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Author(s): Mark Beaumont

Source: *Transformation*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Special issue: Christian-Muslim Relations (April 2012), pp. 111-127

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90008077>

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Transformation

29(2) 111–127

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DOI: 10.1177/0265378812439957

trn.sagepub.com

**Mark Beaumont**

Senior Lecturer in Islam and Mission, London School of Theology, UK

Abstract

The arrival of Muslim rulers who were insistent on the unity of God among Christians who testified to the unity of God in His triune nature introduced a considerable challenge to those Christians who were in the ascendancy throughout the Middle East. Now they were on the defensive, needing to stem the movement of members of their own community to Islam which would eventually lead to Muslims becoming the majority. In the period of gradual transfer from majority to minority status Christian theologians attempted both to make their faith in the Trinity intelligible to Muslim intellectuals with whom they debated, and to give reasons to Christians for holding firm to their faith. These theologians are hardly known to the global church of the 21st century and it is the purpose of this paper to make them come alive for Christians who are witnessing to their faith before Muslims in our time in the hope that a contemporary testimony to the Triune God can be encouraged.

Keywords

Christian defence, dialogue, heresy, John of Damascus, Muslim polemic, Triune God

The Islamic Faith in the Oneness of God

Twice the Qur'ān criticises those who confess the Trinity. Sūra 5: 72–3 calls on Christians to give up adding gods to the One True God. 'They are unbelievers who say that God is Christ, son of Mary. Christ said 'Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord'. Whoever associates another with God, God will keep out of the garden, and the fire will be his destiny . . . They are unbelievers who say that God is one third of a Trinity. There is no God but One'. The accusation of polytheism is heard here clearly. The contention with the Christians is over the status of Christ, with the text charging Christians with making a second god alongside God. While the concept of the Trinity is mentioned, there is no reference to the third member of the Trinity here. The second passage in which the Trinity is challenged is sūra 4:171. 'People of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion. Only speak the truth about God. Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was the messenger of God, and His word which He cast on Mary, and a spirit from Him. Believe in God and His messengers and do not say "Trinity"; give it up for your own good. Surely God is One God. Far be it

Corresponding author:

Mark Beaumont, Senior Lecturer in Islam and Mission, London School of Theology, UK

Email: imarkbeaumont@gmail.com

for Him to have a son'. In this context, the Qur'ān provides another reason for Christians to refrain from speaking of the divine status of Christ and thus the Trinity. The problem is Christians believing that God had a son, which is something unacceptable to God. Sūra 72:3 demonstrates why this should be the case. 'Our Lord has neither taken a wife nor a son'. Thus sonship is understood as related to family life created by God, but must not be attributed to Him as some humans do who associate other deities with Him. Again the third member of the Trinity is not brought out, though there is a reference to 'spirit' from God in Christ. There is a third text in the Qur'ān relevant to the accusation that Christians have added deities to the One God. In sūra 5:116–7, God interrogates Jesus about his teaching. 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "take me and my mother as gods alongside God"'. Jesus replies, 'I did not say what I did not have the right to say . . . I only told them what you commanded me to say: worship God, my Lord and your Lord'. According to this dialogue, the original Jesus brought the message of submission to God alone to those of his time, but the implication is obvious that Christians deviated from this pristine teaching by adulterating it with veneration of Jesus himself along with his mother. Another consequence of this text is that the Trinity referred to in the other texts could be Father, Son and Mary. This is exactly what was deduced by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in the most detailed discussion of this text by any of the classical commentators on the Qur'ān. He believes that Christians made up the story that Jesus taught his disciples to worship him along with his mother as a means of giving legitimacy to miracles they performed in the name of Jesus and his mother.¹ In his interpretation of sūra 4:171 al-Rāzī argues that Christians developed a belief that the attributes of God indwelt Jesus and Mary and that this is condemned in the Qur'ān when Christians are warned not to speak of three when God is One. He thinks that Christians began with devotion to Jesus and Mary and grew to attribute divinity to them.² So the nameless third member of the Trinity in the two texts referring to the Trinity can be identified as Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The First Christian Reactions to the Qur'ānic Teaching Concerning the Trinity in the Eighth Century

If this was the Qur'ānic teaching concerning the Trinity then it is clear how difficult the task would be for Christians who encountered such views. They would need to defend their belief in God as one essence (ousia) in three persons (hypostases) which was shared by all denominations of the church in the Middle Eastern territories under Muslim rule. They may have been divided over their understanding of the union of the divine and human in Christ, but they were united in their faith in the Triune God. The earliest testimony to Christian reaction to Islamic rejection of the Trinity comes from the 8th century. John of Damascus (d.c. 750) provided the first known written Christian response to the Qur'ānic condemnation of the Trinity. John wrote in Greek for a Christian readership though he may have engaged in oral debate with Muslims in Arabic. However, in the next generation, an anonymous *Apology for the Trinity* was written in Arabic with the evident aim of presenting a Christian view of the Trinity to Muslims using insights from John's work. In 781, the Muslim Caliph al-Mahdī summoned Timothy I, the Patriarch of the Church of the East in Baghdad, to a 2-day session of answering questions about the Christian faith. This encounter was recorded by Timothy in Syriac to edify his own flock and this was translated into Arabic, probably in the last decade of the century, to make available to enquiring Muslims an accurate account of Christianity. The Trinity was one of several topics raised by the Caliph, and though the written debate may be a stylised version of events, there is no reason to doubt that the questions were just the sort to be put to Christians by Muslims.

