



Imam al-Rida's Theological Confrontation with Anthropomorphism and Corporealism: A Study of His Response to the *Mushabbiha* and *Mujassima*

Alireza Roohi¹ , Mohammadebrahim Roshanzamir² 

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Abstract

The knowledge of God and His attributes has always occupied the minds of humans. Throughout history, many individuals have resorted to anthropomorphism and corporealization to understand God and His attributes. They often imagined God in their minds as a physical being, either resembling their forefathers or a human-like figure with commendable or extraordinary characteristics. With the advent of Islam and its relentless struggle against polytheism, many polytheistic ideas were pushed to the margins; however, significant discussions emerged concerning the attributes of God and their interpretation, marking the onset of the first religious disputes among Muslims. A group of Muslims, later known as *Mushabbiha* (anthropomorphists) and *Mujassima* (corporealists), argued for the attribution of human and corporeal traits to God, based on the apparent meanings of certain Qur'anic verses and Hadiths, particularly those classified as Israelite traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*). This research, structured descriptively and analytically, explores the background of this theological movement and the role of Imam al-Rida in combating it. The findings of this study indicate that this movement has deep historical roots, reaching its peak during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Following the conduct of the Ahl al-Bayt, Imam al-Rida not only repelled the accusations of corporealization and anthropomorphism directed at the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt by their opponents, but also engaged in a thorough battle against this deviant ideology by explaining the correct meaning of the reported attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-khabariyya*), providing a systematic interpretation of the verses concerning divine attributes, clarifying the Hadiths that could be construed as supporting anthropomorphism, and taking a firm stance against the proponents of these ideas.

Keywords: Divine attributes, anthropomorphism, corporealization, Imam al-Rida, Mushabbiha, Mujassima

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1. Associate Professor in Department of History. Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author) (dr.roohi@razavi.ac.ir)

2. Associate Professor in Department of Quranic Sciences and Hadith. Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran.

Introduction

The knowledge of God and His attributes has been one of the most significant concerns of humanity throughout history. Many people have used anthropomorphism and corporealization to understand God. They imagined God in their minds as a physical being or as a human-like figure, resembling their forefathers, or possessing commendable attributes, and they narrated various stories and tales about this. With the advent of Islam and its call to monotheism (*tawhīd*), along with its comprehensive struggle against polytheism (*shirk*), many early conceptions about God were relegated to the margins. However, long-standing debates about divine attributes emerged. The examination of God's attributes and the denial of any form of partnership with Him is one of the most important and ancient disputes among Muslims, to the extent that Ibn Khaldun considers this topic to be the origin of the discipline of Kalam (Ibn Khaldun 1988, 1: 587-589). The understanding of divine attributes confronted two main tendencies among Muslims. On one hand, a group of people imagined the attributes and actions of God to be like those of human beings and became proponents of anthropomorphism and corporealization. On the other hand, another group believed in the transcendence of the Lord, holding that He is free from the attributes of His creatures and human beings (Tahanawi 1996, 1: 529).

A group of literalist Muslims, relying on the apparent meanings of certain Qur'anic verses regarding God's attributes, believed in attributing human and corporeal traits to God. They ascribed attributes such as movement, having members, occupying space, walking, being visible, having a temporal nature, and similar qualities to the Lord. These groups, known as *Mushabbihā*, accused their opponents of disbelief (*kufr*) and denying the Qur'an. In turn, their opponents leveled the same accusations against them.

The abundance and diversity of hadiths from the Imams regarding the denial of anthropomorphism, and the various questions posed to them on this subject, reflect the widespread nature of debates about corporealization and indicate the widespread dissemination of these fabricated hadiths among Muslims.

