The Theology of ‘Ammār al-Basrī

Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies

62

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The Theology of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī

Commending Christianity within Islamic Culture

Mark Beaumont

2021

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My grateful thanks to

David Thomas who introduced me to ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, facilitated the publication of my Mingana Symposium papers on ʿAmmār, and invited me to contribute the article on ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī for *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history, vol. 1 (600–900)*.

Carol Rowe for her collaboration with me in the translation of sections 1 to 4 of ʿAmmār's *Book of the Proof*.

Wageeh Mikhail for his invitation to me to comment on his translation of ʿAmmār's *Book of the Proof*.

Ayman Ibrahim for commenting on section 1 of my translation of ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers*.

David Singh for publishing several journal articles and book chapters of mine concerning Christian theologians in dialogue with Muslims in the early Islamic period.

INTRODUCTION

This study of the theology of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d.c. 850) attempts to highlight the distinctive contribution this Church of the East theologian made to defending and commending the Christian faith in the early ninth century.[1] ʿAmmār was a Basran theologian who evidently contributed to debates with leading Muslim intellectuals in Basra, given that the leader of the School of Basra, Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840), wrote a "Refutation of ʿAmmār the Christian in his reply to the Christians." Chapter one places ʿAmmār in his context as a member of the Church of the East who may have represented the Church in debates with Muslims who had established a military base near Basra after the invasion of the area in the seventh century. How East Syrian Christians lived under Muslim rule is also examined.

Chapter two begins the analysis of ʿAmmār's theology by examining his argument that there is only one creator rather than two. Here ʿAmmār established agreement between Christians and Muslims on the oneness of God over against Zoroastrian beliefs in two deities in conflict. Basra was in an area of strong Zoroastrian conviction and it is not surprising that Christians and Muslims might join forces in debate with dualists if the latter were numerically superior to them at this time. In order to achieve his argument, ʿAmmār depended on the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle to support the rationality of belief in one creator. Since Zoroastrians held that a good deity contests an evil deity, ʿAmmār

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[1] See I.M. Beaumont, "Ammār al-Baṣrī', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema, (eds), *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history, vol. 1 (600–900),* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 604-610.

had to develop an argument for the essential goodness of the one creator.

The third chapter is concerned with whether the creator allowed humans free will or whether their actions were determined by him. Muslim discussion of this question had been an important area of debate in the eighth century and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) had been an advocate of free will. Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr a generation later insisted on determinism. Christian belief in free will had a long pedigree and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī advocates this heritage by arguing that human beings must have free will in order that the creator can reward them for doing what is right. This concern to defend free will indicates that by the ninth century Muslims had come to hold a more deterministic position on human actions.

Chapter four turns to a defense of the authenticity of the Christian Gospels. ʿAmmār reflects the reality that Muslims believed that Christians had obscured the teaching of Jesus in their gospels, either by misinterpreting or by altering it. In order to commend Christian beliefs about Jesus, ʿAmmār decides that it is necessary to mount a defense of the truth of the teaching of Jesus contained in the four gospels. He argues that the gospels could not have been changed by the disciples of Jesus as some Muslims thought because their loyalty to him was unquestioned. Muslims may find the gospels uncomfortable reading because what is taught there differs so much from what they are familiar with in the Qurʾan.

The fifth chapter deals with the Trinity. Here Christians had to respond to Muslim accusations that they had forsaken the oneness of the creator for a belief in three deities as the Qurʾan indicated. ʿAmmār developed the view that the creator had the two essential attributes of life and speech among many non-essential ones such as power or mercy. Without life and speech the creator could not function, but other attributes were a matter of choice for him. Thus ʿAmmār concludes that Christians uphold the oneness of God in his life and speech when they speak of God the Father, the Word and the Spirit, One God in three hypostases.

Chapter six, on the uniting of divine and human natures in Jesus, is an exploration of the way the divinity of Jesus functions

within his humanity given that Muslims rejected any divine nature within him. When the Word of God became human in Jesus it was to show divinity in one human being to the rest of humanity. In response to Muslim anxiety that Christians believe that God took a female companion and engendered a son with her as the Qurʾan was understood to have claimed, ʿAmmār denies that Christians did hold this to be the case. They rather believe that the eternal Son took human flesh in becoming the Messiah. When Muslims retorted that there were two sons, one from eternity and another from Mary, ʿAmmār argues that the one Son had both eternal and temporal aspects.

The seventh chapter explores the incarnation of the Word of God. Muslims rejected the notion that the transcendent God would become embodied in a human being. ʿAmmār gives several reasons why God would wish to do exactly that. He wanted to make himself known to them in a form that human beings could comprehend. He was generous in his attitude to them by making himself visible in human form. He showed them how to live by following the example of the incarnate Word who gave himself for them to bring them to eternal life.

Chapter eight debates the ending of Jesus' life. Muslims held that Jesus was exalted to heaven alive without going through death by crucifixion as Christians believed. ʿAmmār defends the historicity of the death of Jesus on the cross by pointing out that his disciples witnessed it. The reason why the Messiah suffered and died was to defeat death and usher in the resurrected life for the rest of humanity. Only through dying and rising to life could he demonstrate to them that they also could share in his death and resurrection and so enjoy life in the hereafter.

ʿAmmār's presentation of baptism, the eucharist and veneration of the cross is the subject of chapter nine. He regards baptism and the eucharist as reminders for Christians of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Believers are united with him in the water of baptism which reminds them of his being laid in the tomb after his crucifixion and of his being raised from the tomb to life. When believers partake of the bread and wine they partake of Jesus' body and blood which he laid down as a sacrifice for them. When believers kiss the cross they show affection for Jesus

who gave himself for them. They no more worship the cross than Muslims worship a black stone which they kiss during the pilgrimage to Mecca, argues ʿAmmār.

The tenth chapter looks at ʿAmmār's conviction that the generosity of the creator is seen most profoundly in his giving eternal life to human beings, even though he created them as mortal. He disputes with Muslims their portrait of eternal life as an extension of this life with a continuation of eating, drinking, and marriage. The Christian conception is that, following the teaching of Jesus in the gospels, there is no continuation of such things. Rather, humans will be like the angels who do not need to sustain physicality, or to be married in order to procreate.

Chapter One.
The Background for ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Theology in the Church of the East

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī as a Church of the East theologian

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī lived during the latter eighth and early ninth centuries in Basra. Although nothing is known about his biography, it is clear from his writing that he was a member of the Church of the East, given that he defends East Syrian Christology over against rival views. He argues that Christians should not call the Virgin Mary, "Godbearer", since she was only the bearer of the humanity of Jesus Christ, whose divine nature had no beginning in time and existed from all eternity. This argument was characteristic of the Church of the East that had flourished beyond the Eastern boundary of the Roman Empire after Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, had been deposed in 431 for putting forward this Christological position. His refusal to confess that Mary was *theotokos,* bearer of God, led to his being anathematised along with any who followed him.

Beyond the river Euphrates a Christian community developed that by the time of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī had spread throughout Persia and had established churches as far south as India and as far east as China. The headquarters of the Church of the East had moved from Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Persia to Baghdad in Iraq to be closer to the center of the Islamic Empire after the Abbasid family transferred the Caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad in 750. This marked a strategic shift for the Church of

the East from being a community that spoke, wrote and worshipped in the Syriac language to one that began to speak and write in the Arabic language of the Muslim rulers, albeit that Syriac continued to be the language for worship. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī reflects this change. His decision to write in Arabic and to defend Christian faith and practice in the language of Muslims shows that pressure had grown on the Church of the East to adopt Arabic. This shift can be seen by noticing that Timothy I, who was Patriarch of the Church of the East from 780 to 825, could speak Arabic in his discussions with the Caliph al-Mahdī, who had invited Timothy to answer questions about Christianity in 781, but recorded the details of the conversation in Syriac in a letter to a priest.[1] It was only probably towards the end of the eighth century that an Arabic translation was made, demonstrating that internal communication in Syriac was no longer deemed to be adequate when dealing with debate with Muslims. ʿAmmār represents the first generation of Church of the East theologians to write in Arabic.

The fact that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī addresses his *Book of Questions and Answers* to "the Commander of the believers" demonstrates that he thought he could influence the unnamed Caliph to whom he writes.[2] The Caliph was most likely al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833), who was in the habit of holding conferences on religious issues that included Jews and Christians along with Muslims.[3] It is possible that ʿAmmār was one of the Christians in these debates, and this would explain his dedication of the book to the Caliph. It is also likely that he had made a name for himself in Basra to the south of Baghdad as a participant in similar debates. Baghdad and Basra were two centers of intellectual inquiry in the early Abbasid period. The school of Baghdad had developed in the

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[1] See letter 59 in, R.J. Bidawid, *Les Lettres du Patriarche Nestorien Timothée I,* (Rome: Studi e Testi, 187, 1956).

[2] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers' (Kitāb al-masāʾil w-al-ajwiba), in M. Hayek, (ed.) *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et Controverses,* (Beyrouth: Dar al-Mashreq, 1977), 93–265, p. 93.

[3] This is the argument of Michel Hayek. See M. Hayek, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. La Première Somme de théologie chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du christianisme', *Islamochristiana* 2, 1976, 69–133, p. 73.

House of Wisdom which had been established and was financed by the Caliphs. The rival school of Basra had already been set up in the early eighth century and by the late eighth century was led by Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840), who wrote a 'Refutation of ʿAmmār the Christian in his reply to the Christians', according to the *Fihrist* of ibn al-Nadīm (d.c. 995).[4] This is evidence that ʿAmmār was in all probability active in the work of the Basra school in terms of providing a Christian voice in debates.

So, it appears that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī was a theologian who was recognised as someone who could defend the faith of the Church of the East in dialogue with the leading thinkers of his day. It was not just Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who thought it fit to refute the ideas of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. 860), in his *Refutation of the Trinity,* says that, "One Trinitarian theologian has presented arguments in support of the essence and the hypostases, that the one he worships lives eternally by "life" and speaks eternally by "speech," and that life and speech are two properties which confer perfection on His essence".[5] This choice of life and speech as the essential properties of God reflects ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's way of writing about the Trinity, and it seems likely that he is the unnamed theologian here. The climate of debate in this era created an opportunity for Christians to engage with Muslims in making a case for the truth of Christianity, and ʿAmmār's writing is an outstanding example of such apologetics.

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST

The exile of Nestorius in 431 after his excommunication at the Council of Ephesus, was the origin of the Church of the East. The Persian Nestorius had become bishop of Constantinople in 428 and the churches of Persia were to be faithful to his Christology. Nestorius was embroiled in a debate with Cyril of Alexandria and his supporters who held that the Word of God indwelt the human

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[4] See B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, a Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture, vol. 1,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 388.
[5] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity: The First Part of the Refutation of the Three Christian sects', in D. Thomas, (ed. and trans.), *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66–181, pp 131–132.

body of Jesus Christ such that it was the mind and will of the Word that was central to him. Nestorius held to the thinking of his teacher, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), who argued that there were two centers of will in Christ. For example, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, Theodore interprets Christ speaking of the Word of God as other than himself. "I have done everything according to his will and good pleasure. . . . The divine Word, who has assumed me and joined me to himself, faithfully gives me the victory".[6] According to Wallace-Hadrill, "The Word urged the human Jesus towards perfection and assisted him. . . . The two elements are never described as co-operating as equals but always being in a relationship of initiative and response. The human characteristic is voluntary obedience, involving moral struggle".[7] The relationship between the Word of God and the human in Christ is described by Theodore as the Word inhabiting the human as if it were a temple.[8] Christ could be observed by others as one person in the *prosopon* of the union. Theodore says in his work on the Incarnation, "The essence of the divine Word is his own and that of the man is his own, for the natures are distinguished but the *prosopon* is perfected as one by the union. . . . Both natures constitute one *prosopon*".[9] The Word inhabited the human at the moment of conception, but the human had to respond to the Word voluntarily. The human was not forced by the Word but was encouraged to choose wisely. Since there was a moral development of Christ, Theodore was reluctant to call Mary *theotokos,* God-bearer, because the Word of God did not originate in her womb, but was eternally begotten. He wanted the title to be carefully qualified. "When they ask whether Mary was

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[6] *Theodore Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Joannis Apostoli,* J.-M. Vosté, (ed.) CSCO 115–116 / Syr. 62– 63, (Louvain: Officina Orientali, 1940), p. 174, in D.S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: a study of early Christian thought in the East,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 123.

[7] Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 123.

[8] See Theodore's *Hom. Catech.,* viii.5, Tonneau, (ed.) p. 193, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 124.

[9] *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii, vol. 2,* H.B. Swete, (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880–1882), p. 295, in, Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p.124.

the mother of man or the mother of God, let us answer that she was both: the first by the nature of the fact, the second (by the relationship of the Word to the humanity which he had assumed)".[10] Theodore believed that Christ was unique among human beings not because there was a hypostatic union between the Word of God and the humanity, but because Christ was graced by the Word of God in a complete way that was not available to others. "God did not bestow a meager part of the grace of the Spirit upon him, as upon the rest of human beings, but the total plenitude, because He loved him".[11] Therefore, those who are adopted sons of God through faith in Christ do receive the grace of God that was poured out on Christ in all its fullness, but they only receive that grace partially. "We receive a part and are made, through the same grace, participants together in adopted sonship, although we are far removed from that dignity".[12] According to Frederick McLeod, Theodore was most influenced by the Greek idea that "God's wholly transcendent nature excludes any immediate and direct contact with created beings".[13] As a result, he could not admit the possibility of "any substantial union between God and His creatures, even Christ's human nature".[14]

Nestorius was indebted to his teacher, Theodore, in his own struggle with Cyril of Alexandria. He wrote that the title, *theotokos,* was not suitable, "for a real mother must be of the same substance as that which is born of her".[15] In his letter to Cyril of Alexandria, Nestorius argued that Mary should be called

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[10] *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii, vol 2,* p. 310, in, Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 124.

[11] *Theodore Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Joannis Apostoli,* J.-M. Vosté, (ed.), CSCO 115–116/Syr. 62–63, (Louvain: Officina Orientali, 1940), p. 59, in F.G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition,* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 160.

[12] *Theodore Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Joannis Apostoli,* p. 26, in Macleod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition,* p. 161

[13] McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition,* p. 114.

[14] McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition,* p. 114.

[15] *Ep. i ad Caelest,* in Loofs, *Nestoriana,* pp. 166-7, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 127.