John of Damascus on the Heresy of the Ishmaelites

In the 4th decade of the 8th century, John of Damascus wrote a three-volume work entitled *The Fount of Knowledge* (*Pege Gnoseos*) during his retirement from serving the Muslim Caliph in Damascus. The second volume, *Heresies* (*De Haeresibus*), critiques 100 heresies concluding with 'The Heresy of the Ishmaelites'. The third volume, *The Orthodox Faith* (*De Fide Orthodoxa*), expounds in a systematic way John's view of orthodox beliefs. He defines the Trinity in terms now familiar from earlier Greek theology as one essence (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostaseis*), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³ In 'The Heresy of the Ishmaelites' he attempts to defend the Trinity against Muslim attack not by quoting the above definition but by referring to sūra 4:171 as support for a Trinitarian faith. Thus while John sees Islam as the most recent of the heresies, he is condemning in the list of 100, he is quite prepared to find reflections of true belief within the scriptures of the Muslims just as he finds truth within other heresies, such as those of the Christian Nestorians or Monophysites who held the same orthodox view of the Trinity as John, but failed to believe in the process of the Incarnation correctly as John's Chalcedonian church did. John reports that Muslims accuse Christians of associating Christ with God in an unacceptable way because Christians say that 'Christ is the Son of God and God'.⁴ John suggests that Christians should quote the Muslim belief that 'Christ is Word and Spirit of God' and say 'if the Word is in God it is obvious that he is God as well'.⁵ But if Muslims deny that the Word and spirit are in God then they can be accused of cutting off these attributes of God from Him. 'Thus trying to avoid making associates to God, you have mutilated him'.⁶ John is making the assumption here that the hypostases of Christ the Word and the Holy Spirit are actually meant in sūra 4:171, 'Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was the messenger of God, and His word which He cast on Mary, and a Spirit from Him'. This is quite remarkable in a piece of polemical writing that more or less ridicules the contents of Muslim scriptures as a collection of absurd stories. John seems to be condemning the one he calls the false prophet of Islam for developing a largely deviant message on the basis of a few kernels of truth, and to be taking it as his task to separate the wheat from the chaff for the sake of his fellow Christians. In the process, John is advocating that Christians rely, not on an appeal to their own scriptures, nor on the exposition of their own doctrinal beliefs, but on grounds acceptable to Muslims. This apologetic procedure would be followed by others, in particular by the author of an anonymous apology for Christianity which incorporates the language of sūra 4:171 quite directly.

An Anonymous Apology for Christianity

This apology, not in Greek but in Arabic, comes from the same Chalcedonian community as John and shows signs of common assumptions about the Qur'ān containing some testimony to the truth.⁷ The writer says at the end of the treatise that 'if this religion was not truly from God, it would not have stood firm nor stood erect for seven hundred and forty-six years' so it appears to have been composed around the middle of the 8th century, around the same time as John's work.⁸ There is a detailed presentation of the Trinity using language taken from the Qur'ān which suggests that the unknown writer is attempting to set out Christian belief for a Muslim reader, with the parallel purpose of showing fellow Christians a way to communicate their faith with Muslims. The fact that it is composed in Arabic demonstrates that the language of the Muslim rulers was becoming used in some Christian communities, for example in Palestinian monasteries.⁹ After a lengthy prayer, the writer addresses a Muslim reader by declaring 'We do not distinguish God from His Word and His Spirit. We do not worship another god alongside God in His Word and His Spirit'.¹⁰ The first sentence echoes the argument of John of Damascus that Christians do not

mutilate the Triune God by separating His Word and Spirit from Him. The second sentence alludes to Sūra 5: 72–3 which alleges that Christians worship gods alongside the One True God and refashions the phraseology to include Christ the Word and the Holy Spirit in the definition of the One True God. Such language would not have been necessary in a treatise written before the challenge of Islam. The author points to the way God speaks in the plural as ‘We’ in the creation story in Genesis and concludes, ‘We do not say three gods . . . But we do say that God and His Word and His Spirit is One God and One Creator’.¹¹ Obviously here is a rebuttal of sūra 5:73, ‘They are unbelievers who say that God is one third of a Trinity’, and sūra 4:171, ‘Believe in God and His messengers and do not say “Trinity”’. The language of the Qur’ān sets the tone of the presentation which seeks to supply to a Muslim reader correct information concerning Christian belief in God as Triune.

The author proceeds to list seven analogies for the Trinity to indicate the validity of conceiving God as One in Three. First: the disc, rays and heat of the sun do not imply three suns. ‘We do not say three suns’.¹² Second: the eye, the pupil and the light in the eye are not three eyes. Third: the soul, the body and the spirit are not three human beings. Fourth: the root, the branches and the fruit of a tree are not three trees. Fifth: the source, the river and the lake is the same water. Sixth: the human mind, the word that comes from the mind and the spirit that resides in the mind are all of one human being. Seventh: the mouth, the tongue and the word that is spoken all come from one person. ‘All these demonstrate our faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit . . . and people should believe this’.¹³ However, he recognises that ‘we do not perceive anything of the power and greatness of God . . . by analogies . . . but by faith’.¹⁴ He quotes from sūras 4:171 and 16:102 of the Qur’ān to back up his faith in the Trinity and to challenge his Muslim reader to accept this truth. ‘Believe in God and His Word; and also in His Holy Spirit; surely the Holy Spirit has brought down from your Lord mercy and guidance . . . You find in the Qur’ān that God and His Word and His Spirit is One God and One Lord. You have said that you believe in God and His Word and His Spirit, so do not reproach us, you people, for believing in God and His Word and His Spirit’.¹⁵

The methodology of this unknown Christian apologist is similar to that of John of Damascus in terms of referring to the teaching of the Qur’ān concerning the Word and Spirit of God and arguing that these cannot be separated from Him. He goes beyond John in quoting sūra 16:102 in which the Holy Spirit is mentioned as bringing guidance from God in order to stress that the Qur’ān speaks of the third member of the Trinity in his activity of bringing revelation to humanity. There is a more thorough application of Qur’ānic terminology in this apology which may be explained by the author’s decision to write in Arabic rather than Greek, with the consequent desire to utilise as much of the Qur’ān as was suitable to convey Christian meaning. The striking difference between this work and that of John is the absence of the polemic found in the latter. Whereas John ridiculed much of the teaching of Islam as absurd this writer never mocks his reader but appeals to one who ‘knows the truth and opens his breast to believe in God and His Scriptures’.¹⁶ Thus the tone of this apology is respectful even when the writer challenges his Muslim reader to desist from quoting Qur’ānic texts that attack the Trinity. Muslims should not reproach Christians because the latter do not believe in three gods, and Muslims should listen carefully to Christians when they explain their belief in God and His Word and His Spirit. There need not be alienation and controversy between Christians and Muslims if they search their Scriptures in a careful way. This is an optimistic approach that depends on the good will of both sides. However, the gulf between the teaching of the Christian and Muslim scriptures was usually too great for this kind of dialogue, as can be seen in the encounter of Timothy I, the Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) church and the Muslim Caliph al-Mahdī in 781.

Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church

Caliph al-Mahdī summoned Timothy I for an audience with him in Baghdad shortly after Timothy became Patriarch of the East Syrian church in 780.¹⁷ A report of the debate was produced in Syriac and subsequently translated into Arabic but may not conform to the actual conversation in every detail. Nevertheless, it is hardly likely that Timothy would have dared to misrepresent the speech of the Caliph so the questions posed by him in the report are likely to be those he asked in the debate which are mainly concerned with Timothy's understanding of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Scriptures, and the status of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁸ The opening question of al-Mahdī is a reference to Sūra 72:3, 'Our Lord has neither taken a wife nor a son', as he asks Timothy, 'How can someone like you, knowledgeable and wise, say that the most high God took a wife and had a son?'¹⁹ Timothy simply denies the allegation. Here is evidence from the late 8th century for a Muslim interpretation of the Trinity as God, Mary and Jesus and the need for Christians to be able to explain their conception of the Trinity, not on Muslim assumptions of what Christians believed, but rather on what they held to be true. After discussion of the Incarnation al-Mahdī asks, 'Do you believe in three gods?' Timothy replies that Christians believe in 'three hypostases (*aqānīm*) . . . The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which are together one God, one nature, and one essence (*jawhar*)'.²⁰ Timothy holds that this was clearly taught by Jesus in the gospel and is also proved from studying created things. Just as the Caliph is one person in his mind and spirit, and these cannot be separated from him, so it is with God and his Word and Spirit. The sun with its rays and heat are one inseparable sun. We do not say that a person who speaks is without life or spirit so 'if someone says that God exists without Word and Spirit then he blasphemes'.²¹

Timothy uses similar analogies for the Trinity as the writer of the *Anonymous Apology* to make the same point that the Word and Spirit cannot be separated from God. These were obviously common to Christians from the different denominations. However, Timothy embarks on a much more profound explanation of the Trinity than his immediate predecessors and the language of one essence (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*) is translated into Arabic as one *jawhar* in three *aqānīm*. The latter term is a transliteration of the Syriac '*qenōmē*' with which Timothy was familiar, but the former is a newly coined Arabic word for the Syriac '*ousia*' itself a transliteration of the Greek.²²

Timothy provides a series of proofs from the Bible for the Trinitarian nature of God, but these do not appear to make much of an impression on the Caliph who asks, 'How are the Son and Spirit not the same, since you say that God is simple and not composite?'²³ Timothy replies by making a distinction between the essence and the hypostases. With respect to the essence (*jawhar*) there is no distinction between them, but with respect to their own particular characteristics as hypostases (*aqānīm*), one of them is begotten (*yūlad*) and the other is not begotten but proceeds (*yanbathiq*).²⁴ The Father is the origin of the Son and the Spirit. From eternity the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit emanates (*yusḍir*), and the begetting and the emanating are without bodily separation or by means of bodily members. This is because God is not composite or embodied. Timothy offers an analogy from human nature to explain this. 'From the human soul (*naḥs*) the spoken word is born and love emanates without separation or by means of members. Yet love is distinguished from word and word from love'. While the method of begetting and emanating is not clear, the basic idea is possible and is found in nature. Just as smell and taste emanate from an apple, but do not come from a part of the apple but from the whole fruit, and just as the smell is not the taste, so the Son is begotten from the Father and the Spirit emanates from Him. 'The eternal comes from the eternal and the uncreated emanates from the uncreated'.²⁵

Just like the author of the Anonymous Apology, Timothy uses Biblical proofs and analogies for the Trinity, but develops fresh points of comparison such as the human perception of an apple which is rather obscure as an analogy of the Trinity. Better is the human soul that is the source of word and love but is indivisible, since this picture is closer to the relationships within the Trinity that can be characterized as The Father as source, the Son as Word and the Holy Spirit as love between them. Nevertheless, the Caliph is unmoved by such an analogy and draws the following conclusion about the inseparability of the hypostases: 'If the hypostases (*aqānīm*) are not separated or divided one from another, then the Father and the Holy Spirit became human along with the Word'.²⁶ Timothy seeks to assure al-Mahdī that the functions of the three hypostases are different, while they maintain their inseparability of nature. He offers further analogies to secure the argument. The word of the Caliph written on parchment is not immediately connected to his soul or mind but cannot be separated from them. The spoken word is generated from the soul and mind and heard by means of the activity of the air but cannot be divided from the soul and mind. People talk not about hearing the soul or mind but about hearing the word of someone.²⁷ At this point the questions move to the status of Jesus Christ so there is no recorded reaction to these pictures and the discussion of the Trinity comes to an end.

Timothy's detailed defence of the Trinity is one step removed from the Anonymous Apology and two steps removed from John of Damascus' contribution to dialogue. Here Timothy explains how the members of the Trinity function separately without being separated in essence in the attempt to meet the logical scrutiny of the Caliph, who reflects the attention now being given by Muslim intellectuals to Christian teaching. The earlier apologetic stressed how to communicate the Trinity to Muslims but Timothy is required by leading Muslim thinkers to defend the Trinity against logical criticism that takes apart the notion of a Triune God. This latter apologetic activity was to become central in the succeeding generations of Christian apologists.

The Development of the Defence of the Trinity in 9th-century Christian Apologies

The ground work of the eighth century responses to the Qur'ānic attack on the Trinity was built on by three early 9th-century apologists, Abū Qurra (d.c. 830), Abū Rā'īṭa (d.c. 835) and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (d.c. 860) who all attempted to defend and explain the Trinity in Arabic for a Muslim audience that was increasingly involved in debate with Christian intellectuals. The fact that Abū Qurra and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī were both honoured by leading Muslim thinkers by a written response to their teaching suggests that these Christian apologists were making an impact on their intended readership. 'Īsā ibn Sabīh al-Murdār (d. 840) wrote a refutation entitled *Against Abū Qurra the Christian (Kitāb 'alā Abī Qurra al-Naṣrānī)* and Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d.c. 840) wrote a 'refutation of 'Ammār the Christian in his reply to the Christians' according to the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm.²⁸ Unfortunately neither of these Muslim refutations is extant, but there are two 9th-century Muslim responses to the Trinity that provide the earliest written Muslim reactions to Christian defence of the Trinity for a Muslim audience. These are the *Refutation of the Christians (Al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā)* by al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 860) and the *Refutation of the Three Christian Sects (Al-radd 'alā al-thalātha firq min al-Naṣārā)* by Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. c. 860). The latter is an exhaustive description and painstaking demolition of the Trinity from a logical point of view based on the presupposition of the oneness of God.