1. Literature Review

Extensive discussions have taken place regarding God's attributes and the views of Islamic sects on them, which are documented in theological books, hadith literature, and exegeses. The background of theological movements has also been discussed in the books of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (on religions and sects). Several papers in Persian, focusing on the role of Imam al-Rida in dealing with these movements, have been written on this subject. Pakdaman (2008) introduces the theological movements

during Imam al-Rida's time and refers to some reports about Imam al-Rida's intellectual confrontation with these movements. Mohamadjafari (2016) states that Imam al-Rida employed two methods—interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself and rational interpretation of the verses—to clarify the non-corporeal and correct understanding of the verses related to reported attributes¹ of God. Rouhani and Motahhari (2017), in part of their article on Imam al-Hadi's interaction with theological sects, dedicate a brief section to "the ideological movement of anthropomorphism and corporealization." Jamali and Moazzeni Bistgani (2023) make some references to the *Mujassima* and *Mushabbiha* movements in their paper. Taghavi et al. (2022) discuss four verses that are the source of belief in anthropomorphism and corporealization, and then they consider Imam al-Rida's solution, which was the interpretation and rational and narrative exegesis of these verses, as the best method to confront these movements.

The unique contribution of this research is that it humbly attempts to explore the development of ideas related to corporealization and anthropomorphism, particularly during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, and to offer a thoughtful overview of Imam al-Rida's principles and methods for addressing these movements.

2. Some Divine Attributes with Anthropomorphic Implications

Some of the attributes and characteristics of God mentioned in the Qur'an have been used by proponents of corporealization to support their views on anthropomorphism and corporealization, interpreting these verses to align with their beliefs. Some of the most significant of these include: the hand of God (48: 10; 3: 73; 5: 64; 38: 75; 51: 47; 39: 47), the speech of God (4: 164), the establishment upon the Throne (7: 54), the characteristics of the divine Throne (11: 7), the vision of God with the physical eye (75: 22-23), the coming of God (89: 22), the ambush of God (89: 14), God's foot in Hell (50: 30), the establishment (*istiwā'*) (75: 12), and the face of God (28: 88). In addition to the aforementioned cases, there are numerous other verses and hadiths in which attributes and actions such as mercy, anger, laughter, descent (*nuzūl*), sitting, even riding animals, and possessing parts like eyes, ears, and limbs are attributed to God. However, there are also numerous verses and hadiths that entirely reject any form of anthropomorphism, including: "There is nothing like Him"² (42: 11), "No vision can grasp Him, but He grasps all vision, and He is the Subtle, the All-Aware" (6: 103), "Say: 'Praise be to God, Who has not taken a son, and who has no partner in the kingdom'" (17: 111), and many other verses.

3. Attributes with Anthropomorphic Implications in the Old Testament

The corporealization of God has a long history among Christians and Jews, with numerous reports in the Old Testament referring to belief in corporealization and anthropomorphism. The discussion of the vision of God is mentioned in the Book of Genesis, the Book of Exodus, and other parts of the Old Testament (see: Genesis 28:41, 43, 46, 61; Exodus 19:114, and many other passages). Many passages narrate God speaking with humans or prophets (see: Genesis 16:20, 38, 50; Exodus 6:90, among others). In the Book of Exodus, there are references to God's battle with the Egyptians, including details of this conflict (Exodus 14:105). The concept of God creating Adam in His image is discussed in the Old Testament, as found in Genesis: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"³ (Genesis 1:26-27). Furthermore, this idea of creating Adam in the likeness of God is mentioned in other instances, such as in Genesis 5.

4. Classification of Islamic Sects Regarding Divine Attributes

Imam al-Rida divides the people's views regarding the divine attributes into three categories: 1. Negation, 2. Anthropomorphism, 3. Affirmation without anthropomorphism. The belief in negation is not permissible, the anthropomorphic view is also not acceptable because nothing is comparable to God, and the third path is the affirmation of attributes without anthropomorphism (Ibn Babawayh 2020, 100).

4.1. The School of Anthropomorphism (*Mushabbiha*)

The *Mushabbiha* believed that God is a being similar to a human, possessing hands, feet, and other bodily parts. To support their view, they referred to various Qur'anic verses and hadiths. In a broader sense, the *Mushabbiha* adopted corporealization (which explains why they were labeled as corporealists (*Mujassima*)), asserting that God has a physical form. This group attributed human traits to God and interpreted the Qur'anic verses according to these human-like and literal attributes. They likened all of God's attributes to human traits, such as having ears, eyes, occupying space, moving, and the ability to be seen, and attributed these characteristics to God (Shahrastani n.d., 1: 92-93, 109).

