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In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

In this and the next two chapters, a few examples will be given to show the role of intertextual polysemy between the Qur'an and the Bible. It is evident from the Qur'an that it is aware of the Bible, as it attempts to engage with it. This awareness might have been either oral or textual. Muḥammad might have been able to make clever associations in the Qur'an with terms used by Jews and Christians. This might further be attested by Muḥammad asking one of his scribes, Zayd ibn Thābit, to learn the books of the Jews.¹

These three chapters attempt to show that there is more sophistication in the engagement between the Qur'an and the Bible than mere borrowings, as discussed in Chapter 2. There was a lot of discussion on borrowing by previous scholars, including the likes of Abraham Geiger, Charles Torrey, William St. Clair Tisdall, and Richard Bell.

The examples in this chapter show the engagement between Qur'anic terms and Christian terminology. The first example is about the concept of Son of God and the relationship between the terms "*ibn Allah*" and "*abd Allah*." The second example is about God the Father. The third example recalls the example from Chapter 3 about the clinging unto God and how it fits in the teaching of spiritual birth through intertextuality with the Gospel of John. In Chapter 6, the fourth example demonstrates how the Qur'an is not necessarily contradicting the New Testament on the issue that Jesus Christ is begotten of God, but is attempting to interpret John's Gospel. In Chapter 7, the fifth example illustrates Qur'anic engagement with the Incarnation of the Word in the Gospel of John. The sixth example is an extensive use of intertextuality between the Qur'an with the creation story of Genesis and the Gospel of John to give an overview of the extent of the use of intertextual polysemy in hermeneutics. These examples illustrate how the Qur'an may be seen as an interpreter of the Bible and Biblical literature and not as contradicting them. As such, the notions of exclusivism, corruption (*tahrīf*) of earlier scriptures, and theology or Christology of later Muslims were perhaps not at all the intention of the Qur'an.

Since many of the examples are related to the Gospel of John, I must briefly introduce it for those who are not very familiar with it. Theologically and Christologically, the Gospel of John stands distinguished from the Synoptic Gospels.² For Muslims to understand its content, it may be wise to call it a Sufi Gospel. In that, I mean that it is very mystical and spiritual, which may be compared to the works of Ibn 'Arabī or the esoteric works of the Ismā'īlis. This, however, is not my opinion alone, as Clement of

Alexandria (d. c.215 CE), one of the Church Fathers, stated the following about the Gospel: "But John, last of all, perceiving that what had reference to the body in the gospel of our Saviour, was sufficiently detailed, and being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the Spirit, he wrote a spiritual gospel."⁴

Interfaith dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims arrives at many things in common when it comes to ethics and morality.⁵ Some may argue that irreligious individuals are even more likely to be law-abiding citizens than those who affiliate themselves with a religion,⁶ which suggests that ethics and morality are not constrained within religion.⁷ Acts of kindness and charity, for example, go beyond the borders of any religion.⁸ Whether in common sayings about generosity within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts or the sayings of Buddha and Krishna, such ethics and morality are not typically confined to only one faith.⁹ There exist commonalities between religious and even irreligious individuals when it comes down to ethics and morality.¹⁰ When interfaith dialogue discusses human values that can be observed within the contexts of humanism, it is questionable whether we are having an interfaith dialogue or discussing humanism under the cloak of faith.

When interfaith or even intra-faith dialogue starts to discuss theological issues, however, we find ourselves behind roadblocks from understanding one another. In the history of Christianity, for example, there have been many debates on theological matters such as Christology, which is the study of the nature and person of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Such debates have created schisms within the Church and many accusations of heresy.¹² Similarly, Muslim history has had theological debates between various theological schools of thought.¹³

Today, we find that interfaith theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims has reached a stalemate.¹⁴ Mahmoud Ayoub suggests that the most urgent goal of Christian-Muslim dialogue is for both parties to accept the legitimacy and authenticity of the other's traditions.¹⁵ Neither faith is ready to compromise its understanding of its sacred texts on what God or Christ is. Some of these stumbling blocks between Christianity and Islam are the concepts from the Gospels of Jesus as the Son of God, God as the Father, Jesus as Begotten of God, and the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, as will be discussed in the examples in this and the next two chapters. I do hope that, with the examples in these three chapters, a closer relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible may be seen. These examples may shed light that the theology and Christology intended by the Qur'an or Muḥammad may seem to be distinct from how it later developed in the Muslim community.

Son (ibn) of God

If the Qur'an asks Christians to follow the Gospel[s], why does it seem to attack an understanding directly found in the Gospel[s], which is the notion that Jesus is the Son of God? As it is argued that Muḥammad seems to make creative associations while engaging with the Bible, we need to investigate this apparent contradiction. The term under investigation in this example is specifically "*ibn Allah*," which is only mentioned in Qur'an 9:30. It does not generally consider the definition of "*ibn*" in "*ibn Allah*," as a

general definition of the term “*ibn*” in the Qur’an, which is mentioned many times, especially when discussing Jesus “*ibn Maryam*.” The term “*ibn*” is a polysemous term and could be used differently by the Qur’an, where I argue that its definition in the context of Qur’an 9:30 does not necessarily mean “son.”

The term Son (*huion*) of God must be distinguished from only-begotten (*monogenous*) of God. When the Qur’an often speaks against God begets or begotten, the term “*walad*” or “*yalid*” is used. The term Son of God is correctly rendered as “*ibn Allah*,” which is only mentioned in a single verse in the whole Qur’an.

³⁰ The Jews say that Ezra is “*ibn*” of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is “*ibn*” of God. Those are words from their mouths. They resemble the words of those who disbelieved before. God curse them! How they are perverted (*yu’fakūn*)!

³¹ They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God. There is no god but He! Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe. ³² They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths. But God refuses (not desires / *ya’ba*) to do aught but complete His Light, though the disbelievers be averse.¹⁶

