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*The city of Kūfa, the birthplace of Shi‘ism and a center of debates about the delegation of divine powers (tafwīd)*

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**Abstract**

The city of Kūfa, which can be considered as the birthplace of Shi‘ism, was in the first centuries of Islam the center of debates about *tafwīd*, the delegation by God of His powers to His first creature — the Prophet, the Imam or Christ, all preexistent to the creation of the world — or, in a more restricted form limited to human actions, to whole mankind. These debates went beyond the doctrinal borders between sects and movements, as they were fixed by heresiographers and the different Islamic orthodoxies that were progressively established. Our enquiry deals with Shī‘īs of all convictions — Imāmīs, Zaydīs, Ismā‘īlīs, Nuṣayrīs and other *ghulāt* — Khārijites, Mu‘tazilīs and Sunnis, but also Karaite Jews, all sharing similar doctrines of delegation, in an attempt to overcome the dangers of a strict monotheism.

**Keywords**

Shi‘ism — Mu‘tazilism — Kūfa — *ghuluww* — delegation (*tafwīd*) — Neoplatonism — Karaites.

**Shī‘ī Islam is born in Mesopotamia**

Heinz Halm considered Shi‘ism as “a purely Iraqi phenomenon” (*ein rein irakisches Phänomen*). In the words of the Shī‘ī Mu‘tazilī theologian Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258): “The [Shī‘ī] extremists (*ghulāt*) were all native from Iraq and many of them were based in Kūfa”<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, after ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's victory on his enemies Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr and ‘Ā’isha during the famous “battle of the camel” near Baṣra in 36/656, Iraq became the headquarters of the *shī‘at ‘Alī* (“the party of ‘Alī”), as it was an ideal place to fight against the Umayyads in Damascus.

The Arab conquest of Mesopotamia under the caliphate of ‘Umar (13/634-23/644) was consolidated by the foundation of military strongholds (Baṣra in 14/635, Kūfa in 17/638), with the main purpose to settle Arab tribes involved in this conquest. But soon a local non-Arab population joined them, freshly converted to Islam or still faithful to their ancestral religious traditions. During the first three centuries of Islam, the main cities of Mesopotamia, such as al-Madā’in (the ancient Seleucia Ctesiphon, capital of the Sassanids), Baṣra, Kūfa and Bagdad (founded by the Abbasids in

<sup>1</sup> Halm, *Die Schia*, p. 187; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, quoted in Amir-Moezzi, “Les Imams et les Ghulāt”, p. 30.

145/762) had an important Shī'ī population. Being impressive laboratories of ideas, where concepts borrowed from different Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Manichaean or Zoroastrian movements were more or less successfully integrated into a nascent Islamic religion, these cities were the scene of continuous rebellions, often with a messianic undertone, led by descendants of 'Alī who tried to overthrow what they considered as the illegitimate regime of the Umayyads and the Abbasids<sup>2</sup>.

Among these Iraqi cities, Kūfa, where 'Alī was murdered in 40/661, may be considered as the real cradle of Shi'ism<sup>3</sup>. A patchwork of Shī'ī movements appeared there, operating in the name of different pretenders to the imamate. Muslim heresiographical sources usually present these movements as independent, competing and antagonistic "sects". Most of them are labeled by the same authors as "extremists" (*ghulāt*), guilty of "extremism" or "exaggeration" (*ghuluww*), a vague term with different connotations, but generally used in order to condemn doctrines considered as heretical by the later Sunnī and Shī'ī orthodoxies: divinization of Prophets and Imams, transmigration of souls, rejection of Islamic law<sup>4</sup>. With these "extremists" coexisted in 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century Kūfa more "moderate" Shi'ites: the Zaydīs with their different fractions (*Butriyya*, *Jārūdiyya*, *Kāmiliyya*) and famous Imāmī theologians such as Abū Ja'far b. al-Nu'mān, surnamed *Shayṭān al-Ṭāq* (d. ca. 180/796), and Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 199/814). Finally, the Khārijites were represented by nascent Ibādism, whereas the Sunnis were divided into Murji'ites, Ḥanafites, Sufis and Qadarites<sup>5</sup>.

This overview, depending on the later heresiographical tradition, has however to be considered with caution. In that early period the doctrinal boundaries between the different branches of Shi'ism and Sunnism were not yet established in a precise

<sup>2</sup> For a general overview of the origins of Shi'ism, see Halm, *Die Schia*, pp. 6-40; Haider, *The origins of the Shī'a*; for the Mesopotamian intellectual climate in which it appeared, see Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis*, pp. 16-23 and, above all, Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim conquest*.

<sup>3</sup> On the foundation of Kūfa, its shape and its development, see the well-documented study by Dja'it *Al-Kūfa*; on the qualities attributed to the city in Islamic tradition, see Friedman, "Kūfa is Better", pp. 203-237.

<sup>4</sup> This attitude is illustrated by the Shī'ī heresiographers al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912 and 310/922) and his contemporary Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī. Their respective works, *Kitāb Firaq al-Shī'a* and *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, belong to our main sources for the dogmatic history of the beginnings of Shi'ism. Both were written shortly after the minor occultation of the twelfth Imam in 260/874, when a new orthodoxy began to be established in Imāmī Shi'ism.

<sup>5</sup> This catalogue of movements is mainly based on the first volume of van Ess' monumental *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, pp. 151-416. Moreover, van Ess provides (*ibid.*, pp. 416-456) an overview of "heretical" non-Muslim communities (the *zindīq*) attested in 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century Kūfa, such as the Manichaeans, Daysanites, Marcionites and Kantians. However, the Shī'ī *ghulāt* are curiously absent from his presentation.

and distinct way<sup>6</sup>. Hence, interpenetration and mutual influences between these at first sight incompatible movements, acting simultaneously in one and the same city, seem inevitable.

In the following pages, I will try to illustrate this porosity by focusing on a theological concept, which seems to have been formed in Kūfa: the notion of *tafwīd* or “delegation”<sup>7</sup>.

### The delegation of God's powers

The Iraqi cities of Kūfa and Baṣra played a central role in the appearance of a theological reflection in Islam. Beside the thorny question about who was endowed with the political and religious authority over the Muslim community and about the nature of this authority, the debates were animated by theological problems raised in most cases by the numerous contradictions and obscurities in the text of the Qur’ān. Among the various questions debated during these first centuries, two topics seem to be of a particular importance.

First of all, how can the belief in a one and unique God (the dogma of *tawḥīd*), whose transcendence makes Him totally different from His creatures, be harmonized with the anthropomorphic verses of the Qur’ān, attributing to God hands, feet, a throne, along with human feelings, names and attributes?

Second, how to understand God's omnipotence, stressed throughout the Qur’ān, without falling into a total determinism, which destroys human liberty and responsibility? In the same way, how to explain the imperfections and evil in the world, as the latter is supposed to be the creation of a perfect Creator?

These classical questions were answered in very different ways<sup>8</sup>. One of the proposed solutions was to maintain that the unique, transcendent and omnipotent God

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<sup>6</sup> See the pertinent remarks of Buckley, “The early Shiite *Ghulāh*”, pp. 301-325. In the same way, the distinction between “extremist” and “moderate” Shī’īs is rather artificial in the period under consideration, as shown by Amir-Moezzi, “Les Imams et les Ghulāt”.

<sup>7</sup> In order to avoid any misunderstanding, let us clarify from the outset that this paper is not about *tafwīd* in Islamic law, where the term means the delegation of a power to a third person, in particular in cases related to divorce (*tafwīd al-ṭalāq*), nor about the *tafwīd al-amr li-llāh* of the Ḥanbalī theologians: “to leave something to God”, in relation with the interdiction to interpret obscure passages of the Qur’ān, the meaning of which is supposed only to be known by God. In consequence, the different acceptations of the term in Sunnism, as exposed in the entry *Tafwīd* of the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. Esposito, p. 310, are outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> For the Mu‘tazilite answer, see De Smet, “L’impuissance de Dieu”, pp. 321-337.

delegated (part of) His powers to some of His creatures, if not to mankind in its entirety. This “delegation”, designated by the term *tafwīd*, appears in many different versions, in function of the nature of the delegated powers and of the beneficiaries of this delegation.

In order to solve the opposition between divine transcendence and anthropomorphism, a radical position, at first sight surprising in a Muslim context, was adopted in the Shī‘ī circles of Kūfa: the unique and transcendent God created a second God “with a human face”, and delegated to him the creation and the governance of the world. This first created being is sometimes identified with the Prophet Muhammad, sometimes with ‘Alī, or with the *ahl al-bayt* (Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn), or with an Imam of their descent. A variant of this thesis, professed outside the inner Shī‘ī circles, identifies the demiurge with Christ, the Verb or the Son created by God, a position close to Christian Arianism. The Ismaili branch of Shi‘ism adopted the conception of *tafwīd*, but translated it into Neoplatonic terms: the first creature then becomes the Universal Intellect.