Christotokos, bearer of Christ.[16] For Nestorius there could be no "hypostatic union of God the Word".[17] Another problem that Nestorius saw in Cyril's understanding of the Word of God indwelling the human body was the implication that the Word would have suffered death on the cross. The outcome of Cyril's view is that, "God the Word, who was united for the completion of the natural union, must endure naturally all the sufferings of death".[18] This would nullify the eternal nature of God the Word. For Nestorius, the only safeguard is to say that the death of Christ happened to the humanity rather than the Word of God, and that the union between the Word and the humanity was voluntary. "The union of God the Word with (the attributes of a man) is neither hypostatic nor natural but voluntary, consisting of a property of the will".[19] In this union of the Word and the humanity, the divine and human natures, which each have their own *prosopon,* are seen in one united *prosopon.* "The only begotten Son of God and the son of man each have their own *prosopon,* and in Christ it is one *prosopon* of Christ".[20] In other words, we see Christ acting as one person, but in reality, what we see might be the *prosopon* of the Word of God or the *prosopon* of the humanity. Thus, when Christ died on the cross, the *prosopon* of the humanity died, but the *prosopon* of the Word of God did not.

The Synod of Acacius held by the Church of the East in 486, produced a creedal statement on the incarnation and nature of Christ.

> (Christ had) two natures, divine and human . . . without confusion in their diversity . . . (yet with) perfect and

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[16] *Ep. Ii ad Cyrill,* in Loofs, *Nestoriana,* p. 177, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 127.

[17] Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides,* G.R. Driver and L. Hodgson, (eds and trans) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 294, in F.G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition,* p.179.

[18] *The Bazaar of Heracleides,* pp. 40–41, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 128.

[19] *The Bazaar of Heracleides,* p. 179, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 128.

[20] *The Bazaar of Heracleides,* p. 53, in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 128.

indissoluble cohesion of the divine with the human. And if
anyone thinks or teaches that suffering and change inheres in
the divinity, and if, when speaking of the unity of the person
of our Savior, he does not confess that He is perfect God and
perfect man, let him be anathema.[21]

This was most likely a reaction to the Council of Chalcedon in
451 at which a compromise between Nestorius and Cyril was
agreed, but which did not reinstate Nestorius. The Definition of
Chalcedon stated that Christ was perfect in Godhead and
manhood, consubstantial with the Father according to the
Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood.
Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, the God-bearer, and is to be
acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably,
indivisibly, and inseparably. The Synod of Acacius agreed with
the perfect God and perfect man statement and the lack of
confusion in the union of the divine and human. However, there
was a refusal to accept that the Virgin Mary is to be called God-
bearer.

     Relations between the Church of the East and the Orthodox
church that followed the Definition of Chalcedon became more
firmly ruptured at the Council of Constantinople in 553 where
Theodore of Mopsuestia was condemned as a heretic along with
Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 458), and Hiba, bishop of Edessa, who had
translated Theodore into Syriac.[22] The reaction of the Church of
the East was forthright. At the Ninth General Synod, called by
Patriarch Isho‘yahb I in 585, the following statement was issued.
"No man, whatever his ecclesiastical position may be, is
permitted to defame Theodore . . . or to reject his holy writings".[23]
This position was confirmed at the Synod of Mar Gregory I in 605,
where Mar Gregory insisted that schismatic ideas should be dealt

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[21]*Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil de Synodes Nestoriens,* J.B. Chabot, (ed.
and trans.), (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Klincksieck, 1902), p. 302, in
S.H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1 Beginnings to 1500,*
(New York: Orbis, 1998), p. 198.
[22] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1,* pp. 219–220.
[23] J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale,* p. 399, in Moffett, *A History of
Christianity in Asia, vol. 1,* p. 236.

with by proper exegesis of the Bible. As Stewart McCullough notes,

> The Catholicos noted the existence in the Church of certain schismatic ideas, often due to a perversion of the true sense of the Scripture. As a sure guide to the latter, the faithful turn to commentaries and other writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Anyone not recognizing the authority of Theodore, or calumniating him, is to be anathematized.[24]

The Christology of the Church of the East was defined by Cyrus of Edessa in the sixth century as being distinctive from both the Christology of the West Syrian church and the Coptic church in Egypt that followed the miaphysite view of Cyril of Alexandria, and from the Christology of the Orthodox churches. Cyrus of Edessa taught that, "The Word assumed from us a perfect man, showed him to be an exact observer of the divine commandments, made him live beyond all sin and perfected him in all righteousness".[25] In other words, The Church of the East confirmed a distinctive Christology among the churches of the Middle East. Christ was both perfect God and perfect man as the Orthodox churches affirmed, but he grew into that perfection by trial and testing, though without failing. His human nature strove to agree with his divine nature and overcame any temptation to disobey the will of God expressed by the Word of God indwelling him. If there was a union between the humanity and divinity it was a continual uniting of the human will with the divine will. The Orthodox view of the union of the Word of God with the humanity of Christ was that the two natures were so joined together that from the outset, there was no question that Christ would obey the will of God. Despite temptation coming his way, he was fully capable of dealing with it because the union of the human and the divine could not possibly be broached. Of course, the two natures being united was the language of the Orthodox

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[24] W.S. McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam,* (Choco CA: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 150.
[25] Cyrus of Edessa, *Explanation of the Passion,* iii.7, Macomber, (ed. and trans.), CSCO. *Syr.* 156, p. 76 in Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch,* p. 143.

and the Church of the East. As for the miaphysite churches, there was only one divine nature in Christ, who was the Word of God in a human body. The status of Christ's feelings, mind, and will was equivalent to the feelings, mind and will of the Word of God within the human body. They rejected the attempt of the diophysites to distinguish between the divine mind and the human mind in Christ, and held that it was not appropriate to divide up the thoughts and decisions of Christ into two minds, with him sometimes thinking human thoughts and at other times thinking divine ones.

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST IN BASRA

Basra is mentioned as a base for Christian mission to Arabia and India around the year 300 CE in the Church of the East *Chronicle of Seert,* written between the ninth and eleventh centuries. "In the time of Sahloupas (Shalupa) and of Papas (Papa), the two metropolitans of the orient, and of Stephen, patriarch of Rome . . . David (or Dudio, bishop of Bassarah (Basra) . . . left his see and departed for India where he converted a multitude of people".[26] According to Samuel Moffett, this is corroborated by the network of monasteries that have been discovered down the coast of the Arabian peninsula that found their origin in the inspiration of the missionary bishop David.[27] Jean Maurice Fiey points out that the bishop of Basra was elevated to a Metropolitan after 310.[28] This must indicate the recognition by the wider church that Basra had grown in importance as a Christian center of mission with monasteries in Arabia and probably in India related directly to Basra. Christophe Baumer mentions that Christian graves with Syriac inscriptions from the mid-third century have been discovered on the island of Kharg near the Persian coast of the Arabian gulf, and remains of a Church of the East monastery from

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[26] *Chronique de Seert,* A. Scher, (ed. and trans.), in *PO,* tome 4, fasc. 3, no. 17, (Turnhout: Brepols,1907), pp. 236 (26), 292 (82), in Moffett, p. 100.
[27] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1,* p. 101.
[28] See J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chretienne, vol. 3,* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1968), p. 266.

the fifth century have also been identified there.[29] Basra became a point of entry for goods from China and India on their way to Mesopotamia.[30] Thus, the city was a place of commerce that received people and ideas from further afield, and the Christian presence was considerable enough to support extension to those areas. Bishop Joseph of Edessa who was described as bishop of all the churches in Persia and of Great India at the Council of Nicea in 325, visited Kerala in 345 to further cement the relationship between the Church of the East. By 420, there was established a Metropolitan see of Rew Ardashir for the Indian churches.[31] Basra was also the impetus for mission to Arabia. Mar Odisho at the end of the fourth century founded a monastery on the island of Bahrain.[32] By the time of the emergence of Islam in the seventh century there were Christian communities all down the Arabian coast of the gulf. Christophe Baumer gives the following list.

> The monastery of al-Kusur on the Kuwaiti island of Failaka; the church of Akkaz on the Kuwaiti mainland; a church, several hermitages and cemeteries near al-Jubail and Thaj in modern Saudi Arabia; the monastery on the island of Tarut (Darin) in front of the eastern Saudi coast; the monastery on the peninsula of Qatar; the monastery of Marawah on an island belonging to the emirate of Abu Dhabi; and the great monastery and church of al-Khor on the neighbouring island of Sir Bani Yas.

Clearly, Basra as a base for sending missionaries down the Arabian gulf had a positive impact on the setting up of Christian communities along both sides of the waterway.

BASRA UNDER ISLAMIC RULE

In 637 the Muslim Arab army of Saʿad ibn abi Waqqāṣ defeated the Sassanian army of Rustam the Persian administrator, and the victors were welcomed by the Syriac speaking inhabitants of the

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[29] See C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity,* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016), p.22.
[30] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 22.
[31] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1,* p. 266.
[32] See Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 138.

land between the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. That same year, Saʿad ibn abi Waqqāṣ entered the capital of the Sassanian Empire Ctesiphon, which had been deserted by the emperor. Basra and Kufa became military bases for the Arab army, and Caliph ʿUmar (r. 634–644) ordered that the latter be the new capital for Iraq. The newly appointed governor of Basra, al-Ashʿari, invited a Church of the East scholar to act as his secretary.[33] This demonstrates that there were unprecedented opportunities under the Arabs for members of the Church of the East who had never been granted a share in the apparatus of government by the Sassanians. The Arabs fanned out further east and the next governor of Basra, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmir, led his army in the occupation of Persepolis in 650.[34] Kufa and Basra became the centers of Muslim life in Iraq until the building of Baghdad by the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr between 762 and 766.

By 670 Basra had a population of 300,000 and began to be the place where Arabic grammar was worked out for non-Arabs who had embraced Islam and who needed to be able to read the Qurʾan. Abu-l-Aswad al-Duʾali (d. 688) was followed by Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d.c. 786) who completed the first Arabic dictionary. His pupil the Persian Sībawayh (d.c. 793) wrote the first textbook on Arabic grammar. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) was the outstanding Muslim scholar from Basra who became noted for his asceticism and his relaying of traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad through his personal knowledge of seventy of those who took part in the battle of Badr.[35] Basra became a center for Sufism as a result of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's renown. One famous Sufi was the female poet Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 801) who had been a slave but was set free by her master. She was in the habit of walking round Basra carrying a torch in one hand and a ewer in the other. When asked why she was doing this, she replied, "I want to throw fire into Paradise and pour water into Hell so that these two veils

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[33] See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1,* p. 338.

[34] See P.H. Hitti, *History of the Arabs,* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 155–159.

[35] See Hitti, *History of the Arabs,* pp. 241-242.

disappear, and it becomes clear who worships God out of love, not out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise."[36]

The school of the Muʿtazila was founded by Wāṣil ibn Aʿṭāʾ (d. 748), a pupil of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in the early eighth century, who followed his teacher in holding that humans had free will to obey the commands of God.[37] Muʿtazili thinkers also believed that a Muslim who sins does not become an unbeliever, and that the unity of God requires that his attributes can have no existence in His essence. This meant that the Qurʾan could not be thought of as the eternal speech of God but must be regarded as the word created by God in time.

EAST SYRIAN CHRISTIAN REACTIONS TO MUSLIM RULE

After the Muslim invasion of Mesopotamia in 637 the reaction of the Christian population was encapsulated in the response of the Patriarch of the Church of the East who experienced the conquest. Despite the fact that the Sassanians had long ruled the region beyond the Euphrates river, and had upheld Zoroastrianism as the official religion, there was a considerable minority Christian presence. The largest Christian community was the East Syrian church. A much smaller Christian community was the West Syrian church that developed in the sixth century after Jacob Baradaeus had gathered Syriac speaking Christians into a new denomination who wished to maintain the miaphysite belief that Christ had one divine nature in a human body. As a result, when the Muslim governor of the area related to Christians, he dealt primarily with the majority group, the Church of the East.

The Patriarch of the Church of the East from 649–659, Ishoʿyahb III of Adiabene, lived through the conquest of the Arabs in 637. In a letter written to an East Syrian church leader, named Simeon, he notes that the Arabs were initially quite positive about the church. Although Ishoʿyahb believes that it was the will of God that the Arabs had come to rule them, he writes of his surprise that the Arabs had adopted a rather supportive view of

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[36] See M. Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 55.
[37] See Hitti, *History of the Arabs,* p. 245.

the church, when he says, "not only do they not oppose Christianity, but they praise our faith, honour the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries".[38] This commendation of the new rulers contrasts markedly with the way Christians in Palestine and Egypt lamented the negative attitude of the Arab conquerors to their church communities in the wake of the invasion of the Arabs.[39] Another Church of the East writer, the unnamed author of *The Chronicle of Khuzistan* written after 652, agreed with Ishoʿyahb that it had been the will of God for the conquest of the Arabs to happen.[40] "The victory of the sons of Ishmael was from God. Indeed the victory is his. But God has not yet handed Constantinople over to them".[41]

According to Robert Hoyland, this generous view of the Arab conquerors could be the result of a deliberate policy on the part of Ishoʿyahb to foster a respectful relationship with the new Arab governor. This attitude was a continuation of the previous type of relationship between Church of the East Patriarchs and the Sassanian rulers over several centuries. The Church of the East, unlike the churches in Egypt and Palestine, were used to being subservient to non-Christian rule. Hoyland rightly argues that the Christians who had been under Sassanian rule "had no lost or diminished sovereignty to lament", so they sought "freedom to pursue their worship unmolested in return for political loyalty and payment of taxes".[42] Because East Syrian Christians had been used to negotiating their way of life for the whole of their history as a minority group under sometimes painful conditions imposed

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[38] See R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam,* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), p. 181.

[39] See I.M. Beaumont, 'Early Christian attitudes towards Islam', in D. Thomas, (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations,* (Routledge: London and New York, 2018), 107–114, pp. 107–109.

[40] See H.G.B. Teule, 'The chronicle of Khuzistan', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema, (eds)*, Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history, vol. 1 (600–900),* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp 131–132.

[41] See, 'The Khuzistan Chronicle', in M.P. Penn, *When Christians first met Muslims,* (University of California Press: Oakland CA, 2015), p. 52.

[42] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it,* p. 25.

on them by their Sassanian masters, this meant that they could afford to be affirmative about the attitude of the new Arab rulers who turned out to be less overbearing than the Sassanians. Whereas in other parts of Middle East there were Christian communities that were used to being the majority and who now had to swallow the bitter pill of rule by people who quickly dictated terms to them concerning how they could live their lives.