The figure of Ezra in the Qur’an is somewhat enigmatic, especially since it is associated with the term “*ibn Allah*,” which is generally assumed to be Son of God. As such, Paul Casanova considered ‘Uzair mentioned in the Qur’an not the Biblical Ezra, but Azael, who according to haggadic literature is one of the fallen angels.¹⁷ The reasoning he provides is that he considers “*ibn Allah*” in Qur’an 9:30 as a reference to the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6:2–4 about fallen angels and that Azael is also pronounced Uziel, which could have come into Arabic as ‘Uzair.¹⁸ There have been cults of angelic veneration in Judaism.¹⁹ However, if we do take this argument as plausible, why would the Qur’an specifically mention Azael from among all other angels as whom the Jews call the Son of God? According to the midrash, Shemhazai and Azael (Azazel) are two angels who, after the creation of the human, argue with God the unworthiness of human creation, and request that they descend to earth.²⁰ However, when they do, they marry humans and beget children, who corrupt the earth as much as humans.²¹ It is said that Shemhazai repents, but Azael does not, and continues to sin and incites humans to sin.²² It is said that two he-goats are sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, one for God to pardon the sins of Israel, and one for Azael, such that he bears the sins of Israel (i.e., Leviticus 16:8–10).²³ Azael is mentioned several times in the Book of Enoch (e.g., Enoch 6:7) as one of the guards. It seems unlikely that the Jews would venerate a sinful angel as a son of God. If they were to give such divine status to any of the angels, then it would seem more appropriate to consider one of the archangels, such as Metatron, Michael, or Raphael, to name a few, who are more highly respected and venerated. However, why would the Qur’an specifically name Azael instead of the other angels that descended to earth, such as Shemhazai, who at least repented, according to Jewish tradition? Besides in Psalm 29:1, the term sons of deities (*bni alim*) is used, according to the Talmud, as a reference to the patriarchs.²⁴

There seems little to doubt that the Jews venerate and elevate the status of Ezra above Azazel, due to his role in building the Second Temple, writing the Torah, and reorganizing the Sanhedrin.²⁵ Hence, it seems counterintuitive to think the Qur'an specifically mentions Azazel as being venerated as a Son of God in a way that Christians would venerate Christ. Actually, the verse that comes after the term "*ibn Allah*" mentions that the Jews and Christians take their priests (*aḥbārahūm*) and monks (*ruhbanahūm*) as lords (*arbāban*). This could further support that 'Uzair in the Qur'an is a reference to Ezra for his role in reorganizing the Sanhedrin as an authority for the interpretation and jurisprudence of Jewish law. Ezra 7:25–26 affirms Ezra's authority in appointing judges for the Israelites. In here, as a motif, this authority invested to Ezra by the King of Persia is akin to the authority invested to Moses by God. This makes Ezra like a second Moses, who not only wrote the Torah, but also played a role in the foundation of the Sanhedrin. Also, the midrash mentions Ezra and his companions, "*Ezra wa-ḥaburato*."²⁶ In the Great Assembly, Ezra and his companions (*aḥbār*) convene to discuss Jewish law. Ezra had such a great role in the Sanhedrin and its organization that the Qur'an in the verse after mentioning Ezra as "*ibn Allah*" (i.e., Qur'an 9:31) discusses the Jews and Christians taking their priests (*aḥbār*) and monks as lords (*arbāban*).²⁷ As Christ is mentioned in both verses of Qur'an 9:30–31, the relationship between Ezra and the "*aḥbār*" is evident, while there is no relationship between Azazel or any angel with the rabbinic tradition or priesthood of ancient Judaism.

The Biblical Ezra, also known as Esdras in Greek, is considered by Casanova and Torrey to be referred by the name Idrīs in the Qur'an.²⁸ Although Richard Bell agrees with Paul Casanova and Charles Torrey,²⁹ William Montgomery Watt, in his revision of Richard Bell, does not confirm such a conclusion.³⁰ Finding the relationship between Esdras and Idrīs does not provide us with conclusive evidence that the two names are one and the same, according to James Bellamy.³¹ Also, Yoram Erder is not convinced that Ezra is Idrīs, but considers Idrīs to be Enoch.³² Arthur Jeffery considers 'Uzair a corruption of the name Ezra, in which Muḥammad either did not comprehend the name or that he deliberately made it in the diminutive form.³³

Ezra is praised in Jewish tradition for restoring the Torah after it was forgotten. Muslim tradition is aware of this praise as it is referred to by *mufasssīrīn*,³⁴ such as al-Ṭabarī and others.³⁵ Traditional Muslim history books also make mention of it, such as Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāyah wal-nihāyah*.³⁶ Ibn ḥazm, in his book *al-Faṣl fil-milal wal-ahwā' wal-niḥal*, calls Ezra by the names 'Izzar and 'Izra al-Warrāq (Ezra the Scribe) instead of 'Uzair.³⁷ Interestingly, the only verse in the Qur'an mentioning the term Son of God (*ibn Allah*) claims that the Jews call Ezra, the Son of God. This claim does not spring from any historical evidence that any Jew has ever claimed that Ezra is the Son of God. John Walker puts it as, "no historical evidence can be adduced to prove that any Jewish sect, however heterodox, ever subscribed to such a tenet."³⁸

James Bellamy suggests that the text of the Qur'an using the term Ezra as the Son of God to be a misreading of Jewish apocryphal texts (i.e., 2 Esdras 14:9 and 2 Esdras 2: 42–48).³⁹ The texts state, "For you shall be taken away from all, and from henceforth you shall remain with my Son, and with such as be like you, until the times be ended,"⁴⁰ and "So he answered and said unto me, It is the Son of God, whom they have confessed in the world. Then began I greatly to commend them that stood so stiffly for the name

of the Lord.⁴¹ Neither of these statements considers the Son of God a reference to Ezra, but as it is written in the apocryphal text named after Ezra, Muḥammad might have mistook them to be a reference to Ezra, according to Bellamy. Bellamy states, "It is clear that Muḥammad or his informant confused the name of the prophet Esdras, which is also the title of the book, with the Son of God seen by Esdras in the vision."⁴² However, such an argument seems unlikely. There are other apocryphal books that also mention the Son of God (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 2:18, 5:5, 18:13). Yet, that does not mean Muḥammad mistook the Jews calling Solomon the Son of God. Nonetheless, even if other apocryphal texts were not accessed by Muḥammad, it still seems highly unlikely that Muḥammad would make a claim against the Jews that is counterintuitive to what he already knows and understands of their religion and theology from the Jews of Madinah, if they even existed, who are more likely precursors of rabbinic Judaism.⁴³

Traditional Muslim commentators on the Qur'an realized that this claim in the Qur'an is not in accordance to the knowledge they had of the Jewish community around them. Al-Ṭabarī states that perhaps one Jew called Phinehas claimed that Ezra is the Son of God.⁴⁴ In an alternative account by the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr relate Ezra's story that God taught him the Torah after it was forgotten, and that people claimed that Ezra must be the Son of God for receiving the Torah.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, this account is not historically found in Jewish literature.⁴⁶ Al-Rāzī adds that there were possibly three Jews who came to Muḥammad claiming that they cannot believe in him since he does not state that Ezra is the Son of God.⁴⁷ Alternatively, al-Rāzī and al-Ṭabarsī suggest that there might have been a Jewish sect that made such a claim, but that this sect is currently extinct.⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥazm suggests that it is the extinct sect of Sadducees who made the claim that Ezra is the Son of God, and that they were from Yemen.⁴⁹ Al-Maqdisī (d. 355/966) narrates that when Christians claimed that the Messiah is the Son of God, in a challenge some Jews claimed that it is Ezra who holds that title.⁵⁰ He notes that Palestinian Jews made such a claim.⁵¹ Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī even gives this mythical Jewish sect a name, calling them al-Mu'tamaniyyah, and goes on to say that Christianity was influenced by them.⁵² Nonetheless, why would the Qur'an mention a statement like that about a small Jewish sect, if it ever even existed?

