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**DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF
ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN FAKHR AL-DĪN
AL-RĀZĪ'S *KALĀM***

BY

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ABSTRACT

As a religion which upholds divine transcendence as its fundamental element in arriving at divine knowledge, Islam is against any attempt to liken God with the characteristics of others particularly humans. The strong disavowal of anthropomorphism shown by Muslim theologians (the *mutakallimūn*) especially that against anthropomorphism brought by certain marginal schismatic sects throughout the history of Islamic thought has proved this uncompromising stance. This dissertation analyzes the refutations of one of the important later Ash'arite *mutakallimūn*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149-1209) against the literal views of the anthropomorphists who invested God with various anthropomorphic qualities. Advancing mostly philosophical and logical arguments, al-Rāzī, through one of his important theological works, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, set out to prove that the principle upon which the anthropomorphists maintained that God is a body and situated in a direction is unfounded and antithetical to the concept of divine transcendence. He argued that the anthropomorphic views which stem from the literalism and sensible-imaginal approach of some marginal Islamic sects have produced a description of God that completely shattered the principle of divine unity which is the foundation of Islamic understanding of God. Apart from providing an analysis of his arguments against anthropomorphism, this study also discusses al-Rāzī's understanding on the nature of divine attributes and how divine transcendence based on his analysis of relevant material from the Qur'an and *hadith* transpire in his discussion of attributes. Since anthropomorphism also springs from the false understanding of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an (*mutashābihāt*), this study examines al-Rāzī's views of *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* and the role of *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) as the appropriate device in understanding the meaning of those ambiguous verses. It also demonstrates how al-Rāzī, who believes that there should not be a contradiction between the Scripture and the established rational principle, applied *ta'wīl* in comprehending some of the verses of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions.

ملخص البحث

إن الإسلام حين يدعو إلى التنزيه الإلهي كمبدأ أساسي للوصول إلى العلم به تعالى يقوم بمواجهة كل محاولات تشبيه الله تعالى بأية صفات للمخلوقات وصفة خاصة الصفات الإنسانية. فإن الرد العنيف لموقف التشبيه من قبل المتكلمين المسلمين خاصة تجاه القول بالنجس الذي دعت إليه بعض الفرق المنشقة طوال تاريخ الفكر الإسلامي يدل دلالة واضحة على هذا الموقف الحاسر. فهذا البحث يقوم بتحليل ونقد أحد أهم متأخري الأشاعرة، الإمام فخر الدين الرازي (١١٤٩-١٢٠٩م) على التفسير الحرفي للمجسمين الذين يحرصون على أنوع طبائع تجسيمية. لقد قدم الرازي من خلال واحد من مؤلفه الكلامية المهمة "أساس التقيديس" الأدلة الفلسفية والمنطقية لإثبات أن المبدأ الذي بنى عليه المجسمون في دعواهم بأن الله تعالى جسم وأنه في جهة معينة، يثبت بأن هذا المبدأ لا أساس له وأنه مخالف لحقيقة تنزيه الله تعالى. لقد احتج الرازي بأن تلك الآراء التي نجمت عن النزعة الحرفية والحسية لدى الأقليات من الفرق الإسلامية تنتهي إلى تصوير الله تعالى بصورة تتصادم مع مبدأ التوحيد الإلهي الذي يعتبر ركن وأساس في الإسلام. فبالإضافة إلى تحليل الأدلة التي قدمها الرازي تجاه المجسمين فقد تناول البحث عرض موقف الإمام حول حقيقة الصفات الإلهية. كما ناقش موقف الإمام في التنزيه بناء على تحليله للآيات والأحاديث المعينة وأثر هذا الموقف في مناقشته لقضية الصفات. لقد تناول البحث أيضاً دراسة موقف الرازي حول المحكمات والمنشابهات من القرآن وقضية التأويل، وذلك لعلاقتها الوثيقة بقضية التجسيم. لقد أثبت البحث بأن الرازي الذي يؤمن بأن المبدأ العقلي الصحيح لا يتعارض مع النص يقول بجواز التأويل في فهم بعض الآيات القرآنية والأحاديث النبوية.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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**DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF
ANTHROPOMORPHISM
IN FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ'S *KALĀM***

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“Allah will raise up to suitable ranks and degrees, those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge.” - al-Mujādilah 58:11

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“And Allah has full knowledge and is well-acquainted with all things.” (al-Ḥujurāt 49:13)

CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Abstract in Arabic.....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page.....	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Al-Rāzī as a Champion Against Anthropomorphism.....	4
Objective of this Study.....	8
Previous Studies and the Scope of this Study.....	10
Sources of the Study.....	15
Methodology and Significance of this Study.....	16
Plan of the Study.....	17
CHAPTER ONE: DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM: A THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.....	19
Introduction: Rational and Scriptural Basis of Divine Transcendence...	19
Terms Employed to Designate Divine Transcendence.....	23
God's Immanence and the Problem of Anthropomorphism.....	27
The Polemic of Anthropomorphism: Main Groups.....	29
i. The Anthropomorphists (<i>Mushabbihah</i>).....	29
i.i. Main Views of the <i>Mushabbihah</i>	32
i.ii. Epistemological Method of the <i>Mushabbihah</i>	35
ii) The <i>Mu'tazilah</i>	37
iii) Ibn Ḥanbal.....	40
iii.i. <i>Bilā Kayf</i>	44
iii.ii. The <i>Ḥanābilah</i>	47
iv) The <i>Ashā'irah</i>	51
iv.i. Abū Ḥassan Al-Ash'arī.....	51
iv.ii Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.....	58
Conclusion.....	63
CHAPTER TWO: DIVINE ATTRIBUTES IN AL-RĀZĪ'S KALĀM.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Conception of the Attributes.....	67

The Polemic Concerning the Nature of Divine Attributes.....	70
Al-Rāzī's Views on the Nature of the Attributes and their Relation to the Essence.....	79
The Eternal and the Originated.....	82
Classification of the Attributes.....	86
Divine Transcendence as Reflected in al-Rāzī's Classification of Attributes.....	90
Unicity (<i>waḥdāniyyah</i>).....	92
Eternity (<i>Qidam</i>).....	97
<i>Baqā'</i> (Permanence).....	100
God's Being Distinct from Originated Things (<i>Mukhālafatuhu li al-Ḥawādith</i>).....	101
CHAPTER THREE: TEXTUAL AND RATIONAL BASIS OF THE DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE.....	104
Introduction.....	104
<i>Kitāb Asās al-Taqdīs</i>	105
The Arrangement of <i>Kitāb Asās al-Taqdīs</i>	108
The Importance of <i>Asās al-Taqdīs</i>	109
Rational Proofs of Divine Transcendence.....	111
The Rational Principle Underlying the <i>Mushabbihah</i> 's Notion of God.....	111
Al-Rāzī's Counter Arguments.....	117
God as an Existent beyond Sense Perception.....	118
God as an Existent without any Resemblance (<i>shabīh</i>).....	120
Classification of Existents.....	121
The Cause of the Principle (<i>Illat al-Ḥukm</i>).....	124
Negation of the Spatial and Bodily Aspects with regard to God. Characteristics of Spatial Bodies.....	127
Textual Arguments on the Transcendence of God.....	132
<i>Sūrat al-Ikhlās</i>	133
CHAPTER FOUR: <i>MUḤKAMĀT</i> , <i>MUTASHĀBIHĀT</i> , AND THE ROLE OF <i>TA WĪL</i> IN RĀZĪ'S THOUGHT.....	140
Introduction.....	140
The <i>Muḥkamāt</i> and <i>Mutashābihāt</i> in the Qur'ān.....	140
Qur'ānic Origin: Sūrah Āl 'Imrān, Verse 7.....	142
The Legitimacy of Interpreting the <i>Mutashābihāt</i>	147
Can There be Anything in the Qur'ān that is Beyond our Knowledge?.....	149
Linguistic and Technical Meaning of <i>Muḥkam</i> and <i>Mutashābih</i>	153
<i>Ta wīl</i> as a Method for Understanding the <i>Mutashābihāt</i>	154

The Importance of Reason as the Source of <i>Ta'wīl</i> : An Epistemological Analysis.....	159
Rational and Traditional Proofs.....	161
Solution to the Contradiction between Rational and Traditional Proofs.....	168
Ibn Taymiyyah's Response.....	170
CHAPTER FIVE: AL-RAZĪ'S TREATMENT OF THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC VERSES.....	
Introduction.....	174
God's Image and the Form of Adam.....	175
God's Face.....	181
The Vision of Allāh (<i>Ru'yat Allāh</i>).....	186
The Affirmation of Direction (<i>al-jibah</i>) with regard to God.	192
God's Hand.....	198
Conclusion: Al-Rāzī's General Method in Treating the Anthropomorphic Verses.....	200
CONCLUSION.....	203
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	207

