'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*:
A Topical and Theological Analysis of
Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the role played by the Christian scholar ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in theologizing in the Islamic milieu of the ʿAbbasids in the 9th century. His *Kitāb al-Burhān*, one of his only two surviving works, will therefore be thoroughly studied from two perspectives: the Islamic perspective as it is found in contemporary anti-Christian polemical texts; and the Christian perspective, through a comparison of ʿAmmār's treatise with the works of Arab Christian theologians of his day. The present study aims at demonstrating the level of translatability of Christian theology into the Islamic intellectual milieu, as ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī saw it. It is therefore natural that we should examine *Kitāb al-Burhān* as an example of "contextualized" theology in *Dār al-Islām*. ʿAmmār's *Burhān* stands a witness to the numerous attempts made by Arab Christians to reconcile their heritage (the world of Islam) with their inheritance (Christian theology). Such a reconciliation is essential for the future existence of Arab Christians, particularly in the Arab World.

The present study is divided into three major sections, each presenting a particular perspective: the first is a historical overview of ʿAmmār's context. It includes **Chapter One**, which examines the socio-political milieu of Eastern Christians at the advent of Islam, and the beginning of Christian Arabic theology; and **Chapter Two**, which explores the life and works of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, and examines the history of scholarship on *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

The heart of the present study is Section Two, i.e. the theological perspective, which offers a systematic and critical analysis of the content of *Kitāb al-Burhān.* This starts with **Chapter Three**, where 'Ammār's arguments concerning the true religion and the reasons for accepting the Christian religion are closely examined. **Chapter Four** offers an analysis of 'Ammār's presentation of God's existence, God's book, i.e., refuting the allegation of corruption, and God's nature, i.e. the Trinity. And **Chapter Five** presents 'Ammār's Christological views, scrutinizing with critical attention discussions on the unity of Christ, his incarnation, cross and crucifixion. **Chapter Six** offers a discussion on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. And finally, in this section, **Chapter Seven** presents a theological presentation of 'Ammār's views on some aspects of Eschatology, i.e. eating and drinking in the afterlife.

Section Three contains **Chapter Eight**, which investigates the place of 'Ammār. Finally, the appendix offers for the first time an English translation of *Kitāb al-Burhān.*

DEDICATION

To my mother who lovingly gave "ἀπολογία" for the hope within her (I Pet. 3: 16)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Note on Scripture Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are taken from the Revised Standard Version and all qur'ānic citations are from Yūsuf 'Alī's translation.

Arabic Transliteration Table

ا	'	د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	'	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	هـ	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

The short vowels are represented as follows:

a   *fatḥah*

i   *kasrah*

u   *ḍammah*

The long vowels are represented as follows:

ā   *'alif*

ī   *wāw*

ū   *yā'*

The diphthongs are represented as follows:

ay   (يَ ـ)

aw   (وَ ـ)

The final hā' is represented by "ah."

List of Abbreviations

AM	*Anno Martyrum*
BL	British Library
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CE	*The Coptic Encyclopedia*
CEDRAC	Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Arabes Chrétiennes
cf.	Compare, confer
circa	approximately
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
ed.	editor, edition, edited by
EI²	*The Encyclopedia of Islam,* new edition
f., ff.	folio(s)
GCAL	Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*. Città del Vaticano, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944-1953. 5 v.
H.	*Hijrī*
HCMR	History of Christian-Muslim Relations
ISCH	*Islamochristiana*
Michel Hayek, *Apologie et Controverses* (FI),	*Apologie et Controverses* (French Introduction)
N.D.	No date
N.P.	No publisher
no.	Number
p., pp.	page(s)
PAC	*Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien*
ParOr	*Parole de l'Orient*
PIO	Pontificio Istituto Orientale
r.	reigned
trans.	Translation, translated by
vol.	volume

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Chapter One: Introduction

Unquestionably, without a careful reading of medieval Arabic treatises, studies on Christian-Muslim dialogue become inadequate attempts to describe the nature and questions with which Christians and Muslims were struggling. Early texts occupy a major importance in this endeavor, as they acquaint modern scholars with the first issues raised among Christians and Muslims. Texts from the ninth century are of particularly great importance, given their milieu, namely, the formative period of the 'Abbasid renaissance 750-860 AD. Several corpora have been studied, and as a result many Arabic texts have been translated into modern languages such as German, French and English. Consequently, theologians such as Theodore abū Qurrah and abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī have become well-known to Western scholarship.

However, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān* remains to a great extent unknown. This current study fills this gap, and this is what makes this dissertation a foundational work. The thesis will provide an exhaustive theological analysis of *Kitāb al-Burān*, as well as a complete English translation thereof. This groundbreaking work will assuredly provide future scholars with an opportunity to extend their understanding of Christian-Muslim theological encounters during the second part of the ninth century. Similarly, the English translation of 'Ammār's treatise will open a door for many to carry out further studies. None of this was possible

before the appearance of the present dissertation. Furthermore, we have succeeded in

consulting the Charfeh MS—which was not accessible to many scholars who have worked

on *Kitāb al-Burhān* in the past; it is an epitome to the only other known MS, which is in

London.

Methodology and Limitation

In presenting this theological analysis, we will divide the topics covered in *Kitāb al-Burhān*

into five major sections: Religion, God, Christ, the Sacraments, and Eschatology. Our plan is

to provide a brief overview of the way Muslim polemicists viewed each of them, followed by

an analysis of 'Ammār's arguments to assess his position and, finally, each topic will be

critically evaluated. Our methodology is to provide a close critical reading of the text,

identifying its main theological themes, and to assess its arguments in the context of

Christian-Muslim conversation.

Our main resource for this study is the British Library MS, referred to hereafter as BL

MS, which contains *Kitāb al-Burhān*; this is the manuscript Michel Hayek edited and

published in 1977, as we shall discuss later. Other references will also be made, as

appropriate, to the Charfeh MS—especially when significant textual or theological additions are found. Hayek's edition will be referred to as "Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*."[1]

The current study is limited in its scope, as it is fundamentally concerned with the Islamic milieu of ʿAmmār. That is to say, we shall not spend much time on attempts to examine ʿAmmār's arguments in light of current theological conversations between Christians and Muslims. Rather, our main focus will be on providing a theological analysis of his *Kitāb al-Burhān* as an attempt to answer certain Islamic objections to Christianity in the ninth century.

In order to do this, one must consider the situation of Christians at the advent of Islam.

Christians at the Advent of Islam

In order to better understand ʾAmmār al-Baṣrī's milieu, and to depict the development of what became known as *Dār al-Islām*, it is necessary to consider the situation of Christians in the East at the advent of Islam. The focus of this section, therefore, is twofold: to examine first the internal theological and cultural differences within the Christian community, and second the new reality as Islam began to impact the Eastern world.

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[1] Michel Hayek, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et controverses* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq), 1977.

By the middle of the fifth century, Eastern Christian communities were divided due to

their differing doctrinal positions, as well as for cultural reasons. The Melkites, the Jacobites,

and the "Nestorians" were the main sects. The term "Melkite" may well be Semitic in origin,

since the Arabic word "*malik*" means "royal" or "king," and it was this church that was

supported by the state. According to historians, the intervention of the emperor in the affairs

of the Melkite Church is well-documented.[2] With the backing of the Byzantine Empire, the

Melkite Church sometimes harassed non-Melkite Christians, after the refusal of the latter to

adopt the Christological formulae of Chalcedon (451). Among those who suffered

persecution were the West Syrians, the followers of Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), and the

Copts of Egypt. Both groups were later referred to as "Monophysites." The Coptic Orthodox

Church, as the national church of Egypt, has maintained its loyalty to the Alexandrian

theologians, particularly Athanasius (b. c. 296-373) and Cyril of Alexandria (b. c. 375-444).

The Coptic Church was and is non-Chalcedonian.

The third group of Christians, the "Nestorians," were anathematized and persecuted

and fled the known territories of the Byzantine Empire, establishing themselves in Persia. In

this remote location, the "Nestorians" removed themselves from the reach of the imperial

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[2] See Salwa B. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿĀyib, *al-Masīḥiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah wa-Taṭāwurātuha* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1989), 26-42.

wrath of Byzantium,[3] where, it has been argued, they were considered to comprise the "second state religion."[4]

It has been argued that in Persia both the "Nestorians" and the Jacobites enjoyed a "status of legality which they had never enjoyed with Byzantium."[5] There, interestingly enough, the "Nestorian" Church was successful in its mission: several missionary delegations were sent out to central Asia, reaching the Mongols and as far as China,[6] where the "Nestorian" Tablet was erected in 781 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).[7] Perhaps this was possible because the "Nestorian" Church assured the Persian Empire that it had no political aspirations, for it was not a state-church.

Christological expressions and views about the union of Christ (i.e., the unity of his divine and human nature), were the critical cause of schisms in the early Church.[8] Eastern Christians agreed that Christ was the Word of God incarnate, and that he appeared in human form; the real issue was how the two natures of Christ existed in one person. How was the

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[3] Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East: A Political Study* (Athens: Lycabettus Press, 1975), 4.

[4] ʿAzīz ʿAṭiyya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1968), 193; cf. Nīqūlā Ziyādeh, *al-Masīḥiyyah wal-ʿArab* (Dimashq: Qadmus lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2000), 200-202.

[5] Ibid., 20.

[6] Edmon Rabbāt, "al-Masiḥiyyūn fīl-Sharq qabl al-Islām" in *al-Masiḥiyyūn al-ʿArab*, ed. Elias Khoury (Bayrūt: Muʾassasat al-Abḥāth al-ʿArabiyyah, 1986), 19.

[7] Ephrem Yousif, *al-Falāsifah wal-Mutarjimūn al-Suryān*, trans. Shamʿūn Kūsā (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-Qawmī lil-Tarjamah, 2010), 264-265.

[8] Ibid., 16.

divine Λόγος united in the body of Jesus of Nazareth? Did Christ have two natures, equally

united in him? In 451, the Council of Chalcedon was called upon to solve this issue. Yet, as it

presented its proposed "solution," it in fact caused the first "great schism of the Apostolic

Church."[9] While the Melkite Church accepted the formula that asserted the two natures of

Christ, Christ being both divine and human, yet without confusion, or division, or separation,

or change, other Christians rejected this formula. The "solution" was dismissed by the

Alexandrian theologians, who saw it as the extreme opposite of the "Nestorian heresy,"

which had earlier been condemned at the Council of Ephesus 431. Instead, they maintained

the view that in Christ the two natures had become one person. Ultimately, those Christians

who rejected Chalcedonian Christology, found themselves under the persecution of the

Byzantine state-church.[10] Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification to assume that

theology or doctrine was the only reason for such a division and fierce struggle. Naturally,

theological differences were to be blamed for some enmity, but it is indeed necessary to

keep in mind that the three Christian communities existed in three culturally different regions,

and it seems that nationalism played some role in dividing them, for while the Melkite Church

was the emperor's church, both the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Syrian Church were

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[9] ʿAzīz ʿAṭiyya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, 69.

[10] Edmon Rabbāt, "al-Masiḥiyyūn fīl-Sharq," 20. In fact, the three terms referring to the Christian communities in the Middle East prior to the advent of Islam are no longer descriptive of any theological positions, and most Eastern Christians do not use the terms that used to be employed.

national churches.[11] Culture shapes the way one expresses faith, and this was perhaps what happened with the Chalcedonian and non-Calcedonian Christians before Islam. As Zhuravsky clearly argues, philosophical and political factors deepened the division. Certain political and cultural agendas were also in play, with each group of Eastern Christians representing a distinctive people and a specific language, which in turn influenced the local expression of Christianity.[12] The Melkite Church used Greek as its liturgical language while the "Monophysite [Church]…had become the focus of anti-Greek feeling both among the Copts or native Egyptians and among the Jacobites of Syria…[13]" Needless to say, Greek was the language of earlier theological formulations: it was the language used in the theological decision of the Council of Nicaea and at Chalcedon.

This was the situation of Eastern Christianity at the eve of Islam. When Islam took over much of the East, Eastern Christians found themselves subjugated under a new military power. At first, they seem to have regarded Islam as merely the newest invader in their long history of successive conquerors. They expected the Muslims to remain for a period, and

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[11] Seppo Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during the Early ʿAbbasīd Rule* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1993), 39; cf. Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East,* 1-7.

[12] A.V. Zhuravsky, *al-Islām wal-Masīḥiyyah*, trans. into Arabic by Khalaf M. al-Jarrād (Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Waṭani lil-Thaqāfah wal-Funūn wal-Ādāb, 1990), 177; cf. Nīqūlā Ziyādeh, *al-Masīḥiiyyah wal-ʿArab*, 222.

[13] William M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1.

then to be defeated by a new, superior power. The Persians, with their long struggle against

the Romans, were presumably the most likely candidates. Perhaps this is why Griffith

maintains that when Christians first encountered Islam they initially saw it as a political rather

than a religious challenge.[14] But, as "[c]hurches, monasteries…schools, towns and cities all

came under Muslim rule,"[15] as Islam became more and more established, and when the

number of converts increased, the new world order posed several challenges for Christians

in the East. It became evident that Islam was there to stay.[16] This realization was confirmed

as much of the population rapidly converted to Islam, and the cities of Alexandria, Antioch

and Jerusalem, which had all been major Christian centers, fell to the Muslim armies. In fact,

"[a]ll three sees often remained vacant or the patriarch resided in Constantinople."[17]

As early as the seventh century, Christians living under Islam started to produce

apocalyptic literature, such as the apocalypses of Pseudo-Athanasius,[18] John the Less, and

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[14] Sidney Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. van J. J. Genkil, et al., Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 134 (Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2005), 92.

[15] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 8.

[16] Seppo Rissanen, *Theological Encounter*, 38.

[17] Ibid., 37.

[18] See Francisco Javier Martinez, "Pseudo-Methodius, and Pseudo-Athanasius. Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 1985).

Pseudo-Methodius.[19] To be sure, such types of literature evaluated Islam as a tool of

punishment by which God would purify the Church[20]—a perspective commonly found

throughout apocalyptic literature, even before the advent of Islam.

However, this apocalyptic literature did not change the new reality, nor did it attempt to

relate to Islam, or to develop into an Arabic Christian theology which could, in turn, be used

to initiate conversations with Muslims. Recognizing this, Christians began to adopt a different

approach, which later resulted in intellectual interactions and theological encounters with

Islam: they began to write their theological treatises in Arabic, the new *lingua franca*. Most of

these writings were concerned with apologetics, although some were polemical in nature.

This type of literature was much needed because Muslims, on both a scholarly and a

day-to-day level, demanded proof of the credibility of the Christian faith. Before investigating

Arabic Christian theology in general and the theology of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī in particular, it is

necessary to look at the way Islam treated Christians in the newly conquered lands. This will

provide an understanding of the socio-political context in which such theology was

composed, an understanding of which is crucial for an appreciation of the theological

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[19] John C. Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam," in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 19.

[20] Ibid.

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treatises of the Arab Christians.[21] We turn then to examine how Christians were treated in

Dār al-Islam.

The *Dhimmī*s

Before the rise of Islam, there were Christian communities in the Arabian Peninsula. Many

tribes and kingdoms, such as *Kindah*, *Kalb*, *Ghassān* and *kham*, were well established in the

Christian faith.[22] Numerous historians argue that there were many Arab Christians even in

Mecca![23]

In seeking to understand Muḥammad's treatment of the *dhimmī*s, viz., the Jews,

Christians, and the *Ṣābians*,[24] it must be emphasized that two distinct attitudes are recorded

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[21] These compositions were not produced in ivory towers, but rather at the courts of the caliphs, as in the case of Timothy I before al-Mahdī, and abū Qurrah before al-Ma'mūn!

[22] Mattias Schulz, "Fortress in the Sky: Buried Christian Empire Casts New Light on Early Islam," trans. Christopher Sultan. *Der Spiegel*, 21 December, 2012. Available at: [http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/buried-christian-empire-in-yemen-casts-new-light-on-early-islam-a-874048.html], Accessed on 21 December, 2012.

[23] See Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 31-51; cf. the classic study by John Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman, 1979), and Georges C. Anawati, *al-Masīḥiiyyah wal-Ḥaḍārah al-'Arabiyyah* (Bayrūt: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, 1900).

[24] Sūrah 2:62; 5:69; 22:17; cf. abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn-Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (al-Qāhirah: al-Maṭab'ah al-Salafiyyah wa-Maktabatuhā, 1933), 128; Adam Mez, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Islāmiyyah fīl-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijrī*, trans. Muḥammad 'abd al-Hādī abū Rīdah (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-Qawmī lil-Tarjamah, 2010), 55-60.

in the Qur'ān.[25] On one hand, the prophet of Islam praised Christians, as being the people closest to Muslims, in contrast with the Jews, with whom he was not so pleased, perhaps due to the opposition he had experienced from them in the early days of his prophethood, which would naturally lead to the Jews being depicted as hostile towards the Muslims.[26] Khoury argues that one of the significant qur'ānic references is sūrah 5:85.[27] Add to this reference some other qur'ānic verses that praise the practices and character of Christians, who seem to have been "ranked at almost the same level as Muslims."[28]

However, later in his life, Muḥammad seems to have denied major Christian teachings, and even attacked them.[29] He opposed the Christian belief that Jesus is God's Son (*sūrah* 9:30), "denounced the dogma of the Trinity (4:17), and pointed to the division of the Christians amongst themselves (5:14)."[30] Further criticisms are mentioned concerning

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[25] Al-'Āyib mentions that the Qur'ān deals with Christians and Christianity in 117 verses, in 23 sūrahs. See Salwa B. Ṣāliḥ al-'Āyib, *al-Masīḥiyyah al-'Arabiyyah*, 103.

[26] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 10-11.

[27] George Khoury, "The Advent of Islam and Arab Christians" (Catholic Information Network, January 17, 1997). Available at:
[http://www.cin.org/bushra/mag1196/0896khou.html]. Accessed 25 October 2010.

[28] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 6.

[29] Heribert Busse, *Usus al-Ḥiwār fīl-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Dirāsah fī 'Alāqat al-Islām bil-Yahūdiyyah wal-Masīḥiyyah*, trans. Aḥmad Maḥmūd Huwaydī (al-Qāhirah: al-Majlis al-A'lā lil-Thaqāfah, 2005), 87-91.

[30] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 13.

specific Christian practices, such as the direction of prayer, monastic life, and clergy.[31]

Moreover, the Qur'ān itself contains some disparaging remarks and criticism regarding

Christians (sūrah 5:51; 9:34), who, according to the qur'ānic text, are "misled into false

beliefs…teach wrong things…and have abandoned God's promise."[32] Of course, the "false

beliefs" criticized in the Qur'ān are the fundamental Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity,

the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the divinity of Christ. The Qur'ān makes several

references to Jesus as a mere man, a messenger from God, who is to be likened to Adam,

as a created being. Further, according to the qur'ānic text, Christ was not put to death on the

cross, but rather it "seemed so to his followers."[33] These doctrines were, and still are, the

classical Muslim objections raised against the Christian faith. Arab Christian theologians

wrote almost exclusively on such issues, and Christian-Muslim dialogue has always

struggled with these topics.

These two contradictory approaches towards non-believers may have been the reason

why Muḥammad dealt with the Christians of the Peninsula using two different methods, i.e.

with appreciation and with harsh criticism. To put it differently, Salwa B. Ṣaliḥ al-ʿĀyib seems

to have been correct in concluding that Muḥammad approached Arab Christians in two

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[31] Salwa B. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿĀyib, *al-Masīḥiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah*, 116-119.

[32] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 6; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 9.

[33] *Sūrah* 4: 157ff.

different ways: diplomatically and militarily.[34] He approached some tribes using the sword, such as the Christians of Dawmat al-Jandal, and those living on the borders of the Fertile Crescent, while others, such as the Christians of Najrān,[35] received delegations to discuss theological issues.[36] On the whole, however, it seems historically accurate to maintain that Muḥammad settled his relations with the *dhimmīs* by treaties,[37] whereby they were allowed to pay money in exchange for protection by the Muslims if they would submit to the Islamic regime.[38] The *jizyah* was one of two options put before the *dhimmīs*, the alternative being conversion.[39] Adherents of other religions not acknowledged by the Qurʾān were offered either conversion to Islam or death.[40] Lewis puts it this way:

> The Prophet's relations with Christian tribes and settlements in the northern
> *Ḥijaz*, and later in southern Arabia, were in general regulated by
> agreements…By its [the agreement] terms the Christians were permitted to
> practice their religion and run their own affairs, on condition that they paid a

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[34] Salwa B. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿĀyib, *al-Masīḥiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah*, 127.

[35] See Muḥammad M. Saʿad-al-Din, *al-ʿAysh al-Mushtarak al-Islāmī al-Masīḥī fī Ẓill al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah: Shahādah min al-Tārīkh*, al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Taʿāwun, 15 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 2001), 27.

[36] Salwa B. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿĀyib, *al-Masīḥiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah*, 127.

[37] Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East*, 8. See, for example, the text of the Najrān treaty recorded in abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (al-Qāhirah: al-Maṭabʿah al-Salafiyyah wa-Maktabatuhā, 1933), 72-73.

[38] Samir Khalil, "The Christian Communities: Active Members of Arab Society throughout History," in *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 69.

[39] Mark Cohen, *Bayna al-Hilāl wal-Ṣalīb: Waḍʿ al-Yahūd fil-Qurūn al-Wusṭā*, trans. Islam Dia and Moʿez Khalafāwi, (Köln: Al-Kamel, 2007), 183-191.

[40] See Balqīs al-Ruzayqī, *al-Islām fīl-Madīnah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʾah, 2007), 238-242.

fixed tribute, gave hospitality to the Prophet's representatives, provided supplies

to the Muslims in time of war, and refrained from usury.[41]

Nevertheless, the Qur'ān, in speaking of the *jizyah*, is ambiguous, for the text says that the

dhimmīs must pay "*'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn*" (sūrah 9: 29).[42] The wording of this verse has

regularly been taken to mean that humiliation and abasement are to be associated with the

process of paying the *jizyah*.[43] This humiliation is prescribed in part because Islam sees non-

Muslims as people who have rejected the truth revealed by God in Islam, and who must

therefore always be reminded of their wrong choice and its social and religious

consequences. Consequently, the "*jizyah* was not only a tax but also a symbolic expression

of subordination."[44] The manner of payment of the *jizyah* demonstrates the way the emirs

and governors used it as an opportunity to show superiority over the Christians and the

Jews. This may well explain "*'an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn.*"[45]

"Christians and Jews could only avoid the payment of the poll tax, which remained in

force until the reforms of 1839 in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire and in 1855 in

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[41] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 11.

[42] "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

[43] Wilyam al-Khāzin, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-'Abbāsiyyah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1992), 162.

[44] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 14.

[45] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970), 227.

Egypt, by converting to Islam."[46] Unsurprisingly, then, there were Christians who could not

endure the stigma of humiliation and subordination and, not wanting to give up their social

and economic status, sought "refuge…by adopting Islam and joining the dominant faith of the

community."[47]

All in all, it seems safe to conclude that the two paradoxical attitudes found in the

qur'ānic text regarding the *dhimmīs* played a major role in allowing the Christian community

in *Dār al-Islām* sometimes to enjoy a peaceful existence, with no persecution, and at other

times, as under al-Mutawakkil, to suffer horrendously. Arab Christians thus had to live with

the reality that their circumstances were insecure and could change overnight. This

alternating treatment might be attributed to the inconsistency found in the text of the Qur'ān,

the military situation of the Muslim state, or the mood of the caliph. The Arab Christian

community became increasingly vulnerable as their numbers decreased, and their

participation in the state was progressively limited. They became second-class citizens in

countries that had once been their "homeland."

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[46] Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam* (London: Tauris, 1997), 22.

[47] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 18. Lewis says, "The practice of employing non-Muslims was and remained almost universal—for pragmatic rather than theoretical reasons. They [the *dhimmīs*] were useful, and that was enough." Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 30; cf. John C. Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam," 6-8.

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's Covenant, or the Pact of 'Umar, with the *dhimmīs* demonstrates the early situation of the *dhimmīs*, especially Christians, under the first caliphs.[48] It is a document that officially regulated the relationship between the Muslim state and its non-Muslim subjects.[49] The text of the Pact was a letter written by the Christians in Syria in which they laid out their terms of surrender to the conquering Muslim troops. Though it has been argued that the text of the Covenant did not receive its final form under 'Umar I (c. 586-644), but rather was developed later, under the 'Abbasids,[50] it offers a detailed picture of the context of Arab Christians in *Dār al-Islām*.[51]

The main objection to the authenticity of this document is raised by A.S. Tritton, in his classic study *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*. He argues that it is not likely that the Christians whose lands were subjugated would have put forward terms of surrender;

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[48] Both ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyyah and al-Ṭurṭūshī provide the whole text of the Pact. See Muḥammad ibn abī Bakr ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyyah, *Aḥkām ahl al-Dhimmah* (al-Dammām: Ramādī lil-Nashr, 1997); Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (al-Qāhirah: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1994). For the English text, see Bernard Lewis, ed. and trans., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1974), 217-219.

[49] See Mark Cohen, *Bayna al-Hilāl wal-Ṣalīb*, 151-182.

[50] George Khoury, "Theodore abū Qurrah (c. 750-820): Translation and Critical Analysis of His Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, California, 1991), 27; cf. Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): A Study in Christian Muslim Controversy" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 1986), 240.

[51] See Moritz Steinschneider, *Adab al-Jadal wal-Difā' fil-'Arabiyyah bayna al-Muslimīn wal-Masīḥiyyīn wal-Yahūd*, trans. Ṣalāḥ 'abd al-'Azīz Maḥjūb (al-Qāhirah: al-Majlis al-A'lā lil-Thaqāfah, 2005), 195-212.

however, it would be accurate to say that it was the Muslims, the conquerors, who enjoyed

the power and thus, could set forth their own terms to be followed by the Christians.[52] The

other objection relates to the language of the Pact. Tritton says, "Nor is it likely that Syrian

Christians in the seventh century, who knew no Arabic and undertook not to study the

Qur'ān, would echo its language and provisions so faithfully."[53] This objection can be

answered if one considers the fact that Arabic had been a common language among many

Christians even before the rise of Islam. In fact, there are historical records of Christians in

Syria and Iraq being Arabs.[54] Thus, Christians who were originally "Arabs" could have helped

in the compilation process of the Pact.[55] This explanation, however, would need more

historical investigation as the nature of the relationship between the Christians who were

originally "Arabs" and those who were "Arabized" by the advent of Islam still awaits further

research. Lewis, while questioning the attribution of the document to 'Umar I, admits that it

may have undergone some fabrication, and argues that the Pact represented a strategy for

differentiating between Muslims and non-Muslims.[56] 'Umar's Covenant was intended to

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[52] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 8-9.

[53] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 25.

[54] Ḥassan ibn Ṭalāl, *al-Masīḥiyyah fīl-'Ālam al-'Arabī* ('Ammān: al-Ma'had al-Malakī lil-Dirāsāt al-Dīniyyah, 1995), 90.

[55] See Louis Cheikho, *Shu'arā' al-Naṣrāniyyah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1967).

[56] See Albrecht Noth, "Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and Non-Muslims: Re-reading the 'Ordinances of Umar'," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, vol. 18, ed. Robert Hoyland (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 103-124.

prevent the *dhimmīs* from attaining any high positions and to ensure that they had limited power, keeping them in a state of humiliation.[57] The Covenant prohibited them from performing any functions that were regarded as noble, and especially from holding political positions.[58] Christians were totally banned from jobs where they could exercise authority over Muslims[59] and the Covenant also limited their religious freedom to a great extent. Many churches were either ruined or converted into mosques.[60] Even translating Christian materials into Arabic was sometimes banned, for Christian Arabic materials were believed to constitute a threat to Muslims because they might lead to conversion from Islam to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity or Judaism was, therefore, forbidden and its punishment was death.[61] The day-to-day life of the *dhimmīs* was also full of challenges. They could not join the army, nor could they own weapons. Of course, not carrying weapons in a society where everyone had a weapon for self-defense made the *dhimmīs* vulnerable and left them "at the mercy of anyone who chose to attack…there is always a sense of danger, as

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[57] Samir Khalil, "The Christian Communities," 72; cf. Wilyam al-Khāzin, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-ʿAbbāsiyyah*, 166.

[58] Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah Ḥaḍārah ʿĀlamiyyah: Dawr al-Suryān fīl-Nahḍah al-ʿArabiyyah al-Ūlā: al-ʿAṣr al-Umawī wal-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī* (Bayrūt: Bīsān lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ wal-Iʿlām, 2009), 436-438.

[59] A.V. Zhuravsky, *al-Islām wal-Masīḥiyyah*, 183.

[60] Ibid., 73.

[61] Amāl Qarāmī, *Qaḍiyyat al-Riddah fīl-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadīth* (Tūnis: Dār al-Janūb lil-Nashr, 1996), 23-28. See also Aḥmad Ṣubḥī Manṣūr, *Ḥadd al-Riddah: Dirāsah Uṣūliyyah Tārīkhiyyah* (al-Qāhirah: Ṭībah lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, 1993). For a different argument, see ʿabd al-ʿAzīz Jāwīsh, *al-Islām Dīn al-Fiṭrah wal-Ḥurriyyah* (al-Qāhirah: al-Zahrāʾ lil-Iʿlām al-ʿArabī, 1987), 160-162.

well as inferiority…"[62] In fact, the root of the word, *dhimmī*, "*dhamma*" means to blame, to find blameworthy, to dispraise, to find at fault, or to rebuke.[63] Thus the designation of Christians and others as *dhimmīs* is definitely significant.[64]

The Umayyad Caliphate and the *Dhimmīs*

The Umayyad agenda dealt not only with Christians and Jews, but also included all non-Arab subjects in the newly established Muslim empire.[65] As Griffith has stated, it was the policy of the Umayyad caliphs, and particularly that of ʿabd al-Malik (r. 685-705), to assimilate the conquered territories of the Eastern patriarchates into publicly recognizable Islamic centers.[66] This policy obviously succeeded, for there was rapid conversion to Islam by non-Muslims.[67] Under the Umayyad caliphs' rule, many Christians lost their prominent positions in the

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[62] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 36.

[63] Ismāʿīl ibn Ḥammāz al-Jawharī, *Kitāb Tāj al-Lughah wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyyah* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭbaʿat Bulāq, 1945), 287.

[64] The Muslims' control over the *dhimmīs* even affected their clothing and manners. They could not wear the same clothes as Muslims, nor could they wear what they wanted, being assigned a specific color and having their clothing choices restricted in numerous details. Ringing the bells, *nāqūs*, of their churches and sharing their faith with Muslims was prohibited. These regulations were made more severe and were strictly enforced whenever Muslim troops were defeated by the Byzantine armies.

[65] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," in *The Beginning of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2002), 63.

[66] Sidney Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *Muslim World* 78 (January 1988), 2.

[67] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 63.

caliphate and were replaced by Muslim officials. This process of Arabization or Islamization

was lengthy but successful. But, it must be noted, as G.R. Hawting argues, that "although

often connected, Islamization and Arabization in this period were not necessarily

simultaneous processes, and not all the regions under Umayyad rule were affected by them

to the same extent or at the same speed."[68]

Some other "Umayyad caliphs later had crosses on public display destroyed, and

replaced the image of the cross on coins with a simple pillar"[69] and the name of the

Byzantine emperor engraved on the coins was replaced by the Muslim *shahādah*. During this

same era, the Dome of the Rock mosque was constructed in Jerusalem in 691.[70] This event,

in particular, was a "supreme moment of Arabicization."[71] The mosque, built on the site of the

Christian patriarchal seat, sent a strong message to Christians that a powerful suppression

was at hand. The intent of the choice of Jerusalem as the mosque location, and the qur'ānic

calligraphy within the mosque, which spoke against the Trinity and Christology,[72] should not

be misread. The calligraphy contains "five groups of short phrases, each emphasizing the

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[68] *EI²*, CD-Rom edition, s.v. "Umayyads;" cf. Wafīk Naṣry, ed., *abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn: al-Mujādalah*, *PAC*, vol. 23 (Bayrūt: CEDRAC, 2010), 404.

[69] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 9.

[70] Sidney Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 2.

[71] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, 52.

[72] Ibid., 53-54.

unity and the absolute unrivalled power of God, that He has no offspring…"[73] 'Abd al-Malik's

victory over Jerusalem and his creation of the mosque presented him as the victorious caliph

who was successful in suppressing his stubborn opponents.[74]

During the reign of 'Umar II (r. 717-720), the caliph himself was concerned and

distressed that non-Muslims held high official positions. In a letter, he stated that Muslims are

"the best nation that was created…We will not give to their subjects authority over any one of

them…"[75] Muslims, as a result, replaced non-Muslims, and it was reported to the caliph that

none of the Coptic officials remained in his office.[76] Thus, all secretaries and officials in Egypt

who were not Muslims were dismissed as Muslims were appointed in their place.[77] 'Umar II

went further to impose tougher restrictions, or to use Lewis' apt term, "disabilities,"[78] not only

on the religious lives of Christians, but also upon their daily lives. If a Muslim killed a non-

Muslim, he was not sentenced to death but was liable to pay a fine, but if a Christian killed a

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[73] Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2005), 69.

[74] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 9; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow,* 15.

[75] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 21.

[76] George Khoury, "Theodore abū Qurrah," 24; cf. Maḥmūd al-Ḥuwayrī, *Miṣr fīl-'Uṣūr al-Wūsṭā* (al-Qāhirah: 'Ayn lil-Dirāsāt, 2003), 73-75.

[77] Mīshīl Yatīm, and Ignace Dick, *Tārīkh al-Kanīsah al-Sharqiyyah wa-Ahamm Aḥdāth al-Kanīsah al-Gharbiyyah* (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 1991), 169; cf. abū Sayf Yūsuf, *al-Aqbāṭ wal-Qawmiyyah al-'Arabiyyah: Dirāsah Istiṭlā'iyyah* (Bayrūt, Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2011), 69-84.

[78] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 22.

Muslim, the sentence was death. Furthermore, Christians could not pray aloud or sound their clappers, and they were not allowed to bear witness, in a legal sense, against Muslims.[79]

It is worth noting that, during the Umayyad caliphate, Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, (c. 660-c. 750), the son and grandson of key people in Damascus politics, withdrew from public life to the monastery of Mar Sabas. Al-Dimishqī became the first church father to make reference to Islam in his *Fountain of Wisdom*. His well-known classification of the new religion as the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites" shows some knowledge of the Qur'ān.[80]

The process of Arabization under the Umayyads gained ground as people started to adopt the Arabic language as their own. It became necessary for Christians of the East to learn and use this new language in order to be able to communicate with the new local authorities, and maintain their legitimacy within society. Islam became a lifestyle that affected all practices. What could be called an "Islamic world" came into existence as Islam started to shape the many facets of life. Even the times of the day were marked by the names of the Muslim obligatory prayers.[81]

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[79] George Khoury, "Theodore abū Qurrah," 25.

[80] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 9; cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

[81] For more discussion, see Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 14-17.

The 'Abbasid Caliphate and the *Dhimmīs*

Although it is true that Christians were discriminated against, it is equally true that under the 'Abbasids, Christian scholars, translators, and physicians achieved great prominence. As pioneers of various sciences, their contributions to the 'Abbasid intellectual revolution were remarkable.[82] Arabic-speaking Christians, particularly those of Syriac background, knew several languages and were also heirs to a rich theological heritage. They were the main channel by which Greek and Syriac literature was translated and introduced into Arabic, thus helping to establish the 'Abbasid renaissance.[83] This fundamental role is widely acknowledged and accepted by scholars without dispute.[84] The role played by Arabic-speaking Christians at *Bayt al-Ḥikmah*[85] is essential to the understanding of all the academic achievements of the 'Abbasids.[86] Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (808-873) will always be remembered as the pioneer of Arab translators and is renowned for his translations from Greek into Arabic.[87] His works included translations of Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates and the Neo-

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[82] See 'Āṭif al-'Irāqī, *al-Falsafah al-'Arabiyyah* (al-Qāhirah: Longman, 2003), 28-37.

[83] See Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Al-Fayyūmī, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah fīl-Mashriq* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 1999), 73-84.

[84] Ḥassan ibn Ṭalāl, *al-Masīḥiyyah fīl-'Ālam al-'Arabī*, 93; cf. Ephrem Yousif, *al-Falāsifah wal-Mutarjimūn,* 165-197.

[85] Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah,* 583-588.

[86] Mīshīl Yatīm, and Ignace Dick, *Tārīkh al-Kanīsah*, 171; cf. Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī al-Masīḥī* (Jūniyah: Manshūrāt al-Rusul, 2003), 239-256.

[87] See Nīqūlā Ziyādeh, *al-Masīḥiyyah wal-'Arab*, 201, cf. Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah,* 552-564.

Platonists.[88] Samir Khalil points out that 90 percent of Greek philosophical works known at

the time were translated by Arabic-speaking Christians.[89]

Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā (820-912), a Melkite from B'alabak and a famous physician, was asked

by a certain Muslim governor to accompany him to Mecca to provide medical assistance, if

needed. He was unable to go, but he did write a book, *al-Risālah fī Tadbīr Safar al-Ḥajj*

(*Medical Regime for Pilgrims to Mecca*)[90] and thus became the first, and probably the only,

Christian to write on the Muslim *Ḥajj*! These contributions, needless to say, gave the

Christian community some privileges. Their achievements and scholastic expertise gave

cause for them to be admired, and praised[91] and, therefore, allowed to occupy high positions

in the caliphate.[92]

However, even though Arab Christians were allowed to occupy such positions, they

were always reminded that they were not "fully accepted as part of that society."[93] The

'Abbasids, like the Umayyads before them, were also concerned about the inclusion of non-

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[88] See Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, 383-388, cf. Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah,* 465-482.

[89] Samir Khalil, *Dawr al-Masīḥiyyīn al-Thaqafī fīl-'Ālam al-'Arabī*, vol. 1 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 2004), 27-28.

[90] See Bos Gerrit, *Quṣṭā ibn-Lūqā's Medical Regime for the Pilgrims to Mecca: The Risāla fī Tadbīr Safar al-Ḥajj*. Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); cf. Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, 208-211.

[91] David Thomas, "Arab Christianity," 12.

[92] Ibid., 11.

[93] Ibid., 12.

Muslim subjects of the caliphate. The caliphate attracted, and later included, many non-Muslims, especially in the East as they looked eastwards, in contrast to the Umayyads who had concentrated on Damascus. Historians have always argued that this inclusion was the solid achievement of the ʿAbbasid caliphate.[94]

Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775), in 756, "forbade Christians to build new churches, to display the cross in public, or to speak about religions with Muslims. In 757, he imposed taxes on monks, even on those who lived as hermits."[95] Further, in 759, following ʿUmar II's model, he removed all Christians from their jobs in the treasury and, in 766, removed the crosses from the tops of the churches. Many Christian leaders, such as the Melkite Patriarch Theodoret, Patriarch Georges, and the "Nestorian" Catholicos James, were put in prison.[96]

During the reign of al-Mahdī (775-785), the persecution of Christians escalated. Forced conversion was encouraged. Al-Mahdī forced the tribe of *Tanukhids* in Aleppo, which amounted to five thousand fighters, to convert to Islam.[97] Further, due to his anger at a defeat by the Byzantine army, he sent "troops to Homs in Syria, to have all the Christians abjure their faith."[98]

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[94] Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 236.

[95] George Khoury, "The Advent of Islam."

[96] Ibid.

[97] Youssef Courbage, and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 11.

[98] George Khoury, "The Advent of Islam."

Harūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809), who followed some of the policies of 'Umar II,

demolished churches that had been erected after the advent of Islam. He also forced

Christians to "wear stipulated clothes."[99] Under his son al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833), particularly in

814, Christians in Syria and Palestine were heavily persecuted and many of them fled to

Cyprus and into other Byzantine territories.[100] Paradoxically, perhaps echoing the two

different attitudes presented in the Qur'ān, this same caliph al-Ma'mūn had great interest in

science and translations, and had several Christians working for him at *Bayt al-Ḥikmah*.[101]

It was al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861), however, who issued the edict against the *dhimmīs*.

His formulation of anti-Christian law caused a "vehement persecution of Christians."[102]

According to this law, Christians were forced to wear honey-colored hoods and girdles and to

"affix a wooden image of devils to their houses, level their graves even with the ground, ride

only mules and asses with wooden saddles marked by two pomegranate-like balls on the

cantle."[103] He further issued "orders to destroy…churches which were newly built and to take

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[99] Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 24.

[100] George Khoury, "The Advent of Islam."

[101] See Aḥmad Farīd Rifā'ī, *'Aṣr al-Ma'mūn*, vol. 1 (al-Qāhirah: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1997), 295-299, cf. Samīr Maḥmūd al-Durūbī, *al-Tarjamah wal-Ta'rīb bayna al-'Aṣrayn al-'Abbāsī wal-Mamlūkī* (al-Riyāḍ: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal lil-Buḥūth wal-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2007), 14-15; Adam Mez, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Islāmiyyah*, 80-82.

[102] Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 241.

[103] Muḥammad abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, *Dhakhā'ir al-'Arab*, vol. 5 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Imiyyah, 2001), 318; cf. 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, ed. 'Umar Tadmūrī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al- 'Arabī, 1997), 106-107, 119.

the tenth part of their (Christians) houses. If the place was large enough, it was to be made into a mosque."[104] He dismissed all Christians from his administration[105] and non-Muslims were not allowed to perform government service.[106] Ultimately, it was he who "called a halt to the public scholastic disputations…on the grounds that they were disruptive of the good of the society."[107] This end was due, in part, to the public aspect of the theological discussions and the high profile of non-Muslims who participated in them.[108] It would be fair to conclude that persecution was a clear mark of al-Mutawakkil's caliphate.[109]

Christians and Islamification: An Evaluation

It can be argued that, after the advent of Islam, the reality of Eastern Christianity changed once and for all. Yet, Christians showed a great degree of flexibility in the face of their new context. This enculturation included adopting Arabic as a liturgical and theological language. Furthermore, Arabic-speaking Christians began to compose theological writings in Arabic, making them accessible to their fellow Christians.

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[104] Bernard Lewis, ed. and trans., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad*, 224-225.

[105] Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 25.

[106] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 23.

[107] Sidney Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore abū Qūrrah on Discerning the True Religion," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the 'Abbasīd Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1.

[108] Ibid.

[109] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 231; cf. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat Miṣr, 2001), 376.

It would be easy to conclude that the new Islamic empire mistreated the Christians of the East, seizing their lands, while subjecting them to severe sociological regulations as outlined in the Pact of 'Umar. This judgment can be justified from some historical resources—some of which are Muslim. On the other hand, as noted, some Christians enjoyed tolerance and acceptance at the courts of the caliphs and emirs. Such examples can be seen as indications of the tolerance of the young Islamic state towards the *dhimmīs*. Support for this view is seen in the fundamental role that Christians played in building Arab civilization. This view is likewise corroborated by historical resources—some of which are Christian. This latter view is mainly propounded by contemporary Arabic-speaking Islamists. Fahmī Huwaydī, in his study *Muwaṭinūn lā Dhimmiyyūn: Mawqi' Ghayr al-Muslimīn fī Mujtama' al-Muslimīn*, argues that the main reason for the drafting of the Pact of 'Umar is not to be found in Islam, but in the historical situation following the Crusades, and again after the fall of Baghdād, when Christians welcomed the victorious Mongols. In both situations, he claims, Muslims had to "guard themselves from the conspiracies of the Christians."[110] However, he fails to address the issue of the regulations that were imposed upon the Christians of the East prior to the Crusades and the fall of Baghdād, instead calling them

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[110] Fahmī Huwaydī, *Muwaṭinūn lā Dhimmīyūn: Mawqi' Ghayr al-Muslimīn fī Mujtama' al-Muslimīn* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), 212; cf. Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh Naṣārā al-'Irāq* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Rāfidayn lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2010), 258-273, 281.

"later insertions" or "additions."[111] Others have maintained that the Pact was a "holy responsibility" which later took the form of a legal relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims,[112] while yet others claim that the Pact did not cause any humiliation to the Christian community.[113] Majid Khadduri even argues that the Christian community "favorably" welcomed the terms of the Pact![114]

The truth, it seems, is somewhere in the middle, and therefore a balanced approach must be taken in order to understand the extensive history between the two communities. Clearly, the new reality of the Eastern Christians brought limitations and disabilities. Their reality was full of struggles, yet the greatest struggle was not, one could argue, to follow the restrictions of the new context, as much as it was a struggle to re-define their theological identity in a way that would make sense to both the intellectual and the common Muslim. They sought to understand and make themselves understood. It was a fight to legitimate their "being" as a people with credible beliefs and good morals.

Moreover, not all caliphs were equally aggressive towards Eastern Christians. There is no comparison, for example, between the treatment of Eastern Christians under al-Ma'mūn

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[111] Ibid., 211.

[112] See Maḥmoud M. Ayoub, "Dhimmah in the Qur'an and Hadith," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 5 (1983): 172-182.

[113] Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 185.

[114] Ibid.

and al-Mutawakkil. It is almost impossible to pinpoint what can be called a "standard"

condition under which Eastern Christians lived. The state of affairs for the Christians was

totally dependent on the mind or "temper" of the caliph. This was the reality Arabic-speaking

Christians came to expect.

The fate of Eastern Christianity has been compared to the lost island of Atlantis, given

that, within one hundred years or less, Islam took hold of Christian centers in the

Mediterranean basin.[115] This unfortunate judgment, however, does not do justice to the

continuing witness and fervent presence throughout history of the Arabic-speaking church in

the world of Islam. It is a church that has lived and borne witness and proved to be a genuine

part of the life of the East. It is true that Eastern Christianity lost its political and social power

due to the advent of Islam, but, as Ignace Dick has pointed out, it was able to stand firm for

that long period of time, maintaining its liturgical traditions, theology, life and witness, and

thus it is worthy of all praise and appreciation.[116]

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[115] A.V. Zhuravsky, *al-Islām wal-Masīḥiyyah*, 175.

[116] Ignace Dick, *al-Sharq al-Masīḥī*, Min Turāthinā, 1 (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 1967), 80.

CHAPTER TWO: Who is 'Ammār al-Baṣrī?

The Life and Works of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī

Little is known about 'Ammār al-Baṣrī. Given his *nisbah*, it is assumed that he was from

Baṣrah, but the dates of his birth and death are unknown. We can only speculate using the

imprecise historical allusions and data found within his *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

Graf uses a reference made by al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl that places 'Ammār after

Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq,[117] to argue that 'Ammār lived sometime between the tenth and thirteenth

centuries. However, all other modern scholars in this field rely on Michel Hayek's arguments,

which place 'Ammār in the ninth century. While Graf merely relies on al-Mu'taman's

reference, Michel Hayek goes to great pains to explain his reasoning, establishing four

proofs. While the first proofs are inconclusive, the four together form a strong argument for

placing 'Ammār in the ninth century.

First, Hayek notes that 'Ammār dedicates his book, *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, to

an unnamed caliph, and suggests that this might indicate the period when the book was

written. However, Hayek realizes that this is not conclusive as this method of dedicating

books was not uncommon in 'Ammār's day. Second, Hayek considers that the battle

mentioned by 'Ammār concerning a war waged due to the cry of a woman is the battle of

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[117] Georg Graf, *GCAL*, Studi e testi, 133 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1947), 210.

Amorium in 838, where al-Muʿtaṣim defeated the Byzantine army.[118] Historical sources speak

of mighty armies led by the caliph himself as he sought to defeat the Byzantine army at

Amorium. The battle lasted fifty five days, and al-Muʿtaṣim was able to take the strongholds

of the doomed city.[119] Hayek notes that, if this were correct, it would prove that ʿAmmār lived

close to, or shortly after, the time of the battle. However, Hayek does not consider this

conclusive either.[120] Third, Hayek notes that we rarely find references to the doctrine of the

eternity of the Qurʾān in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. According to Hayek, this is strong proof that ʿAmmār

lived during the reign of al-Maʾmūn and al-Muʿtaṣim, when the doctrine of the createdness of

the Qurʾān was widely accepted.[121] Fourth, Hayek draws attention to *Kitāb al-Fihrist* by ibn al-

Nadīm, where there is a reference to a book by abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf[122] written against

ʿAmmār the Christian.[123] Since al-ʿAllāf died in 840/841, it follows that his refutation of

ʿAmmār's arguments must have been composed during the first quarter of the ninth century,

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[118] We will discuss ʿAmmār's rationale for mentioning this battle in our discussion of The Acceptance of the Christian Religion.

[119] See Eric A. Ivison, "Amorium in the Byzantine Dark Ages," in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, Millennium Studies, vol. 5/2, ed. Joachim Henning (New York: W. de Gruyter, 2007), 25-60.

[120] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 10.

[121] Ibid., 10-11.

[122] See Miguel Cruz Hernández, *Tārīkh al-Fikr fil-ʿAlam al-Islami*, trans. ʿabd al-ʿĀl Ṣāliḥ (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-Qawmī lil-Tarjamah, 2010), 179-181.

[123] Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq, *Kitāb al-Fihrist,* ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Ṭihrān: Maktabat al-Asadī, 1971), 204.

most probably during the years 818-819—when al-ʿAllāf left Baṣrah.[124] If this is correct, it becomes reasonable to conclude that ʿAmmār must have composed his works in the early years of the ninth century. Alternatively, al-ʿAllāf might have refuted ʿAmmār's works when he was in Baghdād. This would place ʿAmmār sometime before the year 840, when al-ʿAllāf died. This would have meant that al-ʿAllāf's book of refutation was short, since he would have been eighty five years old at the time.[125]

Hayek also notes that the two Greek works by Aristotle that are mentioned in *Kitāb al-Burhān*[126] were translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq. Ḥunayn died in 873.[127] This suggests that ʿAmmār must have lived during or after Ḥunayn's lifetime, but this argument is inconclusive since it is also possible that ʿAmmār did not use a translation, but read the original Greek.

However, Hayek's dating of ʿAmmār is strengthened when we consider a reference to ʿAmmār by Yūḥannā ibn Sūrus. Yūḥannā was an Arabic-speaking theologian who lived in Cairo, during the last decade of the eleventh century or the early part of the twelfth century. He composed three books: *Kitāb al-ʿIlm wal-ʿAmal* (*Book of Theory and Practice*),[128] *Kitāb*

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[124] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 11.

[125] See Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 17-20.

[126] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 22-23.

[127] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 21.

[128] Yūḥannā ibn Sāwīrus, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm wal-ʿAmal*, ed. Andrāus al-Anṭūnī, (al-Qāhirah: NP., 1913).

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Ifhām baʿd al-Istibhām (*Understanding after Ambiguity*), and *Kitāb al-Tabyīn baʿd al-Shakk* (*Demonstration after Doubt*).[129] Yūḥannā shows some knowledge of "Nestorian" and Jacobite theologians, and actually mentions ʿAmmār by name.[130] This conclusively places ʿAmmār before the time of Yūḥannā ibn Sūrus, that is before the eleventh century, and consequently proves that Graf's dating of ʿAmmār between the tenth and thirteenth centuries is too broad and too late.[131]

Further, we do know that ʿAmmār's works were known and appreciated in Cairo in the 13th century. Al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl quotes ʿAmmār in his *Kitāb Majmūʿ Uṣūl al-Dīn wa-Masmūʿ Maḥṣūl al-Yaqīn*, utilizing and praising ʿAmmār's arguments on the Trinity.[132]

In a word, ʿAmmār witnessed the formative period of the Abbasids, which led the world of Islam to its golden age. On the one hand, he was in all probability a contemporary of prominent Christian theologians such as abū Qurrah and abū Rāʾiṭah and thus he is one of

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[129] Wadīʿ abū-Llīf, "Yūḥannā ibn Sūrus," in *The Proceedings of the 19th Annual Conference of the Arabic Christian Heritage Group*, FCCOS, al-Qāhirah: 26th February 2011. Unpublished Paper.

[130] Ibid.

[131] See also abū al-Barakāt ibn Kabar, *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulmah fī Īdāḥ al-Khidmah,* ed. Samir Khalil (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Kārūz, 1971), 319; Georg Graf, *GCAL*, vol. 2 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1947), 436-437; and Wilhelm Riedel, *Der Katalog der christlichen Schriften in arabischer Sprache von abūʾl Barakāt,* Nachrichten der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen Phil. Hist. Klasse, 5 (Göttingen: Nachrichten der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, 1902), 661.

[132] Ibn al-ʿAssāl, al-Muʾtaman abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm, *Majmūʿ Uṣūl al-Dīn wa-Masmūʿ Maḥṣūl al-Yaqīn*, ed. Wadīʿ abū al-Llīf, vol. 1 (al-Qāhirah: al-Markaz al-Fransīskānī lil-Dirāsāt al-Sharqiyyah al-Masīḥiyyah, 1998), 15, 405-407.

the first generation of Christian theologians to take Islam seriously, and to theologize in the midst of the Islamic context. On the other hand, he was a contemporary of well-known Muslim figures, as evident in the follwing:

> …[T]he scholar and founder of the Ḥanbalī school of law…Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) and the Muslim philosopher abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (c.800-870) are associated with this area, along with Muʻtazila, who had emerged as the dominant school of Islamic thought at this time and had formed two branches in Baṣra and Baghdād under the leadership of abū al-Hudhayl al-ʻAllāf (d.c.840) and Bishr ibn al-Muʻtamir (d.825) respectively.[133]

Theological Corpus: Genre, Topics and Audience

ʻAmmār left behind two treatises: *Kitāb al-Masāʼil wal-Ajwibah* (*The Book of Answers and Questions*), and *Kitāb al-Burhān fīl-Dīn ʻalā Siyāqat al-Tadbīr al-Ilāhī* (*The Book of the Proof of Religion concerning the Divine Economy*).[134] Hayek places *Kitāb al-Masāʼil wal-Ajwibah* first, as it contains an implicit reference to the reign of al-Maʼmūn in 813. ʻAmmār praises the caliph, who is much concerned with "advancement of argumentation concerning" religious discussions.[135] To support this view, Hayek appeals to the note found in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* to the battle of Amorium in 838. That is to say that it is probable that *Kitāb al-Masāʼil wal-*

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[133] Sara Husseini, "Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2011), 200.

[134] Wilhelm Riedel, *Der Katalog,* 650; cf. abū al-Barakāt ibn Kabar, *Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulmah*, 298.

[135] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 94.

Ajwibah was composed first and that al-'Allāf may have responded to it before he left Baṣrah in 818/819; consequently *Kitāb al-Burhān* is placed second, shortly after the battle of Amorium in 838. The two works are found in one single manuscript in the Arabic collection at the British Library. As per its colophon, the BL MS was copied in Cairo on the fourteenth of Hator 1014 AM; that is: Sunday the seventeenth of November 1297 AD.

This thesis will focus primarily on *Kitāb al-Burhān*, but it will be helpful to present a brief overview of 'Ammār's other treatise, as it helps us understand the framework of 'Ammār's theology. *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah* is divided into four parts, in which the classical Islamic objections to the Christian faith are answered. They are:

1. God and the world (28 questions and answers);
2. The correctness of the Gospel (14 questions and answers);
3. The Trinity (9 questions and answers);
4. The Incarnation (51 questions and answers).

Griffith correctly notices that the questions "are phrased in the familiar, conditional style of the Islamic *'Ilm al-kalām,* with the 'question' being the *protasis* of the statement, and the 'answer' its *apodosis*."[136] Most of the 102 questions and answers are also found in a different format in *Kitāb al-Burhān,* which is an abbreviated version of 'Ammār's larger work, *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah.* In other words, *Kitāb al-Burhān* presents the main issues that are dealt

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[136] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian Kalām in the First 'Abbāsid Century," *Le Muséon*, 96 (1983), 150.

with at length in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah.* It may have served as a "quick" reference to aid the Christian community of 'Ammār's time in their daily theological conversations with Muslims.

Writing with clarity, 'Ammār has no ambiguity in his words, which allows his agenda and purpose to be understood. He proposes not only to help the Christian community by providing "proof" of Christianity's credibility, but also to eliminate certain misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims. He states this clearly:

> We now come to what they find distasteful[137] when we say that Christ is the Son of God. They beleaguered people with this by telling them about us that we say that God took for Himself a female companion and a son from her. God is far too exalted for that. When we mention that God has manifested His economy in a body like ours, they distort it by making us say that He descended into the womb of Mary and limited Himself in her. When we mention that Christ was crucified, they distort this understanding to say that we impute weakness to God's [character]. And when we mention baptism, and taking the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ, and our belief that our reward in the lasting world is not found in sexual intercourse or food and drink, they oppose us.[138]

It is not surprising, then, that 'Ammār would choose to focus his discussion on explaining these Christian doctrines, given the Islamic misunderstanding and challenges.

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[137] Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl expounds on this point as he adds: مَا اسْتَشْنَعُوهُ وَشَنَّعُوهُ. This addition clearly agrees with 'Ammār's argument that Muslims not only dislike the theology of Sonship, but they also make it sound despicable to the ears of other people. See folio 122a.

[138] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 56-57.

Clearly, therefore, 'Ammār's audience would be twofold: those who raise the questions and those who are to answer them. He is evidently addressing both communities: the Muslims and his fellow Christians. His ultimate hope is to provide "proof" of credibility to those who demand it. Thus, he not only deliberately chooses to borrow a qur'ānic term to name his treatise (since the Qur'ān [*sūrah* 2:111], challenges Christians and Jews to provide their *burhān* or proof of credibility if their religious claims are to be seen as correct), but also literally quotes *sūrah* 2:111 in answering question seventeenth in the fourth section of *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*![139]

Kitāb al-Burhān: A History of Scholarship

As indicated in the colophon of BL MS, *Kitāb al-Burhān* was copied in Cairo during the thirteenth century by a Coptic scribe, in al-Jūdariyyah, close to al-Mu'iz li-Dīn Allāh al-Faṭimī Street.[140] The exact location where the manuscript was copied is uncertain, as the colophon contains some illegible words. However, the colophon does refer to the house of a certain *Elīsaḥ*, اليسح; most probably a corruption of *Elisha*. This is followed by an undotted word which could be read as النفيس, *the Honorable*. This may have been a description of the

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[139] Ibid., 206.

[140] It is reported by al-Maqrīzī that al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh ordered that section of the city to be destroyed. See Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā'iẓ wal-I'tibār bi-Zikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār* (al-Qāhirah: Mū'asasit al-Ḥalabī, 1853), 97-167.

house, namely, the distinguished house of Elisha; or it may have been a reference to the

honorable Elisha!

Before we proceed with our own analysis of *Kitāb al-Burhān,* it is appropriate that we

review in chronological order the various scholarly studies of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's treatises.

Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, (d. c. 1265)

Al-Ṣafī was a member of the prominent al-'Assāl Egyptian family, in the thirteenth century.[141]

He played a major role with his brothers in what is known as the Coptic renaissance of the

Middle Ages. Al-Ṣafī was particularly talented in summarizing theological works. Many

homilies and patristic works were epitomized by him, which made them widely accessible to

a Coptic readership.[142] Al-Ṣafī condensed both of 'Ammār's works. His epitome of *Kitāb al-*

Burhān is housed at the Monastery of Charfeh in Lebanon. We were granted access to a

copy, and were thus able to compare it with the text of the BL MS. The Charfeh epitome is

clearly legible, and provides considerable help in understanding 'Ammār. As we shall

demonstrate in our discussion on the existence of God, it would seem that al-Ṣafī had a

complete copy of 'Ammār's *Kitāb al-Burhān* at his disposal. In the opening section of the

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[141] Muḥammad Kīlānī, *al-Adab al-Qibṭī Qadīman wa-Ḥadīthan* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Farjānī, 1962), 10-15.

[142] Khalil Samir, "al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl," in *CE.*

manuscript, al-Ṣafī acknowledges his theological differences with ʿAmmār's "Nestorian" position, and clearly indicates that the epitome will avoid such "Nestorian" views in an attempt to make the text ecumenically acceptable—a task at which al-Ṣafī brilliantly succeeded.

Michel Hayek (1977)

Michel Hayek was a Lebanese theologian and novelist, and a talented writer.[143] In 1961, he published *al-Masīḥ fīl-Islām* in which he draws a complete picture of Christ as seen in Islam. Hayek was the first scholar to introduce ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī to the modern reader, publishing ʿAmmār's two treatises from the BL MS in 1977. Hayek provided a seventy page introduction in French, which is also followed by a technical Arabic-French lexicon covering the major part of the vocabulary used in ʿAmmār's two extant works. It is noteworthy that Hayek's edition of ʿAmmār's treatises includes both a French and an Arabic introduction. The latter is a summary of the former.[144] This French introduction was first published in *ISCH* in 1976.[145]

Hayek's work is sometimes inaccurate in its reading of the BL MS, and it does not

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[143] See David Kerr, "'He Walked in the Path of the Prophets,' toward Christian Theological Recognition of the Prophethood of Muhammad," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 431-433.

[144] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 7, footnote 1.

[145] Michel Hayek, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī La première somme de théologie chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du christianisme," in *ISCH* 2 (1976), 69-133.

consider variant readings found in the Charfeh MS.[146] However, his analysis is indispensable

in any scholarly attempt to understand 'Ammār's thought, being the first academic attempt to

read and analyze 'Ammār's works in modern times. Unfortunately, his pioneer work

neglected to add titles and subtitles to the published text, making it difficult at times for the

reader to follow the main idea of the text, especially given the change in the use of language

between the ninth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, there is a need for a new edition of

'Ammār's works; preferably one that will include a comparison between the text of the BL MS

and the Charfeh MS.

Further, it was appropriate that Hayek should provide a French translation of

'Ammār's treatises, given his competency in French and the nature of the series,[147] which

had published numerous mediaeval texts accompanied with French or English translations.

However, no translation into English was provided. This is our primary motivation for creating

an English translation of *Kitāb al-Burhān* as an appendix to this study.

Sidney H. Griffith (1980, 1983)

Griffith has written two articles dealing specifically with 'Ammār: "The Concept of al-

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[146] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 9, footnote 2.

[147] Recherches: Nouvelle série. B, Orient chrétien.

Uqnūm in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity,"[148] and "ʿAmmār al-

Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian Kalām in the First Abbasid Century."[149] The first article, as

the title indicates, deals directly with the Trinitarian formulations that ʿAmmār employed,

particularly his use of the Syriac term "*Uqnūm*." Griffith notes that ʿAmmār may have been

influenced by the *Book of the Scholion* by Bār Konī,[150] and especially by Bār Konī's

arguments against Islam. Griffith believes that ʿAmmār sought to convey the concept of the

Trinity by using terms that had been developed primarily by contemporary Muʿtazilī thinkers,

and especially by abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf. Griffith concluded his lengthy discussion by

observing that ʿAmmār offered the Arabicized form of the Syriac word as a possible

explanation of the Trinity.[151]

Griffith's article was the first to discuss ʿAmmār at length in the English language. It

lacks, however, an appreciation of the theological tension which ʿAmmār surely felt as he

attempted to communicate the classical word "*Uqnūm*" to his interlocutor. Griffith does not

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[148] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes,* ed. Samir Khalil, *Goslar, September 1980* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 218), Rome: PISO, 1982, 169-191.

[149] See Sidney Griffith, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān: Christian Kalām in the First ʿAbbāsid Century." *Le Muséon*, 96 (1983): 145-181.

[150] Addai Scher, *Theodor Bar-Konī Liber Scholiorum*, CSCO, vol. 55 and 69 (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1910), and Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī Livre des Scolies*, CSCO, vol. 432 (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), 175; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 43.

[151] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 191.

present 'Ammār as someone who must have struggled in his attempts to explain a complex

reality and thus repeatedly used different terms to try to convey the "*Uqnūm*."

Three years later, Griffith wrote another lengthy article on 'Ammār, this time covering

a wide range of topics found in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. The article has a fine introduction to the

historical setting of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, followed by a theological analysis of major issues raised

by 'Ammār. Griffith's analysis is comprehensive, but not exhaustive. He indicates that such

deep analysis was done by Michel Hayek in the introduction to *Kitāb al-Burhān* published in

Lebanon in 1977, and that he did not see it fitting to offer a repetitive analysis. This

reluctance made for a short article and resulted in limited coverage of such sections as

'Ammār's discussions on the Eucharist, and Eating and Drinking in the hereafter.

Griffith also writes about 'Ammār in his article "Comparative Religion in the

Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians."[152] As the title indicates, the article

explores the ways in which early Arab Christian theologians such as 'Ammār contended that

their faith was the true religion in face of opposing doctrines.[153]

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[152] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion, 63-87.
[153] See Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 169-191.

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Ivor Mark Beaumont, (2003, 2005)

In 2003, Mark Beaumont published his first article on 'Ammār: "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the

Incarnation," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in*

'Abbasid Iraq.[154] This article was a paper that had initially been presented at the fourth 4th

Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam held at Woodbrooke

Quaker Study Center in Selly Oak, Birmingham, in 2001. Beaumont offers a short analysis of

'Ammār's presentation of the incarnation, based almost entirely on *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-*

Ajwibah. Beaumont's presentation, although brief, offers a fair analysis of 'Ammār's answers

to the questions and objections that had risen to challenge the "impossible" concept of the

incarnation.

In 2005, the fifth Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam was again held

at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center in Selly Oak, and Beaumont delivered another paper,

"'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels."[155] The paper was later

published in *The Bible in Arab Christianity* in 2007. Beaumont offers an analysis of 'Ammār's

Christian and Muslim context with regard to the issue of the Gospel's corruption. Beaumont

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[154] Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, HCMR, vol. 1, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 55-62.

[155] Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity,* The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 6, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007): 241-274.

suggests that Timothy I had an impact on 'Ammār's apology,[156] and that 'Ammār may also

have had in mind certain accusations raised in the writings of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm.

Beaumont's presentation is divided into two sections: 'Ammār's refutation as recorded in

Kitāb al-Burhān, and 'Ammār's refutation in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*. Beaumont

concludes by arguing that 'Ammār's defense of the authenticity of the Gospels "was more

extensive than comparable treatments by any of his known Christian contemporaries in the

early Abbasid period."[157]

Beaumont's two articles make worthwhile reading, and the second, especially,

provides an adequate analysis of 'Ammār's view of the Christian Gospel. Beaumont has also

published *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*, a version of his doctoral dissertation at the

Open University, Oxford Center for Mission Studies,[158] which provides a more extensive and

comprehensive study. In this work, Beaumont compares Christian explanations of

Christology—some by contemporaries of 'Ammār, such as abū Qurrah and abū Rāi'ṭah—

and others as held by modern theologians such as Kenneth Cragg and Hans Küng.[159]

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[156] See in this regard Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 22.

[157] Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption," 255.

[158] Mark Beaumont, "Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., Open University: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2003).

[159] See Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005).

Other Academic Works

References to 'Ammār appear in other academic articles, although 'Ammār is not the focus

of these works. Therefore, we will only refer to them in this thesis when their contributions

are relevant to our discussion of 'Ammār's theological position. Authors of these articles

include scholars such as: David Thomas, Gabriel S. Reynolds, Mark N. Swanson, Samir

Khalil, and Sandra T. Keating.

Scholarship on *Kitāb al-Burhān*: An Evaluation

All of these scholarly studies are fine works, attempting to draw a picture of the intellectual

content and context of 'Ammār's *Kitāb al-Burhān*. Yet none of them has offered a thorough

or comprehensive analysis of 'Ammār's theological presuppositions and arguments as laid

out in his *Burhān*. Rather, these scholars each approached 'Ammār's text through a specific

lens, such as classifying him as a *Mutakallim.* We will show that this does not do justice to

'Ammār's main goal of defending his theological views against Islamic accusations.

Further, none of the above mentioned scholars had access to al-Ṣafī's epitome,

which helps clarify some difficulties in the BL MS and provides insight into the missing

section where 'Ammār offers his explanation for the spread and acceptance of Islam. In our

exploration of many sections of *al-Burhān*, this study will provide a comparison between the

BL MS and that of the Charfeh Monastery. Further, our English translation of *Kitāb al-Burhān* is the first attempt to provide the English-speaking world with access to 'Ammār's words and thoughts.

It is our hope that this ninth century text can still speak today to enrich the never-ending theological conversation between Muslims and Christians.

SECTION TWO: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER THREE: *Kitāb al-Burhān*: a Topical and Theological Analysis

Having studied 'Ammār's socio-political milieu and the history of scholarship concerning

Kitāb al-Burhān, we now move to examine its content. Our aim in this section is to

understand the ways in which 'Ammār defended his position in the face of the objections that

were primarily raised by his Muslim interlocutor.

The choice of topics discussed in 'Ammār's *Burhān* is significant. Indeed, the

subjects he tackled have been standard in almost all theological discussions between

Christians and Muslims, and one can even argue that these topics are still standard issues

found in any Christian-Muslim conversation. Although the topics stem from the points of

contention between Islam and Christianity, they nonetheless also form the backbone of

theological studies in general. Topics such as the Trinity and the incarnation are

indispensable in any theologizing.

Since, however, our concern is only with Christian theology within the *Dār al-Islām*,

we must remember that 'Ammār's theological agenda was decided for him. And therefore,

we ask: "How does he answer questions raised almost exclusively by Muslim thinkers?"

Naturally, this leads us to examine his *Kitāb al-Burhān* from a theological perspective.

The Proofs of the True Religion

'Ammār's discussion is set against the background of the pluralistic cultures of Mesopotamia and its diverse religious groups. There was a pressing need for the Christian community of 'Ammār's time to prove the truth of their position in the face of opposition from other religions, particularly Islam. It is within this context that 'Ammār seeks to demonstrate the credibility of the whole of Christianity and its practices. How, then, does 'Ammār defend and explain Christian theology in his pluralistic setting, while facing particular opposition and restrictions by the Muslim majority?

'Ammār's presupposition is straightforward: "Truth is single."[160] He first establishes that there is but one God. It then follows that the religion that God desires for humanity must also be one:[161] there is no room for religious plurality.[162] 'Ammār also proposes that this religion must be revealed by God, and therefore he stresses that it is God's relationship with humanity that has resulted in the emergence of one true faith. According to 'Ammār, one cannot know the truth by relying on uncritical tradition; rather, it is more fitting for humans to rely on reason and logic in order to know the true religion.

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[160] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* 27. MS Charfeh folio 105a reads:

"وَإِذَا الْحَقُّ وَاحِدٌ لاَ يَنْقُضُ بَعْضُهُ بَعْضًا فَدِينُ اللهِ وَاحِدٌ وَمَا نَاقَضَهُ بَاطِلٌ."

[161] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 50.

[162] See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 89, no. 1 (Jan., 1996), 67-70.

Thus, 'Ammār identifies the strategy by which the religion of God is to be known: the true religion is discerned through reason. However, it should be noted that, while he argues for the validity of reason in discerning the true religion, 'Ammār's also believes in God's self-revelation. Furthermore, he believes that this God has character and personality, so that it is necessary to examine God's attributes as part of the process of discerning the true religion. He propounds three proofs, each of which assumes the existence of God and God's involvement in the affairs of the world.

The First Proof: God is Wise and Generous

'Ammār begins his argument with the then common view of God's motivation in creating the world. Arabic-speaking theologians and Mu'tazilī thinkers such as abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf,[163] believed that the generosity of God was the foundational reason for God's creative acts. God did not create out of need, but rather out of generosity.[164] This generosity is closely related to God's power and wisdom. God created and sustains all the conflicting elements of the world, and by his amazing power keeps all the elements in perfect order and place. Likewise, the creation of the intricate human body demonstrates the wisdom of God. All of these givens,

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[163] Al-Ash'arī, abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'abd al-Ḥamīd (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1969), 182.
[164] Ibid., 236, cf. Dominique Sourdel, *al-Islām fīl-'Uṣūr al-Wusṭā*, trans. 'Alī Muqallad (Bayrūt: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1983), 93-100.

'Ammār concludes, attest to a significant fact: God, being wise, will not destroy creation; rather, God will bring all its incompleteness to total fulfillment. Only fools destroy what they create.[165] Even when death occurs, it should not be seen as the ultimate end. Death, according to 'Ammār, is a manifestation of the body's corruption. Even death, he contends, has a role in the restoration of creation and its progress towards completion.[166]

'Ammār explains this incongruity in human experience by giving examples from nature. Corruption that leads to fulfillment is like soaking a seed to make it softer and larger. This process includes the "corruption" of the seed as it spoils in the water. Or, it is like people who break the ground and dig it up to make it useful for others. Destruction takes place in order to bring forth growth. These illustrations help explain the teaching that the God who created humanity would never destroy it, despite its corruption.[167]

Given this sure hope and the fact that God is generous, 'Ammār concludes that God's divine plan must have been disclosed in a book by which God provides a source of

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[165] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 24.

[166] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 161.

[167] 'Ammār puts it as follows: "If God spoiled our bodies by death then that would not contradict our conclusion that the wise person does not spoil what he has made. This is because we have seen that wise people have spoiled in order to improve, like the seed that they sow in the soil to obtain fresher and more useful grain, and soak with water so that it rots and from which much grain is newly produced in a form acquired in the new production." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* 25.

knowledge.[168] When generation after generation keeps this book, they become joyful,

knowing that death is not their ultimate end.[169] Elsewhere, as we shall see in the discourse

on the incarnation, this same concept is used to prove that God's incarnation in Christ is a

credible belief. It is likely that 'Ammār makes frequent appeals to this concept of God's

generosity since it is a viewpoint that was shared by his Muslim counterparts. As we shall

see in our discussion on the Trinity, utilizing shared doctrines as a starting point is a

common polemical strategy for 'Ammār.

The Second Proof: God's Demand for Morality

The second criterion of the true religion concerns the moral standards that God set for

humans. 'Ammār argues that people are created with a tendency to cause harm to one

other. For this reason, God has ordered them to love one another. These commands are

meant to function as a control, preventing people from killing each other. However, humans

could only know God's moral code through a book in which these divine demands of love are

put forward. After all, knowledge of God is not innate and humans cannot discern the ways

of God by themselves. Thus, there is an obvious need for a direct revelation from God—a

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[168] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 161.

[169] Ibid., 162.

revelation that tells of God's commands and prohibitions.[170] It will ultimately lead people to

receive rewards from God, which is exactly the point of the third proof.

Evidently, 'Ammār believes that God's revelation must be written. It is not enough to

believe that God is revealed in nature or historical events. A textual revelation is

indispensable. This point shows that 'Ammār believes that neither natural revelation nor

reason is an adequate means for knowing God. It is possible that 'Ammār was using this as

a strategy, preparing the way for later arguments that would refute the accusation of *tahrīf*.