4.2. The School of Divesting God of His Attributes (*Mu'aṭṭila*)

In contrast to the *Mushabbihā*, the *Mu'aṭṭila* held the belief that any inquiry into the nature of God was impossible and prohibited, considering any questioning about His essence and attributes as a heresy (*bid'a*). According to this view, humans should only acknowledge God's existence without attempting to describe His attributes. This group is referred to as the *Mu'aṭṭila* (Shahrastani n.d., 3: 79). The main objective of this group in denying the attributes was to preserve the majesty and greatness of the Lord. According to their belief, likening God to the attributes of created beings was incompatible with His divinity and lordship, as these attributes are specific to created beings, and God is completely free from the attributes of His creatures.

One of the earliest proponents of this belief was Ja'd ibn Dirham (d. 742), followed by Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 745) and his followers, who became known as the *Jahmiyya*. Since this group emphasized the denial of attributes, they were called the *Mu'aṭṭila*. The beliefs of the *Jahmiyya* were widely rejected and denied by the *Mushabbihā* in various fields. The *Jahmiyya* denied the attributes of God, such as forbearance (*ḥilm*), power (*qudra*), majesty (*jalāl*), pardon (*afw*), and similar qualities (Ibn Qutayba 1991, 36-37). Among the issues that the *Jahmiyya* denied was the belief in the Throne of God (*ʿarsh Allah*) (Darimi 2010: 39). They also proposed materialistic interpretations regarding the establishment of God upon the divine Throne (Darimi 2010: 70-71). They believed that God's knowledge meant vision (*naẓar*) and observation (*mushāhada*), and that knowledge could not exist without this (Darimi 2010: 120). Ibn Khuzayma, in a detailed discussion, refuted the beliefs of the *Jahmiyya*, especially criticizing their view on the denial of God's face (*wajh Allah*) (Ibn Khuzayma 1994, 1: 53, 57-59).

4.3. The School of Transcendence (*Tanzīh*)

Tanzīh in Arabic means purification, cleansing, and also distancing something from undesirable attributes. The *Tanzīh* of God refers to removing deficiencies and anything that is not befitting of God (Zabidi 1966, 36: 523-524; Ibn Manzur 1993, 13: 548). In technical terms, *Tanzīh* means purifying God from attributes that would imply imperfection. Those who adhere to this belief are called the people of *Tawḥīd* (monotheism) or the people of *Tanzīh*, while those who oppose this view are called the people of *Ta'ṭīl* or *Mu'aṭṭila* (Shahrastani n.d., 1: 193). This group believes that attributing physical characteristics to God is impossible, both rationally and because such attributes would imply flaws and limitations, and God is free from any defect or limitation.

Among Muslims, some believe that questioning these verses is not permissible

because they fall beyond the scope of human reason, and one must have complete faith in these verses. Among those who held this view was Malik ibn Anas (d. 795). Malik, in the context of divine attributes, was of the *Tanzīh* school, believing that one should have faith in God's attributes but refrain from asking questions about them, leaving their interpretation to God. It is famously reported that when Malik was asked about the meaning of the verse "The Most Merciful established Himself upon the Throne" (7: 54), he replied: "The meaning of the establishment is known, but the manner of it is unknown (*bilā kayf*). Belief in it is obligatory, and questioning it is a heresy" (Malik 1944, 6: 465; Dhahabi 1985, 8: 101-106; Shahrastani n.d., 1: 93). Malik opposed the literal interpretation of hadiths. When he was asked about the hadith of God creating Adam in His image, the uncovering of God's shin, and God placing His hand in Hell and pulling people out, Malik vehemently rejected these reports and stated: "No one has the right to narrate them" (Dhahabi 1985, 8: 103-104).

5. Foundations and Methods of Imam al-Rida's Confrontation with Anthropomorphism and Corporealization

The struggle against the ideas of corporealization and anthropomorphism in the speech and conduct of all the Ahl al-Bayt has been a continuous and persistent movement. These noble figures endeavored to combat these ideas through the correct interpretation of the Qur'anic verses, the elucidation of the hadiths narrated from the Prophet Muhammad, and the purification of the hadiths of the Ahl al-Bayt. During the unique cultural and political conditions of the late second century, when various intellectual movements had found opportunities to emerge and grow, many theological disputes arose in society. The interpretation of the reported attributes and the subsequent debates on anthropomorphism and corporealization became a central issue in these intellectual conflicts. In this context, Imam al-Rida systematically and fundamentally confronted this movement. Below, the foundations and methods of Imam al-Rida's approach to dealing with the ideologies of anthropomorphism and corporealization are outlined:

5.1. Explaining the Correct Method of Qur'anic Interpretation

Since all theological schools, including the proponents of anthropomorphism and corporealization, seek to present their views based on Qur'anic verses, Imam al-Rida clarified the incorrectness of this theory by explaining the correct method of interpreting the Qur'an, particularly in the interpretation of the reported attributes.