At the same time, the notion of *tafwīd* is used in Kūfa in order to save human liberty from the absolute determinism proclaimed by some theologians. God delegated part of His powers to mankind, which receives in this way the possibility to act freely. This last topic will be shortly raised at the end of the paper, opening some paths of reflection about the possible link between the two forms of *tafwīd*: “delegation” to a subaltern creating God and delegation to mankind.

### ***God delegates His powers to His first creature***

#### *The Shī‘ī circles of Kūfa*

Although Islam is supposed to be a strictly monotheistic religion<sup>9</sup>, some Muslim minds conceived the idea to split the figure of Allāh in two distinct divinities, a God of the heaven and a God of the earth, invoking Qur’ān 43:84: “And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God”. Thus, the Imāmī theologian native from Kūfa, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 199/814), has transmitted the following tradition from

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<sup>9</sup> This is explicitly stated throughout the Qur’ān, as for instance: “That then is God your Lord; there is no God but He, the Creator of everything” (Qur’ān 6:102); “Is there any creator, apart from God, who provides for you out of heaven and earth? There is no God but He” (Qur’ān 35:3). All Qur’ānic verses are quoted in Arthur John Arberry's translation.

the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) about Bayān b. Sam‘ān, an “extremist” executed in Kūfa in 119/737:

I said [to Ja‘far al-Šādiq]: “Bayān understood the verse ‘And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God’ (Qur’ān 43:84), as if the one in earth is different from the God in heaven and the God in heaven is different from the God in earth. The God in heaven is mightier than the God in earth; the inhabitants of the earth know the eminence of the God in heaven and worship him”. [The Imam] answered: “By God, there is only the unique God; He has not as companion a God in heaven and a God in earth. Bayān lied - that God’s malediction be with him!”<sup>10</sup>.

Al-Kashshī (d. ca. 340/951), who reported this tradition, belonged to a time when Twelver Shī‘ī orthodoxy began to be established, what implied that all forms of “extremism” (*ghuluww*) were tracked. Imam Ja‘far’s curse against Bayān is stereotypical, as similar formulas occur in numerous traditions reporting the doctrines of the “extremists”<sup>11</sup>. If, for the historian, it is difficult to determine the real position of the Imams towards this kind of teaching, it seems that Bayān was not the only Shī‘ī from Kūfa to deduce the doctrine of the two Gods from Qur’ān 43:84. A given Ma‘mar or Mu‘ammar, a disciple of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb (d. ca 138/755)<sup>12</sup> operating in Kūfa during the lifetime of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, is reported to have done the same. According to al-Nawbakhtī, his followers claimed that:

Ja‘far [al-Šādiq] and Abū l-Khaṭṭāb are two magnificent angels (*malakān ‘azīmān*) close to the highest God (*al-ilāh al-a‘zam*), the God in heaven, whereas Mu‘ammar is the God in earth. He obeys to the God in heaven, and recognizes His favors and His power<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, al-Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī, a famous transmitter of traditions of Ja‘far al-Šādiq and related to the *Khaṭṭābiyya*, is accused to have falsely attributed to

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, n° 547, p. 304; cf. Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 59; Tucker, “Bayān b. Sam‘ān”, pp. 248-249; Id., *Mahdis*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>11</sup> To give only one example, al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, n° 587, p. 323: al-Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī ascribes to Ja‘far al-Šādiq the doctrine that the Imams provide men with their means of subsistence (*arzāq*). Ja‘far reacts by saying that this prerogative only belongs to God and he curses al-Mufaḍḍal. Modarressi, *Crisis*, p. 21, presents the rejection of “extremism” by the Imams as an established fact that cannot be doubted, although he does not provide any evidence for this. Modarressi’s book, which treats in detail the question of *tafwīd* (pp. 19-51), is unfortunately biased by outspoken ideological positions. For the still controversial issue about the attitude of the Imams towards the “extremist” opinions of some of their disciples, see now Amir-Moezzi, “Les Imams et les Ghulāt”.

<sup>12</sup> On this emblematic figure of Kūfan Shi‘ism under Ja‘far al-Šādiq and his numerous disciples, the *Khaṭṭābiyya*, see Amir-Moezzi, “*Khaṭṭābiyya*”, pp. 127-129.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 40; cf. Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 210.

the Imam, among other heresies, the distinction between the God in heaven and the God in earth, the latter being no other than the Imam himself<sup>14</sup>.

In the same period, and still in Kūfa, Qur'ān 43:84 was invoked by the *Ṭayyāriyya*, the partisans of 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiyya, who rebelled in Kūfa against the Umayyads in 127/744:

They claim that God is on the throne and that the deity (*al-lāhūt*) is the Spirit of sanctity (*rūḥ al-quḍs*), which transmigrates into the bodies of the Imams. They describe the Imams and the messengers as the Christians describe Jesus, son of Mary [...]. They maintain that the Imams are gods, quoting as proof God's word: "And it is He who in heaven is God and in earth is God" (Qur'ān 43:84), that is the Imam<sup>15</sup>.

All these passages, as they are reported by the heresiographers, imply that the godhead is divided into two distinct beings: a heavenly God and an earthly God, the latter being subordinated to the first and identified with the Prophets and the Imams. Such a dualism is of course incompatible with Islamic monotheism, what could explain Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's angry reaction against the claims attributed to Bayān b. Sam'ān. However, in the absence of any confirmation stemming from contemporary Shī'ī texts, it is legitimate to raise the question if the doctrine was really formulated in this form.

Indeed, nearly three verses higher in the same *sūra* 43, we read: "Say: If the All-merciful has a son, then I am the first to serve him" (*qul in kāna lil-rahmāni waladun fa'anā awwalu l-'ābidīna*) (Qur'ān 43:81). It is not so difficult to read the conditional as an affirmation (by changing *in* into *inna* and forcing somehow the syntax) and to conclude that Allāh had actually a son: the first being created by Him, His first creature, identified with the God in earth of Qur'ān 43:84. This interpretation was proposed by an ally of Bayān b. Sam'ān, executed in the same year 119/737 in Kūfa, al-Mughīra b. Sa'īd, who claimed that:

<sup>14</sup> Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, n° 588, p. 325. Al-Mufaḍḍal is often quoted as a transmitter of traditions related to *tafwīd*; see Asatryan, *Controversies*, pp. 52, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Abū Tammām, *Kitāb al-Shajara*, pp. 111 (Arabic text), 103 (transl.). The *Ṭayyāriyya* are also known under the name *Janāḥiyya*, two denominations referring to the forefather of 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiyya, Ja'far al-Ṭayyār, the brother of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, nicknamed *Dhū l-janāhayn*, because he would have received upon his death two wings in order to ascend to heaven; cf. Tucker, "'Abd Allāh ibn Mu'āwiya", p. 51; Id., *Mahdis*, p. 101; Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 388, n. 700. For another explanation of the term *ṭayyāra*, see Modarressi, *Crisis*, p. 22, n. 25.

[God] created the shadows (*zilāl*) of men. The first [shadow] He created was Muhammad. According to him [al-Mughīra], this is the meaning of God's word: "Say: If the All-merciful has a son, then I am the first to serve him" (Qur'ān 43:81). Then, He sent Muhammad to all men, although he was only a shadow<sup>16</sup>.

We are here in presence of a doctrine which appears under different forms in the esoteric branches of Shi'ism and is supported by numerous traditions attributed to the Imams: the thesis of the preexistence of the Imams, who were created first, long before the creation of heaven and earth. The first creature is either Muhammad, or 'Alī, or the five "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*), Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, or the twelve Imams in traditions belonging to Twelver Shi'ism<sup>17</sup>. It is precisely this doctrine that forms the background of the concept of *tafwīd* in its most radical form: God delegated His creative power to His first creature, which becomes the demiurge of the sense perceptible world<sup>18</sup>. Al-Ash'arī (d. ca. 324/935) summarizes this position in the following way:

The fifteenth fraction of the *ghulāt* claims that God has entrusted (*wakkala*) and delegated (*fawwada*) the affairs (*al-umūr*) to Muhammad and that He gave him power over the creation of the world, so that it is he [Muhammad] who created it and governs (*dabbara*) it, whereas God Most-High did not create anything of all this. A large number among them say the same about 'Alī<sup>19</sup>.