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Arba'in</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>Kitāb al-Arba'in fī Uṣūl al-Dīn</i>
<i>Asās</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>Asās al-Taqdīs</i>
Controversies	Fathalla Kholeif, <i>A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana</i>
EI	First Encyclopedia of Islam
EI2	Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition
<i>Fakhr al-Dīn</i>	Ṣālih Zarkān, <i>Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uhū al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafīyyah</i>
<i>Farq</i>	Al-Baghdādī, <i>Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq</i>
<i>Faṣl</i>	Ibn Ḥazm, <i>al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal</i>
<i>Ibānah</i>	Al-Ash'arī, <i>al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah</i>
<i>Irshād</i>	Al-Juwaynī, <i>al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭi' al-Adillah fī Uṣūl al-I'tiqād</i>
<i>Lawāmi'</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>Lawāmi' al-Bayyināt Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh Ta'ālā wa-al-Sifāt</i>
<i>Ma'ālim</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>Ma'ālim fī Uṣūl al-Dīn</i>
<i>Mabāḥith</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhiyyāt wa al-Ṭabī'iyyāt</i>
<i>Maḥṣūl</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl</i>
<i>Maqālāt</i>	Al-Ash'arī, <i>Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn</i>
<i>Masā'il</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>al-Masā'il al-Khamsūn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn</i>

<i>Maṭālib</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>al-Maṭālib ‘Āliyah min al-‘Ilm al-Ilāhī</i>
<i>Milal</i>	Al-Shahrastānī, <i>Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal</i>
<i>Muḥaṣṣal</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta‘akhhirīn min al-‘Ulamā’ wa al-Ḥukamā’ wa al-Mutakallimīn</i>
<i>Muqaddimah</i>	Ibn Khaldūn, <i>Muqaddimah</i>
<i>Nihāyat</i>	Al-Shahrastānī, <i>Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām</i>
<i>Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id</i>	Al-Taftāzānī, <i>Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyyah</i>
<i>Tafsīr</i>	Al-Rāzī, <i>al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr</i>
<i>Tahāfut</i>	Al-Ghazālī, <i>Tahāfut al-Falāsifah</i>
<i>Ta’wīl</i>	Ibn Qutaybah, <i>Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth</i>
Theology	Yasin Ceylan, <i>Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī</i>

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Qur'ān is replete with messages of the transcendence of God. Apart from emphasizing the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), many verses expound the absolute dissimilarity between God and His creatures.¹ The *mutakallimūn*, concurring with this enormous stress laid by the Qur'ān, affirmed that divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) is one of the underlying principles in arriving at the understanding of God. However, the Qur'ān, as well as the Prophetic traditions, also employ anthropomorphic (*tashbīh*) language in describing some of God's qualities and actions. God, for example, is described as having 'limbs' such as hands,² face³ and eyes.⁴ He is also described as sitting (on the Throne),⁵ descending (to the earthly heavens),⁶ forgetful,⁷ feeling angry⁸ and happy.⁹ Verses with these descriptions, known as those whose meanings are not clearly established (*āyāt mutashābihāt*), depict a somewhat different aspect of divine reality compared to the verses which emphasize the absolute uniqueness of God. As far as the history of *kalām* is concerned, this contrasting description of God was not in the beginning felt as a tension or contradiction but later on, due to geographical expansion of Islamic territories and conversion of people from various religions into Islam, there

¹ Such as the verse, "Nothing is like unto Him" (*laysa ka mithlihi shay*), al-Shūrā 42:11, and "There is none like unto Him" (*lam yakun lahū kufuwan aḥad*), al-Ikhlās 112:4.

² Al-Qur'ān, Ṣād 38:57, al-Fatḥ 48:10.

³ Al-Qur'ān, al-Qaṣaṣ 28:88.

⁴ Al-Qur'ān, Hūd 11:37, Ṭā Hā 20:39, al-Ṭūr 52:38.

⁵ Al-Qur'ān, Ṭā Hā 20:5.

⁶ Based on a Hadith which says, "God waits until three quarters of night and He descends to the earthly heaven and says, "Is there any one who seek my pardon or make a prayer, until the dawn," Ibn Khuzaymah, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa Itḥāt Ṣfat al-Rabb* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), 126.

