other religions and their doctrines, it should again be stressed that al-Jīlī is not proposing that the Christians, in professing the Trinity, have attained the truth in the same way that the Muslims, and especially the elite class of "realisers" (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*) among the Muslims, have. Indeed, it could be argued that according to al-Jīlī's theory, the Christians are in the right merely to the same extent that the idolaters and polytheists are in the right, in that they all worship loci of the divine manifestation.⁷⁸⁵ Furthermore, al-Jīlī goes on later in this chapter to criticise the Christians for limiting their conception of the divine manifestation only to the persons of the Trinity, when in fact the divine manifestation is universal. This all being said, it is clear that the theory of universal theophany does allow al-Jīlī to interpret the Christian doctrine – and the relevant Qur'anic passage – in such a way as to argue that they deserve forgiveness, in an apparent mollification of his view (discussed in the previous chapter) that the Christians are necessarily condemned to hell.

g) Jesus' success in defending his people before God

For this reason, God – May He be exalted – said immediately following this discussion: "On this day, the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness (*yanfa' al-ṣādiqīn ṣidquhum*)," (Q 5:119) in the eyes of their Lord. This was an indication to Jesus – Peace be upon him – that he had achieved what he requested (*bi-injāz mā ṭalaba*). Its meaning is, "Since they were truthful in their selves (*ṣādiqīn fī anfusihim*), due to their interpretation of My word (*li-*

⁷⁸⁵ On which, see *ibid.*, 255-256. This being said, al-Jīlī makes it clear that the Christians come higher in the hierarchy of religions – indeed, they are the closest to the Muslims – than idolaters and the adherents of non-prophetic religions. See *ibid.*, 260. This view of al-Jīlī's is in keeping with Q 5:82-83, which appears to establish the superiority of the Christians over the Jews and the polytheists.

ta'wīlihim kalāmī) according to how it appeared to them (*'alā mā zahara lahum*) – even though they were opposed to the matter as it truly was – their benefit (*naḥūhum*) was with their Lord (*'inda rabbihim*), not with anyone other than Him.” This is because the judgment (*al-ḥukm*) that they were in error (*al-dalāl*), in our view, is the apparent aspect of the matter, in itself (*ẓāhir al-amr 'alayhi fī naḥsihi*), and for this they were punished (*'uqibū*). But since their final destination (*ma'āluhum*) consists in what they, [being] with God, will possess of the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) – which is their belief (*i'tiqāduhum*) in their selves in the reality of that (*ḥaqīqat dhālik*) – their sincerity (*ṣidq*) in that belief is their benefit with their Lord, with the result that the judgment (*ḥukm*) of them ends up at (*āla ilā*) the divine mercy (*al-rahmah al-ilāhiyyah*). So He manifested Himself (*tajallā*) within their selves, according to what they believed about Jesus. So it appeared to them (*zahara lahum*) that their doctrine (*mu'taqad*) was true (*ḥaqqan*), from this perspective. So He manifested Himself to them through their doctrine, because He is in the thoughts (*ẓann*) of His servant.⁷⁸⁶

Al-Jīlī here continues his quasi-*tafsīr* of Q 5:116-119. As in previous passages, he describes the two different ways – the one negative, the other positive – in which Christian doctrine concerning Jesus can be viewed. On the one hand, the Christians are in “error” (*al-dalāl*). This is a Qur'anic term, signifying the opposite of being rightly guided (*al-hudá, al-rashād*),⁷⁸⁷ and which is directly connected to both *shirk* (see e.g. Q 4:116) and *kufṛ* (see e.g. Q 4:136, 4:167). Al-Jīlī's reference here to the Christians' *dalāl* is thus in keeping both with his earlier reference to their *shirk* and *kufṛ*, and with the exegetes' traditional identification of the Christians with “those who are in error” (*al-dāllīn*) mentioned in Q 1:7.⁷⁸⁸ According to al-Jīlī, the Christians' error derives, as we have already seen, from their superficial, exoteric interpretation – here referred to by the phrase *ta'wīluhum... 'alā mā zahara lahum* – of the divine revelation. This interpretation led them to their belief (*i'tiqād, mu'taqad*) that Jesus – along with the other persons of the Trinity – was

⁷⁸⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 130.

⁷⁸⁷ See Lane (1984), 1:1798.

⁷⁸⁸ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 28 (Q 1:7); al-Maḥallī & al-Suyūṭī (2002), 10 (Q 1:7). Based on this verse, Q 5:60 and Q 5:77, Ibn Kathīr declares that “of the attributes of the Christians, the one most particular [to them] is being in error (*al-dalāl*).” See Ibn Kathīr (2000), 28 (Q 1:7).

God, and for this apparently false belief they were punished (*'ūqibū*). As before, the term used for punishment here suggests punishment in the afterlife, i.e. damnation or consignment to hell.⁷⁸⁹

As in the previous passages, however, al-Jīlī indicates that such a condemnation of the Christians is only one of two ways of assessing their belief. Moreover, it is probably the less significant of the two ways – in the Sufī language that he uses here, it is merely the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspect, rather than the deeper, esoteric truth (*bāṭin*, *ḥaqīqah*) of the matter. That deeper truth, as indicated above, allows us to look upon the Christians in a more positive light. In this instance, the more positive assessment of the Christians is rooted in the language of Q 5:119. In that verse, which comes immediately after God's interrogation of Jesus concerning what he told his people about him, God declares that the truthful (*al-ṣādiqīn*) will acquire a benefit (*naḥ*) for their truthfulness. Al-Jīlī takes this to be a reference to Jesus' people, who, as he sees it, were sincere in their interpretation of the divine revelation, and hence can be classified among *al-ṣādiqīn*. Indeed, sticking closely to the language of the Qur'anic verse, he suggests that the "benefit" (*naḥ*) that is due to the Christians consists in the very sincerity of their belief, the idea presumably being that the certitude that accompanies commitment to a particular doctrine is itself a divine blessing.

While punishment, as we saw above, is the inevitable consequence of the Christians' error, if we focus upon the "truthfulness" (*ṣidq*) of their belief then a different outcome emerges. Aside from the

⁷⁸⁹ Note in this regard that, in chapter 58, al-Jīlī calls the inhabitants of hell "*ahl al-ḍalāl*". See al-Jīlī (1997a), 182.

benefit accruing from their own sense of sincerity, their “final destination” (*ma’āl*) consists in their being with God and knowing (at least a part of) the truth. And where earlier the judgment (*ḥukm*) had been that they were in error and thus worthy of punishment, now the judgment brings them back to the divine mercy (*al-raḥmah al-ilāhiyyah*). Understood exoterically, this would appear to mean that Jesus’ people are ultimately granted salvation, that is, entry to paradise or, at the least, deliverance from hell.⁷⁹⁰ According to al-Jīlī’s esoteric, metaphysical conception, however, the Christians’ being brought into the divine mercy can also be understood to mean that God becomes manifest (*tajallá*) within them.⁷⁹¹ Moreover, al-Jīlī connects this divine manifestation within Jesus’ people to their doctrine of the Incarnation, his point apparently being that, because they are open to the possibility that God appears in humanity, the Christians themselves are thereby capable of becoming loci of the divine manifestation.

Al-Jīlī’s position here is once again firmly grounded in his Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics. Mercy (*al-raḥmah*), as we know, is a key concept within Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical system, constituting both the origin and final destination of all things. As has already been alluded to, this idea feeds into al-Jīlī’s soteriology: thus in the last chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, he suggests, in a manner similar to Ibn ‘Arabī, that the damnation of those condemned to hell will not be permanent, for all

⁷⁹⁰ See e.g. Q 2:64, 2:218, 4:96, 4:175, which describe how those admitted to paradise will experience the divine mercy.

⁷⁹¹ This accords with al-Jīlī’s suggestion, which was noted in the chapter on the Torah, that, at the esoteric level, the happiness of paradise and the misery of hell in fact signify, respectively, the Sufi concepts of “proximity” (*qurb*) to and “distance” (*bu’d*) from God – an idea that he adopts from Ibn ‘Arabī. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 259.

people will be brought back into the embrace of the divine mercy at the End Times.⁷⁹² In this instance, however, the context is not merely soteriological, but also metaphysical: the divine mercy embraces Jesus' people both in the sense that they are ultimately saved from the hellfire and in the sense that they become loci for the divine manifestation. This latter idea is firmly Ibn 'Arabian, for according to Ibn 'Arabī it is through His mercy – or as he sometimes puts it, through “the breath of the All-Merciful” (*nafas al-rahmān*) – that God manifests Himself within creation.⁷⁹³

The idea that the Christians will ultimately be embraced by the divine mercy, therefore, can be seen in the context of this Ibn 'Arabian concept of the all-pervasiveness of the divine mercy. Nevertheless, I think there is also a sense here in which the Christians, as al-Jīlī sees it, are especially worthy of receiving the divine manifestation. The reason for this is al-Jīlī's identification of a parallel between the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation and his own Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics, for like the Sufi metaphysicians of the Ibn 'Arabī tradition, the Christians are aware of the presence of the divine within the created world, and in particular within mankind.⁷⁹⁴ This is not to say that they

⁷⁹² See *ibid.*, 261. See also *ibid.*, 183-184. Recognition of this change in the condition of those condemned to hell is one possible way of reconciling al-Jīlī's apparently divergent views about the Christians' soteriological status.

⁷⁹³ See Nettler (2003), 118, note 7 and the references cited there.

⁷⁹⁴ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 260, where he states that it is the Christians' witnessing of God in “the reality of Jesus” (*al-ḥaqīqah al-ʿisawīyyah*) that puts them second only to the Muslims in the hierarchy of religious communities, since “whoever witnesses God in the human being (*man shahida Allāh fī al-insān*) witnesses Him more perfectly (*kāna shuhūduhu akmal*) than all of those who witness God in the different kinds of created beings (*anwāʿ al-makhlūqāt*).” The correspondence between the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation and the Sufi metaphysical theory of the Perfect Man, as expressed by Ibn 'Arabī and al-Jīlī among others, has been noted by a number of scholars. See e.g. Iqbal (2016), 95; Nicholson (1921), 87, 138-139; Hodgson (1974), 2:243; Knysh (1999), 19, and the references cited there.

fully comprehend the truth of universal theophany; as we shall see presently, al-Jīlī criticises them for limiting their conception of the divine manifestation to Jesus and the other persons of the Trinity. Nevertheless, he does seem to demonstrate particular sympathy for the Christian position here, as a consequence of his Sufi metaphysical perspective.⁷⁹⁵ There is, for instance, a notable disparity between his interpretation of Q 5:119, and that put forward in non-Sufi *tafsīrs*, which tend to stress the innocence of Jesus while condemning the Christians for their false beliefs about him.⁷⁹⁶ Al-Jīlī, by contrast, takes care both to demonstrate the innocence of Jesus and to mitigate the error of Jesus' people.