In actuality, the Jews in the time of Jesus found Jesus blasphemous for claiming to be the Son of God.⁵³ If the Qur'an asserts that Jews claim Ezra is the Son of God, then from the outlook, it seems to be an apparent misinformation or a misreading of apocryphal work, as some scholars have suggested.⁵⁴ Beyond Islamic scholarship and literature, there is no Jewish literature that agrees to the claim that Ezra is the Son of God.

There is yet a possibility that we might have misinterpreted and misunderstood the meaning of the term Son of God (*ibn Allah*) as mentioned in the Qur'anic verse. The Qur'anic verse is trying to explain the meaning of the term, but exegetes might have overlooked it. Using intertextual polysemy might provide us with an alternative interpretation of the term. The term for "son" (*ibn*), which is rooted in the term "*b n y*," and its various morphologies is found in the opening passages of the Book of Ezra in the Bible, but it is not understood in the sense of "son."

¹ In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

² "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build (*li-bnut*) a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.³ Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build (*w-ibn*) the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem."⁵⁵

The Book of Ezra discusses the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The word for "son" is "*ibn*" with its root word "*b n y*,"⁵⁶ which besides meaning son, also means building or the verb to build⁵⁷ and also means stone.⁵⁸ Therefore, the term Son of God (*ibn Allah*) may also mean Building of God, or more precisely, the Temple of God. The Talmud makes use of the wordplay with "*b n y*" by stating about children, "Read not 'your children (*banayikh*)' but 'your builders (*bonayikh*).'"⁵⁹ Matthew 3:9 and Luke 3:8 state Jesus saying, "God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." Although the Peshitta uses the terms "*kypha*" for stones and "*bra*" for children, it only makes us wonder if it were meant to also make a wordplay between stones (*abanim*) and children (*banim*).

The root term for "*ibn*" is "*b n*" or "*b n y*," which is a polysemous term that can mean either son or building.⁶⁰ In Hebrew and Aramaic, "*bn*" is used to mean son and to build,⁶¹ as the root Hebrew term "*b n h*" means to build.⁶² Genesis 2:22 shows God taking the rib of man and building (*yiben*) a woman. Perhaps in that sense a son is also called a "*bn*," one who is built by his parents. From the same root, the term "*ibn*" in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ethiopic also means stone,⁶³ which has a similar meaning to its Arabic cognate.⁶⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, stones are sometimes used to serve as memorials (e.g., Genesis 28:18, 31:45–46, Joshua 4:6–7). In the Jacob's ladder narrative (i.e., Genesis 28:18), the place where the stone (*ibin*) is erected is called Bethel (the House of God). In Jacob's blessings to his sons, when he blesses Joseph, he calls him "*ibin yisrael*" (Stone of Israel) and prays by the God who will help (*ya'zer*) him (i.e., Genesis 49:24–25). In the Book of Samuel, "*Ibin ha-'Ezer*" even comes to light: "Then Samuel took a stone (*ibin*) and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer (*Ibin ha-'Ezer*), saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us ('*azarnu*).'"⁶⁵

Samuel traveled year by year to Bethel, where Jacob set a stone and built an altar to God; to Gilgal, where Joshua was before setting a stone (*ibin*) that will witness against Israel in Shechem (i.e., Joshua 24:26–27) in the same place that Jacob hid the people's foreign gods on his way to Bethel (Genesis 35:1–15); and to Mizpah, where he himself set a stone (*ibin*) nearby (i.e., 1 Samuel 7:17), and where Jacob also set a stone (*ibin*) as a mark of covenant with Laban (i.e., Genesis 31:44–53). Samuel then returns to his home in Ramah, where he also built (*yibin*) an altar to God (i.e., 1 Samuel 7:18). The existence of *Ibin ha-'Ezer* in the Book of Samuel does bear an interesting homophone to "*uzayr ibn*." Its first occurrence in the Book of Samuel is where Samuel and the Israelites encamped before the battle against the Philistines (i.e., 1 Samuel 4:1). The name comes again when the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant from *Ibin*

ha-‘Ezer and take it to Ashdod (i.e., 1 Samuel 5:1), although the place is only named “*Ibin ha-‘Ezer*” after the Israelite defeat the Philistines (i.e., 1 Samuel 7:12).

Isaiah 8:14 states that God will become a stone (*ibin*) and a stumbling block to both houses of Israel, which the New Testament cites as a reference to the Messiah (i.e., Romans 9:33, 1 Peter 2:8). Isaiah 28:16 also makes a reference of a stone (*ibin*) laid down by God that the New Testament also cites as a reference to the Messiah (i.e., Romans 9:33, 1 Peter 2:6). The Messiah referred to as a stone is also mentioned in Matthew 21:42 and Acts 4:11 citing Psalm 118:22, which is the stone (*ibin*) that the builders (*bonim*) rejected. The terms “*ibn*” (stone) and “*bny*” (build) might be etymologically related in that stones are used for building.

The Book of Ezra frequently uses the term “*bn*” and its morphological permutations in the context of building the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The Book of Ezra, as an example, includes the following passage: “Be it known unto the king that we went into the province of Judea to the house of the great God, which is built (*bina*’) with great stones (*ibin*), and timber is laid in the walls, and this work (‘*abidah*) goes (‘*abad*) fast on, and prospers in their hands.”⁶⁶