We find a similar definition of *tafwīd* in a tradition of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, transmitted by the Imāmī theologian Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991) and reporting the sayings of an "extremist", a disciple of 'Abd Allāh b. Saba'<sup>20</sup>:

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 8; cf. Tucker, "Rebels and gnostics", pp. 41, 43; Id., *Mahdis*, pp. 62-63. The idea that the "apparitions and shadows" (*al-ashbāḥ wa-l-aẓilla*) were created before the material bodies, is widespread in the Shī'ī circles of the first centuries, in particular in Kūfa; see Asatryan, *Controversies, passim*; De Smet, "Les racines docétistes", pp. 92-95.

<sup>17</sup> For some examples, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, pp. 73-95.

<sup>18</sup> Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 24-25, introduces a distinction between those *ghulāt* who consider the Imams as being God themselves, and the more moderate *mufawwiḍa* (but still very heretical in his eyes) claiming that God delegated to the Imams powers, which in fact only belong to God. This distinction, however, at least in the way it is formulated by Modarressi, is not supported by the texts: when they mention the "divinity" of the Imams, they do not mean that the Imams are identical with God or that they are incorporations of God, but rather that they represent a divine principle emanating from God or created by Him; see the critical remarks about this artificial distinction between *ghulāt* and *mufawwiḍa* in Asatryan, *Controversies*, pp. 51 n. 24, 98-111.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 16; cf. al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna-l-firaq*, p. 238. It is clear that the distinction between all these factions (*ṣanf*) of "extremists" is purely artificial. In reality, doctrines such as *tafwīd* are common to a number of movements, which interacted and mixed with each other.

<sup>20</sup> According to tradition, 'Abd Allāh b. Saba' was the "founder" of radical Shi'ism, as he is supposed to have proclaimed the divinity of 'Alī during his lifetime; on this probably legendary figure, see

He said that God created Muhammad and ‘Alī. Then, He delegated to them the affair (or the command, *al-amr*), so that they are those who create, provide the means of subsistence (*razaqā*), make live and die<sup>21</sup>.

The fact that such doctrines have really been issued is confirmed by texts stemming directly from Shī‘ī circles in Kūfa, most of which were later adopted by the Nuṣayrīs<sup>22</sup>. To give only one example, the *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, known through scattered fragments quoted by several Nuṣayrī authors, transmits the following two traditions:

Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said: “In the beginning, there was God and no space (*makān*). Then, He created space<sup>23</sup> and delegated (*fawwada*) to it all things”. I asked: “What is this, space?” He answered: “Muhammad, peace on him”.

God's messenger said: “I am Adam, according to the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qur’ān. I am the first creature of God”<sup>24</sup>.

The identification of Muhammad with Adam refers to the well-known Shī‘ī conviction that one and the same divine principle flows into the bodies of the Prophets and the Imams, from Adam to Muhammad, and from ‘Alī to the Mahdī<sup>25</sup>. However, the doctrine of *tafwīd* implies that, in contrast with a widespread idea still common in secondary literature, it is not the transcendent God (the “God in heaven”)

Friedländer, “‘Abdallāh b. Sabā”; Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 33-42; Anthony, *The caliph and the heretic*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Bābūya, *Risālat al-i‘tiqādāt al-imāmiyya*, Arabic text quoted in Friedländer, “The heterodoxies of the Shiites”, p. 91. There is a manifest allusion to Qur’ān 30:40: “God is He that created you, then He provided for you, then He shall make you dead, then He shall give you life”. In the next part of this tradition, which occurs in a chapter entitled “Refutation of *ghuluww* and *tafwīd*”, the Imam qualifies *tafwīd* as “a lie of the enemy of God”.

<sup>22</sup> See the references in Asatryan, *Controversies*, pp. 13, 63, 90, 97, 102-103, 109, 156; Id., “Shiite underground literature”, pp. 139-141.

<sup>23</sup> Asatryan, “Shiite underground literature”, p. 156 n. 97, remarks with reason that this sentence seems very close to the wordings in which al-Ash‘arī (*Maqālāt*, p. 32) describes the doctrine of creation according to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam: “[God] was not in space (*makān*), then He produced space”. Asatryan admits that he cannot see any link with Ja‘far's tradition. However, in what immediately follows in the passage about Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, space is identified with the Throne (‘*arsh*): “He claims that space is the Throne” (cf. van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 363-364). We will see that in certain traditions referring to *tafwīd*, the first creature, Muḥammad, is actually identified with the Throne. Hence, the existence of a link with Hishām b. al-Ḥakam could be taken into consideration.

<sup>24</sup> Asatryan, “Shiite underground literature”, §§ 13-14, p. 150. The same *Kitāb al-aẓilla* contains also a tradition identifying the first creature with the Intellect, which received from God the order to come closer and then to go back (Asatryan, “Shiite underground literature”, § 5, p. 148); on this tradition, see *infra*.

<sup>25</sup> De Smet, *Racines docétistes*, pp. 109-112. This divine principle is sometimes called the “Muhammadan light” (*nūr muḥammadī*); see the classical study by Rubin, “Pre-existence and light”.

who manifests Himself in His terrestrial messengers, but rather His first creature. This appears clearly in the teaching attributed to the disciples of Muḥammad b. Bashīr of Kūfa, an enthusiastic admirer of the eighth Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799), whose divinity he proclaimed. Although Ibn Bashīr is famous for his claim that “Mūsā b. Ja‘far is God, who manifested himself among his creatures, so that they could see him”<sup>26</sup>, al-Kashshī reports about his followers:

Their doctrines concerning *tafwīd* are those of the *ghulāt* among the *wāqifa*<sup>27</sup>. They also teach infusion (*ḥulūl*) and claim that all those who are akin with Muhammad are the houses (*buyūt*) and the envelopes (*zurūf*), whereas Muhammad is the Lord (*rabb*) who infuses (*halla*) into all those who are akin with him, he Muhammad, “who has not begotten, and has not been begotten” (Qur’ān 112:3), and who is veiled by these veils<sup>28</sup>.

In other terms, Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm owes his divinity to the fact that Muhammad flows into his body, which is only an envelope. The Lord Muhammad is preexistent to the creation of the world and God delegated His powers to him. Muhammad is of course a created being, but he has not been begotten (in the biological sense) and in turn, he has not begotten. He manifests and veils himself in the bodies of the Imams, these bodies being sheer outward forms, “shirts” recovering the divine principle.

The “subcontracting” of God's prerogatives as implied by the notion of *tafwīd* can even be extended, generating systems of a high complexity. This is the case with the *Umm al-kitāb*, transmitted in a Persian translation by the Isma‘ilis of Central Asia, although the core of the text stems from Shī‘ī circles in Kūfa. From the eternal God (*khodāwand-e jāwīd*) emanate the five “super elected” (*khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*), the *ahl al-bayt*, with in their center the supreme King (*al-malik al-a‘zam*), the Commander of the faithful ‘Alī. As supreme King, ‘Alī is entitled to present himself before the angels saying: “I am *Allāh akbar*” and to require from them absolute obedience. However, he delegates part of his powers to his “regent” (*dāwar*) Salmān, who in turn designates as

<sup>26</sup> Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 63. The idea of the vision of God is an important part of the doctrine of *tafwīd*, as we will see below.

<sup>27</sup> The *wāqifa* are those who “stop” the succession of the Imams; indeed, Muḥammad b. Bashīr considered Mūsā al-Kāzīm as the last Imam and as the Mahdī.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, § 907, p. 479; cf. Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 236; Asatryan, *Controversies*, p. 99 n. 73.

regent Miqdād, and so on<sup>29</sup>. When, after a number of successive cosmic dramas and falls, the moment came to create the material world, ‘Alī delegated this task to his regent Salmān:

Then, the King said to Salmān [named] the Power (*Salmān al-quḍra*): “O Salmān, you are my Gate (*bāb*) and my Book (*kitāb*) — the Qur’ān, the word of God —, you are my right hand — you are God’s hand — in all my palaces, courts (*dīwān*) and veils; you are my messenger (*rasūl*) and my throne (*‘arsh*), of which I am the lord [...]. I am your lord and you, you are the lord of the believers; I put into your hands the governance (*ḥukm*) of the heavens and the earth. I am your lord and you are the lord of all the heavens and the earth”<sup>30</sup>.

A remarkable “play of mirrors” is created in this way. For the inhabitants of this lower world, Salmān is God, whereas in reality he is only a “delegate” of ‘Alī, the supreme King who, in turn, owes his powers by delegation from an eternal God remaining forever inaccessible for His terrestrial creatures. ‘Alī is sitting on the throne, which is Salmān.

