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The Manifestation of God in the Parable of "Light": A Re-reading of the Verse "Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth" (Q. 24:35) Based on Modern Science

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ABSTRACT: Original Paper

The Noble Qur'an employs parables (*al-amthāl*) as a method for bringing the human mind closer to the comprehension of transcendent truths. The expression *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* (Q. 24:35) is among the most prominent Qur'anic parables that has long invited reflection among scholars of the Islamic sciences. Using a descriptive–analytical method, this study examines the historical trajectory of the interpretation of this verse in relation to the development of theories in optics. It also analyzes the system of parables in the Qur'an and demonstrates, in light of recent scientific findings, the possibility of novel understandings of this verse that have been neglected in existing exegetical works. A review of the historical course of interpretation reveals that empirical scientific knowledge had little influence on exegetical understandings up to the 13th century CE. The interpretation of *al-nūr* (light) by *Suhrawardī* as "that which is manifest and makes manifest" has endured due to its consonance with the empirical understanding of the nature of light.

This study shows that, from an ontological perspective grounded in the metaphorical nature of the cosmos, the manifestation of higher truths within it, and the expression of these truths in the Qur'an through parables, attention to recent findings in optical science leads to the discovery of new dimensions of this Qur'anic parable. Features of light, such as the reflection of light in bodies depending on their properties, the visibility of only a small portion of

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the electromagnetic spectrum, the absoluteness of the speed of light irrespective of the observer's motion, and the absence of perceived temporal passage in a hypothetical motion at the speed of light, respectively evoke the levels of divine manifestation in beings, the limitations of human perception, and the absoluteness and atemporality of God.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an and science, light, parable (*mathal*), optics, Verse of Light (*Āyah al-Nūr*)

1. Introduction

One of the important parables in the Qur'an is the parable of God as light, expressed in the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35):

Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth «اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْض...»

This parable has long attracted the attention of exegetes, Qur'anic scholars, philosophers, and mystics, each of whom has offered different interpretations. However, the manner in which scholars have understood this Qur'anic expression has been influenced by their intellectual orientations, their hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an, and their knowledge of the phenomenon of light. Despite the multiplicity of readings offered by various intellectual traditions, ranging from metaphorical to literal interpretations, the question remains: what is the intended meaning of this parable, and on what basis can it be explained?

Answering this question requires, on the one hand, correlating the various interpretations of this expression with the historical development of optical science, and on the other hand, understanding the Qur'anic method of employing parables and the principles by which the intended meaning of God may be accessed through them. Accordingly, the present study seeks to provide a new reading of the parable of divine light in the Qur'an by addressing two questions: First, what relationship exists between the historical trajectory of the interpretation of the expression *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* and the evolution of theories of light? Second, based on the system of parables in the Qur'an, what new explanation of this expression can be offered in light of the discoveries concerning the properties of light in recent centuries?

2. Literature Review

The background of this study encompasses all writings concerning the Verse of Light (*Āyah al-Nūr*) and the parable of God as light. However, this

section focuses exclusively on contemporary studies that, due to their closer relevance to the present research, have addressed various interpretations and examined aspects of the resemblance in this parable.

Soufian (1998), drawing on Qur'anic verses, comparatively examines the characteristics of spiritual light in the Qur'an and physical light in physics, highlighting points of convergence between the two. Nevertheless, the study does not provide a precise theoretical foundation for correlating these two domains. Khademzadeh (2016) demonstrates that Mullā Ṣadrā, in explaining the resemblance between light and God, employs the metaphor "existence is light," and considers this an instance of the unconscious use of conceptual metaphors by philosophers. This interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that Mullā Ṣadrā, based on his doctrine of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) in language, does not regard such expressions as merely linguistic metaphors, in contrast to the assumptions of cognitive linguistics.

Faramarz Gharamaleki and ketabchi (2017) identify two general approaches to interpreting the meaning of light: the metaphorical approach, prevalent until the 11th century CE, and the realistic approach. They characterize the latter, associated with thinkers such as al-Ghazālī, Suhrawardī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, as involving a process of the metaphysicalization of the concept of light. They further raise two critiques against this approach: its lack of grounding in lexicographical and semantic evidence, and its restriction of the aspect of the resemblance (*wajh al-shabah*) to a feature rather than to the qualitative nature of light. Despite its critical engagement with classical views, this study does not offer a satisfactory alternative explanation of the parable.

Vaezi and Jeddi (2020) examine the arguments of proponents of both the metaphorical and realistic approaches to the term light. While endorsing the latter, they propose an additional aspect of resemblance: the impossibility of directly looking at light, emphasizing instead the vision of divine light through the heart. Despite attempting to elaborate the parable, this study only marginally extends earlier interpretations and does not incorporate newly discovered properties of light.