Abū Qurra's Treatise on the Trinity

Abū Qurra's defence of the Trinity is entitled 'A Treatise by Theodore, Bishop of Harran, establishing that Christians do not believe in three gods when they say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God even though each of them is complete in himself'.²⁹ He calls the intended Muslim reader 'the one who negates Christian teaching'³⁰ and spends the first half of the treatise arguing for the place of reason in defence of faith before giving Biblical proofs of the Trinity. The second half is a set of arguments to demonstrate that it is not unreasonable to believe that God is both One and Triune. The negators of Christian teaching object to the Trinity because their 'reason is confused by the Christian claims that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three hypostases (*aqānīm*) in one God (*ilah wāḥid*), and that each of the hypostases is perfect God in himself'.³¹ For the negators, reason dictates that either none of the hypostases is a god or each of them is a god. Abū Qurra begins his attempt to persuade his Muslim audience that God is three in one by expounding Biblical evidence for this belief. For example, he sees appearances of angelic messengers in Gen 16:7–13, 22:12, 23:11–13, 48:15–6, and Ex 3:2–6 as indications of the functioning of the Trinity.³² Rational people should be convinced by these textual proofs that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, but that God is always one, yet since reason sometimes is overcome by feeling it is also necessary to develop rational arguments for the Trinity.³³

He uses the human names, Peter, Paul and John as an analogy for the hypostases (*aqānīm*) since these names refer to persons (*wujūh*), and the human nature (*ṭabī'a*) shared by these three names as an analogy for the divine nature shared by the hypostases. Abū Qurra has supplied *wajh/ wujūh* as a translation of the Greek term *prosōpon* (person) which was a synonym for *hypostasis* in Greek theology, as Rachid Haddad has pointed out.³⁴ There are 'three persons (*wujūh*), one God . . . because the term "person" (*wajh*) is attributed to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'.³⁵ But Abū Qurra recognises that the analogy with three men must not lead to the supposition that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are separated or differentiated, since they would then be three divine beings rather than one divine being.³⁶

He refers to the divine nature in various ways. The three persons (*wujūh*) share the same non-physical nature (*laṭāfa*).³⁷ Therefore each of the persons shares the same essence (*dhāt*).³⁸ The three persons share the same oneness of divinity (*wāḥidiyya al-lāhūt*).³⁹ Three further analogies are presented to support the three persons sharing one divinity. If there are three lamps in a house they each give light but the light is one and indivisible. When three speakers recite the same poem simultaneously the hearer hears one poem. Three pieces of gold are just one kind of gold, not three kinds. Yet the oneness of God is 'purer and higher' than the oneness in any of these analogies.⁴⁰ Finally, the three persons share the same nature (*ṭabī'a*).⁴¹

If it is asked whether the world was created by one or three then the reply should be that all three, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were involved in creating the world, but that the action of creating is the action of the divine nature which they share. Abū Qurra poses his own question to his Muslim reader, 'Do you say that God has word or not?' If he replies 'no' then God is dumb, but if he replies 'yes' then the Word has to be both perfect man and perfect God as Christians believe.⁴² Here is Abū Qurra's version of the argument used by John of Damascus and the writer of the Anonymous apology based on sūra 4:171 in which word and spirit from God are attributed to Christ. However in this form the argument relates to the debate among Muslims about whether the Qur'ān was eternal or created. Seppo Rissanen thinks that Abū Qurra posed difficulties for both sides in the debate. The Mu'tazila denied the eternity of the Qur'ān and thus denied the eternity of the word. The Traditionists held to the eternity of the Qur'ān but would not accept the

personification of God's word.⁴³ Certainly, he is attempting to use the background language of God's word being cast into Mary to give validity to the functioning of the Trinity. Thus his presentation of the reasonableness of the Trinity, which begins with textual proofs from the Bible ends with a textual proof from the Qur'ān. In between, he offers a series of analogies to encourage his Muslim audience to give thoughtful consideration to the triune nature of God. The truly rational people will conclude that God is three in one.

Abū Rā'īṭa's Letter on the Trinity

Abū Rā'īṭa was a contemporary of Abū Qurra with whom he claimed to have debated face to face.⁴⁴ Their theological disagreement lay in the interpretation of the union of divinity and humanity in the incarnate Christ, but they were in agreement over the Trinitarian formula, 'One essence in three hypostases'. However, their presentations of the Trinity show differences in Arabic terminology and apologetic strategy. Abū Rā'īṭa writes his letter on the Trinity to an unnamed recipient who may have asked for guidance in answering Muslim questions about Christian beliefs from someone who had experience of debate with Muslim intellectuals.⁴⁵ The fact that Abū Rā'īṭa discusses concepts that derive from Aristotle in the letter shows both that he was writing to a Christian who would have appreciated a philosophical approach to theology, and that he was familiar with engaging with Muslims on philosophical grounds. Sidney Griffith mentions that some Muslims who were keen on gathering the fruits of the Greek philosophers translated into Arabic by Christians in Baghdad rejected the Trinity 'on the grounds of Greek logic', as in the case of Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 873).⁴⁶

Abū Rā'īṭa says he will try to answer the claim of 'the People of the South' that since God is one, we Christians are wrong to teach the threeness (*tathlith*) of God along with his oneness (*tawḥīd*).⁴⁷ He proposes that 'the People of Truth' agree with 'the People of the South' that God is one, but ask them what kind of oneness they mean. Do they mean one as genus (*jins*), one as species (*nau'*) or one as number (*'adad*)?⁴⁸ These are distinctions drawn from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that Abū Rā'īṭa clearly thinks will be decisive for his argument with Muslim opponents.⁴⁹ Sandra Keating argues that among Christian apologists 'he is one of the first to build his argument using principles of logic and elements drawn from Greek thought'.⁵⁰ This is probably true for writing in Arabic, but Timothy I wrote an apology in Syriac in which he debates with a Muslim 'Aristotelian' a generation before this, in which 'Aristotle is the principal source of his thought'.⁵¹ Christian philosophical theologians such as Timothy and Abū Rā'īṭa were in the habit of engaging with philosophical Muslims using a common intellectual language inherited from Greek thought.

If 'genus' is meant then God encompasses various species which is not possible for the Creator of all species. If 'number' is meant then God is subject to division since the number 'one' is a species of number which is included in the perfection of number, and this contradicts the belief that God is perfect without being divided into parts. If 'species' is meant then God is comprised of different beings and this is unacceptable.⁵² In other words, the Muslim should be driven to admitting that no Aristotelian concept of oneness is adequate to describe God, and as a result no description of God's oneness can be given by a Muslim that does not undermine His perfection. The Christian should come to the rescue by stating that 'we describe Him as "one" perfect in essence (*jawhar*) and not in number, because He is in number 'three' in the hypostases (*aqānīm*)'. This is a perfect description of God because, first, it upholds His complete difference from His creation in his essence so that nothing can be compared with Him; and, second, it upholds His encompassing all of the species of number, even and odd, in His hypostases.⁵³