Since God is the ultimate source of the Christian scriptures, there can then be no doubt that

it is authentic, and thus its *tahrīf* is not possible.

The Third Proof: God's Reward for the Godly

The third indication of the true religion concerns the manner in which humans respond to

divine commands. Prayer, 'Ammār points out, is useful to humans because they receive

things they have requested from God. As a result, they become joyful, seeing their needs

met and having their problems solved. This joy is more abundant than the joy they would feel

if or when they were granted things from God without asking in vigilant supplication. 'Ammār

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[170] Paul Khoury, *al-Mafāhīm 'inda al-Masīḥīyīn: al-Mafāhīm al-Falsafiyyah wal-Lāhūtiyyah fīl-Mujādalah bayna al-Masīḥīyīn wal-Muslimīn min al-Qarn al-Thāmin ḥattā al-Qarn al-Thānī-'ashar*, al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Ta'āwun, 22 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 2004), 163-164.

indicates that people are more appreciative of that for which they work.[171]

In setting forth his three proofs or criteria of the true religion, we see that 'Ammār does not start with the concept of natural revelation. Rather, God is 'Ammār's starting point. This will later serve as an advantageous foundation when he sets forth his argument that Christianity is God's religion which has been revealed in God's book.

Interestingly, we note that these three criteria for knowing the true religion are basically the same as those put forth by abū Qurrah in *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm,* that is: the attributes of God, the permitted and the forbidden and, finally, reward and punishment.[172] This might indicate that the threefold argument had been in common use in Christian-Muslim theological discussions, and that theologians felt free to adapt it as needed. The main difference, however, between abū Qurrah and 'Ammār in the utilization of this argument is that the former structured all his *Maymar* around the argument, whereas 'Ammār only mentions it briefly in his discussion of the proofs of true religion.

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[171] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* 26.

[172] See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm li-Thāwdhūrus abī Qurrah,* PAC, vol. 3 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 1982).

Discerning the True Religion

Having outlined the three proofs, 'Ammār concludes that only one religion can be true, be

pleasing to God and meet the divine demands.[173] Yet he realizes that there are in fact

multiple religions in existence, each claiming to be the correct one that comes from God. In

response to this dilemma, 'Ammār sets forth the criteria by which religions can be evaluated.

He maintains:

> Therefore it is clear that God has a religion pleasing to Him on earth for all of
> his creation. And we have seen that there are many religions and the followers
> of each religion claim that it is the religion of God. So we must put them on the
> same level, and be careful about relying on anything of theirs unless the
> argument seems correct to us, and that it is the religion of God, and then we
> will believe in it and accept it and drop whatever is not it.[174]

Each criterion that 'Ammār establishes pertains either to miracles or to the presence

of rational evidence. That is, religions are known to be either true or false by the testimony of

miracles, and sound judgment. People disagree "about their religions, [and are] divided in

their sects, each claiming that his religion is the religion of God, and that what contradicts it

is not from God. And we know that there is one religion of God among all of them,"[175] but

without miracles and sound judgment to show which one is of God it becomes irrational to

accept the claims of one group and reject the other. However, states 'Ammār, it is equally

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[173] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 162.

[174] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 26.

[175] Ibid.

irrational and impossible to accept all religions, given their contradictory claims.[176] The

presence of miraculous signs therefore becomes an important criterion in discerning the true

religion.

As we shall see at the end of this discussion, 'Ammār varies in his dependence on

reason and reasonable proofs. In one section, it becomes clear that he is teaching the

importance of relying on reason as a means of distinguishing true knowledge from false,

while at other times, he dismisses the adequacy of reason and instead introduces reliance

on the compelling proof of miracles and signs. This is not a contradiction in 'Ammār's

thought. Rather, he seems to be testing each argument or proof on his audience, and using

each idea where it is most convincing. So, for example, at one point it seems more useful to

argue for the importance of reason over tradition. However, at another point, 'Ammār will

dismiss the legitimacy and competence of reason in discerning the true religion. This

"alternation" is justifiable, given the complexity of *Kitāb al-Burhān* and the diversity of topics

under discussion.

The Cessation of Miracles

'Ammār argues that miracles are one means by which the true religion can be identified, but

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[176] Ibid.

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then he immediately considers the fact that such miracles and great signs have ceased.[177]

According to his argument, there are only two possible explanations for this situation. Either

God, knowing that people need miracles to differentiate between religious claims, decided

nonetheless to remove "evident signs of His religion and the certainty of the proof of it;"[178] or,

God first established a religion through great miracles but once the religion had been

established in the world, decided that the miracles were no longer needed or utilized.[179]

'Ammār evaluates these two options, arguing that the first is inconceivable because it

would mean that God is no longer a God who guides people to truth. The second option

must, therefore, be true: that is, the main reason for the cessation of miracles is that miracles

have fulfilled their purpose by having established the religion of God. Having completed their

task in a specific time and context, miracles have ceased to be.

This viewpoint is not well received. The 'Ammār's imaginary opponent argues for the

possibility of knowing the true religion of God and the revealed book apart from miracles.

The argument put forth by the opponent is based on a deep trust in the judgment of the

human mind. The opponent makes it clear that, if humans think critically as they judge

between religions, they can certainly come to the knowledge of the true religion, and thus

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[177] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 98.

[178] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 26, 27.

[179] Ibid.

leave the false ones.[180]

This imaginary opponent is most likely a Muʻtazilī thinker of the day, who gave reason

the ultimate authority in distinguishing truth, to the extent that many contemporary Muʻtazilīs

dismissed the value of miracles and even denied the miracles attributed to Muḥammad.[181]

To them, miracles were not reasonable; rather they were believed to be "beyond reason."

According to their view, miracles were not an appropriate means of determining truth or

discerning between religions, since reason is the ultimate and most reliable means for

knowing the truth. Later Muʻtazilī thinkers took a different position.

ʻAmmār is dissatisfied with this perspective, objecting that not all people are of sound

mind, nor does everyone have the intellectual capacity to differentiate between true and

false religions.[182] Thus, his opponents are demanding that people exceed their intellectual

capacities. This, ʻAmmār argues, is like throwing people into the sea without providing any

means for them to cross it. In short, this would be cruel, given that most people are not

intellectual. His opponent not only requires a great deal from people, but indeed makes it

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[180] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 26, 27.

[181] ʻAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʻabd al-Ḥamīd (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-ʻAṣriyyah, 1995), 132; and ʻabd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir, al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, ed. Albīr Naṣrī Nādir (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1970), 98. See also al-Isfarāyinī, abū al-Muẓaffar Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad, *al-Tabṣīr fīl-Dīn wa-Tamyīz al-Firqah al-Nājiyah ʻan al-Firaq al-Hālikīn*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf Ḥūt (Bayrūt: ʻĀlam al-Kutub, 1983), 72, and Albīr Naṣrī Nādir, *Falāsifat al-Islām al-Asbaqīn,* vol. 2 (Bayrūt: al-Rabiṭah Publishing, 1951), 138-143.

[182] Sidney Griffith, "ʻAmmār al-Baṣrī" 162.

impossible for the average person to know the true religion because the means by which the truth is known is not available to them. Additionally, reason alone is shown to be insufficient since even great intellectuals disagree among themselves. It follows that they too would select different religions and textual revelations as true if they had to judge without the testimony of miracles. According to 'Ammār, it is therefore just and proper that miracles provide the compelling, decisive proof in discerning the true religion for both intellectuals and the common person.

'Ammār is pointed in his argument: God does not ask too much from people, but rather reveals the religion that pleases Godself by supporting it with the compelling proof of miracles performed at the hands of the apostles.[183] In doing so, God shows fairness so that everyone, including the intellectual elite and the common people, is given the same proof.[184] Thus, all have an equal chance to discern the true religion, since God does not display favoritism. To demonstrate this equality, God has granted that truth be grasped by sight and reason, and has made miracles compelling for both types of people.

Having made this point, 'Ammār critically examines contemporary religions for their motivations and their claims to the miraculous. His fundamental assessment is that a religion that uses any earthly cause in its establishment cannot be of God. As we shall see later, he

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[183] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 97.

[184] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 28.

will use this point to argue for the credibility of Christianity.

It is likely that 'Ammār directs his words, at least in part, to his fellow Christians. They must have felt great pressure from the adherents of other religions, and particularly of Islam, so his review and censure of all other religions was needed. However, his critique of Islam is considerably longer than that of other religions, presumably because it was the main rival faith. We shall see this broad censure again in his discussion on the acceptance of Christianity. This apologetic strategy of critiquing all religions was necessary, enabling him to avoid the charge of blaspheming against Islam, while refuting the claims of Islam by implication.

Religions Examined:

Judaism

The first religion examined by 'Ammār is Judaism, which he calls the "religion of the Torah."[185] Judaism was made as a "special religion," since God was not pleased with it as a religion for all of humanity.[186] 'Ammār argues that since Judaism was localized under one king, in one land, and within one kingdom, it was obviously not intended to be a universal

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[185] Ibid., 30. 'Ammār is unique in calling Judaism "the religion of the Torah." See Paul Khoury, *Mafhūm al-Dīn*, 257-258.

[186] Ibid.

religion. Having one unique religion established and growing in one specific region necessarily means that it was not the religion that pleased God.[187] According to 'Ammār's argument against Judaism is simple: God stopped performing miracles within Judaism when the complete sacrificial system of the Old Testament was abolished.

In a further analysis of Judaism, 'Ammār sets forth five earthly means by which a religion may spread. They are: the sword; bribery and payment; ethnocentricity; approval; and collusion. These reasons are important to 'Ammār's argument, since his conclusion will be that only Christianity has been established by the hand of God, rather than by any of these means. 'Ammār's strategy is obvious: he examines all religions in light of the five earthly means.

With regard to the sword, 'Ammār believes that Judaism, having been a local religion that spread in only one country under the leadership of a king, was thereby spread under the threat of the sword. The subjects of the Jewish king were obedient to him in all of his religious opinions. With regard to bribery and payment, 'Ammār starts his argument by reminding his readers of Israel's time of slavery in Egypt.[188] Unfortunately, the BL MS is

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[187] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 38. When we look at al-Ṣafī's epitome, we learn that tribalism gives an opportunity for the religion to become corrupted. In folio 107a, al-Ṣafī states that, since the Children of Israel were one under one king, they were subjected to apostasy, being forced by the king to worship other gods, just as King "Bukht Naṣṣar," i.e., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon in 604 BC, forced his people to worship an idol.

[188] See Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 163.

corrupt here, and it misses a whole page where 'Ammār continues his examination of

Judaism, and evidently criticizes Islam by insinuation.

'Ammār's criticism of Judaism as a localized religion will be utilized equally against

Islam, for, according to 'Ammār, Islam is a local religion, whose adherents are to be found in

one kingdom, subject to one king.

Zoroastrianism

The BL MS does not include 'Ammār's evaluation of the spread of Zoroastrianism, but the

Charfeh MS has a short discourse found in folios 107b-108b. According to al-Ṣafī, 'Ammār

dismisses the truth claims of Zoroastrianism, identifying the involvement of the five earthly

means in its growth. For example, the dualism taught by Zoroaster appeals to the human

mind, as it provides solutions for human problems. 'Ammār states, "Zoroaster out of his

clever trickery called for something that [the human] mind finds helpful."[189] Thus,

Zoroastrianism, according to 'Ammār, gave room for human desires, which ultimately gave it

acceptance. 'Ammār even accuses Zoroaster of performing magic tricks in order to convince

people of his message.[190] Further, 'Ammār asserts that, according to the adherents of

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[189] Charfeh MS folio 107b.

[190] Cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī,* vol. 432 (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), 220.

Zoroastrianism, Zoroaster himself did not perform any miracles by which life was given to a

dead person or sight was granted to a blind one. This, he contends, is a clear proof of

untrustworthiness.

Manichaeism

Another religion 'Ammār examines is "the religion of Mani."[191] According to 'Ammār, Mani's

thinking is similar to that of Zoroaster. Further, Mani did not perform any miracles, but rather

forced his views on his adherents. This clearly indicates that it is not the religion with which

God is pleased. According to abū Qurrah, the followers of Mani are also called Ẓanādiqah,[192]

and they claim to be "the only true Christians."[193] *Zindīq* is a Persian word that made its way

into the Arabic language, and in many cases was synonymous with "heretic."[194] Although this

is not the meaning 'Ammār has in mind, he nevertheless believed that they did not possess

the truth.

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[191] Manichaeism was a dualistic religion founded by Mani (Manes), who lived between 216 and 276 AD. Manichaeism is composed of a mixture of Zoroastrian dualism, Babylonian folklore religions, and Buddhist ethics, as well as some Christian teachings.

[192] See Muḥammad 'abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamad, *al-Zandaqah wal-Zanādiqah: Tārīkh wa Fikr* (Dimashq: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah al-Jadīdah, 1999), 37-58; and 'Aṭwān Ḥusayn, *al-Zandaqah wal-Shu'ūbiyyah fīl-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī al-Awwal* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 1984), 11-25. Cf. F.C. De Blois, "Zindīk," *EI²*.

[193] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq,* 205. See also Samuel Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman world, vol. 118 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999).

[194] F. C. de Blois, "Zindīk," *EI²*.

Marcionism

Marcionism is associated with Marcion, bishop of Sinope in Pontus (c. 85-160 AD). Marcion was condemned as a heretic, having rejected the Old Testament and denied the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.[195] According to abū Qurrah, Marcion's followers argued that they possessed the true Gospel, and that Marcion himself had the right key to its interpretation.[196] 'Ammār objects to their beliefs and finds the five earthly means by which a religion is spread to be prevalent in Marcionism. Within such religion, there can be no truth, he concludes.

Bārdaiṣānism

Bārdaiṣānism is associated with Bār Daiṣān (b. 154 AD), who was a Christian from Mesopotamia.[197] Bār Daiṣān, or in the Arabicized form 'Ammār used, ibn Daiṣān, was a Syrian who had mixed Christian teachings with occult beliefs. He had been influenced by Gnosticism and, as a result, came to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ.[198] Bardaiṣānism has no truth as the aforementioned five means could be discerned in its founding.

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[195] Cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 227.

[196] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 208-209.

[197] Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah*, 361-372.

[198] Cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 229-230.

Islam

The missing folios of the BL MS purportedly examine the first two explanations for the spread of an untrue religion in connection with Islam: the sword, bribery, and payment. It can only be deduced from the rest of 'Ammār's argument that his assessment of Islam is not positive. He speaks of people being compelled by the sword to convert to Islam.[199] However, the actual text of the BL MS starts with an ambiguous mention of Ḥamzah ibn 'abd al-Muṭṭalib in relation to his role in the spread of Islam, and uses this as an example of ethnocentricity.[200] Next, 'Ammār examines the role of approval, indicating that people who heard the message preached by Muḥammad could have been swayed favorably since he offered them "the greed of the world."[201]

In contrast to any Islamic claim to the miraculous, 'Ammār points out that the Qur'ān itself states that Muḥammad had been challenged to perform miracles like the prophets before him, but failed to perform any.

'Ammār's proof texts are *sūrah* 6:109[202] and 17:59.[203] These two verses confirm

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[199] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 31.

[200] The paternal uncle of the Prophet of Islam. He converted to Islam and became one of its bravest men, especially at the Battle of Badr. See G.M. Meredith-Owens, "Ḥamzah ibn 'abd al-Muṭṭalib," *EI²*.

[201] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 31.

[202] "They swear their strongest oaths by God, that if a sign came to them, by it they would believe. Say: they will not believe." Instead we confound their hearts and their minds that they do not believe in the first instance."

'Ammār's assertion that the claim of miracles associated with the spread of Islam are not

substantiated, and that even Muḥammad himself failed to demonstrate equality with other

prophets such as Moses, whose messages were supported with great wonders. 'Ammār

argues that, according to these verses, Muḥammad did not perform any miracles, and that

they indicate instead that only God controls the occurrence of mighty signs and miracles.

The first verse reports that people asked Muḥammad to bring forth proofs of the

authenticity of his call, just as Moses, 'Īsā, and other prophets did. According to Muqātil ibn

Sulaymān, two men—'abd Allah ibn al-Mughirah and al-Ḥarith ibn Hishām ibn al-Mughirah—

challenged Muḥammad to make water spring out of the ground, but Muḥammad did not.[204]

The context of this verse is the story of the qur'ānic prophet, Ṣāliḥ, who was challenged by

the people to display a sign from God by making a specifically described camel come out of

a rock. The people promised that, if the camel appeared from the rock, they would believe in

God. Ṣāliḥ succeeded and then warned the people that it was "God's camel"[205] sent to them

as a sign, and that they should therefore not slaughter it. The people, however, broke their

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[203] "And we refrain from sending the signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false: We sent the she-camel to the Thamūd to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully: We only send the Signs by way of terror."

[204] Adel Théodore Khoury, "al-Islām fī Minẓār al-Lāhūt al-Masīḥī," in *al-'Aqīdah al-Masīḥiyyah fī Liqā' ma'a al-Islām*, al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Ta'āwun, 16, ed. Andreas Bsteh and Adel Théodore Khoury (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 2002), 281.

[205] See *sūrah* 11:64.

word and killed the camel,[206] thus incurring the wrath of God.[207]

In his argument, 'Ammār uses the context of this story to his own advantage, pointing out that, even according to the testimony of the Qur'ān itself, Muḥammad was not a miracle worker, unlike prophets who preceded him. 'Ammār then appeals to *sūrah* 17:59, where, according to al-Ṭabarī, the people had asked Muḥammad to turn rocks into gold. Muḥammad assured them that the performance of miracles is totally in God's hand.

Not only does 'Ammār see this verse as a refutation of Muḥammad's call as a prophet, but he also brings in proofs from qur'ānic commentators to corroborate that Muḥammad did not perform miracles. 'Ammār quotes 'abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās,[208] (d. 687), who, according to 'Ammār "was a witness to the situation,"[209] who stated that the Jews, the Christians, and the polytheists challenged Muḥammad to perform miracles, but he did not. How interesting, then, to see that nowhere in the commentary of ibn 'Abbās do we find this challenge mentioned in association with this particular verse! The closest mention is when

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[206] See *sūrah* 7:77.

[207] Sayyid al-Kīlānī, *Fī Mawkib al-Nabyyīn*, vol. 1 (al-Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1984), 166-169.

[208] See Theodor Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, trans. Georges Tamer (Köln: Al-Kamel, 2008), 383-389.

[209] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 32. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, (d. 687 AD), is called "the doctor" or father of qur'ānic exegesis. He is an authority on exegesis, especially among Sunni Muslims. His well-known *tafsīr* is a respected source of interpretation. The English version has been made available by Mokrane Guezzou. See al-Fīrūzābādī, Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb, *Tafsīr ibn 'Abbās.*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008); cf. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "'abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās," *EI²*.

ibn 'Abbās indicates that some "people" challenged the prophets of Islam.[210] Another

qur'ānic commentator, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, mentions some *kuffār*, polytheists, in the same

regard.[211]

It would seem, then, that 'Ammār is manipulating the interpretation of this text to his

own advantage. He introduces a new question into the text, which in turn challenges the

truth claims of Islam and its prophet. In doing so, 'Ammār is asking a question which was

likely common within his Christian community where Muḥammad's mission was doubted

simply because it did not include miracles as proof of its trustworthiness.[212] However, an

implied attack on Muḥammad himself lies behind 'Ammār's words concerning the falseness

of Islam. 'Ammār believes that prophets such as Moses performed miracles. However,

Muḥammad did not perform any, which means that, since Muḥammad's mission was not

supported by miracles, it is to be deduced that he was not a prophet. 'Ammār's view of

Muḥammad is unambiguous, yet it was not possible for him to state it explicitly. Almost all

Christian Arabic literature of his time, with the exception of al-Kindī, either avoided speaking

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[210] Mokrane Guezzou, 'abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr ibn 'Abbās*, The Royal Aal-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. Available at:
[http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=6&tAyahNo=109&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2], Accessed 01/01/2011.

[211] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *al-Tafsīr*, The Royal Aal-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. Available at:
[http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=6&tAyahNo=109&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1], Accessed 01/01/2011.

[212] Adel Théodore Khoury, "*al-Islām fī Minzār al-Lāhūt*," 280.

of Muḥammad or spoke in a vague manner about his mission. 'Ammār follows the same course. He does not even mention the name Muḥammad *per se*, but it is unmistakable that he denies the validity of Muḥammad's prophethood.

Proofs of the True Religion: An Evaluation

Based on the aforementioned arguments, 'Ammār confidently deduces that none of these other religions can be called the religion of God, since they were not accomplished or accompanied by miracles, nor were they established apart from any earthly motivation. However, up to this point in his argument, 'Ammār has not named the true religion. Therefore, the next section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* is devoted to a discussion of Christianity in relation to the earthly motivations used to spread a religious message. It is clear that he believes that Christianity, having been established by the compulsion of miracles, been accepted apart from any earthly motivations, and having been spread amongst all nations must therefore be the true religion.

'Ammār's arguments are based on the use of reason. He clearly sets forth the argument that, since there are many religious claims, the use of reason, together with supportive evidence, can be of great importance. Surprisingly and abruptly, however, he departs from reason based arguments to use scriptural revelation to prove that Christianity is

the true religion. Why then is his appeal to reason so brief? It cannot be due to 'Ammār's

lack of skill in argumentation. Indeed, based on the internal witness of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, it is

obvious that 'Ammār is familiar with Greek philosophical works and their intellectual

content.[213] Presumably, his succinct use of reason based arguments served 'Ammār's

overall purpose in establishing the truth of his Christian position over against the Islamic

claims of finality. To counter such claims, 'Ammār needed to develop a strategy by which he

could circumvent them without offering clear opposition to Islamic doctrine. The secure way

is therefore to establish an argument whose outward words seem acceptable to Christians

and Muslims, yet whose implicit references undermine the claims of Islam, and even call into

question Muḥammad's prophethood.[214]

'Ammār establishes his argument by rejecting the grounds on which Islamic claims of

truth are based. Thus he appeals to the use of reason, and, in fact, praises such use.

According to him, reliance on tradition is ignorance. Further, by challenging religious

arguments based on tradition, 'Ammār shows great confidence in reason as a reliable

means by which truth is known and true religion is ultimately recognized. Yet, reliance on

reason can only take him so far before he, as a Christian theologian, needs to depend on the

witness of revelation. In the same section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* where 'Ammār argues for the

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[213] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 22-23.

[214] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 104-105.

use of reason, he proceeds to write about a revelatory text in which God's plans for

humanity. It seems that 'Ammār trusted the testimony of reason to a certain extent, yet

revelation still comprised a major element of his epistemology, since it ultimately comes from

God. While respecting the role of reason, 'Ammār has more trust in the revealed truth. This

will be demonstrated in the following section where 'Ammār writes about the acceptance of

the Christian religion.

Concerning the Acceptance of the Christian Religion

Immediately after discussing the means by which different religions spread and the reasons

they were accepted, 'Ammār argues that no such earthly explanations could account for the

spread of Christianity.[215] Instead, he states that miracles and mighty signs were the sole

basis for its acceptance.[216] We shall now turn to consider how 'Ammār developed this view,

and examine his conclusions in light of the Christian-Muslim intellectual milieu.

'Ammār's claim is not prefaced with any arguments, nor does he prepare his readers

by refuting any other viewpoints or claims. Rather, his views are stated directly and bluntly.

When it is noted that the first word in this section is أمّا, *as for*, the reader immediately

anticipates what 'Ammār is actually going to propose. According to Arabic grammar, أمّا is a

corroborative and partitive particle, أداة تفـصيل,[217] which is primarily used to denote a

differentiation between nouns. Presumably, 'Ammār is differentiating between all previously

discussed religions and Christianity in order to argue for the truthfulness of the latter. Thus,

the use of the particle signifies the distinction or dissimilarity that 'Ammār is asserting. He

maintains that all other religions can be explained by human considerations, while

Christianity alone is unique in its divine origins.

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[215] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* (FI), 51.

[216] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 33.

[217] Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon, Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), 93.

At this point, we turn to examine 'Ammār's explanation of the natural spread of false

religions and his contrasting defense of Christianity.

Collusion

'Ammār starts his argument by pointing to the universality of Christianity *vis-à-vis* the

localized nature of other religions. He asserts that Christianity was not found in only one

nation, where only one language was spoken, but rather, was universal. In contrast to this,

he claims that almost all other religions are localized within one nation or ethnic group and

language. As examples, he points to Judaism, which was under one king, and

Zoroastrianism which was known in only one country.[218]

In this way, 'Ammār indirectly refers to Islam as a religion that was founded in only

one nation. He warns that Islam, which he called "*the religion which was after this*," الدّين الذي

بعد ذلك, was not immune from the dangers associated with being limited to "one" nation.[219] In

making his argument, 'Ammār repeats the word "one" eight times in just five lines of the BL

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[218] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 32. Al-Kindī also makes reference to Zoroaster's book. See William Muir, *The Apology of al-Kindy: Written at the Court of Al Mâmûn in Defence of Christianity against Islam; with an Essay on Its Age and Authorship Read Before the Royal Asiatic Society* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882), 43.

[219] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 32. Al-Ṣafī speaks of the last religion, الدين الأخيـر, Charfeh MS folio 110a.

MS.[220] By this unmissable repetition, he powerfully stresses that localization and singularity

of language or ethnicity undermines any claim to truth. Indeed, 'Ammār argues that this

limited range leaves any religion vulnerable, for the doctrine of any religion that is based in

only one place can easily be corrupted.

Conversely, 'Ammār argues that when a universal religion has not been spread

under compulsion, its reliability is assured because any distortion that might take place in

one area will not pervade all other locations. This is exactly the case with Christianity: it is

found in all kingdoms to the ends of the earth. It is found among the people of the east and

the west, and among the *Khūzī* and the Yemenis.[221] This, 'Ammār infers, was not the case

with the Islamic religion.

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[220] BL MS folio 8b.

[221] According to the BL MS, they are الحزي والـمـى. The immediate context does not support
any literal translation of the first word as it appears. The second word is not dotted, but if we add
appropriate dots, it could mean either "Yemen" or "Yemenis." It seems convincing, however, to read
the first word as الخُـزّي, the *Khūzī*. The *Khūzī*, formerly known as *Arabistān*, is the south-western
region of Iran, bordering Baṣrah. *Khūzistān* is *al-Ahwāz* in modern day. After the Islamic invasion of
the region the Arabs called the city *Sūq al-Ahwāz*. The Elamite Kingdom was established in
Khūzistān, with *Sūsah* (Susiana) as its capital city. The region was also known as the land of *Khūz*.
Presumably, Christianity reached *Khūzistān* as early as the first century, for we read in the Book of
Acts that people from Elam were among those who were present in Jerusalem on the Day of
Pentecost, listening to Peter preaching (Acts 2:9). The fact that *Khūz* is located to the north of Baṣrah
seems to support 'Ammār's argument that Christianity spread to the ends of the earth. The immediate
context speaks of the West, the East, the *Khūz* (North) and the Yemenis (South). R.M. Savory
"Khuzistan" *EI²*; Wilhelm Baum, "The Age of the Arabs: 560-1258," in *The Church of the East: A
Concise History*, ed. Wilhelm Baum and Winkler Dietmar (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 8; Svat
Soucek, "Arabistan or Khuzistan" in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 17, issue 2/3 (1984): 195-213, 196.

Furthermore, Islam had, in effect, imposed a new language on the non-Arab people who did not know Arabic.[222] 'Ammār here utilizes the Islamic concept of *taklīf*, presumably having in mind the text of *sūrah* 2: 286 "On no soul doth Allah place a burden [*ukallifu*] greater than it can bear." This concept denotes a law or a difficult order imposed on people by God.[223] This burden, 'Ammār seems to argue, does not support the case for the universality of Islam, for its spread entailed the difficult task of learning Arabic. By contrast, the Christian faith was accepted in many nations, among people speaking diverse languages, and even within countries that were at war with each other.

'Ammār then examines six unacceptable reasons for conversion, while proving that Christianity is innocent of all of them. 'Ammār does not include collusion among these six, for he has already examined it and shown that it did not apply in the case of Christianity. 'Ammār's ultimate point is that, since none of these false motivations apply to Christianity, it must be the true religion.[224]

These reasons are 1) the sword; 2) bribery and cajolery; 3) ethnocentricity; 4) personal preference; 5) permissiveness; and 6) illusions of sorcery.

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[222] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 131.

[223] D. Gimaret, "taklīf," *EI²*.

[224] Ibid., 33.

The Sword

According to 'Ammār, Christianity clearly forbids the use of the sword. Thus, it is illogical to

accuse Christians of compelling conversion by the sword, since those who preached Christ

forbade the sword and in their writings condemned its use.[225] According to 'Ammār, Judaism

commended its use. Likewise, Islam, having used the sword, did not condemn it, but praised

the power of the sword since it had been the means for their successful invasion and

occupation of new territories. By contrast, 'Ammār states that the acceptance and spread of

Christianity could not be attributed to the sword, and he then gives his proofs. First, the

Gospel does not praise the sword; second, the nations accepted a Gospel that forbade the

sword; and third, the nations, despite their differences and animosities, all agree that the

early preachers of Christianity did not use the power of the sword. Likewise, according to

'Ammār's argument, it should be remembered that the first preachers of the Gospel were

poor fishermen, who were powerless and without any earthly prestige.[226] They had neither

power nor glory to give to people.[227] They only offered their "poverty and counsel to their

followers to cultivate penury in this world."[228]

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[225] Ibid.

[226] See Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, *al-Ma'at Maqālah fīl-Imān al-Urthūdhuksī*, trans. Adrīyānūs Shakkūr (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-Būlusīyah, 1991), 219.

[227] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 34.

[228] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 77.

To strengthen this argument, 'Ammār emphasizes that the message of the early Christian preachers opposed human ambition to acquire power and wealth. Since such a message would not please kings or royalty, it is clear that kings accepted the Gospel only on account of compelling miracles and great wonders. In fact, both Jews and Muslims testified that the apostles of Christ preached peace. So when these groups attempted to malign the disciples, they could only accuse them of performing miracles through "magical tricks."[229] Thus, according to 'Ammār, the testimony of the Jews, the Magi and the Muslims makes it clear that those who first preached the Gospel did not use the sword. 'Ammār calls such a witness a "world witness."[230]

It is important to note that 'Ammār's discussion of the sword never directly describes Islam as being a religion of the sword. A close reading of his words shows that he is not willing to risk such a bold accusation against the Islamic empire. Instead, he refers to Islamic armies as political movements that needed the power of the sword in their wars against other nations.[231] This does not necessarily mean that he thought that the religion of Islam was being spread by the power of the sword, but neither does it mean otherwise! 'Ammār

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[229] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 34.

[230] Ibid. 'Ammār repeatedly insists that Christ's disciples could not be accused of violence, and that his opponents could not bring any rational accusations against them. All that the interlocutors can offer is mere words, *kalām*! Furthermore, Jesus himself clearly prohibited the use of the sword by commanding people not to carry the sword "for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

[231] Ibid., 33-34.

cleverly leaves this sentence vague and open to the interpretation of the reader.

In all likelihood, the *dhimmī* regulations were in force during 'Ammār's time, and anything that could have been interpreted as blasphemy against Islam would have met with severe punishment.[232] Landron speaks of a discussion between the caliph 'abd al-Malik and a certain "Nestorian" Christian leader. The caliph asked the Christian for his opinion on Islam, calling it "the religion of the Arabs." The Christian maintained that Islam was a religion that was established by the sword, without any divine signs or mighty wonders, unlike Christianity. Upon hearing this, the caliph became enraged, and ordered his soldiers to cut out the man's tongue. However, others interceded and he was set free on condition that he would never appear in the presence of the caliph again.[233]

To safeguard against offering forthright criticisms of Islam, 'Ammār chose to include Judaism in his discussion of the sword. This device seems unique to 'Ammār. Other Arabic-speaking Christian apologists openly referred to the role of the sword in Islam, but 'Ammār, by including Judaism, suggests to the reader that he is not directing his criticism against Islam. Rather, the focus of his argument is that political power played no role in the spread of

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[232] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs,* 12.

[233] Bénédicte Landron, *Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam: Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994), 28; cf. Joseph Nasrallah, *Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn*, trans. Anṭūn Habbī (Bayrūt: Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 1991), 75.

Christianity.[234]

Nevertheless, ʿAmmār may actually have had some specific Islamic groups in mind when he spoke of those who used the sword to compel conversion. We are told by al-Ashʿarī that some Muʿtazilah and al-Khawārij allowed the use of the sword in spreading "truthful teachings" and in removing the "people of fallacy."[235] However, it is impossible to confirm that ʿAmmār was directing his words against these groups.

Bribery and Cajolery

ʿAmmār's description of Christ's disciples as poor fishermen directly relates to the issue of bribery and payment and paves the way for his defense against any allegations that the apostles seduced people by offering power or money. ʿAmmār points out that poor fishermen could not have offered any worldly incentives to the average person. Their only compelling "force" was mighty miracles.[236] ʿAmmār makes it plain that those who first preached Christianity were in no position to offer gifts for, as he said, "the head of the apostles"[237] affirmed to the sick man at Jerusalem that the apostles had neither silver nor gold. The only

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[234] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 35.

[235] Al-Ashʿarī, abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1980), 451.

[236] See Sarah Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," in *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 78, no. 1/2 (Jan.-Apr., 1985), 110.

[237] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 35.

thing he could offer was healing in the name of Jesus. This is a reference to Peter's healing

of the crippled man as recorded in Acts 3:6.[238]

Ethnocentricity

'Ammār also maintains that Christianity clearly had no ethnocentric bias. Such an allegation

was barely worthy of refutation. In a few words, he states that Christianity had been

accepted worldwide, and not just by the Jews who were of the same ethnic group as Jesus.

Only if Jews had been Christianity's sole followers could it be accused of ethnocentricity.[239]

'Ammār was convinced that racial pride or exclusivity played no part whatsoever in the

spread of Christianity.[240]

Yet, beneath these words there seems to be a hidden allusion to Islam. According to

'Ammār, any religion whose adherents are of the same race as its founder is liable to

develop a sense of ethnic superiority. This line of thinking may have been an indirect attack

on Islam. Support for this conclusion comes from the end of the missing part of BL MS,

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[238] 'Ammār also argues that it would be inconceivable for the apostles to use bribery to spread their message when their teaching prohibited it. According to 'Ammār, people would not accept such self-contradictory teaching, but rather, would have rejected the whole of the Gospel. Thus, since different nations and kings accepted the preaching of the apostles, bribery or payments can not explain Christianity's early expansion.

[239] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 36.

[240] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 164.

where 'Ammār speaks of the Muslim hero, Ḥamzah ibn 'abd al-Muṭṭalib.[241] In other words, it seems that 'Ammār turned the pride of "Arabness" against Islam, as "Arabness" meant that a certain ethnic group identified with the call of one of their own. Universality and "Arabness" are irreconcilable. In contrast, many nations and different races followed Christ.[242] In fact, 'Ammār manipulated the Arabic word for ethnocentricity, التعصب, to indicate that people from different races were in fact related to Christ through a different type of ethnocentricity or loyalty, that of submission and worship.[243]

This apologetic argument seems to have been common at that time. Abū Qurrah's *On the Confirmation of the Holy Law of Moses* uses the same line of thought. Abū Qurrah, however, employs this argument against his Jewish interlocutor, who had claimed that Christianity might have spread among the nations due to ethnic loyalty. Abū Qurrah rebuts this allegation, arguing that ethnocentricity is clearly evident in Judaism, which, as he puts it, "followed Moses out of ethnic loyalty."[244]

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[241] BL MS folio 8a.

[242] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 36; cf. Richard Schaeffler, "Makhlūqūn bil-Kalimah," in *al-'Aqīdah al-Masīḥiyyah fī liqā' ma'a al-Islām*, al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Ta'āwun,16, ed. Andreas Bsteh and Adel Théodore Khoury (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, (2002): 434-435.

[243] Ibid., 141.

[244] Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara, évêque de Harān* (Bayrūt: NP, 1904), 149.

Personal Preference

'Ammār goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Christianity does not have an easily-accepted system of beliefs. Indeed, he argues, Christianity demands that people believe in difficult doctrines, inconceivable to most people.[245] These teachings are not naturally acceptable to the human mind, and they cannot be understood by the average person.[246] Or, to use al-Ṣafī's words, these teachings are full of "estrangement and are distasteful."[247]

'Ammār then lists ten Christian doctrines that are challenging for people to believe: 1) the Virgin birth; 2) the perpetual virginity of Mary; 3) the divine Sonship of Christ; 4) the cross of the Son of God; 5) the resurrection of Christ; 6) the ascension of Christ into heaven; 7) the second coming of Christ; 8) the worship of a crucified Christ; 9) an eternal life that is not devoted to physical pleasures; and, perhaps most perplexing and difficult, 10) the Trinity.[248] These teachings, according to *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, are hard to believe and could be considered as despicable and obscure.[249]

Here 'Ammār and abū Qurrah pursue similar lines of argument. Both apologists summarize the main Christian doctrines, showing how difficult they are for the mind to grasp,

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[245] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 36.

[246] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 164.

[247] Charfeh MS folio 112a.

[248] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 36-37.

[249] Ibid., 139.

as 'Ammār puts it; or challenging to the average mind, as abū Qurrah argues.[250]

'Ammār concludes that Christianity "resisted the wisdom of the wise"[251] and outlines

the doctrines that go against what human reason would favor. Furthermore, Christianity

resists the human lust for sensual pleasure, and instead stresses the importance of prayer

and fasting.[252] 'Ammār makes it clear that Christianity is difficult for the "whole" person. On

the intellectual level, it is difficult because it proposes teachings that are paradoxical—

teachings that in fact contradict reason.[253] Likewise, on a practical level, Christian doctrines

require a strict lifestyle that is intensely focused on denying lusts and fleshly desires and

pursuing vigilant prayer and fasting.

'Ammār sought to block all possible suggestion that Christianity had been accepted

on the basis of its easy appeal. This allegation is totally invalidated by the doctrines and

disciplines of Christianity.[254] Both mind and body must face the challenging nature of

Christianity; thereby leaving no room for human approval.

In a closely related argument, 'Ammār denies the allegation of human approval by

pointing to the stigma of worshipping the cross. Worshipping the cross does not bring any

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[250] Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara,* 73.

[251] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38.

[252] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 51.

[253] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38.

[254] Ibid.

honor in people's eyes.[255] Rather, it is a source of shameful humiliation.[256] Why would

'Ammār argue this, given that in his discussion on the cross, as we shall see, he taught that

the cross is not shameful but a "grace from God"?[257] To answer this question, it is useful to

consider 'Ammār's social context. The "shame of the cross" in this section refers to the

Islamic view, not to the Christian understanding that the "shame of the cross" exhibits the

power of God. In other words, 'Ammār suggests that, from a Muslim perspective, it would be

absurd to think that approval played any role in the spread of Christianity. Similar views are

presented by abū Qurrah, who argues that, since most of Christ's moral teachings are

difficult to follow, the desire for approval cannot be associated with the spread of

Christianity.[258]

All of the ten doctrines 'Ammār lists, with the exception of the doctrine of the

perpetual virginity of Mary, are discussed in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. It would seem, then, that

'Ammār believes these difficult and off-putting doctrines to be of great importance and

worthy of discussion and vindication. Further, as we shall see in the discussion on divine

unity, 'Ammār plainly states that these same doctrines are those to which Muslim polemicists

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[255] See Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 202.

[256] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 60.

[257] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 81.

[258] Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 146-147.

most object.[259] In effect, ʿAmmār had to discuss these theological issues, since disputes with

Muslim polemicists had already shaped the agenda, pre-determining the issues to be

addressed.

However, ʿAmmār also uses this list to indirectly challenge Islam. He refers to the

tenth doctrine concerning the Trinity as "the sum of these [doctrines], their perfection and

completion."[260] ʿAmmār argues that the teaching of the Trinity could not be invented by the

human imagination. The Arabic verb used is يختـرع. By contrast, in a clear reference to

Manichaeism, he notes that the human mind might "invent" the concept of dualism and,

likewise, the oneness of God might also be "invented" by the natural mind, since the

universe attests to the fact that there must be one God.

This point is clearly made in *Kitāb al-Masāʾil wal-Ajwibah*, where ʿAmmār describes

the oneness of God as taught in Islam (though the reference to Islam is indirect, as "*kalām* of

those who claim things").[261] Evidently, he does not dismiss all Islamic teaching on the

oneness of God; rather, he seems to acknowledge that it contains some truth. Indeed, in

ʿAmmār's opening words on the Trinity, he does not object to the doctrine of the oneness of

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[259] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 56-57.

[260] Ibid., 37.

[261] Ibid., 136.

God *per se*, but rather objects to the Islamic understanding of it.[262] He aims at "correcting" the Islamic view.[263]

However, it should be noted that his use of the verb "يخترع" is an indirect reference to the source of Islamic teachings. 'Ammār is thereby suggesting that Islamic teachings were not given by God, but "invented by the human mind."[264] Such language is certainly polemical, but it might be justified given the genre of *Kitāb al-Burhān* and the broader context of Christian-Muslim conversation during 'Ammār's time. This anti-Islamic polemical intention was understood and confirmed by al-Ṣafī, who summarizes various Islamic teachings and then re-states 'Ammār's message as follows: "Unlike those to whom it was said that it suffices them to have faith or to do pilgrimage, or simply to ask for forgiveness in words, or [to hope for] intercession on the final day."[265]

Permissiveness

'Ammār argues that religions might be readily accepted if they allowed people to satisfy their fleshly desires. He maintains that, if the teachings made few demands, people would follow

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262 Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 77.

263 Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 46.

264 Ibid., 37.

265 Charfeh MS folio 113a. The text reads:
"ليس كالَّذين قِيلَ لَهم إنَّ مُجَرَّدَ الإيمان يكَفيهِم أو الحَجّ وحدَه، أو الاستِغْفَار القَوْليّ بمُفرده أو الشّفَاعَةِ أخيرًا."

that religion; and conversely, when the moral code was demanding, people would not

naturally be motivated to accept it. 'Ammār describes men's sexual enjoyment of women as

the ultimate lust and an innate drive, which God put within people so they would bear

children. This strong lust manifested itself in the life of many prophets and figures in the Old

Testament. 'Ammār refers to Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, with whom David had

an affair (2 Samuel 11); to Solomon's problems with foreign wives (I Kings 11:1-9); and to

Samson's encounter with Delilah, which ultimately led to his death at the hands of his

enemies (Judges 16). 'Ammār also refers to Ammon, son of David, who raped his sister

Tamar, as recorded in 2 Samuel 13. Then, 'Ammār mentions the caliph al-Mu'taṣim, who

destroyed Amorium in 838 AD.[266] 'Ammār, however, in relating the story of the battle of

Amorium, gives it a twist to fit the purpose of this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. He manipulates

the context of the battle, saying that al-Mu'taṣim was driven by his desire to rescue a woman

who was in distress in Amorium.[267] According to 'Ammār, this, in addition to the

aforementioned biblical stories shows, the power of sexual lust.[268] All these men, 'Ammār

then asserts, were defeated by their love for women and their desire for sexual pleasure.[269]

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[266] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, 363.

[267] As it has been mentioned before, this reference to the battle of Amorium gives a *terminus ante quem* for the work.

[268] See Jād Ḥātim, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī wa-Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq: Dirāsah wa Naṣṣ* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1985), 78.

[269] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38.

Acknowledging the severity of this problem of lust, 'Ammār asserts that Christianity

does not seek to satisfy such uncontrolled sexual desires.[270] "There is no religion under the

sun that prohibits desire more, and destroys pleasure more and has more restrictive

commands than the Christian religion."[271] These restrictions and prohibitions, he says, are

displayed in the lives of monks, hermits, and celibates, who are totally devoted to prayer and

fasting. All these groups willingly abandon the pleasures of food, drink and sex. The power

that enables such self-discipline demonstrates the divine source of Christianity. If Christianity

had spread because it permitted pleasure, monks and celibates would never have gained

followers. In the Charfeh MS, al-Ṣafī also adds monasticism as another sign of the

authenticity of the Christian religion. Al-Ṣafī maintains that, while Judaism and Islam banned

monastic life and practices, Christianity encouraged them.[272] All of these arguments are

implicit comparisons between Christian and Islamic practices. 'Ammār does not mention the

words "Islam" or "Muslim," but he clearly has Islam in mind as he indicates that Christianity

does not permit fleshly pleasures, but rather encourages its adherents to lead a strict and

even ascetic lifestyle.

'Ammār also emphasizes that Christianity teaches that a man can only marry one

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[270] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 77.

[271] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38.

[272] Charfeh MS folio 114a.

wife. Even when the wife is terminally ill, the husband has no right to abandon her and marry

another.[273] These teachings, 'Ammār concludes, run totally counter to the allegation that the

popularity of Christianity can be attributed to permission of pleasure.[274]

In his arguments, 'Ammār again takes the opportunity to indirectly oppose Islam. It

would have sufficed to refer to David, Solomon, Samson, and al-Mu'taṣim. So, when we note

the two main points of 'Ammār's argument in regard to permissiveness as being 1) sexual

pleasure is a strong lust, and 2) Christianity insists on one wife, we are able to discern his

polemical intention *vis-à-vis* Islam. Without actually stating it, he implies that the Islamic

teaching and practice of polygamy contributed significantly to Islam's rapid increase. Of

course, 'Ammār does not explicitly say that! Yet there can be no doubt that his words are

carefully constructed as a counterattack against Islamic objections to certain Christian

teachings.

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[273] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38-39.

[274] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 164.

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These thoughts can also be found in the apology of al-Kindī, who argues that a major reason for Islam's large number of adherents is that it permits behavior previously deemed unacceptable. With the advent of Islam, many new liberties, such as polygamy and power were granted to people.[275]

Illusions of Sorcery

Last of all, 'Ammār lists magical tricks or illusions of sorcery as another example of an illegitimate incentive for conversion. However, he distinguishes between magic or sorcery, and the mighty miracles performed by the first preachers of Christianity. The apostles had healed chronic illnesses, blindness, one-eyedness, and similar hard-to-heal sickness.[276] He argues that, had the apostles offered no real solutions to such conditions, but merely words, people would have exposed their deception. He likens this to people's curiosity when watching acts of incantation.[277] If people discover the tricks behind such acts, they expose those who perform them. But this was not the case; rather, people received true healing at the hands of those who preached Christianity. In fact, as 'Ammār shows, people never

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[275] William Muir, *The Apology of al-Kindy*, 48.

[276] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 40.

[277] The Arabic word used here is النيرنجـات, which is simply identified in Hayek's footnote as "tricks of magic." The term however has to do with certain ancient practices of tricking people by using certain precious stones and refers to some type of incantation. Al-Ṣafī calls it أَعمَـال المُـشَعْيِدِين, the works of sorcerers and jugglers. See Adolf Wahrmund, *Handwörterbuch der neu-arabischen und deutschen Sprache*, vol. 3 (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1898), 1085.

questioned the power the apostles displayed and never attributed their powers to sorcery.

Rather, it was evident that when people demanded that the apostles accompany their words

with mighty deeds, they were overwhelmed by the irrefutable proof of the truth of the

apostles' preaching.[278] In a word, these collected proofs support the claim that the preaching

of the apostles was not accompanied by any magical tricks or fantasies of sorcery.[279]

Acceptance of the Christian Religion: An Evaluation

'Ammār's arguments regarding the credibility of the Christian faith, particularly the six

reasons he discussed, were not new within the larger body of apologetic literature written by

Arab Christians. There are close similarities between these arguments and those of Timothy

I, al-Kindī, abū Ra'iṭah and others.[280] Certainly, the context in which these apologists lived

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[278] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 40.

[279] Having examined all the possibilities, 'Ammār reaches the conclusion that: "The argument has compelled us, seeing the absence from the Christian religion of earthly reasons which might have established it, to the conclusion that it was accepted and established by clear miracles from God, and His true signs have spread throughout all the different nations." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 40.

[280] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 205; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 71, 260; Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: the Christian Apologies of abū Rā'iṭah*, HCMR, vol. 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), 82; William Muir, *The Apology of al-Kindy*, 48; Louis Cheikho, et al., *Vingt traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens, IXe-XIIIe siècle* (Bayrūt: Imprimerie Catholique, 1920), 134-144. This text is found in Carl Bezold, M.J. de Goeje, and Theodor Nöldeke, *Orientalische Studien: Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag, März 1906* (Gieszen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1906), 284-287; Gianmaria Gianazza, ed., *Īlīyā II: Kitāb Ūṣūl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, PAC, vol. 18, (Bayrūt: CEDRAC, 2005), 315-319;

shaped their treatises and the style of their various arguments. Given that the context did not

significantly change throughout these few centuries, it is no surprise that they depended on

each other's arguments as they wrote their treatises. All of them had the same theological

preoccupation.[281] However, "'Ammār's genius here in the *Kitāb al-Burhān*…lies in his

synthesis of elements which are common to himself, to abū Qurrah and to abū Rā'iṭah and

others among the Christian apologists."[282]

When this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* is compared with a short treatise written by abū

Qurrah, published as an appendix to *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm*,[283] we find

not only that the same number of reasons for accepting religions are listed, but that the

structure of the arguments is almost identical.[284] Moreover, many details are also the same.

For example, in listing the ten Christian doctrines that are difficult for the human mind to

accept, those 'Ammār discusses are exactly the same as those referred to by abū Qurrah.[285]

Likewise, both give the example of sexual permissiveness as a non-spiritual reason for

people to accept a religion.

What is more, both apologists develop very similar analogies to support their

Giacinto Būlus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820* (Rome: PIO, 1986), 283-285.

[281] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 22.

[282] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 71.

[283] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 259-270.

[284] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 74.

[285] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq,* 263.

arguments. Griffith notes this, stating that "the overall structure of the general apologetic enterprise [of abū Qurrah and ʿAmmār] is the same in both authors."[286] When abū Qurrah writes of a man who invented a new religion, and then composed a religious book to support his claims, he seems to have had Muḥammad in mind, for the words of the analogy clearly match Muḥammad's mission. When abū Qurrah speaks of a noble man who embarked on a mission to call people to worship God, he describes him bestowing on people "gifts, honor [positions], and nobility in this world."[287] Further, that man spoke of attributes of God that would be easy for people's minds to comprehend—attributes that abū Qurrah indicates had been previously known.[288] However, abū Qurrah clearly dismisses the credibility of that man's mission, stating instead that "he [that man] has no acceptable argument by which his religion is confirmed."[289] Of course, these references are indirect, but within the larger scope of *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm*, it is not unreasonable to apply these words to Muḥammad.

ʿAmmār's use of this analogy is slightly different. He writes of a man who had created a new religion. This man wrote a book for those who had been told that he performed miracles. However, having discovered for themselves that this man was a liar and that he

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[286] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 70.

[287] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq,* 260.

[288] Ibid.

[289] Ibid.

had never performed miracles, people did not even accept a letter of that book.[290] Again, these references to "that man" suggest a reference to 'Ammār's opinion of Muḥammad's scripture and religion.

As we consider 'Ammār's arguments concerning the various false reasons why people might accept a religion, as well as his words on the credibility of Christianity, we notice that he appeals to the past in order to interpret the present. That is, he looks back at the early days of Christianity, at the methods employed by the apostles of Christ and the miracles they performed, in order to defend and validate the present existence of Christianity. He does this in a context where Christians were under tremendous pressure to convert, as they were faced with the rapid expansion of Islam all around them.

'Ammār believes that the compelling proof of Christianity that was provided by miracles could not be challenged. Muslims, Jews and all people, as well as the Gospel itself, testified that mighty wonders had accompanied the spread of Christianity. The apostles, who were "poor fishermen,"[291] or "weak fishermen,"[292] or "underprivileged fishermen,"[293] and who "had no power or sword,"[294] could not have offered anything to their audience except great

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[290] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 40-41.

[291] Ibid., 35.

[292] Ibid., 34.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid., 35.

miracles demonstrating the truthfulness of their preaching. While 'Ammār firmly believed that

the miracles did in fact testify to the truth of Christianity, the growth of Islam and the

intellectual challenges it presented seem to have been the main reason for the writing of this

section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. It has been argued elsewhere that the purpose of such literature

was to "strengthen the Christians' own sense of their religion's credibility, in spite of the

Muslims' claim to the contrary."[295]

Given this state of affairs, we must be careful in our classification of this section of

Kitāb al-Burhān. In his article, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian

Arabic Theologians," Griffith seeks to prove that 'Ammār, abū Qurrah and abū Rā'iṭah are

caught up in the study of "comparative religions."[296] Their preoccupation led these apologists

to write treatises comparing their own confessional doctrines with contemporary religions

such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Marcionism, and Islam. Griffith cites abū

Qurrah's *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm* and the current section of 'Ammār's

Kitāb al-Burhān as examples of Christian apologists who used their religious context to their

advantage in providing support to their fellow Christians.[297]

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[295] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 63.

[296] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 81-85.

[297] Sidney Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil and Jørgen Nielsen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 11, 26.

This explanation, however, seems to ignore the immediate context of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. ‘Ammār's goal is not so much to compare Christianity with other religions, as to prove that Christianity is the true religion in the face of Islam's claim to be God's final self-revelation through Muḥammad.[298] Faced with the very real danger of being accused of blasphemy against the Qur'ān or Muḥammad, ‘Ammār devises the shrewd strategy of including other religions in his comparison, so that the reader cannot accuse him of blaspheming or dismissing Islam. However, it is evident to his readers, whether contemporary or modern, that Islam is indisputably the target of his arguments.

It is most probable that ‘Ammār, with his extensive knowledge of Islam and its scripture, was familiar with texts such as *sūrah* 3:19, where we read: "The religion before God is Islam;" and *sūrah* 3:85: "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost." Such verses, which directly address the issue of non-Islamic religions, may well have been in ‘Ammār's mind as he composed this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. However, it was impossible for him to refute these verses directly. So, he and his contemporary Christian apologists devised the strategy of attacking Islam's claims to finality indirectly, without explicitly

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[298] Seyyed H. Nasr, "Comments on a Few Theological Issues in Islamic-Christian Dialogue," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 459-460.

speaking against Islam or the Qur'ān.[299] This is not to deny the challenge presented by the presence of a multiplicity of religions in Baṣrah, but to conclude that 'Ammār was writing about "comparative religions" seems to read a modern concern into a very particular historical context.

Griffith's conclusions also lead him to argue that Christian apologists in the 'Abbasid period made great use of "Neoplatonic philosophical principles"[300] and that they primarily appealed to the claims of logic and reason, *vis-à-vis* the Muslim's appeal to the revelation of God, i.e., the Qur'ān. This view suggests that Islamic attacks were not based on philosophical discussion, and also assumes that Christian apologists such as 'Ammār made minimal reference to scriptural arguments. Once again it must be noted that the *dhimmī* regulations that were probably in force in 'Ammār's time did not allow Christians to speak negatively of the Qur'ān or Muḥammad.[301] Therefore, the only possible way for 'Ammār to proceed was to employ philosophical concepts, not because he was a philosopher, but because, as an apologist, he would wish to make use of all available methods. His appeal to philosophical concepts must be seen in this light.

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[299] In this regard, it is also noteworthy that abū Qurrah shows familiarity with the text of the aforementioned *sūrah* 3 in *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq* in his discussion of the Islamic claim to finality. Abū Qurrah was told, "No religion but Islam." This suggests that the Muslim belief in the finality of Islam was an argument used in Muslim anti-Christian polemics. See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 210.

[300] Sidney Griffith, "Comparative Religion," 67.

[301] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 12.

As we previously noted in our discussion on the proofs of the true religion, 'Ammār rejects total dependence on reason as the means for attaining truth, given that humans do not all enjoy equal intelligence. The proof of miracles, however, would meet the needs of all people, no matter what their intellectual capacities.[302] Furthermore, trying to prove that Christianity is a true religion by using biblical references would seem invalid to his interlocutor, given the Islamic accusation of *taḥrīf*. It would have been useless for 'Ammār to appeal only to biblical verses and events to support his view that Christianity is credible and trustworthy, when the Christian scriptures were dismissed as totally inaccurate. The intellectual milieu of the 'Abbasid caliphate set before him specific topics, together with limitations on what he could say, while further handicapping him by claiming his scriptures were corrupt. 'Ammār therefore depended heavily on using an approach that would not face immediate rejection, i.e., the use of reason.

This discussion on the true religion and the reasons for accepting Christianity naturally leads us to consider 'Ammār's view of the existence of God. There is an indissoluble connection between God's existence and God's religion. Next for consideration, therefore, are 'Ammār's proofs of God's existence and his methodology in addressing the topic of the Trinity (in contrast to his Muslim counterpart who uses arguments concerning the

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[302] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 27.

existence of God to refute the Trinity), and a discussion on whether or not God's existence is

indeed Trinitarian.

CHAPTER FOUR: Discourses on the Doctrine of God

On the Proof of the Existence of God

'Ammār provides proofs of the existence of God by using rational arguments and appeals to

Greek philosophy. He cites Plato and Aristotle, briefly utilizing their arguments from design to

prove the existence of God—an approach commonly used by other Greek philosophers.[303]

According to 'Ammār, God is seen in the universe through the natural phenomena, which

testify to God's existence and providence, شواهد خلقه. This providence is manifested in that

wild beasts that are able to kill people are kept away from humans. The very fact that such

animals have destructive powers puts fear in people's hearts and, as a result, they come to

the realization that their ultimate hope and security is not to be found in this perishable and

fragile life; rather, it is eternity that provides full security.[304] Thus, 'Ammār concludes, this

state of affairs works in full accordance with a divine plan whereby humans are urged to

seek the life of bliss, where death does not occur, and tribulations are not found.[305]

'Ammār appeals again to Plato and Aristotle when he seeks to vindicate the oneness

of God, stating that most peoples and religions have agreed that God is one. 'Ammār

indicates that the "three communities, which are the largest religions—I mean the Christians,

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[303] See Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 41-42; cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* 136.

[304] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 22.

[305] Ibid.

the Jews and the Muslims, unanimously bear witness, despite their differences, that God is one."[306] However, the Magi and the followers of Mani take a slightly different position, he writes.[307] Nevertheless, "people throughout the whole world, whether Christians, Muslims, Jews, Magians, unbelievers, philosophers, or worshippers of idols, have agreed, without meeting together or conferring, about the oneness of the essence of God."[308]

That being said, we must raise an important question: Why does 'Ammār choose to start *Kitāb al-Burhān* with such a prolegomenon, given that the primary audiences of his book already believe in one God? True, their understandings of God's oneness differ, as we shall discuss in the discourse on the Trinity. However, neither Christians nor Muslims deny the existence of God. To answer this question we must consider 'Ammār's immediate context of the Mu'tazilah. Almost all Mu'tazilī and other philosophers wrote on the existence of God. For example, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm wrote the treatise *On the Proof of the Existence of God*.[309] Abrahamov lists many Mu'tazilī thinkers who followed in the footsteps of al-Qāsim

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306 Ibid. It is indeed interesting to note the use of the same view recorded in a short treatise by the "Nestorian" Īlīyā Patriarch of Nisibin, (d. 1049 AD). The Patriarch concludes that, if the wild beasts and similar animals had full power over humans, human life would have ended immediately. Paul Sbath, *Vingt traits philosophiques*, 82-86.

307 Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 22.

308 Ibid., 23.

309 Binyamin Abrahamov, *al-Qāsim B. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence*, Islamic Philosophy and Theology, vol. 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

ibn Ibrāhīm by proving the existence of God using the argument from design.[310] However, it

was van Ess who raised the same question of intention in connection with abū al-Hudhayl al-

'Allāf's discussion on God's existence, also acknowledging that almost all Mu'tazilī thinkers

wrote treatises proving the existence of God. Van Ess argues that what really matters to

such Mu'tazilī thinkers is not simply the argument about God's existence; but rather their

intention in using it. That is to say, the argument on God's existence was employed to serve

a certain purpose in the mind of the writer. In the case of abū al-Hudhayl, the argument was

aimed at the worshippers of fate and the Iranian dualists against whom the treatise was

composed. "Abū al-Hudhayl…does not want to prove the existence of God, in which his

opponents themselves in some way believed; he rather presupposes it, in order to infer from

it the temporality of the world."[311] This same answer applies to 'Ammār, who writes this

section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* not to refute dualists so much as to defend Christian doctrines

against certain Islamic objections. His intention in proving the existence of God is therefore

twofold.

First, in starting his *Burhān* with such a prolegomenon 'Ammār displays his intellectual

equality with his Mu'tazilī counterparts, by similarly composing a treatise on God's

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[310] Ibid._,_ 2-4.

[311] Josef van Ess, "Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God," in *Islam and the Medieval West: Aspects of Intercultural Relations*, ed. Khalil I. Semann (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 66.

existence.[312] Additionally, in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, his intellectual equality is clearly

demonstrated, for 'Ammār devotes most of the opening sections to answering questions

raised by dualists, this being the same audience as that addressed by abū al-Hudhayl.

'Ammār shows great interest in refuting dualistic beliefs concerning the eternity of the world,

dedicating questions one through six of *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah* to this topic. It is also

noteworthy that similar arguments to 'Ammār's are found within Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī's *al-*

Ma'at Maqālah. Al-Dimishqī speaks of three proofs for God's existence: the proof from

design, the proof from providence in the affairs of creation, and the proof of providence in the

affairs of the cosmos.[313] Abū Qurrah uses this same argument in *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq,*

arguing from design to show that God exists and that God is the ultimate power who holds

the elements of the universe together.[314] Such proofs continued to be relevant to Arab

Christian theologians. Indeed, the Jacobite Dāniyāl ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (fourteenth century) put

forth the same arguments.[315]

Second, 'Ammār reveals his intent by deriving the doctrine of the oneness of God from

the proof of God's existence. This is where his genius is revealed. Muslim *mutakallimūn*

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[312] Josef van Ess, "Early Islamic Theologians," 65.

[313] Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, *al-Ma'at Maqālah,* 57-58.

[314] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 173-198.

[315] Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques*, 148-149.

employed arguments concerning the existence of God in order to refute the Trinity,[316] while

'Ammār utilizes the same teaching in order to assure his opposing *mutakallūm* that

Christians are indeed believers in one God, although he goes on to use it to prove the

doctrine of the Trinity.[317] Here, he is not merely making an apologetic point; rather, he is

establishing common ground with his interlocutor. Thus, 'Ammār clearly wishes his readers

to understand that Christians are monotheists, and he considers it important to make this

point by using the existence of God as proof of God's oneness—a theme which his Muslim

counterpart definitely accepts. And on such common ground, 'Ammār then proceeds to

assert the Christian position on God's oneness. This, as we shall see, will be more fully

expounded in the discourse on the Trinity.

The Discourse on the Gospels

We now examine 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's position on the trustworthiness of the Christian

scriptures, as it appears in his refutation of the Muslim accusation of *taḥrīf*. First, the

traditional Islamic view of *taḥrīf* will be briefly discussed, followed by an analysis of 'Ammār's

polemical response, which seems to indicate an originality of thought in the field of Christian

polemics during the 'Abbasid caliphate. Concluding remarks will follow.

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[316] Binyamin Abrahamov, *al-Qāsim B. Ibrāhīm*, 17.

[317] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 22.

The Muslim View of the Christian Scriptures: An Overview

The Qur'ān teaches that the Torah and the *Injīl* have the same source as the Qur'ān, that is

the Mother of the Book.[318] God revealed the Torah to Mūsā; the *Injīl* was given to ʿĪsā; and,

finally, the last and most complete revelation, the Qur'ān, was revealed to Muḥammad. The

expectation, then, is that these books, which come from one source, will not disagree on any

given issue, especially *tawḥīd*, and the predictions of the coming of Muḥammad. This also

means that Muslims expect the Gospel to convey the same meaning as the Qur'ān.[319]

The Qur'ān, however, refers explicitly to the issue of *taḥrīf* in the Torah and the

Christian scriptures; see *sūrah* 2:75-79; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41. Adang indicates that, according to

the Qur'ān:

> The Israelites and/or the Jews are accused of confounding the truth with vanity
> (S. 2:24; 3:71), or concealing the truth (e.g., S. 3:187); hiding part of the Book
> (S. 6:91); subtitling words (S. 2:59; 7:162); twisting their tongues when reciting
> the Book (S. 3:78).[320]

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[318] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," in *EI²*; cf. al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī fīl-Radd ʿala al-Naṣāra: ilā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Rābiʿ* (Tūnis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, 1986), 405-426; cf. Ignazio Di Matteo, "'Taḥrīf' od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani," *Bessarione* 26 (1922), 223-260.

[319] Of course, these concepts of inspiration fundamentally differ, and this poses a real problem for the Islamic understanding of Christian scriptures. See al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī,* 424.

[320] Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: from ibn Rabban to ibn Ḥazm* Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, vol. 22 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 223; cf. Gordon Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of Taḥrīf: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's Commentary on Key Qur'anic Verses," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, HCMR, vol. 6, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007), 207-223. It is interesting to note that these same verses are still being used by Muslim scholars in their refutation of the Christian religion. See al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 414. Keating writes: "The Qur'ān places the blame for error in the scriptures of Christians and Jews on those who were

From as early as the time of ibn al-Layth[321] to the time of the "Nestorian" Christian 'Alī

ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, who converted to Islam at the age of seventy,[322] Muslim scholars took

great pains to utilize certain biblical verses to support Muḥammad's prophethood,[323] using

linguistic, historical and textual arguments to prove their point. 'Alī ibn Rabban, for instance,

as a former Christian, was arguably more familiar than the others with the text of the Bible

and its possible different interpretations.[324] In *Kitāb al-Dīn wal-Dawlah*, he bases his

argument on the Syriac roots of specific words. The outstanding example is seen in his

interpretation of Psalm 48:1-2[325], where, on the basis of his analysis of the Syriac root and its

entrusted with preserving the revelations. While numerous references do not make clear who is directly responsible—in several places it is simply stated that the Torah and Gospel have been changed—the Qur'ān most often identifies the Jews as the source of the distortions in the scriptures." Sandra Keating, "Refuting the Charge of Taḥrīf: abū Rā'iṭah (d. ca. 835), and his "*First Risala on the Holy Trinity*," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sabastian Güenther (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005), 43.

[321] Ibn al-Layth was commissioned by Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 764-809) to write to Constantine IV (r. 780-797), inviting him to convert to Islam.

[322] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, eds, "Ar-Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā de al-Ṭabarī," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959), 7.

[323] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad" in *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John Reeves (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 107-131. See also Sidney Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century" in *Vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. T. Fahd, Colloque de Strasbourg 1980 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 141.

[324] 'Alī ibn Rabban shows great knowledge of the content of the Bible, and he employs many biblical verses to support his views, giving their exact reference. He then argues that Christians have "altered" twenty thousand verses from the Gospel that speak of Jesus as merely human. See I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 7.

[325] "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King."

Arabic translation, he concludes that Muḥammad was indeed mentioned in the Bible.[326]

Similarly, al-Mahdī seemed quite convinced of a similar argument and even gives specific references from the scriptures which, according to him, point to the coming of Muḥammad. But Christians, he alleges, have veiled these references in order to deny Muḥammad.[327]

Generally speaking, Muslim scholars have identified two different types of *taḥrīf* in the Christian scriptures: *taḥrīf al-Naṣṣ* and *taḥrīf al-Maʿānī*.[328] The first is the deliberate alteration of the text in such a way that it becomes different from the original;[329] and the second, which was more prevalent in early Muslim exegesis,[330] is the text was misinterpreted, such that the original meaning of the text is not conveyed or is misrepresented in order to prove a point of view.[331] This opinion was held by one of the leading Muslims of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's time, al-

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[326] Camilla Adang, Muslim Writers,144-145; cf. al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī,* 415-416. See ʿAlī ibn-Rabban aṭ-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire: A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam,* trans. Alphonse Mingana (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1922), 86; cf. 58-92.

[327] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni, ed. and trans. with a Critical Apparatus, vol. 2, 1-162 (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Limited, 1928), 36.

[328] See Adel Théodore Khoury, "al-Islām fī Minẓār al-Lāhūt," 330-331.

[329] See *sūrah* 5:38.

[330] Gordon Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of taḥrīf," 222.

[331] Theodore Pulcini and Gary Laderman, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 16. In fact, there is some ambiguity in the qurʾānic references to the corruption of the scriptures, for the Qurʾān does not really indicate the type of corruption that allegedly took place. Was it in the text of the Torah and *Injīl*, or was it only in

Qāsīm ibn Ibrāhīm in his *Radd*.[332] However, this position implies that there are also

numerous authentic segments remaining in the Gospels.[333] 'Ammār shows some

acquaintance with these accusations, and, as we shall discuss later, dismisses both types of

accusation and indeed, rejects the whole concept of *taḥrīf* as a clear impossibility.

'Ammār's Arguments: the Structure

In his response to the issue of *taḥrīf*, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī imagines a conversation or debate

with a Muslim accuser. He begins with the presupposition that, as previously argued, the

Christian religion has been established through wondrous miracles. There had been no

earthly incentive or use of swords. Rather, those who had embraced Christianity had done

so by divine compulsion through signs, قهـرٌ مـن الله بالآيـات. It followed, then, that the written

Gospel that had been instrumental in the spread of Christianity was also confirmed on the

basis of the same compulsion. This necessitated that the Gospel be true, and that full trust

be given to its content.

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the way people interpreted the scriptures? Up until today, we note that this ambiguity has given
Arabic-speaking Christians an opportunity to defend the authenticity of their scriptures.

[332] Ignazio di Matteo, ed. and trans., "Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello zaydita al-Qasim b.
Ibrahim," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali,* 9 (1921), 321; cf. the new edition by Imām Ḥanafī 'abd Allāh, *Ar-Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā: Rasā'il al-Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā'īl al-Rassī,* 2 (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Āfāq al-'Arabiyyah, 2000), 44.

[333] See Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption," 248-249. The sayings
of Jesus, in particular, were seen "as largely authentic." Mark Beaumont, "Muslim Readings of John's
Gospel in the 'Abbasid Period," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* 19, no. 2 (2008), 180.

'Ammār agrees with his interlocutor that there are various interpretations of the

Christian scriptures, but notes that this does not mean that the text has been altered. Rather,

the very existence of different interpretations is a strong argument against those who accuse

the scriptures of having been corrupted, for if they had been corrupted, 'Ammār argues, it

would be natural to expect all interpretations to agree.

The interlocutor also finds the differences between the Gospel accounts to be further

proof of corruption. 'Ammār immediately raises the issue of the purpose that these

corruptions would have served. What was it that the compilers of the Gospel would wish to

hide? Did they want to attribute greatness to Christ? If this were the case, they would have

omitted all the passages that speak of his human limitations. Or, perhaps they wanted to

belittle him? If so, why would they compile the Gospel in the first place? Or, perhaps they

wished to omit all the difficult sayings and expectations, and only affirm those that would be

easy to follow. If so, they could have omitted the importance of leading a disciplined life of

prayer and fasting, and instead, affirm polygamy. Or, they could have denied the historicity

of the cross, affirming that Christ escaped it, and was taken up to heaven…etc.[334]

Additionally, 'Ammār maintains that the alleged corruption was in fact impossible

because the Gospel differs from the Muslim scriptures not only in some details, but on major

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[334] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 43-44.

issues. Whereas the first affirms the Sonship of Christ and the deity of the Spirit, the second

denies this totally; likewise, the Gospel denies sexual intercourse in the life to come, while it

is confirmed in the Qur'ān. 'Ammār's final conclusion is that neither the text of the Gospel,

nor its meaning or interpretation, has been corrupted. It is simply impossible—either

historically or theologically. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī decisively rejects the accusation of *taḥrīf*, and

objects to his interlocutor even using the word *taḥrīf* in connection with the Christian

scriptures. According to him, even the accusation of falsification is not legitimate.[335] He

bases his case on the fact that Christianity was confirmed by divine signs, and not by earthly

incentives. This strategy was common in Arab Christian apologetics during the 'Abbasid

caliphate. For example, this is what 'Ammār's contemporary, abū Rā'iṭah, had to say:

> It must be the case that Christianity is either true or false, and those who have
> accepted it are either wise or ignorant. Those who are wise will not accept what
> has not been demonstrated to be true by logical proof, except by compulsion,
> and the ignorant are not restrained from abandoning themselves to worldly
> things, except by compulsion. There are two kinds of compulsion: either it is
> compulsion by the sword or compulsion by signs from God.[336]

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[335] Ibid., 41.

[336] Georg Graf, trans., *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma abū Rā'iṭa*, CSCO, 130 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1951), 162; cf. Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 342. 'Ammār also makes a clear reference to the sword and the desire for money as incentives for accepting a religion. He uses Arabic parallelism to say that Christianity has been accepted and people who adhered to it have turned from the obedience of Satan to follow God without the threat of the sword or the desire for money. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 132. Abū Rā'iṭah indicates:

"لا تخلو النصرانيّة من أن تكون: إمّا حقًّا، إمّا باطلاً؛ والّذين قبلوها من أن يكونوا: إمّا عُقلاء، وإمّا جهلاء. والعُقلاءُ لايقبلون ما لا يصحّ بالقياس المعقول إلّا بالقهر؛ والجهّال لا يمتنعون من الانهماك في اللذّات الدنيويّة، إلّا بالقهر. والقهرُ قهران: إمّا قهرٌ بالسيف، وإمّا قهرٌ من الله بالآيات."

This line of reasoning provided Christian apologists such as 'Ammār al-Baṣrī with a

twofold strategy: on the one hand, they could employ it to prove that Christianity is true, and,

on the other, they could indirectly attack Islam on account of its use of the sword. 'Ammār

himself makes brilliant use of all the arguments at his disposal to not only refute Islamic

objections but also mount a counterattack.[337] In this section, therefore, he appeals to

"psychological,"[338] historical and theological impossibilities in the corruption of the Christian

scriptures.

The Psychological Impossibility

'Ammār al-Baṣrī has argued that God removed miracles from the world after having

established a religion through great wonders and unmistakable signs. The world does not

need such miracles anymore; the real need is for the Gospel, which, as 'Ammār puts it, has

become "the miracles of God."[339] The Gospel itself is now the visible sign or miracle to all

people.[340] It appears that 'Ammār is referring here to *I'jāz al-Injīl vis-à-vis I'jāz al-Qur'ān*—the

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[337] See Mark Swanson, "Apology or its Evasion? Some Ninth-Century Arabic Christian Texts on Discerning the True Religion," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 37, no. 5 (October 2010), 389-399.

[338] This term is quoted from Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 165.