⁷ Al-Qur'ān, al-Tawbah 9:67

⁸ Al-Qur'ān, al-Nisā' 4:93

⁹ Ibn Majah, "Masājid", no. 800, *Sunan*. Ed. Muḥammad Fuād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1954), vol.1, 262.

emerged different sects which insisted on taking the literal meaning of the *mutashābihāt*. They soon began attributing anthropomorphic qualities to God. Thus, the unity and transcendence of God, which is the pristine pillar of Islamic theology, began to be challenged by these anthropomorphic interpretations. Although this challenge did not become a major threat to the mainstream Islamic theology, it compelled the *mutakallimūn* to provide a considerable amount of substantial and systematic arguments in refuting these ideas.

Apparently, there were many modes of interpretations in dealing with the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’ān ranging from crude emphasis of the literal meaning to the allegorical.¹⁰ At the two opposite extremes, there are the *ta’īl* (divesting God of all attributes) of the *Mu tazilah* and the *Jahmiyyah* who categorically reject any anthropomorphic meanings regarding God’s attributes while at the same time, introducing allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the *mutashābihāt* verses of the Qur’ān. The meanings intended by God in these expressions, according to them, are conveyed metaphorically; God’s hand is His power, God’ eye is His essence, and so on. On the other extreme, there were those who resolutely stuck to the literal meaning and insisted that there are no other meanings conveyed by these expressions beside the literal ones. Taking God’s words as absolute and immutable, they confined themselves to accepting only the literal implications of the expressions. The extreme among them went to the extent of affirming a physical size of God, that God, for example, is no larger than the Jabal Qubays in Mecca.¹¹ They were called the *mushabbihah*,

¹⁰ R. Strothman, “Tashbīh,” *EI*, vol. 8, 685. Abrahamov identifies three different ways adopted by Muslim scholars in treating the anthropomorphic expressions. First, those who adopted the literal meanings of these expressions saying, for example, that God has a face, hands and that He sits on His throne. Second, those who interpreted these expressions in a figurative way. Thus, God’s hand implies His power and His sitting on the throne means His rule over the world. Third, who accepted the sacred text as it is without trying to interpret its modality (*kayfiyyah*). Binyamin Abrahamov, “The *Bilā Kayfa* Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology,” *ARABICA, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Tome XLII, No. 3 (Nov. 1995): 365.

¹¹ This is the view of Abū al-Hudhayl, one of the early *Mu tazilah*. *Maqālāt*, vol.1, 281-282.

those who perform *tashbīh*, namely comparing and making God similar with His creation, especially man, by ascribing human characteristics to Him.

Tashbīh emerged in various degrees as reflected in the different names and designations rendered by heresiographical scholars and *mutakallimūn* to those who uphold it.¹² In general, they were called *mushabbihah* due to the fact that they made God similar to His creation by ascribing some of their characteristics to Him. This assimilation, however, varies depending upon the nature of the assimilation. Broadly classified, there were at least two forms of *tashbīh* prevalent in the history of Islamic thought.¹³ The first form is plain literalism wherein the literal meanings of the anthropomorphic expressions were upheld and metaphorical meanings were rejected. The theological implication of this position is the affirmation of God having all the anthropomorphic qualities including the ‘organs’ mentioned in the Qur’ān. This view was held by the extreme segment of the *Ḥanābilah* whose anthropomorphic tendency was rejected even by other scholars from the same theological school. It was evidenced, for example, in the criticism of Ibn al-Jawzī (d.1210), one of the prominent *Ḥanābilah*, against their views.¹⁴ The second form of anthropomorphism is what we term as ‘philosophical literalism,’ a literal approach that is further substantiated with rational and philosophical arguments. This approach is best represented by the *Karrāmiyyah* and some *Shi‘ī* individuals such as Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and Hishām b. Sālim al-Jawālīki who, although started from the literal understanding of the Scripture, were later on influenced by some philosophical ideas such as the idea of the eternity of the world. Based on the

¹² The *mujassimah*, for example, were called as such due to their ascription of body (*jism*) to God; the *Hulūliyyah* were so-called due to their subscription to the idea of divine incarnation (*ḥulūl*). Others, however, derived their names from their leaders such as the *Karrāmiyyah*, *Hishāmiyyah*, *Bayāniyyah*, and *‘Azāqirah*. See *Farq*, 18-40; *Maqālāt*, vol.1, 281-290.

¹³ These two forms of *tashbīh* are also al-Rāzī’s main object of criticism which will be analyzed later.