A second reliance on Aristotle comes in Abū Rā'īṭa's discussion of the attributes of God such as 'living', 'knowing', 'hearing' and 'seeing', which Muslims presume that Christians believe in too.⁵⁴ He asks the Muslim 'Are they single, absolute names or predicative names?' Single or absolute names are not predicated of anything such as 'earth' or 'fire' whereas predicated names are related to something else such as 'knower' and 'knowledge', because the knower knows through knowledge, a differentiation that derives from Aristotle's *Categories*.⁵⁵ If a Muslim understands living and knowing as acquired by God as predicates of action then he must describe God as Creator only after He created. But if he thinks of them as belonging to God eternally then he must describe God as eternally creating. These were the very issues debated among philosophically inclined Muslims of the late 8th and early 9th centuries, the *Mutakallimūn*, who distinguished between 'attributes of the essence' (*sifāt al-dhāt*) and 'attributes of action' (*sifāt al-fī'l*).⁵⁶ Abū Rā'īṭa goes on to argue that life and knowledge must be eternal in God because there cannot be a time when God does not have life and knowledge. They cannot be parts of God's nature but must be perfect entities that can be distinguished, but are also united with one another in Him.⁵⁷ 'We describe Him by continuity in essence (*jawhar*), and by dissimilarity in the individuals (*ashkhās*) or hypostases (*aqānīm*)'.

If Muslims object that God cannot be divided up in this way, then let them think about three lamps in one house that each give the same light, or Moses and Aaron who are distinct individuals yet share a common humanity.⁵⁸ Just as Adam is the begetter of Abel, Abel is the begotten and Eve is the one who proceeds from Adam and is neither begetter nor begotten, but all three share the same humanity, so the Father is the begetter of the Son, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, but all three share the same essence (*jawhar*). If a Muslim says that this really means three individual gods, then he should be told, 'it is only permitted to describe Adam and Abel and Eve as three human beings on account of the difference which exists between them. It is absolutely not possible that a difference like this exists in these three hypostases'.⁵⁹ He refers to the analogies of the soul the mind and speech, and the sun, its light and heat used by the Anonymous Apology and Abū Qurra to support the continuity and differentiation of the essence and hypostases.

If the Muslim asks why there are only three hypostases and not ten or twelve, then the answer should be that '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 for Him in His eternity to be without knowledge and spirit'.⁶⁰ Abū Rā'īṭa, in contradistinction to all of his above predecessors, does not refer to word and spirit here. Sidney Griffith is probably right to suggest that he is avoiding the anti-Trinitarian context of sūra 4:171 and keeping closely to the terms of debate concerning the attributes of God among the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, but the argument is basically the same as that of John of Damascus. Yet the presentation of God with two attributes of knowledge and spirit tends to suggest that there is one divine essence with two hypostases, so Abū Rā'īṭa, in common with each of the writers surveyed above, fails to distinguish carefully enough between the divine essence and the hypostasis of Fatherhood.

Towards the end of his letter, Abū Rā'īṭa appeals to the way God speaks in the first person plural in the Bible and the Qur'ān, whether in Genesis 1:26, 'Let us make a human being in our image and likeness', or in many places in the Qur'ān, 'We said', or 'We created'. This must mean that the hypostases were involved in the activities described. He gives further analogies of plurality from the Bible and concedes that although Muslims accuse Christians of altering their scriptures they cannot prove the allegation. This is an obvious difference in methodology from Abū Qurra who began his presentation of the Trinity with Biblical testimony, ignoring the charge of textual corruption.

Finally, Abū Rā'īta deals with the concept of causation within the Trinity, which a Muslim may raise, to argue that since the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, He must be more worthy of praise and worship. He refers once more to the analogy of the sun, its light and its heat, and Adam and Eve, to point out that the Son and the Spirit are not less than the Father from whom they originate, but the Son and the Spirit are 'two perfect beings (*dhātān*) from one perfect being (*dhāt*)'. However, he previously uses (*jawhar*) to refer to the essence of God rather than (*dhāt*), and Rachid Haddad believes that the latter term oscillates between two different senses here,⁶¹ between meaning the essence of God (*jawhar*) and meaning the three individuals (*ashkhās*), the three hypostases (*aqānīm*). This confusion of terms could easily lead a Muslim to ask why the Son and the Spirit are not two perfect essences (*jawharain*) from one perfect essence (*jawhar*). Indeed the charge of incoherent terminology would be made by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq as symptomatic of confused thinking among the Christian theologians.

'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Trinitarian Apologetic

'Ammār al-Baṣrī wrote two defences of the Trinity, a longer one as part of a *Book of Questions and Answers*, and a shorter one as a section in his *Book of the Proof*. Since Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d.c. 840) wrote a 'refutation of 'Ammār the Christian in his reply to the Christians' it is probable, as Sidney Griffith argues, that 'Ammār was attempting to answer this leading Mu'tazilī thinker.⁶² The longer presentation is a series of answers to nine questions posed by a Muslim about the Trinity and these may well be the kind of questions raised by Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf in his lost refutation of 'Ammār. The shorter presentation comes in an apology for key Christian beliefs and practices and is designed as a manual of advice for Christians. The nine questions will be used as the basic structure of the analysis given in this article.

The first question is 'Since the Creator is one, how can one be three and three one?'⁶³ The answer is that there is one eternal essence (*jawhar*) in three essential properties (*khawāṣ jawhariyāt*) that are not differentiated or separated. The Creator lives and speaks so 'life' and 'speech' can be attributed to Him. 'The principal essence (*jawhar al-'ayn*) has the attributions of His life and His speech; His speech is the source of His wisdom and His life is the source of His spirit'.⁶⁴ A second question concerns the outcome of these attributions to the Creator which appear to establish His existence first, then his life second, and His wisdom third, and so He is counted as three, divided and partitioned. 'Ammār replies that God is not embodied, so He cannot be divided or partitioned. 'The One who created the world by His word and spirit is necessarily one in His essence (*jawhar*), one in His nature (*ṭabā*'), and no separation or partition occur in Him'.⁶⁵ If the opponents suggest that God's attributes such as 'hearing', 'seeing', 'almighty', 'merciful', 'generous' or 'kind' mean that Christians cannot limit God to threeness, then they need to distinguish between God's names (*asmā*') and His attributes (*ṣifāt*). The names refer to actions of God whereas the attributes refer to properties essential to Him. Only 'life' and 'speech' are essential properties in God. 'Life and speech are properties (*khawāṣ*) in the structure of the essence (*jawhar*), and in the quality of the essence (*dhāt*), and the nature (*ṭabā*)'.⁶⁶

'Ammār is faced with the same difficulty as previous apologists for the Trinity in his selection of two attributes, in this case life and speech, giving the impression of a divine essence having two essential properties. There is clear gap between this opening argument and the accepted Trinitarian formula of one essence in three hypostases. But 'Ammār has chosen to begin on ground familiar to Muslim intellectuals who were attempting to determine whether the names of God referred to actions of God. Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf is reported to have denied that the names did refer to actions of God. While it is acceptable for created human beings to be described as performing an

act of knowing by virtue of which they can be said to be knowing, it is necessary to interpret 'God is knowing' as 'there is an act of knowing that is God' and 'there is an object that he knows'.⁶⁷ Abū al-Hudhayl was concerned to defend God's unity (*tawḥīd*) by denying that there is an entity called 'knowledge' that can be identified in God. 'Ammār is tackling this reticence head on in his argument by isolating life and speech as inherent qualities in God which are distinct from actions that are not.