[339] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 41

[340] Ibid. فهو الآيةُ الظاهرةُ للنّاس

teaching that was being developed at the time.[341] This line of argument made it necessary

for 'Ammār to rely on the use of *al-Naql* in the rest of his defense of the originality of the

Gospel. This is evident in his teaching that the Gospel had become confirmed in the "whole

world," making further miracles unnecessary, but requiring that people now use their minds

to discern the true religion. This discernment would lead them, he suggests, to both accept

the truth of the Gospel and to believe it. However, just as the Gospel is proven to be correct

through the miracles, it is now compelling people to accept it on the basis of its

correctness.[342]

He then affirms that those who had accepted the Gospel as first preached by Christ

and then by his disciples, received it on account of signs and miracles.[343] It then follows that

in order to spread a false gospel, the falsifiers would have had to produce miracles so that

people would welcome it. Now, to falsify it, the same type of compulsion would be required,

just as in the beginning when the Gospel was first spread. He maintains:

> We have proven it to be impossible that the book of the Gospel was enforced
> by the sword or established because of earthly reasons, apart from heavenly
> signs; but rather it was accepted in the world by evident signs and obvious
> marvels; likewise there can be no place for its corruption apart from the
> compulsion of the signs accompanying it. It is equally impossible that it has

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[341] See Issa Boullata, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm 'abra al-Tārīkh: Mukhtārāt* (Bayrūt: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr), 2006.

[342] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 41.

[343] Cf. Gianmaria Gianazza, ed., *Īliyyā II: Kitāb Ūṣūl al-Dīn,* vol. 2, 319.

been falsified without compulsion of the miracles. For just as it was only accepted because of the compelling [evidence] of signs for it to be accepted, its change or falsification can only be accepted by the compulsion of signs. And signs do not occur at the hands of those who falsify the books of God. [344]

'Ammār seems confident that with this strategy he has silenced the Muslim opposition—especially in his contention that the falsifiers of the Gospel must bring forth the same type of miracles, so that people will trust the new gospel. This is simply impossible, he says, for God does not allow those who falsify his books to perform any miracles. Thus, he asserts, the Christian scriptures have clearly never been altered.

In addition, the existence of different interpretations of the widely accepted text of the Gospel stands as another witness to its originality. He makes a sharp differentiation between the revealed text (التنزيـل) and the interpreted one (التأويـل), echoing the two types of *taḥrīf* mentioned in the Qur'ān and maintained by Muslim scholars. The very fact that there are variant interpretations provides a testimony to the genuineness of the revealed text. Christians disagree on the meaning of the same text, and "their difference in interpretation demonstrates the impossibility of the way they have been maligned concerning their

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[344] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 41-42. 'Ammār indicates:

"إنّا إذْ كنّا أحلْنا أنْ يكون كتابُ الإنجيل قُيلَ، إذْ لمْ يُقهر عليه بالسيفِ، ولا ثَبَتَ بالأسبابِ الأرضيّةِ، بغير آياتٍ سمائيةٍ بل بالآيات البيّنات، والأعلام الواضحات قُيلَ في العالم، فيستحيلُ أيضًا مكان تحريفه بغير قهر بالآياتِ عليه. لأنّه كما لمْ يُقبل إلّا بقهـر الآياتِ على قبوله، فهو بالحريّ ألّا يُقبل أيضًا تغييرُه وتحريفُه، بعد أنْ رَسَخَ في قلوب الناس، إلّا بقهر الآياتِ عليه. والآياتُ لا تُجْرَى على أيْدي المحرّفين لكتبِ الله."

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agreement in corrupting the revealed text."[345] 'Ammār confidently repeats and assures the

reader that "it has become apparent that this [the falsification of the scriptures] has never

been possible."[346] 'Ammār is certain that the interlocutor's arguments are weak. If this were

not the case, 'Ammār would have refuted the accusations in more detail.[347]

However, 'Ammār also makes use of this argument to indirectly attack the Qur'ān

itself. He makes it clear that "other religions" live in one land, under one rule,[348] which would

make it easy to falsify their scriptures. This seems to be a strong, yet indirect reference to

Islam, and it is best understood in light of his repeated statement that the Gospel has been

spread throughout the whole world. The phrase "the whole world" is repeated three times in

'Ammār's defense.[349] The whole world has accepted the Gospel due to the compulsion of

miracles, whereas only "one group of people" living under "one king" accepted the other

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[345] Ibid., 42.

[346] Ibid. In *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār argues that it is out of God's justice that the Gospel became available to people in their local languages; God did not make it obligatory for them to learn a certain language in order to read his book. Here again we see an indirect criticism of the Qur'ān, and its claim to universality. Speaking of God's justice and the Gospel, 'Ammār states:

"والثانية ما أظهر هذا الحليم من عدله البسيط على جميع خلقه في بثّه إياه (الإنجيل) فيهم باختلاف لغاتهم، ولم يُكَلّف أَحَدًا من أهل اللغات المختلفة قبولَه بلغةٍ سوى المعروفة لديه من لغته ولسانه."

"The second [proof] is that God who is compassionate showed His undifferentiated justice to all those He created to whom He sent forth the [Gospel] in the diversity of their languages. He did not require anyone from these different languages to accept it [the Gospel] in any language other than that which is known to him." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 131.

[347] Ibid., 45.

[348] Ibid., 42.

[349] Ibid., 41, 43, and 43.

book on account of the compulsion of the sword. The polemical point made here is not to be

missed: the Qur'ān is vulnerable to corruption.

The Historical Impossibility

There is no possibility that there would be different interpretations of a text that Christians

had agreed to alter, 'Ammār goes on to say, for they have no king who might gather them all

together to agree on how to corrupt a text. Nevertheless for the sake of argument, 'Ammār

tackles the assumption that the Roman king, that is the Byzantine emperor, could be the one

behind the falsification of the scriptures. But he quickly rejects this accusation and

emphasizes the historical fact that people clung fast to the scriptures, whether under the

Roman or any other king, to the point that they actually died on account of their belief in its

authenticity. 'Ammār assures his opponent that even the power and authority enjoyed by the

"Christian" emperor could not have been the source of the alleged *taḥrīf*.

This is indeed an interesting ecumenical reference in the *Kitāb al-Burhān*, with 'Ammār

defending the moral and even theological integrity of the Chalcedonian king! Although Arab

Christian theologians were fully aware of the variety of theological stances they adopted,

they were still united in assuring the Muslims that the differences between the Christians

were minor.[350] In his discourse confirming the incarnation, 'Ammār makes this point even more strongly when he replies to the Muslim remark: "Christians disagree [regarding the incarnation]." He repeatedly argues that the differences that exist are minor in comparison with the general Christian consensus. Christians, he indicates, disagree only on terminology.[351]

'Ammār, with much assurance, puts another objection into the mouth of his interlocutor. The previous argument, he thinks, has left the opponent helpless. So, 'Ammār helps the interlocutor by arguing on his behalf. Mockingly he writes:

> "But we will make it easy for you so that when it becomes difficult, despite its
> being easy, and becomes impossible, even though we have made allowances
> for you, you will then know that we have left you with no pretext, and it will
> become obvious to you that falsifying is absurd."[352]

Let us agree in theory, 'Ammār argues on his opponent's behalf, that the Roman king has corrupted the Gospel, which is at his disposal. The question then becomes: If the Chalcedonian Gospel has been corrupted, how then is it identical to those copies that are under the authority of other kings? The Roman king is thus innocent of the accusation, for the other copies are in textual conformity with the one under his authority. Therefore, he

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[350] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 65.

[351] Samīr Samīr, "Khaṣā'ṣ al-Turāth al-'Arabī al-Masīḥī al-Qadīm," in the *Near East School of Theology Quarterly*, vol. 2, (February 1982), 156-190. See also Maqārūs T. Qaldas, "al-Fikr al-Maskūnī fīl-Turāth al-Qibṭī," (al-Qāhirah: Unpublished lecture).

[352] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 41.

asserts, history is not on the side of the Muslim interlocutor.

However, the Muslim opponent argues that *taḥrīf* took place independently in different kingdoms under the auspices of various kings. Here 'Ammār raises another historical difficulty by reminding his interlocutor that this cannot be the case as many Christian believers are under the rule of non-Christian kings. Further, 'Ammār includes geography to support his argument of historical impossibility, and speculates concerning the location where these kings might have met to tamper with the scriptures. Did they trust each other to the point that they left their own kingdoms and went to one kingdom to do the business of *taḥrīf*? Who was that one king who was given such trust? And anyway, how did the Muslims know all this?![353]

The Theological Impossibility

'Ammār rejects the accusation that the variations in the Gospel accounts bear witness to the corruption of the text. What purpose would such corruptions serve? He maintains that, if the apostles had wanted to magnify more strongly Christ, they would not have spoken of his childhood, upbringing, eating and drinking, his death on the cross and burial, or those things that could be seen as belittling him or stressing his human limitations. Or, the argument goes

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[353] Ibid., 43.

on, was their actual purpose to disparage Christ? If so, why did they bother to record the

Gospel at all? The Gospel speaks of Christ as the ruler and judge of the world to come, and

if the purpose of the disciples was to minimize him, then it would have been more logical

never to have honored him in the first place.[354]

We are convinced that the next section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* stands as a witness to

'Ammār's unique ingenuity as he indirectly turns the whole Muslim accusation of *taḥrīf*

against the Qur'ān itself. This type of attack on the Qur'ān is to be found elsewhere only in

the apology of al-Kindī who, having much pride in his "Arabness" and showing great skill in

the Arabic language, actually points to the poor style of qur'ānic Arabic, which, he argues,

borrows words from other languages.[355] He evaluates such borrowing as a weakness in the

text of the Qur'ān and strongly denounces the whole Qur'ān for being broken in rhythm, and

confused in composition.

'Ammār, however, takes a different approach in his attack on the text of the Qur'ān. He

points to the worldly teachings contained in it—teachings that he declares to be against the

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[354] Ibid., 43-44.

[355] Al-Kindī argues: "If the claim be that (apart from all other tongues) the Coran is an unparalleled and miraculous model of Arabic (according to the text, *Verily, We have sent down the Coran in the Arabic tongue, if perchance ye may comprehend*); then, why do we find in it foreign words, as *namâric* from the Persian, and *mishkât* from the Abyssinian, vocabulary? Here is a defect either in the messenger or the message. If there be in the Arabic language no words to express the ideas, then the medium of communication, and therefore the message itself, is imperfect; if otherwise, the messenger." William Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy,* 30.

Gospel. He may have chosen this different strategy because, unlike al-Kindī, his Arab heritage was not at stake, nor was he as confident of his proficiency in Arabic. ʿAmmār addresses the qurʾānic teachings that contradict the Christian faith (such as the idea that Christ was "taken up to heaven" without ever being crucified), as well as tackling the concessions to fleshly desires (such as permission for men to marry many wives, and the hope of even greater sensual pleasures in the life to come)[356] that are promised in the "corrupted book." All these topics, needless to say, are classical themes in Christian-Muslim debates. Arab Christian writers—especially as evidenced in the works of abū Qurrah, al-Kindī, abū Rāʾiṭah and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq—have traditionally utilized these tenets to attack the credibility of Islam.

ʿAmmār brilliantly utilizes these same arguments to show that it is the Qurʾān that is "the corrupted Gospel," for it contains that which the Gospel forbids and affirms all that people would naturally allow. This falsified book, ʿAmmār maintains, contains everything that is easy for people to follow while also omitting everything that would be difficult to grasp and follow. He then lists several things that are affirmed in the Christian scriptures, and yet totally

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[356] ʿAmmār also mentions six signs that the book is false: it permits what God forbids, people were forced at sword point to believe in it, people were prompted to believe in it by financial inducement, people believed in it on account of ethnic loyalty, people were deceived by magic arts into believing in it, and people were influenced by the rulers of the world who promote it.

denied in the corrupted writings.[357] He argues thus:

> Or did they want to erase his [Jesus] laws which they found to be difficult and affirm that which was easy [for them]? Then, why have they not cut out the whole book? This would have been easier for them! They could have composed a book according to their own desires, in which they could have confirmed that when the Jews approached Christ, wanting to kill him, he blew on them with fiery breath and burned them, and he rose to heaven alive. Death did not affect him, nor any evil scourge. And [they could have said] that a man might marry as many wives as he wanted. They could have prohibited the affliction of their bodies by fasting, persistence in prayers, and the abandonment of pleasure, just as the Magi had done. That would have been more pleasant and easier for them. Yes, they could have confirmed in it [the book] what they reasoned would be delightful to them in the hereafter too, such as sexual intercourse, eating, drinking, and the like.[358]

His argument here is especially brilliant, given that this text is speaking about the alleged reasons why Christ's disciples would have altered the Gospel, but at the same time, he powerfully implies that it is Islam that has chosen to corrupt the truth.

Once more, we can see both similarities and differences in the arguments of 'Ammār and al-Kindī. Al-Kindī challenges the Muslim interlocutor to think and consider history, and to trust the testimony of his mind as he reads and considers the truth of the Qur'ān. He clearly

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[357] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 166-167.

[358] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 44. 'Ammār maintains:

"أو أرادوا مَحْوَ ما يصعب عليهم من سننه، وإثباتَ ما يسهُل؟ فلمَ لمْ يسقطوا الكتابَ أصلاً، وكـان أخـفَّ عـليهم، ويـضعوا لأنفسهم كتابًا كما يشتهون، ويثبِّتوا فيه أنّه لمّا أراد اليهود قَتْلَ المسيح فأتوْه نَفَخَ عليهم نفخة وأحـرقهم، وآنـّه ارتفـع إلـى السماء حيًّا، لمْ ينله موتٌ، ولمْ تصبه آفةٌ، وأن يتزوج المرءُ من النساء ما أَحَبَّ، ويحرموا تعذيبَ أـبـدانهم بالـصوم، وإدمـان الصلوات، وترك اللذّات كما فعل المجوس. فإنّ ذلك كان ألذّ عندهم وأخفّ عليهم. نعم، وثبّتوا فيه ما يعقلونه لذيذًا عندهم في الآخرة أيضًا من النكاح، والأكل، والشراب، وغير ذلك."

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contends that Muḥammad made a book for himself and forced it on people.[359] But ‘Ammār

differs from al-Kindī, who uses qur’ānic verses to argue for the genuineness of the Christian

scriptures. Al-Kindi makes it clear that both the Qur’ān and Muḥammad himself testify to the

Gospel as the Word of God. He appeals to the text of *sūrah* 2:121 and 10:49.[360] But,

‘Ammār, while displaying great knowledge of the Muslim scripture, and referring to it in other

sections of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, refrains from using any qur’ānic verses to support the

genuineness of the Gospel. This is a reasonable approach, given that he has just accused

the Qur’ān of being erroneous. There would be no reason to quote evidence from a falsified

book; instead, the use of logic would be more useful and fitting than the use of scriptural

proofs.

‘Ammār makes it clear that, due to these fundamental differences between the

Christian scriptures and the falsified book, it is theologically impossible to contend that the

Gospel has been altered. Since it still contains what seems difficult and demanding, it must

be God’s true book. As we saw earlier in the discussion of the reasons for accepting a

religion, these difficulties in Christianity were used to prove the credibility of Christian

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[359] William Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy*, 114-115.

[360] “Those to whom We have sent the Book! study it as it should be studied; they are the ones
that believe therein; those who reject faith therein the loss is their own….Say: “I have no power over
any harm or profit to myself except as Allah willeth. To every People is a term appointed: when their
term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation).”

doctrine, and to show that its spread was due to the compelling nature of God's miraculous works.[361] Now, however, 'Ammār utilizes the same argument, and exactly the same words and phrases, referring to fasting, prayer, and the denial of the pleasures of life, to vindicate the authenticity of the scriptures. These humbling practices, which are shared by all Christians, are a testimony, he says, to the credibility of the scriptures.[362]

In *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār also makes the argument that the Qur'ān is the Gospel corrupted, but this time his tone is more polemical. 'Ammār argues that the laws of the Gospel are consistent with the character of God, unlike misleading laws that are the work of the leaders of delusion.[363] The interesting word here is أئمة, which refers explicitly to Muslims. The religious leaders of Islam, he charges, have altered the book. Escalating the attack against Islam, 'Ammār says these misleading laws include the "lewd things" of the

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[361] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 39.

[362] Cf. Gianmaria Gianazza, ed., *Īliyyā II: Kitāb Ūṣūl al-Dīn,* vol. 2, 336. 'Ammār connects the Christian teachings that denounce the lavish lifestyle of the powerful to the issue of *taḥrīf*. He argues that even the kings, and those who have authority, majesty and pride, and who are also Christian, are in full agreement with the ethical hardships enjoined in the Gospel. The powerful Christian elite worship a crucified "man," marry only one woman, and are also committed to prayer and fasting. Thus 'Ammār makes his case that a book that had been corrupted would never present such demanding moral standards and that not even a single letter of the Gospel has been altered. He concludes: "And since they have not changed what was found to be difficult with what was easy, as we have described, it is clear they have not changed one letter in the book of God away from its place." See Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 44.

[363] Ibid., 129.

world, such as polygamy.[364]

Elsewhere in the same work, he states that they (his imagined Muslim accusers), with the help of their religious leaders, are the ones who have falsified their book and included in it accusations of *taḥrīf* with regard to the Gospel. 'Ammār states, "No, it is you who corrupted your own book, (بـل أنـتم المحرّفـون كتـابَكم).[365] This accusation is repeated again in question forty-three of *al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*, where he is obviously attacking the leaders of Islam, saying, "This is out of the actions of your religious leaders who carried out the falsification of their books."[366] At this point in his argument, 'Ammār expects that his interlocutor will unable to refute his arguments and must now acknowledge the correctness of the Gospel!

Although 'Ammār clearly makes a case against the Qur'ān in both of his works, he never once refers explicitly to the Qur'ān when he is criticizing it. He always uses a phrase such as "your book," "their book," "the book," etc. However, when he explicitly mention the Qur'ān, it is always within a non-controversial statement. For example, in *al-Masā'īl wal-*

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[364] See *sūrah* 4: 2 "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or that which your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice."

[365] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 146.

[366] Ibid., 249. 'Ammār says, "إنّما ذلك من افتعال أئمّتكم الّذين ولّوا تحريف كتبهم" Noteworthy here is the verb ولّوا, which is used in exactly the same manner in abū Rā'iṭah's *First Risalah on the Holy Trinity*. Abū Rā'iṭah, however, borrows this verb from the Muslim interlocutor who indicates that the ones who falsified the scriptures are the Jews, إنّ الّذين ولّوا تحريفها اليهـود. See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 208.

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Ajwibah, he speaks of the "founder of the Qur'ān" and the consistency of his actions with

what is written in the Qur'ān. Had Muḥammad's actions been in contradiction with the

Qur'ān, 'Ammār argues, people "would have rejected his religion, and refused to accept his

book."[367] Most probably, the socio-political context of 'Ammār's time would be the primary

reason for such indirect criticisms of the Qur'ān.[368]

Moreover, 'Ammār seeks to compare the doctrines of the Gospel with the teaching of

Islam, in order to demonstrate that the actual text of the Christian scripture, let alone the

interpretation of it, is fundamentally different from the Qur'ān. The doctrines he highlights

are: baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the eternal existence of

the Word by which all was created; the deity of the Holy Spirit; and the absence of sexual

intercourse, food and drink in the life to come. All of these teachings, according to 'Ammār,

contradict the Qur'ān.[369]

'Ammār goes on to conclude that, if one denies the Sonship of Christ, it follows that

one will also deny the Father. He then makes his case against his Muslim interlocutor who,

according to *Kitāb al-Burhān*, denies the Spirit, diminishing him as only "from God" in

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[367] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 145-146.

[368] A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs,* 12.

[369] See Adel Théodore Khoury, "al-Islām fī Minẓār al-Lāhūt," 283.

contrast to the biblical witness, which claims that "the Spirit is God."[370] This same contrasting

viewpoint is also applied to the Word, for while the interlocutor believes the Word to be

created, the Gospel, says 'Ammār, is clear that "the Word has never ceased to be; it is

divine."[371] The reference made here to the Word being created is presumably a reference to

the classical Mu'tazilī doctrine of the createdness of the Word of God.[372]

'Ammār's concluding words make it clear that the Gospel—whether in its revealed text

or as interpreted—is authentic.[373] But in doing so, he often uses a sarcastic tone, which

reveals the polemical character of his works. He declares that the Muslim objectors have not

been given the privilege of knowing the truth of the Gospel. Further, they are misleading

others into denying the truth of the scriptures. If they had been given grace, they would

definitely have kept and followed what the entire Gospel teaches. But since this grace of

knowledge was not granted to them, they find many things in the scriptures to be distasteful

and unacceptable, and choose to attack the Christian scriptures instead. Muslims, he

argues, are attracted to that which seems easy for the human mind to accept; they believe in

things according to their appearance. When things look difficult, they leave them and keep to

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[370] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 45.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt,* 245-247.

[373] Mark Beaumont makes the argument that the length of the section of 'Ammār's defense of the revealed scriptures seems to indicate that the *taḥrīf* of revealed text, not its misinterpretation, was the issue at stake. Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels," 255.

the easy way. In doing so, 'Ammār claims, Muslims resemble children, who only like what seems pleasurable to them and run away from any difficulties. 'Ammār likens this Muslim attitude to those who, because of their "ignorance and pursuit of pleasures," take the broad path—the end of which is their destruction. This is opposite to the response of Christians, who follow the difficult way and deny worldly pleasures. Their way will ultimately lead to their good. 'Ammār puts it this way:

> Had they themselves been convinced by the truth, they would not have rejected from the book [the Gospel] things whose actual meaning they have found to be distasteful by virtue of the callousness of their minds. They are too stubborn to know the inner meaning [of these things]. So, they have blamed the book, after it compels them to witness that it was the miracles of God, which men cannot do, that have been confirmed in the world. But they prefer what is easier for their tongues and only accept things, at first glance, on account of their good appearance. They have no patience to try to penetrate deeply into it. If the inner [side] proves to contradict the beautiful outer appearance, they take on the appearance of children who prefer what is easy and good looking, even if it is to their detriment, and anyone who follows the wider way such as this, on account of ignorance, follows his pleasures, even if it leads to a predatory beast which will eat him, instead of following the narrow and difficult way, even if it leads to what is good for him.[374]

These words are judgmental and accusatory. Muslims are far from the truth, they are pleasure-seeking people, they do not think thoroughly or deeply, and they omit things from the scriptures. All this they do on account of the callousness of their minds, which will eventually lead to their destruction. This word (فسادُهُم) not only means destruction and

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[374] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 45-46.

decay, but can also mean corruption.[375] 'Ammār seems to suggest that not only is the Qur'ān

the Christian scriptures in corrupted form, but that the Muslims themselves are also

corrupted, for they follow the wrong way. The choice of words here is very significant,

especially when we remember that the image 'Ammār is using comes directly from Matthew

7:13-14.[376] 'Ammār integrates these words into his apologetics, but carefully plays on words

and changes "destruction" to "corruption."

Comparison shows that all 'Ammār's arguments concerning the theological

impossibility of *taḥrīf* are similar to those of abū Qurrah. In *Discourse on the True Religion*,

abū Qurrah writes of a certain king's son who was the object of revenge by the king's

enemies. Knowing that the son was sick, and knowing that his father had sent him a book

containing a medical cure, they came to him and claimed that their book was the right one,

and would be able to heal his disease. The son, however, was advised to examine the book

before he consumed the medicine, to see whether it truly provided help. Discerning which

book is true is of utmost importance.[377] Thus, abū Qurrah concludes that it is only possible

for one true book to contain the remedy for sickness. It is here that we note interesting

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[375] Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 2396.

[376] "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

[377] Louis Cheikho, "Traité inédit de Théodore Abou-Qurra (Abucara), évêque Melchite de Harrān, (ca. 740-820), sur l'Existence de Dieu et de la Vraie Religion," *al-Mashriq*, 15, Bayrūt 1912), 770-771.

parallels between ʿAmmār's discourse on *taḥrīf* and abū Qurrah's parable. The latter argues

that the book sent by the king contains information about the king (God), a description of the

disease with which the son (Adam) was afflicted, and, finally, the remedy. Abū Qurrah

intelligently proves that only the true Gospel presents these three in a way that matches the

needs and judgment of the mind. Even though ʿAmmār argues differently, we can trace

similar elements in his description of the false book and abū Qurrah's description of the false

apostles who wrote the books. ʿAmmār argues that the falsified book denies the Sonship of

the Word of God and thus denies God, and allows things that God forbids.[378] This is exactly

what abū Qurrah means by "a fancy book," which the false apostles presented to the son, in

the parable of the hidden king.[379]

ʿAmmār's Christian Context

Timothy I met the caliph al-Mahdī face-to-face and therefore had to respond to the questions

set by the caliph. Al-Mahdī alleged that the Bible predicted the coming of Muḥammad, and

that "Paraclete" was a reference to the prophet of Islam. The defense of the Christian

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[378] "They would have prohibited the affliction of their bodies by fasting, persisting in prayers, and abandoning pleasure, just as the Magi had done. Yes, they could have confirmed in it [the book] what they reason to be pleasant for them in the everlasting world too, such as sexual intercourse, eating, drinking, and the like." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 44.

[379] See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 212-216.

understanding of the Paraclete[380] therefore occupies a significant portion of Timothy I's

apology. However, this discussion is totally absent from 'Ammār's corpus. 'Ammār chose to

ignore this issue and instead developed a new attack on the Qur'ān itself.[381] While Timothy I

had no choice, we can speculate that 'Ammār and al-Kindī had relative freedom in choosing

which topics to include in their works.

'Ammār opted for the more important historical questions that pose real difficulties for

the Muslim interlocutor. "Where is the uncorrupted copy of the Gospel," Christians

demanded. "Bring it forth and I will believe it." This accusation was clearly raised in both al-

Kindī's apology and Timothy I's conversation with al-Mahdī. Both theologians use it with

great skill, reducing the Muslim objection to absurdity, and in return, asking the Muslim for

the impossible. Timothy I concludes: "If there is such a book let it be placed in the middle in

order that we may learn from it which is the corrupted Gospel and hold to that which is not

corrupted. If there is no such Gospel, how do you know that the Gospel of which we make

use is corrupted?"[382]

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[380] A. Guthrie, "The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad," in *The Muslim World*, 41 (1951), 251–256; and Montgomery Watt, "His Name is Aḥmad," in *The Muslim World*, 43, Issue 2 April (1953), 110–117.

[381] In addressing this issue, Mark Beaumont argues, "It seems that he ['Ammār] prefers to deal with the allegation of Christian corruption of the Gospels in a more general way." Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels," 243.

[382] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 35-36. Showing greater confidence, Timothy I goes on to declare: "To tell the truth, if I had found in the Gospel a prophecy concerning the

'Ammār also reflects on Timothy I's argument concerning miracles and the corruption of scriptures. Timothy I makes it clear to al-Mahdī that the Gospel was confirmed and established in the world on account of the divine miracles, and, as he puts it, had abrogated the Old Testament, and thus established Christianity. If the Qur'ān was a new revelation from God, he argues, it must also be demonstrated by miracles, and thereby show that the older revelation, i.e., the Gospel, has been annulled. However, since this is not the case, and since the Qur'ān itself has no single miracle attributed to Muḥammad, then the conclusion is clear![383]

Like Timothy I, both al-Kindī and abū Rā'iṭah chose to make use of the enmity between Christians and Jews to support their argument on the authenticity of the scriptures.[384] All the aforementioned theologians make the case that, since there is no peace between the two groups who hold the two parts of the Christian scriptures, it is impossible to assume that they gathered together and agreed among themselves to corrupt the scriptures.[385] The scriptures,

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coming of Muhammad, I would have left the Gospel for the Kur'an, as I have left the Torah and the Prophets for the Gospel," Ibid., 36.

[383] Ibid., 37.

[384] Sandra Keating, "Refuting the Charge of *Taḥīf*," 55.

[385] Timothy I assures al-Mahdī that: "If the Christians and the Jews are enemies, and if there is no possibility that enemies should have a common agreement on the line that divides them, it was therefore impossible for the Christians and the Jews to agree on the corruption of the books. Indeed the Jews disagree with us on the meaning of some verbs and nouns, tenses and persons, but concerning the words themselves they have never had any disagreement with us. The very same words are found with us and with them without any changes. Since the Torah and the Prophets teach

by virtue of the enmity between Jews and Christians, are thus proved trustworthy.

Discourse on the Gospels: An Evaluation

According to 'Ammār, the credibility of the Gospel relates essentially to the credibility of

Christianity: both were attested as true by miracles. Moreover, the Gospel account was

essential to uphold Christianity, since miracles had ceased to occur. The whole system of

Christian belief is dependent on what the Gospel has to say about God. The Muslim

accusation of *taḥrīf* must therefore be answered with powerful counterattacks. This is what

'Ammār attempted to do in his general defense of the Gospel. He makes it clear that "not

even a single letter of the Gospel has been altered,"[386] and introduces innovative arguments

in its defense. In so doing, he invalidates all of Islam by destroying its scriptural basis, and

reduces the Qur'ān to a mere book of human invention, containing things that people

naturally desire to follow and which would ultimately lead them to destruction.[387]

'Ammār's words reflect his historical context. He repeatedly expresses deep frustration

at the Muslim misunderstanding of Christian doctrines. We will clearly see this when we

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the truth of Christianity, we would have never allowed ourselves to corrupt them, and that is the reason why, O our victorious Sovereign, we could have never tampered with the Torah and the Prophets." Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 57, cf. *sūrah* 2:113.

[386] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 44.

[387] Ibid., 46.

examine his defense of the cross and the incarnation. Muslims do not seek to make sense of the apparent difficulties with the Gospel. Instead, they jump to hasty conclusions, one of which is that the Gospel must have been corrupted. This frustrates ‘Ammār and forces him, in a sense, to employ harsh language to answer the accusation, to the point that he ridicules his opponent, describing him as someone acting like a child.

‘Ammār's defense is powerful and clear, and his conclusion is sweeping and unambiguous: *taḥrīf* is just impossible, the Gospel has been authenticated by miracles, and there is no possibility that it was falsified—either in its content, or in its interpretation. Neither history nor theology is on the side of the Muslim interlocutor. ‘Ammār's confidence in the Gospel is evident, and he shows no hesitation in raising objection after objection to demonstrate the impossibility of the Muslim argument and the logic of his position.

However, ‘Ammār ignores the alleged biblical references to Muḥammad, and gives no attention to the Paraclete argument. Perhaps he considers the arguments he utilizes to be sufficient. A denial of Muḥammad, furthermore, would probably have jeopardized his life. So instead, he chooses to dismiss the whole text of the Qur'ān indirectly—a common approach in much of the Arabic Christian literature within the Islamic empire.[388] His attempt is brilliant, and full of originality. He stands alone among Arab Christians in marshalling his arguments

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[388] Mark Beaumont, "‘Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels," 225.

both forcefully and sensitively. His conclusions are compelling. All in all, the comprehensiveness of his apology for the authenticity of scriptures, and the quality of his arguments are no doubt "finer than any that are to be found in subsequent apologetic literature."[389]

Having argued for the credibility of the Gospel, 'Ammār next addresses a much more difficult issue, namely the doctrine of the Trinity. How could he explain the Trinity given his Islamic milieu, and his previous arguments concerning the reasons for the acceptance of Christianity and the oneness of God? This is our next topic of study.

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[389] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 52, quoted from Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels," 250.

The Discourse on the Trinity

'Ammār takes on the daunting task of explaining the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This is indeed an "intricate topic," as Sidney Griffith calls it,[390] and it abounds with issues in need of clarification, given the foundational Islamic doctrine of the absolute oneness of God. 'Ammār seeks to establish the veracity of the Christian view of God's triune nature as best fitting God's attributes of 'existence' 'speech' and 'life.' But, before discussing 'Ammār's arguments and methodology, we must first understand how the Trinity is viewed within Islamic theology.

The Doctrine of the Trinity and Islam

Attributing any plurality to God's essence is seen, according to Islamic thinking, as associating gods with God,[391] which is considered a mortal sin committed against God. Indeed, the Qur'ān affirms the oneness of God in several places,[392] while it clearly rejects the Christian belief in the Trinity.[393] Consequently, it was inevitable that Muslim theologians would go to great lengths to refute such a doctrine, as it was seen, alongside the doctrine of

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[390] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 168.

[391] See Ghassān Sālim, *Maḥāwir al-Iltiqā' wa-Maḥāwir al-Iftirāq bayna al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr, 2004), 215-233.

[392] See for example *sūrah* 34:20-24; 35:40; 46:4.

[393] See for example *sūrah* 4:171; 5:17, 72-73; 5:116; 9:30-31; 43:59.

incarnation, to deny God's oneness and transcendence.[394] 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī and al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm made considerable headway in their refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Al-Ṭabarī in his *Radd* indicates that the "Silencing Questions" he raises against Christianity concerns the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, asserting the oneness of God.[395] Thus, he accuses Christians of شرك, as they claim to believe in God but also think of Christ as God.[396] He then lists human actions performed by Christ which are completely incompatible with the eternal essence of God, and concludes that the doctrine of the Trinity is totally invalid. Rather it confirms the Islamic understanding of *tawḥīd*.[397]

Likewise, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm writes against the Trinity at the beginning of his *Radd,* stating that since "Lordship only belongs to God,"[398] it follows that the essence of Christ is no different from the essence of Christians.[399] In his *Radd,* al-Qāsim shows great depth in his understanding of the Christian position, and his summary of what the various Christian sects

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[394] Muṣṭafā Būhindī, *al-Taʾthīr al-Masīḥī fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Muqāranah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2004), 178-182.

[395] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 121; cf. See Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 184.

[396] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 123; cf. al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 204.

[397] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 124-131.

[398] Ibid., 18.

[399] Ibid. Cf. David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāqʾs "Against the Trinity,"* University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 45 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33.

believe is quite accurate.[400] In his summaries, he even mentions certain analogies used by Christians at the time to prove the truth of the Trinity, particularly the analogy of the sun.[401]

How then does ʿAmmār explain the Trinity to his opponents?

What is "One"?

In this section, ʿAmmār immediately engages with the difficulty of defining the oneness of God, thus engaging the theological issues discussed among the Muslim intellectuals of his time.[402] His opening words, فنحن نبتدئُ فنسألُهُم عـن الواحـد, "We begin with asking them about the 'one'," are indicative of a polemical starting point, as he instantly sets out to challenge the Islamic view, providing no preface or introductory statements concerning the Trinity.[403]

This becomes clearer through a comparison of the opening words here with other statements made at the beginning of other new sections in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. For example, when he moved from speaking about the existence of God to discerning the true religion, he opened with these words, "Since we have demonstrated the existence of our Creator..."[404] Likewise, in moving from explaining the reasons why Christianity was accepted, to refuting

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[400] Ibid., 34.

[401] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 33-35; cf. Wilferd Madelung, "al-Qāsim and Christian Theology," *ARAM* 3 (1991), 43.

[402] Sidney Griffith, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī," 169.

[403] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 180.

[404] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 24.

the accusation of *taḥrīf*, he prefaced his argument by saying, "Since it has become correct to

us that the Christian religion was confirmed on account of miracles…"[405] And again, when

we look at his opening words concerning the divine unity, he writes, "Since we have

demonstrated our faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit..."[406] Thus, it seems safe to

conclude that ʿAmmār intentionally uses these connecting sentences in order to establish

new arguments based on earlier ones already established.

However, this feature is absent in his section on the Trinity, and there is no missing

folio where such a link could have been made. Indeed, the discourse on the Trinity falls in

the middle of folio 17a in the BL MS. This leaves us with one probability: arguments

concerning the doctrine of the Trinity occupied a fundamental place in the Islamic polemical

literature against Christianity, and, in turn ʿAmmār realized the urgency of refuting the Islamic

view of the oneness of God and vindicating the Christian Trinitarian view. In fact, not only is

this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* the only one without any introductory statements, but it is also

the only one that starts with a question.

In addition, the opening paragraph includes the outline of the entire discourse to follow.

ʿAmmār begins by refuting the Islamic view of the oneness of God, proving that Muslims,

though easily confessing the oneness of God, deny God; and while they say that God is

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[405] Ibid., 41.

[406] Ibid., 56.

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living and speaking, actually make God a lifeless and non-verbal God, and ultimately even

deny God's oneness.[407] Next, 'Ammār firmly states that the Muslim interlocutor has no right

to question Christians on issues related to their doctrines, which come from the biblical

witness. He writes:

> We begin by asking them about the 'One' who is easy for their tongues to confess, and they proclaim Him without verifying the real meaning of His knowledge. Because there is contradiction between the apparent meaning of their words and their representation of the Creator as inanimate, without 'life,' and 'word' yet calling him 'alive' and 'speaking,' we will explain what we say for those who want to benefit from understanding it. We must question them over their saying....it is possible for them to prove that their book, which speaks of this [type of oneness], was [not] confirmed by the miracles of God. But it is not required again to prove to them that the Gospel has been accepted on account of miracles. They are not to question us about anything which it tells us and calls us to do. They are to trust our testimony coming out of the straightforwardness of our understanding and knowledge.[408]

'Ammār raises two controversial points here. He rebuts the Islamic view of the

oneness of God, arguing that, according to it, God is in fact denied.[409] Then he makes a

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[407] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 181. Timothy I utilizes the same strategy to show that one who denies these attributes in God's being must be seen as "blasphemous!" Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I: étude sur l'Église Nestorienne au temps des premiers 'Abbāsides. Avec nouvelle édition et traduction du Dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdi* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1974), 13-14; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara,* 44; cf. Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: 'abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī and his Discourse in the Holy Trinity," *Le Muséon*, 124 (2011), 405.

[408] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 46.

[409] Cf. abū Rā'iṭah's similar argument in Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī wa-Risālatuh "fīl-Thālūth al-Muqaddas"* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1996), 66.

more provocative point by speaking indirectly against the Qur'ān. His implied accusation is that, unlike the Christian Gospel, the Qur'ān was not affirmed by miracles. This statement is actually not completely clear in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, as the ink of the negative particle is smeared. The text reads, "We must question them over their saying. It is…possible for them to prove that their book, which speaks of this [type of oneness], was confirmed by the miracles of God."[410] This statement, however, is clear in the epitome of al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl. Al-Ṣafī writes, "Since it is not possible for them to prove that their book was accepted and was confirmed by miracles."[411] 'Ammār pointedly refuses the claim that the Qur'ān was validated by miracles.

Further, 'Ammār starts his refutation of the Islamic view of the oneness of God by analyzing the grammar of the Arabic language and the way nouns are related to adjectives. He identifies the meaning of the word 'one.' According to his analysis, a correct understanding of God's oneness is foundational for understanding the logic of the doctrine of the Trinity.[412] Muslims, he argues, do not grasp the meaning of the oneness of God, even though they ceaselessly confess it. They have failed to carefully examine its meaning and implications. This will be addressed at greater length below.

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[410] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 46.

[411] Charfeh MS folio 117a.

[412] David Thomas, "Changing Attitudes of Arab Christians towards Islam," *Transformation*, 22/1 (Jan. 2005), 14.

Once again, we are struck by 'Ammār's polemical attitude as he mockingly prefaces

his question with the statement: "Tell me, O you who believe in the 'one'…"[413] This language,

as seen earlier in 'Ammār's refutation of the allegation of *taḥrīf*, reflects his self-confidence.

Modern Arabic-speakers use the same structure when frustrated with the other's arguments.

'Ammār makes his interlocutor admit that God is 'living,' and examines the true meaning of

the 'life' of God. What is the relationship between God's being and God's life? Is God's life

found in Godself 'eternal,' or is it added to God's being as an 'accidental' life. Such a

question is exceedingly problematic for his Muslim counterpart. The first option is to say that

the life of God is essential to God's being, "as it is in the soul of a human being, a 'life' in its

substantial essence, and part of him."[414] According to 'Ammār's reasoning, if the interlocutor

accepts this position, he is thereby agreeing with the Christian position. This is unthinkable,

as it would mean that the Islamic view concerning the oneness of God is simply wrong, and

that it is being corrected by the Christian view! The other choice before 'Ammār's interlocutor

is equally difficult. If life in God's being is neither essential nor accidental, then God is

portrayed as a being without life, i.e., God is lifeless.[415] This option is also impossible, as

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[413] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 46.

[414] Ibid.

[415] See Wilferd Madelung, "al-Qāsim and Christian Theology," 37.

Islam, on the basis on qur'ānic verses, describes God as 'living.'[416] 'Ammār shows that he is acquainted with such teaching, and asks his counterpart theologian: "How do you claim the name 'the living one?'"[417] 'Ammār's interlocutor is inevitably faced with the difficult conclusion: Islam believes that God has no essential life.[418]

The support for 'Ammār's problematic question comes from discussions between Arab linguists of his day concerning the relationship between nouns and adjectives. It should be noted that, under the auspices of al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad and his pupil Sībawayh, who wrote the monumental work *al-Kitāb*,[419] this time in history witnessed a formative period in Arabic grammar. The grammarians agreed that the adjective could be used as a noun, since it is ultimately derived from a noun; and that adjectives and nouns are related by a denotative

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[416] See for example *sūrah* 2:225, 3:2, and 20:111.

[417] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 47.

[418] This argument is similarly made by Ilīyā the Patriarch of Nisibis (11th century). Ilīyā, however, indicates that, since God is the only self-subsisting being, it is necessary that God must have life. And it follows that the source of life must have life. See Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques*, *et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIXe siècles* (al-Qāhirah: H. Friedrich, 1929), 100.

[419] See Louis Gardet and Georges Anawatī, *Falsafat al-Fikr al-Dīnī bayna al-Islām wal-Masīḥiyyah*, vol. 1, trans. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ and Farid Jabre (Bayrūt: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1978), 71-72; cf. T.J. de Boer, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah fīl-Islām,* trans. M. 'abd al-Hādī abū Rīdah (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Maṣrīyah, 1938), 54-57. See also Sībawayh, 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān, *al-Kitāb*, vol. I (al-Qāhirah: al-Maṭbaʻa al-Kubrā al-Amīrīyah, 1898), 313, 314; and Werner Diem, "Noun, Substantive and Adjective according to Arab Grammarians," in *The Early Islamic Grammatical Tradition* : The Formation of the Classical Islamic World, vol. 36, ed. Ramzī Baʻlabakkī (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2007), 279-299, 282ff. See also Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-'Ayn: Awl Muʻjam fīl-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah* (Baghdād: Maṭbaʻat al-'Ānī), 1967.

function, i.e., that there is a certain relationship between the adjective and the noun it describes. Or, to use Griffith's words, "The assumption was that verbal adjectives are derived from nouns, and nouns by their very nature indicate entities."[420] This is exactly what 'Ammār points to in his argument that only the one who has 'life' is called 'living.' The adjective (attribute) 'living' is only correct when referring to one who has life. If this relationship is broken, then there is no life in that one whatsoever.[421] In other words, according to 'Ammār, the negation of life, be it essential or accidental, has one result: God cannot be described as living. Only beings with life are called living. However, it is legitimate, in 'Ammār's view, to also call the being that has accidental life living. The problem, however, is that the Muslim interlocutor does not seem to be willing to affirm either kind of life in God's being, and thereby unintentionally attributes death to God. This is well expressed by 'Ammār, who repeatedly mentions the word 'death' as the logical alternative to 'life.'

This same line of argumentation seems to have been common among Arab Christian theologians. We have definite indication, for example, that a reputable philosopher by the name of abū 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Isḥāq ibn Ẓur'ah (d. 1007) argues for the correctness of the Trinity,

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[420] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 169; cf. ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyyah, Muḥammad ibn abī Bakr, *Madārij al-Sālikīn bayna Manāzil Iyyāka Na'budu wa Iyyāka Nasta'īn*, vol. I, ed. 'abd al-'Azīz ibn Nāṣir Julayyil (al-Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭaybah lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2002), 37; and ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyyah, Muḥammad ibn abī Bakr, *Kitāb Shifā' al-'Alīl fī Masā'il al-Qaḍa' wal-Qadr wal-Ḥikmah wal-Ta'līl*, ed. Muḥammad al-Na'sānī Ḥalabī (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1975), 271.

[421] See David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 87.

using this exact argument. He says that Muslim thinkers often use linguistic arguments in

their conversations, so following this same line of discourse, he challenges them, asking,

"Tell us, are the derived nouns taken from existing entities, معانٍ موجـودة؟...All the attributes

that we have mentioned as essential attributes, صفات الـذات, are derived nouns. 'Living' is

derived from life; 'powerful' is derived from power; 'generous' is derived from generosity;

'wise' is derived from wisdom." His argument is clear: since such names are derived,

according to the grammar of the Arabic language, these names must therefore have entities,

معاني.[422]

'Ammār's argument equally applies to the attribute of 'speech.' "Animals are not called

'speaking' because there is no speech in their essence,"[423] 'Ammār argues. This state of

affairs contradicts that of the human soul, which is called living and speaking because it has

life and word in its very essence. Accordingly, 'Ammār concludes that the Islamic view of

God necessitates that God is dead,[424] but that this is totally inappropriate to be said of God,

who is exalted above all.

This stress on the attributes of word and life is foundational to his defense of the

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[422] See Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques*, 15-16.

[423] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 47.

[424] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3., Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. II (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991), 275-276.

Trinity, for they are to be revealed as the Son and the Holy Spirit.[425] To strengthen the attack

and to support his conclusion, 'Ammār raises the question again from a different angle. This

time the question is directly related to the traditional Mu'tazilī argument that, when the

attribute of life is affirmed in God, death is negated in God's being.[426] Al-Ash'arī states that

abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf maintained that God is:

> He [God] is knowing in an act of knowing that is He and is *qādir* in a power of
> efficient causality that is He and is living in a life that is He." And he [al-'Allāf]
> spoke in similar fashion concerning His hearing, seeing, eternity, might,
> majesty, glory, grandeur, and concerning His other essential attributes. He used
> to say, 'When I say "God is knowing," I affirm that He has an act of knowing that
> is God and deny that there is ignorance in God and indicate that there is
> something known [by Him] that has come to be or will come to be; when I say
> *qādir*, I deny that there is any incapability of efficient causality in God and affirm
> that He has a power of efficient causality that is God and indicate that there is
> something subject to [His] power of efficient causality; when I say "God has life,"
> I affirm that He has a life that is God and deny that there is death in God.'"[427]

According to al-Ash'arī, this viewpoint was also shared by other Mu'tazilī thinkers such

as Ḍirār ibn 'Amr and 'Abbād ibn Sulaymān, along with other Mu'tazilīs, Khawārij and

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[425] Ibid., 276; cf. Georges Anawatī, *al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Ḥaḍārah al-'Arabiyyah* (Bayrūt: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, 1970), 98; cf. Louis Gardet and Georges Anawatī, *Falsafat al-Fikr al-Dīnī*, vol. 1, 61-63; and Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 64.

[426] See 'Āṭif al-'Irāqī, *al-Falsafah al-'Arabīyah*, 69-73.

[427] Richard Frank, "The Divine Attributes according to the Teaching of abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf," *Le Muséon*, 82, *Revue d'Etudes Orientales*, Louvain (1969), 451-506, 453.

Murji'ites.[428] This reference is the grounds on which Josef van Ess builds his case that

'Ammār had taken note of the views of Ḍirār ibn 'Amr, as well as those of Mu'tazilī

theologians.[429] Certainly, the reference to such important Mu'tazilī views reveals 'Ammār's

knowledge of his contemporary Islamic intellectual milieu (to the extent that the words of abū

al-Hudhayl can be found verbatim in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*), and demonstrates his

ability to employ Islamic terms to serve his argument.[430]

However, it should be noted that abū al-Hudhayl's view supports the Islamic concept of

the oneness of God[431] against the Trinitarian understanding of Christianity, as it does not

locate the attributes of God outside of God.[432] Instead, it identifies the attributes with the

being of God, thus denying the existence of attributes.[433] If the attributes were viewed

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[428] Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 225, 226. Al-Shahristānī indicates that abū al-Hudhayl differs (انفرد عن
أصحابه) from the main body of the Mu'tazilī thinkers by affirming that the attributes of God are God's
own essence. Further, it is reported that abū al-Hudhayl derived this theological position from the
philosophers who taught that God is a simple being without any form of multiplicity. See al-
Shahrastānī, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, vol. I, ed. William Cureton (Piscataway, NJ:
Gorgias Press, 2002), 34; cf. Richard Frank, *Beings and their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian
School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), 22;
cf. Rashīd al-Khayyūn, *Mu'tazilat al-Baṣrah wa-Baghdād* (London: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 2000), 313.

[429] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 36; cf. Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 226.

[430] David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 90; cf. Sidney Griffith, "The Prophet
Muḥammad," 103.

[431] Richard Frank, "The Divine Attributes," 459.

[432] Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām,* 62; cf. 'Alī Muṣṭafā Ghurābī, *abū al-
Hudhayl al-'Allāf* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Ḥusayn al-Tijāriyyah, 1949), 39-40.

[433] Harry A. Wolfson, "Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the
Kalām," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 79, no. 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1959), 76; cf. 'Abbās M.

differently, i.e., if they existed outside of God, it would mean that they too are eternal,

alongside God, and this understanding would become indistinguishable from the Christian

view that God's attributes of speech (the Word), and of life (the Holy Spirit), are equal to God

in time and eternity.[434]

Thus, for Mu'tazilī thinkers of 'Ammār's time, it was of great importance to reject or

deny the eternity of the attributes,[435] and also imperative that they provide an interpretation

that preserved the oneness of God, while explaining the qur'ānic verses where life, word and

seeing, etc. are attributed to God.[436] Such an interpretation was eloquently set forth by abū

al-Hudhayl who, for example, differentiated between two statements: "God knows by His

essence, not by knowledge" and "God knows by knowledge that is He."[437] The main

difference between the two statements lies in the fact that God's knowledge is not something

other than God. The first statement negates the attribute of knowledge, whereas the second

affirms the attribute which has the same essence as God.[438] For abū al-Hudhayl, it is

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Ḥasan, *al-Ṣilah bayn 'Ilm al-Kalām wal-Falsafah fīl-Fikr al-Islāmī* (Alexandria: Dār al-Ma'rifah al-Jāmi'īyah, 1989), 36-37.

[434] Ṭal'at Akhras, *abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf al-Mu'tazilī: Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wal-Falsafiyyah* (Bayrūt: Dār Khiḍr, 1994), 47.

[435] 'Ādil al-'Awwā, *al-Mu'tazilah wal-Fikr al-Ḥurr* (Dimashq: al-Ahālī, 1987), 179.

[436] Richard Frank, *Beings and their Attributes*, 10-11; cf. Zuhdī Jār-Allāh, *al-Mu'tazilah* (Bayrūt: al-Ahliyyah lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 1974), 27-28.

[437] See Richard Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*.

[438] See Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 180-181; cf. Ṭal'at Akhras, *abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf*, 48.

essential to maintain that God is one essence with no form of multiplicity, which is why he identifies the attributes with God.[439] In doing so, abū al-Hudhayl insists on the absolute oneness of God. This insistence, in fact, was fundamental to the Muʿtazilī thinkers as they maintained that nothing could share God's eternity, not even God's attributes. God is the only eternal "old" being.[440] This belief was so fundamental that they even denied the eternity of the Qurʾān—the very Word of God, according to Islam.[441] In fact, this caused many doctrinal and political conflicts among Muslims of ʿAmmār's time.[442] During the reign of al-Maʾmūn,[443] for example, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was imprisoned when he refused to agree with the Muʿtazilī view that the Qurʾān was created.[444]

However, there were thinkers such as ibn Kullāb who presented a different position regarding the "location" of God's attributes.[445] His position and that of abū al-Hudhayl differ

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[439] Rashīd al-Khayyūn, *Muʿtazilat al-Baṣrah*, 107; cf. ʿAlī Muṣṭafā Ghurābī, *abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf*, 33.

[440] Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 133.

[441] Richard Frank, "The Divine Attributes," 492-493.

[442] Zuhdī Jār-Allāh, *al-Muʿtazilah*, 252-254.

[443] See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ*, 333-360.

[444] See al-Maqdisī, Muḥammad ibn ʿabd al-Wāḥid, *al-Miḥnah ʿalā Imām Ahl al-Sunnah Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd Mazyadī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004); cf. Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 263-278, and Morris S. Seale, trans., *Yūḥannā al-Dimashqī fī Ḥiwār maʿa Aḥad al-Sharqīyīn* (PG, 96: 1335-1347) (Bayrūt: N.P., 1968), 30.

[445] Richard Frank, "The Divine Attributes," 472.

greatly.[446] It is reported by al-Ash'arī that ibn Kullāb frequently said that the attributes of God subsist in God; that they are neither identical to God nor non-identical,[447] but are in God's essence, since attributes cannot subsist in attributes.[448] According to the witness of ibn al-Nadīm, this position seems very much like the Christian position, which is probably the reason ibn Kullāb was accused of being a "Christian."[449] All in all, in the content of 'Ammār's question, there are clear indications that he used current *kalām* issues to validate his Christian position,[450] and, that he probably caused some discomfort among Muslim *mutakallimūn* who could not agree on the location of the attributes of God's essence.[451]

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[446] David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 88; cf. Richard Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 13.

[447] See David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam*, 39.

[448] Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 229-230; cf. William Brice, *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 391.

[449] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 230. Cf. Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 183.

[450] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. II, 275-276; Sidney Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 104.

[451] To further illustrate his position, 'Ammār argues that, when the interlocutor refers to a certain man as "seeing," such a man really must have sight; otherwise, the interlocutor will be found to be a liar. The man is only described as seeing because he must have the attribute of seeing essentially found in him. He has sight and therefore he is seeing. If the interlocutor claims that he denies sight in that man when he refers to him as "seeing," then blindness is made necessary to that man. He is simply blind. Likewise, if life is attributed, then it necessitates that the person has life. Only life denies or negates death and one who does not have life, be it essential or accidental, must be dead. This is certainly applicable to the attribute of speaking, as "speech" is only attributed to one who "speaks." This attribution, for example, is not valid for animals, 'Ammār argues, as they do not have the attribute of speaking in their essence. In summary, only beings with essential or accidental life and word are counted as being living and speaking and it becomes clear that without "life" or "word," a being is basically dead and speechless. If such attributes are not affirmed, then their opposite must be affirmed. There is no other possibility. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 48.

Before 'Ammār ends his criticism of the Islamic view of the oneness of God, he reiterates his claim that by denying the eternity of the attributes, the interlocutor has deprived God of life and speech. Such a denial, 'Ammār argues, has occurred because the interlocutor wants to avoid any acknowledgment of the Trinity. If the latter view is upheld, i.e., if three meanings or entities are affirmed in God's being, then the Christian view of the Trinity is proven to be correct. This conclusion was reported by abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf in his articulation of various views on God's attributes. Al-Shahristānī makes it clear that abū al-Hudhayl denied the attributes in order to avoid confessing the Christian Trinity.[452] So when this testimony of al-Shahristānī is put alongside 'Ammār's arguments, it becomes probable that 'Ammār was constructing his defense of the Trinity according to the Mu'tazilī intellectual arguments of his day, and particularly that of abū al-Hudhayl. The likelihood of this assessment will be strengthened when we reflect on the second part of 'Ammār's criticism of the Islamic view of the oneness of God.

'Ammār likens Muslims who deprive God of word and life to those who worship idols. He states that, if God does not have such attributes, then God is no longer speaking, or living, which reduces God to a mere idol. However, it is known from the scriptures, he

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[452] Al-Shahrastānī, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, vol. I, 34. Al-Shahristānī puts it this way:

"وإذ أثبت أبو الهذيل هذه الصفات وجوهًا للذات فهي بعينها أقانيم النصارى."

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continues, that God in fact has word and life, and that God rebukes those who worship idols.

The witness of the scriptures, 'Ammār indicates, proves that God indeed has word and life.

In 'Ammār's list of biblical references, the biblical proof-texts come from Psalms, the Book of

Job, and Isaiah. In the Psalms, David affirms that the Word of God created heaven.[453] Job

states the same.[454] Likewise, the prophet Isaiah makes it clear that the Word of God is

eternal.[455] 'Ammār then uses the Psalms once again to point out that the Word of God is

worthy of praise[456] and stands firm in the heavens.[457]

In his discourse on the incarnation, as we shall see, 'Ammār uses the texts that were

traditionally used in its defense. But in arguing for the Trinity, 'Ammār carefully chooses and

manipulates non-traditional scriptural proof-texts. He only utilizes passages that refer to God

in connection with word and life. This selectivity shows how Arab Christian theologians, such

as 'Ammār, felt pressured by Muslim arguments to re-read their scriptures in search of

verses that could, even if taken out of context, be used to support a fresh articulation of their

faith.

It is instructive to note that in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah* 'Ammār makes rich use of

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[453] "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6).

[454] "The Spirit of God has made me" (Job 33:4).

[455] "The Word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

[456] "In God, whose Word I praise, in God I trust without a fear" (Psalm 56:4).

[457] "The Word of our God stands firm in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89).

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other biblical references, presenting several biblical texts in which God speaks in the royal plural, which according to him is clear-cut evidence of the Trinity. The verses mentioned in *Kitāb al-Burhān* are but a portion of the verses used in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*.[458] However, it would seem that the argument in *Kitāb al-Burhān* was developed out of Timothy I's dialogue with al-Mahdī, where most of the same verses are employed.[459] Timothy I's list of verses is more exhaustive, as they come from both the Old and New Testaments— particularly from the text of the Great Commission.[460] Abū Rā'iṭah and abū Qurrah as well (though their list is fuller than that of any of their contemporaries)[461] use almost the same set of biblical witnesses.[462] Such widespread use indicates that these verses were common in the Christian-Muslim dialogues about the Trinity at that time.

The Christian View of the Trinity

The previous section of 'Ammār's apology sets the stage for an explanation of the Christian view of the Trinity, which so far has only been defended. Just as he has formerly used the 'speech' and 'life' argument to logically defend the truth of the Trinity before his possibly Mu'tazilī counterpart, he now uses the same set of arguments to state his view of the Trinity.

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[458] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 160.

[459] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam*, 14.

[460] Ibid., 15.

[461] See Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 116-117; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 29-32.

[462] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 116-118.

However, before doing so, he clarifies that the Trinity is not to be confused with either

tritheism,[463] or the idea of God consorting with a female partner.[464] Against these

misunderstandings or false accusations, 'Ammār explains the Christian belief in the Trinity,

which, according to him, is simply affirming that God is one with two essential attributes: the

attributes of life and speech.[465] In the Trinity, the Father is said to have the attribute of life

and speech. The 'speech/word' is Christ, and the 'life' is the Holy Spirit. 'Ammār states: "In

saying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we just want to confirm that God is 'living'

and 'speaking'."[466] Immediately after this theological statement, 'Ammār explains what it

means that the Son of God is the 'word' of God and the Holy Spirit is the 'life' of God.

'Ammār makes it clear that the begetting which is said of the Son is not to be understood

physically, for God did not take a female partner with whom he begat a Son.[467] Rather, the

Sonship of Christ is likened to the begetting of the word to the soul. Likewise, the life of God

is eternal and is essential to God's being. God has never ceased to be and will live forever.

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[463] See *sūrah* 4:171. Cf. Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 168; David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 95; Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 184; and Sidney Griffith, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 750–c. 820 AD): A Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1978), 154. Wolfson clearly states that the teachings of the Qur'ān concerning the Trinity are not those of the orthodox Christian church. See Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 304; cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 52.

[464] See *sūrah* 72:3.

[465] Wilferd Madelung, "al-Qāsim and Christian Theology," 37.

[466] Sidney Griffith, "Answering the Call," 114-115.

[467] Cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 206.

God has always had life. To support this view, ʿAmmār appeals to various analogies, such as that of the soul with its word and life, and the analogy of both fire and sun with their heat and light. All these analogies are seen as perfect examples of things that are one in essence, yet have two essential attributes. These analogies come from the Greek and Syriac fathers, being found in Tertullian's *Against Praxeas* and St. Gregory of Nazianzus' *Theological Oration*.[468] In fact, Timothy I also uses the same comparisons in his conversation with al-Mahdī. However, Timothy I builds on these analogies to deduce an inseparable relation between the hypostases.[469] This inference is dismissed in ʿAmmār's conclusion.[470]

ʿAmmār's implementation of these analogies serves his purposes well, as he maintains that, if these beings are deprived of their attributes, they will no longer exist, and the names they are given will most assuredly be inappropriate for them. Thus, if the sun is deprived of its light and heat, it becomes dark and cold and cannot be called "sun" anymore. On the other hand, the triple nature of the attributes of the sun does not negate its nature as one sun. Eloquently and profoundly, ʿAmmār summarizes it as follows: " ولا تَوحِيدَهَا تَثلِيثُهَا يُبطِل ولَم

تَوحِيدُهَا تَثْلِيثَهَا, Therefore, the triune nature of these things does not negate their oneness;

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[468] See Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); cf. Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 184.

[469] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam*, 13; cf. Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdi (IIe/VIIIe), "Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes," *ISCH*, 3 (1977), 128.

[470] These analogies are also found in the apology of abū Rāʾiṭah. See Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rāʾiṭah al-Tikrītī*, 84.

neither does their oneness negate their triune nature."[471]

It is interesting to note that here, for the first time, 'Ammār uses classical Christian terms to explain the Trinity, using تثليث and توحيد to consummate his argument. تثليث, therefore, is the essential term to be used to refer to God with the attributes of 'speech' and 'life;' and similarly, توحيد is essential to the nature of God's essence. There is perfect harmony between the two, and, in fact, according to 'Ammār, the two concepts are supportive of each other. The تثليث supports the توحيد of God, and the توحيد is upheld by the تثليث. This inseparable relation between God and God's attributes, between God's essence and God's qualities, is what Christianity means by the doctrine of the Trinity.

Furthermore, as al-Ṣafī excellently puts it, the triune nature of God is the only way to explain God's oneness, and if it were not for such a nature, the oneness of God would have been totally nullified, "لولا هذا التّثليثُ تُبْطَلُ وَحدانيّتهُ."[472]

Islamic Objections

'Ammār imagines his opponent asking why the 'speech' and 'life' of God are called

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[471] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 49.

[472] Charfeh MS folio 119a. Additionally, al-Ṣafī summarizes 'Ammār's argument: "If you negated from God the triune nature of entity, and maintained the oneness of His entity, you would have negated describing Him with the most noble of the exciting things, and described Him with the most despicable and needy (attributes)." See Charfeh MS folio 119a

hypostases and the word of the soul and the other attributes of the above-mentioned beings are not referred to in the same way.[473] This question, in fact, seems natural. But, considered carefully, it poses a danger to the uniqueness of God, and herein lies its difficulty.[474] From 'Ammār's perspective, if the attributes of other beings can be called hypostases, then God will be deprived of his distinctness, as God and nature will become identical. So to maintain God's uniqueness, 'Ammār modifies his argument, and insists that God is described with the perfect terms at hand. *Hypostasis* refers to the perfect thing that is self-sustained and does not need any other thing for its being and subsistence. This is, of course, contrary to the attributes of the beings mentioned earlier, since they with their attributes are all created. However, the foremost reason why these beings and their attributes are mentioned in connection with the Trinity, 'Ammār clarifies, is that they are mere examples of beings with but one nature, which exist in multiplicity. As mere examples, they should not be viewed as perfect paradigms of God's being, for God is far more exalted than such natures. This is precisely why the attributes of these beings are not called *hypostases*. God and nature are distinguishable, and the Trinity affirms this distinctness.

وإنّما أعطينا المثلَ، إذ كان ليس للهِ شبيهٌ يُعطَي المثلُ منهُ على الاستواء، في أنّا وجـدنا شـيئًا واحدًا معروفًا بثلثة معانٍ فلمْ يُبطِل تثليثُ معناهُ توحيدَ جَوهَرِه ولا تَوحيدُ جَـوهَرِه يُبطِل تثليثَ معانيهِ. بل هو ثابتٌ في جَوهَرِهِ على وحدانيّتِه وفي معانيهِ على تَثليثِها.

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[473] David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 90.

[474] Ibid., 93.

Translation: However, we give this example, because there is nothing similar to God that can be taken as comparable to Him on a basis of equality. We have found one thing known by three meanings, and the threeness of its meanings does not nullify the oneness of its substance, nor does the oneness of its substance abolish its three meanings. But it is firmly established in the oneness of its substance and in the threeness of its meanings.[475]

Such a profound statement indicates 'Ammār's unique skill in manipulating even the Arabic language to vindicate the correctness of the Trinity—a distinctive feature of his literary style throughout *Kitāb al-Burhān,* as we shall see.[476] This statement displays 'Ammār's sensitivity to the intellectual context, while his choice of words and the elegant structure of his prose bear testimony to 'Ammār's consummate skill in Arabic, even when addressing such complex theological matters.

'Ammār insists that the distinction between the Creator and the creation must be maintained, but then argues that no examples or analogies can correspond perfectly to the thing they explain.[477] He follows with an example: When someone asks the interlocutor to make a statue of a king, it is understood that the statue will not have a sense of taste or smell, nor will it hear or be able to walk. Even though the statue perfectly resembles the king in appearance, it does not do justice to the king's nature, and it cannot match his qualities.

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[475] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 50.

[476] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 45.

[477] This is the same way Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, Theodore Bar Konī and abū Rā'iṭah define the "example." See Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, *al-Ma'at Maqālah*, 207; Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 187; and Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 78, 86, 108.

Likewise, when the attributes of word and life are used to describe the soul, and the attributes of light and heat to describe the sun, they are all only examples of one being with multiple attributes. However, states 'Ammār, it is impossible to make an analogy from creation that perfectly matches the Creator. Indeed it is inappropriate, for God is not to be compared with his creation, and is the only perfect being. Then, for the third time, 'Ammār indicates his reason for using the analogy, eloquently explaining: "But we have only given you, from what you have witnessed, one thing which has one substance yet has three meanings, so this possibility is not denied."[478]

This repeated assertion must not go without notice. Why is it important for 'Ammār to modify his argument and repeat himself three times in such a short section of the treatise? Before attempting to answer this question, it must be noted that these three repetitions are phrased with great eloquence and accuracy. To fully appreciate this, his rendering should be considered as a whole.

1. "ولَم يُبطِل تَثليثُهَا تَوحِيدَهَا ولا تَوحِيدُهَا تَثْلِيثَهَا."
2. "فلمْ يُبطِل تَثليثُ معناهُ تَوحِيدَ جَوهِرهِ، ولا تَوحِيدُ جَوهَرهِ يُبطِل تَثليثَ معانيهِ. بل هو ثابتٌ في جَـوهَرهِ على وحدانيّتهِ وفي معانيهِ على تَثلِيثهَا."

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[478] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 51. This same point is made by abū Rā'iṭah in his apology for the Trinity, where he shows that there is clear evidence in creation for things that exist in three attributes, خـواص. For abū Rā'itah, this similarity must not be denied. See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 112. On the other hand, Muslim thinkers fiercely dismissed any similarity between God and any other thing. See Wilferd Madelung, "al-Qāsim and Christian Theology," 38; cf. Bo Holmberg, "The Trinitarian Terminology of Israel of Kashkar, (d. 872)," *ARAM* 3 (1991), 62.

3. "إنّما أعطيناكَ ممّا شاهدتَ شيئًا مُوَحّدًا في جَوهَرِهِ مُثلّثًا في مَعَانيهِ، لئلّا يُنكَرَ إمكانُ ذلك."

It is evident that 'Ammār chooses and repeats his terminology with great care, and his phrasing is likewise elegant. In addition, 'Ammār's choice of the word توحيد is significant, as it is an important concept in Islamic theology, and is of particular importance in Mu'tazilī thinking.[479] Presumably, this choice is an attempt to find common ground with his Mu'tazilī interlocutor.

However, the repetition of terms (as will be seen again in his discourse on the confirmation of the incarnation) probably serves the purpose of assertion and affirmation. Like all Christians of his time, 'Ammār found himself accused of tritheism, and it was his mission therefore to affirm the oneness of God to his Muslim counterparts while holding on to the Trinitarian position. This tension demands that he assert both truths simultaneously, with equal force and eloquence. Failure to do so would suggest that he either does not believe in the oneness of God, or that he is compromising his view of the Trinity in order to win his argument with his interlocutor. Neither option is viable, for 'Ammār believes equally in the oneness of God, which is only understood when the eternal attributes are upheld, and in the Trinity, which is simply understood as the logical and most complete expression of God and of God's attributes of speech and life.

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[479] Ṭal'at Akhras, *abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf*, 45.

It is also noteworthy that 'Ammār displays great appreciation for the transcendence of

God in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. This is well expressed in the multiple recurrence of

the sentence "there is nothing like God."[480] This language also reflects the beliefs of the

Mu'tazilī thinkers of 'Ammār's time, particularly al-'Allāf, who repeatedly spoke of God's

transcendence above any linguistic description.[481] So, even though 'Ammār is greatly

concerned with equally upholding the oneness of God in a triune nature, he insists that

language will always fall short in describing the essence of God, who is far higher than any

human terminology. It is only because the books of God have portrayed God in this way that

Christians believe and trust its truth.[482]

In *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah,* 'Ammār addresses a further question: since two

attributes are seen as essential to God's essence, why do Christians not accept three, four

or five, as well? If the Trinity, تثليث, is affirmed, why not attribute تربيع, quaternity (making

the Godhead four), or تخميس, quinity (making the Godhead five), or تسديس, sexity (making

the Godhead six), to God's being?[483] To answer this objection, 'Ammār aggressively

accuses the interlocutor of being blind and ignorant, and declares that the interlocutor has

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[480] *Sūrah* 42:11.

[481] Ṭal'at Akhras, *abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf*, 52.

[482] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 48, 52, 53, 55, and 56; cf. Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 149.

[483] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 156.

failed to make a distinction between nouns and adjectives as they relate to the

characteristics of God's fundamental essence and the characteristics of God's intentions and

actions.[484]

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[484] Ibid. Cf. Wilferd Madelung, "al-Qāsim and Christian Theology," 37. It is instructive to note the close similarity of 'Ammār's answer to that of abū Rā'iṭah. Both show deep consternation at the question, and turn back to accuse their Muslim counterpart of either being blind and ignorant, as 'Ammār does, or of attributing the lowest possible substance to God, أحطّ جـوهر, as abū Rā'iṭah does (Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrīṭī*, 88). Cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 33, 37. At this point in his defense of the Trinity, 'Ammār attempts to establish another argument against the Islamic perception of God. He states that his Muslim counterpart does not describe God in the noblest of terms. According to 'Ammār, beings must either be substance or *hypostasis* or power or accident—an argument found in Aristotle. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 52.

However, 'Ammār does not provide a definition of any of these terms; instead, he gives examples of the way each term may refer to a being. "'Substance,'" he states, "as when you say 'man;' or '*hypostasis*,' as when you say 'Moses,' 'David,' or 'Solomon;' or 'power,' as the heat of fire or the ray of the sun; or 'accident,' as the darkness of black and the whiteness of white." His point is that only substance and *hypostasis* are terms of perfection, as they do not need anything else in their subsistence, unlike power and accident. The substance and the *hypostasis* are self-sustained. In addition, they assume powers and accidents. The substance, 'Ammār maintains, has two powers. As for accidents and powers, they do not subsist by themselves; rather, they are in need of the substances that support them and are in them. Therefore, the most perfect among these four classifications are the substance and the *hypostasis*. Yet immediately after stating this, 'Ammār repeats his previous point regarding beings that are one in essence, but known in three meanings or entities. According to his conclusion, earth is one, but it has coldness and dryness; likewise fire, though one in essence, has heat and dryness.

'Ammār reacts strongly against the manner in which his interlocutor describes God and the terminology he uses. He argues that "the most despicable and poorest things are those that need others for their sustenance." This, of course, implies that, by contrast, the manner in which Christianity describes God is most noble, full and perfect. 'Ammār makes no direct claim, but he is clearly declaring here (and, as will be seen, in his discourse on the confirmation of the incarnation) that the Christian view or description of God is the more perfect, *vis-à-vis* the Muslim view which deprives God of word and life, and thus reduces God to an idol. 'Ammār reduces the God of Islam to an absurdity, showing that the Trinity is the best way to understand God. See Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 169.

"One Substance, Three *Hypostases*"

In sharp contrast to the Islamic view of God, 'Ammār lays out his understanding of the biblical

and logical reasons why Christians believe that God is of one substance with three

hypostases. For him, the reason for using such terms is twofold. He is showing first that

Christianity upholds the oneness of God, and second that God is a perfect being.

Christianity, as a monotheistic religion, believes in one God, who exists in three meanings or

entities.

At this point, 'Ammār's interlocutor seems to have conceded that it is appropriate to

attribute word and life to God's being, but he wonders why God's many attributes are

restricted to only word and life. There are also the attributes of seeing, knowing, hearing, and

the like.[485] This objection was apparently supported by qur'ānic verses in which God is

described as having such attributes.[486] This objection seems reasonable and poses a real

challenge to 'Ammār's argument.[487] After all, the being of God cannot be imagined without

such attributes. So, why can 'Ammār's argument regarding word and life not also apply to

these other attributes? On the one hand, 'Ammār must show these other attributes to be non

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[485] In answering the same question, abū Rā'iṭah differentiates between two types of names: absolute names, such as 'earth' and 'heaven' and predictive names, such as 'knower' and 'knowledge.' See Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 71, 74.

[486] See for example *sūrah* 22:61; 42:11.

[487] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. II, 276.

essential, unlike word and life. If they are affirmed as essential, the Trinity is basically no longer upheld; rather, an endless multiplicity of God's attributes is maintained. Thus, it is necessary that 'Ammār's argument be interpreted and explained in such a way that only these two attributes are affirmed as essential, without totally denying the validity of the other attributes.

The difficulty of this task is demonstrated by the fact that the rest of 'Ammār's discourse on the Trinity is more or less given to discussing this issue. On the other hand, however, the interlocutor seems to use this line of argument to simply nullify the Trinity. For him, as a Muslim thinker, the oneness of God is not a subject to be questioned. Thus, he can agree with 'Ammār that the essence of God is one, while attempting to counterattack the doctrine of the Trinity by using the same methodology as 'Ammār employed, i.e., by using specific descriptions to refer to God.

Let us now discuss 'Ammār's affirmation of word and life as the only essential attributes of God.

