THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Developing the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu:
Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the

School of Theology and Religious Studies

Of The Catholic University of America

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Washington, D.C.

2012

Developing the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu:
Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology

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During the eighth and ninth centuries, in the Islamic empire governed from

‘Abbāsid Baghdad, a new body of Christian literature appeared: theological treatises

written in Arabic rather than in Syriac or Greek, and composed with the express purpose

of articulating Christian doctrine in conscious dialogue with the religious discourse of the

surrounding Islamic milieu. A number of these treatises sought to defend and further

develop Trinitarian doctrine by drawing upon the terminology and conceptual range of

the Qur’ān, contemporary Muslim debates about the relationship between the divine

attributes and the oneness of God, and the Islamic appropriation of Greek philosophical

concepts, particularly those of Aristotelian metaphysics. The earliest such treatise is

Fī tatlīt Āllah āl-wāḥid, a work of anonymous authorship from approximately the middle of

the eighth century, which is also considered the earliest known Arabic Christian apologia

on any subject. Other important writings on the subject include those of the Melkite

Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-c. 820), the Jacobite Habīb ibn Ḥidman Abū Rā’iṭah (c.

770-c. 835), and Ammār āl-Baṣrī (fl. c. 830), an adherent of the Church of the East.

An important theme in these Trinitarian writings is the use of the terms Word and

Spirit in reference to God in the Qur’ānic text. Another is the question, then beginning to

be important in internecine Muslim theological debates, of how God can be one and yet

be described with multiple attributes. A third is the question of how a human attribute, such as begetting, could exist at all unless there is a corresponding attribute in God. In each of these areas of exploration, the Arabic Christian authors here considered seek to demonstrate that only Trinitarian doctrine fully satisfies the language of the Qur'ān itself, the Islamic emphasis on God's transcendence, and the demands of a rigorous metaphysical account. One striking characteristic of this body of Arabic Christian apologetical literature is its approach of using the very elements of Islamic discourse that were perceived as most opposed to Christian doctrine (for example, Qur'ānic "proof texts" against the Trinity) as evidence for Trinitarian doctrine.

This dissertation by Thomas W. Ricks fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in theology approved by Sidney Griffith as Director, by William Loewe as Co-director, and by John Galvin as Reader.

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Introduction

During the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., in the Islamic empire governed from ʿAbbāsid Baghdad, three great cultural and social forces converged to produce a new body of Christian literature: theological treatises written in Arabic rather than in Syriac or Greek, and composed with the express purpose of articulating Christian doctrine in conscious dialogue with the religious discourse of the surrounding Islamic milieu. The first of these cultural forces was the new character of the expansive Islamic empire, which brought with it Arabic as the new lingua franca, new incentives for conversion to Islam, and to some degree greater freedom for Christian communities that lay outside the orbit of Constantinopolitan Orthodoxy. The second was the ascendancy of Greek philosophical concepts within the Arab world as a result of the great translation movement. This movement to bring the major works of Greek philosophy, medicine, and science into the heart of Arab culture created a situation in which Aristotelian translators and commentators were in demand in the most fashionable intellectual circles and in the courts of political power of ʿAbbāsid Baghdad. The fervent desire for the works of Greek antiquity, and especially, for Aristotelian philosophy, brought Christians and Muslims into near proximity and frequent collaboration with each other. The third force was the emerging debate within Islam about how to understand the divine attributes in light of both the implications of Arabic grammar and the Muslim doctrine of *āl-taūḥīd*, or a conception of monotheism so absolute as to preclude any kind of plurality in the divinity.

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A New Social Reality in the Islamic Empire

The rise of the Islamic empire, followed by the removal of its seat of government from Harran to Damascus in 661, and then from Damascus to Baghdad in 762, brought sweeping social changes for large populations of people stretched over enormous swaths of territory. These changes were hardly limited to religious considerations, instead involving virtually every facet of daily life. As Dimitri Gutas puts it in his book *Greek Thought, Arab Culture*,

> Egypt and the Fertile Crescent were reunited with Persia and India politically, administratively, and most important, economically, for the first time since Alexander the Great…. The great economic and cultural divide that separated the civilized world for a thousand years prior to the rise of Islam, the frontier between the East and the West formed by the two great rivers that created antagonistic powers on either side, ceased to exist. This allowed for the free flow of raw materials and manufactured goods, agricultural products and luxury items, people and services, techniques and skills, and ideas, methods, and modes of thought.[1]

This development means that in a relatively short time the Arabophone Muslim community changed from being a demographically small and geographically somewhat isolated people to being the masters of a vast, cosmopolitan, and culturally diverse empire with a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and confessional identities. Significant numbers of Christians were included among the inhabitants of the newly polyglot caliphate; in fact, Sidney Griffith notes that

> … after the consolidation of the Islamic conquest … perhaps fifty percent of the world's confessing Christians … found themselves living under Muslim rule. Conversely, during … the very centuries during which the classical Islamic culture was coming into its own, the Muslims themselves

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[1] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 11-12.

still did not make up the absolute majority of the population everywhere in the caliphate, not even in Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, where by the end of the ninth century the largest populations of the speakers of Arabic lived.[2]

Thus the stage was set for the creation of a cultural milieu in which the presence of each major faith community, Christian and Muslim, would be a significant factor in the development of the other's religious discourse. For the Muslims this meant, in part, the appropriation of a rich heritage of philosophical tools, already long established in Christian usage, for the propagation of Islam, as well as the administration of a empire in which many subjects of the professional and intellectual classes did not share the caliph's religion. For the Christians, the task set before them consisted of preserving a faith tradition in wholly new political circumstances as well as articulating and defending the intellectual integrity of that faith in a world shaped by the increasing cultural hegemony of the Arabic language to the detriment of Greek and Syriac.

Richard Frank points out that the Arabic language itself was not a mundane or purely pragmatic factor in the cultural interchange and mutual influence that took place over the next few centuries, but instead was a key factor due in large part to its status in Islam:

In no culture, perhaps, has speech and the eloquent use of language been so praised and admired or the language itself more cherished and studied…. Common Islamic dogma, founded in the Koran itself, has it that while the miracle of Moses – the signs and wonders worked through him by God to confirm his mission – had the form and character of magic and

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[2] Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 11.

that of Jesus the form and character of medicine and healing, that of Muhammad was language.[3]

Indeed, so profound was the influence of the Arabic language in which the Qur'ān was given, and so directly was its language associated with the action of God to reveal His will and His design of true religion, that the individual verses of the text were given the name *āīāt*, the Arabic term for "signs" which also applied to the miracles that would confirm the legitimacy of a true prophet's ministry.

Thus Christians in the Islamic empire faced a double linguistic challenge. On the one hand, there was the practical need, if their communities were not to become linguistic relics, to accommodate the new quotidian reality by being able to express Christian doctrine in Arabic. As far as is known, this was a largely new project, because no extant pre-Islamic Arabic Christian literature exists. This fact includes the absence of any Arabic translation of the Bible or liturgical text. Arabic-speaking Christian communities, then, needed quite badly what might be called an "indigenous theological vocabulary" in order to engage with Islam in a way that was terminologically accessible. This was not always an easy task, since the use of Greek terminology had been so formative in the early development of Christian doctrine. The translation of technical terms always introduces the possibility of "conceptual shifts" as terms lose some of their original resonance or take on differing nuances.

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[3] Richard Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), 9.

On the other hand, the cultural and religious milieu in which such a task would be taken up was hardly linguistically neutral. As Griffith puts it, by the time Christians were seriously engaged in the work of creating an apologetical literature in Arabic,

> … the religious lexicon in Arabic had already been co-opted by Islam, and unlike the earlier situation in pre-Islamic Arabia, the newly Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians outside of Arabia in the ninth and tenth centuries in the conquered territories were faced with the imperative of translating their teachings into and commending their faith in a religious vocabulary that had now become suffused with explicitly Islamic connotations….[4]

As will be shown, one of the more ingenious aspects of the early Christian Arabic apologetical literature was to turn this distinct disadvantage into a rich mine of source material. Rather than shrinking from the task of articulating and defending Christian doctrine in a language that already had such religious significance for a different faith, the first generation of Arabophone Christian controversialists often drew upon Islamic materials, including Qur'ānic "proof texts," Qur'ānic terminology, Islamic theological emphases, and internal Muslim debates about the divine attributes and their relationship to the divine oneness, in order to build their case for Trinitarian doctrine.

Another important factor in Christian-Muslim interaction during this period was the enhanced incentive to convert to Islam that developed in the eighth century. The Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd āl-Āziz, who reigned from 717 to 720, had actively promoted the equality of converts to Islam with native Arab Muslims, in terms of both social standing and opportunity for political advancement. Following the 'Abbāsid revolution and the shift of power first to Damascus and then to Baghdad, large numbers

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[4] Griffith, *Shadow*, 19-20.

of well-established scholarly and professional families found themselves in the position of having a different religion than the ruling elite at the very time that upward mobility began to be linked with conversion to Islam. Gutas cites as typical examples of the period the Wahb and āl-Jarrāḥ families, both of which produced numerous scholars and state officials during the ninth century, and whose rise to prominence coincided roughly with their conversion to Islam.[5] Given this social dynamic, leaders of the Christian communities must have felt tremendous pressure to produce arguments for Christian doctrine that were intellectually attractive enough to prevent the defection of their best and brightest to the religion of the caliph.

Another new circumstance that contributed to the development of the Christian Arabic apologetical literature was the social standing of the non-Chalcedonian Christian communities. These Syriac-speaking Christians, conversant in the achievements of Greek philosophy but entrenched in a strong tradition of theological scholarship quite apart from the world of Constantinopolitan Orthodoxy, had been politically and socially marginalized while their communities were under Byzantine rule. With the advent of the Muslim empire, a sphere of scholarly enterprise and interaction with broader geographic parameters and greater political neutrality was created. Gutas describes the situation in this way:

> With the advent of Islam, all these centers [i.e., the centers of eastern Christian scholarship] were united politically and administratively, and, most important, scholars from all of them could pursue their studies and interact with each other without the need to pay heed to any official version of 'orthodoxy,' whatever the religion. We thus see throughout the region and through the seventh and eighth centuries numerous

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[5] Gutas, 131-32.

"international" scholars active in their respective fields and working with different languages.[6]

As will be shown, this is an apt description of some of the authors who contributed significantly to the nascent Christian Arabic literature about the Trinity. Since one of these authors, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, was an adherent of the Church of the East, and another, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rāʾiṭah, was a Jacobite Christian, a brief examination of these communities is in order.

The Church of the East and the Jacobite Community

The Church of the East has traditionally but erroneously been referred to in Western literature as the "Nestorian" church, and in modern times has adopted the appellation Assyrian Church of the East. The precise origins of this ecclesial community lie hidden in the mists of primitive ecclesiastical history. By the third century, there was a sufficiently large Persian Christian population that Persian historians recount some persecutions, mainly of those who had converted from Zoroastrianism to Christianity. By and large, though, Persian Christians fared rather better than their Roman brethren until the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313. Ironically, the improved situation of Roman Christians proved ill for those in Persia, mainly because Constantine imprudently wrote to the Persian king requesting that he treat the Christians within his domain well, but doing so in terms that suggested that Constantine considered himself the ruler of all those who belonged to the Christian faith. This in turn led to a suspicion that perhaps the Persian Christians were not loyal citizens, a fearful suspicion at a time when

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[6] Gutas, 15.

Persia had been struggling with Rome for control of its border territories for over three

hundred years.

     This political reality led to significant difficulties in keeping up any kind of

regular communication between the Christian communities of Persia and those of the

Roman Empire. Still, it is recorded that one "Bishop John of the Church of Greater Persia

and the Churches of the East" attended the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 and signed its

creed.[7] The Church of the East has always affirmed the second ecumenical council, that

of Constantinople (381), as well, but by the time of the Council of Ephesus (431),

significant differences of theological expression had emerged. In contrast to the

Alexandrian theological tradition, with its strong emphasis upon the unity of Christ, the

Persian tradition emphasized the reality of the two natures of Christ, human and divine.

This emphasis led to the Church of the East's refusal to accept the title bestowed on the

Blessed Virgin Mary by the Council of Ephesus – *theotokos*, or "Mother of God." While

it must be emphasized that the Persian church certainly did not deny the divinity of Christ

– the essential reason for the title bestowed by the council – the title seemed to Persian

Christians to blur the reality of the two natures of Christ in a way that was almost

Eutychian, suggesting that the human nature was subsumed into the divine, and which

was therefore unacceptable. Persian Christians also saw the council as something of a

Roman imposition. The next blow to unity between the West and the Church of the East

came in 449, when the metropolitan of Persia adopted the title, "patriarch of the East," in

clear contradistinction to the title used by the Roman bishop. The final blow to unity

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[7] For the normative text of this creed, see Denziger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, edition xxxv
(Freiburg: Herder, 1973), #150.

came with the Chalcedonian Christological definition of hypostatic union.[8] The term *hypostasis* was typically rendered in Syriac as *qnome*, but Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar Winkler argue in their comprehensive study of the Church of the East that this community's use of *qnome* could be understood as the particular "individuation" or "concretization" of a nature, rather than as the nature itself.[9] Understood this way, the Chalcedonian definition was incomprehensible from the Persian point of view.

This rejection of the Chalcedonian definition brings up the important question: is the Church of the East truly "Nestorian"? In their own histories, members of this church have always objected to the title, noting that Nestorius was Greek-speaking, and therefore outside the orbit of Syriac Christianity. They also insist that it makes no sense to call their church by the name of a person who belonged to the church of Constantinople, rather than being the Persian patriarch. More to the point, the Christology of the Church of the East was put in its final form by Babai the Great in the early sixth century. Babai's teaching clearly affirms both the single personhood and the two natures of Christ; by any reasonable standard, it is an orthodox definition that is not substantively at odds with the Chalcedonian definition. For this reason, it must be affirmed that the Church of the East is not, in fact, Nestorian.

The history of the Jacobite church can also be traced to the disagreement over the Chalcedonian definition. Unlike the Church of the East, which held that the definition

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[8] For the normative text of the Chalcedonian Christological definition, see Denziger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, edition xxxv (Freiburg: Herder, 1973), #302.

[9] Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 38-40.

failed sufficiently to emphasize the distinction of the two natures of Christ, some Syriac-speaking Christian communities objected that the definition, with its reference to two natures, was in fact Nestorian, and therefore heterodox. Again, it must be remembered that the Greek term *hypostasis* was typically rendered in Syriac as *qnome*, which has a slightly different connotation than the Greek. It seems to indicate two different individuations or concretizations, and therefore it is quite understandable that some Syriac-speaking Christians would find it Nestorian. Those who objected to the Chalcedonian definition on these grounds came to be called "monophysite" Christians, for their alleged insistence upon the "one nature" of Christ.

For some time after the council, this theological (or perhaps terminological) controversy did not formally divide the Christian communities that lay within the Roman sphere of influence. Eventually, however, the efforts of the emperor Justinian to enforce the Chalcedonian definition during the early sixth century caused the theological controversy to become a political one as well. The "monophysite" patriarch of Alexandria ordained Jacob Baradaeus as the first "monophysite" bishop in a territory where there was already a Chalcedonian bishop.[10] This was the first appearance in Christian history of a double-hierarchy based on differing confessions, and it is this "Jacob" for whom the Jacobite church is named. Jacob made great efforts to establish a strong "monophysite" presence within his territory. Throughout a long reign from his ordination to the episcopate in 542 until his death in 578, he traveled constantly, ordaining priests and deacons loyal to himself and the "monophysite" confession. It

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[10] Ibid.

should be noted as well that the Jacobite church is certainly not the only Christian

community with a "monophysite" confession; the Armenian, Coptic, and Ethiopian

churches are "monophysite" as well.[11]

As with the "Nestorian" church, it is important to ask whether the Jacobite church

is truly "monophysite" in the sense that it departs from orthodox Christological doctrine.

An examination of the writings of such Jacobite figures as Severus of Antioch and

Philoxenus of Mabbug shows that they in fact affirm both the human and divine natures

of Christ, but seek to emphasize that in the person of Jesus Christ there is but one

conscious subject and one actor, the Incarnate Word.[12] In fact, Philoxenus in particular, in

spite of the tendency among some monophysites to avoid usages of the *communicatio*

idiomatum, is fond of making paradoxical statements emphasizing the two natures of

Christ, such as saying that "the Immortal One died." The Jacobite tradition, then, clearly

holds to a different Christological doctrine than the Eutychian form of monophysitism,

which held that the divine nature of Christ was so great that the human nature was

"dissolved like a drop of honey in the sea."[13]

The other Arabophone Christian "denomination" that must be taken into account

for its importance in the development of the Christian Arab apologetical literature to be

considered here is the ecclesial community traditionally known as "Melkites." The name

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[11] For an account of the theological history of these churches, see Aziz S. Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 1968.

[12] For a thorough treatment of these authors' Christological writings, see Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford: University Press), 1985.

[13] See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 330-33.

itself is of Arabic origin, meaning "royalists" and intended to signify those Christians who during the Christological controversies maintained the same doctrinal expressions as the "king," i.e., the Byzantine emperor. Although better known in the West than the Jacobite church or the Church of the East because of its adherence to the Chalcedonian Christological definition, the Melkite church is in a somewhat different category than the other two "denominations" with regard to its origin and formation. Griffith notes that

> while the Nestorian and Jacobite churches were already in the process of formation prior to the rise of Islam … the Melkite community as a sociologically distinct community of Christians came into existence only in Islamic times and in the world of Islam. They professed the faith of Byzantine orthodoxy, but very much in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the Islamic challenge to Christian faith.[14]

Thus, among the Christian communities here considered, the Melkites are perhaps the best example of the complex cultural dynamic described above, in which the Christian community in some sense owed its cultural identity and its linguistic expression to the rise of Islam, while at the same time influencing the direction of Muslim doctrinal expression by its participation in the formation of a Christian Arabic apologetical literature.

The Translation Movement and the Rise of Arab Aristotelianism

Perhaps no intellectual current during the ʿAbbāsid period was more sustained or more pervasive than the translation movement which brought the philosophical and scientific texts of classical Greece into the mainstream of Arab cultural life. Gutas notes that, so complete was this movement in both its origins and its aims, that it lasted over

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[14] Griffith, *Shadow*, 137-38.

two centuries, claimed as its proponents and participants virtually every part of the professional and ruling classes of the ʿAbbāsid empire, and achieved the translation into Arabic of "almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East."[15] This great intellectual achievement became a formative influence on the development of the Christian Arabic apologetical literature in three distinct ways.

First, because a great deal of Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotelian dialectic and metaphysics, had already been assimilated by the Syriac-speaking Christian communities, the materials translated into Arabic formed a significant portion of the intellectual apparatus with which Christians would begin their Arabic response to Islam. Gutas argues that the degree to which the translation movement began as a Syriac enterprise has been significantly exaggerated, but the historical record is clear that the Christian communities in what later became the ʿAbbāsid empire were engaged in mastering the Greek disciplines even before the appearance of Islam. As Griffith puts it,

> Over that long period of time [from the sixth to the tenth centuries], in the careers of an impressive number of mostly … Jacobite scholars from the environs of Edessa, some with direct ties to the philosophical school in Alexandria, the fortunes of Aristotle and Greek philosophy and science more generally, grew steadily in the Syriac-speaking world.[16]

Thus the terminological and conceptual range of the Greek texts formed a significant part of the worldview and intellectual heritage of those who first took pen in hand to respond to Islam in the Arabic language. Furthermore, because of this background, philosophical

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[15] Gutas, 1-2.

[16] Griffith, *Shadow* 112-13.

investigations would serve as intellectual common ground for Muslims and Christians, who once the translation movement was in full swing, worked cheek-by-jowl in the translation enterprise.

Second, some of the texts translated from the Greek became highly influential sources in the development of the art of public disputation, which in turn greatly influenced the nascent Christian Arabic literature, both in format and in content. Gutas traces this series of developments to a single critical decision made by the caliph āl-Mahdī late in the 8th century:

> It is reported on quite unimpeachable authority that the caliph āl-Mahdī (d. 785) … commissioned the translation into Arabic of Aristotle's *Topics*…. The *Topics* is hardly light reading, so the question why it attracted such attention at the initial stages of the translation movement is significant…. There can be little doubt that the selection of the book was because of its contents and their relevance to the needs generated with Islamic society….[17]

Gutas then goes on to describe how this project turned out to be the first of three such translations of the *Topics* over a period of a century and a half, the last of them being done by none other than Yaḥya ibn 'Adi, a prominent Jacobite Christian controversialist. The early interest and perennial prominence of this particular text suggests how important it was in the formation of what in fact became an important feature of Arab cultural life, the public disputation about questions of a religious nature. In fact, the same caliph who played such a crucial role in the translation movement by having the *Topics* translated the first time is on record as having used theological dialecticians as state propagandists for the suppression of non-Islamic Persian religion. With the Christians having honed their

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[17] Gutas, 61-62.

skills at disputation and polemic over centuries of Christological controversy, the caliph seems to have felt the need to draw on the same classical sources in order to create a cadre of well-trained apologists for Islam. The resulting tradition of formal theological debate had a direct influence on the shaping of the apologetical literature in Arabic to be considered here.

A third way that the translation movement influenced the Christian Arabic theological enterprise is creating a kind of secular, intellectual criterion against which Muslims and non-Muslims alike could be measured. Just as in the religious sphere the Qur'ān made a claim for Islam as the authentic heir of all true prophets throughout history, so now in the philosophical sphere Muslim controversialists attempted to arrogate to themselves the role of authentic heir to the intellectual heritage of ancient Greece:

> The Byzantines were portrayed as deserving of Muslim attacks not only because they were infidels … but because they were also culturally benighted and inferior not only to Muslims but also to their own ancestors, the ancient Greeks. The Muslims by contradistinction, in addition to being superior because of Islam, were also superior because they appreciated ancient Greek science and wisdom and had translated their books into Arabic.[18]

As will be demonstrated, the first generation of Arabophone Christian apologists took up the challenge thus presented. They sought to show that Trinitarian doctrine is authentic to God's revelation because it is supported by the prophets and even by the language of the Qur'ān itself, but it is also authentic to the philosophical heritage in that it is coherent and consistent in the context of Aristotelian metaphysics.

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[18] Gutas, 84-85.

The Divine Attributes and the Oneness of God

A final cultural force that was of great importance in its contribution to the creation of the Christian literature to be examined here was the burgeoning debate within Islam about how the divine attributes were to be considered in light of God's absolute oneness, which in the Islamic tradition would preclude any kind of plurality within the divinity. The way in which the question was formulated and investigated depended largely on the rules of theoretical Arabic grammar. Frank points out that Arabic grammar, in turn, held a particularly prominent place in the development of the Islamic religious discourse:

> … [G]rammar is the first science to reach maturity in Islam – before the end of the second/eighth century – and it does so, almost completely apart from earlier and alien traditions, as a peculiarly Islamic science. This attention to language, most particularly to the language of the Koran and to the grammatical and lexical structures and the characteristics of literary Arabic, had a profound influence on the formation and development of the kalām [Muslim theological discourse] … not simply in their terminology but also in the manner in which many fundamental problems of ontology and ethics – concerning, thus, God's Unity and His Justice (*at-tawḥīd wal-ʿadl*) were conceived, formulated, and analysed.[19]

The chief problem for the Muslim grammarian and theologian of the period is that the rules of Arabic grammar indicate that any attribute (*ṣifah*) applied to an entity being described implies the existence of a noun, which in turn indicates what Frank calls "a kind of entitative reality"[20] within the subject described. Thus to make predications of God is, at least potentially, to affirm within the divinity multiple entitative realities that are in some way distinct from Him, which in turn could undermine the doctrine of God's

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[19] Frank, 10.

[20] Ibid., 13.

unicity. Yet both the language of the Qur'ān and Islamic piety, such as devotion to the "beautiful names of God," affirmed many divine attributes. The early Arabophone Christian apologists considered here were eager to take advantage of this very real theological problem and use it to demonstrate that only Trinitarian doctrine could satisfy the demands of Arabic grammar, just as only Trinitarian doctrine could make the language of the Qur'ān fully intelligible or satisfy the requirements of a vigorous philosophical investigation.

Chapter 1: *Fī taṯlīṯ Āllah āl-wāḥid*

The first text to be considered here is also the earliest extant Arab Christian

apologia, *Fī taṯlīṯ Āllah āl-wāḥid.* When in 1899 Margaret Dunlop Gibson[1] published a

text and translation of this document based on a manuscript from the Convent of St.

Catharine on Mount Sinai, she introduced the treatise to the English-speaking world

under the title "On the Triune Nature of God." This name is infelicitous because the term

"nature" (Arabic *ḏāt* or *ṭabīʿaah*), with all its philosophical implications, does not appear

in the Arabic title. The term *taṯlīṯ*, which comes from the word for three, has no exact

equivalent in standard English, but could be translated "threeness" or perhaps "trinity."

Thus a more precise rendering of the Arabic would yield a title for the treatise such as

"On the Trinity of the One God," or perhaps even "On the Fact that the One God Exists

as Three." (For the sake of brevity, this treatise will hereafter be referred to simply as

Fī taṯlīṯ.)

Both the identity of the author and the precise date of the treatise's original

composition are unknown. Samir Khalil Samir, in an examination of the manuscripts

from which Gibson produced her text and translation, detected (on a page that Gibson

seems to have found illegible) a reference to the Christian religion having "stood firm …

and erect for seven hundred and forty-six years."[2] Samir argues that, depending upon

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[1] Margaret Dunlop Gibson (1843-1920) was a Semitics scholar who, together with her twin sister Agnes Smith Lewis (1843-1926), rediscovered numerous early Syriac and Arabic Christian manuscripts. For a recent account of their lives and work, see Janet Soskice, *The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Found the Hidden Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

[2] Samir Khalil Samir, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity," *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 61.

whether one uses the Incarnation, the advent of Jesus' preaching, or the paschal events as one's starting point, this reference would yield of date of composition between 737 and 771, making it the earliest known Christian document in Arabic, and possibly even the sole surviving Arabic Christian document from the Umayyad period, which ended with the rise of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate in 750.

In order to provide context for the Trinitarian doctrine found in this treatise, it will be useful to note some of the stylistic and terminological characteristics of the text. Perhaps most importantly, the treatise demonstrates a familiarity on the part of the author with the text of the Qur'ān and a strong commitment to using much of the same terminology. There are at least eight direct Qur'ānic quotations or citations in the treatise, and the rest of its text is saturated with Qur'ānic expressions and turns of phrase. So closely does *Fī taṯlīṯ* track with Qur'ānic terminology, in fact, that different readers could legitimately argue about what "counts" as a Qur'ānic citation. They could also perhaps argue about whether the author's constant use of such terminology is a reflection of the religious idiom available to him, or reflects a consciously employed strategy on his part. It is not necessary to impose such a dichotomy on the author's motivations, however, since both considerations must have been factors in the writing of the text. On the one hand, as Sidney Griffith points out, the religious vocabulary of the Arabic language in the eighth century "had already been co-opted by Islam"[3] and the author's unstructured and flowing style suggests an easy familiarity with the Qur'ānic vocabulary and conceptual range. Samir goes so far as to describe the unnamed author as "impregnated with the

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[3] Griffith, *Shadow*, 19.

Qur'ānic culture."[4] On the other hand, as will be shown below, the author pursues a consistent strategy of putting the vocabulary of this Qur'ānic culture to work for his apologetical enterprise. The religious idiom of his time and place has become for him not merely a given fact of his cultural milieu, but also "a new idiom in which [his] faith must be articulated if it is to carry conviction."[5]

A second noteworthy facet of the style in which *Fī tatlīt* is written is an almost complete lack of discernible structure. Far from being a formal academic work, the treatise almost seems written according to "stream of consciousness," as various arguments, quotations, analogies, and associations occur to the mind of the anonymous author. Indeed, so loose and flowing is its composition that one could reasonably hypothesize that the treatise as we now have it is the written record of a speech or sermon, although there is no historical or textual reason to believe this to be the case. Whether intentionally or otherwise, this style is particularly suited to a document that draws so heavily on the Qur'ān ("Recitations" or "Readings"), itself a collection of texts that were originally oral proclamations. Perhaps, as with the issue of Qur'ānic vocabulary described above, the style of *Fī tatlīt* both reflects the cultural norms to which the author was accustomed and constitutes one aspect of his conscious apologetical strategy.

A third characteristic of the treatise is its strong scriptural orientation. Besides its Qur'ānic citations already mentioned, the text includes some eighty-one biblical quotations, including in its scope Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job, the Psalms, Isaiah,

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[4] Samir, 108.

[5] Griffith, *Shadow*, 57.

Jeremiah, Daniel (in its longer form), Ezekiel, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Malachi, Baruch, and the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. This is in part a reflection of the early stage of Christian-Islamic encounter during which it was written. Samir has suggested what he calls a "periodisation" of Christian apologetical works of the ʿAbbāsid era, in which he argues that the first stage included works with a purely "biblical-homiletical" approach.[6] This heavily scriptural way of writing gradually gave way to a purely logical-philosophical method by the beginning of the tenth century, with a combination of the two methods being predominant during the middle and late ninth century. Besides being an indication of the treatise's early date, the strongly scriptural orientation of *Fī tat̲lī̲t̲* is in part due to the question of religious legitimacy at the heart of the Christian-Muslim theological encounter. As will be shown below, the Qur'ān explicitly claims to reaffirm the central message of all true prophets throughout history, including the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus. Thus one of the central issues at stake in Christian-Muslim dialogue was which of the two religious traditions was faithful to the common source material that both claimed, particularly the writings of the prophets. In writing about the Trinity, then, the author of *Fī tat̲lī̲t̲* had to demonstrate that Trinitarian doctrine was not a novelty that post-dated Christ, but instead one aspect of an authentic understanding of the entire scriptural heritage.

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[6] Samir, 110-113.

"God and His Word and His Spirit"

Although the text begins with the conventional formulation, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God"[7] the author quickly turns to a Trinitarian formulation that is less familiar. Instead, the phrase "God and His Word and His Spirit" is used throughout the text. The apologetical strategy employed by the treatise is two-fold: first, to ground a Trinitarian formula in terminology that emphasizes the oneness of God in a way that the more commonplace "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" does not; and second, to appropriate Qur'ānic terminology to such a degree that the Muslim reader will be put upon the horns of a dilemma, namely, either rejecting terminology that is used in the Qur'ān itself, or affirming the reasonableness and theological integrity of Trinitarian doctrine.

As with many ancient theological texts, the treatise at hand begins with a doxological passage that not only praises God for the divine attributes but also invokes blessing and guidance for the author's project. In this opening doxology the author makes his first attempt at the apologetical strategy described above:

> Verily [the angels] adore Thee, and set their seal to one Lord, that men may know that the angels adore God and His Word and His Spirit, one God and one Lord. We worship Thee, our Lord and our God, in Thy Word and Thy Spirit….We do not distinguish God from His Word and His Spirit. We worship no other god with God in His Word and His Spirit. God shewed His power and His light in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Gospel, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God and one Lord. [8]

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[7] Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, With a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1899), 2.

[8] Gibson 2-3; *"wa-ānamā yusbaḥūn ṯulṯ wa yuḵtamūn bi-rabb wāḥid li-yʿalim al-nās ān al-mulāīkah yusbaḥūn li-lah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi, ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Fa-lak nʿabad rabbunā wa ālāhunā*

In this wonderfully concise passage, the author has managed to accomplish four things related to his apologetical strategy. First, he draws upon the Qur'ānic usage of the terms "Word" and "Spirit" and subtly aligns this usage with the biblical sense of the terms. Second, by use of the relative pronoun "His" (which in the Arabic text is actually a suffix appended to the terms "Word" and "Spirit"), he recasts the Trinity in such a way that the accusation that Christians worship three gods is obviated. Third, by invoking "the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Gospel," the author draws upon the Qur'ānic claim that the Qur'ān affirms these earlier revealed texts.[9] If it can be shown from these earlier texts, goes the implied argument, that God is to be worshipped "in His Word and in His Spirit," and the Qur'ān can be shown to use these words in a similar way, then one must conclude that the Trinitarian understanding of God is theologically tenable. Fourth, building upon these previous points, the author presents an implied challenge to Muslims: how is it that God can be distinguished from His Word and His Spirit, with no worship being offered to the latter two?

The use of "Word" in the Qur'ān

In order to understand the apologetical strategy employed by the treatise at hand, one must be aware of the way the terms "Word" and "Spirit" are employed in the Qur'ānic text. There are three passages employing the term "word" (*kalimah*) that are of

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bi-kalamatika wa rūḥika.... Lā nafraq Āllah min kalamatihi wa rūḥhi wa lā nʿabad mʿa Āllah bi-kalamatihi wa rūḥhi ālah āḵar. Wa-qud bīn Āllah āmirhi wa nūruhi fī āt-tūrāah wa-al-ānbīā wa-al-zabūr wa-al-ānjīl ān Āllah wa kalamatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid."

[9] See Qur'ān 3:3, 3:48, 3:65, 3:93, 3:184, 4:163, 5:43-46, 5:66-68, 5:110, 7:157, 9:111, 16:44, 17:55, 21:105, 26:196, 35:25, 48:29, 57:27, and 61:6.

particular importance because they explicitly apply the appellation to Jesus Christ. Surah

3 includes a description of an angelic announcement to Zakarīya (= Zacharias), somewhat

in parallel to the account found in Luke 1:5-22, albeit without the miraculous details of

Zacharias and Elizabeth's advanced ages. Verse 39 of this surah says of Zakarīya, "The

angels called to him as he was standing praying in the holy of holies, saying: God

proclaims to you glad tidings of Yahya [= John], attesting to a Word from God; and also

noble, set apart, a prophet among the righteous." As one might expect from a text that

describes Zakarīya's encounter with angels and the announcement of Yahya's upcoming

birth, this same surah contains a passage in parallel to the Annunciation scene from the

Gospel of Luke. Verses 45 and 46 read:

> Lo, the angels said, "O Mary, God proclaims to you glad tidings of a
> Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, eminent in
> this world and the next, and among those close [to God]. He will address
> the people in infancy and in maturity, and be counted among the
> righteous.[10]

The third passage that uses "Word" in reference to Jesus is perhaps even more

notable, in that it has ironically become both a Muslim "proof-text" in denial of the

divinity of Jesus *and*, for the author of the present treatise as well as other Christian

writers, one of the key Qur'ānic citations in support of Trinitarian doctrine. Surah 4:171

says:

> O People of the Book! Do not exceed proper bounds in your religion, and
> do not say about God anything but the truth. Indeed, the Messiah Jesus son
> of Mary is a messenger of God, and His Word sent to Mary, and a Spirit
> from Him. So believe in God and His messengers. Do not say "Three":
> cease; it will be better for you, for indeed, God is one God. He is beyond

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[10] All translations of Qur'ānic texts in this dissertation are my own.

having a son, and unto Him are all things in the heavens and on earth. God suffices as the Doer of things.

There are three elements in this passage which will become important in the way that the anonymous author at hand attempts to build his case for the Trinity. The first, of course, is the Qur'ānic assertion that Jesus is a "Word from God," in this instance joined with the assertion that He is also a "Spirit from God". The second is the implication that, by affirming Trinitarian doctrine, the Christians have undermined the oneness of God. The third is the suggestion that, if God had a son, it would imply some insufficiency or lack in God Himself. Rather than shrinking from these challenging claims, the author of the treatise engages their theological implications and actually builds his case on them. In doing so, he lays down one of the principles that will become a basic and recurring aspect of the early Arabophone Christian response to Islam; namely, reaching into Islamic sources and theological discourse and making what would otherwise be challenges to Christian doctrine the raw materials of the Christian apologetical strategy.

In order to contextualize these three key passages, one must take into account the other Qur'anic uses of the term "word" in relation to God, and in doing so, three closely related terms must be included: the singular *kalimah*, the plural *kalimāt*, and the word *kalām*, which could be translated "speaking." When the Qur'anic use of these terms is analyzed, four characteristics of the divine word or speaking emerge. First, the divine word participates in the divine attribute of eternality: it is unchangeable, inexhaustible, infinite. Second, the divine word establishes a relationship between God and humankind. Third, the divine word guides humankind, bringing persons out of their ignorance into a

right way of conducting themselves. Fourth, the divine word is associated with judgment

and eschatological punishment.

Surah 6 contains two verses which express the immutability of God's word. Verse

34 of this surah speaks of the patience and perseverance of the various prophets of God in

the face of the rejection of their message and asserts that "there is no one [or nothing] that

can alter the words of God." Later in this same surah, this same assertion is repeated and

the immutability of God's word(s) is associated with His nature. The changelessness of

the divine word results from God's omniscience: "The word of your Lord is fulfilled in

truth and justice. There is no one [or nothing] that can alter His words; He is the One

Who Hears and the One Who Knows." As in Christian theology, this quality of the divine

word as unchangeable is linked with the idea of its being unbounded or unlimited. Surah

18:109 expresses the infinity of the divine word(s) thus: "Say: 'If the sea were ink for the

words of my Lord, then the sea would be depleted before the words of my Lord were

depleted, even if we were to add another [sea] like it as reinforcement.'" Surah 31:27

contains a very similar description of God's words: "And if indeed upon the earth, all the

trees were pens, with the sea to supply them [as ink], and after it seven [more] seas, the

words of God would not be depleted, for God is powerful and wise."

In the Qur'an's teaching, the divine word or speaking also effects a relationship

between God and humankind. Just after Adam's expulsion from the primeval Garden,

"Adam received from his Lord words, for [God] turned toward him. For He is the One

Who Turns [in forgiveness], the Merciful." Later in the unfolding of revelation, the

divine words establish a special place for Abraham in the economy of God's activity in

the world: "When Abraham was put to the test by his Lord by means of some words, he fulfilled them. God said: 'I will make of you a leader to the people.' Abraham said: 'And from my offspring?' God said: 'My covenant does not benefit evildoers.'" In another passage the divine word is represented as coming to other faithful people throughout the history of revelation and assuring them of overcoming the world's resistance. Surah 37:171-173 says that "Our word has already come to Our servants, the ones sent [by Us], that they would be victors, and that Our forces would be triumphant."

According to the Qur'ān, the divine word or speaking not only establishes a relationship between God and human beings; it also brings them out of ignorance and teaches them how to act. Surah 14:24-25 says:

> Do you fail to see how God sets down a proverb [or "parable" or "lesson"]? A good word is like a good tree, having its root fixed and its branches in the heavens; it bears fruit at all times, by permission of its Lord. And God sets down proverbs [parables/lessons] for the people, so that they may bring them to mind.

The nascent Muslim *umma* (community) is commanded in the Qur'ān to take this principle into account in their treatment of pagans when engaged in battle: "If one of the polytheists appeal to you for refuge, take him into protection until he hears the word of God, then bring him to a secure place. That is because they are a people who do not know [about God]."

The Qur'ān also associates the divine word or speech with judgment and eschatological punishment. Surah 10:96-97 describes the two-fold function of God's word in relation to those who resist it. The divine word both affords an opportunity for becoming a servant of God, as described above, and then becomes a word of judgment

that is effected *against* those who resist it: "Those against whom the word of your Lord

has proved true do not have faith, even if every sign came to them, until they see the

painful punishment." Surah 11:118-119 issues an equally dire warning, this time

associating the word of God with a judgment directed not at those who lack faith, but at

those who are committed to disputing with one another. By being more concerned with

disputation than anything else, these evildoers have made impossible the achievement of

unity among humankind. The word of God is here represented as a primordial judgment

against such people:

> If your Lord had willed, He could have made the people into a single
> united community; yet they will not stop disputing [with one another],
> except for those upon whom your Lord had mercy. And it was for this that
> He created them, and the word of your Lord is fulfilled: "I will fill Hell
> with the jinns[11] and humankind together."

Surah 40:5-6 compares the unbelievers of Muhammad's time with those of previous

generations who resisted the message of the various prophets sent to them, and asserts

that the primordial judgment described in the passage above has already been

accomplished upon them:

> … Every people planned to take hold of the prophet sent to them, and
> quarreled vainly in order to refute the truth, yet *I* took hold of *them*, and
> what consequences! In this way was the word of your Lord proved true
> upon those who did not believe: they are associates of the Fire.

Thus the author of *Fī tatlīt* had a rather rich body of Qur'ānic uses and

connotations of the terms *kalimah, kalimāt,* and *kalām* to draw upon in his own use of the

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[11] The jinns, from which comes the English term genie, are a class of spiritual beings mentioned several times in the Qur'ān. They are not to be identified precisely with angels and are described in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* as "a category of created beings believed to possess powers for evil and for good." The Qur'ānic treatment of the jinns reduced them considerably from the power they were accorded in pre-Islamic Arab folklore. *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill), 2003, vol. 3, 43-49.

term "Word of God" as an appellation of the second Person of the Trinity. As noted

above, there are three different passages in the Qur'ān that use the term "word" in

reference to Jesus, and perhaps most importantly, no other person is described in the

Qur'ān as being a "word from God." It is certainly true that the Qur'ānic text nowhere

associates the various other uses of the term *kalimah* described above with the person of

Jesus. Furthermore, since the various surahs of the Qur'ān are not presented in any

chronological or thematic order, but simply according to their respective lengths, it is

impossible to trace any development of the Qur'ānic usage of the word group

kalimah/kalimāt/kalām, in the way that one might trace the way in which the Old

Testament phrase "word of the Lord" may have influenced the use of *Logos* in the

Johannine literature of the New Testament. Yet the lack of obviously systematic use of

these terms should not obviate the point here addressed. As previously described, the

author of the present treatise seems to have deeply imbibed Qur'ānic terminology, such

that the apologetical opportunity presented by the various resonances of *kalimah*, *kalimāt*,

and *kalām* in the Qur'ān was not lost on him. If, indeed, according to the Qur'ān, Jesus

(and no one else) is a "word from God," then the other Qur'ānic senses of this term are

by no means irrelevant.

The use of "Spirit" in the Qur'ān

Equally important for the task at hand is the Qur'ānic use of the term "spirit." In

some cases, the Qur'ānic use of this term clearly refers to angels.[12] In other cases, the text

uses the expression "My spirit" or "His spirit" in reference to God, but in the context of

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[12] See, for example, surahs 19:17 and 78:38.

God's creation of the first man as a living being: "He formed him, and breathed into him from His spirit."[13] Beyond these two categories of use, however, there are several other Qur'ānic usages of "spirit" in reference to God that must have been intriguing for the author at hand, some of which he even quotes or strongly alludes to, as will be shown later.

There is a group of three passages that speak of Jesus having been "supported with the Holy Spirit." The first reference appears in a verse (2:87) that condemns the historical response to messengers sent by God:

> We gave Moses the Book, and sent messengers after him. We gave Jesus,
> the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit. Is it
> not the case that when a messenger comes to you with what you
> yourselves do not like, you become haughty, then a part of them you
> accuse of being liars, and another part of them you kill?

In a somewhat similar verse much later in this long surah (2:253), the text commemorates the favors bestowed by God on various messengers and then singles Jesus out for particular recognition, using the same terminology as the verse above: "We preferred some of those messengers over others; among them were some to whom God spoke, and others, We exalted to greater rank. We gave clear proofs to Jesus, son of Mary, and supported him with the Holy Spirit…." Elsewhere in the Qur'ān (surah 5:110), Jesus is represented as being addressed by God on the Day of Judgment, and once again the same terminology that appears in the two passages above is used:

> Some day God will gather the messengers, and will say to them: "What
> was the reply that you received?" … Then God will say: "O Jesus, son of
> Mary, recall my favor toward you and your mother, as I supported you
> with the Holy Spirit, so that you addressed the people in infancy and in

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[13] Surah 32:9; see also 15:28-29 and 38:72.

> maturity, and as I taught you the Book and the Wisdom, and the Law and the Gospel; and as you create out of clay the shape of a bird, by My permission, and you breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by My permission, and heal the blind and the lepers, by My permission, and as you raise the dead, by My permission; and as I held back the Children of Israel from you when you gave to them clear proofs, but those who did not believe said, "This is nothing other than obvious sorcery!"

Just as the Qur'ān refers to no person other than Jesus by the term "word," so no other prophet is described as having been "supported by the Holy Spirit." Equally striking for the author of *Fī tathlīt* is the fact that this third reference is followed immediately by descriptions of Jesus breathing life into a bird made out of clay[14], performing miraculous healings, and even raising the dead. More will be said about this later, but for now it should be noted that this passage combines the unique reference to Jesus having been "supported by the Holy Spirit" with the exercise of life-giving or life-restoring powers, a link that will play a key role in the apologetical strategy of the author being considered.

In addition to the three passages just described, there are two other Qur'ānic passages that describe the spirit of God as having played a unique role in the conception of Jesus. Surah 21, entitled "The Prophets," consists in part of a recitation of God's interaction with various prophets and the virtues they demonstrated. Verse 91 of this surah says: "And [there was] she who remained chaste: so We breathed into her from our Spirit, and We made her and her son a sign to all creation." A second passage that uses very similar terminology is found in surah 66. This surah ends with a set of verses (10-

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[14] This passage appears to have been influenced by the so-called "Infancy Gospel of Thomas," or by an oral tradition about Jesus that either preceded and inspired this apocryphal gospel, or that developed from it. In the Infancy Gospel, the child Jesus is criticized for forming sparrows out of clay on the Sabbath; he responds by clapping his hands and commanding the birds to come to life, whereupon they fly away. See Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), 2009, and J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: University Press), 2005.

12) that contrast two faithless women (the wives of Noah and Lot) with two faithful

women (the wife of one of the Pharaohs, and Mary). Verse 12 describes Mary thus:

"Mary, the daughter of ʿImrān, she who remained chaste, so We breathed into her body

from our Spirit, and she believed in the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was

one of the obedient ones."

Another group of Qurʾānic passages describe a special role for the Spirit in

bringing revelation to humankind. One of these passages is particularly noteworthy

because the text of *Fī tatlīt* strongly alludes to it. Surah 16:101-102 reads:

> When we substitute one sign in place of another (and God knows what He
> sends down), they say, 'You are an inventor,' but most of them do not
> know. Say: the Holy Spirit brought it down from your Lord in truth, in
> order to establish those who have faith, and as a guide and glad tidings to
> those who submit [to God].

The author of *Fī tatlīt* was at least somewhat cognizant of this passage, because he

misquotes the latter portion of it as "the Holy [Spirit] has brought it down a mercy and

guidance from thy Lord."[15] Surah 40:15 shows that this coming down of the Spirit with

guidance is no one-time event, but something that takes place in various times and places:

"The One exalted above all ranks, Lord of the throne: by His decree He sends the Spirit

upon those among His servants whom He wills, to warn of the Day of Meeting."

Terminology similar to both of these passages is found in surah 42:51-52, which teaches

that some form of mediation is necessary for divine revelation. The term "spirit" is used

here to indicate the means by which revelation comes down:

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[15] Gibson, 5; "*tanazaluhu rūḥ al-quds min Rabbak riḥmah wa hadā*."

> It was not given to any human being that God speak to him, except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger for the revelation, by God's permission, of what God wills. For He is exalted and wise. And in this way We have inspired you, by Our decree, with a Spirit. You did not know what the Book was, nor what faith was. But We have made it a light, by which to guide those among our servants whom We will….

This passage is linguistically somewhat complex, and the various existing translations of the Qur'ān do not agree on its exact rendering.[16] The translation given here is intentionally literal in order to make clear the use of the term "Spirit" in the passage. Since the point at stake is how the terminology of the Qur'ān was mined for the "raw material" of the Christian apologetical response, it would be mistaken to take one's cue from latter-day translations that may themselves be at pains to avoid terminology that has been used by Christian apologists.

There is another passage in the Qur'ān that uses the term "spirit" in reference to God in a way that is different from any other Qur'ānic use. Surah 58:22 declares that:

> You cannot find a people that believe in God and the Last Day, being on friendly terms with those who turn aside from God and his messengers, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their fellow clansmen. For such as those, [God] has written faith in their hearts, and supported them with a Spirit from Himself….

The terminology of this last phrase differs from the description of Jesus having been supported only by the substitution of the phrase "a Spirit from Himself" for the phrase "the Holy Spirit." This is the only Qur'ānic reference to anyone other than Jesus being

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[16] E.g., Pickthall translates the first part of verse 22 as "We inspired in Thee (Muhammad) a Spirit of our command," while Shakir introduces even more of an interpretive gloss by rendering the same phrase as "thus did We reveal to you an inspired book by Our command." See Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1999) and M. H. Shakir, *The Qur'an* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1999).

supported by God's Spirit, and upon careful examination of the text, the two references are somewhat different. The passages previously described associated the support of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with his production of "clear proofs," specifically the life-giving or life-restoring miracles. Those passages also, given their context, associate the support of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with his special status as a messenger of God. The present passage seems to be in a different category, since it speaks of faithful people being supported by a "Spirit from God" not in relation to any special role or ministry, but as a special gift protecting them from defection due to natural ties of kinship and affection.

In summary, the use of the term "Spirit" in the Qur'ān is by no means systematic or perfectly consistent. But there were a number of uses that were directly relevant for the project of casting Trinitarian theology in Qur'ānic terms. The text of the Qur'ān seems to associate God's Spirit with Jesus in a unique way, since no other prophet is said to have been "supported by the Holy Spirit," and since this support is particularly associated with the life-giving or life-restoring miracles of Jesus. Additionally, the Qur'ān associates God's Spirit with the conception of Jesus in a way that also seems unique, since through it Jesus and his mother became "a sign for all creation." Lastly, the Qur'ānic text seems to assign to God's Spirit the double role of bringing about or mediating divine revelation and then supporting those who believe in that revelation in such a way that they are made able to transcend their natural ties of affection in order to be faithful.

The Uses of "Word" and "Spirit" in *Fī tathlīt*

When the text of *Fī tathlīt* is analyzed carefully, it becomes clear that the author of the treatise strove to use the terms "Word" and "Spirit" in ways that would be consistent

with traditional Christian Trinitarian theology, and yet would also hew closely to the

Qur'ānic uses of these terms described above. As described above, the Qur'ān repeatedly

suggests that the Word of God participates in the divine attributes of unboundedness and

immutability, which in turn suggest the quality of eternality. Although the question of the

eternality of God's Word was a matter yet to be completely settled in Islamic theology,

the presence of these texts was sufficient for the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* to seize upon this

aspect of the Qur'ān and make it a key part of his presentation. By the time of his writing,

of course, the co-eternality of the Persons of the Trinity was undisputed Christian

doctrine, so this was perhaps the easiest aspect of two traditions to correlate.

The author's first representation of the Word of God as participating in the divine

attribute of eternality comes early in the treatise, as he describes the creation of the

universe as an action that God accomplished through His Word and the animating power

of His Spirit:

> It is written also in the beginning of the Law, which God sent down to His
> prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, "In the beginning God created the heavens
> and the earth." Then he said, "The Spirit of God was upon the waters."
> Then He said, by His Word, "Let there be light"; and there was light….
> Then He said, "Let us create man after our own image and likeness." So
> God shewed in the beginning of the book which He sent down to His
> prophet Moses, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God, and
> that God … created all things, and gave life to all things by His Word and
> His Spirit. We do not say three Gods … but we say that God and His
> Word and His Spirit are one God and one Creator.[17]

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[17] Gibson 3-4; "*Wa maktūb āīḍān fī rās al-taūrāah ālatī ānzalahā Āllah ʿalā Mūsā nabīhi fī ṭūr Sīnā: badū ḵalaqa Āllah al-samā wa al-ārḍ ṯum qāl rūḥ Āllah kān ʿalā al-mīāah. Ṯum qāl bi-kalimatihi yakūn nūr fakān nūr…. Ṯum qāl naḵlaq ānsān ʿalā šibhunā wa tamṯālunā faqad bīna Āllah fī āwal kitāb ānzalahu ʿalā nabīhi Mūsā ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa ān Āllah … ḵalaqa kul šaī wa āḥīā kul šaī bi-kalimatihi wa rūḥhi wa lasnā naqūl ṯalaṯah ālāha … walākinā naqūl ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa ḵāliq wāḥid.*"

As is typical with this author, he succinctly accomplishes several things in this short passage. By referring to Moses as a "prophet," he subtly invokes the prophetology of the Qur'ān and joins this usage with the Qur'ānic image of a book being "sent down" from God to His messenger. He is also careful to include the line in which God speaks in the plural, "Let us create," which later in the treatise he will align with the similar Qur'ānic usage. Not only does the author speak of God creating by means of His Word and His Spirit; he boldly proclaims that God, His Word, and His Spirit are "one Creator." This is a key consideration because, later in the treatise, the author is keen to show that this unique attribute of God, the ability to create, was resident in His Word even after that Word appeared on the earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Shortly after this passage, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* addresses this issue of the eternality of the Word of God, and simultaneously takes up one of the main points on which the Qur'ān seems explicitly to oppose Christian doctrine – the concept that God could beget. He writes:

> We do not say that God begat His Word as any man begets; God forbid! but we say that the Father begat His Word as the Sun begets rays, and as the mind begets the word, and as the fire begets heat; none of these things existed before what was begotten of them. God … never existed without Word and Spirit, but God was ever in His Word and His Spirit; His Word and His Spirit were with God and in God before He made the creatures. We do not say how this is. Verily everything relating to God is majesty and might….[18]

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[18] Gibson 5; "*Wa lasnā naqūl ān Āllah walada kalamatihi kamā yalad āhid min al-nās, m'aāḏ Āllah: walākinā naqūl ān al-Āb walada kalamatihi kamā talad al-šams al-š'aā'a wa kamā yalad al-'aql al-kalimah wa kamā talad al-nār al-saḵūnah. Lam yakun šaī min hāwalā qabal alaḏī walada minhu. Wa lam yakun Āllah ... dūn kalimah wa rūḥ walākin Āllah munḏu qaṭ bi-kalimatihi wa rūḥhi wa kānat kalimatihi wa rūḥhi 'and Āllah wa bi-llah qabal ān yaḵlaqa al-ḵalāīq. Lā naqūl kaīf yakūn ḏalak fa-ān kul šaī min āmr Āllah 'aẓmah wa jabrūah....*"

In drawing upon these classical metaphors for the Trinity, familiar to any student of patristic theology, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* applies them to the specific question at hand, the relationship between God and His Word. As already shown, the Qur'ānic data is fraught with the tension between the absolute uniqueness of God and the apparent eternality of His Word, with the result that the Muslim is put upon the horns of a theological dilemma: whether to posit at least two eternally existing entities, and if not, what to make of the Qur'ānic terminology. The author at hand is able to draw upon both this inherent tension in Islamic theology and the traditional Christian metaphors for Trinitarian life and draw his ringing conclusion: God exists eternally with and in His Word. Furthermore, in an impressive rhetorical flourish, he asserts that the obscurity of this way of existing is based in the very fact that he is talking about God. Since "everything relating to God is majesty and might," one should not be surprised at a conclusion that affirms both the Qur'ānic data and the traditional Christian language, and yet is not completely comprehensible. The reason this way of arguing is so impressive is that the author manages to turn an Islamic way of thinking about God into a tool for his apologetical strategy. The Qur'ānic emphasis that God is completely apart from and different from His creation means that we should not be surprised if we must conclude that His mode of existence is something quite unfamiliar to us. While the Muslim may assert that God does not beget because He is beyond such human ways of acting, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* argues that this very "otherness" of God means that perhaps He "begets" eternally in a way that human beings can only dimly understand by way of analogy. As will be shown later, other Arabophone

Christian authors take a similar approach to the Qur'ānic objection to begetting with reference to God.