¹⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Daf‘ Shubah al-Tashbīh bi Akuff al-Tanzīh*, ed. Ḥassān Saqqāf (Ammān: Dār al-Imām al-Nawawī, 2000).

anthropomorphic qualities mentioned in the Qur'an, they try to justify their ascription of these qualities to God by applying the philosophical concepts of substance, accidents, atom and body.¹⁵

The *mushabbihah* position, however, must be differentiated from the position of the early generations of the Muslims (*al-salaf*) who took a safe and precautionous stand in approaching the problem of anthropomorphism. Their position was often associated with Mālik ibn Anas's saying that "God's sitting on the Throne is known, but its modality is unknown, and belief in it is obligatory while inquiring about it is an innovation" (*al-istiwā' ma ḡūl al-kayf majhūl al-īmān bihī wājib wa al-su'āl ānḡu bid'āh*).¹⁶ Later on, this principle was developed and known as *bilā kayf* (without modality) in which the anthropomorphic attributes are accepted without further inquiry regarding their modality. Although the fine line dividing the *salaf* and the *mushabbihah* is sometimes regarded by their adversaries, the *Mu tazilah*, as obscure, due to their rejection of allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*), one discernible difference, as pointed out by al-Rāzī, is that the *salaf* maintain that the meanings that are intended by God through these anthropomorphic expressions are not literal, hence the meanings must be entrusted to God (*tafwīd ma ḡāhā ilā Allāh*).¹⁷ The *mushabbihah*, on the other hand, adhere and insist on the literal and anthropomorphic meanings and further support their position by their own rational construction.

¹⁵ For further views of the *Karrāmiyyah* and these individuals, see *al-Farq*, 18-36; *Milal*, 88-96; W.M.Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 79-81; A.S.Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (Bristol: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1947), 74-78, 108-112.

¹⁶ *Milal*, 65; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1981), 113.

¹⁷ *As ās*, 208.

AL-RĀZĪ AS A CHAMPION AGAINST ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Among the *mutakallimūn* who had been actively involved in the polemic against anthropomorphism was Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin ‘Umar b. al-Ḥusayn, better known as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,¹⁸ one of the most important Ash‘arite *mutakallimūn* of the twelfth century. As a staunch critic of the *mushabbihah*’ views especially those prevailing at his time, al-Rāzī took the task of defending the divine transcendence through his systematic refutation of the anthropomorphic ideas of the *mushabbihah* especially in his theological work *Asās al-Taqdīs*. Born in Rayy, northern Persia in 1149, al-Rāzī (d.1209) was a famous *mutakallim* of the thirteenth century. He was a celebrated scholar of his time,¹⁹ and was regarded as the reviver of Islam in the twelfth century.²⁰ Both he and al-Ghazālī were esteemed as the founder of the new school in *kalām* which was mainly characterized by its maximal employment of logico-philosophical tools in *kalām*. Although he was known mainly as a *mutakallim*, al-Rāzī’s brilliant and encyclopedic mind enabled him to write in many fields of knowledge such as philosophy, logic, *fiqh*, physics, medicine and astronomy. Ibn Khallikān rightly acknowledged al-Rāzī’s great intellectual ability when he remarked that the latter was the “greatest authority on the Greek sciences of his time and surpassed all his contemporaries in theology, metaphysics and

¹⁸ Information regarding the life and works of al-Rāzī can be found in many sources some of which will be continuously mentioned in this introduction. Among the important works that provide biographical information on al-Rāzī are Ṣālih Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa ‘Ārā’uhū al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafīyyah* (Egypt: Darul Fikr, 1963); Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafṣīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī”, in M. M. Sharif, (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 642-656; Tony Street, ‘Concerning the Life and Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’, *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society: A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, ed. Peter G. Riddell & Tony Street (Leiden: Brill, 1997); G. C. Anawati, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” *EI2*, vol. II, 751-755.

¹⁹ Al-Rāzī was also known through other titles such as *Imām al-Fakhr* and *Ibn al-Khaṭīb*. He was born in a family of scholars and had his father Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn, a well-known scholar of Rayy as his first teacher. Later on, he studied various disciplines in Rayy and Marāghah under Muḥammad al-Baghāwī and Majd al-Dīn al-Jilī (who was also the teacher of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrāwardī) and Kamāl al-Dīn al-Simmānī. *Theology*, 1.