'Life' and 'Speech' and Other Attributes

'Ammār lays out the rationale of the Christian position that only these two attributes are seen as essential within the Godhead. It is because, "We have found that life and speech belong

to the principle of the essence and structure of the substance."[488] This means that these attributes are in fact "differentiating attributes"[489] they distinguish between essences.[490] For example, when the attribute of life is affirmed to bodies, they are called animate beings. However, this name (animate beings) does not apply to the earth from which bodies were made. Moreover, the attribute of word is the basis upon which animate beings are classified; those which have the attribute of speech are called human beings, while others, which are speechless, are named beasts and animals. In this clear manner, 'Ammār presents his argument, observing that the other attributes do not function as differentiating qualities. He puts it thus:

> Hearing, sight, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, and generosity must remain in the substance and there is no separation between them, because we see in the one substance the hearing and non-hearing, the seeing and the non-seeing, the forgiving and the merciful, and the unforgiving and the unmerciful, the good and the generous, and the non-good and the ungenerous.[491]

That is to say, that one substance can indeed have one of these attributes or their opposites. For example, the substance of humanity may have the attribute of either hearing or

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[488] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 52. Charfeh MS folio 120a indicates:

"لمّا وجدنا الحياةَ والنّطقَ ذاتيّةً أصليّةً لا تقوم الذّاتُ إلاّ بهما وما سواهما ليس كذلك أثبتناهما دون غيرهم."

[489] Ibid., 157.

[490] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 170. Griffith states: "All other attributes, such as 'seeing' and 'hearing,' are not basic constitutive attributes of beings, and no one of them delineates another grade of being by reason of its occurrence. Rather, the occurrence of any other attribute necessarily presumes the occurrence of the essential constitutive attributes of being as the condition of its own appearance." Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 170-171.

[491] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 52.

deafness. Yet the substance remains undifferentiated from other substances. The deaf man remains a deaf man; he does not turn, because he lacks hearing, into an animal, for instance. "The substances are not subject to these differences."[492]

With regard to the attributes of hearing and seeing, 'Ammār makes it plain that they should not be ascribed to God as essential attributes, for they are "two members of the body put together in composite bodies."[493] The real meaning of such attributes is to ascribe knowledge to God. In fact, as the argument explains, these two attributes are to be understood as anthropomorphisms,[494] "since according to human experience we become aware of things by hearing and seeing."[495] God, according to the revealed book, decided to speak to humans according to their experientially-based ability to understand. So, the books use words such as hearing and seeing to speak of God. However, such attributes are not essential to the substance of God.

Similarly, 'Ammār rejects the attributes of justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, favor, mercy and forgiveness as essential attributes of God's nature. He maintains that these attributes are, in fact actions which must be attributed to the one who has word as an

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[492] Ibid.

[493] Ibid., 53.

[494] Timothy I makes the same argument indicating that God speaks to humans in such a way that they can understand. See Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 152.

[495] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 53.

essential attribute. Since they are actions, by their very nature they tend to change. For

instance, God is described as merciful only when mercy is shown to humans; but when

humans commit wrongs, God's attribute of justice is revealed, and so on. This reality

mandates that such action-based attributes should not be applied as fundamental to God's

essence.

Equally, the attribute of will does not count as an essential attribute, as it is not the

principal essence.[496] He attests to two kinds of will: compulsory and free. The first is simply

the instinct that animals have, acting according to necessity and inherent incentives; thus,

during the summer months ants collect food for the winter, without thinking or understanding.

Only nature and necessity explain such actions. As for the second type of will, free will is—to

quote al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl's phrase[497]—الطّبيعـة العقليّـة, the rational nature of the will. This

rational or free will is only enjoyed by one who has wisdom, i.e., word.

At this point, however, ʿAmmār lacks precision, as he first indicates that only wisdom

gives the substance the ability to make free choices, and then he argues that it is only the

attribute of word that enables the substance to make such choices. Is it wisdom or is it word

that enables free will? It is not clear. However, numerous considerations strongly suggest

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[496] Ibid., 53, 54.

[497] Charfeh MS folio 121a.

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that 'Ammār's intent is to argue that it is word that gives the substance free will.[498] First, he

does not mention wisdom any further in this section; second, he reflects on the role of word

in differentiating the substance of humans from the substance of animals; and third, the

whole framework of the argument is that the existence of will does not differentiate between

substances. It is clear that both humans and animals have the capacity to will, but the

difference between the substance of each group does not lie in the fact that will is not

equally shared. Rather, humans are separated from the beasts only on account of their

attribute of speech. Reflecting in more detail, 'Ammār indicates: "The wills that exist in us

[humans] and them [animals] have become a will of choice in us because we have the

quality of speech but a will of compulsion in them because of the absence of speech."[499]

In addition, we can know that the attribute of will is not essential, because will is not

unchanging; that is to say, God wills for us to do different things. The divine will, therefore, is

changing. At one point in time, God wanted to be worshiped in Jerusalem, but now this

command has been changed. Yet this changing state is not applicable to the attribute of life,

for God has always been living and will never cease to live.[500] In other words, 'Ammār

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[498] Speaking of life, 'Ammār indicates: "This we have and they do not. So, what separates us from this inanimate earth is not the existence that we have in common with it, but rather the particularity of life which we have and they do not." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 54.

[499] Ibid.

[500] The Arabic text of the BL MS has بيت المقدس, which is traditionally translated as Jerusalem. However, this statement is made clearer in al-Ṣafī's epitome, where we read وكان يريد أن

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indicates that will cannot be an essential distinguishing attribute as it is an action-related attribute.[501] According to 'Ammār, this proves the uniqueness of the attributes of life and speech, and establishes the fact that God is one substance known in three *hypostases*. He further insists that describing God with attributes that are subject to change is not appropriate at all. All the Beautiful Names, with which the interlocutor describes God are not to be seen, according to 'Ammār, as essential attributes of God's essence, since they denote some sort of change.[502]

Knowledge and wisdom are two other attributes that 'Ammār considers. He makes it clear that these two attributes are essentially dependent on the attribute of speech. Only one

يُقَرَّبَ له فى البيت المقدّس فقط, and He [God] wanted [sacrifices] to be presented to Him only in the Holy Place (the Temple). Charfeh MS folio 121a. The definite article that al-Ṣafī adds to the word بيت, house, makes the sentence more relevant, and it switches the emphasis from the city of worship, بيت المقدس, to the place of worship, البيت المقدّس. However, this change indirectly maintains the validity of worship that was presented in Jerusalem, even after temple worship was nullified, while 'Ammār's text nullifies such worship altogether.

[501] This was also a common theme in the thought of al-'Allāf. See Ṭal'at Akhras, *abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf*, 57.

[502] As for power and might, 'Ammār likewise dismisses them as essential attributes of God. However, he offers a relatively ambiguous response, providing no real refutation of the interlocutor's objection. In fact, he only indicates, as he has done before regarding the attribute of will, that there are two kinds of powers: physical power and spiritual power. He then goes on to give examples of such powers, stating that the power of the elephant in carrying people and the power of the camel in carrying burdens is simply physical, and it can only be attributed to that which has a body. Since God has no body, it becomes necessary that God's power is thought of in terms of spiritual power, which is similar to the power of the soul by which things of the world are administered and sustained. However, 'Ammār suddenly identifies the spiritual power of God with God's word, nullifying any real possibility of God having power that is not God's very word. Again, he seems to have in mind the texts from the Book of Psalms and the Book of Job that he quoted earlier. He does not elaborate on this point, but simply states that the heavens and earth were created by God's mighty word.

who has speech as an essential attribute can be described as wise and knowing.[503]

Having denied the aforementioned attributes as essential qualities of God, 'Ammār concludes his discourse on the Trinity by stating for the fifth time[504] that only speech and life are of God's essence, as well as the structure of the substance. This repetition is fundamental to the argument, because it insists that only two attributes are essential to God's being—and this argument validates the Trinitarian nature of God. 'Ammār goes to great pains to prove that all other attributes proposed by the interlocutor are valid as characteristics or descriptions; however, they are all dependent on the essential attributes of life and word. According to 'Ammār, this is supported by the testimony of the Gospel and the books that preceded it. This statement, interestingly enough, also occurs five times.[505] Such

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[503] Appealing again to an analogy, he states, "We do not say: 'I saw a knowledgeable donkey or a wise bull.'" Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 55. Neither the donkey nor the bull has the attribute of speech; hence they cannot be described as wise, since speech does not exist in them. Contrary to this, it is perfectly legitimate to call humans knowing and wise. 'Ammār's most notable examples are Aristotle and Galen. For instance, the reason Aristotle is considered wise is that the words recorded in his books on logic are correct; as for Galen, his knowledge of medicine is outstanding, and he is therefore worthy of the attribute of knowing. It is only because these men had the attribute of speech that they could demonstrate such knowledge and wisdom in different fields of knowledge. In addition, 'Ammār identifies the attribute of speech with knowledge, stating that, when the wise one understands the reality of things on account of the attribute of speech it is then called wisdom. From human experience, there are those who have wisdom and knowledge, as well as those who are ignorant and foolish. The substance of both remains the same. So, neither the presence nor the absence of wisdom and knowledge functions as a differentiating quality between substances. Only word and life do.

[504] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 52, 53, 54, 54, and 55.

[505] Ibid., 48, 52, 53, 55 and 56.

repetition should not be dismissed without careful attention. 'Ammār suggests that the Trinity

is ultimately a biblical revelation of God. Another point which 'Ammār emphasizes is that this

biblical testimony comes from "correct" books that have been demonstrated to be God's self-

revelation by miracles and great signs.

It is no wonder, then, that 'Ammār places the discourse on the Trinity immediately after

his refutation of the accusation of *taḥrīf*. It is simply logical. If the Gospel is correct, it follows

that whatever it teaches must also be correct and worthy of acceptance.[506] Although 'Ammār

utilizes logic here, he ultimately appeals to the Gospel as the source from which the proof of

the Trinity is drawn. This has been stated several times, and 'Ammār draws attention to the

fact that understanding the Trinity is challenging. In fact, the doctrine seems

incomprehensible at times—a major theme that can be traced throughout Arabic Christian

theology.[507] It is only because of the witness of the books of God that Christians, though not

fully understanding the nature of the Trinity, trust that it is correct belief. Unambiguously, he

states his case:

> We do not deny that minds cannot comprehend something without the [witness
> of] the book. We in fact acknowledge that minds themselves did not become
> aware by themselves of [the fact that] these meanings are the Father, the Son,

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[506] Abū Qurrah argues similarly in his treatise on the Trinity. See Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 27-28, 33, 46-47.

[507] See Bo Holmberg, "The Trinitarian Terminology," 58; cf. Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 148; cf. Sidney Griffith, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore abū Qurrah," 154.

and the Holy Spirit, without the [witness of] the book; just as they did not become aware of any of the Creator's names and attributes, except through the teachings of the book. [Minds] would not have accepted a book that is not worthy of acceptance. But since it has been [proven to be] worthy of acceptance due to its perfection among the nations…on account of the signs that appeared at the hands of those who called for it, signs, not [intellectual] search compelled them [the nations] to comprehend His knowledge…just as we have made clear in our previous point.[508]

At this point, 'Ammār's opening words concerning the Trinity need to be recalled. He states that Muslims are in no position to question Christians on the topic, as the latter find the Trinity within their scriptures, which was confirmed by miracles. The words of al-Ṣafī are instructive here. He puts it thus:

The Gospel ordered us to confess the Trinity which is associated with these essential attributes, not other attributes. These [the essential attributes] were previously mentioned in the books of the Prophets, and they were finally mentioned in the books of the Apostles many times.[509]

This is also clear in the preface to the section on the Trinity in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, where 'Ammār affirms that he has already demonstrated the Gospel to be correct and trustworthy, and the accusation that Christians worship three gods is therefore not valid. He then uses an analogy of two men going before a king to dispute the ownership of a house.

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[508] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 169.

[509] Charfeh MS folio 120a, the Arabic text is:

"ولأنّه أيضًا أُمِرَ في الإنجيل بالإقرار بالتّثليثِ المَرجَعُ به إلى هذه الصّفاتِ الجوهريّةِ دون ما سواها ذِكرُهَا في الكتبِ النّبويّةِ متقدّمًا وفي كُتُبِ الرّسُل أخيرًا ذُكِرَتْ كثيرًا."

Each one claims that he owns the house. Once the case or argument, بَيِّنة, of one of them is

vindicated, there is no need for the king to go through a process of validating the ownership

of the doors of the house or its bricks.[510] If one of the men proves to the king that he owns

the house, it follows that the doors, the bricks, and the like are also his. This is exactly how

'Ammār considers his argument against *taḥrīf* and its role in validating belief in the Trinity. He

attests that, since the Gospel is correct, there is no need to prove the correctness of every

letter in it. The overall content of the Gospel is true.[511]

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[510] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 148. We find this analogy in *Kitāb al-Burhān* as well, but its use and relevance to the Trinity argument are more clearly expressed in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*.

[511] Near the end of this discourse in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār takes on the task of refuting another objection. This time it relates to the Muslim accusation that Christians impute partition or division to God's being. Obviously the issue at stake here is the relationships between the attributes of life and word in God's being. If these two attributes are affirmed in God, does this really mean that God is three separate and divided entities? "No," 'Ammār states, "Christianity does not inevitably impute to the Creator partition or division, because partition and division only apply to bodies, and God has no body." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 56; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara,* 44.

This statement is supported by more analogies. The first is that the human soul, having life and word in its essence, is not partitioned, but remains one. Likewise, heat and light are confirmed in the essence of fire but they do not inevitably cause division in it. In *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār speaks directly to his opponent and asks why the attribution of life and word to God's substance seems to indicate partition and division. "I do not know," he wonders, "why those deniers refuse affirming eternal life and essential wisdom to the eternal Creator? Do they think that this will necessitate that in God's essence partition and division must occur? If they think so, let them nullify their thought, and know that that which is not a body cannot have partition or division at all." Ibid., 153. For a similar argument, see Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam,* 16-17.

'Ammār's Discourse on the Trinity: An Evaluation

Now that we have presented 'Ammār's discourse on the Trinity, an important question must be raised: Was 'Ammār's presentation of the Trinity clear and convincing? Would it have made any noticeable impact on his interlocutor? Was his utilization of terms drawn from the Islamic intellectual context useful in supporting his views, or did it complicate his presentation? How effective was this attempt? Does the attribute argument suffice in the explanation of the Trinity in his Muslim context?

Due to the scarcity of the resources available from this era and the fact that even the treatise composed by al-'Allāf in response to 'Ammār's theology is lost, we can only speculate as we seek to answer these questions. Our speculation, nonetheless, may become more convincing when we compare this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* with his other discourses. There is no doubt that 'Ammār exhibits great assurance in his refutation of the *taḥrīf* allegation. 'Ammār does not seem at all hesitant in reducing the whole allegation to absurdity, showing great confidence in his position. However, there are signs of hesitation in his arguments on the Trinity, which are especially apparent in his numerous claims, and in his use of a wide variety of terms.

Clearly, he does not seem to find a concrete word with which to define أقـانيم, *hypostases*. So, he uses other terms such as: خواص, *Khawāṣṣ*, جهـات, *Jihāt*, معـاني, *Ma'ānī*,

and finally decides to render أقانيم, *Aqānīm* in its Arabicized form.[512] This is informative as it

is indicative of the difficult nature of the topic that 'Ammār attempts to explain. As for the

Trinity, with all the difficult issues involved, it seems understandable that 'Ammār struggles to

find a way to faithfully articulate his theological understanding while also remaining relevant

to his Islamic context. Because of this, he makes several attempts and 'tries' a variety of

terms in order to communicate the Trinity with his counterpart.[513] This suggests that 'Ammār

does not find any of these terms completely satisfactory or convincing for his opponent, so

he goes on 'testing' different ones, hoping that one of them will adequately convey the

Trinity. This is, in fact, reflected in his own words in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, where he,

with both humility and decisiveness, admits that all human descriptions of God, and even his

own Trinitarian formulation, fall short in describing the quiddity of God. He maintains:

> Goodness me, if our description of Him with oneness and Trinity is false and
> invalid; though some of His creatures are found to be as such, their description
> of Him as one in meaning, since needy powers, and vile accidents are found to

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[512] In *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār provides a definition of *al-Uqnūm*. He says, "It is a Syriac word...It means the individual particularity that is perfect and self-sufficient, which does not need any other in the being of its essence." Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 162. Ilīyā the Patriarch of Nisibis (11th century) prefers using the term, كيان, entity or essence; he explains: "كيان, according to Syriac-speakers is every self-subsisting being." This definition perfectly matches 'Ammār's definition of *al-Uqnūm*. This is indeed interesting, for Ilīyā concludes "God is one essence, كيان واحد, three *hypostases*." See Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques*, 100, 102.

[513] In his refutation of the Christian sects, abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq notes that Christians use different words in their description of the *Aqānīm*, such as 'properties' or 'attributes.' These different uses, he maintains, "are really only an attempt to find what is most apt." See David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam,* 69.

be as such, is false and invalid. And if both descriptions fall short of [knowing] the truth of His majestic essence, and the splendor of His quiddity; goodness me, [at least] we have attributed to Him the best of the qualities and names, unlike them. However, truth is in our description, given how we described Him; and falsehood is in their description, since they did not know what they said, and did not reason the corruption of their depiction.[514]

This is a clear acknowledgment affirming the fact that speaking of God is indeed difficult and remains a theological impossibility, given the limitations of the human mind and the majestic essence of God! This is not to suggest that ‘Ammār is unsure of this articulation; on the contrary, he is steadfast in his affirmation that the Christian description of God is the correct one.[515]

That being said, how clear is ‘Ammār’s argument? It is true that ‘Ammār does not show the equality of the *hypostases*.[516] He only speaks of the *hypostases* as independent and self-subsisting entities within the essence of God, without explaining the equality of these three entities and their relationship to the one substance of God. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that this ‘insufficiency’ in ‘Ammār’s presentation of the Trinity is understandable, for his main focus was not to indicate the equality of the three *hypostases*, but rather to

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[514] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 164:

"فلعَمري، لئن كان وصفْنَا إيّاه بالتّوحيدِ والتّثليثِ زُورًا وبَاطِلاً، لأنّ بعض خلائقِه موجـودٌ كـذلك، فـإنّ وصـفَهُم بالوَحْـدَانيّ المَعْنَى، إذ كانت القوى المضطرة، والأعراض الدّنيئة موجودةٌ كذلك، زُورٌ وبَاطِلٌ. وإن كـان جميـعُ القَـوْلَيْن يَقْـصُرَان عـن حقيقةِ كُنْهِ ما هو عليه في عظمةِ ذاتِه وجلالِ ماهِيتِه، فلقد، لعَمري، آثرنَـاهُ بأفـضل مـا يُوْجَـدُ السـبيلُ إليـه مـن الأسـماءِ والصفاتِ، دُونَهُم. بل، الحقُّ فيما وضعنا، إذ عَزَوْنَا الذي به عَزَوْنَا؛ والزّورُ فيما وصفوا، إذ جهلوا ما قالوا، ولم يعقلوا فسادَ ما نعتوا."

[515] See abū Rā’iṭah’s similar argument in Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā’iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 88.

[516] David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," 90.

prove the fact of their existence, and that, though Christians describe God in three

hypostases, they uphold God's oneness.[517] This concern is what drives him to make use of

analogies of things with three entities, yet one in substance. Therefore, to balance his

argument, 'Ammār states merely that the Trinity does not nullify the oneness of God. The

issue at hand is not whether or how the three hypostases are equal as much as it is

concerned with the oneness of God.

It would then be safe to conclude that 'Ammār's struggle is to maintain the triune

nature of God, rather than to establish the equality of the *hypostases*, as was the issue

during the Arian heresy This point of focus is another area where the doctrine of the Trinity

was reactive, being articulated by Arab Christian thinkers in response to Islamic theology.

The pressure that came from the qur'ānic affirmation of God's oneness shaped the way the

hypostases were conveyed to the Muslim thinker. Arab Christian theologians such as

'Ammār found themselves obligated to answer the qur'ānic accusation that they believed in

three gods. This new challenge shifted the focus of the Trinitarian formulations and made the

oneness of God the focal point of the defense.

It is to be noted that 'Ammār's purpose in composing *Kitāb al-Burhān*, as indicated

earlier, was to provide rational proof of the credibility of Christianity by structuring the entire

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[517] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 176.

argument to correspond with Islamic views of God's attributes.[518] These proofs are directed

to his opponent as well as to his fellow Christians, who, as he describes, "trust the [witness]

of the books."[519] As for the Muslim thinkers, 'Ammār's main concern is to point out that the

Trinity is the ultimate solution to the dilemma of the depiction of God found in Mu'tazilī

thinking.[520] That said, it is still to be wondered whether he was successful in his presentation.

In answering this question, we must look at the scribal addition at the end of the Trinity

section in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, which reads: "Whoever wants to look further at this

[i.e. the issue of the Trinity]…should [read] the epitome of Yaḥyā [ibn] 'Adī to abū 'Īsā al-

Warrāq."[521] This insertion is indeed interesting, as it suggests either that the scribe does not

find 'Ammār's arguments convincing, or perhaps that Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's[522] gave a more

comprehensive refutation of the issues raised by abū 'Īsā than did 'Ammār's. Or, it might

indicate that in the intervening centuries new questions concerning the Trinity had been

raised, which demanded the additional work by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. All these remain possibilities,

as there is no evidence of the Muslim reaction to 'Ammār's thinking—except the lost *Radd* of

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[518] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. II, 220.

[519] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 67. Abū Rā'iṭah makes the same point in his discussion on the correctness of the Trinity, where he shows that the reason for using biblical verses is twofold: awaking the Muslim opponents, لمَـنْ خالفنـا تيقظًـا, and strengthening, تـشديدًا, his fellow Christians. See Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 88.

[520] Sidney Griffith, "The Concept of al-Uqnūm," 180.

[521] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 177.

[522] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 122-125.

al-'Allāf.[523]

Nevertheless, an interesting statement is to be found in the refutation of al-Warrāq. In rejecting the arguments of 'Ammār and other Arab Christians concerning God's attributes, al-Warrāq writes, "We have understood your classifications and your descriptions."[524] The classifications and the descriptions were the Christians' description of God as one essence in three hypostases. These words of al-Warrāq clearly show that the attributes argument made sense, even though the actual teaching of the Trinity was not accepted. In other words, the way of communicating the Trinity was understood and its logic was also acknowledged, but the doctrine itself was not accepted, most probably due to qur'ānic warnings. The means by which the Trinity as a doctrine was introduced seems to have been relevant to the intellectual context of the day. In itself, this comment by al-Warrāq is a bold witness to the relative success of the Arab Christian theologians in explaining the Trinity to their Muslim counterparts.

However, the Muslim denial of the Christian Trinity must be seen in its broader context of Islamic doctrine. If a Muslim were convinced of any Trinitarian formulae, he or she would, *ipso facto*, no longer be Muslim! There is no place for the Christian Trinity in the Qur'ān, although it is obvious that the doctrine of the Trinity denied by the Qur'ān is not the Trinity of

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[523] Wilhelm Baum, "The Age of the Arabs: 560-1258," 62.

[524] David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam*, 132.

Christianity.[525] As simplistic as it may sound, the absolute oneness of God's being remains fundamental to Muslim thinking. Although 'Ammār's Muslim opponent may have seen some rationale or logic in the Trinity in 'Ammār's arguments, that would not be able to change the Islamic view that the Trinity is simply an incorrect understanding of God.[526] This is exactly what 'abd al-Majīd al-Sharafī, speaking of the nature of the Muslim refutations of the Trinity, indicates. He states that the authors who composed treatises refuting the Trinity did not see any truth in it, even to a small degree. Rather, the starting point in their refutations concerned the "absolute wrongness of the Christian position."[527] Given this basic presupposition, it is impossible for an argument to be 'convincing.' Rather, it is the issue of relevancy that matters.

In addition, it must be borne in mind that 'Ammār's text is polemical in nature. Polemics rarely lead to convincing persuasion, but rather give birth to more polemical literature. There is evidence of al-Warrāq refuting Arab Christian theologians using their own attributes argument against them. Al-Warrāq was, in turn, refuted by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. Such cycles do not stop! And even when the Muslim polemicists accepted the analogies used by Arab Christian theologians, their acceptance was only for the sake of rebutting these same

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[525] Michel Hayek, *al-Masīḥ fīl-Islām,* (Bayrūt: al-Maṭba'ah al-Kāthūlīkiyyah, 1961), 34.

[526] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 253.

[527] Ibid., 210.

analogies. It was, in fact, an artificial acceptance.[528] Again, the qur'ānic prohibition against

Christians saying 'three' concerning God, was both the starting and end point of all

refutations.[529] The force and influence of such verses on Muslim polemicists must not be

underestimated.

Further, had the Qur'ān been as tolerant, or even ambiguous concerning the Trinity, as

it was towards the cross, such discussions could have been dramatically changed. Perhaps

Muslim polemicists could have appreciated the attributes argument raised by Christians,

and, in so doing, followed the understanding of ibn Kullāb. Or, perhaps they could have

shown less resistance to the Christian view that God has two constitutive attributes. But this

is not the testimony of history. Muslims are bound to deny the Trinity, due to qur'ānic

warnings.[530] Thus, it seems that Christians and Muslim have reached another impasse in

their intellectual encounter, and that the Islamic creed, "...He is Allah the One and Only;

Allah, the Eternal, Absolute,"[531] will always be irreconcilable with the Christian formula, "In

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."[532]

To worsen the situation, there are signs of Muslim polemicists failing to differentiate

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[528] Ibid., 225.

[529] Ibid., 253.

[530] Harry A. Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 49, no. 1 (Jan. 1956), 16; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 44.

[531] *Sūrah* 112:1-2

[532] The Gospel according to Mathew 28:19.

between three attributes and three essences, and continuing to accuse Christians of tritheism.[533] This, of course, is to be partially blamed on statements both within the Qur'ān and in the history of qur'ānic interpretation. There can be no doubt that works such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* have had a tremendous impact on the Muslim understanding of this issue. Al-Ṭabarī writes that the Qur'ān prohibits Christians from saying that the Lords are three, ولا تقولوا الأرباب ثلاثة.[534] 'Ammār himself reports that such a false view of the Christian Trinity was common among his Muslim counterparts. There is textual evidence from *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah* that 'Ammār's opponent seems to hold such a misunderstanding.[535] This shows that tritheism as an allegation against Christianity was common at the time.

The words of al-Mahdī to Timothy I bear witness to the same confusion and misunderstanding. The caliph charges: "You, then, believe in three gods."[536] Similarly, abū Rā'iṭah quotes his interlocutor who accuses Christians of believing in three gods.[537] It may be concluded, in fact, that the Muslim polemicists, by not differentiating between 'three

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[533] See al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 256; cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 206.

[534] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān,* vol. 8, ed. 'abd Allāh Turkī (al-Qāhirah: Hajar lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī' wal-I'lān, ND), 579-580; cf. Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 107.

[535] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 161.

[536] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam,* 13.

[537] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth*," 102; cf. Salīm Dukkāsh, *abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī*, 97.

hypostases' and 'three gods' made it almost impossible for fruitful conversation regarding the attributes of God to take place. And Arab Christians, such as 'Ammār, found themselves obligated to affirm their belief in the oneness of God repeatedly. Ongoing discussions have widened the gap between the understandings of the two faiths, once again proving that the history of Christian-Muslim understanding is a history of misunderstanding.

In addition, the classical word *Uqnūm*, used by 'Ammār and other Arab theologians of his generation may have contributed to such a misunderstanding. But did 'Ammār insist on this term? The answer is no; he shows no sign of insisting on using it but rather, as shown earlier, tried using a variety of terminology. Unfortunately, none of the terms worked! This is not to be blamed on 'Ammār's articulation or use of *Uqnūm*. There are several issues related to the Trinity, and it is clear that, even though abū Qurrāh does not make use of such a classical term, but instead uses the Arabic, وجه, *persona*, his argument remains equally unconvincing.[538] We find this term used in the eleventh century by 'abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl, a prominent translator of patristic theological treatises from Greek into Arabic, who indicated that *Uqnūm* can mean *persona*, properties, or person.[539] Present contemporary publications that attempt to explain the Trinity to a Muslim audience, such as Ibrāhīm Lūqā's *al-*

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[538] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 28.

[539] Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology," 399; cf. Henri Boulad, *Manṭiq al-Thālūth* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 2001), 43-44.

Masiḥiyyah fīl-Islām, seem to have equally little success.[540]

It would be unfair, then, to claim that 'Ammār failed to convince his interlocutor of the Trinity because he utilized the term *Uqnūm*. 'Ammār was a product of his time, and he made use of his heritage in communicating with his new context. Furthermore, he attempted to adjust his beliefs according to the intellectual currents of his day, which fully justifies his use of the term *Uqnūm*. There is more, then, to the rejection of the Trinity in Islamic thinking than his choice of terminology.

Furthermore, the attributes argument he employed was in common use by many other Arab Christian theologians. According to abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, many Arab Christians of his time favored this type of argument as a means of demonstrating the Trinity,[541] and his summation of their argument resembles that made by abū Qurrah and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī. This testifies to the widespread use of the attributes argument put forward by Arab Christians

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[540] Ibrāhīm Lūqā, *al-Masīḥiyyah fīl-Islām* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, 1984), 70-76; cf. Samuel Zwemer, *al-Masīḥ kama Yarāhu al-Muslimūn: Ḥayāt wa-Ṣifāt wa-Ta'līm Yasū' al-Masīḥ Ḥasaba al-Qur'ān wal-Aḥādīth al-Nabawiyyah* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, ND), 20-21, and *Sīrat al-Masīḥ bi-Lisānin 'Arabīyīn Faṣīḥ* (Larnaca, Cyprus: ABDO, 1987), 5. This dilemma of communication is exactly described by abū Rā'ṭah: "The word of someone who is your [the Muslim's] opponent in religion is unacceptable to you." See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 173.

[541] David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam,* 133. The Arabic verb used by al-Warrāq is يستحسن, which denotes more than the idea of favoring. In fact, it implies that Christians have other arguments to demonstrate the Trinity, but this specific one had proven to be applicable to the context. Al-Warrāq also describes such an argument as المستحسنة. See Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 571.

such as 'Ammār. In fact, it was used so frequently that it irritated many Muslim scholars, such as al-Jāḥiz, who wrote about it with great frustration.[542] Others, such as 'Īsā ibn Ṣubaḥ al-Murdār and Ḍirār ibn 'Amr, felt obliged to compose treatises against such Christian arguments.[543]

All of this leads us to conclude that the refutation of the Trinity in *Dār al-Islām* goes beyond the refutation of any or every doctrine that contradicts the Qur'ān.[544] Rather, the level of insistence on the absolute oneness of God reflects that the issue was not a matter simply of a few verses, but one of a whole system of belief that is founded on God being one.[545] Since Islam came out of the culture of the Arabian Peninsula, where Muslims were surrounded by polytheists,[546] it seemed imperative for Muslim theologians to insist on the existence of one God rather than revert back to the plurality of gods acknowledged in the Arabian Peninsula. God's oneness was a reflection of the newly emerging Islamic empire itself. That is to say:

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[542] Joshua Finkal, *Three Essays of abū 'Othmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiz* (al-Qāhirah: al-Salafīyah Press, 1926), 19-20. See the recent study: abū 'Othmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiz, *al-Mukhtār fīl-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā: Ma'a Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Taqwīmiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad 'abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 1991).

[543] Sidney Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 112; cf. Mark Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation," in *Dialog,* vol. 44, no. 3 (Fall 2005), 258.

[544] This doctrine is found in verses such as *sūrah* 112:1-2.

[545] Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Surveys,* vol.1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 64.

[546] Mark Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation," 256.

In vindicating the doctrine of *tawḥid*, they [Muslim polemicists] were vindicating at the same time a specific civilization with set social, political, economic, and spiritual frameworks; and their vindications fit within a culture closed to everything that could threaten the foundation of that civilization, its stability, and its endurance.[547]

Thus, the expectation that ‘Ammār's argument might convince his interlocutor is not reasonable. It fails to properly assess the cultural and political implications of the Islamic doctrine. When one considers the fact that abū al-Hudhayl composed a treatise against ‘Ammār, it becomes evident that ‘Ammār's views were given painstaking examination.[548] Perhaps it was because Ammār had structured his own treatise to oppose the viewpoints of a prominent Muʿtazilī thinker that the Islamic expert felt compelled to respond.[549]

We now turn our attention to examine ‘Ammār's arguments concerning the meaning of the Sonship of Christ to the Father, which is an important theme in Christian-Muslim discussions concerning the nature of Christ.

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[547] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 258.

[548] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. II, 275-276.

[549] Sidney Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 117; cf. David Thomas, "Changing Attitudes of Arab Christians," 14.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discourses on Christology

The Discourse on the Divine Unity

In his discourse on the divine unity, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī begins to address issues of Christology, including Christ's incarnation and crucifixion. We turn our attention, therefore, to the first aspect, where he defends the Christian doctrine of divine unity against multiple Muslim misconstruals and misunderstandings. 'Ammār's defense is straightforward. He briefly states two apologetic foundations for this doctrine: the scriptural and the rational proofs. From this base, he then refutes the Muslim misunderstanding of the doctrine, while challenging his interlocutor to explain why he finds the idea of the Sonship of Christ objectionable. His challenge comes in the form of five questions, followed by five refutations of possible answers.

The Word of God is the Son of God

It is safe to state that 'Ammār was convinced that most Muslim objections were based purely on a misunderstanding of Christian doctrine. For example, although the divine unity is not threatened by the affirmation that Christ is God's eternal Word, Muslims see in this doctrine a limitation on God or understand it as attributing "bodiliness" to God.[550] When Christians

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[550] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 172.

venerate the cross of Christ, Muslims protest that this imputes weakness to God's being.[551]

Likewise baptism, which purifies from sin, is judged as despicable; the central liturgical

sacrament of Eucharist wherein Christians partake of the body and blood of Christ is

rejected; and the Christian belief in an eternal spiritual, rather than sensual, reward, is

mocked.

Having outlined the Muslim objections, 'Ammār presents the Christian doctrine of the

divine unity as fundamental to the teachings of Christianity. He clearly states that the way

Muslims understand the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ to the Father God is based on

wrong assumptions, and he appeals to the text of *sūrah* 72:3, "And Exalted is the Majesty of

our Lord: He has taken neither a wife nor a son."[552] Muslims imagine that, when Christians

declare that "Christ is the Son of God," they mean that God had a female partner with whom

He had a son.[553] This is not what the Sonship of Christ means, he assures his interlocutor.

"To all of this, I say: 'We are innocent before God of saying that He took for Himself a female

companion.'"[554] God is far too exalted to have had a son through a sexual relationship with a

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[551] See Muṣṭafā Būhindī, *al-Ta'thīr al-Masīḥī*, 134.

[552] Since 'Ammār refers twice to this verse during his defense of the divine unity, it would seem that it was widely used in anti-Christian Muslim polemics.

[553] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 68.

[554] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57.

female companion.[555]

Later in his defense of the Sonship of Christ, ‘Ammār makes another appeal to the

Bible, stating that, according to the witness of the scriptures, God is revealed as Father and

Son. ‘Ammār writes: “They are properties of the Creator—may His praise be exalted—as He

said in his pure and holy book, which was confirmed in the world on account of the

resurrection of the dead and the indescribable wonders.”[556] Indeed, in *Kitāb al-Masā’īl wal-*

Ajwibah, ‘Ammār argues that it was not the later Christians who named the three hypostases

as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; rather, it was those who were counted as worthy recipients of

the inspiration of the Gospel, and to whom the nature of God’s secrets was revealed. The

“Blessed Matthew” mentioned this at the end of “the first part of the Gospel,”[557] when he

records Christ’s command to his followers to go and make disciples and baptize them in the

name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These words, ‘Ammār argues, may have

caused some misunderstanding in people’s minds, so that is why the “Beatified John,” the

compiler of “the fourth part of the Gospel,”[558] makes it clear that the Sonship of Christ to the

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[555] If some Christians, such as monks, have kept themselves pure from such relationships, ‘Ammār’s argument goes on, how could such sexual activity be attributed to the Creator? Rather, ‘Ammār proclaims, Christians believe in the Sonship of Christ simply because the Gospels reveal this understanding.

[556] Ibid., 61.

[557] Ibid., 164.

[558] Ibid., 165. Being familiar with the traditional accusation that the “Gospel of ‘Īsā” had been altered, ‘Ammār makes it clear that there is only one Gospel, existing in four parts. In so doing, he

Father is not to be understood in human terms; rather the "fourth section" of the Gospel starts with the statement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God is the Word; he never ceased to be as such with God; everything came into existence through him, and without him no creature [came to being]."[559] 'Ammār further legitimizes the naming of the divine *hypostases* as Father, Son and Holy Spirit by emphasizing that this teaching comes from no one less than Christ himself. The Great Commission text in Matthew 28:18-20 is a clear statement made by Christ in which he speaks of Father and Son. Thus, according to 'Ammār, Christians base their belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ on Christ's own words.[560]

Such appeals to scriptures would suggest that 'Ammār is convinced that his earlier refutation of the accusation of *taḥrīf* and his arguments authenticating the credibility of the scriptures have been sufficient to persuade his interlocutor. As we have seen before, he uses the same appeal at the end of his apology for the Trinity.[561]

However, 'Ammār also seems to be aware that evidence from Christian scriptures is not really sufficient for his Muslim interlocutor, who in fact dismisses the testimony of the

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shows a deep understanding of his context, and, at the same time, attempts to convince the Muslim interlocutor of the authenticity of the Gospel.

[559] Ibid., 208.
[560] Ibid., 167.
[561] Ibid., 56.

scriptures as a whole.[562] Thus, 'Ammār does not give further details about scriptural support

for the Sonship of Christ, but thereafter relies on logic and reason instead.[563] And this

anticipated contempt for biblical support is reflected in the interlocutor's objections in *al-*

Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah, in the sixth question of the discussion on the oneness of God and the

three *hypostases*, where he says:

> Since you were not able to affirm these meanings of God with reasonable logic
> you [falsely] attributed them to the book [the Gospel]. In your claims, you do not
> show any certainty. Rather, in your claims, you are doubting and not certain.
> Truth is not on your side, unlike what you think.[564]

'Ammār's basic argument is that the Christian reference to the Word of God is not to

"flesh," for the Word of God is never to be understood in terms of human begetting.[565] In

establishing this viewpoint, he asks, "Why do Muslims think it distasteful to call the Word

son?"[566] He then posits five possible answers. 1) It is distasteful because of all that

accompanies human conception, pregnancy and the pain of delivery; 2) It is distasteful

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[562] Ibid., 76.

[563] This weakness or inadequacy of scriptural references to support the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ seems to have been noticed by al-Ṣafī, who attempts to mention the *rasūl*, who spoke of Christ as "the one from whom all families of earth are named." This is, of course, the Pauline statement in the Epistle to the Ephesians 3:15: "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

[564] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 169.

[565] Al-Ṣafī adds a fourfold assertion to deny this kind of bodily sonship. He indicates that the Christian community does not make any reference to this alleged bodily sonship in their book, nor has it been heard from them; they do not believe it, nor do they say it. In folio 122a, he renders it this way: "ليس يُوجَدْ لنا في كتابٍ، ولمْ يُسمَعْ منّا، ولانعتقده، ولا نقوله."

[566] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57.

because human sonship is temporal; 3) It is distasteful because human sonship is related to the body; 4) It is distasteful because Muslims believe that the praised one is the one who "begetteth not, nor is He begotten;" 5) It is distasteful because sonship is related to humanity and should not be spoken of in relation to God.

Before we discuss these possible answers, however, it should be noted that 'Ammār seems to have been influenced by Timothy I's argument with al-Mahdī, where he first assures the caliph that belief in "God's female partner" is blasphemous.[567] The patriarch totally dismisses all suggestion that Christians proclaim such ideas.[568] Instead, he declares that the Christian statement, "Christ is the Son of God," means that "Christ is the Word of God who appeared in flesh, for the sake of the salvation of the world."[569]

We should also note that, to a great extent, 'Ammār's explanation of the Christian meaning of the Sonship of Christ which uses both biblical proof, الـدّليل النقلـيّ, and logical proof, الـدّليل العقلـيّ, also resembles that of Timothy I. Timothy I clearly argued that the primary reason for understanding Christ to be the Son of God is scriptural: "the Gospel says this about Christ." This Sonship is not physical, he maintains; rather, it transcends all human comprehension. Tongues cannot even describe it. It is similar to the sonship (birth) of the

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[567] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam,* 8.

[568] Bar Konī argues similarly. See Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 175.

[569] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam,* 8.

word from the soul and the rays of light from the sun.[570] Indeed, the structure of the

argument of both theologians is almost identical. Timothy I's argument can be summarized

as follows: denial of physical sonship; the biblical witness as the source of the belief; the

incomprehensibility of this sonship; and the use of logical arguments and/or examples that

support the correctness of the doctrine. If we follow the structure of the first part of 'Ammār's

argument, prior to refuting the possible answers, we can see that it is identical to Timothy I's.

This testifies to the widespread admiration for the theological prowess of Timothy I during his

long tenure as the head of the Church of the East (780-823),[571] and to the impact of his

theological thought on later theologians such as 'Ammār al-Baṣrī.

We now turn to examine the five objections that 'Ammār refutes.

First Possible Answer

Having utilized the same logic as Timothy I, 'Ammār then asks why Muslims think of Christ's

Sonship as distasteful. The interlocutor's first possible answer is that it is inappropriate to

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[570] Abū Raʾīṭah also indicates that there is no way for the human mind to comprehend "the how" in which the Word of God took flesh and became incarnate. See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 262. In *Kitāb al-Masāʾil wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār shows that, in the Christian faith, there are some doctrines that are beyond the human mind and its ability to comprehend. This is not to be considered a defect in the faith, he argues. For example, the human mind was not aware of the Sonship of Christ until the Gospel "awakened" it to understand this divine reality. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 169.

[571] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 48.

attribute sonship to God because sonship, according to our human experience, is always

associated with "sexual intercourse, ejaculation of sperm and pregnancy."[572] Further, the

baby remains in the womb for nine months, and when the time comes, she is delivered with

much blood, and accompanied by pain. This is the only possible way by which humans have

offspring,[573] and such normally private details would be offensive if applied to God. Arguably,

'Ammār intentionally chooses to start with this possible answer, as it is directly related to the

Muslim 'misunderstanding' previously indicated. This is not, he maintains, how Christ is

related to God; nor is it the way the Word of God is said to be the Son of God. Sonship, in

Christian theology, is not to be understood in human terms, "for we do not believe that the

Son [of God] is a body."[574] Therefore, Christians are absolutely innocent of the accusation

that they attribute such human actions to God, for Christ's sonship to God is not an action.[575]

In due time, Christ, who is eternally the Son of God, was born of a woman, but in eternity, his

Sonship to God is not on account of a woman. He is the Word of God who is unlimited.[576]

'Ammār concludes: "[Christ's] eternal birth is not from the body of a woman, but he is the

Word of God who is not to be defined or comprehended. His generation is far more excellent

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[572] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57.

[573] Ibid.

[574] Ibid.

[575] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 53.

[576] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 69.

than the [generation] of light from the sun, and the word from the soul."[577]

Second Possible Answer

Ammār anticipates that the transience of human sonship is another reason why Muslims might find the Sonship of Christ to be repugnant. Human sonship is bound in time; sons are present in time, but are mortal. This state of being temporal is not, the argument goes, applicable to the Sonship of the Word of God, for he is eternal, and he did not begin in time.[578] 'Ammār foresees that the Muslim interlocutor will not accept the Sonship of Christ, not only because human sons are mortal,[579] but also because they are subject to change. Sons become fathers and grandfathers, and ultimately they die. This state of affairs, being temporal and changing, proves the weakness of the 'meaning' or 'name' of sonship. 'Ammār agrees with his Muslim interlocutor on this issue, yet he promptly modifies the statement. The reason for this status change throughout life, he argues, is that human sonship is not related to the essence of human nature; rather, it is given to sons from their fathers.

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[577] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57. In *Kitāb al-Masāʾil wal-Ajwibah*, ʿAmmār makes a brief reference to this assumption, as he contemplates:

"أمِنْ أجل أنّهم لا يعقلون أبًّا وابنًا إلاّ بمباضعةٍ وجماعٍ؟"

Ibid., 165-166; cf. Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 207.

[578] In *Kitāb al-Masāʾil wal-Ajwibah*, pp. 165-166, ʿAmmār makes a similar, yet brief reference to this assumption, as he contemplates

"أمِنْ أجل أنّهم لا يعقلون أبًّا وابنًا الاّ بمباضعةٍ وجماع، ثمّ تباين في الأوقاتِ والحالات؟"

[579] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 69.

However, as for Christ's sonship, it is too high for human sonship. This is what 'Ammār calls "Sonship which excels all."

Reflecting further on this issue, 'Ammār affirms for the interlocutor that the Sonship of God is not a result of the action of God, but rather that he is of the very substance of God. This said, it follows that, unlike human fatherhood and sonship, the Fatherhood of God does not precede the son's existence. The substance of God has always had the Word. Without this eternal Word of God, God becomes non-knowing and non-speaking.

This is not the case with human fatherhood and sonship: the father precedes the son because he himself has received the 'meaning' of fatherhood as a 'loan' from his own father. The states of fatherhood and sonship are not part of the essence of being human. Rather, these states are borrowed from others. Human fathers and sons are two created bodies: one created body creates the other. Furthermore, the names Father and Son are noble names, which God granted to humans as signs of honor and favor towards them. Among these attributes are life, knowledge and speech. However, when speaking of God, Christians believe that these names are of God's own substance, even though they are also used in reference to humans, for humans themselves are created with God's breath. The most excellent eternal names that humans have been given are the names Father and Son. These two realities are the foundation for the world's population and cultivation.

'Ammār seems to have al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's argument in mind. The latter had raised

the question concerning the names father and son, asking whether they were derived from

the nature of God, i.e., from God's essence, or whether they were accidental names. Al-

Qāsim's argument asserts that, if the name father is correct only after the son was

born/begotten, then the name itself must be accidental; it is only true after the birth of sons

take place. Al-Qāsim even applied this argument to all kinds of Christians—whether *Rūm* or

non-*Rūm*. He further makes the point that the names father and son are not substantial.[580]

'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī also argued this point, likewise contradicting 'Ammār's

position. He presented two assumptions concerning the Sonship of Christ and its

relationship to time: either the Father begat the Son before the foundation of the world, and

thus the Son could not be begotten as he already existed; or the father begat the son as an

accidental being, and thus the Son must be created, and not eternal.[581] The objections of al-

Qāsim ibn Ibrahīm and 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī would seem to be the driving force behind

'Ammār's second answer to his Muslim interlocutor. 'Ammār evidently attempts to express

the eternal Sonship of Christ using terminology that corresponds to their presentation of

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[580] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 318-319; cf. the new edition by Imām Ḥanafī 'abd Allāh, 40-41.

"إنّكم إن كنتم إنّما سمّيتم الآب عندكم أبًّا، لإنّه ولد، بزعمكم، ولدًا وابنًا، فليس هذ الأسماء بأسماء طبيعيّة ذاتيّة، ولا أسماء أيضًا قنوميّة شخصيّة. ولكنّها حادثة عرضيّة عند حدوثِ أولادٍ بين الوالدين والأولاد، وليس بأسماء طبيعيّة ولا قنوم—لا في الرّوم ولا في غير الرّوم."

[581] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 137.

opposing views. He clearly articulates that time has nothing to do with the Sonship of Christ.

After all, how can time be applied to the divine reality? Christ's Sonship is not temporal, but

rather transcends all human comprehension of time and space.

Third Possible Answer

'Ammār's third possible answer is closely related to the first. He speculates that Muslims

might find this Christian teaching distasteful because, according to human experience, sons

exist in human bodies. If this is the case, he argues, let it be known that this is not how

Christians view the Sonship of Christ, as Christians "do not speak of the bodies of the Father

and Son."[582] This modification, 'Ammār believes, should help the interlocutor become more

comfortable with the reference to Fatherhood and Sonship. As possible support, 'Ammār

draws examples from nature, of things and beings that came from or were begotten by other

things without necessarily having to be termed father and son. For example, Eve 'came out'

of Adam, but Adam, in this case, is not Eve's father. At this point 'Ammār turns to his

interlocutor, as he will at the end of his discourse on the cross, and accuses him of taking

the honor and grace of receiving names borrowed from the very essence of God and turning

them into something distasteful and despicable. Praise, not rejection, should be given to God

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[582] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 59.

who bestowed on us, as humans, that which is not of our own essence. We should not deny

this, nor should we dislike it. Rather, we should respond with gratitude, as 'Ammār himself

did in his conclusion: "Praise be to Him for His favor, His blessing and endowment."[583]

Fourth Possible Answer

In this fourth possible answer, 'Ammār utilizes the qur'ānic idea that real honor is given to

him who "begetteth not, nor is He begotten" (*sūrah* 112:3). This classic Muslim statement

speaks of God as the transcendent being who is exalted above having a son. The verse was

traditionally used against the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Christ.[584] But 'Ammār

disagrees with the meaning of this verse, and dismisses its logical accuracy on account of

nature. He argues that if the one who "begetteth not, nor is He begotten" is the greatest, then

indeed worms, bugs, mosquitoes, gnats and all that did not grow from fetuses must be

exalted as the greatest of beings, as well! Further, equal adoration must be given to

sparrows, swallows, chickens, and all kinds of birds, which "beget not, nor are begotten;"

rather, they lay eggs.[585] Three times he repeats that the Son of God is not flesh—reiterating

for his Muslim audience that the Christian concept of Sonship is far from the way sonship is

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[583] Ibid., 61.

[584] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 172.

[585] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 60.

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understood in physical and sexual terms. 'Ammār makes his argument even stronger when

he maintains that:

> If what was not begotten is the most exalted thing, then Eve, who was not
> begotten, would have been the most exalted over all things. And [it follows] that
> Satan, who "begetteth not, nor is He begotten," would have been higher than
> Abraham, the friend of the Most Merciful. Furthermore, if fatherhood and
> sonship were deficiencies, then there would be nothing more deficient than
> people, in which they [fatherhood and sonship] are found.[586]

Within this text we note 'Ammār's modification of the qur'ānic verse where Satan is

described as one who "begetteth not, nor is…begotten." Linking this statement with the idea

that God is too exalted to be connected with fatherhood, he shows that Satan is thereby

identified as greater than Abraham, the friend of the Most Merciful.[587] Becoming even more

aggressive, 'Ammār turns the accusation back to his interlocutor and states that "it is actually

a deficiency and baseness to be that which 'begetteth not, nor is…begotten.'"[588] This

outrageous construction testifies to 'Ammār's audacious polemical character, daring to apply

what the Qur'ān says about God to Satan! This argument might have been even more

distasteful to the Muslims than the doctrine of Christ's sonship. In fact, 'Ammār's words

might be construed by some as not only offensive, but also blasphemous.

In a similar fashion, yet without any reference to Satan, Theodore abū Qurrah, in

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[586] Ibid., 61.

[587] See *sūrah* 4:125

[588] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 61.

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Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq wal-Dīn al-Qawīm, identifies the similarities between God and

Adam, and observes that many human characteristics can, indeed, be ascribed to God.[589]

He argues thus in reference to the allegorical story he had told of the king's son (Adam), the

physician who was helping him in discerning the right medication (reason), and the

messenger sent by the king (the book). Abū Qurrah argues that three virtues that are true of

Adam—begetting, emanation and headship—are found in God's character as well. If Adam

did not have a son, he would not have enjoyed life or headship; rather his headship would

have been practiced over pigs, donkeys, and all other beasts. In fact, according to abū

Qurrah, this is not real headship, but a misery. If we dismiss this similarity, he asks, how can

we understand God's headship?[590]

However, it is noteworthy that in this section alone, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī makes ten

references to *sūrah* 112:3. On several occasions, he quotes the verse verbatim, while at

other times he slightly modifies its words to fit the rest of his argument. This suggests that

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[589] See Mahmud Mustafa Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God: a Study of the Terms *ibn* and *Walad* in the Qur'ān and Tafsīr Tradition," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 69-71.

[590] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 224-227. It is interesting to note that, of the many animals and insects abū Qurrah lists, 'Ammār mentions four: الخنافس والدود والبق والبعـوض. Ibid., 227; cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 61, and David Thomas, "Explanation of the Incarnation in Early 'Abbasid Islam," in *Redefining Christian identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam,* ed. J.J. van Ginkel, et al., Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 134 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2005), 140; cf. Samir Khalil, "al-Ta'thīr al-Lāhūtī al-Masīḥī 'alā al-Qur'ān," in *al- Qur'ān fī Muḥīṭuh al-Tārīkhī*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, trans. Sa'd-Allāh al-Sa'dī (Köln: Al-Kamel, 2012), 222-223.

this verse was widely known to both Christians and Muslims as a denial of the begetting of the Son. 'Ammār makes all possible efforts to nullify the strength of this qur'ānic accusation without making any reference to whether the verse itself is true or false.

Only at the end of his refutation of his interlocutor's supposed objection does 'Ammār make the Christian position completely clear. God's essential names or properties have not been withheld, but God has graciously given them to humans as a sign of honoring them and showing them great favor.

Fifth Possible Answer

'Ammār's refutation of the last objection is based on the Muslim refusal to attribute to God what belongs to humans, such as the names father and son. He notes that Muslims dislike such names being given to God, who is far higher than any human experience or essence. He reminds his interlocutor that this argument is not entirely correct, for human names or qualities such as living, knowing, beneficent, generous, gracious, favorable, and the like are essentially God's. Since this is the case, the argument goes, why not attribute two other names, namely, father and son to God?

'Ammār answers with two possible responses. The first concerns the claim that such names were given on account of God's preferring and honoring humans, and the second

relates to the deficiencies attached to the two names. With regard to the former, ‘Ammār

affirms that what is more amazing and honoring is not the fact that humans have been given

such names, but rather the human person itself! Mankind has been given a wondrous

position within creation. Indeed, he suggests, all of these blessings affirm the reality of the

hereafter. He says: "It is man who is amazing, and it is through the greatness of his status

and blessing of his name that the world multiplied; [because of this], we are found in the

world. We [also] find the world to come in our existence in this world."[591]

As for the second objection, ‘Ammār does not actually refute it, but instead, uses it to

criticize his opponents. He applies the same word, عيب, deficiency, not to the names father

and son, but rather to the Muslim interlocutor.[592] The deficiency is not in his argument, but in

his antagonist, who is not following the right path and is thereby condemning himself as

deficient. ‘Ammār then reflects on Muslim theology and makes reference to two of God's

attributes—his mercy and his anger. These attributes, he argues, imply some ‘deficiencies.’

The first speaks of certain emotional changes within the heart of the one showing mercy as

he experiences suffering and anguish, while anger, he argues, implies an "alternation of an

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[591] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 61.

[592] Repeatedly, we notice this distinctive feature of ‘Ammār's use of the interlocutor's language, where he employs the latter's exact words against him. We have seen this previously in his apology for the correctness of the scriptures, where he applies the noun "فساد" to the interlocutor himself.

earlier state of knowledge and the contentment which only happens on account of prior

knowledge."[593] In other words, "If Muslims can distinguish between human and divine

knowledge and wisdom, they should be able to distinguish between human and divine

begetting."[594]

Thus, 'Ammār acknowledges that it is only in human experience, not in the character

of God, that these qualities are seen as implying deficiency, and he applies the same

argument to the names father and son. If the name merciful is applied to God, without

implying that emotional changes exist in God's essence, why not likewise call God Father,

as the deficiencies of human fatherhood are not found in God's essence? In effect, 'Ammār

challenges his interlocutor to think of these names metaphorically.[595]

In *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār makes this same argument, including further

divine names that are accepted by Muslims, such as mighty, powerful and glorious, which

are also characteristics that indicate a changing state. 'Ammār, in fact, challenges his

interlocutor to drop all these names or descriptions of God since they indicate a changing

state within God.[596] However, since Muslims are not fair in their debating tactics, 'Ammār

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[593] Ibid., 62.

[594] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 69.

[595] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 173.

[596] Further, he acknowledges that, while humans share certain names with the divine being, that does not necessarily mean that humans are equal to God in essence.

concludes, they disbelieve God and the divine books, which give these names as essential

names of God. He says forcefully: "If they did not attribute this to Him, their judgment would

not have come on them, and they would not have denied Him and His books which say this

of Him."[597] 'Ammār's final words in this regard show that he is convinced of the strength of

his position, and expects that the Muslims will be silenced and unable to counter his

arguments.[598]

Discourse on the Divine Unity: An Evaluation

In explaining the divine unity, 'Ammār has taken the theological approach of the *via negativa*.

He does not say what the divine unity is, but simply what it is not. God's unity is not a bodily

reality, and it is not to be understood in human terms. He argues that human existence and

the experience of begetting is not applicable to God's Fatherhood/Sonship. The divine unity

is essentially beyond human comprehension. He also makes it clear that God cannot be

defined in terms of time or location. This restricted approach suggests, first, that 'Ammār's

concern is not to define the doctrine of divine unity, but rather to refute what has been

slanderously and falsely said against it; and second, that the intended audience for this

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[597] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 62.

[598] To 'Ammār's words, al-Ṣafī adds the strong claim that Muslims only adhere to "what they have heard, what they have received in tradition, and what they have grown accustomed to." See folio 123b.

argument are not the Christians of his community, but the Muslims. Let us consider these two points in further detail.

Defining the Unity versus Defending the Unity

It is evident that 'Ammār does not make a concerted effort to articulate or define the doctrine of the divine unity; rather, as he states at the beginning of this section, his goal is to refute the Islamic misunderstandings and false accusations concerning it. In this section, his main objective is to refute the false accusations of the Muslim interlocutor, who understands the Sonship of Christ only in human and physical terms. His brief definition of the doctrine of the divine unity is found in the following statement from *Kitāb al-Burhān*:

> We call the Word of God 'Son' just as the Gospel told us. We do not say that the Word of God is a body. But since you find some of God's creatures, I mean the spiritual and subtle beings, which bring forth their own words in a way that cannot be comprehended by reason or understood, why do you not say the same about [the bringing forth of] the Word of God, which passes all understanding of the spiritual angels and men as a whole?[599]

In *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*, however, 'Ammār devotes a major section to answering questions regarding the reasons for incarnation and the divine unity, and thereby defining the doctrine. We notice there, for instance, that he locates the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ in the divine economy, and seems to suggest a type of "progressive

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[599] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57.

biblical revelation."[600] He argues that though the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of

Christ exist eternally in the essence of God, the books of the Old Testament do not mention

such realities on account of the weakness of the minds of people during those periods. But

later, when the Son himself appeared in the flesh, in human form like ours, people needed to

know about the majesty of his incarnation, of "his Sonship to his Father," of "the Fatherhood

of God to him," and of "the eternal nature of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father."[601]

However, this limited teaching on the nature of the divine unity is unlike his coverage

of other doctrines in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. For example, as we saw in his discourse on the Trinity,

he makes use of logic, *kalām*, and the scriptures to clearly articulate the triune nature of the

one divine essence. This leads us to conclude that, in this section, his goal was simply to

refute the interlocutor's false accusations and to assert that Christ's Sonship should not be

understood in terms of time.

At the end of this refutation, the language becomes sharply polemical and 'Ammār

describes the Muslim interlocutor as refusing to believe God and God's books. His ultimate

polemical thrust comes in his comparing Satan with God in that he "begetteth not, nor is He

begotten." We can only imagine how this polemical use of the text of the Qur'ān must have

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[600] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 37.

[601] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 176. He puts it this way:

"حتّى ظهر الابنُ متجسّدًا فاحتاج أهل عصره حينئذٍ إلى أن يخاطبهم ويخبرهم بعظيم نعمتهِ عليهم في تجسّده بشرًا مـن جوهرهم، ويعلن لذلك بنوّته لأبيهِ، وأبوّةَ أبيهِ له، وأزليّةَ الرّوح الفائضةِ من ذاتِ أبيهِ لهم."

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infuriated his Muslim interlocutor!

We must, however, understand this section within the wider context of *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

Immediately after answering the five possible objections, ‘Ammār devotes the greater part of

this treatise to confirming the doctrine of the incarnation (folio 27b to folio 37a). The section

on the divine unity, therefore, may have served as a ‘negative’ introduction to the

subsequent discussion on the incarnation. In fact, on the basis of the terminology and

language used, we can fairly conclude that ‘Ammār’s short statement explaining the divine

unity could have been directly followed by the discourse on the confirmation of the

incarnation, without any excursus to refute Muslim misunderstandings. His defining

statement ends with an affirmation of God’s unity as surpassing all the understanding of the

spiritual angels and men as a whole, while his later section on the incarnation begins with

the same affirmation that God, who surpasses all the understanding of the spiritual angels

and men as a whole, has indeed been manifested in the flesh. This clear progression of

thought suggests that we could overlook, if we wished, the five possible answers and

proceed directly from the statement on the divine unity to the discourse on the incarnation. A

comparative listing of the Arabic words used in the two sections strengthens this conclusion.

The identical words are put in bold. Regarding the unity ‘Ammār writes:

ولا نقول إنّ كلمةَ اللهِ جسمٌ. فقد تجد بعض خلقه، أعني النّفسَ الرّوحانيّةَ اللطيفةَ قد تُولَد منها
كلمتُها بمـا لا تَعْقِلُ **ولا تُـدْرك.** فكيـف لا تقـول فـي كلمـةِ اللهِ إنّ ذلـك فـوق **دَرْكِ الملائكـة**

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He then opens his discussion on the incarnation by saying:

فأمّا تجلّي الخالق لخلائقهِ في بَشَرٍ منّا، فإنّه كما أنّه—تقدّست أسـماؤُهُ—محـيطٌ بالـسماءِ والأرض **لا تُدْرِكُه** لطافةُ **الملائكةِ الرّوحانيّين**، ولا غوامضُ فكرِ **الإنْس أجمعين**، كذلك لا يُعْرَفُ غورُ تدبيرهِ ونعمتهِ وجودهِ وكرمهِ في تجلّيه لخلقه، ولا يفي **بِدَرْكِ** علمِ ذلك إلّا علمـهُ المحيط بكلّ شيء.[603]

‘Ammār's main point is clear: God's Word is not flesh, but, according to the divine economy, God's Word took on flesh in order to show God's goodness and generosity. In the middle of this, ‘Ammār inserts the five possible objections, as we showed earlier, and refutes them. Arguably, it could be proposed that ‘Ammār had little choice in developing his defense, as his Muslim interlocutor found the idea of Christ's Sonship to be repugnant and vile. Ammār's agenda was, therefore, set for him. His protagonists had moved from repugnance to misrepresenting Christ's Sonship as equivalent to human, physical sonship, thus compelling ‘Ammār to refute the accusations. At this stage, defining the divine unity would not be his top priority.

‘Ammār's Audience

In some sections of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, ‘Ammār's audience is explicitly named. We note, for

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[602] Ibid., 57.

[603] Ibid., 62.

example, that, in his answer to question twelve concerning the reasons for the incarnation,

he directs his criticism to the Jacobite Christians. He makes specific reference to the term

'Mother of God' and addresses the Jacobites as those "people who think that Christ told

them to name him as one substance and one *hypostasis*."[604] His polemic against the

Jacobites is extensive, and yet he keeps in mind that his main disagreement is not with them

as much as it is with those who deny the incarnation as a whole. These words are very

indicative of his agenda, for the book as a whole is not directed at opposing the Jacobites'

"apparent claims," but rather at addressing the Muslims' total denial of the incarnation. The

phrase "the appearance of their words" suggests that 'Ammār believes that the Jacobites'

mistaken position on the incarnation does not actually lie in the way they understand the

doctrine, but rather in the way they express it. We shall explore this in more detail later. For

now, it is important to note that this reflects the way Arab Christian theologians usually put

aside their own theological disagreements in order to concentrate on addressing issues

raised by Muslims.

The section devoted to the five objections seems to have been directed primarily

toward the Muslims. In other sections of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār has acknowledged the

Muslim accusation of *taḥrīf*, and explained why he makes little appeal to the scriptures as

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[604] Ibid., 197.

supportive proof. However, in his discourse on the confirmation of the incarnation, he addresses both the Muslim and Christian communities, and says: "If you did not charge that the books [the scriptures] had been corrupted and altered, I would have brought before you three prophesies concerning this [incarnation], but I mentioned them anyway before those who trust that the books are correct."[605]

In this section then, ʿAmmār is writing to both communities. He includes scriptural references and interpretation to assure the Muslim interlocutor that the Gospel supports the Christian doctrine, as well as to strengthen the faith of the Christian communities. However, this objective does not apply to ʿAmmār's discourse on the divine unity, where he is focusing on making his defense against the Muslim community, rather than delineating a theology for Christians.

The five possible answers are of concern to Muslims, which means that ʿAmmār must formulate his defense of the Christian view of the divine unity in terms that are comprehensible to the Muslim audience. Furthermore, the fact that many of the objections to the doctrine of the divine unity and the incarnation are actually alien to the Christian understanding of the doctrine, would support the supposition that Christians were not the targeted audience.

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[605] Ibid., 76; cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 44.

It seems evident, therefore, that the Muslim theological concerns and misunderstanding of Christian doctrines have greatly influenced the nature and style of Arabic Christian theological treatises. We have seen 'Ammār's many attempts to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity following to the Muslim *kalām* argumentations common during his days.[606] Likewise, in this discussion of the divine unity, 'Ammār has totally shaped his arguments according to the needs of his Muslim audience.

We now turn our attention to 'Ammār's arguments concerning the possibility of the incarnation. This is the largest section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* and one of the most difficult topics in Christian-Muslim theological conversation.

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[606] David Thomas, "Explanation of the Incarnation," 134.

The Discourse on the Confirmation of the Incarnation

In seeking to analyze 'Ammār's arguments concerning the possibility of the incarnation,[607]

we shall lay out the Islamic objections to, and 'Ammār's four grounds for believing in, the

incarnation. We shall then examine his argument that the Christian view of God is the only

correct one, presenting as it does, a God who relates to humans in the flesh, and 'Ammār's

corresponding refutation of Islamic views of God. We shall then discuss 'Ammār's use of

biblical proof-texts, and finally reflect on the overall presentation of the incarnation within the

broader framework of his Christology, primarily as articulated in *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

Muslim Theology and the Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation

The Christian teaching concerning the incarnation of God in Christ is understood by Muslims

on the basis of their understanding of God's being.[608] Obviously, concepts of God differ

widely between Christianity and Islam. While the former teaches that God's Word became

flesh and led a human life in order to redeem humanity from the power of sin, the latter

strongly denies any physical relatedness of God to the world—especially in human form.[609] In

the Islamic view, God is far too high and exalted for such action. The divine is only

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[607] Noteworthy here is the fact that only in an interfaith context, especially between Christians and Muslims, would it be essential to defend the possibility of the incarnation, as opposed to the mode in which it took place. The latter discussion was more relevant amongst Christian denominations.

[608] Seyyed H. Nasr, "Comments on a few Theological Issues," 458; cf. Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 71.

[609] Ghassān Sālim, *Maḥāwir al-Iltiqā'*, 241-243.

manifested to humans through a mediated disclosure: God sends messengers and prophets who speak a divine word. The ultimate revelation, according to Islam, is through Muḥammad. As al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm strongly protests, merely suggesting that God relates to the world in a human form poses a major threat to the doctrine of God's transcendence and absolute oneness.[610]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of Muslim polemicists of 'Ammār's time composed treatises refuting the doctrine of incarnation and the teaching of the Trinity. Al-Qāsim's *Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā*,[611] *Ar-Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā* of al-Ṭabarī,[612] and the more sophisticated refutation of al-Warrāq,[613] were all dedicated to this cause. Muslim thinkers rejected the incarnation on three counts: according to philosophical and logical reasoning; through explication of texts in the Qur'ān;[614] and through Muslim interpretation of biblical texts.

Thus, on the first count, they raised difficulties concerning the time and mode of the incarnation and the unity of the Godhead. How could God be incarnate, they argued, since God is One? Furthermore, as al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm noted, the teaching of the Fatherhood of

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[610] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 16-17.

[611] Ibid.

[612] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd."

[613] See David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity.*

[614] See David Thomas, "Explanation of the Incarnation."

God and the Sonship of Christ cannot be substantiated at the same time.[615] On the second

count, Muslim thinkers quoted the Qur'ān to show that the doctrine of the incarnation is

completely erroneous. Texts such as *sūrah* 3:59; 4:171-172; 5:17, 72, 75, 116; and 9:30

unequivocally deny the incarnation. Muslim polemicists ardently sought to disprove the

incarnation by their interpretation of such qur'ānic texts, but, on the third count, they went

further and also interpreted some verses in the Gospel in such as way as to strengthen their

argument.[616] This was done either by directly refuting the texts or by giving alternative

interpretations of them.[617] For example, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm refers to the opening verses of

the Gospel according to Matthew to identify the physical relationship of Jesus to Joseph and

his antecedents. His point is that Christ has a human father, and a human grandfather, and

that it therefore goes against both common sense and the witness of the Gospel to attribute

divinity to him.[618] To this, 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī argues that, upon searching the Christian

scriptures, he became confident that there were twenty thousand references to Jesus as a

mere human being, while there were only approximately ten verses that seem to indicate his

divinity—and even these ten are debatable, he argues. The problem, according to him, is

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[615] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 16-17.

[616] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 317-322.

[617] See for example the *Radd* of 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, 327.

[618] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 44.

that Christians have built their doctrine on only the ten difficult verses.[619] In light of these arguments, we must examine how 'Ammār al-Baṣrī defended his Christian view of the incarnation.

Discourse on the Incarnation: Structure and Content

'Ammār structured his defense of the incarnation by first arguing at great length that it is reasonable to believe in the incarnation, given God's attributes of graciousness and justice, and the human need to know God. He then elucidates the basic "Nestorian" Christological explanation of the incarnation. Near the conclusion of this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, he assures his Muslim opponent that the agreements between Christians are much greater than their disagreements, which are basically over what he classifies as terminology.

'Ammār begins by reviewing his arguments in his discourse on the divine unity, i.e., that God's economy cannot to be fully comprehended, and that humans are incapable of understanding the God who embraces heaven and earth. He writes that God "embraces heaven and earth, and is not comprehended by the subtlety of the spiritual angels or the innermost thoughts of all humans."[620] Only God's own knowledge truly and fully

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[619] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 138.

[620] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 62.

comprehends God's economy.[621] Nevertheless, humans are not left without help in knowing

God, for God is a revealing God. Divine books convey relevant information accessible to the

limited human mind and the weakness of human knowledge.[622] Here, 'Ammār sets out the

agenda or purpose for this section:

> However, at any rate, we mention some of what His books have indicated about
> Him regarding this. Nonetheless we know that they only mentioned a few things
> that weak human beings might manage to understand. We will explain this in a
> way that should compel rational people to affirm it.[623]

His starting point is therefore clear: belief in the incarnation is based on biblical

witness. The scriptures, having been shown to be the authentic testimony of God's

revelation, speaks of the incarnation. Therefore, 'Ammār concludes, the doctrine must be

correct. Phrases such as "according to what the Torah has said,"[624] and "what God's books

have indicated,"[625] allude to the biblical approach 'Ammār used to defend the

reasonableness of the incarnation.[626] Further, we note that 'Ammār supports his argument

by reminding his readers that Christians and Muslims both agree that the grace of God was

first displayed with the free decision to create humankind. 'Ammār argues:

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[621] Ibid.

[622] Idid., 63.

[623] Ibid.

[624] Ibid., 56, 66, 69.

[625] Ibid., 69, 76.

[626] This argument is also repeated in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah.* See Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 206.

Before we explain in detail the grace of the Creator to His creatures, we must mention the nature of His grace, kindness and generosity to them that preceded this, so that what we will explain about the beginning of these, which our opponents join with us in affirming, becomes a witness in our favor against their disagreement.[627]

'Ammār believes that proving the nature of the economy of God will necessarily prove the incarnation, so, at this point in his argument he offers four justifications for his understanding of the divine economy.

The Incarnation According to the Divine Economy: the Four Reasons

Before we discuss the four arguments that confirm the divine economy, and which, according to 'Ammār, thereby demonstrate the reasonableness of the incarnation, we must mention that all four reasons are 'God-related.' They are the means of revealing 'more' of God. The first reveals God's wisdom, justice, and love; the second makes public the love of God and the joy this brings to humans; the third speaks of God's favor and justice; and the fourth affirms God's complete grace and goodness. It is obvious, then, that 'Ammār's starting point in the discourse on the incarnation is to assume divine self-revelation. Using this approach would surely guarantee less opposition. If God had chosen to be revealed to the creature this way, who could oppose it! The divine economy was simply revealed in the

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[627] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 63.

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incarnation. 'Ammār attempts, therefore, not only to prove the correctness and reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, but to actually silence his opponents by demonstrating that the incarnation is simply a divine initiative.

Such an appeal to God's initiative and freedom is also found in abū Qurrah's apology concerning the possibility of the incarnation. Abū Qurrah starts his argument by stating that God has freely chosen this method of manifestation.[628] Likewise, abū Rāʾīṭah elaborates on the same theme, arguing that the generosity, goodness and grace of God, according to the witness of the divine books, are the main reason for the incarnation. He summarizes it as follows:

> That which caused God, blessed is His name! to become incarnate and become human as much as our weak understanding is capable of grasping and based on what we are able to draw from the books of God and what they pass on to us, is found in His righteousness, His goodness, and His grace and the favor He shows to His creation in accordance with its need of these from him, and His great mercy on them, because they had fallen into destruction and death, and he wanted to resurrect them and create them anew, for every affliction had mastery over them, and every kind of sin had overcome them.[629]

However, this strategy for relating the incarnation to God's initiative of self-revelation suggests that 'Ammār's appeal, at least in this section, is not based on rational proof as much as on the proofs of Christian scriptures. He hopes that, by using a common point of

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[628] Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 180.

[629] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth*," 120.

contact, his arguments might find some acceptance by Muslims. "And we have also made it a must for the people of sound mind to know the correctness of this, and to stop rejecting it."[630]

Now let us consider the four reasons or proofs that confirm the credibility of the incarnation.

The First Reason: The Need to Know God

'Ammār's first proof demonstrating the reason for the incarnation concerns God's own self-revelation and the nature of the human knowledge of the divine. According to 'Ammār, knowing God is not innate in human beings like the knowledge or instinct of animals. Bees, for instance, naturally know how to collect nectar and make honey. The spider, too, does what is inherent in its nature in weaving a web.[631] But the human understanding of God is not instinctive in this way. Nor is it due to a lack of generosity on God's part that knowledge of God is not implanted within humankind. Rather, it is because God is concerned that, if humans were to have innate knowledge of the divine nature, they would probably cease to

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[630] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 68.