Within a couple of generations by the end of the seventh century, East Syrian Christians had begun to interpret Muslim rule as part of the divine scheme of history expressed in apocalyptic writing. In *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, which* was written in Syriac in 691-2, there is a depiction of seven millennial periods based on seven epochs mentioned in the book of Daniel. The fifth millenium is that of "the sons of Ishmael", indicating that the ruling Arabs were being named after their supposed ancestor, Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar from the story in Genesis 16:15. The sixth millenium belongs to the Greeks who rule a Christian kingdom that supersedes the Muslim hegemony. However, during the fifth millenium many Christians would give up their Christian allegiance and embrace the faith of the sons of Ishmael. This would fulfil the prediction of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46, when he warned that people would be separated as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats.[43] The writer is reflecting the state of affairs for the Church of the East in the late seventh century. It is clear that within two generations of the arrival of the Arabs, significant numbers of the East Syrian church had publicly transferred their allegiance to the religion of their rulers. This movement of Christians to Islam was interpreted as the result of God's judgement on the church by John of Penek, an East Syrian monk, who wrote *The Book of main points* between 686 and 693. He maintained that God had sent the Arabs in order to punish Christians for their unwillingness to turn away from their sins.[44] John held that these Arabs could not possibly have

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[43] See L. Greisiger, 'The apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac)', in D. Thomas and B. Roggema, (eds), *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history, vol. 1 (600–900),* 163–71, pp.164–167.

[44] See L. Greisiger, 'John bar Penkāyē. The book of main points', in *CMR 1,* pp. 176–81.

conquered so much territory without being sent by God. "God gave victory into their hands. For apart from divine aid how could naked men riding with neither armor nor shield be victorious"?[45]

By the early eighth century Arabic had become the language of administration throughout the Muslim Empire. This indicated to Christians that they had to accept the inevitability of Arab rule for the foreseeable future. Some East Syrian writers, who had become familiar with the scriptures that the Arabs had brought, began to offer criticisms of the Arabs as having inferior beliefs and practices to Christians. This polemical style is evident from the early ninth century *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* which exists in both West and East Syrian writings. This is the tale of a Syrian monk named Sergius Baḥīrā who came across a young man called Muḥammad in Arabia and who had a vision of this young Muḥammad becoming the future leader of the Arabs. In the light of the vision, Sergius Baḥīrā instructed Muḥammad about the true God, but he recognized that Muḥammad was not capable of receiving the full teaching of Christianity because of the undeveloped nature of Arab culture. For example, Sergius Baḥīrā taught Muḥammad that there would be physical pleasures in the afterlife because he thought that this would be more acceptable to Arabs than the more spiritual experience of the afterlife believed by Christians. He also knew that the Trinity would be far too difficult for Muḥammad to comprehend but Sergius Baḥīrā did point out the Word of God and the Spirit of God to Muḥammad, which can be seen in the way Muḥammad included these titles for Jesus Christ in the Qurʾan in 4:171, where Christ is called a "Word of God and a Spirit from Him". However, after the death of Sergius Baḥīrā, a Jew called Kaʿb al-Aḥbār came to influence Muḥammad and challenged the Christian teaching he had received from Sergius Baḥīrā, with the result that Muḥammad toned this Christian teaching down in the Qurʾan.[46] The influence of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār can be seen in *The Affair of the Qurʾan* found as an appendix to an East Syrian version of the *Legend of Sergius*

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[45] See M.P. Penn, 'Book of Main Points', in *When Christians first met Muslims,* p. 89.

[46] B. Roggema, 'The legend of Sergius Baḥīrā', in *CMR I,* pp. 600–603.

Baḥīrā, which says that the Qurʾan was first written by the Syrian monk Baḥīrā, but that a Jew called Kaʿb al-Aḥbār added laws about the lex talionis and divorce. But when the governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf, discovered that the text of the Qurʾan had been corrupted by Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, he insisted that all copies of the Qurʾan were destroyed. He then asked Christian leaders to explain the Bible to him and he added these corrections to the final version which he named "the Qurʾan". This story shows Christian knowledge of the Muslim tradition that al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf divided the Qurʾan into sections and chapters.[47] Such a polemical approach to the scriptures of the Arab rulers was one way of dealing with the reality of East Syrian Christians forsaking the church for Islam. Making the Qurʾan a somewhat inferior document that basically incorporates Christian teaching from a monk might have been thought to be an acceptable procedure to try to stop Christians giving up the faith, but it probably did not have the desired result.

Another path for Christians was to argue that Muḥammad was actually critiquing his own Arab culture from a Christian perspective. In other words, the message that Muḥammad delivered in the Qurʾan was based on Christian truth that Muḥammad knew would be difficult for his people to understand. In this scenario, Muḥammad was not duped by a Jew into removing Christian elements from his message, but was faithful to the Christian teaching he had received. This is the view presented in *The Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab notable,* written in Syriac by an East Syrian Christian who describes the dialogue taking place in the 720's when Maslama was governor of Iraq. The author thinks that the titles given in Q4:171 to Jesus, "the Word of God and his Spirit", demonstrate that Muḥammad was depending on Luke 1:35, where the Angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High".[48]

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[47] B. Roggema, 'The affair of the Qur'ān', in *CMR I,* pp. 595–596.
[48] B. Roggema, 'Disputation between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab notable', in *CMR 1,* 268–273, p. 270.

According to the author, Muḥammad believed in the Trinity but felt that he had to communicate deep truths in simple terms so that he would gain a hearing from his uncultured Arab audience. Muḥammad is portrayed as a sincere monotheist struggling to get this across in a totally polytheistic environment. There is no doubt that such a view of the integrity of Muḥammad would be much more congenial in actual dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The author has the Arab ask the Christian what he thinks of Muḥammad.

> Arab: Tell me the truth, how is Muḥammad our prophet considered in your eyes?
>
> Monk: As a wise and God-fearing man who freed you from idolatry and brought you to know the one true God.
>
> Arab: Why, if he was wise, did he not teach us from the beginning about the mystery of the Trinity as you profess?
>
> Monk: You know, of course, that a child, when it is born, because it does not possess the full faculties for receiving solid food, is nourished with milk for two years, and then they feed it with meat. Thus also Muḥammad, because he saw your simpleness and the deficiency of your understanding, he first taught you of the one true God . . . for you were children in terms of your understanding.[49]

Muḥammad is said by the monk to be a man who believed in the one true God within a Trinitarian framework, but who made the tactical decision not to emphasize the Triune nature of the one true God because the Arabs were like children who were not at the right stage to grasp this advanced teaching.

Yet another Christian approach to the message of Muḥammad was to argue that a comprehensive reading of the Qurʾan would result in the affirmation of Christian truth. This type of argument is found in the writing of the Church of the East Patriarch, Timothy I (d. 828), who reports his conversation with the Muslim Caliph al-Mahdī, who had invited Timothy to answer questions about Christianity in Baghdad in 781. One of the questions arose from the apparent rejection of the crucifixion of

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[49] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it,* p. 538.

Jesus as an established fact in the Qurʾan. The Caliph quoted
Q4:157, "They did not crucify him" and asked Timothy whether
he agreed with it or not. Timothy ignored Q4:157 but referred
instead to Q19:33, where the infant Jesus says, "Peace be on me,
the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive".
Timothy argued that the infant Jesus must have meant that he
would die and then be brought to life. Al-Mahdī did not accept
Timothy's reading of the text in chronological order, and
explained that Jesus is not actually dead but will die in the future.
In this interpretation, al-Mahdī shows how Muslim scholars had
come to believe that Jesus did not die at the end of his life, but
was taken alive to heaven, and would come back to earth to
establish Islam and then subsequently die. Timothy went on to
argue that Jesus could not possibly have been raised to heaven as
the Qurʾan declares unless he had first died an actual death. "If
Jesus is not dead he would not have ascended to heaven. But it is
affirmed by you that the ascension of Jesus to heaven and his
resurrection took place a long time ago, as your book testifies".[50]
Timothy sees a contradiction between the plain meaning of
Q19:33 and al-Mahdī's interpretation of it. It is clear that Timothy
chose not argue directly against the apparent rejection of the
crucifixion of Jesus in the Qurʾan, but preferred to use a different
text from the Qurʾan to hold up to scrutiny the standard Muslim
view of the end of Jesus' life put forward by al-Mahdī. By doing
so, Timothy was upholding the Qurʾan as a scripture that
supported Christian truth. Therefore, Christians should be
involved in the process of interpreting the Qurʾan to unfold this
reality when engaged in dialogue with Muslims.

THE CHURCH OF THE EAST AS A MILLET IN THE ISLAMIC EMPIRE

The attitude of the Arabs to the local Christian populations was
determined by the teaching of the Qurʾan that Christians along
with Jews were people of the book. In practice this meant that

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[50] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdi and the Nestorian Patriarch
Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823),*
(Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1975), appendix, p. 45.

Christians could maintain their community life by the payment of an annual tax, *jizya*. In Iraq and Persia the tax was collected by the churches and passed on to the Patriarch who would present the funds to the Muslim government. This raised the status of the Patriarch of the Church of the East to a position of primacy since he technically represented all Christian churches including the West Syrian miaphysites to the rulers. In other words, when a Muslim governor wished to consult a Christian leader he naturally invited the East Syrian Patriarch to engage with him. This could even mean that the Caliph in Damascus called on the East Syrian Patriarch even though the Church of the East was not the dominant Christian community in the city. In 691, Patriarch Henanisho I (r. 685–701) was asked by Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik to give his opinion of Islam. When he replied that Islam had been established by the sword and not by miracles such as Moses and Jesus brought, ʿAbd al-Malik thought of cutting out the tongue of the Patriarch but relented and dismissed him never to appear before him again.[51] This story indicates the precarious nature of the relationship between church leadership and Muslim government. The response of Henanisho can be compared with that of Timothy cited above. The latter did not openly criticize Islam in his encounter with Caliph al-Mahdī. Perhaps he had learned a lesson from his predecessor about the propriety of open critique of Islam.

There appear to have been agreements reached between the new rulers and the Church of the East to determine the permissions granted to Christians under Muslim rule. Only Muslims were exempt from paying the *jizya,* since they were required to police the state, and Christians and others were basically paying for that policing. It is interesting to note that in Iraq and Persia, Zoroastrians were regarded as monotheists who had to pay the *jizya,* despite not being named in the Qurʾan as a people of the book. Laws were administered by each millet, so Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians were given the responsibility of handing down judgements on members of their communities unless there was an incident involving a dispute with a Muslim.

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[51] See Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 144.

In this case a Muslim judge would make a ruling. The testimony of a non-Muslim was of less weight and the penalty imposed on a non-Muslim was often harsher than on a Muslim. The life of a Muslim was valued more highly than that of a non-Muslim, such that the penalty for a Muslim taking the life of a non-Muslim was the payment of blood money, but for a non-Muslim taking the life of a Muslim was death.[52]

When the Caliphate moved from Damascus to Baghdad after 762, the Patriarch of the Church of the East became the representative for all Christian communities in the Abbasid Empire. This was simply a recognition of the numerical strength of the East Syrian church in Iraq and further east where the center of the Abbasid regime was now located. Baumer points out that the Church of the East was less controversial to the Abbasids than the miaphysites who held to the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity, and the Orthodox who were fiercely loyal to Byzantium. East Syrian views of Jesus were much closer to those of Muslims, and the Church of the East had never been allied to the Greek speaking Orthodox churches, thus was less likely to be influenced by "the arch-enemy Byzantium".[53] Once the building of the new capital Baghdad was completed, the Patriarch of the Church of the East was invited to live there to be always close to the seat of Islamic government. The testimony of Timothy I (r. 780-825) was that he was a frequent visitor at court meeting all kinds of people there and being involved in discussions with leading people from a variety of millets as well as leading Muslims.[54]

One of the developments from the new center of Islam in Baghdad was the desire of the Caliphs for translations of Greek thinkers into Arabic. Naturally, they turned to Christians who had already translated Greek thought into Syriac and were depending on these works in their own medical training school in Gondeshapur. Caliphs were beholden to Christian doctors as their personal physicians. During the Patriarchate of Timothy, around

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[52] See Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 148.
[53] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 148.
[54] See Bidawid, *Les Lettres du Patriarche Nestorien Timothée I.*

fifty Syriac speaking translators were engaged in translating, Timothy himself being one of them. The Caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) and al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–832) sought Greek manuscripts from Byzantium and so there was often a process of transposing these to Syriac and then to Arabic. As a result of this teamwork over several decades, "The Arab world had access to the works of the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, the Physicians Galen and Hippocrates, and the mathematicians Euclid and Ptolemy".[55] The Church of the East was largely responsible for bringing the fruit of Greek writing to Muslim intellectuals who would go on to develop their own expertise in mathematics, astronomy and medicine.

CONCLUSION

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī inherited both the theology of his East Syrian predecessors and the various attitudes to Islam evident in previous Church of the east writing. He was faithful to the Nestorian rejection of the title *theotokos,* "God bearer", for the Virgin Mary, and upheld the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia that there was a union of wills between the Word of God and the human being that the Word assumed. He emphasised the importance of the training of the assumed human being in aligning his will to that of the Word of God. He also upheld Theodore's insistence that only the assumed human being died on the cross.

ʿAmmār was close to Patriarch Timothy in his attitude to Islam. He appealed to the Qurʾan for concepts that supported Christian teaching, and defended Christian practice by referring to the practice of Muslims. There is an absence of polemic against Islam in his work. He seems to accept that Muḥammad brought the message of Islam without being taught by a Christian monk or a Jew. The message of Muḥammad in the Qurʾan is different in several respects from that of Jesus found in the gospels. He puts these alternative messages up for debate and argues that the promise of eternal life through faith in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a better type of faith, because it gives hope for

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[55] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 157.

humans that one of their kind passed through death and came out on the other side alive. His being raised by God from death guarantees that those who believe in him will be raised from death.

Michel Hayek, the editor of the Arabic texts written by ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, has argued that ʿAmmār is the first theologian to compose a systematic theology in Arabic.[56] He deals with all the essential doctrines in turn from creation to eternity. However, this theology is worked out in dialogue with alternative beliefs. He argues for creation in dialogue with Greek philosophers, and with Zoroastrians. He upholds human free will in debate with Muslim determinists. He presents the Triune God using Aristotle's concept of attributes that Muʿtazili Muslims appealed to. He defends the possibility of the incarnation by appealing to the generosity of God towards his creatures held by Muʿtazilis. He likens the devotion of Christians to the cross to the devotion of Muslims to the black stone of the Kaʿba in Mecca.

The significance of his systematic theology goes far beyond the impact he had on Muslim intellectuals in his time. ʿAmmār shares with Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), the West Syrian philosopher and theologian active in intellectual circles in Baghdad, the role of Christian thinkers who were debating partners of Muslims at the highest level. Nevertheless, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī came before Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and established the precedent for such engagement.

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[56] See M. Hayek, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. La Première Somme de théologie chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du christianisme', *Islamochristiana* 2, (1976), pp. 69–133.