5.1.1. The Method of Interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an Itself

Examples of intra-Qur'anic interpretation in the narrations of Imam al-Rida are

relatively abundant, but here we will mention only a few instances related to the interpretation of reported attributes. In a hadith, 'Abdul'aziz ibn Muslim⁴ says, "I asked Imam al-Rida about the verse 'They forgot God, so He forgot them' (9:67). He replied: 'God does not forget nor make mistakes; rather, forgetfulness and error pertain to creatures who did not exist and were then created. Have you not heard the verse, 'And your Lord is not forgetful' (19:64)? That is, God punishes those who forget God and meeting with Him by making them forget themselves, as He also says in another verse, 'And do not be like those who forgot God, so He made them forget themselves. It is they who are the defiantly disobedient' (59:19), or in another verse, 'So today We will forget them as they forgot the meeting of this Day of theirs' (7:51). That is, We leave them as they neglected the preparation for this Day' (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 120)." In this narration, Imam al-Rida interpreted the forgetfulness of God, based on other Qur'anic verses, as neglecting or abandoning.

In some cases, although Imam al-Rida does not explicitly reference another verse in his interpretation, it is clear that the explanation he provides is based on other Qur'anic verses. Muhammad ibn 'Ubayda⁵ says, "I asked Imam al-Rida about the verse 'What prevented you from prostrating to what I have created with My hands?' (38:75). Imam al-Rida replied: 'It means by My power and strength' (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 120)." It appears that Imam al-Rida's interpretation of "hands" in this verse is based on the verse 'Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, they are actually pledging allegiance to God. The hand of God is above their hands' (48:10), as well as the verse 'And remember Our servant David, possessing [many] hands' (38:17), and the verse 'And the heaven We constructed with hands' (51:47), where "hands" signifies power and strength.

5.1.2. Referring Allegorical Verses (*al-mutashābihāt*) to Unequivocal Verses (*al-muḥkamāt*)

In some cases, Imam al-Rida responded to the supporters of anthropomorphism and corporealization by referring allegorical verses to unequivocal verses. When Abu Qurra⁶ said: "It has been narrated to us that God has divided His vision and speech between two of the prophets; He has given speech to Moses and vision to Muhammad," Imam al-Rida replied: "Then, is it not the same one who said to everyone: 'No vision can grasp Him' (6:103), 'And they do not encompass Him in knowledge' (20:110), and 'There is nothing like Him' (42:11), but Muhammad?". Abu Qurra replied, "No." Imam al-Rida then said: "How can someone come to the people and say: 'No vision can grasp Him; and they do not encompass Him in knowledge; there is nothing like Him,' and then himself claim: 'I have seen Him with my two eyes,

and I have comprehended Him, and He is like a human'? Would you not be ashamed? Even the *Zindīqs* ⁷ could not attribute such a contradiction to the Prophet, where he said something and then contradicted it."

Abu Qurra then mentioned the verse from Surah An-Najm (53:13): "And indeed, he saw him in another descent." Imam al-Rida responded by explaining that in verse 11 of the same Sura, it is clear that the Prophet saw what was not God, as the verse says: "The heart did not lie about what it saw." Then, in verse 18, God says: "He certainly saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord." Therefore, the signs that the Prophet saw were other than God. Imam al-Rida further pointed out that in Sura *Ṭāhā*, verse 110, God says: "And they do not encompass Him in knowledge." Therefore, if the sight could see God, it would also encompass and have knowledge of Him.