The Christians' attainment of the divine mercy and the manifestation of God within them signal the success (*injāz*) of Jesus' intercession with God on their behalf. This is a clear indication of the greater weight that al-Jīlī allots to the more positive assessment of the Christians. As he previously indicated, they are truly deserving of God's mercy and forgiveness; hence Jesus' willingness to plead with God on their behalf. Al-Jīlī's position, it can be said, thus represents a softening of the orthodox Islamic attitude towards the Christians, in particular with regards to their doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. Again, this is not to say that he thinks Christianity to be on a par with Islam. As will

⁷⁹⁵ Other Sufi authors also display sympathy for Christianity, often on account of their association of Jesus with the renunciation of the world and the passions of the base self. See e.g. Shabistarī (2011), 123: "In Christianity (*tarsā'ī*) I saw the goal of denuding oneself of worldly attachments (*tajrīd*), salvation (*khalās*) from the plight of blind imitation (*taqlīd*)." See also Nurbakhsh (1992), 39-48. For a survey of scholarship on depictions of Jesus in Sufism, see Milani (2012).

⁷⁹⁶ See e.g. Ibn Kathīr (2000), 352 (Q 5:119): "God – May He be exalted – says [this] in response to His servant and messenger Jesus, son of Mary – Peace be upon him, regarding what He communicated to him in terms of declaring his innocence (*al-tabarrī*) from the unbelieving Christians, who lie about God and His prophet (*al-naṣārā al-mulḥidīn al-kādhībīn* 'alā Allā wa-'alā rasūlihi)."

become clear in the final sections of the chapter, he remains here, as always, within the framework of the orthodox Sunni conception of sacred history, even if his Sufi metaphysical perspective may lead him to take that orthodox view in a more benevolent direction.

h) The metaphysical meaning of the Gospel

The Gospel is an expression of the manifestations of the names of the essence (*tajalliyyāt asmā' al-dhāt*), meaning, the manifestations of the essence within His names (*tajalliyyāt al-dhāt fī asmā' ihī*), and among the aforementioned manifestations is the manifestation within the qualified oneness [of God] (*tajalliyyah fī al-wāḥidiyyah*), through which He appeared (*ṣahara*) to Jesus' people in Jesus, in Mary, and in the Holy Spirit. So they witnessed (*shahidū*) the Real in each of these loci of manifestation (*fī kull maẓhar min hādhihi al-maẓāhir*).⁷⁹⁷

In the previous two chapters, we saw al-Jīlī outline his conception of the metaphysical meaning of the Qur'an and the Torah, that is, the way in which those scriptures represent the different aspects of the divine manifestation within creation. Here he applies this same idea to the Gospel, informing us that it represents the “manifestations of the names of the essence” (*tajalliyyāt asmā' al-dhāt*). By “the names of the essence” al-Jīlī means those names that are unique to the divine: God (*Allāh*), the Unqualified One (*al-aḥad*), the Qualified One (*al-wāḥid*), the Unique One (*al-fard*), the Odd One (*al-watr*), the Everlasting (*al-ṣamad*), the All-Holy (*al-quddūs*), the Living (*al-ḥayy*), the Light (*al-nūr*), and the Real (*al-ḥaqq*).⁷⁹⁸ Since *al-wāḥid* is one of the names of the essence, it follows that, as al-Jīlī indicates here, the divine manifestation at the level of *al-wāḥidiyyah* is among those manifestations represented by the

⁷⁹⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 130.

⁷⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, 50, 96.

Gospel. This is the level, it will be remembered, at which the divine essence begins to take on a degree of multiplicity within itself, by virtue of its acquisition of names and attributes.⁷⁹⁹ In suggesting that this level of the divine existence is revealed in the Gospel, al-Jīlī indicates that the Gospel is a particularly exalted form of revelation, since the only levels above that of *al-wāḥidiyyah*, at least in one version of his scheme, are those of the unqualified oneness (*al-aḥadiyyah*) or absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) of the divine essence, and of the imperceptible, simple essence itself. This allows us to assign to the Gospel a place in the hierarchy of scriptures: while the Gospel is lower in the hierarchy than the Qur'an, which represents the divine manifestation at the higher level of *al-aḥadiyyah*, it is higher in the hierarchy than the Torah, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, represents the levels of *al-raḥmāniyyah* and below. This hierarchy can also be expressed in terms of the divine essence, names and attributes, the divine essence (the Qur'an) being more exalted than the names of the essence (the Gospel), which in turn is more exalted than the attributive names (the Torah).⁸⁰⁰ This accords with the orthodox Islamic notion of the abrogation of the Torah by the Gospel and of the Gospel, in turn, by the Qur'an, and reflects a view of history in which things get better over time, until the revelation of the Qur'an, which cannot be bettered.

Al-Jīlī also makes a connection here between the Gospel's revelation of God as *al-wāḥid* – among the other names of the essence – and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which, as we have seen, is key

⁷⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, 48-50; al-Jīlī (1999b), 19-20.

⁸⁰⁰ The Psalter, which represents, in al-Jīlī's scheme, the "attributes of the acts" (*ṣifāt al-af'āl*), comes beneath the Torah in the hierarchy. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 127.

to his understanding of the contents of the Christian revelation. As he sees it, it is at the level of *al-wāḥidiyyah* that God becomes manifest in the three persons of the Trinity. His reasoning here, we might suggest, is that since it is at this level that God begins to take on the names and attributes that He makes manifest in creation, it can thus be said that *al-wāḥidiyyah* is the source of the divine appearance within phenomenal forms, which is the truth represented by the doctrine of the Trinity. This idea can also be expressed in terms of al-Jīlī's theory of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which, we should always bear in mind, is the main focus of his book. According to that theory, the human being is the perfect locus for the manifestation of the divine names and attributes within creation. Since *al-wāḥidiyyah* is the level at which the divine names and attributes first emerge, it therefore follows that the Perfect Man can be viewed from one perspective as the locus of the manifestation of *al-wāḥidiyyah*.

The significance of all this is that, in explaining that God's qualified oneness appears in Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit, al-Jīlī seems to be implying that the persons of the Trinity are Perfect Men, or, in the case of the Holy Spirit, perfect loci for the manifestation of the divine attributes.⁸⁰¹ He spells this out, in fact, by describing the three persons of the Trinity as *mazāhir*. This, as we know, is a key term in Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics, which denotes the created forms – in particular the human beings – in which the divine names and attributes

⁸⁰¹ As noted in chapter one, though al-Jīlī states at one point that by the term "Perfect Man" he only means Muhammad, nevertheless he also indicates that other individuals are worthy of being called by this title, their relation to Muhammad being that of the "perfect to the most/more perfect". See al-Jīlī (1997a), 207.

appear. Although, according to al-Jīlī's theory of universal theophany, all created forms are divine *mazāhir*, in its fullest sense the term applies to those created beings that receive all of the divine attributes and manifest them in their own attributes and actions – i.e., the Perfect Men.⁸⁰² In using it here, al-Jīlī is acknowledging that the Christians did truly witness the divine attributes in the phenomenal forms of Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. Even if these three persons are not identical with God, as the Christians would have it, nevertheless they are vessels or loci for the divine manifestation within creation.⁸⁰³ This is a repetition of the idea that we saw above, when al-Jīlī stated that God was the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. Once again, then, we see that al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysics leads him towards a more benevolent view of Christian doctrine.

i) The Christians' mistake & error

But even if they were in the right (*muḥiqqīn*) with respect to this manifestation (*tajallī*), nevertheless they were mistaken (*akḥṭa'ū*) and erred (*dallū*). As for their mistake (*khaṭa'uhum*), it consisted in the fact that they believed (*dhahabū*), in this regard, in the confinement (*ḥaṣr*) of that to Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. And as for their error (*ḍalālulhum*), it consisted in the fact that they professed (*qālū bi-*) absolute incarnationism (*al-tajsīm al-muṭlaq*) and a divine comparability (*al-tashbīh*) that was limited to this qualified oneness (*al-muqayyad fī ḥādhihi al-wāḥidiyyah*). What they said by way of limitation (*al-taqyīd*) is not determined

⁸⁰² See *ibid.*, 97-98, where he explains that, while all humans are *mazāhir* of the divine beauty and majesty and the names associated with those attributes, the Perfect Man is a *mazhar* of all of the names, both essential and non-essential, majestic, beautiful, and "shared"; hence the term *mazāhir* in its fullest sense applies to the Perfect Men.

⁸⁰³ The orthodox Christian formula is that the persons of the Trinity are "of the same being" (*homōousia*). For the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, as understood by the Orthodox Churches (which are of greater relevance here), see Ware (1995), 27-42; Louth (2003), 16-31. Al-Jīlī, following Ibn 'Arabī, would agree that the persons of the Trinity, as created forms, are of the same existence (*wujūd*) as God, yet he sees them as forms of limited existence (*al-wujūd al-muqayyad*), in contrast to the unlimited existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) of the divine.

by it (*min ḥukmihā*) [i.e. by qualified oneness]. This was the locus (*maḥall*) of their mistake and error. So understand!⁸⁰⁴

While al-Jīlī demonstrates a certain degree of sympathy for the Christians and makes an attempt to understand the ultimate truth of their doctrine of the Trinity from his Sufi metaphysical perspective, ultimately, as a committed Muslim, he is bound to conclude they are in some sense mistaken. The Qur'an, after all, is quite clear in its condemnation of the doctrine of the Trinity and of any suggestion that Jesus, Mary, or any other created being should be taken as a god, a condemnation that was taken up and developed in the post-Qur'anic tradition. This passage makes it clear that al-Jīlī does not disagree with the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition that the Christians are mistaken in professing the Trinity and Incarnation. Nevertheless, his reasoning is somewhat different.

Al-Jīlī divides the failings of Jesus people into two categories: their “mistake” (*khaṭa'*) and their “error” (*ḍalāl*). The latter term, which we have already come across in this chapter and in the chapter on the Torah, is stronger than the former; or rather it seems more particularly to signify a religious error with potential soteriological consequences.⁸⁰⁵ The Christians’ “mistake”, as al-Jīlī sees it, is to “confine” (*ḥaṣr*) the manifestations of the divine attributes to the three persons of the Trinity. Whereas before al-Jīlī’s Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics led him to adopt a

⁸⁰⁴ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 130.