CHAPTER TWO.
ARGUING FOR ONE CREATOR

ʿAmmār opens his Book of Questions and Answers with a debate about God being the one Creator of the world. This might seem a strange choice in a document dedicated to the Muslim Caliph, given that Muslims were emphatic that God is one. However, ʿAmmār is indicating to the Caliph that he is aware of the strength of Zoroastrian belief in the world being the work of two rival creative beings. This traditional belief system of the Persians was evidently alive and well in the Persia of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Zoroastrians had been given the status of a people of the book by the Muslim rulers and were therefore free to continue to practice their faith in exchange for the payment of the *jizya*. Indeed, it was most probably the case that Zoroastrians continued to be the major religious community in Persia, though some of them would have embraced Islam to avoid paying the tax and to benefit from social advancement. Basra was the main point of access for Persians to the sea for those involved in trade and Zoroastrians would have been a prominent group in the city in Sassanian times. This presence doubtless continued under Muslim rule. In a sense it was natural for a Basrian Christian to take Zoroastrian views seriously in attempting to defend Christianity. The Caliph resided in Baghdad and was himself close enough to the Persian section of the Islamic Empire to realise the numerical strength of his Zoroastrian subjects. ʿAmmār thus hopes to interest the Caliph in a sound defence of the oneness of God which he hopes will prove that Christians share with Muslims a conviction that there is only one Creator.

ʿAmmār knows that many Muslims suspected that Christians did not really believe in the oneness of God as a result of their holding to the Trinity. While this knowledge comes to the fore when ʿAmmār defends the oneness of God in His triune state, it is a presupposition of the opening argument of the Book of Questions and Answers. It was imperative to establish right at the outset that Christians were passionate in defending the oneness of God. In that way, ʿAmmār could invite the Caliph to appreciate that Christians were just as forthright as Muslims in arguing against any who believed in a multiplicity of divine beings. If he was successful in engaging the interest of the Caliph, then ʿAmmār might have a hearing for the more difficult defense of the Trinity and the incarnation that would follow. ʿAmmār wants to establish common ground with Muslims on which to build his case for the truth of Christianity. When he comes to defending the Trinity, ʿAmmār argues that it is the best form of oneness.

ZOROASTRIAN BELIEF IN TWO CREATORS

Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, lived sometime between the twelfth and seventh centuries BCE. He believed that there was a 12,000 year struggle between Ahura Mazda, the god of goodness and light, and Ahiram, the god of evil and darkness. Ahura Mazda created the world as a place of war against Ahiram. The texts of Zoroaster were gathered into the book of the Avesta during the reign of Vologases (r. 51–78 CE). The Sassanian rulers advocated Zoroastrian teaching along with belief in older Persian gods such as Mithra, Anahita, and Verethraghna, which were included in their version of the Avesta in the time of Ardashir (r. 224–240) and Shapur (r. 241–272). In the new version of the Avesta, Ahura Mazda and Ahiram are depicted as "two original spirits, twins, who are known for being in opposition to one another. In thought, word and deed they are two, the good and the bad".[1] The account of these two twins continues with the utter opposition of the one to the other. "When these two spirits, Ahura Mazda and Ahiram,

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[1] 'The Avesta,' Yasna 30, 3, in Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 63.

encountered each other, one created existence and the other non-existence. This situation will last for eternity".[2]

The Sassanians actively enforced the dualism of Zoroaster as the state religion. Vahram II (r. 276–293 CE) had his Christian wife tortured and executed for failing to renounce her faith and embrace Zoroastrianism. In this period the Zoroastrian high priest, Kartir, claimed to have eliminated rival religions, such as Jews, shamans, Brahmans, Greek and Syriac speaking Christians, Mandeans and Manichaeans, on an inscription on the tower of Naqsh-e Rostam.[3] Shapur II (r. 309–379) imposed a special tax on Christians who he believed to be supporting the Christian Roman Empire with whom he was at war. The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Shimun I, refused to collect the double taxation and was ordered to worship the sun and the fire by Shapur. Shimun is said to have replied, "Why should we worship something that does not see our worshipping? And why pray to one who does not hear our prayers? And why praise something that knows nothing of its own light? Far be it from Christians to worship creatures as they should the Creator and confuse the Creator with his creation".[4] However, Shimun was executed along with one hundred priests in 341. This was followed up by mob violence against Christians which was so devastating that the see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon lay vacant until the election of Isaac I in 399. This situation changed in 410 when Yazdgerd I (r. 399–420) granted freedom of worship to Christians. But this was short lived once his successor Vahram V 9 (r. 421–438) began to persecute Christians once again. Yazdgerd II (r. 438–457) sought to remove Christians altogether and might have succeeded had not Hormizd III (r. 457–469) and Piroz I (r. 469–484) relented. In the final year of the reign of Piroz a new wave of persecution broke out before his death at the hands of the Huns. Christophe Baumer comments, "It is truly astounding that the Christians accepted their martyrdom practically without resistance, and no rebellion arose. Presumably the inner fire of faith and the ideal of following Christ

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[2] 'The Avesta,' Yasna 30, 4, in Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 63.
[3] See Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 65.
[4] See Baumer, *The Church of the East*, p. 69.

absorbed all the vital energies of the victims, so that armed opposition was not an option".[5] It appears that the persecution of Christians settled down after this and the Church of the East was able to exist by the payment of taxation. So when the Arabs took over Sassanian territory in the 630's the Church of the East exchanged one form of rule for another and paid tax to the new rulers as they did to the old.

This longstanding state religion of the Sassanians lasted until the arrival of the Arabs and the establishment of Islam as the new state religion. By the time that ʿAmmār wrote, Zoroastrianism had become one of the religions of the Caliphate with no special position. Nevertheless, the fact that ʿAmmār chose to debate with the concept of two creators rather than one shows how popular the old state religion continued to be.

PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF ONE CREATOR FROM GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers* opens with a section on Proof for the oneness of God the Creator in twenty-eight questions. Questions one to two dialogue with Greek philosophy to establish the truth of one Creator. The questioner is set up by ʿAmmār as someone who does not believe in creation but holds that matter is eternal.

ʿAmmār's first question is asked by what he calls "a person of unbelief" who seeks evidence that there was a being who created the world. The answer relates to the way the world functions in harmony. Given that the world is composed of four basic elements, earth, water, fire and air, the disparate elements of the world would be chaotic if there was no co-ordinating principle that enabled them to work together. This is the first proof that there was one being who set up the world with these elements that function well. ʿAmmār confidently claims that, "He, by his power, is its establisher. He controls its complex structure, determining the role of each of its elements, whether agreeing

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[5] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 74.

with or opposing the other".[6] It is notable that ʿAmmār appeals to the Greek concept of the four basic elements of the world for his proof that the world was created. The Stoics who first proposed the four elements did not hold to a Creator of them.[7] But ʿAmmār insists that these elements would cancel each other out if they were not co-ordinated by a being who managed them well.

He turns to the human body for further evidence of the hand of a Creator. The manner of the co-ordination of the parts of the body by the human mind is the second proof that there was one Creator who designed the world in which human beings could thrive. ʿAmmār concludes, "To the witness of reason, no clearer or more obvious evidence is needed, for the existence of your Creator, than His composition of your body from these different and opposing characteristics, and His creation of a rational soul that He constructed within man by His power and His wisdom".[8]

The second question relates to the proposal that the four elements were not made by a Creator but rather eternally exist. "The claim of those who speak of eternal material is invalid. They claim that, from this material the Maker made use of varieties of substances and determined the types of forms".[9] Here ʿAmmār is involved in a discussion with alternative Greek opinion to that of the Stoics. Plato held that the Demiurge formed the world from already existing materials.[10] ʿAmmār shows his familiarity with different types of Greek thinking. He poses a question to those who believe that the four elements always existed and never came into being. "So, from which thing is matter newly created? Is it produced from another preceding matter"?[11] He gives the answer

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[6] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 96.

[7] The fourfold division of the cosmos by Stoic philosophers in which two active elements, fire and air, relate to two passive elements, earth and water, is assumed by ʿAmmār to be reliable as a ground for understanding the make-up of the world. For Stoic physics and metaphysics see K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfield and M. Schofield, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 407.

[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 97.

[9] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers'. p. 98.

[10] See Plato's 'Timeaus'.

[11] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 99.

of Aristotle that there cannot be an endless chain of reproduction of material without an unmoved mover at the origin of everything.[12] "If it preceded from something that existed before it, then you have transformed it into the eternal which is endless".[13] The discussion of such Greek philosophy had become central to the debates held by Muslim intellectuals in Basra. ʿAmmār is demonstrating his competence as an interpreter of the Greek inheritance and his agreement with his Muslim debating partners that the best of Greek thought can be harnessed to proving that the world was created by God. These first two questions are taken up with Greek conceptions of the world. ʿAmmār has set down a marker of his ability to defend the one Creator in dialogue with Greek philosophy. His credentials as a serious philosopher have been established in the hearing of the Caliph, who himself recognized the fundamental significance of Greek thinking in the establishment of truth. On this shared foundation he can now show in questions three to six how dualism has no rational credibility, and set up the claim of Christians to be as ardent monotheists as Muslims.

PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF ONE CREATOR FROM GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

ʿAmmār also refers to Greek philosophers in his subsequent writing, *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy.* He points out that Plato and Aristotle testified that God is one.[14] He quotes from the writing of Aristotle where Aristotle says that the world was caused by an eternally existing Being.

> Aristotle, in his book about the state of the world and the heavens, after speaking about heaven and earth, and air, water and fire, and other substances of the world, says, "We must now speak about the one who is the cause of all of this.

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[12] See Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'.

[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 99.

[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy', in M. Hayek, (ed.) *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et Controverses,* (Beyrouth: Dar al-Mashreq, 1977), 20–90, p. 22.

> For when we speak about all these things it is not good to omit to speak about the one who is their cause." He says a little further on, "He is the true God . . . who directs all things, who is wise . . . the heavenly beings proceed from his power, and thereafter one thing after another, resulting in earthly beings."[15] In another of his books known as *The Book of Existence and Decay*, after saying that the sun and the stars move and guide everything, he says, "Above these is another who oversees them and who is not overseen and nothing influences him, for he is everlasting, unchanging and unfaltering, and one in number."[16]

Plato also upheld the existence of one creative being. ʿAmmār quotes from the writing of Plato, who says, "The forms of all things exist in the knowledge of the bestower, like the mark on a seal, and after He created everything this is like the mark in the clay, which not being separated from the seal can be seen in the clay".[17]

In both of his books, ʿAmmār relies on Greek thought to establish proofs of a Creator, demonstrating that he believed such a foundation to be acceptable to Muslims with whom he was attempting to dialogue. He sets an example to his fellow Christians of relying on the heritage of Greek thinking to establish proofs of the existence of one Creator of everything. In other words, ʿAmmār depends on rational arguments for the one Creator rather than beginning with the revelation of his oneness in scripture. He appeals to reason to supports what scripture reveals.

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[15] This is a reference to Aristotle's belief in a mover of all that exists who moves without being moved, a being that is eternal, substantial and actual expressed in his 'Metaphysics'. See Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', 12, 7. 1072a 23–26, in *Aristotle Works vol. 2*, J. Barnes, (ed.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 1694.

[16] See Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', 12, 7. 1072a 23–26, in Aristotle Works *vol. 2*, J. Barnes, (ed.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 1694. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 23.

[17] ʿAmmār reports Plato's argument in his 'Timaeus' that a demiurge created intelligence in the soul and the soul in the body, such that his work was the fairest and the best. See Plato, 'Timaeus', 30bc, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, (eds), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 1162–1163. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 23.

PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF ONE CREATOR AGAINST ZOROASTRIAN BELIEF IN TWO CREATORS IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions three to six deal with the dualism of Zoroastrians. Now that ʿAmmār has proved that there is one Creator of the world, he turns his attention to those who hold to two creators. Question three raises the possibility that there are two beings involved in the production of the world. ʿAmmār has the questioner ask, "What is the evidence that their Creator and designer is one rather than two opposing entities—as we experience their opposition in the world, between life and death, health and illness, wealth and poverty, good and evil, light and darkness, and benefit and harm"?[18] These opposing forces are not evidence of two creators in opposition, argues ʿAmmār, but rather the fact that what has the potential to pull apart and fragment actually works to the ultimate good rather than the loss of life is proof of one mind directing everything. "If such contrast was due to the opposition between two managers, instead of what is seen of the beneficial outcomes, there would be contention and corruption".[19] Human society would not function if different kinds of people did not co-operate. "They are unable to live, apart from helping each other".[20] The various occupations of human beings do not work independently of each other. "It would not be possible for each of them to employ himself to establish his life. Each one would become his own farmer, grocer, carpenter, blacksmith, weaver, and tailor, providing himself with everything he needs without the help of others".[21]

The dualist concedes that people may have been created to co-operate with each other, but suggests that the two creators had that purpose in mind.

> If the two who created were cooperating and compatible, not opposing and conflicting—each of them created various types of creatures that possess the goodness for the world and its

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[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 100.
[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 100.
[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 101.
[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 101.

people; both cooperating in one coherent management, according to what we see from the good outcomes of situations, as you have described?[22]

ʿAmmār asks, if one of the two created the entire world, how would the creation of a particular element by a second creator fit? "We cannot conceive any of these elements in isolation to be good for anything; an element cannot benefit anyone without these elements cooperating in harmony with each other, as we have established earlier in our argument".[23] The work of creation is so integrated that there is no logic to holding to two creators rather than one. Reason supports a united mind behind the existence of the world.

> It is not a trait of the Almighty Wise God to invent what has no use in it; this is not among his attributes. If, by creating one element alone, He purposefully wanted to create this whole world beautifully, then He created some and neglected others, leaving some to be completed by another deity, then this would have been from ignorance or impotence without doubt. This is not one of the attributes of the One who is able by His wisdom to create a group of creatures from nothing.[24]

ʿAmmār appeals to the wisdom of God as the energy behind creation. Nothing was created out of place and everything was created for a wise purpose. Dualism undermines that wise purpose, so must be denied.

The Zoroastrian returns in the fifth question to his previous argument that the two creators actually co-operated in their creative work. "Who can deny that the two deities cooperated in the creation of all creatures"?[25] ʿAmmār replies by stating that co-operation is something that is seen in created beings. A constructor of a building needs help to assist him in building it using bodily members. God has no need of such help. A governor seeks help from his officials but if the rest of the people oppose him then he fails to achieve his government of the people. God is

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[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 102.
[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 102.
[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 102–103.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 103.

not like such a governor who is unable to execute his own command.

The final question posed by the Zoroastrian concerns the inner intention of the two creators. Could they not have been united in will and intention to create together? To this argument ʿAmmār replies, "Does not the cooperation itself demonstrate the weakness of two helpers and their incapacity together, as well as their impotence and ignorance, since each of them uses his companion's help without any need of help"?[26] The very need to argue for two creators is an admission that they both fall short of perfection. A perfect Creator has no need of assistance in His work. ʿAmmār ends the debate with the Zoroastrian by appealing to Qurʾanic concepts of the Creator without formally quoting the Qurʾan. In this way he is submitting to the Caliph his proper credentials as a *Mutakallim,* a thinker who uses reason to defend truth revealed in scripture. Perhaps he had already done this in the presence of the Caliph to whom he dedicates the work. He concludes,

> A rational person is convinced by this analogy that the Creator of these creatures is One,[27] Almighty and Wise,[28] who has no helper in creating them, and no supporter for Him in their production. Rather, He is the One, the Creator,[29] the Determiner, and the Controller of its government. He has no partner, opponent, helper, or associate.[30]

ʿAmmār sounds like a Muslim Muʿtazili intellectual here, using language familiar to his debating partners. The first six questions of his *Book of Questions and Answers* set out how he intends to carry on the presentation of his arguments as conforming to the principles of the Muʿtazila, and so gain a hearing from them and the Caliph who is their patron.