In the Book of Ezra, the term “*ibn*” is used in the context of an instruction to build God’s Temple. If we intertextualize between the Qur’an and the Book of Ezra and contextualize the Qur’anic verse in accordance to the Biblical narration in the Book of Ezra to build the Temple of God in Jerusalem, then we may have an alternative meaning for the term “*ibn Allah*.” For a moment, if we consider the term “*ibn Allah*” to mean the Building of God, or in its Biblical context, the Temple of God, then the Qur’anic verse would be stating, “And the Jews say that the Temple of God is Ezra and the Christians say that the Temple of God is the Messiah.”⁶⁷ If we accept this understanding, we do know that Ezra is not himself a Temple of God, but it could be a Qur’anic allusion of the Jewish belief that the Temple of God is in Jerusalem, as stated in the Book of Ezra about building the Second Temple. Nonetheless, the term “‘*a z r*,” which is the root of the name Ezra or ‘Uzair, is a polysemous term with various meanings. It means help in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic.⁶⁸ In addition, “‘*azarah*” is sometimes associated with the ledge surrounding Ezekiel’s altar (i.e., Ezekiel 43:14, 43:17, 43:20, 45:19) or the temple court (2 Chronicles 4:9, 6:13).⁶⁹ As such, Qur’an 9:30 may be translated as, “And the Jews say Ezra (or Temple Court)⁷⁰ is the Building (Temple) of God and the Christians say the Messiah is the Building (Temple) of God.” More correctly so, the Christians do indeed state that the Messiah’s body is itself the Temple of God.⁷¹ Also, the Messiah “*ibn Allah*” might be a reference to God’s stone (*ibin*) that is a stumbling block, as referred to in the New Testament. If we are to understand the term “*ibn Allah*” in the context of Temple of God, then what seems to be the Qur’anic objection? Since the Qur’an continues to state that this is a saying with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*), it may be intertextualized with other passages of the Qur’an where this term is also used, such as,

O you who believe! Take not intimates apart from yourselves; they will not stint you in corruption. They wish you to suffer. Hatred has appeared from their mouths (*afwāhihim*); yet what their breasts conceal is greater. We have indeed made clear the signs for you, were you to understand.”⁷²

And that He may know the hypocrites. And it was said unto them, "Come, fight in the way of God or defend [yourselves]." They said, "Had we known there would be fighting, we would have followed you." That day they were closer to disbelief (*lil-kufr*) than to belief (*lil-imān*), saying with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*) what was not in their hearts. And God knows best what they conceal.⁷³

O Messenger! Let them not grieve thee, those who hasten unto disbelief (*fil-kufr*), those who say, "We believe" (*āmannā*) with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*), while their hearts believe not, and those who are Jews, who listen to lies and to others who have not come to thee. They distort the meaning of the word, saying, "If you are given this, then take it, but if you are not given this, then beware!" For whomsoever God desires that he be tried, thou hast no power to avail him aught against God. They are those whose hearts God desired not to purify. Theirs is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter they shall have a great punishment.⁷⁴

In these Qur'anic passages, it seems that when the Qur'an uses the term "with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*)" it is contrasted that what they say with their mouths is not the same as it is in their hearts. Also, Qur'an 9:30 mentions that when the Jews and Christians say things with their mouths, they imitate the unbelievers of before using the term "*kafaru*." This term is also found in Qur'an 3:167 and 5:41, as mentioned above. This could make use of a different understanding of the Qur'anic passage. If the Jews and Christians are making a claim about the Temple of God, it is nothing but a saying with their mouths, implying it is not in their hearts. Perhaps the Qur'an here is suggesting that the Jews and Christians should not only say where the Temple of God should be, either in Jerusalem as stated in the Book of Ezra or the Messiah himself as stated in the Gospel of John (i.e., John 2:21), but also they themselves should have their hearts as a Temple of God, in which I have argued in an article that the *Qiblah* passages of the Qur'an are in reality an allusion to the *Shema'* emphasizing the role of the heart over the direction of prayer.⁷⁵ From the same Qur'anic chapter, the term "with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*)" is also used in the following verse, "How, since if they prevail over you, they will not observe any kinship or treaty with you? They please you with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*), while their hearts refuse. And most of them are iniquitous."⁷⁶

The Qur'an here shows a contrast that what their mouths say is dissimilar to what is in their hearts. It appears that the Qur'an later states that those who claim the Temple of God to be that in Ezra or the Messiah attempt to extinguish God's light with their mouths and God desires not to allow it: "They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*). But God refuses to do aught but complete His Light, though the disbelievers be averse."⁷⁷

The above passage is also found in a different chapter, which also subtly uses a term rooted in "*b n y*."

¹ Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. ² O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? ³ Grievously odious is it in the Sight of God that you say that which

you do not do.⁴ Truly God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure (*bunyān*).⁵ And [remember] when Moses said unto his people, "O my people! Why do you hurt me, though you know well that I am the Messenger of God unto you?" So when they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve; and God guides not iniquitous people.⁶ And [remember] when Jesus son of Mary said, "O Children of Israel! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me whose name is Aḥmad." And when he came unto them with clear proofs, they said, "This is manifest sorcery."⁷ Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates lies against God, while he is being called to submission (*islām*)? And God guides not wrongdoing people.⁸ They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths (*bi-afwāhihim*), but God completes His Light, though the disbelievers be averse.⁷⁸

The phraseology of Qur'an 9:32 and 61:8 are the same. Also to note, both Qur'an 9 and 61 are assumed to be Madinan chapters. In Qur'an 61, what seems to be the objection is that some people attempt to extinguish God's light with their mouths by saying falsehoods. Earlier in the same chapter, it criticizes people who say what they do not do, which could mean that they say what is not truly in their hearts (i.e., Qur'an 61:2). Hence in Qur'an 9:30, one might consider that the Qur'anic objection is not what they are saying with their mouths about the Temple of God, but it is because their mouths say something different than their hearts. Perhaps their hearts should be where the Temple of God (*ibn Allah*) is or perhaps they should truly believe the Temple of God is in Jerusalem or is the Messiah, and not just say that with their mouths. The Gospel of John provides us with a distinction between the profession of faith by the lips and understanding spiritual mysteries. In the Gospel of John, Nicodemus appears to profess faith in Jesus as man of God, but nonetheless fails to understand the mysteries related in his teachings. Jouette Bassler states, "If, however, Nicodemus's [*sic*] profession of faith seems to be acceptable within the framework of this Gospel, Jesus' response to Nicodemus seems to indicate that on another level *inaccessible to the reader* it is *not* acceptable."⁷⁹ In discussing Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, Arthur Canales also arrives at the same conclusion that the profession of faith needs to be internalized in the heart,⁸⁰ and he also states, "If religion is only externalized in ritual and not internalized in a person's heart; religion becomes ineffective."⁸¹ However, though in John 3 Nicodemus seems to profess faith by the lips while not fully understanding the mysteries that Jesus is teaching, he nonetheless seems to have become a good disciple of Jesus in the later accounts in the Gospel of John (i.e., John 7:45–52 and John 19:38–42).⁸²

While discussing Qur'an 9:30, Fazlur Rahman suggests the light intended in the passage is a reference to Islam,⁸³ agreeing with classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.⁸⁴ He also recognizes the relationship between the passages in Qur'an 9:32 and 61:8.⁸⁵ If we do take into consideration intertextuality between the passages, Qur'an 61:7 talks about *islām*, which is the surrender of a person to God, and therefore, there is a possibility that the light referred to in Qur'an 61:8 might be the surrender to God. If we take this into consideration when understanding the light in Qur'an 9:32 as

well, then perhaps having the Temple of God in a person's heart is also an allusion of this surrender to God.