Much later in the treatise, the author returns to this question of the eternality of God's Word and applies it more explicitly to the person of Jesus Christ. Returning again to the supposedly agreed-upon common source for Muslims and Christians, the Old Testament prophets, the author of *Fī tatlīt* quotes Isaiah:

> Isaiah also prophesied by the Holy Ghost about the birth of the Christ, saying, "A Maiden shall be with child, and shall bear a son and He shall be called Emmanuel, the interpretation of which is 'Our God with us.'" The Maiden is the Virgin who is of the race of Adam. She gave birth to the Christ, Emmanuel, God of God, and mercy to His creatures. We do not hear of one man from Adam till this our day who was called "God with us" or who was called the Word of God. He was born of a Virgin without any man touching her.[19]

Here the author very cleverly connects the Old Testament prophecy with the Qur'ānic terminology about Jesus. Having already explored the idea that God exists eternally in and with His Word, he is able to present this prophecy as the link connecting God's presence in His Word, the virgin birth (an event affirmed by the text of the Qur'ān), and the Qur'ānic description of Jesus as "a word from God." His implicit argument runs thus: there is only one person in biblical tradition who is considered Emmanuel, "God with us." Similarly, there is only one person referred to by the text of the Qur'ān as a "word from God," and it is the same person, Jesus Christ. Since God exists eternally in and with

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[19] Gibson 18; "*Wa tanbā Āšʿaīā āīdān bi-rūḥ al-qadas ʿalā mīlād al-masīḥ wa qāl al-batūl yakūn li-ha ḥabal wa talad ibnān wa yusmā ʿĀmānwīl tarjamatihi mʿanā Ālahunā. Fa-al-batūl hīa al-ʿadrān alatī hīa min darīah Ādam hīa waladat al-masīḥ Āmānwīl ālah min Āllah wa raḥmah li-kuluquhi. Wa lam nasmʿa bi-āḥid min al-nās min Ādam ilā yūmnā hadā yusmā mʿanā Āllah āū yusmā kalimah Āllah. Wa wulida min ʿadrān min ġīr yamsaha bašar.*"

His Word, then, saying that Jesus is a Word from God and saying that He is God-with-us amount to the same thing.

The treatise at hand also draws upon the second Qur'ānic characterization of the Word of God; namely, that it establishes a relationship between God and humankind. This concept is a particularly easy one for the author to appropriate from Islam and apply to Christian theology, of course, since the existence of the Logos Christology meant that a very similar understanding of God's word was already present in Christian doctrine. In drawing upon this idea common to the two traditions, the author draws a contrast between the salvific power of God's word as present in the preaching of the prophets, and the power of God's Word incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. By drawing this contrast, he is able both to draw upon the common wellspring of prophetic teaching, and to issue an implicit critique of Islam, since Islam was dependent on the preaching of another prophet, rather than the more powerful and efficacious action of God's Word present in person. He writes:

> The work of Satan and his error appeared in every nation and every people. They worshipped fire and images and beasts and trees, and served living things and sea-monsters and every beast of the earth. God was not content with this for His creatures…. When the prophets of God saw this, that the children of Adam were lost, and that the Devil had conquered them, and that no man could save the race of Adam from error and destruction, the prophets and apostles of God entreated God and asked Him to come down to His creatures and His servants, and to preside in His mercy over their salvation from the error of the Devil.[20]

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[20] Gibson 10, "*Wa ẓahara 'amal Iblīs wa ḍalālathi fī kul āumah wa kul qaūm. wa 'abadūā āl-nār wa āl-aṣnām wa āl-dūāb wa āl-bašar wa 'abdūā āl-ḥīwān wa āl-ḥītān wa kul dūāb āl-ārḍ. Fa-lam yurḍā Āllah haḏā li-ḵuluquhi.... Falamā rāī ḏalak ānbīā Āllah ān banī Ādam qud halakūā waqad ḡalaba 'alīhum āl-šīṭān wa lam yastaṭ'a āhid min āl-nās ān yaḵlaṣ ḏariah Ādam min āl-ḍalālah wa āl-halkah raḡaba ānbīā Āllah wa rusuluhu ilā Āllah wa sālūh ān yanzal ilā ḵuluquhu wa 'abāduhu fa-yatūlā bi-raḥmatihi ḵalāṣuhum*

Immediately following this passage, the author quotes or paraphrases Is 64:1, Ps 80:1, Ps 107:20, Hab 2:3, Ps 118:26-27, and Ps 50:3, and argues that each of these Old Testament passages refers to the coming of God the Word in the person of Jesus Christ.

In this passage, the author appeals to a particularly Islamic description of the condition of humankind before being redeemed. The problem as described here is not violence or lack of charity among men, nor an interior tendency to sin. Rather, the problem to be solved consists essentially in the fact that human beings have been duped into worshipping all manner of created things, the singular evil that Islamic tradition came to describe as *širk*, the "association" of created things with divinity.[21] By describing the human need met by Christ in this way, the author has subtly aligned the mission of Christ with the Qur'ānic concept of how the Word of God establishes a relationship between God and humankind. According to the Qur'ān, the Word of God establishes a saving relationship by leading human beings to the worship of the one true God. For the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*, the Word of God as present in the preaching of the prophets did not accomplish this, for the prophets themselves both begged God to come in person and declared that He would do so. Furthermore, by the selection of the particular prophetic passages that the author uses, he is making an implicit argument for understanding the Word to be divine; while most of the passages used refer to God himself coming, Ps

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min ḍalālah āl-šīṭān." It should be noted that the use of "apostles" in Gibson's translation should not be taken to refer to Christ's apostles, which would render the usage anachronistic. She has simply translated the Arabic term *rusul* (the "sent ones" of God) by its familiar Greek equivalent.

[21] The term *širk* does not appear in the Qur'ān, but forms of the verb from which it is taken, *šaraka*, appear many times in the Qur'ānic text to describe idolatry.

107:20 refers to the entity that comes to achieve salvation as God's Word. By asserting

that "no man could save the race of Adam from error and destruction," the author

simultaneously affirms the Qur'ānic principle that only the Word of God can establish the

salvific relationship between God and man, and implicitly critiques Islamic soteriology.

Since the preaching of the prophets was insufficient to turn the tide of human idolatry,

and since the Qur'ān claims to reaffirm and continue the prophetic mission, the author

seems to argue, how could simply following the Qur'ān be salvific? For the author of *Fī*

taṯlīṯ, the Word of God had to come in person, and this was accomplished by the

appearance on earth of Jesus Christ.

A bit later in the treatise, the author introduces terminology that is more explicitly

Christian to align the saving mission of Christ with the Qur'ānic understanding of the

Word of God. He begins to write of the work of Christ in terms of mediation, while

coupling this concept with a specifically Qur'ānic characterization of how this mediation

is achieved.

> The Christ is Mediator between us and God; [He is] God of God and [He
> is] Man. Men could not have looked towards God and lived. God willed
> mercy to His creatures and honour to them, and the Christ was between us
> and God, the God of God, and a Man, the judge of men by their deeds.
> Thus God was veiled in a Man without sin, and shewed us mercy in the
> Christ, and brought us near to Him.[22]

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[22] Gibson 13, "*Wa āl-Masīḥ hūa āl-wasiṭ bīnunā wa bīn Āllah ālāhān min Āllah wa ānsān. Lam yakun yastaṭīʿa āl-nās yanẓarūn ilā Āllah wa yaḥīūn. Fa-ārād Āllah raḥmah bi-ḵuluquhu wa karāmah lahum. Fa-kān āl-Masīḥ bīnunā wa bīn Āllah ālāhān min Āllah wa ānsān āl-dīān li-lnās bi-āʿamālihum. Fa-la-ḏalak āḥtajaba Āllah bi-ānsān min ḡīr ḵaṭīah fa-raḥamanā bi-āl-Masīḥ wa qarabanā ilīhi.*"

By asserting that "men could not have looked towards God and lived," the author brings together the Old Testament terror of looking upon the divine[23] with the typically Qur'ānic characterization of God as wholly apart from His creation. As described earlier, the veil is a Qur'ānic usage having to do with how God speaks to a human being. Here once again the author of *Fī tatlīt* appropriates this image and applies it to the humanity of Christ. So in his typically succinct fashion, the author has brought together three distinct elements of terminology or imagery: that of mediation, taken from the Christian tradition; that of the impossibility of a human being looking directly upon God and surviving, a notion common to the two traditions; and the idea of the Word of God addressing humankind from behind a veil, taken from the Qur'ān. By his close alignment of these disparate elements of expression, the author is able to speak about the saving work of Christ in a way that is faithful to Christian tradition and yet aligns with a Qur'ānic way of understanding how the Word of God establishes a relationship between God and humanity.

The author returns to this same way of speaking about the salvific work of Christ later in the treatise, grounding his argument once again in the theoretically common ground of Old Testament prophecy:

> Jeremiah the prophet prophesied … by the Holy Ghost, saying, "This is our God, we will worship no God but Him. He knew all the paths of knowledge, and gave them to Jacob His servant, and to Israel His saint. After this He looked upon the earth and mixed with the people." We do not know that God looked upon the earth or mixed with the people except when He appeared to us in the Christ, His Word and His Spirit. He veiled Himself in flesh, He who is not of us. Men saw Him and He mixed with them. He was God and Man without sin. It was He who knew the paths of

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[23] See, for example, Gen 32:30, Ex 33:20, and Is 6:5.

good and of knowledge and of judgment, and who taught them and made them to spring up to those who follow His command and His word.[24]

Here the author has chosen to cite a prophecy which combines a very Qur'ānic description of God (the One who knows all things) with a description of God's action which is quite unknown and even contrary to the Qur'ān (mixing with His creation). The question which is ever operative behind these prophetic citations, of course, is which tradition, Christian or Islamic, is the faithful heir of the prophets. The tension between the two different characterizations of God present in the prophecy (knowing all things and mixing with His creation) would have been obvious to the Muslim reader. The author then cleverly uses two different Qur'ānic expressions to argue that the tension is resolved in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God, communicating the divine knowledge and thereby establishing the divine-human relationship, and yet this Word appears to humanity in a way that is in keeping with the Qur'ānic principle: the Word of God is veiled in the flesh of Jesus.

This passage serves as an excellent segue to the third Qur'ānic characterization of the Word of God through which the author of *Fī tatlīt* expresses his Trinitarian doctrine, namely, that the Word of God guides humanity out of its ignorance and into a right way of believing and acting. More will be said on this point later, when we turn to the way in which the author attempts to bridge the soteriological differences between the Qur'ānic

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[24] Gibson 28, "*Wa tanbā Ārmīā āl-nabī… bi-rūḥ al-quds wa qāl haḏā ālāhunā lā n'abad ālah ġīruhu. ' 'Alama kul subul āl-'alm wa ā'aṭāhā Y'aqūb 'abduhu wa Īsrāīl ṣaġīhu. B'ad haḏā 'alā āl-ārḍ ārā wa āl-nās ḳālaṭ.' Wa lā n'alam ān Āllah ārā 'alā āl-ārḍ āū ḳalaṭ āl-nās ilā ḥīn āṭ'anā bi-āl-Masīḥ kalimatihi wa rūḥhi. Fa-āḥtajaba bi-āl-jasad alaḏī līsa minnā. Fa-rāhu āl-nās wa ḳālaṭahum wa kān ālah wa ānsān min ġīr kaṭīah. Wa hūa ālaḏī 'alama subul āl-ḳīr wa āl-'alm wa āl-ḥukum wa ā'alamahum wa nabatahum li-man ātab'a waṣīatihi wa qūluhi.*"

text and the Christian tradition. For now, the point to note is that the author of *Fī tatlīt*, in his treatment of Christ's salvific work, attempts to describe it in a way that is largely compatible with how the action of the Word of God is described in the Qur'ān.

The alignment of Christian doctrine with this particular Qur'ānic characterization of the Word of God begins early in the treatise. In one of his first references to the salvific mission of Christ, the author writes of God that

> He is the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, one God and one Lord;
> but in the Christ He saved and delivered men. We will shew this also if
> God wills, how God sent His Word and His light as mercy and guidance to
> men and was gracious to them in Him. There came down to Adam and his
> race from heaven no Saviour from Satan and his darkness and his
> error….[25]

Taken in the context of the treatise, it is clear that the last line of the passage cited means that there came no merely human entity with the ability to turn humankind away from its error. Rather, the Word of God was the only entity that could turn humankind away from its error and to the worship of God. This is a point on which the two traditions are largely in agreement, and thus provides the author with a relatively easy way to align the work of Christ with the Qur'ānic data about the Word of God.

Later on in the treatise, the author quotes the prophet Isaiah to support this characterization of the work of Christ:

> He said by the Holy Ghost about the Christ, "There shall come from Zion
> the Saviour, and shall turn away error from Jacob." He also said by the
> Holy Ghost, "There shall be also from the root of Jesse [one who] shall
> stand as a chief of the nations, and the nations shall trust in Him." Verily

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[25] Gibson 6-7; "*Hūa āl-Ābu wa āl-Ībn wa Rūḥ al-Quds ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Āmā fī āl-masīḥ fa-kalaṣa āl-nās wa najāhum. Fa-sa-ānbīna dalak ān šā Āllah kīf ārsala Āllah kalimatihi wa nūruhi raḥmah li-lnās wa hadā wa min ʿalīhum bihi. Wa lam nazala min āl-samā kalāṣ li-Ādam wa darīatihi min Īblīs wa ẓalamatihi wa ḍalālatihi.*"

> Jesse begat David the prophet; Mary the good was from the race of David
> … and from her was born the Christ, Word and Light of God, on whom
> the nations trust; He was their Hope and their Saviour from error. Isaiah
> said also by the Holy Ghost, "There is no angel and no intercessor, but the
> Lord will come and save us"; because it was more suitable that no angel
> and no intercessor could save us, until He appeared to us in the Christ and
> saved us, and He led the nations … and was gracious to them in
> guidance.[26]

The author of *Fī tatlīt* is clearly trying to align the prophetic traditions, the Qur'ānic

concept that the Word of God leads humankind out of error and ignorance, and the

mission of Christ. As will be shown later on, the author ultimately realizes that he cannot

limit his description of the work of Christ to leading humankind out of error without

doing damage to the Christian understanding of redemption. Later in the text, he will

attempt to bridge the gap between Christian and Qur'ānic soteriology and will skillfully

weave together the concepts of the two. For now it suffices to note that the author

represents the salvific work of Christ as consisting chiefly in leading humankind out of

error concerning God, thus aligning Christ's ministry with the Qur'ānic characterization

of God's Word.

As presented in the Qur'ān, this error consists largely in the commission of

idolatry. The author of *Fī tatlīt* again aligns prophetic testimony from Isaiah with the idea

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[26] Gibson 17; "*Qāl bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds ʿalā āl-masīḥ yātī min Ṣahīūn āl-muklaṣ wa yaṣraf āl-ḍalālah ʿan Yʿaqūb wa qāl āīḍān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa yakūn min āṣal Āīšī yaqūm raīs āl-āumum ʿalīhu yatūkalūn wa ān Āīšī hūa wālad Dāūd āl-nabī wa Marīam āl-ṭībah min ḏarīah Dāūd ... wa minhā wulida āl-masīḥ kalimah Āllah wanūruhu āladī ʿalīhu yatūkal āl-āumum wa kān rajāhum wa ḵalāṣuhum min āl-ḍalālah. Wa qāl Āšʿaīā āīḍān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds lā malak wa lā šafīʿa walākin al-Rabb yātī fa-yaḵlaṣunā min ājal ānahu āḥaqa bihi ānahu lam yastaṭʿa malak wa lā šafīʿa ān yaḵlaṣunā ḥatā āṭlanʿa bil-masīḥ wa kalaṣanā wa hadā āl-āumum wa tasalaṭa ʿalīhum....*" Regarding the first sentence of this passage, the NRSV renders the relevant phrase as "he will come … to those in Jacob who turn from transgression" (Is 59:20). The anonymous author appears to be working from the Septuagint or from some version of the Old Testament derived from it. The Masoretic text does not as easily align with his method of argument.

that the Word of God leads humankind out of error, and applies this concept to the work

of Christ:

> Isaiah also prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, "Behold, the Lord
> sitting upon a light cloud, and He will come to Egypt, and the idols of
> Egypt shall be shaken." The Christ went into Egypt clothed with pure
> flesh from Mary whom God purified…. Then He it was who shook the
> idols of Egypt and brought to naught the work of the Devil through it, and
> led them away from the error of Satan to the truth of God and His
> merchandise; and He has made His light to dawn in their hearts. Look,
> when was Egypt saved from the worship of idols and the error of Satan,
> save when the Christ trod it in His mercy and appeared to them in His
> light?[27]

Here the text of Isaiah provides the author with an opportunity to align his often-cited

"error of Satan" very specifically with the primary form of sin with which the Qur'ān is

concerned; namely, the trespass upon the unique honor due to God that is committed by

the worship of idols. Out of all the many ways that the salvific work of Christ may be

expressed (reconciliation between God and humankind, the demonstration of a perfect

life of justice and charity, vicarious atonement for sin, the giving of the Holy Spirit, etc.),

the author has chosen to express Christ's work quite narrowly as the vanquishing of idols.

By characterizing the mission of Christ in this way, the author of *Fī tatlīt* accomplishes

two things simultaneously. First, he perfectly aligns what Christ accomplished with the

Qur'ānic understanding of what is done by the Word of God; i.e., bringing humankind

out of ignorance and into the worship of the one God. Second, using the same rhetorical

technique noted earlier, he turns on its head the fundamental Muslim objection to

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[27] Gibson 23; "*Tabanā Āšʿaīā āīḍān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl haḏā āl-Rabb qāʿad ʿalā saḥāb kafīfah wa yātī Miṣr wa yazalzalu āūṯān Miṣr. Faqad dakala āl-masīḥ ilā Miṣr lābas jasad ṭāhar min Marīam ālatī ṭaharahā Āllah…. Ṯūm hūa āladī zalzala āūṯān Miṣr wa ābṭala ʿamal āl-šīṭān minhā wa hadāhum min ḍalālah Iblīs ilā ḥāq Āllah wa tajāratihi wa āšraqa nūruhu fī qalūbuhum. Fa-ānẓar matā kalaṣat Miṣr min ʿabādah āl-āūṯān wa ḍalālah Iblīs ilā ḥīn waṭāhā āl-masīḥ bi-raḥmatihi wa āṭlʿahum bi-nūruhī?*" See Is 19:1.

Christian doctrine, namely, that the worship of Christ compromises the oneness of God. Rather than creating an idol in competition to God, he seems to argue, the mission of Christ overturned the worship of idols – exactly what a careful student of the Qur'ānic text would expect the Word of God to do.

The author also represents the work of Christ in conformity with the fourth characteristic of the Word of God as represented in the Qur'ān, namely, that it is associated with eschatological judgment. Blending descriptions of the earthly ministry of Christ and images of his role in judgment, he writes:

> He wrought every sign among the children of Israel, and other people, and rewarded men in wisdom and righteousness. He rewarded those who believed in Him with everlasting life and the Kingdom of Heaven, and He rewarded those who rejected Him and did not believe in Him with contempt and sore punishment. Look how it corresponds with the strength that is in the works and signs of the Christ which are written in the Gospel.[28]

It is highly noteworthy that this description of Christ's meting out just desserts to both the faithful and the faithless is bracketed by references to his "signs." Few terms could be more laden with Qur'ānic significance than this term, "signs" (*āīāt*). In the conceptual world of the Qur'ān, signs are the guarantee of true prophethood; Jesus in particular was given by God the ability to "produce clear signs;" the individual verses of the Qur'ān are referred to as "signs;" and finally, the Qur'ān itself in its entirety is regarded in Islam as the sign par excellence of God's salvific activity in the world. Furthermore, it is the individual's response to these signs – faith and submission to God's will on the one hand,

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[28] Gibson 25; "*Wa ʿamala kul āīah fī bunī Īsrāīl wa ġīruhum wa tajāzā āl-nās bil-hikam wa āl-baz. Jazā min āman bihi ḥīāah dāīmah wa malakūt āl-samā. Wa jazā min kafara bihi wa lam yūman bihi hūāb wa ʿaḏāb ālīm. Fa-ānẓar kīf wāfaq bi-qūah ālatī bi-āʿamāl āl-masīḥ wa āīātihi ālatī kutiba fī āl-ānjīl.*"

or rejection of the signs (and by extension, of God) on the other hand – that determine his ultimate destiny. Thus in this passage the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* describes the eschatological role of Jesus in a way that is emphatically Qurʾānic. The passage is a kind of word picture, at the center of which is the Word of God determining the eschatological destiny of human beings based on their response to him; surrounding the Word are the signs wrought by him, the response to which become the measure of each person's standing before God. It is a passage that is particularly striking in its ability to combine fidelity to the Christian doctrinal tradition with Qurʾānic imagery and language.

As with the term "Word," the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* seeks to use the term "Spirit" in a way that is faithful to Christian orthodoxy and yet aligns with the usage of this term in the Qurʾān. As noted above, one of the Qurʾānic characterizations of the Spirit is that it played a special role in the conception of Jesus Christ, a fact which means that this conception is taught by the Qurʾān, at least implicitly, to be unique in human history. Drawing upon this aspect of the Qurʾānic text, the author of the treatise at hand writes:

> He [Habakkuk] prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, "God shall come to Teman, and the Holy One shall be shaded by the wooded mountain." This is the plain and healing prophecy, when God shewed by the tongues of His prophets from what place the Christ should come and from whom He should be born, when His Word and His light should appear to men. Verily Teman is Bethlehem, it is on the right hand of the Holy City. The shady wooded mountain is Mary the Holy, whom God the Holy Ghost overshadowed, and the power of God rested upon her, as the Archangel Gabriel said, when Mary said to him, "Whence shall I have a boy, when a man hath not touched me?" Gabriel said to her, "The Spirit of God shall come down upon thee, and the power of God shall rest upon thee." God agreed to the saying of His Prophet, and His Angel Gabriel when they say this saying about the Christ, and their saying is true.[29]

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[29] Gibson 29; "*Tanabā bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl Āllah min Tīmnā yātī wa āl-Quds min jabal āšʿar yutiẓalal*

Obviously building upon the Qur'ānic idea that God's Spirit was uniquely involved in the

conception of Jesus is no great stretch for the author at hand, since this idea is also central

to the Gospel. However, his treatment of the subject is noteworthy. Mary's question to

the angel as quoted here follows exactly the wording of the Qur'ānic text in surah 19:20,

rather than following the text of the New Testament (Lk 1:34). The archangel's response

as quoted here, however, is not the text found in the following verse of the Qur'ān

(19:21), but instead follows closely the text of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:35a). It would

appear, then, that the author wanted to draw upon the Qur'ānic account, but the response

given by the angel in the Qur'ān would not have sufficed to connect the conception of

Jesus with Habakkuk 3:3. Instead of using either the Lucan or the Qur'ānic text

straightforwardly, then, the author has skillfully woven together an account using

material from both texts. By doing so, he is able to draw upon the Qur'ānic language

concerning Jesus' conception while at the same time implicitly criticizing the Muslim

understanding of this event. While the text of the Qur'ān seems to describe the

conception as an act of special creation (see surah 19:35), the inclusion of the angel's

response to Mary from Luke's Gospel suggests that the event is something quite

different. In fact, by using the language of God's Spirit coming down upon Mary, the

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fa-hadahi āl-nabwah āl-bīnah āl-šāfiah ḥīn bayana Āllah ʿalā āl-lasnah ānbīāhi min āī makān yātī āl-masīḥ wa miman yawalad ād āṭliʿa lil-nās kalimatihi wa nūruhi. Fa-ān Tīmnā hīa Bīt āl-Laḥīm wa hīa ʿalā yamīn Bīt āl-Maqdas. Wa āl-jabal āl-muzilal āl-āšʿar hīa Marīam āl-Maqdasah ālatī zalalahā Āllah Rūḥ āl-Quds wa ḥal bihā qūah Āllah kamā qāl Jabrīl rās āl-mulāīkah ḥīn qālat lahu Marīam āīna yakūn lī ğalām wa lam yamsanī bašar. Qāl lahā Jabrīl Rūḥ Āllah ʿalīki yanzala wa qūah Āllah biki yaḥal. Faqad wāfaqa Āllah qūl nabīhi wa mulākuhi Jabrīl ḥīn yaqūlūn fī āl-masīḥ hadā āl-qūl wa qūluhum āl-ṣādaq." See Hab 3:3.

author is able to bring to the reader's mind the Qur'ānic assertion that Jesus was "God's Word sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him" (4:171).

The prophecy from Habakkuk 3:3 as quoted here appears to be taken from an Arabic text of the Bible based on the Septuagint, since the second half of the verse differs significantly from the Masoretic text but matches that of the Septuagint. (Since the identity of the author at hand is unknown, it is also possible that he had the ability to read Greek and was working directly from some version of the Septuagint and translating the text given there into Arabic.) As has already been noted, the author's frequent citation of Old Testament prophecies is an important element of his overall apologetical strategy. By citing this material which both the Christian and Muslim traditions claim to affirm, he implicitly but insistently poses the question of which tradition is faithful to the prophetic teachings. In this case, he is able to align the prophecy of Habakkuk (at least as rendered in the text he is using) with the words of Mary as given in the Qur'ān and the words of the Archangel Gabriel from Luke 1:35 to highlight the action of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus. By doing so, he deftly aligns his treatment of God's Spirit with a key element of the Qur'ānic characterization of the Spirit, while at the same time calling into question the Muslim understanding of the conception of Jesus.

Furthermore, it is possible that there is another reason for the author's particular selection of Habakkuk 3:3. This is one of the verses that, according to the arguments of some Muslim apologists, prophesy concerning the advent of Muhammad and the establishment of Islam. Working from the Masoretic text, a typical translation of this verse would be, "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran." Some

Muslim commentators have seen in these geographic references a description of the origins of Muhammad in the Arabian Desert and as a result have asserted that this among other biblical passages prophesies the advent of Islam. If such an assertion were familiar to the author of *Fī tatlīt*, he may have been particularly keen to incorporate Habakkuk 3:3 into the treatise for two reasons; first, by drawing upon the Septuagint text or an Arabic version of the Bible based upon it, he could introduce a quite different rendering of this verse, and second, by connecting the prophecy with both the Lucan and the Qur'ānic accounts of the Annunciation to Mary, he would be able simultaneously to undercut the idea that the passage prophesies the rise of Islam and to call into question the Muslim understanding of Jesus' conception, as described above.

If indeed Habakkuk 3:3 was chosen by the author at hand as a source text because it was known to him to be used as a Muslim apologetical source, such a usage would be in parallel to his use of certain Qur'ānic passages. We have already noted that he is particularly concerned to draw upon those texts from the Qur'ān that are generally understood to present the greatest or most explicit challenges to Christian doctrine. In a similar way, if the hypothesis described here is correct, he would be interested in incorporating Habakkuk 3:3 into the treatise specifically because it was used as a Muslim "proof text."

The author of *Fī tatlīt* also seeks to align his use of the term "Spirit" with the second Qur'ānic characterization, namely, the representation of the Spirit of God as the agent of revelation. In a typical passage, the author draws upon Matthew 22:41-46, and writes:

> And the Christ said to them, "How did the prophet David prophesy by the Holy Ghost about the Christ, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put Thine enemies below Thy footstool? If the Christ be the Son of David, then how does David call Him Lord?" The Jews were perplexed, and answered Him not a word. If the Christ were not God of God, He would not have dared to make Himself Lord of David, but the Christ was God of God, He was made flesh of Mary the daughter of David, for she was of the lineage of David, and therefore He was named the Christ. God had promised to David His prophet that the Christ should be of his race. Everything that David the prophet had said happened; verily he spake by the Holy Ghost, who revealed everything to him."[30]

As with the idea that the Holy Spirit was involved in a unique way with the conception of Jesus, this presentation of the Holy Spirit as the agent of revelation is no great stretch for the author, given the traditional doctrine of revelation. But other elements of the passage suggest that he is consciously trying to appropriate this particular characterization of the Holy Spirit for this apologetical strategy. He uses the term "prophet" in reference to David three different times, drawing upon an appellation that is certainly given to David in the Qur'an[31] but which is not a biblical title for the Israelite king. In fact, in his usage of the Gospel of Matthew, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* goes so far as to ascribe to Jesus himself use of the phrase "the prophet David," even though the text of the gospel does not support this. Clearly the author is trying to draw upon the prophetology of the Qur'ān, an

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[30] Gibson 16-17, "*Fa-qāl lahum kīf tanabā Dāūd āl-nabī bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds ʿalā āl-masīḥ: Qāl āl-Rabb lirabbī ājlas yamīnī ḥatā āḍʿa āʿadāka taḥt manṣab qadamīka. Fa-ān kān āl-masīḥ bin Dāūd fa-kīf yadʿaūhu Dāūd rabbān? Fa-tʿaṣat āl-yahūd wa lam yajāwabūhu bi-kalimah. Wa laū lam yakun āl-masīḥ ālah min Āllah lam yajtarā ān yajʿal nafsihi rabbān li-Dāūd walākin kān āl-masīḥ ālah min Āllah tajasada min Marīam bint Dāūd li-ānahā kānat min sabaṭ Dāūd fa-li-ḏalak kān yusimā āl-masīḥ. Wa kān Āllah waʿada Dāūd nabīhi an min ḏarīatika yakūn āl-masīḥ. Wa kān kul šaī takalama Dāūd āl-nabī ānamā takalama bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds ālaḏī kān yūḥī ilīhi kul šaī.*"

[31] See surahs 17:55 and 21:78.

important aspect of which is the "Spirit" as the agent of inspiration and revelation, as described in the discussion of surahs 16, 40, and 42, above.

The description the author gives of the mode of prophecy – that David spoke by the Holy Spirit, who revealed everything to him – also seems to partake of the immediacy and directness of the Qur'ānic concept of prophethood. With the biblical treatment of prophecy, the reader often gets the impression that the prophet may have spoken an utterance with a double-meaning, the full sense of which may have not been immediately clear even to the prophet himself. In other cases, the prophet seems completely unaware of the import of his utterance, which may even be at cross purposes with the speaker's intent.[32] The text of the Qur'ān itself is received by Muslims according to a quite different understanding of the mode of prophecy, in which the prophet consciously and passively receives the text which is to be proclaimed (and later written down) directly from God. The author of *Fī tatlīt* seems in this passage to attempt to accommodate David's words to this Islamic sense of how divine revelation occurs, in a way similar to his description of a book having been "sent down" to the "prophet Moses" noted earlier.

In a passage that follows a similar apologetical trajectory, the author of *Fī tatlīt* writes:

> The faithful Job also prophesied by the Holy Ghost, saying, "It is the
> Spirit of God that hath created me, and in His name He reigns over all; it
> is He who hath taught me understanding." The prophets and saints of God
> have shewn that God and His Word and His Spirit established all things
> and gave life to all things, and it is not fitting for any one who knows what

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[32] See, for example, Jer 31:15 as treated in Matt 2:18, or the prophecy of Caiaphas as recounted in John 11:49-51.

God hath sent down to His prophets, that he should disdain to worship
God and His Word and His Spirit, one God.[33]

Like David, Job is one of the twenty-five prophets referred to as such in the text of the

Qur'ān, and although the author of *Fī tatlīt* does not explicitly call Job "the prophet," by

using the closely related verb *tanabā,* he is clearly fitting Job into the Qur'ānic category,

as already done with David. As with the passage from Matthew 22/Psalm 110, the author

notes that Job prophesies "by the Holy Spirit" and once again characterizes the prophetic

mode in a strongly Qur'ānic way, speaking of what "God has sent down to His prophets."

Moreover, this passage from *Fī tatlīt* deftly ties together two different characterizations of

the Holy Spirit that are part of the author's apologetical strategy. As just shown, the

passage appropriates the Qur'ānic understanding of revelation by the Holy Spirit and the

closely related Qur'ānic understanding of prophethood; additionally, by citing this

particular passage from Job, the author is able to associate with the Spirit the divine

prerogative of giving life. Concern for the power of giving or restoring life as represented

in the Qur'ān will serve a key function in the author's overall apologetical strategy, as

will be demonstrated later. Thus, with his usual concision, the author has connected four

different strands of thought to serve his apologetical objective: the "prophet" Job, a

theoretically common source for both Christians and Muslims; the Qur'ānic concept of

revelation, with its emphasis on the role of the Spirit; the theme of life-giving as a divine

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[33] Gibson 23-24; "*Wa tanabā Āyūb āl-ṣadīq āīḍān bi-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa qāl Rūḥ āl-Rabb āladī kalaqanī wa bi-ismuhu malaka kul šaī. Hīa ālatī tʿalamanī āl-faham. Faqad bayana ānbīā Āllah wa āṣfīāhu ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi āqām kul šaī wa āḥīā kul šaī wa līsa yanbaġī li-āḥid yʿalam mā ānzala Āllah ʿalā ānbīāhi ān yastankaf li-yʿabad Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid.*" The citation from Job is either misquoted or taken from a variant text. It fits most closely with the Septuagint, but the phrase "in His name He reigns over all" appears in neither the LXX nor the Masoretic text. See Job 33:4.

prerogative; and the implicit question running throughout the entire treatise, namely, how to understand the relationship between God, His Word, and His Spirit.

The author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* also draws upon the remaining Qur'ānic characterization of the Spirit, namely, a special role of supporting believers in such a way as to maintain their steadfastness in faith. In fact, he uses language similar to that found in surah 58:22 of the Qur'ān not only to characterize the action of the Spirit, but also the relationship between the Word of God and the Spirit of God:

> He [Christ] sent to the Apostles the Holy Ghost as He had promised them. If He were like Adam or like any man, prophet or otherwise, He could not decree in Heaven, nor could He go up to Heaven and remain on the earth as Adam remained, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses and the Prophets and the Apostles, all of them. But He is the Word and the Light of God, God of God; He came down from Heaven for the salvation of Adam and his race from Satan and his error. He went up to Heaven where He had been in His honour and His dignity, and filled the hearts of men who believed in Him with strength and the Holy Ghost that they might adore God and His Word and the Holy Ghost in Heaven and in earth.[34]

As with so many passages in *Fī taṯlīṯ*, the author here combines a number of different elements to support his apologetical strategy. Most importantly for the point at hand, he uses terminology similar to that found in surah 58:22 in order to align the Christian doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the Qur'ānic usage of the term "Spirit." This alignment then allows him to inject an implicit critique of the Muslim understanding of Jesus as one among the prophets, while at the same time presenting a kind of

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[34] Gibson 14; "*Wa ārsala ilā āl-ḥūārīūn Rūḥ āl-Quds kamā waʿadahum wa laū kān miṯl Ādam āū miṯl āḥid min āl-nās nabīān āū ġīruhu lam yastaṭīʿa ān yaqḍī fī āl-samā wa lā yaṭlʿa ilā āl-samā wa yabqī fī āl-ārḍ kamā baqā Ādam wa Nūḥ wa Ībrahīm wa Mūsā wa āl-ānbīā wa āl-rusul kuluhum. Walākin kalimah Āllah wa nūruhu ālah min Āllah najala min āl-samā bi-kalāṣ Ādam wa ḍarīatihi min Īblī wa ḍalālatihi. Wa ṣaʿada ilā āl-samā ḥīṯ kān fī karāmatihi wa salaṭānihi wa malā qalūb āl-nās ālaḏīn āmnūā bihi qūah wa Rūḥ āl-Quds li-kīmā yasbaḥ Āllah wa kalimatihi wa Rūḥ āl-Quds fī āl-samāwāt wa āl-ārḍ.*"

"Trinitarian economy" of God's salvific activity in the world. By mentioning a number of

the "prophets" affirmed by the Qur'ān[35], the author is able to draw a contrast between

them and Jesus, in that only Jesus was able to send the Holy Spirit to indwell his

followers. By using the appellation "Word of God" again here, the author suggests his

Trinitarian economy of salvation: God has sent His Word into the world, and to those

who believe in that Word, Jesus sends the Spirit. This economy, while drawing upon the

Qur'ānic usages of "Word" and "Spirit" as has been shown here, also stands in contrast to

the Qur'ānic economy, in which the precise relationships between God, His Word, and

His Spirit are left unclear. Besides this entire schema using the terms "Word" and

"Spirit," the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* draws on a number of other Qur'ānic concepts and terms in

order to pursue his apologetical strategy.

The Authority of God

As was noted earlier, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* makes a subtle change of syntax in the

way that he recasts the Trinitarian formula. He does not refer to "God the Word" or "God

the Spirit;" rather, he refers to "God and *His* Word and *His* Spirit" (*Āllah wa*

kalimatihi wa rūḥhi). In doing so, he is not only drawing upon the Qur'ānic uses of

"Word" and "Spirit" as shown above, but also upon a Qur'ānic principle that one might

call "devolved authority." Although the primary theological emphasis of the Qur'ān is the

complete otherness and transcendence of God, there are a number of passages which use

the formula "God and His x" to indicate that God's absolute authority has devolved upon

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[35] See, for example, surahs 2:37, 3:84, 4:125, 7:103-104, 11:25, 19:58, 40:23, and 71:1, among many
similar references.

some entity so truly and completely that to resist or disobey that entity is to resist and disobey God.

One such passage is surah 2:285, which says that, "The messenger has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and the faithful, each one of them, has faith in God and His angels and His books and His messengers [*bi-Āllah wa malāīkatihi wa kutubihi wa rusulihi*]…" The construction of his phrase is highly noteworthy, since the entire string of entities is governed by the preposition *bi-*, which indicates that the object of faith is everything which follows: God, His angels, His books, and His messengers. As previously noted, surah 42:51-52 articulates the Qur'ānic principle of inspiration, in which God speaks to a human being only in a mediated way, through inspiration, a veil, or a messenger. Taken together, these two passages suggest that the mediatory agent through which God communicates with the human being is so closely identified with God's own authority, that the two cannot be distinguished. Having faith in God's word means having faith in the means by which that word is communicated.

A similar passage appears in surah 7 and applies this principle explicitly to Muhammad himself. Verse 58 of this surah reads:

> Say: O people, I am the messenger of God sent to you all, the messenger of Him to Whom belongs lordship of heaven and earth. There is no god but He; He gives life and gives death. So have faith in God and his messenger [*bi-Āllah wa rusūlihi*], the illiterate prophet, who has faith in God and His words [*bi-Āllah wa kalimātihi*], and follow him so that you may be guided.

This verse actually serves as a double-example of the principle here explained, since Muhammad is described as exercising faith in both God and His words, and the people

are exhorted to exercise faith in both God and Muhammad. Perhaps the most striking example of this "devolved authority" is found in surah 33, a surah that is in part concerned with various practical rules of conduct among Muslim believers. Verse 36 of this surah teaches that, "It is not appropriate for any faithful man or woman, when God and His messenger have ruled upon a matter, to have any choice in their matter. Whoever disobeys God and His messenger certainly goes astray in manifest error." In this passage, the verb here translated "ruled upon" has for its subject the phrase "God and His messenger," and there is no distinction whatsoever drawn in the text between the decision-making authority of God and that of His messenger. There is certainly nothing in the text that would allow for a translation such as "when God has ruled upon a matter *through* His messenger," or anything of that sort. Instead, the text suggests a single decision-making authority exercised by God and His messenger. Similarly, at the end of the verse, the person who goes badly astray does so by disobeying "God and His messenger," with the text once again making no distinction whatever between disobeying God and disobeying His messenger.

Clearly the structure of the phrase "God and His Word and His Spirit," the Trinitarian formula used most often in *Fī taṯlīṯ*, draws upon these Qur'ānic uses of the formula "God and his x" to denote devolved authority. Having borrowed this structure, the author connects it with another Qur'ānic usage that connotes God's absolute authority, namely, the throne of God.

The Throne of God

In the language of the Qur'ān, the throne of God is the ultimate symbol of His authority. Other than actual names of God expressing divine attributes, the throne (*'arš* in Arabic) is the term most often associated with God's transcendence. Verses of the Qur'ān that refer to the throne can generally be grouped into three categories. In the first category are verses that mention God's throne in reference to His absolute uniqueness and the fact that there is but one God. In the second are verses that mention God's throne in the context of His identity as the Creator of the entire visible universe. As will be shown later, this is an important association, because the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* makes a great deal of the connections between God's role as Creator, the association of creative powers with Jesus, and the association of God's "Word" with the act of creation. In the third category are a couple of verses that make reference to God's throne in the context of specifically denying the idea of God begetting a son.

A typical example of the first category is surah 23:116-117, which proclaims, "Exalted be God, the King, the Truth. There is no god but He, Lord of the throne of honor! Whoever calls upon another god, along with God, has no proof for such a thing. Indeed, his reckoning will be with his Lord…." In a similar passage, Muhammad is instructed to take consolation in God's greatness when his preaching is rejected by those he would like to win to Islam: "So if they turn away, say: God is sufficient for me. There is no god but He, and in Him I trust. He is Lord of the greatest throne" (surah 9:129). A typical example of the second category, those passages which associate the throne of God with His role as Creator, is surah 10:3, which reads, "Truly your Lord is God, who

created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself upon the throne, directing affairs…." Surah 57 includes a very similar passage which associates the throne not only with God's creative powers, but also with His continuing watchfulness over all of His creation. Verses 4 and 5 of this surah read:

> He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself upon the throne. He knows what enters the earth, and what comes forth from it, what descends from heaven and what rises up to it…. Unto Him is the Lordship of the heavens and the earth, and unto Him are all affairs turned back.

At least one Qur'ānic passage combines both of these concepts, the utter uniqueness of God and His creative power, in conjunction with the throne imagery. Surah 32:4-5 says that "God is He who created the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, in six days; then He established Himself on the throne. There is none besides Him to support you or intervene for you…."

As mentioned above, there is also a passage in the Qur'ān that makes reference to the throne of God in the context of specifically denying the possibility of God begetting a son. Surah 43:81-82 reads: "Say: if the Merciful One had a son, then I would be first among his worshippers. Glorified be the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Lord of the throne, from what they ascribe to Him!" As shown above, the image of God's throne is usually invoked in the Qur'ān as a symbol of His creative power, His absolute uniqueness, or both. In this context, surah 43:81-82 seems to be using the image of the throne to set up an explicit contrast between the God who was capable of creating and administering the visible universe, and a God whose nature would admit of begetting. This contrast suggests two compatible reasons for the importance of the symbol of God's

throne for the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*. First, and most obviously, this contrast stands as a direct

challenge to Christian Trinitarian doctrine, and therefore must be confronted directly.

Second, as noted previously, using those Qur'ānic texts that seem to issue the most

explicit challenges to Christian theology as the raw material for the Christian response

seems to be a key component of this author's apologetical strategy.

The text of *Fī taṯlīṯ* returns numerous times to the image of God's throne, using

this image to underscore the relationship among God, His Word, and His Spirit, that is

being presented. After presenting several Old Testament prophecies teaching that God

would come "in person" to save His people[36], the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* argues that Jesus

Christ is the fulfillment of these prophecies, and uses the image of the throne to explain

how this can be so:

> It is He who came down from Heaven a Saviour to His servants. The
> throne is not divided, for verily God and His Word and His Spirit are on
> the throne, and in every place complete without diminution. The heavens
> and the earth and all that is therein are full of His honour.[37]

With his usual concision, the author here accomplishes several things. First, he neatly

appropriates Qur'ānic terminology and imagery. Not only does he use the term throne

here as the symbol of God's authority, but he connects it with the term "honor," as is

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[36] The prophetic passages cited in this portion of the text include Is 64:1, Ps 80:1-2, Ps 107:20, Hab 2:3 (misquoted), Ps 118:26-27 (also misquoted), and Ps 50:3. Interestingly, this series of citations also includes the following: "There is no intercessor and no king, but the Lord will come and save us." This line does not appear to be taken directly from any Old Testament source, but is similar in terminology to both Is 59:16 and surah 32:4 quoted above. Both *Fī taṯlīṯ* and surah 32:4 use the phrase *lā šafiʿa* ("no intercessor" or "no one to intervene"). Apparently the author was so deeply immersed in Qur'ānic terminology that, when citing Scripture from memory, he conflated Old Testament and Qur'ānic verses.

[37] Gibson 10; "*wa hūa āladī habaṭa min al-samā kalāṣ li-ʿabādihi. Wa lam fāraq al-ʿarš. Fa-ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa ruḥhi ʿalā al-ʿarš wa fī kul makān tām lā yuntaqaṣ. Āmtalata al-samāwāt wa al-ārḍ wa mā fī-himā min karāmatihi.*"

done in the Qur'ān. Second, building upon the use of the terms "Word" and "Spirit" as described above, he raises the question of how God can be on the throne and yet His Word and His Spirit be absent from the throne. In doing so, he takes up the main Qur'ānic argument against Christian doctrine (that Trinitarian doctrine undermines the oneness of God by associating other entities with Him) and inverts it. If God's Word and His Spirit are not upon the throne with him, he implies, then the throne – the Qur'ānic symbol of God's singular authority – is actually divided. Since in the Qur'ān, the throne is associated not only with God's creative power, but also with his continuing administration of the universe, the terminological flourish "the heavens and the earth and all that is therein" (itself another Qur'ānic appropriation), links the image of the throne with the salvific work of God's Word. With this adroit combination of terminology, the author argues that the administration of all things described in the Qur'ān is accomplished in part by the Word having come down to save God's servants. Finally, by placing this passage as the conclusion to a series of Old Testament prophecies, the author implicitly poses the question: which tradition is the legitimate heir and fulfillment of these prophecies? As mentioned previously, the text of the Qur'ān places great stock in the idea that Islam follows upon and reaffirms the preaching of all true prophets throughout history, including the prophets of the Old Testament.

A bit later in the text, the author again uses the theme of God's throne to discuss God's salvific activity in the world, and in this passage he combines Qur'ānic terminology with a more explicit Christian soteriological emphasis:

The Wicked One thought that he would not cease to conquer the race of Adam and weary them, and that no one could save them from his error. It pleased God to destroy him and to trample on him by that Man whom he had tempted and sought to weaken…. God sent from His throne His Word which is from Himself, and saved the race of Adam and clothed Himself with this weak conquered Man through Mary the good, whom God chose from the women of the ages. He was veiled in her, and by that He destroyed the Evil One, and conquered and subdued him…. He boasts not over the race of Adam, for it was a terrible grief when God conquered him by this Man with whom He clothed Himself. If God were to destroy Satan without clothing Himself with this Man by whom He healed him, Satan would not have found grief and remorse.[38]

The author points out that Christians understand the Word of God to be issued from God's throne, the Qur'ānic symbol of God's unique and singular authority. This emphasis is further intensified by the phrase "from Himself" (*minhu*). If the Word is truly from God, and issues forth from the throne, then it is not possible to speak of it as somehow compromising or competing with God's unique authority. By speaking in this way about the Word of God coming into the world, the author simultaneously expresses a Christian understanding of the relationship between the God the Father and God the Word and posits an implicit challenge to the Islamic critique of Trinitarian doctrine. This challenge could be stated as: if the Word of God is the an expression of God's own authoritative will, and issues from God's singular and unique authority, in what sense could devotion to that Word be considered a rival to the unique fidelity that is owed to God alone?

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[38] Gibson 11, "*Wa ẓan āl-kabīṭ ānahu lā yazāl yaqhar ḏariah Ādam wa yatʿabihum wa līsa yastaṭīʿa āḥad ān yaklaṣuhum min ḍalālatihi. Fa-āhiba Allah ān yahalakahu wa yaṭīhu bi-haḏā āl-ānsān alaḏī āftana wa āstaḍaʿafa…. Fa-ārsal Allah min ʿaršuhu kalimatihu alatī hīa minhu, wa kalaṣa ḏarīah Ādam wa labasa haḏā āl-ānsān āl-ḍʿaīf al-maqhūr min Marīam āl-ṭībah ālatī āṣṭafāhā ʿalā nisā āl-ʿaālamīn. Fa-āḥtajab bi-hā wa āhlaka bi-hu āl-šar wa ākbatihu wa kabatihu…. Lā yaftakara ʿalā ḏarīah Ādam šadīd āl-ḥasarah ḥīn qaharahu Āllah bi-haḏā āl-ānsān āladī labasahu. Laū ān Allah āhalaka Iblīs min dūn ān yalbasa haḏā āl-ānsān āladī ṭabihu bihi, lam yakun Iblīs yajad al-ḥasrah āl-nadāmah.*"

Also important in this passage is the author's use of the term "veiled" to describe the relationship between the Word of God and the humanity of Jesus. The reality of Jesus' humanity is emphasized by the reference to "Mary the good," through whom the Word of God was veiled in order to come into the world and defeat Satan. This use of the verb "to be veiled" is significant because it appropriates one of the key terms of the Qur'ānic account of divine revelation and applies it to Jesus. As described above, surah 42:51 teaches that God speaks to humankind only in a mediated or indirect fashion, and one of the ways this occurs is "through a veil." As also noted previously, one of the Qur'ānic emphases about the Word of God is that it brings human beings out of their ignorance and into a right way of acting. By combining the images of the throne, the veil, and the Word, the author if *Fī tatlīt* is able to align Trinitarian doctrine, particularly the Christian account of the so-called "economic" Trinity's activity in the world, with a thoroughly Qur'ānic notion of divine revelation. The Word that came forth from God's throne in order to guide human beings had to be veiled in order to be accessible to humankind, thus the necessity of the humanity of Jesus.

The next passage in which the image of the throne is used seeks to emphasize the perfect unity of action that exists among the persons of the Trinity, or in the terminology of *Fī tatlīt*, among God, His Word, and His Spirit. This passage enumerates the various things that Christ accomplished on the earth, and says that

> He taught them to worship God and His Word and His Spirit, one God and
> one Lord. He taught that the Christ did not come down from Heaven for
> His own salvation, for verily the Word and the Spirit were with God from
> all eternity, and the angels adored God and His Word and His Spirit, one
> Lord who makes all holy, but He came down a mercy and a salvation to

Adam and his race from Satan and his error. The throne is not divided
with God. The God of God was in Heaven ordering things and shewing
mercy to His creatures as He willed.[39]

The emphasis that Christ did not come for his own salvation seems in part a reaction to

the Qur'ānic representation of Jesus appearing before God on judgment day and being

judged along with the rest of humankind.[40] This passage, like so many others in *Fī taṯlīṯ*,

very concisely expresses Christian doctrine – that Christ came to effect the salvation of

others, but was in no need of salvation himself – while posing an implicit challenge to

Islamic belief. For the author of this treatise, the fact that Christ was in need of no

salvation consisted not so much in the fact that he led a sinless human life in perfect

obedience to the Father, but in his very identity as the Word of God, which was with God

from all eternity. Salvation as represented here consists in being with God, and it is not

possible for God to exist without His Word, which is co-eternal with Him. Picking up on

the Qur'ānic identity of Jesus as a "Word from God," already discussed at length above,

the author anticipates a conceptual debate that would later become a critical matter in the

development of Islamic doctrine, namely, whether the Word of God could be considered

eternal. If eternal, then there would appear to be two distinct eternal entities (God and His

Word), which would potentially, from an Islamic point of view, compromise the absolute

oneness of God which is so central to the message of the Qur'ān. If, on the other hand,

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[39] Gibson 12, "*wa āʿalamuhum ān yaʿabadūn Āllah wa kalimatihu wa rūḥhu ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid. Wa āʿalam ān āl-masiḥ lam yanzal min āl-samā li-ḵalāṣ nafsihi laqad kān kalimah wa rūḥ ʿand Āllah min qabal āl-dahar. Wa kānat āl-mulāīkah yasbahūn li-lah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi rabb wāḥid yuqadasa kul wa-lakinuhu nazala raḥmah wa ḵalāṣ li-Ādam wa wa ḏarīatihi min Iblīs wa ḍalālatihi. Wa lam yufāraq āl-ʿarš ʿand Āllah. Wa kān ālah min Āllah fī āl-samā yadabara āl-āmūr wa yaraḥama ḵalqah kīf yašā.*"

[40] See surahs 3:55 and 5:109-119.

the Word of God is considered not-eternal, then the question is raised as to how God existed from all eternity without His Word, and how that Word came into being at some point without positing mutability in God.

The last sentence of the passage quoted picks up on one of the themes closely associated with the Qur'ānic usage of the throne image as described above, namely, the power of God to administer the created world. The author seems to be reacting to an anticipated Muslim critique that if the Word of God were present on the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, then this would cause a theological problem. Either the power of God to oversee and administer the created world would be compromised, or else the "throne" (the singular and unique power of God) would be divided because God's authoritative Word had left the throne and come down to earth. The author of *Fī tatlīt* anticipates such a criticism and attempts to undermine it with the bold assertion that, because the throne of God is not divided, the Word of God was simultaneously on earth in the person of Jesus Christ and in heaven, continuing the divine administration of the created world. Certainly this is a somewhat different mode of expression than is typically found in Christian theology, but it would seem to align with the scriptural testimony about the perfect unity existing between Jesus Christ and God the Father.[41] The conclusion of the passage quoted also uses other Qur'ānic terminology to characterize the actions of Jesus Christ in his perfect union with the throne of God. He is said to have been "showing mercy … as He willed," a combination of verbs that are used many times in the Qur'ān to describe the divine activity.

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[41] See, for example, John 10:30 and John 14:10-11.