[631] Noteworthy here is the fact that the Qur'ān has two *sūrahs* named after these two insects that 'Ammār mentions, see *sūrahs* 16 and 29.

give thanks for that knowledge, taking such grace for granted.[632]

'Ammār spares no effort in pressing the question of how we know about God. He continues: God chose incarnation as a way of communicating with humans, and did so because the knowledge of things that are not perceived by the senses is not readily accessible or believable. Rather, sure knowledge is learned through the senses.[633]

The human soul is an outstanding example of something that is believed to exist, yet is not perceived by the senses. Many people of different backgrounds agree that the human soul exists; however, many of them, being unable to subject it to learning obtained by their senses, deny it. Yet people have no difficulty in accepting the reality of the human body, which they see with the eyes and feel through the senses. Recognizing this limitation in human knowing, God has chosen to reveal Godself to people in such a way that their senses can comprehend. This has been done in a gradual manner.[634] At first, therefore, God spoke to Adam, Abel, Cain, Noah, Abraham and Moses, as we know from the witness of the Torah.[635]

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[632] 'Ammār considers this a legitimate concern, and cites as an example the fact that people no longer praise the lamb for its quietness and calmness. Furthermore, if God had granted innate knowledge to all people, everyone would know God. This is obviously not the case, since the world is full of people who do not know God.

[633] Ibid., 65.

[634] The same argument is made by abū Rā'iṭah. See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth*," 116.

[635] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 64-66.

At this point in his argument, 'Ammār is making a clear appeal to his Muslim audience.

It is quite obvious that he is referring to Old Testament figures who are also mentioned by

name in the Qur'ān, and are, therefore, acceptable witnesses to Muslims. In fact, 'Ammār

modifies his list of biblical names to match the qur'ānic rendering of their names. This is

especially clear in the case of Cain and Moses. The first he renders as قايل, rather than the

biblical قايين; the second is named, موسى بن عمران, unlike the biblical موسى بن عمرام.

According to the qur'ānic text, we read that when Cain, قايل, killed his brother Abel, هابيل, he

did not know what to do with the dead body. At that moment, God sent a raven, which

started to show Cain how to bury the body of his brother.[636] Only in some early Muslim

commentaries on the Qur'ān, such as that of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, do we read of more

divine reaction towards this crime. Muqātil, for example, reports that Cain heard a voice from

heaven asking him about his brother.[637]

We note, then, that 'Ammār mixes the biblical with the qur'ānic account by slightly

changing Cain's name. He also adds a reference to God speaking to Abel, even though

neither the Bible nor the Qur'ān mentions this. Presumably, 'Ammār, in his attempt to list

common biblical and qur'ānic figures, was more concerned with names than with the

scriptural accounts of what was said concerning these patriarchs.

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[636] See *sūrah* 5:27-31.

[637] His account seems to be a verbatim quotation of the story reported in Genesis 4:9-10.

The second figure to whom 'Ammār appeals, is Moses. Moses is a leading figure in the

Qur'ān, and is mentioned in many *sūrahs* as a prophet and messenger from God.[638] 'Ammār

makes explicit reference to God speaking to the 'dumb'[639] Moses from the burning bush, as

recorded in the Qur'ān—especially in *sūrah* 7:103-137.[640] 'Ammār's modification of Moses'

father's name is also interesting. According to the Old Testament, Moses' father was

'Amrām, عمرام,[641] which the Qur'ān renders as *'Imrān*, عمران,[642] and it is this latter form that

'Ammār uses. Again, this is an attempt to connect with his Muslim audience.[643]

'Ammār moves from mentioning Moses to recounting the Old Testament story of the

Tabernacle. God, he says, had ordered the Children of Israel to build a house for worship,

where they could offer sacrifices and know the presence of God in one location. As will be

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[638] Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbīyā'*, vol. 2 (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Taḥrīr, 1990), 69-134. See also *sūrah* 2:47-71; 5:20-26; 7:103-137, 10:75-93; 17:4-7, 101-104; 20:9-97; 26:10-66; 27:7-14; 28:2-46; 40:23-46; 43:46-55; 44:17-33; 79:15-25;159-166.

[639] 'Ammār uses the word أخـرص, which literally means dumb; this is corrected by al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl who uses the word ألثـغ, 'lisper' to mean "slow of speech and tongue." This modification matches the witness of Exodus 4:10. See Cherfeh MS folio 128b.

[640] Repeatedly, we note the account of God appearing to Moses being used to support the possibility of incarnation in the writings of Arabic-speaking Christians. For example, abū Qurrah shows astonishment at the Muslim interlocutors who believe that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, while they deny the manifestation of God in the Body of Christ. See Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 185.

[641] Exodus 6:20. See Samir Khalil, "al-Ta'thīr al-Lāhūtī," 217-218.

[642] See Ghassān Sālim, *Maḥāwir al-Iltiqā'*, 127.

[643] Similar modifications can be traced throughout much of the Arabic Christian literature of the Abbasid caliphate. The well-known example is the rendering of the Holy Spirit as روح القـدس, not الروح القدس. The former is definitely qur'ānic (see *sūrah* 5:110).

shown next, this paved the way for ‘Ammār to make two more connections with Islamic

teaching, i.e., God’s attributes and the *Ka‘bah*.

‘Ammār speaks of those who “go against us in our saying,” who, when it comes to the

economy of God and the human need to see God, say that God also spoke to them in “their

book” about the divine economy, and that God spoke to them as a hearing and seeing God.

Certainly, in several places the Qur’ān speaks of God as such; thus we read the explicit

formulation, “God is hearing and seeing,” which is quoted verbatim in ‘Ammār’s discourse,

and is found ten times in the Qur’ān.[644]

‘Ammār’s utilization of such anthropomorphic attributes or descriptions of God reflects

the various ways in which the Muslim *mutakallimūn* at the time were attempting to

understand the attributes of God. ‘Ammār himself would reflect on this issue later. However,

for now, it is important to note his numerous attempts to establish common ground with his

Muslim audience. For instance, he refers to God forgetting, which seems to indicate an

acquaintance with *sūrah* 9:76, where it clearly says, “They have forgotten God; so he hath

forgotten them.” But, argues ‘Ammār, God does not forget. Forgetting is attributed to God in

order that humans, who do forget, may be able to understand God.

However, ‘Ammār is necessarily selective in the qur’ānic ideas that he adopts.

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[644] *Sūrah* 4:58,134; 17:1; 22:61,75; 31:28; 40:20,56; 42:11; 58:1. Rushdī Zayn, *al-Mu‘jam al-Mufahras li-Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir, 1996), 107-108.

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Certainly, there are other references in the Qur'ān that negate the idea of God forgetting, as in *sūrah* 19:64.[645] But of course, if 'Ammār had used such verses, his argument would not have stood. Further, he refers to God as a surety for people,[646] as someone who is angered,[647] and someone who is contented.[648] All of these attributes, 'Ammār argues, belong only to the creature, but God has described Godself in such a manner in order to identify with human actions and feeling. Implementing such anthropopathic elements in speaking of God would seem to indicate God's awareness of the human need to see the divine.

Yet even while he utilizes Islamic theology, 'Ammār continues to take a polemical stance. He explicitly plays on words to deny the Muslim belief that God spoke to them from the *Ka'bah*, or that God ever spoke directly to Muḥammad. 'Ammār's choice of words makes it obvious that he rejects such assertions. He dismisses any revelation in Islam;[649] using an Arabic conditional phrase containing the particle لو, followed by a past tense, indicates the negation of a past action—if he had…[which he did not].[650] Thus 'Ammār is arguing that had God spoken to them or to their prophet, God's knowledge would have been confirmed to

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[645] "[The angels say:] 'We descend not but by command of thy Lord: to Him belongeth what is before us and what is behind us, and what is between: and thy Lord never doth forget.'"

[646] *Sūrah* 16:91 says, "Fulfill the Covenant of God when ye have entered into it, and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made God your surety; for God knoweth all that ye do."

[647] *Sūrah* 16:106; 47:28; 48:6; 58:14.

[648] *Sūrah* 5:119; 48:18; 9:100.

[649] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 166-169.

[650] See Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 3014.

them, but the particle لو indicates that God did not speak either to them or to their prophet and that this is why they have pursued erroneous ways in their search for God. As we shall see, this accusation is more fully developed in 'Ammār's discussion of the second proof affirming the reasonableness of the incarnation.

Near the end of this section, 'Ammār more clearly reveals his agenda. He expects Muslims to accept the possibility of the incarnation on the basis of both logic and the testimony of the books of God. The incarnation has been verified, and in fact, it took place, according to the Christian doctrine; now the opponents must accept it and believe in it.[651] 'Ammār puts it thus:

> Yet, they ask us to confirm this to them from His books and from what indicates to rational people that he had really done it, without them denying that he had done it, but instead by confessing that His favor is in it. This is confirmed to them, and they ought to accept it and believe in it.[652]

The Second Reason: The Need to See God

'Ammār's second argument for the credibility of the incarnation concerns peoples' insatiable need to see God. This proof also relates to God's love and the joy he brings to humans. 'Ammār speaks of the various ways in which humans demonstrate their need to see God. In their great desire to know things as they really are, some go to great lengths, counting the

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[651] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 67.

[652] Ibid.

stars and trying to figure out what they are; or they explore alchemy, trying to transmute metals and seeking to understand the elements of being. Other people use divination, foretelling future events or practicing augury[653] or incantation. Yet others hurry to listen to a new prophet and hear a prophetic word. All this, he argues, shows that, if humans are left without revelation, they will ultimately reach incorrect conclusions.

These attempts are all indicative of the human desire for knowledge. Yet, the highest and the most worthy knowledge of all to be sought is knowledge of God, the Creator, the most generous one. To substantiate this point, 'Ammār appeals again to the Old Testament, where Moses expressed his desire to see God. 'Ammār surely has both Exodus 18:23, and *sūrah* 7:143 in mind. The biblical account speaks of God's majesty being shown to Moses, whereas the Qur'ān uses this same story to teach an opposite lesson. It describes Moses' desire to see God, followed by Moses' repentance when he realizes that God is far too glorious to be seen.[654]

To this, however, 'Ammār adds another attempt to dialogue with Muslims. He speaks

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[653] The Arabic word used here is زجر الطير. This refers to an ancient practice by which people attempted to divine the future or other information through the study of the flight of birds. This word traditionally used is العيافة. See ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ed. 'abd Allāh 'Alī Kabīr, et al, vol. 4 (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma'ārif, [1984-1986]), 1813.

[654] Al-Ṣafī adds here the text of the Gospel according to Matthew 13:17, in which Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." He uses this verse to further support 'Ammār's argument that many people have wished to see God in the past. See Cherfeh MS folio 125b.

of their belief that they will see God on the Day of Resurrection. Once again, he directly

refers to a text of the Qur'ān, *sūrah* 75:22-23, which says the believers will look at the face of

God, i.e., at the beatific vision. In this, 'Ammār demonstrates his knowledge of Islamic

doctrine. However, it is interesting to note that he does not say that "all Muslims" believe that

they will see the face of God, but refers rather to "many of our opponents"—a clear reference

to the variety of Islamic interpretations and understandings of the abovementioned text.[655]

The *Shī'ah*, for example, deny a literal beatific vision, whereas the Mu'tazilī's interpretation of

the first text insisted that it had an allegorical/symbolic meaning, which, according to them,

was that believers will be waiting to receive God's reward. These interpreters even doubted

the literal meaning of the *ḥadith* attributed to Muḥammad in which he affirms that he saw

God.[656] For example, abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf argued that God can only be seen by the

heart.[657] The adherents of the *ḥadīth* and *sunnah*, on the other hand, have always

maintained that on the Day of Resurrection God will be seen just as "humans can see the

crescent moon."[658] Muslims have used the Qur'ān to support both interpretations, some

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[655] "Some faces that Day will beam [in brightness and beauty] looking towards their Lord." Cf. *sūrah* 18:110; 92:18-20.

[656] D. Gimaret, "Ru'yat Allāh," *EI²*.

[657] Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 218.

[658] Ibid., 321.

appealing to the text of *sūrah* 75:22-23, while others appeal to *sūrah* 6:103.[659]

Our concern here, however, is not with how early Muslim theologians differed on the issue of the beatific vision; rather, we are noting that 'Ammār's reference to 'many' rather than 'all' argues strongly for his acquaintance with this controversial and detailed issue, which caused a split among Muslims. This is also a further example of how 'Ammār used the intellectual issues of his day to his own advantage, just as he did in his arguments concerning the Trinity, and in his reference to the attributes of God.

Second, 'Ammār argues that, since God is not perceived by the senses, people have sought out idols to worship as gods and have even given the name of God to them. Worship of idols that can be touched and seen seems to have met the human need for the tangible. But 'Ammār is convinced that a generous and loving God would reveal Godself to people in order to meet their need. As Griffith states, "[T]he generous God would not be niggardly and withhold from His creatures their security. He would appear to them in a body that is evident to the senses."[660] And the flesh the creator would indwell could be perceived by the senses. This manifestation, 'Ammār assures his reader, does not diminish or belittle God in any way. Rather, it assures humans of God's favor and generosity, while elevating them to a higher

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[659] "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things."

[660] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 176.

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place, to the benefit of all. The truest honor humans can ever be given is that God has manifested Godself in a body like their own.

The Third Reason: The Need to Experience God's Justice

The third argument put forward to support the reasonableness of the incarnation likewise pertains to God's nature. The incarnation, 'Ammār declares, is where God actually displays divine justice. Here, 'Ammār appeals to the human experience of justice, according to which it is necessary that the person being judged must see the judge. People of sound mind would consider it a great injustice if the judge were not known to the subject of his judgment. Likewise, it is also unjust in the eyes of God to judge humans without having first been revealed or manifested to them. This criterion of justice can only be achieved when God is manifested by being incarnate. However, since manifestation of God's essence is fundamentally impossible, God has chosen to be 'veiled' in a body—a tangible, visible body. This enables both kinds of people, i.e., those waiting for their reward from God, and those who will receive judgment, to see the veiled God. It is only at this moment of God's relatedness to the creature that the obedient will receive their reward from the God they can see, and likewise those who are afraid, being under God's judgment, will also see their

judge.[661] This plan, 'Ammār argues, agrees with what the scriptures have said about God. It perfectly accords with God's character as a just God who speaks to the creature in a relevant, comprehensible manner. To this line of reasoning, 'Ammār adds that only the human essence could be the essence on earth in which God would chose to be veiled. Of all that is seen, the human essence is honorable and most valued; it is the most worthy for God to use as a veil of manifestation. The argument is thus: "The worthiest visible thing, and the noblest, and the most honorable according to Him [God] and the worthiest thing for His veiling, is the essence of man."[662]

The Fourth Reason: The Need to Enjoy God's Dominion

'Ammār's fourth point pertains to humankind's God-given dominion over creation. God has given humanity dominion over this perishable world, and it logically follows that God would give them the ultimate form of dominion, i.e., dominion over the hereafter. Repeatedly then, we note that 'Ammār bases his argument on the belief that God will one day bring all creation to perfection. This also applies to human domination, for while dominion is only limited, God will bring human authority to full completion and grant dominion over the world to come. This divine act parallels God's generosity.

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[661] Ibid., 69.

[662] Ibid.

We note here that al-Ṣafī seems to have found this last argument unsatisfactory. Instead, he completes ʿAmmār's point with a reference to Jesus' words in the Gospel according to Matthew 28:18: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."[663] For al-Ṣafī, this was an important theological addition. As a Copt, he wanted to stress that the one in whom God is revealed to humanity was not a mere human, but was indeed the one into whose hands all powers were given, that is, he was divine-human. However, this does not seem to be what ʿAmmār wishes to emphasize. For him, it was more important to depict God's humanity. This is not to say that ʿAmmār does not believe in the divinity of Christ, but rather that he has a different focal point.

It is claimed that Nestorius taught that there were two separate persons in the incarnate Christ, one divine and the other human. This meant that the Virgin Mary did not give birth to the divine, but to man; and that the two natures of Christ—divine and human—were in harmony, but each functioned according to its own attributes. However, according to Cyril of Alexandria, who stressed the essential unity of Christ, this explanation seemed to indicate a separation in Christ's person. The Nestorius-Cyril controversy was ended at the third ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431. Nevertheless, ʿAmmār clearly adhered to the "Nestorian" tradition, which taught that Christ is perfectly human and perfectly divine without

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[663] Cherfeh MS folio 126b.

thereby affirming two Christs or two sons. In this he resembles Timothy I, without actually quoting his words.[664]

It is important to note that the four reasons are not presented at equal length: each argument is shorter than the preceding one. Of course, there is no reason why the explanations should all be of equal length. However their decreasing lengths are significant. First, it seems safe to suggest that 'Ammār considers the first reason to be the most important, given that knowing God is a crucial starting point in theology. Once this is well established, the presentation of God's appearance in the flesh would naturally become more convincing. Furthermore, it is also possible that 'Ammār attempts to use any and every possible argument to prove the possibility of the incarnation, regardless of how little there is to say on the topic. This is exactly what he does in the following section, where he re-explains the four reasons.

After presenting four proofs of the incarnation, 'Ammār proceeds to elaborate on his arguments. In so doing, he outlines the classical "Nestorian" view of incarnation. He seems convinced that his previous arguments are sophisticated enough to compel his opponents to accept the reasonableness of belief in the incarnation and, as a result, stop rejecting it. The

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[664] See Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 175. See also Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

strength of the argument does not come from logic, however. Rather, he has based it on

what the books of God have taught about God's self-revelation to humans.[665] It is evident

that 'Ammār hopes that his four reasons, along with his subsequent explanation, will be

completely convincing of the truth of the incarnation. 'Ammār's argument starts with a review

of the four reasons why God has chosen to self-reveal to the creature. This revelation, or

manifestation, was accomplished in the body that Christ took from the Virgin Mary without

any human agency through marital relations.[666] Through the body of Christ, God spoke to the

world. In this way, humans who had been led astray by the deceiving tricks of the devil are

now brought close to God and able to enjoy peaceful relations.[667] In fact, 'Ammār says, the

devil has lost power in Christ's body and thus has been subjected to humans; and

conversely, the human state of misery has been altered such that they can know God,

without need of the intermediate role played by any messenger or prophet from God.

In *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār argues that the benefit of Christ's incarnation

would not be equally applicable if God had chosen to self-reveal through an angel without a

human body. The body of Christ, having been taken from among humans, allows for the

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[665] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 175.

[666] This argument is also found in Timothy I's defense before al-Mahdī. See Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes," 127.

[667] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm refers to this same idea as something claimed by Christians. See al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 38.

benefits of the incarnation to be accredited to the rest of humankind, which would not be the case if he had taken the form of an angel, not to be identified with them.[668]

The unity between the body and the properties of the soul is fundamental to 'Ammār's argument, as it answers the difficult question of how human actions can be attributed to the incarnate God. The properties of the soul, when united to the body, become the actions of the body by virtue of 'borrowing.' Yet, these properties are of the soul's own essence. Further, such unity does not impute any weakness to the being of the soul; it does not indicate that the actions depart from it to dwell in the body. For example, the attributes of life and speech, which are essential to the being of the soul, become the attributes of the body, without the soul having to be emptied of them. So then, the name of 'man' has become inclusive of the soul with its attributes and the body. This unity, in turn, necessitates that, when an essential act of the soul, such as understanding or knowledge, is attributed to 'man,' it refers to the soul; and when an essential act of the body, such as eating or drinking, is attributed to the soul, it refers to the body. 'Ammār realizes that using the analogy of the unity of the soul with its essential properties within the body is not perfectly illustrative of the way in which God is veiled in the body of Christ. Nevertheless, this remains a good attempt at explicating the manner of the union.

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[668] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 217-218.

This "Nestorian" understanding of the distinction between the divine and human actions of Christ was already known within the Muslim community. For example, we read in al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's *Radd* a faithful summary, if not a verbatim rendering, of the same sort of teaching that 'Ammār indicates here. Al-Qāsim, speaking of what "Nestorian" theologians believe, says:

> So, we ["Nestorian" Christians] when we see him [Christ] eating and drinking, and coming and going in the world, getting tired, and complaining, laughing, and crying, we attribute this and the like to the human nature; and when we see him raising the dead, healing the sick and walking on the water, we attribute this to the divine nature.[669]

This statement also corresponds to what Timothy I states before al-Mahdī: "The very same Christ is the Word born of the Father, and a man born of Mary. From the fact that he is Word-God, he is born of the Father before the times, as light from the sun and word from the soul; and from the fact that he is man he is born of the Virgin Mary, in time; from the Father he is, therefore, born eternally, and from the Mother he is born in time, without a Father, without any marital contact, and without any break in the seals of the virginity of his Mother."[670] However, these human actions were used in Muslim rebuttals of the divinity of Christ. Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabari, for example, attempts in his *Radd* to refute the divinity of Christ and its relation to the incarnation by referring to the physical developments of the

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[669]Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 37.

[670] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 17-18.

body of Christ. The body, he indicates, has grown from one state to the other. It has blood

and flesh, and that which is made of blood and flesh cannot be divine.[671]

'Ammār's Counterattack on the Muslim Denial of the Incarnation

At this point, 'Ammār wonders whether there is any greater favor, grace or goodness than

that which is found in the manifestation of God in flesh. This manifestation, 'Ammār reminds

his audience, is the culmination of God's goodness, which was graciously shown in the

creation of humankind. God has brought divine goodness to completion by appearing in the

body of Christ. The first man, Adam, had fallen into sin and was thus wandering far from

God, having been subjected to death. However, the grace of God, which has been shown in

its fullness in Christ, brought salvation from such death. God in Christ has not only given

humans salvation, but has granted them dominion over this perishable life and the life to

come. 'Ammār then compares the Christian view of God's goodness to creation with that of

Islam, which, according to his analysis, denies any such completion of God's favor and

grace. The Christian view of the incarnation, he maintains, brings the ultimate degree of

honor, dominion and kingship to humans. Conversely, its denial represents an ignorant

refusal of honor.

'Ammār uses the illustration of a person being chosen from a particular nation to be

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[671] I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 124-126, 131.

crowned as king. In this case, his honor and dominion is shared by all, since he is their

representative. Likewise, the honor and dignity of Christ is bestowed on all humans since he

is from our own race.[672] This last point refers to the argument of Adamic representation that

'Ammār had established earlier.

'Ammār continues to reflect on the anthropological implications of the incarnation. For

example, he dwells on the benefits of the incarnation, since God, in Christ's body, lifted the

bodies of humans to the state of sonship. Those who had been enslaved were given a noble

status "by the condescension of the Son who is one of them in order to lift them up to share

in God's kingdom."[673] As a result, they are filled with an indescribable joy. Even if all people

joined with heaven and earth in their outpouring of gratitude for God's goodness, they would

be unable to offer appropriate thanks.[674]

In *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār further reflects on the communal benefits

bestowed on humanity through the incarnation of Christ. He tells the parable of a king who

wanted to bestow perfect goodness and favor on his subjects. The king decided to choose

one person from among them on whom he would bestow grace, dominion and authority.

This noble status was then given to the rest of the king's subjects. Likewise, 'Ammār argues,

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[672] Ibid., 74.

[673] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 82.

[674] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 75.

all of creation has been greatly honored by the incarnation of God in Christ.[675]

This style of parable seems to have been common within Arabic Christian theology. According to Cheikho, it was used in a treatise dated 877 AD concerning the incarnation. In this parable, the author describes a certain king who wanted to show his generosity to his subjects, so he decided to choose a bride for his son from among his subjects. The king's intention was to pour out his generosity on the rest of the bride's family, giving them authority, nobility and dignity. Here also, the author argues that this is the way the Creator has been identified with humanity, through Christ who took the form of man.[676]

"Three" Proof-Texts

According to 'Ammār, God's books indicate that God always intended to become incarnate. The problem is that his opponent has quit studying the books, and even worse, considers them to have been corrupted, and therefore unworthy of trust. This line of thinking perfectly reflects the words of the Muslim al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, who clearly dismissed any support

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[675] Ibid., 216.

[676] The text reads: "God the Word became incarnate, because God wanted to show us His generosity. In this, He resembles a king who found a bride for his son in the house of one of his subjects and he intended to join those in the house to himself to make them closer to him in order to mingle with them and call them his family, as well as to give them an inheritance. So the Creator showed generosity in the incarnation of the Word by mingling with us and befriending us…And the Word ascended into heaven and he will come again to join us to himself and give us his goodness as an inheritance and make us partake in his riches." Louis Cheikho, *Vingt traités théologiques*, 110-111.

drawn from the Christian scriptures, as it had been corrupted. He declares that Christians

have misinterpreted their scriptures in order to find biblical support for their false doctrine.[677]

However, after disputing the accusation of *taḥrīf*, ‘Ammār reflects on ‘three’ prophecies from

the Old Testament which, according to his interpretation, foretold God's manifestation in the

body of Christ.[678] Though the prophecies are three in number, they are also, as he indicates,

from five different quotations. ‘Ammār seems to have numbered them three because they

are drawn from three Old Testament sources: the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Psalms, and

the Book of Daniel. At this point, ‘Ammār's words seem to be directed to a Christian

audience, as he hopes to provide some kind of biblical support for the average Christian

who, as ‘Ammār puts it, "trusts that the books are correct."[679]

‘Ammār first quotes from Isaiah 7:14,[680] and 9:6.[681] These two texts have traditionally

been used by Christians to support the Virgin birth of Christ.[682] However, at this point in *Kitāb*

al-Burhān, ‘Ammār does not use these verses in connection with Christ's birth; rather, he

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[677] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 59.

[678] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 54.

[679] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 67.

[680] "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

[681] "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'"

[682] See Steven A. McKinion and Thomas C. Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

presents them as indications that God was manifested in a body like that of humans, i.e., the flesh of Christ. Hence he concludes, "Our God has become flesh like ours."[683] Timothy I also uses Isaiah 7:14 to support the doctrine of the incarnation.[684] Further, this quotation from Isaiah seems to have been known by the Muslim polemicists of 'Ammār's time. Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, for example, questions it and argues that the "Nestorian" view of the means of incarnation actually nullifies the words of Isaiah, because it places the timing of divine unity at the time of Jesus' birth, rather than at conception.[685]

The second quotation comes from the Book of Psalms 8:4-6.[686] This verse states that the Son of Man has been placed lower than the angels, which would actually seem to counter 'Ammār's own argument in this section of the treatise. This point was raised by 'Alī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, who used these words of David to refute the Christian teaching of the incarnation. He argues that, while David is speaking to God in the text of the Psalm, he also prophesies about the coming of the Messiah, but does so without attributing divinity to Christ.[687]

But 'Ammār swiftly rebuts this charge, inserting an important modification in his

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[683] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 67.

[684] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity,* 82.

[685] David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, 110.

[686] "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him a little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under His feet."

[687] See I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 146.

interpretation of David's words. He states that the lowering only concerns Christ's death, a death on the cross. Conversely, 'Ammār draws further support for his position by showing that these verses also point to the exaltation of Christ over all things. He then appeals to Psalm 107:20,[688] where he finds clear corroboration of the Christian view that God's Word has been sent to heal humans of their sin.

The last proof-text used by 'Ammār is from Daniel 7:13-14,[689] which is commonly interpreted by Christians as referring to God the Father's exaltation of Christ. Although 'Ammār lists this verse in support of the doctrine of Christ's representative role and the dominion he will enjoy and share with all humanity, these verses are interpreted and explained here solely in support of the doctrine of incarnation. These particular verses were frequently employed by Arabic-speaking theologians of the time to support the doctrine of the incarnation. Since they come from the Old Testament, it is possible that they were originally used in Christian apologetics against the Jews, and were only later used in Arabic Christian apologetics against Islam.[690]

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[688] "He sent forth His word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction."

[689] "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

[690] It is evident that Timothy I, abū Rāʾiṭah, and abū Qurrah all used these sets of verses to support the incarnation. See Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity,* 87; Sandra

Other Views of God, non-Islamic

According to ʿAmmār, if one denies the Christian view that God's self-manifestation offers the best understanding of God's being and attributes, one is left with merely confusing, incomplete and contradictory views about God's being. According to ʿAmmār, the first to err in their understanding of God were those who totally denied God's existence. This may well have been a reference to the *Zanādiqah*, whom he has previously mentioned.[691] He also refers to Manichaeans and their dualistic view that the world consists of the two fundamental entities of good and evil.[692] Further, in a clear reference to the Greek philosophy of Aristotle,[693] he mentions those who speak of God as matter, ὕλη.[694] Lastly, he mentions the

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Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth*," 130; Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 99-100. In *Kitāb al-Masāʾl wal-Ajwibah*, ʿAmmār gives an exhaustive list of biblical proof texts, including texts from the Old and New Testaments. Having referred to the words of David and Isaiah in the Old Testament, ʿAmmār then indicates that the testimony of the New Testament is remarkably exhaustive. He quotes the "Four Pillars," i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His selection of texts contains paradoxical stories of human and divine action in the person of Christ, such as Jesus' weeping at Lazarus' tomb and his powerful words that gave life to Lazarus. According to ʿAmmār, these actions show the extent of separation between the divine and the human in the person of the Messiah: that is to say, Christ had the attributes of both man and God, as he was subjected to human emotions, but at the same time displayed divine acts such as giving life to the dead. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 205-211.

[691] Ibid., 23.

[692] Al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿabd al-Karīm, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, 181-190.

[693] Ibid., 317-318.

[694] Lit. wood or forest. The term used is هيولي. It was Arabicized from Greek by Arab Christian translators during the Abbasid caliphate. See Tawfīq al-Ṭawīl and Saʿīd Zāyid, *al-Muʿjam al-Falsafī* (al-Qāhirah: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah l-Shuʾūn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīriyyah, 1983), 208.

idol-worshippers, who, not knowing God, have attached God's name to idols and worshipped

them. All these non-Abrahamic views of God, according to 'Ammār, have erred.

Unlike his contemporary, Theodore abū Qurrah, in his *Treatise on the True Religion*,

'Ammār does not address the Jewish view of God when considering the Abrahamic religions,

but focuses on the more challenging view(s) presented by Muslims. Abū Qurrah was seeking

to compare the religions of his time, and 'Ammār had likewise previously spoken about the

multiplicity of religions. However, in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān,* 'Ammār is not trying so

much to discern the true religion as to prove that the Christian view of God is the most

viable.

Other Views of God, Islamic

'Ammār shows great familiarity with the different views of God within Islamic theology. He

lists the various Islamic sects of his time, saying:

> Some of them from a religious community in our time, in order to confirm their
> Creator to themselves, represent Him among themselves as limited, seated on
> a throne, ascending from one heaven to another, and descending from one
> heaven to another. Some of them make Him limited to a known space, and
> known forms, and they determine that He is not more than these. Some of
> them, while wanting to honor Him, make Him a visible light that enlightens them
> from the light of the resurrection, having put into consideration the day of
> reckoning the awards of paradise and hell. Some of them, in order to know and
> understand Him, say that He has two hands like their hands, and two feet like
> their feet. Some of them are embarrassed by this, and say that He is not seen

or comprehended.[695]

In the last part of the text quoted above, it is clear that 'Ammār is referring to the

Muslim anthropomorphists, who, according to al-Shahrastānī, once said, "We believe in

whatever is reported in the book and *sunnah*, and we do not try to interpret it, knowing for

certain that God does not resemble any created things, and that all the images we form of

him are created by him and formed by him."[696] 'Ammār also seems to be making explicit

reference to the *Jawāribiyyah*, followers of Dāwūd al-Jawāribī, who once taught that God has

flesh and blood and even members and limbs such as hands and feet.[697] Muqātil ibn

Sulaymān also believed this.[698] 'Ammār's words also contain references to the *Rāfiḍah* who

were mainly *Shī'ite* Muslims. The *Hishāmites* were a sect of the *Rāfiḍah* who followed

Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. They believed that God has a specific length and width, and

ultimately a certain limit. They also taught that God is a shining light who shines like a round

pearl, and that the throne is where God is located.[699] Another group of *Rāfiḍah* maintained

that God looks like humans,[700] while the *Rāfiḍah* sect of Hishām ibn Sālim al-Jawālīqī denied

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[695] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 77.

[696] Al-Shahrastānī, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, 181-76; cf. al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn 'abd al-Karīm, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wal-Niḥal* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 88.

[697] Ibid., 258.

[698] Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt,* 258-259.

[699] Ibid.,102.

[700] Ibid.,105.

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that God has flesh and blood. According to their understanding, God is a bright light, and has

a hands, feet, ears, eyes, nose and mouth.[701] According to abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, this last sect

went as far as to say that God has black hair.[702] Finally, ʿAmmār's reference to those who do

not attribute a body to God, and thereby limit God's existence to a given place, seems to fit

the Muʿtazilī description of God. Al-Ashʿarī, for example, reports that the general belief of the

Muʿtazilah was that God has no body, and that no form or image can represent God.[703]

ʿAmmār uses these conflicting Islamic views to support his defense of the Christian

view of God. His reference to God's throne stands as the best example of this. Although he

does not refer directly to the text of the Qurʾān,[704] he speaks of those who portray God as

seated on a throne. Muslims at that time were divided in their understanding of this. Some

interpreted it literally, while others (primarily the Muʿtazilīs) insisted on a purely metaphorical

interpretation. They understood it to mean that God is in control.[705]

This reference to God enthroned seems to have been a common theme among Arab

Christian polemicists. For instance, it is clearly found in the apology of abū Qurrah

concerning those who deny the possibility of the incarnation. He makes it clear that divine

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[701] Ibid., 259.

[702] Ibid.,105.

[703] Ibid., 87-216, 226.

[704] See *sūrah* 10:3, 13:2, and 20:5.

[705] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 261.

forgiveness is grounded only in the redeeming work of Christ through his suffering on the cross. Thereafter, he refers to the Muslim belief that God is seated on the throne, and uses this to rebut their accusation that the teaching of the incarnation imputes limitations to God. He argues: "God made for Himself a throne on which to sit in the heavens from the time that He first created [them]."[706] Abū Qurrah argues that speaking of God as seated on a throne in no way limits God to this location. "None of them [the interlocutors] can say that God, having sat on the throne is not [present] everywhere in heaven."[707] In the same way, he argues, the "body [Christ's body] has become for us like the throne in the heavens."[708]

The Jacobite, abū Rā'iṭah al-Tikrītī, also utilized the same argument to advance the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. He maintains that, since Muslims believe that God is seated on the throne and yet is not limited to it, they should also understand that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation does not impute any limitation to God. According to abū Rā'iṭah, God is everywhere and is not limited to one place.[709]

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[706] David Thomas, "Explanation of the Incarnation," 134; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 181.

[707] Ibid., 182.

[708] Ibid. Ultimately, abū Qurrah eloquently says: "Why do the opponents then deny the dwelling of God in the body taken from the pure Virgin Mary, while they say that God is seated on the throne in heaven?" Ibid., 199.

[709] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 258.

The 'Correct' View of God: the Christian View

In presenting the 'correct' view of God, 'Ammār answers the accusation that Christians themselves disagree concerning the incarnation. Christians agree, he says, that God the Creator is one, is known by three *hypostases*, and that God is everywhere, not limited or comprehended.[710] The Christians' "disagreement concerns the body which they see, to the point that some of them say one *hypostasis*, and others say two *hypostases*, whereas their agreement is that the one in whom the Creator manifested had a body and a soul."[711]

It is interesting to note al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl's scribal addition to 'Ammār's text. As a Copt, al-Ṣafī had a different interpretation of the hypostatic union from that of the "Nestorian" 'Ammār. However, he seems to totally agree that all differences between Christians lie in mere expression. Christians, he states, affirm God's oneness and triune nature. God is "One God; He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[712] Furthermore, al-Ṣafī identifies the Christian groups mentioned in 'Ammār's text by their Christological view. Those that teach that Christ is "two natures and two hypostases" would be the "Nestorians," while those who believe Christ is "two natures and one substance" would be the Melkites. Yet, because

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[710] See Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 194.

[711] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 79. We note that this is not the case in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*, where 'Ammār clearly refutes the Jacobite and Melkite understanding of the incarnation. See Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 197-200.

[712] Cherfeh MS folio 130a.

'Ammār's original text made no reference to the Monophysite understanding of the incarnation, al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl adds a short marginal note concerning the Jacobite understanding of the incarnation. He writes, "And the Jacobites say that 'He is one substance and one *hypostasis* and they unite on account of His goodness in substance, *hypostases*, and will.'"[713]

The fact that 'Ammār minimizes the differences between the "Nestorian" communities and other Christian views is significant, because it seems to contradict his polemical language against other Christians in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwibah*. There, he directly calls the Jacobites and the Melkites "people of ignorance."[714] Such language must be understood within its historical context, for the doctrine of the incarnation was extremely divisive between the Christian communities long before the rise of Islam.[715] Many Christian apologists wrote treatises against other Christians, particularly concerning their understanding of the mode of the union. We are reminded of abū Qurrah's "*Confession of Faith*," where he lays out the 'correct' view of the incarnation in opposition to the 'erroneous' views of the Jacobites, the

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[713] The Cherfeh MS folio 130a reads:

"فقالتِ النّسطوريّةُ: إنّه جوهران أَقنُومان وإنّهما اتّحَدَا بالمشيّةِ وفي البنوّةِ والمسيحيّةِ لا في الجوهرِ ولا بـالقنومِ. وقالتِ الملكيّةُ: إنّه جوهران قنومٌ واحدٌ وإنّهما اتّحدا يالقنوم لا بالجوهرِ ولا في المشيّةِ. (وقالت الْيَعْقُوبيّةُ: إنّه جوهرٌ واحدٌ، أُقنومٌ واحدٌ وإنّهم اتّحدا بجودهِ بالجوهرِ والقُنُومِ والمشيّةِ). فَاخْتَلَفُوا يسبَبِ الاتِّحَادِ لاَ في وُجُودِ الْخَالِقِ."

[714] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 200.

[715] Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation," 56; cf. Sidney Griffith, "'Melkites,' 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria," *Syrian Christians under Islam: the First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 9-55; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore abū Qurrah*, 172ff.

"Nestorians," the Eutychians, Dioscorus of Alexandria, the Maronites, and finally Severus, whom he calls "the ass."[716] It seems, however, that the moderate attitude 'Ammār takes in this section is similar to that of Timothy I, who in discussing the variant Christological formulae says, "Some confess one person of natural filiation in two natures and *hypostases*. Others confess one *hypostasis* either in two natures or out of two natures. Still others confess one person, one *hypostasis* and one nature."[717]

In addition, this ecumenical attitude must be seen within the context of the Muslim objections concerning the incarnation. Arabic-speaking Christian polemicists considered Islam a much bigger challenge to the fundamentals of their faith than the positions of other Christians. 'Alī ibn Dāwūd al-Arfādī (11th or 12th century), for instance, eloquently argues that there is no fundamental difference between Christians, since they all base their doctrines on the Gospel, Saint Paul and the Book of Acts. He says:

> I have not seen amongst them any doctrine which contradicts the other… Since the Gospel is the foundation of the religion, and Paul is its proof, and the Book of Acts is its witness… their agreement, their consensus and their faith are correct as far as the foundation of the religion, its proof, and its witness are concerned.[718]

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[716] Ignace Dick "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra," *Le Muséon*, 72 (1959), 59; cf. Constantin Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, 104-139; cf. Louis Cheikho, et al. *Vingt traités théologiques*, 98, 102; and Sidney Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore abū Qurrah*, 172ff.

[717] Thomas Hurst, "The Syriac Letters," 182.

[718] See Samir Khalil, "Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Masīḥī al-Qadīm," *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology,* vol. 2 (February 1982), 157; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 140-142.

The Discourse on the Incarnation: An Evaluation

In arguing for the possibility of the incarnation, 'Ammār's style is characterized by several features. First, we note the repetition of certain arguments and the use of particular expressions. For example, 'Ammār mentions three times that God created the world out of divine generosity, not out of any need.[719] Three times he speaks of the fact that it is worthy of God to fulfill divine generosity.[720] Twice he addresses his Muslim opponent and requires him to trust the Christian views on the incarnation.[721] Three times he describes the miracles performed at the hands of Christ's disciples as "great miracles."[722] Ten times he speaks of God being manifested to Moses in the bush.[723] 'Ammār makes four references to the concept that God is not comprehended by sight and that eyes cannot see God's essence.[724] Furthermore, he repeats not only formulae, but the arguments themselves.

This repetition is significant, for it suggests that 'Ammār is not so much concerned with a specific style of writing as with a desire to use whatever is at his disposal—argument,

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"ولا رأيتُ فيهم إيمانًا يَنْقُضُ إيمانَ صاحبِه، ولا اعتقادًا يَفْسَخُ اعتقادَ الآخر....فلمّا كان الإنجيلُ أساسَ الدين، وبولُس برهانًا عليه، والإبْرَكْسِيسُ شاهدًا له؛ ولمْ أجد بينهم في ذلك فرقًا ولا خلفًا؛ كان اتّفاقُهُم واجتماعُهُم وإيمانُهُم قد صَحّ في أساس الدين، وبرهانِهِ، والشاهدِ له."

[719] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 64, 69, 70.

[720] Ibid., 67, 67, 67.

[721] Ibid., 67, 68.

[722] Ibid., 72, 73, 73.

[723] Ibid., 66, 66, 66, 67, 68, 70, 70, 74, 75, 75.

[724] Ibid., 65, 68, 70, 70. The first part of this particular reference is qur'ānic in nature. It reflects the text of *sūrah* 6:103, which indicates that "Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision."

formulae, logic and phrases—in order to show the reasonableness of the doctrine of the

incarnation. This is not to say that his writing style is poor or awkward. In fact, his treatise is

very eloquent, and his defense of the incarnation testifies to the variety of ways by which

Arab Christians argued for the credibility of Christianity. The repetition may also indicate that

'Ammār has been drawn into a discussion that was not of his choice.

Confirming the incarnation is not a matter for debate in Christianity. Notwithstanding

the differing interpretations, up to this point in history no Christian had denied the incarnation

of God in Christ. But 'Ammār finds himself on the defensive, seeking to provide a rationale

for a doctrine that is basically assumed among all Christians, and he may well have hoped

that repeating his arguments would provide a forceful and convincing case. The repetitions

present 'Ammār as a theologian who seeks to convey his point in a variety of ways. He has

indeed made all possible efforts to vindicate the doctrine of the incarnation, insisting that it

was God's own choice and initiative to disclose Godself to humanity.

Another feature of this discourse is his heavy dependence on scriptural proofs. This

greatly reduces 'Ammār's reliance on logic and rational argument. Indeed, there are only two

places where we note explicit logical analogies being used. First, 'Ammār speaks of mankind

being fed with milk as a child, which is likely a reference to the text in Hebrews 5:12-14. The

second logical argument is found in his example of a slave who has been entrusted with

many responsibilities and advantages. A master who entrusts a slave with the management

of the affairs of his house can be compared to God, who gives dominion to humankind

through the body in which God was veiled.[725]

However, as we have seen earlier, the Qur'ān asserts that the Christian scriptures

have been tampered with, thereby denying its credibility and authority and it would therefore

seem most improbable that 'Ammār's interlocutor would be convinced of the possibility of the

incarnation on the basis of biblical testimony. One in fact wonders why 'Ammār makes such

a strong appeal to scriptures when he certainly knows that the interlocutor dismisses it. Has

'Ammār's clear confidence in his argument against *taḥrīf* caused him to think that the

interlocutor will accept the teachings based on the witness of the scriptures? Or is he listing

the biblical support not to convince the Muslim interlocutor, but rather to provide scriptural

proofs for his fellow Christians to counter any doubts they might face when their belief in the

incarnation is challenged? Or, as Mark Beaumont argues, was it indeed difficult for

Christians of 'Ammār's time to "ignore the source of their theology in defending the

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[725] Repeatedly, we notice al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl adding more biblical support to reinforce 'Ammār's point. Here for instance, he makes reference to the text of the Gospel according to Luke when Jesus says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Al-Ṣafī maintains that, if a master can give the good gift of dominion to his slave over a house or certain properties, how much more will God give humans ultimate dominion over the lasting world.

incarnation?"[726] Presumably, 'Ammār finds his best proof in the book of God, which has been confirmed by miracles. And thus the scriptures stand as the ultimate proof and the solid basis for the incarnation.

However, we are inclined to conclude that such an appeal to scriptural texts and analogies may screen 'Ammār's inability to defend the doctrine of the incarnation in a logical manner. By contrast, we saw that he utilized logical reasoning vigorously in his rebuttal of the accusation of *taḥrīf*. Is the latter a demonstration of confidence in his argument, while the former betrays a lack of such confidence? In all likelihood, this is not the case, for concerning such mysteries as the Trinity or the incarnation, how can God, the Infinite, be explained in human language? Defending the person of the Godhead in human terms is indeed a difficult task, let alone seeking to make such a defence to Muslims, who consider the absolute transcendence and the oneness of God to be non-negotiable truths. To escape this dilemma, 'Ammār would have found an appeal to the witness of the scriptures to be his best line of argument. When forced to provide a logical defence, he readily admits that divine things cannot be completely comprehended. As he argues, everyone knows that God created the world, without knowing how it was created; thus the incarnation should be

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[726] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 80.

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accepted on account of scriptural evidence, without too much investigation into the 'how.'[727]

In the whole of his discussion of the incarnation, 'Ammār never provides a complete

definition of the doctrine.[728] The reader is only given a defense of it. This would seem to

indicate that 'Ammār is not attempting to compose a theological treatise on the incarnation,

but rather to defend its truth. According to Islam, God's transcendence and distinctiveness

are jeopardized if the incarnation is upheld.[729] Because of this, 'Ammār's major concern is

not to 'correct' the Muslim understanding of the incarnation, but rather to convince his

Muslim audience that a belief in God's generosity is the foundation of this Christian teaching.

Definition is offered concerning things unknown, while a defense is offered regarding

doctrines that are known but rejected. We have traced this approach in his previous

discourse on the divine unity. He does not provide a definition of the unity, but rather

defends it as legitimate, and, in so doing, refutes five Muslim objections.

It must also be noted that 'Ammār does not answer Islam's main objection, i.e., the

allegation that the incarnation would limit God's being. While he shows awareness of this

objection,[730] he does not attempt to refute it in any comprehensive manner. Instead, he

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[727] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 214.

[728] See Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 174.

[729] Mark Beaumont, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation," 57; cf. David Thomas, "Explanation of the Incarnation," 134.

[730] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 56.

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simply repeats such statements as "God is not limited,"[731] or "God is not comprehended,"[732]

and fails to show how the incarnation does not contradict the incomprehensibility of God, or

how the incarnation of the Word of God does not threaten the transcendence of God.

'Ammār does not seem to be able to produce adequate refutations of the Islamic objections,

though he clearly speaks of his arguments as though they were convincing enough to

silence his opponent.[733] Unlike his creative and forceful arguments against the allegation of

taḥrīf, it seems that 'Ammār's confidence in his defense of the incarnation may in fact hide a

kind of helplessness!

Furthermore, according to Muslim reasoning, Ammār's argument is actually self-

contradictory. Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, for example, argues that the Christian belief in the

incarnation not only threatens the transcendence of Almighty God, but also limits God's own

identity by making the Creator identical to the creature, and the Lord who made all things

equal to the things He made.[734] In a word, God's uniqueness is not upheld if the doctrine of

the incarnation is believed. This is not viewed as a theological difficulty within Christianity,

where it is held that the divine power manifested in creation and history is indeed disclosed

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[731] Ibid., 72.

[732] Ibid., 75.

[733] Ibid., 67.

[734] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, *Ar-Radd*, 27-28.

to humans in the person of Christ.[735] God's Word took on human flesh: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God….and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."[736] Or as Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī indicated, Christianity teaches that God, the Most Generous, has given humanity Godself in the incarnation.[737]

We also note that challenges raised by Muslim thinkers placed a new pressure on ʿAmmār, which shaped his answers and the structure of his presentation and forced him to be selective in his arguments. ʿAmmār himself says that there are other reasons that confirm the possibility of the incarnation, but he does not specify what they are.[738] Rather, the four reasons he chose to include in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān* seek to answer the concerns of his interlocutor. We are left to wonder about the other reasons and arguments he alludes to. Were they less relevant to Muslim theology? Or perhaps ʿAmmār may have thought that what he wrote concerning the incarnation was long enough.

The specific pressures of his Muslim audience shifted the focus of ʿAmmār's explanation. In Christian theology, the incarnation is related to the Trinity and to the Sonship

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[735] Kenneth Cragg, "Islam and Incarnation," in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 137.

[736] John 1:1, 14. Al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl actually uses this verse to further strengthen ʿAmmār's argument. He writes, "God is the Word, and the Word became flesh, and He indwelt in us, and we have seen His glory." Cherfeh MS folio 127b.

[737] Samir Khalil, "al-Turāth al-ʿArabī al-Masīḥī al-Qadīm wal-Islām," in *al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām: Marāyā Mutaqābalah*, ed. Raḍwān Sayyīd (Bayrūt: Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Masīḥiyyah al-Islāmiyyah, Jāmiʿat al-Balamand, 2002), 84-85.

[738] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 70, 79.

of Christ. However, for his Muslim interlocutor, and in the context of explaining his contrary view of God, 'Ammār relates the incarnation to the Gospel, rather than to the Trinity. He emphasizes that the message of the Gospel, which had been entrusted to the apostles, is all about the incarnation. Thus, the Gospel as outlined by 'Ammār is that God, who is one essence but known in three *hypostases*, has appeared in the flesh. While traditionally, the heart of the Christian Gospel had been presented as the salvation of humanity through the cross of Christ, this core focus shifts to an emphasis on the incarnation.[739] In the same way, 'Ammār shifts the focus from the Trinitarian Great Commission to the 'incarnation Gospel.' The pressures of his Islamic context did indeed foster new answers and insights.

All in all, however, we cannot calculate the effectiveness of 'Ammār's arguments regarding the incarnation, as we have no specific Islamic polemical texts that explicitly respond to them. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that al-'Allāf, who spared no effort in composing a refutation of 'Ammār the Christian[740] must have devoted a significant portion of his work to refuting 'Ammār's articulation of the incarnation.[741]

A doctrine that is closely related to the issue of incarnation is that of Christ's crucifixion. How can the Word of God die? Why do Christians venerate a symbol of death?

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[739] Ibid., 72, 73.

[740] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 204.

[741] David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, 38.

Does not the cross of Christ belittle him, and impute weakness to God? These questions are

samples of what 'Ammār, the Christian apologist must answer. We now turn to examine his

answers.

The Discourses on the Cross of Christ

All Arabic-speaking Christian theologians face the predicament of defending the crucifixion

of Christ in the face of Muslim denials of its historicity, as well as Muslim mockery of the

Christian practice of venerating the cross. In *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah* where 'Ammār

deals with the reasons for the incarnation of the Word of God, he dedicates fifty-one

questions and answers to the topic, eighteen of which deal directly with the divine economy

of the cross. But in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār spends little time addressing the actual

crucifixion of Christ.

Discourses: Structure and Content

Despite the small amount of attention given to this aspect of his defense, he in fact devotes

what can be classified as two sections to the subject. The first section, folios 37a-38a, is

actually part of his discourse on the confirmation of the incarnation; the second section,

folios 41b-42a, has the explicit title "Discourse on the Cross."[742] In differentiating the two

parts, Hayek has called the first, "Saying on the Crucifixion [of Christ],"[743] while keeping ibn

Kabar's title for the second, "Discourse on the Cross."[744] We, however, will treat the two

sections concerning the cross as one comprehensive text, given the close relationship

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[742] The Cherfeh MS has a title for the first part but omits the whole of the second part.

[743] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 20.

[744] Wilhelm Riedel, *Der Katalog*, 650.

between the two topics in Christian theology. The first section addresses Muslim objections

to the historicity and theology of the cross, while the second seeks to validate the Christian

practice of venerating the cross.

Here, nonetheless, a question must be raised: "Why did 'Ammār approach the issue of

the crucifixion and the cross in two separate parts? One would think that it would have been

logically appropriate to deal with these issues in one major section. After all, when dealing

with other Muslim objections 'Ammār does gather the whole subject under one heading.

However, as we shall see, 'Ammār himself explains the structure. As we saw previously in

his discourse on the union of the divine and the human in Christ, 'Ammār lists some Muslim

objections to the Christian faith. Most of these were objections to Christian doctrines that,

according to him, are misunderstood in Islam. Among them was the issue of the union of the

divine and human natures in the person of Christ, which Muslims see as a limitation of God.

Likewise, baptism and the Eucharistic belief in eating the body and blood of Christ are

rejected. Further, the Christian belief that eternal reward is spiritual, rather than physical, is

mocked. The crucifixion of Christ is also on this list, because Muslims object that it imputes

great weakness to God's character. He then promises to address all the topics that Muslims

find to be the most distasteful and despicable.[745] It is these Muslim objections, then, that

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[745] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 56.

form the fundamental structure of *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

This list of objections reveals several things. First, it shows how essential it was that Arab Christian writers present a logical justification for their belief in the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, as this was seen to pose a major challenge to the Muslim doctrine of the oneness of God. Likewise, it explains the length of the sections devoted to defending the union of the two natures in Christ, and the incarnation, in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. Second, this list shows 'Ammār's priorities in answering the Muslim accusations. The order of the topics is deliberate, reflecting the seriousness of the Islamic objections and the importance of a Christian response. In this list, 'Ammār's evaluation and explication of the cross of Christ follows his vindication of the union of the two natures in Christ. When this union is confirmed, the Muslim objection to the Christian's belief about the identity of the crucified one arises naturally. In response, 'Ammār is ready to lay out the logic of the cross, the identity of the crucified one, and the human need that it meets.

One other possible reason for splitting the discussion into two sections could be that 'Ammār wanted to address doctrine and practice separately. In this way, he could set out the philosophical and logical reasons why Christians believe in Christ's crucifixion and the role it plays in the divine economy of salvation; and only then would he lay out the consequences of the cross of Christ in the life of the church, its worship, and liturgy. By placing the Christian

practice of venerating the cross at the end of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, this practice is set alongside

his discourses on other practices such as baptism and the Eucharist. This might have served

his strategic purposes in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, which were framed on the basis that Muslim

opposition primarily concentrated on the issues of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. 'Ammār

might have considered it less important, at least at this point in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, to defend

the Christian practices of kissing the cross, baptizing children, and distributing communion.

Further, 'Ammār's theological background may have played a role in his decision to

offer no more than a minimal apology for Christian veneration of the cross, since the

"Nestorian" Church does not venerate icons, but only the cross. In contrast, the Melkite

theologian Theodore abū Qurrah, unlike 'Ammār, composed a lengthy treatise entitled *On

Venerating the Holy Icons*.[746] The limited number of Islamic writings rejecting the cross may

also have influenced 'Ammār's decision to provide a relatively minimal defense of the cross.

Indeed, as we have seen earlier, Mu'tazilī theologians considered it most important to refute

the doctrine of the incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity because they contradict the

most fundamental Islamic doctrines. Their critical analysis of both the Trinity and the

incarnation established a pattern in Islamic refutation of Christianity: Islamic polemicists tend

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[746] See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Ikrām al-Ayqūnāt li-Thāwdhūrus abī Qurrah*, PAC, vol. 10 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 1986); and the English edition of the text by Sidney Griffith, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997).

not to refute all that Christians believe, but only the tenets over which there is the most

serious disagreement.[747] This may well explain the basic structure of *Kitāb al-Burhān*—a

book that shows great interest in justifying the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and

incarnation.

Before we examine the main ideas in the text, it is beneficial to present the overall

structure of 'Ammār's statement concerning the cross. At the end of the previous discourse,

he had provided four proofs to substantiate the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. The

incarnation stems from divine generosity; it answers the human desire for knowledge of God;

it meets the need for human beings to see the God who will be their Judge; and it is God's

gift to honor humans by giving them authority over the hereafter. 'Ammār concludes by

rejecting the Muslim charge that belief in Christ's death on a cross imputes weakness to

God's being. Throughout this discourse he maintains that the cross does not imply any

weakness in God's character, but rather, that it is God's power that is revealed in the cross

of Christ, as God relieves humanity of the anxiety of sin and death—an argument which is

found in Bar Konī's *Livre des Scolies*.[748]

In protecting God from the imputation of weakness, Muslims express horror at the

Christian belief that God's prophet ʿĪsā was killed. 'Ammār therefore uses the Qur'ān to draw

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[747] David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, 18.

[748] See Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī,* 202.

a parallel with another prophet who had been killed. He argues that God permitted Yaḥyā ibn

Zakariya, a prophet who was close to God and occupied an honored position in Muslim

eyes, to be killed.[749] In his case, it was never suggested that the manner of his death

contradicted the divine protection of God's messengers. 'Ammār finds similarities between

Yaḥyā ibn Zakariya's death and the death of Christ on the cross. He argues that both died in

total accordance with God's will. As a result, 'Ammār questions why Muslims are so

appalled, contending that the death of Christ on the cross would make "the skies…ready to

burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin."[750] If Christ is a

mere prophet, as Islam asserts, why would his death be the cause of all of this? After all, the

Qur'ān admits that many prophets were killed.

'Ammār next explains the significance of the cross of Christ within the divine economy

of salvation. He maintains that Christ's death on the cross alleviates human anxiety, which is

inherited because of sin. Death was the penalty humanity had to pay on account of Adam's

sin. The death of Christ brought remission for such sins and Christ's death took place in

public so that everyone would see and know that he had died, and so trust that, when they

died, they would rise in human form, just as Christ had risen. Thus, on the cross of Christ,

death was overcome: this is why it is a sign of God's power. It is because of this, 'Ammār

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[749] See Michel Hayek, *al-Masīḥ fīl-Islām*, 47-48.

[750] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 79; cf. *sūrah* 19:90.

states, that the cross, which symbolizes Christ's death, is honored and venerated in the liturgical life of the Christian church. According to 'Ammār, it is surprising that Muslims, who kiss the very stone that polytheists in the Arab Peninsula used to kiss, should object to Christians kissing the cross. Muslims, according to 'Ammār, kiss the stone on account of Abraham. 'Ammār sees the crucifixion of "the veil of the Creator" (i.e., the body of Christ) on the cross as a sign worthy of more honor than a stone associated with Abraham.

Bar Konī argues in a similar way, reminding his readers that other material objects had been given honor, such as the Ark of the Covenant during the Old Testament period. He argues that the honor that Christians give to the cross is in no way given to the wood. Rather, it is offered to Christ, who gave his life on it, and that it thus manifests the power of the resurrection over death and sin.[751]

Islamic Theology and the Cross of Christ

Simply stated, Islam rejects the cross.[752] While Christianity praises "the power of God" displayed in the cross of Christ, Islam sees in it the "weakness of God." The two viewpoints

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[751] Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 200-201.

[752] See Ghassān Sālim, *Maḥāwir al-Iltiqā'*, 278-299, cf. Heribert Busse, *Usus al-Ḥiwār*, 167-172.

are irreconcilable.[753] The Qur'ān, in *sūrah* 4:157f declares:

> That they said: 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God.' But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.

This verse has been universally understood by Muslims as denying the historicity of the crucifixion.[754] Muslim exegetes have gone to great pains to provide various theories explaining that Christ was not crucified, but rather "he/it was made to appear so," شبّه لهم, to the Jews.[755] It seems, as al-Sharafī argues, that the lack of qur'ānic reference to Jesus' last days on earth has opened the door wide for Muslim commentators to speculate as they reflect on the text of *sūrah* 4:157f. Indeed, they have found it difficult to provide a reasonable explanation of the qur'ānic text regarding Jesus' death.[756] Oftentimes their theories are inconsistent and contradictory.[757] One major theory holds that Judas Iscariot or some other disciple was put to death in place of Jesus. Others maintain that, when Jesus was "taken up" to the heavens, the Jews, out of fear of the crowd, seized a man and put him on the cross;

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[753] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 378.

[754] David Thomas, "Denying the Cross in Early Muslim Dialogue with Christians," in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, Global Theological Voices, ed. David E. Singh (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 51.

[755] Michel Hayek, *al-Masīḥ fīl-Islām*, 216; cf. Muṣṭafā Būhindī, *al-Ta'thīr al-Masīḥī*, 178-182; and Samir Khalil, "al-Ta'thīr al-Lāhūtī," 230-233.

[756] See al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 378-379; cf. Gabriel S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?" *BSOAS*. 72(2) (2009), 250.

[757] Gabriel S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus," 258.

others claim that prior to the crucifixion, God made one of Christ's guards look like Jesus, and when the latter was taken up to heaven, the Jews took the guard and killed him.[758] All of these theories are offered in order to erase any suggestion of God's powerlessness. Muslims highly esteem God's power in protecting messengers and prophets, and believe that God would not allow them to be subjected to their enemies. Al-Qāḍī 'abd al-Jabbār, for example, argues that God "protected Christ from the cross, and exalted him so that the hands of his enemies could not reach him to crucify him."[759]

It would be an oversimplification, however, to conclude that Muslims only objected to the doctrine of the cross on account of the text of *sūrah* 4:157f. There is no doubt that Christian veneration of the cross, shown especially during liturgical processions, might have posed a challenge to the newly emerging Islamic empire, where Islam needed to "establish its distinctive character."[760] Muslims, being a people who strongly believe in the transcendence of God, must have felt uneasy with displays of an emblem representing

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[758] Michel Hayek, *al-Masīḥ fīl-Islām*, 222-231.

[759] 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubūwah,* ed. 'abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān (Bayrūt: Dār al-'Arabiyah, 1966), 123. For a fuller exposé of the classical interpretation of Muslim scholars, see Gabriel S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus," 240-245; cf. Mark Swanson, "*Folly to the Ḥunafā': The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian/Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*" (Ph.D. diss., [Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1992]), 197-223; *Folly to the Ḥunafā'* (al-Qāhirah: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Arabicorum et Islamologiae, 1995); and recently, "Folly to the *Ḥunafā'*: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, HCMR, vol. 4, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, et al., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), 237-56.

[760] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī,* 114.

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"God's death." It would seem as though the Christian *dhimmīs* were challenging not only the

Qur'ān's account in *sūrah* 4:157f, but were provoking the establishment of the Islamic

empire.[761]

'Ammār's Arguments

As the *Kitāb al-Burhān* contains several qur'ānic quotations, it is natural to assume that

'Ammār was quite familiar with the Qur'ān, including the text of *sūrah* 4:157f regarding the

historicity of the cross. In fact, his indirect reference in *Kitāb al-Masā'īl wal-Ajwibah*:

وكيف لنا أن نعلم أنّه مات موتًا صحيحًا؟ ولعلّه أرخى رأسه رياءً ومكرًا ليُري الناظرين أنّه قـد
مات يقينًا يقينًا...

> *Translation*: How are we to know that he [Christ] died a real death? Perhaps he
> bowed down his head in deceit and deception in order to show those who were
> looking [at him] that he died for certain,

echoes the text of *sūrah* 4:157f.[762] The significance of the exact occurrence of the structure,

مات يقينًا, and its equivalent in *sūrah* 4:157, وَما قَتَلُوهُ يَقِـينًا, "they did not of a certainty kill him,"

should not be underestimated. It clearly indicates the 'Ammār's familiarity with the text of

sūrah 4:157f, and his acquaintance with the various Muslim interpretations of this ambiguous

verse regarding the crucifixion of Christ.

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[761] See Mark Swanson, "The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, (750-1258),* ed. Samir Khalil and Jørgen Nielsen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 117.

[762] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 236.

As far as *Kitāb al-Burhān* is concerned, however, it is evident that 'Ammār chooses to address this issue on a different level. He realized that this Christian doctrine had a negative impact on Muslims, because they saw it as imputing weakness to God's being—which was unimaginable to them.[763]

In response to the Muslim total denial of the historicity of the cross, 'Ammār defends the Church's belief in the doctrine of the cross and its right to adore it as the symbol of God's mercy. This was indeed a difficult endeavor, since, in arguing for the correctness of the doctrine, he had to rebut the clear-cut qur'ānic denial of the crucifixion event. Yet none of his words called into question the actual text of the Qur'ān, as this would have jeopardized his status as a *dhimmī*, and would have made him liable to be judged as a blasphemer against the holy scripture of Islam. 'Ammār rather quotes *sūrah* 19:90, which declares that heaven and earth cannot tolerate the association of God with any other. The qur'ānic reference directly opposes those who associate a son with God. Even though this speaks against a false understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Christ (especially when linked with *sūrah* 72:3), it has been traditionally taken to oppose the Christian belief in the Sonship of Christ. 'Ammār may have found himself in a position of danger when dealing with the

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[763] Kenneth Cragg, "The Qur'ān and the Cross," in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts,* Global Theological Voices, ed., David E. Singh (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 177.

issue of the cross, having to deny or declare suspect the text of *sūrah* 4:157f. It is interesting

here to notice that 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī uses this verse in the same way as 'Ammār. The

verse clearly speaks against those who associate others with God, yet both al-Ṭabarī and

'Ammār refer to it in connection with the cross. This may well suggest that both borrowed

their argument from a "Nestorian" tradition, or that 'Ammār is actually answering 'Alī ibn

Rabban al-Ṭabarī's objection.[764]

Whereas Sidney Griffith questions why 'Ammār should have chosen not to deal with

sūrah 4:157f,[765] the high reverence given to the Qur'ān by Muslims and the political support

given by the state must not be underestimated. These would have been strong deterrents

against any direct questioning of a qur'ānic text. The only exception is probably that found in

the apology of 'abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī—a text judged by many scholars to have

been written under a pseudonym.[766] Timothy I, in his dialogue with al-Mahdī, raises some

difficult theological issues in answering al-Mahdī's use of *sūrah* 4:157, but he does not

actually offer any criticism of it. Timothy I argues:

> And who made a similitude for them in this way, O our King? How did God
> deceive them and show them something which was not true? It is incongruous
> to God that He should deceive and show something for another thing. If God
> deceived them and made a similitude for them, the Apostles who simply wrote

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[764] See I.A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd," 133.

[765] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 178.

[766] See William Muir, *The Apology of al-Kindī*, 123-128.

what God had shown to them, would be innocent of the deception, and the real cause of it would be God. If on the other hand, we say that it is Satan who made such a similitude for the Apostles, what has Satan to do in the Economy of God? And who dares to say about the *ḥawārīyūn* that Satan was able to deceive them? …[The] crucifixion is consequently a reality also, and not an illusion or a similitude.[767]

A Common Ground

'Ammār carefully searched the text of the Qur'ān to find common ground on which to build his argument. His selection falls upon the person of John the Baptist. Then he asks:

> How do they accuse us, when they consider Christ to be a prophet, that we diminished him when he was crucified? It is much more honoring to God, they say, that He would not let Christ be crucified. I wish I could know what they say of John, son of Zechariah. They confessed that he was beheaded, and that his head was given to a slave-girl, a dancer, who had sought his death. Is it because God considered him little that He let all of this happen to him?[768]

Here 'Ammār shows his creative originality. Having recognized that Muslims dismiss the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Christ, he instead utilizes their traditional portrayal of Christ as a mere prophet. He thus argues from Muslim theology itself. If Christ is a mere prophet, even lower in rank than the prophet of Islam, why were the skies ready to burst and the earth to split on account of what took place on his cross? After all, many prophets of God were not well received. In fact, some were killed—a point previously made by Timothy I in his

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[767] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 41-42.
[768] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 80.

encounter with al-Mahdī.[769] Thus the cross of Christ should not be seen as a stumbling

block.[770] 'Ammār may have had *sūrah* 2:87 or 3:181 in mind. 'Ammār continues to speak

from common ground, using the specific example of Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā. According to the

Qur'ān, Yaḥyā, who is mentioned five times, was a prophet whose life was pure and whose

message was a witness to that of Jesus'. Al-Ṭabarī records a saying attributed to Muḥammad

in which Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā is reckoned as someone who will be without blemish on the day

on judgment. According to al-Ṭabarī, the reason for this high rank is that Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā

never committed a sin, nor had intercourse with women.[771] It is worth noting here the

similarities between this Islamic tradition about Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā and the biblical witness

about him. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no

one greater than John the Baptist."[772]

The Qur'ān records that Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā died, but gives no details about this death.

Again, Qur'ān commentators have proposed several possibilities. Therefore, 'Ammār mixes

the biblical account of Yaḥyā's death with that of the Qu'rān. Details such as the "girl dancer"

who asked for John's head are not found in the Qur'ān, but are a clear reference to

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[769] Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes," 142.

[770] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 54.

[771] Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5-6 (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat wa-Maṭba'at Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954), 12-17.

[772] See Matthew 11:11a.

Herodias' daughter who asked for Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā's head. According to the biblical narrative, Herod Antipas (21 BC-39 AD), a son of Herod the Great (73 BC-4 BC), ordered that Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā be killed.[773] This conflation seems to support 'Ammār's purpose, as he puts what the Bible says about Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā into the mouths of Muslims. This, in fact, was a strategy used by many apologists on both sides.

Although, according to Islam, Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā enjoyed a high position among the prophets of God, he was put to death. This tragic end did not, 'Ammār reminds them, impute any weakness to God;[774] nor does it seem to contradict God's ability to protect his prophets. Likewise, Christ's death should not, 'Ammār argues, be seen as an imputation of weakness to God, for it fits well within God's economy for saving humanity. If the death of a prophet has some salvific value to others, if it furthers the divine purpose of saving people, then God will allow it to happen. The results of a prophet's death can be beneficial to people for whose sake the prophet was originally sent by God. According to 'Ammār, the prophet often faces the risk of having his mission rejected and could even be killed. When this happens, God should not be blamed for letting a prophet go through the pain of death.

Elsewhere, 'Ammār found further common ground in the traditional Christian and Muslim practice of "touching the coat of a godly man." This sign of honor, according to

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[773] See Matt 2:19-22; 14:1-12; Mk 5:14-29.

[774] Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue*, 72.

'Ammār, was a normal way for eastern people to show respect to their godly teachers. This practice can still be seen in various parts of the Arab world, as Christians kiss the hand of the priest holding the cross, and as Muslims visit and touch the tombs of devout *imāms*. According to 'Ammār, in honoring those seen as good and devout in their worship of God, people show their sincere desire for closeness to God. 'Ammār maintains that, by kissing the sign of the cross, Christians, too, seek to be closer to God through worship.

The Cross in the Divine Economy

Having proven that Christians do not impute weakness to God when proclaiming Christ's crucifixion, 'Ammār reverts to fulfilling the original purpose of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, i.e., providing the proof of the course of the divine economy.[775] 'Ammār argues that Christ's death, with its salvific value, is God's way of relieving humanity of sin and death. Before stating this in more detail, however, 'Ammār inserts the phrase "in his human nature," بأنـسيته.[776] This is another modification he uses to guard himself against the objection raised by Muslims concerning God the Father's union with Christ on the cross, and the notion that Christ's death in fact meant that God was crucified. 'Ammār is affirming for his Muslim audience that "Nestorian" Christians, at least, refer only to Christ's human nature when speaking of his death. This

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[775] Wilhelm Riedel, *Der Katalog*, 650.

[776] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 80.

same statement had been made by Timothy I in his discussion with al-Mahdī.[777] In fact, there are significant similarities between Timothy I's explanation and that of 'Ammār. Both state that it was the human nature of Christ that was crucified. Another similarity is seen in 'Ammār's argument concerning the wood of the cross. Timothy I says, "As we honor the roots because of the fruits that come out of them, so also we honor the Cross as the root of which the fruit of life was born to us, and from which the ray of immortality shone upon us."[778] By comparison, Ammār states, "After all, the wood of the cross, speaking of the fruit, is closer than the stone."[779] Timothy's encounter with al-Mahdī seems to have been widely known within the "Nestorian" church, and 'Ammār was evidently influenced by the apologetics of the Patriarch, finding themes and examples that he could implement in his *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

Our premise that 'Ammār used Timothy I's apology is more clearly supported when we examine the latter's presentation of the divine economy of the cross. Timothy I had shown al-Mahdī that Christ was not weak when he was put on the cross. Rather, as Christ had foretold, he had gone to the cross by his own will, demonstrating his authority over his body.

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[777] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 87; cf. N.A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries, 632-900 A.D., Translations with Commentary* (Hartfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993).

[778] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 40.

[779] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 87.

Christ "showed that he would suffer out of his own free will, and not out of his own weakness

or from the omnipotence of the Jews."[780] 'Ammār develops this idea into his more

comprehensive view of the divine economy. He argues that God, out of love for humans, and

desiring to grant them enjoyment of eternal life, was manifested in the flesh, thus

demolishing their fear of death. Further, God spoke to them in the flesh of Christ. God then

made this same flesh go to the cross and die there.[781] 'Ammār's understanding of the divine

economy of salvation perfectly parallels that of Timothy I, as both Christian authors

emphasize the free will of Christ in going to the cross. Timothy I believes that, in going to the

cross, Christ showed his power; while 'Ammār maintains that it was Christ's power, not his

weakness, that was in fact displayed on his cross. In *Kitāb al-Masāʼīl wal-Ajwibah*, 'Ammār

makes the argument even clearer that Christ's power and majesty were the main reasons

why he endured the pain of the cross. Christ overpowered suffering, pain and death by his

resurrection. 'Ammār affirms that, on the cross God was not weak, contrary to the Muslim

accusation. Rather, God thereby abolished death and gave life to humankind. To use

Timothy I's words, "God delivered to death in the flesh His beloved Son for the life, salvation,

and resurrection of all."[782]

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[780] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 43.

[781] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 80.

[782] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 40. However, 'Ammār speaks little

The Veneration of the Cross

In speaking of the Christian practice of venerating the cross, 'Ammār presents the cross as a symbol of Christ's body which was crucified on the cross to relieve humans of death. Thus, this symbol is worthy of all honor and veneration. Notwithstanding this, some people believed that Christians worshipped the actual wooden cross. Caliph al-Mahdī charges Christians with this in his conversation with Timothy I.[783] Likewise, another Muslim polemicist addressed Christians, saying:

> You extol the cross and the image. You kiss them, and you prostrate yourselves to them, even though they are what people have made with their own hands. They neither hear, nor see, nor do harm, nor bring any advantage. The most estimable of them among you are made of gold and silver. Such is what Abraham's people did with their images and idols.[784]

'Ammār does not address such issues, but he does draw a comparison between the veneration of the cross and the honor given to the procession of the 'Abbasid caliph. The

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concerning redemption from sin, although he argues that, on the cross, God redeemed humanity from anxiety, death, and ignorance concerning the life to come. People had not seen anyone die and rise again before the death and resurrection of Christ, nor did they know of the eternal life awaiting them. "Philosophers, intellectuals, and advocates of error and ignorance, as a whole, did not know that after death, which separates their bodies from their souls, they will be raised from their graves and return to life," 'Ammār announces. The fact that death ruled over all humanity and seemed to be their end brought sadness and anxiety to people. The hope of eternal life was not yet achieved. Death and sin were obstacles facing humanity, and release from death was needed. It was this exact human need that was met on the cross, bringing happiness to those who longed for eternal life and were burdened with anxiety at being ruled by sin. Just as Christ rose from the dead, their bodies would also be raised to enjoy the life to come.