As another interesting note, Qur'an 61:4 uses the term "*bunyān*" meaning structure or building sharing the same root as "*ibn*." The keywords of the passages in Qur'an 9 and 61 discussed might show that these passages allude to each other. Using intertextual polysemy, as seen, may provide us with a different understanding than that seen by classical exegetes. However, perhaps the Qur'an is not trying to emphasize that Jews and Christians should not point the temples of God, either in Jerusalem or the Messiah, but they themselves need to embody the Temple of God, and this concept moves in parallel to Paul's epistle to the Corinthians.⁸⁶ "19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."⁸⁷

When Paul states "You are not your own," in this passage in 1 Corinthians, it would suggest that the person has surrendered him/herself to God, which is *islām*. Due to this surrender of the self to God, the bodies have indeed become temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul stating, "you were bought at a price," also resembles a reference within the same Qur'anic chapter:

Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of God, slaying and being slain. [It is] a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is truer to His pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made. That indeed is the great triumph.⁸⁸

There is a scholarly debate as to which "body" Paul is referring to, the individual body or the communal body (i.e., the church).⁸⁹ Jamieson et al. suggest that Paul here is using a metaphor describing the *Shekhinah*, which is typically identified as the Spirit of God, taking its place within the sanctuary of the body.⁹⁰ Commenting on Pauline understanding of the temple, Howard Marshall states the following:

Just as the Shekinah [*sic*] was present when Jews read the Torah together,⁹¹ so Jesus is present when his people meet in his name. Jesus himself is the 'temple' for his people (Jn. 2:21). It can be said, therefore, both that Jesus is the place where God is present and that his presence with his people constitutes them as the place of God's presence. Jesus both is the new temple in himself and constitutes his people as the new temple.⁹²

The *Shekhinah* (*al-Sakīnah* in Arabic) is mentioned few verses before Qur'an 9:30 (i.e., Qur'an 9:26), where the passage states that *al-Sakīnah* had descended upon the messenger and the believers. On the body being a temple of the Holy Spirit as described by Paul, Richard Pratt states, "The Holy Spirit takes up residence in believers, making their bodies a holy place for the dwelling of God's special presence."⁹³ This is a general description of the *Shekhinah*.⁹⁴

About 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, Richard Lenski states, "As the Spirit's sanctuary we belong wholly to him, and that certainly includes also our body, so that this body itself

can be called his sanctuary.”⁹⁵ Here Lenski is describing a full surrender to God. Commenting on Paul’s passage, Charles Barrett suggests that a person is a slave to sin, and thus, “he could be freed only by becoming again what he had been created to be—the son and servant of God.”⁹⁶ In other words, Barrett seems to equate being a son of God with surrendering to God by accepting being His servant. Since the context of this passage in Paul’s epistle is about fornication, then it might appear that this metaphor is that of the marriage between the body and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the statement, “you were bought at a price,” may serve two purposes as suggested by Charles Talbert that it is either similar to the purchase of slaves or the payment of a dowry.⁹⁷ Charles Hodge states that there are two characteristics of a temple. First, it is the dwelling place of God, and therefore, holy. Second, the proprietorship of a temple is God. In other words, the believer completely surrenders his self and body to God.⁹⁸

Using intertextual polysemy between the Qur’an and itself, as well as between the Qur’an and the Bible, may provide us with different insightful conclusions in such hermeneutics. These intertextualities might further indicate the polysemous nature of understanding the term “*ibn Allah*,” as a reference to the Temple of God. In Qur’an 9:30, the term “deluded from the truth (*yu’fakūn*)” is used. Here, the Qur’an asserts that the Jews and Christians who with their mouths make claims (of what is perhaps not in their hearts) are deluded from the truth (or lying) using the term “*yu’fakūn*.” The root of the term is “*i f k*” meaning “lie” in Arabic,⁹⁹ and also meaning to pervert, to reverse, or to turn back in Aramaic.¹⁰⁰ This might support the concept that the Qur’anic objection is that Jews and Christians say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, or in other words, they are lying, in which their outer appearance is not the same as their inner realities. The same term is used against the sorcerers with Moses, in which their sorcery is described as “*ya’fikūn*,” in which the outer appearance of their magic is different than its inner reality.

¹¹⁷ And We revealed unto Moses, “Cast thy staff!” And, behold, it devoured all their deceptions (*ya’fikūn*). ¹¹⁸ Thus the truth came to pass, and whatsoever they did was shown to be false. ¹¹⁹ Then and there they were vanquished and turned back (*inqalabū*), humbled. ¹²⁰ And the sorcerers were cast down prostrate. ¹²¹ They said, “We believe in the Lord of the worlds . . .”¹⁰¹

This passage describes the sorcerers as soon as they realized that Moses’ rod is eating up the magic that they tried to make; they believed in him using the term “*inqalabū*.” Accordingly, if the sorcerers lied (*ifk*), they needed to “*inqalab*,” which means to return, to put something upside down or inside out.¹⁰² However, the root of the term is “*qalb*,” which also means heart.¹⁰³ If the Jews and Christians are saying a lie by saying with their mouths what is not in their hearts, then the Qur’an might allude here that they need to internalize with their hearts (*qulūb*) what they say with their mouths.

The term “*ibn*” is polysemous. In the context of Qur’an 9:30, especially since the Qur’an talks of Ezra (or Temple Court) as “*ibn Allah*,” it specifically is an allusion to the Building of God, or more specifically the Temple of God. Hence, this is not a general definition of the term “*ibn*” in the Qur’an, but specifically the Qur’anic usage of the term “*ibn Allah*,” which is only mentioned in Qur’an 9:30.

Although the Qur'an uses the term "*ibn Allah*" in only one verse, throughout the Qur'an it points many times that God does not give birth, using the root term "*w l d*." Sometimes, this concept is given in general (e.g., Qur'an 18:4, 6:101–102, 10:68, 17:111, 19:88–93, 21:25–26, 23:91, 25:1–2, 37:149–162, 39:1–4, 43:81, 72:3, 112:3), as the ancient Arabs used to believe that some of their deities and angels are daughters of Allah.¹⁰⁴ However, some of this concept is used in the Qur'an specifically relating to Jesus Christ (e.g., Qur'an 4:171–172, 19:35–36). Noticeably, in many parts of the Qur'an, whenever it talks against God giving birth using the term "*w l d*," it confirms that the subject is a servant (*'abd*) instead. Hence, the root of the word "*'abd*" is found nearby many of the verses in the Qur'an that explicitly speak against the concept of God giving birth (*w l d*) (e.g., Qur'an 6:101–102, 19:88–93, 21:25–26, 25:1–2, 37:149–162, 39:1–4, 43:81), and especially when the notion of God giving birth (*w l d*) to Jesus Christ is rejected, it reaffirms that Jesus Christ is a "*'abd*" of God (i.e., Qur'an 4:171–172, 19:35–36).