In the final passage of *Fī taṯlīṯ* that make use of the throne image, the author is particularly adamant to assert that the unity of God is a Christian doctrine, and to deny any suggestion of Christian polytheism:

> Say not that we believe in two Gods, or that we say there are two Lords. God forbid! Verily God is one God and one Lord in His Word and His Spirit. Nevertheless God inspired His servant and prophet David and shewed him that the Christ is the Word and the Light of God when He appeared to men by His grace. Verily He is God of God, though He has put on flesh. He who obeys Him obeys God, and he who is disobedient to Him, God will put below His feet, that men may know that God and His Christ are on a throne and [have] one honour. Nothing of God is without any other part.[42]

This passage brings together a number of terms and concepts that the author of has been using throughout the treatise. As he has done before, he combines the terms throne and honor, just as the Qur'ānic text does, to express the absolutely unique authority of God. He again invokes the Old Testament prophets, in this case particularly represented by David, to suggest that only Christian doctrine regarding the relationship between God and Jesus Christ is faithful to the prophetic tradition, a key point given the Qur'ān's insistence that its teachings are a reaffirmation of previous authentic prophecy. Although the author does not here use the terminology of God's revelation being "veiled," that idea is called to mind by his reference to Christ having "put on flesh" in order to "appear to men." Finally there is another reference to eschatological judgment which, as demonstrated above, is associated in the Qur'ān with God's Word. Having woven together these

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[42] Gibson 16, "*Wa lā taqūl ānā nūman bi-ālāhīn āu naqūl rabbīn. M'aāḏ Āllah. Ānamā Āllah ālah wāḥid wa rabb wāḥid bi-kalimatihi wa rūḥhi. Wa-lākin Āllah āūḥī ilā ʿabduhu wa nabīhi Dāūd wa bayana lahu ān āl-masīḥ kalimah Āllah wa nūruhi āḏ āṭlʿa li-lnās bi-raḥmatihi. Fa-ānahu ālah min Āllah wa ān kān labasa jasad. Fa-man āṭāʿahu faqad āṭāʿa Āllah wa man ʿaṣāhu fa-Āllah jāʿalahu taht qadamīhu li-yaʿalam āl-nās ān Āllah wa masīḥhī fī ʿarš wa karāmah wāḥida. Wa līsa šaī min Āllah bʿaḍuhu dūn bʿaḍu.*"

previously used terms and concepts, the author concludes the passage with his coup de grâce, the declaration that "nothing of God is without any other part." Although the use of the term "part" in reference to God may be shocking to the Western Christian accustomed to speaking of God's absolute simplicity, the author's point is clear: it is not possible to imagine some part of God existing in one mode or place, while some other part of Him exists in another mode or place. Rather, Christians believe that, just as the Qur'ān taught, the Word of God must be veiled in order to be accessible to humankind, and when this word took the veil of Jesus' humanity, the perfect unity between God and His Word was not broken or violated.

The Power to Give or Restore Life

As has been noted earlier, the author of *Fī tatlīt* is also quite interested in the Qur'ānic treatment of some of Jesus' miracles, particularly with regard to the ability to give or sustain life. There are two Qur'ānic themes which provide the background of this interest, namely, the unique divine prerogative of creation and the representation of God as the Giver of sustenance.[43] The text of the Qur'ān explicitly sets up a contrast between the power to create as a key attribute of the one true God and the pretensions of idols. For example, surah 13:16 reads:

> Say: "Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?" Say: "God." Say: "Do
> you indeed take others than Him, who have no ability for benefit or for

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[43] There are at least sixty-nine Qur'ānic passages having to do with God's unique ability to create, with God as the provider of sustenance, or combining these two themes. See, for example, 2:21-22, 2:29, 2:57-60, 2:172, 2:212, 3:37, 8:27, 5:88, 5:114, 6:2-3, 6:73, 6:101-102, 6:142, 6:151, 7:32, 7:54, 7:160, 8:26, 10:31, 10:59, 10:93, 11:6, 11:88, 13:16, 13:26, 14:32, 15:19-20, 15:28, 15:85-86, 16:3, 16:56, 16:72, 16:114, 17:30-31, 17:70, 17:99, 20:81, 22:34, 23:91, 24:38, 25:2, 25:58-59, 27:60-64, 28:57, 28:82, 29:17, 29:60-62, 30:37-40, 34:24, 34:39, 35:3, 36:81, 39:4, 39:52, 39:62, 40:13, 40:62-67, 41:9, 42:12, 42:19, 42:27, 55:14, 45:16, 51:58, 57:4, 59:24, 64:3-4, 67:15, and 67:21.

> harm, even for themselves?" … Do they make for God partners who have created even as He has created, so that their creation and His creation seemed similar to them? Say: "God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Almighty."

The Qur'ān also links this unique divine attribute of creation with the attribute of providing sustenance to creatures in general and to humankind in particular. For example, surah 40:61-64 describes God as follows:

> It is God who made the night for you to rest in, and the light of day so that you may see, for God has favor toward the people; yet most of the people do not give thanks. Such is God, your Lord, the Creator of all things; there is no God besides Him…. It is God who made for you the earth as an abode, and the heavens as a canopy; has formed you, and made your forms excellent, and provided you with sustenance of good things. Such is God, your Lord, so glory to God, Lord of all creation.

In addition to describing the power to create as the divine attribute par excellence, and linking this attribute with that of providing sustenance, the Qur'ānic text also draws an explicit contrast between the ability to create and the quality of begetting. Surah 6:101 says, "Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can there be a son for Him who has no spouse? He created all things, and He is the One who knows all things." Surah 25:1-2 almost exactly echoes the same understanding of God: "Glory to Him who sent down upon His servant the Criterion [i.e., the Qur'ān] as a warning to all creation, He to whom belongs the Lordship of the heavens and the earth. He has taken no son, nor does He have a partner in His dominion. He created all things and decreed their estimation."

Against this Qur'ānic background, the author of *Fī tatlīt* is keen to take advantage of the story of the boy Jesus making live birds from clay, as recounted in surah 3:49.

Citing this ability to create, and linking it with both the provision of sustenance and other

divine prerogatives, the author writes:

> You will find in the Coran, "And he spake and created from clay like the form of a bird, and breathed into it, and lo! it was a bird by permission of God." He forgave trespasses, and who forgives trespasses but God? He satisfied the hungry, and no one does that nor provides food but God. You will find all this about the Christ in your Book; He gave the Apostles the Holy Ghost, and gave them authority over devils and over all sickness. No one gives the Holy Ghost but God, He who breathed into Adam, and lo! he was a man with a living soul."[44]

In this passage the author commits a bit of verbal legerdemain, as he smoothly elides

Qur'ānic testimony about Jesus (the creation of the bird) with New Testament references

(forgiving sins, bequeathing the Holy Spirit on the apostles, etc.). Upon careful analysis,

however, it becomes clear that the author is not merely "playing fast and loose" with his

source materials, but creating a dense and tightly interwoven fabric of concepts and

allusions. First, he clearly wants to show that even the Qur'ān itself testifies that the

attribute that most perfectly expresses God's utter uniqueness, the ability to create, was in

some way resident in the person of Jesus. Second, he carefully aligns the description of

the bird's creation by Jesus with that of Adam by God, calling attention to the parallelism

which exists between the Qur'ānic and Old Testament texts. Third, in a way that is not

obvious in translation, he has also associated the giving of the Holy Spirit to the apostles

with these other two texts. Just as the Greek *pneuma* can be translated either "breath" or

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[44] Gibon 12-13; "*Wa āntum tajadūn fī āl-Qur'ān wa qāl wa k̲alaqa min āl-ṭīn kahīah āl-ṭīr fa-nafak̲a fīhi fa-āḏā hūa ṭīr bi-āḏan Āllah. Wa ḡafara āl-ḏanūb wa man yaḡfar āl-ḏanūb ālā Āllah? Wa āšb'a min āl-jū'a wa līsa y'amal haḏā wa lā yarzaq ālā Āllah. Wa āntum tajadūn kuluhu min āmar āl-masīḥ fī kitābukum wa ā'aṭā āl-ḥūārīūn Rūḥ āl-Quds wa salaṭahum 'alā āl-šīāṭīn wa 'alā kul maraḍ. Wa līsa y'aṭī Rūḥ āl-Quds ālā Āllah. Hūa ālaḏī nafak̲a fī Ādam fa-āḏā hūa ānsān ḏā nafas ḥīah.*"

"spirit" depending upon context, so also the Arabic term *rūḥ* can be translated with either of these terms. Thus the passage can be understood as a kind of tripartite "frame" consisting of three instances of the breath of life being given (by Jesus to the bird, by Jesus to the apostles, and by God to Adam), with other expressions of divine prerogative (forgiving sins, providing sustenance, and power over devils) interwoven on this "frame." Furthermore, the frame is so constructed as to refer implicitly to each of the three "books" given by God as they are mentioned in the Qur'ān – the Qur'ān itself, the New Testament/*Ānjīl*, and the Old Testament/*Taūrāah.*

The author is probably also drawing upon another Qur'ānic story about Jesus having to do with sustenance. Surah 5:114-115 records a story that must have interested the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ,* both for its apparent echo of certain gospel themes and for its relevance on the question of the identity of Jesus. The passage reads:

> Lo, the disciples said: "O Jesus, son of Mary, can your Lord send a table down to us from heaven?" Jesus said: "Fear God, if you are faithful." They said: "We want to eat from it, and satisfy our hearts, and know that you have told us the truth, and to be among the witnesses thereof." Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O God our Lord, send down to us a table from heaven, that there may be a feast for us, for the first and the last of us, and a sign from you; and provide sustenance for us, for You are the best provider of sustenance." God said: "I will send it down to you, and if afterward anyone among you does not have faith, I will punish him with a punishment that I have not applied to anyone in all creation."

The linkage of the term "sign" with the provision of sustenance in a passage having to do with Jesus and his disciples brings to mind the gospel story found in John 6:1-25. In this passage, Jesus miraculously provides food for a crowd of five thousand people from five barley loaves and two fish. When the crowds later seek him out on the other side of Lake

Capernaum, Jesus tells them that, "You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill." It is quite true that the Qur'ānic story quoted here makes a clear distinction between God and Jesus, and presents the miracle as being requested by Jesus and performed by God, rather than being performed by Jesus directly. Implicit in the passage, however, is the fact that Jesus was able to obtain from God a miraculous provision of sustenance that the disciples were not able to obtain directly. For the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*, the point here would be Qur'ānic evidence linking the divine attribute of providing sustenance closely with Jesus, and doing so in a way that distinguishes the prayers of Jesus from those of his disciples.

Furthermore, there is a second reason that the Qur'ānic passage quoted above would have been of particular interest to the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*. The story of the table from heaven is followed immediately by a passage that addresses the idea of worshipping Jesus. Verse 116 reads:

> And lo, God said: "O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as gods, in place of God'?" He said: "Glory to You! It could not be that I would say what I have not the right to say; and if I had said it, You would have known. For indeed, You know what is in my soul, and I do not know what is in Your soul. For You know the hidden things.

For a Christian theologian interested in how the Qur'ān treats this attribute of providing sustenance, it must have seemed that the Qur'ānic text itself is rather defensive on this point. No sooner is Jesus presented as being able to bring about the provision of a table from heaven in a way the disciples could not, than the text presents him as saying that He should not be worshipped. Given the near proximity of these two things in the Qur'ānic text, it is not surprising that the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* lists the provision of sustenance among

the divine attributes associated with Jesus. Nor could it have been lost on him that verse 116 addresses an attitude about Jesus that would have been unknown among orthodox Christians, on two counts. First, the passage suggests that whatever worship is directed to Jesus is a direct replacement for the worship that would otherwise be offered to God. Second, it suggests that the worship offered to Jesus by Christians is offered equally to his mother. Thus this surah associates Jesus with the miraculous provision of sustenance, and then immediately follows up the association with a passage forbidding the worship of Jesus, but doing so in such terms as any orthodox Christian could affirm and agree with.

This point is significant because the theological goal of the author throughout the treatise at hand is to affirm Trinitarian doctrine in a way that emphasizes the oneness of God and is, to the highest degree possible, in keeping with Qur'ānic terminology and concepts. In fact, the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* sets this whole question of the exercise of the divine prerogative of creation and sustenance of life in a traditional Christian interpretation of the biblical creation account. Early in the treatise he writes:

> It is written also in the beginning of the Law, which God sent down to His prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then he said, "The Spirit of God was upon the waters." Then He said, by his Word, "Let there be light"; and there was light…. So God shewed in the beginning of the book which He sent down to His prophet Moses, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God, and that God, may He be blessed and exalted! created all things, and gave life to all things by His Word and His Spirit. We do not say three Gods….. but we say that God and His Word and His Spirit are one God and one Creator.[45]

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[45] Gibson 3-4; "*Wa maktūb āīḍān fī rās āl-Taūrāah ālatī ānzaluhā Āllah ʿalā Mūsā nabīhi fī Ṭūr Sīnā badū kalaqa Āllah āl-samā wa āl-ārḍ. Ṯum qāl Rūḥ Āllah kān ʿalā āl-mīāh. Ṯum qāl bi-kalimatihi nūr fa-kān nūr…. Fa-qad bayana Āllah fī āūl kitāb ānzaluhu ʿalā nabīhi Mūsā ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa ān Āllah tabārak wa tʿaālā kalaqa kul šai wa āḥīā kul šaī bi-kalimatihi wa rūḥhi. Wa lasnā naqūl ṯalaṯah ālāha ... walākinā naqūl ān Āllah wa kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ālah wāḥid wa kāliq wāḥid.*"

By interpreting the creation account given in Genesis in this Trinitarian fashion, the author not only grounds his apologetical strategy in the theoretically common ground of the Mosaic books, but also provides an explanation for the association of the divine attributes of creation and sustenance of life with Jesus in the Qur'ānic text. Having drawn upon all of the Qur'ānic material about the Word of God, as shown above, the author is able to present Jesus as the creative and life-giving Word through which God's distinctive attributes are exercised. The emphasis that God, His Word, and His Spirit are not only "one God" but also "one Creator" is an implicit challenge to surah 5:116 and its suggestion that worship directed to Jesus is "in place of" worship of God. How is it, the author seems to ask, that the Qur'ān can represent the giving and sustaining of life as the divine attributes par excellence, associate them with Jesus, and commend worship of God but forbid worship of His Word, through which these attributes are exercised?

In conclusion, the anonymous author of *Fī ta<u>th</u>ī<u>th</u> Āllah āl-wāḥid* called upon a deeply conversant knowledge of the Qur'ān in order to articulate his defense of Trinitarian doctrine. He interwove biblical material, particularly from the Old Testament, with the Qur'ānic uses of the terms "Word" and "Spirit" to build an argument that only a Trinitarian understanding of God could make intelligible both the teachings of the prophets and the expectations of God's Word and God's Spirit that could be derived from the Qur'ān. Three aspects of this author's apologetical technique were to become standard methodology for the other Arabophone Christian theologians to be considered here: placing Muslims in the dilemma of either denying Qur'ānic language about God or

else affirming the theological integrity of Trinitarian doctrine; making heavy use of Old Testament material to implicitly but constantly challenge Muslims as to which religious tradition could credibly claim to be the theological heir of the prophets; and inverting Qur'ānic "proof texts" and other elements of Islamic discourse, including the ontological chasm existing between God and His creation, to be the basis of Trinitarian arguments.

Chapter 2: Theodore Abū Qurrah

The texts to be considered next are the writings of Theodore Abū Qurrah, a

Melkite theologian and controversialist of the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

Unfortunately little is known with certainty of the details of Abū Qurrah's life and career,

because he provides little information about himself and the only third-party references

about the man and his life consist of what John C. Lamoreaux describes as "short notices

in a variety of sources, almost all of which are late and hostile to their subject."[1] It is

known with some certainty that Theodore served as the Melkite bishop of Haran, a

Mesopotamian city with an astonishingly diverse religious environment, about which

more will be said shortly. Sidney Griffith, Ignace Dick, and a number of other scholars

give credence to the report that Theodore had also been a monk of the famous Judean

monastery of Mar Sabas[2], but Lamoreaux considers this to be unlikely and the text from

which this tradition is taken to be "naively legendary."[3] He further suggests that the text

likely confused Abū Qurrah with another Theodore who, like Abū Qurrah, was also from

Edessa. The dates of Theodore's birth and death are unknown, but the extant references

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[1] John C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah: Library of the Christian East, Volume I* (Provo UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), xii.

[2] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic (*Aldershot UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 271.

[3] Lamoreaux xiii.

suggest that his career as an apologetical theologian began during the reign of the caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) and lasted at least until the reign of al-Maʿmūn (813-833).[4]

Theodore Abū Qurrah occupies an interesting position in the development of Arabophone Christian theology, in that the extant texts indicate that he wrote in both Greek and Arabic. Whereas one of his primary influences, John of Damascus, had written in Greek although living in the new Muslim empire, and had lived within a Byzantine ecclesiastical and theological tradition, Theodore Abū Qurrah "wrote in Arabic, with an eye to the Muslim *mutakallimūn* [theologians] of Basrah, Kufa, and Baghdad."[5] Indeed, the Muslim community seems to have done a better job of preserving Abū Qurrah's memory as a theologian than his own Melkite community, since we know of his participation in both Christian-Muslim debates and internecine Christian controversies in part from references found in the bibliographical writings of Ibn āl-Nadīm (tenth century) and ʿAbd āl-Jabbār āl-Hamadhāni (tenth and early eleventh centuries).[6] Thus the writings of Abū Qurrah, together with the anonymous text *Fī tathlīth* considered above, can be considered the earliest documents attempting to formulate a natively Arabophone expression of Christian doctrine, in conscious dialogue with the Islamic religious milieu in which the documents were written.

As mentioned above, the Haran in which Theodore lived, ministered, and wrote was a place of striking religious diversity. In addition to the Muslim majority, there were

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[4] Griffith, *Beginnings*, 271.

[5] Griffith, *Beginnings*, 272.

[6] Lamoreaux, xvii.

representatives of all three of the Arabophone Christian "denominations" – the Chalcedonian Melkite church, the non-Chalcedonian Jacobite community, and the non-Chalcedonian Church of the East. Finally, there was even a newly resurgent Neoplatonic paganism competing for the religious adherence of Haran's citizens.[7] Against this polyglot theological backdrop, Theodore had a number of distinct agendas as an apologist: the defense of monotheism against paganism, the defense of Christianity against both Judaism and Islam, and the defense of Chalcedonian Christology against the non-Chalcedonian doctrinal expressions of both the Jacobite church and the Church of the East. As a result, he wrote treatises on a wide range of theological topics and directed to an array of audiences, from broad accounts of how to discern the true faith from among the variety of religious expressions available in his time and place (e.g., *On the Existence of God and the True Religion* and *On the Method of the Knowledge of God*) to treatments of quite narrow and specific doctrinal questions (e.g., *Letter to David the Monophysite* and *On Free Will*). Here we will concern ourselves only with those writings of Theodore Abū Qurrah's which bear upon the question at hand: the development of an Arabophone Christian Trinitarian theology which drew upon Qur'ānic and Islamic terminology and concepts. Using the titles by which John C. Lamoreaux has made them known to the English-speaking world, the relevant treatises include *On the Method of the Knowledge of God*, *On the Death of Christ*, *On Our Salvation*, *Theologus Autodidactus*, and particularly *On the Trinity*.

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[7] Lamoreaux, xi.

Abū Qurrah's Appropriation of Islamic Terminology

The first characteristic to note about these writings of Theodore Abū Qurrah is the degree to which he has taken pains, like the anonymous author of *Fī taṭlīṯ*, to express himself in terms that would resonate with a Muslim reader, or even with an Arabophone non-Muslim who was under the influence of the Muslim religious discourse. A crucial example is how he frames the question of determining the true religion from among the many religious traditions competing for the attentions of his intended audience. In the treatise translated and published by Lamoreaux under the title *Theologus Autodidactus*, Abū Qurrah reviews briefly the teachings and theological emphases of Haran's Neoplatonic pagans, the Magians, the Samaritans, the Jews, the Christians, the Manicheans, the Marcionites, the Bardaisanites, and finally the Muslims. Theodore represents the Muslims' response to the teachings of all the previously mentioned groups as, "Don't listen to any of those you just met! They're just a bunch of infidels who associate partners with God."[8] By placing the Muslims last in his recounting of the various religious traditions he mentions, and by formulating the Muslim claim about all the other groups in this way, Theodore gives a central place in his treatise to the Muslim claim that only Islamic doctrine preserves and honors the oneness of God. Furthermore, given the theological variety among the groups described, by singling out this allegedly common trait, Theodore indicates how central to the theological debates of his day were the issues around the unicity of God.

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[8] Lamoreaux, 5; the original Arabic is unpublished and unavailable.

In this same text, Abū Qurrah sets the stage for discerning which religion is true by postulating what one can presume about the way God would act toward His creation, given what we know about the divine nature. In other words, he assumes a methodology in which one examines the natural order, derives from that examination some conclusions about God's nature, and then uses those conclusions as the basis for one's assumptions about the way that God would go about revealing Himself and His will to humankind. In describing this procedure, Abū Qurrah casts everything he says in a thoroughly Islamic conceptual framework:

> Because God is kind and generous, when He saw His creation deviating from the true worship, He would have sent them messengers and a book, both in order to show them the true worship and to return them to it from their sins. And yet, there are many messengers and many books, and they disagree with one another! One of two things must be the case: either not even one of these messengers has come from God, or there is among them just one true messenger. Because of what we know about God's generosity and about how He cares for His creation, the latter must be the case.[9]

One can discern even in this short passage at least three key concepts from Islamic soteriology. First, there is the notion that humankind tends to sink into error regarding authentic worship and that the main thrust of God's salvific action in the world is to bring humankind back to right worship of Himself. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, this guidance of humankind out of ignorance (Arabic *jāhalīah*) and into right worship is one of the primary Qur'ānic emphases about the Word of God. Second, there is the idea that this guidance into right worship is accomplished by the sending of "messengers and a book." This terminology immediately calls to mind such Qur'ānic passages as surahs 2:87, 2:285, 5:110, 21:12, 42:52, and 58:22, all of which have already

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[9] Lamoreaux 6; the original Arabic is unpublished and unavailable.

been quoted above. These passages characterize the salvific action of God in the world as the sending of messengers, the sending down of a Book, or both. It is significant that a Christian theologian of Theodore Abū Qurrah's time, with so many conceptual choices available to describe the economy of salvation (the offering of sacrifice, the establishment of communion, the calling of a covenant people, etc) would select these rather emphatically Qur'ānic terms when describing how one would suppose God to act, based upon what we can discern of His nature. He clearly wants to establish common ground using explicitly Islamic terms before moving into a more detailed discussion of how to discern among the various messengers and books purporting to bear God's self-revelation.

Abū Qurrah also makes use of the Islamic conceptual framework in his short treatise *On the Characteristics of the True Religion*, which is similar in theme and content to portions of *On the Existence of God and the True Religion*. He takes the same strategy in this shorter treatise of arguing that one can discern from the divine attributes how we might expect God to accomplish His salvific agenda in the world, and then by comparing the various religious traditions to these conclusions, determine which of them represents what God actually has done and revealed. In pursuing this line of reasoning, Abū Qurrah posits three essential characteristic marks of the true faith: first, that it would be universal, with messengers having been sent to all nations and peoples of the world; second, that the messengers would be validated by the performance of signs and wonders (a common assertion among Christian apologists and a sore spot for Muslims, since no one claimed Muhammad to have been a thaumaturge), and third, that the messengers sent

by God would deliver their messages in the native tongues of the peoples to whom they

preached. This third characteristic is particularly noteworthy for the purpose at hand:

> The third characteristic is that God's messengers must instruct the nations
> to which they are sent in their native tongues, so that those nations might
> understand them and receive what they bring. Why is this? If God were
> not to give the messengers He sends to human beings the power to address
> them in an understandable manner, He would not have a just claim against
> them on the day of the resurrection should they declare His messengers
> liars and not believe and accept their message. In short, if God were to
> punish the nations that did not accept His messengers, notwithstanding
> that those messengers had addressed them in an unintelligible fashion, He
> would no longer be just.[10]

While this is a reasonable supposition that fits well into the overall construct of

Abū Qurrah's argument, it is also a clever way to address a Muslim audience. First, it

aligns his argument with a key aspect of the Islamic understanding of the Qur'ān. It will

be remembered that one of the basic tenets of Islam was that the preaching of

Muhammad was no new religion, but simply the same message preached by all of God's

authentic messengers to the various nations, but *this time rendered in the Arabic tongue*.

The text of the Qur'ān itself emphasizes this point: "The Book that elucidates – We have

made it as a Qur'ān in Arabic, in order that you may become wise."[11] Similar statements

are made in surahs 16:102-103 and 20:113, both of which emphasize the clarity and

accessibility of the Arabic in which the Qur'ān is rendered.[12]

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[10] Lamoreaux 56; the original Arabic is unpublished and unavailable.

[11] Surah 43:2-3: "*Wa āl-kitāb āl-mubīn anjaʿalanāhu Qur'ānān ʿarabīān li-ʿalakum tʿaqilūn.*"

[12] Surah 16:102-103 says, "The Holy Spirit has brought it down from your Lord, as the Truth to make firm those who believe…. This is in the clear Arabic tongue; *nazalahu rūh āl-quds min Rabbik bi-āl-haq li-yaṭbit āladīn āmnūā.... hadā lisān ʿarabīah mubīn.*" Surah 20:113 says , following a passage about the Last Judgment, "Therefore we have sent it down, an Arabic Qur'ān, and promulgated in it some of the threats of judgment….; *wa kadālik ānzalnāhu Qur'ānān ʿarabīān wa ṣarafnā fīhi min āl-waʿaīd....*"

Second, Theodore makes this claim while engaged in the project of being one of the first to write Christian theology in Arabic. So at the same time that he asserts that this linguistic accessibility is a necessary characteristic mark of the true religion, Theodore by the very fact of his writing causes Christianity to fit this requirement. This somewhat ironic stratagem is important to consider, since there is no known Arabic version of the New Testament or Arabic Christian liturgy prior to Abū Qurrah's time. This previous dearth of articulation of the Christian message in Arabic would leave Christianity open to a charge that it did not possess the third characteristic described by Abū Qurrah, but for the very project on which he is engaged. Thus the inclusion of this third characteristic affirms an important Islamic soteriological principle while at the same time obviating the idea that Christianity was not proclaimed in Arabic.

A final example of Theodore Abū Qurrah's attempts to use terminology and concepts that would resonate with Muslims or others under the influence of the Arabophone Muslim discourse is his use of a Qur'ānic image already familiar from its appearance in *Fī tathlīt*: the throne of God. As we have seen above, the anonymous author of that treatise used the throne of God, and its importance as a Qur'ānic expression of God's absolute authority and uniqueness, to pose a dilemma about how God could sit on the throne, and yet His Word and Spirit be absent from it. Theodore displays his knowledge of this important Qur'ānic image but makes use of it in a somewhat different apologetical stratagem. In his treatise *On Our Salvation*[13], he quotes a number of Old

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[13] Lamoreaux surmises that the texts appearing as the sixth, seventh, and tenth treatises in Constantin Bacha's edition of Theodore Abū Qurrah's writings originally constituted a single treatise and has published them this way in English with the title *On Our Salvation*.

Testament passages referring to God's presence on the throne, thus linking the Old

Testament and Qur'ānic images, and then writes:

> I do not suppose that the people of faith will disagree with the prophets
> about God's sitting on a throne. At the same time, none of them can say
> that because of His sitting on a throne He is not everywhere in heaven.
> Rather, all of us know that God is in every place and that He fills the
> whole of heaven, notwithstanding that He shows Himself to His angels in
> heaven only from the throne, as well as that it is to that place that the
> angels lift praise to God because of His residing there – and they do not do
> this in ignorance.[14]

Abū Qurrah makes use of this image of the throne not to build a case for the

Trinity, as did the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*, but instead to defend the doctrine of the Incarnation.

After the foregoing passage, he goes on to build an analogy between the simultaneous

presence of God on the throne and in all places, and the presence of the Son in a human

body while at the same time retaining the divine attribute of infinity. After building his

analogy, Theodore challenges the Muslims directly, although not by name:

> How do those who disagree with us deny that God resides in the body that
> He took from the pure Virgin Mary, while they say that God sits on the
> throne in heaven? It is incumbent on them either not to find fault with such
> as those who say this or not to speak like those who find fault.[15]

Although these passages are not directed at developing his Trinitarian doctrine,

they are significant for the immediate question at hand, which is Abū Qurrah's interest in,

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[14] Lamoreaux 136-37; "*Wa lastu āẓun ān āḥdān min āhl āl-āīmān yuḥālifuhum fī dalak. Wa lā āḥad minhumyaqdar ān yaqūl ān Āllah li-jalūsuhu ʿalā āl-karasī lā yakūn fī kul muḍʿa min āl-samāʿ bal nʿalam kulunā ān Āllah fī kul āl- muḍʿa wa nʿalam ānuhu mālā āl-samāʿ kulhā ġīr ānuhu lā yabdū li-lmulāʿkatihi fī āl-samāʿ ilā min āl-ʿaršwa ilā mā hunāk yarfʿaūn āl-tamjīd li-lah li-ḥalūl Āllah fīhi wa hum lā yajhalūn.*"

[15] Lamoreaux 137; "*Fa-mā bāl āl-muḥālafīn li-nā yankarūn li-lah āl-ḥalūl fī āl-jasad āl-mān ḥūḏ min Marīam āl-ʿaḍrā āl-maṭharah wa hum yaqūlūn ān Āllah jalasa ʿalā āl-ʿarš fī āl-samāʿ. Wa qad kān ʿalīhum āmā ān lā yʿaībūā miṯl ālaḏīn yaqūlūn. Wa āmā ān lā yaqūlūā miṯl ālaḏīn yaʿaībūn.*"

and aptitude for, making use of Qur'ānic and Islamic concepts and terminology. His

argument demonstrates sufficient familiarity with the text of the Qur'ān to borrow from it

an important image, the throne of God, align that image with similar usages from the Old

Testament, and then put it to use in his apologetical strategy. One can almost imagine a

sly smile creasing his face as he wrote the line, "I do not suppose that the people of faith

will disagree with the prophets…." Like the author of *Fī tatlīt*, Theodore implicitly

challenges his Muslim readers about their claim to be the authentic heirs of the

theological and spiritual legacy of the prophets. He even ends the first passage cited

above with a Qur'ānic flourish, pointing out that the angels cannot be considered to act in

ignorance, the very term that Muslims used to describe the general state of the world

before the advent of Muhammad's preaching.

Abu Qurrah's Position in the Development of Christian Arabic Writings

The second characteristic of Theodore Abū Qurrah's writings is that he clearly

belongs to the second period of Arabophone Christian apologetical writing as described

by Samir Khalil Samir; namely, the period characterized by a blend of scriptural and

philosophical approaches. On the one hand, he is eager to take the same approach as the

author of *Fī tatlīt*, placing his Muslim readers on the horns of a dilemma by using biblical

evidence, especially from the prophets, for the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, in *On

Our Salvation*, he marshals citations from Genesis, the Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Baruch,

Micah, and Hosea, as well as Matthew, John, and Hebrews, for the idea that Christ was

divine and co-eternal with God the Father. In a typical passage, he quotes Isaiah 48:12-16

(in a translation that seems derived from the Septuagint) and comments on it thus:

> God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Hearken to me, O Jacob, nay, Israel,
> whom I called. I am the first and I am forever. My hand laid the
> foundation of the earth, and my right hand propped up the heavens; I shall
> call them and they will stand together, and all of them will assemble and
> hear. Who declared this to them? Because He loved you, the Lord fulfilled
> His intention from Babylon, to uproot the seed of the Chaldeans. I spoke, I
> called, I am the one who brought this one and prospered her way. Draw
> near to me and hear: I have not spoken in secret. From the time it came to
> be, I have been there; and the Lord has sent me and His Spirit." Who is
> this one who was the first and forever, who laid the foundation of the earth
> and propped up the heavens and called Babylon and established her way;
> and now the Lord sent Him and His Spirit? This can only be the eternal
> Son, who was sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit, when He became
> incarnate and was born of the Virgin Mary.[16]

In the treatise *On the Trinity*, Abū Qurrah takes a similarly scriptural approach,

particularly grounded in Qur'ānic terminology about the pre-Islamic scriptures: "We have

already shown you, in this treatise in brief, elsewhere in detail, that everyone must

believe in the gospel, the law of Moses, and the intervening books of the prophets."[17] He

seems at pains here to refer to those scriptures affirmed by Christians in a way that

echoes the Qur'ān and emphasizes that they are the theological common ground of

Christians and Muslims. His use of the term *āl-ānjīl* allows him to refer to the New

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[16] Lamoreaux 146; "*Qāl Āllah fī Āšʿaīā āl-nabī yā Yʿaqūb bal yā Āsrāʾīl āladī dʿawatihi. Ānā āl-āwal wa ānā ilā āl-ābd. Wa yadī ālatī āusasat āl-ārḍ wa yamīnī ālatī ṣalabat āl-samāʾ ādʿawahum fa-yanhaḍūn mʿaān wa yajtamʿaūn kulhum fa-yasmʿaūn. Man āḫbarhum bi-hadā āl-Rābb muḥabak qaḍā bi-hamatihi min Bābal li-yastā ṣul zarāʿa āl-Haladānīn. Ānā qalat. Āna dʿawat. Ānā āladī ātītu bi-hadā wa ānjaḥat ṭarīquha. Āqtarabūā minī wa āsmʿaūā ānā lam ātakalam ḫufīān wa munẓu kānit lam āzal hunāk wa āl-Rabb ārsalunī wa Rūḥhi. Fa-man hadā āladī hūa āl-āwal wa ilā āl-ābd āladī āsasa āl-ārḍ wa ṣalaba āl-samāʾ wa dʿaā Bābal wa waḍaʿa ṭarīquhā wa ālān āl-Rabb ārsalahu wa Rūḥhi ilā āl-Ibn āl-āzalī āladī ṣār rusūlān li-lāb wa li-Rūḥ āl-Quds ḥītu tajasad wa wulida min Marīam āl-ʿaẓrāʾ.*"

[17] Lamoreaux 178-79; "*Āṭbatunā lakum fī mīmarunā hadā bi-āl-āījāz wa fī ġīruhu bi-talḫīṣ ānuhu qad wajaba alā wāḥid ān yūʾman bi-āl-ānjīl wa nāmūs Mūsā wa mā bīnhumā min kutub āl-ānbīāʾ.*"

Testament with a specifically Islamic term, while skirting the issue of the rather different

sense in which this term is used in the Qur'ān, as a way to refer to the preaching of Jesus

itself, as opposed to the books written later about His life and teachings. He then goes on

to make the rather bold claim that "these scriptures … mention the Father as God, the

Son as God, and the Holy Spirit as God. They do not speak of three gods, however, but

warn us sternly to speak of just one God."[18] In the text that follows, Abū Qurrah cites

passages from Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, Job and Hosea, as well as Matthew, John,

and Romans. In many of the passages taken from the Old Testament, he bases his

argument in the frequent textual ambiguity between "the angel of the Lord" and the

presence of God Himself, apparently interpreting the former as pre-Incarnate appearances

of God the Son.

When dealing with these scriptural proofs, Abū Qurrah takes a rather sly posture

with regard to the status of the Qur'ān itself. Without articulating any clear position about

the origin of the Islamic text, he asserts that "both we and you already recognize that all

revealed books forbid us to speak of anything other than one God."[19] Here Abū Qurrah

uses a specifically Islamic way of referring to scripture, in that the word that Lamoreaux

has chosen to translate as "revealed" is actually *manuzilah*, a word which would be

literally rendered "handed down" or "given down." This is a Qur'ānic term capturing the

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[18] Lamoreaux 179; "…*haẓahi āl-kutub ālatī taẓakara ān āl-Āb ālah wa āl-Ibn ālah wa āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds ālah* [*wāḥid*]. *Wa lā taqūl ṭalāṭah ālaha bal taḥẓarunā ān naqūl ḡīr ālah wāḥid*." Lamoreaux's translation omits the first appearance of *wāḥid*, apparently taking it to be a scribal error. The syntax of the sentence does indeed work better without it.

[19] Lamoreaux 179; "*Wa naḥnu wa āntum qad ʿalamnā ān āl-kutub kulha āl-manuzilah tanhī ān yaqāl ilā ālah wāḥid.*"

sense by which Muslims believe inspired scripture to be transmitted not just dynamically, but in a literal word-for-word sense. Besides using terminology about scripture that would be familiar to a Muslim reader, Abū Qurrah in this passage has referred to scripture in such a general way that the precise formulation of what constitutes revealed scripture is put to the side in favor of establishing the common ground: Muslims and Christians agree that inspired scripture teaches that there is but one God.

It should be noted that Theodore Abū Qurrah seems to have had much less direct knowledge of the Qur'ān than the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*. Whereas the anonymous author treated earlier cites the Qur'ān often and expresses himself in writing that is virtually saturated with its concepts and terminology, Abū Qurrah cites it only infrequently and is much less influenced by its terminology. That said, he was certainly aware of some of the key Qur'ānic claims that were relevant for his purposes. For example, when explaining in *Theologus Autodidactus* the different understandings of God presented in the various religious traditions that he reviews, he zeroes in on a key distinction between Christianity and Islam, quoting the Qur'ān's assertion in surah 112:2-3 that God is "one, eternal, who did not beget and was not begotten."[20] This particular selection from the Qur'ānic text is important not only because it shows Abū Qurrah's awareness of this Islamic emphasis about the divine nature, but also because the treatment of begetting as an attribute is a key part of Abū Qurrah's Trinitarian theology, as will be shown later.

Whereas *Fī taṯlīṯ* was almost purely scriptural in its approach, Abū Qurrah's writings make use of both scriptural and philosophical arguments. In fact, his most

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[20] Lamoreaux, 19.

important treatise for the subject at hand, *On the Trinity*, is rather neatly divided into two parts, with the first presenting arguments for Trinitarian doctrine from the scriptures, and the second presenting proofs that are purely philosophical in character. Theodore Abū Qurrah himself explains that these rational proofs are given by God in addition to the scriptures both for those who faith is too weak to be maintained by scriptural evidence alone, and as a weapon against those who would otherwise disturb the consciences of these same weak Christians:

> As for the Christians to whom He gave such persuasive arguments, it was
> not because those of us who understand the definition of faith needed
> rational persuasion, but so that the Holy Spirit might strengthen through
> them the weak whose faith is imperfect without some rational and valid
> proof to support it and so that he, through what they say, might stone you
> with a valid argument, as if with a rock, so as to keep you from disturbing
> the church's children, even as God ordered the stoning of all beasts who
> would approach Mount Sinai when He descended on it.[21]

Abū Qurrah uses four different philosophical tools in his treatment of Trinitarian doctrine: an account of how attributes may be discussed; a nuanced understanding of how number is applied to beings; a set of philosophical terms including person, nature, essence, and taxonomical categories that he calls "logical names;" and the use of analogy. Uses of these philosophical tools in relation to Trinitarian doctrine appear primarily in his treatises *On the Death of Christ* and *On the Trinity*. Because his uses of these various tools are interrelated and mingled in the text, it is not possible to treat them entirely

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[21] Lamoreaux 179; "*Wa ānamā āqnʿa man qad āqnʿahu min āhl āl-Naṣar ātiahmin dalak līsa ḥājah min kān minā yʿaqal ḥad āl-āīmān ilā qanūʿa āl-ʿaqal li-dʿam bihi ʿalā yadī hū'lā' min lā yatam āīmānuhu min āhl āl-ḍʿaf ilā bi-ān yasnaduhu bʿaḍ burhān yaṣaḥ bi-ʿaqaluhu. Wa li-yarjakum min āl-sinatikum* [sic; translation given corrects to *āl-sinatihim*] *bi-kalām ṣaḥīḥ ka-āl-ḥajarah yakaf bihā šaġbakum ʿan ābnā' āl-kanīsah ka-mā āmara Āllah ān tarjam āl-sabāʿa āl-dānīah min Ṭūr Sīnā' āẓ taral ʿalīhu.*"

separately, but they will be examined here in light of the conceptual distinctions among them.

In *On the Death of Christ*, Theodore Abū Qurrah does not address the Trinity as his primary concern, but his employment of certain philosophical tools is quite relevant to his Trinitarian doctrine. He begins the treatise by contrasting the way that Christians, called here "the people of truth" (*āl-ḥāq āhluhu*), and others – the people of falsehood or error (*āhl āl-bāṭal*) – treat attributes, especially attributes that appear to be contradictory and unable to be predicated of the same being. Regarding the people of truth, he writes that

> … when it is a question of things that contradict unity in different respects, you will find contradiction in the words of the people of truth and you will find them saying both "Yes" and "No" of a single thing. This is because their minds carefully examine things so as to distinguish their different respects and isolate each for separate examination. Their minds grasp when a thing has an attribute in one respect and use that attribute to describe that thing. At the same time, their minds grasp when the same thing, in another respect, has an attribute at variance with the first. When they do this, however, they are moved to maintain the first attribute and not cast it aside…. Their knowledge of the truth of things is broad enough to encompass them and join all their attributes together.[22]

In the context of Abū Qurrah's social and religious milieu, and taking into account the content of his entire corpus of writings, it is difficult to read this contrast as referring to anything other than the respective treatments of God's unicity by Christians and Muslims. Muslims could appeal to the very sensible argument that what is one cannot

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[22] Lamoreaux 109; "*Fa-ānak qad tajad fī kalām āhl āl-ḥāq taḍādadan wa tarāhim yaqūlūn nˁam walakin lā ˁalā šaīˀ wāḥid wa dalak ān ˁaqūluhim tašḫaṣ ilā āl-āšīāˀ fa-tamīz ānḥāˀhā wa tajarad kul wāḥid minḥā tanẓa ruḥā wa qad taṣīb ālatī lahu ṣafah fī naḥū min ānḥāˀhu fa-taṣafahu bi-tilka āl-ṣafah wa taṣīb lahu ṣafah taḫālaf āl-āūlā naḥū fī āḫar wa bi-hā ḥarakah ān tˁaqad ˁalā āl-ṣafah āl-āūlā fa-lā taṭraḥhā…. Wa taḥūā āl-āš īāˀ mˁarafah ḥaqīqatihā watajamˁa kul ṣafātihā.*"

also be three, and vice versa, making it necessary for Christians to make just the

argument that Theodore Abū Qurrah makes here – that one may simultaneously and

without contradiction speak of God as one and as three. Furthermore, in the period during

which Abū Qurrah lived and wrote, with Muslim society rapidly becoming more

interested in *falsafah* – Greek philosophy – it was very much to the Christian's advantage

to show not only that his way of speaking about God was not a self-contradiction, but that

it actually demonstrated greater philosophical sophistication than the Muslim account

which, as Abū Qurrah implies, exercised a less nuanced way of predicating attributes.

This concern for giving an account of how attributes should be predicated is

closely connected with the second of Abū Qurrah's philosophical tools, his nuanced

account of how number should be predicated in relation to beings. Abū Qurrah's use of

this tool in *On the Death of Christ* is somewhat complex, since he does not seek to

address Trinitarian doctrine directly. Instead he builds a case for understanding the

relation between number and beings that involves the Trinity, and then uses the relation

that he has established as the foundation for his consideration of Christ's death.[23] In

doing so, he writes:

> Orthodoxy says that God is one in nature and three in person. It can thus
> say that God is one in one respect and three in another respect…. When

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[23] There are a couple of different reasons that may explain why Abū Qurrah would proceed in this way. First, since we have no information about the chronological relationship among his various treatises, he may have assumed a certain amount of knowledge on the part of his reader about what he has said elsewhere about the Trinity. In this case, it would not be necessary to rehearse a complete defense of Trinitarian doctrine before drawing conclusions that can then be applied to the Christological question at hand. Second, it would be reasonable to assume that he anticipated an entirely Christian audience for this treatise, since it was concerned with a rather technical point of Christology. If that were the case, he could presume broad agreement about Trinitarian theology and use that agreement as a basis for the argument that this treatise makes against both Jacobites and adherents of the Church of the East.

the ignorant hear that God is both one and three, they think the statement contradictory and invalid. In most things, falsehood surrounds the truth on either side, and in contradicting the truth does not grasp its unity.[24]

With regard to this verbal picture of true doctrine occupying a kind of central ground between errors, Abū Qurrah attributes to Arius the doctrine "that God is three in person and three in nature," (*talātah fī āl-wajūh wa talātah fī āl-tabā'a*) and to Sabellius the doctrine "that God is one in nature and one in person" (*wāḥid fī āl-tab'aah wa wāḥid fī āl-wajah*). Abū Qurrah seems to suggest that Arius and Sabellius arrived at such theological error by failing to realize that number cannot be predicated of any being absolutely, but instead is applied as that being is considered in a particular aspect of that being's existence. Clearly in making this argument Abū Qurrah has moved beyond the purely scriptural approach and is bringing to bear the philosophical types of reasoning that would eventually become predominant in Christian-Muslim debates about the Trinity, including the use of non-scriptural terms that are taken from Greek philosophy.

It is also possible that he intends in this passage to respond to the Qur'ānic assertion that "threeness" must not be predicated of God. As already noted, direct citations of the Qur'ān are rare in Theodore Abū Qurrah's treatises. However, it is not difficult to imagine this passage from *On the Death of Christ* as a response to one of the most well-known ostensibly anti-Trinitarian passages in the Qur'ān, surah 4:171. Even if Abū Qurrah were not familiar with the exact wording of this passage, its direct challenge to Christianity must have made its general sense widely known in Christian-Muslim

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[24] Lamoreaux 110; "*Qad yaqūl āl-Āurtūdaksīah fī āl-ālah ānahu wāḥid fī āl-tabī'aah wa talātah fī āl-wajūh wa qad qawī ān taqūl wāḥid fī naḥū wa talātah fī naḥū āhar.... Wa āl-jahāl ādā sam'aūā ān āl-ālah wāḥid talātah zanūā ān hadā qūl yanqaḍ b'aḍahu b'aḍān wa ānahu lā yastaqīm ābdān. Wa āl-bātal fī āktar āl-āsīā' muḥīṭ bi-āl-ḥāq wa lā yaqaf 'alā āl-waḥadiah fī muhālifatihi āl-ḥāq.*"

theological encounters. In fact, the very way in which Abū Qurrah cites the Trinity as a

case of number being predicated of a being in two different respects – not in an argument

about Trinitarian doctrine, but in an argument about Christology – indicates that he

expected his anticipated readership to be familiar with this line of argument.

A third purely philosophical tool that is deployed by Abū Qurrah is the distinction

between person (*āl-wajūh*) and nature (*āl-ṭabāʿa*). This distinction appears not only in *On*

the Death of Christ as just cited, but also in *On the Trinity* in a discussion of how number

may be predicated of a being. Here, then, we see the second philosophical tool discussed

above being joined with the terms person and nature in a specifically Trinitarian

argument. He writes:

> I want those who deny Christian doctrine [literally, "who deny what
> Christians say"] to know that some names refer to persons [*āl-wajūh*] and
> others to natures [*āl-ṭabāʿa*]. Names that refer to natures include "man,"
> "horse," and "ox." Names that refer to persons include "Peter," "Paul,"
> and "John." If you want to count many persons with one nature, you must
> not predicate the number of the name that refers to the nature.[25]

He then points out that number can be predicated of Peter, James, and John in reference

to their persons, but not in reference to their nature, which is common to them and to

which number is not applied. In the same way, he argues, one may enumerate the persons

of the Trinity, but just as humanity is the common nature of Peter, James, and John, and

is not enumerated, so one cannot say there are three gods because of the enumeration of

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[25] Lamoreaux 183; "*Āʿalam āīhā āl-mankar qūl āl-Naṣārī ān min āl-āsmā' āsmā' dalīlah ʿalā āl-wajūh wa minhā āsmā' dalīlah ʿalā āl-ṭabāʿa. Fa-āl-āsm āl-dalīlah ʿalā āl-ṭabīʿaah hūa ka-qūlak ānsān wa fars wa ṯūr. Wa āl-āsm āl-dalīlah ʿalā āl-wajah hūa ka-qūlak Buṭrus wa Baūlus wa Yūḥanā. Fa-ānat āḏā āradat ān tʿadad wajūhān kaṯīrah lahā ṭabīʿaah wāḥid fa-līsa yanbaḡī ān tawaqʿa āl-ʿadad ʿalā āl-āsm āl-dalīlah ʿalā āl-ṭabīʿaah.*"

the persons, anymore than one would say there are three "humanities" because of the

enumeration of Peter, James, and John.

Abū Qurrah then takes the argument a step further by making a distinction

between the "logical name" – that is, person – and the individual name particular to each

person:

> [Y]ou must count three persons and one God. This is because "person" is a
> logical name and does not belong essentially to just one of them. Rather,
> the name "person" is predicated of the Father and of the Son and of the
> Holy Spirit, and of every angel, human being, and animal, as well as of
> every other indivisible entity. The logical name was introduced solely that
> number might be applied to it, for it is not right for number to be applied
> to their common name, that by which their nature is named, which name
> belongs essentially to it…. Nor is it right for number to be applied to the
> particular, non-logical name of each of them – otherwise, number will
> make each of the numbered entities to be all three of them. How so? If you
> say, "Here, Peter, James, and John are three," you make each one to be the
> three of them. So also, if you say, "In heaven, the Father, Son, and Holy
> Spirit are three," you make each one to be the three of them. For this
> reason, it is necessary that number be applied to the logical name, which is
> predicated of each of them (that is, of a person) and that we say that Peter,
> James, and John are three persons, but that the name "man" remain
> singular, neither diffused nor multiplied.[26]

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[26] Lamoreaux 183-184; "*Yanbaḡī ān tʻadad talātah wajūh ālahān wāḥid li-āna āl-wajah hūa āsm mantaqī wa līsa bi-tābat wa lā li-wāḥid minhum bal yaqʻa āsm āl-wajah ʻalā āl-Āb wa ʻalā āl-Ibn wa ʻalā āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds wa ʻalā kul wāḥid min āl-mulāʼkah wa āl-nās wa āl-ḥīwān wa ḡīr dalak min āl-ḡīr āl-manfaṣaat. Fa-ānamā duḥila āl-āsm āl- mantaqī li-yakūn ʻalīhā āl-ʻadad li-āna lā yastaqīm li-lʻadad ān yakun ʻalā āsmuhum āl-ʻaām āl-musmāah tabīʻatihimāl tabat li-hā.... Wa lā yastaqīm ān yakun āl-ʻadad ʻalā āsm kul wāḥid minhum āl-ḥāṣ ḡīr āl-mantaqī li-kīlān yajaʻal āl-ʻadad kul wāḥid min āl-mʻadūdīn kuluhum. Wa kīf dalak? Idā qalat hunā talātah Butrus wa Yʻaqūb wa Yūḥanā faqad ṣayarat kul wāḥid minhum talātihim ka-dalak ān qalat ān fī āl-samāʼ talātah āl-Āb wa āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds faqad ṣayarat kul wāḥid minhum talātihim. Min āujila dalak yaṣtara āl-āmr ān yakun āl-ʻadad ʻalā āl-āsm āl-mantaqī āl-wāqʻa ʻalā kul wāḥid minhum āladī hūa wajah fa-naqūl ān Butrus wa Yʻaqūb wa Yūḥanā talātah wajūh wa āsm āl-ānsān yabqī ʻalā ḥadatihi lā yantušira wā lā yakutira .*" It is perhaps important to note that Abū Qurrah's use of the term *wajah* is not precisely parallel to the traditional Western usage of *prosopon* or *persona*. Whereas the two latter terms have usually been used within the Boethian sense of an individual substance of a rational nature, Abū Qurrah's use of *wajah* does not require the attribute of rationality, since it is applied to the lower animals and even apparently to non-living substances; rather, it is indivisibility which is the key attribute of the *wajah*.

Thus we see that Abū Qurrah makes a conceptual distinction not only between person and nature, but also between different types of names as they are applied to beings, with number being applicable to the "logical name" – the name that is be used in an ontological taxonomy – but not being applicable to the particular, non-logical name. This is a particularly interesting point for him to make, because in so doing, Abū Qurrah posits a relationship between philosophical categories and grammar. His concern that number not be applied to the particular, non-logical names of the persons (Peter, James, and John or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is that the grammatical structure would then suggest that each individual must be all three of the individuals. As explained in the introductory chapter, one of the key aspects of Muslim theological discourse in the eighth and ninth centuries was the working out of theological assertions according to the rules of Arabic grammar. Thus Abū Qurrah's concern here that number not be predicated of the particular, non-logical names, lest each individual be described as all three, signals that he is to some degree writing within the same conceptual framework. This fact is important for two reasons: first, it reveals a key component of the common ground of Christian-Muslim religious discourse of the period; and second, it shows that the writing of Christian theology in Arabic was no mere project of translating Greek terms into Arabic, but was instead a genuine attempt to articulate Christian doctrine within an entirely new conceptual framework.