5.1.3. Providing Correct Interpretations of Qur'anic Verses Suggestive of Corporealization and Anthropomorphism

Imam al-Rida devoted sustained attention to interpreting Qur'anic verses—especially those pertaining to the divine attributes. In response to a question concerning the verse, "Faces on that Day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord" (75:22–23), he interpreted *nāzira* (gazing upon) as "radiant, awaiting the reward of its Lord" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 115). In his interpretation of "hand" (*yad*) in the verse, "What prevented thee from prostrating to that which I created with My two hands?" (38:75), he explained it as God's power and strength (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 120). He also commented on the verse, "On the day when the shin shall be uncovered and they are called to prostrate" (68:42), saying: "A veil of light is lifted, and the believers fall in prostration, whereas the spines of the hypocrites are rendered rigid, leaving them incapable of prostrating" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 121).

When asked about the verse, "and He left them in darkness, unable to see" (2:17), Imam al-Rida declared God to be transcendent above being described with "leaving" in the creaturely sense. He explained that when it became known that they would not return from their disbelief and error, God withheld His aid and grace from them and left them to themselves. When asked about "God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing" (2:7), he interpreted "sealing" (*khatm*) as God's placing a seal upon their hearts as a recompense for their disbelief. When asked whether God compels servants to commit disobedience, he replied that God grants them choice and respite (see: Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 124).

Imam al-Rida was also asked about God's statement, "Nay! Indeed, from their Lord on that Day they shall be veiled" (83:15). He replied that God—Blessed and Exalted—is not described as "entering a place," such that He would be hidden from His servants

by being located therein; rather, the meaning of the verse is that they are deprived of their Lord's reward. He was likewise asked about "and thy Lord comes, and the angels, rank upon rank" (89:22). He answered that God is not described by coming and going; He is exalted above being subject to transition. The meaning, he said, is that the command of thy Lord comes, and the angels come in ranks. In response to the verse, "Do they wait for anything but that God should come to them in the shadows of clouds, and the angels?" (2:210), Imam al-Rida explained: God means, "Do they await anything but that God send the angels in shadows of clouds?"—and he stated that the verse was revealed in this manner (see: Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 126; Majlisi 1984, 3: hadith 21).

5.1.4. *The Method of Rational Interpretation*

Based on some hadiths, Imam al-Rida interpreted the verses concerning God's attributes through rational argumentation. When Imam al-Rida recited the verse, "Nay, but His two hands are outspread" (5: 64), 'Abdullah ibn Qays⁸—while gesturing toward the Imam's hands—asked, "Two hands like these?" Imam al-Rida replied: "If God had two hands like those of human beings, He would be a created being" (Ibn Babawayh 2020, 168). In this hadith, Imam al-Rida rejects the concept of God's having a hand through rational interpretation, explaining that hands are a characteristic of created beings, and created beings are in need of a Creator, while God is the absolute Self-Sufficient.

When Abu Qurra asked Imam al-Rida whether he denied a narration that says: "The sign of God's anger is that the angels carrying the Throne feel its heaviness and fall into prostration. Once God's anger is alleviated, the Throne becomes lighter, and they return to their place," Imam al-Rida replied: "Has God been angry with Satan and his followers from the time He cast them out until today and until the Day of Resurrection, or is He pleased with them?" Abu Qurra answered: "He is angry." Imam al-Rida responded: "Then when has God ever not been angry so that the Throne becomes lighter?" He then added: "Woe to you! How dare you describe your Lord as one who changes from one state to another and attribute qualities that belong to creatures to Him? He is exalted; He does not perish like those who perish, and He does not change like those who change" (Kulayni 2008, 1: 323).

5.2. **The Correct Method of Understanding Hadiths**

The *Mujassima* and *Mushabbiha* narrated hadiths that they believed could serve as evidence for their ideas of corporealization and anthropomorphism. Some of these hadiths are undoubtedly fabricated, while others, though not fabricated, have been misinterpreted by the anthropomorphist and corporealist movements in ways that supported their theory. Imam al-Rida, on several occasions, clarified the fabricated

nature of some of these hadiths by presenting criteria for understanding and evaluating them, and in other cases, by providing correct interpretations, he closed the door to the misuse of these narrations.

Below, some of the criteria for understanding and evaluating hadiths, with examples, will be discussed.