¹⁷¹ O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter anything concerning God save the truth. Verily the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word, which He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three." Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God; Glory be to Him that He should have a child (*w l d*). Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God suffices as a Guardian. ¹⁷² The Messiah would never disdain to be a "*'abd*" of God; nor would the angels brought nigh. Whosoever disdains His service (*'ibadatih*), and is arrogant, He will gather them unto Himself all together.¹⁰⁵

The usage of the word "*'abd*" by the Qur'an carries an interesting understanding of the term "*ibn Allah*," which is not necessarily born of God (*w l d Allah*). The word "*'abd*" carries several meanings, in which the most common meaning is servant or slave.¹⁰⁶ However, "*ta'abbud*" also means to worship,¹⁰⁷ "*abbada*" and "*ta'bid*" also mean to make, to create, to form, or to produce, as in building a road (*ta'bid al-Tariq*).¹⁰⁸ In Hebrew and Aramaic, the term includes the meaning to make, to labor, to serve, to worship, to create, to perform, or to act.¹⁰⁹ Its usage in the meaning to make and to create is especially used in the Bible in the Books of Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel (e.g., Ezra 4:15, 19, 22, 5:8, 6:8, 11–13, 16, 7:18, 21, 23, 26, Jeremiah 10:11, Daniel 2:5, 3:1, 15, 29, 4:2, 35, 5:1, 6:10, 22, 27, 7:21). The root of the terms "*ibn*" and "*'abd*" are also used together in Ezra 5:8. It is perhaps because a servant or a slave (*'abd*) performs, labors, or makes (*yu'abbid*) things that he is called a "*'abd*."¹¹⁰

Conclusion

The Qur'an rejects the term born of God (*w l d Allah*) in favor of the word "*'abd*," especially whenever it distinctively speaks of Jesus Christ. However, it does not favor the word "*'abd*" when it uses the term "*ibn Allah*." There is perhaps a relationship between the meaning of the terms "*'abd*" and son "*ibn*" in Muḥammad's mind. As "*ibn*" means to build, and from "*ibn*" comes the form "*mabna*," which means building, so is

from the word “*abd*” comes the form “*ma‘bad*,” which means temple. Hence, if the term “*ibn Allah*” can be an allusion to the Building of God (*mabna Allah*), so can the term “*‘abd Allah*” be an allusion to the Temple of God (*ma‘bad Allah*). The Ka‘bah in Makkah, which is a Temple of God, is called “*al-baniyyah*.”¹¹¹ Also, as “*‘abd Allah*” could mean made by God so is “*ibn Allah*” could mean built by God.¹¹² The Qur’an emphasizes the term “*‘abd*” instead of “*walad*,” but it does not show this preference when it critiques the term “*ibn*.” The reason may lie in the relationship between the polysemous meanings of the terms “*‘abd*” and “*ibn*.” Also, the term “*‘abd Allah*” could mean the work of God, as His work comes through His servants, who work for Him. As such, if the Qur’an prefers the term “*‘abd*” for Jesus, it should not be seen as derogatory to Christian Christology, for even the Gospel of John shows the Son doing the work and the will of the Father (e.g., John 5:19–47).

There is also a likelihood that Qur’an 9:30 is alluding to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and the Christian concept of Jesus as the Temple of the Body. There is also a likelihood that when Qur’an 9:30 states, “That is a saying from their mouths,” does not necessarily mean that what is said is not true. Rather, it might mean that they do not believe in what they are saying—saying something with their mouths, when their hearts are averse to it.

Fatherhood of God

How would Muḥammad reconcile the Gospel[s], which he asks the Christians to follow, and the notion of the Fatherhood of God? The answer may be investigated from a linguistic point of view using intertextual polysemy as well with Muḥammad’s creative state of mind. The root of the word for father in Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic is “*ab*.”¹¹³ If the term is related to “*abah*” or “*aby*,” it can mean desire or be willing in Hebrew and Aramaic,¹¹⁴ or it can mean unwilling or undesired in Arabic and Ethiopic.¹¹⁵ In Arabic, the root “*a b y*” usually means desiring not.¹¹⁶ A more accurate word for the term God the Father is “*āb*,” when compared to the term for father (*ab*), in which its root could be “*a w b*” or “*a y b*.”¹¹⁷ The term “*abah*” meaning desire, in Aramaic and in Hebrew, is utilized numerous within the Pentateuch (e.g., Genesis 24:5, 24:8, Exodus 10:27, Leviticus 26:21, Deuteronomy 1:26). However, the Bible mainly uses this word in a negative manner, usually to show that something is not desirable or not to follow. Rarely, however, has it been used in a positive context (e.g., Isaiah 1:19). In Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, the term “*awb*” or “*ayb*” means to return to, as in “*iyāb*” meaning to return, as well as “*awwāb*” meaning one who returns.¹¹⁸ The term “*twb*” also means to return,¹¹⁹ and as such “*awwāb*” and “*tawwāb*” can be synonymous.¹²⁰ Although in Hebrew and Aramaic, the root “*ayb*” is typically used for enemy, as it is also used in Akkadian and Ugaritic to allude to enemy,¹²¹ the term may actually be rooted in the meaning to return, as it is used in Arabic. The Arabic term for enemy, as used by the Qur’an, is “*adw*.” Its relationship with “*awd*” is a possibility, as ambiguously used in Qur’an 17:8.¹²²

The Qur’an states that the place of desire or return (*al-ma‘āb*) is to God (i.e., Qur’an 3:14, 13:29, 13:36). The meaning of “*ma‘āb*” as a place of return (*marja‘*) is also evident

in classical Qur'anic commentaries, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr.¹²³ The Qur'an also uses the term "*awwābīn*" for those who desire God or return to God (i.e., Qur'an 17:25, 38:19, 50:32). The Qur'an also uses the words for servant or temple (*'abd*) several times within the same verse or proximity as the term for return or desire (*ma'āb*) (i.e., Qur'an 13:36, 78:39). The Qur'an even describes, within the same verse, David and Solomon as "*'abd*" and as those who desired or returned to God (*awwāb*) (i.e., Qur'an 38:17, 30). The linguistic style of the Qur'an describes Job (Ayyūb), whose root name also means return or desire,¹²⁴ as a "*'abd*" who desired or returned to God (*awwāb*) (i.e., Qur'an 38:44). Chapter Ṣād actually uses the terms "*awwāb*" and "*ma'āb*" many times (e.g., Qur'an 38:25, 38:40, 38:49). In a couple of verses, the Qur'an uses the term "*ma'āb*" negatively, as a place of bad desire or a bad place to return to (i.e., Qur'an 38:55, 78:22). The Qur'an has also used the term "*aby*" immediately after it talks about the concept of "*ibn Allah*." The term "*ya'ba*" from the root "*a b y*" is used to mean that God refuses or desires not His Light to be extinguished by people's mouths.