Perhaps the most complete presentation of the doctrine of the *Mufawwiḍa* (“those who profess *tafwīḍ*”), applied in this case to the pentadic system of the *Mukhammisa* according to which Muhammad, as first created being, appears in the five *ahl al-bayt*<sup>31</sup>, can be found in the heresiographic work of al-Qummī:

Concerning those who profess delegation (*tafwīḍ*), they claim that the eternal One (*al-wāḥid al-azalī*) established (*aqāma*) a unique and perfect person (*shakṣ wāḥid kāmīl*) in which there is neither increase nor decrease. He delegated to him governance and creation (*fawwāḍa ilayhi al-tadbīr wa-l-khalq*); [this unique person] is Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and the other Imams. Their essence (*ma‘nā*) is one, whereas number is a pure illusion. They negate the birth [of the Imams] and admit to be unable to search for the eternal One who established this perfect one to whom He delegated [His power] and who is Muhammad. It is he [Muhammad] who created the heavens and the earth, the mountains, the human beings, the jinn and the world with all that it contains. They claim that it is impossible for them to know the Eternal (*al-qadīm al-azalī*). Hence, they are satisfied with knowing Muhammad, the creator to whom the creation of beings has been delegated (*al-khāliq al-mufawwāḍ ilayhi khalq al-khalq*). Those names by which God is named in His Book are in fact the names of the delegated creatures. The Eternal created [these creatures], but He created nothing else, so

<sup>29</sup> Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 155-159. Salmān and Miqdād were companions of the Prophet who supported ‘Alī and, for this reason, are held in high esteem by the Shi‘ites.

<sup>30</sup> *Umm al-kitāb*, § 172, p. 71; cf. Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> The *Mukhammisa* belong to the same tradition as Abū l-Khaṭṭāb and the *Khaṭṭābiyya*; see Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 218-225.

that these names do not apply to the Eternal, as for instance *Allāh*, the One, the Impenetrable (*al-ṣamad*; cf. Qur’ān 112:2), the Victorious, the Creator, the Living or the Permanent<sup>32</sup>.

This passage summarizes the doctrine of *tafwīd* as it was professed during the first centuries of Islam in Shī‘ī circles in Kūfa. The ultimate Principle, “the eternal One”, remains inaccessible for His creatures: He is an unknown, hidden God. God’s creative activity is restricted to the creation of a unique and perfect being: “He created nothing else”. The essence (*ma‘nā*) of this first creature is one and unique, although it appears in several hypostases (in the case described by al-Qummī: Muhammad, who manifests himself in the five *ahl al-bayt*). The transcendent and hidden God delegated to His first creature all His powers, including the creation and the governance of the sense perceptible world. Hence, all the divine names and attributes mentioned in the Qur’ān refer to the first created being, which bears the name of *Allāh* and which common believers take erroneously for the ultimate Principle.

The famous “school anecdote” in the *Umm al-kitāb*, telling how the five *ahl al-bayt* appear successively to ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, the unfortunate teacher of the young Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, illustrates this process of delegation. First, the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him saying: *anā subḥāna llāh*, “I am ‘God is elevated’, meaning the pure and radiant God, elevated above all attributes and descriptions”. Then ‘Alī said to him: *anā al-ḥamdu lillāh*, “I am ‘praise be to God’, meaning ‘I am this God whom the heaven and the earth praise’”. Next appears Fāṭima, saying: *lā ilāha illā anā llāh*, “‘There is no God, save that I am God’, meaning ‘There is nowhere a God, neither in the divine world, nor in the human world, neither in the heaven, nor in earth, save me, Fāṭima the Creator (*Fāṭima al-fāṭir*), I who am the creator of the souls of the believers. I am ‘God the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To him belong the names most beautiful’ (Qur’ān 59: 24)”. In his turn, al-Ḥasan declares: *anā Allāh akbar*, “‘I am God, the greatest, meaning ‘I am a God greater than heaven and earth, I am the greatest, I am ‘God, there is no God but He. To him belong the names most beautiful’ (Qur’ān 59:23-24)”. Finally, al-Ḥusayn

<sup>32</sup> Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 61. The heresiographer’s presentation may give the impression that the *Mufawwiḍa* were a distinct “sect” among the *ghulāt*. In reality, as we have seen, *tafwīd* is a widespread doctrine in the “radical” Shi‘ism of that moment, along with transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*), return (*raj‘a*) of the last Imam as Mahdī or infusion (*ḥulūl*) of a divine principle into the body of the Imam. Muslim heresiographers applied themselves to invent sects claiming each of these “heresies”: thus, they mention the *Tanāsukhiyya*, the *Raj‘iyya* or the *Hulūliyya* as distinct “sects”, although they probably never existed as such; see Buckley, “Early Shiite Ghulāh”, p. 303. On the artificial distinction between *ghulāt* and *mufawwiḍa*, see *supra*, note 18.

closes the succession of apparitions by saying: *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwa illā bi-llāh al-‘alī al-‘aẓīm*, “‘There is no power nor force save with God, the elevated, the magnanimous’, meaning ‘There is no God save me, as I am the one who punishes the unbelievers and brings salvation to the believers. I am al-Ḥusayn, the son of ‘Alī, I am al-Ḥasan, the son of ‘Alī, I am Fāṭima the radiant, I am ‘Alī the most high, I am Muhammad, the elected’”<sup>33</sup>.

A vision described further on in the *Umm al-kitāb* provides an important complement to this doctrine. The elected in paradise witness the appearance of a colored figure, sitting on a throne, wearing a crown on its head, two earrings and a sword on its shoulders. The angel Gabriel explains them that the figure represents Fāṭima, the crown Muhammad, the earrings al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the sword ‘Alī, whereas the throne is the “‘place of power” (*makān-e qudrat*) on which the King Most-high (*malik ta‘ālā*) is sitting<sup>34</sup>. In other terms, the eternal God (*khodāwand-e jāwīd, al-ilāh al-qadīm*) without name delegated His powers to the supreme King, who manifests himself in the five *ahl al-bayt*. Hence, they are those who create (Fāṭima al-Fāṭir!<sup>35</sup>) the heaven and the earth, who are worshiped by the creatures as the one and unique God, whose names and attributes they bear, and who will give to men the recompense and punishment they deserve.

In this same logic of *tafwīd* one has to understand the so-called “sermons of the Imams” or “sermons of ‘Alī”, in which they overtly proclaim their divinity. The famous transmitter of hadith Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju‘fī, who died in Kūfa around 128/745<sup>36</sup>, claims to have heard a sermon by the fifth Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 115/733). The Imam spoke as follows:

<sup>33</sup> *Umm al-Kitāb*, §§ 39-42, pp. 99-100; Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 132-133; for an analysis of this “school anecdote” and its Christian sources, see Anthony, “The legend of ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba””, pp. 4-18, with English translation of the passage here mentioned, *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> *Umm al-Kitāb*, §§ 211-212, p. 63; Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>35</sup> The attribution of this masculine quality to Fāṭima, sometimes linked with the masculinization of her name as Fāṭim, is widespread in Nuṣayrism and related movements; see Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, p. 301; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs, passim*. According to the Isma‘ili author Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna*, in al-Sāmarrā‘ī, *Al-Ghuluww*, p. 307, this alteration of gender was already part of the doctrine of the *Mukhammisa*: “They claim that Fāṭima was not a woman and they refuse to speak about Fāṭima in the feminine, calling her Fāṭim”. Let us remind that in the *Umm al-Kitāb* the creation of the material world is delegated to Salmān; see *supra*. A similar masculinization, applied to the figure of Mary, appears at the end of the *Gospel of Thomas*; see Koester and Lambdin, “The Gospel of Thomas”, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Halm, “Das ‘Buch der Schatten””, pp. 29-35.

We are the faces of the Merciful, the houses of the Judge (*al-dayyān*), the tongues of the most eternal Lord, His hidden aspects (*ghuyūbihi*) in all that is manifest [...]. I am the cause of causes (*'illat al-'ilal*), the hidden face of eternity, someone who has no equal. I am the whole of the whole (*kull al-kull*); I was the one who created light [...]. I am the elevated, the great ...<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, this tradition was transmitted in a Nuṣayrī treatise. However, sermons of this type are widespread in Shī'ī literature, also among the Imāmīs and the Ismā'īlīs. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi studied the history of these sermons in the Twelver Shī'ī tradition, showing a continuity lasting until 19th century Iran. So, Ja'far Kashfī (d. 1850) quotes a sermon in which 'Alī would have declared from the pulpit in the mosque of Kūfa:

I am the face of God; I am the eye of God; I am the hand of God; I am the tongue of God; I am the light of God [...]. I am the one who manifests power on earth [...]. I am the master of the first creation [...]. I am the one who governs (*mudabbir*) the world [...]. I am the master of the stars and the one who governs them, on the order of my Lord (*bi-amr rabbī*) [...]. I am the creator and the created (*anā al-khāliq wa-l-makhlūq*)...<sup>38</sup>

In other terms, 'Alī is divine for the simple reason that the anthropomorphisms of the Qur'ān and all the qualifications of Allāh, his names and attributes, refer to him. He has all the powers of God, but nevertheless he was created (*makhlūq*) and he acts under the command of his Lord.