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[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 103.
[27] God is called "one" twenty-one times in the Qurʾan.
[28] God is called "wise" seventy-six times in the Qurʾan.
[29] God is called "creator" eleven times in the Qurʾan.
[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 103–104. That God has no partner, helper or associate is stated seventy-three times in the Qurʾan.

Dualist beliefs refuted in The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy

ʿAmmār has only a very brief mention of dualism in *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy*. He joins together three dualist groups, the Zoroastrians, the Manichaeans, and the Daysanites as essentially saying that there are two spiritual beings in opposition to one another, one a force for good and the other for evil.

> We observe the Magians,[31] the Manichaeans,[32] the Daysanites,[33] and others like them, despite their polytheism, testifying that there are two eternal beings, saying that one of them is a god and the other a devil; yet, in spite of their error, they believe in only one god, since they do not call the other one a god, but rather call him filthy and accursed.[34]

ʿAmmār seems to relegate the second eternal being in each case to the role of a spiritual being that is not fit to be worshipped. In other words, he interprets these three dualistic beliefs as supporting monotheism, since only the being that promotes good is judged to be a 'god'. This gives him the opportunity to argue that even the dualists really believe in one god. Defining the being that promotes evil as a 'devil' demotes the power and influence of the second deity to the rank of an evil angel in the conceptualisation of the pure monotheists, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Therefore, even the dualists unwittingly support Biblical and Qurʾanic notions of the supremacy of God over all spiritual beings. However, there is a flaw to this interpretation of the second deity as equivalent to the devil. In the Biblical and Qurʾanic accounts of the devil, he is described as a rebellious angel, refusing to accept his role as a spiritual being created to

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[31] Magians were followers of Zoroaster whose religion posited an opposition between good and evil deities, and was the main religious tradition in Persia before the Islamic period.

[32] Manichaeism was founded by Mani (d. 274 CE), and was a development of Zoroastrian dualism with elements taken from Christianity.

[33] Daysanites followed the teaching of Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222 CE), who held to dualistic views of the power of good and evil.

[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.

serve God. But the Zoroastrians did not follow this account as we have already seen above. They really did hold to two opposing powers that eternally exist. ʿAmmār does quote them as believing in the eternity of the two gods, yet seeks to undermine the credibility of their assertion of the eternity of the second deity.

The Manichaeans believed in two eternal powers of good and evil, the good manifesting in light, spirit and soul, and the evil in darkness and physicality. The evil power took control of aspects of good light and managed to bind these to physicality, and produced the physical world and human beings. Salvation for humans would come from release of the light from being trapped in the physical body. Abstention from killing, eating meat, sexual reproduction, growing vegetables, drinking wine and milk, private property, physical work, medication, washing body or clothes more than once a year, was the way of salvation.[35] ʿAmmār reduces the complexity of this view of good and evil to a format familiar both to Christians and Muslims, of the eternal God having to deal with the evil actions of one of his created non-physical messengers. The Daysanites held that the created world was a mixture of good with evil. The physical body was a prison for the soul. Bardaisan believed that Jesus had no physical body so was immune from the effects of evil. Nevertheless, he believed in the possibility of emulating Jesus, who represented God to human beings. He held a form of trinitarianism of God the Father, the Holy Spirit the Mother, and Christ the Son.[36] It is clear that Bardaisan did not hold to a second deity in the way that ʿAmmār suggested. However, it probably suited ʿAmmār that the Daysanites be included among the dualists, because of their denial that the physical body was to be received with praise as a good gift of the One Creator.

THE ONE CREATOR AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The reason for the emergence of dualism can be put down to the problem of evil. If both evil and good coexist in the world then

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[35] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* pp. 109–110.
[36] Baumer, *The Church of the East,* p. 36.

one solution was to posit two coexisting powers of good and evil. For monotheists, there could only be one power at work in the creation of the world. It must follow that the one power created both good and evil together. This issue preoccupies ʿAmmār in the succeeding set of questions in his *Book of Questions and Answers*. Question eight begins this discussion with the following question, "Who was He kind and generous to when no-one—as you claim—was with Him before the creation of any of His creatures that He might be generous towards"?[37] The questioner is still the dualist here. The reply gives ʿAmmār the opportunity to define the intention of the One Creator in making the world.

> The Generous began—through his generosity and wisdom—by setting up for his worshippers the abode of the world and that which is in it, before He created them. Then He created them in it and bestowed these things lavishly on them. There is no better favor or greater kindness than His forming them as His own, in this noble state of life, intelligence, speech, understanding, capability, and choice, after coming into being from nothing.[38]

In other words, the Creator acted in generosity by creating a world in which human beings could thrive. His intention was to bless them with special benefits of mental ability and capacity for choosing their actions to enable them to prosper in their environment. The next two questions challenge the concept of generosity by asking how humans can possibly know what kindness is without experiencing the opposite. The dualist exposes the danger for the monotheist of ignoring the reality of cruelty in the world as a means of defining kindness. ʿAmmār replies that this does not negate the generosity of the Creator in intending goodness for human beings before the act of creation. Question eleven raises the problem of evil within the intention of the Creator. "If He is almighty, wise, and generous, as you have described, why did He create them susceptible to pain, suffering, harm, and complaining, ending all their affairs in death, not

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[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 104.
[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 105.

creating them perfect, with no pain, corruption, or death"?[39] ʿAmmār concedes that the Creator might have created human beings not to die, but decided that they should die in order to be transferred to another abode in which death would have no place. "He created them in this state, which is capable of impacting their condition including death, as it transfers them from this condition and this abode to a better situation and abode".[40] Therefore, according to ʿAmmār, the Creator intended two stages of creation. The first was a preparatory work for the second complete version. "He has for them another destination to which He would raise them. He would establish in them that which He had already begun through His generosity, and would complete in them that which He had already granted them of His grace and goodness".[41] This naturally leads to the question why the creator did not intend just the one perfect life, without the burden of struggle with evil in the preparatory stage. ʿAmmār has three reasons. First: He created them in a condition of struggle so that when he remade them in a condition without such struggle, they would be aware of the difference between the two conditions and their delight would be all the greater. Second: if they strove to merit the second stage by their good deeds in the first stage, then they would be "like the victors of a magnificent kingdom, after showing bravery, strength, and striving".[42] Third: the Creator placed human beings in a situation where they could either merit rewards or punishment for their actions.

> If He had not prepared for them in this abode beneficial and harmful circumstances—and made them all susceptible to both—there would not be a reason for profit in them, then they would not discern what is reward and what is punishment. The one who seeks His reward would not know what is good, and the one who is cautious about His punishment would not avoid evil.[43]

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[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 107.
[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 107.
[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 108.
[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 108.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 109.

In admitting that the Creator intended humans to choose between good and evil actions ʿAmmār acknowledges in question twelve, that God created the opportunity for evil choices, without determining which choices his creatures would make. Even death itself, though an evil experience which is not chosen by humans, is turned into a benefit for them.

> He graciously grants them the praiseworthy death, being affectionate to them and liberating them by removing what is distasteful to them. He made death within them—by His kindness and mercy—like a flash of lightning between their sleeping and their end. Thus, death too—as their ultimate destiny, which He prepared for them in His goodness—is useful and beneficial for them all.[44]

The delay between death and resurrection to eternal life is the concern of question thirteen. Why did God not shorten the time between death and the experience of the new life since some of the dead may wait thousands of years before entering 'the habitation of grace'?[45] This raises the question whether death was really necessary for the transition from the first to the second stage. Why did the Creator not "send whoever among them that acted wisely and completed his time, to the abode of blissfulness, without causing him to swallow the unpleasantness of this death which occurs to the first and last of them"?[46] The answer lies in the justice of God in treating all human beings fairly. To treat everyone equitably God decided to judge all human beings at the same time. Death provides the equalizing measure after which God decides to send the people of evil to "the habitation of punishment"[47] and the people of goodness to their place of bliss. It would be unfair and unjust if God blessed the good people and punished the evildoers at the point of their death thousands of years before he did this to others. In other words, the delay of the Day of Judgement as an event that takes place for all human beings from all periods of time is an act of justice. Here ʿAmmār

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[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 110.
[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 110.
[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 110.
[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 110.

represents the Christian consensus that there is an intermediate state between death and resurrection to eternal life. Muslims too held to the centrality of the Day of Judgement as effecting all humanity together as clearly taught in the Qurʾan in 2:281, "Be in awe of the day when you are brought before God. Then each soul will be rewarded for what it has merited and none will be treated unjustly". ʿAmmār makes common cause with Muslim convictions about the intentions of God in relation to humanity.

The dualist returns to the necessity of death in question fourteen. "Was He not capable of doing with them that which is appropriate for His justice and His mercy without making them die"?[48] Death is the most appropriate method of dealing with human beings, argues ʿAmmār. If there was no end to the life of humans in the first stage then countless generations would follow the bad example of their parents and this endless cycle of bad behavior would never come to an end. "Thus, instead of what was intended by introducing their creation in this abode in order for them to gain His reward by their deeds, His creating them in it would become harmful, evil, and corruption for them".[49] There had to be a limit to the harm that evil actions could do to humanity. Death would at least bring an end to the experience of evil for those who had merited the reward of eternal life in an abode without such evil.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

There is a brief discussion of the problem of evil in the opening section of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy*. ʿAmmār makes two points, the first is about the difficulties faced by human beings in life and the second is about reality of death for all humans. With respect to the difficulties of life, ʿAmmār draws attention to the danger posed to humans by wild animals. Despite being threatened by beasts of prey, the fact that humans are not overwhelmed by them is an indication of the goodness of the Creator in setting up the world in such a way.

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[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 111.
[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 112.

This is because "the Creator made these destructive killers uneasy about humans so that they would not destroy them".[50] In addition, the presence of animals that could attack humans enabled human beings to look for another world in which such problems would be absent. They were aware that "This world is not a place of rest or security because of its many evils and tribulations".[51] Evil has a positive benefit for humans in making them look for absolute goodness. ʿAmmār argues that evil is of value in exercising and developing the souls of human beings.

> Therefore, these damaging and painful things became of greater benefit to humans than delightful and enjoyable things, because the latter nourish their bodies while the former strengthen their souls, and stimulate them to seek a world where there is no adversity or tribulation, and cause them to withdraw from this world on account of the tribulations that it has brought them.[52]

With respect to the reality of death, ʿAmmār argues that the resurrection from death will be the proof of the existence of a good Creator who grants eternal bliss to those who have practiced goodness rather than evil.

> We know that on the Day of Resurrection, by our being saved from death, we will all join together in knowing the One who has saved us from death, without doubt or disagreement. We will know the superiority of the enjoyment of life over death when we are saved from adversity, and death will increase our delight in our abundant joy.[53]

Death is simply the culmination of evils such as the illnesses that weaken the body. Even diseases have a positive benefit for humans in turning minds to the world to come in which such negative experiences will be absent.

> All diseases and illnesses train us in this world, and show us what may befall us which we cannot fend off; they make us

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[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.
[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.
[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.
[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.

break away from trespasses and sins and urge us to do good;
they induce us to withdraw from this transitory world and
they instil in us a desire for the eternal abode.[54]

For ʿAmmār, no evil in this world is pointless. All evil
experiences have the potential to inspire good results in human
beings, urging them to turn their minds to the world that will be
free from evil altogether. In other words, the Creator has intended
this world to be a training ground for the next one. Those who
accept the training regime will prosper in this life with an
increasing desire to be good in the face of evil, and prosper in the
next life by enjoying the perfect existence of freedom from evil
and the totality of joy.

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār opened both of his books with proofs for the existence of
one Creator, appealing to Greek philosophy at the outset. Rather
than rely on scriptural teaching, he sought the opinions of Plato
and Aristotle. The former was less useful to him because Plato
only held to the creative work of a secondary deity, the Demiurge,
who merely formed the world from pre-existing material which
had no creator. ʿAmmār failed to recognise this weakness in
Plato's approach when he argued against the eternity of matter.
Aristotle was more helpful to the cause of creation of matter given
his insistence on the being who is the first cause of everything,
the unmoved mover of the universe. ʿAmmār was making use of
the newly translated writings of Plato and Aristotle into Arabic
that were being studied and debated in Basra and Baghdad by
Muslim intellectuals. Christians and Muslims shared this Greek
philosophical inheritance, and so ʿAmmār was able to enter this
debate as an equal with his Muslim counterparts by avoiding any
appeal to the Bible or the Qurʾan at the beginning of his
apologetic for Christianity. Greek philosophy was the common
ground on which proof for the existence of one Creator who made
everything from nothing could be based. Another Christian
apologist writing in Arabic in the early ninth century, Theodore
Abū Qurra (d.c. 825), a Chalcedonian Melkite theologian who

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[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.

was born in Edessa and was bishop of Harran for a short time, also appealed to the Aristotelian argument for the unmoved mover to support the existence of God.[55] However he conceded that this argument does not enable humans to know for certain whether this power was one or more persons. He imagines someone seeing a wall built round a vineyard and asking how many people built it. The reply comes that it was built by the owner of the vineyard but it is not known how many people were involved in its construction. By analogy, the world is seen to be created but it is not possible by observation to know whether there was one creator, or two or more creators.[56] However, Abū Qurra does not go on to argue for one Creator over against two or more creators as ʿAmmār does.

ʿAmmār's refutation of dualism appears to reflect a different environment from debates in the Basrian school of the Muʿtazila. Muslims shared with Christians an emphatic belief in one Creator of everything, so it might seem unlikely that dualism would feature in discussions in Basra or Baghdad. Nevertheless, the reality on the ground was that the traditional religion of Zoroastrianism was still followed by many. ʿAmmār probably decided to include a debate with Zoroastrian belief in two opposing deities in order to make his argument fully rounded in the context of his life in Basra. It is also possibly an indication that the school of the Muʿtazila included representative Zoroastrians in debates. If ʿAmmār had been invited to debate in Baghdad, then it was quite likely that there would have been Zoroastrian invitees there also. Therefore, what at first sight seems a diversion from Greek philosophy, is actually a natural development for an argument concerning the oneness of God in the context of the time and place in which ʿAmmār wrote. The inclusion of the dualistic tendencies of Manichaeism and the followers of Bardaisan by ʿAmmār does not truly match the strict dualism of Zoroastrianism. ʿAmmār's depiction of Mani and Bardaisan as holding to a good god but an evil devil is both a failure

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[55] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God and the True Religion', in I Dick (ed.), *Theodore Abuqurra: Traite de L'Existence du Createur et de la Vraie Religion,* (Jounieh: Librairie Saint-Paul, 1982), 173–270, pp. 182–186.