A fourth philosophical tool used by Theodore Abū Qurrah in the context of Trinitarian doctrine is the use of analogy. His use of analogy is particularly prominent in his response to a verbal ploy that Muslims apparently used in an attempt to demonstrate

to Christians that the doctrine of the Trinity was inherently self-contradictory. Abū

Qurrah describes the use of this ploy as follows:

> The ignorant [literally, "those who have no mind"] ask the Christians:
> "Tell me. Do you deny every God other than the Father? Do you deny
> every God other than the Son? Do you deny every God other than the
> Holy Spirit?" If the Christian says, for instance, "I deny every God other
> than the Son," they respond, "The Father and the Holy Spirit, then must
> not be God." If, however, the Christian says, "I do not deny every God
> other than Christ," they respond, "You have, then, multiple gods."[27]

Abū Qurrah responds that the question itself is defective and then proceeds to examine it

by way of analogy. He imagines that a "gospel" (*ānjīl*), by which he apparently means an

individual copy of one of the canonical gospels, is placed before a Christian who is then

asked whether he denies every gospel other than this one. Abū Qurrah argues that the

Christian may safely assert that he does indeed deny every gospel other than the one

placed before him because "it does not follow from your words that each of these gospels

[i.e., each of the other gospels in the world] is not a full gospel, for the Gospel through

which the Holy Spirit speaks is one."[28] This is not the only analogy that Abū Qurrah

makes to the verbal ploy that he is attempting to refute. He also suggests the follow

scenario:

> Imagine that there is set before you a plate inset with three mirrors. When
> you look in the plate, a complete image appears in each mirror. Suppose
> someone were to point to the image appearing in one of the mirrors and
> ask, "Do you have an image other than this?" You would have to say, "I

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[27] Lamoreaux 188;"*Fa-yasāl min lā ʿaqal lahu wa yaqūl li-l-Naṣarānī āḫbarunī ātkafar bi-kul ālah ǧīr āl-Āb? Ātkafar bi-kul ālah ǧīr āl-Ibn? Ātkafar bi-kul ālah ǧīr āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds? Fa-ān qāl āl- Naṣarānī ānī ākfar bi-kul ālah ǧīr āl-Ibn fī āl-maṯl qāl lahu iḏn āl-Āb wa āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds līsa kul wāḥid minhumā ālahān. Wa ān qāl āl-Naṣarānī lā ākfar bi-kul ālah ǧīr āl-Masīḥ qāl lahu iḏn lak ālhah šatī.*"

[28] Lamoreaux 189; "*Lā yalazam min qūluka haḏā ān yakūn kul wāḥid min tilka āl-ānjīlīn līsa bi-ānjīl tām.*"

have no image other than this," for because your face is one and your countenance is one, you do not have an image other than this one. By saying this, however, you would not be denying that the image in each of the other mirrors is your image.[29]

Finally, Abū Qurrah proposes yet a third analogy, in which an artist sketches three different pictures of a person, one each on three different sheets of paper, and then asks the person whether he denies of himself any other countenance. In each of these three analogies, Abū Qurrah sees the multiple items (gospels, reflections, and images) as corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity insofar as it is not necessary, nor logically permissible, to affirm one as true and authentic while denying the others. To demonstrate why this is so, Abū Qurrah uses additional philosophical terminology like his distinction between person and nature explored above. He argues that in each of the hypothetical questions, the questioner is asking not about the hypostasis (*āqnūm*), but instead about the substance or nature (*jaūhar, ṭabīʿaah*)[30]:

> When asked about the gospel placed before you, you were asked not about its hypostasis, but its essence (that is, its words, through which the Holy Spirit spoke), for the name "gospel" is not distinct to that book to the exclusion of others. Similarly, when asked, "Do you deny every God other than Christ," you were not asked about His hypostasis, even if the question hints at it, but only His nature, for the name "God" is not distinct to Christ

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[29] Lamoreaux 189; "*Yūḍʿa bīn yadīk ṭabaq mūwaṣilah fīhi ṯalāṯ marāīāt fa-āḏā āṭliʿat fī āl-ṭabaq ṭuliʿat ṣūrah tāmah fī kul wāḥid min tilka āl-marāʾāt. Fa-laū ān rajalān āšār bi-yadihi ilā āl-ṣūrah āl-ṭālʿaah fī āḥdā āl-marāīāt fa-qāl laka ilak ṣūrah ḡīr haḏahi? Āl-ḥāq ʿalīka ān taqūl ānahu lā ṣūrah lī ḡīr haḏahi. Li-āna āḏā kān wajahuka wāḥdān wa ḥalītuka wāḥdah fa-lā ṣūrah laka ḡīr wāḥidah. Wa lam yakun qūluka yanfī āl-ṣūrah āl-ṭālʿaah fī kul wāḥidah min al-marātīn min ān takūn ṣūrah laka.*"

[30] Abū Qurrah's use of *jaūhar* as opposed to *ṭabīʿaah* seems to turn on the distinction between written words and living beings. In the case of the former, the hypothetical question is properly directed at the meaning of the words, and for this he uses *jaūhar*. Lamoreaux has chosen to translate this term "essence," but the more commonly used translation is "substance." In the case of living beings (the persons of the Trinity), the question is directed not at meaning, but at the innermost quality of their being, and for this he uses *ṭabīʿaah*.

to the exclusion of the Father and the Spirit. The name "God" is the name of a nature, not a hypostasis.… For that reason, you can rightly say, "I deny every god other than Christ," without having the Father and Spirit cease from being God. The question, instead, is equivalent to asking, "Do you deny every divine nature other than Christ's nature?" This you answer in the affirmative, and your answer is true, in that the Son's divine nature is the nature of the Father and the Spirit.[31]

By introducing the use of analogy to defend and explain Trinitarian doctrine against the Muslim charge of inherent self-contradiction, Abū Qurrah moves the debate onto rather difficult ground. Although Christian theologians had long used analogies, such as the well-known one involving the sun, its light, and its heat, to support Trinitarian doctrine, for Muslims this was evidence that Christians simply did not understand the yawning chasm that existed between God and His creation. Since the Qur'ān placed such emphasis on the notion that God's glory consists in being exalted far above all comparisons to creatures, the use of analogy risked undoing the entire project of expressing Trinitarian doctrine in terms that were familiar and accessible to, and even affirmed by, Muslims. As will be shown later, though, Theodore Abū Qurrah takes the bold approach of not only affirming the possibility of analogy between God and the natural world, as seen in the examples just cited, but of actually arguing that analogies between human attributes and divine attributes are theologically necessary if God is to be understood as the origin of all perfections.

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[31] Lamoreaux 189; "*Āḏā sū'lat ʿan āl-ānjīl āl-mūḏūʿa bīn yadīka līsa ʿan āqnūmuhu tusā'l. Ānamā suā'l ʿan jauhariah āl-ānjīl āī ʿan kalāmihi ālaḏī naṭaqa bihi Rūḥ āl-Quds li-āna ism āl-ānjīl līsa hūa ḫāṣān li-ḏalak ā-maṣḥaf dūn ḡīrihi.Ka-ḏalak ḥīṭu saʾl ʿan āl-Masīḥ fa-yaqāl laka ātkafara bi-kul ālah ḡīruhu līsa ʿan āqnūmih tasaʾl wa ān kānat āl-masāʾlah tašīr ilīhi bal tasāʾl ʿan ṭabīʿaah āl-Masīḥ li-āna ism ālālah līsā bi-ḫāṣ li-l-Masīḥ dūn āl-Āb wa āl-Rūḥ. Wa ānamā ism ālālah ism ṭabīʿaah lā ism āqnūm.... Fa-li-ḏalak yaḥsanu ān taqūl ānī kāfar bi-kul ālah ḡīr āl-Masīḥ wa lā yasqaṭ āl-Āb wa āl-Rūḥ min ān yakūn kul wāḥid minhumā ālahān. Li-āna haḏahi āl-masāʾlah ānamā tašbah ān yaqāl laka ātkafaru bi-kul ṭabīʿaah ḡīr ṭabīʿaah āl-Masīḥ. Fa-taqūl nʿam wa qūluka ḥaq li-āna ṭabīʿaah āl-Ibn āl-ālahīah hīa ṭabīʿaah āl-Āb wa āl-Rūḥ.*"

Abū Qurrah's Treatment of the Divine Attributes

Having considered Theodore Abū Qurrah's use of both scripture and philosophical tools in his writings about Trinitarian doctrine, we will now consider in a more detailed fashion the way in which he builds a case for the Trinity around the question of divine attributes. For the reason just described, one of his most fundamental tasks in this regard is to establish that one may speak of human attributes as analogous to divine attributes. To understand Abū Qurrah's teaching on this particular point, it is necessary to collate texts from three different treatises: *On the Method of the Knowledge of God*, *Theologicus Autodidactus*, and *On Our Salvation*. In the first of these treatises, Abū Qurrah presents an epistemological theory holding that knowledge can be derived in one of four ways: "Everything that can be known is known in one of four ways: through being seen, through its effects, through something resembling it, or through something contrary to it."[32] He then asserts that each of these methods, other than the first one, is applicable to knowledge of God. After expounding a couple of quasi-Thomistic arguments about God's effects in the world, he takes up the question of whether anything can be known about God by resemblance/similarity. In doing so, he points out that the usual ways of using human language to speak about God are inextricably linked to human attributes, and here he shrewdly makes use of common terminological ground with Muslims:

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[32] Lamoreaux 157; "*… āmā ʿaīānān wa āmā bi-āʾṯar wa āmā bi-šabah wa āmā bi-ḫalāf.*" It should be noted that the Arabic term Lamoreaux translates "resembling" (*bi-šabah*) does not necessarily connote physical resemblance. One could also translate it "similarity."

Indeed, everyone says that God is living, hearing, seeing, wise, powerful, just, generous, and so on. Each of these attributes is something we find in ourselves. If no created being resembled God in any way, it would be impossible to apply both to him and to us a single attribute. And yet, we find that everybody agrees that it is appropriate to apply to God the things that among us are considered honorable. At the same time, they flee the loathsome prospect of applying to him anything that among us is considered a defect.[33]

Each of the attributes that Abū Qurrah mentions here is grounded in Qur'ānic descriptions of God. Thus Abū Qurrah's strategy here is very similar to that used by the author of *Fī tatlīt:* the reader must either concede Abū Qurrah's point or else risk denying the language used in the Qur'ān. As such, it would be very difficult for any Muslim reader to object to the assertion that these are attributes that can be predicated of both God and human beings. Moreover, just as the Qur'ān emphasizes repeatedly that God is "exalted far above" all weaknesses, Abū Qurrah is clear that only those qualities observed as most noble in human beings may be attributed to God. Even though he has carefully built his argument to this point on common terminological ground between Christians and Muslims, he clearly anticipates that his readership may initially recoil in horror at the suggestion of any similarity between God and His creatures:

When we say that created beings resemble God, those who hear should not flee. With regard to what resembles him, we mean to suggest only that it resembles him in the manner that an image in a mirror resembles the person who appears in it: the person being a solid body; the image in the mirror, a transient specter.[34]

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[33] Lamoreaux, 159; "*Fa-qad yaqūl kul wāḥid ān Āllah ḥaī samīʿa baṣīr ḥakīm qawī ʿadal jūād wa mā šā kul dalak wa hadā kuluhu qad tarāhu fīnā wa ʿandanā. Wa laū kān lā šaī yašbah Āllah min āl-ḫuluq fī ḥāl li-mā āstaṭīʿa ān yaqʿa ʿalīhu wa ʿalīnā ṣifah wāḥidah batah. Wa hadā fī āl-nās kuluhum ānahum yastaḥsanūn ān yūqʿaūā mukāram mā ʿandanā ʿalā Āllah wa yūāfaquhum dalak wa yastaḥsanūn ān lā yūqʿaūā ʿalīhi šaīʾān min munāqaṣunā wa yafrūn min dalak.*"

[34] Lamoreaux 160; "*Lā yanfar āl-sāmʿaūn min qūlunā ān āl-ḫalāʾiq tašbah Āllah. Li-ānā ānamā naqūl*

Besides emphasizing the exaltation of God over His creatures, this statement rather cleverly suggests to the reader by way of analogy that any honorable attribute that may be discerned in human beings must also be predicated of God, just as any handsome feature that appears in a reflection must have its source in the actual face of which it is a reflection. In other words, he has made a subtle but crucial adjustment to his argument by the analogy of the face in the mirror. He is now suggesting not only that there are attributes that can be predicated both of human beings and of God, but that any attribute that can be predicated of a human being (except attributes of defect) *must* have its origin in a divine attribute. Although so subtle as to be easily missed, this suggestion is important an aspect of Abū Qurrah's argument, as will be shown more explicitly later on.

Theodore Abū Qurrah makes a similar argument about the relationship between human and divine attributes in *Theologus Autodidactus*, a treatise in which he is particularly concerned with what may be discerned of God from observations about human nature: "While God is unseen, through the likeness of our own nature's virtues, notwithstanding that God transcends and is contrary to our nature, our minds can see both Him and the attributes according to which He is to be worshipped…"[35] Abū Qurrah then goes on to build an analogy around the idea of a mirror, similar to the passage from *On the Method of the Knowledge of God* just examined, but with a greater elaboration of how the reflection in the mirror corresponds to understanding the divine attributes. In this

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ānamā āšbahahu minhā fī āl-ḥāl ālatī yašbahahu fīhā kamā yašbah āl-šaḫṣ āladī fī āl-marāah āl-wajah āladī yaṭlʿa fīhā. Fa-āl-wajah jaram ṯābit wa šaḫṣ āl-marāah ḫīāl zāʾil."

[35] Lamoreaux 9-10; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

account there is not only a person looking into a mirror and seeing there an authentic

likeness of himself; there is also a second person who can see into the mirror, but whose

vision is blocked from direct observation of the first person. The second person is a friend

of the first person, and by looking into the mirror can recognize his friend by the

authentic likeness of that friend's features, even though he cannot see his friend directly.

In the same way, argues Abū Qurrah, one can observe and know the divine attributes by

observing the noble attributes that are to be observed in human beings, because they are

the authentic image and likeness of some aspects of the divine nature. He is then careful

to elaborate that even those human attributes that mirror divine attributes differ

ontologically from them, to the same degree and in the same way that a person's

reflection in a mirror differs ontologically from the person himself:

> At the same time, in terms of these attributes, the two faces do not
> resemble one another, for the face of the man in and of itself transcends
> and is contrary to the likeness in the mirror. After all, he exists, while the
> image does not. Accordingly, something unseen can be seen from its
> likeness, notwithstanding that it transcends and is contrary to its likeness.[36]

In setting up this analogy, Theodore Abū Qurrah both affirms certain key Islamic

emphases about the nature of God and sets the stage for a specifically Trinitarian

argument based on the correlation of human and divine attributes. By emphasizing that

the first person is not directly observable by the second person, he underscores doctrinal

ground that is common to Christians and Muslims, the incomprehensibility of the divine

nature. This aspect of the analogy also calls to mind the Qur'ānic teaching that God's

self-disclosure is always mediated in some way, as described in surah 42:51-52; the

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[36] Lamoreaux 10; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

second person recognizes his friend not by direct apprehension, but through the medium

of the mirror. By his insistence that the likeness in the mirror "transcends and is contrary

to" the living person, Abū Qurrah affirms the great ontological chasm between God and

His creation which is a central theological emphasis of the Qur'ān. On the other hand, as

with the passage from *On the Method of the Knowledge of God* cited above, by the very

use of this analogy Abū Qurrah challenges the Islamic sense of an absolute ontological

gulf between God and everything outside himself. Since the image in the mirror has its

existence only insofar as it reflects the real and living face of the man who looks into the

mirror, the implication is that a human attribute can exist only insofar as it is the

authentic reflection of a real divine attribute. This implication sets the stage for one of

Abū Qurrah's key arguments for the Trinity; namely, that one may derive from a

particular human attribute – the power of begetting – not only the reasonableness of

Trinitarian doctrine, but also its theological necessity.

Abū Qurrah on Begetting and Headship

After setting forth the mirror analogy just described and in that context making

reference to the specific attributes of existence, life, and knowledge, Abū Qurrah turns his

attention to what he considers the highest and noblest of human attributes: begetting and

headship. He writes that

> We see that something resembling Adam in nature was begotten and
> proceeded from him. We see, too, that that he is head over this one who is
> like him. Since Adam begets and is head over one who is from him, He
> who caused him to beget and to be head must surely Himself beget and be

> head over one who resembles Him. Nonetheless, this is so in a
> transcendent and contrary manner.[37]

Having established his argument on common terminological ground with Muslims, Abū

Qurrah now turns his argument rather abruptly to the attribute which the Qur'ānic text

most emphatically denies of God, the power of begetting. Whereas the attributes

mentioned up to this point – existence, life, and knowledge – are not only obvious

common ground but also readily supported by Qur'ānic language, begetting is explicitly

denied as a divine attribute, and is even associated specifically with weakness or defect in

the Qur'ānic text.[38] This is why it is so important to note that Abū Qurrah's mirror

analogy *necessitates* an analogous divine attribute in order for a human attribute to exist

at all. His reader has been led to affirm divine attributes supported by the Qur'ān, and

then to affirm that these attributes are the transcendent reality of which similar human

attributes are mere reflections. Having affirmed both of these points, the reader is then

left with three choices: first, to deny that begetting exists as a divine attribute, in which

case there is a human attribute without a divine attribute as its source, leaving a kind of

ontological gap and perhaps even ascribing to human beings a virtue that is absent in

God; second, to affirm the existence of begetting as a divine attribute, and reject the

Qur'ānic text; or third, to affirm begetting as a divine attribute and modify his

understanding of what the Qur'ānic text means. The remainder of Abū Qurrah's

argument beckons the reader to this third option.

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[37] Lamoreaux 12; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

[38] See, for example, surahs 4:171; 6:100-102; 10:68; 17:111; and 23:91.

As noted above, the Qur'ānic text seems to deny a divine attribute of begetting at least in part because of an association of begetting with a defect, weakness, or need. Two aspects of Abū Qurrah's thinking that have already been presented form the backdrop of how he responds to this Qur'ānic characterization. First, he argues in *On the Death of Christ* that it is necessary to speak of attributes with a certain degree of philosophical nuance, ascribing a particular attribute to a particular being in one way, while simultaneously maintaining that the same attribute may not apply to the same being in another way. As already quoted above, he maintains that one of the philosophical advantages of "the people of truth" (*āl-ḥāq āhluhu*) is that they can both affirm and deny a given predication when that predication is considered in two different ways. This is important to note because it means that Abū Qurrah is operating with an implicit assumption that one may affirm begetting as a divine attribute from a certain perspective and deny it from another perspective. In other words, this principle opens a way for his affirmation of a divine attribute of begetting to be true and for the Qur'ānic denial of such an attribute to also be true, if the text considers the attribute from a different point of view. Certainly this seems to be the case, for the Qur'ān explicitly mentions the necessity of copulation with a partner in order for begetting to occur.[39] Although Theodore Abū Qurrah does not quote this text or make any explicit reference to it, he certainly seems to have it in mind when he writes:

> Adam's begetting of a son took place through a woman, sex, and development…. Further, Adam preceded both his son and Eve in time…. God's begetting of His Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit,

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[39] Qur'ān 6:101: "How can he have a son, when he has no companion?"

transcend and are contrary to this. They did not take place through a
woman or sex. They involved neither pregnancy nor development. There
was no question of temporal precedence, only simultaneity.[40]

So, following Abū Qurrah's principle about the predication of attributes, begetting may

be affirmed of God insofar as He is the origin of a Son of like nature with himself, while

it may be denied of him insofar as "begetting" connotes cooperation with a partner, a

process of growth or development, or precedence in time. The second aspect of Abū

Qurrah's thinking which shapes his response to the Qur'ān on this point is the distinction,

inherent in the mirror analogy, of a difference between how a given attribute exists in

God and how it exists in human beings, even though the attribute is the same. The

Qur'ānic verses cited above seem to reject begetting as a divine attribute based on an

assumption that the attribute must exist in one being exactly as it exists in another being.

Using the attributes of existence, life, and knowledge which are theological common

ground for Muslims and Christians, Abū Qurrah has already built up a case that one must

admit that there are attributes that exist in both God and human beings, but in quite

different ways:

> Adam's existence has a beginning and an end, while God's existence is
> above and contrary to that, being without beginning and having no end….
> Adam's life is perishing and in order to persist requires, first, milk, and
> then food and drink. It grows up little by little, such that he is now a child,
> now a youth, now an old man…. As for God's life, it transcends and is
> contrary to this. It has no beginning and needs nothing. It does not grow
> up and change from one state to another…. Adam obtained his knowledge
> through his senses or from someone who taught him. He does not know
> what was and will be, nor even much that is right in front of him. As for
> God's knowledge, it transcends and is contrary to this. He did not obtain it

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[40] Lamoreaux 12; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

through His senses or from someone who taught Him. From Him, nothing that was or will be is hidden, from all eternity to all eternity.[41]

In the same way, then, God's begetting and headship "transcends and is contrary to" the way in which begetting and headship exist among human beings.

In the treatise published by Lamoreaux under the title *On Our Salvation*, Abū Qurrah further explores this problem of how the same attribute can be predicated of God and of human beings, and how this problem relates to the affirmation or denial of God's having a Son. He argues that, in order to predicate of God an attribute of begetting, one must either affirm that this begetting takes place in a way similar to human beings, which is impermissible, or else affirm that begetting exists in God in a way that is not fully comprehensible by human beings. Furthermore, if the idea of God's begetting a Son were to be rejected based on the fact that it requires positing a kind of begetting that is beyond human understanding, this would entail rejecting all cataphatic doctrines about divine attributes:

> You will surely object: How could God beget, when we see that one who begets experiences inescapable necessities such as sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and its consequences, none of which can properly be said of God? We respond: How can you inquire about something that transcends the heavenly minds and all the angelic hosts, who humble themselves before it and refrain from inquiring about it? If, because you do not understand how it occurs, you find that you must reject the sonship even after it has been proven to be the case, it is time for you to deny everything you attribute to God, in that you do not understand how it occurs. If you refuse to do so, then tell me how God is alive when life among us is accompanied by necessities of which you are not ignorant, things like eating, drinking, nourishment, clothing, and transience. You are unable to say how God is alive notwithstanding these necessities. Accordingly, you

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[41] Lamoreaux 11; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

should deny life to God because you do not understand how it occurs and because it is contrary to the type of life you see with your own eyes….[42]

Here Abū Qurrah pursues a rather shrewd line of argument, in that he is borrowing from Qur'ānic and Islamic modes of expression about God and using them for his apologetical purposes. As noted above, he has selected an attribute, life, which has undoubted and explicit Qur'ānic support, and here he points out that there is no way for any believer, Christian or Muslim, to explain how this attribute exists in God. He knows that the Muslim reader cannot retreat to the position that one cannot make positive predications of divine attributes, because this would contradict the Qur'ānic witness. Perhaps even more importantly, Abū Qurrah's argument that divine attributes "transcend and are contrary to" the human attributes of which they are the source largely aligns with the central Qur'ānic tenet that a great ontological chasm exists between God and His creation. We have already seen in the previous chapter that one of the key apologetical methods of the author of *Fī tathlīṯ* was to take Islamic arguments used against Christian doctrine and invert them, using these quintessentially Islamic ways of thinking to support his Trinitarian arguments. In a similar way, Abū Qurrah here affirms the idea that God exists in an entirely different way than human beings exist, and then argues that if this is the

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[42] Lamoreaux 142; "*Wa-lakin taqūl kīf yalad Āllah wa qad narā āl-wālad tanūbihi āl-nūā'bālatī lā yaḫlū minhā āḫidmin āl-jumāʿa wa āl-ḥamal wa tūābʿa dalak mimā lā yaḥsan ān naqūluhu ʿalā Āllah? Fa-naqūl lak mā ānta wa āl-masālah ʿan āl-āmar āladī yafūt āl-ʿaqūl āl-samāwiah ājnād āl-mulāʾkah kulhā ḫāšʿaah dūnihu hādīah ʿan ṭalabihi? Wa ān kanat lā bad lak min ābṭāl āl-banwah bʿad mā ādatuka ilīhā āl-āstaqāmah li-lā mʿarafatuka bi-kīffatihā fa-qadḫān lak ān yabṭal kul mā taṣaf Āllah bihi li-jahaluka bi-kīffatihi wa ilā fa-āḫbarunī kīf Āllah ḥī wa li-lḥīāah ʿandanā āl-nūāʾb ālatī lā tajhaluhā min ilā kul wa āl-šara b wa āl-ǧadāʾ wa āl-labās wa āl-fanāʾ. Wa lā tastaṭīʿa ān taqūl kīf hūa ḥī ʿalā ǧīr hadahi āl-nūāʾb. Fa-āḏā ābṭ al āl-ḫīāah min Āllah li-lā mʿarafatuka bi-kīffatihā wa muḫālifatihā mā qad tarāhu bi-ʿaīnuka.*"

case, one cannot deny a divine attribute of begetting on the basis that the attribute of begetting exists among human beings in a way that we may not ascribe to God.

Divine Exaltedness and the Attribute of Begetting

In order to fully explore Theodore Abū Qurrah's treatment of begetting as a divine attribute, one must collate arguments found in three different treatises: *On the Method of the Knowledge of God*, *On Our Salvation*, and *Theologus Autodidactus*. When all the relevant texts are considered together, it becomes clear that Abū Qurrah's strategy revolves around the idea of God's absolute perfection and utter transcendence, a concept which any Muslim reader would be eager to affirm. Abū Qurrah seeks to place his reader in the position of having to affirm a divine attribute of begetting or else affirm a defect in the divine nature. We have already seen that he argues, via his mirror analogy, that no human attribute can exist without a divine attribute of which the human attribute is a dim reflection. In *On the Method of the Knowledge of God*, he also pursues this line of thinking to its obvious conclusion; namely, that if one denies a divine attribute of begetting, one necessarily ascribes to human beings a perfection or virtue which God is lacking:

> You who deny the Son, do you say that God is or is not able to beget one like Himself? If you suggest that God is not able to beget one like Himself, you have introduced in Him the greatest of defects…. Notwithstanding that you recognize that one of us can beget one like himself, you suggest that God is unable to do something excellent that we are able to do – and everyone knows that begetting is one of the things that among us are considered honorable and excellent. There is no escape: You must concede that God is able to beget one like Himself.[43]

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[43] Lamoreaux 162; "*Fa-aḫbarunī aīhā āl-jāḥad li-l-Ibn. Ātaqūl ān Āllah yaqar ān yalad miṯluhu ām lā*

Next Abū Qurrah acknowledges the distinction between affirming that God *is able* to

beget and affirming that He *has actually done so*. Such a distinction could potentially

give his reader a way of affirming that the human attribute of begetting does indeed find

its origin in a divine attribute of having the capacity for begetting, but without actually

having to affirm that God has in fact begotten a Son. Abū Qurrah argues that such a

position would still involve asserting a defect in God. If one were to assert that the divine

attribute is the capacity for begetting, rather than actually having done so, then one must

find a reason for this capacity not to have been exercised. He then argues that the only

possible reasons would each constitute a defect in the divine nature:

> God would only refrain from begetting one like Himself – since He is able
> to do so – for one of three reasons. It may be that He is too lazy or too
> weak to endure the discomfort that would befall Him in the act of giving
> birth. It may be that it is out of envy that He does not want to see one like
> Himself. It may be that He has the ability to beget but does not know this,
> and that He thus refrains from making use of it out of ignorance. Each of
> these options is simply too loathsome to be said of God and must be
> rejected: God is not overcome by laziness, nor is He touched by envy, nor
> is He subject to ignorance… It is not possible for us to deny that God has a
> Son. If we do, we attribute to God defect, fault, and something quite
> loathsome.[44]

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*yaqdar fa-ān yʿamat ān Āllah lā yaqdar ān yalad miṯluhu faqad ādẖalat ʿalīhi āʿaẓam āl-munaqaṣah ḥīṯu tajʿ
alunā naḥnu yaqdar āḥadunā ān yalad miṯluhu wa tajʿal Āllah lā yaqdar ʿalā mā naqdar naḥnu ʿalīhi min
āl-fūāḍal. Li-āna āl-walad qad ʿalama kul āl-nās ānuhu min mukāram mā ʿandanā wa fūāḍalah. Fa-lā bad lik
a min ān taqūl ān Āllah yaqdar ān yalad miṯluhu.”*

[44] Lamoreaux 162; “*Fa-ān Āllah lā yamtanʿa min ān yaladmiṯluhu iḏ kān qādar ān yalad ilā li-āḥad
ṯalāṯah āsbāb. Āmā li-kulfah tanūbihi fī āl-wilādah yaksal ʿanhā wa yʿajaz. Wa āmā li-ānuhu lā yuḥub ān
yarā miṯluhu ḥasadān. Wa āmā ān yakūn fīhi qūah ʿalā ḏalak lā yʿarafuhā wa ānamā yamtnʿa ʿan ān yastʿa
maluhā jahalān bihā. Fa-kul haḏā āsmaj min ān yaqāl ʿalā Āllah wa hūa nafī minhu. Fa-l-ʿamrī mā yʿatarīhi
kasal wa lā yadẖal ʿalīhi jasad wa lā yadnū minhu jahal.... Wa līsa li-āḥad ān yankar ān li-lah ibnān wa ilā f
aqad ādẖila ʿalā Āllah āl-naqaṣ wa āl-ʿaīb wa āl-samājah āl-ʿaẓīmah.”*

This line of argument seems almost calculated to cause the Muslim reader to recoil in horror, since nothing could be further from the Qur'ānic descriptions of God than the attribution of weakness, envy, or ignorance here postulated.

Having established rational arguments that both the denial of God's ability to beget and the denial of His actually having done so would entail the affirmation of a defect in God, Abū Qurrah turns his attention to two objections to the concept of divine begetting. In answering these objections, he continues to focus on the idea of divine exaltedness and perfection, suggesting that either of the objections made would also entail defects in God. The first objection is that the father who begets a son must necessarily be prior to that son. The implication of this objection, although not clearly articulated by Abū Qurrah in the text, is that the Christian doctrine of the co-eternality all three Persons of the Trinity and the doctrine of God's having begotten a Son are mutually contradictory. Abū Qurrah has already laid the groundwork for responding to this objection by his position that the same attribute exists in God and in human beings in quite different ways and that the human attribute is but a reflection of the divine attribute. In response to this particular objection, he argues that chronological priority is not inherent or necessary to the attribute of begetting, but instead is the result of the imperfect way in which the attribute exists in human beings:

> You must remember that about which we earlier agreed: Of necessity, we
> describe God with the things that among us are considered honorable and
> we exclude from Him our defects, on account of their being contrary to
> His essence, which essence is nothing other than honorable. The priority
> of a father with respect to a son arises solely from a defect in our own
> nature as begetters…. A human father is begotten in a state that is
> incomplete, in that he has yet to attain the point where he is able to

beget…. Furthermore, even after he has attained the ability to beget … he still cannot do so apart from sexual intercourse, and still more time passes for him before he is able to have sexual intercourse, during which time he is prior to his son…. As for God most high, however, there was never a time when He was unable to beget one like Himself. There was never a time when He did not know that he was able to beget one life Himself. There was never a time when He did not will to make one like Himself.[45]

Abū Qurrah's response to the objection based on chronological priority is perfectly consistent with what he has said previously about the relationship between human and divine attributes, since he locates in human nature three separate defects or weaknesses from which a human father's chronological priority to his son originates: the need for physical growth and development, the need for sufficient cognitive development to be aware of one's own ability to beget, and the need for a cooperative partner in the act of begetting. This association of chronological priority with human needs and defects is in keeping with Abū Qurrah's insistence that the same attribute may exist in different beings in different ways, and that a given human attribute is but a weak reflection of a transcendent divine attribute. By arguing as he does, he is able both to overcome the objection and to emphasize yet again the transcendence and absolute perfection of God which is so important to Muslim discourse about God.

The second objection that Abū Qurrah addresses is the suggestion that if God can and does beget, there is no necessity for him to have begotten only one Son. He seems to

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[45] Lamoreaux 162-63; "*Fa-yanbaḡī lika ān taḏkar ānā ātafaqunā bi-āl-āḍṭarār ān naṣaf Āllah bi-mukāram mā ʿandamā wa yanfī ʿanahu munāqaṣunā li-muḫālifatihā jaūharihi āl-karīm wiḥdah. Wa qad am āl-āb ʿalā āl-ibn ānamā yakūn min naqaṣ ṭabīʿaah āl-walad ʿandanā…. Āḥadunā yūlida ḡīr tām wa lā bālaḡ ḫad maqdarah āl-wilādah…. Wa āḏā balaḡā āl-ānsān minā ṭāqah āl-wilādah … lā yaqdar ān yalad ilā bi-āl-zūāj wa tamḍī ʿalīhi āzmān qabal ān yaṣal ilā zamān āl-zūāj yakūn fīhā āqdam min ibnuhu…. Āmā Āllah tʿaālā fa-ānuhu lam yakun qaṭ ḡīr qādar ān yalad miṯluhu. Wa lam yakun qaṭ lā yʿalam ānuhu yaqdar ān yalad miṯluhu wa lam yakun qaṭ lā yašāʾ ān yalad miṯluhu.*"

imagine his reader asking, "If indeed the lack of an attribute of begetting would be a defect in God, why is this attribute not maximally expressed, in the begetting of many sons?" In answering this objection, Abū Qurrah again grounds his response in the concept of God's complete adequacy and perfection:

> Since God was able to beget one like Himself, one of two things must have been the case: either He begot one Son and no more or He begot more than one Son. If you suggest that He must have begotten more than one Son, the one Son must have been deficient, for He was insufficient to please the Father. If the Son was deficient and the Son is equal to the Father and of His essence, the Father, then, was lacking.[46]

As with his previous response, Abū Qurrah's argument here is exactly in keeping with his previous positions. Human begetting, although it produces another being of equal dignity and like essence with the begetter, is but a pale reflection of divine begetting, because it produces a being who, like the begetter, is imperfect. The divine begetting, on the other hand, produces a Begotten One who is utterly adequate and pleasing to the Begetter, because in being of like essence with the Begetter, He is perfect and without defect. Like Abū Qurrah's previous response, this answer overcomes the objection while at the same time associating the defect of limitation exclusively with human begetting and emphasizing divine transcendence and perfection. Since the Qur'ānic objections to divine begetting are all based in the association of begetting with weakness and defect, Abū Qurrah's method of arguing transcends the assumptions that are built into the Muslim criticism of Christian doctrine.

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[46] Lamoreaux 163; "*Āllah ad kān yaqdar ān yalad miṯluhu lā bad min ān yalḥaquhu āḥad āmarīn āmā ān yalad ibnān wāḥidān wa lā yazīd. Wa āmā ān yalad āktar min ibn wāḥid. Fa-ān zʿamat ānahu yanbaḡī ān yalad āktar min ibn wāḥid fa-āl-Ibn āl-wāḥid nāqaṣ li-ānahu lā kafāīah bihi li-masrah āl-Āb. Wa ān kān āl-Ibn nāqaṣān wa āl-Ibn ʿadal li-l-Āb wa min jaūharihi fa-āl-Āb idan nāqaṣ.*"

Headship in God

Closely related to his arguments on begetting are Abū Qurrah's arguments on the divine attribute of *rīāsah*. The most literal translation of this term is "headship," although Lamoreaux uses both this term and "dominion" when translating *rīāsah* in different passages. These two lines of argument (on begetting and on headship) are connected in four different ways. First, the headship/dominion that Abū Qurrah attributes to God arises from the divine attribute of begetting and is entirely dependent upon it. Second, both concepts are described as specific instances of human attributes mirroring divine ones. Third, both begetting and headship are ways that he approaches Trinitarian doctrine with the language of attributes. Fourth, in both lines of argument he seeks to overcome Muslim objections to Trinitarian doctrine by demonstrating that the attribute in question is a manifestation of divine transcendence and perfection, rather than a violation or diminution of it.

In *Theologus Autodidactus*, Abū Qurrah argues that a significant aspect of Adam's nobility consisted in becoming the head not merely of lower creatures, but of a community of persons like to himself in nature and equal to himself in dignity. He rather humorously asserts that "… it would not be headship but degradation and dishonor to be called the head of ticks, pigs, scarabs, and worms. His speech, too, would be empty and unneeded, for He would have no one to understand or answer him."[47] He then goes on to argue that, just as a lack of begetting as a divine attribute would mean that a perfection

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[47] Lamoreaux 12; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

exists in human beings that was absent in God, so also the absence of headship as a

divine attribute would mean that Adam's most noble attribute, the headship of a

communion of persons like to himself in dignity and worth, had no basis in a

corresponding divine attribute. Furthermore, it must be the case that God exercises

headship over a communion of persons of like essence because otherwise His headship

would be exercised over His creatures only. Importantly, Abū Qurrah argues that the

ontological gap between humankind and the "ticks, pigs, scarabs, and worms" is actually

less than that between humankind and God:

> Would it not be absurd that Adam is head of one like himself but God is
> head only of His creation? Adam would not be pleased to be head of the
> creation. Indeed, neither he nor any of us would be pleased to be head of
> pigs, asses, flies, bedbugs, fleas, scarabs, and worms. If Adam and we are
> not pleased with this, how is it that we attribute to God that with which we
> ourselves are not pleased? If we were to say that God is head, but only
> over angels and humans, this also would be degradation. After all, by
> nature angels and humans stand further from God than do pigs, lice, and
> scarabs from us. While we and those animals share the nature of living
> being, angels and humans share absolutely nothing with God.[48]

Here it becomes plain that for Abū Qurrah absolute divine transcendence is at the

heart of his argument. It would be woefully insufficient to assert that the human

attribute of headship is the reflection of a divine attribute of headship exercised

over the created universe, because Adam's headship would then in a sense be of a

greater order than God's. It is specifically because of God's transcendent nature

that we can be assured that He must exercise headship over a communion of

persons of like essence, because otherwise the "headship" attributed to him would

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[48] Lamoreaux 13; the original Arabic text is unpublished and unavailable.

be an insult and a degradation. By arguing this way, Abū Qurrah exercises the strategy we have seen before in *Fī tatlīt* of inverting the Muslim argument against Christian doctrine. Whereas for the Muslim, divine transcendence means that God must not be associated with other beings, for Abū Qurrah that very transcendence means that God must be associated with other beings, else He cannot be said to exercise meaningful headship. There also seems to be in this argument an implicit critique of some of the Qur'ānic modes of expression about God's transcendence, such as the title "Lord of the Worlds" (*Rabb āl-ʿalamīn*)[49]. In the Qur'ānic text this title is clearly intended to convey God's unique exaltedness over His creation, but when viewed through the lens of Abū Qurrah's argument, it can be seen as faint praise indeed, ascribing to God only a headship of little dignity.

In *On Our Salvation*, Abū Qurrah again makes use of the idea of divine headship and seeks to build a case for Trinitarian doctrine around the questions of whether that headship is absolute or relative, and whether it is eternal or temporal:

> Before there were creatures, was He possessed of dominion? If you say that He did not have dominion before there were creatures, you have caused him to derive honor from creatures, for dominion is surely an honor for the one who possesses it. Further, if it was creatures that gave God His honor … it would not have been out of His graciousness that He created them. No! It would rather have been His need to be honored by having someone to dominate that caused him to create them…. Furthermore, if you maintain that God's dominion was only over creatures, you make His dominion to be of the most inferior and mean sort….[50]

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[49] See, for example, surahs 1:2; 6:45 and162; 10:10; 27:44; 37:87; and 45:36, among other passages.

[50] Lamoreaux 140; "*Qabal ān yuḫliqa āl-ḫuluq kānat lihu rīāsah ām lā? Fa-ān qalat ānahu lam takun*

As with the arguments examined above, Abū Qurrah builds his case on the implicit

question of which account of divine headship genuinely expresses the divine

transcendence and exaltedness - an understanding of God as Lord over His creatures

only, or an understanding of God as head of a communion of persons alike in essence and

dignity. The argument presented here builds on the argument from *Theologus*

Autodidactus, in that the argument there suggested that a divine headship exercised only

over created beings would be a diminution of the divine honor. The present argument

goes a step further and argues that, if God's headship is exercised over only His

creatures, then it is both a temporal rather than eternal attribute and it actually makes God

dependent upon His creatures. Clearly this argument is calculated to inspire horror in a

Muslim readership accustomed to Qur'ānic expressions of God's absolute transcendence

and exaltedness above His creatures. Here again Theodore Abū Qurrah is inverting the

Muslim objection to Trinitarian doctrine and making it instead the lynchpin of his

argument. Without divine headship over a communion of persons of like essence and

dignity, God's lordship is associated not with transcendence but with defect, since it

would be a headship that is not only of lesser dignity than Adam's headship, but time-

bound and dependent upon His creatures. This line of argument is why Abū Qurrah can

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lihu rīāsah qabal āl-ḫuluq faqad jʿalatahu yatḫad āl-šarf min āl-ḫuluq li-āna āl-rīāsah šarf li-man hīa lihu lā muḥālah. Wa ān kān āl-ḫuluq hum āladīn šarfūhu ... fa-ānahu lā minah lihu ʿalīhum bi-ḫulquhu āīāhum li-āna ḥājatihi ilā ān yašraf bi-āl-rīāsah ʿalīhum hīa ālatī dʿatihi ilā ḫulquhu āīāhum.... Ānka ān zʿamat ān rīāsah Āllah ilā ʿalā āl-ḫuluq faqadjʿalahā ādanī āl-rīāsāt...."

make the almost strident claim that "if you deny that God has a Son, you attribute defect to God, nullify the glory of His divinity, and reduce the honor of His dominion."[51]

Having established his argument that God must have a Son in order for His headship to be both eternal and transcendent over His creatures, Abū Qurrah turns his attention to two details about the exercise of this divine headship that are crucial for his project of defending Trinitarian doctrine. These two details are the question of whether God's headship is exercised over an equal, and the question of the mode by which this divine headship is exercised. With regard to the first question, he presents the full range of options ("God's dominion must be over one equal, one lesser, or one greater"[52]) and then immediately rejects the second and third options. If God's headship were exercised over one inferior to himself, then the same problem would arise as with headship over mere creatures; it would be a headship that was inferior to Adam's and therefore a derogation of the divine transcendence. The third choice involves a simple contradiction in terms, since there is nothing greater than God. Thus by a simple rational argument Abū Qurrah establishes that the headship exercised by God must be over one equal to himself, and moves on to the question of the mode by which the divine headship is exercised.

Abū Qurrah asserts that headship can be exercised in one of three modes: "by force, by will, or by nature."[53] He then argues that the divine headship cannot be

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[51] Lamoreaux 140; "*Ānka ān ānkarat ān yakūn li-lah Ibn faqad ādhalat ʿalīhi āl-naqaṣ wa āqṣīatihi ʿan jalāl lāhūatihi wa ḥaṭaṭatihi ʿan šarf mulukuhu.*"

[52] Lamoreaux 141; "*Rīāsah Āllah lā bud min ān takūn āma ʿalā mā hūa ʿadaluhu wa āma ʿalā mā hūa dūnuhu wa āmā ʿalā mā hūa āfḍal minhu.*"

[53] Lamoreaux 141; "*... āmā ān takūn bi-āl-qahar wa āmā ān takūn bi-āl-raḍā wa āmā ān takūn ṭabāʿaah.*"

exercised by force, both because this would involve a logical contradiction and because it would entail a defect in God. Since he has already offered a proof that God's headship must be exercised over one equal to himself, if this headship were imposed by force, it would mean that the one equal to God is weak and therefore that God himself is weak. As for headship that operates "by will," Abū Qurrah does not mean by this that the one exercising his headship imposes his will on the other; this mode of headship would fall into the first category of force. Instead, he makes clear that he is referring to the will of the one who is subject to the headship exercised. It would be a kind of elective headship, not unlike that exercised by the head of state in a democracy. Abū Qurrah makes an argument similar to what he has already written about headship not being derived from creatures because this would entail God being dependent upon His creatures. In the present argument, he asserts that the divine headship cannot be according to the mode of the will because then God would be dependent upon the will of the one over whom He exercises headship, which would also entail His headship being at least potentially transitory, which would be a diminution of the divine transcendence.

Theodore Abū Qurrah thus concludes that the divine headship operates according to the mode of nature:

> It remains that His dominion be by nature. Dominion by nature is the type
> of dominion that the Father has over the Son. It never ceases. It is not
> brought about by force. In it, there is neither discomfort nor misgiving. It
> is instead full of joy and love.[54]

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[54] Lamoreaux 141-42; "*Faqad baqī ān takūn rīāsah ṭabāʿaīah. Wa āmā āl-rīāsah āl-ṭabāʿaīah fa-hīa ālatī takūn li-l-Āb ʿalā āl-Ibn ālatī lā zūāl li-hā wa lā nīlat bi-āl-qahar wa lā fīhā kulfah wa lā waham wa hīa mumtal'ah sarūrān wa hubān.*"

There is a significant danger for the Anglophone reader in understanding this part of Abū Qurrah's argument. When he writes of "dominion by nature," one might get the impression that he is asserting that the Father and the Son have different natures, which would of course be outside the mainstream of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine. However, Abū Qurrah clearly affirms in numerous places in the treatises here analyzed that the Father and the Son share the same substance, for which he uses the Arabic term *jāūhar*. Here, instead of the philosophically precise *jāūhar*, he uses the somewhat more general term *ṭabāʿīah*. Although Lamoreaux's translation is faithful to the Arabic construction, the headship Abū Qurrah describes here might be more felicitously rendered in English as "a relation of headship that is natural to both the one exercising headship and the one over whom headship is exercised."

This way of writing about the divine headship opens up a very important consideration for the project at hand. Given that Abū Qurrah seems to be speaking of a divine headship that is "natural" in the sense just described, he appears to be describing the relations of the Persons of the Trinity in terms of divine attributes. Although sharing the same nature/essence (*jāūhar*), according to Abū Qurrah's account, it is "natural" (*ṭabāʿāī*) to God the Father to exercise headship and similarly natural to the Son and the Spirit to be subject to that headship. This would seem to describe a divine attribute specific to each Person, although admittedly the way in which there is a difference between the Son and the Spirit is not addressed here, most probably because this passage occurs in a primarily Christological treatise. Bearing in mind that Arabophone Christian authors eventually argued for three incommensurable attributes indicating the presence of

three divine Persons in the one God, the argument here considered would seem to be a major developmental milestone. Although Abū Qurrah does not in any of his treatises articulate the full-blown argument based on three incommensurable attributes, here he establishes a clear link between divine attributes and multiplicity in God. Once headship by force and headship by will have been eliminated for the reasons he explains, what remains is that God (which is how Abū Qurrah consistently refers to God the Father in these arguments) has a unique attribute of exercising headship over a communion of Persons like to him in essence and dignity, while the Son has an attribute of being subject to that headship. This is perhaps the earliest such link between divine attributes and divine Persons to be found in the Arabophone Christian literature.

Divine Attributes and Divine Persons

Later in *On Our Salvation*, Theodore Abū Qurrah makes a rather striking claim that bears directly upon the idea of three incommensurable divine attributes as indicative of the three divine Persons. This claim does not occur in a systematic consideration of divine attributes, but instead in a passage that attempts to prove that the Old Testament bears witness to the Persons of the Trinity. In enumerating various scriptural passages, Abū Qurrah writes:

> Solomon, the son of David, made mention of this Son, calling him the
> "Wisdom of God," both so as to teach us that he was always with God and
> to inform the ignorant that whoever denies the eternity of this Son
> deprives God of His wisdom. He said, speaking in the voice of Wisdom,
> "The Lord created me at the beginning of His ways for His deeds. Before
> the ages, He established me in the beginning. Before the earth was made,
> before He poured out the founts of water, before He shaped the mountains
> and hills, before all, He begot me. When He was creating the heavens, I
> was with Him. When He was marking off His throne on the winds, when

He was making firm and preparing the founts below the heavens, when He established for the sea the limit of its extent, that the waters might not transgress its edge, when He was making strong the foundations of the earth, I was acting with him. I was daily His delight, and I was rejoicing in Him always." What sun is more luminous than this proof of the eternity of the Son and of His being begotten from God before all eternity, as well as that through him God created the world, that He delights in God and God delights in Him, even as said above, and that He became incarnate?[55]

Whereas the previous passage examined merely suggested a link between divine attributes and the existence of multiple Persons in God, this passage explicitly associates the Son with the divine attribute of Wisdom. Certainly Theodore Abū Qurrah is not the first Christian writer to assign this passage from Proverbs a Christological interpretation, and a full examination of the difficult interpretive history of this passage due to the verb "created" would be out of place here. Despite its use by other Christian authors before and after Abū Qurrah, the presence of this identification of the Son with divine Wisdom is significant in this context for two reasons. First, since it occurs in the same treatise as the treatment of divine headship just described, it suggests that Abū Qurrah was thinking in terms of divine attributes as he developed his Trinitarian theology. Second, because the association between divine attributes and divine Persons becomes more explicit when he focuses specifically on Trinitarian doctrine in *On the Trinity*, and because the Trinitarian arguments based on divine attributes because more prominent in later Arabophone

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[55] Lamoreaux 145; "*Sulīmān ibn Dāūd qad dakara hadā āl-Ibn wa hūa yasmīhu ḥikmah Āllah li-yʿalam āl-nās ānahu lam yazal mʿa Āllah li-yaḫbar āl-jiḥāl ān min ʿaṭal āzalīah hadā āl-Ibn faqad salaba Āllah ḥikmatihi. Wa qāl ʿan āl-ḥikmah ān āl-Rabb ḫalaqanī rās ṭurqah āl-āʿamāluhu wa qabal āl-dahar āsasanī fī āl-budʾ qabal ān ṣanaʿa āl-ārḍ qabal ān yafjar ʿaīūn āl-mīāh qabal ān yajmad āl-jibāl wa ilā kām qabal āl-sakal waladunī ḥīṯu kān yaḫlaq āl-samāʾ kuntu mʿahu ḥīṯu kān yajad ʿaršuhu ʿalā āl-rīāḥ wa ḥīṯu kān yūṯaq tahīʾah āl-ʿaīūn ālatī taḥt āl-samāʾ. Āḏ waḍaʿa li-l-baḥar ḥad nahāīatihi wa āl-mīāh lā tʿadū šafatihi. Ḥīṯu kān yaṣnʿa āsās āl-ārḍ qūīān qad kuntu mʿahu āṣnʿa. Ānā āladī kān yamtataʿa bunī kul yūm wa kuntu āsira bihi fī kul ḥīn. Fa-āīah šams āūḍaḥ min hadahi dalālah ʿalā āzalīah āl-Ibn wa mūluduhu min Āllah qabal āl-dahūr wa ān Āllah bihi ḫalaqa āl-ḫuluq wa ānahu yasar bihi wa yasar Āllah bihi kamā qulnā min fūq wa ānahu tajasad.*" See Prov 8:22-30.

Christian literature, this usage seems to be a noteworthy point in the overall

developmental trajectory.

As one would expect, Abū Qurrah's most developed Trinitarian argument appears

in his treatise *On the Trinity*. In developing his argument, he brings together the focus on

the divine attributes, considerations from Arabic grammar, and the identification of Jesus

as the Word of God. He approaches his argument by recounting a challenge that Muslims

of his day apparently posed to Christians, namely, "Was it three or one that created the

world?"[56] As Abū Qurrah explains, this was supposed to be an unanswerable question,

since if the Christian asserted that three had created the universe, it would appear to be an

assertion that there were three Creators and therefore an admission of polytheism,

whereas if the Christian answered that one had created the universe, the Muslim would

"consider the other two hypostases nullified."[57] In response to this rhetorical challenge,

Abū Qurrah cites several examples from the natural world in which it is considered

appropriate to associate the same verb with two different nouns in the singular and yet

not to assign the verb to the same nouns when they are joined by the conjunctive *and* into

a plural subject. He points out, for example, that one may say, "The carpenter made the

door" and "The hand of the carpenter made the door," but one does not say, "The

carpenter and his hand made the door." After citing several examples of this kind in

which one entity executes the action of a given verb *through* another entity, Abū Qurrah

argues:

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[56] Lamoreaux 185; "*Talāṯah ḫalaqūā āl-ḫuluq ām wāḥid?*"

[57] Ibid., "*... ẓanūā ān āl-āqnūmīn āl-āḫīrīn qad buṭilā....*"

In the same way, one says, "The Father created the world" and "The Son created the world." One does not say, "The Father and the Son created the world," for the Father created the world through His Son. It is as St. Paul said, "In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son, through whom He created the world."[58]

Adroitly shifting from speaking of God's *Son* to speaking of God's *Word*, Abū Qurrah immediately follows this argument by quoting John 1:1-3 with its emphasis that God made all things through His Word. The terminological shift from God's Son to God's Word allows Abū Qurrah to associate the argument that he has just built upon grammar and analogies from the mundane world with the Qur'ānic resonances and connotations of the Word of God presented previously. Since the term *word* is used in the Qur'ān specifically in reference to Jesus, as also explained above, Abū Qurrah may be attempting in this passage simultaneously to suggest that the Muslim's rhetorical challenge is baseless *and* to introduce one of the more problematic passages from the Qur'ān in such a way that the act of creation is associated with Jesus.

Two significant characteristics of Abū Qurrah's argument up to this point are worth noting. First, his response to the rhetorical Muslim challenge follows a pattern seen previously, in which the Muslim argument is not merely answered, but actually inverted to be an argument in favor of Trinitarian doctrine. Whereas the hypothetical Muslim would like to give his Christian interlocutor a strict choice between creation by one or creation by three, Abū Qurrah points out that this dichotomy does not accord with common sense and everyday experience. Beyond this, he also subtly suggests that the

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[58] Lamoreaux 186; "*Ka-dalak yaqāl ān āl-Āb halaqa āl-huluq. Wa yaqāl ān āl-Ibn halaqa āl-huluq. Wa lā yaqāl ān āl-Āb wa āl-Ibn halaqā āl-huluq li-āna āl-Āb ānamā halaqa āl-huluq kuluhu bi-Ibnuhu kamā qāl Mār Būlus ān Āllah fī āhar āl-āīām kalamanā bi-Ibnuhu āladī bihi halaqa āl-duhūr.*" See Heb 1:2.

dichotomy does not align with Islamic religious sensibilities either, since both religious traditions affirm that God acts through His Word, although the precise identity of that Word is a matter of dispute. Second, the introduction of grammar as a key element of his argument is an important precedent for developing Arabophone religious discourse, both Christian and Muslim. As will be shown later, grammatical considerations, particularly from the Qur'ānic text itself, eventually become an important aspect of the debates about unicity and multiplicity in God.

Theodore Abū Qurrah clearly intends to place this appellation of *Word* in reference to the second Person of the Trinity in the context of divine attributes, for he then calls the reader's attention to other New Testament passages in which Jesus is referred to by other attributes:

> For this reason, St. Paul called the Son "the light of the Father's glory," when he said, "In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son, through whom He created the world. He is the light of the Father's glory and the form of His essence." He also called him "the Wisdom of God" and "His power" … comparing him to God in the same way that the fire's heat is like the fire, for heat is the fire's power. So also, the evangelist John called Him "Word" when he said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God."[59]

In treating the term Word as a divine attribute, Abū Qurrah accomplishes something similar to what the author of *Fī tatlīt* accomplishes by using the phrase "God and His Word and His Spirit." The second hypostasis of the Trinity is conceptually oriented to the first in such a way that any accusation of polytheism is obviated. That said, Abū Qurrah's

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[59] Lamoreaux 187; "*Li-dalak samaā Mār Būlus āl-Ibn ḍū' mujad āl-Āb ḥīṭu yaqāl ān Āllah kalamanā fī āl-āīām bi-Ibnuhu āladī bihi ḫalaqa āl-duhūr āladī hūa ḍū' mujad wa ṣūrah 'aīnuhu wa samāhu āīḍān ḥikmah Āllah wa qūatihi.... fa-ānzalahu min Āllah bi-manzilah ḥarārah āl-nār min āl-nār li-āna āl-ḥarārah qūah āl-nār. Wa Yūḥanā āl-Mubašar qad samāhu kalimah ād qāl ānahu fī āl-bud' lam yazal āl-kalimah wa āl-kalimah lam yazal 'anda Āllah.*" See Heb 1:2-3 and John 1:1.

association of the Word of God with divine attributes is unquestionably a development of

Arabophone Trinitarian theology beyond anything to be found in *Fī tatlīt.*

Careful attention should be paid to Abū Qurrah's use of scripture in this passage.