The idea of delegation is clearly expressed in a passage from the *Rawḍat al-taslīm*, a Nizārī Ismā'īlī work by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). It concerns the Nizārī Imam after the proclamation of the Great Resurrection in Alamūt in 559/1164:

God has dressed him [the Imam] with the garment of His own unity and provided him with His own eternal existence. He gave him an attribute among His own names and attributes, so that he can manifest it and so that the lights of this name, the effects of this attribute, become manifest through him. His speech is the speech of God, his action is the action of God, his order is the order of God, his word is the word of God, his judgment is the judgment of God, his will is the will of God, his knowledge is the knowledge of God, his power is the power of God, his face is the face of God, his hand is the hand of God, his audition is the audition of God, his view is the view of God. For him, it is right to say: "We are the most beautiful names of God, his most eminent attributes", meaning: "I am the highest name and the highest attribute of God concretized and personified". "I have known God

<sup>37</sup> Strothmann, *Esoterische Sonderthemen*, § 10, p. 7 (Arabic part).

<sup>38</sup> Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, pp. 105-107; Arabic text on p. 108, n. 93.

before the creation of the heavens and the earth”. “We were established by God in such a way that, being close to him, we are him”. “I am the one who lifts the heavens and I am the one who spreads the earth, I am the first and I am the last, the apparent and the hidden. I am the one who knows everything”<sup>39</sup>.

Of course, such an outright divinization of the Imams was not generally accepted in the Shi‘ī community. After the final occultation of the twelfth Imam in 329/941, a kind of orthodoxy was established in Twelver Shi‘ism, with the adoption of a rational theology and a certain rapprochement towards Sunnism. The notion of *tafwīd* was then qualified as *ghuluww* and the transmitters of *mufawwiḍa* traditions were condemned as “extremists”. In the eyes of the most rigorist doctors, ascribing special powers or an extraordinary knowledge to the Imams was an offense deserving *takfīr*<sup>40</sup>.

However, they could not prevent that traditions of the Imams in favor of *tafwīd* were introduced into the main collections of Imāmī hadith. This is the case, for instance, with the monumental *Bihār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1700). It includes a tradition about ‘Alī saying to Salmān that the Spirit of God (*rūḥ Allāh*) came to the Prophet and his Legatee (*waṣī*), so that God delegated to them the power to resuscitate the dead, to know the past, the present and the future, and to have a perfect knowledge of all that is in heaven and earth<sup>41</sup>. Such kind of hadith appear along with other traditions, perhaps more moderate, stating that the Imams make use of the special powers, which were delegated to them “with God's permission”, condemning at the same time the *muqaṣṣirūn*, the “neglectful” who deny the Imam any special power<sup>42</sup>.

### *A mysterious Zaydī sect*

In the part of the *Kitāb al-Shajara* devoted to Islamic sects, the Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* Abū Tammām (4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century) mentions among the Zaydī factions the *Khalafīyya*,

<sup>39</sup> Al-Tūsī, *Rawḍat al-taslīm*, § 351-352, p. 102; cf. Jambet, *La convocation d’Alamut*, pp. 294-295. Compare with the sermon in which the Nizārī *dā‘ī* Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān (d. 589/1193), the “old man of the mountain”, proclaimed his own divinity in Guyard, *Fragments*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>40</sup> According to Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 29-37, 41-43, if Kūfa was the capital of all heresies, the doctors of Qom were the guardians of orthodoxy, fighting with all their forces against the errors of the extremists. For a more balanced presentation, see Ansari, *L’imamat et l’occultation*, pp. 235-242.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 25, pp. 336-337; vol. 26, p. 14.

the disciples of a given Khalaf b. ‘Abd al-Šamad, who claimed to descend from Zayd b. ‘Alī, the eponym of Zaydī Shi‘ism killed in Kūfa in 122/740 during his rebellion against the Umayyads. On his flight from their persecutions, Khalaf is said to have settled in the land of the Turks<sup>43</sup>. Abū Tammām being our unique source about these *Khalafiyya*, we do not know if the movement took its origins in Kūfa. However, it is clear that the doctrine attributed to them bears a close resemblance with contemporary Kūfan ideas:

[The *Khalafiyya*] abstain from describing the Creator in terms only fitted for the description of a created being. They do not say about Him “knowing” or “non-knowing”, “powerful” or “non-powerful”, “a thing” or “not a thing”, “limited” or “non-limited”. They say “the Creator” (*al-Bārī*), not with the intention to affirm a reality (*‘alā jihat al-taḥqīq*), nor in a metaphorical way (*‘alā jihat al-majāz*), but rather they speak about Him approximately (*bil-taqrīb*) [...]. They ascribe to the Creator all the attributes of God Most-High occurring in the Qur‘ān in the form *fa‘āl*, but they attribute all those in the form *fā‘il* to Mīkhā‘il<sup>44</sup>. They claim that the first being created by God is an angel named Mīkhā‘il. He delegated to him the governance (*tadbīr*) of the entire creation. Then they maintain that Mīkhā‘il contemplated his own essence, so that four angels were generated (*tawallada*) out of him: Gabriel (Jibra‘īl), Azrael (‘Azrā‘īl), Mīkā‘īl and Israfil (Isrāfīl). He assigned to Gabriel the revelation and the benefits, to Azrael the grasping of the spirits and the calamities, to Mīkā‘īl the writing of good and bad, and to Israfil the blow into the trumpet. They claim that these five are the best of all creatures in the heaven and in the earth. The Creator also chose among His creatures in earth five [persons]: Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. As Muhammad is the lord of the four corporeal beings, Mīkhā‘il is the lord of the four spiritual beings<sup>45</sup>.

The *Khalafiyya* thus developed a radical apophatic theology, which reminds us the “twofold negative theology” of Isma‘ilism<sup>46</sup>. The transcendent God delegates His powers to His first creature, the angel Mīkhā‘il, who in turn assigns different tasks to four angels proceeding from him. To this pentad of celestial angels corresponds on

<sup>43</sup> Walker, “An Isma‘ili Version”, pp. 173-174.

<sup>44</sup> The form *fa‘āl* expresses the intensity of an action, whereas *fā‘il* is simply the active participle. In consequence, an attribute as *al-jabbār* (“the omnipotent”) is applied “approximately” to the Creator and an attribute as *al-qādir* (“the powerful”) belongs to His first creature. Note that the reading Mīkhā‘il, which seems to be a *lectio difficilior* derived from Hebrew, is uncertain in the unique manuscript of the text, the more that it is redundant with Mīkā‘īl, the name of another angel in the pentad.

<sup>45</sup> Abū Tammām, *Kitāb al-Shajara*, pp. 96-97 (Arabic text).

<sup>46</sup> As was observed by Walker, *Isma‘ili heresiography*, p. 173. On the “twofold negative theology” of Isma‘ilism, see De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*, pp. 75-83.

earth the pentad of the *ahl al-bayt*. In other terms, the angel Mīkhā'il is the God in heaven and Muhammad the God in earth.

*A Christological version of the doctrine of tafwīd*

Among the Shi'ites of Kūfa at the end of the Umayyad period, Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī (d. between 120/738 and 126/744) and the *Manṣūriyya* distinguish themselves by the fact that they considered Christ, and not Muhammad, as the first created being: "They claim that the first creature created by God is Jesus, and then 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, these two being more eminent than all the other creatures"<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, they used to swear by pronouncing the formula *wa-l-kalimati* ("by the Verb"), a manifest allusion to Jesus, the *Logos*, called *al-kalima* in the Qur'ān. This could be explained by the Christian origins of the Banū 'Ijl, the tribe to which Abū Manṣūr belonged<sup>48</sup>.

A similar doctrine was ascribed to "two strange Mu'tazilīs": al-Faḍl al-Ḥadathī and Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ<sup>49</sup>. Presented as disciples of al-Nazzām (d. between 221/836 and 230/845), Aḥmad (d. between 227/842 and 232/847) is said to have lived in Baṣra, whereas Faḍl was a native of al-Ḥadītha, "the new city" on the Euphrates, nearly 240 km. North of Bagdad<sup>50</sup>. We are no longer in Kūfa, but still in Mesopotamia. Moreover, the doctrines ascribed to both figures are very close to the teachings held in contemporary Shī'ī circles in Kūfa.

We know about their doctrines through a polemical debate reported by al-Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 300/913) in his *Kitāb al-intiṣār*. The Mu'tazilī al-Jāhiz (d. 255/866) had accused some Shi'ites to divinize 'Alī; the pro-Shī'ī theologian Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. ca. 298/911) answered by observing that the Mu'tazilīs al-Faḍl al-Ḥadathī and Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ did the same with Jesus; finally, the Mu'tazilī al-Khayyāṭ reacted with the statement that both disciples of al-Nazzām were excluded from the Mu'tazilī circles because of heresy.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 47.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 47-48; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 9; cf. Tucker, "Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī", pp. 66-67, 72, 74; Id., *Mahdis*, pp. 79-80, 83-84.