⁸⁰⁵ See Lane (1984), 1: 761: s.v. “*khaṭa'*”: “a wrong action; a mistake, or an error; contr. of *ṣawāb*;...it signifies an *unintentional fault or offence or disobedience*.” *Ibid.*, 1798, s.v. “*ḍalāl*”: “the going away from the right course”; can be “a state of perdition”. Note also how *khaṭa'* is used in the context of the erring – but still rewarded – *mujtahid* in the hadith quoted above. And see above on al-Jīlī’s use of the term *ahl al-ḍalāl* to denote those condemned to hell.

more sympathetic attitude towards the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, here it leads him to criticise the Christians; indeed, in the final chapter, he identifies this mistake as the reason for their falling from “the rank of monotheists” (*darajat al-muwahhidīn*).⁸⁰⁶

According to al-Jīlī’s Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysics, it will be remembered, God in His essence possesses absolute – which is to say, unlimited – existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), in contrast to the limited existence (*al-wujūd al-muqayyad*) of creation.⁸⁰⁷ As such, it is a mistake to try to limit or restrict the divine in any way.⁸⁰⁸ By trying to limit the unlimitable existence of the divine to three particular created forms (the persons of the Trinity), the Christians make such a mistake. Moreover, because, according to the fundamental theory of al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysics, the entirety of the phenomenal world is a locus for the divine manifestation, it is wrong to claim, as the Christians do, that the only loci of divine manifestation are the three persons of the Trinity. In this regard, al-Jīlī’s stance towards Christian doctrine is once again reminiscent of the position taken by Ibn ‘Arabī, though al-Jīlī’s criticism of Christian doctrine is more direct.⁸⁰⁹ Furthermore, his criticism reflects the distance between his Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysical position and the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, for to say as al-Jīlī

⁸⁰⁶ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 260.

⁸⁰⁷ For this notion in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, see Nettler (2003), 9, and the references cited there.

⁸⁰⁸ Thus in his commentary on the *Futūḥāt*, for instance, al-Jīlī criticises those who profess only one of God’s incomparability (*al-tanzīh*) or comparability (*al-tashbīh*) to creation, because either of these two positions, when taken on its own, serves to restrict (*ḥaṣr, taqyīd*) God to only one of His aspects. See al-Jīlī (1999a), 111-112.

⁸⁰⁹ See Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 144 (the chapter on Jesus), where he explains that the divine breath (*al-naḥās al-ilāhī*) breathed into Mary is the “substantial essence” (*al-jawhar al-hayūlānī*) of all phenomenal existences – i.e. not just of Jesus. The idea that the entirety of creation receives the divine breath is in fact a key Ibn ‘Arabian idea. See e.g. *ibid.*, 49.

does that Jesus is only one of many loci of the divine manifestation is, from a Christian perspective, to undermine the uniqueness of the Incarnation.

The Christians' "error", meanwhile, is closely connected to their "mistake". In describing this error, al-Jīlī uses technical terms drawn from the discourse of *kalām*, namely, *tajsīm* and *tashbīh*. The former term is most commonly used in intra-Muslim theological debates on whether the Qur'an's assignation of body parts to God ought to be taken literally. It is generally a pejorative term used to denigrate those such as the early Shī'ī theologians Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795-6) and his student Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823) who are said to have professed that God has or is a body (*jism*),⁸¹⁰ an idea rejected by both Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites.⁸¹¹ Al-Jīlī's use of this term in his critique of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is somewhat unusual. The terms more commonly used by Muslim theologians who wrote against the Trinity and Incarnation are *ittiḥād* (union) and *ḥulūl* (indwelling),⁸¹² while Arab Christian theologians more often use terms such as *tajassud* and *ta'annus*.⁸¹³ Al-Jīlī's condemnation of the Christians for their "absolute incarnationism" (*al-tajsīm al-muṭlaq*) thus echoes not so much the theological polemics against Christianity as it does intra-Muslim

⁸¹⁰ On Hishām, see van Ess (2017), 410-448.

⁸¹¹ See e.g. al-Zamakhsharī (1997), 13/52; al-Ash'arī (1953), 12/10.

⁸¹² See Massignon & Anawati (1971), 571; and see e.g. the title of the 3rd/9th century Baghdadi writer Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's *Radd 'alā al-ittiḥād*. Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 141, uses *ḥulūl* in this context.

⁸¹³ See Massignon & Anawati (1971), 571; and see e.g. the titles of the Melkite theologian Theodore Abū Qurrah's (d. 820-825) *Maymar fī al-radd 'alā man yunkir li-Allāh al-tajassud* and the Jacobite theologian Abū Rā'īṭah's (d. after 830) *al-Risālah fī al-tajassud*.

polemic.⁸¹⁴ As in the conventional use of the term in *kalām*, the *tajsīm* of the Christians is perhaps connected here to a point made by al-Jīlī on several occasions in the course of the chapter, namely, the limitation of their literal reading of their scripture. Just as the *mujassimūn*, in the Islamic theological context, are those who take the Qur'an's assignation of body parts to God too literally, so too might the Christians be deemed *mujassimūn* for believing that God is literally identical with the three persons of the Trinity.

The second term al-Jīlī uses to criticise the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – *tashbīh* – is also often used in *kalām* discourse in a pejorative sense, to attack those who assign created – particularly human – attributes to God.⁸¹⁵ For this reason, it is often paired, as here, with *tajsīm*.⁸¹⁶ The theologians, both Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite, contrast it with *tanzīh*, a term which denotes the proper assertion of God's incomparability to creation. This pair of terms has a particular significance in the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī, who, as we saw in chapter one, took an original stance on the issue, proposing the synthesis of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*,⁸¹⁷ a position that was adopted by al-Jīlī.⁸¹⁸ By attributing *tashbīh* to the Christians here (as well as in the chapter on the

⁸¹⁴ Later in the book, al-Jīlī stresses that the manifestation of God in man is “on the condition of the divine incomparability, [for] He is exalted beyond incarnation (*al-tajsīm*) and representation (*al-tamthīl*).” See al-Jīlī (1997a), 144. Here *tajsīm* bears no relation to Christian doctrine; rather, al-Jīlī appears to be defending his Sufi metaphysical theory against the potential charge of identifying God and man.

⁸¹⁵ See van Ess (2000), 341-342.

⁸¹⁶ See Abrahamov (2002), 3, note 13.

⁸¹⁷ In this regard, Shahab Ahmed has recently called *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* “the fundamental Akbarian question”. See Ahmed (2016), 90. For Ibn 'Arabī and his school's treatment of the issue, see Izutsu (1984), 48-67. For a poetic statement of the position, see Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 70.

⁸¹⁸ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 59-61. For al-Jīlī's elaboration of this idea in his *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥāt*, see Morrissey (2016).

Torah),⁸¹⁹ therefore, al-Jīlī is suggesting that they make the mistake of limiting themselves to only one half of the truth by viewing God in terms of only one of His two fundamental aspects. In al-Jīlī's view, this is a serious mistake. Indeed, in his commentary on the *Futūḥāt* he describes this kind of unadulterated *tashbīḥ* as polytheism (*shirk*) and dualism (*tathniyah*),⁸²⁰ while in his *Ghunyat arbāb al-sam'ā* he declares, "The only thing forbidden (*mamnū'*) with respect to the divine is to declare Him comparable (*al-tashbīḥ*), for it is not permissible to compare the Real to anything."⁸²¹ In this sense, by accusing the Christians of excessive *tashbīḥ*, al-Jīlī again adopts the orthodox Sunni view of the Trinity, which is to condemn it as *shirk*. At the same time, however, he makes the charges of *tashbīḥ* and *shirk* from his particular Ibn 'Arabian perspective.

The Christians' *tashbīḥ*, he also tells us, is "limited to this qualified oneness" (*al-muqayyad fī ḥādhihi al-wāḥidiyyah*). The term *muqayyad* evokes the error of *taqyīd*, that is, the limitation of the absolute existence of God.⁸²² The Christians' *tashbīḥ*, it is thus suggested, is limited by their considering God only at the level of unqualified oneness, to the exclusion of the higher levels of the divine existence. There is perhaps an implicit contrast being made here between the Gospel, which is a revelation limited to the level of *wāḥidiyyah*, and the Qur'an, which, as we have seen, al-Jīlī holds to be "an expression of

⁸¹⁹ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 120, where he tells us that Jesus' people made the mistake of professing absolute *tashbīḥ*, even though Jesus himself synthesised *tanzīḥ* and *tashbīḥ*.

⁸²⁰ Al-Jīlī (1999a), 112.

⁸²¹ Quoted in al-Jīlī (2004), 41.

⁸²² The connection between *tashbīḥ* and *taqyīd* is also made by Ibn 'Arabī. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 69.

the pure essence (*'ibārah 'an al-dhāt al-mahḍ*”), that is, the higher level of *al-aḥadiyyah*.⁸²³ In light of this, it could be said that the Christians’ error is a consequence of the limited nature of their revelation. By manifesting the names of the divine essence, the Gospel leads the Christians to look upon God from the perspective of qualified oneness, that is, in His state of being qualified by names and attributes that invite comparison with creation. In focusing only on this aspect of the divine, the Christians are blinded by the all-consuming perspective of *tashbīh*, neglecting to balance this perspective with that of *tanzīh*.⁸²⁴ The Muslims, by contrast, because their scripture reveals the divine essence in its unqualified state, are able to look at God from the perspective of *tanzīh* as well as *tashbīh*. Al-Jīlī develops this idea, which we already came across in the chapter on the Torah, in the course of the remainder of this chapter. This being said, al-Jīlī also states here that the Christians’ *taqyīd* was not a determination (*ḥukm*) of *wāḥidiyyah*, which is to say that the revelation of the qualified oneness of God need not necessarily have led them into *tajsīm* and *tashbīh*. Similarly, in the following section, he states that the Christians’ false doctrine of the Trinity was a result of their going against the true contents of their scripture. It can therefore also be argued that for al-Jīlī the Christians’ error is a consequence not so much of the limitations of the Gospel – though it certainly *is* limited vis-à-vis the Qur’an – as of their mistaken or limited interpretation of that

⁸²³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 127, 116.

⁸²⁴ In this regard, I do not agree with the statement of Nicholson (1921), 140, that, in al-Jīlī’s view, the Christians “recognise the two complementary sides of true belief concerning God, namely that from the one point of view (*tanzīh*) He is above all likeness and that from the other (*tashbīh*) He reveals Himself in the forms of His creatures.”

revelation. This argument would fit with what we saw earlier in the chapter regarding al-Jīlī's suggestion that the Christians' interpretation of the Gospel was limited to its *ẓāhir* meaning.

j) The true message of the Gospel, its appearance in the Qur'an, & acceptance by the Muslims

All that there is in the Gospel is that upon which is founded the divine revelation in human existence (*al-nāmūs al-lāhūtī fī al-wujūd al-nāsūtī*), which is the requirement of the appearance of the Real in creation (*muqtaḍā ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq fī al-khalq*). But when the Christians believed (*dhahabat*) what they believed, in terms of incarnationism (*al-tajsīm*) and confinement (*ḥaṣr*), this was in opposition to (*mukhālīfan li-*) what is in the Gospel.