He presumes an equivalency between the use of the term "Word" in the Johannine

literature with the terms "light," "wisdom," and "power" from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(which, in keeping with the tradition of his era, he mistakenly attributes to St. Paul).

Whereas some interpreters might take the term "Word" to be used as the proper name of

the Second Person of the Trinity and the other terms to be used metaphorically, Abū

Qurrah apparently sees no difference in the use of these terms. For him, they are

equivalent expressions of an attribute of God that are in some way distinct from God

Himself. Each of these attributes (Word, light, wisdom, and power) is substantially

identical with each of the others, and yet none of them is identical with the First

Hypostasis. This is a crucial point, because it means that Abū Qurrah establishes a direct

correlation between divine attributes and the Divine Persons of the Trinity.

He does not, however, establish any clear distinction between the Second and

Third Persons of the Trinity in this regard. If Word, wisdom, light, and power all refer to

the same attribute which is the Second Hypostasis, there is no similar list of terms which

are considered equivalent expressions referring to the Third Hypostasis. The reader is left

with the conclusion that there is both rational and scriptural support for the idea of a

divine attribute which may be understood as a distinct divine hypostasis, but is not

offered any explanation for why there should be more than one, and if more than one,

why only two.

In conclusion, Theodore Abū Qurrah's writings occupy an important position in the developmental trajectory of Arabophone Trinitarian doctrine. First, they move beyond the purely scriptural approach of *Fī tatlīt* to an approach that combines scriptural and philosophical argumentation. Second, Abū Qurrah introduces Arabic grammar and its implications as a relevant consideration in the work of theology. Finally, he begins to build the conceptual framework for an articulation of Trinitarian doctrine on the basis of divine attributes, by arguing that the human attributes of begetting and headship must correspond to similar divine attributes and doing so in a way that affirms the central Islamic tenet of God's absolute transcendence and exaltedness.

Chapter 3: Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah

The next texts to be considered are those of the Jacobite theologian and apologist

Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah (hereafter referred to simply as "Abū Rā'iṭah,") who

lived and worked in the Jacobite center of Takrīt during the late eighth and early ninth

century. There are only two events that allow for the approximate dating of Abū Rā'iṭah's

life. First, he is known from both Melkite and Jacobite sources to have sent Nonnus of

Nisibus as his deputy to the court of an Armenian prince to debate Christology with none

other than Theodore Abū Qurrah, a mission which seems to have taken place between

815 and 820. Second, Abū Rā'iṭah is known to have been among the accusers of a bishop

named Philoxenus who was deposed in 828. Sandra Toenies Keating, who has introduced

a volume of Abū Rā'iṭah's writings to the Anglophone world, concludes approximate life

dates of 770-835 for Abū Rā'iṭah.[1] This dating makes him a near-contemporary but

probably somewhat younger than Theodore Abū Qurrah, and the passage of time between

the heights of their respective careers is somewhat significant in the changes it

necessitated for Abū Rā'iṭah's apologetical method, as will be demonstrated later.

Georg Graf, in his extensive efforts to develop a comprehensive bibliography of

early Christian Arabophone writings, has catalogued a total of seven texts attributed to

Abū Rā'iṭah.[2] Like Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah had multiple intended audiences and a

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[1] Sandra Toenies Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'iṭah* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 35-40; see also Griffith, *Beginnings*, 164-165.

[2] Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947), 222-226.

range of apologetical agendas, as he sought to prevent the conversion of Christians to

Islam, to commend Christian doctrine to Muslims, and to defend and promote the

distinctive doctrinal expressions and liturgical practices of his Jacobite community vis-à-

vis the other two Arabophone Christian "denominations," the Melkites and the Church of

the East. Among his seven known texts, three are particularly relevant for the purpose at

hand: a *risālah* (epistle) on the Trinity, another on the Incarnation, and a third "on the

proof of the Christian religion." These three texts will be referred to hereafter as

Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas, *Fī āl-Tajasud*, and *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*, respectively.

As with Abū Qurrah, little is known with certainty of the particulars of Abū

Rā'iṭah's life and day-to-day work. The surviving texts use the term *āl-Takrītī* as part of

his name, indicating a person from or closely associated with Takrīt, and giving rise to

the idea that he may have been the Jacobite bishop of that important theological center.

Griffith gives some limited credence to that possibility, also noting that he may instead

have been bishop of Nisibis, and noting that there is contradictory information on this

point in the existing texts.[3] For her part, Keating rejects entirely the idea that Abū Rā'iṭah

was a bishop of either city, noting that the somewhat traditional idea of Abū Rā'iṭah as

bishop of Takrīt arose from a combination of mere speculation and references in Coptic

authors beginning in the eleventh century, quite too long after Abū Rā'iṭah's time to be

taken at face value.[4] Keating gives more credence to a reference in an Armenian

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[3] Griffith, *Beginnings*, 165.

[4] Keating, 40-45.

chronicle about the Christological debate between Nonnus of Nisibis and Abū Qurrah which calls Abū Rā'iṭah a "*vardapet* in Mesopotamia." She argues that at this point in history, the term *vardapet* was used in the Armenian Church to refer to a non-ordained theologian who served as a teacher of scripture, doctrine, and philosophy, and that the term may be understood as roughly the equivalent of *malpōnō* in the Church of the East during the same era.[5] Thus it may well have been the case that Abū Rā'iṭah was not a bishop, but rather a scholar of international and inter-communion repute in the still-new endeavor of expressing and defending Christian doctrine in Arabic.

Abū Rā'iṭah's Use of Qur'ānic Terminology and Islamic Concepts

Throughout his writings, Abū Rā'iṭah shows a stronger familiarity with the Qur'ānic text and a greater effort at using Islamic terminology than Abū Qurrah. A typical example of the way he employs Qur'ānic turns of phrase appears in *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*. Abū Rā'iṭah's overall argument in this *risālah* is that there six invalid reasons for the embrace of a particular religion or ideology (the desire for temporal gain or advantage, the desire for heavenly reward, overpowering fear, the fact that the religion under consideration permits what is desired, the opportunity to advance social standing, and tribal solidarity)[6], and only one valid reason - the existence of proof for the religion, given by God Himself. His objective, of course, is to establish that only

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[5] Keating, 46.

[6]Keating 83; "*Kul dīn ẓahara fī āl-ʿaālam lā yaḥlūā āʿataqād fa-āʿaluhu min āḥad sabʿaah āqsām āḏṭarārān. Āḥaduhā āmā raḡbah fī ʿaājal ẓahar nafʿahu wa ḡīrihi. Wa āl-ṯānī ṭamʿa fī ājal yarjūā darakahu. Wa āl-ṯālaṯ rahbah qāharah yaḍṭar ilā qabūluhu. Wa āl-rābʿa raḥsah fī kul maṭlūb min āl-maḥẓūrāt tasabab ihi. Wa āl-ḥāmas āstaḥsānān li-tanmīqahu wa zaḥrafatahu. Wa āl-sādas tūāṯā wa ʿaṣbīah min rahaṭ maḥtāl ʿalā rahaṭ wa āl-waṣūl ilā āl-ʿaz wa āl-maẓāfarah ʿalā āl-qudrah wa ādrāk āl-ṯarwah wa āl-āīsār bi-naṣrah.*"

Christianity can be understood as contrary to the first six motivations and in keeping with

the seventh. In elaborating this argument, Abū Rā'iṭah is sometimes obliged to

demonstrate that various aspects of Jewish and Christian salvation history do not fall

within the first six categories. He anticipates, for example, that an interlocutor might

point out that the Exodus event, with its attendant call of the Jewish people back to

faithful worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was accomplished through a

combination of fear and desire:

> You see that Moses, son of 'Imrān and the other prophets accepted by you,
> proclaimed a religion and they revealed it and confirmed it with desire and
> fear together. As for the desire, it is just as the statement of Moses that
> "God made you heirs to the land of Canaan…." As for the fear, it is also
> just as his statement to the Sons of Israel, offering to them that "Surely
> God has made you heirs of the peoples, so you shall kill them until not one
> of them remains…." [7]

It is worth noting that Abū Rā'iṭah refers here to Moses as the "son of 'Imrān"

and as one of the prophets, both of which are Qur'ānic ways of referring to him. This is

significant in that it demonstrates both Abū Rā'iṭah's familiarity with the Qur'ānic text

and his willingness to establish common ground with his Muslim audience by using such

terminology. Abū Rā'iṭah has thus set himself the task of demonstrating that the dynamic

of the Exodus event was something other than fear and desire, and he continues to

develop his argument in specifically Qur'ānic terms. Rather than compelling his people

through fear and desire, argues Abū Rā'iṭah, God "brought about the protection of the

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[7] Keating 94-95; "*Wa qad tarūn Mūsā ibn 'Imrān wa ġīruhu min āl-ānbīā' āl-qabūlah minkum qad d'aūā
ilā dīn wa āẓharūhu wa āṯbatūhu. Bi-āl-raġbah was āl-rahbah jamī'aān. Āmā āl-raġbah fa-ka-qūl Mūsā ān
Āllah mūraṯakum ārḍ Kan'aān…. Wa āmā āl-rahbah fa-ka-qūluhu āīḏān li-binā Isrā'īl wa taqdamah ilīhum
ān Āllah mūraṯakum ārḍ āl-āmum yaqīnān fa-taqtalūnuhum ḫīṯ lā tabqūn minhum āḥdān….*"

religion, and its acceptance through signs and wonders that God revealed and caused

through the hand of [Moses] in the land of Egypt…. Now these signs proved the religion

of God by the hand of Moses [and] are among the wonders widely-known by all of the

peoples."[8] By using the term "signs" (*āl-āīāt*), Abū Rā'iṭah connects this seminal event in

salvation history with a key Islamic concept, since as previously explained this term is

used throughout the Qur'ān to denote the proofs that God provides for his revelatory

action in the world and even for the Qur'ānic verses themselves. Taking both the singular

and the plural into account, this term appears some 235 times in the text of the Qur'ān.

Abū Rā'iṭah is thus able simultaneously to cast the Exodus in specifically Qur'ānic

terminology and fit it into his model of valid and invalid reasons for conversion to a

particular religious tradition.

As he continues to describe and characterize the Exodus event, Abū Rā'iṭah does

so in a way that is virtually saturated with Qur'ānic terminology:[9]

> The proof of this [i.e., that God acted toward Egypt and toward the
> Israelites in order to provide convincing signs to validate His revealed
> will] is the statement of God, may He be praised! to His intimate friend,
> Moses, when he begged Him to save the Sons of Israel from the hand of
> Pharaoh and from the error of his people, from his enslavement and
> oppression of them with every painful torment, and to reveal to them His
> religion and send down to them His book with His practices and His law
> by His [own] hand in mercy to them here [on this earth], when the
> Merciful One said to His servant Moses: "I have seen the humiliation of
> my people dwelling in the Land of Egypt, and I have heard their cries, and
> I have descended to save them. And so, I send you for this."[9]

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[8] Keating 95-97; "*… j'ala 'aṣamatuhu āl-dīn wa qabūluhu bi-āl-āīāt wa jarā'iḥ ālatī āẓharuhā wa ājrāhā Āllah 'alā yadīhī bi-ārḍ Miṣr.… Fa-hadahi āl-āīāt āṯbat dīn Āllah 'alā yadī Mūsā min āl-'ajā'ib āl-mudā'aah fī āl-āmum kāfah.*"

[9] Keating 96-99; "*Wa āl-burhān 'alā dalak qūl Āllah sabḥānuhu li-najīhu Mūsā 'and āl-tamāsuhu halāṣ*

Even in so short a passage as this, at least five different Qur'ānic allusions or turns of phrase can be detected. First, Abū Rā'iṭah follows the mention of God's name with the expression "*sabḥānuhu,*" which Keating has translated "may He be praised!," and which can also be rendered "Glory to him," "may he be exalted," or simply "blessed be he." This usage follows a Qur'ānic convention, and the expression appears in forty-one different places in the Qur'ānic text. Second, Abū Rā'iṭah describes God's reason for intervening on behalf of the Israelites first as saving them "from the error of [Pharoah's] people" – i.e., from the influence of Egyptian polytheism – and mentions their deliverance from hardship and slavery only secondarily. Third, Abū Rā'iṭah expresses God's revelatory action in a quintessentially Islamic way by attributing to Moses a prayer for God to send down his book, an attribution which certainly is not drawn from the Old Testament and which incorporates a purely Muslim way of understanding scripture. Fourth, the Law of Moses is referred to in this passage not by the Arabicized form of the word Torah (*āt-Tūrāah*), as sometimes appears in Arabophone Christian writing, but by the terms *sunan* and *šarā'a.* Both of these terms were and are significant ones for a Muslim reader. The first term is used to refer to the rules of daily living attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic tradition and is the root word for Sunni; it could be loosely but reasonably translated "the way of right living." The second term is used to refer more technically to Islamic law and has entered English and other Western

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buni Isrā'īl min yad Far'aūn wa ḍalālah qūmuhu wa āst'abāduhu āīāhum wa sūquhum bi-kul 'adāb ilīhum wa āẓhāruhu li-hum dīnuhu wa ānzāl kitābuhu 'alīhum bi-sunanuhu wa šarā'ahu 'alā yaduhu rāḥmān li-hum hunāk ād yaqūl āl-Raḥīm li-'abduhu Mūsā naẓrān naẓartu ilā dalah š'abī āl-sākin bi-ārḍ Miṣr wa sam'atu ḍajījuhum wa nazaltu bi-ḥalāṣuhum. Fa-t'aāl ārsaluka li-dalak." See Ex 3:7-8.

languages under the near-transliteration *sharia*. Fifth, God is referred to in the passage by the name *āl-Raḥīm*, the Merciful, which is one of the most frequently used names for him in the Qur'ān and in Islamic practice.

In addition to attempts to employ Qur'ānic terminology such as the one just described, Abū Rā'iṭah also attempts to affirm and employ Islamic ways of speaking about God insofar as possible for a Christian author. This includes acknowledging the limitations of human language itself when used in reference to God, and in his treatise *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah* Abū Rā'iṭah expresses this limitation in terms that echo the Qur'ān:

> If someone asks us about [any] part of our teaching about God, may He be praised! concerning the Trinity and the Unity, and the matter of the Incarnation and becoming human, and anything else about His attributes, and we answer with a deductive proof or an analogy or evidence from a book, and if [the answer] happens to approach the goal and the questioner is happy with the answer [given to] him, then we thank God for this! If it is found, [however], to be far from [the goal], not appropriate for [the question] in all or most respects, this is [still] good and holds true for His predication, for according to His statement: "The understanding of the one who describes Me with descriptions is not capable of succeeding."[10]

The statement with which Abū Rā'iṭah ends this passage is not a direct Qur'ānic quotation, so it is not clear why he feels justified in calling it a statement of God Himself. That said, the statement does reflect the idea, held in common by Christians and Muslims, that God is greater than any human capacity for describing him accurately.

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[10] Keating 101-103; "*Wa aḏ sa'lnā 'an b'aḍ qūlunā fī Āllah sabaḥānuhu min āmar āl-taṯlīṯ wa āl-taūḥīd wa āmar āl-tajasud wa āl-tā'nus wa ġīr ḏalak min ṣafātihu fa-ājabunā bi-rā'ā āū qīās āū ḥajah min kitāb fa-waq'a qarībān min āl-baġīah wa āqn'a āl-sā'il fī jūābihu šakarnā Āllah 'alā ḏalak wa ān ālfā b'aīdān minhā ġīr mulā'im li-hā fī jamī'a ānḫā'ihu āū jaluhā fa-ḏalak jamīl hūa 'alā ṣidiq ṣafatihu fī qūluhu ān taṣafunī āl-wāṣafūn fa-lā yanāl āl-'aqūl.*"

Since this apophatic sense of God's absolute transcendence is so important to the Islamic religious discourse, the statement also goes somewhat beyond establishing common ground and affirms a key Muslim assertion about God. Furthermore, although not a direct quotation, the statement does seem to echo certain Qur'ānic verses, in that it uses the same verb (Arabic *waṣafa*, to describe or predicate) that a number of these verses use to warn against some of the descriptive assertions that are made about God.

Some of these verses are clearly directed against polytheistic assertions or statements about God that would lend themselves to polytheistic interpretations (for example, 6:100, 21:22, and 37:159). Two other Qur'ānic verses, however, seem to give a more general warning against descriptions or predications offered about God. Surah 21:18, for example, represents God as saying, "We cast the Truth against Falsehood, and Truth knocks the brain out of Falsehood, such that Falsehood dies. Woe be to you, for the description you make!"[11] Giving an even more general warning, surah 37:180 reads, "Exalted be your Lord, the Lord of Glory, beyond the descriptions (or attributions) they make of him."[12] Since these verses seem to issue such a broad condemnation of descriptions made of God, one or both of them, or perhaps a proverb derived from them, could lie behind Abū Rā'iṭah's statement.

There is another consideration about this statement of Abū Rā'iṭah that is worth noting. Besides the Qur'ānic verses already mentioned, there are two others which use the same Arabic terminology about making descriptions or predications of God, but

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[11] *Bal naqdif bi-āl-ḥaq ʿalā āl-bāṭil fa-yadmaġuhu fa-āḏā hūa zāhiq wa la-kum āl-waīl mimā taṣ ifūn.*

[12] *Subḥān Rabbika Rabb āl-ʿazah ʿamā yaṣifūn.*

specifically with reference to the attribute of begetting a son. Surah 23:91 declares that "God has not begotten a son, and there is none from among the gods with him…. God is exalted above the descriptions (or attributions) they make of him."[13] In surah 43:81, Muhammad is commanded, "Say: if the Most Gracious One had a son, I would be the first among those to serve him. Exalted be the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne, beyond the descriptions they make of him."[14] Given the existence of these verses, Abū Rā'iṭah's strongly apophatic statement may be a rather sly way of raising the issue of using the language of begetting in reference to God. As will be shown below, Abū Rā'iṭah's fundamental position about the divine attributes can be summarized in two points: 1) If it is not possible to use the language of begetting in reference to God because of its creaturely connotations, then likewise it is not possible to ascribe any attribute to God, since ultimately one uses the language of creaturely attributes in order to do so; and 2) human attributes are metaphorical reflections of divine ones, rather than the other way around. In other words, the position that he takes in the passage quoted above may be understood as a preparatory statement that draws on the terminology of the Qur'ān in order to place the whole question of divine begetting in the context of the limitations of language to describe God.

In *Fī āl-Tajasud,* Abū Rā'iṭah posits that a Muslim interlocutor may argue that using the terms Begetter, Begotten, Father, and Son in reference to God necessarily

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[13] *Mā ātaḫaḏ Āllah min walid wa mā kān mʿahu min ālāh…. Subḥān Āllah ʿamā yaṣifūn.*

[14] *Qul ān kān li-al-Raḥmān walad fa-ānā āwal āl-ʿaābidīn. Subḥān Rabb āl-samāwāt wa āl-ārḍ Rabb āl-ʿarš ʿamā yaṣifūn.*

entails predicating of God everything that one would predicate of human fathers and

sons. Rather than attempt to defend the use of these terms on Christian doctrinal grounds

or purely rational grounds, he resorts again to Qur'ānic terminology:

> If it follows from our description of God as Begetter and Begotten, Father
> and Son, that we are compelled to make necessary for Him all predications
> of creaturely begetters and begotten, fathers and sons, then [since] you
> would describe Him and we would describe Him as a Doer of things, so
> [too,] we must make everything necessary for Him that is necessary for
> someone who does something. But does a doer from among created things
> know how to do something without movement or place or time or thought
> or a tool or an instrument to make it, or anything else that we have not
> described? Then we must describe God, may He be praised! as not making
> [any]thing without these [things], as humanity needs them when it does
> something.[15]

Abū Rā'iṭah here draws upon a term that the Qur'ān itself applies to God in at least two

verses. Surah11:107 states, "Your Lord is the Doer of that which he wills."[16] In a very

similar passage, surah 85:14-16 says of God that "he is the affectionate Forgiver of sins,

Lord of the efficacious throne, the Doer of that which he wills."[17] Abū Rā'iṭah then

imagines a dialogue in which his Muslim interlocutor argues that God's doing is nothing

like creaturely doing because of his absolute power. Rather than argue with this point,

Abū Rā'iṭah affirms it and argues that in the same way, God's begetting is nothing like

human begetting. Just as God can be correctly described as a Doer because of his

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[15] Keating 264-66; "Ān kān min qabal waṣafunā Āllah wāladān wa mūlūdān wa ābān wa ibnān
naḏṭar ilā ān nulazmuhu jamī'a ṣifāt āl-wāladīn wa āl-mūlūdīn fa-āl-ābā' wa āl-ibnā' āl-maḫlūqah faqad wa
ṣaftumūhu wa waṣafanāhu fā'al āl-āšīā' fal-nulazamuhu kul mā lazama min fī'al šī'ān. Fa-hal y'aqalu fā'al
min āl-maḫlūqīn yaf'al šī'ān bi-lā ḥarakah wa lā makān wa lā zamān āū fikrah āū ālah āū ādāah yaf'al bihā
āū ḡīr ḏalak mimā mal naṣafa. Falnaṣafu Āllah li-hu āl-ḥamdu ānahu lā yaf'al šī'ān dūn haḏā li-ḥāl
āl-maḍar ilīhā āl-'abād 'and āūān f'alahum li-šī'."

[16] Rabbak f'aāl li-mā yurīdu.

[17] Wa hūa āl-Ḡafūr āl-wadūd ḏū āl-'arš āl-majīd f'aāl li-mā yurīd.

efficacious action of bringing into existence whatever he wills without any dependence

upon a process of thought, the passage of time, the use of tools, etc., so also he can be

described as Begetter and Father, or in the case of the second Person of the Trinity, as

Begotten and Son without any dependence upon the various creaturely aspects of human

begetting. By arguing in this way, Abū Rā'iṭah uses the same technique as that used by

Abū Qurrah and by the author of *Fī tatlīt*, namely, placing his Muslim reader in the

difficult position of either denying the legitimacy of Qur'ānic language about God or

affirming the reasonableness of language used in Trinitarian doctrine. Furthermore, in the

midst of articulating Trinitarian terminology, he affirms the principle that is perhaps most

basic to all Islamic discourse about God: that he is utterly beyond and unlike his

creatures.

In fact, Abū Rā'iṭah not only affirms this principle of the divine transcendence

and makes it central to his argument, but he goes a step further. In applying the idea of

divine transcendence to the attribute of begetting, he argues that creaturely begetting is

actually a metaphor: "How does one in reality become a father or a son? All of those who

are called father and son among creatures are only called this as a metaphor, as the saying

about from where [a child] is: he is given to [a father] from God."[18] Thus Abū Rā'iṭah

suggests that the divine attribute of begetting is not a metaphorical expression derived

from the human attribute of begetting, such that Trinitarian terminology could be seen as

anthropomorphic (and therefore, in Islamic terms as *širk*). Rather, the human attribute of

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[18] Keating 267-69; "*Fa-min āīna yuṣīr āb haqān āū ibn? Fa-kul min samā ābān āū ibnān min al-maḫlūqīn fa-ānamā samā ḏalak bi-āst'aārah min āl-qūl minhu Āllah ʿalīhi.*"

begetting reflects imperfectly and partially a divine attribute which is its source. He goes

on somewhat later in the same *risālah* to argue similarly for all human attributes:

> Just as God is living, hearing, seeing, knowing, and human beings are
> those [beings] described with these, [too], the identity between the names
> and attributes results from His gracious bestowal [of them] on His
> servants, so that they are named with His names and described with His
> attributes, [yet] the two differ in meaning.[19]

This way of thinking and speaking about attributes is quite similar to the mirror

analogy in Abū Qurrah's writings examined earlier, in which he emphasizes that a human

attribute can exist only insofar as it is the dim and imperfect reflection of a real divine

attribute, just as the features in a person's reflection can exist only insofar as they reflect

the existence of the real person's actual features. Abū Rā'iṭah does not elaborate his

notion that human attributes are metaphorical to the degree that Abū Qurrah articulates

his mirror analogy. Nonetheless, the rhetorical effect is much the same: Abū Rā'iṭah's

Muslim reader is left with a choice between affirming that the attributes of begetting and

being begotten do in fact exist in God, or else explaining how a human attribute can exist

without a basis in the divine life.

Abu Rā'iṭah's Use of Scripture

As has already been mentioned, Abū Rā'iṭah clearly belongs to the second stage

of Arabophone Christian theology as described by Samir Khalil Samir, in which both

scriptural and philosophical tools and arguments are used in the project of articulating

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[19] Keating 271-73; "*Fa-ka-mā ān Āllah ḥī samīʿa baṣīr ʿalīm wa āl-ānsān āl-mūṣūf bi-dalak wa ātafāq
fī āl-āsmā' waāl-ṣifāt li-āmtanānuhu bihi ʿalā ʿabāduhu bi-mā āsmāhum bihi min āsmā'hu wa wuṣufuhum
bi-ṣifātihi muḫtalafān āl-mʿanā.*"

Christian doctrine and defending it against Muslim criticism. In fact, he is keenly aware

of the distinction between scriptural and philosophical approaches, sometimes explicitly

commenting on his own methodology and his reasons for proceeding in particular ways

or using particular types of evidence, as will be shown in further detail below. Two

important background issues influence the way the Abū Rā'iṭah goes about using

scriptural arguments. The first is the continuing lack in his time of a complete and

authoritative Arabic translation of the Bible. Keating has noted that when he quotes from

the Old and New Testaments, he appears to be making his own translations from the Old

Syriac version and that his translations of particular texts are inconsistent, suggesting that

they were done on an ad-hoc basis over time, according to the needs of the moment.[20]

This fact in turn suggests the transitional linguistic character of the time and place in

which Abū Rā'iṭah wrote. On the one hand, Arabic had not yet become so completely

dominant that a standard Arabic text of the Bible had been produced, but on the other

hand, Arabic was becoming sufficiently prominent that Abū Rā'iṭah eventually compiled

a list of his biblical proof-texts in Arabic, the *Šahādāt min qūl āl-Tūrāah wa*

āl-Ānbīā' wa āl-Qadīsīn ("Witnesses from the Words of the Torah, the Prophets, and the

Saints")[21] to serve as a kind of handbook for Christian apologists in debate with Muslims.

The second background factor influencing Abū Rā'iṭah's use of scriptural

argument is the problem of *āl-taḥrīf,* the alleged interpolation and corruption of the Old

and New Testaments. From early in the Islamic period until the present day, Muslim

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[20] Keating 304.

[21] Ibid, 299-333.

theologians have asserted that all authentic prophets proclaimed a message that was

substantially identical to the preaching of Muhammad, and that the reason for doctrinal

disagreements among Jews, Christians, and Muslims is that no authentic copy of the

original contents of the Old or New Testament exists. Rather, runs the Muslim argument,

the Jewish and Christian scriptures as they are known are the result of alterations made

by Jews and Christians to justify their heterodox beliefs as they drifted farther and farther

from the various prophets' original testimony and teaching. Against this backdrop of

Muslim insistence on *āl-taḥrīf* as the origin of Jewish and Christian scriptures, the

Christian apologist could not simply cite scriptural evidence and expect it to be fully

convincing. That said, scriptural testimony could not simply be set aside, since as noted

in both the preceding chapters, one of the central questions in Christian-Muslim

encounters was which religious tradition could claim to be the authentic spiritual heir of

the prophets.

Abū Rā'iṭah attempts to take into account this methodological tension with regard

to scriptural testimony, and as a result he takes the nuanced approach of incorporating

select scriptural evidence from the Bible supported by both Qur'ānic and philosophical

evidence. We can be quite certain that by the height of his career the issue of *āl-taḥrīf*

was a significant factor in Christian-Muslim dialogue and that he was aware of the

pitfalls of using scriptural evidence, because unlike the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* and Theodore

Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'iṭah makes an explicit reference to the issue. Writing about the

scriptural use of plural language in reference to God, he writes in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas*:

Now it is necessary for us to notice … that "God" is not counted as a single one, in keeping with the witnesses of the [sacred] books, cautioning the one who differs from us, and strengthening with support the one who follows us, even if the ones who differ from us on it declare it to be false when they claim we have altered [the sacred books] by adding to them and taking away from them.[22]

Keating argues that Abū Rā'iṭah's awareness of the problem of *āl-taḥrīf* and its effect on Christian-Muslim dialogue substantially affected the particular scriptural passages that he was willing to bring to bear in his apologetical writings and to commend for use by other Christians. Writing about the selections that appear in his handbook *Šahādāt min qūl āl-Tūrāah wa āl-Ānbīā' wa āl-Qadīsīn*, Keating asserts that

… within limited confines he still employed passages from the Old Testament in his apologetical writings. He apparently did this because it was easier to provide convincing evidence for the Old Testament than for the New that it had not been tampered with, since the same texts had also been preserved by the Jews."[23]

Abū Rā'iṭah made this type of argument explicitly in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas*:

Now, if they deny this teaching [i.e., multiplicity coexisting with oneness in God], and reject it, saying: "The prophets did not say this, rather, you have altered the words from their places, and you have made [the prophets] say what is false and a lie," it should be said to them: If these books were only in our possession, and not [also] in the hands of our enemies the Jews, then, By my life! one could accept your teaching that we have changed [them] and substituted [words for other words]. However, if the books are also in the hands of the Jews, no one can accept your teaching, unless it were found that the books that we possess differ: [but] what is in the hands of the Jews is in harmony with what we possess.[24]

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[22] Keating 201-203; "*Wa qad yajab ʿalīnā ān nutbʿa … bi-ān Āllah līsa ʿadida wāḥid farada bi-šahādāt min āl-kutub tīqẓān li-man ḫālifunā wa tašdīdān li-yaqīn mi-man šāʿanā wa kān muḫālifūnā li-hā makḏabīn bi-mā āḏʿauā min taḥrīfunā āīāhā bi-āl-zīādah fanuhā wa āl-naqṣān minhā.*"

[23] Keating 303.

[24] Keating 207-209; "*Fa-ān ānkarūā haḏā āl-qūl wa ḥajadūhu wa qālūā ān āl-ānbīā' lam tanṭaq bihi*

There would have been some methodological danger in arguing this way, since Abū Rā'iṭah is asking his Muslim interlocutor to reject a mainstream Islamic doctrine about the scriptures as accepted by Jews and Christians, in favor of affirming his logical argument about the current state of those scriptures. Yet Abū Rā'iṭah is clearly interested in affirming Islamic concepts and using Qur'ānic terminology to the highest degree possible, as already demonstrated. Thus there emerges one of the characteristics that most clearly distinguishes Abū Rā'iṭah from the other early Arabophone Christian theologians considered here. On the one hand, he seems more knowledgeable about the text of the Qur'ān and more eager to make use of it than, for example, Theodore Abū Qurrah. On the other hand, he seems more willing to challenge his Muslim interlocutors about fundamental disagreements in the two religious traditions than other Christian apologists.

In summary, Abū Rā'iṭah found himself in a place and time in which Arabic was becoming the regional lingua franca and yet its burgeoning dominance had not yet prompted the creation of an authoritative Arabic translation of the Bible, so like the author of *Fī tatlīṯ* and Theodore Abū Qurrah before him, he got along by using his own translations of biblical proof-texts. But unlike these slightly earlier Arabophone Christian authors, he felt the need to take explicit note of the issue of *āl-taḥrīf*, to weigh somewhat more carefully the scriptural passages that he would employ, and to blend biblical,

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wa ānamā ḥarafutum āl-kalām ʿan mūḍʿahu taqūlutum ʿalīhum āl-zūr wa āl-kaḏab. Yuqāl li-hum ānahu laū kānat haḏahi āl-kutub fī āīdīnā min ġīr ān yakūn fī āīdā āʿadā' nā āl-Yuhūd kān li-ʿamrī yaqbul qūlukum ānā ġīrnā wa badalnā. Fa-āmā āḏ ṣārat āl-kutub fī āīdā āl-Yuhūd āīḍān lam yaqbul qūlukum āḥad ilā ān yūjad mā fī āīdīnā min āl-kutub muḫālifān li-mā fī āīdā āl-Yuhūd minhā mušākalān mulāūmān li-mā kān li-dīnā minhā."

Qur'ānic, and philosophical argumentation such that no argument could be rejected by his interlocutors due to having been based on "interpolated" scripture alone.

An important example of this kind of argumentation is his assertion that the scriptures use plural language in reference to God, and that because of this usage it is necessary to understand that although God is one, there is within God some kind of plurality. Immediately after the passage from *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas* cited above, in which Abū Rā'iṭah makes note of the accusation of *āl-taḥrīf,* he builds an argument based on scriptural language, beginning with quotations from the Old Testament. First he assembles a catena of quotations from the Book of Genesis, including passages about the creation of Adam (Gen 1:26), the creation of Eve (Gen 2:18), the expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:22), and the confusion of human languages at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:7). In each of these quotations, God refers to himself using plural pronouns. Abū Rā'iṭah then includes a citation from the Book of Daniel, in which God speaks to Belteshazzar using a plural pronoun in reference to himself (Dan 4:31). By selecting these quotations, Abū Rā'iṭah has assembled testimony from both the Torah (*āl-Tūrāah*) and the Prophets (*āl-Ānbīā'*), thereby including two of the "units" of revealed scripture cited individually in the Qur'ān. He then turns his attention to the Qur'ānic text:

> You recall that in your book [something] similar to what we have referred
> to from the sayings of Moses and Daniel is written in accounts concerning
> God: "We said"[25], "We created"[26], "We commanded"[27], "We inspired"[28],

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[25] E.g., surahs 2:34, 35, and 37; 7:166; 20:68; and 25:36. This usage appears 27 times in the Qur'ānic text.

[26] E.g., surahs 7:181; 15:26 and 85; 36:71; and 50:38. This usage appears 24 times in the Qur'ānic text.

[27] Surah 17:16 appears to be the only appearance of this construction in the Qur'ān. Keating suggests surahs 10:24 and 11:40 as well, but these are examples of the noun "our command" rather than the verbal form.

"We destroyed"[29] and "We annihilated"[30], along with many others comparable to these. Does one who thinks doubt that these words are the speech of several and not the speech of one single [individual]?[31]

Abū Rā'iṭah displays in this passage some key points of his apologetical method with regard to the use of scriptural arguments. Although it would be much easier to draw from the New Testament to build his case for multiplicity of persons in God, he selects texts only from the Old Testament here since he has established a rational argument which makes those texts less assailable. Furthermore, he has selected passages for which there are almost exactly parallel grammatical usages in the Qur'ān. He also displays the depth of his Qur'ānic knowledge by the number of examples he gives and the significant number of Qur'ānic passages represented by the expressions he mentions.

After listing these examples of Qur'ānic texts in which God is presented as speaking of himself using plural pronouns, Abū Rā'iṭah anticipates an argument by his Muslim interlocutor that God speaks in the "royal we" in the Qur'ānic texts mentioned, and responds to such an argument on philosophical grounds. Noting that the use of plural pronouns by an individual is permitted not only in Arabic, but in Hebrew, Greek, and Syriac as well, Abū Rā'iṭah argues that the usage is permitted due to the composite nature of human beings:

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[28] E.g., surahs 4:163; 7:117; 21:73; and 35:31. This usage appears 24 times in the Qur'ānic text.

[29] E.g., surahs 6:6; 10:13; 26:208; and 54:51. This usage appears 29 times in the Qur'ānic text.

[30] E.g., surahs 7:137; 26:172; 25:36; and 37:136. This usage appears 6 times in the Qur'ānic text.

[31] Keating 202-203; "*Wa qad ḏakartum ān fī kitābukum maktūbān āīḏān šabah mā ḏakarnā min qūl Mūsā wa Dānīāl ḥakāīah ʿan Āllah min qulnā ḫalaqunā wa āmarunā wa āūḥīnā wa āhlakunā wa ḍamarunā mʿa naẓāʾir li-haḏahi kaṯīrah. Āīšuka āḥad yʿaqul ān haḏā āl-qūl šatā lā qūl wāḥid fard?*"

> This is correct and permitted in a composite of different things, and a composition of members which are not similar, because it is one [thing with] many parts. The primary parts of the human being are the soul and the body. And the body is also a construction of various basic elements and many members. For this reason it is necessary that what you have described be clearly specified. As for the One, simple [God] Who is in agreement in all manners and does not have members or parts, how is it possible that He be specified clearly in the way you have described … when He is counted as one, just as you have asserted?[32]

Thus Abū Rā'iṭah uses the philosophical categories of composition and simplicity to interpret and clarify the use of plural pronouns in the Old Testament, as well as to pose an implicit hermeneutical challenge with regard to the text of the Qur'ān. By presenting the argument in this way, he presents to his interlocutor three possible choices: to reject Qur'ānic language about God, to affirm that language but deny that the usage has any correlation to ontological categories, or to affirm the language and admit that the plural usage points to some kind of multiplicity in God. The overall structure of his argument aligns the portion of Christian scripture that Abū Rā'iṭah believes can be presented as most acceptable to a Muslim, the testimony of the Qur'ān, and the philosophical categories for which there was so much interest among Muslim theologians and other intellectuals of the time. He concludes this portion of his argument with a statement that brings together quite succinctly all three of the sources that he has so skillfully woven together:

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[32] Keating 202-205; "*Dalak ṣaḥīḥ jā'iz fī āl-mū'lif min āšīā' muḫtalafah wa murakub min ā'aḍā' ġīr mutašābihah. Li-ānā wāḥid kaṯīr ājzāū'hu. Fa-āwal āl-ājzā' min āl-ānsān āl-nafas wa āl-jasad. Wa ān āl-jasad āīḍān mubinā min ārkān šatā wa ā'aḍā' kaṯīrah. Fa-li-dalak jāz ān yunṭiqa ʿalā mā waṣaftum. Fa-āma āl-wāḥid āl-basīṭ āl-mutafiq fī kul ānḥā'hu āladī lā ā'aḍā' li-hu wa lā ājzā' fa-kīf jāz li-hu ān yunṭiqa bi-mā waṣaftum ... ād hūa ʿadida wāḥid ka-mā zʿamtum.*"

So you should know that God is one and three when He speaks in both [types] of utterances: "I commanded" and "We commanded" and "I created" and "We created" and "I revealed" and "We revealed". For "I commanded", "I revealed", and "I created" indicate that his *ousia* [Arabic *jaūhar*] is one, and "We commanded", "We revealed", and "We created" indicate three *hypostaseis* [Arabic *āqānīm*].[33]

Having already built this case for unity and multiplicity existing simultaneously in God based on the language of scripture, Abū Rāʾiṭah then makes another scriptural argument in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas,* this one based on the rather mysterious passage about Abraham found in Gen 18. This argument is also based on language used of God, but rather than arguing that singular and plural language are used of God with equal accuracy, he argues that the three beings that appear to Abraham are collectively addressed with singular terminology:

[Moses] reports in the Torah concerning Abraham, the Friend of God, saying: "God appeared to Abraham [while] he was before the door of his tent in the place of such and such. As the daylight became hot, Abraham sat before the door of his tent. He lifted his eyes, and beheld three men standing before him. So he stood, facing them, and bowed to them, and said: "Lord, if you regard me with merciful eyes, then do not pass by your servant." Do you not see that those who Abraham saw with his own eyes were three in number, because he said "three men", yet he called them one Lord …? Now the number three is a *mysterion* [Arabic *sirr*] for the three *hypostaseis* [Arabic *āqānīm*]. And he called them "Lord", not "Lords". [This is] a *mysterion* for one *ousia* [Arabic *jaūhar*]. So in three can be one, just as we have described.[34]

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[33] Keating 204-205; "*Li-tʿalimūā ān Āllah wāḥid ṯalaṯah min ḥīṯu naṭaqa bi-kulī āl-lafaẓatīn min āmartu wa āmarnā wa ḥalaqtu wa ḥalaqnā wa āūḥītu wa āūḥīnā. Fa-āmartu wa āūḥītu wa ḥalaqtu dalīl ʿalā ānahu jaūhar wāḥid wa āmarnā wa āūḥīnā ḥalaqnā dalīl ʿalā āqānīm ṯalaṯah.*"

[34] Ibid., "[*Mūsā*] *aḥbar fī āl-Tūrīah ʿan Ābrahīm ḥalīl Āllah qāʾilān ān Āllah tarāīā li-Ābrahīm wa hūa ʿanda bāb ḥīmatihu fī mūḍʿa kaḏā wa kaḏā. Fa-li-mā āl-saṭhar āl-nahār jalasa Ābrahīm ʿalā bāb hibāʾhu. Fa-rafaʿa ʿaīnīhu wa ābṣara rajālān ṯalaṯah qīāmān fūquhu. Fa-qām mustaqbulān li-hum wa sajada li-hum wa qāl Rabb ān kanat rāmqān ilī bi-ʿaīn āl-raḥmah fa-lā tajāwazan ʿandaki. Āf-lā tarūn ān ālaḏī ʿaāīna Ābrahīm ṯalaṯah ʿadaduhā ḥīṯu qāl rajālān ṯalaṯah fa-samāhum Rabbān wāḥidān....? Fa-ʿadad āl-ṯalaṯah sirr ān li-āqānīm āl-ṯalaṯah. Wa tasmītuhu āīāhum Rabbān lā Ārbāb sir li-jaūhar wāḥid. Fa-fī ṯalaṯah yajawaz wāḥid ka-mā waṣafnā.*"

Since Abū Rā'iṭah begins this argument from the experience of Abraham after concluding his previous argument based on scriptural language, it may be considered a separate "unit" of argumentation, leading to the question why he considered this additional argument necessary. His strategy here is to invoke the experience of the key figure of Abraham due to Abraham's unique importance in the history of revelation. Since Abraham was simultaneously regarded as the spiritual progenitor of Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, and as the literal forefather of the Arabs through descent from Ishmael, he occupied a central role in the revelation of right worship. There was hardly any more formidable figure that could be invoked for the project of supporting Trinitarian doctrine in the Arabic language.

Furthermore, Abū Rā'iṭah has here structured his argument in a way that subtly aligns it with an important tradition in Islamic religious discourse. By focusing on what Abraham *saw* and what Abraham *said in response*, Abū Rā'iṭah forms a kind of Christian *ḥadīṯ* ("report" or "narrative") in support of a Trinitarian understanding of God. The *ḥadīṯ* was and is a form of Islamic teaching in which a point of doctrine is supported not by quotations from the Qur'ān but instead by a short narrative from the life of Muhammad or from one of his original circle of companions. A *ḥadīṯ* provides guidance about right belief or right action by recounting how Muhammad or one of his close companions reacted to a given set of circumstances.[35] In this passage, Abū Rā'iṭah has cast the scriptural material he is using in the form of a *ḥadīṯ* in order to enlist Abraham's

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[35] *The Encyclopedia of Islam* says that the term "is used for Tradition, being an account of what the Prophet said or did, or of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence." *The Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition*, vol. III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 23-28.

support for the idea that "oneness" and "threeness" are not mutually exclusive. Even the title by which Abraham is called here, Friend of God, is in parallel to the phrase "Companion of the Prophet." Thus Abū Rā'iṭah has in this passage drawn upon the Old Testament, in keeping with the considerations presented earlier, to marshal two different elements from Islamic religious culture – the seminal figure of Abraham and the reliance upon *ḥadīṯ* to guide belief – in order to build an argument for Trinitarian doctrine.

Abū Rā'iṭah also marshals scriptural evidence to make another type of Trinitarian argument, built upon the triad of God, his Word, and his Spirit – the same type of argument that figured so prominently in *Fī taṯlīṯ.* Since, as noted previously, Abū Rā'iṭah seems to have been quite conversant with the text of the Qur'ān, one may reasonably suppose that he was familiar with the ways in which the terms Word and Spirit are used therein. Thus the resonances of those terms as described in the chapter on *Fī taṯlīṯ* above are quite relevant for the argument that he builds around the idea of a God/Word/Spirit triad. One appearance of this type of argument follows upon the arguments just described in *Fī āl-Ṭālūt āl-Muqadas,* while a very similar line of reasoning appears in *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah.* In the former, Abū Rā'iṭah draws upon several passages from the Psalms and from Isaiah in order to argue for the God/Word/Spirit triad. He begins with Ps 33:6 and writes: "And David said in his book: 'By the Word of God the heavens were created, and by the breath of it all of their hosts.' Now David clearly expresses the three *hypostaseis* when he says God, and His Word, and His Spirit. In our description, are

we adding to what David describes?"[36] In order to understand the use that Abū Rā'iṭah makes of this verse, one must understand that the same Arabic word, *rūḥ*, is used for both "breath" and "spirit", much like its cognate *ruach* in Hebrew or *pneuma* in Greek. Thus the God/Word/Spirit triad, although lost in the English translation, would be clear to anyone reading the original Arabic. One could argue that the quintessential Qur'ānic expression of God's transcendent uniqueness is the ability to create.[37] Thus Abū Rā'iṭah has chosen a verse which associates this key Qur'ānic expression of divine power and transcendence, the ability to create, with both the Word and the Spirit. Lest the implication of divinity for the Word and the Spirit be lost on his reader, Abū Rā'iṭah immediately follows this passage by quoting Ps 56:10, in which David asserts that he praises [Arabic *sabaḥa*] the Word of God. Can David himself, Abū Rā'iṭah asks rhetorically, be one of those who offers praise to something other than God? Thus the Muslim reader is left with three implied choices: to demur from the strong Qur'ānic association of creation with the unique power of God, to assert that the seminal figure of David was in fact a polytheist, or to concede the possibility of a triad of God/Word/Spirit in which "threeness" is present without contradicting the divine unicity. In further support of his argument, Abū Rā'iṭah quotes Ps 107:20, in which salvific and healing power are attributed to the divine Word, and Isaiah 48:16, in which the sending of the prophet Isaiah is attributed to the Spirit of God.

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[36] Keating 204-205; "*Wa ān Dāūūd qāl fī kitābuhu bi-kalimah Āllah ḫalaqat āl-samūāt bi-rūḥ fīhi kul qūātihā. Fa-qad li-faṣāḥ Dāūūd bi-āl-ṯalaṯah āqānīm ḫīṭu qāl Āllah wa kalimatihu wa rūḫhu. Fa-hal zadnā fī waṣafunā ʿalā mā waṣafa Dāūūd?*"

[37] See surahs 2:117, 3:47, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82, and 40:68, where God's unique power is described by the formula "Be! and it is" (*kun fa-yakūn*).

Abū Rā'iṭah includes a similar argument in his *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*. In this treatise, he structures his argument very similarly to the one described above, in that he describes the appearance of the three beings to Abraham (see Gen 18), but in a shorter form and in a more traditionally exegetical way, without the apparent intention to create an Abrahamic *ḥadīṯ* in support of the Trinity. He then transitions to an argument using the texts of the psalms, but here the argument is less developed, focusing on the divinity of the Word without dealing with the Spirit or establishing a clear God/Word/Spirit triad. Rather than Ps 33:6, he quotes Ps 119:89, writing:

> Then, David, the Prophet, verified [Moses'] statement, that the Word [of God] is a [self-] existent being, true God from true God, not an inconsistent Word, when he said in speaking to his Lord: "You are our eternal Lord, Your existent Word is present in heaven." And also his statement: "To the Word of God I give praise." The Word is, then, true God, deserving the praise of David and other creatures.[38]

The fact that there are two separate arguments here (the argument from Abraham's experience with the three visitors and the argument from the psalms about the Word's true divinity) appearing in the same order in the respective treatises, but appearing in a much less complete form than in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas* suggests that *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah* is the earlier of the two texts. Although he had apparently not yet developed the presentation of Abraham's experience as a "Christian *ḥadīṯ*" nor the God/Word/Spirit triad, he was clearly attempting to adopt a somewhat Islamic mode of

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[38] Keating 118-19; "*Ṯum ān Dāūūd āl-nabī ḥaqaqa qūluhu bi-ān āl-kalimah ḏāt qā'imah ālāh ḥaq min ālāh ḥaq lā kalām muntaqaḏ āḏ yaqūl fī qūluhu li-Rabbihi bi-ānka Rabbunā ābadān qā'imah kalimatuka mūjūdah fī āl-samā'. Wa qūluhu āīḏān li-kalimah Āllah āsbaḥ. Fa-āl-kalimah iḏān ālāh ḥaq mustawajab āl-tasbīḥ min Dāūūd wa ǧīruhu min āl-ḫalā'iq.*"

expression since here he refers to David as "the Prophet," a Qur'ānic rather than biblical

title for the Israelite king.

Another significant difference with the argument as it appears here is that Abū

Rā'iṭah follows the quotations from the psalms with one of his quite rare New Testament

citations:

> In addition is what the Messiah, may He be praised! said to His disciples
> and His Apostles when He sent them to proclaim the truth, [and] abolish
> the invocation of many gods and worship of them, to announce and
> proclaim the One God, when He, the Praiseworthy, said to them: "Go and
> announce [the Good News] to all people, and purify them in the name of
> the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and I am with you until the end
> of the world."[39]

As already noted, New Testament quotations are rare in Abū Rā'iṭah's

apologetical treatises, most probably because of the problem of *āl-taḥrīf,* the allegation of

which he explicitly acknowledges. One apparent reason for the inclusion of the passage

above, in which he quotes Mt 28:19, is to serve as a segue to another kind of scriptural

argument in support of Trinitarian doctrine. Having made the two-fold argument from the

Old Testament presented above (the experience of Abraham and the testimony of David

about the divinity of the Word of God), and then having quoted Jesus mandating the

Trinitarian baptismal formula, Abū Rā'iṭah is left with an implicit problem of unity

between the Old Testament and New Testament witnesses. He seems to interpret his

Muslim interlocutor asking something like the following: "We acknowledge that Jesus

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[39] Ibid., "*Faḍalān ʿan qūl āl-Masīḥ sabḥānuhu li-tulāmīḏt wa rusuluhu ʿand ārsālahu āīāhum li-dʿawah
āl-ḥaq āl-mabṭalah ḏakar āl-ālaha āl-kaṯīrah wa ʿabādatihā mubaširīn dāʿaīn ilā Āllah āl-wāḥid āḏ yaqūl li-
hum āl-ḥamīd āḏhubūā wa baširūā āl-nās kāfah wa ṭahhurūhum bi-ism āl-Ābu wa āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ
āl-Quds wa ānā mʿakum ilā ānṣarām āl-dunīā.*"

was a prophet and taught true doctrine. How could it be, then, that he taught threeness in

God, whereas such a thing was never taught by the previous prophets?" In response, Abū

Rā'iṭah makes an argument based on the concept of divine pedagogy and a gradual

revelation of the divine nature:

> This description [of God as three and one], (as well as other things which
> God, glory be to Him! made known), which has never ceased and does not
> cease [to be true], was hidden from the forefathers because they were
> incapable of perceiving its meaning, was revealed to later [people] so that
> they would be more perfect in knowledge and understanding, and because
> the meaning available to them concerning the teaching and faith in [God]
> became [more] subtle and refined. The disciples preached [the description
> of God] in their dispersion [over the earth] to the ones who followed them
> and among others who described God with His honorable description, and
> by it proved [the disciples'] proclamation to be the true one, having [also]
> the power [to perform] countless other signs and every wonder, as we
> have described.[40]

This passage is noteworthy for two different reasons, both related to an inherent tension

in the Qur'ānic text. On the one hand, this passage appears to be one of the cases in

which Abū Rā'iṭah challenges an Islamic presupposition head-on. Since Islamic belief

supposes the teaching of every authentic prophet throughout history to be identical, there

would appear to be no room in Islamic thought for the idea of a gradually unfolding

divine revelation. According to this conventional Muslim way of thinking, if Trinitarian

doctrine were correct, it would have been explicitly taught by every prophet in history –

the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament period, the various prophets sent to Gentile

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[40] Keating 119-121; "*Fa-ḏalak ṣafa lam tazal wa lā tazāl ka-tamat ʿan āl-āwalīn li-ʿajazuhum ʿan āl-waqūʿa ʿalā mʿanāhā wa ġīr ḏalak mimā Āllah lihu āl-ḥamdu āʿalam bihi wa ẓaharat li-l-āḫrīn li-yakāmluhum fī āl-ʿalam wa āl-mʿarafah wa li-mā laṭaf wa ḏuq fī āl-mʿanā āl-mūjūd fīhum min āl-qūl wa āl-āīmān bihi wa ilīhum dʿaūā āl-tulāmīḏ tafīrīqān minhum man tābʿahum wa bīn ġīruhum mi-man waṣaf Āllah li-ʿazīz ṣafatiwa bi-hā ḥaqaqūā dʿawatihum āl-ṣaḥīḥah āqtadārān minhum ʿalā āl-āīāt āl-ġīr maḥṣā ʿadaduhā wa āl-jarāʾiḥ kuluhum ka-mā waṣafnā.*"

peoples[41], Jesus himself, and Muhammad. As previously noted, Abū Rā'iṭah is

noteworthy among the earliest Arabophone Christian theologians for his willingness to

flatly deny core Muslim beliefs. Indeed, since he departed in this passage from his usual

custom of avoiding New Testament citations, one may well ask why. He appears to have

done so specifically for the purpose of introducing this idea of divine pedagogy, in which

God gradually revealed Himself over time, first as one and later as three-in-one. Even in

this context, Abū Rā'iṭah characterizes the mission of Jesus in Islamic terms,

emphasizing the work of Jesus in revealing God and instructing his followers in authentic

worship, rather than emphasizing the sacrificial/redemptive role of Jesus as one might

expect from a Christian theologian. Despite this concession to the Islamic conceptual

framework, there is no denying that this passage contradicts a key Islamic tenet more

directly than most early Christian Arabophone writings.