<sup>49</sup> Pellat, "Deux curieux mu'tazilites", pp. 483-494.

<sup>50</sup> Van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 3, pp. 431, 436; Pellat, "Deux curieux mu'tazilites", p. 485. Goldziher, "Spottnamen", p. 325, called al-Ḥadītha "eine Nuṣejrierneste".

The author of the book [Ibn al-Rāwandī] said: concerning his [al-Jāhiz's] statement “among them [the Shi‘ites] some pretend that ‘Alī is God”, we respond: among you [the Mu‘tazilīs], some pretend that it was Christ who created the world, being the Lord of the first and the last. He is the one who will hold men to account on the day of Resurrection and who will manifest himself (*al-mutajallī*) to them. He is the one to whom the Prophet makes allusion when saying: “You will see your Lord as you see the moon, with no need to press in order to see him”<sup>51</sup>.

A bit further, Ibn al-Rāwandī goes on:

Among the Mu‘tazilīs two men claim that the second lord of creation is a produced demiurge (*mudabbir maṣnū‘*) submitted to annihilation (*fanā‘*). They are Faḍl al-Ḥadathī and Ibn Ḥabīṭ<sup>52</sup>.

Here again we find the idea, attested in the Shī‘ī circles of Kūfa, that the deity is split into an eternal God, creator and not created, and a created and creating God who produces and governs the world by delegation:

[Ibn Ḥabīṭ and Faḍl al-Ḥadathī] claim that the world has two creators, of which the first is eternal (*qadīm*) — it is God Most-High — and the second produced (*ḥādīth*): it is the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*), Christ, Jesus son of Mary, [the Word] with which the world was created<sup>53</sup>.

Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) adds that, according to the two Mu‘tazilīs, the role of Jesus as creator of the world is clearly stated in Qur’ān 5:110: “Thou createst out of clay as the likeness of a bird”<sup>54</sup>.

Jesus is thus a subaltern God created by the eternal God. According to al-Baghdādī, Ibn Ḥabīṭ and Faḍl al-Ḥadathī considered Jesus as the son of God “in the sense of adoption and not of generation” (*‘alā ma‘nā al-tabannā dūna al-wilāda*)<sup>55</sup>. God created *ex nihilo* His first creature and then adopted it as His son.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, p. 152.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, vol. 4, p. 150.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, vol. 1, p. 59.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 260. I follow here the correction proposed by van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 6, p. 217 note 21. The printed text has *‘alā ma‘nā al-nabī* (“in the sense of the prophet”), which manifestly makes no sense.

The same heresiographer gives us a hint as to the reason why our two Mu‘tazilīs, and probably also the Shī‘ī movements in Kūfa to which they seem very close<sup>56</sup>, felt the need to duplicate the God of the Qur’ān:

They also claim that Christ is the one who will hold the creatures to account in the Hereafter. It is he to whom God alludes by his word: “When thy Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank” (Qur’ān 89:22) [...]. It is he who created Adam according to his own image: this is the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of what was transmitted, that God created Adam according to his image. He [*sic*, in singular] claimed that it is he [Christ] to whom the Prophet alludes by saying: “You will see your Lord as you see the moon during a night of plain moon”<sup>57</sup>.

In other terms, the duplication of the godhead can be explained as an attempt to reconcile the divine transcendence with the anthropomorphisms of the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition. The first being created by the eternal and inaccessible God is a God “with a human face”, who created Adam according to his image and who will appear at the end of times in order to preside the final Judgment. It is this God whom the elected will be able to see in the Hereafter; the *visio beatifica* does not concern the eternal God, but only His first creature.

Perhaps for the same reason, the Zaydī movement of the *Bakriyya*, based in Baṣra but also present in Kūfa, claimed: “On the day of Judgment, God will create a form (*ṣūra*), in which He will be seen and from which He will speak to His creatures”<sup>58</sup>.

Obviously, this idea was popular in this time, as it also occurs outside Shī‘ī related circles. For instance, ‘Ubayd b. Mihrān al-Muktib, a transmitter of hadith from Kūfa who died around 132/750 and who is classified by al-Shahrastānī among the

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<sup>56</sup> Beside the duplication of the godhead in relation with the notion of *tafwīd*, the two Mu‘tazilīs share with the Shī‘īs of Kūfa the belief in metempsychosis, including the transmigration of human souls into animal bodies (al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, pp. 61-63), and the conviction that the first created being (Jesus or Muhammad) appears on earth by adopting a corporeal envelope; cf. al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 60: “Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ claims that Christ took as armor a material body (*tadarrā’a bi l-jasad al-jusmānī*), being the eternal Word incorporated (*al-kalima al-qadīma al-mutaḥajassida*) as the Christians say”. Hence, it is not surprising that the Sunni author of the *Kitāb al-Mu‘tamad*, the *qāḍī* Abū Ya‘lā (d. 459/1066) describes al-Faḍl al-Ḥadathī as “a Shī‘ī extremist” (text quoted in van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 6, p. 219); cf. Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, p. 220 n. 93; van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 3, pp. 434-440. Although he notes these similarities with “Shī‘ī extremism”, van Ess explains the “Christology” of both Mu‘tazilīs by supposing a “Kontakt mit christlichen Kreisen, vielleicht in einer Art ‘ökumenischer’ Bemühung zwischen Ṣūfīs und (nestorianischen?) Mönchen” (*ibid.*, p. 440). It seems to me that these “contacts” must rather be located in the Shī‘ī circles of Kūfa.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 216; cf. van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 2, pp. 109-110.

Sunni Murji'ites, "claimed that God manifests himself in the form (*'alā ṣūra*) of a man. In this way he explained the word [of the Prophet]: 'God (*Allāh*) created Adam according to the form of the Merciful'" (*al-Raḥmān*)<sup>59</sup>. Hence, *Allāh* refers to the transcendent God and *al-Raḥmān* to His first creature; bearing the anthropomorphic attributes and forms, the latter transmits them in turn to his own creatures, man in the first place.

In the same period, the "Neoplatonist" Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. first half 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century) professed the absolute transcendence of God, stating that all His names and attributes are created. God's Word is a creature, which the Qur'ān mentions under the name *al-Raḥmān*:

He said: God created a being named *al-Raḥmān*. Then he [*Allāh* or *al-Raḥmān*?] created the Throne and said: "*al-Raḥmān* sat himself upon the Throne" (Qur'ān 20:5)". This means that this *Raḥmān* is created<sup>60</sup>.

In the part of his heresiography dealing with Jewish sects, al-Shahrastānī mentions a similar doctrine — the anthropomorphisms of the Torah refer to a being created by the supreme God — and ascribes it to the *Maghāriyya*, the "people of the caves" (allusion to Qumrān?)<sup>61</sup>. Here follows a translation of the whole passage:

A faction among the *Maghāriyya* claims that God Most-High spoke to the Prophets by the intermediary of a chosen angel. He put him at the head of all creatures and established him as His lieutenant among them. They say: all what is in the Torah and other books concerning the description of God Most-High refers to this angel. If this would not be the case, it would not be allowed to give any description of God Most-High. They say that the one who "spoke directly to Moses" (Qur'ān 4:164) is this angel and that the tree mentioned in the Torah is also this angel. The Lord is too elevated to speak directly to a mortal. All that is reported in the Torah about the demand to see [God], "I spoke from mouth to mouth with God", "God has come", "God raised up in the clouds", "He wrote the Torah with His hands", "He is firmly sitting on the Throne", "He has the form of Adam, with curly and abundant black hair", "He

<sup>59</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, pp. 140-141; cf. Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, p. 422 n. 29; van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, p. 213. The same doctrine is attributed to the *nābita* (a vague term designating various anthropomorphic movements in Sunnism): "They claim that God (*Allāh*) created Adam according to the form of the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)" (Abū Tammām, *Shajara*, p. 62 of the Arabic text).

<sup>60</sup> Al-Murtaḍā al-Rāzī, *Tabṣirat al-'awāmm*, p. 56; cf. van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 2, p. 500, vol. 5, p. 218; Frank, "The Neoplatonism of Ḡahm ibn Ṣafwān", pp. 420-422.