So in reality, only the Muhammadans (*al-muḥammadiyyūn*) undertook what was in the Gospel, because the Gospel in its completeness (*bi-kamālihi*) is in a single verse of the Qur'an, which is when He – May He be exalted – said, “And I breathed into him of My spirit (*wa-naḥakhtu fīhi min rūḥī*).” (Q 15:29). And His spirit is none other than He. This is God's – Glory be to Him and May He be exalted – announcement (*ikhbār*) of His appearance in Adam.

Then He supported it [i.e. the verse] with, “We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that it is the truth/the Real (*al-ḥaqq*).” (Q 41:53) This means that the whole world (*jamī' al-'ālam*), which is referred to by [the term] “on the horizons and in themselves” is the Real (*al-ḥaqq*). Then He clarified it (*bayyana*) and stated it openly (*ṣaraha*) when He said with regard to Muhammad – May God bless him and grant him peace: “Those who pledge allegiance to you only pledge allegiance to God,” (Q 48:10) and when He said, “Whoever obeys the messenger has obeyed God.” (Q 4:80)

So Muhammad's people were guided (*ihtadā*) by this to the reality of the matter (*ḥaqīqat al-amr*), and for this reason they did not confine (*lam yaḥsirū*) the Real existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqqī*) to Adam alone, because the verse only designated Adam alone. Rather, they behaved properly (*ta'addabū*) and knew (*'alimū*) that by Adam was meant every individual of this human race (*kull fard min afrād hādhā al-naw' al-insānī*), and witnessed the Real in every part of existence in its completeness (*fī jamī' ajzā' al-wujūd bi-kamālihi*), heeding the divine command (*imtithālan al-amr al-ilāhī*), which was that He said, “until it is clear to them

that it is the truth/the Real.” And so it was for Muhammad and the Muslims.⁸²⁵

This long passage is worth quoting in full because it gets to the heart of al-Jīlī’s view of the Gospel, the Christians, and, more generally, the relationship between God and creation. The Gospel, he explains, contains a single basic truth, which is summed up in the phrase *muqtaḍā ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq fī al-khalq*, that is, the necessity of God’s manifestation within creation. This, of course, is the key Sufi metaphysical idea of universal theophany, expressed in its most basic terms. The Gospel, as al-Jīlī sees it, thus contains a true expression of the underlying divine nature of reality. Moreover, this truth, he explains, is the basis for another idea, which is represented by the phrase *al-nāmūs al-lāhūtī fī al-wujūd al-nāsūtī*. Al-Jīlī uses the term *nāmūs* here and elsewhere in the book as a synonym for *tajallī* or *ẓuhūr* – that is, to denote the divine manifestation.⁸²⁶ The terms *lāhūtī* and *nāsūtī*, though essentially synonymous here with (the perhaps more common) *ilāhī* (divine) and *insānī* (human), carry a special significance in the context of a discussion of Christian doctrine. Muslim theologians such as al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and ‘Imām al-Ḥaramayn’ al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) use the terms *lāhūt* and *nāsūt* in their descriptions of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, according to which, as they understand it, the *lāhūt* of God unites or mixes with – or inheres in – the *nāsūt* of Jesus.⁸²⁷ The pair of

⁸²⁵ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 130-131.

⁸²⁶ See also *ibid.*, 151, 199, 267, 269, 271. For this meaning of *nāmūs* (which is one of many), see Lane (1984), 1:2854. Given that al-Jīlī, as we have seen throughout this thesis, interprets the scriptures as forms of divine manifestation, his use of *nāmūs* in this way does not contradict its apparently original meaning of “revealed law.” See Motzki (2003), 515.

⁸²⁷ See Arnaldez (1986b), 612. Al-Juwaynī’s explanation of the Christian doctrine of *ittiḥād* as the idea of “*ẓuhūr al-lāhūt ‘alā al-nāsūt*” is remarkably close to al-Jīlī’s

terms also appears in the Sufi technical lexicon, having been first introduced, it seems, by al-Ḥallāj,⁸²⁸ and later adopted by Ibn ‘Arabī.⁸²⁹ Significantly, Ibn ‘Arabī uses the terms in the chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ* in the context of his exposition of the appearance of the divine spirit in man, thus indicating, perhaps, some awareness of the Christian resonance of the terms.⁸³⁰ At the beginning of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, meanwhile, al-Jīlī describes Muḥammad as “the locus of the synthesis of the realities of the divine nature (*al-lāhūt*), and the source of the delicate aspects of human nature (*al-nāsūt*)”,⁸³¹ indicating that these terms are connected, as he sees it, to the theory of the Perfect Man. Just as the phrase *muqtaḍā ẓuhūr al-ḥaqq fī al-khalq* stands for the theory of universal theophany, then, the phrase *al-nāmūs al-lāhūtī fī al-wujūd al-nāsūtī* seems to stand for the theory of the Perfect Man. Both of these ideas, al-Jīlī appears to be suggesting, are contained in the Gospel.

If this is the case, then the source of the Christians’ error would not be the Gospel, but rather, as suggested above, their own false or

language here. See also Ibn Taymiyyah (1995), 2:107: “Particular indwelling (*al-ḥulūl al-khāṣṣ*)...is the position of the Nestorian Christians and those like them who say, ‘The divine inhered in the human (*al-lāhūt ḥalla fī al-nāsūt*), like water inhering in the vessel’...And particular union (*al-ittiḥād al-khāṣṣ*)...is the position of the Jacobite Christians, whose position is more wicked (*akḥbath*), and who are the blacks and the Copts, who say, ‘The divine and the human mixed and mingled (*ikhtalaṭā wa-imtazaḡā*), like yoghurt mixing with water.’”

⁸²⁸ See Arnaldez (1986b), 613-614; al-Ḥallāj (1913), 129-132; Takeshita (1987), 19.

⁸²⁹ See Arnaldez (1986b), 614; Izutsu (1984), 149. The parallels between Christian and Sufi terminology is probably part of the reason why Sufis like al-Ḥallāj and Ibn ‘Arabī, were accused of professing the Christian doctrines of *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*. See e.g. Ibn Taymiyyah (1995), 2:281: “[The position of the Sufis] is like the position of the Christians (*qawl al-naṣārā*), and those among the Rejectionists (*al-rāfiḍah*) who have extreme views (*al-ghāliyah*) about the Imams, and those among the ignorant dervishes and Sufis (*juhhāl al-fuqarā’ wa-al-ṣūfiyyah*) [who have extreme views] about the shaykhs. For they view it [the Imam or shaykh’s relation with God] either like the union (*ittiḥād*) of water and milk, or in terms of indwelling (*ḥulūl*), or in terms of some other kind of union (*ittiḥād*).” See also Ibn Khaldūn (1958), 3:85-86: “The oneness [*ittiḥād*] (assumed by the Sufis) is identical with the incarnation the Christians claim for the Messiah.”

⁸³⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 138.

⁸³¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 6.

limited interpretation of that scripture. Indeed, where before al-Jīlī indicated that their interpretation is confined to the apparent (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the revelation, here he goes further and explicitly states that Christian doctrine is actually “opposed” (*mukhālīfan*) to the contents of the Gospel. Specifically, what is opposed to the Gospel is their aforementioned “incarnationism” (*tajsīm*) and “confinement” (*ḥaṣr*) of God to the three persons of the Trinity. In other words, whereas the Gospel reveals that the divine (*al-ḥaqq*, *al-lāhūt*) is manifest in creation (*al-khalq*) – the theory of universal theophany – and, specifically, in humanity (*al-insān*, *al-nāsūt*) – the theory of the Perfect Man – the Christians make the mistake of claiming that God actually takes on a human body – an idea, as we have seen, which is referred to in the polemical literature by the term *ḥulūl* (indwelling) – and of limiting the manifestation of the divine to Jesus and the other persons of the Trinity, and thus ignoring the metaphysical truth that the whole of creation is a divine *māẓhar*.

In contrast to the Christians’ mistaken reading of their revelation, the Muslims – or as al-Jīlī calls them, in keeping with his strong sense of the close connection between religious communities and their prophets, “the Muhammadans” (*al-muḥammadiyyūn*)⁸³² – profess the true meaning of the Gospel, which is to say that they acknowledge the truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man. This idea parallels the

⁸³² Ibn ‘Arabī uses the term Muhammadans in a technical sense to denote a specific class of *awliyā’*, namely those who embody the Muhammadan Reality. See Chittick (1989), 376. Since al-Jīlī also refers to *al-muslimūn* here, and since, in the final chapter, he identifies *al-muslimūn* with *al-muḥammadiyyūn* (see al-Jīlī (1997a), 255), I do not think he is using the term in this precise, Ibn ‘Arabian technical sense. It does seem, however, to carry the connotation of *true* Muslims, that is, those who know the true, metaphysical meaning of the Muhammadan message.

orthodox conception of sacred history, according to which the Christians have distorted or misinterpreted the true, original meaning of the Gospel, which is in perfect harmony with the Qur'an.⁸³³ As usual, however, al-Jīlī's reasoning here is somewhat different. The Muslims' superior reading of the Gospel to the Christians', he explains, derives from the fact that the entire Gospel (*al-Injīl bi-kāmilihi*) is contained in a single *āyah* of the Qur'an. That *āyah* – Q 15:29/38:72 (the wording is the same in both) – is a statement of how God breathed into Adam to give him life. This is one of the key Qur'anic proofs for the Ibn 'Arabian idea expressed in the passage from the *Faṣṣ* on Jesus quoted above, namely that the divine spirit is the inner reality of creation, or, put another way, that creation is the locus for the divine manifestation.⁸³⁴ In identifying Q 15:29/38:72 as the key Qur'anic "announcement" (*ikhbār*) of the truth of universal theophany, therefore, al-Jīlī is following Ibn 'Arabī's lead.⁸³⁵

Furthermore, by referring to Q 15:29/38:72 in the context of his discussion of the Gospel, al-Jīlī calls to mind the similarity between the verse and those Qur'anic verses (Q 21:91, 66:12) that speak, using the same terminology, of how God breathed His spirit into Mary in order to conceive Jesus. It is notable in this regard that al-Jīlī identifies the verse describing God's breathing into Adam as the verse that summarises the Gospel, rather than those verses that refer to God breathing into Mary.