In addition, from a methodological perspective, the article by Nasiri Gheydari, *"Spectrum of the Existence's Consciousness"* (2022), may be noted. It integrates ontological views of early philosophers with evidence from modern empirical science to describe a spectrum of consciousness in existence. Similarly, Moradi and Gholampourmir (2025) employs modern science to interpret another part of the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35) on the property of olive oil emitting light without contact with fire.

The innovation of the present study lies in correlating the historical development of interpretations of the parable of divine light with theories in optics; explaining this parable through a model derived from the Qur'anic system of parables within an ontological framework; and articulating additional aspects of resemblance in light of discoveries in modern science.

3. Theoretical Framework

An understanding of the historical development of theories of light, as well as an examination of the system of parables (*al-amthāl*) in the Qur'an, constitutes a necessary prelude to the issues addressed in the present study.

3.1. Historical Development of Theories of Light

The phenomenon of light has long engaged human thought and has consistently been the subject of scholarly efforts aimed at deeper understanding and explanation.

3.1.1. The Phenomenon of Light in Ancient Greece

In the ancient world, the understanding of light, like other natural phenomena, was intertwined with mythology. From approximately the 6th century BCE, the Greeks initiated systematic inquiry into nature. Broadly speaking, ancient Greek views on light may be classified into two principal theories: the emission theory (*ṣudūrī*/*shuʿāʿ*) and the entrance theory (*dukhūlī*/*inṭibāʿ*) (Lindberg 1999). The emission theory posits that vision results from rays emitted from the eye, whereas the entrance theory holds that vision occurs through the entry of light into the eye.

The emission theory was articulated in various forms. Pythagoras (d. 475 BCE) considered vision to result from a fire emanating from within the eye that reaches objects in its path, thereby preparing the mind or soul to receive their images (Sa'adatmand 2021). Plato (d. 347 BCE) proposed that the fire emitted from the eye combines with sunlight to form a continuous medium between the object and the eye, allowing the motions of the visible object to reach the eye and subsequently the soul, an explanation that appears to address the problem of vision in darkness. Euclid (d. 300BCE), based on this framework, developed a geometric theory of vision grounded in the rectilinear propagation of light and the conical emission of rays from the eye (Lindberg 1999). Hero of Alexandria (d. 62CE) emphasized the infinite speed of light, arguing from the immediate visibility of stars upon opening the eyes (Sa'adatmand 2021). Ptolemy (d. 170CE) likewise adopted this framework and attempted to integrate the physical and psychological

aspects of vision with geometric theories. He also investigated the phenomena of reflection and refraction experimentally and formulated mathematical descriptions of them (Lindberg 1999).

In contrast, the entrance theory also had its proponents. The atomists, most notably Democritus (d. 357 BCE), held that vision occurs through the emission of a thin layer of atoms from the surface of objects, which then affects the eye. Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), however, maintained that light from a luminous source such as the sun acts upon a potentially transparent medium (e.g., air or water), rendering it actually transparent. Vision then occurs through the interaction of objects with this medium, producing alterations that are transmitted to the eye (Lindberg 1999).

With regard to color, divergent views were also prevalent. Democritus regarded atoms as devoid of color and considered colors not as real entities but as representations of properties such as smoothness, heat, and solidity. Plato similarly denied that objects possess inherent color as a surface property, proposing instead that objects emit streams of fiery particles; objects are transparent when their particles are uniform in size, whereas colored objects contain particles of varying sizes (Sa'adatmand 2021). Aristotle, for his part, attributed color perception to the interaction between colored objects and the potentially transparent medium, which undergoes modification and transmits this change to the eye (Lindberg 1999).

3.1.2. The Phenomenon of Light among Islamic Scholars

Early Muslim scholars largely followed the views of ancient Greek thinkers regarding the nature of light. Al-Fārābī (d. 950CE), in *al-Jamʿ bayna raʾyay al-ḥakīmayn*, sought to reconcile the positions of the Platonists (emission theory) and the Aristotelians (entrance theory), presenting their disagreement and mutual critiques as largely terminological, and proposing a mediating position between the two (al-Fārābī 1984, 46–50).

Avicenna (d. 1037CE), along with the Peripatetic (*mashshāʾī*) tradition more broadly, adopted the entrance theory in line with Aristotle. In *al-Shifāʾ*, he describes light as "visible in itself" (*marʾī bi-dhātih*), which, when combined with bodies, renders them visible. He also attributes the perception of color to the arrival of light upon objects (Ibn Sīnā 1983, 2: 257). Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048CE), however, strongly criticized both the emission and entrance theories, dismissing the latter as merely philosophical and rooted in conjecture (Sajjadi 1989, 2: 581, citing al-Bīrūnī 1988).

Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040CE) represents a decisive turning point in the science of optics and, more importantly, in scientific methodology. He

sought to ground knowledge in experimental verification. Through this method, his distinctive contributions to optics led to the complete rejection of the emission theory and the reformulation of the entrance theory, providing a precise and reliable account of the propagation and perception of light. In addition to synthesizing the physical and mathematical dimensions of vision, he distinguished between self-luminous bodies and those that shine by reflected (secondary) light. His works on optics were translated into Latin in the late 12th century CE and exerted a profound influence on the development of optics in the West (Lindberg 1999).

Despite the remarkable rigor of Ibn al-Haytham's method and the compelling accuracy of his findings in optics, neither his scientific achievements nor his empirical methodology gained widespread acceptance among scholars for approximately three centuries. It was only later, with the contributions of Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 1319CE), that his work received broader recognition. Various reasons have been suggested for this delayed reception, among which adherence to established methods and resistance to intellectual innovation are considered the most significant. The perspective of Suhrawardī (d. 1191CE) is also noteworthy, as he is among the most influential figures in interpreting the opening phrase of the Verse of Light. Regarding the physical characteristics of light, Suhrawardī holds that sensory phenomena such as light and sound are indefinable without direct perception, and he describes light as the most manifest of all things and the least in need of definition (Abdollahi 2024).

In effect, by adopting a version of the emission theory, he explains vision as resulting from the interaction between light emitted from objects and light emanating from the eye. Without engaging with the anatomical structure of the eye or the mechanism by which light reaches the retina, he refers to sight as the "light of the eye" (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 104, 134–135). The absence of Ibn al-Haytham's influence in Suhrawardī's account further confirms the limited dissemination of the former's theories during that period.

3.1.3. Theories of Light after the Scientific Revolution

The study of light has occupied a central place in multiple domains within the history of science. In this section, selected developments are highlighted. Following Ibn al-Haytham, discoveries in optics entered a new phase beginning in the 17th century. Isaac Newton (d. 1727CE) demonstrated, through experiments involving the passage of light through a prism, that colors are intrinsic properties of light itself rather than attributes of the objects with which light interacts. He explained the dispersion of white light in a prism as resulting from its composite nature, being constituted of all colors, and from differences in the refrangibility of light

rays (Newton 1672, 3081–3085). He further proposed that light consists of extremely small particles, whose sizes are related to color: the smallest particles correspond to violet light (with the greatest deviation in refraction), while the largest correspond to red light (with the least deviation) (Newton 1718, 347–349).

Newton also provided the first systematic explanation that the color of objects depends on their interaction with incident white light (Figure 1). Each object absorbs certain rays and reflects others, the latter constituting the perceived color (Newton 1704, 135). This account shifted the understanding of color from being a property of object surfaces to being a property of light itself.

Figure1. How objects with different color reflect incident white light

Almost contemporaneously, Christiaan Huygens, noting similarities between the behavior of light and sound, proposed the wave theory of light (Huygens 1912, 19–21).[1] However, Newton's authority and the explanatory power of his theory in accounting for phenomena such as reflection and refraction ensured its dominance for over a century. In 1800, William Herschel, by passing light through a prism and detecting higher temperatures beyond the red end of the spectrum, demonstrated the existence of invisible radiation, possessing heat but not visible to the eye (Herschel 1800, 284–289).

In another experiment, Johann Wilhelm Ritter and Böckmann (1801) showed that radiation beyond the violet end of the spectrum affected silver chloride, indicating the presence of invisible, higher-energy radiation in sunlight (Ritter & Böckmann 1801, 527). Ultimately, in the 1860s, James Clerk Maxwell, through the formulation of electromagnetic field equations, demonstrated that these equations predict waves propagating at the speed of light. Consequently, visible light came to be understood as only a small

1- Among Islamic scholars, Ibn al-Haytham regarded the motion of light as analogous to the motion of physical bodies. However, Kamal al-Din al-Farisi, in his reexamination and critique of Ibn al-Haytham's optical theory in Tanqīḥ al-Manāẓir, proposed a view closer to the wave-like behavior of light by likening it to sound, on account of its simultaneous capacity for transmission and reflection from a surface. On this basis, two tendencies, particle-like and wave-like, in the interpretation of the nature of light had already been addressed within the scholarly tradition of Muslim scientists centuries before European physicists (Pazari 2013).

portion of the broader electromagnetic spectrum (Maxwell 1861, 499) (Figure 2). These findings strongly supported the wave nature of light.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, by confirming the particle aspect of light, showed that light energy is emitted in discrete packets (*photons*), with energy proportional to frequency (Einstein 1905a, 148). Thereafter, light was understood to possess a dual nature, both wave-like and particle-like. Another fundamental property that transformed our understanding of the universe concerns the speed of light. From the 17th century onward, it became established that light travels at a finite speed. In the early 20th century, Einstein, in his theory of relativity, demonstrated that the speed of light in a vacuum is always constant and cannot be exceeded. In other words, all observers, regardless of their motion or direction, measure the same value for the speed of light. On this basis, he formulated the theory of special relativity.