<sup>61</sup> In fact, the manuscripts and the printed editions all read *al-muqāriiba*; however, the hypothetical correction in *al-maghāriyya* seems generally accepted in secondary literature; see Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, p. 606 n. 64.

wept during the deluge of Noah so that His eyes were irritated”, “the Omnipotent (*al-jabbār*) laughed so that His tooth appeared”, and so on, [all this] is referring to this angel. It is allowed in practice that He sends a spiritual angel from among His elite and gives him His name, saying: this is my messenger, he takes my place among you, his words are mine, his command is mine, his apparition among you is my apparition. This is the statute of this angel. It is said that Arius, when he claimed about Christ that he is God and that he is the quintessence (*ṣafwa*) of the world, borrowed this doctrine from them, as they are four hundred years prior to Arius, being the masters of asceticism and renouncement (*aṣḥāb zuhd wa taqashshuf*). It is also said that the author of this doctrine is Benjamin al-Nahāwandī. He established for them this doctrine, teaching them that all ambiguous verses (*al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt*) in the Torah need interpretation (*ma'ūla*), that the Most-High cannot be described with the attributes of man, that He is not resembling one of His creatures and that none is equal to Him. What is meant by these expressions in the Torah is this enormous angel<sup>62</sup>.

This passage gave rise to an abundant secondary literature in the field of Jewish studies, addressing questions about al-Shahraṣṭānī's sources, and the relation with the sect of Qumrān and Gnostic movements in Judaism<sup>63</sup>. It is not our task here to summarize the whole debate. Be it sufficient for our present purpose to note that al-Shahraṣṭānī's wordings, although explicitly referring to the Torah, are clearly Islamic: allusions to verses from the Qur'ān, Islamic names of God (*al-jabbār*), Islamic expressions such as *al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt*, usually referring to the “ambiguous verses” of the Qur'ān. The doctrine is identical with the one we found in Islamic (mainly Shī'ī) movements: what the revealed books have to say about God refers in fact to a subaltern being, to which God delegated His powers, including His attributes and His names. Moreover, the text bears a flagrant contradiction, as the doctrine is simultaneously attributed to the *Maghāriyya*, “four hundred years prior to Arius” (who died in Constantinople in 336) and to Benjamin al-Nihāwandī, one of the founders of the Jewish sect of the Karaites in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, who was a native of Iran but operating in Mesopotamia<sup>64</sup>. Hence, it is most likely that al-Shahraṣṭānī reports the doctrine as it was formulated in Karaite circles in Iraq, under strong Islamic influence<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Shahraṣṭānī, *Milal*, pp. 217-218; Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, pp. 606-608.

<sup>63</sup> For some elements of bibliography, see Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, p. 606 note 64; van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, p. 402.

<sup>64</sup> van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 402-403; vol. 3, pp. 440-441. On the Karaites in general, see Faii, *Les Caraites*.

<sup>65</sup> The Islamic influence on Karaite doctrines is well-known; see, for instance, Stern, “Fāṭimid propaganda among Jews”, pp. 87-95.

The interaction between different doctrines related to *tafwīd*, as they were developed in Kufa and surrounding areas by Shī‘īs, Karaite Jews, Christianizing Mu‘tazilīs and “heterodox” Sunnis, is admirably summarized by al-Ash‘arī:

A group among the *ghāliyya* [the “extremist” Shī‘īs] says that God Most-High gave to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib the power (*aqdara*) to make (*fa‘ala*) bodies and that He delegated (*fawwaḍa*) to him the affairs and the governances (*al-umūr wa-l-tadbīrāt*). A group among them says that God gave to His Prophet the power to make bodies and to create men. This is identical with the doctrine of certain Christians, according to whom God favored Jesus with a subtlety (*laṭīfa*) allowing him to create the celestial bodies (*al-ajrām*) and produce the terrestrial bodies (*al-ajsām*). This is also identical with the doctrine of those, among the Jews, who claim that God created an angel and gave him the power to create this lower world. This angel is the one who created (*khalāqa*) this world and established (*abda‘a*) it; he is the one who sent the Prophets and sent down the books. This is the doctrine of the followers of Ibn Yāsīn<sup>66</sup>.

Finally, it is interesting to note that al-Shahrastānī links the Karaite doctrine to the teaching of Arius, which he summarizes by the sentence: “The Eternal is God and Christ is created” (*al-qadīm huwa Allāh wa-l-Maṣīḥ huwa makhlūq*)<sup>67</sup>. At the end of his chapter about the Christians, he reverts to Arius, whose Christological position he exposes quite fairly:

Arius claims that God is one (*Allāh wāḥid*), named “father”, and that Christ is the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) and His son by way of election (*‘alā tariq al-iṣṭifā’*). He was created before the creation of the world and he is the creator of the things<sup>68</sup>.

We recognize here, even in the details of the formulation, the Muslim speculations about *tafwīd*. The influence of Arianism or a related Christology on the development of Shi‘ism in Mesopotamia deserves further research.

### *Towards the Neoplatonisation of tafwīd*

The texts quoted thus far show that the first creature to which God delegated His powers, bears different names: Jesus, Muhammad, ‘Alī, the five *ahl al-bayt* or a

<sup>66</sup> Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 564-565; according to van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, p. 403, Ibn Yāsīn refers to the Karaite Benjamin al-Nihāwandī.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 223.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 227.

gigantic angel. Among the Qur’ānic verses and traditions, which Ibn Ḥābiṭ and Faḍl al-Ḥadathī interpreted as referring to Jesus in his quality of first created being, al-Baghdādī mentions the following hadith:

It is he [Jesus] to whom the Prophet refers when saying: “God Most-High created the intellect (*al-‘aql*) and said to it: ‘come closer’ and it came closer. Then, He said to it: ‘go back’ and it went back. He then said: ‘I have not created a nobler creature than you. Through you I give and through you I take’”<sup>69</sup>.

Apart from the question of a possible Neoplatonic influence on this famous hadith, widespread in Shī‘ī literature<sup>70</sup>, it is obvious that Muslim philosophers, who introduced Neoplatonic conceptions into their systems, refer to this tradition. Hence, the Intellect, identified with Plotinus’ *Noûs*, has to be added to the list of first created beings to which the transcendent God (Plotinus’ One in this case) delegated His powers.

This is clear from the entry about the *Khābiṭiyya* and the *Ḥadathiyya*, the followers of Ibn Ḥābiṭ and Faḍl al-Ḥadathī, in al-Shahrastānī. Among their heretical innovations (*bid‘a*) appears the idea that all what is reported about the vision of God on the day of Resurrection and in the Hereafter, in fact refers to:

The vision of the first Intellect, which is the first created being (*awwal mubda‘*), the Agent Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘‘āl*) from which the forms of the beings emanate. To it the Prophet refers when saying: “The first which God Most-High created is the Intellect. He said to it: ‘come closer’ and it came closer. Then he said to it: ‘go back’ and it went back. He said then: ‘By my power and my magnificence, I have not created a more beautiful creature than you; through you I exalt and through you I abase; through you I give, and through you I take’”. He is the one who will appear on the Day of Resurrection. Then, the veils will be lifted between him and the forms emanating from him, so that they [men] will see him as the moon during a night of plain moon. As to the Giver of the Intellect (*wāhib al-‘aql*), He will never be seen. With a created being, only another created being can be associated<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>70</sup> A Neoplatonic influence was supposed by Goldziher, “Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṭ”, pp. 318-324; by contrast, Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 18-21, thinks that the intellect mentioned in the hadith has not to be taken in a philosophical sense.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 63. The expression *wāhib al-‘aql* as referring to the Creator of the Intellect is strange; it reminds us of Avicenna’s *wāhib al-ṣuwar* (the “giver of the forms”, the *dator formarum* of Medieval Latin philosophy). But in Avicenna, this expression refers to the Agent Intellect, and not to God.

Of course, al-Shahrastānī is a relatively late author (he died in 548/1153) and it is quite probable that this Neoplatonic reformulation of the doctrine of the two dissident Mu‘tazilīs was done at a later stage, if it was not the work of al-Shahrastānī<sup>72</sup>. Van Ess supposes here the influence of Avicenna’s philosophy; I would rather plead in favor of an Ismā‘īlī background, the more that al-Shahrastānī was familiar with Ismailism, and perhaps secretly a Nizārī Ismā‘īlī himself. Indeed, we find in this short passage the scheme underlying the different cosmological and eschatological systems developed by Ismā‘īlī authors from the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The transcendent, unknown and inaccessible Creator (*al-mubdi‘*) delegated all His powers to His first creature, the first created being (*al-mubda‘ al-awwal*), the Intellect (*al-‘aql*), which bears all the names and attributes of God, including the name *Allāh*. The Intellect produces the universe by emanation, as the source of the influx of the forms, which the Creator established in one fell swoop (*daf‘atan wāḥidatan*) in its essence. As the first efficient cause, the Intellect is also the final cause to which the whole creation aims to return. The saved souls will finally come into conjunction with the Intellect, but it is impossible for them to reach the level of the transcendent Creator<sup>73</sup>.