5.2.1. Presenting Hadiths to the Qur'an

According to the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt, one of the emphasized methods for understanding and evaluating hadiths is presenting them to the Qur'an. Imam al-Rida also employed this method to combat the misuse of hadiths by the supporters of corporealization and anthropomorphism.

In a debate with Abu Qurra –mentioned in 5.1.4-, when he asked Imam al-Rida whether he accepted the hadith related to God's anger, Imam al-Rida responded: "If the hadith contradicts the Qur'an, I reject it."

5.2.2. Correct Interpretation of Hadiths

Imam al-Rida did not merely reject and dismiss the views of the anthropomorphists and corporealists; rather, by providing the correct interpretation of divine attributes, he warned people against the misinterpretations and superficial readings of verses that, on the surface, might suggest corporealization or anthropomorphism. When asked, "Tell us about God, the Exalted: Where was He, how was He, and upon what did He rely?" Imam replied: "God, the Blessed and Exalted, created place without Himself having a place, and He created 'how-ness (*kayfiyya*)' without having a 'how' Himself, and He relies upon His power" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 117).

In another narration, when explaining the attributes of God, he said: "God has always been knowledgeable (*ʿālim*), powerful (*qādir*), living (*ḥayy*), eternal (*qadīm*), hearing (*sammī*), and seeing (*baṣīr*)." The narrator said: "Some people say that God has always been knowledgeable with knowledge, powerful with power, alive with life, eternal with eternity, hearing with hearing, and seeing with sight." Imam al-Rida replied: "Anyone who says and believes such things, in reality, associates other deities with God, and such a person is not considered one of our friends." He then added: "God has always been, by His essence, knowledgeable, powerful, living, eternal, hearing, and seeing. God is far above and beyond what the polytheists and anthropomorphists claim" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 119).

There are other narrations from Imam al-Rida on this subject, but for the sake of brevity, we will refrain from including them here (see: Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 39-43, 59, 119, 136).

In response to Aba Salt al-Harawi's⁹ inquiry about the hadith "The reward for

'There is no god but God' is the gaze upon the Face of God, the Exalted," Imam al-Rida replied: "O Aba Salt, anyone who imagines God to have a form like that of other creatures is a disbeliever (*kāfir*). The Face of God is the Prophets, Messengers, and His Proofs upon the earth (*hujaj*), peace be upon them. Through them, people turn towards God, His religion, and His knowledge. And God, the Exalted, says: 'Everything upon it will perish, and the Face of your Lord, full of majesty and honor, will remain' (55:26-27). And He says: 'Everything will perish except His Face' (28:88). Thus, looking at the Divine Prophets, Messengers, and His Proofs in their heavenly stations is a great reward for the believers on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet said: 'Anyone who is an enemy to my Ahl al-Bayt and my family will not see me on the Day of Judgment, and I will not see them.' He also said: 'Among you are those who will not see me after my death.' O Aba Salt, God, the Exalted, is not described by place, nor is He perceived by sight or imagination" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 116).

The most famous narration that was criticized by Imam al-Rida is one that has been reported in many Sunni sources, where the Prophet is said to have stated: "God, Blessed and Exalted, descends to the lowest heaven every night and calls to the people, 'Who is there that will call upon Me so that I may answer him?'" (Bukhari 1987, hadith 1145; Muslim n.d., hadith 757; Ibn Hanbal 2000, hadith 10313; Bayhaqi 1993, 3: 2; Ibn Abi Shayba 1988, 3: 54, hadith 12059, and 6: 72, hadith 29556; 'Abd al-Razzaq 1984, 1: 555, hadith 2106; Nasa'i 1990, 6: 123; Darimi 2010, 77-81, 427; Suyuti 1993, 1: 547, 551-552). When Imam al-Rida was asked about this narration, he replied: "May God curse those who distort the words from their rightful places. I swear by God, the Prophet did not say such a thing. Rather, he said: God, Blessed and Exalted, sends an angel to the lowest heaven every night during the last third of the month and every Friday at the beginning of the night, commanding the angel to call out: 'Is there a supplicant that I may grant his request? Is there a repentant one that I may accept his repentance? Is there one seeking forgiveness that I may forgive him?' The angel continues to call out until the dawn breaks, and then returns to his place in the heavens" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 127).