The third question logically follows from the previous discussion: 'Why does God need His speech and His Spirit but not hearing and sight?' The answer is that His speech and His spirit are not equivalent to His hearing and His sight. He appeals to Biblical testimony despite the opinion of his opponent that 'we and our enemies the Jews agreed together to publish this falsified book which was corrupted (*taḥrīf*) to make it agree with our religions'.⁶⁸ The plural language of Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and 11:7, 'let us', has to be interpreted alongside the singular language of Deuteronomy 6:4, 'the Lord your God is one'. The solution is found in regarding the plural 'we' as the expression of one essence (*jawhar*) who creates by his word and spirit but not by his hearing and his sight.⁶⁹

Question four is 'Why do you call these three properties three individuals (*ashkhās*) yet you lead the hearers of your teaching to believe that you reject three gods?' He does not call them individuals (*ashkhās*) since that term applies only to beings with physical bodies. He calls them by the Syriac term 'aqānīm'. In order to explain the meaning of this term he appeals to the categories of Aristotle, essence (*jawhar*), power (*quwa*), accident ('*ard*'), and then he adds hypostasis (*qunūm*) to them. The essence and the hypostasis are alike in that they exist without depending on anything else, whereas power and accident depend on something else for their existence.⁷⁰

The fifth question relates more exactly to the Trinitarian formula: 'Why do you call the three hypostases Father, Son and Holy Spirit?' The basic reason is that the Apostles report Jesus as commanding baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Matthew 28:19. John also speaks of the Son as the Word of God in the opening of his gospel, and later in 14:17 declares that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Apostles declare that 'The eternal living one who speaks is Father, who has His eternal Word, and His eternal life the Holy Spirit'.⁷¹ If the opponent objects to the names 'father' and 'son' as implying procreation in physical terms then he should be told that there is no physical relationship between properties of God's essence. In the Torah God calls Himself 'king', 'Lord', 'wise' when human beings are also called by these names, but God's names do not have the same meaning as the human names.⁷² Question six asks how this interpretation based on analogy (*qiyās*) can be certain and avoid doubt. The answer is that all descriptions of God derive from scripture, and reason depends on that which is revealed there.⁷³

Question seven returns to the divine status of the members of the Trinity. 'If you claim that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each perfect God then either you believe in three gods or three parts of one perfect god'. 'Ammār answers that the three distinct members of the Trinity share the same perfect essence (*jawhar kāmīl*), just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob share the same human nature but are distinct persons. There are not three perfect essences, or three perfect gods, but 'each of them in his property (*khawāṣ*) is perfect God'.⁷⁴ The eighth question insists that if the three hypostases are perfect God then they must be three perfect gods. This would be true, says 'Ammār, if the essence (*jawhar*) is equivalent to the property (*khawāṣ*), but this is not the case. Just as three flames from a fire share the same perfect essence, and yet are not called three fires, and three drops of water are not called three waters, so Father, Son and Holy Spirit who share the same perfect divinity are not called three gods. The ninth and final question is missing in the manuscript but the answer is concerned to argue that each of the three properties shares the same essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiya*), so there is no essential distinction between their functions.

ʿAmmār shares with his predecessors a common approach to presenting the Biblical basis of the Trinity, and analogies for the Trinity based on the sun and human nature. He shares with Abū Rāʾiṭa an appeal to Aristotelian categories to argue that life and speech are eternal properties of God in contradistinction to actions of God such as seeing and hearing. Clearly these two theologians were willing to enter into the debate among Muslim intellectuals of the early 9th century concerning the status of the attributes of God that had developed upon the presuppositions of Greek philosophy. While ʿAmmār's Muslim debating opponent is known to have been Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, the details of his arguments are lost. However, two Muslim contemporaries should provide some indication of the kind of response from the Muslim side.

Ninth-century Muslim Polemic Against the Trinity

The Refutation of the Christians by Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860)

The Zaydī Imam Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm wrote *The Refutation of the Christians* possibly after debating with Christians in Egypt between 815 and 826.⁷⁵ He quotes from the Qurʾān those verses that criticise those who associate with God other persons worthy of worship, especially 112: 1–4, 'Say, He is God the One, God the Eternal, who does not beget and who is not begotten, and there is no-one like Him'. Then he challenges Christians to pay heed to them. 'Whoever talks about God having a son, all those who associate anyone with God, among Jews, Christians, and any other people, should listen to God's clear arguments against them concerning this'.⁷⁶ When he turns to the way Christians speak of the Triune God, he has a very accurate understanding of the kind of terminology used by Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa. 'All the Christians claim that God is three separate individuals (*ashkhās*), and that these three individuals have one similar nature (*ṭabīʿa*) . . . Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.⁷⁷ He recounts the analogies of the sun and of human nature used by Christians, and says that Christians depend on them to argue that there is 'one essence (*dhāt*) and one nature (*ṭabīʿa*) which joins together the three hypostases (*aqānīm*)'. Al-Qāsim does not develop a particular critique of any of this, since the burden of his refutation is directed at the notion of the divinity of Christ, but it is clear to him that the Trinity goes beyond the boundaries set by the Qurʾān by associating other beings with God. David Thomas points out that Al-Qāsim emphasises the individuality of the hypostases 'unlike the Arabic speaking Christians who emphasise the identity between them'.⁷⁸ This Muslim understanding of the hypostases would explain ʿAmmār's rejection of the terminology of three individuals (*ashkhās*) in favour of three properties (*khawāṣ*) shared by the one essence.