[783] Ibid., 39.

[784] Quoted from Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 143-145.

honor Christians give to the cross is likened to when people "honor the king by venerating even the hoof of his horse, and the dust of his feet, in addition to his footwear and coat," 'Ammār argues.[785] It is also similar, he declares, to the honor people offer to a godly man, who is close to God through worship. It is noteworthy that these arguments are also found verbatim in the later apology of Īshū'yāb ibn Malkūn, the Patriarch in Nisibis in the thirteenth century.[786]

'Ammār does not provide any further rationale for kissing the cross, but counterattacks by speaking of the Islamic practice of kissing the black stone in Mecca—an argument that was also borrowed by Īshū'yāb ibn Malkūn.[787] In their *ṭawāf* around the *Ka'ba*, as part of the *Ḥajj*, Muslims must kiss the stone, if possible. This practice has been preserved because Islamic tradition records that the prophet of Islam once kissed the black stone in Mecca.[788] 'Ammār maintains that the wood of the cross has "fruit" unlike the dead nature of the black stone. That the stone was previously honored and kissed by idol worshippers before Islam in

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[785] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 87.

[786] Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques,* 158-159 ; cf. George Philip Fighālī, ed., *Mawsū'at al-Ḥaḍārah al-Masīḥīyah*, vol. 18 (Bayrūt: Nobilis, 2010), 77-83; Ephrem Yousif, *al-Falāsifah wal-Mutarjimūn*, 73-84; and Mājidah Muḥammad Anwar, *al-Madāris al-Fikrīyah al-Suryānīyah fīl-Sharq al-Adnā al-Qadīm* (al-Qāhirah: Ītrāk lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2009), 80-86. See also the recent study: Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, 59-60.

[787] Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques,* 160.

[788] See in particular book 25 in Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, and book 16 of Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī's *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim*. See *al-Jāmi' bayna al-Ṣaḥīḥayn: lil-Imāmayn al-Bukhārī (194-256 H.), wa-Muslim (206-261 H.)*, compiled by Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad Shāmī (Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 1995).

pre-Islamic Mecca makes this action more unacceptable than the Christian practice of kissing the cross.

At this point in his argument, 'Ammār returns to his conversation with the imaginary Muslim opponent and asks why Muslims would honor such a stone. Is it "because it came down from heaven?"[789] If Muslims believe so, 'Ammār says, then they should not worship created stones, since God had commanded them to fight the polytheists on the same account. Why then would Muslims kiss a stone, similar in nature to that which was kissed by polytheists? This seems like nonsense to 'Ammār. If the honor given to the stone is because it came down from heaven, as Islamic tradition holds, then there should be no difference, he goes on to say, between the stone which came out of heaven, and the wood of the cross which is from earth.

But, if Muslims answer that such honor is offered to the stone mainly on account of Abraham, who according to *sūrah* 2:125-127 was the builder of the *Ka'ba* in Mecca, then why would they stumble at the idea of honoring the cross of Christ? If the honor is given because of Abraham, 'Ammār argues, how much more should Christians honor the cross, on which the body of the Creator was crucified?

'Ammār thus points to a contradiction in Islamic traditions, for if Muslims say that God

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[789] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 88.

ordered them to kiss the black stone, it sharply conflicts with God's displeasure at the

polytheists for doing the same thing. As in his discourse on the true religion, ʻAmmār once

again alludes to the military power of Islam and its wars—one of which was against the

polytheists who kissed the black stone. All in all, he convincingly uses the Muslim practice of

kissing the stone as a parallel to the Christian practice of venerating the cross.

In actuality, this same argument was often used to attack the Muslim practice of

venerating the black stone while also defending the Christian practice of kissing the cross.

Yūḥannā al-Dimashqī seems to have been the first Christian apologist within *Dār al-Islām* to

have used this defense.[790] This same argument can also be found in the Apology of al-Kindī,

who dismisses the veneration of the *Ka'ba* as pagan in origin. Al-Kindī even uses a

discussion on comparative religions to support his arguments. He tells his imaginary Muslim

interlocutor that the Brahmans and the Indians who worship the sun kiss the stone.[791]

However, it should be noted that Muslim scholars during the ʻAbbasid period also

linked the veneration of the cross to worshipping idols, and polytheism. They claimed that

the Christian practice of worshipping or venerating the cross was similar in nature to the

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[790] Barbara Roggema, "Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters: A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East," in *Christians at the Heart of the Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʻAbbasid Iraq*, HCMR, 1, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 3.

[791] Anton Tien, ed., *Risālat ʻabd Allāh ibn Ismāʻīl al-Hāshimī ilā ʻabd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī Yad'ūhu bi-hā ilā al-Islām, wa-Risālat ʻabd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī Yaruddu bi-hā ʻalayhi wa-Yad'ūhu ilā al-Nasrāniyyah* (London: N.P., 1880), 104.

polytheistic practice of venerating idols in the ancient temples. The anonymous *Radd* speaks

of the veneration of the cross as the equivalent of what the contemporaries of Abraham had

done with idols.[792] The other interesting allusion to veneration as a form of honoring idols

comes from 'abd al-Jabbār in *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubūwah,* where he sees this Christian

element of worship as a continuation of the ancient Roman practice of worshipping idols in

the temples.[793] In a word, the veneration of the cross was seen by Muslims as "idolatry and

hence another sign of *shirk*."[794]

Discourses on the Cross: An Evaluation

'Ammār maintains that the work of the cross and the veneration it is due are fundamental to

Christianity. Humans can only experience true relief from death and sin through the death of

Christ. The cross brings happiness and joy to those who have been longing for the life to

come, and its symbol is therefore worthy of veneration. As Christians kiss this emblem, they

worship the Creator, and glorify him. Praise therefore should be offered in this way to the

work of God on the cross, and should never be seen as a distasteful rite. It is a gift from God

which should be received with thanksgiving.

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[792] D. Sourdel, ed. & trans., "Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'abbāside contre les chrétiens," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 34 (1966), 1-33; cf. al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 436.

[793] 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubūwah*, 167.

[794] Barbara Roggema, "Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters," 1.

However, 'Ammār clearly displays his polemical expertise in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, as is seen if consideration is given to his use of Arabic verbs. For instance, he accuses Muslims of being "loquacious and garrulous" (يَهْرَفُون) in their objection to the cross. The verb indicates excessive praise of something or someone and is frequently used to describe sayings that are not based on fair judgment. It also carries the idea of being hasty. For example, when it is linked to prayers, يهرفون فـي الـصّلاة, it means people rush their prayers, or perform the prayers too quickly. Thus, he accuses Muslims of being both long-winded and hasty in judging that Christian belief in Jesus' death on the cross imputes weakness to God. This polemical language can also be found in his description of the Muslims' objections: "They [the Muslims] have prejudice, bias and injustice."[795] These three negative adjectives indirectly express the Christian's plea for Muslims to be fair rather than quickly labeling Christians as those who follow a corrupt faith. In short, 'Ammār seems to be requesting a fair trial.

It is of considerable interest to note that such an appeal for fairness was openly expressed in abū Rāïṭah's third letter on the Holy Trinity, where he says, "Verily we are called upon to a debate with you. Let us get down to our dispute about what stands between

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[795] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 80.

us. It is hoped that you will treat us justly in the discussion…"[796] This shows that Arab

Christians felt that their Muslim counterparts judged their beliefs unjustly. Arabic Christian

treatises are thus an attempt to explain their beliefs and justify their doctrines

On another occasion, 'Ammār offers sharp criticism of his Muslim opposition. In his

concluding words concerning the cross, he launches a counterattack on the Muslims,

describing them as "dead." They find the gift of God's grace in the cross of Christ to be

distasteful and, instead of recognizing such a gift, they are "returning the recognition…into

disbelief and defamation!"[797] Then, in stating that a person of sound mind cannot accept the

Muslim idea of venerating the stone that had previously been kissed by the polytheists, he

clearly turns the Muslims' own arguments against them. 'Ammār says, "And if this is not so,

what does worship by venerating the stone really mean? We do not think they can give a

reasonable answer. We leave the discourse on this subject, since we know the result!"[798]

This statement indicates the polemical nature of 'Ammār's arguments. He is both displeased

with the hasty Islamic accusations and pointing out the inconsistent elements in Muslim

practice. However, he sees no use in further reflection on the issue, maintaining that

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[796] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 169.

[797] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 81. It is noteworthy that al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, in the Cherfeh MS, uses softer and more inclusive language when referring to the reaction people should have in response to the cross. He includes both Muslims and Christians, and says, "Let us, then, praise the grace of the economy of the cross, and not deny it—particularly not oppose it." Folio, 131a.

[798] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 87.

Muslims are unfair. Thus, he argues that the final result would not be just, and suggests that

Christians should leave the discussion of this subject, for silence is better!

CHAPTER SIX: Discourse on the Sacraments

As we have seen throughout *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār's main goal is to show the reasonableness of Christianity by refuting the intellectual and doctrinal charges that were raised almost exclusively by his contemporary Muslim polemicists. Rarely, however, do we find Christian 'practices' defended, with the exception of these sections on the veneration of the cross, and the discourses on baptism and the Eucharist. 'Ammār chose to address some Christian practices in order to show that they must be 'correct' practices since they are based on 'correct' doctrines. As we learn from Islamic anti-Christian literature, Muslim polemicists, such as 'abd al-Jabbār,[799] argued against the Christian inattention to washing before prayers and their consumption of pork.[800] Baptism and the Eucharist, however, were rarely criticized by Muslim polemicists.

Such rare mention of Christian practices raises a difficult question: Why does 'Ammār ignore the specific Islamic charges against Christian practices and behavior, and focus only on the correctness of baptism and the Eucharist? We shall try to answer this question at the end of our analysis of the discourse on the Eucharist, but first we turn to analyze 'Ammār's apology for baptism.

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[799] 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 149.
[800] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 529-538.

The Discourse on Baptism

ʿAmmār opens this section by stating that the practice of baptism is mocked and ridiculed by

Muslims. Such ridicule, he indicates, is an affront to the Christian view, which upholds

baptism as a glorious sign by which sin is nullified and removed.[801] According to ʿAmmār,

Muslims never analyze their own practices, or view them dismissively, although they are

quick to do so with Christian practices. For example, their washing after sexual relations is

done to excess, as a way of obtaining purity. He then notes that Muslims not only wash their

sexual organs but do a thorough cleansing so that even their hair is washed.[802] ʿAmmār

seems to have some of the purification *ḥadiths* in mind, such as those mentioned by al-

Bukhārī.[803] ʿAmmār makes the point that Muslims should critically analyze such washings, for

their effectiveness in purification is in doubt. ʿAmmār thus turns the Muslims' ridicule and

objection back on his opponents, while presenting his belief that their washings are

erroneous.

What is Baptism?

Up to this point, ʿAmmār has not presented a definition of baptism. However, he explains that

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[801] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 81.

[802] Ibid., 82.

[803] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (al-Qāhirah: Dār Maṭābiʿ al-Shaʿb, 1960), 70-72.

Christ had wanted to leave something tangible for his followers, thereby enabling them to

remember that resurrection follows death. Baptism, therefore, is seen as a reminder of

Christ's death and resurrection. 'Ammār presents the viewpoint that Christ ordained the ritual

of baptism, using the natural element of water. This element has special significance, since

humans themselves were created of water and dust.[804] And since Jesus had been baptized

in water, and later rose from the dead, Christians who followed his example would likewise

be raised.[805] 'Ammār sees baptism not only as pointing to the resurrection, but also as a

symbol of the creation story. Almighty God created humans out of water and dust, and after

they had fallen victim to sin, desired to re-create humans through Christ, who would share

their substance. Baptism then, symbolizes and generates re-creation.

This concept of baptism is found in Yūḥannā al-Dimashqī, who argues that it is both a

sign and a proof that God took the initiative once again in restoring creation and thus

overcoming sin.[806] However, according to 'Ammār, the process of re-creation can be likened

to the work of a potter, who, out of the same elements of water and dust, makes earthen

vessels. When a vessel is spoiled, the potter re-models the work by applying water to the

same clay. Similarly, therefore, the water of baptism renews humans into the new life given

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[804] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 55.

[805] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 83.

[806] Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, *al-Ma'at Maqālah*, 224-225.

by God through Christ.[807] 'Ammār presents this analogy of the potter as proof that water is indispensable in the process of re-creation. Although 'Ammār makes no reference to the Bible, this image seems to be a reference to Jeremiah 18. Theodore of Mopsuestia also made this same allusion to the potter in his discussion of baptism.[808] 'Ammār, however, adds the idea that water is involved in the remaking of the vessel, since this is crucial to his argument concerning baptism.

Discourse on Baptism: An Evaluation

Thus far, 'Ammār has presented the benefits of baptism and argued that it is a correct Christian practice. However, we need to see how this argument fits in the flow of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, and seek to determine whether his argument would have been convincing to a Muslim reader.

Needless to say, 'Ammār's explanation of baptism is selective because of his apologetic intent. We note with interest that he chooses not to detail the various rituals related to the practice of baptism, such as the oil with which the baptized person was anointed, or the prayers that were said, the role of the priest, or the Trinitarian formula that

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[807] Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 77.

[808] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie chez 'Ammār al-Baṣrī," *Parole de l'Orient* 27 (2002), 325.

was pronounced during baptism. Al-Ṣafī also avoids mention of most aspects of the sacrament, adding only the liturgical detail that baptism is administered by three immersions in water.[809]

However, all of these 'overlooked' aspects of baptism would seem to confirm that 'Ammār was mainly concerned with defending only one point with regard to baptism. Unlike the East Syrian theologians,[810] who clearly described the liturgical aspects of baptism, 'Ammār chose to focus only on the significance of the sacrament in removing sin, its depiction of re-creation, and the remembrance and hope of Christ's death and resurrection.[811] Thus, it would appear that his Islamic context was uppermost in his mind, and that in this section, he was primarily addressing Muslims.[812] This also explains why 'Ammār does not offer any definition of baptism; he simply addresses the Islamic arguments against its effectiveness. Although he does not go into detail in refuting the Muslim viewpoint and defending Christian baptism, Ammār derides the Islamic practice of washing as ineffectual and absurd.

Furthermore, in speaking about God's creation of the world from dust and water—a

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[809] Charfeh MS folio 132b.

[810] Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals*, 75.

[811] See Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 323.

[812] Ibid.

reference to Job 33:6,[813] 'Ammār attempts to show that God is the author of baptism, and that it has a divine origin. Thus, its legitimacy is directly derived from the authority of God. Furthermore, in stressing that Christ's death and resurrection are remembered in baptism, 'Ammār is indirectly linking Jesus with God. The point is clear: God created the world from water and dust, and correspondingly Christ creates new life by the water of baptism, which is the symbol of his death and resurrection.[814] Obviously, this further supports 'Ammār's theological understanding that Christ is God incarnate. In addition, this identification of Christ with God shows that 'Ammār considers Christ to be central to the whole of creation. Only through Christ do humans enjoy new life and victory over death. Without him, as the potter example shows, creation is forever spoiled. Christ's centrality is indispensable in the process of human re-creation.

That said, however, it remains unclear to 'Ammār's interlocutor that there is a need for re-creation. This idea of restoring the human nature to its original state is based solely on a Christian understanding. Yet here, it seems that 'Ammār presents the Christian doctrine of salvation and redemption as a solution to answer Islamic objections. This does not seem satisfactory!

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[813] Ibid., 326. This reference was also used by Theodore of Mopsuestia. The Qur'ān refers to the creation story in similar terms; see *sūrah* 3:59; 15:26; 22:5; 23:12; 32:7; 37:11; 40:67; 55:14.

[814] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 324.

We now turn to look at 'Ammār's view of the Eucharist, and his defense of this

practice.

The Discourse on the Eucharist

We have seen in the previous section, on baptism, that 'Ammār considers baptism to represent new life given by water to the followers of Christ. However, he spent little time explaining or defending it, since Muslims gave relatively little attention to this practice. As with baptism, we note with al-Sharafī that, when dealing with the Eucharist, Muslim polemicists seldom paid attention to the practice, let alone attacked it. Al-Sharafī indicates that only in *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubūwah* does 'abd al-Jabbār mention the Eucharist, as a practice carried out by Christians in remembrance of Christ.[815] This is a brief yet fair account of the Eucharist. Presumably, what 'Ammār is refuting is a popular criticism raised by the average Muslim, *vis-à-vis* the more intellectual rebuttals presented by his contemporary Mu'tazilī thinkers.

The Name of Christ is given to the Eucharist

'Ammār's argument indicates that beneath the Muslim objection to the Eucharist is the issue that it has been named "the body of Christ."[816] 'Ammār dismisses this objection, arguing from scriptures that in many cases Christ gave his name to others. 'Ammār's proof-texts are

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[815] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 529, footnote 24.

[816] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 84.

Matthew 25:35-40, where Jesus identifies himself with the prisoners and the sick;[817] and, interestingly, *sūrah* 2: 245, where it says: "Who is it that will lend unto Allah a beautiful loan." 'Ammār sees in these two texts a clear identification between Christ and the sick, and similarly, between God and the recipient of a loan.

'Ammār does not mention the Qur'ān as the source of the text, but this lack of reference is corrected by al-Ṣafī, who clearly states that the source of the text is "the book of those who deny this [calling the Eucharist the body and blood of Christ]."[818] We know that 'Ammār was well-acquainted with the text of the Qur'ān, so not mentioning the Qur'ān should not be seen as an indication otherwise. Rather, it is his style in *Kitāb al-Burhān*[819] to effortlessly use texts from both the Christian scriptures and the Qur'ān to shape and form his phrasing and arguments. Meanwhile, it is a characteristic of al-Ṣafī to mention the source of quoted texts. For example, in the same discussion in the Charfeh MS, when the reference is made to the Eucharist as being a remembrance of Christ, al-Ṣafī acknowledges this as a

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[817] "'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'" (Mathew 25:35-40).

[818] Charfeh MS folio 133a.

[819] See the appendix of qur'ānic citations. See also Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 56.

Pauline term.[820]

Nevertheless, ʿAmmār considered identifying the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ to be clearly legitimate, since both the Gospel and the Qurʾān make similar identifications. Ultimately, if Christ so identified himself with the poor, then he would freely identify himself with the elements of the Eucharist.[821] Thus ʿAmmār concludes:

> As it is legitimate that he named himself with names of others, it is [also] legitimate that others be named with his name, for there is no difference in that. Accordingly, he names the bread and the drink [wine], which he made as Eucharist, his body and his blood; the [ultimate] aim of Christ, our Lord, was to make manifest the world that lasts, the resurrection from the death, for there is no harder thing in this world for the people in it than death, and nothing more valuable for them than salvation from it [death], and attaining a life that has no death, and after which death does not come.[822]

It should not escape attention that ʿAmmār uses the word "drink," instead of the classical word "wine." In doing so, he shows some sensitivity to his Muslim audience, by distinguishing the type of drink used in celebrating the Eucharist from that which is offered as drink to visitors to monasteries. We learn from historical records that one reason that Muslims visited Christian monasteries was to drink wine.[823] Certainly this gave a bad reputation to several monasteries, especially after alcohol shops that sold wine to Muslims

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[820] Charfeh MS folio 133a.

[821] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 329.

[822] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 85.

[823] Ḥabīb Zayyāt, *al-Diyārāt al-Naṣrānīyah fīl-Islām* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1999), 41-50, cf. Mūsā Makhkhūl, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Suryāniyyah*, 483-486.

were established near some monasteries![824] So it seems appropriate that 'Ammār should

differentiate between the type of drink used in the Eucharist, i.e., the drink and that which is

consumed by visitors of monasteries.[825] However, the question remains: "Why celebrate the

Eucharist?"

The Reasons for Celebrating the Eucharist

The Eucharist, according to 'Ammār, is not merely a theological issue. It is rather a practical

teaching which, alongside Baptism, demonstrates an important aspect of Christian doctrine,

that is, the resurrection. The reason why Jesus ordained the Eucharist is to remind his

followers that "similar to his being raised victorious from death, their bodies will be raised

from the dead. Consequently, this brings joy and comfort."[826] The practice of the Eucharist

therefore becomes a means of remembering a future hope. The eschatological

accomplishment of Christ's death is remembered in the Eucharist, and so 'Ammār does not

use the word "sacrament" to speak of the Eucharist. To him the Eucharist is a powerful

reminder of the life to come—a life of eternal bliss.[827] He may have intentionally avoided

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[824] Ibid., 69-76; cf. Suhayl Qāshā, *Tārīkh Naṣārā al-'Irāq,* 217-232.

[825] Muḥammad M. Sa'ad al-Dīn, *al-'Aysh al-Mushtarak*, 34; cf. Adam Mez, *al-Ḥaḍārah al-Islāmiyyah*, 83.

[826] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 85.

[827] Ibid., 87.

speaking of the Eucharist as a sacrament with any mystical nature so that his interlocutor would not find another ground on which to question Christian doctrines.

To make this clear, 'Ammār affirms that the practice of the Eucharist is not to be understood literally, i.e., the bread is not literally the body of Christ, neither is the drink, or wine, his blood. This means that the elements in themselves do not give life,[828] while at the same time, 'Ammār is reaffirming to his fellow Christians that their practices indeed are significant—both theologically and practically. Surely, his words carry a pastoral concern through which the needs of his Christian community are met. Even if Christians face the danger of death, the Eucharist reminds them that eternal life is assured. 'Ammār teaches that "[t]he remembrance of his [Christ's] death relieves them [Christians] from sadness, and they rejoice as they remember life, as if they took the assurance of life by their hands."[829] This seems to be what 'Ammār has in mind in this section, for he uses the word قربان, *Qurbān*, a Syriac word that made its way into Arabic, and indicates the idea of offering, or sacrifice.[830] The Arabic verb قَرَّبَ, means to offer something. This is actually the meaning of the word found in the Qur'ān, in *sūrah* 5:27 and 46:28.[831] Therefore, it seems accurate to

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[828] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 331.

[829] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 85.

[830] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 327; cf. Sidney Griffith, "'Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine': the Eucharist as 'Living Medicine' in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian," in *Modern Theology* 15(2) (April 1999), 229-233.

[831] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 327, footnote 24.

conclude that 'Ammār intentionally uses this term to make a theological point. The point is

this: in celebrating the Eucharist, Christians affirm their belief that Christ, قَـرّبَ نفسه, offered

himself on their behalf so that they may have new life.[832]

From scriptures, 'Ammār appeals to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament as a

prototype of the sacrifice of Christ that is remembered at the Eucharist—a theme that was

used by Theodore Bar Konī in his *Livre des Scolies*.[833] 'Ammār then utilizes the 'second

Adam' theme developed in the New Testament by Paul to argue that just as the 'first Adam'

brought sin to his descendants, أهل جـوهره, and people therefore needed to offer sacrifices

for the remission of sin, so has the 'second Adam' brought obedience and forgiveness to

all.[834] It is as if Christ:

> …representing all those of his substance, has nullified sin on account of which
> death entered into the sacrifices that were slaughtered and offered to God on
> behalf of the sins of the Children of Israel. [This happened] because it was
> necessary for him to nullify death and show life by his righteousness, just as
> death had been necessitated, and life was nullified on account of the
> disobedience of the first Adam.[835]

In fact, 'Ammār goes to great pains to demonstrate the similarities and differences

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[832] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 87.

[833] See Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Theodore Bar Konī*, 186, 198.

[834] This view seems to have been taken from Theodore of Mopsuestia. See Būlus al-Faghālī,
Thiyūdūrus Usquf al-Maṣṣīṣah wa-Mufassir al-Kutub al-Ilāhiyyah (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 1993), 81-
84; cf. Samir Khalil, "al-Ta'thīr al-Lāhūtī," 222-223.

[835] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 86.

between the first Adam and Christ. And thus he shows great familiarity not only with

arguments from systematic theology, but also with biblical theology and its explanation of the

unfolding of divine revelation. It is true that, although 'Ammār can be identified as a Christian

Arab apologist in *Dār al-Islām*, he also demonstrates a solid biblical knowledge, which

entitles him to be called a biblical theologian as well. He takes into account the way the

Christian scriptures reveal the divine plan.

The humanity of Christ is also crucial in 'Ammār's apology concerning the Eucharist. It

is only because Christ shared the human substance that his victory over death and his

triumphal resurrection can be ascribed to them. If his substance were different, it would have

been impossible for their substances to be raised from the dead. 'Ammār uses the word

"substance," جوهر, eleven times in this short segment of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. Such repetition is

significant as it shows the importance of Christ's identification with humans.

Why Defend the Eucharist?

In concluding this chapter, we now turn to the question we raised in the opening paragraph

of the discussion on baptism. Why did 'Ammār not defend other Christian practices, but

focus only on baptism and the Eucharist?

It seems safe to conclude that, in Christian thinking, these two sacraments were of

great importance to the whole of Christian life and doctrine. Their fate is linked with the

defensibility of many essential doctrines. According to ʿAmmār, sin is nullified and new life is

given to the faithful in baptism;[836] likewise, the Eucharist is the demonstration of Christ's

victory over death,[837] and is therefore a remembrance of the resurrection and eternity which

is to come.[838] Given the importance of these doctrines, and the fact that these two

sacraments constitute the backbone of Christian practices, it is understandable that ʿAmmār

devotes a section of his *Kitāb al-Burhān* to deal with possible objections raised against these

primary sacraments in the Church of the East.[839]

This is in fact how al-Ṣafī understands *Kitāb al-Burhān*, for we see in his epitome that

baptism and the Eucharist are the two means by which the story of redemption is unfolded to

human society. Al-Ṣafī indicates that Christ, wanting to confirm the correctness of salvation

in word and deed, left two practices to the Church: "first, the symbol (رمـز) of baptism; and

second, the sacrament (سّر) of the Eucharist."[840] In summarizing the ultimate significance of

the *Qurbān*, al-Ṣafī, brilliantly puts ʿAmmār's words as follows:

فاحتمل عنهم لعنة خطاياهم، فارتفع الموتُ إذ قام مقام الذّبيحة عـن الخطيّة الآدميّة التـي

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[836] Ibid., 82.

[837] Ibid., 81.

[838] Ibid.

[839] ʿAmmār's tradition accepts seven sacraments as ordained by the word of God. They are:
1. The Ordination, 2. Holy Baptism, 3. The Oil of Unction, 4. The Oblation of the Body and Blood of
Christ (the Eucharist), 5. Absolution, 6. The Holy Leaven, 7. The sign of the life-giving Cross.

[840] Charfeh MS folio 133a.

كانت سَبَبَ الموت كما كانت ذبائحُ بني إسرائيل تُقَرَّب عن خطاياهم هذه الذي كانت رمزًا على
تقريبهِ ذاتِهِ عن أهل جوهره. فهو القُربان الحقيقيِّ؛ لأنّه أبطَلَ الموت بإبطالهِ سَبَبهُ وبيّن بُطلانَ
الموت بأن بَاشَرَهُ، وخَرَجَ منه غيرَ مائتٍ البتّة، وأظهَرَ الحياةَ الّتي لا يعقبها موتٌ، وارتفع من بلد
الموت إلى بلد الحياة، أعني صَعِدَ من الأرض إلى السّماء.[841]

Translation: He [Christ] bore on their behalf the curse of their sins, and therefore death has been nullified since he took the place of the sacrifice that was offered for Adam's sin, which was the cause of death—for thus were the sacrifices of the Children of Israel offered for their sins. These were a type of his offering of himself in place of those who are of his essence. He is the true offering, because he nullified death by nullifying its cause. He showed the nullification of death by going through it, and coming out of it alive. Thus, he manifested the life which is not followed by death, and was lifted from the place of death to the place of life, that is, he ascended from earth to Heaven.

However, this conclusion should not lead us to think that 'Ammār has presented us with a full Christian understanding of the *Qurbān*, for the framework of his presentation is considerably influenced by Islamic objections to these sacraments. As we have seen, 'Ammār intentionally avoids speaking of some aspects related to the Eucharist, such as the manner in which the *Qurbān* is to be practiced. Instead, his whole presentation of the *Qurbān* is structured to prove that Christ offered his body on behalf of sinners and that new life is given to those who trust his sacrificial work. Therefore, the Eucharist is not to be denied, 'Ammār believes, for it serves as a reminder of the work of Christ by which sin is forgiven and new life is celebrated and received.[842] Baptism and the Eucharist, then, are two

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[841] Ibid., folio 134a.

[842] Khalil Chalfoun, "Baptême et Eucharistie," 330, cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 87.

means of receiving such grace. Baptism not only purifies, but gives new life; and the

Eucharist is not merely a consumption of some elements, but is a celebration of the

forthcoming eschatological fulfillment.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Eschatological Arguments

The Discourse on Eating and Drinking in the Hereafter

The last issue 'Ammār tackles in *Kitāb al-Burhān* concerns eschatology—specifically the issue of eating and drinking in the hereafter. 'Ammār's basic argument is twofold. First, the reward of believers cannot be physical, but rather, must be spiritual; and second, that humanity's real need is for God.[843]

'Ammār starts by presenting the Islamic objection to the Christian view of eternity, i.e., that an eternal life without marriage, eating and drinking is not a proper reward. 'Ammār sharply refutes this objection, presenting his opinion that the the nature of the reward according to the Islamic understanding is "low, passing, imperfect, and vile...in which afflictions bind us, such as sickness, diseases, many blights."[844] Further, 'Ammār indicates: "What they [the Muslims] mention of reward is the imperfection, the deficiency, and abrogation of reward."[845]

This position is essentially a defense of the biblical understanding of eternal life, as 'Ammār indicates, for he mentions at the beginning of the section that this type of reward is

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[843] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 56.

[844] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 88.

[845] Ibid.

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what is recorded in the Gospel.[846] In fact, the word "Gospel" is mentioned twice in this short section, [847] as is the phrase "His [God's] Books."[848] It would appear that 'Ammār and his contemporary theologians, being well-acquainted with Islam, choose to make a pointed reference to Islamic teaching on this issue in order to turn the accusations back on their Muslim interlocutors. This method of defense was justifiable in polemical treatises such as *Kitāb al-Burhān*.

'Ammār argues that the eternal reward as described in the Gospel is far higher than fleshly needs. Such needs are certainly not evil in themselves: they are necessary for the continuation of life.[849] But they thereby also serve as reminders that our lives in this world are vulnerable and imperfect, and that we have many needs. This reminder also promotes humility as the proper attitude for all humans. According to al-Ṣafī, the cause of the original fall was the lack of such humility.[850] But, in eternal life, believers will have no physical needs, since their bodies will be transformed into a more powerful form.[851]

Rather than the enjoyment of physical pleasures in Paradise, the true eternal reward

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[846] Ibid.

[847] Ibid., 88 and 88.

[848] Ibid., 89 and 90.

[849] This view was put forward by Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī and abū Qurrah. See Yūḥannā al-Dimishqī, *al-Ma'at Maqālah,* 119; and Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 231-236.

[850] Charfeh MS folio, 134b.

[851] Cf. Gianmaria Gianazza, ed. *Īliyyā II: Kitāb Ūṣūl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, 390-391.

will include a transformation that erases human neediness, and makes nature perfect.[852]

This new nature can be likened to the nature of "the righteous angels."[853] 'Ammār did not

believe that the nature of humans would be the same as that of the angels, but he implies

that the honor that believers will enjoy is the same honor that is given to angels. Such honor

includes rejoining the angels "in rank, power, dignity, endurance, and eternal joy."[854] 'Ammār

states:

> He [God] will transfer us from this vile world and from this weak and needy
> body to a strong and honorable body; and after this vile life, which is not
> dependent on anything other than itself, to an everlasting life which does not
> experience need and is not weak.[855]

Here 'Ammār refers to his interlocutor and states:

> I do not think that the opponents claim that the reward of Gabriel, Michael and
> all the angels who are close [to God] is imperfect or vile, or that their [the
> opponents'] pleasure in having sexual intercourse with women, and eating
> and drinking, is more than the pleasure of the angels or other things than
> these.[856]

'Ammār ends *Kitāb al-Burhān* with a final reference to the Book of God, which tells of

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[852] See Wafīk Naṣry, *The Caliph and the Bishop: A Nineth Century Muslim-Christian Debate: al-Ma'mūn and abū Qurrah* (Bayrūt: CEDRAC, 2008), 266-268.

[853] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 89.

[854] Ibid.

[855] Ibid.

[856] Ibid., 89-90. This same argument is put forward by abū Qurrah, who argues that the ultimate reward is attained when humans become God-like. See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 237.

the things of God.[857] This point is well expressed by al-Ṣafī, who compares the reward of this

world with that which comes from God. Al-Ṣafī indicates that fleshly rewards make humans

dependent on things coming from the earth, whose essences are lower than that of humans.

By contrast, the ultimate reward comes when full dependence on God is accomplished. Al-

Ṣafī puts it thus: "We will be sustained by that which is far nobler than our essence, i.e., our

Creator."[858]

‘Ammār's discourse concerning eating and drinking in the hereafter is similar in focus

to that of his contemporary Arab Christian theologians, abū Qurrah and abū Rā'iṭah, who

also alluded to Islam's belief in the sensual pleasures of Paradise, while insisting that the

Christian view is higher and nobler since it does not include any physical aspect. These

Christian polemicists thus utilized the Muslims' own beliefs against them.[859] What is striking

is that, in this case, Muslim polemicists felt the force of these arguments enough to rebut the

Christians' accusations. They felt the need not only to refute Christian beliefs, but also to

defend their own stand on polygamy, and on eating and drinking in Paradise.[860] This, in fact,

is a rare moment where Arab Christians seem to have been successful in making their

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[857] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 90.

[858] Charfeh MS folio 134b; cf. Gianmaria Gianazza, ed., *Īliyyā II: Kitāb Ūṣūl al-Dīn*, vol. 1, PAC, vol. 17 (Bayrūt: CEDRAC, 2005), 389.

[859] See Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 210, 236-239, 252-253.

[860] Al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 552.

Muslim counterparts feel pressured and defensive.

It is to be noted that, although 'Ammār refers to the Gospel four times, he never quotes any biblical verse to support his arguments. He seems to assume that the reader is already familiar with verses that negate the idea of any physical need in eternity. This section, therefore, might primarily be addressed to 'Ammār's fellow Christian community.

Although 'Ammār presents identical arguments in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwiba*, there is a significant change in 'Ammār's tone in this section of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, and he takes a strongly polemic approach, whereas friendlier language is observable in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwiba.* For example, words such as 'vile' and 'abrogation' are not found in reference to Islamic doctrines; rather, in *Kitāb al-Masā'il wal-Ajwiba*, 'Ammār actually addresses his opponent as "O, wise man"[861]—an unprecedented title! Even the endings of the two books differ. In the conclusion of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār betrays frustration with his interlocutor, considering it fitting to end the book shortly after denying the 'vile' Islamic view of fleshly reward in eternity. In *al-Masā'il wal-Ajwiba*, however, the conclusion is short and straightforward, without any of the emotional expressions found in *Kitāb al-Burhān*. It is indeed difficult to explain this difference in tone.

In his discourse on eating and drinking in eternity, 'Ammār assures his fellow

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[861] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 264.

Christians that their ultimate need in eternity is not based on things similar to their earthly

substances. Rather, God will reward the faithful with divine rewards for they will no longer

have any needs. This Christian view, ʿAmmār is persuaded, is the correct one, and it

therefore follows that the Islamic objections are irrelevant. God will reward the faithful by

giving them a status that is similar to the rank of the angels in honor and dignity.

SECTION THREE: A CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER EIGHT: The Place of ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī

This section analyzes the significance of ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī as an Arab Christian theologian

writing during the formative days of Islam. We shall discuss his literary style and his use of

both scriptures and logic. In addition, we shall examine how *Kitāb al-Burhān* fits within the

Muʿtazilī milieu of the ninth century. We shall then explore the ways in which he

contextualized his faith to meet the challenges of *Dār al-Islām*, and defend our conclusion

that he not only proved the credibility of his theological position but totally invalidated the

Arabic proverb, "أَبَتِ العَرَبيّةُ أَنْ تَتَنَصّرَ, Arabic [culture] has refused to be Christianized." Finally,

we shall highlight the lessons that can be drawn from *Kitāb al-Burhān* for the Arabic-

speaking church of today.

‘Ammār al-Baṣrī: An Arab Christian Apologist

‘Ammār's Literary Style

It is clear from the opening words on the divine unity in *Kitāb al-Burhān* that ‘Ammār's

agenda is apologetic in nature, as he sets out to correct the Islamic misunderstanding of

Christian doctrines. In so doing, however, his literary style tends to move back and forth

between apologetics and polemics. This point is difficult to miss. Not only does he seek to

clear up Islamic misunderstandings of Christianity and provide logical and scriptural support

for his claims, but at times, very sharp criticisms are made of the Islamic perception of God,

as we have seen in his discourses on the Trinity, the incarnation, the cross of Christ, and the

hereafter.

'Ammār's critical style is distinguished by two features: it is both direct and

generally polite. He is mostly respectful of those who disagree with him, and he

takes their objections seriously.[862] Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that 'Ammār

is not pointed in his criticism of his Muslim interlocutor. He openly criticizes his

counterpart's views on the nature of God, and then offers the Christian view as the

truest depiction of God. However, we must keep in mind that *dhimmī* regulations

may well have been a major factor in his chosen style. In this, his style differs

greatly from the apologetic style of al-Kindī. The latter, whoever he may have been,

did not seem to fear the same consequences if the Qur'ān or Muḥammad were

insulted. After all, he most likely was writing anonymously! But this was not the

case with 'Ammār. The very fact that the BL MS lacks the section where 'Ammār

offers unflattering reasons why people would accept Islam suggests that some

dhimmī regulations were in force at the time the manuscript was copied. However,

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[862] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 39.

the fact that ʿAmmār directly criticized Islam, may indicate that some of the regulations were not in effect when ʿAmmār actually wrote the section. It may also indicate that ʿAmmār's criticism was considered respectful enough to be permitted in Baṣrah in the ninth century without jeopardizing his life.

ʿAmmār obviously desired to be clear and relevant, and all of his arguments show astute sensitivity to his times and audience. He sought to make his theological convictions as intelligible as possible, and thus avoid any charge of "intellectual absurdity."[863]

The Arabic eloquence of ʿAmmār

ʿAmmār was a master of writing, with an outstandingly rich command of the Arabic language.[864] There are very few inaccuracies, awkward structures or deficiencies in the Kitāb al-Burhān, and those that exist can be blamed on scribal errors. Most mistakes are either grammatical in nature, or spelling errors. For example, we read برآآتهم, their innocence which is a corruption of برآتهم.[865] Similarly, we notice that the scribe uses يـضعون, put or compose, instead of يـضعوا.[866] This particular type of mistake appears quite frequently, with the scribe

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[863] Sidney Griffith, "Ḥabib ibn Khidmah abū Rāʾiṭah: a Christian Mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 165.

[864] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 45.

[865] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 34.

[866] Ibid., 44.

seeming to have difficulty putting verbs in the plural form.[867] Apparently, the scribe also

considers the word أقـانيم, *hypostases*, to be an Arabic word, which in the accusative case

should be written with nunation, أقانيمًـا.[868] He also wrongly renders النـاطقين, the speaking

ones, in the genitive case, when it should be in the nominative, النـاطقون. Another scribal

mistake can be seen in the repetition of a sentence in folio 25b. However, none of these

mistakes or deficiencies can be blamed on 'Ammār, and the book as a whole shows not only

a good grasp of grammar, but great eloquence.[869]

'Ammār's fluency was probably affected by the level of Arabic that was common

among his Muslim countrymen in Baṣrah, for it is obvious that he was well acquainted with

their *kalām* arguments, and had established intellectual equality with some Muʿtazilī thinkers.

In fact, the quality of his Arabic is another aspect that distinguishes him from his Christian

contemporaries—especially abū Qurrah and abū Rā'iṭah. For, although they also composed

theological treatises in Arabic, 'Ammār's Arabic, and his creative use of it, far surpasses

theirs. 'Ammār was comfortable "inventing" Arabic terms to support his arguments.[870] We

note with interest how he breaks all the rules, as Hayek indicates, and uses "nouns as if they

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[867] Ibid., 56, 57, 62, and 65.

[868] Ibid., 51.

[869] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 31.

[870] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses,* 17.

were infinitives."[871] 'Ammār also feels at liberty to coin new forms of words—especially attributive nouns. He speaks, for instance, about وحـدانيّ, one, i.e., related to the oneness; حكمـانيّ, wise, related to wisdom; and جـسمانيّ, fleshly, related to the flesh; أنيّـة, identity, related to "I am," أنـا; مائيّـة, whatness, related to مـا. The prime example of this is the many words he invented from the Arabic word إنـسانٌ, man or humanity. From this word he creatively derived: أَنْسَنَةٌ, humanizing; تَأَنّسَنَ, became human; تَأّنّسَ, He became human; أُنْسيّةٌ, humanity; and أُنّوسَـةٌ, humanity.[872] This explains Hayek's fascination with 'Ammār's Arabic and his description of his writing as "مهرجان," festival of words.[873]

When we consider this richness, the eloquence of his linguistic style and his ability to both summarize and present compelling arguments, it becomes obvious why 'Ammār has been identified as the most profound and exciting figure among Arab Christian theologians in the ninth century, for he was someone who used Arabic to the advantage of his theological position.[874] In this regard, Hayek argues that, since Timothy I did not write in Arabic, 'Ammār can be classified as the first Arab Christian theologian who composed treatises in Arabic, especially given his mastery in using the language and his rigorous style.[875]

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[871] Ibid.

[872] Ibid., 18.

[873] Ibid.

[874] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 45-46.

[875] Ibid., 26-27.

Another interesting feature of 'Ammār's style is his use of repetition. As noted earlier,

he carefully repeats words and phrases in order to further his arguments. But he also shows

great skill in using synonyms and unexpected antonyms to great effect. With regard to

Christianity he says:ليس دينٌ تحت السّماءِ أَمْنَعَ لشهوةٍ ولا أَكْسَرَ عن لذّةٍ ولا أَضْيَقَ أمرًا من دين النّصرانيّة,

"There is no religion under the sun which prohibits desire more, and destroys pleasure more

and has more restrictive commands than the Christian religion."[876] Likewise, in refuting the

tahrīf allegation, he powerfully writes: فاختلافُهَا في التّأويل يوضحُ مُحَالَ ما ادّعِيَ عليهَا من اتّفاقهَا في

تحريفِ التّنزيل, "Their [the Christians] differing interpretations demonstrate the impossibility of

what has been alleged concerning their conspiracy to corrupt the revealed text."[877] And

eloquently he states " فأيّة نعمةٍ أعظم وأيّ فضلٍ أكثر وأيّ جودٍ أظهر ممّا ختم الله به ما ابتدانا به من جوده

وكرمـه!, "What greater grace, what more abundant favor, what more obvious generosity is

there than that by which God has sealed His generosity and kindness which He initiated in

us!"[878] It is indeed correct that 'Ammār

> …had the advantage of being the first to write a suitably rigorous account of
> the fundamental proofs of Christianity in Arabic in adequate language.
> However, he had other merits; his gift for synthesis, his powerful theological
> vision, his certainty regarding existential faith…make him one of the most
> attractive figures in Eastern Christianity.[879]

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[876] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 38.

[877] Ibid., 42.

[878] Ibid., 73.

[879] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 33-34.

'Ammār's Use of the Christian Scriptures

'Ammār was clearly a biblical theologian who held the scriptures in high regard, depending

on its truths as he made his defense of Christianity. As we have previously shown, there are

obvious allusions to biblical texts throughout the text of *Kitāb al-Burhān*. 'Ammār

demonstrably knew the scriptures and the specific verses that could be used as proof-texts,

and he also makes references, both direct and indirect, to biblical narratives. For example,

he mentions the story of Amnon and his rape of Tamar, the beautiful sister of his half-

brother, Absalom;[880] the story of Samson's vengeance on the Philistines;[881] David's affair

with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah;[882] and Solomon's love for women.[883]

But more than this, the Bible is foundational to 'Ammār's apology, and he structures

his arguments by adding phrases such as "They [the apostles] reported in the Gospel,"[884]

"As the Gospel reported,"[885] "As they [Christians] found it written in the Gospel,"[886] "The

Gospel attributes them [the *hypostases*],"[887] and "The Gospel tells…"[888] All these modifying

phrases show that he considers the scriptures to be the real source of theological reflection,

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[880] II Samuel 13.

[881] Judges 15.

[882] II Samuel 11.

[883] I Kings 11.

[884] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 34.

[885] Ibid., 36.

[886] Ibid., 52.

[887] Ibid., 55.

[888] Ibid., 57.

and the ultimate proof of the truthfulness of an idea. In a word, he sees his theology as biblical theology.

Further, we note that 'Ammār does not limit himself to the text of either the Old or New Testament; but quotes from both. For example, he repeatedly appeals to the Psalms and to the Gospel according to Matthew, and he also quotes the Book of Daniel, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Acts, and the Gospel according to John.

It is revealing that the majority of 'Ammār's biblical citations are found in his defenses of the Trinity and the incarnation. Concerning the first topic, he makes five biblical references,[889] and six references are made regarding the latter.[890] This large number of quotations is significant, given that these two teachings have always been difficult topics in Christian-Muslim theological conversation. The fact that he appeals to the scriptures to explain them shows that he believes that the testimony of the scriptures stands as the ultimate witness to the truth of these beliefs. However, he does not quote any verses to support Christian teaching on the cross, the crucifixion, or baptism.

It is also notable that when 'Ammār quotes the scriptures he does not paraphrase them. The only exception in *Kitāb al-Burhān* is when he indirectly refers to Isaiah 53. Here, unlike his other quotations from Isaiah, he summarizes the whole chapter in one sentence!

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[889] Ibid., 48, 48, 48, 48, and 48.
[890] Ibid., 72, 76, 76, 76, 77, and 77.

He puts it thus: ما رضي الله عن خلقه فاحتمل لعنتهم وحـرق صـكَّ خطايـاهم, "God was not pleased

with His creature. He has borne their iniquities, and has burned the written code [record] of

their sins,"—a summation that seems relatively unrelated to the actual text.[891]

Nevertheless, ʿAmmār uses significantly fewer biblical quotations than do abū Qurrah

and abū Rāʾiṭah. There is no convincing explanation for this, since these theologians were all

writing within the same time-frame, and presumably with the same purpose in mind. Perhaps

the Muʿtazilī context of Baṣrah where ʿAmmār was active demanded more reliance on *kalām*

and rational proofs than on scriptural proofs.

Nonetheless, it remains true that the verses used by ʿAmmār could not only support his

arguments but also provide spiritual and intellectual support to his fellow Christians in their

daily encounter with Muslims.[892] It may well have been the case that some Christians

doubted the incarnation or the Trinity due to the fierce and consistent Muslim objections they

faced all around them. There is textual evidence supporting this idea, for ʿAmmār makes it

clear that he is listing certain verses in order to support those who trust that the books of

God are correct, i.e., his Christian community.[893] This comes as no surprise when we

consider that *Kitāb al-Burhān* was meant to function as an attestation of credibility both to

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[891] Ibid., 86.

[892] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 44.

[893] Ibid., 76.

those who ask for proof,[894] and to those who might start to doubt their faith.

All biblical citations in *Kitāb al-Burhān* are, of necessity, addressed directly to the Christian community, since the Muslim interlocutor attributes *taḥrīf* and corruption to the Christian scriptures. This accusation was well known to 'Ammār who, as we have seen, includes arguments refuting it and demonstrating that the books of God are trustworthy. This is exactly why 'Ammār, whenever he makes reference to scriptures, adds a declaration that the books of God have not been corrupted in any way whatsoever, but remain correct and reliable. Invariably, 'Ammār either prefaces or closes his quotations in *Kitāb al-Burhān* with a statement concerning the trustworthiness of the scriptures.[895]

'Ammār's Use of the Qur'ān

'Ammār's wide knowledge of the Qur'ān is no less impressive than his knowledge of the Christian scriptures. It is clear that he had specific qur'ānic passages in mind as he arranged his arguments supporting Christianity.[896] 'Ammār shows great confidence in using the book of Islam, knowing where and how to quote it, and which texts to "ignore" in order to avoid

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[894] See *sūrah* 2: 111; cf. Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 155.

[895] See, for example, Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 40.

[896] See Paul Khoury, *al-Tafsīr al-Masīḥī lil-Qur'ān,* al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Ta'āwun, 18 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 2002), 5-7; cf. Paul Khoury, *al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas fī Nuṣūṣih al-'Arabīyah al-Qadīmah,* vol. 1, al-Masīḥiyyah wal-Islām fīl-Ḥiwār wal-Ta'āwun, 49 (Jūniyah: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyyah, 2010), 5.

complicating the flow of his arguments. That is to say, that 'Ammār is highly selective in

using the holy text of Islam. The most obvious example is when he "ignores" a qur'ānic verse

in his defense of the crucifixion. *Sūrah* 4:157ff has always been associated with the Islamic

rebuttal of the historicity of the cross, as we see in al-Mahdī's conversation with Timothy I.[897]

However, 'Ammār makes no reference to this verse. The reason, as we have suggested

before, may have had to do with the *dhimmī* regulations concerning criticizing the Qur'ān.

Not only does 'Ammār use both direct and indirect quotes from the Qur'ān, but he also

takes the title of this treatise from a qur'ānic verse. The Qur'ān, in *sūrah* 2:111, challenges

the "People of the Book" to bring forth their proof if they are right in their claims. The proof

that 'Ammār puts forward is therefore two-fold: it is proof that Christianity is not absurd, and it

is a refutation of Islamic objections.[898] It becomes obvious that 'Ammār deliberately makes

this qur'ānic allusion in naming his treatises. First, *sūrah* 2:111 is quoted literally in *Kitāb al-*

Masā'il wal-Ajwibah, in question 17 under the fourth section, where the reasons for the

incarnation are discussed.[899] And second, he quotes directly from *sūrah* 2 on two

occasions.[900] He is, in fact, answering the qur'ānic challenge, and thus putting forth his

detailed proof that Christianity is correct, that the Gospel has not been altered, that

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[897] Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes," 141-143.

[898] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 48.

[899] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 206.

[900] Ibid., 28 and 84. 'Ammār quotes verses 286 and 245.

incarnation is possible, and that God is one with three *ṣifāt*.

However, it must also be kept in mind that 'Ammār does not accept the Qur'ān as a

revelation from God.[901] As we have seen in 'Ammār's refutation of the *taḥrīf* allegation, he

not only denies that there is any truth in the Qur'ān, but also sharply attributes *taḥrīf* to it,

arguing that it is the Gospel corrupted. Nevertheless, the Qur'ān is the book of 'Ammār's

opponent and it seems appropriate, and even necessary, that 'Ammār give it some serious

attention, and attempt to draw proofs from it to substantiate his arguments. Indeed, his use

of the Qur'ān may well have been a strategy for establishing an element of common ground

with his interlocutor.

'Ammār makes ten direct references to the Qur'ān in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, (2:245, 286;

5:18; 6:109; 17:59, 85; 19:90-91; 72:3 twice; and 112:3)*.* Not all ten quotations oppose the

Christian faith, though some, of course, do. Verses such as 5:18; 72:3 and 112:3 have been

used in anti-Christian polemics throughout most of the history of Christian-Muslim relations.

These verses 'Ammār refuted. For example, in response to *sūrah* 72:3, he argues that

sonship should not be understood physically, offering the birth of the word from the soul and

the light from the sun as examples of non-physical births.[902]

On the other hand, there are verses that he seems to have used simply in order to

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[901] See Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 166-169.
[902] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 57.

establish common ground with Muslims. These are verses in which he faces no doctrinal

challenges but is in agreement with them. In quoting such verses, he hopes that the

interlocutor will accept the argument being discussed, since it is based on the common

ground of biblical and qur'ānic verses. We note, for example, that *sūrah* 2:245[903] perfectly

corresponds to his argument that God can be identified with humans, to the point that God

speaks as someone who seeks a loan! 'Ammār then uses this idea to explain and defend the

Eucharist, for Christ, as 'Ammār maintains, called the elements his own body, thus

identifying them with himself—a theme undoubtedly expressed in *sūrah* 2:245. Though such

use seems reasonable, it may not have been accepted by his Muslim counterpart, since

anthropomorphisms were not always appreciated in Islamic thinking.[904]

However, other instances of qur'ānic usage perfectly match the Islamic interpretation—

at least in 'Ammār's immediate time and context. For example, we note that his interpretation

of *sūrah* 17:59 echoes the words of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān concerning people who asked

Muḥammad to perform miracles similar to those performed by Mūsā and 'Īsā. This verse,

along with its interpretation, supports 'Ammār's point that only Christianity was accepted on

account of great miracles and mighty wonders, and that even the Qur'ān itself denies that

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[903] "Who is it that will lend unto Allah a goodly loan."

[904] See for example, Binyamin Abrahamov, *al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm ar-Rassī, Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm: Kitāb al-Mustarshid* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

any miracles were performed by Muḥammad.

‘Ammār not only quotes directly from the Qur'ān, but also borrows several phrases that are qur'ānic. This is significant because it shows that ‘Ammār, like his contemporary (and now also, modern-day) Arab Christian theologians, was confident in using the text of the Qur'ān, even manipulating it at times to his own advantage. We are reminded, for instance, of Patriarch Timothy I in his conversation before al-Mahdī, where the Patriarch showed excellent knowledge of the Qur'ān. Similarly, abū Qurrah uses many of the "Beautiful Names" of God from the Qur'ān, such as *Ḥakīm*, and *Ṣabūr*, to describe the attributes of God.[905] ‘Ammār and the others living in *Dār al-Islām* not only knew the Qur'ān but also knew how to use it to prove their differing views. This is true enculturation, and shows that Arab Christian theology was effectively translated into the context of Islam.[906] It also shows that the Qur'ān itself became a part of their mindset, as a source of their theological articulations.[907] Samir Khalil puts it thus:

> The author [an Arab Christian theologian] is impregnated with the qur'ānic culture. He does not live in a "Christian ghetto," nor does he use what some

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[905] Ignace Dick, *Maymar fī Wujūd al-Khāliq*, 187-189.

[906] See Mark Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafā'*, 5; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 50.

[907] Samir Khalil, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity, (c.750)," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period, (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil and Jørgen Nielsen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 109; cf. Sidney Griffith, "The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early ‘Abbasid Period: Theodore abū Qurrah and the Summa Theologiae Arabica," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (March 1996), 12.

might call a "Christian Arabic" vocabulary or style, and much less a "Christian Arabic grammar." He shares with Muslims….the common Arabic culture, which carries many qur'ānic words and expressions, and a certain style and even some Muslim thoughts.[908]

To find a verse or theme within the Qur'ān, a modern researcher only needs a print or digital concordance. But in 'Ammār's time, such a task would be truly daunting. The fact that he used some verses that were not commonly employed in anti-Christian discourse suggests that 'Ammār probably owned and studied his own copy of the Qur'ān. This proposition becomes even more likely when we consider that, after quoting *sūrah* 6:109, 'Ammār cites what he identifies as ibn 'Abbās's interpretation of *sūrah* 6:109. This could indicate that he had a set of Islamic books in his private book collection!

All of these considerations suggest that the Qur'ān itself was foundational to 'Ammār's intellectual life to the point that we can no longer differentiate between his words and some qur'ānic phrases and allusions.[909] In a word, he knows the Qur'ān, quotes it, interprets it, and is ultimately aware of its contemporary interpretation.

Finally, It is interesting to note that several qur'ānic quotations used by 'Ammār are identical with the text of the current Qur'ān. This interesting fact leaves us wondering whether 'Ammār was indeed quoting from an actual copy of the Qur'ān. It is difficult to imagine him

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[908] Samir Khalil, "The Earliest Arab Apology," 109.

[909] Samir Khalil, *The Significance of Early Arab-Christian Thought for Muslim-Christian Understanding* (Washington, D.C: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, 1997), 8.

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memorizing such lengthy verses and reproducing them exactly in his works. Was he perhaps

a monk studying at a "Nestorian" monastery and writing to refute Islamic objections to

Christianity? Does the reference he makes in *Kitāb al-Burhān* while discussing the union of

the divine and human natures in Christ—,"If some of us exalt ourselves above that

(marriage), how then this can be attributed to the Creator?"—shed any light on his

profession? Or does his statement, "The Gospel orders us to baptize people…" suggest that

he was in fact a priest? We can, unfortunately, only speculate.

'Ammār and Islam

We know that 'Ammār had immersed himself in study of the Qur'ān, but what was his

attitude toward Islam? As a Christian apologist who writes to refute Islamic objections, it is

understandable that he dismisses any claims to the truth of Islam. However, in his rejection,

he shows admirable fairness and objectivity. As we have seen in many sections of *Kitāb al-*

Burhān, such as the discussion on the Trinity and the incarnation, 'Ammār structures his

argument to fairly address the beliefs and questions of his imagined interlocutor. 'Ammār

opens each discourse by stating an actual Muslim objection to a Christian doctrine, outlines

what Muslims believe about the topic, and then refutes their objections.[910] For example, he

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[910] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 39.

speaks of the Islamic objection concerning the divine unity, indicating that their objection primarily arises from their wrong perception. They believe that the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Christ denotes a physical relationship. Next, he details the Islamic doctrine that God "begetteth not, nor is He begotten,"[911] and then states that the Christian position is very different from their understanding. This is indeed a fair way of handling an objection, and it clearly demonstrates his attempted objectivity in addressing the "other." This attitude seems to be characteristic of 'Ammār. When speaking of the human ability to understand the divine nature, he states that neither the Islamic nor the Christian religion can grasp the full 'whatness' of God, who transcends all human intelligence[912]—a statement that today would be labeled pluralistic!

This perspective suggests that beneath 'Ammār's apparent confidence in his doctrinal accuracy is a humble apologist who fully acknowledges the limitations of the human intellect. This can also be seen in his discussion of other religions, and other Christian positions. 'Ammār disagrees with the Christologies of the Jacobites and the Melkites, but he nevertheless emphasizes that the various sects agree that God appeared in the flesh. For his time, 'Ammār demonstrates an unusual level of "ecumenism."

'Ammār also uses the term مخالفونا, our opponents, when referring to Muslims.

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[911] *Surāh* 112:3.

[912] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 164.

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Otherwise he either directly calls them "Muslims,"[913] or sometimes uses the term

"Islāmiyyah."[914] Both terms are different from abū Rā'iṭah's designation of Muslims as " أهـل

التـيمّن, people of Yemen, or the Southerners."[915] According to 'Ammār, the south is not a

place with which Muslims are identified; rather, the south is where Christianity spread and

flourished.[916] 'Ammār, then, avoids the negative tone of abū Qurrah and the localized

descriptions used by abū Rā'iṭah. He also avoids any engagement with Islam that would

result in direct confrontation. As we have seen, this is particularly evident in his discussion of

Christ's cross. 'Ammār ignores the blatant qur'ānic denial of the historicity of the crucifixion,

and instead develops a theological reflection on the implications of the cross for human life,

and the assurance it gives of victory over death.

However, whenever it is possible to refute qur'ānic accusations without thereby

impugning the credibility of the Qur'ān itself, 'Ammār rigorously challenges such texts. We

see this in his discourse on the divine unity, where he boldly provides an alternative

understanding of *sūrah* 112:3. Furthermore, he deliberately avoids addressing some of the

complicated issues in Christian-Muslim conversation, such as the role and function of

Muḥammad, the revealed nature of the Qur'ān, and the issue of the Paraclete. Indeed, such

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[913] Ibid., 22.

[914] Ibid., 23.

[915] Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 164.

[916] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 32.

questions are not usually addressed; rather, only when compelled to answer do Arab

Christian theologians provide an apology. The most diplomatic example has always been

that given by Timothy I.[917] All in all, it is clear that 'Ammār felt at home within the context of

Islam. That is to say, that he did not divorce himself from his Islamic context, but rather went

to great lengths to understand Islam, thereby showing respect for its teachings. He then

sought to explain Christian doctrine to his Muslim counterparts.[918] Because of his attitude

and concerted effort, 'Ammār's conversation with Islam is exceptionally important.[919]

Having examined 'Ammār's use of the Christian and Muslim scriptures, we now turn to

consider his use of the *kalām* arguments.

'Ammār al-Baṣrī and the Question of "Christian" *Kalām*

Sidney Griffith has demonstrated that 'Ammār's style of answering questions is similar to that

of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*—especially that of al-'Allāf.[920] Further, Griffith demonstrates that

'Ammār develops strategies and even casts his terminology in the manner of his

contemporary *mutakallimūn*. However, is it a fair appraisal to describe 'Ammār as a

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[917] Alphonse Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, 33-35; cf. Samir Khalil, "The Prophet Mohammed as Seen by Timothy I and Other Arab Christian Authors," in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 75-106.

[918] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 39.

[919] Ibid., 44.

[920] Sidney Griffith, "'Ammār al-Baṣrī," 148.

"Christian *mutakallim*,"[921] as Griffith has done?

First, there is no justifiable reason why *'Ilm al-kalām* itself, as an intellectual exercise, should be described as either Muslim or Christian. The evidence suggests that it was indeed started by some Muslim scholars who, following the theological legacy of Yūḥannā al-Dimashqī,[922] wished to reconcile Greek philosophy (which they encountered at the hands of their Christian counterparts) with the teachings of the Qur'ān, especially concerning the issue of predestination and divine attributes. It is in this way that *'Ilm al-kalām* came into existence. That it was developed at the hands of Muslim scholars does not necessarily make it an exclusively Islamic science, especially since it was developed in dialogue with other thinkers.[923]

Further, there seems to be no evidence in the writings of Muslim *mutakallimūn* that they were engaged in this endeavor in order to establish something that was specifically Islamic. Rather, their main aim was to synthesize the teaching of Islam with tenets of Greek philosophy, hoping to provide rational refutations of other beliefs.[924] Muslim *mutakallimūn*, especially the early ones, were in close contact with Christian theologians, and so it seems natural that both groups influenced each other intellectually. Such mutual influence must

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[921] Ibid.

[922] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 22-24.

[923] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 158.

[924] 'Abd al-Majīd al-Sharafī, *al-Islām wal-Ḥadāthah* (Tūnis: Dār al-Janūb Iil-Nashr, 1998), 46.

have left both groups struggling to articulate their faith in light of the opposition of the other, and these articulations were then further refined as they conversed together.[925] The "crisis of faith" therefore was not only 'Ammār's! It was indeed a crisis that helped shape Arab Christians and Arab Muslims as both groups were involved in theological conversations regarding their religious convictions.[926] As the proverb says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another."[927]

Thus, their theological conversation took in a specific style and had a certain religious flavor: one gave rise to Arabic Christian theology, while the other resulted in what has become commonly known as Islamic *kalām*.[928] The Islamic nature of *'Ilm al-kalām* is indeed questionable, given the fact that "*al-kalām* and *al-lāhūt* [theology] are two sides of one coin."[929]

In addition, Griffith often refers to 'Ammār's arguments about the Trinity as the most logical and appropriate solution to the intellectual dilemma that arose among Muslim *mutakallimūn* concerning the attributes of God. Thus, Griffith presents *Kitāb al-Burhān* as if it were a "Christian answer" to a "Muslim problem." This view seems an inadequate description

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[925] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 24.

[926] See Joseph Nasrallah, *Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn*, 222-223.

[927] Proverbs 27:17 (NRSV).

[928] Yūsuf Zaydān, *al-Lāhūt al-'Arabī wa-Uṣūl al-'Unf al-Dīnī* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009), 172.

[929] Ibid., 200.

of *Kitāb al-Burhān,* since it reduces the treatise to a mere conversation with the Muʿtazilīs. Such a reduction fails to address the fundamental structure of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, for we know from abū al-Barakāt that ʿAmmār's *Kitāb al-Burhān* is structured as a testimony to the unfolding of the divine economy.[930]

ʿAmmār's treatise is thus also a pastoral solution offered to support Christians who were at risk of converting to Islam while under intense socio-political pressures and faced with difficult questions regarding the truthfulness of their faith.[931] ʿAmmār is engaging in a vitally important contemporary discussion in order to explain the mystery of the Trinity in terms that may also have found some appreciation among the Muslim thinkers of his day. His main focus, however, remains, not the Muʿtazilīs, but his fellow Christians, who needed to present a *burhān* of the integrity of their faith. *Kitāb al-Burhān* is ʿAmmār's contribution to support the Christian community in *Dār al-Islām*; ʿAmmār's arguments surely sustained Christians, enabling them to stand firm, ready to give reason for their hope.

Kitāb al-Burhān must also be seen against the background of a long series of "faith crises" experienced by ʿAmmār, both as an individual and as representative of a church that unexpectedly found itself in the midst of a theological discussion that was not of their own choice.

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[930] Wilhelm Riedel, *Der Katalog*, 650.

[931] See Sandra Keating, *Defending the "People of the Truth,"* 12.

Accordingly, in keeping with abū al-Barakāt's subtitle to *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 'Ammār's

method of answering Islam is to be understood within the wider context of the divine

economy, where God, according to Christian thinking, unveils the divine salvific plan in

successive historical events.[932] The truth of Christianity, according to 'Ammār, lies within the

whole divine plan in which humans know that God exists; that God is One known in three

attributes; that their divine books are authentic; that God appeared in the flesh; that the body

in which God was veiled died on the cross; and that eternity is a place where God and

humans can have a relationship. These are the preoccupations of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, and it is

therefore evident that 'Ammār not only uses the attributes argument as both proof and

explanation of the Trinity, but also provides a more holistic discussion and proof. It is the

whole economy of God that is the *burhān per se*. The whole of God's plan perfectly parallels

the foundations of the Christian faith, and as a result Christianity must be the only "*vera*

religio," since truth itself is single.[933] This is 'Ammār's ultimate interest, rather than any

preoccupation with certain Mu'tazilī discussions on the nature of God's attributes.

For 'Ammār, the credibility of Christianity has to do with God's self-revelation more

than with God's character. The revelation of God in history and scriptures (revelation history)

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[932] G.W.H. Lampe, et al., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 940.

[933] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, 27.

assures Christians that their understanding of God is correct, and that God is indeed a triune

God who is manifested in Christ for the sake of their salvation. The whole of *Kitāb al-Burhān*

is a proof not only of the Christian doctrine but also of a perfect harmony between God's

revelation and the way Christians received it through the books of God, and the manner in

which they responded to this revelation.[934] Their reception is clearly equated with their

system of doctrines, and their response to doctrine is their worship and their observance of

religious practices such as baptism, the Eucharist, and the veneration of the cross. 'Ammār's

point is clear: all of Christianity harmonizes with God's plan. Therefore, it necessitates that

Christianity is the "*vera religio*."

'Ammār was a man of his age who was under pressure to provide a proof of credibility.

This seems to have provoked a crisis of faith, which led him to compose his *Kitāb al-Burhān*,

as a "literature of resistance."[935] His compelling *burhān* is the fruit of a crisis or process of

struggle, which demanded that he re-articulate his theological identity.

The manner in which this apology was expressed is indeed significant. 'Ammār's aim

was to re-articulate the truth of Christianity in a vocabulary suitable for his Muslim audience,

or, as Griffith declares, 'Ammār's task as well as the task of all Arab Christian theologians

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[934] Ibid., 25.

[935] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 17.

was to put the orthodoxy of their faith into accommodation with the New World Order,[936]

whose paradigms of thought were generated essentially by Islam.[937]

With this view of *'Ilm al-kalām* in mind, we can conclude with certainty that 'Ammār

was neither a *mutakallim* nor a classical theologian, but rather a Christian apologist *par*

excellence! There is no doubt that 'Ammār particularly utilized *kalām* arguments in his

discourses on the existence of God, the Trinity, and the incarnation. That *kalām* arguments

are clearly used when he addresses Muslim objections raised mainly by Mu'tazilī thinkers,

does not necessarily mean that he was a *mutakallim*. Rather, as an apologist, he utilizes

everything at his disposal in order to refute his interlocutors' objections and to offer pastoral

support to his fellow Christians in their conversations with Muslims. It is not surprising, then,

that he employs the givens of "Islamic" *kalām* in relation to those beliefs that were

particularly opposed by the Mu'tazilī thinkers. 'Ammār uses the *kalām* arguments to establish

common ground with his contemporaries whose main articulations of theological discussion

were clearly colored by *kalām*. Had 'Ammār's apology been structured differently, it may not

have reached the attention of al-'Allāf and may have failed to communicate to his context. In

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[936] Sidney Griffith, "The Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-'Aql of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa': A Profile of the Christian Creed in Arabic in Tenth Century Egypt," in idem, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 28.

[937] Sidney Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," *ARAM* 3 (1991),136; cf. Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 22.

a word, *kalām* was only one tool for conversing with Islam, as our analysis of *Kitāb al-Burhān* has demonstrated.

This viewpoint is supported when we consider other sections in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, such as the discourses on the cross and on baptism, where ʿAmmār refutes classical Islamic objections that were not raised by his Muʿtazilī counterparts. Yet at other times, such as in his discourse on the incarnation, ʿAmmār makes use of non-Muʿtazilī Islamic views of God. In this discussion, he concludes that the Christian view is the correct understanding of the divine. In his defense of the existence of God and in refuting the allegation of *taḥrīf*, he appeals to Greek philosophy and logic. In his defense of the incarnation, the crucifixion and baptism, he appeals to the scriptures and in the apology for the Trinity, he uses *kalām* arguments.

His use of such differing styles of argument clearly shows that ʿAmmār's main concern is not to establish a coherent "Christian" *kalām*, but rather to use all available tools to vindicate his theological position and to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith. That we cannot find a unified apologetic method within *Kitāb al-Burhān* demonstrates that ʿAmmār's focal point is not *kalām*, but a desire to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity, against the Muslim accusation of absurdity.

However, if we cannot call ʿAmmār a "Christian mutakallim," neither should we see him

as a classical Christian theologian. There can be no doubt that in his attempts to justify

Christian doctrine, he is definitely theologizing. But when we consider the structure and

content of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, it becomes obvious that his methodology differs from that of

theologians. ʿAmmār did not choose the topics of *Kitāb al-Burhān*; rather, his theological

agenda was set decades before he was born, when the Qurʾān first challenged Christians to

bring forth their *burhān* of credibility.[938] This challenge questioned the Trinitarian view of

God, the deity of Christ, the cross of Christ, the incarnation, and the trustworthiness of the

scriptures, as well as particular Christian practices. As a result, these topics of discussion

were part of the conversation between Islam and the wider Christian community, and thus

Arab Christians in particular found themselves compelled to discuss these issues with their

Muslim challengers.

Given these parameters, it is not accurate to describe ʿAmmār as a theologian. Rather,

he is a theological apologist who articulated the traditional doctrines of his "Nestorian" faith

and, aware of his Islamic context, engaged in addressing its objections. Accordingly, he is

not so much concerned with structuring a consistent theological treatise as with answering

Islamic objections. This becomes evident when we consider that the topics covered in *Kitāb*

al-Burhān do not compose a coherent theological treatment of all Christian doctrines; rather,

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[938] See *sūrah* 2:111.

they are answers to questions raised almost exclusively by Muslims. This is very clear, for example, in the lengthy discussion on the incarnation and the divine unity. In *Kitāb al-Burhān*, a full theological explanation of these two complex topics is not provided. Instead, 'Ammār simply repudiates the idea of the physical sonship of Christ, and then lists four arguments showing that the incarnation is credible. There are many other issues related to these two topics, but 'Ammār ignores them and focuses only on those aspects that were opposed by Islam. Clearly, Islam shaped the theological agenda of Arab Christian apologists!

'Ammār's *Kitāb al-Burhān* is therefore to be seen in this context, and the selection of these particular topics demonstrates the faith crisis that he encountered and eloquently answered. The credibility of aspects of his faith had been questioned, and it was understandable that he should answer accordingly. In this, he fits within the larger context of ninth-century Christian-Muslim relations, wherein, prompted by clear qur'ānic objections to Christianity,[939] the two faiths conversed on theological matters.

No wonder then that we find close similarities between the arguments of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī and other Arab Christian theologians; similarities also found with the works of his predecessors, his contemporaries, his successors, and even contemporary Arab Christians.

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[939] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses* (FI), 24.

As noted previously, 'Ammār's views on the Trinity have recently been used by Ibrāhīm Lūqā

in his *al-Masīḥiyyah fīl-Islām.*

Of course, one factor that has helped maintain this continuity of thought is Islam itself.

Islam's objections to Christianity have not fundamentally changed, and they remain as fierce

and direct as they were during the early encounters between the two religions. The fact that

such objections have remained unchanged has enabled Arab Christians, especially those

living within *Dār al-Islām*, to draw insights from their long heritage and to utilize ancient

answers once again.

Negatively, however, this state of affairs means that, like 'Ammār, Arab Christians

have focused their energies on apologetic discussions rather than on reflection about other

issues and the development of new theological thought.[940] Presumably, this is why very few

theological theories have been produced by Arab Christians: they have been engaged in

responding to unchanging issues since the seventh century! Possibly, the only exception is

the recent articulation of Arab/Palestinian liberation theology, which was developed in

response to the ever-increasing political conflict between the Arabs and Israel.[941] But

another interesting result has been that, after the advent of Islam, new Christian heresies

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[940] Adnane Mokrani, *An Intellectual Biography: an Interview with F. Samir Khalil Samir S.J.*, PAC, vol. 23 (Bayrūt: CEDRAC, 2010), 22-23.

[941] The outstanding example remains the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008).

ceased to appear in the Eastern world, presumably because major theological conversations

were thereafter limited to the discussion of issues raised by Islam.[942]

The Legacy of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī

In our analysis of ʿAmmār's discourse on the Trinity, we saw that his arguments circulated in

later centuries, and that Arab Christian theologians who followed him sometimes reproduced

his arguments almost verbatim.[943] Indeed, some of the arguments that he presented in the

ninth century are still in circulation today. It seems fitting, then, to consider the influence of

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī on modern Arabic-speaking theologians.

A Theological "Father" of the Arabic Church

Before we discuss this, however, we must consider Hayek's argument concerning ʿAmmār's

influence on the theologians who followed him—particularly abū al-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyīb, who

used some of ʿAmmār's terms to describe the Trinity. Likewise, Hayek argues that Īlīyā of

Nisibin, and ʿAmr ibn Mattā may also have made use of ʿAmmār's arguments concerning the

Trinity. Although these theologians used numerous terms that were first found in ʿAmmār's

treatises, such similarities do not provide conclusive evidence that they actually knew

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[942] Yūsuf Zaydān, *al-Lāhūt al-ʿArabī*, 75.