5.3. Refuting the Incorrect Attribution of the Theory of Corporealization and Anthropomorphism to the Imams

Some individuals in this period attempted to attribute the theory of corporealization and anthropomorphism to the Imams. Imam al-Rida, with explicit statements, removed this false accusation from the teachings of the Imams and their followers. In one narration, when someone told Imam al-Rida, "People attribute the views of anthropomorphism and determinism (*jabr*) to us due to the reports that have been

transmitted from your fathers," Imam responded by stating that these narrations were fabricated (Ibn Babawayh 2020: 63).

5.4. Clarifying the Consequences of Belief in Corporealization and Anthropomorphism

Numerous narrations from Imam al-Rida have been reported rejecting and dismissing those who believed in corporealization or anthropomorphism. In one hadith, Imam al-Rida considers the believers in anthropomorphism to be polytheists (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 114; 2020: 68). In another narration, Imam al-Rida states that the supporters of anthropomorphism are deprived of knowing God (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 116), and in yet another narration, he disavows them (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 117).

It is also narrated from Imam al-Rida that he said: "Anyone who speaks of anthropomorphism and injustice is a disbeliever and a polytheist (*mushrik*), and we disown them." Imam further described the belief in corporealization and anthropomorphism as the speech of the extremists (*ghulāt*), who diminish the greatness of God. He then said: "Whoever loves them has shown hatred towards us, and whoever hates them has shown love towards us. Whoever takes them as guardians or helpers has opposed us, and whoever opposes them has accepted us as their guardians and helpers. Whoever is attached to them has broken ties with us, and whoever breaks ties with them has joined us. Whoever is cruel to them has done good to us, and whoever shows kindness to them has done harm to us. Whoever honors them has dishonored us, and whoever insults them has honored us. Whoever accepts them has rejected us, and whoever rejects them has accepted us. Whoever does good to them has wronged us, and whoever wrongs them has done good to us. Whoever denies them has confirmed us, and whoever confirms them has denied us. Whoever helps them has deprived us, and whoever deprives them has helped us. O Ibn Khalid, anyone from our Shi'a who takes them as guardians or helpers is not one of us" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 142; 2020: 363).

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Notes

- ¹ The ‘reported attributes’ (al-ṣifāt al-khabariyya) refer to those divine attributes known only through scriptural texts, whose apparent meanings may suggest corporeality.
- ² All translations of Qur’anic verses in this paper are based on Nasr et al. (2015).
- ³ All Old Testament translations in this paper are based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
- ⁴ A Kufan traditionist (*muḥaddith*) and companion of Imam al-Riḍa. He is cited in Shi‘i hadith collections (e.g., *al-Kāfī*) for transmitting key doctrinal traditions, most notably the well-known sermon on monotheism (*tawḥīd*) attributed to Imam al-Riḍa. While little is known of his life, his transmissions played a significant role in early Imami theological discourse.
- ⁵ A Kufan traditionist and companion of Imam al-Riḍa. He is cited in early Imami hadith sources for transmitting a range of reports, including theological and jurisprudential traditions. While details of his life are sparse, his narrations contribute to the corpus of teachings attributed to Imam al-Riḍa.
- ⁶ A Kufan transmitter and companion of Imam al-Riḍa. He is cited in Imami hadith collections for narrating a limited number of reports, primarily concerning theological and ethical subjects. His biographical details are sparse in classical *rijāl* sources, reflecting his minor profile among the Imam’s students of hadith.
- ⁷ A term denoting a heretical atheist or covert materialist in classical Islamic heresiography, applied to those accused of hiding beliefs—often dualist or anti-religious—that fundamentally subverted Islamic doctrine.
- ⁸ The narrator identified here should not be confused with Abu Musa al-Ash‘ari, the well-known Companion of the Prophet, who bears the same name and lived in an earlier period. The identity of this ‘Abdullah ibn Qays as a transmitter contemporary with Imam al-Riḍa is not clearly established in the biographical sources, and his precise identification remains uncertain in some reports.
- ⁹ A prominent companion of Imam al-Riḍa and a well-known scholar in early Islamic history. He is frequently mentioned in narrations concerning the teachings and discourses of Imam al-Riḍa, particularly regarding theological and esoteric topics. His name is often associated with the transmission of hadiths related to the attributes of God and the imamate.