[56] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God', p. 198.

to represent their beliefs accurately and a failure to represent them as believing in two opposing gods. This likely indicates that ʿAmmār was rather unfamiliar with these two groups, and only knew them from the reports of others, and that he had little direct access to their teaching. Theodore Abū Qurra also referred to the followers of Bardaisan and Mani in his 'Treatise on the Existence of God'. He says that Bardaisan believed in five eternal gods. Four were the elements, fire, air, earth, and water, the fifth was intelligence who conquered these four.[57] John Lamoreaux points out that this description of Bardaisan's teaching is unlike any other descriptions of Bardaisan's beliefs in the early middle ages.[58] Abū Qurra's description of the Manichaeans appears to reflect what is known of Mani's teaching. Mani claimed to have a more correct understanding of Christianity. There were two gods before the creation of the world, one light and the other darkness. Darkness attacked light. The world was made by a combination of light and darkness. Human beings reflect this combination in having a soul from light and a body from darkness.[59] In his 'Treatise on Free Will', Abū Qurra refutes the teaching of Mani that the darkness of the body overcomes the light of the soul. If this is the case, he argues, then the soul cannot keep from doing evil since it is trapped in the body. But Mani still holds that the soul should do good. He might as well ask an eagle whose wings are tied to fly.[60] However, Abū Qurra does not, like ʿAmmār, deal with this kind of dualism as part of an argument for the truth of one Creator. The accuracy of Abū Qurra's treatment of Manichaeism may reflect the fact that he was familiar with Manichaean groups in the region around Edessa. ʿAmmār's familiarity with Zoroastrians is based on the fact that they were the majority religious community in southwest Persia.[61]

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[57] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God', pp. 209–210.
[58] See J.C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah,* (Provo UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), p.5.
[59] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God', pp. 205–206.
[60] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on Free Will', in J.C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurra,* 195–206, p. 199.
[61] Robert Hoyland points out that Zoroastrianism's stronghold had been in southwest Iran. See R.G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: the Arab Conquests*

ʿAmmār's treatment of the problem of evil was designed to deal with the reason for dualism. If the Creator had good intentions for the world that he created then how can the existence of evil in that world be attributed to him? One answer to that question was given by Zoroaster who posited an evil god at war with the good creator to account for all that undermines goodness. The prevalence of such a belief in Mesopotamia and Persia provided an opportunity for a Christian apologist to attempt to refute it. The fact that ʿAmmār included such a refutation in a work specifically addressed to the Caliph demonstrates the continuing importance of dualistic beliefs in the population governed by the Caliph. In proving that there was only one Creator over against any belief in two deities, ʿAmmār was demonstrating that Christians were just as convinced of monotheism as Muslims who were regularly suspicious that Christian assertion of the Trinity fundamentally undermined pure monotheism. Thus, rather than beginning with a defence of the oneness of God in the Trinity, ʿAmmār started with arguments for the oneness of God that Muslims might support. In this way, ʿAmmār could establish his credentials with the Caliph that he was a worthy debater at the highest intellectual level equal to any Muslim *mutakallim.*

ʿAmmār sought to argue that any experience of evil by human beings could be turned to their benefit. This was because the Creator had established difficulties in order to train humans. He created predatory animals that threaten humans but the Creator gave humans the ability to overcome them. Diseases that afflict humans are the precursor to death that finally brings about the end of their life in this world but they remind humans of the existence of a second world in which there will be no illness or death. The experience of illness enables humans to hope for the second life by performing good deeds that will be rewarded with eternal bliss. While the body suffers, the soul can grow and develop. In other words, the Creator intended suffering for the body to be a training method for the soul, the spiritual dimension

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and the Creation of an Islamic Empire, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 208.

of humans, which in reality is far more significant than the temporary effects of bodily pain.

This theory that the pain of body could lead to the growth of the soul had a long history in Christian theology. One of the earliest systematic theologians, Irenaeus (b. 130 CE), believed that experiencing evil was intended by God to be training for the soul. In his 'Refutation of Heresies', Irenaeus asked how humans could be trained in doing good without the possibility of doing evil. "First the mind discovers that disobedience is evil and bitter; and by penitence it spits it out. Then it learns by realization what sort of thing is contrary to goodness and sweetness; and thereafter it does not attempt even to taste of disobedience to God".[62] Irenaeus goes on to argue that "It was for our benefit that the Lord allowed all these things, that we may be trained by means of them . . . so that his goodness may be demonstrated . . . and man may at length reach maturity, becoming ripe, through these experiences, for the vision and enjoyment of God".[63] While Irenaeus speaks of wrongdoing rather than illness, the basic idea that God intended humans to experience evil in order for them to grow in goodness is established as early as the second century CE. This theory was repeated by subsequent theologians writing in Greek and Syriac so that by the time of ʿAmmār it had become commonplace among all the Christian communities of the Middle East.

ʿAmmār then was putting forth a well-established apologetic for the existence of evil in the world created by the one God who intended that good would ultimately triumph over it. Even death itself, the apparent victory of evil over humans, was interpreted as a necessary gateway to an eternal life in which there would be no experience of evil that would end in death. Death was necessary because humans needed to perform good acts in this life in order to be rewarded with the good life after death. There could be no automatic granting of eternal life. Humans must work out how to avoid evil by doing good. There would be a habitation

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[62] Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', iv. xxxix. 1–2, in H. Bettenson, (trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 69–70.

[63] Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', iv. xxxvii. 7, in Bettenson, (trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers,* p. 70.

of bliss for doers of good but alongside this there would be a habitation of punishment for humans who were doers of evil.

All this was the common inheritance of Christian theology from early times. Abū Qurra also argued that a wise Creator created the four elements, air, fire, earth and water to function in harmony. He made them for the benefit of human beings, but most humans do not appreciate this and perform evil deeds. Yet he is patient with them in the hope that they will repent and perform good deeds. He will resurrect them all after death and reward the good and punish the evil.[64] ʿAmmār the Church of the East theologian shared with the Chalcedonian Melkite Abū Qurra a similar theological inheritance. While they sometimes put this heritage to different uses, they drew on the same resources. They both saw the significance of Aristotle's argument for an unmoved mover of everything as a support for their Christian belief that God made the world. They both upheld the wisdom of God in the formation of the four elements, air, fire, earth and water of Stoic thought. His control of these opposing principles meant that harmony ruled rather than discord. When humans opted for discord, the Creator intended another world free from it where harmony would reign. Humans would be divided into those who would be rewarded with this new world and those who would be excluded from it.

ʿAmmār and Abū Qurra demonstrate that Christian apologists in the early ninth century took the Greek philosophical inheritance seriously in dialogue with other religious communities. Given that Muslims who were in charge of all the religious groups were engaged in a study of that Greek philosophical inheritance, it is evident that ʿAmmār and Abū Qurra sought to appeal to Greek arguments in order to defend Christian beliefs as rational in accordance with Greek philosophical assumptions. Both ʿAmmār and Abū Qurra were honoured with refutations by Muʿtazili writers. According to the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 977), ʿĪsā ibn Sabīh al-Murdār (d. 840) wrote a refutation of Abū Qurra entitled

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[64] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God', pp. 187–189.

Kitāb ʿalā Abī Qurra al-naṣrānī (Against Abū Qurra the Christian),[65] and Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840) wrote a "refutation of ʿAmmār the Christian in his reply to the Christians."[66] This attention to two Christian apologists by leading Muʿtazili thinkers shows how the translation of Greek thought into Arabic was impacting the dialogue between Christians who translated it and Muslims who eagerly absorbed it.[67] Muslims shared with Christians the recourse to Aristotle's argument in support of the existence of God. Christians emphasised the wisdom and generosity of God that were fundamental principles for the Muʿtazili conception of the reason for the creation. In addition, both Abū Qurra and ʿAmmār upheld free will for humans just as Muʿtazili thinkers did, as the following chapter will study.

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[65] See *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, vol. 1,* B. Dodge, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 394.

[66] See *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, vol. 1,* B. Dodge, p. 388.

[67] Orsolya Varsanyi has shown how ʿAmmār tended to follow the usage of Greek philosophy and theology translitered into Arabic. Only in a minority of instances does ʿAmmār use Arabic terms that had no Greek background. See O. Varsanyi, *Ninth-century Arabic Christian Apology and Polemics: a Terminological Study of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba,* (Piliscsaba: The Avicenna Instutute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2015), p. 352.

CHAPTER THREE.
HUMANS ARE FREE TO CHOOSE GOOD OR EVIL

ʿAmmār developed his treatment of the problem of evil by arguing that the Creator intended that human beings had the opportunity to choose between good or evil actions. In the light of Zoroastrian teaching that there was a fundamental struggle between good and evil deities, ʿAmmār argued that the one Creator allowed humans to struggle with good and evil choices. In other words, rather than a dualism in the creation of the world the truth lay in the unity of the one Creator's intentions for His creation. Of course, this Christian conviction that the one Creator intended humans to respond to Him in obedience was shared by Jews and Muslims. ʿAmmār was relying on this reality in his address to the Caliph at the beginning of *The Book of Questions and Answers.* However, there was another debate over human choice beyond the defense of human free will against dualist teaching. Muslim intellectuals were divided over the way human choice should be understood. Some held the view that God had given humans the choice to act in obedience or disobedience, while others held that God created all human actions before they were acquired by humans, so that God had already decided which actions a particular human being would choose, whether good or evil. ʿAmmār decided to engage in debate with the second view. He shared this approach with Abū Qurra who also defended human free will over against determinist Muslim opinion. These two theologians from different denominations demonstrate that the cumulative inheritance of Greek and Syriac theology was a belief that God had created

humanity to freely choose good or evil actions. Theodore Abū Qurra and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī dialogued with determinist Muslims in the hope that they might influence these determinist Muslims to adopt earlier Muslim beliefs that the Qurʾan taught that God would judge humans for the choices that they freely made for good or evil. However, the trend towards determinism was so strong that by the end of the ninth century the mainstream Sunni view would be that God decreed all human actions before they were acquired by humans.[1]

MUSLIM DISCUSSION OF FREE WILL

Early debate about free will among Muslims arose out of political dissension which occurred in the period of Ummayad rule. If the Ummayad family claimed that God had placed them in control of the whole Muslim community then they could demand obedience from all Muslims. Yet they had seized that control in a bloody civil war that inevitably meant that many Muslims did not accept that they should submit to them. Was obedience to the Ummayad ruler equivalent to obedience to God? If God had decreed that the Ummayads should rule then that would have the effect of silencing opposition. However, there were significant numbers of Muslims who rejected the divine right of the Ummayads to rule. During the Caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), the governor of Iraq, Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf made a public speech demanding absolute obedience from those who had rebelled against his government. Someone in the crowd shouted that the Caliph was not God's governor who was above everything, but that he was accountable to God for his actions.[2] In reaction to this event, the Caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik, asked a leading exponent of this view, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), to give his considered opinion in writing. The letter that Ḥasan wrote to the Caliph is one of the earliest extant documents in the history of Muslim thought.

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[1] This chapter is based on I.M. Beaumont, 'Christian Defence of Free Will in Debate with Muslims in the Early Islamic Period', *Transformation* 36, (2019), 149–163.
[2] See T. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology,* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000), p. 38.

ḤASAN AL-BAṢRĪ'S LETTER SUPPORTING HUMAN FREE WILL

Ḥasan acknowledged the invitation of the Caliph who had heard that Ḥasan did not hold to divine determination of human actions, but could not believe that the intelligent and religious Ḥasan held such an opinion. Ḥasan wrote that he would follow the example of the ancestors who followed the sunna of the messenger of God and who only used arguments that God put forward in the Qurʾan.[3] He quoted several texts showing how God holds people accountable for their actions. For example, Q 39:7, "If you do not believe, God has no need of you. He is not pleased with unbelief in His servants. But if you are grateful, He is pleased with you", is interpreted by Ḥasan to mean,

> If disbelief was from God's decree and determination (*qadar*),
> He would approve of one who did it. God would not decree
> something and then disapprove of His own decree. Oppression
> and wrong are not from the decrees of God; rather, His decree
> is His command to do good, justice, and kindness, and to give
> to relatives. He forbade abomination, evil, and injustice.[4]

He then quoted texts which appear to support the view that God decrees all actions of human beings, including their unbelief and disobedience. The clearest text is Q13:27, "God leads astray those He wills, and guides to Himself those who repent". Ḥasan commented, "But they do not look at what precedes those words and what follows them".[5] By quoting Q14:27, "God strengthens those who believe in his lasting word in this life and in the next, but He leads astray the wrongdoers; God does what He wills", Ḥasan argued that, "He leads astray the wrongdoers in their denial and enmity".[6] Another text that might support the eternal decree of God is Q11:105, "The Day it arrives, no one may speak

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[3] See ʿḤasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 116–121, p. 116.

[4] ʿḤasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* p. 117.

[5] ʿḤasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* p. 118.

[6] ʿḤasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* p. 118.

without His permission. Some of them will be desolate and others will be happy". Ḥasan points out that,

> They interpret this such that God created people in their mothers' wombs either fortunate or unfortunate so there is no way for whoever is fortunate to become unfortunate nor is there a way for the unfortunate to become fortunate . . . But the fortunate ones on that day will be those who hold fast to the command of God about His religion.[7]

Ḥasan ended his letter to the Caliph with the advice that, "God did not send out the messengers to make people do the opposite of what He has decreed for them and then punish these people for all eternity for not obeying Him when He never even gave them the option to do so".[8] William Montgomery Watt argues that Ḥasan's argument was based on the exhortation in the Qurʾan for humans to be righteous. "He felt he must assert that they had been given power to achieve it".[9]

MUSLIM ADVOCACY OF DETERMINISM

Dirār ibn ʿAmr, who was active in the generation after Ḥasan, read the Qurʾan to teach that God determined all human actions before they were performed. He argued that Q2:286, "God will not burden any soul beyond what it can bear; it will be rewarded for the good which it has acquired, and will suffer for the evil which it has acquired", meant that human actions are created by God and are acquired by humans. Watt indicates that this distribution of activity between God and humans meant that the final responsibility for actions was shared. "It was thought that in this way human responsibility was sufficiently safeguarded, while the parallel statement that God created the acts of men fully admitted His omnipotence".[10] The pupil of Dirār ibn ʿAmr, al-

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[7] 'Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* p. 121.

[8] 'Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's letter to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik', in A. Rippon & J. Knappert, (eds), *Textual sources for the study of Islam,* p. 121.