On the other hand, with his extensive knowledge of the Qur'ānic text, Abū

Rā'iṭah may be playing off a significant event in the history of the nascent Muslim

community that was recorded and explained in the Qur'ān itself – namely, the change in

Muhammad's teaching about the *qiblah*, the proper direction for prayer. During the

earliest portion of Muhammad's preaching career, while still in his native city of Mecca,

his adherents had followed the Jewish and Christian custom of facing toward Jerusalem

to pray. After the famous exodus to Yathrib, known to later history as Medina, the

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[41] In this category the Qur'ān mentions by name Hud (11:50) and Saleh (26:142).

Muslims adopted the custom of praying facing toward Mecca.[42] The Qur'ān itself

provides a theological explanation for this change:

> The fools from among the people will say: "What has turned them away
> from the *qiblah* to which they were oriented?" Say: "Unto God are the
> East and the West. He guides whom he will to a straight path." Thus We
> have made you into a balanced community, so that you may be witnesses
> unto the people, and the Messenger may be a witness unto you. And we
> made the *qiblah* to which you were oriented, but only to test those who
> follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels. It was a
> tremendous thing, except to those guided by God…. Turn your face in the
> direction of the Sacred Mosque. Wherever you may be, turn your faces in
> its direction.[43]

Although Abū Rā'iṭah does not mention this Qur'ānic passage or the event that it

describes explicitly, his knowledge of the Qur'ān may have provided him with the

knowledge that a change or development in teaching was not completely unknown in

Islamic doctrinal history. Although the change in the direction of prayer may seem a

minor matter to the modern Christian, it was in fact a significant event – a "tremendous

change," according to the Qur'ānic text – because it involved a deviation from the

traditional Jewish and Christian practice by the nascent Muslim community, and the

concomitant emergence of that community as a quite distinct religious tradition. The fact

that the Qur'ānic text itself contains this defensive-sounding explanation for the change

indicates both its psychological impact on the early Muslim community and the degree to

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[42] See Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 53 and John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1998), 14.

[43] Surah 2:142-144: "*Sayaqūl āl-sufahā' min āl-nās mā walāhum ʿan qiblatihim ālatī kānūā ʿalīhā? Qul li-lah āl-mašraq wa āl-maḡrib. Yahdī man yašā' ilā sirāṭ mustaqīm. Wa ka-dalak jaʿalnākum ummah wasaṭan li-takūnūā šuhadā' ʿalā āl-nās wa yakūn āl-Rusūl ʿalīkum šahīdān. Wa mā jaʿalnā āl-qiblah ālatī kunta ʿalihā ilā li-nʿalam manyatbʿa āl-Rusūl mi-man yanaqalib ʿalā ʿaqibīhu. Wa ān kānat la-kabīrah ilā ʿalā āladīn hadā Āllah…. Fūl wajahak šaṭar Āl-Masjid Āl-Ḥarām wa ḥīṭu mā kuntum fūlūā wajūhakum šaṭa rahu.*"

which it seemed to be a contradiction of the notion that authentic doctrine, and the authentic worship derived from that doctrine, had never changed in the history of the world. This precedent in Islamic history may explain why Abū Rā'iṭah is willing to deviate from his usual custom of avoiding New Testament quotations, in that he perhaps felt himself to be on solid ground in arguing for a gradually unfolding revelation.

Abū Rā'iṭah's Use of Philosophical Tools and Arguments

In addition to his apparently superior of knowledge of the Qur'ān, one of the things that distinguishes Abū Rā'iṭah from the other Arabophone Christian writers considered so far is his much more extensive use of terminology and concepts from the Greek philosophical tradition, particularly Aristotelianism. Although this distinctive trait of his writings may be explicable in terms of differing traits of personality and background, it may well be explained instead by social and cultural developments in the Arabophone world. Since he seems to have been slightly younger than Theodore Abū Qurrah, there would have been a small chronological difference, perhaps twenty years or so, between the pinnacles of their respective careers. It is worth noting that during this very period Muslim intellectuals in the cosmopolitan parts of the empire, such as Damascus and Baghdad, were becoming more and more interested by and conversant in the concepts and terminology of Greek philosophy. Thus Abū Rā'iṭah's extensive use of these concepts may be understood as another method by which he attempts to express and defend Christian doctrine in a way which would have particular resonance with a Muslim audience of his time and place. Furthermore, as will be shown below, Abū Rā'iṭah

consistently interweaves the use of philosophical concepts with the prominent Muslim doctrine of God's utter incomparability. He does so in order to pursue an apologetical strategy in which a Trinitarian notion of God is shown to be uniquely compatible with both the demands of philosophy and the core Islamic tenet of God's uniqueness.

As shown above, Abū Rā'iṭah considered a Trinitarian understanding of God to be not only orthodox doctrine, but more "subtle and refined" (*laṭaf wa ḏuq)* than the Muslim teaching on God's oneness. In *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas,* he attempts to demonstrate this point using the categories from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He poses the context of his argument by asking his imagined Muslim interlocutor whether the Muslim assertion that God is one is meant to say that God is one in genus, one in species, or one in number. He then argues that each of these understandings would be deficient: it cannot be said that God is one in genus, because that would indicate the presence of multiple species in God; it cannot be said that God is one in species, because a species is comprised of multiple individuals; and it cannot be said that God is one in number, because this would contradict the Muslim doctrine that nothing is comparable to God, since the created universe is full of things that are one in number.[44]

Abū Rā'iṭah then goes on to argue that the key to understanding God's oneness is another concept taken from Aristotelian philosophy: not the categories of genus, species, and number, but instead the distinction between *ousia* (*jaūhar*) and *hypostaseis* (*āqānīm*):

> We describe Him as one perfect in *ousia*, not in number, because He is in
> number (that is, in *hypostaseis*) three. [This] description of Him is perfect
> in both ways: When we describe Him as one in *ousia*, then He is exalted

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[44] Keating, 172-75.

above all His creatures, be it His perceptible or His intellectually comprehensible creation – nothing is comparable to Him, nothing is mixed with Him, He is simple, without density, incorporeal, His *ousia* approaches everything closely without blending or mixing.[45]

By arguing this way Abū Rā'iṭah achieves a brilliant synthesis of the Aristotelian concepts which were enjoying prominence in the intellectual life of the Arabophone world and the central Islamic doctrine of God's absolute transcendence. He has already demonstrated that none of the categories from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* provides a satisfactory way to categorize God's oneness because each of them would violate the doctrine of divine incomparability. By understanding God's oneness as consisting of an absolutely unique substance, Abū Rā'iṭah is able to affirm both Aristotelian concepts and the divine incomparability, while simultaneously presenting his imagined interlocutor with three uncomfortable choices: to define the divine oneness in terms of an Aristotelian metaphysical category, putting at risk the divine incomparability; rejecting the Aristotelian categories altogether; or admitting that the Christian understanding of God's oneness was more refined and did not place the doctrine of divine incomparability and the Aristotelian categories in competition with each other.

Throughout his writings, Abū Rā'iṭah is eager to demonstrate when using the categories of *ousia* and *hypostasis* that the name referring to the *ousia* may be used as a general term or as a particular reference to the individual beings that share the *ousia*. For example, in *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*, he devotes a lengthy passage to demonstrating that

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[45] Keating 174-77; "*Nuṣafuhu wāḥid kāmalān fī āl-jauhar lā fī āl-ʿadad li-ānā fī āl-ʿadad āī fī āl-āqānīm ṯalaṯah. Fa-qad kamalat ṣafatithi fī āl-wajhīn jamīʿaān. Āmā waṣafnā āīāhu wāḥidān fī āl-jauhar falāʿatalāʾhu jamīʿa ḫuluquhu wa barīatuhu maḥsūsah kānat ām mʿaqūlah lam yašbuhhu šaiʾ wa lam yaḫtalaṭ bihi ġīruhu basīṭ ġīr kaṯīf rūḥānī ġīr jasmānī yāt ʿalā kul bi-qurb jauharuhu min ġīr āmtazaj wa lā li-ḫutīlāṭ.*"

this is the case when speaking of human persons. He notes that there are two different

types of statements one may make that involve naming an *ousia*:

> The first … is applied to the *ousia* of the thing … everything that is a
> component of [the thing] participates in it, without increase or decrease in
> its measure or its members… as when one says "living" and "human
> being". The other [kind of statement describes each individual] member
> and its differentiation in itself … as when one says "Saʿd" and "H̱ālid".[46]

In other words, in the mundane use of language, when one says "human being,"

one may be referring to the general concept of a human being, or one may be referring to

a particular human being (i.e., a particular participant in the *ousia* of human being). The

reason this point is so important to Abū Rāʾiṭah is that he wishes to establish as

philosophical common ground with the Muslims the idea that individual existents may be

legitimately referred to by the name of the *ousia* in which they participate. Since this is

the case, when the Christian calls the Father "God," and calls the Son "God," and calls

the Spirit "God," he is not thereby affirming the existence of three gods any more than he

is affirming the existence of three different "humanities" when he calls Peter "human

being," and calls Paul "human being," and calls John "human being."

Abū Rāʾiṭah makes this same point about the use of the name of an *ousia* in

Fī āl-Tajasud. In this treatise, he imagines that his Muslim interlocutor notes that a

Christian would affirm the statement that Christ is God, and would also affirm the

statement that God is three *hypostaseis*. Therefore, objects the Muslim, the Christian

should affirm the statement that Christ is three *hypostaseis*, and yet Christian doctrine

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[46] Keating 108-11; "*… āḥadhā wāqʿa ʿalā jaūhar āl-šīʾ… āl-maštarak fīhi āl-jamīʿa āl-mutajazā minhu bi-lā zīādah wa lā naqṣān ʿalā qudrah wa taqṭīʿahu…. ka-qūl āl-qāʾil ḥī wa ānsān.*"

affirms that Christ is but one of the three *hypostaseis*, which would be appear to be

contradictory. Abū Rā'iṭah counters this objection based on the same two-fold usage of

the name of an *ousia*:

> According to us, the name "God" is [both] general and specific. The three
> are in general divinity and each one of them is the same as the other in
> quiddity, just as we have described concerning gold – all of it may be
> characterized as gold, even the smallest piece of it is also gold. However,
> we mean [here] that the incarnated One is divine, that is, one of the
> *hypostaseis*, and He is the Son, the living Word of God, eternally divine,
> not three *hypostaseis*. [47]

> Abū Rā'iṭah anticipates that this line of argument - that God may be considered

one in his transcendent and incomparable *ousia* but three in his *hypostaseis* - may be

dismissed by his Muslim interlocutor as simply inconsistent:

> If they refuse this description … and say … the one whose *ousia* is other
> than his *hypostaseis*, and whose *hypostaseis* are something other than his
> *ousia* cannot be described because it is contradictory … it should be said
> to them: Have we described [God's] *ousia* as other than His *hypostaseis* as
> you have described? … We only describe [God] as unified in *ousia* and
> divided in the *hypostaseis*, and [God's] *ousia* is His *hypostaseis*, and His
> *hypostaseis* are His *ousia*, as with the placement of three lights in one
> house. [48]

Although helpful in countering the posited Muslim objection, this explanation may be

somewhat disconcerting for the modern Christian reader, perhaps at first reading even

calling into question Abū Rā'iṭah's Trinitarian orthodoxy. There are two separate issues

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[47] Keating 222-23; "*Ism Āllāh ʿandanā ʿaām wa ḫāṣ fa-ṯalāṯihā ʿaāmah ālah wa kul wāḥid ḏāt āl-āḫar fī āl-māhīah ka-mā waṣafnā min āmr āl-ḏahab āl-mūṣūf kuluhu ḏahabān wa āl-qalīl minhu ḏahabān āīḍān. Fa-ānamā ʿanīnā ān āl-mustajasad ālāh āī āḫad āl-āqānīm wa hūa āl-Ibn kalimah Āllah āl-ḥīah ālāh āzalī lā ṯalaṯah āqānīm.*"

[48] Keating 184-85; "*Fa-ān ānkarūā haḏahi āl-ṣafah … wa qālūā ān … man kān jauhar ḡīr āqānīmuhu wa āqānīmuhu ḡīr jauharuhu lam yakun fī āl-ṣafah muḫtalafah … yuqāl li-hum āfhal waṣafnā jauharuhu ḡīr āqānīmuhu ka-mā waṣaftum? … Ānamā waṣafnā ānahu mutafaq fī āl-jauhar mufāraq fī āl-āqānīm wa jauharuhu hūa āqānīmuhu wa āqānīmuhu hum jauharuhu bi-manzilah āḍwā' ṯalaṯah fī bīt wāḥid.*"

with the passage as quoted here. The first is primarily a problem of translation. The

Arabic word that Keating has here translated "divided" - *mufāraq* - should instead be

translated "differentiated." The second issue has to do with the relationship between the

jaūhar and the *āqānīm* as here presented. Taken out of context, it might appear that Abū

Rā'iṭah's description asserts that the two are identical, collapsing any meaningful

distinction between them. On the contrary, since his entire argument here depends upon

making a meaningful distinction between the *jaūhar* and the *āqānīm*, it would make no

sense for him to establish an identity between them. The broader context of his argument,

together with his analogy of three lights placed together in a house, demonstrate that

when he writes, "[God's] *ousia* is His *hypostaseis*, and His *hypostaseis* are His *ousia*," he

means that God's *jaūhar* is common to all three of the *āqānīm*, and the *āqānīm* exist in

no state other than that of sharing a single *jaūhar*.

Abū Rā'iṭah's further explanation of this relationship is important in revealing the

degree to which he is willing to draw upon contemporaneous Muslim debates about the

divine attributes and how they may be understood in conjunction with God's oneness:

"The *ousia* of the Godhead is the three *hypostaseis*, and the three *hypostaseis* of the *ousia*

of the Godhead are the *ousia*. For the difference between the *ousia* [and] the single

hypostasis is like the difference between a whole thing and one of its properties…."[49] The

term Abū Rā'iṭah uses here, rendered by Keating as "property" is *ḫūāṣṣah*, rather than

ṣifah, the term that is usually translated as "attribute." But it is important to note that Abū

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[49] Keating 186-87; "*Fa-jaūhar āl-lāhūt talatah āqānīm talatah āqānīm jaūhar āl-lāhūt jaūhar. Li-āna muḫālifah āl-jaūhar āl-āqnūm āl-wāḥid ka- muḫālifah šaī' 'aām li-b'ad ḫūāṣṣah.*"

Rā'iṭah argues that the divine *jaūhar* can be understood as the "sum total" of three distinct properties, with each property being one of the *āqānīm*. This fact is obscured by the fact that he then goes on to present a conventional account of the Trinity that would be quite at home in Western theological texts, in which each hypostasis is distinguished by a property unique to it: "the Father by His Fatherness, and the Son by His Sonship, and the Spirit by His Procession…."[50] But a careful reading of the text shows that this passage is inconsistent and that Abū Rā'iṭah uses the term *ḫāūṣṣah* in two different ways. The first usage asserts that the *jaūhar* is equivalent to the three *āqānīm* taken collectively, and that each of the *āqānīm* is the expression or instantiation of a particular divine property. Thus emerges an account of the Trinitarian persons as three incommensurable divine properties, clearly distinct because each is different from the others, and with the *ousia* being the equivalent of these three incommensurable properties taken together. Abū Rā'iṭah points out that this definition of the divine *ousia* is analogous to the definition of the human *ousia*, which can be expressed as "living, having the faculty of speech, mortal."[51] In his clearly different second usage of the term *ḫāūṣṣah*, Abū Rā'iṭah refers not to a property which is one part of the divine *ousia*, but to the relational property that characterizes each person of the Trinity. Clearly he does not intend this second usage of to be identical to the first, for then he would be defining the divine *ousia* as "having Fatherhood, having Sonship, and proceeding," which would be a definition of what is common to the persons by the very properties that distinguish them. Significantly, Abū

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[50] Keating 186-89; "*āl-Āb bi-ābwīatihi wa āl-Ibn bi-binūtihi wa āl-Rūḥ bi-ḫarūjihi….*"

[51] Keating 188-89; "*ḫī manṭīq mā'it.*"

Rā'iṭah asserts that there is no other existing thing which has this kind of relationship between *jaūhar* and *āqānīm.* By doing so, he both proactively responds to an anticipated objection that his account does not align with common experience about things and affirms the Islamic doctrine that there is nothing that is like God.

Later in the text, Abū Rā'iṭah again seems to approach the contemporaneous Muslim debates about the divine attributes and their relationship to the divine unicity when he responds to an imagined question from a Muslim interlocutor about the specific number of *āqānīm* in the Godhead:

> Now if they say: "What prompts you to describe God … as three *hypostaseis* rather than ten or twelve [*sic*, should be translated as "twenty"], or fewer than this or more?", it should be said to them: Truly we do not describe Him as three *hypostaseis* instead of one *ousia*. These three *hypostaseis* are one *ousia* in all aspects. It is not possible to find an equivalent or a likeness for this…. As we have already explained, God possesses knowledge and spirit, and the knowledge of God and His spirit are permanent and perpetual, not ceasing. For it is not permitted in a description of God … that He be described in His eternity without knowledge or spirit.[52]

This passage is in important one for understanding Abū Rā'iṭah's approach, not only because he reasserts that the *jaūhar* is the *āqānīm* and vice versa, but because he identifies the second and third of the *āqānīm* as knowledge and spirit. Spirit is not used here as the proper name of one of the persons of the Trinity, but as a quality or characteristic indicative of life and vitality. The association that he makes between divine

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[52] Keating 196-97; "*Fa-ān qālūā mā āladī d'aākum ilā taṣafūn Āllah ... āqānīm ṯalaṯah dūn ʿašarah āū ʿašrin āū āqal min ḏalak āū āktar yaqūl li-hum ānā lam taṣafuhu ṯalaṯah āqānīm dūn jaūhar wāḥid. Fa-haḏa hi āl-ṯalaṯah āqānīm jaūhar wāḥid fī jamīʿa ānḫā'hi mā sabīl ilā ān yūjad li-ḏalak naẓīr wa lā maṯal.... Ka-mā ḏakarnā ān Āllah ḏū ʿalam wa rūḥ wa ʿalam Āllah wa rūḥhu dā'imān qā'imān lam yazalā. Li-ānahu lā yajūz fī ṣifah Āllah ... ān yakūn mūṣūfān fī āzalīatihi bi-lā ʿalam wa lā rūḥ.*"

attributes and the three *āqānīm* is even clearer in the original Arabic, because the phrase

that Keating has chosen to translate "God possesses knowledge and spirit" might be more

precisely rendered as "God is the possessor of knowledge and spirit." Furthermore, the

term "possessor" (*ḏū*) is a relatively complex and multi-layered Arabic term that

depending upon context may be translated lord, owner, or head. Thus it is itself indicative

of a particular attribute, that of headship or dominion, and is also a term which appears in

the Qur'ān in reference to God and thus would be familiar to a Muslim reader.[53] Thus

Abū Rā'iṭah draws upon an understanding of divine attributes that Christians and

Muslims hold in common to present an argument for Trinitarian doctrine in which the

Godhead is expressed as a triad of dominion, knowledge, and spirit. Each of these

attributes or properties may be understood as distinct from the others since no two of

them are commensurable. Taken together they may be, according to Abū Rā'iṭah's

thinking, understood as an approximate expression of the divine *ousia*, just as the human

ousia is expressed as "living, having the faculty of speech, and mortal." One must say

that these three properties together constitute only an approximate definition of the divine

ousia because, as is clear from Abū Rā'iṭah's assertion that nothing is like God, He has

these attributes in a way that is different from any of His creatures.

Another important area of exploration in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas* in which Abū

Rā'iṭah draws upon the philosophical tradition is his consideration of analogy (*āl-qīās*)

and the way in which analogies may be made between God and created things. This is an

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[53] See, for example, surah 40:15, where God is referred to as Lord of the Throne (*ḏū āl-ʿarš*), surah 51:28, where He is called Lord of Power (*ḏū āl-qūah*), or surah 57:21, where He is referred to as Lord of Favor (*ḏū āl-faḍal*).

area in which he quite self-consciously draws upon the philosophical debates taking place

among the Muslim intellectuals of his day, for he mentions them in a general way when

he introduces the subject of analogy:

> According to the *ahl ar-ra'y*,[54] the analogy is limited to what is similar in
> one way, for the most part there is difference. If the analogy bears
> resemblance to what is compared in every manner, and there is no
> difference in any [part] of it, then there would be a question as to whether
> it is a sound analogy.[55]

In *Fī ā<u>t</u>bāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*, Abū Rā'iṭah articulates a second limitation on the

use of analogy in theological discourse which also draws upon Islamic thought. He

begins by noting that any analogue lies at some rational distance from the thing to which

the analogy is made. But then he points out that this problem is greatly compounded

when the thing for which an analogy is sought is God Himself, due to the ontological

chasm that lies between Him and His creation:

> The term "analogy" is used by those having knowledge besides for the
> exalted predication of God … for every attribute predicated of spirits and
> corporeal beings in general. And if our goal is to present the analogy …
> then effort and intense [care] in its correct [application] are necessary for
> us … on account of its distance from the things that are compared to it in
> all of its relations…. For that for which the analogy is sought is above
> every analogy found among what is intelligible and perceptible, as we
> have [already] described.[56]

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[54] The phrase which Keating has here left untranslated literally means "the people of opinion." The text provides no clue as to whether Abū Rā'iṭah has in mind any particular school of thought. Keating notes that the phrase "is probably a general reference to the group of Islamic scholars who were known for their extensive use of reason and opinion."

[55] Keating 186-87; "*Had āl-qīās 'and āhl āl-rā'ī mā šibih fī t'aḍ āl-wajūh fa-kān āl-ġālib 'alīhi āl-āḫtilāf. Fa-laū ān āl-qīās āšbah āl-muqās bihi fī kul ānhā'ihi wa lam yuḫālifuhu fī šaī' minhā kān iḍān hūa āl-āmr āl-multamas lahu qīāsān qā'imān.*"

[56] Keating, 104-105; "*Fa-ḥad āl-qīās āl-must'amal man ḏūī āl-m'arufah faḍalān 'an ṣifah Āllah … āl-m'atalīah 'an kul ṣifah mūṣūfah āl-ārūāḥ wa āl-ājsām jamī'aān. Wa āḍ ġarḍunā ḍakar āl-qīās … wajab 'alīnā āl-ājtihād wa āl-mubāliġah fī taṣḥīḥhu … āstaṣ'aba li-b'aduhu min āl-āšīā' āl-muqīs fīhi kul*"

So, in summary, Abū Rā'iṭah describes three considerations in the use of analogy: first, that an analogue may be expected to be like the thing to which an analogy is made in only one way, but different from it in many ways; second, that the conceptual distance between the two means that great care must be taken in developing analogies; and third, that God transcends comparison to any created thing that is apprehended by the senses or even by the intellect, such that the first two principles are intensified for any analogy that is used to describe Him. These principles are an important aspect of Abū Rā'iṭah's apologetical method, since the very question of divine analogy was controversial in Islamic thought. Only by emphasizing these principles drawn from Islamic thought about analogy does he establish sufficient common ground with his intended Muslim audience for the Trinitarian analogies that he explores in the text.

A particularly prominent analogy in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas* is Abū Rā'iṭah's comparison of the three Trinitarian *hypostaseis* to three lamps in a house. He returns to this analogy a number of times in the treatise at hand, comparing the single light emanating from the three lamps to the divine *ousia*. He imagines that his Muslim interlocutor may challenge such an analogy on the basis that the three lamps suggest three different sources, such that the oneness of God is compromised by the analogy, even if the existence of the *hypostaseis* themselves is granted. Abū Rā'iṭah's response to this objection is built on Islamic sources in two ways. First, following the principle articulated above about the parameters of an analogy, he argues that in order to be a sound analogy,

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ānḫā'ihi.... Ān āl-multimas li-hu qīāsān y'alūā 'alā kul qīās mūjūd min āl-m'aqūl wa āl-maḥsūs ka-mā waṣaf nā."

the two things being compared need only be alike in a single way, and indeed it is

anticipated that they will be different in more ways than they are alike. Thus the analogy

between the Trinity and the three lamps placed together in a house is apt, in that there is a

single point of correlation between the two: the existence of a shared *ousia* which cannot

be differentiated among the three existing things. In fact, in order for the imagined

Muslim objection to be valid, the Trinity and the three lamps would have to be alike in

every way, which in turn would violate the Muslims' own principle about how analogies

work. The second way in which Abū Rā'iṭah's response draws upon Islamic thinking is,

once again, the principle that since God is utterly transcendent, one need not apply to him

the same principles that one would apply to created things:

> If God … were a luminous and perceptible light … each one of them
> would be in need of a cause from which it emerges, just as it is necessary
> that the perceptible lights have sources. [However,] when we briefly
> described the lights, which are above all of the senses and knowledge, we
> are not compelled to describe each one of them as having a cause. Rather,
> one of them is the cause of the other two, without beginning and without
> time.[57]

The term that Keating has here chosen to translate "knowledge" (*āl-ʿaqal*) would be better

translated "intellection" or "process of cognition." By noting that the three "lights" being

described in the analogy – i.e., the three divine *hypostaseis* – are beyond anything that

one perceives with the senses and beyond the normal processes of intellection, Abū

Rā'iṭah affirms a core Islamic tenet. But he also undercuts with a single stroke any

objections which would be based on differences between God and perceptible things.

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[57] Ibid., "*Fa-laū ān Āllah … nūrān wa ḏū' maḥsūs li-kān … kul wāḥid minhā maḥtājān ilā ʿalīhi yaḫraj āl-āḏūā' āl-maḥsūsah ālatī hīa maḥtājah ilā āl-mʿaādan. Fa-āmā āḫtiṣār waṣafnā li-āḏūā' mʿatalīah ʿan āl-ḥūās wa āl-ʿaqal jamīʿaān lam nuḍṭira ilā ān naṣaf li-kul wāḥid minhā ʿalah bal āḥadhumā ʿalah āl-āṯnīn bi-lā badā wa lā zamān.*"

Abū Rā'iṭah follows this argument with three other analogies, answering multiple anticipated objections along the way about whether these analogies deviate from the doctrine of God's unicity. In so doing, he continues to anchor his Trinitarian argument in the two principles articulated above: the philosophical position that an analogy works by establishing a single point of similarity between two things, while accepting the fact that there are numerous points of difference between them; and the Islamic tenet that, because God is utterly beyond His creation, any attribute that is ascribed to Him is held by Him in a different way than the same attribute would be held by one of His creatures. The first of these analogies is the comparison of the Trinity to the triad of Adam, Eve, and Abel, in which the first entity is the source and origin of both the second entity and the third entity, but in a different way in each case:

> The description of the property of one of them is not the description of the property of the other, because Adam is the begetter and not the begotten, and Abel is the begotten and not the begetter, and Eve is the one who proceeds from Adam … not the begetter or the begotten. Each one of these is inseparable from that which differentiates it from the other, yet the *ousia* is not different, as we have explained. And Adam and Abel and Eve are a *mysterion* (Arabic *sirr*)[58]for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to the extent that it is possible for what is perceptible and visible to be a *mysterion* for that which is neither perceptible, nor visible.[59]

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[58] The basic meaning for this Arabic term is "secret." Like the word mystery, it can also be used to mean "sacrament."

[59] Keating 188-89; "*Wa līsa ṣifah ḫāṣah āḥadhumā ṣifah ḫāṣah āl-āḫar li-āna Ādam wālad lā wulida wa Hābīl wulida lā wālad wa Ḥūā ḫārajah min Ādam lā wālad wa lā wulida. Lazam kul wāḥid minhum ḫāṣatihi ālatī bihā yuḫālif li-l-āḫar min ḡīr ān yukūn āl-jaūhar muḫtalaf kamā dakarnā. Wa Ādam wa Hābīl wa Ḥūā sirr āl-Āb wa āl-Ibn wa Rūḥ āl-Qudus bi-qadar mā yumkin āl-maḥsūs āl-mabṣar ān yakūn sirān li-mā līsa bi-maḥsūs wa lā mabṣar.*" It is perhaps worth noting that the term Keating has translated "description" here is *ṣifah*, the same term that is sometimes translated "attribute." So Abū Rā'iṭah is here speaking of the distinctions among the three divine *hypostaseis* in the language of attributes, although exploring the implications of divine attributes in terms of the Islamic debates over unicity is not his primary purpose here.

Abū Rā'iṭah anticipates that a Muslim may object that this analogy suggests three gods. Presumably the basis for this objection would be the fact that the *ousia*, although shared, is held by three distinct, individual beings. He answers this objection by articulating four different ways in which the Adam/Eve/Abel triad differs from the three persons of the Trinity. First, the three human persons had lives that were chronologically defined, with different beginnings, endings, and life spans. Second, they occupied different physical spaces in which they underwent bodily growth. Third, they were unequal in power. Fourth, they experienced interior conflict. By elaborating this list of considerable differences, Abū Rā'iṭah brings his analogy in line with the two principles of Islamic thought articulated earlier. Since it is possible to identify a similarity between the Trinity and the Adam/Eve/Abel triad (a shared *ousia* common to three distinct individuals, one of whom is the source of the other two, but in two different ways), but a much longer list of differences, the comparison meets the definition of analogy that he adopted from Islamic thinkers of his time. By articulating the ways in which the divine persons occupy the relations of begetting, being begotten, and proceeding quite differently from the human persons, Abū Rā'iṭah emphasizes that God is far beyond the limitations of his creatures and unable to be described fully in conventional human language, despite the usefulness of some analogies.

Abū Rā'iṭah offers two other analogies: the triad of the soul, the intellect, and the faculty of speech, as well as the familiar triad of the sun, its light, and its heat. He presents these two analogies in the context of replying to a proposed Muslim objection that continuity (*ātiṣāl*) and division (*āftarāq*) cannot be simultaneously present in the

same thing. Rather, continuity precedes and is ended by division, or else division is dissolved into continuity. Abū Rā'iṭah responds by pointing out that although such is frequently the case, even in created things continuity and division can exist simultaneously in the same thing:

> Now, what do you say about the soul and the intellect and the faculty of speech? Are they continuous or are they divided, or do they have both attributes, I mean continuity and division? Was the soul ever separate from the intellect and the faculty of speech, or one of these two from the others, then joined [together] later? Or is it not the case that their continuity and division [occurred] together from their very beginning, [so that] one of them did not precede the other? … Tell us about the sun and its light and its heat: is it continuous, one part with another part, or is it separate and not continuous? Or does it have both attributes together …? Now, does its continuity precede its division, or does its division precede its continuity? Or did it have both states together from the beginning …?[60]

As with his other Trinitarian analogies, Abū Rā'iṭah is primarily interested here in showing that the Christian way of understanding God's oneness fits into both the definition of analogy affirmed by his Muslim interlocutors and with the idea that God is ultimately beyond creaturely comparisons. Indeed, he anticipates that the triads of soul/intellect/speech and sun/light/heat may inspire in his readers the idea that the three *āqānīm* of which he writes are parts of God, and is careful to dismiss such an understanding as incompatible with the concept of analogy that he is using. In reference to these two triads, he writes that "… we only connect them analogously because of the

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[60] Keating 192-93; "*Fa-mā 'asākum ān taqūlūā fī āl-nafs wa āl-'aqal wa āl-naṭaq. Āmtaṣalah hīa ām maftaraqah ām li-hā kulā āl-ṣifatīn ā'anī ātiṣālān wa āftarāqān. Fa-hal kānat āl-nafs qat mubāīnah li-l-'aqal wa āl-naṭaq āū b'aḍ haḏīn li-hā ṯum ātuṣilat min b'ad. Āū līsa ānamā ātiṣāluhā wa tabāīnuhā jamī'aah m'a āwal ānšā'ihā lam yutaqadam āḥaduhā āl-āḫar….Āḫbarūnā 'an āl-šams wa ḍū'hā ḥarāratihā āmtaṣalah hīa b'aḍuhā bi-b'aḍ lam mutabāīnah ġīr mutaṣalah. Ām li-hā kulā āl-ṣifatīn jamī'aān ... Fa-hal taqdam ātiṣāluhā āftarāquhā āū āftarāquhā ātiṣāluhā. Ām li-hā kulā āl-ḥālīn jamī'aān….*"

state of their simultaneous continuity and division, [where] one of them does not precede

the other. And we have said before this point … that an analogy bears resemblance [to

what is compared] in some aspect, but the difference is predominant."[61] Thus the working

definition of analogy is preserved, and even more importantly, Abū Rā'iṭah makes clear

that the differences between the Trinity and these triads of created things are greater than

the single point of similarity that he is expressing.

The two light-based analogies used by Abū Rā'iṭah in *Fī āl-Ṭālūṭ āl-Muqadas*

also appear in his other treatises. In *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah,* for example, he uses the

analogy of three lamps placed together in a house to demonstrate that even among created

things, it is sometimes possible to assert without contradiction that a given entity is

simultaneously both "one" and "three":

> If they [i.e., the Muslims] say: "It is one particular, that is, counted as one,
> not three, in light", we say: We do not count the light of all of them to [a
> single] one of the lamps which, in emitting its light, does not have
> [anything] particular apart from the [other] lamps. Nor do we see that its
> light takes something away, or deprives the other lamps of their [own]
> emission [of light]…. Now if they say: "[It is] three [lights]", we say …
> There is no difference among them in the light and the illumination, and
> no separation in the place [of the light]. Rather, what is necessary for light
> is proper [to them] in all of their states. So they should know that the light
> described is one and three together [simultaneously]: one with regard to
> the quiddity of the light and its *ousia*, and three with regard to the number
> applicable to the being of the particular lamps….[62]

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[61] Keating 194-95; "… *Ātaḥadnāhā qīāsān li-ḥāl ātiṣāluhā wa āftarāquhā jamī'aān m'aān lam tataqadam āḥaduhā āl-āḥar. Wa qad qulnā fī āl-qīās qabl āl-mūḍ'a ānahu mā āšbah fī b'aḍ wajūhhu wa kān āl-āḥtilāf ḡālibān 'alīhu.*"

[62] Keating 104-107; "*Fa-ān qālūā hūa wāḥid ḥāṣah āī m'adūd wāḥid lā ṯalaṯah fī āl-ḍū' qulnā lam n'ad āl-ḍū' kuluhuli-b'ad āl-muṣābīḥ ālaḏī lā yajāūz fī āḥrāj ḍū'hu ḥāṣah ḡīruhu min āl-muṣābīḥ fa-lasnā narāhu yuḡādar ḍū'hu šī'ān wa lā yaslab ḡīruhu min āl-muṣābīḥ ḥarūjuhu….Fa-ān qālūā ṯalaṯah qulnā … līsa bīnuhum āḥtilāf fī āl-ḍū' wa āl-ānārah wa lā tabāīn fī āl-makān. Bal hūa mulā'imah fī jamī'a ḥilātihā āl-mustawajabah bi-hā āl-ḍū' li-y'alamūā ānāl-ḍū' āl-mūṣūf wāḥid wa hūa ṯalaṯah jamī'aān m'aān. Āmā wā ḥid fa-fī māḥīah āl-ḍū' wa jaūharuhu wa āmā ṯalaṯah fa-fī āl-'adad āl-wāq'a 'alā ḏāt āl-muṣābīḥ āl-ḥāṣ….*"

In this somewhat more elaborated use of the three lamps analogy, Abū Rā'iṭah

emphasizes the equality in worth, dignity, and power of the three Trinitarian *hypostaseis*

by noting that none of the lamps diminishes the illumination of the other two. This is also

the analogy that Abū Rā'iṭah seems to have felt came closest to the reality of the divine

life, since he notes that there is no spatial separation in the place illuminated by the

lamps, whereas elsewhere he had given spatial and physical separation as the main

difference between the Trinitarian persons and the Adam/Eve/Abel triad: "They [i.e., the

Trinitarian *hypostaseis*] are not like corporeal things nor like bodies, which are separated

and divided, since they do not have a body nor flesh." [63] Perhaps the lack of this clear

difference based on spatial separation is why Abū Rā'iṭah, at the conclusion of the

passage cited above, felt the need to emphasize in a somewhat doxological fashion that

"[for him] there is no likeness nor measure: [God is] one in *ousia*, eternity, knowledge,

power, honor, majesty….."[64]

In this same treatise, Abū Rā'iṭah uses the sun/light/heat triad as a Trinitarian

analogy, and quite significantly for the purpose at hand, combines this use of analogy

with the concept of attributes. In this remarkable passage, he clearly suggests some

identity or correlation between attributes and *āqānīm*:

> [It is] that which is called "one sun" because of its genuine existence and
> uniqueness in its singularity, a being, one *ousia*, comprehending three

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[63] Keating 114-15; "*Līsat ka-āl-ājsām wa lā āl-ājsād āl-mutabāīnah āl-mutafaraqah āḏ hīa līsat bi-jasad wa lā jasam.*"

[64] Keating 106-107; "*... Bi-ān lā šibih wa lā maqdār wāḥid fī āl-jaūhar wa āl-āzalīah wa āl-ʿalam wa āl-qūah wa āl-majad wa āl-ʿaẓmah....*"

> known properties, that is, the sun disc which is described with two
> substantial attributes, which are the light and the heat, since [the sun] does
> not cease to be described with the two [attributes], in that it does not cease
> to generate the light, [which is] generated simultaneously with the existence
> of the sun disc … without one of [the attributes] having existed prior to the
> other two.[65]

In the account presented here, there is a clear distinction between properties (*ḫūāṣ*) and

attributes (*ṣifāt*), since there are three of the former and only two of the latter. The sun

itself is presented as ontologically prior, with the light and the heat generated by it

described as its attributes. Certainly the analogy of the three lamps and the analogy set

forth in this passage are mutually contradictory, since in the former analogy it is not the

case that two of the lamps are attributes of the other. But the fact that these analogies

work in different ways would not make either or both of them untenable, according to the

principles of analogy that Abū Rā'iṭah himself sets forth. As the texts themselves suggest,

if the mutual incompatibility of the two analogies had been raised as objectionable, he

would have replied that each of the analogues is like the Trinity in one way but different

from it in many others, and that in any case God is ultimately beyond all of these

comparisons to created things.

Abū Rā'iṭah makes another important point about analogy and its use in

describing God in *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas*. He argues that the assertion of divine oneness

itself establishes a numerical analogy between God and the many created things which

can be described as "one." Furthermore, because the oneness that Christians ascribe to

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[65] Keating 112-13; "*Āl-mʿaqūl ʿalā ṣaḥaḥ wajūduhā wa ānfarāduhā bi-wiḥdānīatihā šamsān wāḥdah ḏāt jaūhar wāḥid madrūkah ṯalaṭah ḫūāṣ mʿarūfah āʿanī āl-qurṣ ālaḏī hūa āl-mūṣūf bi-āl-ṣifatīn āl-jaūharīatīn ālatī humā āl-nūr wa āl-ḥarārah munḏu lam tazal bi-humā mūṣūfān ānahu lam yazal wālad āl-nūr mūladān bi-wajūd āl-qurṣ ... bi-lā zamān sābiq li-wajūd āḥadhumā qabl ġīrihi.*"

God involves the "subtle and refined" distinctions that Abū Rā'iṭah has made using the

Aristotelian metaphysical categories, this oneness is unique to God and therefore fulfills

the Islamic dictum that "nothing is like Him" in a way that the oneness ascribed by

Muslims does not:

> What do you say about one human being, and one king? Is not each one of them a single [individual]? Which comparison is more important than what you describe? As for the Christians, they reject any comparison [of creatures] and likeness with [God] when they describe Him as three *hypostaseis* and one *ousia*…. When it is found that He is three *hypostaseis* and one *ousia*, then His description is above every comparison and likeness [with creatures], because it is not possible that a single *ousia* [having] three *hypostaseis* … exists in creation.[66]

By arguing in this way, Abū Rā'iṭah uses an apologetical stratagem that has already been

noted in the authors previously considered: namely, inverting an argument made by the

Muslims such that it becomes an argument for the Trinitarian understanding of God. In

this case, the idea is that Muslims pay greater honor to the divine unicity by asserting not

only that God is one, but that He is so utterly unique and transcendent that there is

nothing among His creatures to which he can be compared. Following on this assertion,

the charge is made that Christians diminish the divine unicity and transcendence by a

doctrine that implies the existence of three gods, or of a God comprised of three parts.

Here Abū Rā'iṭah argues, contrarily, that merely describing God as one makes every

individual thing in the created universe an analogue to Him, and that in having one

jaūhar without further distinction or refinement, the divine uniqueness is compromised.

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[66] Keating 198-99; "*Fa-mā qūlukum fī ānsān wāḥid wa malik wāḥid. Ālīsa kul wāḥid minhumā fardān. Fa-āī tašbīh ā'aẓam mi-mā waṣaftum. Fa-āmā āl-Naṣārī fa-nafat 'anhu kul tašbīh wa maṯal li-waṣafuhum āī āhu āqānīm ṯalaṯah jaūhar wāḥid….Fa-āḏ wujida ānahu ṯalaṯah āqānīm jaūhar wāḥid fa-qad ā'aṯilat ṣifatihi 'an kul tašbīh wa maṯal li-ānahu lā sabīl ilā ān yujad fī āl-ḫuluq jaūhar wāḥid āqānīm ṯalaṯah….*"

Far from diminishing the divine transcendence, only a Trinitarian understanding of God preserves His utter uniqueness.

Another important philosophical concept that Abū Rā'iṭah brings to bear in his defense of Trinitarian doctrine is that of causality. In *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas*, he imagines his Muslim interlocutor pointing out that, since the Christians refer to each of the three *āqānīm* of the Trinity as "Lord" and "God", then they should have no objection to speaking of "three Lords" or "three Gods." In response, he argues that this line of reasoning would be correct if each of the *āqānīm* could be considered a cause, but that it fails as a critique of Christian doctrine because only one of the *āqānīm* can be considered a cause, while the other two are caused by the first. He emphasizes that this relationship of causality is a key aspect of understanding the Trinity correctly:

> If it were the case that the books describe each one of the *hypostaseis* as Lord and God, without bringing any of the *hypostaseis* into relation with another, and it were necessary that each one of them is a cause, not caused, then what you have described is permitted and right. However, if it is true that the Son and the Spirit are from the Father, then there are not many causes, [nor are] three gods or lords ascribed [to God].[67]

As with his treatment of analogies described above, Abū Rā'iṭah here rather ingeniously blends two different principles, both of which are calculated to appeal to his Muslim audience. While causality is taken from the philosophical categories that were of such appeal to Muslim intellectuals of his day, the emphasis on God as the origin and cause of all things – including God the Father being the origin and cause even of the other two

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[67] Keating, 208-209; "*Laū kānat āl-kutub m'a waṣafuhā kul wāḥid min āl-āqānīm rabbān wa ālahān lam tuṣifa b'aḍ āl-āqānīm ilā b'aḍ wa wajabat ān kul wāḥid minhā 'alah lā m'alūl li-kān mā waṣaftum jā'izān mustaqīmān. Fa-āmā āḏ ḥaq ān āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ min āl-Āb lam taṣar 'allān kaṯīrah lam tunsiba ālahah ṯalaṯah wa lā ārbāb.*"

hypostaseis of the Trinity – aligns well with the Muslim religious sensibility that carefully delineates ontologically between God and all else. Thus his argument from causality constitutes a two-pronged appeal to his Muslim readership. Like other apologetical stratagems used by the Arabophone Christian theologians reviewed here, the use of this argument seems designed to place the Muslim interlocutor in the awkward position of choosing between an admission that the Trinitarian understanding of God accords well with philosophical principles, or else dismissing the particular philosophical principle at hand – causality – as relevant for a discussion of God. The latter position would hardly be tenable, of course, due to the Islamic emphasis on this very attribute of God, as the origin of all.

Abū Rā'iṭah imagines that the introduction of the idea of causality into the discussion may prompt an objection from his Muslim interlocutor based on the chronological relationship between a thing and its cause. The objection is that causality and simultaneity are mutually exclusive, such that the Christian may either affirm that one of the *āqānīm* is the cause of the other two, and therefore exists prior to them, or else affirm that the three are co-existent, in which case none of them can be the cause of the others:

> If the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, as you have described,
> then it ought to be the case that the Father [exists] before the one of which
> He is the cause. And if the Father does not [exist] before the Son and the
> Spirit, and they exist eternally together, then one of [the *hypostaseis*] is not
> [more] worthy than the others of being the cause of [the others]. And your
> teaching that one is the cause of two is false.[68]

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[68] Keating 210-11; "*Ān kān āl-Āb ʿalah āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ ka-mā waṣaftum yanbaḡī ān yakūn āl-Āb āqdam mi-man hūa li-hu ʿalah. Fa-ān lam yakūn āl-Āb āqdam min āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ wa āūjabtum ānhā*

Although Abū Rā'iṭah does not explicitly compare this argument to the one previously

described based on continuity and division, the two arguments are in fact exactly parallel.

In both cases, the imagined Muslim interlocutor detects what appear to be mutually

contradictory attributes in the relations among the Trinitarian *āqānīm* as they are

described by Christians. In both cases, the apparent contradiction arises because the

Muslim assumes a necessary chronological component for the particular relations being

described. Abū Rā'iṭah's awareness that the two are largely parallel cases is shown by the

fact that he responds to both objections using the same analogy, that of the triad of the

sun, its heat, and its light:

> Some causes, such as you have described, [exist] before those [things] for
> which they are the cause. However, this is not as you have described with
> all causes. You see the sun, and it is the cause of its rays and its heat. In
> the same way fire is the cause of its light and its heat. And it is never
> lacking its light and its heat. The teaching about the Son and the Spirit
> from the Father is the same as this: [they are] two [things which are]
> eternal from [something] eternal, although the Father does not anticipate
> them.[69]

Abū Rā'iṭah's response subtly points out that the erroneous assumption in both objections

is the inclusion of a chronological component. He notes that even with some created

things such as the sun and fire, simultaneity and causality may cohere in the same

relations between things, just as division and continuity may cohere. But his inclusion of

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 āzalīah mʿaān fa-līsa bʿaḍuhā āḏan bi-mustaḥaq ān yakūn ʿalah li-bʿaḍ dūn bʿaḍ. Baṭala qūlukum bi-ān ʿala h āl-āṯnīn wāḥid."

[69] Ibid.; "*Bʿad āl-ʿalul ʿalā mā waṣaftum min āl-qadamah ālatī hīa li-hum ʿalah walakin līsa kul āl-ʿalah ka-mā waṣaftum lā maḥālah. Fa-qad tarūn āl-šams wa hīa ʿalah šʿaāʿahā wa ḥarāratihā. Hakaḏā wa āl-nār ʿalah ḍū'hā wa ḥarāratihā wa lam takun qaṭ ʿaādamah li-ḍū'hā wa ḥarāratihā. Hakaḏā wa āl-qūl fī āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ humā min āl-Āb āzalīān min āzalī bi-lā sābiqah kānat min āl-Āb li-humā.*"

the adjective eternal (*āzalī*) subtly reminds the reader that the subject at hand – God – is

beyond all chronological considerations. Abū Rā'iṭah's position might be stated as: even

with the more rarefied of created things, a relation of causality does not necessarily imply

a relation of precedence; therefore, how much more is this the case with God Himself,

who transcends all of the temporal limitations associated with His creatures. Here, then,

is another use of Abū Rā'iṭah taking a key Islamic affirmation about God – his eternality

– and turning it to his own apologetical purposes.

In a similar passage in *Fī āṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*, Abū Rā'iṭah suggests that these

two divine attributes – eternality and causality – when taken together, suggest the

possibility of multiple *āqānīm* in the Godhead:

> As for the relationship of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, it is a
> substantial, unceasing relationship, because the Father is the eternal cause
> of the Son and the Spirit, for they are from Him (in spite of the difference of
> their properties) He is not from them, without being earlier or later [in
> time], two perfects from a perfect, two eternals from an eternal, because of
> the identity of each one of them with the others in every way with their
> *ousia*….[70]

In other words, if God is eternal, and God is also a cause, then the possibility exists for

there to be an eternal relation (*āḍāfah*) of causality. Although Abū Rā'iṭah does not make

the conclusion explicit, it is clear from his presentation that if no such eternal relation of

causality actually exists, then God would have an unfulfilled potentiality, a state of things

which he and his Muslim interlocutor would agree is impossible. Since, then, God is

eternally a cause, there must be multiple *āqānīm* in the Godhead, which means that only

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[70] Keating 114-15; "*Fa-āmā āḍāfah āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ ilā āl-Āb fa-āḍāfah jauharīah lam tazal li-āna
āl-Āb ʿalah āzalīah li-l-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ. Li-ānahumā minhu ʿalā āḫtilāf ḫūāṣhumā lā hūa minhumā min ġīr t
aqdīm wa lā tāḫīr kāmalīn min kāmal āzalīn min āzalī li-ātilāq kul wāḥid minhum mʿa āl-āḫar fī kul ānhā'
jaūharuhā.*"

a Trinitarian account of God would satisfy the logical requirements of divine eternality and divine causality. Furthermore, by his clever use of the term "two eternals" (*āzalīn*), Abū Rā'iṭah draws directly from the contemporaneous Muslim debates about the divine attributes and whether the positing of such attributes implied multiple eternal existents.

Abū Rā'iṭah addresses another Muslim objection that is related to causality, although in this argument the term cause (*ʿalah*) does not appear. Rather, the argument speaks of a thing which has its origin in another thing, a relation that encompasses the notion of causality but also establishes closeness between the two things that goes beyond mere causality. The argument is that when a thing has its origin in another thing, the second thing is either a part of the first thing, or an operation of the first thing. This being the case, the second thing is not entitled to the name of the whole thing:

> Either the Son and the Spirit are a part of the being of the Father when you describe them as being from Him, or they are His operation. How, if you say that they are a part of Him, then the part does not deserve the name of the perfect [whole], that is, "God". And likewise, if [they] are his operation, in the same way they are not deserving of the name "God", because it is the name of the perfect whole.[71]

In responding to this argument, Abū Rā'iṭah makes use once again of Aristotelian metaphysics and argues that a thing may be legitimately described as a "part" by being part of a number (and therefore a perfect whole in itself) or by being part of a perfect whole. He asserts that each of the divine *āqānīm* fits the first of these definitions, because each of them is one out of three. By answering the objection in this way, he is able to

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[71] Keating 212-13; "*Āmā ān yakūn āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ bʿaḍ ḏāt āl-Āb āḏ waṣaftumūhā minhu wa āmā fiʿaluhu. Fa-ān qultum ānahā bʿaḍuhu lam tastaḥaq āl-bʿaḍ tasmīah āl-kamāl āī ālah wa ān kānā fiʿaluhu fa-ka-ḏalak āīḍān lam yastaḥaq ism āl-ālah li-ānahu ism āl-kamāl.*"

affirm the philosophical common ground (the metaphysical definition of "part") and yet simultaneously affirm that God has no "parts" in the sense of divisions and thereby preserve an understanding of God's oneness that his Muslim readers would affirm.

In addition to using this numerical understanding of "part" to reply to the objection, Abū Rā'iṭah argues that there are two ways in which a thing may be from another thing that involve neither parts nor operations: the way in which one who is begotten comes from the begetter, and the way in which Eve came from Adam, yet without being his part, his operation, or his child. Significantly, Abū Rā'iṭah concludes this portion of his argument by asserting that "truly God is above all attributes, and is not commensurate with the teaching in this regard."[72] His argument here is substantially similar to his reply to the previous objection described, about a cause preceding the thing that it causes. As with the previous argument, he points out that even the more refined created things (in this case, human beings) serve as exceptions to the point being made by the Muslim interlocutor. That is, although in many cases a thing which comes from another thing is either a part or an operation of the first thing, the highest of creatures, human persons, have their origins in other created things without being either parts or operations. This being the case, he argues, how much more does God Himself transcend the philosophical principle being articulated, since He transcends all that can be said of His creatures.

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[72] Keating 214-15; "... ān kān Āllah 'an kul ṣifah mut'aālīān wa lā bi-ḥasab āl-qūl fī haḏā āl-wajah." The term that Keating translates here as "attributes" would be better translated as "description." Abū Rā'iṭah does not seek here to deny the validity of divine attributes, but to say that God transcends descriptions and that the analogies offered give an idea about the divine life but without encompassing it.

Abū Rā'iṭah's Arguments Based on the Divine Attributes

Each of Abū Rā'iṭah's treatises includes arguments for Trinitarian doctrine based on divine attributes. In *Fī aṯbāt dīn āl-Naṣrānīah*, the argument is very brief and is "wedged in" between the argument based on a triad of sun/light/heat and the argument based on a triad of Adam/Eve/Abel, both of which have been described above. Having made an argument that the sun exists as an entity with a single *ousia* and three distinct properties, Abū Rā'iṭah proceeds as follows:

> Now if this is possible of things created and made, should this be denied of the Creator and Maker, Whose remembrance is exalted? In this way, His being is described by His existence as living and speaking, with life eternal and a substantial word. His word is begotten from Himself from eternity without ceasing, and His life proceeds from Him without time: three existent properties (that is, three substantial *hypostaseis*), a Father, Who begets His Word ceaselessly, and a Son, Who is begotten without time, and a Spirit, Who proceeds from Him, without interruption, One God, one Lord, one ousia.[73]

Although the passage is short, a careful reading reveals a number of interesting features for the purpose at hand. The first sentence seems to argue, in a manner quite similar to Theodore Abū Qurrah's writings, that if a given quality or perfection can be shown to exist in the created realm, then that same quality or perfection must be ascribed to the Creator as its source. Since, Abū Rā'iṭah seems to argue, the sun has been shown to exist as a single *jaūhar* and three properties, the Muslim is faced with two choices: either to admit that a quality or perfection exists among created things without having its basis in a

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[73] Keating 112-15; "*Fa-āḏā kān ḏalak mumkanān min āl-ḫalūqāt āl-muṣnūʿat fa-hal yunkira ḏalak fī āl-Ḫālaq āl-Ṣānʿa jala ḏikaruhu ka-mā wuṣifa ḏātihi bi-wujūdihi ḥīān nāṭiqān bi-ḥīāah āzalīah wa nuṭiq jaūharī. Nuṭiquhu mūlūd minhu āzalī munḏu lam yazal wa ḥīātuhu munbaṭaqah minhu bi-lā zamān ṯalaṯah ḥūāṣ ḏātīah āī āqānīm jaūharīah Ābān wāladān li-kalimatuhu munḏu lam yazal wa Ibnān mūlūdān bi-lā zamān wa Rūḥān munbaṭaqān minhu bi-ḡīr ḏarak Ālāhān wāḥidān wa jaūharān wāḥidān.*"

similar quality in the divine life, or else God exists simultaneously and eternally as One and Three. Furthermore, since (as every Muslim would affirm) God is both living and speaking, one may discern that the three properties in the divine life are existing, living, and speaking.[74] Taken together, the two parts of the argument may be taken to suggest that God exists with these three properties as the source and origin of all three categories of created beings – those that merely exist, those that both exist and are alive, and those that are existent, alive, and rational/communicative, although Abū Rā'iṭah does not flesh out this particular metaphysical point here.