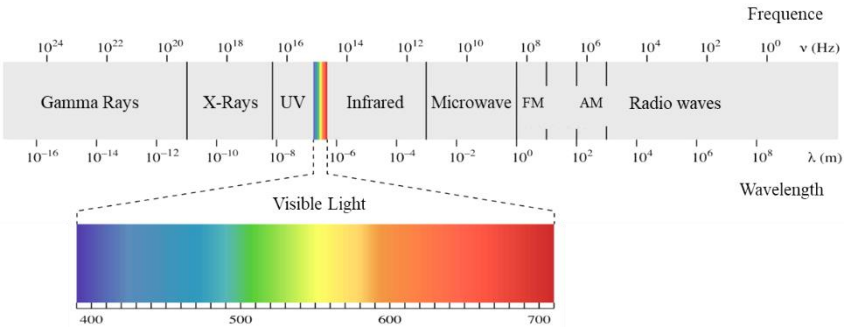

Figure 2. Spectrum of electromagnetic waves

Today, the speed of light in a vacuum (*c*) is regarded as one of the fundamental constants of nature, with no known physical phenomenon exceeding it. The designation "relativity" arises from the fact that measurements of space and time depend on the observer's state of motion: for an observer moving at high velocity relative to an object, the object's length appears contracted, and the temporal progression of events appears slower (*time dilation*) (Einstein 1905b, 894–900). This slowing of temporal processes at high velocities is such that, hypothetically, if an object could move at the speed of light, time would cease to have meaning for it, implying atemporality in motion at light speed. However, such a state would require infinite energy and thus remains purely theoretical.

3.2. Parables (al-Amthāl) in the Qur'an

The use of parables constitutes one of the stylistic methods of the Qur'an

in conveying its elevated truths. The purpose of the revelation of the Book, and particularly the articulation of parables within it, is to render these truths comprehensible to human beings. Since the human mind is not capable of grasping ultimate realities as they are in themselves, the use of parables, while maintaining brevity of expression, draws upon the relationship between the mind and tangible reality. One of the manifestations of the Qur'an's invitation to reflection is found in its parables, in many of which God presents elements of nature to approximate spiritual and metaphysical realities to human understanding. The mention of parables is thus regarded as a prelude to human contemplation. In certain verses, after presenting a parable, the Qur'an further generalizes, describing parables as a means of admonition and reflection for people, while reserving true understanding of them for those endowed with knowledge (Q. 14:25; 59:21; 29:43).

God illustrates the manner of His use of parables in verse Q.13:17 with the expression *"kadhālika yaḍribu Allāhu al-amthāl"* (That is how Allah draws comparisons). This statement follows a description of rainfall from the sky and the utilization of it by various entities, serving as a model for how one should reflect upon parables in order to arrive at truth. On this basis, an "archetype of divine parable-making" may be discerned:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّماءِ ماءً فَسالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِها فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّيْلُ زَبَداً رابِياً وَ مِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِي النَّارِ ابْتِغاءَ حِلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتاعٍ زَبَدٌ مِثْلُهُ كَذلِكَ يَضْــرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَ الْباطِلَ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفاءً وَ أَمَّا ما يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَذلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثالَ (الرعد/17)

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of] their capacity, and the flood carries along a swelling scum. And from what they smelt in the fire for the purpose of [making] ornaments or wares, [there arises] a similar scum. That is how Allah compares the truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people remains in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons (Q. 13:17).

Tabataba'i (1969, 11: 335–338) regards this verse as among the most significant in expressing general principles of divine knowledge through the manifestation of truths. First, it indicates that the mercy descending from God is initially devoid of form and measure, acquiring shape and limitation according to the properties of the entities upon which it descends. Second, the descent of truth is inevitably accompanied by extraneous elements of falsehood, which ultimately dissipate. He further explains that the rule exemplified by this parable applies both to divine action and divine speech. In other words, God manifests truths in two forms: the material world and language. Both are manifestations of reality that, in accordance with their respective characteristics, represent truth in different ways. Although God

created the heavens and the earth in truth and not in falsehood (Q. 46:3), elements of falsehood become concomitant with truth within them, without being the intended purpose of creation. Similarly, in divine speech, ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābihāt*) may convey meanings that are not the primary intent.