²⁰ Nasr, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” 642.

philosophy.”²¹ His analytical and philosophical mind can be seen, for example, through his critical commentaries on a number of Ibn Sīnā’s works such as *al-Ishārāt* and *Uyūn al-Ḥikmah*.²² In *kalām*, he wrote many monumental works such as *Muḥaṣṣal*, *Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, *Maṭālib ʿĀliyah* and *Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*, which propound important aspects of *kalām*, putting him at par with his predecessors such as al-Baqillānī, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī who had contributed to the refinement of the Ashʿarite *kalām*. Al-Rāzī’s independent approach is also apparent in his disagreements with his predecessors on a number of issues based on his own justified arguments. His important contribution to the enrichment of later Ashʿarite *kalām* is also evidenced by the influence of some of his theological ideas on later Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn*, such as ʿAlī al-Jurjānī and Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī.²³ Al-Rāzī was also known as a *mufasssīr* through his voluminous Qurʿanic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, which is regarded as a systematic *tafsīr* due to the great emphasis he placed on describing the interconnections between the Qurʿanic chapters and verses. This is also associated with his belief in the unity of truth between philosophy and religion.²⁴

As far as anthropomorphism is concerned, al-Rāzī was strongly opposed by the *mushabbihah* especially the *Karrāmiyyah*.²⁵ Equipped with strong logical and philosophical tools together with his courage and convincing eloquent oratory, he held debates with the leaders of the *Karrāmiyyah* and converted many of them into the fold of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah*.²⁶ At the same

²¹ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, trans. MacGuckin De Slane (London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1843), vol. 2, 652.

²² Although critical of Ibn Sīnā, al-Rāzī was also influenced by many of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical ideas. He was also influenced in physics by another scholar, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī.

²³ See Chapter Four, 168-169.

²⁴ *Theology*, 6.

²⁵ See information about *Karrāmiyyah* in Chapter One, 29, n.53.

²⁶ See the introduction of M. Saghir Hasan Ma’sumi, *Imām Rāzī’s ʿIlm al-Akhlāq*, being an English translation of his *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Quwāḥumā* with introduction and commentary (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1970), 6.

time, his continuous attacks on their views during his travel in many places,²⁷ had also stirred great hostility among the *Karrāmiyyah* against him. They, in turn, leveled severe allegations against him, and even threatened his life. Similar hostile attitude towards him was also shown by the *Ḥanābilah* and the *Isma'ilīs* due to his bitter criticism against their doctrines.²⁸

Apart from his criticisms against the *mushabbihah* in his theological works, al-Rāzī composed a specific work, *Asās al-Taqdīs*²⁹ which was particularly intended to refute the two forms of *tashbih* we mentioned above. In this work, he underlined the paramount importance of preserving the divine transcendence by advancing substantial rational and traditional proofs against the major premises underlying the views of the *mushabbihah*. Arguing that God is an existent beyond the reach of human senses, al-Rāzī further drew attention to the stark differences between the transcendent understanding of God and the notion of body (*jism*) and direction (*jihah*), the two main qualities which were attributed to God by the *mushabbihah*. He made use of the already established *kalām* discussion of body (*jism*), substance (*jawhar*) and accident (*ʿaraḍ*) to show that God is essentially different from the characteristics of bodies. These bodies are homogeneous, located in a certain direction and in need of each other and all these are important indications of the physical nature of corporeal beings, which are utterly inappropriate to the divine nature. In principle, al-Rāzī maintained that any attempt to locate God in a direction as attempted by the *mushabbihah*,

²⁷ Al-Rāzī's intellectual life was very much coloured by his travels into various places as well as having patronized by several rulers. After completed his studies in Rayy, he traveled to Khwarizm where he held debates with the *Mu'tazilah*. He then moved to Transoxiana and was accepted at the Courts of the Ghūr rulers, Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Shihāb al-Dīn. After receiving antagonistic and hostile opposition from certain scholars, he left Ghūr to Ghaznah where he stayed for a while in the Court of Ghaznah. He finally settled in Herat where he taught under the patronage of Khwarizm Shah 'Alā' al-Dīn until the end of his life.

²⁸ Ma'sumi, 11-14; *Theology*, 3.

²⁹ Ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqā (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jil, 1993).

would only end up attributing to God characteristics which are impossible to Him.