This passage is also quite significant in that it establishes a strict identity between the three properties presented and the three *āqānīm* of the Godhead, accomplished by the use of the Arabic article *āī*, translated here "that is" and appearing between the phrases "three existent properties" and "three substantial *hypostaseis*". Used like the Latin abbreviation "i.e." is used in English, this article equates the one phrase with the other. By this assertion, Abū Rā'iṭah separates his Trinitarian account from the conventional Western explanation. In Western formulae, each of the persons of the Trinity has a special property by which he is known and identified – the Father by the fact that He begets, the Son by the fact that He is begotten, and the Spirit by the fact that He proceeds. In Abū Rā'iṭah's account, God has the property of existence, and this eternal existence is the Father; God lives, and this eternal act of living is the Spirit; God is rational and communicative and this act of self-disclosure is the Son. This corresponds perfectly to the relationship between the *jaūhar* and the *āqānīm* that Abū Rā'iṭah described above, in

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[74] The word *nāṭiq* carries both the sense of "rational" and of "speaking."

which the *jaūhar* is identified with the "sum total" of the *āqānīm*. Here he describes the

āqānīm as "*āqānīm jaūharīah,*" which Keating has translated "three substantial

hypostaseis," but which could also be translated as "three *hypostaseis* pertaining to the

ousia."

In *Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas,* Abū Rā'iṭah develops a more elaborated argument for

Trinitarian doctrine in which he draws heavily on the Aristotelian metaphysical

vocabulary. He sets the stage quite early and unobtrusively in the treatise, in the context

of a postulated statement of Muslim belief about God which focuses on a short list of

divine attributes. He imagines his Muslim interlocutor asserting that "you agree with us,

and give witness to the truth of what we possess, in as much as you do not deny our

description of God as one, always was and always will be, living, knowing, seeing,

hearing, having no partner…."[75] In this way, Abū Rā'iṭah shrewdly sets the stage for an

examination of the divine unicity in relation to the divine attributes and vice versa.

Somewhat later in the treatise, after the discussion of God's oneness in light of the

distinction between *ousia* and *hypostaseis* discussed above, Abū Rā'iṭah returns to the list

of agreed-upon divine attributes. Basing his argument in the conceptual framework of

Aristotle's *Categories*, he poses the question as to whether descriptions of God as seeing,

hearing, knowing, and the like, are absolute names or predicative names. In so doing,

Abū Rā'iṭah is shrewdly and simultaneously drawing upon the Qur'ānic use of these

terms, the Aristotelian categories mentioned, and the contemporaneous Muslim debates

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[75] Keating 168-69; "*… Āfqatamūnā wa šahadtum ʿalā mā fī āyadīnā bi-ānahu ḥaq min ḫīṭu lam tankarūā ʿalīnā waṣafnā ān Āllah wāḥid lam yazal wa lā yazāl ḥaī ʿaālam baṣīr samīʿa lā šarīk li-hu….*"

about the relationship between God's unicity and the divine attributes. Abū Rā'iṭah's

sudden reference to these descriptions of God as "names" rather than as attributes may

strike the modern Christian reader as somewhat jarring, but in fact this is exactly how the

text of the Qur'ān uses the terms, as proper names of God.[76] Thus Abū Rā'iṭah had as his

"raw material" an alignment of sorts between the Qur'ānic and Aristotelian vocabularies.

Furthermore, his explanation of predicative names corresponds rather nicely to the

implications of Arabic grammar which were beginning to give rise to some

uncomfortable implications for Muslim theologians:

> The predicative names … are related to something else [i.e., something
> other than the named thing] just as "knower" and "knowledge" [are related
> to each other], "seer" and "seeing", "wise" and "wisdom", and anything
> similar to this. So the knower is knowing through knowledge, and the
> knowledge is knowledge of a knower. And the wise person is wise
> through wisdom, and the wisdom is wisdom of a wise person.[77]

In other words, for the attribution of a predicative name to be, there must be two distinct

entities: the being to which the attribution is made, and the entity by which there is a

basis for the attribution. Just as the concept of an attribution being a proper name

provided an alignment between the Qur'ānic and Aristotelian vocabularies as described

above, so this understanding of predicative names provided an alignment between Arabic

grammar and the Aristotelian categories. The rules of Arabic grammar implied the

existence of the same two entities described in Abū Rā'iṭah's account of predicative

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[76] See, for example, surah 2:127, where God is called "the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing" or surah 42:11, where he is called "the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." There are at least thirteen verses in the Qur'ān in which these three attributes are used as proper names.

[77] Keating 176-79; "*Wa āmā āl-āsmā' āl-muḍāfah āl-mansūbah ilā ġīruhā fa-ka-āl-ʿaālam wa āl-ʿalm wa āl-baṣīr wa āl-baṣar wa āl-ḥakīm wa āl-ḥikmah wa mā āšbuh ḏalak. Fa-āl-ʿaālam ʿaālam bi-ʿalm wa āl-ʿalm ʿalm ʿaālam. Wa āl-ḥakīm ḥakīm bi-ḥikmah wa āl-ḥikmah ḥikmah ḥakīm.*"

names: a being which is, for example, a hearer, and an act of hearing by which that being may be called a hearer.

Abū Rā'iṭah then progresses to a discussion of whether the attributes of life and knowledge are eternal or acquired, and taking into account the mutually agreed-upon position that God has eternally possessed both life and knowledge, he concludes that these divine attributes are both predicative names and ones which by definition are eternal. Having established this point, and connected the philosophical terminology that he is using to both Qur'ānic terminology and Arabic grammar, Abū Rā'iṭah zeroes in on the key issue at hand: how can the eternal attributes of life and knowledge, which according to both Aristotelian metaphysics and Arabic grammar must be considered as entities distinct from God Himself, be reconciled theologically with the divine unicity? In order to answer the question, Abū Rā'iṭah makes a number of further distinctions:

> Most certainly these are related to Him, that is, life and knowledge, either as other than Himself, as [one] partner is related to [another] partner, or as from Him. "From Him" also has two aspects: either [the attributes are] an act He has done from Himself, but we have refuted this [description of] the attribute … or they are from His *ousia*. And further, if they are from His *ousia*, then this has two aspects. Either [they are] something perfect from something perfect, or [they are] parts from something perfect. However, if [they are] parts, this is not possible in a description of God, because He is above this. So they must certainly be something perfect from something perfect.[78]

Having made his argument that God's life and knowledge must be considered predicative names and eternal attributes, Abū Rā'iṭah here plays the ultimate rhetorical "trump card"

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[78] Keating 182-83; "… *āl-mansūbah ilīhi āl-ḥīāah ā'anī wa āl-'alm āmā ǧīruhu ka-mā yansab āl-šarīk ilā āl-šarīk wa āmā minhu. Fa-minhu āīḍān 'alā wajhīn āmā f'al fa'ala minhu fa-qad nafīnā 'anhu āl-ṣifah … wa āmā mā takūn min jaūharuhu. Wa ān kānat āīḍān min jaūharuhu fa-dalak 'alā wajhīn. Āmā kāmalah min kāmal wa āmā āb'aāḍ min kāmal. Fa-āmā āl-āb'aāḍ fa-lā yajūz fī ṣifah Āllah li-āna m'alā 'an dalak. Fa-āḏā lā mahālah ānahā kāmalah min kāmal.*"

by introducing the possibility that life and knowledge be considered "partners" of God.
The term that he uses here, *šarīk*, is frequently condemned in the Qur'ān and is closely
associated with the term *širk*, which means association of a partner with God and is
considered the gravest of sins in Islam. His final distinction, that if the attributes of life
and knowledge pertain to the divine *jaūhar*, they must either be parts or "something
perfect from something perfect" is a similar rhetorical *coup de grace*, since the idea of
"parts" in God would be abhorrent to Muslim and Christian alike. Abū Rā'iṭah's
argument is meant, then, to marshal the requirements of Arabic grammar, Islamic
affirmations about God's life and knowledge, and the Aristotelian metaphysical
categories in support of a Trinitarian understanding of God. According to this
presentation, then, God has both life and knowledge as eternal attributes, distinct from
Himself but real existent entities pertaining to his *ousia*, and these attributes are the Spirit
and the Son.

Two other Trinitarian arguments based on divine attributes appear in
Fī āl-Tajasud. Since this treatise is concerned primarily with the Incarnation, the question
at hand is not so much whether God can be understood as simultaneously one and three,
but instead whether one may legitimately affirm that Jesus is God incarnate. This being
the case, Abū Rā'iṭah attempts to answer Muslim objections that Jesus could not be
divine based on New Testament passages that seem to ascribe to him either ignorance or
weakness. These arguments are significantly different from the argument presented in
Fī āl-Ṯālūṯ āl-Muqadas, but they are noteworthy both because of their basis in divine
attributes and because of Abū Rā'iṭah's use of the Qur'ān in support of them.

To introduce the first of these arguments, Abū Rā'iṭah describes a Muslim argument against Christ's divinity that he had encountered:

> As for what they refer to concerning the Messiah's knowledge … [saying He] was lacking knowledge of the Hour [of Judgment], and [consequently] they impose the status of a servant on Him, because, according to their suspicion, He is ignorant of this, their ill suspicion can be deterred and they can be turned back to what is correct, if it is not difficult for them to be fair.[79]

The reference is clearly to Matt 24:36, in which Jesus says that not even He Himself knows the timing of the world's end, and that this knowledge is reserved to the Father. Abū Rā'iṭah responds by arguing that Jesus' statement is an intentional separation of Himself from knowledge that would be harmful in its effects on the disciples if revealed. Following the pattern already seen a number of times, in which the Muslims' argument is inverted such that their objection becomes the basis of an argument for Christian doctrine, Abū Rā'iṭah contends that this statement of Jesus is actually an expression of divinity, since it is in keeping with God's administration of the universe. This divine administration includes revealing what is helpful for humankind and concealing what is not, "because God does not reveal a matter nor keep it hidden from His servants, except for the purpose of their benefits and the cause of their usefulness."[80] By invoking the wise administration of all things, Abū Rā'iṭah is injecting into the argument a common Qur'ānic representation of God. Verses such as 3:173, 4:171, 6:102, and 39:62-63

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[79] Keating 276-77; "*Wa āmā mā dakarūā min āntifā' ʿalm āl-Masīḥ … min ʿalm āl-sāʿaah wa āījābuhum ʿalīhi āl-ḳʿabūdīah min ḥīṭu jahal dalak ka-ẓanūnuhu fa-āsturidāʿa sū' ẓanūnuhum wuridahum ilā āl-ṣūāb ġīr ʿasīr ān ānṣafūā.*"

[80] Keating 278-79;"*Li-āna Āllah līsa bi-maẓhar āmar wa lā ḥājab min āl-ʿabād ilā li-sabab fa-nāfʿahum wa ʿalah ṣalāḥhum.*"

emphasize God's sufficiency and excellence as the administrator of affairs for the good of humankind. It is not insignificant that in some cases, as demonstrated earlier, these descriptions are paired with assertions that God has no son specifically because He is sufficient by Himself, as in 4:171 and 6:101. Thus Abū Rā'iṭah takes a Qur'ānic attribution, that of God's administrative sufficiency, which is linked in the Qur'ānic text with an argument against Trinitarian belief, and makes it the centerpiece of his response to the argument against Christ's divinity. In responding as He did to the disciples, Jesus was in fact displaying the divine attribute of perfectly wise governance of those who trust Him.

The second of these arguments is based not upon apparent ignorance in Jesus, but upon an apparent defect of His abilities. Abū Rā'iṭah seems to have encountered Muslims who argued as follows: When His disciples James and John approached Jesus and asked for seats of honor on either side of Him in His kingdom, as recorded in both Mt 20:21 and Mk 10:37, He replied that such a position was not His to give. It would seem, then, that Jesus lacked the authority or the power to make a determination about their request. Therefore, the New Testament itself clearly teaches that Jesus had an attribute of weakness or inability and so He cannot be considered divine. As with the previous argument, Abū Rā'iṭah responds by arguing that in answering as He does, Jesus is actually displaying attributes in keeping with His divinity, rather than demonstrating a lack of authority or power. First, His response rebukes them for their ignorance of His own teachings, since He had already promised places of honor to all twelve of His inner

circle of disciples, as recorded in Mt 19:27-28. Second, His response encourages James

and John on to greater virtue, according to Abū Rā'iṭah's interpretation of His words:

> If this is as I have described, [the Messiah means to say]:
> "What you [two] have asked of me is not mine to give.
> Rather, it is for you to strive for greater and higher virtue,
> through which you will attain what you ask of me. When
> you do this, you will receive what you ask of me by merit
> and worthiness, [for then] I shall give to you [two]
> particularly, apart from the other disciples.[81]

In explaining the principle that greater progress in virtue could lead to greater reward,

Abū Rā'iṭah quotes surah 74:38 and also seems to paraphrase surah 18:110. So in an

argument that parallels his apologetical strategy in the previous example cited, Abū

Rā'iṭah takes an event that is supposedly incompatible with the doctrine of Christ's

divinity, shows that the event actually represents Jesus as acting in the exact ways that

one would expect God to act, and marshals the Qur'ānic text in support of his

interpretation of the story.

In conclusion, the writings of Abū Rā'iṭah demonstrate significant development in

the apologetical project of articulating Trinitarian doctrine in Arabic. His knowledge of

both the Qur'ān and the Aristotelian philosophy that was becoming a major intellectual

force in the Arabophone world of his day allowed him to combine the language of the

Qur'ān, Aristotelian metaphysical concepts, and the burgeoning debates among Muslim

intellectuals about the implications of Arabic grammar for the divine unicity into

powerful Trinitarian arguments based more or less entirely in the conceptual range of

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[81] Keating 284-85; "*Wa aḏ ṣār āl-āmar ʿalā waṣafat fa-līsa āʿaṭā' mā sāltamānī ilā bal ilīkumā ān taḥraṣā ʿalā āl-samū wa āl-āʿatalā' fī āl-faḍal ālaḏī bihi yūwaṣal ilā mā sāltamānī. Wa āḏā fʿaltumā ḏalak naltumā m ā sāltamānī āʿaṭā'kum ḥāsah dūn ḡīrukumā min āl-talāmīḏ bi-āstījāb wa āstaḥqāq.*"

contemporary Muslim discourse. This combination of sources also served as the

foundation for Abū Rā'iṭah's elaboration of a Trinitarian thesis based upon the divine

attributes, in which God as both eternal and cause must be eternally causing. Finally, Abū

Rā'iṭah brought to prominence in Arabophone Christian literature the understanding of

the Trinity as an eternal triad of Existence, Life, and Rationality, with these attributes

understood as *āqānīm* by which the divine substance could be defined.

Chapter 4: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī

The final texts to be considered are the two known apologetical treatises of

'Ammār al-Baṣrī, an adherent of the Church of the East. Even less is known about the life

and career of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī than about those of Theodore Abū Qurrah or Ḥabīb ibn

H̱idmah Abū Rā'iṭah. Indeed, for a long time the specific period in which he lived was

unclear due to a lack of identifying data in the thirteenth-century Coptic bibliographies

which have been of such importance for the history of Arabophone Christian literature.

More recently, it has been demonstrated that he was a contemporary of the Muslim

theologian Abū l-Hud̲aīl al-'Allāf, who died around 840, and was probably the target of

Abū l-Hud̲aīl's treatise "Book Against 'Ammār the Christian, in refutation of the

Christians."[1] This places 'Ammār historically as a contemporary of the other authors here

considered and as a participant in the nascent project of articulating Christian doctrine in

Arabic, in conscious dialogue with the Islamic religious discourse of the day.

The two treatises known to have come from 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's pen are the *Kitāb*

āl-burhān ("Book of Proof") and the *Kitāb āl-masā'il wa āl-ajwibah* ("Book of Questions

and Answers"). The *Kitāb āl-burhān* is the shorter of the two works and includes essays

on twelve topics that were conventional subject matter in Muslim-Christian debate of the

time: proofs of the existence of God, proofs of the true religion, reasons for embracing

Christianity, response to the Muslim accusation of *al-taḥrīf* (interpolating or distorting

the scriptures), the Trinity, the oneness of God, the Incarnation, the crucifixion, baptism,

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[1] Griffith, *Beginnings*, 147.

the Eucharist, veneration of the cross, and the question of bodily pleasures in heaven. The

Kitāb āl-masāʾil wa āl-ajwibah is quite different in structure, taking the form of a kind of

apologetical handbook. The "questions" referred to in the title are not questions properly

speaking, but suppositions having to do with Muslim-Christian encounter: "if someone

says…," or "if someone asks…." The "answers" of the title are given in the form of the

Christians' response: "then we say…." Since they belonged to rather different genres, it

would seem that somewhat different audiences were envisioned for the two works, with

the *Kitāb āl-burhān* being written with a broader audience potentially composed of both

Christians and Muslims in mind, while the *Kitāb āl-masāʾil wa āl-ajwibah* reads as a text

written for Christians only, formatted as a manual for those involved in theological

debate with Muslims. Besides being the smallest corpus of writings among the three

authors of known identity here considered, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Trinitarian writings are

distinguished by being the most oriented to philosophical concepts and arguments and the

least concerned with the use of scripture. They are also the most concerned with

establishing a particular Trinitarian account based on a single set of divine attributes, the

triad of Being, Living, and Rational[2], as will be shown hereafter.

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[2] The Arabic term *nāṭiq,* translated here as "rational," is difficult to render in English with a single word. It carries both the sense of "rational" and of "speaking." The Arabophone Christian writers saw a connection between the idea of *nāṭiq* as "speaking" and the identity of Jesus as the Word of God, but I have chosen to translate it "rational" in part as a term of convenience because the adjective rational has its noun form "rationality," while the adjective speaking has no such noun form in conventional English usage.

The Metaphysics of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī

As already mentioned, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī focuses more on philosophical arguments, particularly Aristotelian metaphysics, than any of the other authors here considered. At one point in the *Kitāb āl-burhān*, he gives a tidy synopsis of the metaphysical categories that he employs:

> For you know that things are not devoid of four aspects: first the substance, for example "human." Then there is the *qanūm*, for example, Moses, David, and Solomon. Then there is the power, for example, the heat of the fire and the rays of the sun. Then there are accidents, for example, blackness in black people and whiteness in white people. These four things make up the substances and the *āqānīm*, because the substances all have a power … and they bear the accidents as well. Every substance also has two powers: for example, the earth has its coolness and its dryness; for another example, water has its coolness and its wetness; and for another example, fire has its heat and its dryness…. So these things are unified in their substances, but threefold in their qualities [*m'aānīhā*]. And the *āqānīm*, for example, are Moses, David, or Solomon, and everyone standing independently from that which is outside itself. As for the accidents and powers, they are unified in their qualities and do not stand by themselves … for they are in need of substances to bear them and for them to exist in.[3]

This summary of metaphysical concepts has a number of noteworthy features. First there are the terms *jaūhar* for substance/*ousia* and *āqānīm* for *hypostaseis*, borrowed from the Syriac tradition and already familiar from the writings of Abū Rā'iṭah. Of the four

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[3] Michael Hayek, *Kitāb āl-burhān wa Kitāb āl-musā'il wa āl-ājwibah* (Beirut: Dar El-Mashreq Publishers, 1977), 51; "*Fa-ānka t'alam ān āl-āšīā' lā lā taḫlū min ārb'aah wajūh. Āmā jaūhar ka-qūlak ānsān. Wa āmā qanūm ka-qūlak Mūsā wa Dāūd wa Sulīman. Wa āmā qūā ka-ḥarārah āl-nār wa š'aā'a āl-šams. Wa āmā 'arḍ ka-āl-sūād fī āl-masūd wa āl-bīāḍ fī āl-mubīḍ. Fa-ākmal haḏahi āl-ārb'aah āl-āšīā' āl-jaūāhar wa āl-āqānīm. Li-āna āl-jaūāhar kuluhā li-hā haḏahi āl-qūā ... wa hīa taḥtamal āl-ā'arāḍ āīḍān. Wa kul jaūhar āīḍān fa-la-hu qūatān miṯl āl-ārḍ li-hā āl-barūdah wa āl-yabs, wa miṯl āl-mā' li-hu āl-barūdah wa āl-raṭūbah, wa miṯl āl-nār li-hā āl-ḥarārah wa āl-yabūsah.... Fa-hīa mutawaḥidah fī jaūāharuhā muṯaliṯah fī m'aānīhā. Wa āl-āqānīm āīḍān miṯl qūlak Mūsā, Dāūd, Sulīman, wa kul wāḥid qāīm bi-nafsuhu must'aḡin 'an ḡīruhu. Fa-āmā āl-ā'arāḍ wa āl-qūā āl-mutawaḥidah fī m'aānīhā lā taqūm bi-ānfasuhā miṯl āl-jaūāhār wa āl-āqānīm, fa-hīa muḥtājah ilā āl-jaūāhar ālatī taḥmaluhā wa takūn fīhā.*"

"aspects" of a thing described, the substance and the *qanūm* are the two that are understood as enjoying a kind of ontological independence, existing in and of themselves, whereas the power and the accident exist only in substances.

Besides these four metaphysical building blocks, 'Ammār significantly introduces another concept, the *m'anā* or "quality." Clearly the *m'anā* is not intended to include the accidents of a thing, since it is defined in terms of the powers of the substance, which are themselves distinct from the accidents. Nor can the qualities be considered a separate, fifth metaphysical category, as 'Ammār's examples demonstrate. Since he asserts that a thing is "unified in its substance but threefold in its qualities," but for each of the examples that he cites has named only two attributes, it would appear that the category of "quality" includes the identity of the substance, together with the essential properties by which that substance is defined. Somewhat conveniently for his purpose, he finds that things can be understood as having two such essential qualities, with the result that things in the natural world can routinely, perhaps even universally, be described as three qualities of a common substance.

'Ammār considers the metaphysical apparatus that he has presented here to be the solution to a problem presented by Muslim controversialists of the period; namely, that oneness and threeness were mutually exclusive on a simple mathematical basis. According to this view, for Christians to affirm that God is one and to simultaneously affirm Trinitarian doctrine was not only theologically wrong, it was logically untenable based on the definitions of one and three. 'Ammār makes this the first problem to which he responds in his longer treatise, the *Kitāb āl-masā'il wa āl-ajwibah*:

> As for how one can be three and three can be one, by my life! Such a thing cannot be possible, for the number one cannot be the number three. But as for the quality which we intend to refer to in our teaching, we mean one eternal substance, eternally existing in three particular properties, pertaining to the substance, and neither separated nor divided. All three of the particular properties are of one eternal substance, which is not called "three" because of the definition of "particular property", not separable nor divisible because of their origin and completeness. And the substance is not three, by the definition of what it means to be one – that is, oneness; rather, the three are particular properties.[4]

This passage recalls Abū Rā'iṭah's emphasis that a given entity could validly be described with an attribute in one way, while the same attribute is denied of it in a different way. Bearing in mind the increasing value attached to philosophical sophistication at this point in the 'Abbasid centers of learning, 'Ammār appears to be following the same apologetical stratagem as his Jacobite peer; namely, representing Trinitarian doctrine as not only compatible with scripture, but also able to support a nuanced metaphysical treatment.

Somewhat later in the *Kitāb āl-masā'il wa āl-ajwibah*, 'Ammār has a very similar passage explaining the metaphysical categories, but in this case he also explains why he does not use the conventional Arabic term for persons, *āšḫāṣ*, as a name for the *āqānīm*:

> We do not call them three *āšḫāṣ* , and it cannot be imagined that one of us would call them *āšḫāṣ*, because for us *šaḫṣ* [singular form; "person"] refers to each body that is defined by its sections and limbs, which distinguish it

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[4] Hayek 149; "*Āmā ān kūn āl-wāḥid ṯalāṯah wa āl-ṯalāṯah wāḥid, fa-ḏāk li-'amrī lā yumkan kūnuhu, wa ḏalak ān āl-'adad āl-wāḥid lā yakūn āl-'adad āl-ṯalaṯah. Fa-āmā āl-m'anā āladī ilīhu naqṣadu fī qūlunā, fa-ānā n'anī ān ḏalak āl-jauhar āl-wāḥid āl-qadīm lam yazal mūjūdā bi-ṯalaṯ ḫūāṣ jauhariāt ǧīr mutabāyanāt wa lā mafraqāt. Wa jamī'a āl-ṯalaṯ āl-ḫūāṣ hūa ḏalak āl-jauhar āl-wāḥid āl-qadīm āladī - āī līsa hūa ṯalaṯah bi-m'anā ḫāṣah - lā yatab'aḍ wa lā yatajazā bi-'aīnihu wa kamāluhu, wa lā hūa ṯalaṯah, bi-m'anā mā hūa wāḥid - wāḥidah, bal ṯalāṯ ḫūāṣ.*"

from other bodies. Rather, we call them in the Syriac tongue three *āqānīm*.[5]

Thus ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī becomes the only one of the authors here considered to affirm explicitly the terminological debt owed by Christian Arabic to the Syriac language. It is perhaps noteworthy that he does so while explaining why a particular term carried with it connotations that made it unacceptable for use in a particular theological context. Perhaps as a member of the maligned "Nestorian" church he was particularly attuned to how the choice of terminology could give rise to a perception of erroneous doctrine even when there was no intent to affirm heresy. The particular reason for his objection to the term *āšḫāṣ* as a name for the three divine *hypostaseis* seems to be twofold. First, he understands the term to be one that is properly applied to corporeal and spatial beings. His second reason, somewhat easier to overlook, is that the term *āšḫāṣ* would connote too great a separation or division among the *hypostaseis*.

Taken together, these two passages reveal the metaphysical apparatus within which ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī attempts to articulate and defend Trinitarian doctrine. To summarize, each existing thing can be considered to exist simultaneously as one and multiple, since each thing has both its substance and the particular properties by which that substance is defined. Individual existents, which may share a common substance with others, may be called *āqānīm*. Where these *āqānīm* are rational beings who occupy a corporeal existence by which they are defined and separated from other *āqānīm*, they may also be called *āšḫāṣ*, but since corporeality and division do not apply to the divine

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[5] Hayek 162; "*Lam nasmuhā talatah āšḫāṣ wa lā yatūhumna āḥad ʿalīnā ānā samīnāhā āšḫāṣān li-āna āl-šaḫs ʿandanā kul jasam maḥdūd bi-āqtāruhu wa jūāriḥ tafṣala bīnuhu wa bīn mā sūāhu min āl-ājsām. Bal samīnāhā bi-lisān surīānī talatah āqānīm.*"

hypostaseis, they may not be referred to by this term. The clear implication of this

metaphysical schema is a kind of meta-trinitarianism, in which existing as both one and

three is common to God and His creatures and thus is not the way in which God differs

from the creation. Rather, one difference between God and His creatures resides in the

presence or absence of spatial division and chronological difference among *āqānīm* of the

same substance.

Another important consideration is the fact that, although according to 'Ammār

each existing thing has a kind of triune existence due to its substance and its special

properties, the three qualities cannot be called *āqānīm* in the case of created beings. This

distinction is due to the second great difference between God and His creatures. 'Ammār

offers as examples of the "trinitarian" existence of created things the triad of the soul, its

word, and its life, as well as the common example of fire, its heat, and its light, but

asserts that the three qualities in each of these existents cannot be called *āqānīm*. The

divine *hypostaseis* can be called so

> … because of the perfection and exaltedness of the Creator, which
> preclude that His Word and His Spirit are incomplete and imperfect
> entities. The *qanūm*, according to us, is a complete entity, not an
> imperfect one, and does need anything outside itself for its stability. This
> power which we mentioned in reference to the soul, the sun, and fire, is
> not a complete entity, but instead an incomplete aspect of the things in
> which they inhere, insofar as they are created, rather than the Creator….
> We did not give you the metaphor for the Creator from among created
> things as if created things were a perfect metaphor for the Creator. We
> called the three qualities found in the Creator, and by which He is known,
> *āqānīm* by reason of their completeness.[6]

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[6] Hayek, 50: "*… li-kamāl āl-Ḫāliq wa ʿalūhu ʿan ān takūn kalimatuhu wa rūḥhu nāqasīn ġīr kāmalīn.
Li-āna āl-qanūm ʿandanā šīʾ kāmal ġīr nāqaṣ wa lā yaḥtāj fī ġīruhu ilā ṯabātuhu. Wa haḏahi āl-qūā ālatī
ḏakarnā li-l-nafs wa āl-šams wa āl-nār nāqaṣah ʿan āl-kamāl bi-qadar naqaṣ āl-āšīā ʾ ālatī hīa lihā, āḏ hīa*

In this explanation one may discern a tactic familiar from the writings of Abū Rā'iṭah; namely, combining language about God that would appeal to Islamic religious sensibilities with the philosophical concepts then gaining such prominence among the Muslim intellectuals. With his insistence that the "qualities" discernible in the Creator must be understood differently because of God's exaltedness, 'Ammār affirms the ontological chasm between the Creator and creatures that was so important in Islamic religious discourse, but he has also aligned this emphasis perfectly with the purely philosophical definition of *qanūm*. Additionally, he refers to the second and third "qualities" in God by drawing upon the Qur'ānic terms Word and Spirit, as the author of *Fī taṯlīṯ* did so systematically and consistently at a somewhat earlier period. Finally, 'Ammār carefully emphasizes that the metaphors offered for the triune life of the Creator are not intended to correspond to the divine life in every way. In doing so, he uses the term metaphor (*miṯl*) rather than analogy(*qīās*), but his explanation recalls the explanation of the extent and limitations of analogy given by Abū Rā'iṭah, which as already described, was itself taken from the philosophical discourses of Muslim controversialists of the time.

'Ammār's use of the triad of God, His Word, and His Spirit seems to have given rise among his Muslim interlocutors to an accusation that this would seem to introduce a kind of dependency in God, which as already mentioned, would not only be a violation of both Christian and Islamic doctrine about the divine nature, but would also conflict with

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maḥlūqah, ʿan āl-Ḥāliq....Wa lam nʿaṭak āl-miṯl min āl-Ḥāliq ʿalā āl-Ḥāliq fī kamāl āl-maḥlūq miṯl āl-Ḥāliq. Ḥatā āḏā samītu āl-mʿaānī āl-ṯalaṯah ālatī wujida āl-Ḥāliq mʿarūfān bi-hā āqānīmān li-kamāluhā."

the repeated Qur'ānic emphasis on God's sufficiency as the administrator and governor

of all things. In the longer of his treatises, the *Kitāb āl-masā'il wa āl-ajwibah,* 'Ammār

imagines that a Muslim may pose the problem this way:

> Is He one who is in need of His Word and His Spirit, or is he independent
> of them? For if you claim that He is in need of them, you ascribe to Him
> compulsion, lack, and deficiency; and if you claim that He is independent
> of them, then you reject their permissibility, just as you have rejected from
> Him all those things superfluous in Him….[7]

'Ammār's response is relevant for a consideration of his metaphysics because his answer

to this challenge involves his understanding of the relationship between a substance and

its properties. Since he has articulated an understanding of entities in which they are

defined by their substance and the particular qualities that pertain to that substance, he

argues that the language of dependency or need simply has no rational meaning in this

context. Returning to the examples that he has already given, he suggests that asking

whether God "needs" or "is dependent upon" His Word and His Spirit is equivalent to

asking whether fire "needs" or "is dependent upon" its flames and its heat, or asking

whether water "needs" or "is dependent upon" its coolness and its wetness. Since in each

case, the two properties being mentioned are, in 'Ammār's terminology, "substantial and

natural" to the entity being described, there is no logically permissible question of need

or dependency.

'Ammār goes on to make a distinction between the question posed and other

similar questions about need or dependency in God: "But it is permitted for you to ask,

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[7] Hayek 158-159; "*Fa-hal hūa muḥtāj ilā kalimatihi wa rūḥhi ām hūa ğanī 'anhumā? Fa-ān z'amtum ānahu ilīhumā muḥtāj faqad waṣaftumūhu ilā āl-āḍṭarār wa āl-'ajaz wa āl-naqaṣān, wa ān z'amtum ānahu ğanī 'anhumā, fa-ānfūhumā āḏan 'anhu kamā taqītum 'anhu mā kān 'anhu mustağnīān….*"

does the Eternal, Living, and Rational One need a place or position or hearing or sight, or anything that is created or made. For one will say to you: We seek refuge in His sublimity above all such needs."[8] It would appear that 'Ammār has combined here two different categories – those of accidents (place and position) and those of divine attributes that are named in both the Bible and the Qur'ān (seeing and hearing). As will be shown later on, he considers the latter category to be composed of attributes which are in fact metaphors for the incommensurable qualities that he names in this same passage. The first category, on the other hand, he considers to be accidents pertaining to corporeal beings and thus to have no applicability to the divine. For whatever reason, he does not make this distinction here, even though it is clearly present in his writings elsewhere. Instead, he pursues the tactic of dismissing any suggestion of divine need or dependence based on the same Qur'ānic emphasis that appears so frequently in the writings of the authors here considered – God's absolute transcendence above all such matters of created things. The distinction that he seems to want to make here is that the second question – whether God can be said to need or depend upon various accidents or qualities – can be answered theologically, but the original question – whether God can be said to need or depend upon His Word or His Spirit – is simply unintelligible. By answering in this way, 'Ammār seeks to place "Word" and "Spirit" in a different category than any other attribute. Furthermore, by mentioning the triad of God/Word/Spirit earlier in the passage and then changing his terminology to a triad of Eternal/Living/Rational later in his answer,

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[8] Hayek, 159: "*Bal ānamā yajūz li-ka ān tasā'l hal yaḥtāj āl-āzalī āl-ḥī āl-nāṭiq ilā makān āū mūḍʿa āū samʿa āū baṣarāū ilā āī šī' mimā ḫuliqa wa burā', fa-yuqāl li-ka: nʿaūd bi-jalāluhu ān yakūn ilā šī' min haḏahi maḥtājān.*"

'Ammār seeks to imply an equivalency between the two, about which more will be said later.

Another challenge prompted by 'Ammār's account of the divine *hypostaseis* and answered by him within his metaphysical framework is that of how one can speak of God's Word and God's Spirit as distinct without introducing separation or division in the divinity. In response, he writes in the *Kitāb āl-burhān* that

> Christians do not admit any division or separation into the Creator, for division and separation pertain to bodies and God has no body. And we do not consider the subtle, spiritual soul[9] to be corporeal, and so it is not separated or divided by the affirmation of Life and a Word in its substantial nature…. We perceive that fire is not corporeal, not divisible, and not separable in our affirmation of it having heat and light, and indeed we know the subtlety of the nature because it is not visible, not concrete, and not sensible; instead, it is concealed by its subtlety in bodies. We know also that the substance is not sensible and is not combusted with its heat, and along with this, we know that due to its subtlety, its heat and its light are apparent in it. From this, that which pertains to its substance – its heat and its light – is apparent in connection to, but distinction from, the substance. For you cannot separate or divide the qualities found in it, due to its subtlety.[10]

'Ammār appears in this case to have conflated two somewhat different arguments into one response. On the one hand, he begins with the straightforward assertion that division

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[9] The Arabic term *nafs* that I have here translated "soul" can also, depending on context, be translated self, psyche, spirit, identity, or even person. For this reason, the term should not be assigned any significant theological import in this context. 'Ammār is simply emphasizing God's incorporeal and spiritual nature.

[10] Hayek 55-56; "*Wa lā yalazam āl-Naṣrānīa li-dalak ān takūn ādhalat āl-Ḥaliq tabʿaīḍān wa lā taqsīmān, li-āna āl-tabʿaīḍ wa āl-taqsīm ānamā yaqʿa ʿalā āl-ājsām wa Āllah līsa bi-jasam, wa lam naru āl-nafs āl-rūḥānīah āl-laṭīfah tajusimat wa lā tabʿaḍat wa lā tuqsimat bi-tabāt āl-ḥīāah wa āl-kalimah li-hā fī dāt jaūharuhā....Wa lā rāʾīnā āl-nār tajusimat wa lā tabʿaḍat wa lā ānqusimat bi-ātbātunā li-hā āl-ḥarārah wa āl-ḍūʾ wa ānamā li-nʿalam ānahā ālaṭaf āl-ṭabāīʿa li-ānahā ḡīr marʾīah bi-dātihā wa lā malmūsah wa lā maḥsūsah bal mustaknah bi-laṭāfatihā fī āl-ājsām, wa ānahu jaūhar lā yaḥas bi-hā wa lā yuḥriqa bi-ḥarāratihā, wa mʿa dalak, min laṭāfuhā, fa-ḥarāratuhā wa ḍūʾhā mūhūm fīhā wa li-hā. Wa ka-dalak yabdū ādā ẓaharat bi-tʿalaquhā wa bi-ḡīruhā mā li-hā fī dātuhā min āl-ḥarārah wa āl-ḍūʾ fa-lam ta nqasam wa lam tatajazāʾ mʿa laṭāfatuhā wa wujūd āl-mʿaānī fīhā.*"

and separation pertain only to corporeal beings, which would mean that they are necessarily unintelligible when speaking of God. He proposes the familiar example of fire, with its qualities of light and heat, as an "incorporeal" existent that may be ascribed particular properties without introducing severability or divisibility. On this point, of course, the modern reader may well object to the argument based on the fact that fire may in a sense be incorporeal, but it is certainly not *immaterial*. Lacking the insight into the physical universe provided by modern science, this distinction was lost on ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. But ʿAmmār quickly leaves behind his example of fire in favor of a purely metaphysical argument: that the nature and substance of a thing is incorporeal and immaterial regardless of the corporeality of the thing itself, and the qualities of a thing pertain to its nature and substance. Although the point is not stated with precision, he seems to be saying that articulating the qualities by which a thing is known could never be considered to introduce severability because of the incorporeal, immaterial aspect of the substance itself. So in a sense he presents a kind of double-argument that speaking of God's Word and God's Spirit does not introduce any possibility of separation or division; first, because the *substance* of all things is incorporeal, even though most substances reside in and are expressed by bodies, and second, because God is incorporeal in a more absolute sense.

In the *Kitāb āl-masāʾil wa āl-ajwibah*, ʿAmmār expresses much the same argument, but adds another element:

> Regarding parts and divisions, these are not among the attributes of that which is incorporeal, nor of what exists eternally. Indeed these are attributes of temporal and composite bodies. As for your saying that

mastering the creatures and administering these arrangements [i.e., of the universe] is a proof of one Creator, Living and Wise, we do not contradict you. For we told you straightforwardly that He who created the creatures by His Word and His Spirit is without doubt one in His absolutely singular substance by reason of His nature, to which separation cannot attain and which division cannot encompass.[11]

So in addition to corporeality, in this treatise ʿAmmār mentions eternity as a reason that the affirmation of God's Word and His Spirit does not introduce division or separation in the divinity. Clearly this is the argument that most completely distinguishes between God and created things on this question of division and separation.

Thus there can be discerned in ʿAmmār's treatment of this point a kind of graduated scale of arguments. His argument based on the immateriality of the nature of things makes no distinction whatever between God and created things, since all natures are themselves equally immaterial, even though some are the natures of material things. On a second level is the briefly stated argument based on a consideration of fire, with its qualities of heat and light. This argument makes a distinction between corporeal and non-corporeal things, but still places God in the same category with those created things that have a "subtle" nature. Only the third argument, based on the divine attribute of eternity, makes a distinction between God and all created things. Although all three arguments are articulated using the vocabulary of Aristotelian metaphysics, and therefore are based in a category of discourse that would have been common to Christians and Muslims, presumably this last argument with its clear distinction between God and all other things

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[11] Hayek, 152-53; "*Āmā āl-ājzā' wa āl-ābʿaāḍ fa-līsa min ṣifāt mā līsa bi-jasam bal mā lam yazal mūjūdān bi-āzalīatihi. Bal ḏalak min ṣifāt āl-ājsām āl-muḥadaṯah āl-mū'lafah āl-murakabah. Fa-āmā qūluka bi-ān ātaqān haḏā āl-ḫuluq wa āḥkām haḏā āl-naẓām dāl ʿalā Ḫāliq wāḥid ḥī ḥakīm fa-ġīr mardūd ʿalīka. Wa qad āḫbarnāka ānfān bi-ān ālaḏī ḫalaqa āl-ḫuluq bi-kalimatihi wa rūḥhi lā maḥālah wāḥid fī jaūharuhu manfarad bi-ṭabāʿahu lā yadrakuhu tabʿaīḍ wa lā yanāluhu tajzī'.*"

would have been somewhat more palatable to a Muslim interlocutor. We have no information about the chronological relationship between the *Kitāb āl-burhān* and the *Kitāb āl-masāʾil wa āl-ajwibah*, but it is plausible that this additional layer of argument based on the divine attribute of eternity may have been a refinement based on the response of his Muslim interlocutors to ʿAmmār's first two arguments. In such a scenario, ʿAmmār would have been challenged based on the lack of a clear distinction between God and created things inherent in the first two arguments, and when preparing a handbook for those who would engage in theological dialogue with Muslims, would have added the argument based on eternality so as to make a stricter separation between God and all created beings, in keeping with this central principle of Islamic religious discourse.

Another objection that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī answers using the apparatus of Aristotelian metaphysics is the suggestion that speaking of each of the divine *hypostaseis* as "God entire" (*ālah kāmil)* necessarily entailed the enumeration of three gods. ʿAmmār's resolution of the problem lies in the relationship between substance and *hypostasis*. He presents his case as follows:

> … We say that the Father is God entire, meaning that He is an eternal, particular, complete substance. And the Son is God entire, meaning that He is an eternal, particular, complete substance.[12] Therefore all of them together are one complete God, with one eternal substance that is common and complete…. It is not necessary for us, if we say that each one of them in His particularity is a complete substance, to say that the three together are three complete substances…. Or do you not see that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob … are not together three complete substances, but there is

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[12] It is not clear why ʿAmmār mentions only the Father and the Son here, with no mention of the Holy Spirit. Hayek's critical edition of the text does not indicate a lacuna in the manuscript at this point.

common to the three of them one complete common substance? Nor is it necessary for us to name the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit three complete gods; if they were different in substance, there would be in the grouping of them three complete substances, which would mean being numbered as three complete gods.[13]

Interestingly, 'Ammār does not in this passage use the term *āqānīm* for the three divine *hypostaseis*, preferring instead to refer to each in His particularity (*ḫāṣīatihi*). But there can be no doubt, given his definitions described above and the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he offers here, that he is building his argument on the distinction between substance and *hypostaseis*. Taking his previous arguments described above into account, the distinction between how Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exist as three *āqānīm* and how God exists as three *āqānīm* would be clear. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can be described as "three men," even though they share a common substance and nature, because of their corporeality and temporality. Having established that the presence or absence of corporeality and temporality makes a significant difference in how one can speak of the relationships among multiple *āqānīm,* 'Ammār is able to extend that argument to address this objection. With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the common substance means that one cannot describe them as "three humanities," although one can still say "three men" because of the divisions in time and space existing between them. Similarly, the common substance in the divine *āqānīm* means that one cannot describe

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[13] Hayek, 181; "*Naqūl ān āl-Āb ālah kāmil āʿanī jauhar ḫāṣ kāmil. Wa āl-Ibn ālah kāmil āʿanī jauhar ḫāṣ kāmil. Ṯum jamīʿahā fī jumlah ālah wāḥid kāmil, āī jauhar wāḥid āzalī ʿaām šāmil.... Lā yalazamnā āḏ qulnā ān kul wāḥid minhā fī ḫāṣīatihi jauhar kāmil, ān naqūl ānhā fī āl-jumlah ṯalaṯah jūāhir kāmilah.... Āū lā tarā ān Ābrahīm wa Āsḥaq wa Yʿaqūb ... līsa hum fī āl-jumlah ṯalaṯah jūāhir kāmilah, ālaḏī qad ʿam ṯalāṯuhum jauhar wāḥid ʿaām šāmil. Bal ānamā yalazamnā ān nasmī āl-Āb wa āl-Ibn wa āl-Rūḥ āl-Quds ṯalaṯah ālaha kāmilah, laū kānat muḫtalifah fī āl-jauhar fa-taṣīr fī āl-jumlah ṯalaṯah jūāhir kāmilah takūn ʿal ā ḥasab ḏalak ṯalaṯah ālaha mʿadūdah kāmilah.*"

them as "three divinities," but taking God's incorporeality and eternity into account

additionally rules out saying "three gods."

'Ammār elaborates on the relationship between substance and *hypostasis* a bit

later in the text of the *Kitāb āl-masāʾil wa āl-ajwibah*. In doing so, he suggests that the

term "substance" may be used in two related but different senses, and that the two

different uses result in a different enumeration of the entities being described:

> Regarding the name *qanūm*, it does not follow and does not concord with
> the name "particular substance" in every instance. Rather, we say that
> each one of the group Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is a complete *qanūm*,
> and likewise in its particularity is a complete substance. Then we would
> say that the three of them considered collectively are three complete
> substances. But it is not permitted that you say that the three considered
> together are three complete substances, because the complete and common
> substance will not permit you to place the name of enumerated substances
> upon an assemblage of *āqānīm* of the same general nature.[14]

So it would appear that, in addition to the meaning of the word "substance" as he has

used it thus far, 'Ammār is willing to admit of a more restricted sense in which the term

substance can also be applied to a particular instantiation of the general substance.

Another way of expressing this would be to say that the presence of Abraham constitutes

the presence of a complete substance, even though every existent of that substance is not

present. 'Ammār is clearly concerned that this refinement of the way the term substance

may be used will cause the distinction between substance and *qanūm* to be lost, because

he immediately follows the clarification by saying that if the *qanūm* always corresponded

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[14] Hayek, 173; "*Fa-āmā ism āl-qanūm fa-līsa yajrī wa lā yanṣaraf mʿa ism āl-jaūhar āl-ḫāṣ fī kul ānhāʾih. Bal qad naqūl ān kul wāḥid min Ābrahīm wa Āsḥaq wa Yʿaqūb qanūm kāmil, wa ka-dalak fī ḫāṣatihi jaūhar kāmil. Tum naqūl ān talaṭahum fī āl-jumlah talaṭah āqānīm kāmilah. Wa lā yajūz lika ān takūl ānahum fī āl-jumlah talaṭah juāhir kāmilah, li-āna āl-jaūhar āl-šāmal āl-ʿaām lā yadʿaka ān taḍʿa ism āl-juāhir āl-mʿadūdah ʿalā āl-āqānīm āl-majmūlah min āl-ṭabīʿaah āl-šāmilah āl-ʿaāmah.*"

to the "particular substance," there would be no need to use both terms. He argues that both terms are necessary because the substance is the expression of what is required by the essential nature of a thing, whereas the term *qanūm* makes it possible to express that the particular existents of the substance are not parts, powers, or accidents.

Seeking to demonstrate the reasonableness of his argument through analogies involving created things, 'Ammār turns to his familiar examples of fire and water:

> But you see that when three flames of fire are ignited, each flame thus lit is a form standing by itself, as each one of them is a substance complete in its essence, each fire being complete in its essence and its nature. In numbering it, you have no choice but to say three flames and three things, but as was made clear, there are not three fires nor three substances, but only one fire and one substance. Likewise, if you saw three drops of water, each is a form standing on its own and a substance complete in essence and nature. If you saw the three of them grouped together, you would have no choice but to say three drops and three forms, but you cannot say three waters and three substances, but only one water and one substance.[15]

In both cases, the principle articulated above holds true, in that the substance is present whole and entire in each of the three flames or drops, and yet there is only one substance, whole and entire, in the totality of the three entities.

Attribution and Language about God

Another important aspect of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Trinitarian writings is a well-developed theory of attribution and the uses of language in reference to God, with

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[15] Hayek, 174; "*Ilā tarā ān ṯalāṯ šʿal min nār, kul šʿalah minhā šabaḥ qaʾim bi-nafsihi āḏ kul wāḥid minhā jaūhar kāmil fī ḏātihi āī nār kāmilah bi-ʿaīnihā wa ṭabāʿahā, ān min bʿad ʿadadahā, lam yakūn lika muḥīṣ min ān taqūl ṯalaṯah šʿal wa ṯalaṯah āšīāʾ walakin, kamā waḍaḥa, lā ṯalaṯah nīrān wa lā ṯalaṯah jūāhir bal nār wāḥidah jaūhar wāḥid. Wa ka-ḏalak āḏā rāīt ṯalāṯ qaṭarāt min māʾ, āḏ kul qaṭrah minhā šabaḥ qaʾim bi-nafsihi āī jaūhar kāmil fī ḏātihi wa ṭabāʿahi. Fa-āḏā āradat ān tajmal ʿadaduhā lam yakūn lika muḥīṣ min ān taqūl ṯalāṯ qaṭarāt wa ṯalaṯah āšbāḥ wa lā yastaqīm lika ān taqūl ṯalāṯ āmīāh wa ṯalāṯah jūāhir, bal māʾ wāḥid jaūhar wāḥid.*"

particular reference to the language used in both the Bible and the Qur'ān. In the

Kitāb āl-burhān, 'Ammār articulates the first principle of his theory of attribution by

insisting that any descriptor applied to a thing must correspond to an attribute which is

present in the thing being described. Furthermore, to deny the presence of the attribute is

to affirm the opposite descriptor:

> It is clear that one does not call a thing "living" when there is not
> established for it [an attribute of life, nor does one call a thing rational
> unless it has a][16] word, on the basis of which we describe it so. It is also
> clear that if one is deprived of life, he must be described as lifeless, but
> God (blessed be He) is exalted beyond that.[17]

'Ammār follows this introduction with an argument based on the descriptor "seeing," in

which he insists that one must either affirm that a given being is "seeing," in which case

one must also affirm the presence in the thing described of an attribute of sight; or else

one must describe the same being as "blind." Finally, he structures an identical argument

around the descriptor "rational." In making these arguments, 'Ammār seems to have been

taking a cue directly from the internecine debates that were beginning to occur among

Islamic scholars about the implications of the rules of Arabic grammar. Such rules could

not be lightly shaken off by those who affirmed the revelation of the Qur'ān; since God's

speech was in Arabic, the divine revelation and the rules of Arabic grammar were

inseparable from one another. According to these principles, predications or *sifāt* imply

nouns, which in turn signify extant individual actions or entities. Thus to say that "God

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[16] There is a textual lacuna in the manuscript according to Hayek's critical edition; the words that appear in brackets are my supposition.

[17] Hayek, 47; "*Faqad waḍaḥa ānahu lā yasmīhu ḥīān āḏ lam yaṯbat lihu ... kalimah ʿalā mā waṣafnā min ḏalak, wa ānahu qad āʿadama ilahhu āl-ḥīāah faṣīrahu mūātān, jala Āllah wa tʿaālā ʿan ḏalak.*"

hears" or "God sees" is to posit an act of hearing or seeing, which exists in God and can

be thought to be in some sense distinct from him. In other words, despite the absolute

unicity by which the Qur'ān described God, the Arabic language in which it was written

implied some kind of multiplicity in God in order for predications of Him to have any

basis. Thus 'Ammār al-Baṣrī was making a point about the language of attribution which

drew directly from a source that his Muslim interlocutors would have found undeniable –

the Arabic language of the Qur'ān – but which implied some kind of multiplicity in God.

 'Ammār was not hesitant to press this point. Drawing upon two of the Qur'ānic

descriptions of God[18], he writes:

> Indeed it is clear [that in no way are] the attributes of Life and Wisdom
> expressed except by the names Life and Wisdom. Their meanings are
> denied and it becomes necessary to describe Him as "not living" and "not
> rational," in the case where one declines to affirm of Him a Word and a
> Spirit…. And it certainly follows from the denial [of a Word and a Spirit]
> from the Creator that He is represented as mortal, lacking life and lacking
> a word, like the idols which were called gods. God in His books
> reproaches those adherents who follow gods who have no life and no
> word….[19]

In this remarkable passage, 'Ammār first appropriates the Muslim debates about

predications and multiplicity in God. He then aligns two divine attributes affirmed in

common by Christians and Muslims, Wisdom and Life, with the second and third

hypostaseis of the Trinity, God's Word and His Spirit – which also happen to be Qur'ānic

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[18] See for example, for *ḥī.* surahs 2:255, 20:111, and 40:65; for *ḥikmah/ḥakīm*, surahs 2:129, 9:28, and 33:34.

[19] Hayek 48; "*Faqad waḍaḥa … yanbūʿa āl-ḥīāah wa āl-ḥikmah ilā bi-ism āl-ḥīāah wa āl-ḥikmah, wa ābṭala mʿanāhā wa āūjaba ānahu ḡīr ḥī wa lā nāṭiq, wa ānahu āḏ haraba min āṯbāt āl-kalimah wa āl-rūḥ…. waqʿa fī ābṭāl āl-Ḥaliq āl-batah wa yaṣīr mūātān lā ḥīāah lihu wa lā kalimah ka-āl-āṣnām ālatī tusimā ālahah, wa Āllah fī kutubihi yaʿaīr ʿandatuhā bi-ānahum yʿabadūn ālahah lā ḥīāah lihā wa lā naṭaq.*" The first set of brackets represents a lacuna in the manuscript and the text within the brackets is my supposition.

terminology, as has already been shown. He then posits that the implications of attribution in Arabic on the one hand, and an absolutist understanding of the doctrine of *āl-taūḥīd* on the other hand, are inherently in conflict, implicitly giving his Muslim reader a very uncomfortable choice between denying all predications of God or admitting some kind of multiplicity in Him. Finally, in a rhetorical tour de force, he inverts the Muslim accusation of *širk* by suggesting that a God stripped of His Word and His Spirit is simply one of the lifeless, mute idols condemned in the scriptures, which he slyly refers to as "God's books," tacitly including even the Qur'ān.