In general, the recognition of truth requires distinguishing it from the form in which it is manifested. Just as in any parable, one must seek its intended meaning, for fixation upon the external form of the parable obstructs access to its truth. This verse thus indicates that the existence of ambiguity is inevitable, arising from the manifestation of truth within a limited medium (Tabataba'i 1969, 3: 61–63).

This perspective—regarding the correspondence between the order of creation and the divine Book—reflects an ontological approach that can be observed earlier in the works of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) and, more systematically, in the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640 CE). In their thought, a correspondence is established between the "Book of Creation" (*kitāb al-takwīn*) and the "Book of Revelation" (*kitāb al-tadwīn*, i.e., the Qur'an), grounded in the gradation of existence. Al-Ghazālī, possibly influenced by Plato's theory of Forms, states: There is nothing in the material visible world except that it is a likeness of a spiritual reality in the world of the unseen, as though that spiritual reality is its soul and meaning (al-Ghazālī 1985, 48).

Mullā Ṣadrā, by establishing a one-to-one correspondence between Qur'anic parables and realities, interprets the multiplicity of parables in the Qur'an as means of ascending from the outward form of this world to the truths of the hereafter: There is no form in this world except that it has a reality in the hereafter, and no true meaning in the hereafter except that it has a form and likeness in this world (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 2004, 1: 324–325). From this perspective, the most fundamental relationship between the Qur'an and the natural world may be understood as the manifestation of a single truth in two distinct media, each characterized by its own properties.

4. Historical Development of the Interpretation of the Verse of Light

In this section, the relationship between exegetical perspectives and theories of light is examined in two periods: first, the metaphorical approach dominant among exegetes up to the 11th century CE, and second, the realistic approach that became prevalent after the 11th century CE.

4.1. The Exegetical Views up to the 11th Century

Exegetes up to the 11th century CE, offered interpretations of the expression *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* that were grounded in the acceptance of metaphor in the Qur'an, aiming to avoid attributing physical, sensory light to God. The description of the term *al-nūr* as *al-munawwir* (illuminator) can be regarded as the simplest way to avoid equating material light with God, employing the metaphor of using a verbal noun (*al-maṣdar*) in place of an active participle (*ism al-fāʿil*). Attention to familiar properties of physical light, such as the visibility of objects in light, their invisibility in darkness, and the association of light with beauty, can be seen as the basis for the two concepts of *al-hādī* (guide) and *al-muzayyin* (beautifier), which are later mentioned in the Verse of Light. In these interpretations, Qur'anic verses describing divine scripture as light and a means of guidance (Q. 6:91), and God as the one who adorns the heavens with stars (Q. 37:6), have also played an influential role.

However, some exegetes have understood light in broader terms, such as director, regulator, and sustainer (*al-mudabbir*, *al-nāẓim*, *al-qawwām*) (Faramarz Gharamaleki & ketabchi 2017), extending beyond the lexical meaning and drawing on other Qur'anic verses describing God. It appears that these dominant interpretations were developed without explicit consideration of the contemporary scientific understanding of light, and were instead grounded in the general perceptual experience of the phenomenon.

4.2. Exegetical Views after the 11th Century

After the 11th century CE, alongside earlier approaches, a realistic interpretation of the expression *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* emerged. This shift in perspective, compared to earlier exegetes, reflects two broader attitudes toward the presence of metaphor in the Qur'an.

One view, while accepting the presence of metaphor in the Qur'an—understood as the use of a word in a meaning other than its literal sense—argues that in the Verse of Light the term *al-nūr* itself possesses a meaning beyond its apparent, sensory sense. Al-Thaʿlabi (d. 1035CE), citing a view from mystics, interprets the root meaning of *al-nūr* as "purification and clarification," and explains the Qur'anic usage as denoting the transcendence (*al-tanzīh*) of God from imperfection (al-Thaʿlabī 2001, 7: 100).

Similarly, Al-Jurjani (d. 1078CE) defines *al-nūr* in this expression as that

which makes both the perceptible and the intelligible manifest, without requiring the presence of physical light or radiance (al-Jurjānī 2009, 2: 365). However, al-Thaʿlabī himself elsewhere explicitly acknowledges the presence of metaphor in the Qur'an; for example, he interprets "hearing" (*samʿ*) as a metaphor for obedience (al-Thaʿlabī 2001, 1: 236), and describes God as "thankful" (*shākir*) in a metaphorical sense (al-Thaʿlabī 2001, 3: 407). Al-Jurjānī (2001, 53), for his part, considers metaphor to be more eloquent than literal expression and presents it as having rhetorical superiority.