God, al-Rāzī argued, is an existent beyond the grasp of human senses. As a Supreme Being, He has neither any equal nor resemblance (*naẓīr wa shabīh*). The uniqueness of his existence is affirmed both by reason and the Scripture, hence, no physical principles can be applied to the existence of God. Once the divine transcendence is upheld, it follows, epistemologically, that the anthropomorphic verses or expressions in the Scripture cannot be taken literally. In line with this position, al-Rāzī put forward an important epistemological principle that if there is any contradiction between the Scripture with the already established rational principle, the latter must be maintained. The acceptance of the former will only lead to the impingement upon the divine transcendence which has already been firmly established. Furthermore, inconsistency in a scriptural message is unacceptable since it would denigrate its integrity as a divine message. As a way out, al-Rāzī maintained that the *mutashābihāt* verses must be dealt with in the strong precaution of preserving the divine transcendence by using the methodology of *ta'wīl*, an allegorical interpretation of a verse. Nevertheless, *ta'wīl* must be based on the proper identification of the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*) and appropriate assignment of their meanings based on the verses which have established meaning (*muḥkamāt*) and substantiated by conclusive proofs. Above all that, *ta'wīl* should only be carried out by qualified people. Al-Rāzī admitted that *tafwīd*, namely to entrust the meaning of the *mutashābihāt* to God, as done by the *salaf*, is the safest way in dealing with anthropomorphic verses, yet this should not prevent those who are deeply rooted in knowledge and those who believe that the whole meaning of the Qur'ān is comprehensible from establishing the appropriate meaning of these verses.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The subject we are dealing in this study can be briefly phrased as the problem of anthropomorphism (*tashbih*). In particular, this study is an analysis, through one of al-Rāzī's works, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, of a methodology in interpreting or understanding the meaning of the anthropomorphic expressions concerning certain qualities of God mentioned in the Scripture and in the Prophetic traditions with an underlying emphasis in preserving the divine transcendence. In achieving this objective, this study aims, first, at examining al-Rāzī's views on divine transcendence through his views on the divine attributes. It also seeks to elaborate his defense of divine transcendence through his refutation, scripturally and rationally, of the views of the *Mushabbihah* regarding God. It then analyzes al-Rāzī's method of interpreting the anthropomorphic verses.

Due to the interrelated subject matter of the study, this research dwells not only within the realm of *kalām* but also encroaches into another important field in Islam, namely, *tafsīr*. Simply put, it begins with *kalām* but ends with *tafsīr*. Since the principle of divine transcendence is mostly elaborated in *kalām*, the theological discussions leading to its establishment is the main concern of this study, while the problem of understanding the anthropomorphic expressions through the discussion of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* falls under the domain of *tafsīr*. The selection of al-Rāzī as its intellectual figure and this topic in particular is, to us, duly fitting. For our scholar was well known as both a *mutakallim* and a *mufassīr*. In *kalām*, as mentioned before, he was an eminent and notable later Ash'arite scholar whose theological ideas have left repercussions in the theological discussion of the later *mutakallimūn*. While in *tafsīr*, his *magnum opus*, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, has been regarded as the greatest work both in volume and importance, encyclopedic in nature combining various disciplines in

one work.³⁰ In addition, al-Rāzī's mastery of language, philosophy, and *kalām* has great significance in his discussion concerning the way the anthropomorphic verses should be comprehended.

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

To the best of our knowledge, there has been no specific study on al-Rāzī's views regarding divine transcendence and anthropomorphism. Neither is there any particular analysis of al-Rāzī's *Kitāb Asās al-Taqdīs* apart from al-Saqā's comments as an appendix in his edition of this work.³¹ Nevertheless, within a more general and comprehensive study on al-Rāzī's theological thought, this subject is included, for example, in Ṣālih Zarkān's comprehensive study on al-Rāzī's theology, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uhū al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafīyyah*.³² In this work, Zarkān deals with the divine transcendence under the subject of negative attributes (*sifāt salbiyyah*) which includes the purification of God from any physical qualities. Another similar work is that by Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*.³³ These two published works also prove to be invaluable to access al-Rāzī's theological views as a whole.

There are also several articles which partially discuss al-Rāzī's view on some aspects of the problem of divine transcendence and anthropomorphism.