⁸³³ For a modern expression of this idea, see Ali (1946), 137, note 396 (Q 3:55): "*Those who follow thee*: The Muslims are the true Christians, for they follow (or should follow) the true teaching of Christ, which did not include the blasphemy that he was God or the son of God in the literal sense."

⁸³⁴ Ibn 'Arabī also alludes to this verse in the course of his elaboration of his cosmogony in the chapter on Adam at the beginning of the *Fuṣūṣ*, as well as in his discussion of the nature of Muhammad in the final chapter. See Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 49, 216.

⁸³⁵ See also al-Jīlī (1997a), 150 (in the chapter on *al-rūḥ al-quds*), where he describes how the divine breathing into Adam denotes "the divine existence within created beings" (*al-wujūd al-ilāhī fī al-makhluqāt*).

While the latter verses specifically indicate that God's spirit is the inner reality of Jesus, the former verse suggests more generally that God's spirit is the inner reality of the entirety of mankind, Adam, as "the father of mankind" (*abū al-bashar*), standing for mankind as a whole. This truth, he explains, is acknowledged by the Muslims, who recognise that what is meant by "Adam" is "every individual of this human race" (*kull fard min afrād hādhā al-naw' al-insānī*). Thus, they do not make the same mistake as the Christians of limiting the manifestation of God to one particular individual, for they see God not only in Adam, but also in "every part of existence in its completeness" (*fī jamī' ajzā' al-wujūd bi-kamālihi*), which is to say that they recognise the metaphysical truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man.

Al-Jīlī's claim that the entire message of the Gospel is contained in a single verse of the Qur'an clearly implies, in keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history, the superiority of the Qur'an over the Christian scripture. This is not to say, however, that verse 15:29 is the *only* Qur'anic proof for that underlying truth. In fact, says al-Jīlī, there are a number of Qur'anic verses that support and make evident the truth expressed in Q 15:29. Specifically, he cites verses 41:53, 48:10, and 4:80. Q 41:53 – "We shall show them Our signs etc." – is often quoted by Sufis, including Ibn 'Arabī, for the same purposes as al-Jīlī has here, namely, to denote the truth of universal theophany.⁸³⁶ It is notable that, in his commentary on this verse, al-Jīlī stresses that it is the

⁸³⁶ See e.g. Sands (2006), 44, 173, note 77; Silvers (2010), 47, 63; Keeler (2006), 188; Ibn 'Arabī (1946), 69; Izutsu (1984), 54; Chittick (1989), xv, 43, 92, 164, 245, 358, 399, note 21. Al-Jīlī also quotes this verse for the same purposes elsewhere in *al-Insān al-kāmil*. See e.g. al-Jīlī (1997a), 121.

“whole world” (*jamī‘ al-‘ālam*) that is a divine manifestation, the point again being that the divine manifestation is not limited to Jesus or the three persons of the Trinity, but rather is universal. The other two verses al-Jīlī cites here indicate, according to his reading, that God became manifest in the person of Muhammad; or as he puts it in the final chapter in his explanation of the same two verses, “He [i.e. God] established Muhammad in His own station (*aqāma Muḥammad maqām nafsihi*).”⁸³⁷ As we know, according to al-Jīlī’s theory, Muhammad is the archetypal Perfect Man.⁸³⁸ By citing these verses here, therefore, al-Jīlī seems to be indicating, again in keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history, that the Christians are mistaken to imagine that their own prophet, Jesus, is the best of mankind and the only recipient (along with his mother) of the divine manifestation, for in so doing they overlook the existence of a greater Perfect Man – Muhammad – along with the primordial perfection of all human beings.⁸³⁹

This point is brought home if we briefly turn to a passage from chapter 50 of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, on the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-quds*), where al-Jīlī explains that the Perfect Man so perfectly manifests the divine attributes that

when he touches something with his hand (*idhā masaḥa bi-yadihi*), he heals the blind and the leper (*abra’a al-akmah wa-al-abraṣ*), and when his tongue utters the creation of a thing (*takwīn shay’*), this occurs through the command of God – May He be exalted. And he is supported by the Holy Spirit...⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁷ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 279.

⁸³⁸ See *ibid.*, 207-214, 279-280; al-Jīlī (1997b), *passim*, and esp. 227-235.

⁸³⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī uses Q 48:10 in a similar way. See Chittick (1989), 323-324. For al-Jīlī’s notion that all humans are inherently perfect, see al-Jīlī (1997a), 47, 207; al-Jīlī (1997b), 332.

⁸⁴⁰ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 152.

There is an implicit parallel being drawn here between the Perfect Man and Jesus, who, in the Qur’anic account (see Q 3:49), possesses these same miraculous powers. The point, then, is that individuals other than Jesus (most of all, Muhammad) are capable of possessing the powers that he possessed,⁸⁴¹ and of receiving the support of the Holy Spirit like he did.⁸⁴² It is therefore incorrect to say, as the Christians apparently do, that Jesus (along with the other persons of the Trinity) is the only locus for the divine manifestation, or, in Sufi metaphysical terms, that he is the only Perfect Man. This is the meaning, then, of the Christians’ “opposition” to the message of the Gospel: namely, their failure to comprehend the truths of universal theophany and the Perfect Man in their fullest sense.

Throughout this section, there is a clear sense of the superiority of the Muslims over the Christians. This is brought out by some of the key terms that al-Jīlī uses. While the Christians, as al-Jīlī declares on a number of occasions in this chapter, are in error (*ḍalāl*), the Muslims are rightly guided (*ihtadā*). While the Christians were earlier described as being “in the wrong” (*‘alā al-bāṭil*) “in the reality of the matter” (*‘alā ḥaqīqat al-amr*), the Muslims, by contrast, have arrived at “the reality of the matter” (*ḥaqīqat al-amr*). While the Christians profess doctrines that deserve to be called by the pejorative terms *shirk*, *tashbīh*, and *tajsīm*, the Muslims, by contrast, behave properly (*ta’addabū*) and heed the divine

⁸⁴¹ See also *ibid.*, 269, 278.

⁸⁴² See also *ibid.*, 67, where he explains that all individuals who manifest the divine attributes receive the Holy Spirit, which is the name for the “subtle reality” (*laṭīfah*) that God places in them as a replacement (*iwaḍan*) for their annihilated selves. Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 143, where he notes that other humans than Jesus, such as the famous Sufi Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, possessed the capacity to revive the dead by breathing the divine spirit into them.

command (*imtithālan al-amr al-ilāhī*). While al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysical perspective, as we have seen over the course of the chapter, leads him to adopt a relatively benevolent view of Christian doctrine, therefore, nevertheless there is no mistaking his sense of the superiority of Islam and the Muslims over Christianity and the Christians. This superiority, as we have already seen, is a consequence partly of the greater completeness of the Qur'an vis-à-vis the Gospel, and partly – and it is probably the greater part – of the Christians' more limited capacity to correctly interpret that scripture.

It should be noted that al-Jīlī's conception of what the Muslims believe about the universal divine manifestation, as expressed here, is an idealised one. What he seems to mean is not that all Muslims believe that the entirety of creation is a manifestation of God – which would be an inaccurate statement, and one that would contradict what he says about the religious scholars later on – but rather that this is the true meaning of the Islamic message contained in the Qur'an, as his Qur'anic proof texts purport to show; hence it is what true "Muhammadans" profess. In this regard, it should be kept in mind that, although al-Jīlī is clearly concerned with the rights and wrongs of Christian doctrine in this chapter, his text is also (and perhaps primarily) directed at his fellow Muslims, and his primary goal here is to set out his Sufi metaphysical theory and the place of the various scriptures within it, rather than to engage in polemic against the Christians or any other non-Muslim group. This intra-Islamic dimension of al-Jīlī's discussion becomes clear in the concluding section of the chapter.

k) Guidance & error

If a verse like this had been sent down (*unzilat*) in the Gospel, Jesus' people would have been guided (*ihtadā*) to that. But it is not like that, because through every book that God – May He be exalted – sends down, He leads many into error (*yudill bihi kathīran*) and guides many others (*wa-yahdī bihi kathīran*), just as He – Glory be to Him and May He be exalted – announced in the Qur'an.

Look at the scholars of external forms (*'ulamā' al-rusūm*), how they erred (*dallū*) in their interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of these two verses, believing what they believed (*fa-dhahabū ilā mā dhahabū ilayhi*) with regards to them. Even if what they believed contained an aspect of the truth (*wajhan min wujūh al-ḥaqq*), nevertheless principles (*uṣūl*) became established among them, by which they were distanced (*bu'īdū*) from God and from knowing Him (*ma'rifatihī*). Meanwhile, the people of realities (*ahl al-ḥaqā'iq*) were guided (*ihtadā*) by these two [verses] to the knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*) – May He be exalted. So the same thing guided some and led others into error.

God – May He be exalted – said, “through it He leads many into error and guides many others, but through it He only leads astray those who do bad (*al-fāsiqīn*).” (Q 2:26) An egg is said to go bad (*fasaqat*) when it becomes rotten (*fasadat*), and is not fit for hatching. So what is intended here is a people whose capacities to receive (*qawābil*) the divine manifestation (*al-tajallī al-ilāhī*) have rotted (*fasadat*), since they imagine that God – May He be exalted – does not appear in His creation (*lā yazhar fī khalqihī*). Indeed, He does not appear to them (*bal lā yazhar lahum*).

Then, since they found what was required by those principles of divine incomparability (*al-uṣūl al-tanzīhiyyah*), which He determines (*ḥakama*) through the divine essence (*bi-al-dhāt al-ilāhiyyah*), and since they abandoned essential matters (*al-umūr al-'ayniyyah*), they followed the governing attributes (*al-awṣāf al-ḥukmiyyah*). But they did not know that those governing attributes were, in their essence (*bi-'aynihā*), in a state of perfection (*'alā kamālihā*), due to this essential matter (*al-amr al-'aynī*) and the existence that is created and Real (*al-wujūd al-khalqī al-ḥaqqī*).⁸⁴³

Al-Jīlī here returns again to the question of the cause of the Christians' error. In this instance, he initially implies that it is the

⁸⁴³ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 131.

limitation of the Gospel that is to blame, given that it did not contain a verse like Q 4:80, which explicitly establishes – as al-Jīlī sees it – the truth that God is manifest in the entirety of humanity. At the same time, however, al-Jīlī adds an element to the discussion that he has not yet explicitly mentioned, namely the idea that the Christians’ error was part of the divine plan, for whenever God sends down a scripture, He means by it to guide some and lead others astray. Al-Jīlī bases this idea on the Qur’anic statement (see Q 2:26, etc.) that it is God who guides the believers and leads the wrongdoers into error, a statement that appears to indicate that guidance and error are divinely ordained, that is to say, pre-determined. The Qur’an’s stance on this point, however, is not perhaps as clear-cut as it may first appear, for in a coda to verse 2:26 it is said that God only leads astray those who do bad (*al-fāsiqīn*). This might be taken to suggest that God only leads astray those who are already sinners, in which case there would seem to be some element of free choice involved in the response to revelation.