Having affirmed an understanding of attribution that was current among his Muslim interlocutors and then turned that same theory to his own apologetical purposes, 'Ammār then turned his attention to defending the use of metaphor (*miṯl*) when describing God. He does so in a way that is similar to the approach taken by Abū Rā'iṭah:

> The metaphor is not the likeness of a thing which corresponds to the likeness in every respect. As in the case of a human being, if you were asked to make a likeness of some ruler that you had not seen, you could not make the likeness move; nor would it see, nor hear, nor smell, nor taste, nor walk. And so someone may say to you: He moves, sees, hears, tastes, smells, and other similar things, but the thing [you have made] has none of these traits, so how can you say you have made his likeness? This would be treating you harshly, for it is not possible to make a likeness that is in all ways similar to him of whom it is a likeness.... And therefore it is not possible for us to give you a metaphor for the Creator that fits in every way from among created things, because they are not like Him, and you will not find among created things a complete likeness for the Creator....[20]

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[20] Hayek, 50; "*Wa āl-miṯl lā yakūn miṯl āl-šī' āladī yuḍirab lihu āl-miṯl fī kul šī'. Ka-mā ān ānsānān laū sā'laka ān t'amal lihu miṯāl b'aḍ man lam yaruhu min āl-malūk fa-miṯlatuhu lihu fa-lam yajaduhu yataḥaraku wa lā yabṣar wa lā yasm'a wa lā yašam wa lā yaḏūq wa lā yamšī fa-qāla lika: Fulān yataḥaraka wa yabṣar wa yasm'a wa yaḏūq wa yašam wa mā āšbah ḏalak, wa haḏā līsa 'alā šī' min haḏahi āl-ḥaṣāl, fa-kīfa qalat ānaka qad 'amalat miṯluhu? Kān qad ġalaẓa 'alīka ānahu lā yumkanuka ān taj'al āl-miṯl fī kul šī' miṯl āladī miṯlatuhu bihi.... Fa-li-ḏalak līsa yumkanā ān n'aṭika āl-miṯāl min āl-maḫlūq 'alā āl-Ḫaliq fī kul šī', li-ānahu lā yašbahuhu wa lā tajad fī āl-maḫlūqīn kāmilān miṯl āl-Ḫaliq....*"

As had already been shown, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī sometimes hesitates between language that emphasizes the absoluteness and utter transcendence of God (which places him more firmly on common ground with his Muslim interlocutors) and language which suggests that God may have some things in common with created beings, especially those of a more "subtle" nature. By articulating the principle described here, 'Ammār is able, like Abū Rā'iṭah, to draw from examples of created things and yet avoid accusations by Muslims that he has compromised the divine transcendence. Furthermore, as shown earlier, by affirming this principle, he is pursuing a form of discourse that was in keeping with the dialectical principles expressed by the Muslim scholars of his day.

In seeking metaphors from among created things to demonstrate that a given thing could be simultaneously three in one sense and one in another, 'Ammār calls upon the familiar examples of the sun and fire, but also contributes another metaphor that is less common among the Arabophone Christian authors here considered, that of the human soul:

> … We perceive the soul, for which we affirm the word and the life, and by this we do not describe three souls…. By the correctness of affirming the life and the word as substantial qualities of the soul, the soul is described as being living and rational…. The soul and its word and its life are one soul…. And the threeness of these things does not contradict their oneness, nor does the oneness contradict their threeness.[21]

It is quite noteworthy that 'Ammār offers this example because it goes beyond the rule about metaphors that he has articulated. Whereas the other examples used in this section

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[21] Hayek, 49; "… *Narā āl-nafs, ād ṯubitat lihā āl-kalimah wa āl-ḥīāah, lam taṣar li-dalak ṯalaṯah ānfs.... bi-ṣaḥah āl-ḥīāah wa āl-kalimah li-l-nafs jauharīah ṣārita nafsān ḥīah nāṭiq.... Faqad tujida āl-nafs wa kalimatihā wa ḥīāatihānafsān wāḥidah.... Wa lam yubṭila taṯlīṯuhā tauḥīdahā wa lā tauḥīdahā taṯlīṯuhā.*"

of the text, fire and the sun, have in common with the divinity only the fact of threeness-in-oneness, in the case of the soul the particular qualities that he attributes to it are the same as the qualities that he attributes to God. As has already been shown, he equates the Holy Spirit with the presence in God of an eternal attribute of Life, just as he equates the Word with the presence in God of an eternal attribute of Rationality. So by speaking of "the soul and its word and its life," ʿAmmār articulates a triad that is almost identical to "God and His Word and His Spirit." This metaphor would seem, then, to be in a different category from any other comparison or language about God that ʿAmmār offers. Taking into account the fact that ʿAmmār ultimately makes a case for understanding the Trinity as a triad of eternal attributes of Being, Living, and Rational, there would appear to be a kind of ontological correlation between created things and God insofar as every created thing participates in the attribute of existing, a subset of existing things participate in the attribute of living, and a subset of living things participate in the attribute of rationality. As shown earlier, ʿAmmār posits a kind of trinitarian existence for all beings, with each being defined as a triad of its substance and its two principal attributes. Thus the human soul would be understood in this schema as the pinnacle of the created world, since it has the same principal attributes as the Trinity, albeit not eternally so, and therefore belongs to the only class of material beings to participate in all three of the Trinitarian attributes.

Even with such a close comparison between the Trinitarian life of God and the human soul, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī is eager to emphasize the extreme limitations of human language in making predications about God. In order to do so, he focuses on the

quintessential Qur'ānic expression of God's uniqueness, His role as creator, and explores

the differences between God's act of creation and human acts of creation:

> There is nothing corresponding to His essence to show you, and no
> similarity between His operations and the operations of His creatures. We
> find that every maker of a thing among creatures and its act of making is
> not free with regard to its making, for the thing is made by the movement
> of the maker's bodily members and the use of its limbs. Its movements are
> conducted according to its limitations, and its limbs are used according to
> its composition and formation, which in turn are fashioned according to
> the composer and former that preceded it in composition and formation….
> But truly we know, since we find [God's] nature to be exalted beyond
> these attributes, that we find creating and causing things to be done
> according to His being, for indeed He causes things efficaciously and
> wisely without movement, and heals, intends, or wills without effort or
> supplies.[22]

Having focused on God's absolute uniqueness as Creator and expressed the ontological

chasm existing between Him and his creatures, even when those creatures engage in

activities that are somewhat similar to His, 'Ammār then goes on to claim this very fact

as support for his Trinitarian doctrine. He argues that the activities through which God

brings about the creation of things – intending, willing, and executing – are unintelligible

except in the case of one who possesses the attribute of rationality. Rationality, in turn,

can only be attributed to a being that is living. In other words, the fact that human beings

speak of God as "making" or "creating" something is ultimately an indication of the

presence of these eternal attributes of Life and Rationality, since the usual attributes one

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[22] Hayek, 149; "*Fa-lā naẓīr lihu fī jauharuhu wa lā šibih bīn āf'aāluhu wa āf'aāl ḫulquhu. Wa dalak ānā wajadnā kul ṣānʿa šīʾ wa fāʿaluhu min āl-maḫlūqīn lā yaḫlū ʿanda ṣanʿatuhu dalak āl-šīʾ min taḥrīk āʿaḍāʾhu āstʿamāl jūāriḥhu wa kānat ḥarakātuhu tadal ʿalā ḥudūduhu wa jūāriḥhu tadal ʿalā tarkībuhu wa tāʾlīfuhu, wa ān tāʾlīfuhu wa tarkībuhu yadalān ʿalā mūʾlif murakab mutaqadam lihu ālafuhu wa walī tarkībuhu. Bal bi-ḥaq nʿalam ād wajadnā dātuhu mutʿaālīah ʿan hadahi āl-ṣifāt ṯum wajadnā lihu ḫalaqān ḥādaṯān āḥdaṯuhu wa kūnuhu ānama āḥdaṯa dalak āmrān wa ḥikmān dūn ḥarakah wa ʿalāj āū musīʾah āū ārādah dūn kulfah wa mūʾūnah.*"

might associate with acts of creation, such as the movement of limbs, are not to be

predicated of God. It can be only through attributes of Life and Rationality that God

makes and administers the universe, and following the principles drawn from Arabic

grammar described above, these attributes signify the presence of entities in God that

both pertain to His substance and yet are in some sense distinct from Him. By arguing in

this way, 'Ammār follows a pattern found in the writings of all the authors here

considered – i.e., appropriating the very concepts that Muslims use to argue against

Trinitarian doctrine and making them central to the argument in favor of Trinitarian

doctrine.

     Having suggested that the name "Creator" as applied to God and the description

"creator" as applied to human beings mean rather different things, 'Ammār attempts to

use a similar kind of argument to overcome the Muslim objection to calling two of the

divine *āqānīm* by the names Father and Son. He points out that, like the term Creator, the

terms Father and Son have quite different meanings when applied to God, and argues that

Muslims should appreciate this based on their own use of language to describe God:

> I believe that they do not understand "father" and "son" except with regard
> to material things and sexual reproduction … just as they reason from
> created fathers and their sons, and the difference of their persons and the
> variation of times and places between them. And it was for that, that we
> said to them: Renounce your description and your naming of Him as
> compassionate and merciful, for we do not reckon that you consider
> compassion and mercy except as accidents…. Renounce your description
> of Him as mighty and conquering, for you do not consider mightiness and
> conquering power except with regard to tyrants, oppressors, and ones who
> are blameworthy…. And refrain from your description of Him as wrathful
> and angry, for you do not consider wrath except in regard to changeable
> beings, passing from one state to another.[23]

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[23] Hayek, 165-66; "*Āman ājal ānahum lā yʿaqalūn ābān wa ibnān ilā bi-mubāḍʿaah wa jamāʿa....*

In this passage from the *Kitāb āl-masā'il wa āl-ajwibah*, 'Ammār has constructed a subtle and multilayered argument in defense of traditional Trinitarian language about God. On one level of the argument, he has implied that by automatically assigning to the names "Father" and "Son" creaturely associations, the Muslims who object to these names have in fact abandoned their own religious principle that nothing is like God. On a second level, he has introduced a tension between terminology about God that would have been familiar from the Qur'ān and from Islamic religious discourse on the one hand, and the concepts from Aristotelian philosophy then gaining currency among the Muslim intellectual classes on the other hand. By pointing out that some of the words used to describe God in the Qur'ān refer to accidents and others imply mutability, 'Ammār seeks to place his Muslim interlocutors in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between traditional Islamic language about God and the linguistic strictures that would be imposed by careful adherence to philosophical principles. They could avoid having to make such a choice, of course, by arguing that language implying accidental properties, mutability, corporeality, or temporality in God was simply metaphorical and intended to be understood in a different way when applied to Him – in which case they would be affirming exactly what 'Ammār is claiming about the use of the terms Father and Son.

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kamā ʿaqalūā min man ābā' āl-maḫlūqīn wa ābnā'hum wa tabāīn āšḫāṣuhum wa āḫtilāf āl-āūqāt wa āl-āzmān bīnuhum. Fa-ān kān ḏalak ka-ḏalak qulnā lihum: Fa-ānkarūā waṣafukum wa tasmītukum āīāhu rū'ūfān raḥīmān fa-lā naḥasabukum tʿaqulūn raḥmah wa rā'fah ilā ʿarḍān.... Wa ānkarūā waṣafukum āīāhu jabārān qahārān fa-ānakum lam taʿqulūā jabārān qahārān ilā ẓalūmān ġašūmān maḏmūmān.... Wa āstankafūā lihu min waṣafukum āīāhu ġaḍūbān saḫūṭān fa-ānakum lā tʿaqulūn ġaḍūbān ilā mutaġīrān muta naqalān min ḥāl ilā ḥāl."

'Ammār returns to this same idea later in the text in one of the rare passages in which he calls upon scriptural evidence. He does not quote the biblical text directly, but makes a number of allusions to Old Testament passages in which God makes predications about Himself using terminology that the Bible also applies to human beings:

> For He named Himself King, and Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar were called kings, and David and Solomon were kings. He named Himself God, and Moses His servant was called a god. He named Himself Lord, and some of the people were called lords. He named Himself Powerful, and Samson was called powerful. He named Himself Wise, and Solomon was called wise, and so on with many other names, almost without end. It is not the case that agreement in the names necessitates agreement in the meanings as well.[24]

'Ammār's list of biblical references is somewhat reminiscent of Abū Rā'iṭah's use of scripture, in that they are all taken from the Old Testament. There was probably a two-fold motivation behind limiting his selection of biblical allusions in this way. Although he was not as focused on the accusations of *āl-taḥrīf* as was Abū Rā'iṭah, 'Ammār was certainly aware of the problem and makes reference to it in the opening paragraph of the *Kitāb āl-burhān*.[25] Sensitivity to this issue would have caused him to be more willing to use Old Testament than New Testament references, since with the same scriptures being used by the Jewish scholars taking part in the theological debates of the early ninth century, they were less vulnerable to accusations of being interpolated to support

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[24] Hayek 168; "*Fa-ānahu samā nafsihi malakān, wa sumī Farʿaūn wa Buḫtanṣar malūkān wa Dāūd wa Sulīmān malūkān. Samā nafsihi ālahān, wa sumī Mūsā ʿabduhu ālahān. Samā nafsihi Rabbān, wa samī āl-nās bʿaḍuhum bʿaḍān ārbābān. Samā nafsihi jabārān, wa sumī Šamšūm jabārān. Samā nafsihi ḥakīmān, wa sumī Sulīman ḥakīmān. Mʿa āsmāʾāḫar kaṯīrah lā yuḥṣā ʿadaduhā. Fa-līsat, wa ān wāfaqahā fī āl-āsmāʾ, ānahā mūāfiqah lihu fī āl-mʿānī āīḍān ka-ḏalak.*"

[25] Hayek, 46.

Trinitarian doctrine. As with the other authors here considered, 'Ammār would have been keenly aware of the Muslim claim to be the theological heir of the authentic religion of the Old Testament. Thus using this list of names and predications of God, many of which are also used in the Qur'ān, would present a strong challenge to the Muslim interlocutor, offering him a choice between denying the validity of language about God or admitting that the same words can be used to describe God and to describe human beings, but with quite different meanings due to the ontological chasm between God and His creatures.

This list of examples differs from the earlier passage about predications used of both God and created beings in a subtle but important way. In the earlier passage, 'Ammār points out the ways in which Muslims describe attributes of God. But in this passage, he uses examples of how God has described or named Himself. So he has significantly raised the level of the evidence being cited, from human testimony about God to God's own witness about Himself. In doing so, 'Ammār implicitly appropriates the Muslim theory of scripture, in which the actual language of God is transmitted to human beings, who act in a purely passive and receptive capacity. In other words, 'Ammār argues in the context of a theological and religious culture in which it is not possible for his interlocutor to say that the language about God found in scripture was in part a human construct. Rather, in calling upon God's self-descriptions in the Old Testament which were echoed in the Qur'ān, 'Ammār was invoking the highest possible testimony for how the same words could be used to make analogous predications about God and about human beings.

'Ammār's position that the same descriptor or predication could have different though related meanings when applied to God and to human beings is not limited only to descriptions or predications given in common language. Rather, he makes it clear that even the metaphysical terminology which he puts to such extensive use should also be understood as pointing to a somewhat different reality when applied to God:

> We have used for these eternal properties the well-known name of *āqānīm*, due to their completeness and their exaltation beyond names of powers or accidents, not because they are *āqānīm* as *āqānīm* are commonly known. Similarly we have used the name substance for the eternal essence, which is the will attributed to Him, not because He is a substance [as substances are commonly known][26]. It is not necessary if we name His particular properties according to this sense, to call them three substances.[27]

Thus 'Ammār gives an almost apophatic explanation for his use of the term *āqānīm*; its use is primarily intended to convey that the three entities referred to as such are neither accidents nor powers. In the final analysis, when the term is applied to God, it tells us more about what the three are not, than about what they are. Similarly, the term "substance" is not intended to place God in the same category as any other existing thing, nor even to establish a metaphor for Him.

A Triad of Properties: Being, Living, and Rational

In addition to being concerned with proving that the language of description and predication applies to God quite differently than it applies to His creatures, 'Ammār al-

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[26] Hayek's critical edition of the text indicates a lacuna at this point. The words in brackets are my supposition based on the context and structure of the passage.

[27] Hayek 175; "*Ājrīnā ʿalā hadahi āl-ḫūāṣ āl-āzalīah āsmāʾ āl-āqānīm āl-mʿarūfah, li-kamāluhā wa ʿalūhā ʿan āsmāʾ āl-qūā wa āl-āʿarāḍ āl-muḍṭarah, lā li-ānahā āqānīm ka-āl-āqānīm āl-mʿarūfah. Ka-mā ānā ānamā ājrīnā ism āl-jaūhar ... āl-dāt āl-āzalīah ārādah āṯbāt ānītuhu, lā li-ānahu jaūhar ... līsa yalzamnā āḏā naḥnu samīnā ḫūāṣuhu ʿalā hadā āl-mʿanā ān nasmīhā ṯalaṯah jūāhir.*"

Baṣrī is also eager to demonstrate that two particular terms are in a class by themselves

when applied to the divine life. These terms, not surprisingly, are "Word" and "Spirit."

Contrasting the use of these terms with all of the other expressions that may be used to

describe God, ʿAmmār writes:

> Some have described God … by two eyes, two ears, two hands, two legs
> by way of expression and metaphor. But they do not do so with regard to
> their description of His Word and His Spirit by which He created the
> creatures and by which He orders affairs. Not a single one of them says
> that God created the creatures by His hearing or His sight or His ears or
> His eyes or His hands or His legs, or by anything other than His Word and
> His Spirit. And God … was mentioned in some of His books as creating
> the creatures or accomplishing things by His hand or by His arm. You
> must know that this saying "His arm" and "His hand" refers to His
> command, His power of forbidding, and His will, generated of His Word
> and His Spirit….[28]

So it would appear that ʿAmmār goes so far as to deny that these two terms are

metaphorical when applied to the second and third divine *hypostaseis*. His treatment of

these terms in this passage is particularly noteworthy, insofar as he links them directly

with God's act of creation. As already demonstrated, ʿAmmār argues elsewhere that the

attribute of being Creator is inherently linked with qualities of Life and Rationality,

which in turn indicate the presence in the divinity of two other *āqānīm*. By using the

terms Word and Spirit in this passage, rather than the terms Rational and Living, he picks

up that same argument within the context of discerning what is metaphorical in the

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[28] Hayek, 161; "*Bʿaḍuhum qad waṣafa Āllah … bi-āl-ʿaīnīn wa āl-āḍanīn wa āl-yadīn wa āl-rijalīn ʿalā jahah āl-ʿabārah wa āl-mujaz, fa-ānahum lam yaṣafūā ḏalak ʿalā jahah waṣafuhum kalimatahu wa rūḥhu fī ḫalaqa āl-ḫalāʾiq wa tadbīr āl-āmūr, wa lā qāl āḥad minhum ān Āllah ḫalaqa āl-ḫuluq bi-samʿahu ām bi-baṣarihu ām bi-āḏanīhu ām bi-ʿaīnīhu ām bi-rijalīhu ām bi-šʾ sūā kalimatihi was rūḥhi. Wa ān kān Āllah … ḏukira fī bʿaḍ kutubuhu ānahu ḫalaqa ḫuluqān āū fʿala fʿalān bi-yadihi ām bi-ḏarāʿahi, fa-ānaka āḏā tabīnata qūluhu fa-wajadatihi yʿanī bi-ḏarāʿahi wa bi-yadihi āmaruhu wa naḥīhu wa ārādatuhu āl-mutawaladīn ʿan kalimatihi wa rūḥhi….*"

traditional and scriptural language about God, but does so in terms that appropriate

Qur'ānic terminology and subtly injects the question of the relationship between God,

His Word, and His Spirit, which is unresolved in the Qur'ānic text itself.

Although he argues for understanding Word and Spirit as something other and

higher than metaphor when used in reference to God, 'Ammār still seeks to emphasize

that these two terms refer to properties in God that are more exalted than the properties in

human beings or other creatures that may be referred to by the same words. In the

Kitāb āl-burhān, he writes:

> We do not want, by our saying "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"
> anything more than to affirm correct doctrine; namely, that God is both
> living and rational. For it is the Father that has moved us to the position
> that He has the qualities of Life and a Word. This life is the Holy Spirit,
> and the Word is the Son, not as if we would ascribe to God all that pertains
> to us in regard to ownership or procreation, for God is very greatly exalted
> above that, just as the word is begotten by the mind [with no corporeal or
> sexual process].[29] Yet God is above even this, due to His subtlety and
> incomprehensibility, because of which He is not apprehended even by the
> imaginations of the purely spiritual angels or the prophets sent by Him.[30]

Provided that the supposition presented in the translation above to supply the words

missing from Hayek's edition is correct, 'Ammār here presents a kind of tripartite

hierarchy of meanings for attributes. On the most basic level, such terms have a common

meaning as they are applied to created beings, as when a man is said to be father to his

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[29] According to Hayek's critical edition of the text, there is a two-word phrase at this point that is, according to his footnote, "difficult to understand." Perhaps 'Ammār used very obscure terminology or perhaps the text was corrupted in transmission. The words in brackets in the text as translated here represent my supposition.

[30] Hayek 48-49; "*Lā narīd bi-qūlunā āl-Āb wa āl-Ibn wa Rūḥ āl-Quds āktar min taṣḥīḥ āl-qūl bi-ān Āllah ḥī nāṭiq. Fa-āl-Āb hūa āladī qaṣadanā ilīhu bi-ān lihu ḥīāah wa kalimah. Wa āl-ḥīāah Rūḥ āl-Qudus, wa āl-kalimah āl-Ibn, lā kamā yansabunā muḥālifūnā ilīhu min taṣyīrnā li-lah ṣāḥibah wa waladān minhā, taʿālā Āllah ʿan dalak ʿalūān katīrān kamā tuwalida āl-kalimah min āl-nafs ... bal wa fūq dalak min āl-laṭāfah wa āl-ġamūḍ bi-mā lā tadrakuhuāūhām āl-mulāʾikah āl-rūḥānīn wa lā āl-ānbīāʾ āl-murasalūn.*"

son, and this connotes both physical generation and priority in time. On a second level,

attributes may be taken as descriptions of a purely spiritual or noetic reality, as when the

word is "begotten" by the mind. On the third level of meaning are the exalted divine

properties which such attributes are intended to describe in God. The fact that 'Ammār is

positing a difference between the second and third levels of attributive meaning is

underscored by the fact that he says God's "subtlety and incomprehensibility" prevent

even the angels and prophets from direct apprehension of Him. He does not choose these

two groups only because of their closeness to God. Rather, he emphasizes the incorporeal

nature of the angels by describing them with the adjective "spiritual" (*rūḥānī*), suggesting

that they have a particular affinity for spiritual or noetic realities. If God's begetting of a

Son or generation of a Word were to be understood at this level of meaning, then, it

would be apprehended by the angels. Similarly, against the background of Islamic

prophetology, in which prophets are believed to receive their divine messages in a

mechanistic, word-for-word fashion, the prophets would be understood to have a

particular affinity for receiving and understanding words from God. If it is admitted that

neither of these groups apprehend the divine substance, then the attributes described by

words of begetting, life, and issuance of a rational word must exist on a completely

different ontological level than the same language even when applied to the least

corporeal and most noetic activities of human beings.

Another aspect of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's treatment of the divine Word that should be

taken into consideration is the way in which he treats the concept of the "word" in

general. In the *Kitāb āl-burhān*, he writes that

> … the word has four aspects; among them, the sounded word made by the voice; the visible word made apparent by a line of writing; and the word begotten in the soul which does not pass the lips, is not set down with ink and does not appear to the eyes; and also the power of the soul from which comes the possibility that we express the word and that we decree things, administer affairs, establish the world, and subjugate beasts. This power of the soul resides, according to the doctrine of the Christians, in the Word of God, and moreover, in the perfection by which idols fall short.[31]

In addition to the common understandings of the spoken word, the written word, and the thought word, then, 'Ammar includes a fourth element of meaning, the word as a power of the rational soul. In describing this power of the soul, his choice of examples is significant, because as already explained, the capacity for decreeing, administering, and so forth is a Qur'ānic way of describing not human beings, but God Himself. To intensify this allusion, 'Ammār goes on to state explicitly that this power of the soul is present in the Word of God. There are a number of important implications for proceeding in this way. First, his description here suggests that the power of the human soul to issue a word of command or administration is in some way a reflection or echo of the divine power by which all things were made and are governed. This account recalls the teaching of Theodore Abū Qurrah that descriptions of human attributes are in fact metaphors for divine attributes, with the latter occupying a kind of ontological reality of which the former are only a pale reflection. Second, by introducing this fourth element of meaning,

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[31] Hayek, 49; "… *al-kalām ʿalā ārbʿaah āūjuh: fa-minhu kalām masmūʿa yaẓhuru āl-ṣūt, wa minhu kalām munẓūr ilīhu yaẓhuru āl-ḫaṭ wa minhu kalām mutawalida fī āl-nafs lam tʿabirahu āl-šifatān wa lam yatabīn āl-midād wa lam yaẓhuru li-l-ʿaīūn, wa minhu āl-qūah ālatī li-l-nafs ālatī bi-hā āmkana ān nuẓaru āl-kalām wa naqdaru āl-āšīā' wa nadbaru āl-āmūr wa nasūs āl-ʿāālam wa nastʿabad āl-buhā'im. Fa-li-ḏalak, āl-qūah li-l-nafs qūlu āhl dīn āl-naṣrānīah fī kalimah Āllah, wa fūq ḏalak fī āl-kamāl bi-mā taqṣaru ʿanhu āl-āūhām.*" The term that I have translated "word" here is not the most basic term for word, *kalimah*, but instead *kalām*, which can also be translated with the terms speech, saying, utterance, discourse, etc. It would seem that 'Ammār chose this word in order to speak as broadly as possible about the generation of ideas and communication, and also to connect the concepts of *kalimah* and *naṭaq*, the "rationality" that entails the facility for communication.

'Ammār suggests another layer of meaning for the Qur'ānic teaching that Jesus is a "word from God," a phrase that the Qur'ānic text applies to Jesus alone among the prophets. If one limits the meaning of "word" to the written or spoken word, then perhaps this expression could be understood in a way that is limited to Islamic prophetology, despite the curiosity of Jesus alone being given this appellation. But if the word is extended to include as well a power of the rational soul that is directly related to the attributes of mastery and administration, then it becomes extremely difficult to understand "word from God" as a merely prophetic title. 'Ammār seems to be following the technique so often found in the writings of the authors here considered, of placing the Muslim in the uncomfortable position of either denying the validity of the language of the Qur'ān itself or else denying the metaphysical understanding of "word."

Thus when 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's treatment of the terms Word and Spirit is taken into account along with the rest of his theory of metaphysical and linguistic considerations applied to God, one arrives at a synthesis of his Trinitarian account that can be described as follows. God's attribute of being Creator necessarily implies properties of Life and Rationality. The attributes of Life and Rationality in turn imply the existence of entities within God that are in some sense distinct from Him, although one in substance because the properties are substantial properties pertaining to the divine nature. Both the Bible and the Qur'ān refer to these properties as God's Spirit and God's Word, although the Bible is clear about the relationship among God, His Word, and His Spirit, while the Qur'ān leaves the relationship unexplained. Since Word and Spirit are used in the scriptural language about God to name the substantial properties through which His

attribute of being Creator is expressed, these terms are necessarily in a different category

of language than other terms such as God's sight or God's hearing, which are

metaphorical and when analyzed refer in fact to operations of His Word and His Spirit.

Therefore, in order to affirm "Creator" as a proper description of God, one must affirm

three divine *āqānīm*, and since the three are co-eternal, with no distinctions of time or

chronological priority, and incorporeal, with no distinctions of spatial dimension, they are

one in substance, such that their affirmation entails no denial of the divine unicity.

As has already been shown, 'Ammār is eager to position Word and Spirit, along

with what he considers their equivalents of Rationality and Life, as something other than

metaphorical language about God. Another important aspect of his Trinitarian account is

his exploration of how these same attributions differ from other divine attributes. In the

Kitāb āl-burhān, 'Ammār suggests that in dialogue with Muslims he had been challenged

as to why, if the divine *āqānīm* corresponded to eternal qualities of the divine substance,

and thus were in fact divine attributes, there were only three such entities. Even on the

basis of biblical and Qur'ānic language alone, one could name many divine attributes,

which according to 'Ammār's logic could result in the affirmation of many *āqānīm* in

God, rather than just three. 'Ammār represents his Muslim interlocutor as putting the

question this way:

> When you attribute to God the Word and the Spirit, and say that He is
> imagined to be three *āqānīm*, why is it that you do not attribute to Him
> also hearing, sight, wisdom, knowledge, efficacy, power, clemency,
> intellection, compassion, nobility, existence, kindness, will, and similar
> things, which also pertain to the substance? For just as you call Him living
> and rational, and therefore attribute to Him life and a word, so also you
> call Him hearing, seeing, wise, knowledgeable, efficacious, powerful,

clement, forgiving, compassionate, noble, magnanimous, willing, and such things.[32]

The Muslim interlocutor represented here bases his objection in the same principle of Arabic grammar on which ʿAmmār has built his argument. Although the structure of the argument is not as apparent when the text is translated into English, the objection correlates adjectival forms with predicative nouns, on the basis that any attribute implies the existence of a noun, which in turn indicates the existence within the subject described of an entity that is metaphysically distinct from the subject, and by which the attribute is valid. So, for example, since the Christian will readily admit that God is compassionate, why does he not also affirm a fourth *qanūm* of Compassion?

As explained previously, part of ʿAmmār's answer to this problem lies in a description of all things as existing in a kind of "trinitarian" fashion, being understood to have both their substance and the two primary properties by which their substance is defined. Another part of his answer is his linkage of Word and Spirit to the absolutely unique role of God as Creator, understanding the act of creation to entail Rationality, which in turn entails Life. But in the context of this challenge, ʿAmmār undertakes a more detailed response to the problem of the particular attributes here articulated.

The first aspect of his argument is to present a kind of ontological framework for the entire created, material order, revolving around three fundamental attributes of being, life, and rationality:

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[32] Hayek, 52; "*Fa-āḏ qad āṯbāta li-lah āl-kalimah wa āl-rūḥ fa-qalta ānahu wuhimā ṯalaṯah āqānīm, fa-lima lam taṯbat lihu āīḏān samʿaān wa baṣarān wa ḥakīmah wa ʿalmān wa qūah wa ʿafūān wa mʿarafah wa riḥmah wa karimān wa wajūdān wa nʿamah wa ārādah wa mā āšbih ḏalak jaūharīah āīḏān. Fa-ānka kamā āsmītahu ḥīān nāṭiqān fa-aṯbata lihu ḥīāah wa kalimah, ka-ḏalak samītahu samʿaān baṣīrān ḥakīmān ʿalīmān qādrān qūīān ʿafūān ġafūrān raḥīmān karīmān manʿamān marīdān wa mā kān bi-ḏalak šabīhān.*"

… We regard life and rationality to be fundamental to the nature and constitutive of the substance…. We consider the earth to be lifeless, and with regard to the bodies formed from it, the difference between the earth and what is formed of it is the quality "life." We call those bodies, distinct from the quality life itself, "living things." Then we consider the living things to be differentiated by the quality "reason," and so we call some of them – i.e., human beings – rational, and those remaining which are not rational we call by the names of "beasts" and "livestock." There is no hearing, seeing, clemency, forgiving, kindness, generosity, and nobility apart from the condition of the substance, and its condition does not differentiate some beings from others. Because we see within the same substance some hearing and some not hearing, some seeing and some not seeing, some forgiving and compassionate and some unforgiving and not compassionate, some generous and noble and some not generous and not noble, so the substance is not differentiated by these kinds of differences and is not changed by its condition into a different substance….[33]

The properties of life and rationality, then, serve as the distinguishing features that differentiate classes of created beings, and so it is on this basis that they are believed to enjoy a kind of ontological priority. This schema extends the principle articulated by Theodore Abū Qurrah – namely, that no human attribute can exist without being grounded in a divine attribute of which it is the dim reflection – to the entire material created order. Even the earth itself reflects the most basic divine attribute of being, while the lower animals reflect both the attributes of being and of living, and the rational animal, the human being, reflects all three attributes of being, life and rationality.

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[33] Hayek, 52; "*Wajadnā āl-ḥīaah wa āl-naṭaq min sūs āl-ḏāt wa min banīah āl-jauhar…. Rāīnā āl-ārḍ mūātān fa-jubilat minhā āl-ājsād fa-faṣala bīnuhā wa bīn mā jubila minhā m'anā āl-ḥīaah, fa-samīnā āl-ajsād li-ḏalak dūnuhā ḥīwānān. Ṯūm rāīnā āl-ḥīwān qad faṣala bīnuhā m'anā āl-nuṭaq fa-sumī b'aḍuhā li-ḏalak nāṭiqān ā'anī āl-ānsān, wa baqī sā'irhā ḡīr nāṭiq mustaḥaqān li-ism āl-buhā'im wa āl-dūāb. Wa lam yujad āl-sam'a wa āl-baṣar wa āl-'afū wa āl-maḡfarah wa āl-riḥmah wa āl-jūd wa āl-karim bi-ḡīr āl-jauhar 'an ḥāluhu wa lā yufṣala bīn b'aḍuhu wa b'aḍ, li-ānā narā fī jauhar wāḥid āl-samī'a wa ḡīr āl-samī'a, wa āl-baṣīr wa ḡīr āl-baṣīr, wa āl-ḡafūr wa āl-raḥīm wa ḡīr āl-ḡafūr wa lā āl-raḥīm, wa āl-jūād wa āl-karīm, wa ḡīr āl-jūād wa lā āl-karīm, fa-lam yuẖtalaf āl-jūāhir bi-āẖtilāf ḏalak wa lam tataḡīr 'an ḥāluhā ḥatā tanqasam ilā jūāhir āẖar.*"

This passage may at first appear to conflict with the basic theory of Arabic grammar on which ʿAmmār has constructed his argument. Since the various attributes treated here are described as "conditions" of the substance, it would appear that there is no entity within the subject described to serve as the predicative noun by which the attribute is valid. However, he goes on to explain how each of the attributes mentioned here fits into his Trinitarian account based on the attributes of Being, Life, and Rationality. ʿAmmār first treats the two attributes which are descriptions of sensory perception, seeing and hearing. He argues that "it is not necessary to ascribe them to God substantially, for these are constructive operations in composite bodies, and God has no body to execute such operations. Indeed, we intend by our expression that He hears or sees, to express that He knows."[34] This pair of attributes are the only ones that ʿAmmār treats in this way, more or less dismissing them as purely metaphorical. In a sense, though, he has merely displaced the objection onto a different attribute, for certainly his Muslim interlocutor could respond that the attribute "knowing" should entail a fourth *qanūm* of Knowledge. ʿAmmār sets aside this possibility temporarily and deals with the divine attribute of knowledge later in the text, as will be shown below.

Next ʿAmmār discusses an attribute called the "efficacious will" or "operative will." ʿAmmār defines this concept broadly enough to include both the capacity of animals for achieving things according to their instincts, and the human will, or "will of choice" (*ārādah āḫtīār*). Since according to his definition the will is common to both the

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[34] Hayek 53;"*Fa-lā yajab ān tūjabhumā li-lah jaūharīn. Li-anahumā jāriḥtān rukibutā fī ājsād mūʾlifah, wa lā jasam li-lah turkiba fīhi jāriḥtān. Wa ānamā āradnā bi-qūlunā samīʿaān baṣīrān.*"

lower animals and human beings, 'Ammār argues that it is not one of the attributes that
distinguishes one class of beings from another:

> … We are distinguished from the beasts not by what we have in common
> with them – namely, life – but by what is distinct in us – namely, reason.
> Likewise, it is not the will which separates us from the beasts, which in
> fact groups us together with them, because wills are found both in us and
> in them. The distinction is reason; specifically, the reason of choice, which
> they lack because they act under coercion.[35]

Since a thing must be alive in order to exercise a will of either kind, the attribute of will
would actually seem to pertain to the attribute of life and serve as an ontological dividing
line being those entities that have the attribute of being only, and those that have both the
attributes of being and living. 'Ammār, however, does not pursue this line of reasoning,
probably because it does not end in an association with the divine attribute of Rationality.
Instead, he chooses to dismiss the attribute of will as not pertaining to the divine
substance since it is shared not only with rational beings but also with the lower animals.

'Ammār argues that a third group of attributes – justice, compassion, nobility,
generosity, kindness, clemency, and forgiveness – are in fact attained rather than eternal
attributes, because they describe His relationship to created beings:

> … These are operations to which He attained after His act of creation. For
> if He punishes accordingly as His creatures deserve, He is called just; and
> if he has mercy upon His creatures, He is called compassionate; and if He
> bestows magnanimity on His creatures, he is called noble; and if He is
> generous and kind to them, He is called generous and kind; and if He
> forgives and pardons them, He is called forgiving and clement.[36]

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[35] Hayek, 54; "*Wa ka-dalak ānfiṣalnā min āl-buhā'im līsa bi-mā yajm'anā m'ahā min āl-ḥīāah lakin
bi-mā ḥaṣaṣnā bihi min āl-naṭiq. Wa ka-dalak līsa bi-l-ārādāt ānfaṣilnā min āl-buhā'im li-ājtimā'anā m'ahā
fīhā fa-ṣārat āl-ārādāt āl-mūjūdah fīnā wa fīhā linā, bi-faḍīlah āl-naṭiq, bi-āḫtīār, wa lihā bi-'adamhā
āl-naṭiq, bi-āḍṭarār.*"

[36] Ibid., "*Fa-ānamā hīa āfā'aīl mundu ṣār ilīhā fī ḫalaqahu. Fa-āḏā 'aāqabuhum bi-āstaḥqāquhum ṣumūhu*

He goes on to argue that every attribute in this category is made possible by the presence of the more fundamental attribute of Rationality. It is the power of reason that makes possible operations such as these, which is in turn why these descriptions are never attributed of the lower animals, who lack reason even though they have the attribute of life. ʿAmmār's argument, then, implies two distinct reasons why the attributes listed here need not imply the existence of other *āqānīm*. First, he has made clear throughout his argument that one of the most important ways that the divine *āqānīm* differ from others is their eternality. Since these attributes are acquired by virtue of the relationship between God and His creation, they cannot be said to be eternal, having a specific beginning at the dawn of God's relationship to the created order. ʿAmmār is able to argue in this way without introducing mutability in God because the basis of these operations, the divine *qanūm* of Rationality, is itself eternal. The second reason is that the attributes here, specifically because they are operations of the reason, cannot be considered apart from Rationality. In a sense, to say that God is just, noble, generous, and so forth, is to say the same thing – namely, that God has the attribute of Rationality – in a number of different ways.

The next set of divine attributes that ʿAmmār treats are those of "power and strength." He argues that these attributes can refer either to physical strength and power, in which case they cannot refer to God because of his incorporeality, or to spiritual strength:

ʿadlān, wa āḏā raḥamahum sumūhu raḥīmān, wa āḏā tafaḍala ʿalīhum sumūhu karīmān, wa āḏā jāda wa ānʿama ʿalīhum sumūhu jūādān munʿamān, wa ʿafā ʿanhum wa ġafara lihum sumūhu ʿafūān wa ġafūrān."

> Regarding the spiritual kind, it is like the strength of the subtle soul; i.e., its word, by which it can discourse upon things and forbid things, listen to entities and obey them, command the obedience of beasts which are physically stronger than itself, administer the affairs of the world and govern its organization. The power and strength of God … is like the strength of the soul which we have mentioned – i.e., His Word, by which he established the heavens and the earth.[37]

The identity that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī establishes between the eternal Word of God and the quality of Rationality has already been demonstrated at some length. It is clear, then, that when he says that the power and strength of God are the Word by which He created all things, he is defining the attribute of power as an operation of the Rationality, much as he did with the previous set of attributes described above. Although ʿAmmār does not go so far as to assert that the divine power and strength are acquired attributes, it is noteworthy that he associates them so closely with the act of creation, which was the same association that justified referring to the previous set as acquired attributes. The distinction between that group and the present pair of attributes is that power and strength are demonstrated in the act of creation, whereas the others were expressed in God's treatment of His creatures after the act of creation.

After his examination of power and strength, ʿAmmār considers the attributes of wisdom and knowledge. In doing so, he becomes the only author among those considered here to make explicit reference to some of the Greek writers whose works were having such a profound impact on the intellectual landscape of the Arabophone world of his time:

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[37] Hayek, 54; "*Wa āmā āl-rūḥānī fa-ka-qūah āl-nafs āl-laṭīfah āʿanī kalimatihā ālatī āẓhirat bihā āmarhā wa nahīhā fa-samʿat āl-āšīāʾ wa āṭāʿat lihā, wa āstʿabdat āl-buhāʾim ālatī hīa āqwā minhā ābdānān bihā, wa sāsat āmar āl-ʿaālam wa āḥkamat tadbīruhu bihā. Fa-qudrah Āllah wa qūatuhu … ka-qūah āl-nafs ālatī dakarnā āʿanī kalimatuhu ālatī bihā qāmat āl-samāʾ wa āl-ārḍ.*"

> We call rational entities wise and knowledgeable, as we call Aristotle wise, for the greatness of his teaching set down in his books of reason; and we call Galen knowledgeable because of what he set down and achieved in his books on medicine. Wisdom and knowledge are referred to the word, for they are not attributed to anything other than the entity with a word. For if you see the entity with a word achieve those things attained by what is characteristic of the word, for that reason his word is called knowledgeable. And if we see him attain by it the reasons and causes of things, it is called wise.[38]

As with the other attributes treated by ʿAmmār, wisdom and knowledge are considered to be related directly to the Word or quality of Rationality. In this particular case, the association is especially strong because ʿAmmār argues that, in the case of the human being, it is not the person himself who is ultimately referred to as wise or knowledgeable. Rather it is his word which achieves those appellations. By extension, then, the attributes Wise and Knowledgeable, when applied to God, are attributed directly to His eternal Word.

While the list of divine attributes treated here is certainly not an exhaustive account of every attribute mentioned in the Bible or the ʿQurʾān, it is expansive enough to appreciate how ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī would likely respond to any other attribute that might be named. In each case, the attribute is ultimately reducible to be a metaphor for, or an operation of, the qualities of Life or Rationality. Therefore, there is no reason to posit an additional *qanūm* for any of them, because the eternal qualities of Life and Rationality account for the affirmation of these attributes in God.

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[38] Hayek, 55; "*Wa nasmī āl-nāṭiqīn ḥikmāʾ ʿalamāʾ kamā nasmī Ārasṭū li-ḥasan kalāmuhu fī waḍʿahu kutub āl-manṭiq ḥakīmān, wa nasmī Jālīnūs li-mā waḍʿa min āl-kutub fī āl-ṭib wa adraka fīhi ʿāālmān. Wa āl-ḥikmah wa āl-ʿalm rājʿaān ilā āl-kalimah, āḏ kānā lā yunsibān ilā ilā ḏū kalimah. Fa-āḏā rāīta ḏā āl-kalimah yadraku āl-āšīāʾ āl-mūjūdah ʿalā mā hīa ʿalīhi mumīz minhu li-ḏalak sumīta kalimatuhu ʿalmān. Wa āḏā rāītahu yadraku bihā kīfiatuhā wa āsbāb wajūduhā, sumītahā ḥikmah.*"

In conclusion, the Trinitarian writings of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī may in some respects be considered the culmination of the theological trajectory of the other authors considered here. His metaphysical schema is as completely developed as that of Abū Rāʾiṭah, but he contributes some important further enhancements: the concept of the "quality" (*mʿanā*), which may be either the identity of the substance of a thing, or else the power of the substance by which the substance is defined; the idea that even created things exist as simultaneously one and multiple because of the oneness of their substance and the plurality of their qualities; and the refusal to apply the term *ašḫāṣ* to the divine *hypostaseis* in order to avoid implying any possibility of either corporeality or division in the divinity. Like the other authors here considered, ʿAmmār sought to exploit the Qurʾānic uses of the terms Word and Spirit but his account fully aligns these two terms with the divine attributes of Rationality and Life, with all other scriptural divine attributes being considered as either non-eternal attributes defining the relationship between God and His creation, or else reducible to the incommensurable three attributes of Being, Life, and Rationality. Finally, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's writings take the Islamic emphasis on the utter uniqueness and transcendence of God to its limit, suggesting that both the language of attribution and the language of metaphysical analysis have fundamentally different meanings when applied to God than when used of created beings.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

The Trinitarian speculations of the anonymous author of *Fī taṯlīṯ*, Theodore Abū

Qurrah, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī might be summarized in

the following seven points. First, they attempted to appropriate Qur'ānic language and

Islamic religious idiom, particularly the Qur'ānic uses of the terms "Word" and "Spirit"

in reference to God in order to build their case. Second, they constructed their arguments

using a selective and nuanced approach to the biblical sources, particularly as time went

on and the allegation of *āl-taḥrīf* became an apologetical challenge, calling primarily

upon the prophets as allegedly common ground with Muslims. Third, as Greek

philosophical concepts, particularly Aristotelian metaphysics, became more prominent in

Arab Muslim society, they drew upon this common intellectual ground in an attempt to

show that Trinitarian doctrine was supported not only by the prophets and Qur'ānic

terminology, but was also more intellectually gratifying from the point of view of

metaphysical considerations. Fourth, they attempted to maintain a consistent focus on the

absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God, a point so central to Islamic theology and

piety, as the touchstone of all their argumentation. Fifth, they attempted to establish that

in order for a human attribute to exist, it must have a divine attribute as its source and

origin, while emphasizing that the same named attribute may refer to related but different

realities in God and in human beings, owing to the ontological difference between God

and His creatures. Sixth, they sought to draw upon the implications of Arabic grammar

and the resulting Islamic debates about the relationship between the divine attributes and

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the oneness of God in order to construct a Trinitarian account in which God may be understood as possessed of three eternal and incommensurable attributes, indicating the presence of three divine *āqānīm*. Lastly, in pursuing each element of their apologetical strategy named here, they sought to invert Muslim arguments, making the Qur'ānic proof-texts and other tools used in anti-Trinitarian arguments by Muslims the very materials from which they constructed their Trinitarian arguments.

Certainly this apologetical literature of the eighth and ninth centuries constitutes a bold and intellectually adventurous experiment in apologetical theology. But does it have continuing relevance for Christian-Muslim encounter, or even for Trinitarian theology more broadly, in the modern age? Conversely, should it instead be looked upon as a theological curiosity at best and an aberrant theological dead-end at worst? When Hans Urs von Balthasar sought in the middle of the twentieth century a *ressourcement* that would overcome what he saw as the ossification of the theological enterprise, he wrote:

> There were any number of theses deserving of development which the Fathers initiated, and which, subsequently, as theology became systematized, were held unsuitable, unimportant, and so left in abeyance…. What a wealth of material is to be found in Thomas, what a variety of approaches and aspects he suggests, how numerous the hints and promptings scattered at random through his works….[1]

Von Balthasar, like others of his generation including Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner, saw in the theological speculations and suggestions of both the Church Fathers and of Aquinas many side-paths and byways that, although not part of the main thoroughfare of systematic theology, were well worth exploring for their complementary insights. One

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[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 208.

might take the point a step further and suggest that, if we are to understand the God of

revelation to be infinite and boundless, as the Cappadocians so often remind us we must,

then there may well be infinite "standing-places" from which to contemplate the divine

life, with correspondingly infinite possibilities of expression, so long as actual

contradiction of revealed truth is avoided.

With this line of thinking as one's trajectory, one may well regard the project of

commending faith in Christ and adherence to Christian doctrine in the terminological and

conceptual range of Islamic religious discourse as one of the great unfinished projects of

theological history. A full accounting of the factors that caused this bold venture to all but

disappear from the theological landscape would need to encompass, among other factors,

the turning away of Muslim theologians from *falsafah* in the later Middle Ages, the

reduced social standing of Christians in the caliphate as time wore on, and the tendency

in later periods to characterize "Christian-Muslim encounter" in political and military

terms, rather than in theological and academic ones. In any event, such an accounting

would be out of place here. For the purpose at hand, it is sufficient to suggest that, like

the enrichment and revivification that Von Balthasar could imagine flowing from his

proposed patristic and Thomistic *ressourcement*, there are opportunities both for

enriching Trinitarian theology and for enhancing Christian-Muslim theological encounter

by revisiting and further developing some of the Trinitarian speculations of the early

Christian Arab theologians considered here.

It is not necessary that each point made by these four authors be considered

equally valid and equally worthy of further development. Perhaps the two most

"culturally bound" aspects of the Trinitarian accounts described here are the appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics and the theological implications of Arabic grammar. In each of these cases, there is a systemic and internally consistent structure of thought which may produce compelling implications for those who affirm the necessary presuppositions. Yet neither of them offers the kind of universal adherence that would make them a tool of systematic theology across cultures and languages (although, of course, Aristotelian metaphysics has had a much broader cross-cultural appeal and adherence than Arabic grammar). In a relatively recent but very brief assessment of the way in which a doctrine of the Trinity based on divine attributes found its way into Coptic tradition, Mark Swanson distinguishes between the routine demands of systematic theology and "apologetical utility."[2] For Muslims or others who embrace Aristotelian metaphysics or are interested in the demands of theoretical Arabic grammar, these aspects of the arguments explored here may continue to be "apologetically useful." Since the study of Greek philosophy and other classical literature no longer holds the position as intellectual common ground between Christians and Muslims that such study held in eighth and ninth century 'Abbasid Baghdad, classical philosophical concepts are unlikely ever to be as important to Christian-Muslim theological encounter as they were in that time and place.

The more general project of commending Christian doctrine in Islamic and even Qur'ānic terms is of obvious interest and value. Yet such a project, were it to be renewed in the context of formal academic theology, would undoubtedly provoke considerable

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[2] Mark Swanson, "Are Hypostases Attributes?" *Parole de l'orient*, vol. XVI (1991), 249.

controversy. This is so because such an endeavor touches directly upon one of the most fundamental questions of theological method: how closely correlated are the contents of revealed truth and the form of its doctrinal expression? One has to admit, in the case of the early Arabophone Christian writers treated here, that at times their way of describing God's interaction with His creation, while admirably attempting to bridge the conceptual gap between two distinct religious traditions by means of Islamic idiom, sometimes verged upon a representation of Christ and his redemptive work that could be reasonably accused of departing from scripture and Christian tradition. Three examples that present themselves are the reliance upon the prophetology of the Qur'ān, a conception of Christ's mission that at times almost limited it to establishing authentic worship of the one true God, and the mechanistic and passive sense of the inspiration of scripture. Yet none of these authors, while engaged in so bold an experiment, ever crossed the line into undeniable heterodoxy.

Among the points most relevant and most worthy of further consideration is these authors' exploitation of the Qur'ānic use of the terms "Word of God" and "Holy Spirit." This is an area that should be further explored for three distinct reasons. First, the bare fact that these terms are used in a post-Christian text which bears evidence of direct Christian or quasi-Christian influence (such as the inclusion of materials from the apocryphal gospels) suggests the need for exploring how these terms came to be used there and what resonances they may have originally carried. Second, the fact that the Qur'ānic text leaves the relationships among God, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit unexplained calls for theological inquiry and for a frank assessment of the theological

coherence and consistency of the Qur'ān itself. Third, as demonstrated above, these terms are often used in relationship to Jesus (for example, with Jesus alone among the prophets being called "a word from God" and likewise alone among the prophets being "supported by the Holy Spirit"). Thus there is an unresolved tension in the Qur'ānic text itself about who and what Jesus Christ is, and such a tension is fair ground for investigation from the point of view of apologetical theology.

What of the attempt to develop a theology of the Trinity based on three incommensurable divine attributes? On the one hand, it must clearly be said that what has been meant by the term *hypostaseis* and what has been meant by the term *attributes* in traditional Western Christian theology are distinct concepts which do not overlap. In the conventional theological usage of Western Christianity, attributes are predications of the divine substance and therefore by definition are common to the three divine persons of the Trinity. On the other hand, the Arabophone Christian authors presented here do not, when analyzed carefully, attempt to make a direct and straightforward correlation between attributes (*sifāt*) and hypostaseis (*āqānīm*). Instead, what can ultimately be discerned in their work (particularly the writings of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, who among this first generation of Christian Arab apologetical theologians develops the idea most completely) is the suggestion that all discourse about divine attributes must be based on two fundamental principles. First, because of God's exalted and transcendent nature, all language of attribution must be understood to mean something different than the same language applied to human beings. Second, within the attributions or predications made about God in the language of the Bible and the Qur'ān, some are purely metaphorical,

while others are ultimately reducible to three attributes which are neither further

reducible nor commensurable with each other. These three most essential predications are

described not as attributes but as the principles of the divine substance.

While not proceeding in terms of divine attributes, Western Christian theology

has traditionally ascribed to each *hypostasis* of the Holy Trinity a unique property: the

Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds. Furthermore, it is understood

that the language of begetting and proceeding is applied to God in a completely different

way than the same language would be applied to human beings. These properties and the

mutual relations established by them are further understood to be eternal. In a sense, then,

both the traditional Western Trinitarian theology and the approach via the divine

attributes by the apologetical theologians considered here could be described in the same

broad terms: one transcendent God, who cannot be encompassed by human language, but

who can be truly affirmed as having three distinct eternal properties, each

incommensurable with the others.

The early Councils and Fathers seized upon the philosophical concepts available

to them to explore this reality and of course, their endeavor was not without its own

controversies, including the fundamental question of whether such a metaphysical

apparatus could be applied to the data of revelation, a problem captured succinctly in the

famous rhetorical question of Tertullian's, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"[3]

Modern Christians are inclined to forget, since the metaphysical speculations of the

patristic era have been enshrined in dogmatic definitions and systematic theology, that

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[3] Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, vii.

the use of such tools was a conscious choice by bishops and other theologians to draw upon extra-biblical resources for the exploration of revealed truth. This suggests in turn that the Trinitarian speculations of the authors presented here could become the basis of a renewed theological exploration of Trinitarian doctrine. Just as the language of begetting, when used of the Trinitarian *hypostaseis*, refers to an ineffable reality to which we can only approach with the language of creaturely attributes while acknowledging that we "see through a glass darkly," so also the language of God's "rationality," understood as the eternal attribute of self-communication, similarly falls short of the reality that it seeks to describe, and yet does in fact tell us something of the relationship between the first and second *hypostaseis* of the Trinity. One could similarly explore a parallel between the understanding of the Holy Spirit as eternally proceeding and the description of the Spirit as the predication of the eternal life of the Trinity. Ultimately the touchstone for such a renewed theological endeavor must be the humble and habitual affirmation of the most basic Islamic religious sentiment: like Him there is nothing.

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