³⁰ The Jews say that Ezra is "*ibn*" of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is "*ibn*" of God. Those are words from their mouths. They resemble the words of those who disbelieved before. God curse them! How they are perverted (*yu'fakūn*)!

³¹ They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God. There is no god but He! Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe. ³² They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths. But God refuses (not desires/ *ya'ba*) to do aught but complete His Light, though the disbelievers be averse.¹²⁵

The Qur'an has also used the same root word (*a b y*) for Satan's sin. Satan's only sin, according to the Qur'an, was his pride and having an ego (e.g., Qur'an 2:34, 15:31, 20:116). Perhaps the Qur'an tries to portray a message that this is the type of desire that needs to be uprooted, while planting the desire of selflessness. Also, the Qur'an uses the same word for Pharaoh not desiring or refusing God's request through Moses, "And We verily did show him (Pharaoh) all Our Signs, but he denied them and refused (*aba*)."¹²⁶ It is also the same word stated in Exodus with Pharaoh's refusal: "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not (*abah*) let them go."¹²⁷

Conclusion

Besides meaning God the Father (*al-āb*), Muḥammad perhaps imagined the term to also mean that God is the one desired or returned to. However, this does not mean that God the Father and the Son of God have completely different meanings than those known as some mystical filial relationship, which shall be shown in the next section. However, Muḥammad seems to have made creative associations from his understandings of the Gospel[s], while reciting the Qur'an. He capitalizes on polysemous Arabic terms in choosing specific words that provide double meanings in constructing his arguments.

Spiritual birth

In Chapter 3, the method of intertextual polysemy used to portray the clinging of the fetus in the mother's womb is used as a metaphor for those who cling unto God. Spiritually, it describes the creation of the human being as being born of God in a metaphorical sense. In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes the Divine Mystery of being born again. The significance of this mystery in the Gospel of John is that the Gospel speaks so expressively about the Son of God immediately after talking about the process of spiritual birth (i.e., John 3:1–21):

³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴ "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.¹²⁸

The Gospel of John makes great use of symbolism.¹²⁹ Mary Coloe says about this passage, "The literal meaning is nonsense forcing the hearer/reader to look for a 'surplus of meaning.' So Nicodemus is asked to go beyond the literal meaning of 'birth' to a deeper meaning."¹³⁰ This is a notion that would be agreeable to the Stoics, Philo, and Averroës, as discussed in Chapter 2. In the passage, the use of symbolism in the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus concerning rebirth also shows that such symbolism remains enigmatic even to the highly learned in the community. As William Grese says, "The heavenly journey set before Nicodemus is not a trip through the heavens to God, but through the enigmas and riddles that surround the heavenly

revelation made available in Jesus.”¹³¹ The statements that are made by Jesus in regard to the rebirth are meant to be allegorically interpreted. Hence, it is meant to be seen as a symbol. Grese continues to state, “Nicodemus is not only superficial; he is also unable to pass beyond a very physical interpretation of rebirth as a repetition of the first birth.”¹³² Jesus’ teachings on the concept of rebirth go beyond the physical interpretation. As such, the understanding of Jesus as Begotten of God, which the passage continues to elaborate on, would only be understood allegorically as well. Grese suggests that Nicodemus represents people who do not have a full grasp of the allegorical nature of Jesus’ discourse, where he states, “In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus is speaking to a representative of the world (in the dark).”¹³³ The reason Grese suggests it is in the dark is due to symbols in the text. Nicodemus comes at night asking questions, which is a representative of darkness, a meaning that Bassler also concurs with.¹³⁴ This interpretation, which is both literal and symbolic, is also evident in the interpretation of the early church fathers. Origen takes into consideration that Nicodemus came at night to secretly meet Jesus, but it is also symbolic of the night of his own ignorance.¹³⁵ Augustine makes a similar reference that Nicodemus seeing Jesus at night is symbolic of those in darkness seeking the light.¹³⁶ John the Evangelist appears to be very precise in his contrast between light and darkness, and this is even seen from the very beginning of his Gospel, where he speaks of John the Baptist, who is not the light, but coming to witness for it (i.e., John 1:6–8). Due to this precise use of words by John, then the detail of Nicodemus coming by night would serve this precise Evangelist’s contrast,¹³⁷ and perhaps the irony of coming in the night to the Light of the World, as identified in his prologue.¹³⁸

The concept of rebirth from a spiritual understanding is not necessarily foreign to the Jews, and as such could be the reason why Jesus tells Nicodemus that he is a teacher of Israel and still does not understand this concept. According to the Talmud, a proselyte is like a newborn baby.¹³⁹ Hence, the rebirth in Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus may be viewed as a spiritual conversion, which as a concept should not be alien to a Jewish teacher. Such a concept is also similar to that in Islam for a new convert, who is considered like a newborn infant,¹⁴⁰ as it is also the same as those performing ḥajj, where their sins are wiped out like the day they were born, as stated in the prophetic tradition, “Who comes to this house (Ka‘bah) and avoids sexual relations and sins, returns like the day his mother bore him.”¹⁴¹

The Qur’an describes the spiritual birth of the human being when comparing and analyzing the verses in *sūrah al-‘Alaq* and *sūrah al-Rahmān*. The physical is used as a metaphor to describe the spiritual. Now that the term for being born again may be understood from a spiritual context, then those who are spiritually born of God, through the process of being born again, as described by the Gospel of John and alluded to by the Qur’an, may be called spiritual sons of God. As such, the Gospel of John talks about Christ Begotten of God and alluding to him as a son immediately after the narrative of being born again (i.e., John 3:16–17). This may also be intertextualized within the Gospel, where Jesus describes that people who enter heaven must become like little children,¹⁴² for even the wording used in the verses, below, about those who enter the Kingdom of God is very similar to the wordings used by Jesus for those who are born again/from above (e.g., Matthew 19:13–15), especially

since the Kingdom of God is only mentioned in the Gospel of John in the Nicodemus narrative.