[943] See Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques*, 15-16.

'Ammār's works, for such explanations and defenses of the Trinity were, and are, frequently used by Arab Christians. It is equally likely that a common pool of ideas developed, from which all Arabic-speaking theologians have drawn their teaching, modifying them as needed to fit their discussion with Muslims.[944]

Some modern Christian authors, writing in Arabic in the Arab world, clearly use 'Ammār's arguments, often without giving him due credit.[945] Unfortunately, they basically repeat his arguments—especially concerning the Trinity—without even acknowledging that it was he who formulated them. A quick glance at recent publications shows that numerous theologians have put forward the same line of thinking that was first introduced by 'Ammār.[946] This phenomenon surely indicates that 'Ammār's arguments are viewed positively by Arab

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[944] Michel Hayek, *Apologie et controverses*, (FI), 30-32.

[945] These arguments could well have been used by other Christians who preceded 'Ammār, but it is in 'Ammār's writings that such arguments are first recorded.

[946] See, for example, the anonymous, *al-Burhān al-Ṣarīḥ fī Ḥaqīqat Sirray Dīn al-Masīḥ* (Malṭah: N.P, 1834); Ibrāhīm Lūqā, *al-Masiḥiyyah fīl-Islām*; Iskandar Jadīd, *Fī Sabīl al-Ḥaqq* (Bayrūt: Irsāliyat al-Karmal al-Injīliyyah, 1960), and his two other works: *'Iṣmat al-Tawrāh wal-Injīl* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, 1990), and *Nuṣrat al-Ḥaqq* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, 1980); C.G. Pfander and William Tisdall, *Kitāb Mizān al-Ḥaqq* (al-Qāhirah: N.P, 1915); Samuel Zwemer, *al-Masīḥ Kama Yarāhu al-Muslimūn: Ḥayāt wa-Ṣifāt wa-Ta'līm Yasū' al-Masīḥ Ḥasaba al-Qur'ān wal-Aḥādīth al-Nabawiyyah* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, ND), and his other work: *al-Sirr al-'Ajīb fī Fakhr al-Ṣalīb* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at al-Nīl al-Masīḥiyyah, 1900) ; Yassā Manṣūr, *al-Ḥaqq al-Ṣarīḥ fī Lahūt al-Masīḥ* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at al-Nīl al-Masīḥīyah, 1922) ; Zakarīyā Buṭrus, *Allāh Wāḥid fīl-Thālūth al-Quddūs* (Rikon, Switzerland: The Good Way, 1980).

Christians. In our discussion of the Trinity, we noted that abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq saw that

Christians of his time favored certain arguments for defending the Trinity.[947]

Given the testimony of al-Warrāq, and the fact that the topics under discussion

among Christians and Muslims remain unchanged today, it should be no surprise that

Christians of modern times still favor ʿAmmār's arguments. After all, it was ʿAmmār's

faithfulness to his religious position in the midst of an alien thought-world that sustained the

Arabic-speaking church itself. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to call him a foundational "father"

of the Arabic-speaking church.[948] It follows that the members of the Christian community in

the Arab world owe their religious existence to this great apologist theologian, whose writings

"helped lay the foundations of Christian theology in Arabic."[949]

"Arab Christians"?

Most people are puzzled by the terms, "Arabic Christian theology," and "Arab Christians."[950]

"Arabic" and "Islamic" are often considered synonymous, thereby aggravating the problems

that arise from Christianity being incorrectly identified only with the West. An example of this

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[947] David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam*, 133.

[948] Adnane Mokrani, *An Intellectual Biography*, 62, footnote 40; cf. Wafīk Naṣry, ed., *abū Qurrah and al-Maʾmūn*, 10.

[949] Sidney Griffith, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī," in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, ed. Kenneth Parry and John R. Hinnells (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 26.

[950] Wafīk Naṣry, ed., *abū Qurrah and al-Maʾmūn*, 10; cf. Wafīk Naṣry, *The Caliph and the Bishop,* 29-30.

assumption can be seen in a statement made by the former Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-

Qadhdhāfī, who once said, "Christians who live in the Arab World are closer to the Vatican

than Mecca; they have a European spirit in an Arab garment."[951] This pronouncement is

dangerous as it places Arab Christians outside of *Dār al-Islām*, in which they once were

active members. Moreover, such a biased view does not do justice to the history of

Christianity in the Middle East, and it particularly dismisses the valuable and indispensable

role played by Arab Christians in building what has become known as "Arab/Islamic

civilization."[952]

Moreover, on an intellectual level, this view overlooks the fact that Arab Christians

were intellectually equal to their Muslim counterparts. This has been demonstrated to be

particularly true in the case of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, who no doubt considered himself 'equal' to

his interlocutor, despite being socially subjected to *dhimmī* regulations. Further, 'Ammār is a

fine example of an Arab Christian who chose not to ignore the reality of Islam, but rather

decided to engage with it in meaningful and significant dialogue.[953] His *Kitāb al-Burhān* is

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[951] Andriyah Zakī, *al-Islām al-Siyāsī wal-Muwāṭanah wal-Aqallīyāt: Mustaqbal al-Masīḥīyīn al-'Arab fīl-Sharq al-Awsaṭ (*al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Dawliyyah, 2006), 26.

[952] See Muḥammad M. Saʿad-al-Din, *al-'Aysh al-Mushtarak*, 87-104; cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 176.

[953] Adnane Mokrani, *An Intellectual Biography*, 23.

certainly an example of a 'living text' that still speaks today to the Arabic-speaking church.[954]

Besides providing arguments showing the truthfulness of Christianity, it functions as a profound plea, seeking to inspire Arab Christians of today to seriously grapple with the claims of Islam in their own context.

A Common Ground with Islam

Kitāb al-Burhān falls within the broader literary contributions of Arab Christians to *Dār al-Islām*. Scholars and historians now recognize that Arab Christians played a major role in providing the emerging Islamic empire with vital literature in numerous fields of knowledge.[955] One can hope that Christians can again fulfill this role as cultural mediators, seeking to both maintain their Arabness and relate to Western Christians who are interested in learning about, and conversing with, Islam.[956] Arab Christians can indeed be bridges, or translators, between Islam and global Christianity, just as they were cultural bridges between Islam, the Syriac world and Hellenism.

This 'translation' remains imperative. However, it is not a translation of texts into other

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[954] See Sidney Griffith, "Kenneth Cragg on Christians and the Call to Islam," *Religious Studies Review*, 20, no. 1 (Jan. 1994), 34.

[955] See Wilhelm Baum, "The Age of the Arabs," 64-69; cf. Asʿad ʿabd al-Raḥman, "Ahammīyat al-Wujūd al-Masīḥī fīl-Sharq al-Awsaṭ," *in al-Rabīʿal-ʿArabī wa-Masīḥīyū al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, ed. Metrī al-Rāhib (Bayt Laḥim: Dīyār, 2012), 50.

[956] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 21.

languages, but rather a transmission of Arab Christians' knowledge of Islam to the West. The Arabic church needs to renew its mission, making its extensive history of dialogue with Islam available to Western Christianity. In this way, the Arab church can extend its work of translation by explaining Christianity to Muslims, but also by explaining Islam to the Western church.[957]

Likewise 'Ammār, an apologist active in the intellectual life of *Dār al-Islām* during the ninth century, becomes an intermediary between his community of Eastern Christians and Christians in the West. His work thus has the potential to initiate an ecumenical movement between the two Christian communities. In one sense, 'Ammār also becomes a connecting point between the Arabs of the Day of the Pentecost and contemporary Arab Christians. He stands as a witness to the rich heritage of the Arabic-speaking church, which extends from those who were present in Jerusalem listening to the Apostles of Christ, to the Syrian "Nestorians" of the East and now to modern-day Arabic-speaking Christians.

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[957] Ibid., 179.

Concluding Thoughts: A Plea for Engagement

The appeal of 'Ammār's *Kitāb al-Burhān* is primarily one for engagement between the Arab

church and its Islamic context.[958] 'Ammār's work is a fine example of an attempt to

contextualize Christianity within *Dār al-Islām*, and especially amongst the Muʻtazilī

intellectual life in Baṣrah. This example is one that is needed to inspire the Arabic-speaking

church today, for there is a tremendous need once again for the church's faith to be spoken

into its context; and for its present to connect with its past.

There can be no doubt that the Arabic-speaking church of today does not find itself in

the same context as 'Ammār. However, it is equally true that Islam continues to form the

church's context and that theological conversation between the two religions is an inherent

part of their relationship, and of the life of the church. The reality of Islam still demands a

burhān from Christians concerning their doctrinal claims. Further, the ties between Islam and

the Arab context have become indissoluble, since Arab culture has been strongly colored by

Islamic thought and theology. And of course, the Arabic language itself, which, as many

would say, is the 'language of the Qur'ān,' has become the strongest tie between Islam and

Arab culture. It is natural, then, that this discourse must be carried out in Arabic. This is

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[958] Wajīh Mīkhā'īl (Wageeh Mikhail), "Taṭawwur al-Lughah al-Kanasīyah bayn al-ʻAṣr al-Islāmī al-Mubakkir wal-Wāqiʻ al-Muʻāṣir," in *Translated Manuscripts*: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference of the Manuscript Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, May 2007, ed. Yūsuf Zaydān (Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2010), 158.

exactly what 'Ammār accomplished through his rich and eloquent use of the Arabic language, thereby showing how Arab Christians can indeed be genuine members of their Arabic world, making use of the common ground on which Christianity and Islam can meet.

Likewise, Arab Christians should not be expected to live as strangers in their homelands![959] For it is completely inappropriate for one group to lay claim to a language by virtue of it being called 'holy.' Nor is it fitting that Arab Christians should adhere to theological formulae coined within the Greek context and use them in the context of *Dār al-Islām*. The two tendencies are equally dangerous: the latter a temporal alienation that locks the church into its ancient history, while the former is a geographical alienation, uprooting the church from its Arabness and situating it in a non-Arabic context.[960] This engagement must also be comprehensive. It is imperative that it include topics of faith, worship and life. Furthermore, it needs to be carried out in a way that is relevant to Muslims; otherwise, communication between Muslims and Christians will break down once again.[961] Likewise, there is a need to question the relevance of Greek theological formulations in the Arab context. How can Greek theological formulae, created to address Greek concerns and theological issues raised in a

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[959] See Riad Jarjour, "The Future of Christians in the Arab World," in *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* eds. Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 16.

[960] Samir Khalil, *Dawr al-Masīḥīyīn al-Thaqāfī fīl-'Ālam al-'Arabī*, vol. 2, Mawsū'at al-Ma'rifah al-Masīḥiyyah 5: al-Fikr al-'Arabī al-Masīḥī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Mashriq, 2004), 53.

[961] Wajīh Mīkhā'īl, "Taṭawwur al-Lughah al-Kanasīyah," 158.

Greek milieu, be useful today in a Muslim context? Were not these same articulations a major factor in dividing Christians before the advent of Islam? Arguably, the absence of any Arab Christian creedal formula, with Islam in mind, is a grievous lack. This absence is especially unhealthy given that Islam is a creedal religion in which the *Shahādah* is repeated five times a day.[962]

One of the primary needs of the church in the Arab world today is to formulate statements of faith that speak to the challenges of Islam. In such an attempt, a work such as *Kitāb al-Burhān* would doubtless be of great importance.[963] Its value comes from the fact that 'Ammār maintained a balance between his Christian heritage and his contemporary Islamic context, and was able to reconcile his heritage with the inheritance of his Islamic culture.[964]

When the modern Arab church succeeds in such a mission, it will thereby succeed in preserving its apostolic faith, having Arabicized it![965] Arab Christians, following the example of 'Ammār, must genuinely bring together their theologies with their Arab culture and thus

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[962] Wajīh Mīkhā'īl, "The Missiological Significance of Early Christian Arab Theology with Special Reference to the Abbasid Period, (750-1258)" (ThM. thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2004), 104.

[963] See Ignace Dick, "Deux Écrits," 56-59.

[964] An outstanding contemporary example of this is Maẓhar Mallūḥī. See Paul Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2007). See also the unique 'eastern' readings of the Christian scriptures by M. Mallūḥī: *al-Injīl Kamā Awḥiya ilā al-Qiddīs Lūqā: Qirā'ah Sharqiyyah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 1998), *Nash'at al-'Ālam wal-Bashariyyah: Dirāsah Mu'āṣirah fī Sifr al-Takwīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, 2001), and *Qirā'ah Ṣūfiyya li-Injīl Yūḥannā* (Bayrūt: Dār al- Jīl, 2004).

[965] Riad Jarjour, "The Future of Christians," 11.

once again invalidate the loathsome saying: "Arabic [culture] has refused to be Christianized."

Kitāb al-Burhān speaks of the divine economy, and Arab Christians also have a role to play in this economy. As 'Ammār exemplified, their role is to affirm themselves as Christian and as Arab simultaneously and indissolubly,[966] and to fulfill their task with deep humility,[967] and openness.[968]

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[966] George Khoury, "Theodore abū Qurrah, (c. 750-820): Translation and Critical Analysis of his Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1990), 303.

[967] David Thomas, "Early Muslim Response to Christianity in Muslim-Christian Dialogue, (Second/Eighth-Eighth/Fourteenth Centuries)," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas, HCMR I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 254.

[968] Adnane Mokrani, *An Intellectual Biography*, 129.

APPENDIX I

List of biblical quotations in *Kitāb al-Burhān*

Bible	Arabic	English	Hayek	MS
Mtt. 10: 9-10	قــال المـسيح ربنــا لرســله حيث بعث بهـم: لا تحملـوا سوطًا ولا عصًا ولا ذهبًا ولا فـضة ولا تلبـسوا حـذاء ولا قميص ولا كساءين	…Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff…	30; 35	7b; 10a
Mtt. 26: 52	مـن سـلّ الـسيف بالـسيف يموت	…for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.	35	10a
Acts 3:6	لـيس لنـا ذهـب ولا فـضة نعطيك، لكن ما اعطانا ربنا لنـا باسـم المـسيح: انهـض واحمـــل جنازتـــك وقـــم وانطلق الى بيتك	I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk [and carry your bed, and go to your home].	35	10a
Ps. 33:6	بكلمة الله خلقت الـسماوات وبروحه جميع جنودها	By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth	48	18a
Job 33:4	روح الله خلقتنى	The Spirit of God has made me	48	18a
Is. 40:8	كلمــة الله قايمــة الـى ابـد الابدين	The word of our God stands forever	48	18a
Ps. 119: 89	كلمـــة الهنـــا قديمـــة فــي السماء.	[The] word of our Lord is eternal in the heavens	48	18a
Ps. 56: 4	لكلمة الله اسبّح	[To the Word of God] I praise	48	18a
Jn. 10: 38	ان لـم تـصدقونى فـصدقوا اعمالى	…even though you do not believe me, believe [my] works	72	23b
Is. 7: 14; Mtt. 1: 23	هذه العذرى تحبل وتلد ابنًا يــدعى اســمه عمونويــل وتفسيره: معنا الهنا	Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, [which means: Our Lord is with us]	76	35b

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Is. 9: 6	ولد لنا ولد وابن ومسلّط وملك، وسلطانه على عاتقه	For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder	76	35b
Ps. 8: 5-6	مَن الرجل الذي ذكرته وابن البـشر الـذي اصـطفيته ونقصته قليلاً من الملائكة. ثـم بالحمـد والمجـد رديتـه وسـلطته علـى كـل شـئ عملـت يـداك. وكـل شـئ اخضعت تحت قدميه	Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet,	76	35b
Ps. 107: 20	ارسـل كلمتـه فـشفاهم وخلّصهم من الحبال	He sent forth His Word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.	77	35b
Dan. 7: 13-14	رأيت على سـحاب الـسماء كالانـسان أتـى فبلـغ الـى عتيـق الايـام فقربـوه بـين يديـــه، واعطـــاه الملـــك والسلطان والقـدرة لتعبـده الشعوب والالسن، وسلطانه سلطان غير بائد ولا متنقض ولا فان	I saw…and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days…and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.	77	35b

Mtt. 25: 35-40	كنــت ســائلاً فــاعطيتمونــي وكنت جائعًا فاشـبعتمونـي وكنـت مريـضًا فعـدتمونـي، وما اشـبه هـذا مـن القـول على ما في الانجيل. ويقول للطالحين مثلَ قوله ويحكي عــنهم خـــلاف مــا فعـل الـــصالحون. فيقولـــون له:"متى كنت يا سيدنا كذلك، فيقول كل ما فعلتم بواحـد مـن هـؤلاء الـصغار فبـي فعلتم واليَّ صنعتم. "	…For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me…[He will say to the evil doers the opposite of this] Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee [as such] And [He] will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'	84	40a
Mt. 26: 26-28	كلوا هذا جسدي الذي يُقرّب لمغفرة الخطايا، وهذا دمي الذي يُسفك لغفران الذنوب	…Eat; this is my body [which is offered for the forgiveness of sins]…this is my blood…which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.	85	40b
Mt. 26: 26	ان هذا الذي اعطـيكم هـو جسدي	This [which I am giving you] is my body	85	40b
Is. 53: 3, 11, 12	مــا رضــى الله عــن خلقــه فاحتمل لعنتهم وحرق صكّ خطاياهم	[God was not pleased with him]…he shall bear their iniquities…and [burn the written code of their sins]	86	41a

APPENDIX II

List of qur`ānic quotations in *Kitāb al-Burhān*

Qur'ān	Arabic	English	Hayek	MS
2: 286	تعالى الله عن تكليـف النـاس ما لا يطيقون	[May God be exalted of] place[ing] a burden greater than it can bear	28	5b
17: 59	وما منعنا ان نرسل بالآيات الا ان كُـذّب بهـا الاولـون. وآتينـا ثمود الناقة مبصرة فظلموا بها وما نرسل بالآيات الا تخويفًا	And We refrain from sending the signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false: We sent the she-camel to the Thamud to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully: We only send the Signs by way of terror.	31	8a
6: 109	واقسموا جهد ايمانهم ان يروا آية يؤمنوا. قـل ومـا عـساهم انها اذا جاءت الا يؤمنوا لتمكن افـادتهم وقلـوبهم، كمـا لـم يؤمنوا به اول امره	They swear their strongest oaths by God, that if a sign came to them, by it they would believe. Say: they will not believe." [instead we confound their hearts and their minds that they do not believe in the first instance]?	31	8a
19: 90-91	انه تكاد السموات يتفطّرن منه وتنشق الارض وتخـرّ الجبـال هدًّا، ان دعوا للرحمن ولدًا	At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, That they should invoke a son for Most Gracious.	45, 79	16a, 37a

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5: 18	وقالت اليهود والنصارى نحن ابناء الله واحباؤه. قـل فلـمَ يعذبكم بذنوبكم. بل انتم بشر مـن خلـق يغفـر لمـن يـشاء ويعذّب من يشاء	The Jews and the Christians say: "We are sons of Allah, and his beloved." Say: "Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay, ye are but men,- of the men he hath created: He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and He punisheth whom He pleaseth…	45	16a
17: 85	انها من امر الرب	The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord	45	16a
72:3	ان الله اتخــذ صــاحبة وولــدًا منها، تعالى الله عن ذلك علوًا كثيرًا	And Exalted is the Majesty of our Lord: He has taken neither a wife nor a son.	56	23b
72: 3	ان الله اتخذ صاحبة وولدًا	He has taken neither a wife nor a son.	57	23b
112: 3	لم يلد ولم يولد	He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;	60	25b
2: 245	اقرضوا الله قرضًا حسنًا	Who is it that will lend unto Allah a goodly loan,	84	40a

APPENDIX III

Kitāb al-Burhān, translated into English

Proof of the Existence of God

In the name of God, the most compassionate and generous:

We start with the help of God—may He be exalted—and with the excellence of His guidance, to copy The Book of Verification of the Faith. It includes The Unity [of the divinity and humanity of Christ]; The Confirmation of the Incarnation; The Eucharist; and Food and Drink in the Everlasting Life. It also includes Questions and Answers. To our Lord be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

First of all, Greek sages such as Plato and Aristotle speak of the nature of the world as intimidating, by which I mean the air, water, fire and other things similar and analogous. [2a]// Their antipathy, and the antipathy of all the animals with their force to destroy humanity proves to you the economy of the Creator and all that it has of goodness and benefit [to humans]…to go far away from him and to flee him so that they, by natural force, do not make him perish…...a recruit in the army isolated from his home situation becomes intimidated and fearful…and grows up. And his status became unsafe from them dominating him or taking his life. Their power…shortens his life. It, [humanity], became familiar with these weak beings which do not have the strength to destroy [the human race], but [rather] that [humans] have the force to destroy them. [All this is] obvious proof that the Creator moved these destructive forces away from humans so that they would not destroy them, and [thus] humans became used to these weak things that had no power to destroy their souls, and this had the effect of moving them to understand about transference from this world, and that [this world] is not a place of rest or stability because of its many plagues and tribulations. Therefore, these painful and hurtful things have become of greater benefit to humans than the pleasant and enjoyable things, because the latter nourish their bodies while the former rectify their hearts, moving humans to seek a world where there is no adversity or tribulation, and causing them to give up this world on account of the tribulations that it has brought them.

As for death, who is ignorant of its proof concerning the Giver of life? For the One who gave life is the One who takes it again, and only He has the authority to take what belongs to Him. And we know that on the Day of Resurrection, we, being delivered from death, without doubt or disagreement will all undoubtedly know the One who delivered us. We will know the overabundance of the enjoyment of life when we are saved from adversity. And death will add to the quality of our happiness, just as the trial of hunger and thirst

increases the joy of eating and of drinking. All the diseases and illness[es] edify us in this [2b]// world. They show us that which befalls us and which we cannot drive back; they move us away from disobedience and trespasses, inciting us to do good, making us give up this world which passes away, and making/causing us to desire that which remains/endures. There are many reasons, too long to expose/expound, but people of sound mind know some of them.

Since the existence of the Creator has been made obvious by testimonies from His creation… so I… the whole world, in spite of their differences, agree to confess that there is only one God, and [such] agreement never lies. We see that the three greater religions—I mean Christianity, Judaism and Islam—testify unanimously, giving testimony that God is one. And we see the Magians, the Manicheans, the Bardesanes, and other who are like them, in spite of their associating [others with God] that they [all] attest to two eternal beings, saying that one of them is a god and the other a devil; and so, in spite of their mistake, they believe in only one god, since they do not call the other one a god, but filthy and accursed.

We see the Greek sages such as Plato and Aristotle testifying that God is one. Aristotle in his book, On the Nature of the World and the Heavens on the World and the Sky, after having spoken about the heavens and the earth, and the air and water and fire, and of other substances of the world, says: "We must speak now about He who is the cause of all of this." It is not good if he tells us about all these things if he omits discussion about their cause! Shortly after this, he said: "It is true God…Who directs all things...Who is wise…and from His might all heavenly beings proceed, and thereafter one thing after another results in these earthly beings." In another book known [3a]// by the name of Existence and Decay, having spoken of the sun and the planets and the way in which they move and guide everything, he said: "Above these is He who regulates them and Who is not regulated by anything, He is everlasting, immutable and unchanging, and one in number."

And Plato said: "The shape of everything was in the knowledge of the Beneficent, like the engraving of a seal; and after He created all things, it is like an engraving in clay, since it is not separated from the seal, [but] is visible and seen in the clay."

As for the idol worshippers, while they name their idols "gods," they say that above them is a god above whom there is nothing else. Therefore since all people of the world, (whether Christians, Muslims, Jews, Magians, Manicheans, philosophers, [or] idol worshippers), have [all] without meeting together agreed concerning the oneness of the substance of God, he is exceedingly ignorant who goes against the agreement of the whole world together with the testimonies of the created things as well, concerning their Creator!

And if the polytheists showed ignorance by associating something of the eternal whom they named "demon" with God, yet they agree on the oneness of the substance of

God, and are ignorant of the oneness of the Eternal whose oneness is naturally embedded in minds; as some of the people of truth have said, "One cannot think of 'two' without there being 'one,' but one can think of 'one' without there being 'two.'" Just as if you have "one" servant, you can take "two" of them; and if you have "two," it is not possible that one of them did not precede the other. So, if you have "two," therefore it cannot be that the second is before the first. "One" before both is possible. And the temporal one cannot precede the eternal, but the [3b] eternal can precede the temporal one. It is thus obvious that the Eternal must be one, and that all things are after Him.

In what we have described is that which provides evidence to whoever is different from the animals, [i.e., humans], concerning his Creator, the wise, whose attributes are pre-eminent. To Whom be all praise.

Proofs of the True Religion

And since we have demonstrated the existence of our Creator—may His name be blessed—it is necessary for us to consider rational proofs apart from uncritical tradition concerning the beginning of the knowledge of religion on earth as a religion pleasing to Him for the whole of His creation. We will produce three proofs. First: Since we know that He—may He be glorified and exalted—is wise and generous, through that which we have seen of His wisdom in making this world a great and perfect abode out of conflicting things whose strengths He balanced by His foreknowledge and His profound wisdom until He made them equal, so that one did not come against another in such a way that the created world would disintegrate and be destroyed. With what we have seen of His wisdom in making our bodies and other things, along with what we have witnessed of His generosity in creating us, (without Him having any need of us), [and] setting us in this world and subjecting all that is in it under us, we conclude that He would not spoil what He has made. For we do not see a wise person making something and [then] spoiling it; on the contrary, that is one of the attributes of an ignorant person who regrets what he has done. [Yet] if God spoiled our bodies by death, then that would not contradict our conclusion that the wise person does not spoil what he has made. This is because we have seen that wise people have spoiled in order to improve, like the seed that they sow in the soil to obtain fresher and more useful grain. [They] soak [it] with water so that it rots and from this, much grain is newly produced in a form achieved by the new production. And we have seen them breaking up the ground and working it so that it will be beneficial to them and bring forth what will adorn it. And they cut down plants and burn them, and in this way they become useful to people. And they chop wood so that it serves a useful purpose for them, and they wet the soil with water and change its nature so that it is useful to them for building. Likewise, [4a]// we must give up the

idea that our Creator has spoiled our bodies with death; and we know and trust that He did not want to destroy us as if He is not wise in what He does, but rather He renews us to a higher and more magnificent and more perfect form than this one we now have. He does this for reasons that prevent spoken arguments from being refuted when they are clarified.

And if we are right in thinking that He spoils our bodies to renew them, then we must believe in their resurrection and life. And if He created us out of His generosity and not out of need for us, and set us in this passing world in which we are surrounded by hardships and evils, then we must know that He has not yet perfected His generosity from which He created us in His mercy towards us; however, He will do this when He renews us and fulfills His grace and generosity towards us. At that point, it will become true for us that, since there is no doubt that He is transforming us from this realm to the other, [and] that He would not refrain from telling us what He has prepared for us; that rather, He has sent us the good news about this and put it in a book lest we forget and so that future generations [also] may inherit it and have great joy in it.

Second: If He created human beings in a form in which it is possible for some of them to harm others, we have no doubt that He commanded them to love one another and forbade them from harming one another. Indeed, He has not failed to do this, but informed them and taught them what they are to do. And thus He gave them evidence about Himself, through His commanding and His forbidding, since they are not by nature acquainted with knowledge of Him without being instructed. And He put His commands and prohibitions in a book which all their descendents would inherit and put to good use.

Third: Since in His kindness and generosity He has prepared for us a noble and sustainable world, we have no doubt that He will regard our prayers to Him in ways that are most beneficial to us. And this would not happen unless He commanded us to reach it by our striving and effort, because we see [4b]// that someone, when he achieves something by his [own] merit and accomplishes it by his [own] work and effort, has greater joy from it than from what is given and freely granted to him, (like one who receives as a gift what he did not ask for, or acquires something by guile), and he has greater joy and pride in it, and people praise him for it; unlike someone who is given without cleverness and acquires without merit.

So we must know that He has commanded people to do good and to strive in worship with this aim, and that He put this in a book lest it be forgotten, and so that future generations would inherit it and act according to it.

Therefore it is clear that God has a religion on earth for all His creation that is pleasing to Him. And we have seen that there are many religions and that the followers of each religion claim that it, [theirs], is the religion of God. So we must put them, [these religions], on the same level, and be careful about relying on anything of theirs unless the

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argument seems correct to us and that it is the religion of God, and then we will believe in it and accept it and drop whatever is not it. The argument is only [shown to be] correct by one of two means: Either we see in it the signs which human beings cannot imitate, and we testify about it that it is from God and we accept it as our religion it and we drop whatever is not it; or [we see] by rational evidence that nothing resembling it refutes the existence of the signs concerning it at the time of its appearance, even if they, [those who performed the signs], have died after it, [the religion], became well established and powerfully accepted. Each unanimously claims this about their religion, and to accept one claim apart from the others is ignorance and an unquestioning [acceptance of] tradition. Equally, the acceptance of [all] their claims with all the contradictions and falsehood between them all, is inconceivable and impossible.

There is nothing more probable in the investigation of the claim of each of them and the search for knowing its truth so that we become aware of its aim, than the agreement of all of them that God made His signs appear at the hands of the one who proclaimed it during the first appearance of each religion, to guide people by the signs to His religion; and setting forth for them, (by the appearance of signs which they are incapable of imitating), His argument to them by their observation of [5a]// signs which are not in the power of human beings to imitate, so His religion, rather than that which contradicts it, is [shown] to them [to be] true. And they must accept it and they will inevitably be punished if they go against it. If this is so, and if [God] guides people to His religion and sets forth His argument to them, He manifested signs.

And we have seen people in our day disagreeing about their religions, divided in their sects, and each claiming that his religion is the religion of God, and that what contradicts it is not from God. And we know that there is one religion of God among them all─since truth is one and it does not contradict itself, and whatever contradicts it is invalid and corrupt. Even though people need guidance, and need to distinguish the religion of God from that which contradicts it, and to move away from the many religions which are not from God towards the religion of God, God's ceasing to promote the signs in our time is based on one of two things: It may be, when He had to inform people about His religion and lead them to it and set forth for them the argument for it by the appearance of the evident signs of His religion, that He then withdrew what was necessary for guidance by removing evident signs of His religion and the certainty of the proof of it. Or it may be, when He made His religion appear by its true signs and visible tokens, and knowing that minds would be hard pressed if He removed the signs of His religion to testify that they are the signs confirmed and accepted in the world, that He withdrew their appearance from the human eye so that by mental effort a deduction would be drawn about His religion, and that He did not set them forth before their

eyes in a compelling position for people to accept the religion and so negate praising them for this and so revert to what God dislikes by compelling them to obey Him.

The first suggestion, which involves God changing what is necessary for guidance and withholding what is necessary for direction to His religion by the manifestation of His signs cannot be, [5b]// and no religious person would say it. We are obligated, therefore, to consider the second possibility, that God, having revealed His religion through His signs and having set forth His argument by them, and having known that His religion would compel minds to testify that it was established in the world on account of the signs and tokens, [that He] has removed their appearance from human eyes. Only a stubborn person claims that, without signs, he knows the religion of God and His Book from among other religions and books by examining what the religions call people to do in the whole world, and by studying through logic their books and the books of the one who repudiates them, and scrutinizes and narrows his investigation of this until he discerns the religion whose meaning is correct and whose teaching is powerful and whose language is truthful. Then he would judge it as [the religion] originally from God, in terms of the correctness of the meaning and the power of the teaching and the truthfulness of the language, unlike other religions.

I say to this [person]: You [are one] who has demanded far too much from people and you throw them into a sea!—which God knows that He did not give them the means to cross, and so He did not demand that they cross it. This is because there are two kinds of human beings: There are fine and subtle people as well as rough and unsophisticated ones; and there are many unsophisticated people but few subtle ones. So if He had demanded of them what you mentioned, it would only lead the unsophisticated people to alienation in their minds and action concerning what they need for their lives through studying the books of different and conflicting people in the world, and weighing them until they distinguished the one whose meaning is correct, and whose words are truthful, judging it to be from God. Since among the different groups of people there is the person who expresses an opinion about his religion and negates what contradicts it, [and] who is more perceptive among them, [and] who may be incapable of this until he sees for himself, apart from others, that he possesses the truth. Perhaps he is wrong and his mind, though subtle, falls short from knowing the truth. So how do common people attain such knowledge when the sophisticated ones among the different groups failed to? God is far above demanding from people what they cannot bear, [6a]// and He also brings down the subtle people to something about which knowledge they do not agree. Since we have seen that the sages and the philosophers disagree about the nature of the visible world and contradict one another in their numerous books about it, how can they not differ about the nature of religion, which is much more profound and deep than the nature of the world? Rather, there can be no doubt that they

disagree about the knowledge of it twice as much as they disagree concerning the knowledge of the nature of the world. And this is as harmful for the cultured people as it is for the unsophisticated people: a contradiction for them in reaching the truth of religion. Had God known that His religion would be recognized from among all these religions He would have confined it to this argument when He revealed His religion, and would not have put some of His signs into the hands of His messengers. At the time when the messengers were seen with their abundance of knowledge on account of what had been revealed to them, and with their power in demonstrating the truth by their words, the people were more aware of the revelation of signs to them at the hands of the messengers than we are in our time, and therefore we do not have them, and we therefore need to know God.

So if God by His authority did not instruct the apostles to clarify this by words without signs to those prior to us, then He instructs us in our weakness with what the apostles announced much more adequately. Thus it is obvious that God—may He be glorified and exalted—because He knew that demanding humans according to what you, stubborn person, have wanted, would have damaged the common people as well as the educated, and would have deprived them of what is needed for them to know the truth, [therefore, God] sent His apostles and revealed His signs at their hands just as the religious people have reported it, to gather together by this means—the sophisticated and the common people—in the knowledge of the truth of His religion. And He does not show favoritism between the subtle and the vulgar people in the knowledge of the truth, but He removed the miracles from each group all together, restricting them to those who [first] showed the signs which cannot be imitated, and made them accept His word. So there would be no preference for the subtle [6b]// in withdrawing themselves by their cleverness from what others are incapable of, and likewise there would be no delay for the vulgar in that which the subtle attained. If the truth is attained by sight, by the appearance of the signs to the eyes, and [if] it is necessary for the reception of teaching from a person who reveals it, not by the inquiry of the mind nor by the acuteness of sight, nor by understanding—God, may His name be blessed—wants to entrust to the two groups His signs which neither of them can imitate; [and this] is more useful than what you have wanted, [which is] that everyone accepts tradition by his [own] reason. If each person claims that his [tradition] is his own and is not [derived] from anyone else, and that it is not necessary for each person to judge others, then the tradition of each one is his own thought [and] he must follow his desire and his pleasure and the testimony of his reason to attain that of which no one else is capable. And as for all their traditions, the signs which cannot be imitated distinguish their search for truth from that which could be confused with the false.

So by employing reason there is the tradition of the signs, whereas by employing

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ignorance there is the tradition of each person [and] an investigation by his reason apart from signs, as we have described, from a comparison of minds and the claims of each person that he has attained what no one else has attained with the religion of God—may He be blessed and exalted—[but] His revelation of the signs at the hands of His apostles is more useful to people and more plausible to them for [attaining the] knowledge of His religion; and the investigation of the signs is more essential for them than what he demanded of them. And the claim of each person to whom God revealed the signs at the hands of His messengers, testifies to this.

Therefore, corruption is evident in what the stubborn have stated about this, and we go back to the consideration that compels us to affirm that God removed the signs in our time because His religion compels minds to the attestation that it, [the true religion], is established in the world by them, [the signs], so He did not need to continue to reveal them to the eyes.

Know that minds are not compelled to affirm concerning one religion among the religions; that [7a]// it is established in the world by the signs of God unless they find in it a cause among the causes of the world which might establish it permanently. If it became possible for us that it, [a religion], were established by a cause among the causes of the earth which would allow people to be led to agreement on one [religion], there would be no need to testify that it is established by signs. [When] you find something that leads people to one conclusion about a [religion] and about those like it, indeed you know that it is not the religion of God that has the signs removed from it. Since minds are compelled to testify about it by them, because God, if He knew that there would be something in His religion that minds might accept as establishing it in the world, then He would not have removed the signs from it; just as He did not remove them in the time of the children of Israel when they were one people. Presumably, other causes can be mentioned concerning its establishment other than the signs: many earthly causes. It was not until the time when the revelation of the Christian religion drew near that God manifested greater signs, [and] then He removed them from it after it was established from the east to the west of the earth, and closed off the opportunity for earthly causes so that it was no longer possible for minds to accept any of them for establishing [His religion]. So in this way it is known that minds were compelled to testify that [His religion] is [established] by signs apart from anything else, and the argument of them was found even when the signs were rejected, and there was no other cause that they might have accepted for it.

For this reason, Christ, our Lord, said to his apostles when he sent them out: "Do not carry a stick or a rod or gold or silver, and do not wear sandals or two shirts or two garments or the like," to remove from his apostles all earthly causes by which people are empowered and honored, so that he dissuaded the inhabitants of the world from accepting

earthly causes by removing them in favor of the signs of God, apart from anything else.

Therefore, since [we] have made it clear that the religion of God compels minds to hold [7b]// that it is established in the world by the signs of God, and therefore, no other reason may be found that establishes it, I will begin to examine, religion by religion, among those religions that claim the signs. So in each religion in which we can recognize a cause that establishes it, or that it was accepted on account of collusion, we know that it is not the religion of God which He intended for all of His creation or that He wanted to be extended to them all.

I begin with the first of the religions, the religion of the Torah, which God did not intend for the whole of His creation, nor did He make it such that He compelled minds [so] that it was accepted on account of signs. He made it a distinct religion, and He did not extend it to include the whole of His creation. This is why He did not remove the signs from it until it had been completed. The viewing of the signs testified about it. When they came to an end, and His prophets and His kings and His priests and His sacrifices ceased to exist, it became obvious that it, [the religion of the Torah], had ended. God did not make it a religion that was established from Himself so that it may not be accepted. And He did not intend it for the whole of His creation until they witnessed the religion which does include the whole of His creation, [i.e., Christianity]; and He left it behind in such a way that He abandoned it, so it was not established among people of sound mind, except by the latter.

So I say that we may accept as the basis for its establishment five causes apart from signs: firstly, the sword; secondly, bribery and payment; thirdly, fanaticism; fourthly, approval; and fifthly, collusion.

Concerning the sword: Since the Children of Israel were in one country and under one king, then the king could have convinced whoever was under his power to accept and submit to his word, since subjects are obedient to the one who rules over them, keeping his commands.

Concerning bribery and payment: Since the Children of Israel were slaves in Egypt and escaped from there, their obedience may have.......

[8b]// and Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and others among them about this. And if others among them differ then it does not negate fanaticism.

Concerning collusion: Perhaps someone may have responded to him, [i.e., Muḥammad], in the first instance by the greed of the world, and accepted his collusion concerning the testimony about him by mentioning the signs which they described. They could have set that up, [the testimony], as they wished and forced it on those whom they compelled by the sword, even though the Book, [i.e., The Qur'ān], on which they agree rejects the signs and mentions that the one, [Muḥammad], who is said to have performed

them was asked that he perform the signs as they were performed by the prophets before him, but according to his own word, he did not perform them: "And We refrain from sending the signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false: We sent the she-camel to the Thamūd to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully: We only send the Signs by way of terror." And that [happened] after they asked him to perform signs, and their description of what Moses and Jesus performed.

Likewise, his saying: "They swear their strongest oaths [by God], that if a sign came to them, by it they would believe. (Say, it may be, that even when the signs come they will not believe, instead we confound their hearts and their minds that they do not believe in the first instance.)" And Ibn ʿAbbās interprets this and he was a witness to the situation when the Christians and the Jews and the idolaters joined together and they swore by God that if they saw a sign of the Prophet they would believe it. So he replied to them that this had been sent down to him concerning their request.

So these religions that might be established by these things, or by some of them, are not the religion of God from which He removed the signs after He had established it to support minds in testifying that the signs were there at its appearance, clearly seen by the eyes that looked upon them. God did not remove the signs from His religion until He annulled the significance of earthly causes for it. So it cannot be assumed that [His religion] was established by such [earthly] reasons, rather it is compelling to minds that [His religion] was established by signs in the world, and thus the law of God [that] is established, rests on His creation.

Concerning the Acceptance of the Christian Religion

[8b]// As far as the Christian religion is concerned, I did not see it in a people of one house or one country, [among] a people speaking one language so that they might be in collusion over one thing which they desire, like the religion of the Children of Israel; nor in one kingdom in which they might [have a common] opinion, where the king could gather them together in one religion, like the religion of Zoroaster; [nor] with what was accepted on account of [a common] opinion like the religion of Mani and similar religions; nor in one kingdom with one language where they might be compelled by the sword to accept it, like the religion which came after it. Rather, in every kingdom, every language and tongue in the east and west, among the Khūzī and the Yemenis, among the whites and blacks, in nations that dislike each other's language, they became enemies and could not be united to be in collusion or be established by the compulsion of the sword, or set up in the world by feverish fanaticism, or by bribery or payment. Separated by their languages, living apart in their countries, opposed in their kingdoms and the situation of their world, situated apart from each other by the seas

which God made as a barrier lest they join themselves together and destroy each other because of the diversity of their kinship and the differences of their races and skin colors.

If someone says, "The nations did not collude in this religion, nevertheless there are those who proclaimed it that there was collusion in it such that the nations accepted it by trickery"; we say: "If we go along with what you say, we must judge according to what we have seen, and by reason and analogy. And you know that people [worship] according to what they are born to [follow] and according to their customs, and on what their body grows, and on what they inherit from their fathers and elders, but it is not possible after what we have seen, that a group of people should convert to another religion in our time, or the time which preceded us, [9a]// from what it they were [believing in] to another, unless for compelling reasons."

So let us put forward, between ourselves and you, all of the reasons why people might transfer from what they [believed] to another [religion] to which they were called. [However], as we informed you that we can assume that the establishment of all religions that are in the world [is based on earthly reasons], therefore we will examine them, [such reasons], concerning the spread of the Christian religion in order to show you that it, [such reasons are], excluded from them, and that it is not assumed that [it was established] by them, unlike their [role] in the establishment of other religions. Rather, it compels minds in an alternative way: by signs and wonders. And there are six reasons after collusion which we may ascribe to the proclamation of those who proclaim it, [the religion]. So let us examine whether it is possible for them to be received without signs.

The first [reason] is the sword; and the second is desire for wealth and leadership and power; and the third is fanaticism; and the fourth is approval, and the fifth is permission in law; and the sixth is trickery by magic and suchlike.

Concerning the sword: The Christian religion forbids it, how then can [its establishment] be assumed by it? There is no preacher of it, [the Christian religion], who [would] use the sword while the writings in his Book which he gives to those who were compelled by it, [the sword], [state] that he did not use it and that he forbids it. This would be understood as robbery and a great deceit, since it contradicts his action: it is unacceptable.

We have already looked at the Torah which used the sword, not rejecting it but rather describing and depicting its use. Likewise, the religion of Islam uses the sword, not rejecting it but rather describing and depicting its strength and how it invaded territory by using it. Having presented the Holy Gospel in which is [found] prohibition of the sword and the reception of it by the nations, and their testimony in the east and the west agreeing that there was no collusion among them, [that] they have not been compelled by the sword, neither was the [sword] used [9b]// against them, [all] testify that the Christian religion was

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not established by the sword and that that those who proclaim it did not use it. [Given the fact that] the innumerable nations in the east and the west could not agree without communicating or meeting or getting together from [their] different kingdoms [that are] in opposition to each other, (in all parts of the world and faraway countries and different languages and races), [all] testify that those who proclaimed to them this religion were weak fishermen with no rule and no sword; they could not have compelled them all by the sword.

And how is it possible [to allege], if their testimony agrees with that of the twelve helpless men, that they compelled kings of power and strength and of fortified and large kingdoms, since their proclamation was incompatible with the power of authority and rule. The assistance of the kings cannot be assumed to [have helped] them, nor the submission to them, [kings], unless by the compulsion of [the apostles] over them, [the kings]. In this, the whole world which opposes the Christian religion, such as the Jews, the Magi, and the Muslims and others, agree that the disciples of Christ did not compel people with the sword nor use it. [Indeed,] the most the Jews could accuse them of, is magic and trickery, not the sword. And in a similar way the Magi and the Muslims attributed the [acceptance of the disciples] to signs.

So how does the whole world agree on their being free from the sword, and that it is clear to minds that they did not use the sword in establishing their religion, and that the issue as they wrote in the gospel concerning the prohibition of it, prohibiting the whip and the rod, and gold and silver, and every reason among worldly causes in the establishment of their religion, so that nothing but [divine] signs are assumed [concerning] the establishment of their religion? In this way, our argument concerning the prohibition of the sword for the Christian religion is well founded, clear, and corroborated by the existence of the prohibition of the sword in the Book, [the Gospel]. And anyone who makes a contrary claim [10a]// against us needs firm evidence for his claim from the testimony of rational people, but he will never find it; instead he will only find [copious] words. It is not rational whatsoever that a religion be established in the whole world with all its languages, commanding submission and humility and subservience, and forbidding what contradicts them, while [clearly] stating the prohibition of the sword in the saying: "Whoever uses the sword dies by the sword." This is not what minds accept; rather common opinion and the varying pieces of evidence that support it. People testify that those who proclaimed it, [the Christian religion], were poor fishermen, not that it was established by the sword, but testify to their being free from it. Therefore it has been shown to be correct that the Christian religion was not established by the sword.

Concerning bribery and financial payment: How is it possible, if the whole world agrees, despite there being no communication and no collusion, that the apostles were poor

fishermen, [just as] their Book which was in their hands describes? For example, it is said that even their leader, Simon, said to a crippled man at the gate of Jerusalem who had begged from him: "We do not have gold or silver to give you, we only have what our Lord has given to us. In the name of Christ, get up and carry your mattress, and stand up and go to your home." [How then] to accuse them of offering a bribe with gold or silver? Or is it possible that, since their Book forbade them from [possessing] gold or silver, (for example, the Holy Gospel reports that Christ—to him be praise— said to them: "Do not carry a whip or a rod or gold or silver"), that they offered a bribe with gold or silver? And had they demonstrated [to people] contradictory actions to what they had commanded them, or to their words that "We do not have gold or silver," people would not have accepted their words and would not have considered their saying, and no one would have accepted the Christian religion from them [10b]// if they were commanded to do it, and people would have denied [their claims.] People also would not have accepted their Book, and the signs would have been nullified in their hands. But, if we see leaders of the kings and sages of the people and races of the nations accepting their Book in which they commanded, as their Lord commanded them, not to carry gold or silver, and that they were poor, not having gold or silver, [therefore] we conclude that their Book with its teaching concerning this matter was accepted only upon their truthfulness, their words, and their beliefs: their Book did not contradict their teaching. And how do you accuse fishermen, (about whom all the kings and nations of the world without collusion [agree] concerning their insignificance and poverty, and they have made clear in their Book that they were poor), that they bribed the kings of the world to accept their proclamation and they gave freely to them what they coveted? Rather, their Book declares the opposite of this in their prohibition of covetousness and money, and power, and pride, and whatever resembles these. So it is clear that it is not possible to mention bribery and financial payment in the establishment of their proclamation at all.

Concerning fanaticism: Goodness me! If it were the case that the Jews followed Christ, disregarding other people, you might say: "They became fanatical about him." However, since uncountable and differing races followed him, how is it possible to mention fanaticism among different groups of people who would surely oppose someone not from their group? Rather, this is totally absent from them.

Concerning approval and what is of common opinion which is accepted by minds and comprehended by reason which can be assumed as a cause of the acceptance of [the Christian religion] apart from signs, I have seen that the Christian religion has nothing to do with that at all! For those who proclaimed it stated things and reported news which cannot be accepted by common opinion, nor can it be comprehended by reason, or imagined by intelligence, or comprehended by reason. So we may summarize ten points [11a]// in which

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we demonstrate the [credibility] of our saying, by the will of God—may He be exalted.

First: At the beginning of their message they said that a young virgin became pregnant without intercourse or impregnation, and this had never been witnessed in the world.

Second: They said that she gave birth without losing her virginity, so she was a nursing mother while still being a virgin, and this is contrary to reason.

Third: They said that this child was God's son, and this is denied by all of the nations, which speak of God's oneness in terms of distinctiveness, and uniqueness.

Fourth: They said that the son of God was crucified and died and was buried; at one time they attributed power to him, and at another they attributed submissiveness to him, and that, at first sight, contradicts itself.

Fifth: They said that after his death and burial he was raised and came out of the tomb alive, and that is not known by the very nature of reason.

Six: They said that after his resurrection from the tomb he ascended into heaven, and that is far from comprehensible.

Seven: They said that after his ascension into heaven he will descend to the earth to raise the dead and to send the good to the place of bliss and the wicked to hell, and that did not cross the minds of the people of the world.

Eight: They called for the worship of the crucified one, even if people answered the call with what was involved in it of submissiveness and repulsiveness and which is contrary to lust and pleasure, and with its constraints upon them to carry a heavy burden by receiving it from them through the dispersal of their wealth to the poor and the giving up of their souls to death for his sake, as well as what is similar to that.

Nine: They proclaimed another world. They did not promise [the people] something of the pleasure which is known, like the things they witnessed in this world. Rather, they were commanded to renounce this world and treat lightly [11b]// with the pleasure of food and drink and sexual intercourse and other things. And they called them to another world also, informing them that they would not eat or drink or marry there. So they prohibited them from what is known as [physical] pleasure in this world and in the hereafter.

Ten:—which is the summary, the completion, and perfection of this all—they called them to believe in God, who is Father, and Son and Holy Spirit. This is not comprehended by reason or common opinion. Common opinion only accepts the idea of good and evil, according to what people conceive of good and evil in the world; or accept one [Being], according to what they conceive of the order of things and their testimony that one [Being exists]. However, as for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, they are not imagined by common opinion. Further, it cannot be assumed that common opinion would accept this, like

the other [reasons] that we described [earlier]. Did reason accept any of this information or did common opinion invent it, or did the mind comprehend so that it was assumed as a cause of its acceptance? In fact, all of it was considered belittling, despicable, and nonsense, and is there anything so repulsive as the call to worship a crucified [man] and submission to the cross, and faith in the unity in trinity?!

So it is clear that the Christian religion was not established by acceptance on account of the approval of minds, and that neither common opinion, nor lust, nor power was the reason for its acceptance, for it opposed the power of authority and rule and such like, and souls were submitted to the cross and the carrying of injury and dishonor. And it opposed reason and the wisdom of the wise as it contradicts what is not in their wisdom, and it opposed their wisdom. And it opposed pleasure by prohibiting lust and pleasures while commanding devotion to fasting and prayer.

Concerning permissiveness in the law: Even when we say that permissiveness is one [reason] by which [12a]// people are attracted, [we say] that this benefits only when those who proclaim something, [i.e., a religion], proclaim it in a way which reason will accept, so that minds accept it, [the religion], after this [permissiveness in the law]. As for what reason does not accept: it does not accept permissiveness in the law, and minds do not follow, for it opposes it. Among the first things which are strict in law is burdening the mind with what it does not comprehend, and the afflicting of the intellect with what it cannot understand. Therefore I say: There is no religion under the sun which prohibits desire more, and destroys pleasure more and has more restrictive commands than the Christian religion. For people of sound mind know that there is no desire more overwhelming than that of men for women, because God made it natural in them when He established their essential [nature.] Through it, the [human] world is increased, and by it, the world is populated. So we may report about David the prophet who, despite his purity, desired women so intensely that he murdered a man for his wife; and about Solomon, son of David—a spring of wisdom and a sea of proverbs—who so desired women that they defeated his wisdom; and about a man that God raised up for the children of Israel from among the giants to protect them, (so he protected them and killed a thousand men from among their enemies with the jawbone of an ass, and God caused water to flow out from that jawbone when he was thirsty so he drank from it), who afterwards desired women so that because of them he put himself into the hands of his enemies, who tore out his eyes; and about a man from among the kings in our time who set out from his kingdom with his whole army for the Rum, [Byzantium], in search of a woman at a certain citadel, (we have not seen kings do such things for any other worldly pleasures!); and about one of the sons of David, the prophet, who acted immorally towards his sister. His action was notorious and became well-known.

Those who proclaimed the Christian religion commanded kings and others who had been overcome by desire for women and excessive demand for them, that a man should marry [12b]// only one woman. And even if she is afflicted by all kinds of illness, which in turn would not allow for them to be together, he is forbidden to look at a woman besides her, until death. And they made equality in this between the kings and their servants, and they did not seek to win over the kings by preferring them to their servants. And they also commanded them to disperse their wealth among the poor, and they increased fasting and were devoted to prayer and they consider submissiveness and subjection to be a noble [thing] and let go of earthly pleasures and desires. Therefore, some people began to fast all the time; and some fled to the mountains and hid themselves in caves with wild beasts; and some lived in monastic cells; and some chose to withdraw to their monasteries, devoting themselves to fasting and prayer. And in their struggle they did not promise them anything that they were accustomed to of pleasure, except what they consider restrictive, such as the absence of food and drink and marriage and other things like them.

[Therefore,] what place is there at all to mention permissiveness in the law alongside their command to give up the world and its pleasures and lust? Thus it is clear that permissiveness in the law was excluded for them, and it cannot be the case that it is assumed of them.

And concerning the fantasies of sorcery: I have seen them warning people to be on their guard against it and caution them not to be deceived by it, and they guarantee to them, contrary to it, the resurrection of the dead and the healing of the sick and chronically ill, and the opening of eyes and other things like that. So I know that they set themselves to be free from them, and to make a clear distinction between their actions and the actions of magic, and that people, having looked into their [actions] were confident that they are free of such thing in their proclamation, based upon three qualities:

First: [People] noticed the signs which they, [the apostles], performed; they hastened to watch [them] just as one hastens to watch acts of incantation and the like, [13a]// or when something is proclaimed to be astonishing, people hurry to see it and may give gifts for it. So if they, [the apostles], did not do what they promised to do [in miracles] when people hastened to watch, they would have been exposed and their lying would have been made clear, and people would not have accepted their Book or paid any attention to their speech.

Second: Since there is no one who proclaims a religion who can guarantee the acceptance of his proclamation through performing anything without being asked [by people] about the conditions he had imposed [on people to also be] on himself. So if he performed what he proclaimed, his call would be accepted, and if he did not perform it then it would not be accepted since he had not fulfilled his conditions. So you understand, that since their

religion, [Christianity], was accepted according to the conditions they had imposed on themselves, then it was not accepted until they had been asked concerning what they had promised [of miracles] and had performed them.

Third: Therefore, because there is no one with any illness among the types of illnesses, (a chronic illness among categories of chronic illnesses, blindness, having only one eye, and other similar complaints), who upon hearing of someone who proclaims the power to heal him, would not hurry to him with his need, for the health of his body. People hurry to doctors who do not claim the power to heal by words which have no harm in them, but [claim to heal] by rigorous medical treatment that is undesirable for people. So how would people not hurry to those who proclaim the power to heal by words that have no pain or trouble for them! Therefore you understand that with their promise of this, [performing miracles], everyone who had something, [some illness], like we have described would have hurried to them. Thus, if they did not heal through their hands and if they did not perform what they had promised to them, then they would have been exposed to all people, and as a result their proclamation would have been nullified and people would not have accepted their religion. Therefore, it is true for everyone that they established the religion with signs that magicians cannot imitate, and not by fantasies of magic that have no truth in them. So the argument has compelled us, seeing the absence from the Christian religion of earthly reasons which might have established it, to the conclusion that it [13b]// was accepted and established by clear miracles from God, and His true signs have spread throughout all the different nations. And the testimony about this from its Book is on our side, since it announces that the ones who proclaimed it had performed great miracles, and all the nations accepted their scriptures concerning this. Had they had not performed the signs that they claimed in their Book to have performed, then their Book would not have been accepted and we would not have believed a single letter of their saying, as they demonstrated lies and falsehoods by recording in their Book what they had not done. And also, if they wrote in their Book about what they had not done or if they committed such foolishness, people would not have accepted this falsified written Word or clear fabrication. For example, if a man in our time proclaimed a religion which he preferred, [and] wrote a book to those to whom he said that he had performed great miracles on account of which they had accepted his religion, but he in fact had not done anything of this because he was a liar, people would have rejected his book and they would not have accepted one letter from such a book.

Thus, since we have seen these great kingdoms, numerous nations, and different languages agreeing together despite their different countries, kingdoms, and languages about the acceptance of the Book, [the Christian Scriptures], and since those who proclaimed it to them had performed great miracles, we [must] conclude that they had done

such [great miracles]. And had they had not performed such [miracles], these nations would not have agreed to accept their Book, and they would not have agreed to testify that they performed them.

Refuting the Charge of Corrupting the Scripture

Since it has become true to us that the Christian religion was confirmed on account of miracles, and that the Gospel is the Book of God made generally available to all creatures, and that God has removed miracles and no longer displays them before people's eyes once the Gospel became confirmed in the world by them, and since it, [the Gospel], demands that minds acknowledge it as the Book of God which was confirmed by His miracles and wonders, —it therefore necessitates that the whole world should accept and believe it. As for those who oppose us, it is not necessary for us to refute what has been slandered against it as being corrupted since the cessation of [14a]// miracles in our age. Nevertheless, the [existence] of the love of God which guides His creatures is the reason His Book is in the world, just as was proven to be correct at its inception, it demands minds to witness to its correctness. It, [the Gospel], is the evident sign to the people. There is no need for the appearance of other signs and wonders other than it, because of the truthfulness and confirmation of that which has been revealed [in it].

However, we will show to those who love the truth the impossibility of even mentioning corruption in the universally-available Book of God, which is for all His creatures, and I say:

Since we have shown it to be impossible that the Book of the Gospel was accepted without heavenly miracles, (since it was not enforced by the sword, nor was it confirmed on account of earthly reasons but it was accepted in the world on account of obvious miracles and clear signs), it is also impossible that it has been corrupted without the compulsion of miracles, because, just as it was accepted—but on account of the compulsion of miracles—its alteration and corruption is [needing to be made] much more acceptable, having been grounded in the hearts of the people, but on account of the compulsion of miracles. And [since] miracles are not performed at the hands of those who corrupt the Books of God, it becomes obvious that no corruption ever happened after the nations accepted it, and that it remains as it was. We must also judge that which has gone before us with that which we have witnessed. If we suppose a certain city from among cities, [each] having [different] types of religions, our minds cannot imagine the collusion of one of them to corrupt their Book, because of the multiplicity of peoples' opinions and the lack of their compliance with each other, without someone uniting them all on one thing.

The proof of this is that we see groups of interpretation in all religions, as they differ

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from each other and they do not follow one another. If it were possible that people agreed to gather together to corrupt the revealed [text], it would not have been possible that their interpretations would differ. Their different interpretations demonstrate the impossibility of what has been slandered concerning their, [the religious sects'], agreement in corrupting the revealed text. If they are being compelled [14b]// to agree on one thing in corrupting the revealed [text] or others thereof, they would have also agreed on one thing in the interpretation. Therefore, it is apparent that they never agreed; they never corrupted [the Scriptures] without someone uniting them on one thing and forcing them to do so. There is no one king over the Christian kings in the world who could unite them and force them to corrupt the Book. It is obvious that this [corruption] is impossible.

If anyone says that the widespread different opinions prove that there was corruption, as they say about the sect of the Greeks, [namely, concerning] the religion of the king and similar statements, we say that Christianity is neither [found] in a single country nor is it in one kingdom, unlike other religions. Therefore, which kingdom is the one accused of the corruption [of the Gospel] which you claim that its king has united it, [i.e., everyone], to agree on it? If you say "the Greeks," we will not hold this against you and will allow it, because if you suppose that the King of the West wants to corrupt his Book, you would not have found it possible for him to do this, because people have been instructed by this Book even until death where it remains as is. How then could the King of the Greeks do what others than himself could not have done? And why would he corrupt a book in which all the things which he opposes in it [are confirmed], without dropping that which he opposes and dislikes, and confirming in it that with which he agrees and likes?

But we will make it easy for you, so that if you find your opinion unsubstantiated and impossible to prove, even though we allowed it, you know that we have given you all possible ways to present your objections, and it becomes obvious to you that corruption [of the Gospel] is absurd. We say:

"O you, behold, the King of the Greeks has corrupted the Gospel in his hands, just as you claim. [So] how is it that there is no difference between his Gospel in his own tongue, and the Gospels which are in the tongues which differ from his which are not under his power, but do not accept his word on the corruption [of the Gospel]? Therefore, the King of the Greeks is blameless of the charge of having changed his Gospel, on account of the testimony of all the Gospels in many tongues which are not [15a]// under his power and do not accept his word. These Gospels agree with the King's text, and, likewise, his text agrees with them."

If he comes back saying: "Every King has forced the people in his kingdom to corrupt the Gospel," we say: "But, there are Christians whose king is not a Christian." We

answer you regarding the Christian kings, and then we turn to those whose king is not Christian. We say:

"We said, 'Is it with some consent of the Christian kings throughout the world concerning what is to be changed, what is to be deleted, and what should be left in its [original] state? Or did each and every one of them on his own, change, add or delete?'" If you say, "They had consent," we say: "You have reached the impossible as we have shown you, [in your claim] that people comply with one another and agree on their opinions. Also, where did you gain knowledge that one of them, or all of them, agreed on this corruption? It is either based on your own assumption, or that they informed you, or perhaps you saw them gather together to corrupt [the Gospel]? I do not think that you claim that have seen them, or that they informed you. It is only your own assumption. With the 'correctness' of your own assumptions, you have not attained that which nullifies the certainty of the whole world [regarding the Book of God]. It is only your saying! Indeed, with the "correctness" of your own saying and claim you have not attained that which would nullify the Book of God in the whole world."

I ask you further: "Where did they gather together? In whose kingdom did they meet? It must be the case that all of them traveled to a particular kingdom of one king. Who is this one? How did they trust each other, and how did everyone submit to the other? And how did you know you about this?"

Or you may say: "The apostles differ amongst themselves." I wish I could know what they really want with all of this attention being paid to the corruption [of the Gospel]! Was it the exaltation of Christ that they wanted? Why then did they not remove from the Gospel that which diminishes him, that is, the mention of his childhood, his upbringing, his food, drink, crucifixion, death, burial, and other things? And why did the Jews and the other nations of the time [15b]// neglect to write about this, and let them know about it? We see them claiming that the [apostles] did what they really did not do.

Or was it his, [Christ's], denigration that they wanted? Why then did they not remove the whole book to start with, since they wanted to denigrate its object by erasing from it that which exalts him, such as his saying that he is the Judge of the Day of Judgment, the Lord of the world, God the Creator of the universe, and the like.

Or did they want the eradication of the laws which were hard for them to maintain, and to affirm what was easy? Why then did they not remove the whole book to start with? It would have been easier! They could have composed a book according to their own desires and could have affirmed in it that when the Jews wanted to kill Christ they approached him, [that] he blew a breath on them and burned them; and that he was lifted up to heaven alive, [that] death did not win him, nor was he affected by any scourge. [They could have written]

that a man may marry as many women as he wants; they could have prohibited the disciplining of their bodies by fasting, the commitment to prayers, and the abandonment of human pleasure, just as the Magi [have done]. This would have been even more pleasant for them and easier. Yes, and they could also have affirmed in it what they reason to be pleasurable in the everlasting world, such as sexual intercourse, food and drink and the like, since they think [so] lightly of the Book of God to the point that they corrupt it however they wish. Why do they not delete the hard [things], such as its call to them to worship a crucified [person]─I know nothing harder for kings and those who have authority, majesty, and honor than confessing the worship of a crucified [person]─along with its prohibition against a man marrying more than one woman, and such as its commands to them regarding humility, submission, perseverance through hardships, and the abandonment of pleasures and lusts, and [instead,] being committed to fasting and prayers, and the like.

And since they did not exchange that which was difficult for them with that which is easy, as we have described, it is obvious that they have not changed even one letter of the Book of God away from its original state.

If any of the people of "sight" says, [16a]// "We believe that it was not possible to corrupt the revealed text, but they have corrupted the interpreted text away from its purpose and its meaning; they have not corrupted the actual text itself."

We say, "The Gospel has instructed us that we baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It also informed us that the Word has never ceased to be; He is eternal. The Word is God, by whom all things were created, and the Spirit is Lord; and that there is neither sexual intercourse nor food nor drink in the everlasting life, and many other things which are too countless to mention. This and many other similar things are in the text of the Book without any interpretation. Now, look, do any of these agree with your Book?"

As for the Son, you say, "The skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin! That they should invoke a son for [Allah] the Most Gracious." And you say that "[both] the Jews and the Christians say: 'We are sons of Allah, and His beloved.' Say: 'Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay ye are but men,─of the men He hath created: He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and He punisheth whom He pleaseth.'" You also deny the Father as you deny the Son. As for the Spirit, [you say] the contrary: "It is from the command of the Lord." You say, then, that it comes from the Lord, and God's Book says it is the Lord. As for the Word, you say it is created; but the Gospel says that the Word has never ceased to be, and the Word is God.

Regarding sexual intercourse, food and drinking in the everlasting life, you affirm these things, while the Gospel invalidates them. How then can the Gospel be turned around

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to the direction of the teachings of your Book? This is absolutely impossible. If it were not for the weakness of your argument, I would have multiplied the testimonies which invalidate your statements. But I find it sufficient to refute your [argument] with your own words.

Therefore, it has become obvious that the Gospel has never been corrupted nor altered, either in its revealed text or in its interpretation, from that which Christians agreed upon; and that it is the Book of God which demands that the world believe in it and submit to it, and accept whatever is in it of things [16b]// which are clear and ambiguous—things which are hidden from our opponents, who have then admonished the hearts of those who have not looked at the Books of God and have not known their ways, to turn [them] away from believing in them, [the Books of God]. Had they been convinced with truth, they would not have negated things from the Book which they, on account of their coarse minds, have found the apparent meaning to be distasteful, and they have become too crude to know the inner meaning therein. So, they have blamed the Book, after it compels them to witness that it was the miracles of God which men cannot do, which have been affirmed in the world. But they prefer what is easier for their tongues and hearts, and only accept things on first glance, according to their good appearance. They have no patience to try to penetrate deeply in it. If the inner [aspect] proves to contradict the beautiful outer appearance, they throw it away—and in this, they bear a resemblance to children who prefer what is easy for them and what is attractive in appearance to them, even if it is for their ruin. And [they are like] those who follow wide ways such as this on account of ignorance and follow after pleasures, even if it leads to a lion which will eat him, instead of following the narrow and difficult way, even though it would lead to what is good for him.

The Discourse on the Trinity

We begin with asking them about the "One" who is easy for their tongues to confess, and about Whom they proclaim without verifying the real meaning of His knowledge; to show that there is a contradiction between the apparent meaning of their words and their representation of the Creator as inanimate, without "life" and "word" yet calling Him "alive" and "speaking." We will explain what we say for those who want to benefit from understanding it, for it is legitimate to question them over their saying....it is possible for them to prove that their Book which speaks of this [type of oneness] was confirmed by the miracles of God. But it is not required to again prove to them that the Gospel has been accepted on account of miracles. They are not to question us about anything which it tells us and calls us to do. [17a]//. They are to trust our testimony coming out of the straightforwardness of our understanding and knowledge—just as when witnesses testify before the judge about the boundaries of a house. The judge asks them to give witness about it one after the other. I

say:

"Tell me, oh you who believe in the 'One,' do you say He is 'living?'" If he says, "Yes," then we say: "Is it a life of His own in His eternal essence, as it is in the soul of a human being—a life in its substantial essence and part of him? Or, is this life accidental, like the life of the body which has a life that is other than it, and has no life in the essence of its substance?" If he says, "Life is in Him, in His eternal essence," then, he says what we say. But, if he says, "His life is neither essential nor eternal, nor accidental," we say, "Then you do not want to confirm in the word 'living' a life which is essential, eternal, and not accidental." If he says: "Yes," we say: "How do you claim the name 'the living One' while the name 'living' is derived from life? We call a man 'living' as long as life is in him; but when his living spirit leaves him, we call him 'dead.' Since you call him 'living,' where his life is neither essential nor permanent nor accidental on account of nature or food, therefore, you should call earth 'living although it has no life; and water "living" even though it is without life; and also the air, fire, and sky, and other inanimate things. We only know that a thing is called by what it has, not by what it does not have. Therefore, these four elements and their like are not called 'living,' for they have no 'life' in their essences. Further, animals are not called 'speaking,' because there is no speech in their essences. But we call the soul of a human being 'living' and 'speaking' because it has 'life' and 'word' in its essence."

It has become clear that he does not call Him "living" since he does not affirm that He has "life" and "word"—just as we have previously explained. [17b]// He deprives his God of "life" and makes Him inanimate. May God be greatly exalted above that! We will tell him again: "Why have you called Him 'living' while you do not want to attribute 'life' to Him?" If he says, "In order to deny that He is dead," we say: "What you have fled from, what you have denied in your teaching, you must affirm, because as you call Him 'living' to deny that He is dead it necessitates, without doubt, that you attribute death to Him when you deny Him 'life' and do not make it necessary for Him. This is because there is no difference between calling Him 'living' simply to deny that He is dead, and not making 'life' necessary to Him—in which case you have made death necessary to Him. In other words, if the name 'living' is used here to negate the name 'death,' then 'life' remains under the name 'death.' And we have seen that that which does not have life, whether it is essential or accidental, must be subjected to death, since death is, without doubt, the opposite of 'life.'"

It is as if you say: "This person is 'seeing,'" and we ask you: "Does he have 'sight'?" If you answer: "No," then you lied in describing him as "seeing"; for the name "sight" is correct for someone who has "sight." Your saying, "I did not want to verify 'sight' in him by my saying that he is 'seeing,' but I wanted to deny blindness in him," shows that you wanted to deny any confirmation of blindness; in doing so you have denied "sight" while confirming

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blindness. Similarly, the name "living" is only necessary when the concept of "life" is involved, and the name "death" is only negated when "life" is affirmed. And you, no matter what you want to assert by mentioning its name, you [only] deny death. You can only call someone "speaking" when he has "word" in his essence. Just as you would never call an animal "speaking" because it does not have "word" in its essence, so you would call the soul of a human being "speaking" because it has "word" in its essence. The opposite of "speech" is only negated by affirming "word," and if it is not affirmed it follows, without doubt, that its opposite must be affirmed.

It is clear…the source of life and wisdom [can only be described] by the names "life" and "wisdom." [18a]// But he has negated their meaning and necessitated that He is "non-living" and "non-speaking." Since he escaped from asserting "the Word" and "the Spirit" in order to avoid three meanings in the essence of the Creator which would nullify his confession of the oneness of God, he ended up totally invalidating the Creator, making Him an inanimate being, without "life" or "word," similar to the idols which are called gods. But God, in His Books, reproaches those who worship them because they worship gods that have no "life" and no "speech." Meanwhile, He speaks of Himself in all of His Books as having "Spirit" and "Word." Thus He said by the mouth of David: "By the word of God the heavens were made, their starry host by His breath," (Psalm 33:6); and He said by the mouth of Job: "The Spirit of God created me," (Job 33:4); and He said by the mouth of Isaiah: "The word of our God stands forever," (Isaiah 40:8); and from the mouth of David again when he said: "The word of our God stands firm in the heavens," (Psalm 119:89); and again, "Because of the word of God I praise God," (Psalm 56:4). Their testimonies to "the Word" and "the Spirit" are too numerous for us to count or list in this book.

And we say: "We are blameless before God concerning the accusation of speaking of three gods. On the contrary, in saying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we only want to affirm that God is 'living' and 'speaking.'" The Father is the One we refer to as having "life" and "word." "Life" is the Holy Spirit, and "Word" is the Son. This is not, as our opponents attribute to us, that we make a female partner for God, and a son from her. May God be greatly exalted above that! Just as the word is produced from the soul… but achieving understanding of this subtlety and ambiguity exceeds the intellectual faculties of the spiritual angels and the sent prophets. Concerning the "word" of the soul, we do not hold to a literal interpretation of the written letters, which you suspect is happening. Speech has four aspects: there is the heard word, made apparent by the voice; there is the shown word, made visible through writing; there is the word produced in the soul, which is not [18b]// expressed by the lips or made visible by ink and is unseen by the eyes; there is the power of the soul by which we can express words and are able to do things, conduct business, lead

the world, and subdue animals. Therefore, according to the teaching of the Christian religion, the power of the soul is in "the Word" of God, but our intellectual faculties fall short in achieving understanding of this perfection.

What they say about "the life," (i.e., the Holy Spirit), is that it is essential and eternal, not the life of accidental bodies which have neither permanence nor eternal existence. But it has not ceased to be and it will not cease to be. He has always existed and will exist forever and ever. It is, therefore, correct when they, [Christians], say that God is "living" and "speaking." They do not by necessity mean that there are three gods, for we see that the soul, when "word" and "life" are confirmed in it, does not become three souls; nor does the fire, when "warmth" and "light" are confirmed in it, become three fires; nor does the sun, when "light" and "heat" are confirmed in it, become three suns. But just as the soul, fire, and sun are truly like this, so by the confirmation of substantial "life" and "word" in the soul, it becomes "living" and "speaking"; otherwise, it would be inanimate. By the fact of the "warmth" and "light" in a fire, it becomes complete through them and becomes a fire, not water or anything else. If it loses "heat" and "light," it would no longer be named "fire." Likewise, the sun with its "light" and "heat" is called "sun." If it loses "light" and "heat," it dims and cools down and would not be named "sun" anymore. You find that the soul, with its "word" and "life" is one soul; the fire, with its "warmth" and "light" is a single fire; the sun, with its "light" and "warmth" is one sun. Therefore, the triune nature of these things does not negate their oneness; neither does their oneness negate their triune nature.

[19a]// If someone says: "How can you call 'the Word' and 'the Spirit' hypostases in God, but you do not call the 'word' of the soul and its 'life' hypostases, nor the 'warmth' and 'light' of the fire, nor the 'light' and 'warmth' of the sun?" We answer: "We do this because of the perfection of the Creator and His transcendence above having His 'Word' and His 'Spirit' imperfect or flawed. For us, the hypostasis is a perfect thing, not deficient, and it does not need anything else for its establishment. As for these powers we have mentioned—that of the soul, the sun, and the fire—they are imperfect in power if compared to the Creator, for they are created. Because of this imperfection, we do not call them hypostases. We did not give you these examples from the created to the Creator [to indicate] that both are equally perfect, so that when you call the three concepts by which the Creator is found to be known, hypostases, in virtue of their perfections, you would also call the three concepts by which the created substances are known, hypostases. If this were the case, then what would be the superiority of the Creator over the creature, if you could apply whatever you find in the Creator to the creature?