The Refutation of the Trinity by Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. 860)

Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's refutation of the Trinity is certainly the most thorough of any of the Muslim refutations that are extant from the early Islamic period. He is aware that different Christian communities disagree over their understanding of the uniting of the divine and human in Christ but that they basically agree over the definition of the Trinity as 'one essence (*jawhar*), three hypostases (*aqānīm*)', and that the three hypostases are Father, Son and Spirit.⁷⁹ He reports that they have different terms for the hypostases, properties (*khawāṣ*), or individuals (*ashkhās*), or attributes (*sifāt*) yet 'despite their differences over explanation and terminology they keep more or less the same meaning, as they themselves admit'.⁸⁰ Unlike Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq does not quote from the Qurʾān to support his argument but depends solely on logical reasoning. So he

subjects the language of the Trinity to a sustained assault based on the presupposition that God must be one, and that the definition of oneness necessarily excludes threeness.

He develops a mirror argument to that of John of Damascus and his successors that God's Word and Spirit are eternally of God, by showing the Christians that if the three hypostases are equivalent to the essence then the threeness of the hypostases must attach to the one essence. 'Every number attaching to the properties will attach to the essentiality (*jawhariyya*).'⁸¹ Christians end up having to admit three essentialities rather than one and thus the Trinity is negated. The same applies to the concept of divinity. If Christians claim that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are divine then there are three divinities that must share the one divine essence, and the result is that there must be two definitions of divinity, one for the essence and the other for the hypostases.⁸² This principle also applies to the characteristics of the three hypostases. If Fatherhood is essential to the Father and not the Son then the Son lacks an essential quality and so is less than God in his essence. If fatherhood and sonship are eternal qualities then they must be shared by each, so the Son must be Father too.⁸³

Abū 'Īsā does not usually refer to individual Christian writers but prefers to speak about the teaching of the three main Christian communities of his time, but he says that:

one Trinitarian theologian (*mutakallim*) has presented arguments in support of the essence (*jawhar*) and the hypostases (*aqānīm*), that the one he worships lives eternally by 'life' and speaks eternally by 'speech', and that life and speech are two properties (*khāṣatān*) which confer perfection on His essence'.⁸⁴

This choice of life and speech as the essential properties of God reflects 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's way of writing among the theologians studied above and it may be that he is the unnamed *mutakallim* here. Abū 'Īsā counters this by examining the essence (*jawhar*) in this presentation. If the essence is specified by 'life', then the definition of any essence in the created world must also be specified by 'life' and even stones would have to be specified as 'living' which is absurd. But if the essence is specified by 'life' by a cause ('*illa*) which is other than the essence then an eternal cause other than the essence and the hypostases has been established, and this falsifies the argument.

He finds the appeal to the generation of word from intellect, light from the sun, and heat from fire as analogies for the generation of the Son from the Father to be useless to support the Christian case for the Trinity. No matter whether Christians intend to compare the generation of the Son by the Father directly or only approximately with these other types of generation, they cannot escape from giving the eternal Father the same status as a created being or object.⁸⁵ Abū 'Īsā, like other mu'tazilī Muslim thinkers, rejected analogies from the created and temporal world for the uncreated and eternal God, since there is nothing like Him (Q112:4). The problem with Christians is precisely that they think it appropriate to compare God with what He resembles with the result that 'they are openly introducing anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), and they do not remove anthropomorphism from their teaching'.⁸⁶

Conclusion

These Muslim reactions to Trinitarian theology show the challenge faced by Christians in the period of early Islamic dominance. The traditional consensus of all the denominations that God is one essence in three hypostases was put to the test by the Islamic belief that the unity of God precludes His enumeration in three properties. When Christians appealed to analogies of unity in enumeration in the observable world to support the rationality of threeness in oneness, Muslims would reject the application of the analogy to the eternal and timeless One with whom nothing and no one can be compared. The Christian apologists struggled to express the Trinity in similar terms

in the Arabic language of the Muslims. Abū Qurra chose nature (*ṭabīʿa*) or essential being (*dhāt*) whereas Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār agreed on essence (*jawhar*) to translate the Greek term *ousia*. There was even greater divergence in translation of the Greek *hypostaseis*. All three apologists writing in Arabic transliterated the Syriac *qenômê* as (*aqānīm*). Abū Qurra much more frequently used (*wujūh*) a translation of the Greek *prosopon* meaning person, and Abū Rāʾiṭa preferred (*ashkhās*) to indicate the individual persons. ʿAmmār realised that this emphasis on the individual persons of the Trinity was likely to play into the hands of Muslims who wanted to see three divine beings in the hypostases and argued for the necessity of using properties (*khawāṣ*) of the one essence to divert attention away from threeness to oneness.

When asked why there were only three hypostases and not more, all three apologists fell back on the Biblical testimony, though Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār attempted to defend the rationality of the three hypostases by means of the distinction between ‘attributes of the essence’ (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and ‘attributes of action’ (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*). Thus, for Abū Rāʾiṭa, God creates through His ‘life’ and ‘knowledge’ which are attributes of His essence and not through ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ which are attributes of His action. For ʿAmmār, the attributes of essence become ‘life’ and ‘speech’, but the argument is similar. It is obvious that only two attributes are chosen here, leaving the impression that the essence has two hypostases rather than three, but this is the inheritance of Greek Trinitarian writing passed down to them, among which Irenaeus, for example, could speak about the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of God.⁸⁷

Notes

- 1 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, on sūra 5:116–117.
- 2 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, on sūra 4:171.
- 3 John of Damascus (1958) *The Orthodox Faith*. In: FH Chase (trans.) *St John of Damascus: Writings*. Washington DC: Catholic University, 165–406, p. 167.
- 4 John of Damascus (1972: 137).
- 5 John of Damascus (1972: 137).
- 6 John of Damascus (1972: 137).
- 7 The Arabic text (Sinai 154) is edited and translated into English by MD Dunlop as *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God*. London: Cambridge University Press (1899).
- 8 Samir discovered this statement on one of the pages of the manuscript not included in the printed version by Dunlop, who said that she was unable to photograph ‘a few pages from the end’. Samir believes that this dates the writing to just before 750. See Samir SK (1994) *The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity* (c. 750). In: Samir SK and Nielsen JS (eds.) *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*. Leiden: Brill, 57–116, p. 61. Swanson calculates the date not from the birth of Christ but from the beginning of the church and suggests 788. See Swanson M (1993) *Some Considerations for the Dating of fī tatlīt allāh al-wāhid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-gāmiʿ wuḡūh al-īmān*. London, British Library op. 4950, In: *Parole de L'Orient* 1993, 118–141, p. 140. However, Griffith argues that Palestinian scribes were more likely to compute the date from the beginning of the year of the Incarnation, thus placing the composition around 755. See Griffith SH (2008) *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 54.
- 9 See Griffith SH (1988) *The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic*. *The Muslim World* 78: 1–28.
- 10 Gibson MD (ed.) (1899) *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God*. London: Cambridge University Press, 75.
- 11 Gibson (1899: 76).
- 12 Gibson (1899: 76).