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.¹⁴³

According to Islamic tradition, the first verses of Qur'anic revelation are Qur'an 96:1–5.¹⁴⁴ As these verses are found to be a possible allusion to spiritual birth, perhaps it is alluding to Muḥammad's own spiritual birth. Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night, as Muḥammad claimed that revelation came to him at night. Muḥammad called the night of his revelation the Night of Measure (*laylah al-qadr*). What is interesting is that the term "*qadr*" in Hebrew and Aramaic means darkness.¹⁴⁵ If we assume that this definition also existed in Arabic in the past, then perhaps *laylah al-qadr* would also mean the night of darkness. The Qur'an describes itself to have been revealed at night calling it *laylah al-qadr*. Perhaps the Qur'an attempts to state that it has been revealed in the darkness of the night to take people out of darkness into the light. "¹ Truly We sent it down in the Night of Power. ² And what shall apprise thee of the Night of Power? ³ The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. ⁴ The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. ⁵ Peace it is until the break of dawn."¹⁴⁶

If Qur'an 96:1–5, which is described in Islamic tradition to have been revealed during *laylah al-qadr*, is an allusion to spiritual birth as described in the Gospel of John, then we need to search for further clues that connect *laylah al-qadr* with the Gospel of John.¹⁴⁷ The Qur'an describes *laylah al-qadr* as a night when the angels and the Spirit descend until dawn. The Gospel of John does talk about angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. "He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'"¹⁴⁸

This passage in the Gospel of John is, in itself, a possible allusion to Jacob's ladder.¹⁴⁹ Jacob sees a vision *at night* of a heavenly ladder, which angels ascend and descend on (i.e., Genesis 28:12). The term for the stone that Jacob uses as a pillow in Genesis 28:11, 28:18, and 28:22 is "*ibn*." John 1:51 may be referring to Jesus as the stone (*ibn*) pillar or ladder to heaven. This, in particular, may be John's intention since the stone pillar erected by Jacob in Genesis 28:22 is considered God's house, even calling the place Bethel, which means God's house (i.e., Genesis 28:19). In John 2:19–21, it becomes evident that Jesus' body is itself described as the Temple of God or God's house. Perhaps John suggests that the oil that Jacob pours on the stone pillar (i.e., Genesis 28:18) is symbolizing Jesus as the anointed one (Messiah), especially when Genesis 31:13 recounts the pouring of oil in Bethel and calls the ritual "*mashaḥṭa*" (same root as messiah) for anointing it.

The detail that this ladder is seen at night is perhaps used by the Qur'an in that the descent of the angels and the Spirit occur also at night during *laylah al-qadr*. The

Hebrew Bible calls Jacob's ladder "*sullam*." This term is only used once in the whole text of the Hebrew Bible and it is cognate to the Arabic term for ladder as well, which is also "*sullam*."¹⁵⁰ In the earliest texts of the Qur'an, the term "*salām*" and "*sullam*" is written in the same manner of "*s l m*," which may be seen in Qur'an 97:5. However, even though the intertextuality between the terms "*sullam*" and "*salām*" may be a point of coincidence, Muḥammad's perception of angels coming down on *laylah al-qadr* might still, in itself, be an allusion to Jacob's ladder. According to Qur'an 97:5, one may infer that the descent of angels and the Spirit cease at dawn, which may be likened to the detail in Genesis 28:18 that states Jacob taking the stone that was under his head and erects it as a pillar in the early morning.

As Qur'an 97:4 describes angels and the Spirit descending in *laylah al-qadr*, which is better than a thousand months, Qur'an 70:4 describes the angels and the Spirit ascending in a day (note that it opposes the night), which measures fifty thousand years. The term used for measure is "*miqdār*," which is also rooted in "*q d r*." Perhaps it is just a coincidence, but Qur'an 70:8 describes the heaven as oil, while Jacob put oil on the stone he slept on, after seeing the vision of the ladder to heaven (i.e., Genesis 28:18).

In another place, the Qur'an describes how nonbelievers ask for the angels to descend so that they may believe (i.e., Qur'an 15:7). The response is that angels do not descend except with "*ḥaqq*" (truth) (i.e., Qur'an 15:8). Then, it says that God sent down "*al-dhikr*" (Qur'an) (i.e., Qur'an 15:9), which is related to Qur'an 15:6 when the nonbelievers ask the person who "*al-dhikr*" descended upon. Then, the Qur'an describes how previous messengers were also not believed (i.e., Qur'an 15:10–13). Afterward, the Qur'an states that even if a gate of heaven opened and they ascend (i.e., Qur'an 15:14), they would claim that it is just an illusion (i.e., Qur'an 15:15). In Qur'an 15:7–15, the nonbelievers challenge Muḥammad to have angels descend so they may believe in him. Then, it says that the angels only descend in "*ḥaqq*" and that the Qur'an descended from God. Qur'an 15:8–9 is perhaps an allusion to the Qur'an descending in *laylah al-qadr* (i.e., Qur'an 97:1), when the angels do indeed descend (i.e., Qur'an 97:4). Qur'an 15:14–15 state that if a gate of heaven opens and they ascend, they would still not believe. Qur'an 15:21 states that anything that descends is with a known measure (*qadar*), which is also rooted in "*q d r*." If Qur'an 15:8–9 is an allusion to Qur'an 97:4, then there is a likelihood that both are allusions to Genesis 28:12 and John 1:51, since Qur'an 15:14 speaks of a gate of heaven opening, similar to Jacob describing the place as the gate of heaven in Genesis 28:17 and John 1:51 quotes Jesus that heaven opens.

In yet another place, Qur'an 32:5 states, "He arranges matter (*yudabbir al-amr*) from the heaven to the earth; then it will ascend to Him in a day measured (*miqdāruhu*) a thousand years of those which you count." Here, although this passage does not talk about angels, it might be a reference to the Spirit, using the term "*amr*," which Qur'an 17:85 associates with the Spirit. Also, as subsequently will be illustrated in the last example of Chapter 7, the term "*yudabbir al-amr*" might be an allusion to the Messiah. In addition, this passage also uses the term "*miqdār*," which is rooted in "*qdr*." If Qur'an 32:5 is an allusion to Qur'an 97:1–5, then perhaps both are allusions to Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28:17 and John 1:51.

These could be additional clues of allusions between traditionally the first passages of the Qur'an with the Gospel of John making further indication that the Qur'an might have alluded to Muḥammad's own spiritual birth from above, and therefore, he is trying to assume authority that he is receiving a heavenly message from the Spirit and the archangel Gabriel that descended on him in *laylah al-qadr*.

Conclusion

Here we see that comparing the intertextual polysemy within the Qur'an about those who spiritually cling unto God with the Gospel of John brings us to a good example of the method of intertextual polysemy. If a person clings unto God as a fetus clings into its mother's womb, then it could be an allusion of spiritual birth and the person spiritually becoming a child of God. Hence, the Qur'an may not necessarily speak against God having children, as long as it emphasizes that these are to be understood spiritually and not physically. However, on the Qur'anic understanding of "*walad*" and its use of Jesus, the next chapter, I hope, would provide further insights.