Another influential perspective is that of Al-Ghazālī, whose views significantly impacted later scholars. After considering all elements of the visible world as analogues of the world of the unseen (*ʿālam al-malakūt*), he regards every material term in the Qur'an as possessing a spiritual "soul" (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) that is non-sensory and non-physical (al-Ghazālī 1985, 48–51).

Accordingly, he rejects metaphor understood as a deviation from the original meaning and instead posits the spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) as the deeper and primary meaning, with various usages representing different levels of this underlying reality. He considers interpreting words in a purely sensory sense to be simplistic and inconsistent with the truths of the Qur'an. This perspective appears to have been developed, in part, to avoid interpreting Qur'anic expressions, especially those describing divine attributes, as metaphorical. Since God is pure truth and only speaks truth, Al-Ghazālī identifies God as the true light in the phrase *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth,"* while considering the application of *al-nūr* to anything other than God, such as physical light, as metaphorical. In his description of physical light, he classifies objects into three categories: Dark objects that are invisible; Objects that are visible in themselves but not capable of illuminating other objects (e.g., stars or embers when not ignited); Objects that are both visible in themselves and capable of illuminating others (e.g., the sun, moon, lamps, and fire) (al-Ghazālī 1986, 41–42). In essence, he divides objects into luminous and non-luminous categories, with luminous entities further subdivided. His account, while supporting the concept of spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*), appears to be based on general human perception of light rather than on the scientific understanding of light available in his time.

Suhrawardī follows al-Ghazālī in his general approach to metaphor in the Qur'an and specifically in interpreting the verse *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth."* However, in his explanation of the role of light in vision, he demonstrates familiarity with the scientific concepts of his time. By implicitly adopting a form of the emission theory (*ṣudūrī*), he argues that

vision requires three factors: an external one (light emitted from a luminous object) and an internal one (light reaching the object from the eye), and their interaction (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 134–135). Nevertheless, his definition of light in this context appears to be independent of his broader theoretical commitments regarding the nature of light and is instead rooted in common experiential understanding. He defines light as "that which is manifest in its own essence and makes other things manifest by its essence" (*al-ẓāhir fī ḥaqīqat nafsih al-muẓhir li-ghayrih bi-dhātih*) (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 113), a definition that exerted significant influence on subsequent scholars.

A noteworthy point in this discussion is the relationship between two ideas associated with al-Ghazālī and his followers: first, the notion that elements of the material world are analogues of the spiritual world, and second, the belief in the existence of a "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) in linguistic expressions. The first pertains to the created world and appears unrelated to language, while the second concerns Qur'anic vocabulary. However, to clarify the relationship between these two views, another issue must be considered: whether linguistic meanings are divinely instituted or conventionally established by humans. Only if divine designation of meanings is accepted can the two perspectives be meaningfully connected; otherwise, accepting the first does not necessarily entail acceptance of the second.

Regarding the relationship between exegetical views of the Verse of Light and scientific theories of light, the position of Ibn al-Haytham warrants examination. Although he formulated his theory in the 10th century CE, prior to al-Ghazālī and Suhrawardī, and grounded it in experimental evidence while supporting the entrance theory, the limited dissemination and acceptance of his ideas until the time of Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 1319 CE) meant that his theory did not significantly influence later scholars. Nonetheless, Suhrawardī's definition of light as "that which is manifest and makes manifest" corresponds in practice to Ibn al-Haytham's insights and became one of the most widely accepted definitions of light in explaining the divine light in this parable, persisting even into contemporary times. Thus, with the presumption that the defining feature of light in the material world (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) is its quality of manifesting itself and making other things manifest, Ibn al-Haytham's theory indirectly influenced the acceptance of Suhrawardī's interpretation among later generations.

Following the empirical discovery of the role of light in vision and the subsequent rise of empirical science, more advanced theories of light were developed; however, these had little impact on exegetical perspectives. The reasons for this lack of influence may include limited familiarity of Qur'anic

scholars with contemporary scientific knowledge, caution against *tafsīr bil-ra'y*, and an aversion to excessive or overly scientific interpretation.

5. Foundations for Understanding the Parable of Divine Light and Its Correspondence with Modern Science

What earlier exegetes stated in interpreting the parable of God as light was based on the characteristics of light with which they were familiar. The role of recent discoveries in optics in elucidating this Qur'anic parable necessitates first clarifying the foundational principles underlying its understanding. The foundation for understanding God's intended meaning in the parable *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* is the same as the foundation for understanding other Qur'anic parables. A parable (*mathal*) is formed based on the resemblance between familiar phenomena and those under consideration. In the Qur'an, in particular, the relationship between the source and the referent is especially strong, originating from God's role as the Creator. As the Creator of existence, God also presents parables drawn from creation in the Qur'an in order to clarify higher truths. With respect to light, an important question arises: Did God merely describe light as a metaphor for Himself in the revelation of this verse, or did He create light in such a way that it serves as a parable reflecting His own existence?