As al-Jīlī understands it from his Sufī metaphysical perspective, the Qur’anic term *fāsiqīn* denotes not so much those who behave sinfully – though this is the exoteric meaning – as it does those individuals who have closed their hearts to God.⁸⁴⁴ Expressed in terms of his Ibn ‘Arabian technical vocabulary, this means that their *qawābil* – that is, their “receptivities” – are not sufficiently prepared to receive the divine manifestation. Underlying this concept, and the related Ibn ‘Arabian concept of “preparedness” (*al-isti‘ādā*), is the idea that, although all

⁸⁴⁴ This connection is suggested by Q 57:16, which, as we saw in the chapter on the Torah, links the *fāsiqīn* to those whose “hearts have hardened”.

individuals are inherently perfect *in potentia*, there is nevertheless a hierarchy among human beings with regards to their capacity to manifest that perfection *in actu*, an idea that have already come across. Whether an individual's ability to manifest his inherent perfection is determined by God or by oneself is not clear from this passage, though it does seem from the writings of both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Jīlī that an individual's receptivity or preparedness is dependent upon the particular "mystery" (*sirr*) or "subtle reality" (*latīfah*) – which is to say, the inner nature⁸⁴⁵ – that God chooses for that individual.⁸⁴⁶ In this sense, then, it can be said that those who do wrong – which is to say, those who are unreceptive to the possibility of the manifestation of God within themselves – only do wrong as a consequence of their God-given natures, as al-Jīlī understands it.⁸⁴⁷

Who are those, we might ask, who are incapable of receiving the divine manifestation within themselves? In one respect, given the context and his critique of the Christians for limiting their belief in the manifestation of God in creation to the three persons of the Trinity, al-Jīlī's target here is clearly the Christians. They are *fāsiqīn*, it might be said, because they are unreceptive to the possibility of God becoming manifest in creation, beyond the three persons of the Trinity. At the same time, al-Jīlī also explicitly directs his criticism here at those he calls "the scholars of external forms" (*'ulamā' al-rusūm*). This is a pejorative term

⁸⁴⁵ For these concepts in Sufī literature, see Keeler (2006), 66; Tahānawī (1963), 1407-8.

⁸⁴⁶ See al-Jīlī (1999a), 71.

⁸⁴⁷ This fits with his similar suggestion that the error of the Jews was a consequence of the divine decree (*qadar*), for which see al-Jīlī (1997a), 124. However, see also al-Jīlī's creed, in *ibid.*, 7: "Whatever good deeds reach you are from God, and whatever bad deeds reach you are from yourself, for there are few [bad deeds] from God."

used by Ibn ‘Arabī and other Sufīs to refer to those religious scholars who concentrate only on the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspect of religion, at the expense of the esoteric (*bāṭin*) reality accessed by the Sufi “gnostics” (*al-‘arīfūn*).⁸⁴⁸ Al-Jīlī is using the term here in the same pejorative sense.⁸⁴⁹ Indeed, it seems that he is here using the opportunity presented by his criticism of the Christians to damn the exoteric religious scholars by association, rather in the way that, in the chapter on the Torah, his criticism of the Jews’ reason-based innovations in their religion seemed to contain an implied attack on the rationalist theologians and philosophers. In this regard, it is notable that when describing the approach of ‘*ulamā’ al-rusūm*’, he repeats many of the terms he has used over the course of the chapter in reference to the Christians. Thus the scholars, like the Christians, are said to have erred (*ḍallū*). This error, like the Christians’ error, is a consequence of their limited interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of revelation (in this case, of Q 48:10 and 4:80),⁸⁵⁰ for like the Christians, it is implied, they are unable to progress beyond the apparent meaning of scripture. Their error is made manifest in their incorrect beliefs (*dhahabū ilā mā dhahabū ilayhi*), which, like the Christian doctrines, nevertheless contain an element of truth (*wajhan min al-ḥaqq*).

⁸⁴⁸ See e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1972-1992), 3:359; Chittick (1989), 72, 148, 171, 247, 388, note 22; Abū Zayd (2006), 95-96. See also the similar usage by Rūzbihān Baqlī, quoted in Sands (2006), 10-11.

⁸⁴⁹ Elsewhere in the book, al-Jīlī refers to the same group as *ahl al-ẓāhir*. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 103, 188.

⁸⁵⁰ The majority of medieval Sunni exegetes interpret Q 48:10 as a reference to the so-called “pledge of the tree” (*bay‘at al-shajarah*) or “pledge of satisfaction” (*bay‘at al-riḍwān*) made to Muhammad by his Companions prior to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah in 6/628, thus limiting the meaning of the verse to a particular historical event. Similarly, they interpret Q 4:80 in terms of the necessity of obeying the commandments and prohibitions of God, as expressed through His messenger Muhammad. See e.g. al-Ṭabarī (1999), 4:180 (Q 4:80), 11:338-339 (Q 48:10); Ibn Kathīr (2000), 335 (Q 4:80), 1225-1227 (Q 48:10).

The parallel that al-Jīlī implicitly draws between the Christians and the religious scholars brings into focus his view of the former. The error of the scholars, he tells us here, stands in contrast to the guidance attained by the “people of realities” (*ahl al-ḥaqā’iq*), a term that denotes those who have attained “knowledge of God” (*ma’rifat Allāh*) – in other words, the gnostics (*al-‘ārifūn*). We can say by analogy, therefore, that Christian doctrine, like the knowledge attained through exoteric religious scholarship, does not lead one to knowledge of the underlying reality of existence – that is, to the fundamental Sufī metaphysical truth that creation in its entirety is a locus for the divine manifestation. This is in keeping with what we have seen throughout this chapter. Likewise, just as it is said that the scholars have been “distanced” (*bu‘idū*) from God, so too can it be said that the doctrine of the Trinity also distances the Christians from Him, by limiting their conception of the manifestation of the Godhead to three particular forms. The overall impression given, then, is of a people sincerely striving to know God, yet who nevertheless fall well short of such knowledge.

This being said, it might also be said that the Christians, as al-Jīlī sees it, are in one sense closer to the truth than the exoteric scholars. While the latter, it is suggested, reject the very idea that God appears in creation, with the result that they are entirely veiled from seeing the divine manifestation, the Christians, by contrast, *do* acknowledge the fact of divine manifestation, only they limit it to Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. While al-Jīlī does not go so far as to make this point explicitly, nevertheless it does seem possible to draw it out of his discussion here.

Whereas the Christians, as we have seen, are guilty of professing a form of *tashbīh* – specifically, the doctrine of the Incarnation – that limits God to particular created forms, the scholars, by contrast, adopt what al-Jīlī calls “the principles of divine incomparability” (*al-uṣūl al-tanzīhiyyah*). This is to say that they make the opposite mistake to the Christians, namely, to profess unadulterated *tanzīh*. They do so by focusing upon the divine attributes that relate to how God governs the world (*al-awṣāf al-ḥukmiyyah*), which thereby establish a clear distinction between God and His creation. In so doing, says al-Jīlī, they fail to realise the essential truth that God is in fact manifest in His creation, a truth which he here indicates by the phrase “*al-wujūd al-khalqī al-ḥaqqī*”, which indicates that phenomenal existence is *both* created and divine. In light of this truth, the correct stance to take, as we have seen, is to profess both *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* simultaneously. By neglecting to bring together these two positions and instead professing one of the two extremes, both the Christians and the religious scholars fall into error.

1) Divine statements of the truth

And the Real – Glory be to Him and may He be exalted – informed us about Himself in that regard in several places in His book (*kitābihi*), as when He said, “So wherever you turn, there is the face of God,” (Q 2:115) and when He said, “...and in your own selves; do you not see?” (Q 51:21) and when He said, “We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them except through the truth/the Real,” (Q 15:85) and when He said, “And He subjected for you all that is in the heavens and on earth, from Him,” (Q 45:12) and when he [i.e. Muhammad] – Prayers and peace be upon Him – said, “God is the hearing, sight, hand, and tongue of the servant,” and other examples like that, which are unlimited, so understand.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁵¹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 131.

Already in this chapter, al-Jīlī has provided several Qur’anic verses in support of his theory that God is manifest in man and creation. This, as we know, is the basic idea of his Sufi metaphysics, and it is this that the Christians only understand in a very limited way, and which the exoteric religious scholars utterly fail to grasp. In both cases, we have seen, it is those groups’ limited or mistaken interpretation of the divine revelation that is the cause of their error.

Given the centrality of the Qur’an and divine revelation more generally both to al-Jīlī’s Sufi metaphysical theory and to this chapter, it is not a surprise that the chapter concludes with some more scriptural texts that purportedly support his theory of universal theophany and, more particularly, of the Perfect Man. Thus he quotes Q 2:115, a favourite verse of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers, who view it as a clear statement of the presence of the divine throughout the phenomenal world.⁸⁵² The true meaning of this verse, al-Jīlī suggests earlier in the book, is realised by those who, unlike the Christians and the scholars, are able to synthesise the perspectives of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*.⁸⁵³

In addition to Q 2:115, al-Jīlī cites Q 15:85 as another Qur’anic verse indicating the manifestation of God in all of creation. The other Qur’anic verses (Q 51:21, 45:12) cited here, along with the *ḥadīth qudsī* that he alludes to, indicate (according to al-Jīlī’s interpretation) more specifically the manifestation of God in mankind, and thus provide

⁸⁵² For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of this verse, see Chittick (1989), 4, 12, 20, 51, 89, 111, 122, 143, 277, 280, 343, 355. For al-Jīlī’s interpretation, see al-Jīlī (1997a), 150-151, where he explains that the verse denotes how the “sanctified spirit (*al-rūḥ al-muqaddas*)...is present, in its perfection, within [the universe] (*muta’ayyin bi-kamālihi fīhi*).”