- 13 Gibson (1899: 76).
- 14 Gibson (1899: 76).
- 15 Gibson (1899: 77–8).
- 16 Gibson (1899: 75).
- 17 Timothy describes his two day audience with the Caliph in a letter to the priest Sargis in 782/3. See epistle 59 in Bidawid RJ (ed.) (1956) *Les Lettres du Patriarche Nestorien Timothée I*. Rome: Studi e Testi 187, 42–43.
- 18 The Syriac version is edited and translated into English by Mingana A (1928) as The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi, *Woodbrooke Studies* II: 1–162. The Arabic version is edited by Cheikho L (1921) in *Al-Machriq* 19: 359–374, 408–418 and reproduced with a French translation by Putman H (1975) in *L'Église sous Timothée I: 780–832*. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, appendix: 7–51. Putman believes that the Arabic version is a summary of the longer Syriac one made in the 794/5.
- 18 *Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church*, in Putman H (1975) in *L'Église sous Timothée I: 780–832*. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, appendix: 7.
- 19 Putman (1975: 13).
- 20 Putman (1975: 13–14).
- 21 See Griffith SH (1982) The Concept of *Al-Uqnūm* in ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity’. In: Samir SK (ed.) *Actes du Premier Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes*. Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 169–190, p. 179.
- 23 Griffith (1982: 16).
- 24 Griffith (1982: 16).
- 25 Griffith (1982: 17).
- 26 Griffith (1982: 18).
- 27 Griffith (1982: 18).
- 28 See Dodge B (trans.) (1970) *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, a Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol 1. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 388, 394.
- 29 Abū Qurra (1904) Treatise on the Trinity. In: Bacha C (ed.) *Les Oeuvres Arabes de Theodore Aboucara*. Beirut: Imp. Alfawaid., 23–47, p. 23. See also the English translation of the Treatise in Lamoreaux J (2005) *Theodore Abu Qurrah*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 175–193.
- 30 Abū Qurra (1984: 33).
- 31 Abū Qurra (1984: 27).
- 32 Abū Qurra (1984: 29–31).
- 33 Abū Qurra (1984: 33).
- 34 See Haddad R (1985) *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050*. Paris: Beauchesne, 172.
- 35 Abū Qurra (1984: 34).
- 36 Abū Qurra (1984: 35).
- 37 Abū Qurra (1984: 38).
- 38 Abū Qurra (1984: 39).
- 39 Abū Qurra (1984: 37).
- 40 Abū Qurra (1984: 36–37).
- 41 Abū Qurra (1984: 39, 44).
- 42 Abū Qurra (1984: 44).
- 43 See Rissanen S (1993) *Theological encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 142.
- 44 Abū Rā’iṭā begins his ‘Reply to the Melkites on the union (of the divine and human in Christ)’ with a reference to a debate between himself and Abū Qurra that he wishes to follow up in writing. See Graf G (ed.) (1951) *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā’iṭā*, CSCO 130. Louvain: Secrétariat

- du Corpus SCO, 65–72.
- 45 Abū Rā'īta (2006) The First Letter on the Holy Trinity. In: Keating ST (ed. & trans.) *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īta*. Leiden: Brill, 166–167.
 - 46 See Griffith SH (1980) Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'ītah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century. *Oriens Christianus* 64: 161–201, p. 175, and Perier A (1920–1921) Un traité de Yahya ben 'Adi, defense du dogme de la trinité contre les objections d'al-Kindi. *ROC* 22: 3–21.
 - 47 Abū Rā'īta (2006) The First Letter on the Holy Trinity. In: Keating ST (ed. & trans.) *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īta*. Leiden: Publisher, 168–169.
 - 48 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 170–173).
 - 49 See Aristotle (1933) *Metaphysics* 5.6., In: Tredennick H (trans.) *Metaphysics. Books I–IX*, vol. 17. London: Harvard University Press, 1016b–1017a.
 - 50 Keating ST (2006) *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īta*. Leiden: Brill, 157.
 - 51 See Cheikho HPJ (1983) *Dialectique du Langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothee I (728–823) à Serge*. Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 60.
 - 52 Abū Rā'īta (2006) The First Letter on the Holy Trinity. In: Keating ST (ed. & trans.) *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īta*. Leiden: Publisher, 172–176.
 - 53 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 174–177).
 - 54 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 176–177).
 - 55 See Aristotle (1983) *Categories* 1–7. In: Cooke HP and Tredennick H (eds. & trans.) *The Categories* vol. 1. London: Harvard University Press.
 - 56 See Griffith SH (1980) Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'ītah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century. *Oriens Christianus* 64: 182.
 - 57 Abū Rā'īta (2006) The First Letter on the Holy Trinity. In: Keating ST (ed. & trans.) *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īta*. Leiden: Publisher, 182–185.
 - 58 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 184–187).
 - 59 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 188–189).
 - 60 Abū Rā'īta (2006: 196–197).
 - 61 See Haddad R (1985) *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050*. Paris: Beauchesne, 166.
 - 62 See Griffith SH (1982) The Concept of *Al-Uqnūm* in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity'. In: Samir SK (ed.) *Actes du Premier Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes*. Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 180–181, and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (1983) *Kitāb al-Burhān: Christian Kalām in the First Abbasid Century*. *Le Museon* 96: 145–181, p. 169–172.
 - 63 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (1983: 148).
 - 64 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (1983: 149).
 - 65 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (1983: 154).
 - 66 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (1983: 156–157).
 - 67 See Frank RM (1978) *Beings and Their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian school of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 12.
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- 77 Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (1921–1922: 314–315).
- 78 See Thomas D (2001) The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Period. In: Ridgeon L (ed.) *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*. London: Curzon, 84.
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- 82 Abū `Īsā al-Warrāq (1992: 112–113).
- 83 Abū `Īsā al-Warrāq (1992: 126–129).
- 84 Abū `Īsā al-Warrāq (1992: 130–131).
- 85 Abū `Īsā al-Warrāq (1992: 166–171).
- 86 Abū `Īsā al-Warrāq (1992: 168–169).
- 87 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, (*Adversus Haereses*), IV. XX. I, ‘In carrying out his intended work of creation, God did not need any help from angels, as if he had not his own hands. For he has always at his side his Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit. Through them and in them he created all things of his own free will. And to them he says, “Let us make man.”’ Bettenson H (trans.) (1969) *The Early Christian Fathers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 85.