Starting from Kūfa and surroundings in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, with propagandists such as al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwazī, Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and ‘Abdān<sup>74</sup>, the Ismā‘īlī movement is the direct heir of the Shī‘ī doctrines developed in Mesopotamia, in particular in Kūfa in the vicinity of the followers of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb. But progressively, Ismailism introduced into this doctrinal framework Neoplatonic conceptions and terms borrowed from the Arabic version of Plotinus and Proclus. This process is eloquently illustrated in the introduction of the *Kitāb ithbāt al-nubūwwāt* by Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971), where we meet a Neoplatonic reformulation of the doctrine of *tafwīd*:

It is He [the Creator] who put in the first being the form of all things, apparent and hidden, and who established it as the Preceder (*sābiq*)<sup>75</sup> in relation to every end and every beginning [...]. It is He who

<sup>72</sup> This is the opinion of Gimaret and Monnot in Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, pp. 225-226 n. 28, followed by van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 3, p. 438 n. 77: “deutlich durch neuplatonische Kategorien und das System Avicennas überformt”.

<sup>73</sup> For the various elaborations of this scheme in the different branches of Ismailism, see DE SMET, *La philosophie ismaélienne*.

<sup>74</sup> Halm, *Die Schia*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>75</sup> In Ismā‘īlī terminology, the Preceder refers to the Universal Intellect.

emanated upon the first being so much light and splendor that nobody is able to know something beyond it [the first being] [...]. It is He who, by the intensity of His generosity and power, left the governance (*tadbīr*) of the two worlds, with all the subtle and composed beings they contain, to the first Preceder. He established it [the Preceder] as Lord of the lords (*rabb al-arbāb*), towards whom everybody bows for centuries. It is He who made the Preceder the source of all spiritual and corporeal light<sup>76</sup>.

The unknown creating God designated the Intellect, in its quality of first created being and ultimate limit of intelligibility, as His delegate, to take His place as the supreme deity, the “Lord of lords”, object of the worship of all men for centuries. A more extreme form of *tafwīd* is nearly imaginable.

### ***God delegated a part of His powers to mankind***

The debates held in Kūfa during the first centuries of Islam about God’s delegation of His prerogatives to His first (and unique) creature, manifestly with the aim to reconcile transcendence and immanence, divine inaccessibility and anthropomorphism, were conducted, in the same period and in the same city, conjointly with debates about another form of *tafwīd*: God’s delegation to man of the liberty of action. The synchronism and the identity of place (Kūfa) and terminology (*tafwīd*, *mufawwiḍa*) plead in favor of the existence of a link between these two forms of delegation. However, in order to determine the exact nature of this link, further research is needed. In this last part of my paper, my intention is only to open some paths of reflection.

During the second century of the *hijra*, Mesopotamia, and in particular the city of Kūfa, was the setting of heavy discussions between Jabrites, who adhered to an absolute determinism in order to save God’s omnipotence explicitly stated in the Qur’ān, and the Qadarites, trying to save human freedom more or less, by different exegetical means<sup>77</sup>. A group among these Qadarites adopted a position considered as radical by the others; hence, they were called *al-mufawwiḍa*, the defenders of *tafwīd*, sharing this name with the “extremist” Shī‘īs who claimed that God renounced to His powers in favor of His first creature:

<sup>76</sup> Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubūwwāt*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 205-206, 229-233.

Among the Qadarites there is a group called *al-mufawwiḍa*. They pretend that they are left on themselves (*muwakkalūn ilā anfusihi*) and that they have power over all good actions, by the delegation (*tafwīḍ*) they claim, and not by God's assistance (*tawfīq*) or guidance<sup>78</sup>.

As God delegated to mankind the power to act in full liberty, to do the good and the evil as it wants, it is useless for it to ask His assistance. Human actions being not created by God, only man is responsible for them. A similar position is ascribed to a Khārijite faction in Kūfa:

[Some among the *Bayhasiyya* Khārijites] agree with the Qadarites about predestination (*qadar*). They say that God Most-High delegated [His power] (*fawwāḍa*) to mankind, so that God has no will regarding men's actions<sup>79</sup>.

Due to this delegation, God's omnipotence is restricted to heaven, whereas on earth, man acts freely. In this way, he becomes a kind of terrestrial God, what reminds us of the distinction made by Shī'ī "extremists" between the God in heaven and the God in earth. But here, the delegation is not limited to Prophets and Imams, as it is extended to the entirety of the human species.

Hence, it is probably not by chance that an anti-Qadarite treatise, attributed to the Umayyad caliph 'Umar II (reg. 99-101/717-720), qualified this theory of *tafwīḍ* as innovation (*bid'a*) and extremism (*ghuluww*)<sup>80</sup>. Still in Kūfa, the Sunni Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), founder of the Ḥanafī School, was looking for an intermediate solution between the antagonistic positions of the *ahl al-tafwīḍ* and the determinists, the *ahl al-ijbār*<sup>81</sup>. A similar attempt was made in "moderate" Shī'ī circles, with the famous hadith attributed to the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: *lā jabr wa lā tafwīḍ walākin amr bayna amrayn* ("neither constraint, nor delegation, but something between the two"), a hadith which was coined, according to van Ess, in Kūfa<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Al-Malaṭī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, p. 133; cf. Strothmann, "On the History of Islamic Heresiography", pp. 9-10.

<sup>79</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 127; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 93, ascribes the same doctrine to another Khārijite group, the *'Ajārīda Maymūniyya*.

<sup>80</sup> Van Ess, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie*, pp. 117-127, along with the texts § 7, p. 140 and § 36, p. 167.

<sup>81</sup> This is the case in his letter to 'Uthmān al-Battī translated in van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 5, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> Van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*, p. 790 n. 94; Id., *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 206, 341; vol. 4, pp. 489-490.

It is not the place here to write the history of this hadith, or to discuss its influence in the different branches of Shi‘ism. We only want to evoke the possible link between this moderate position facing the extreme *tafwīd* of some Qadarites, who elevated man as the absolute master of his actions, and a moderate position facing the extreme *tafwīd* of Shī‘ī movements presenting the Imams as subaltern, creating deities. In both cases, the moderate position was legitimized by traditions attributed to the first Imams.

This link is indeed implied in the short presentation al-Shahrastānī gives of the figure of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Hostile to every form of “extremism” tending to divinize the Imams — rejection of the triad *al-tanāsukh wa-l-ḥulūl wa-l-tashbīh* (metempsychosis, infusion of the godhead into the human body of the Imam, assimilation of God with a human being) — Ja‘far is supposed to have said, just before quoting the hadith about the intermediate position between *jabr* and *tafwīd*:

God Most-High wants something through us (*bi-nā*) and He wants something from us (*minnā*). What He wants through us, is hidden to us, but what He wants from us, is clear for us. Why then to be busy about what He wants through us, rather than about what He wants from us<sup>83</sup>?

In other terms, even if God delegated to the Imams special powers, they act in conformity with God’s will, without being able to grasp the ultimate divine goals. At the same time, God delegated to man a certain liberty of action, but without losing control over him. Such an intermediary position will become mainstream in Twelver Shi‘ism.

### **Conclusion**

The city of Kūfa, which can be considered as the birthplace of Shi‘ism, was in the first centuries of Islam the center of debates about *tafwīd*, the delegation by God of His powers to His first creature — the Prophet, the Imam or Christ, all preexistent to the creation of the world — or, in a more restricted form limited to human actions, to whole mankind. These debates went beyond the doctrinal borders between sects and movements, as they were fixed by heresiographers and the different Islamic orthodoxies that were progressively established. We have met in our enquiry Shī‘īs of

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<sup>83</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 166.

all convictions, Imāmīs, Zaydīs, Ismā‘īlīs, Nuṣayrīs and other *ghulāt*, Khārijites, Mu‘tazilīs and Sunnis, but also Karaite Jews, all sharing similar doctrines, in an attempt to overcome the dangers of a strict monotheism by introducing intermediaries, “secondary causes” as the philosophers call them.

The Christology implied in the doctrine of *tafwīḍ* reminds us of Arianism, as suggested by al-Shahrastānī. The world has been created and is governed by the “Son” of God — Christ, identified with Muḥammad, ‘Alī or the *ahl al-bayt* — but this “Son” has been created by the Father and is subordinate to Him. Beside his demiurgic functions, the “Son” represents the divine principle, which manifests itself on earth through the continuously renewed corporeal envelopes of the messengers, Prophets and Imams, who appear in an uninterrupted chain. Without any doubt, such a conception is rooted in “heretical” Christian traditions, widespread in Mesopotamia, of which Islam, and Shi‘ism in particular, are the direct heirs<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> On the “Ebionite” background of Shī‘ī imamology, see De Smet, *Racines docétistes*, pp. 109-112.

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