⁸⁵³ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 60.

scriptural support for his theory of the Perfect Man. Again, in quoting these particular verses in this context, al-Jīlī is following the example set by Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters.⁸⁵⁴ The *ḥadīth qudsī* mentioned here, meanwhile, is a favourite of many Sufi authors, Ibn ‘Arabī included, for it evokes the manifestation of the divine attributes in the individual who has attained proximity to God through acts of devotion.⁸⁵⁵ More specifically, this hadith indicates the manifestation of several of what al-Jīlī calls the attributes of the divine self (*al-ṣifāt/al-awṣāf al-naḥsiyyah*) – the attributes of the divine essence in the *kalām* conception – in those individuals who have attained perfection.⁸⁵⁶

It is notable that the chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil* that is ostensibly devoted to the Gospel ends with a presentation of the Islamic scriptural proofs for al-Jīlī’s theories of universal theophany and the Perfect Man. This can be explained by the fact that these are the core ideas of the chapter, the book, and al-Jīlī’s thought more generally. As I have argued, the Gospel and Christian doctrine, in addition to being subjects for al-Jīlī’s critique, serve as foils for al-Jīlī’s elaboration of his Sufi metaphysics and promotion of his Sufi approach over and against that of the exoteric scholars.

⁸⁵⁴ For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of these verses, see Chittick (1989), 84 (Q 51:21), 368 (Q 45:12).

⁸⁵⁵ For the hadith, see Bukhārī (1862-1908), 4:231. For Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of this *ḥadīth qudsī*, see Graham (1977), 173-174; Chittick (1989), 176, 325-330. For use of this hadith in Sufism more generally, see Graham (1977), 173; Schimmel (1978), 43.

⁸⁵⁶ See al-Jīlī (1997a), 215, 269, 278, where he spells out this point. For these attributes, see *ibid.*, 67-93.

Conclusion

We have seen how in chapter 38 of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, al-Jīlī engages with and elaborates upon the Qur'an's and Islamic tradition's evaluation of the Christians and their scripture from his Sufi metaphysical perspective. Like the other scriptures discussed in this section of the book, the Gospel, as al-Jīlī sees it, is a genuine divine revelation. This means not only that it is a revealed book, but also, in metaphysical terms, that it is an expression of a form of divine manifestation (*tajallī*). Indeed, it is an expression of the manifestation of the names of the divine essence. This makes it a more complete form of revelation than the Torah (and the Psalter), but a more limited form of revelation than the Qur'an. The Gospel thus indicates – to those who can understand it – the fundamental truth that God is manifest in His creation, even if it does not reveal the divine essence itself. At the same time, the Gospel can be viewed as the cause of a grave error on the part of Jesus' people, for the followers of Jesus, reading literally the Trinitarian formula with which it begins, took Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit as three gods. In keeping with the orthodox Islamic conception, al-Jīlī views this doctrine as *shirk*, and criticises the Christians for declaring God to have been incarnate (*al-tajsīm*) and for comparing Him to His creation (*al-tashbīh*). Again, as in the orthodox conception, the fault for this lies primarily with the Christians themselves for their misreading of scripture, and not with Jesus, who taught them no such doctrines.

This, however, is only one side of the story. Looking at Christian doctrine through the prism of his Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics, al-Jīlī

acknowledges that there is a certain truth to it. Since the entirety of creation is a locus for the divine manifestation, it is correct, esoterically speaking, to say that God is manifest in Jesus, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. And since the human being is the most perfect locus for the manifestation of the divine attributes, it is correct, esoterically speaking, to say that God appears within the world through man. Hence, from this perspective, it can be said that the Christians are monotheists and servants of God. Yet even from this perspective, it must still be acknowledged that the Christians make a mistake, for they limit the divine manifestation to the three persons of the Trinity, and thus ignore the basic truth that God is manifest in all human beings and in all of creation. This basic truth, as al-Jīlī sees it, is expressed time and again in the Qur'an, which is so much more comprehensive than the Gospel that it can be said that the entire Gospel is contained in only one Qur'anic verse. In this sense, the Gospel also bears some responsibility for the Christians' error. While the Christians do not make the mistake made by the exoteric religious scholars, who see only the aspect of God that is incomparable to creation (*al-tanzīh*), nevertheless, being blinded by their *tajsīm* and *tashbīh* they still fail to appreciate the complete picture. Hence it must be said that they are in error, even though they are, to a certain degree, also in the right.⁸⁵⁷

Al-Jīlī's discussion in this chapter often veers into original and, from the orthodox Islamic perspective, dangerous territory, particularly

⁸⁵⁷ Al-Jīlī's ambivalent assessment of Christian doctrine accords with his statement earlier in the book that those who have received the manifestation of the attribute of divinity (*tajallī ṣīfat al-ulūhiyyah*) – among whom he counts himself – declare the doctrines of all religions to be both right and wrong (*yusawwib...wa-yukhaṭṭi*). See al-Jīlī (1997a), 73.

when he is discussing the hidden truth underlying Christian doctrine.⁸⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is also clear that he maintains the absolute supremacy of Islam and the Qur'an – in both their ordinary and deeper metaphysical senses – over Christianity and the Gospel. We can thus say that his Sufi metaphysical perspective leads him to adopt a relatively benevolent and even partially positive attitude towards Christianity, yet that he remains within the framework of the orthodox Islamic view. These two aspects become clear in the final chapter of the book, where he declares that the Christians are “nearer than the past communities to the Real” and “nearer than others to the Muhammadans”, thus implying both the relative exaltedness of Christianity and the ultimate superiority of Islam.⁸⁵⁹ As we have seen, the respective places of these religious communities in the hierarchy of religions is largely a consequence, as al-Jīlī sees it, of the relative completeness of – and their interpretations of – their respective scriptures. Al-Jīlī assesses both of these matters through the prism of his Sufi metaphysics. Once again, therefore, we see that for al-Jīlī it is only through understanding the Sufi metaphysical theories of universal theophany, the levels of existence, and the Perfect Man, that one can understand the meaning of the Gospel and its place within sacred history.

⁸⁵⁸ See the earlier note on the view of the editor of the Cairo edition that certain passages of this chapter must be the later additions of a heretic.

⁸⁵⁹ Al-Jīlī (1997a), 260.

Conclusion

The chapters of *al-Insān al-kāmil* on the Qur'an, Torah, and Gospel serve as a useful case study of al-Jīlī's Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics. As this thesis has hopefully shown, a close reading of these chapters gives us an insight both into the key elements of al-Jīlī's thought, and into a number of important issues such as how his Sufi metaphysics determines his view of sacred history and the relation of his thought to Sunni orthodoxy.

To begin with his Sufi metaphysics more generally, the three chapters that we have looked at bear out the suggestions made in chapter one, namely, that al-Jīlī's thought revolves around the metaphysical problem of the one and the many, and that he attempts to resolve this issue via the Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysical theories of universal theophany, the levels of existence, and the Perfect Man. These three theories, in fact, determine his view of scripture and prophecy. Thus we have seen how, in accordance with al-Jīlī's theory of universal theophany, he believes that each of the scriptures constitutes a form of divine manifestation (*tajallī*), being thus a "revelation" not only in the narrow sense of a scripture or book revealed by God, but also in the broader sense of being an unveiling of God Himself. Connected to this, we have also seen how, in accordance with his theory of the levels of existence, al-Jīlī deems each of the scriptures to correspond to a particular level within the hierarchy of existence, and thus to be an expression of a particular type of divine name or attribute, or even, in the case of the Qur'an, of the divine essence itself. Furthermore, since the

Perfect Man is defined in the Ibn ‘Arabian Sufi metaphysical lexicon as the figure who is a locus of divine manifestation (*mazhar*), it follows that he views the prophets Muhammad, Moses, and Jesus, the recipients or *mazāhir* of these *tajalliyyāt*, as Perfect Men. Finally, it should also be noted that al-Jīlī’s explication and interpretation of the contents of the scriptures, and the doctrines that are drawn from them, is also determined by these three key Sufi metaphysical concepts. This is true of his interpretation of Qur’anic verses, of his reading of the contents of the tablets of the Torah, and of his analysis of the true meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. In each case, his discussion takes us back to the same key ideas, which provide a key to explaining the basic issue of the one and the many.

This tendency of al-Jīlī’s to view the scriptures and prophets through the prism of his Sufi metaphysics is reminiscent of Ibn ‘Arabī, who similarly uses Qur’anic prophetic stories in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* as gateways to a discussion of his Sufi metaphysical theories. Equally, the three key Sufi metaphysical theories that underlie al-Jīlī’s view of the scriptures are, as we saw in chapter one, highly Ibn ‘Arabian. This deep influence of Ibn ‘Arabī on a thinker living in Yemen two hundred years after him can be taken as an indicator of the extent of Ibn ‘Arabī’s impact on the Sufi thought of the Later Middle Period. At the same time, however, it would be wrong to view al-Jīlī as merely a duplicator of or commentator on Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. I have not come across a passage in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings (or in the works of his interpreters) in which he applies his Sufi metaphysics to the various scriptures in so systematic

and consistent a fashion as we find in these chapters of *al-Insān al-kāmil*,⁸⁶⁰ nor, as far as I know, does Ibn ‘Arabī ever engage with such topics as the contents of the Torah or the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in such a sustained way as does al-Jīlī. My thesis therefore bears out the commonly made claims that al-Jīlī is both a more systematic writer than Ibn ‘Arabī and a relatively independent-minded thinker.

While the chapters analysed here provide an overview of al-Jīlī’s key Sufī metaphysical theories and the relationship of his thought to Ibn ‘Arabī’s, given that they are specifically concerned with the scriptures they also give us some insight into his view of sacred history. It is clear that, in line with the orthodox Islamic view of sacred history, al-Jīlī views the revelation of the Qur’an, Torah, and Gospel as different manifestations of a single phenomenon.⁸⁶¹ In orthodox terms, they constitute different instances of God’s “sending down” (*tanzīl*) of the true message to one of His prophets, who are thereafter commanded to propagate this message to their people. In Sufī metaphysical terms, as just noted, they constitute different types of “manifestation” (*tajallī*) of the divine existence, the prophet to whom the scripture is revealed being a locus of this manifestation (*majlā*, *maẓhar*).

At the same time, we are also able to draw out of al-Jīlī’s discussion of the scriptures a hierarchy of scriptures, prophets, and religions; indeed, al-Jīlī makes this hierarchy explicit on a number of

⁸⁶⁰ Though al-Qūnawī does draw a tantalising parallel between “the universal divine books” and the five divine presences (*ḥaḍrāt*), he does not develop this connection. See Todd (2014), 99.