From a perspective analogous to the correspondence between the "Book of Creation" (*kitāb al-takwīn*) and the "Book of Revelation" (*kitāb al-tadwīn*), and particularly in light of the verse Q. 13:17, the parable of God as light is not merely a linguistic expression but is also related to the very mode of creation of light. Thus, the properties of light can be regarded as symbolic reflections of divine attributes. It is important to note that a parable corresponds to its referent only in certain respects. As indicated in God's statement concerning the limited scope of parables and the emergence of ambiguity within them (Q. 13:17), not all aspects of the phenomenon of light can be applied to God. This non-correspondence stems from the limitations of the receptacle, not from any deficiency in the Creator.

The relationship between this perspective and the metaphorical and realistic approaches to Qur'anic parables can also be examined. The view presented here in explaining the system of parables in the Qur'an reflects the thought of earlier scholars such as Al-Ghazālī and his followers regarding the creation of the world. This mode of thought may be understood as an extension of the concept of metaphor to the level of creation—namely, the divine act—while Qur'anic parables reflect these truths within the domain of language. On the other hand, attributing metaphor to the process

of understanding profound meanings from tangible words in the Qur'an is based on the assumption that language was initially established by humans and subsequently expanded through metaphor to encompass new layers of meaning. Therefore, accepting metaphor in divine action from an ontological perspective is not inconsistent with metaphor in divine speech, contrary to the assumption of many proponents of this interpretive model.

The role of modern science in understanding Qur'anic parables can be explained within this framework. Just as God has repeatedly affirmed that His signs are elaborated for "*those who know*" (Q. 6:97; cf. 7:32; 9:11; 10:5; 41:3), particularly in the field of optics, correlating the properties of light with the parable *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* may unveil deeper dimensions of this manifestation in the knowledge of God.

5.1. Correspondence between Properties of Light and Divine Attributes

In addition to the defining property of light, its being both manifest and manifesting (*al-ẓāhir wa al-muẓhir*), which proponents of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) consider to be the essential meaning of the term light in the phrase *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth,"* some researchers have proposed another aspect of resemblance: the impossibility of directly looking at light, and consequently, the emphasis on perceiving the divine light through the heart (Vaezi & Jeddi 2020). However, the properties of light that may serve as points of resemblance in this parable are not limited to these. Other aspects of similarity, once freed from the constraints of the parabolic framework, may reveal manifestations of divine attributes.

5.1.1. The Emergence of Color in Objects

Contrary to the views of earlier scholars who considered color to be an independent property separate from external light, modern scientific discoveries show that white light is composed of a combination of various colors. When light strikes objects, part of it is reflected from their surfaces, and it is this reflection that produces the color of the object. In essence, each entity reflects a portion of light in a specific way, thereby manifesting a facet of the colorless light within itself. The Qur'an itself regards the diversity of colors in nature as a sign for those who reflect: *"And whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse hues there is indeed a sign in that for a people who take admonition"* (Q. 16:13). It also refers to the descent of water from the sky, from which fruits of different colors emerge (Q. 35:27;

39:21); a single, colorless water gives rise to diverse forms of life depending on the capacity of each plant, while all are nourished by the same water: "*In the earth are neighbouring terrains [of diverse kinds] and vineyards, farms, and date palms growing from the same root and from diverse roots ,[all] irrigated by the same water, and We give some of them an advantage over others in flavour. There are indeed signs in that for a people who apply reason*" (Q. 13:4). Just as the Qur'an points to the manifestation of diverse effects of water in living beings according to their capacities, colorless light also appears in various forms in objects according to their properties.

Similarly, God manifests His attributes in the components of creation in diverse ways, according to their respective capacities. While God has manifested Himself to humanity through creation (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 1994, 155), created beings do not possess the capacity to reflect all of His attributes. The Qur'anic account of God's manifestation to Prophet Moses through the destruction of the mountain (Q. 7:143) illustrates this limitation of capacity. Conversely, God has also manifested Himself through His speech (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 1994, 204), revealing it to the heart of His most exalted servant, who becomes the perfect mirror of divine attributes. This is described as a weighty word (Q. 73:5), which other creatures cannot bear (Q. 59:21). The continuation of the phrase *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* in the Verse of Light, as interpreted in traditions in relation to the heart of the believer, particularly the Prophet and his household (PBUTH), indicates such a level of manifestation of divine light within these sacred beings (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 102–103). This understanding of creation corresponds to the Qur'anic statement in the verse Q. 13:17 regarding the manifestation of divine truth in created beings according to their varying capacities.