[9] W.M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam.* (London: Luzac, 1948), p. 55.

[10] W.M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam,* p. 105.

Najjar, developed this dual interpretation of actions. Firstly, human actions are created by God and humans perform them. Secondly, God wills every action in his sovereignty. Thirdly, the human power to perform the action is in the help provided by God at the time of the action.[11] Al-Najjar held that, "God has absolute control of the course of events so that man can do nothing contrary to what God wills".[12] This belief was to become the mainstream view of Sunni Muslims.

CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN FREE WILL

The three denominations in the Middle East all held to the reality of free will for humans to obey or disobey the commands of God. The Chalcedonian 'Melkites', the Miaphysite West Syrian 'Jacobites', and the Diophysite East Syrian 'Nestorians' all believed that the disobedience of the first human Adam resulted in a tendency in his descendants to disobey God but that his fall did not altogether stop humans freely choosing to obey God. Miaphysites could quote Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) who wrote that despite the fall of Adam bringing corruption to the rest of humanity, his descendants could still choose to obey the law of God.[13] Diophysites held to the view of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429) that the free will of human beings defines them as rational beings. Sin may entice them but they can choose to reject this in favor of doing what is right.[14] Chalcedonians followed John of Damascus (d.c. 750) who argued that the ability to choose their actions is characteristic of human beings. God does not impose actions on humans, because He will reward them for choosing good and punish them for choosing evil.[15] God knows what

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[11] See Al-Ashʿarī, Abū-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī. *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Musallīn,* H. Ritter, (ed.), (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1963), pp. 283–284.

[12] W.M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam,* p. 108.

[13] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Romans 7:15,* in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines.* (London: A&C Black, 1968), p. 372.

[14] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Romans 11:15,* in Kelly, pp. 373–374.

[15] John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Christian Faith, 3:18,* in M. Knell, *Sin, Grace and Free Will. A Historical survey of Christian Thought, vol. 1,* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2017), p. 163.

choices humans will make before they make them but he does not determine them.[16]

ʿAMMĀR AL-BAṢRĪ'S DEFENSE OF FREE WILL

The defense of human free will occupies questions fourteen to twenty-eight in the opening section of ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers*. The allocation of half of the questions in this section on the proof for the existence of one Creator, shows just how significant the debate about free will had become among Muslims. While ʿAmmār could take for granted that Muslims would agree with his proof for one Creator rather than two, and that this one Creator wisely intended to benefit human beings especially in the effects of the creation, he could not be sure that all Muslim intellectuals would accept that the one Creator had given human beings freedom to choose to obey or disobey his commands. Since Muslims disagreed with each other about whether God had given free will to humans to choose to obey his law or whether he had already decreed the choices that humans would make before they made them, ʿAmmār placed this discussion of free will at this point in his presentation to demonstrate that Christians agreed with those Muslims who supported free will. Maybe he also wanted to take sides in a hotly debated issue among Muslims before beginning to defend Christian beliefs that were opposed by all Muslims. Issues such as the integrity of the Gospels, the Trinity, the incarnation, and the cross, were all uniformly rejected by Muslims, and the defense of these occupies the remainder of the *Book of Questions and Answers*. By beginning with proof of the existence of one Creator who intended to be generous to humans above the rest of the creation, ʿAmmār brought all Muslims on his side. By continuing with a defense of human free will he brought some Muslims on his side. By the time he opened his defense of the integrity of the Gospels, ʿAmmār had established that Christians were in agreement with Muslims about some key beliefs. He was demonstrating that

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[16] John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Christian Faith, 2:30*, in Knell, p. 175.

Christians could be useful debating partners with Muslims rather than being totally against Islamic convictions.

The fact that ʿAmmār addressed his *Book of Questions and Answers* to the Caliph shows that he was attempting to bring him on his side. The Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833) who was famous for holding debates at court between representatives of various religious communities, supported the Muslim *muʿtazila* who held that God had given the law to human beings because he had made them capable of choosing to obey it. This support was crowned in 827 when al-Maʾmūn declared *muʿtazila* doctrine to be official teaching. Then in 833 he imprisoned Aḥmād ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), the leading *traditionist,* for refusing to accept the Caliph's enforcement of the *muʿtazila* view that the Qurʾan was the created speech of God. Aḥmād ibn Ḥanbal insisted that the Qurʾan was the eternal word of God preserved in heaven before the creation of the world. He also held that before God created the world, He decreed every action that human beings would take. These two beliefs are found in the statement of faith dictated by ibn Ḥanbal. The sixteenth item states, "Belief in the predetermination [by God], [both] of the good and of the evil". The eighteenth item says, "The Qurʾan is the speech of God, uncreated".[17] It is likely that the Caliph addressed by ʿAmmār is al-Maʾmūn since his successors al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833–842) and al-Wāthiq (r. 842–847) were less interested in religious debates at court, and al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) rejected the stance of the *muʿtazila* in favor of the *traditionist* position of ibn Ḥanbal. Al-Mutawakkil also declared that Christians were to be regarded as second-class citizens and ended the openness for debate between Christian and Muslim intellectuals.[18]

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[17] See W.M. Watt, *Islamic Creeds,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 31–32.

[18] See P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs, tenth edition,* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 429–430; and D. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 137–145.

ʿAMMĀR AL-BAṢRĪ ON THE NECESSITY FOR HUMAN BEINGS FREELY TO CHOOSE GOOD OR EVIL IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions fourteen to sixteen deal with whether God was just to create people at different times. If he had created all human beings at the same time in the beginning then his judgement of them would be more equal. ʿAmmār points out that creating humans from generation to generation is a kindness on the part of the Creator, because one generation provides an example for the next generation of how to behave appropriately. This helps the next generation humans to choose to follow their good actions.

> Do we and you not see that the godly people who abstain from wrongdoing and prefer to perform good deeds because they take heed of the calamity of those who have gone before them and because they are aware of the long period ahead as a result of their fleeing from the threat of punishment which their Lord would bring down on them. If the Lord created them all at the same time, then how would he let one of them take advice from another?[19]

ʿAmmār goes on to consider the impact of one generation on the next. The Creator intended human beings to produce offspring and the way parents would care for their children would be conducive to the moral development of individuals. Parents would quite naturally practice good deeds towards their children and therefore individuals would be members of families that encouraged good deeds and discouraged evil deeds. God willed,

> By his generosity and kindness . . . The excitement of childbirth and the sanctity of marriage, the love of one for another, and compassion of one for another, like we see in the sacrifice of an individual human being and his wealth, rejecting hatred of his father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, kin and relatives, loving them and being affectionate to them.[20]

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[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 113.
[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 114.

It is clear that the Creator planned that one generation should influence the next generation so that each individual human being might achieve a good life. As a result, the Creator organized humanity to develop in a succession of time. One generation would follow another, and so generations would die one after another. The death of one generation would therefore not be detrimental to the wellbeing of future generations since the example of an earlier generation would remain for future generations. As for the fairness of the Creator, it would not have been fair for Him to create all human beings at the same time because they would depend on the good example of previous generations to make the best choices of how to live in obedience to the commands of God. Planning for the death of each generation does not imply that the Creator would automatically be unjust in His judgement of previous generations. This is seen in the way good actions are encouraged by family loyalty. "They will love those they are related to, and they will be related to those they have a kinship with, and they will have a kinship with those they give birth to".[21]

The questioner turns to the problem of disobedience to God's commands. Question seventeen asks about children who do not follow the good example of their parents. What was the point of God planning death for people who refused to follow the good example of their parents and ancestors? ʿAmmār answers that the Creator cuts short their rebellion by removing them in death. If God had not provided a means of cutting off their wickedness through their death, then an extended life "for the wicked increases their corruption and brings harm to all the people of their group".[22] There is no difference between death coming to the good and the wicked, because death is universal for good as well as evil people. The questioner returns in question eighteen with asking whether God would have been more merciful to shorten the life of evil people so that they would not continue to set a bad example for others. "Why did God not bring death upon those who he knew would be rebellious and wicked when

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[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 115.
[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 116.

reaching adulthood after childhood and youth . . . to avoid creating people who merit his punishment"?[23] ʿAmmār replies by indicating that there is no inevitability in the choices that people make when they look at the example of their parents and ancestors. Some children reject the good example set by their parents, yet in adulthood they repent of their wrongdoing, "after being instructed in the morality of their Lord the Almighty".[24] However, if God had brought death upon them while they were in a state of rebellion, then they would not have had the opportunity to repent. Despite the Creator knowing that some individuals would rebel against Him, He did not act on that knowledge by cutting them off before the rebellion started. "If he had intended to kill those who he knew would be unbelieving and wicked in their childhood and youth, then their being generated would be futile, and their end would have already been decided before their creation had begun".[25] God decided to allow human beings to use the intelligence and understanding with which He had endowed them to choose to do good or evil.

Questions nineteen and twenty concern the children of evil parents. Why did the Creator not put to death the children of evil parents? Would it not have been just for Him to cut off children who He knew would be evil? ʿAmmār responds by pointing out that children do not necessarily follow the bad example of their parents. The Creator wanted in His generosity to the children of bad parents to give them an opportunity to reject the example set before them and choose rather to do what was right. This would be much fairer to them than cutting off their lives because they were born into bad households. God chose "to be merciful and kind to His enemies, the unbelievers and rebels",[26] and so he could not cut short their life merely because he knew that they might commit evil actions. He wanted children to make choices for good or evil regardless of the example of their parents. He intended that children born to either good or bad parents should be able to choose the kind of actions that would merit eternal life

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[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 116.

[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 117.

[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 117.

[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 118.

for them. This is why children have the capacity to freely choose good actions despite the example of bad parents. "He freed their hands to do things that he made possible for them as human beings, characteristic of their offspring as children. If their hands had not been freed, there would have been no freedom of action to attain the merit of the afterlife".[27]

ʿAmmār sums up this set of questions by admitting that we do not have perfect knowledge of how God manages the world. We know that He intends good for human beings, but we also know that He allows human beings to experience pain, hardship and death. We do not always know how He directs humans when they deal with these evils, but we can be sure that good will trump evil. "We do not know how He created the world or how He installed souls in our bodies or when death will come to any of us, but that does not at all negate our knowledge of His creation and His direction of it and His management of what is in it for the good of all of us".[28]

Question twenty-one focuses on the pain and suffering that humans inevitably experience. Who created illnesses? Was it a creator equal to him who created them? Here the questioner raises the possibility of a Zoroastrian response to the problem of evil, with the concept of a second divine being wrecking the good work of the first divinity. ʿAmmār replies that the One God created the opportunity for illnesses to develop.

> He created for them what would develop their bodies from eating and drinking. He made for them minds to know what would be good for them and would be good for their children . . . They would fail to obtain what was good for their bodies without sufficient means . . . They would be harmed by illnesses and exposed to destruction.[29]

Question twenty-two asks whether God could have altered the outcome for humans from His prior knowledge of how they would behave? ʿAmmār repeats his previous argument that God created the world in such a way that He provided an opportunity for

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[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 119.
[28] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 120.
[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 121.

human beings to make their own decisions. "He set them free by the freedom of their nature to be changeable in their actions as they wished".[30] ʿAmmār brings this set of questions and answers to a conclusion by summarizing the argument he has presented. Did the Creator "not give them minds to distinguish between what would be good for them and what would be bad for them? Did He not make for them the means to carry out what would be beneficial for them and to avoid what would harm them? . . . Did He not provide for them the means to repent of their wrongdoing"?[31]

The questioner suggests in question twenty-three that the Creator must have intended to be merciful to evil people and to forgive them for what their rebellion. "What is his comfort in punishing evil people and taking vengeance on them? It is imperative for him, if he is generous, kind, and gentle as you have described, to forgive them and not to punish them for their wrongdoing".[32] ʿAmmār responds by arguing that, "There is no comfort for him in the punishment that is brought upon the people who deserve punishment".[33] But if he forgave them and did not punish them, would "they not suffer punishment in themselves of regret, grief, sorrow, and sadness at missing what he bestows on those who obtain a reward from their Lord".[34] Therefore, even if God granted eternal life to the rebels, they would be continually depressed by looking at the happiness of the obedient ones. However, such feelings should not be found in a life free from pain and suffering.

The questioner returns by asking why it is difficult for God to forgive the rebels if He wanted to be kind and generous to human beings. ʿAmmār reaffirms his answer to the previous question, that God shows his kindness and generosity by being just towards human beings. He would not have demonstrated kindness to people who had worked hard to obey Him if they discovered that God had granted a reward in the afterlife to those

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[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 122.
[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 122.
[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 122–123.
[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 123.
[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 123.

who had rebelled against Him in this life. God is justified in punishing rebels with sorrow and pain rather than giving them a life of joy and peace. Question twenty-five asks how it is just for God to separate human beings into two distinct groups that experience separate eternal destinies. ʿAmmār responds by saying that everyone will be placed in an eternal habitation.

> There will be happiness and joy for the people who do good and distress and unhappiness for the people of evil deeds . . . It is not right that the Just and the Wise makes this the same for both of them . . . There is no doubting his raising of the people of good deeds to the highest and most honorable places and his putting the people of evil deeds in the lowliest and meanest of places.[35]

ʿAmmār envisages eternal life to be experienced in two different ways by human beings. There is a resurrection to happiness for some and sadness for others, dependant on how they have behaved in this life. Good and evil people will not be separated entirely into two distinct worlds, but will share the new world with the good being given higher places above the station of those who were evil.

Question twenty-six asks why God did not decide to create people to be incapable of rebelling against him by doing evil actions. ʿAmmār dismisses this question as asking for the impossible. "What you ask of Him in this instance is inconceivable".[36] He insists that the definition of doing good or evil depends on three qualities in people, capability, intelligence and choice. "Whoever achieves obedience to his Creator by intelligence, choice and capability, if he follows the obedient path, then he is considered righteous and good".[37] If a person is "created by decree" then his "constitution is imposed on him . . . He is not called good or evil and his deeds do not count towards him being righteous or immoral, therefore, he does not merit reward or punishment".[38] However, God created human beings

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[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 124.
[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.
[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.
[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.

with capability, intelligence and choice. "They are capable of choosing the good that they choose, and for that reason their obedience is counted to them as righteousness and their reward is merited, and their happiness is completed by what they obtain and their joy is increased by what they deserve".[39]

Question twenty-seven asks whether there is equality between the three characteristics of capability, intelligence and choice. "If there is equality in capability and intelligence, their wills are not equal in choosing the deeds, we do not see the equality of capability and intelligence benefiting them in the choice of their wills at all".[40] ʿAmmār replies by arguing that human beings have the capability to know the difference between good and evil upon which the will decides.