⁸⁶¹ Al-Jīlī’s position here has perhaps influenced the contemporary Egyptian historian of religion and scholar of al-Jīlī’s thought Youssef Ziedan, who proposes that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam constitute three manifestations (*tajallīyyāt*) of a single religion (*diyānah*). See Ziedan (2015), 18, 21.

occasions. The hierarchy is based on the principle set out above, that each of the scriptures represents a particular form of divine manifestation. Since, according to the theory of the levels of existence, some of these manifestations are more complete than others, which is to say that they are fuller expressions of the divine names and attributes (or essence), it follows that some of the scriptures are more complete than others. Significantly, we find that the hierarchy of scriptures, prophets, and religions that emerges from al-Jīlī's discussion is fully in keeping with the Qur'an-based, Sunni orthodox conception of sacred history, even if its Sufi metaphysical expression and rationale are relatively untypical. The Qur'an, as an expression of the divine essence, stands at the top of the hierarchy of scriptures, followed by the Gospel, as an expression of the names of the essence, and then the Torah, as an expression of the attributive names.

In accordance with this hierarchy of scriptures, Muhammad stands at the top of the hierarchy of prophets, for as the recipient of the Qur'an he embodies the divine essence as well as all of the divine attributes, and is thus the most perfect Perfect Man. In the chapter on the Psalter, al-Jīlī gives a clear statement of the direct correspondence between the hierarchy of scriptures and the hierarchy of prophets and the superiority of Muhammad and the Qur'an within these hierarchies:

Know that in every book (*kitāb*) that He sent down to a prophet (*nabī*), He only put sciences (*'ulūm*) that were of the level of the prophet's knowledge of the divine wisdom (*ḥikmah ilāhiyyah*), so that the prophet would not be ignorant (*lā yajhal*) of that which he brought. For the books are distinguished (*yatamayyiz*) from one another in superiority (*al-aḥdaliyyah*), to the degree that one messenger (*mursal*) is distinguished from another in the view of God – May He be exalted. For this reason, the Qur'an is the best

of the books of God (*aḥḍal kutub Allāh*) – May He be exalted – that were sent down upon his prophets (*anbiyā'*), because Muhammad was the best of the messengers (*aḥḍal al-mursalīn*).⁸⁶²

As for Moses and Jesus, while al-Jīlī excuses them for the errors of their people, he nevertheless deems them to be lesser prophets and Perfect Men than Muhammad,⁸⁶³ just as he deems the revelations or manifestations that they received to be not as complete as the Qur'an.⁸⁶⁴ Indeed, though, as stated above, al-Jīlī suggests that Jesus and Moses are Perfect Men, he never actually applies the term *insān kāmil* to them, reflecting his view that this title, properly speaking, should only be used of Muhammad.

Finally, the superiority of the Qur'an and Muhammad means that Muhammad's people, the Muslims, are, in al-Jīlī's view, the best religious community,⁸⁶⁵ and his religion, Islam, the best of religions. And just as the Gospel comes second in the hierarchy of scriptures, so too do the Christians come second in the hierarchy of religious communities, for though they committed the error of limiting the divine manifestation to Jesus and the other persons of the Trinity, nevertheless, their (from an exoteric perspective) mistaken doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity enabled them to at least partially recognise the key Sufi metaphysical truth that God becomes manifest in His creation and, most

⁸⁶² Al-Jīlī (1997a), 125.

⁸⁶³ If al-Jīlī's description of his mystical ascension in chapter sixty-one is a guide, then it can be said that he places Moses higher in the hierarchy of prophets than Jesus, for he puts Moses in the sixth heaven (as in traditional accounts of the Prophet's *mi'rāj*), and Jesus in the fourth (as is relatively common in Sufi literature, though he is also often placed in the second heaven). See al-Jīlī (1997a), 237-238. Nevertheless, because the revelation received by Jesus is more complete than that received by Moses, there is a case to be made for saying that Jesus comes higher in the hierarchy of prophets.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibn 'Arabī takes a similar view. See 'Aḥḍī (1939), 72.

⁸⁶⁵ This phrase, which al-Jīlī himself uses, is consciously meant to echo Q 3:110.

completely, in mankind. The Jews, meanwhile, did not recognise this truth, since Moses was commanded not to propagate the two tablets of the Torah that contained the mysteries of “lordship” (*rubūbiyyah*) and “power” (*qudrah*), which point to God’s appearance within mankind. Judaism and the Jews thus come third in the hierarchy of religions and religious communities.

Al-Jīlī’s insistence on the superiority of the Qur’an, Muhammad, Islam, and the Muslims should not come as a surprise. Any other position would have been unthinkable and unimaginable to a committed medieval Sunni Muslim like him (as it was to Ibn ‘Arabī and most other pre-modern Sufi thinkers),⁸⁶⁶ given that the Qur’an, hadith, and wider Islamic interpretative tradition insist on this point. Nevertheless, al-Jīlī’s commitment to this orthodox Islamic view of sacred history and religious difference bears spelling out, given the emphasis that some modern authors place on the indifference of Sufi thinkers, particularly in the Ibn ‘Arabian tradition, to the distinctions between religions, in other words, on their religious relativism, inclusivism or pluralism.⁸⁶⁷ Far from being unconcerned by religious difference, al-Jīlī’s discussion of the scriptures

⁸⁶⁶ See e.g. Ibn ‘Arabī (1946), 156; Keller (1996); Keller (1999), 189. For other Sufi thinkers, see e.g. Keeler (2006), 210, 220-223, 245-246; Rāzī (1982), 157-178; Casewit (2017), 257-259.

⁸⁶⁷ See e.g. ‘Afīfī (1939), 149-151; Hodgson (1974), 2:220; Schimmel (1978), 271; Chittick (1994), esp. 1-12, 123-176; Lewisohn (2001); Cornell (2004); Akkach (2007), 107, 111, who refers specifically to al-Jīlī’s “Sufi ecumenism” and his belief in the “transcendent unity of religions”; Geoffroy (2001), 182-193; Shah-Kazemi (2012), 29-32, 35-36, 58-59; van Ess (2013), 31; Ebstein (2016). Many of these writers are influenced by the Perennialist or Traditionalist philosophy, which advocates the “transcendent unity of religions”. Some of them, such as Cornell and Ebstein, do however acknowledge that Sufi thinkers insist on the superiority of Muhammad and Islam within the overall context of a more inclusivist approach to religious difference. It should also be noted that, somewhat ironically, the perspective of these modern scholars, who are generally sympathetic to Ibn ‘Arabian Sufism, corresponds in one sense at least with that of Ibn ‘Arabī’s critics. Thus Ibn Taymiyyah, for instance, criticises Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers for their supposed belief in the “unity of religions” (*waḥdat al-adyān*). See Chodkiewicz (1999a), 102-103.

instead presents us with a Sufi metaphysical conception of a hierarchy of religions, with Islam at its summit. As such, the findings of this thesis support Gershom Scholem's view that "the prevailing conception of the mystic as a religious anarchist who owes no allegiance to his religion finds little support in fact. History rather shows that the great mystics were faithful adherents of the great religions."⁸⁶⁸ Indeed, where al-Jīlī comes closest to contradicting the orthodox Islamic conception of sacred history, I think, is not in his discussion of the pre-Qur'anic religions and their scriptures, but rather in his near deification of Muhammad, whose body he deems to be a locus of the manifestation purified of all traces of humanness, and in his notion that a type of prophecy continues after Muhammad's death, through the medium of the Perfect Men who embody the Muhammadan Reality, an idea that would seem to contradict the orthodox Sunni view that, following the golden age of the first three generations of Muslims, Islamic history is marked by a near continuous process of decline.⁸⁶⁹ These ideas do not, however, undermine the hierarchy of religions, but if anything strengthen our sense of the superiority of Muhammad and Islam.⁸⁷⁰

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that, even when al-Jīlī does appear to adopt a more benevolent view of other religions by recognising that their scriptures point towards underlying metaphysical truths, he

⁸⁶⁸ Scholem (1974), 26.

⁸⁶⁹ For this aspect of the orthodox view of history, see van Gelder (2017). For the critique by Ibn Taymiyyah of the Ibn 'Arabian notion that a form of prophecy continues, via the friends of God, after Muhammad's death, see Knysh (1999), 105-106; Sarrio (2011), 282-283; Chodkiewicz (1999a), 103.

⁸⁷⁰ Thus Hodgson (1974), 2:451: "This exaltation of Muḥammad expressed a hardening communalism which looked less to the eternal islām that could appear, as the Qur'ān makes clear, in any community, and more to the historical community in which islām was made most perfect; by the Middle Periods, the other communities were felt to be mere relics of the past, not very relevant to real life anyway."

shows little interest in actual Judaism or Christianity, the actual scriptures used by the Jews and Christians, and therefore in interreligious relations in this world.⁸⁷¹ Rather, the Jews and Christians whom he talks about are Qur'anic archetypes, dwelling in the intellectual realm of sacred history. Similarly, the Torah and Gospel seem to be relevant to him principally insofar as they, like the subjects of many of the other chapters of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, are Qur'anic themes, which thus need to be defined and interpreted, *al-Insān al-kāmil* being, as suggested in the introduction, a kind of lexicon of key Sufi metaphysical terms, many of which are taken from the Qur'an. While some contemporary scholars, such as Vincent Cornell, may wish to construct out of aspects of al-Jīlī's Sufi metaphysics an 'on-the-ground' religious pluralism, it is important to recognise that this is a modern exegetical development. As I have tried to stress here, al-Jīlī's primary interest is rather in the elaboration of his broader Ibn 'Arabian Sufi metaphysics, and it is therefore as a Sufi metaphysical theorist, not as a theorist of interreligious relations, that he should primarily be viewed. This is not to say that his Sufi metaphysical theories necessarily have no relevance for interreligious issues, or that they might not validly serve as a theoretical basis for a contemporary elaboration of a theory of interreligious relations, such as that conceived by Cornell. The point is only that al-Jīlī's own principal concern is in the metaphysical problem of the one and the many – to which his theories of universal theophany, the levels of existence, and the Perfect Man

⁸⁷¹ It should be noted that, in the final chapter of the book, al-Jīlī does display some interest in lived Judaism and Christianity, through his discussion of Jewish and Christian rituals and festivals. See al-Jīlī (1997a), 259-261. This interest does not come through, however, in his chapters on the scriptures.

constitute an attempt at an answer – and that his view of the scriptures, prophets and religions ensues from those theories.

My presentation of al-Jīlī's thought has necessarily been a preliminary one. Even on the topic of his view of sacred history and other religions there is more to say, based, for instance, on the final chapter of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, on “All of the religions and forms of worship” (*sā'ir al-adyān wa-al-'ibādāt*), in which al-Jīlī sets out the doctrines and rites of the different religions known to him.⁸⁷² All other aspects of his Sufi metaphysics also await further investigation and analysis. This thesis has hopefully made clear, however, the value of closely studying al-Jīlī's work, and its relevance for wider debates pertaining to Ibn 'Arabian Sufi thought.

⁸⁷² See *ibid.*, 252-280; Morrissey (2018).

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