5.1.2. Visibility of Only a Portion of Light Spectrum

What is commonly referred to in everyday language as "light" is, in scientific terminology, designated as *visible light*, which constitutes only a small portion of the broader electromagnetic spectrum. The human eye's ability to perceive this limited segment exists alongside the fact that no upper boundary can be conceived for the spectrum of light itself (i.e., electromagnetic waves). What has enabled humans in recent centuries to recognize non-visible light is the existence of "signs" of its presence, detectable through its effects on temperature or through inducing changes in certain materials. The knowledge of God without direct observation, and instead through His signs at various levels, evokes a parallel with this characteristic of light. These signs are sometimes as clear and direct as visible light perceived by the eyes, and at other times require the engagement

of multiple layers of intellectual reflection for their recognition.

The Qur'an refers to such divine signs using the term *al-āyah*. God emphasizes in the Qur'an that signs exist within the components of creation, including the entirety of the material world and human beings (Q. 51:20–21), as well as in events such as the victory of truth over falsehood in human interactions (Q. 3:13), for those who reflect. However, the miracles of the prophets may be considered the most evident signs of God. These are described not only with the term *al-āyah* but also with the term *al-bayyinah* (Q. 57:26), which denotes a clear rational or sensory indication (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1992, 1: 157). It is important to note that the comprehension of truths, and particularly the knowledge of God through these signs, depends on the observer's qualities of reflection, faith, and certitude.

5.1.3. Independence from the Observer's Condition

The constancy of the speed of light in a vacuum formed the foundation of Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity at the beginning of the twentieth century, a theory according to which spatial dimensions (length) and temporal intervals are relative to observers moving at different velocities. Although the title of this theory may initially suggest that all things in the universe are relative, closer examination of its foundations reveals a deeper truth. In this theory, the speed of light is a universal constant, and no transmission of information or causal influence can occur at speeds exceeding the speed of light. The constancy of the speed of light implies that differences in the relative velocity between observers and the light source do not alter the measured speed of light. Thus, rather than rendering the speed of light relative, the theory reveals the relativity of spatial dimensions and temporal intervals as observed in motion.

The status of light, being beyond the reach of all observers and independent of their conditions, serves as a metaphorical reminder of the absolute and unattainable nature of God in relation to all phenomena in existence. Another implication of the theory of relativity is timelessness at the speed of light (in theoretical terms, not in practice). In other words, if an entity were to move at the speed of light, time would not elapse for it. This concept evokes the notion of God's transcendence over time and the absence of past and future with respect to the Divine Essence.

6. Conclusion

The expression *"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth"* in the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35) has long been a subject of inquiry among exegetes,

Qur'anic scholars, philosophers, and mystics in explaining the relationship between God and the phenomenon of light. Exegetes up to the 11th century CE, without reference to the prevailing scientific theories of their time, and primarily based on the common understanding of light, namely its beauty, the visibility of objects in light, and their invisibility in darkness, adopted a metaphorical interpretation, understanding light in this context as "adorner" (*al-muzayyin*) or "guide" (*al-hādī*). After the 11th century, a realistic interpretation of this expression became prevalent, grounded in the notion of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ al-maʿnā*) for the term *al-nūr*. This interpretation also remained largely based on a general, non-scientific understanding of light. The well-known definition of light by Suhrawardī, "that which is manifest in itself and makes other things manifest," despite his acceptance of an emission-based theory (*ṣudūrī*) of vision, provides evidence for this claim. However, the widespread acceptance and longevity of this definition may be attributed to the dissemination, in the 13th century CE, of the experimentally grounded entrance theory of Ibn al-Haytham. Following this development, no significantly new interpretation of this parable gained widespread prominence until the present day.

The Qur'anic system of parables (*al-amthāl*), which presents truths at a sensory level to facilitate understanding and stimulate reflection, is grounded in a deeper ontological principle, which is the manifestation of truths within the structure of the created world. In other words, God has created the universe as a parable of higher truths and has also represented these truths in the Qur'an through linguistic expression. From this perspective, a metaphorical approach is not limited to the level of language but extends to the level of existential phenomena. Accordingly, the parable of divine light not only serves as a linguistic tool for deep understanding but also reflects the very manner in which light itself is created. Thus, the properties of light can be regarded as indicators of divine attributes.

The emergence of colors from the combination of light in white light reflected from various objects recalls the diverse manifestations of divine attributes in creation. The human capacity to perceive only a portion of the light spectrum, depending on sensory and cognitive abilities, inspires an analogous understanding of the varying levels at which divine signs may be comprehended. The absolute and invariant nature of the speed of light suggests the absolute nature of God in relation to all things and His transcendence beyond all limitations. Likewise, the absence of time at the speed of light metaphorically reflects God's encompassing relationship with time and His supra-temporal nature.

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