³⁰ Also known as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, this Quranic commentary (32 vols., al-Qāhirah edition) is regarded as the most extensive exegesis based on individual opinion and reasoning (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*). Its vast discussions cover various kinds of knowledge, including many views of different sects such as the *Mu tazilah*, the philosophers, *Karrāmiyyah*. The extensive nature of this work is evidenced, among others, in al-Rāzī's discussion of *Sūrat al-Fā'iḥah* in which he said that from this particular chapter alone, 10,000 problems can be extracted. As reported by al-Dhahabī, Abū Ḥayyān in his work *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* remarked that this work "has everything in it except tafsīr" (This statement is also attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah). Al-Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrīn* (Al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1986), vol.1, 289-296.

³¹ See appendix in al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqā (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jil, 1993), 229-245.

³² Egypt: Darul Fikr, 1963.

³³ Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996.

Shalahudin Kafrawi has written an article *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Sources of Ta'wīl: Between Revelation and Reason*³⁴ in which he focuses on the role of revelation and reason in his *tafsīr*. *Ta'wīl*, as a manifestation of the central role of reason in the interpretation of revelation, dominates the whole article. Another article which investigates al-Rāzī's view on *ta'wīl* and the relation between reason and revelation is written by Nicholas Heer, *The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymiyyah and The Mutakallimūn*.³⁵ Although the central focus of the article is the refutation of Ibn Taymiyyah of the views of Ash'arite *mutakallimūn* especially al-Rāzī, Heer began by discussing the view of al-Rāzī on the issue. The Ash'arites' position with regard to the conflict between reason and scripture, according to Heer, is to invariably give priority to reason over scripture and al-Rāzī was among those who strongly emphasizes this principle. Binyamin Abrahamov discusses the view of al-Rāzī on the transcendent aspect of divine essence and attributes in his article "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes."³⁶ He argues that al-Rāzī, like al-Ghazālī, in his later works changed his mind concerning human's knowledge of God's essence and adopted the philosophical position that His essence cannot be known. Another relevant article is Binyamin Abrahamov's "The *Bi-lā Kayfa* Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology" which elaborates the position of *bi-lā kayf* especially among the *mutakallimūn*.³⁷ He maintains that the arguments based on the *bi-lā kayfa* doctrine had a dual function. One the one hand, they served as a weapon against anthropomorphism and against figurative interpretation, and on the other, they

³⁴ In *Islamic Quarterly: A Review of Islamic Culture*, vol. XLIII, no. 3 (Third Quarter, 1999).

³⁵ In *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studie in Honour of James A. Bellamys*, ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1993).

³⁶ *ARABICA, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Tome XLIX, no. 2 (2002).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Tome XLII, Fascicule 3 (Nov. 1995).

aimed at strengthening the thesis of the unknowability of God's essence and attributes.³⁸

The subject of anthropomorphism alone has become the interest of several people. R. Strothman wrote an article under the heading “*tashb ĩh*” in the First Encyclopedia of Islam in which he analysed the words relating to the issue such as *tashb ĩh* (likening God to His creatures), *tamthĭl* (giving simile to God), *ta ĩwĭl* (allegorical interpretation), *tanz ĩh* (keeping God pure) and *ta ĩĭl* (divesting God of attributes). Maintaining that the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an have been interpreted in various degrees, he also admitted the difficulties in approaching the question since none of the Muslim theologians openly declare that they are anthropomorphists but rather everyone asserts *tanz ĩh* as opposed to *tashb ĩh*.³⁹ Nevertheless, the issue of anthropomorphism, according to him, hinges upon two extreme positions, namely, *tashb ĩh*, held by many groups such as the *Karrāmiyyah* and some of the *Hanābilah*, and *ta ĩĭl* which is held by the *Jahmiyyah* and the *Mu tazilah*. He analysed views of some theological figures who were involved in these polemics such as Jahm bin Ṣafwān, the earliest *mu āĩĭlah*, Aḥmad ibn Hanbal, who introduced the *bilā kayf* method, and Hisham b. al-Ḥakam, a stark exemplar of the anthropomorphists. Strothman, however, differentiates between *tashb ĩh* and *tajs ĩm* claiming that the latter is less severe since the *mujassimah* like Hisham b. al-Ḥakam usually add the phrase “not like our body” in their views when comparing God with human beings.⁴⁰

William Montgomery Watt wrote two articles entitled “Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism” and “Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology,” both found in his book, *Early Islam*.⁴¹ In the first article, Watt points out that *tashb ĩh* was first raised by the *Mu tazilah* and *Jahmiyyah*

³⁸ Ibid., 378.

³⁹ Strothman, “Tashbĭh”, *EI*, 685.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 687.

⁴¹ Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.