"However, we give this example, but because there is nothing like God, the example is given in relation to Him [only] in terms of similarity. We have found one thing

known by three meanings. The triune nature of this thing did not nullify the oneness of its substance, nor did its oneness of substance abolish its three meanings. But it is established in its substance on its oneness, and in its meanings on its triune nature. This example cannot be similar in all things to the thing it represents, just as if someone had asked you to make a statue of a king whom he had never seen, and when you sculpted it, he did not find it moving, or seeing, or hearing, or smelling, or tasting, or walking. Then, he tells you, 'That man moves, sees, hears, tastes, smells, [19b]// and so on, but this one has none of these qualities. How do you say, then, that you have made the statue like the king?' It would seem as though it were impossible for you to make the statue identical in every way to the one whose likeness you have made, (if this were not a representation but the object itself), particularly when it is not in your power to make the thing that is represented into an image of it in all respects. Therefore, it is impossible for us to give you an example taken from the creature to the Creator in every respect, because they are not alike, and you will not find any creature as perfect as the Creator to the extent that he has what the Creator has, which would make him identical to the Creator in all respects. But from what you have witnessed, we have only given you one thing which has one substance yet has three meanings, so that this possibility is not denied. We do not mean that the Creator has any equivalent. You also, when you say that the Creator has one meaning, do not wish to compare Him to the accident which is apart from the substance, for He is one in meaning.

"Still, you should not specify your Creator in your doctrine by what you witness to be despicable. You know that things are not but four types: either 'substance,' as when you say 'man;' or 'hypostasis,' as when you say 'Moses,' 'David,' or 'Solomon;' or 'power,' as in the heat of the fire or the ray of the sun; or 'accident,' as in the darkness of black and the whiteness of white. The more perfect of these four things are 'substances' and 'hypostases,' because all substances have powers,—such as the heat of fire and the rays of the sun—and they also sustain accidents. Furthermore, any substance has two powers, such as the earth which has coolness and drought; such as water which has coolness and humidity; such as fire which has heat and dryness; such as air which has heat and humidity. All these things are one in substance and triple in their meanings. Hypostases, also, [20a]//—as when you say 'Moses,' 'David,' 'Solomon'—each is sustained by himself, without the need for the other. But accidents and powers, one in their meanings, do not subsist by themselves as the substances and hypostases do, for they need the substances which support them and are in them.

"You have appealed to the most despicable and the poorest things, and to those things which need others for their sustenance, and you have described your Creator by means of them, and you have confessed His oneness in meaning like them. Heat is only in

the meaning of heat, coolness is only in the meaning of coolness, whiteness is only in the meaning of whiteness, and blackness is only in the meaning of blackness. In your narrow description of Him, you are not even allowing Him to have 'life' and 'word' so that He is complete in His essence by His 'life' and His "'word'! If you had done this, you would have attributed to Him the most honorable meanings you have ever found, not the most despicable, the lowest, and poorest meanings you have witnessed. As for Christians, however, having found that the Creator is One yet known in three meanings, and since 'substance' to them is the most perfect meaning that they have found which includes several hypostases, (just as the substance of a human being includes all of the hypostases of humanity), and since they wanted to confirm what they had validated before men, they called it 'substance.' Furthermore, since He is perfect and lacking in nothing, and it was not appropriate that His meanings be attributed to what they found to be incomplete, and since they witnessed hypostases lacking nothing in themselves, needing nothing and having no defect, such as the accidents which are in need of the substances, (which generally are one in meaning), they called them 'hypostases' after they had found this mentioned in the Gospel. So what they have attributed to the Creator, that is, Him being One in substance and three in hypostases, is consistent with that which they have found to be the most perfect thing. [20b]// Since you found accidents and powers [which are] one in their meanings to be despicable, unlike that which was one in substance yet known in three meanings, you have described the oneness of your Creator's meaning in the most despicable way."

Someone could say: "Since you have confirmed that God has 'word' and 'spirit,' and you say, 'three hypostases,' why do you not also confirm in Him, hearing, seeing, wisdom, knowledge, power, authority, mercy, understanding, compassion, generosity, kindness, grace, will and other similar substantial qualities? Just as you have called Him "living" and "speaking," confirming in Him "life" and "word" you can also call Him hearing, seeing, wise, knowing, powerful, authoritative, merciful, forgiving, compassionate, generous, gracious, willing, and other similar names."

We respond: "We have come to this because we have found that 'life' and 'speech' belong to the principle of the essence and structure of the substance, unlike other properties. We see that earth is inanimate and that bodies have been made out of it. The concept of living separates it from what was formed out of it. This is why we call bodies 'animate beings,' not the earth. We have also seen that the meaning of speaking makes a separation between the animate beings. That is why some are called 'speaking,' (i.e. human beings), as for the rest they remain speechless, rightly called beasts and animals. Hearing, sight, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, and generosity must remain in the substance and there is no separation between them, because we see in the one substance the hearing and non-

hearing, the seeing and the non-seeing, the forgiving and the merciful, and the unforgiving and the unmerciful, the good and the generous, and the non-good and the ungenerous. The substances are not subject to [21a]// these differences, and they do not change their status in order to be divided into other substances, as we have seen the meaning of 'living' separating the earth from what is formed out of it, making something called animate beings while the earth remains inanimate and lifeless. As we have seen the concept of speech differentiating between the substances of animate beings so that some are called 'beasts' and 'animals' while others are called 'speaking,' so, out of the other attributes, we have confirmed only 'life' and 'speech' as substantial in the essence of the Creator, since we find them to be of the principle of the substance. Further, God has attributed them to Himself, and testimonies in His Books affirm that as well. That is what we will show in more detail later, explaining it more clearly than in this sentence, God willing.

"As far as 'hearing' and 'seeing' are concerned, you should not attach them to God as substances, because they are two members of the body put together in composite bodies, and God has no body in which two members can be put together. But by saying 'hearing' and 'seeing,' we mean 'knowing,' because we become aware of things by hearing and seeing, and God has spoken to us by what we can comprehend. He affirmed in Himself what is in us to make us understand His understanding of things, because otherwise we would not have understood them."

With regard to justice, compassion, generosity, kindness, favor, mercy, and forgiveness, these are actions, since He uses them with His creatures. When He punishes them on the basis of their merits, they call Him "just"; if He shows them mercy, they call Him "merciful"; if He shows them an act of kindness, they call Him "generous"; and if He is good and gracious to them, they call Him "good and gracious"; when He shows them His mercy and forgives them, they call Him "merciful and forgiving." These actions are attributed to the one who is "speaking." If "speech" is essentially confirmed in him, it becomes possible for him to implement them and use them. We do not say: "We have seen a just lamb, or a favorable or generous elephant, or a merciful and gracious horse, or a merciful and forgiving bull," because animals lack speech, [21b]// from which the qualities of these and similar actions come.

As for the "will," it is of two kinds. One is the will of compulsion, [i.e., instinct], such as the will of that which is not "speaking," for what it performs is by virtue of its nature, like ants which accumulate in summer what sustains their life in winter, without discernment or wisdom on their part, but because of what is inherent in them. The other is the will of choice, such as the will of someone who chooses one thing, thinking about it before doing it, to be used for his benefit and the benefit of others. This will of choice is only to be attributed to

someone who has "word." If "word" is confirmed in his substance, he becomes able to choose, since making choices is a quality which is not possessed by that which does not have "word." "Will" is not of the principle of substance because it has nothing to do with differentiating us from the animals. We share wills with the animals, and we are not differentiated by that which we have in common, but rather by the meaning of speech which is affirmed in us by our superiority over the animals. This we have and they do not. So, what separates us from this inanimate earth is not the existence that we have in common with it, but rather, the particularity of life which we have and they do not.

Thus also, our separation from the animals is not because of the life which we have in common, but is rather the particularity of speaking which we have. It is also not on account of the wills which we share with the animals that we became separate from them. The wills that exist in us and them have become a will of choice in us because we have the quality of "speech," but a will of compulsion in them because of the absence of "speech." Therefore, the will is not part of the structure of the substance, like "life" and "speech." We have shown it to be true that "will" does not differentiate between substances, as the substance of the animate beings is separated from the earth on account of "life," and the substance of those who "speak" is separated from other animate beings by virtue of "speech."

The proof of this is that we say: "God wills us to do this or that, and He does not will such and such, and we want to worship Him; we do not want to deny Him." [22a]// We say: "He used to want us to worship in Jerusalem, but He does not want us to do this today." But we cannot say the same about "life" and "speech" which are parts of the structure of the substance; as if we said "God was alive at one time, or was "speaking" and now is "not speaking." No, not according to what ought to be said about Him, what those with speech claim for Him by their speaking about "the Noble Names."

As for "power" and "strength," they are of two kinds. One is physical and the other is spiritual. The physical is like the force of an elephant carrying men by the massive size of his body, and like the force of a camel carrying a burden by the strength of its body and its members. The spiritual, however, is like the subtle strength of the soul; I mean its "word," by which it shows its "commands" and "prohibitions." The soul hears things and obeys them. Animals, which are stronger than the human body, have been subdued by it, [spiritual power], and it directs the affairs of the world and controls the world's economy. Thus, the power and strength of God are not in members, as we have described the strength of physical beings, since He has no body. But this is like the power of the soul that we have mentioned, that is, His Word, by which heaven and earth have been established.

As for "wisdom" and "knowledge," they are only attributed to a speaker who has wisdom. We do not call "wise" or "learned" that which is "not speaking," just as we do not

say: "I saw a knowledgeable donkey or a wise bull." But, we call speakers wise and knowledgeable, just as we call Aristotle "wise" on account of the rightness of his words in composing books of logic. We call Galen "knowledgeable" on account of what he composed in books of medicine and what he accomplished in that field. Wisdom and knowledge are associated with the "word," since they are only attributed to the one who has "word." So if you see someone who has "word" demonstrating an understanding of existing things as they are and showing the ability to distinguish between them, then you call his word "knowledge." And if you see him understanding the way things exist by his word and the reasons for their existence, you call it "wisdom." If wisdom and knowledge were other [22b]// than what we have described, it necessitates that, (since you see some people who are wise and others who are not wise, some knowledgeable and others who are not knowledgeable), that their substances should be different and be separate from each other to the degree that the substance of the wise is not the substance of the one who is not wise, and the substance of the knowledgeable is not the substance of the one who is not knowledgeable. Just as when you see some animate beings speaking, (such as human beings), and others not speaking, (such as beasts), you realize that the substance of the one speaking is not the substance of the one that cannot speak,─here I mean spiritual speech. If the expression of the latter is prevented by illness, then his speech and thought are not negated in his soul and are not excluded from the substance of those who speak.

This is what we say of the Word of God when we see Him knowing things as they are through it and surrounding them by His comprehension, we call it "knowledge." When we see Him governing and directing all of their economy, we call it "wisdom." It is clear, then, that wisdom and knowledge are associated with the "word," and that they are only attributed to the wisdom and knowledge of one who speaks, who has "word." It is obvious then that nothing ought to belong to the structure of the substance and its essential nature except "life" and "word." Therefore, the Holy Gospel and the Books which preceded it, attribute the Spirit and the Word to the essence of the Creator. In doing this, Christianity did not by necessity impute to the Creator partition or division, because partition and division only apply to bodies, and God has no body. We do not see the subtle spiritual soul becoming embodied, or partitioned, or divided by confirming life and word in the essence of its substance, but we know this by means of our conjecture, not by its becoming embodied, or being partitioned or divided. We do not see fire becoming embodied, or partitioned, or divided by our confirming heat [23a]// and light in it; we know that it is the most subtle element because it is invisible in its essence, intangible, and untouchable but sheltered in bodies by its subtlety, and that it is a substance which is not felt, and does not burn by its heat. And yet, because of its subtlety, its heat and light are assumed to be in it and of it. Thus it shows the heat and light which are

in its essence, when it appears by its relationship with that which is other than it, and it is not divided or partitioned with its subtlety and the existence of these concepts in it.

Therefore God—may His praise be magnified—since we also know by conjecture that He is One, exists in three meanings. It is best that in this we do not assume that He has any partitions or divisions, which are applicable only to bodies, and He has no body. But we find this in some of His creatures, without them having to be divided or partitioned, and this is accepted on the basis of what He announced to us in His Book which He authenticated to us by its appearing with overwhelming miracles. We believe that He is one substance known in three hypostases; that He surrounds the heavens and the earth, without being limited; that He is invisible, eternal, and unceasing; and that He lasts forever and ever.

Discourse on the Union

Having demonstrated our faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that we believe Him to be one Creator of everything, who embraces all things, we leave aside the questions and answers that might develop concerning this, not wanting the book to be too lengthy, and turn to address their condemnation of us for saying that Christ is the Son of God. They stirred up people against us by reporting that we say that God took a female companion and had a son from her. May God be greatly exalted above that! When we mention that God manifested His plan in a body of ours, they allege that we say that He descended into the womb of Mary and limited Himself in her. When we mention that Christ was crucified, [23b]// they allege that we impute weakness to God. When we mention baptism, and taking the Eucharist as the body and blood of Christ, and our belief that our reward in the eternal world is not found through sexual intercourse, food or drink, they oppose us in all of this. We will demonstrate in all of this the grace of God towards spiritual and physical beings, and His revelation of life from death to human beings, and of their ascent from earth to heaven, the place of eternity and immortality.

Therefore, I will begin with what they found to be most despicable and most distasteful to them, when it became lodged in their hearts that we say that God took a female companion and a son. To all this I say: We are free before God from being suspected of saying that He took a female companion. If one of us could exalt himself above that, how then can this be attributed to his Creator? May God be greatly exalted far above that! But we call the Word of God "Son" just as the Gospel reports. We do not say that the Word of God is a body. But since you find one of His creatures, (I mean the spiritual and subtle soul), bringing forth its own words in a way which you do not understand or comprehend, why do you not say this about the Word of God which is beyond the comprehension of both spiritual angels and human beings?

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I would like to ask them why they find distasteful our naming of the Word as "Son," according to what is in the Books of God concerning him. Is it perhaps because we find that our sons only exist through sexual intercourse, which we are ashamed to show? We consider the sperm by which they exist to be dirty to the extent that we wash ourselves of it. This is how their creation comes from it. They remain in the darkness of the womb for nine months, and they come out by strong labor pains through a narrow uterus, together with much blood. We therefore inform them, [our accusers], that we are blameless before God from all of this, because the Son, according to us, does not have a body [24a]// and he has no members, flesh or blood. His eternal birth is not from the body of a woman, but he is the Word of God, not confined or perceived. His origination is far beyond the description of the generation of light from the sun and speech from the soul.

If it is because our sons exist in a moment of time, then we inform them that the Son remains timeless and that he has no beginning in time. If it is because the sonship of our sons changes as they become fathers and then they become grandfathers, and then after that they die, bringing to an end what they are called, then this is a proof of the weakness of the meaning of what they are called. We inform them that their sonship is changed and transferred to something else until it comes to an end, which happens because these meanings are not from their own essences, but they are borrowed from fatherhood. The exalted sonship, (which is from the essence, does not change, is not transferred, and does not come to an end), becomes an example for their sonship. Thus other sonships can be inferred from it, even though the example does not contain the completeness of the thing it represents. It is known that a son of ours is not an act of the father, but is from his substance, and that fatherhood has not preceded sonship, since a man is not called "father" until he has a son: thus fatherhood and sonship must be together. So the Word of God, when called "Son," is not His act, but is from the essence of His substance; it was not His act but it was from His substance. His substance never ceases to be; it never ceases to be and He was never without it. If He were without Word at any point in time, it would have to be said that He was not speaking or knowing. If a father from among us, at the occurrence and time of coming into being, (before the name of "fatherhood" was applied to him), precedes the son in his occurrence and time of coming into being, it is because they are two created [24b]// bodies; a created one creates; one is after the other. Fatherhood and sonship do not belong to their essence, but they were loaned names of what belongs to the Creator in His essence, because He has given us all of the noble names He has in His essence, such as "living," "wise," "knowledgeable," and "speaking," among others.

It can only be inferred from the naming of the Word as "Son," (since we know that the created son is from the essence of the substance of the father and is not his act), that the

Word is from the substance of God and is not His act. It cannot be inferred that God is a body in which another body was created. Fatherhood and sonship are two properties created together in us; one cannot lack the other, since a father and son from among us are created in time. It is imperative that we know that fatherhood and sonship in the essence of the Creator are eternal; neither preceded the other, since there is nothing in the essence of the Creator that is created or which precedes or follows. When an example is given to us about one thing, we do not to apply it to everything, but we limit it to the meaning that is intended by it. For example, since our Creator calls us by His noble names which belong to Him in His essence, such as "living," "wise," "knowledgeable," and "speaking," so that it can be inferred from their nobility that they are His and that they are not from our essence, then He shows His favor to us by granting us these names. It is not permissible for us, having seen them created in us as we are created, to say that they are also created in the Creator, for He is eternal. But we must say, since they are in reality from the Creator and are given to us as a loan, that they are eternal in Him. If they are temporal for us, they are eternal for Him, since in us they are shifting and transitory in this world.

We also find the names "fatherhood" and "sonship" to be the most noble among these names, and they bring the greatest blessing to us, and they are most valued by us. Since the blessing of what we were given in these names, from one spirit [25a]// male and female, the world has become full of humans, males and females, and it has become a prosperous world, so that it is known that by virtue of them the world is multiplied and maintained. Even though the properties of the Creator who created the world did not start with them, He multiplied us by naming us by them. Without the blessing of what was loaned to us by these names, Adam would not have been called "living," "knowledgeable," "speaking," and things like these. He would have died and his wife, too, and would have been obliterated. This whole world would have been obliterated, and on account of this eradication, the hereafter also would have been obliterated. Therefore, the blessing, growth, and maintenance of creatures is only by virtue of that by which we have been honored, by the Creator giving us of what He has in His essence of fatherhood and sonship. This is not from our essence, for if we return to it we will only find death and a return to that from which we originate: I mean, the dead earth.

If it is because our sons are bodies, we inform them that fatherhood and sonship, according to us, mean that the Father and Son are not physical; they have nothing of that in their essence. At a specific time, a man may remain for a while without being called "father" until another body is created out of him, and so they both together are entitled to fatherhood and sonship. Then, the name of sonship is handed on from the son when he is named "father." This is not removed from him by death.

Therefore, oh listener, why do you shrink from our mention of fatherhood and sonship? They are not physical. It is possible that a human proceeds from another human like him without the first being called a "father" and the second a "son." Just as when Eve proceeded from Adam, she was not called his son, nor was he called her father. Just as fruit comes from a tree, the tree is not called a father, nor the fruit a son. Also, when beasts give birth they are not called "fathers" and "sons." Just as you say "lion cubs," "dog pups," and "sheep lambs", they are not called "sons" and "fathers" lest they share with humans in the dignity [25b]// of fatherhood and sonship, which are two properties of the Creator.

Therefore your Creator, O man一may His praise be exalted一has honored you with what is not in your substance. You suppose that it is from your essence, and, according to you, it has become an imperfection. You have turned what ought to be worthy of praise into defamation and censure. After this, we inform you that the Son of God does not have a body, but He embraces everything; He is not limited, and cannot be comprehended by any rational mind.

If it is because, according to them, the honor and the praise in the saying that He "does not beget and is not begotten," let the one who says this know that if the exaltation is that it is said about Him that He "does not beget and is not begotten," then he must have granted exaltation to the worms, bedbugs, mosquitoes, and nits, and all that becomes an embryo, and comes into being; and exaltation to the locusts for they plant something which has neither form nor life, then it takes form and comes into being shortly after that; and exaltation to the sparrows, swallows, wasps, chickens, hens and all kinds of birds which lay eggs, for birds do not give birth to birds; and exaltation to the trees, plants and herbs; yes, and to that which does not have life一grains, seeds, rocks and stones; and to the totality of nature, animate and inanimate, (for instance, the earth, water, air and fire), since each of these components does not beget and is not begotten.

If all these animate beings or inanimate things which we have mentioned are the most despicable in the world, and if human beings that have fatherhood and sonship are the most exalted in the world; yes, and if the animate beings which generate and are generated, (despite the fact that they are not called "fathers" and "sons" lest they share with human beings in this dignity), are more exalted than those things which neither generate nor are generated, therefore it becomes clear to them that deficiency and despicability are only found in that which [26a]// does not generate nor is generated; and honor and high rank are found in that which was generated and generates. If that which was not generated is the most exalted thing, then Eve, who was not generated, would have been the most exalted over all things; and Satan, who does not generate nor is generated, would have been more exalted than Abraham, the friend of the Most Merciful. Furthermore, if fatherhood and sonship were

deficiencies, then there would be nothing in the world more deficient than people who live in it, and nothing would be higher in rank than the beetles, worms, bugs, mosquitoes and everything we have described among such animate beings and inanimate things. Each of them does not beget and is not begotten.

Since we have found that man is the most dignified of all things, and that he is more honored by God than them or even the angels, we know that dignity and loftiness are in what is generated and generates. If it depended on choice, He would have given those things high rank and dignity; yet He did not make him deficient or low, since despicability and deficiency are in that which does not beget and is not begotten. We are certain that our dignity and our high rank occur by the application of the names of fatherhood and sonship to us. They are properties of the Creator—may His praise be exalted—as He said in His pure and holy Book which was confirmed in the world on account of the resurrection of the dead and the wonders which cannot be described. We know that our Creator has left none of His properties and noble names which He has in His essence, but He has called us by them, such as living, knowing, wise, forbearing, speaking, king, powerful, mighty, strong, able, generous, kind, merciful, and others like that in Him. A man is called by all of these names which only the Creator merits and not His creation. Praise be to Him for His favor, His beneficence and blessing!

If it is because they see these in humans, and according to them it is not appropriate to attribute to God what belongs to humans, we say that if a human being is called living, knowing, beneficent, generous, gracious, favorable, [26b]// or the like, then they cannot call the Creator by them as well.

If they say: "All of this belongs to the Creator, yet He has preferred and honored us by calling us by these names." We say: "Why then do you not include fatherhood and sonship as well? Is this too amazing, or too human? It is through being amazing, and through the greatness of His status, and the blessing of His name that the world multiplied, and so we are found in it. Through our existence in this world we find the world which does not pass away."

If they say: "That is deficiency in us"; we have accounted for aspects of deficiency yet we have excluded them from fatherhood and sonship which are amazing, beyond comprehension, and are too exalted to be described. What is their argument, then, after we have removed the mention of deficiencies, in their neglecting to add them to these names which we have mentioned? I would like to oppose them over what, according to them, they find to be a deficiency, such as mercy, (which exists for them only through causing suffering and anguish to the heart), and anger, (which does not exist for them until it changes what comes before it), and contentment, (which only happens for them by means of advancing in

their knowledge of what is decreed for them afterwards), so that they exclude that and everything like it from the Creator. For if they find something to be deficient according to them, they do not attribute it to their Creator; so they must not attribute to Him mercy, contentment, discontent, anger, or the like. Yet if they do not attribute these to Him, surely their judgment from Him will descend upon themselves, for they do not believe in Him and His Books which say these things about Him. They may come back and say, "We name Him by these things, yet we exclude from Him any deficiency that appears in us." I answer, "Why do you not attribute to Him fatherhood and sonship, while excluding from Him the deficiency which exists in us?" I do not think they have an argument, but they are afraid of this. Their hearts are not familiar [27a]// with Him because of their aversion to what might come to pass from the fear of the appearance of things, without the examination of their inmost secrets.

Confirmation of the Incarnation

As for the manifestation of our Creator to His creatures in a human being from among us, just as He一hallowed be His names一embraces heaven and earth and is not comprehended by the subtlety of the spiritual angels or the innermost thoughts of all humans; so the profundity of His direction, grace, generosity and kindness in His manifestation to His creatures is not known, and only His knowledge, which embraces all things, can comprehend this.

However, in any event, we mention some of what His Books have indicated about Him regarding this [incarnation]. Nonetheless, we know that they only mentioned a few things which weak human beings might manage to understand. We will explain this in a way that should compel rational people to affirm it.

Before we explain in detail the grace of the Creator to His creatures, we must mention the nature of His grace, kindness and generosity to them that preceded this, so that what we will explain about the beginning of these, (which our opponents join us in affirming), becomes a witness for us against their disagreement with us when we describe the completion of His grace towards His creatures,一since the beginning of God's generosity, which they do not mention, and the completion of His favor, which they deny, are similar. These two similar actions signify the One who is known by them, who began by providing a little and then completed it with abundance, and made them advance gradually from smallness to greatness just as He made the mind and body of a human being gradually advance from being small to being great, and from having little to having much knowledge.

I say: The Creator一may His praise be exalted一has never ceased to be one, living, knowing, and independent of others. Out of His kindness and generosity He has made creatures which can be divided into two kinds: visible and invisible, physical and spiritual.

Both kinds are, in turn, divided into three types: the kind which is living and speaking, such as the spiritual beings; [and] the kind which is living but non-speaking, such as beasts, animals, birds, and insects; [27b]// [and] the kind which is inanimate, non-living, such as heaven, earth, water, fire, air and other inanimate things. Then He created human beings different from all of this, and established him as one whose spirit comes from the spiritual beings, and whose body comes from the physical ones. And in his body He gathered the powers of these four elements, such as heat, cold, dryness and humidity. So he, [the human], became representative of all the creatures, and the two types regarded as spiritual and physical were joined in him. The powers of the four different elements of which the world is composed are found in him in order to show, by the gathering together of different, contradictory things in him, that their Creator, despite the differences in them, is One, and that He gathered all of them in one thing which He made out of them all. And whenever He honors an individual person He includes all of His creatures, since he is their representative who is given something great—just as He acquired for him two great things, namely earth and heaven. He housed him at first in the lowest of these houses, (i.e., earth); having had it decorated with all the lights hanging from its roof, and set him up with servants, and provided him with food, drink, clothing and everything he needed. He made him king over everything on earth and subjected under him what is on the land and in the sea, in order to transfer him afterwards to heaven where he, on account of the difference between the two houses, may know the virtue of honor which he would attain over against that which he left behind, and this will be the basis of his joy.

Having shown God's grace and generosity towards him, [the human], we now say: The Creator—may He be exalted and praised—since the beginning of humanity is Him gathering together in him all His creatures whether spiritual or physical, out of His generosity towards him, as we have described, it is therefore necessary that people of sound mind should know that the Creator will complete what He started, lest anything is left uncompleted by Him, since the Creator out of His generosity, not out of His need for him, created him. [28a]// And it is not possible to attribute to the Creator the beginning of an uncompleted grace, for He is generous and not grudging. The command of the One who ordered the beginning which we have described, and His making a house for us, urging its building and completion, must give witness concerning His generosity and kindness as He completes what He has started.

Therefore, we will briefly mention four explanations concerning what are known as the reasons for the manifestation of the Creator to His creatures, to perfect what He had begun in humanity out of His generosity and kindness, thus manifesting His wisdom and justice.

The first of them shows His wisdom, justice and love for His creatures by bringing them gradually closer to knowing Him, and confirming Himself to them, for He cannot be comprehended by the way they comprehend and come to understand. As we have mentioned, this is attested to in His plan to manifest Himself in a body like ours.

I say: God－may He be exalted and praised－did not imprint His knowledge in our substance, as He imprinted knowledge of things in that which has no "word" without them having learned these things, like the bee in which is imprinted the knowledge of collecting honey and of making hives where it puts the honey; and like the spider in which is imprinted knowledge of making a house for itself. This is done lest our praise for the knowledge of Him becomes worthless, just as praise of a lamb for its calmness and its stillness is worthless, since this is the lamb's nature; and the censure of a wolf for its deceit and meanness is worthless, since these things are woven into its nature. Had God imprinted knowledge of Him in our substance, He would not have found anyone of us who is ignorant of Him or does not know Him, or anyone who ignores Him at one time then changes to knowing Him at another time, since our substance would be one. At this point, we needed our Creator to make Himself known to us, since He called us to know Him, and ordered us to worship Him. And He is not limited to a place, but He embraces all places. For He and all the angels and humans are comprehended by our senses, since we only comprehend things by them, and our minds only know what our senses indicate. Many people have also differed on the classification of what leads to them. However, what we comprehend by them, [our senses], is what seems correct to us, [while] that which our minds [28b]// deduce is unlike anything which reaches our senses. That which is not pictured in the imagination cannot stay firmly in the soul, and believing in it becomes very difficult, and it is only possible through words, and by the compulsion of evidences, and also by what is comprehended about it by the senses.

If you reached the point of what you had previously deduced and wanted to verify it for yourself, and you did not find that it was according to your imagination, its existence would be invalidated by you. We see that people are united in confirming [the reality of] their bodies as they comprehend them by their senses; yet they disagree about their souls, since their souls are not comprehended by their senses, (despite the evidence of their souls' logic, wisdom, direction, and closeness, since it indwells their bodies), with the result that many people deny and reject their souls, yet they speak with their souls' logic. And many disagree about this, and discuss theories too lengthy to be mentioned.

God－may His praise be exalted－knew that our knowledge of Himself does not stand firm in our souls; and that our worship of Him is not pure; and that it is not agreeable to us since our eyes do not comprehend Him, and our imaginations do not reach Him till our souls find rest concerning His standing firm; and that doubt about Him is banished from our

hearts only through His appearance to us, by His speaking to us through what our senses can achieve, [through] His commanding and forbidding us and directing us to worship Him in one place, (as if He is only to be found there, as we cannot worship Him in every place). He spoke to Adam, Abel, Cain, Noah, and Abraham, as if He were human, just as the Torah says; He commanded them and forbade them, and they saw Him; He spoke to Moses from the bush, as our opponents admit; He also spoke to him from the cloud just as a man speaks to his friend, according to what the Torah says. Then, after that, He ordered the sons of Israel to build a house of stone and an ark of wood so that He may dwell in it, and speak to them from it, and receive their sacrifices [29a]// as if He were contained in it. He called it His house; since the house belonged to Him who was known by His familiarity with it, by His living in it, so that their eyes, their thoughts, their worship, and their supplications might be directed towards one place, as if it contained Him. This was so that their thoughts might not wander everywhere in search of Him without finding Him, since He is not visible, and imaginations do not reach Him so that He becomes contained or confined, and He is not affected by anything which depends on Him,—thus people might return to denying Him and not believing in Him.

We have seen that the ones who oppose our teaching refer to their Book concerning God's directing what they should do, (which is similar to what we have described of people's need for this), for God's direction of them. They say that God said He is a Hear-er and See-er, not that He has "hearing" or "sight," but because He spoke to people in a way which they can understand, He attributed the properties of hearing and seeing to Himself even though He is exalted far above them. Likewise, is His saying that, although He knows everything, He forgets, He provides, He is angered, and He is satisfied, and similar responses that belong to creatures and are not appropriate for the Creator. Likewise, is His saying that He has a house in the direction of which He ordered them to pray from every place, as if He were there and not anywhere else. The house is only known on account of its owner's dwelling in it, and his familiarity with it. Thus, He led them to assume that the house confines Him so that He could confirm Himself to them, and He demonstrated that people need to turn their faces towards one place which He assigned for Himself. However, had He spoken to them from that house, or had He spoken to their prophet just as He spoke to Moses from the bush, or just as He spoke to the priests of the sons of Israel from the ark, this would have been a stronger confirmation of His existence to them, and it would have been more indicative of His kindness towards them, that the house was truly His, that He appeared in it, and spoke from it, just as He spoke from other places. There is no difference between us and them in what we have mentioned, and no defect in it. Indeed, He spoke to Moses from what is less [29b]// than this, I mean from a contemptible, dishonorable and fruitless

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bush.

Since we have shown people's need for this, the direction of God for them as we have described, and the belief of our opponents in the same regard, they and all people of sound mind who acknowledge the Books must know that the appearance of God to people in a human being living among them, is a better likeness of His favor, His generosity, and His kindness to them, and is a much stronger confirmation of His permanent existence, and a clearer proof of His kindness to them and the honor He shows them in His appearing in the image and likeness of a human being, and in a stone house, and an ark of wood, and a contemptible tree, a cloud, and the like. He has not neglected to do what was better and more like Himself. Yet, they ask us to confirm this to them from His Books and from that which indicates to rational people that He has really done it, without them denying that He had done it, but instead by confessing that His favor is in it. This is confirmed to them, and they ought to accept it and believe in it.

The second reason [for the manifestation of the Creator to His creatures] is that He demonstrates His love for His creatures, His pleasure in introducing joy to them, His removal of doubts from them, His showing them kindness, and giving them their needs and their desires; and this is what I say about it:

What people love the most, what they find most delightful, and what they find most pleasing to their souls, is knowing everything to the point that nothing remains hidden. We have seen people going to great pains to calculate the stars, study alchemy, tell fortunes, watch acts of incantation, and the like. Moreover, they rush to watch tricks of magic and other things, they are so keen to understand and comprehend their reality. When it is reported to them that a prophet has appeared, they become eager to go and see him and find favor with him. What is of greater value to them, or more [30a]// significant and more desirable than all of this, than seeing their Creator, their originator, the One who is in charge of their wellbeing, the One who made heaven and earth for them? This is like when Moses, son of 'Imrān, the prophet, wanted this, so he asked his Lord to show Himself to him; and it is like many of our opponents who say they will see God on the day of the Resurrection. There is no grace greater in value or more significant for them than seeing Him. Also, we have seen many people, out of their desire to see their gods which they name idols and see and worship by His name. As a result, people of sound mind must know that God, since He is not comprehended, out of love for His creatures and the care for them that He shows in His actions and reveals in His grace and generosity, is not grudging in giving His creatures their needs and desires by appearing to them in a body which their senses can grasp. All of this raises them up and benefits them, yet does not abase Him nor show any deficiencies in Him, but rather He shows His generosity and His action. Since He began by appearing to them in

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human form without a real body, and in a bush, and within an ark of wood, and other things which are inferior to them, according to Him it is understandable that He would do this in a real body of theirs, which is more honorable for Him, and through which their honor is more abundant, and in which His grace is more manifest; and by His generosity and kindness He is more like them and yet worthier than them, and He has not stopped doing what was worthy of Him.

If they ask us to prove the correctness of this to them, then surely it has never been denied by them, because such an action is better and more akin to God's favor and generosity. He therefore does this, and they must accept it and believe in it.

As for the third reason which demonstrates His favor and justice, we say: God ordered His servants to obey Him and forbade them from disobeying Him, and prepared for them His reward for obedience and His punishment for disobedience, and informed them that He judges every human being according to his deeds, and that He is not comprehended, and that eyes cannot see Him. [30b]// People of sound mind must know, (since according to them it is repugnant that the judge is veiled from those whom he will judge, and that this is not just according to them, that it is not good according to God as well), that at the point of reaching a judgment and verdict between heaven and hell, the judge sees the one whom he judges, but the one being judged does not see the judge. It is worthier for God that He does what is more appropriate and more agreeable than His creatures. They know that He spoke to us in His Books, not according to His power, but according to what we can comprehend by ourselves; He spoke to us about Himself by what was not obligatory for Him; and on the day of Resurrection, the day when He will judge us, He will not treat us according to His ability, but according to His justice. He must appear to us in something which our senses can reach, but since manifesting Himself in His essence is impossible, He therefore makes this thing a veil between us and Him. Thus, the hopeful and the fearful will fix their eyes on the One from whom the judgment will come, and they will gaze on Him. The one who obeys does not expect a decree concerning his reward where he cannot see anything; and the one who fears is condemned to punishment without seeing the One who makes that judgment. If this were the case, He would have contradicted what He informed us about in His Books, in His words to us which we can comprehend, before our coming before Him and our standing in His presence, and He would have impoverished us when we received what is due to us, and so we would be compelled to accept what is imposed on us. This is not like His acts, or His justice, or His wisdom. [Rather,] the worthiest, the noblest, the most honorable, and the most similar visible thing for His veiling is the substance of a human being.

As for the fourth reason, in which He shows the completion of His grace and generosity, we say:

Since our Creator created us, not out of His need, but to bestow His generosity on us and to make us honorable like Himself, there is nothing greater in value for us, or more profound concerning honoring us and the honoring all of His creatures which are included in us, (since He gave [31a]// us dominion in this perishable world over all which is in it), than for Him to bring this to completion by giving us dominion in the everlasting world. Since we have the names of kingship and dominion, which do not belong to us in our own essence, but our Creator has graciously given us what is His and what only He is entitled to, they will not be taken from us in the situation of our reward in the everlasting world. Through the enhancement of His dignity in the time of our reward in the everlasting world, we will be more worthy and more deserving of the full force of the meaning of this, and God will be even more like this by the completion of the generosity with which He began.

Now that we have shown here how it can be possible that the names of kingship and dominion are established in one of us and so they include all, we have also mentioned some of the reasons which the Books of God indicate concerning the design of the manifestation of the Creator to His creatures in a human being from among humanity. And we have also compelled people of sound mind to know the truthfulness of this and to stop rejecting it, since it is more akin to the favor of the Creator and His blessing, His might, His justice and His wisdom. Now, from each chapter, we will produce an answer concerning the meaning of God's design so that there will be a unified structure that does not look disjointed to the one looking at it, and so we say:

Since God—may His praise be glorified—created humanity out of His generosity and kindness and knew that he, [humanity], would need to know Him and to have evidence of His generosity, (because his eyes do not comprehend Him and his mind cannot fully grasp Him), He made Himself known to him in a way that he could comprehend, that his senses could reach, and in which his soul could find rest. Therefore, He set out His design for doing this and at one time He appeared to him in his image, and in a bush at another time, and in a cloud at another, and in other ways too. Was there anything of greater value to him, [humanity], more significant and more highly desirable than His appearing to him in what was closer than the things in which He had appeared, [31b]// than in an image without form or change or the like? But instead [He appeared] in a real body of his own substance from which he, [the human], can know Him, and in which his soul can find rest; and by His appearing to him he is given dignity, honor, and dominion, just as the soul gives the body its life and speech. He completes the dominion that He gave him over some of His creatures by making it extend over the rest of His creatures, and thus he reaches the highest degree of honor. This is the reason He created him, not because He needed him. When He judges him, He will have a body which he can look at, and the judgment will not be rendered without

him knowing where the judgment comes from.

He―may His praise be glorified―manifested Himself for this and other reasons which are not mentioned by the majority of the varying opinions of the people of the world [who] differ in the search for Him, in their confusion concerning Him and in their remoteness from knowing Him, because the eyes do not comprehend Him, and the minds do not attain to Him, except through the design, the might, and the dominion. [He manifested Himself] without the moving of His essence from one place to another, or it having to go through one state to another, but through what is more honorable for Him than the things in which He had previously appeared, to bring the souls of people closer to His existence, [through] forms, visions, a bush, a cloud, an ark of wood, and a house of stones. In this way, His grace and generosity to His creatures are more evident and more visible, and He has honored them more and more. I mean: a man, His image, from the Virgin Mary, without an element of human seed. He spoke to the people of the world through him, and He addressed them by his tongue, and He put them at ease when they looked at him, and He brought them close to Himself, because they had been at a distance from Him on account of the deceit of Satan, and He removed them from their enemy, and gave them power over him, and called them to know Him without a messenger between Himself and them, by means of a tongue united with a body of theirs. This is rather like the soul that shows its logic and wisdom from [within] a lifeless body, without a messenger between itself and it, but through union with it and showing its life and its wisdom in it and benefiting [32a]// it with what it has, to the point that what it has of life and speech becomes essential and substantial to it, having come as a benefit to it without lacking anything, and without the body being separate from it. For this reason, one name has become inclusive of both of them, I mean the name of a human being and the meaning of it. So, if it is said that a human being "spoke," "understood," "knew," "was able," and "organized," this all indicates the soul, since the origin of speech and wisdom is in its essence. And if it is said that a human being "ate," "drank," "grew taller," "got broader," and "died," this all indicates the body which is sustained by food and drink, and grows, and increases in length and width, even though it's essence is inanimate.

Therefore, since a decree of God is above all other decrees, (none of which can be compared with it), the manifestation of the Creator in our body through design, and union with it by dominion and might without limitation happens in the same way as the limitation of the soul in the body. He has given it one name, along with the body in which He has veiled Himself from us: I mean, the name of Christ.

When it is said that He is He, has always been and always will be, and that He is Creator and God, this indicates that the Creator who is invisible, and who, by His grace, has spoken to us from our body in which He veiled Himself, for by design He came closer to us

and spoke to us from our substance, (because He encompasses heaven and earth), [this He did] after He had been used to speaking to us from what was far from our substance, and remote from us.

When it is said He is created, pertains to time, eats and drinks and the like, this refers to our body in which He veiled Himself from us. So, the name Christ became indicative of the Creator and His creature. He is Creator who is invisible in His divinity, and seen in his humanity as created; just as a human being indicates spirit and body, so he is spiritual in his spirit and bodily in his body. And since we have found this in the creature, even though the creature falls short of the perfection of the Creator, how much more appropriate is the perfection and loftiness of this in comprehending the Creator! And if the created soul which falls short of the perfection of power and generosity [32b]// gave the body in which it was veiled what it has of life and speech to the point that the body became one with it in living and speaking, how much more appropriate it is that we know that the Creator perfects the gift, perfects the honor, and bestows the gift and the grace in this to His creature. Moreover, by His generosity, with which no other generosity can be compared, after He was known to be dwelling in heaven and that He was called as such because of the honor of its location and the loftiness of its place, He became one who dwelt in our body with the plan to become closer to His creatures, without being limited or confined by it. But while He indwells it, He encompasses all things. He has shown His power, His design, and His dominion in it and He has spoken to the people of the world in their languages. And He told the people that He is their Creator who has always wanted to confirm His existence to them. He spoke to them from visible things and made this real by giving life to the dead, sight to the eyes of the blind, hearing to the ears of the deaf, speech to the mute, healing to the sick, and purity to the leprous, in order to make plain that, when He gave life to the dead by dominion and power, He was the One who made them dead, and when He gave sight, hearing, speech and healing, He was the One who had done this in the beginning when He made this person blind and that person deaf or mute or leprous, and he said, "If you do not believe in me, believe in my works." He sent messengers to all the people of the world in their different languages which He had created for them, so that people would know that the One who divided the languages and made them different is the One who calls them to know Him, and that nobody else can do that but He Himself. He ordered them to preach His manifestation in a body of theirs and tell people what He has shown in it of His power, might, and dominion, and to preach what He has prepared for them in His Kingdom, and to call them to worship Him and obey Him, and to proclaim the life of their bodies after death, and their destination in the life which does not perish [33a]//.

The messengers carried out His orders in the whole world, after He had forbidden

them from carrying with them anything with which people of this earth strengthen themselves. He gave them the power to do great miracles, the like of which creatures cannot do. They proclaimed to the peoples of the world that their Creator, (about Whom they differed, and concerning Whom their teaching multiplied, and from Whom their desires were separated, and Whose name they gave to others among stars and idols and other things, and thus they opposed each other over Him, and the majority of them were confused concerning Him, because they neither saw Him nor comprehended Him), [He] appeared in a body of theirs and He spoke to the people from it, and He showed His power and might in it, and He took it with Him in His dignity and made it reign, and He gave it life after it was dead, and He took it up to heaven higher than His angels, and it will remain His veil between Him and them and the rest of His creatures for eternity.

They, [the apostles], performed great miracles in His name, and thus they confirmed that He is their Creator. And the people of the world accepted what they proclaimed and their joy became greater as He honored them by appearing to them and by His raising of their substance. They stopped searching for the Creator. And they believed that He is one, known in three hypostases, that He is present in all places, that He is not contained in any place, that He appeared according to His design without any limitation, and that He established fellowship with them. They put aside the books which those who were confused about Him had written before His appearance, which called the stars, and the idols and other things by His name. They also started to worship Him, and they despised the lusts of the world for His sake, and were led to accept the sayings of the fishermen who were His apostles. Thus, their victory was not possible on account of the power or might of authority, but because of the appearance of great miracles by their hands.

What greater grace, what more abundant favor, what more obvious generosity is there than this by which God has sealed His generosity and kindness which He initiated in us! And what conclusion concerning this situation more clearly indicates the initiation of His favor to us than that He began by creating us, to the extent that we fell short of praising His grace in this, that is, in making us. For He was in the universe by Himself yet He made a portion of the universe for us along with Himself. And while He was the only One who is living and speaking, He gave us [33b]// a share by making us, along with the angels, speaking beings. While He alone had dominion over what He had created, He gave us a portion by giving us dominion over what is on earth. Then, when He wanted to seal our situation by bringing His grace to completion, He brought us to the goal of His generosity and kindness so that we would know that He had created us for this reason and not because He needed us. There is no greater grace for us other than His manifestation to us, and His appearance in us, and His fulfilling the dominion which He had given us over what is on earth by giving us

dominion over what is in heaven. After the first man fell from rank due to his disobedience, and after his departure from paradise when he became the subject of wrath, being placed under death after having been cut off from any hope of life, He manifested Himself in a human being from among us and took him with Him in dominion and dignity. When he, [humanity] despaired of having any mercy or salvation from death, his Creator manifested Himself to him in his substance, so He has raised him from death, and made him a governing king over that which is in heaven and on earth.

What greater grace is there for the creature than his Creator bringing him to this degree of honor, dignity, kingship, and dominion? And what ignorance is greater than the ignorance of the one who hates his own honor and dignity? For while he likes one of the angels to speak to him in the form of a human being, he hates his Creator speaking through a human being. And while he likes his Creator to speak to him from a bush, he hates the Creator speaking to him from his body. And while he likes kingship and dominion over this base earth, he hates them over the noble heaven. And while he likes dominion over some people in this perishable world, he hates dominion over the angels in the everlasting world. And while he likes to have a share of the permanence and eternity which his Creator has in His essence so that he may stay living, remain and not perish, he hates to have [34a]// a portion of his Creator's kingship and dominion. And while he wants dignity and honor through the revelation of something from the unseen world through a servant from among the angels, he hates to know everything from the unseen world by the manifestation of the One who created the Angels. And while he wants to exaggerate the favor and kindness of his Creator, by describing Him as the One who gave him dominion over the beasts of the land and the fish of the sea, he hates to describe Him as the One who gave him dominion over the spiritual angels, all the humans, and all the creatures. So, the goal of his Creator has become related to the imperfection of his substance and the earthly nature of his body, and is not related to the favors and grace of his Creator and to His generosity and kindness to which He had made him accustomed. For, when He took one of the people into His dominion and kingship, all spiritual and physical beings entered into the honor and dignity of this, since he is one of the spiritual beings in his spirit and one of the physical beings in his body. Thus, he, [Christ] is king over them all, and this kingship is later confirmed to them by the most amazing wonders.

Just as one after another of the sons of Israel ruled, it was said that kingship belongs to the sons of Israel. And when one after another of the non-Arabic speaking nations ruled, it was said that kingship belongs to the non-Arabic speaking nations. And when one after another of the Arabs ruled, it was said that kingship belong to the Arabs. He is king over them, and kingship for them is through him. That is so because he is from them, and his

dignity and honor fall on them. It is said that no one has advanced over the people of that kingdom, because the honor of one king falls on them all, since he is from their race.

For this reason and for an even greater reason than this, the honor of the spiritual and physical creatures is through the honor of one human being from humanity, and by him they are raised in their souls above the lowliness of slaves' souls, and their common people as well as their leaders are raised from slavery to the rank of sonship, since the honor and dignity that belongs to their Creator have become theirs [34b]// through a human being who is from them in his spirit and body. Their joy becomes greater in their eternal dwelling while the description of it becomes weaker, and even if all who are in heaven and earth and that which lies in between had one language, they would not arrive at the description of such great grace or the gratitude for it throughout all eternity.

Why then do our opponents hate this great grace and immense honor of which creatures fall short in comprehending and in offering thanksgiving? What imperfection affected God when He manifested Himself in a base, fruitless bush, and spoke to Moses who was a mute shepherd? And what imperfection affected Him in His manifestation in a human being from among us, (who are more honorable and beloved than the bush which He had created for us!), and in His speaking to all the people of the world with its philosophers, wise men, kings, its powerful, good, and excellent people, since they are more numerous than a mute shepherd, who initially neither listened nor obeyed?

Also, what imperfection affected God when He gave humans dominion over what is on earth, so that it will affect Him when He gives him dominion over what is in heaven? Is not the generosity greater in the eternal situation? Is not His initiating him in his dwelling on earth, even though it is perishable, a witness to the seal of His decree concerning him by transferring him to heaven, even though it is eternal? And is not His giving him dominion over what is on earth, even though this has an end, a witness that He has sealed and perfected it by giving him dominion over what is in heaven, even though it is eternal? But He did not bring together what He had intended all at once, but began with a little and sealed it with a lot. This is like a man who begins with milk in his infancy and later progresses to food.

Why, O man, does your Creator intend honor and nobility for you, yet you want lowliness and baseness for yourself? Why [35a]// are you so miserly concerning His granting you the goal of His generosity and kindness? This does not lessen His kingship or dominion, just as what He offered you earlier of His kindness did not lessen Him. It is as if you want to make Him as stingy as you are. You may buy a slave with your money, and you may give him authority over your property and all that your hands possess. You may give him dominion over all your subjects, and inform them that whoever honors him honors you, and whoever obeys him obeys you, and whoever opposes him or does not subject himself to him

despises and opposes you. You do not trust Him concerning yourself and your dominion, and you do this in fear of Him, damaging yourself and diminishing your great dominion, but this is the very least of what your Creator made for you. How do you deny this for your God, perfect in kindness and complete in generosity, who does not fear passing diminishment for Himself nor the diminution of His kingdom, and who does not have your imperfection in doing what we have previously described concerning you?

How much more appropriate it is for you to know that your Creator does what you fail to do, in a way that is indescribable and which words cannot explain! But it has become clear that He has not neglected to do this. These Books of His declare this, both before His doing it and after His revelation of it, and confirm your understanding of what your Creator granted to you, (despite your neglecting to look into His Books, and to understand His design), so that you will confess His majesty and magnificence and thank Him for His action, favor and grace.

If you had not characterized the Books as altered and corrupt, I would have brought to you three prophecies about this. I mention them anyway so that whoever trusts that the Books are correct will look at them.

The prophet Isaiah said: "This virgin shall conceive and bear a son, whose name will be 'Emmanuel,' which means 'our God is with us.'" This means that God will manifest in a body of ours, and He will unite it with Him so that it will become [35b]// the one Christ. Therefore, our God is in a body of ours.

The prophet Isaiah also said: "A child has been born to us; a son, a ruler, and a king. His authority is on his shoulder." And the prophet David said: "Who is the man you have mentioned, and the son of man whom you have chosen, and made a little lower than the angels? Then with praise and glory you have crowned him, and given him dominion over everything your hands have made, and subjected everything under his feet." He means that he was lower than the angels by his death, then after this he mentioned the majesty of the dominion.

David also said: "He sent His word and healed them, and rescued them from the traps." He means that God sent His son to the sons of Israel and to the rest of the nations and he healed them from the disease of sin, and delivered them from worshiping idols and from death, by what he stated to them concerning the knowledge of God.

And the prophet Daniel said: "I saw coming on the clouds of heaven someone like a man, who went to the Ancient of Days and they led him into His presence. He gave him kingship and dominion and might so that the nations and tongues would worship him. His dominion is not a perishable dominion, and is not destroyed, nor pass away."

Prophecies about this are too numerous for us to count or mention in this book.

What is more beneficial to people than looking into the Books of God? They speak of this plan of God, and people will accept this and their souls will find rest in the presence of their Creator [who is] speaking to them from a body of theirs. There is no greater proof of His presence than this! Or else, they deny Him and stumble in seeking their Creator, who is everywhere and in a specific place without being comprehended, and they have, in truth, no plan by which they can ever be saved. Since the Creator is neither understood nor comprehended, some of them have come to a place of total unbelief and [36a]// denial concerning Him. Some of them adhere to the confession of two principles which are two visible bodies. Some of them say that God is primordial matter. Some of them adhere to idols to which they give His name and they worship them, since they have never seen Him, never comprehended Him, and never acknowledged His plan. Some of them, from a religious community in our time, (in order to confirm their Creator to themselves), represent Him among themselves as limited, seated on a throne, ascending from one heaven to another, and descending from one heaven to another. Some of them make Him limited to a known space and known forms, and they determine that He is not more than these. Some of them, while wanting to honor Him, make Him visible light that enlightens them from the light of the resurrection, and the day of reckoning of the awards of paradise and hell. Some of them, in order to know and understand Him, say that He has two hands like their hands, and two feet like their feet. Some of them are embarrassed by this, and say that He is not seen or comprehended. They deny the plan that God has made known, which confirms His presence in creation. They reduce the issue to what the Creator is in Himself without His plan by which He makes known His presence to His creatures in a way which they can understand. So, when their thoughts wandered in search of something that they could understand, they found nothing. Therefore, they approximated Him to things in their souls, without any admission from their mouths that there was no evidence to prove it. Their practice happens without love or fear, for love and fear only relate to things that can be imagined.

In addition to this, they confess that they need God, since He sent a Book down to them to make His words about Himself like their words about their limited souls, with reference to hearing, seeing, satisfaction, [and] anger, that pertain to physical beings. In order to confirm Himself to them, He made necessary to Himself what is necessary to bodies. However, they do not [36b]// benefit from what they learned of this, and they neglect to practice what they were commanded to do, and do not accept the truth from us, which they were commanded to accept as a witness to them concerning this.

If they had gathered to look into the Books of God, and if they knew His plan to manifest Himself in a human being from among them and to speak to them by him, then they would have stopped searching heaven and earth for Him, and they would have become

aware of His presence in a body of theirs by means of the plan, and their souls would have found rest in this. And they would have accepted His saying that He is everywhere, and that He appeared according to the plan in a specific place. When their thoughts sought, they would have ended up at the body from which He speaks to them, and they would have stopped at it and would have achieved their quest and found rest in it. And they would have come to worship Him and they would have left whatever they had been content with in their search for an unseen Creator, who had already brought the search closer to them when He appeared in a body that can be seen. And they would not have been satisfied with the disagreements that we have described concerning their teaching, and the wrongness of their doctrine.

If they say that Christians disagree, we say this only concerns the created body. Some of them call it a hypostasis, and others reject that. As for the Creator, they do not disagree about Him, and their teaching concerning Him is that He is One who is not comprehended. Their agreement concerning the Creator's manifestation in a body of theirs is much more important than their disagreement concerning the body itself. And their teaching is that He is one, known by three hypostases, and that He is everywhere, not limited, nor comprehended. Their disagreement concerns the body which they see, to the point that some of them say one hypostasis, and others say two hypostases; whereas their agreement is that the one in whom the Creator was manifested had a body and a soul.

Surely the generosity of the Creator, His grace, favor, and gentleness towards His creatures, His blessing of His creatures, His benevolence to them, and His honoring them by His manifestation to them in the ways which we described, are obvious. And among these many ways, we made known [37a]// only some of them, because we dislike lengthy writing about them. Other people have much better knowledge than us, regarding them. And abundant thanks be to God for His grace and His benevolence!

Discourse on the Crucifixion

They condemn us for saying that Christ was crucified, and they accuse us of attributing weakness to God or deficiency to Christ, and they hold it against us that we slander God and attribute to Him what "makes the heavens almost split apart because of it, the earth crack open, and the mountains become completely flattened. "They" do not introduce weakness to God; "we" have done this to Him. How do we introduce weakness to God when we say that Christ was crucified, yet he, according to them, is a prophet lower than their prophet in rank, and is not so exalted by them that the heavens are almost split apart by this happening to him? Since he is exalted above what they accuse us of saying about God, then neither weakness nor imperfection has been attributed to God.

How do they accuse us of diminishing him in our report that he was crucified, when according to them, Christ is a prophet? They say that he was so much more honored by God than that he should be called "crucified." I wish I knew what they would say of John, son of Zechariah; they confess that he was beheaded, and that his head was given to a slave-girl, a dancer, who had asked that it be given to her! Was it because of his insignificance to God that He neglected him until this happened to him? On the contrary, they recognize his being favored by God, and they do not attribute weakness to God concerning one whom they greatly praise. Yet they impose on others the same thing, according to what they say, attributing weakness to God through prejudice, bias and lack of justice.

If our freedom from that of which we have been accused has been made clear, [then] we must show what we know of the plan of the crucifixion of Christ in his humanity, and the benefit it has for all humans. I say:

Since most people before the coming of Christ were in error and unbelief, and philosophers and wise men, together with crude and ignorant people did not know that after death, (which separates their bodies from their souls), they will be raised from their graves [37b]// and come to life, (for they had never seen a man who conquered death, and remained alive, and was taken up to heaven, and did not return to death, something for them that cannot possibly be), then God—hallowed be His Names—out of love for His creation, wanted His creatures to rejoice by revealing to them life for their bodies, and releasing them from the dilemma of the fear of death which He had imposed upon them, for it is the greatest misfortune to befall them in this world. He also wanted to crush their enemy Satan, since he was the reason for the sin of Adam which caused death to enter the world. God wanted to remove it from them and lift them up from their fall, and to bestow on them His grace, and proclaim the good news of His kingdom which He had prepared for them in the everlasting world which never ends or passes away, where no evil overtakes them, where no hardship or misfortune affects them, where death does not reach them, or destruction, corruption or change. God wanted what He had prepared for all of them to come to pass in one of them, for the time of the resurrection of all of them had not yet come; and since one thing can be applied to all, then the resurrection of their substance is more certain for them than what is restricted to words, for action is better than speech.

Therefore, with all that we have already explained, He appeared in a human body, veiled Himself in it, spoke to the world from within it, showed His goodwill to people, and honored them by veiling Himself in it and by uniting Himself in power and dignity with it. So he put it to death to give life to it ahead of them, and raised it to heaven, proceeding ahead of them.

He made his death public, directly in front of their eyes, just as when a man wants

to make something public he makes it known in such a way that people can see it, raising it high above them and setting it in front of them. So when people looked at what the Creator veiled Himself with, which had died, his death became clear to them and they knew that it was from their substance that death happened in the substance [38a]// of his body, and what appeared of his suffering was known to be of their substance. Then, he arose from the tomb alive; he ascended into heaven to be there forever. They knew, then, with certainty, that all their substance will be raised from the tombs and will escape, like him, the power of death, because he was equal to them in their substance; and anyone who makes himself like him in righteousness and purity will reach heaven, just as he did. The joy will greatly increase of those afflicted by death, (which separates their bodies from their souls), of those who are immersed in agony over it, (in its clinging to them and in its permanence in all of them), when it is made certain that one of them has escaped from the fate of death for them. It, [death], becomes for them similar to sleep between this world and the one to come. This increases their hope, as they work in search of what has been prepared for them in His kingdom. Death is despised by them, as it becomes evident to them that its permanence has no hold over them. And their joy will greatly increase by what is related about life for them.

So, O dying man, this is the grace of God and His gift to you by means of the crucifixion of Christ which you find distasteful, and you turn the thanksgiving which you should have, into unbelief and defamation!

Discourse on Baptism

As for that with which you mock us as you scorn baptism, (which we hold in high regard, and declare that it abolishes sin), I return to them and thoroughly wonder about the apparent thing which they have neglected: their own problem which they did not examine themselves. When sperm,—in which man's visible form is formed, (heaven and earth are created to [preserve] that form),—is ejaculated from one of them, he does not simply wash the place from whence it came, as he does with his spoiled human waste, (from which nothing is really formed but worms and the like), but he washes from the top of the head to his feet. He calls this type of washing from that clean thing from which God created humans, purification! [38b]// He also claims that he expiates his sins according to the number of hairs [of the genitals?], and thus a good deed is counted to him. They have neglected to be surprised at this, which is the real wonder. And instead they wondered at baptism, which is an illustration of the resurrection from the dead. Christ our Lord, who in humility died in his humanity, was buried and was raised from the dead, wanted to confirm this to us, and to represent it for us in a way which makes us always remember him, and be reminded that, we too, will be resurrected from the grave.

Let it be known that the model represents the thing it signifies. It is not the thing itself. It is as if you wanted to exemplify a certain city built of stone, marble, teak and pine, [and] decorated with gold, silver and the like; so it is represented by you with ink and dyes on parchment skin. The city occupies a parasang of land, [3.5 square miles.] There will be no disparity between the city in its capacity, length, width, size, gold, silver and other decorations therein and its representation in ink and parchment skin. There is no disparity that prevents this representation from being a type of the city, despite its small size and unassuming form, [and] despite its, [the city's], greatness and nobility.

Likewise, just as Christ was buried in the ground and rose from it alive, having been delivered from death, [God], wanting to give us a type of this—and there is no type like death in this world or any equivalent to life in the other world—there was nothing closer to us than water from this earth by which he could typify his burial and his resurrection. This is because we have been formed out of water and dust, and water in his body is closer to air than to earth and fire.

And he, having been buried in the ground dead and raised from it alive, commanded us to remember this by burying our bodies in the water and rising from it. In this way we remember [39a]// his burial in the ground and resurrection. In this way we may learn that the resurrection is true, having its type in our bodies, for if the type of the thing is found, it indicates the truth of the thing which it typifies.

Moreover, God created Adam from clay. He formed him from dust and water. Adam was pure, without sin; but Satan deceived him, and on account of his sin God condemned him to death. God loved to restore him from death to life. So, indeed, He did this in one who is a type for all men, and He did this, as a type for them all, until the time comes when He gives them life in Him, and thus their restoration will be a type of the life by the water which, alongside dust, started their creation. This is likened to the potter who, while making a vessel out of clay and water and the vessel is spoiled before it is put in the furnace, restores his handiwork with only water to repair the vessel. Correspondingly, when death corrupts us, the Creator, only through water, restored our nature on account of the type He has given us, until the time when He restores the creature by the true life. It is as if, having been baptized in water, we were made with the type of life and the end of death.

We only expect the thing that the type exemplifies. Our Creator—may He be exalted and praised—has made us come to this world by two births: one birth from the loins of our fathers, and the other from our mothers' wombs. Our birth from our fathers does not have the form of man, or life, or motion; and our birth from our mothers is through the completion of the human body and its form, and the perfection of its humanity through the soul. Likewise, God has made two births for us in the other world: one is above the other,

and it announces it. One is from the water, and it is a type of the resurrection from the earth and life from the dead; and the other is the birth from the belly of the earth through which is certainty, [39b]// truthful life, a perfect and completed work. The first birth from the loins of our fathers, which is far from the reality of humanity, is likened to the birth of baptism in relation to the reality of true life, of which it was a type. And the second birth, from the wombs of our mothers in the perfection of humanity and the truthful life, is likened to our birth from the earth in the perfection of our spiritual shape and the truth of the eternal life which we will attain, and to which we will be restored.

Therefore we say that the abolition of sin is found in baptism, because it is a type of the death to this world which has sin, and [it is a type] of the life in another world where there is no sin. If the end of death is true in our bodies, then sin which was the cause of death is nullified. And thus we know that it is nullified, for the thing which was its cause and through which it entered, we have received a type of its end for all of us. In fact, one of us has abolished it.

Discourse on the Eucharist

As for what they also reject when we say that Christ has named the Eucharist that we receive [as] his Body and his Blood, we inform them that the Christ, our Lord and our God, since he wanted to give us confirmation of his body with his intelligence and his will, could have named himself with the names of others, and likewise he could have named others by his name. [This naming could have happened], just as Matthew wrote about him addressing the good ones on the Day of the Resurrection, when he will manifest [himself] to judge the good and the wicked: "I was begging and you gave to me, I was hungry and you made me full, I was sick and you visited me," and similar sayings which are in the Gospel. As for the wicked, he, [Christ], mentions something similar yet contrary to what the good have done. So they say to him, "When were you thus, Lord?" and he says, "All that you [40a]// have done to one of these little ones, you have done to me, and you have done it to me." There is nothing which demonstrates the mystery of his love for charity, [and] his joy in generosity and benevolence more than his considering himself in their place. This is not an imperfection on his part, but rather, out of his generosity and the abundance of his grace he took their name on himself in his saying, "Lend to God a beautiful loan." He put himself in their places and put them in his place, for the lender is a rich giver, and the borrower is someone who is given what he lacks, as we have [previously] described.

As it is legitimate that he named himself with the names of others, it is [also] legitimate that others be named with his name, for there is no difference in that. Accordingly, he names the bread and the wine which he made as Eucharist, his body and his blood. The

[ultimate] aim of Christ, our Lord, was to show the world that which lasts: the resurrection from death. For there is no harder thing in this world for the people in it than death, and nothing more valuable for them than salvation from it, [death], and the attaining of a life which has no death and after which death does not come.

And since Christ died in his humanity and rose again and ascended into heaven to prove by that [rising] the resurrection of those whose substances [are like his human substance] and whose human natures are like his, he wanted to leave them something by which they might remember his death on their behalf, and [might remember] that his resurrection shows theirs. And [thus] his death and resurrection will not be forgotten. This is the life of them all. He was not satisfied with reminding them by words only, without bringing them, [his words], into perceivable existence, into the form of a thing which they could take in their hands, on which he would put the name of his body which died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. He gave the type of his death and resurrection in baptism. [So] as their hands take that which is named "his body," which died and rose, they remember the resurrection and the life that lasts. Therefore, the remembrance of his death relieves them from sadness and they rejoice [40b]// as they remember life, as if they took the assurance of life by their hands; for the most sure thing to humans is that which they touch with their hands, and that which their palms can hold. For this reason, he, before his death [and] while he was still in flesh, gave his disciples bread which they did not doubt to be his body, and he said to them: "Eat, this is my body which is offered for the forgiveness of sins, and this is my blood that is shed for the pardon of transgression." He did not mean that the essence of that bread and that wine was his body and blood, for his teaching refers to the meaning of the life which was revealed in his body being resurrected from the grave, and to his victory over death. Thus he says: "This which I give you is my body." This means, "The life which appeared in the resurrection of my body from the grave and its victory over death, this [life] is what you may remember, and it appears to you as you partake of this bread to which I have given my name. It is my body as it appears to you, and it is [also] a remembrance of the [state] of everlasting life which my body has attained after it rose from the grave." Therefore, he made our life after death and our resurrection from the grave into a [tangible] figure, and the form of bread and wine represents his body and blood before our eyes, by his death, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into heaven. [Thus], we know that we will rise from the grave and that we will overcome death, just as he did, because he died in our substance, and his ruling concerning death and life is ours.

As for naming his body and his blood "an offering for the world," this was [done] according to the law of God with the Children of Israel, who used to offer sacrifices to God for their sins. Because of the sin of Adam, the Creator decreed that death should fall on him,

and [thus] death passed to his seed until God restored the second Adam [41a]// without seed, whom He made as a veil between Him and His creature, as we formerly described. He acted in full accordance with righteousness, and no sin was found in him. The prophet Isaiah described him, [saying], "[When] God [showed] approval for His creature, he, [Christ], bore their curse and burned up the certificate of the debt of their sins." It was necessary, on account of His righteousness, that by His justice He remove death from him, [Christ], as well as from those of his substance, just as He decreed death to Adam and to those of his substance on account of his, [Adam's], disobedience. It is as if he, representing all those of his substance, had nullified sin, on account of which death entered into the sacrifices which were slaughtered and offered to God on behalf of the sins of the Children of Israel. [This happened] because it was necessary for him to nullify death and show life by his righteousness, just as death had been necessitated, and life was nullified on account of the disobedience of the first Adam.

[Indeed] the nullification of death is not shown as he falls under it, [but through] overcoming it, and resurrecting from it. Thus he shows that it has no power or strength; instead, it was nullified, and life was established in its place. We know that man is still subjected to the decree of death, even if he has a long life. It is said that he is in the grip of death, similar to the rest of those of his substance. He, [Christ], did not show the nullification of death until after he had accepted it; then he revealed its abrogation. So he died on behalf of the creatures, not because death was decreed on him, since he did not sin, (unlike Adam who sinned and death was decreed on him), but instead he died so that the nullification of death for him and for those of his substance might be [publically] demonstrated. He died [in flesh] so that it might be known that he was of the [same] substance in which death ruled. Then he rose [from the dead] to show the nullification of death for him and them, and [to show] that death had not been decreed on him, (unlike the decree of death on those of his substance), since he had no sin. He rose to life and [thus] nullified the power of death as he overcame it. Therefore, those of his substance knew that what was decreed upon them of death on account of Adam's sin was nullified for them on account of his victory over it, as he is equal to them in their substance; and that all of their substance [41b]// is collected in his, since all human substance is one. He, having demonstrated the nullification of sin by which death was necessitated for Adam's children, took the place of the offerings which were presented to God in order that sins may be nullified. All of this was a type for him. But he, indeed, has nullified sin as he abrogated death which had entered on account of sin. For all of those offerings did not nullify death which had entered on account of sin, but he nullified it and brought life out of it as he ascended into that place where there is no death, that is, heaven.

Discourse on the Cross

As to what they mock when we venerate and honor the cross, we will turn the argument back on them. It is much more surprising to see them venerating a stone, which the polytheists had venerated and honored! Truly, the wood [of the cross] is closer to fruitfulness than the stone!

If they say, "We do not mean the stone per se," then we say, "Neither do we mean the wood itself." As we have described, our reason for venerating this symbol is the manifestation of our Creator in flesh that was crucified on it, through which [He] showed us the resurrection, the life, and the obliteration of sin. By touching the symbol on which people crucified that which was our Creator's veil, we magnify Him, and thus it brings us closer to Him, just as we honor the king by venerating even the hoof of his horse and the dust of his feet, in addition to his footwear and coat. Also, as you and we touch the coat of a goodly man who is close to God through devotion, we want to become close to our Creator by touching one of His servants who obeyed Him. If we touch the coat of a man who obeyed the Creator so that we may honor God Himself, how much more should we touch the sign on which the veil of the Creator and his body were crucified! Ignorance should not stop us from doing this which we do to that which is lower and smaller, as well as to [42a]// that which is more significant and greater,—unless a certain force occurs in our substance that makes us too proud to venerate the hoof of the king's horse, the coat of the goodly worshipper, and the veil of the Creator! That would be ignorance and error.

We have clearly explained our purpose in venerating the cross. If we go back and ask you the reason why you venerate the stone, what would be your answer? If you say, "That is because it came down from heaven," then we say, "We heard that God has forbidden honoring the stones which He has created in this world, and that men have taken them as idols to worship. So, what makes honoring and venerating that which came down from heaven more worthy than that which is from the things of this world, for God is the Creator of it all? If they say, "It is because of Abraham," then we respond, "So, you kiss a stone because of Abraham, and disown the cross on account of the veil of the Creator—I mean, the body of Christ?!" If they say, "God required us to do so," then we say, "You should not say God has prescribed it, since you confessed that He prohibited you from doing such a thing, and He ordered you to combat the polytheists over it. And if this is not so, what does worship by venerating the stone really mean?" We do not think they can give a reasonable answer. We thus leave the discourse on this subject, since we know the result!

Discourse on Eating and Drinking in hereafter

As for what they reject of the Gospel concerning the abrogation of marriage, food, and drink in the everlasting life, (thinking that these are insufficient as a reward for good people), we will return to them with the contrary of what they mentioned, which people of sound mind deny. [What they mention of reward] is the imperfection, the deficiency, and abrogation of [reward], and what the Gospel mentioned is the correct reward, the comprehensible grace. This is because we know that God—may He be exalted and magnified—since He put us in this low, passing, imperfect, and vile world in which afflictions, (such as sickness, diseases, [42b]// many blights and devastating death), encompassed and made our bodies weak, imperfect, subjected to blights, [we know] that He made our life sustainable only with what comes from the fabric of the world and is woven out of it so that our weakness and need may be shown, and [so] that we may be forbidden from pride and arrogance which harm our souls. Our life is [ultimately] death, as, although while we are living and speaking we direct the whole world, it, [life], does not remain or become established except on account of something which comes from dust and is woven into it. When we lose that which sustains our life, I mean food and drink, [we know that] He will transfer us from this vile world and from this weak and needy body to a strong and honorable body; and that after this vile life which is not established except on account of something else other than itself, [He will transfer us] to an everlasting life which has no need and is not weak. Then we acknowledge the advantage of what we will attain over against what we were, since it is the ultimate reward which has been prepared for us.

But our gladness and our joy in it are different than what we have experienced in this passing world, and of the weakness of our body while it was [living] in it. [It is also different] from our need for vile things which sustain our life, such as eating and drinking. Our reward is superior to this.

Thus it has become evident that God—may His name be blessed—has shown in His Book that He will magnify the place of His reward, away from any weakness or need, and that their, [the faithful], life is sustained by something other than themselves. And [it has become evident] that He makes their body in that world perfect strength, not weak, not sustained by food or drinking and not subjected to growth on that account, as it grows from a small state to a bigger one. Instead, it will remain [sustained] by the power of the Creator, and not by something weaker than itself which is inferior to it. Therefore, the gladness of the creature with its Creator will last forever and ever; it will remain in one perfect state, a state that is not sustained with the taste of different kinds of food, or different kinds of drink, or the multiplicity of sexual intercourse, even if these things are different and multiple. Instead, [God] [43a]// will rejoin them in rank, power, dignity, endurance, and eternal joy with His holy

angels forever and ever.

I do not think that our opponents claim that the reward of Gabriel, Michael and all the angels who are close [to God] is imperfect or vile, or that their, [the opponents'], pleasure in having sexual intercourse with women, and eating and drinking, is more than the pleasure of the angels in other things then these.

As for what they mention concerning eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse—all of these things were put in this world for us as vile things by which we preserve our generations. In them we resemble the animals. [Therefore,] it is evident to people of sound minds that since they, [the opponents], place these things where there is no need for such things, (which are a gift yet defective), and since they speak of our need for them [in the other world], then they have made the reward of God—may He be exalted—low, as they [attribute] to it imperfection, and need, and all that the animals share with us. They have not spoken highly of the magnitude of the reward of God and the abundance of His reward, and [instead, they claim] that we have been comprised of these animal lusts which are shared between humans and animals. These [things] which are vile and low are for us as a need, which God put in us so that we may preserve our generations. We know that these things end up being compost manure and waste.

If it were not for the length of the book as it is, I would have shown at length the imperfections in what they say. But we put [the argument] before him who understands. And to God, our Creator and our Lord, for what He has informed us from His Books, and for His guiding us concerning His economy, be abundant and eternal praise, forever and ever.

May God forgive the reader of this book, and the one who hears it, and the one who owns it, and its scribe in the first place, and their parents, and the sons of baptism and the whole world. It was accomplished on the fourteenth of Hatur/Hatour in the year 1014 of the Holy Martyrs, in the house of… in Al-Jawdariyyah.

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