> He imparted to their essential nature the knowledge of good and evil and the capability and means to choose excellent good deeds and pursue good actions. But they transgressed what is right by their own covetousness and resorted to the cravings of their bodies. This was a key to their iniquity and their wrongdoing that they willed the soundness and the fairness of others for themselves, and they condoned the arrogance and the hostility from themselves towards others. In their choice of this they became deceived in their minds and they continued in the falseness of what is contrary to the inescapable truth.[41]

ʿAmmār holds that God created humans with the mental capacity to be aware of good over against evil actions. However, having that knowledge of good and evil actions is not enough for human beings to make decisions about whether they will perform good or evil acts. While it is true that all human beings have the same capability to know the difference between good and evil deeds, they do not all choose the same kinds of actions.

The final question concerns the culpability of humans after the fall of Adam. If people chose evil after the beginning of "this error among them and straying from the path of rightness of their

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[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.
[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 126.
[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 126.

opinions",[42] then the Creator could not have judged them for opposing what was right. ʿAmmār retorts that that this notion would have contradicted the reason for His creation of human beings. God did not create a world in which people would be trapped in evil by the evil choices of their ancestors. He created a world where there would be incentives for people to do good.

> If the beneficence of their creator made them happy, it was necessary for them to do good to their friends. If it made them happy that he pardoned their wrongdoing, it was necessary for them to pardon those who wronged them. If it made them happy that no-one compelled them it was necessary for them that they did not compel anyone. If they loved that they were not robbed, it was necessary for them that they did not steal. If they loved that they were not ill-treated it was necessary for them not to ill-treat others.[43]

ʿAmmār completes the series of questions and answers on human free will to choose between good or evil actions by this set of logical demonstrations. The fall of Adam should not be used an excuse for the notion that God determined the actions of Adam's descendants after punishing Adam for his rebellion. All human beings are free as Adam was to obey or disobey. His rebellion set a bad example yet the underlying purpose of God was to enable humans to see the advantages of choosing good rather than evil.

ʿAMMĀR AL-BAṢRĪ ON THE NECESSITY FOR HUMAN BEINGS FREELY TO CHOOSE GOOD OR EVIL IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

ʿAmmār does not have much to say about free will in *the Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy*. He affirms that the Creator gave commands to humans that they were capable of obeying, and that obedience to these commands would bring a reward of the afterlife. He argues that it was much better for human beings to strive to keep these commands and earn their reward than for God to give them life after death as a gift.

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[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 126.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 126–127.

Since in His kindness and generosity He has prepared for us a sublime eternal world, we have no doubt that He will regard our prayers to Him in ways that are most beneficial to us. And this would not happen unless He commanded us to attain it by our own striving and effort, because we see that when someone achieves something by his own merit and accomplishes it by his own work and effort, it brings him more pleasure than something that is given to him gratuitously and freely granted to him - like one who receives as a gift what he did not ask for, or acquires something by trickery - and he has greater pleasure and pride in it, and people praise him for it more, unlike one who is provided for unreasonably and succeeds unworthily. So, we must know that He has commanded people to do good and to strive in service with this aim.[44]

Here ʿAmmār affirms the basic thrust of his detailed argument in *the Book of Questions and Answers* that the kindness and generosity of the Creator led Him to set human beings in a situation where they would have to make choices to do what was right and avoid doing what was wrong. These choices would be made by their free decision such that they would achieve a reward by their own merit and accomplishment. There is a critique of the view of determinists who held that the Creator decided on the actions of humans before they acquired them from Him. This belief would inevitably lead to people who consistently made bad choices being granted eternal life as a gift despite being unworthy of any reward. ʿAmmār calls this an unreasonable position to hold. However, it is interesting that he did not think it necessary to develop his argument for free will in the later piece of writing. Perhaps he felt that the case for free will presented so carefully and from a variety of angles in his earlier work did not need to be made in the later writing.

 This probably indicates that the two works were designed for different audiences. *The Book of Questions and Answers* was addressed to the Caliph to seek an audience for Christianity. In that work ʿAmmār attempted to show that he was aligned with the *muʿtazila* who were supported by the Caliph over against the

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[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 25–26.

traditionists who opposed them and were opposed by the Caliph. *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* was written for leaders of the Church of the East to enable them to respond to Muslim criticisms. Since it was written after the death of the Caliph al-Maʾmūn, when the position of the traditionists was becoming more acceptable, there was less need for ʿAmmār to demonstrate his sympathy with the *muʿtazila*. ʿAmmār was not alone among Christian theologians of the early ninth century in arguing in Arabic for free will. His older contemporary, Theodore Abū Qurra, also argued against determinism in favor of free will.

THEODORE ABŪ QURRA ON FREE WILL

Theodore Abū Qurra wrote a treatise on free will to show that those who hold that God determines the actions of humans are in error. He addresses Manichaeans and does not name Muslims, yet by referring to the Qurʾan, he shows awareness of Muslims who believe in divine determinism. Theodore mentions two groups of people at the outset of his presentation. The first group are "Those who claim to have no freedom and to be compelled by their creator to do the good and evil they do". The second are "Those who say that God created them with freedom but that, for some cause or another, compulsion was introduced into their freedom such that it was coerced into doing the good and evil it does".[45] Theodore says he will demonstrate that humans are free to choose good or evil actions. Divine influence on humans does not determine their actions but encourages them to voluntarily agree to a certain action.[46]

He asks the first group who believe that God determines every human action whether God would have been just to command human beings and reward them for obeying Him when He did not treat animals in this way. He ridicules this position by talking of a man commanding his ass, "Ass, fly about in the air

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[45] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', in J.C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, (Provo UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 195–206, pp. 195–196.
[46] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 196.

like an eagle", who ends up beating the ass for failing to fly. Theodore refers to Qurʾan 2:233 by way of refuting determinism. "Far be it from God to assign people a task that does not lie within their power"![47] So while Theodore does not name the determinists as Muslims, he is fully aware of Muslim debate concerning determinism and free will. He aligns himself with those Muslims who held to free will in choosing to quote a verse from the Qurʾan which teaches that the commands of God are not beyond the capacity of people to obey. Thus, the Qurʾan must be understood to hold that God created humans with the ability to choose to obey Him, an interpretation of the Qurʾan held by Ḥasan al-Baṣri as Sidney Griffith has pointed out.[48] Theodore has an interlocutor respond by saying that God has the power to do with his creation what he pleases, a belief dear to the *traditionists*. But Theodore argues that God may have treated animals as He pleased but He did not do this with human beings.[49] Theodore's opponent comes back and argues that, "God gave people commandments and prohibitions solely that he might have a just cause against them when he punishes them".[50] To this argument, Theodore replies by indicating that when God punishes people for disobeying Him, they would be justified in saying, "You have the power to punish me". But they would not be justified in asking God why He was punishing them because "he had preordained it for them through his power".[51] In the final analysis, Theodore places his opponent in an impossible situation.

> Any way you look at it, constraint can never be reconciled with the giving of commandments and prohibitions. Those who speak of constraint will either have to deny all divine commandments and prohibitions in order to do so, or, if they continue to affirm that god gives people commandments and

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[47] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 196.
[48] See S.H. Griffith, 'Free will in Christian Kalām. The doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de L'Orient* 14, (1987), 79–107, p. 97.
[49] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', pp. 196–197.
[50] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 197.
[51] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 197.

> prohibitions, clearly they will have to reject constraint and advocate freedom.[52]

He continues by observing that rulers normally reward those who obey them and punish those who do not. In normal life people do not think they have been preordained to choose either to obey or disobey.[53]

Theodore then critiques those who hold that divine foreknowledge entails divine determination. There are those who say that, "God foreknows everything; what he foreknows takes place; as for what must take place, the one who does it is compelled to do it; accordingly, human freedom is compelled to do the good or evil it does".[54] Theodore responds by arguing that God would be subject to compulsion himself in doing what he foreknows. "That God is compelled with regard to anything that he has done or will do is the most loathsome thing that could enter anyone's mind. May he be exalted above that and blessed"![55] In truth, "God's foreknowledge compels no one".[56] Sidney Griffith has shown how this argument is similar to that of Ḥasan al-Baṣri, "Who clearly made the point that God's knowledge cannot be said to force the unbelief of one who has the power not to disbelieve".[57] Theodore was challenging determinist Muslims with the arguments used by Muslims who held the view that humans had the power to freely choose their actions.

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār set out to present a systematic argument for humans being free to choose to obey or disobey the commands of God, which shows how significant he felt this case to be in dialogue with Muslims. While Theodore Abū Qurra also wrote a treatise in favor of free will, the fourteen questions and answers on free will by ʿAmmār are more comprehensive than Theodore's writing.

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[52] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 197.
[53] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 198.
[54] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 203.
[55] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 203.
[56] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On Free Will', p. 206.
[57] S.H. Griffith, 'Free will in Christian Kalām. The doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah', p. 103.

They constitute the most complete set of arguments for human free will extant in Christian apologetics in Arabic in the early Islamic era. There is one particular difference between the presentations of Theodore and ʿAmmār, the fact that Theodore quotes from the Bible and the Qurʾan but ʿAmmār does not. Theodore refers to the Qurʾan when he is in dialogue with Muslims and to the Bible when in dialogue with Manicheans. It may be that ʿAmmār thought that referring to the Bible or the Qurʾan would not have been helpful in the attempt to persuade Muslims of the truth of free will, and this may indicate that he was reluctant to enter the kind of debate among Muslims that had developed since the time of Ḥasan al-Baṣri. Theodore felt able to use the same Qurʾan quotations as Ḥasan al-Baṣri, in order to align himself with that Muslim tradition. It is all the more interesting that in a piece of writing addressed to the Caliph who supported the free will position, ʿAmmār did not appeal to the Qurʾanic texts that could be interpreted to support free will. Perhaps he was all too aware of the growing discord among Muslims over how to interpret the Qurʾan concerning free will versus determinism, and did not want to enter that debate. One area of agreement between Theodore and ʿAmmār is that they do not refer to Muslims who taught free will, but imply that Muslims hold that God determines human actions. This may suggest that they saw the *traditionist* approach was gaining ground among Muslims in Harran and Basra, because the most vocal Muslims were determinists. Basra was where the free will case was first proposed in writing. ʿAmmār was no doubt relying on this heritage in his questions posed by a determinist that were given answers by someone who held to free will, and he could count on the Caliph agreeing with the latter. ʿAmmār hoped that the Caliph would recognise that Christians were on the right lines with respect to free will. In other words, a Christian theologian could be on the right side of the argument raging between upholders of free will against believers in divine determinism. By utilising arguments from his Christian tradition, ʿAmmār was making a contribution to Muslim thinking about free will. Theodore and ʿAmmār both appeal to the difference between animals and humans to argue that animals act from instinct but humans act

from choice. Theodore mentions asses and eagles whereas ʿAmmār speaks of wolves and sheep.[58] They both point out that animals are not praised for behaving instinctively, yet humans are praised for choosing to do the right thing. Animals are determined by instinct but humans are defined by free will. In this way, humans cannot be described as determined by God to act in a certain fashion as animals are. This contrast between animals and human beings is found in previous Christian defences of free will.[59] ʿAmmār differs from Theodore in the way he treats evil as a reality for human beings, by giving considerable space to arguing that human beings need to have a real choice between good and evil. Theodore does not consider the problem of evil but merely proposes that humans ought to be praised for choosing what is good. By analysing the way pain and suffering can result from wrong choices by human beings, ʿAmmār shows how pain and suffering have a positive value for humans in enabling them to make better choices. Human beings discover that bad choices lead to good ones. He argues that God was wise to create human beings with real choices for good or evil, since from their evil deeds they might achieve a better quality of goodness than if they had been determined by God to always choose to do good deeds.

While ʿAmmār does not quote from the Qurʾan, he does enter into the discussion of the Qurʾanic concept of 'acquiring' (*iktisāb*). He shows familiarity with the view of Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr, who understood Q2:286, "God will not burden any soul beyond what it can bear; it will be rewarded for the good which it has acquired, and will suffer for the evil which it has acquired", to mean that God creates human actions which are acquired by humans. This Basrian contention between Ḥasan al-Baṣri and Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr was the kind of debate that ʿAmmār was doubtless engaged in. He mentions the notion of acquiring actions in questions twelve and twenty-six. In his answer to question twelve ʿAmmār argues that since it was the will of God to grant a new life to humans after death, "He knew that He would not enhance their delight except

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[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.
[59] See M. Knell, *Sin, Grace and Free Will,* pp. 162–163, and 168.

by their acquiring it (*bi-iktisāb min-hum*)".[60] Yet God did not decree beforehand which actions human beings would acquire. He gave humans free will to decide which actions to acquire. God "set them free to change in the operation of their deeds, until when they merit his favor by their good deeds they are in their happiness and their glory in what they have been given like the victors in possession of the greatness of bravery and strength and praise".[61] ʿAmmār is convinced that God created humans with the capacity to acquire good deeds but that He did not predetermine that they would perform them. God gave the acquisition to humans themselves. On the analogy of soldiers parading after victory in battle, humans may only merit praise for their deeds if they have acquired them by their own choice. They should not be praised for actions performed by the determination of God. ʿAmmār comes back to discussing acquisition in answering question twenty-six. He argues that if God "imposed a way of life on the essential nature of human beings, they would not afterwards find a way to change their good or bad way of life, and there would be no possibility for them to acquire the reward".[62] God created human beings with minds that were capable of choosing what was right, and He did not want to make decisions for them ahead of time. "They are capable of choosing the good that they choose, and for that reason their obedience is counted to them as righteousness and their reward is acquired".[63] Humans can only be counted righteous after they have proved their ability to make right choices. In order for them to merit their reward they have to be able to acquire good deeds without God deciding in advance that they should acquire them.

The churches of the Middle East were in consensus that God planned to create humans with the capability of choosing good or evil, and that the fall of Adam had not fundamentally altered that capability. None of the varying denominations, the Chalcedonians, the Copts, the West and East Syrians, diverged on this conviction. This was in marked contrast to the Latin speaking

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[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 108.
[61] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 108.
[62] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.
[63] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 125.

church in North Africa and Europe, which had adopted
Augustine's view that the fall of Adam had indeed fundamentally
altered the capability of humans to choose good rather than evil.
Augustine of Carthage (d. 430) believed that although God had
created human beings with the freedom to choose good or evil
this freedom was corrupted by the fall of Adam. After Adam fell
into sin, he lost the capability to choose good, so that he now was
capable only of choosing evil but no longer capable of choosing
good unless directly assisted by God. In other words, Adam could
freely disobey God but could only obey Him after God enabled
him.[64] Augustine also held that Adam passed on the incapacity to
choose to obey God to all his descendants, because Adam's one
act of disobedience meant that every other human was destined
to disobey God. As a result, all children were born with inherited
sin which would exclude them from meriting eternal life unless
they received the grace of baptism to annul the impact of Adam's
transgression.[65] Augustine held that the aid of the power of God
was absolutely essential for humans to choose what was right. He
argued that, "We can ourselves do nothing to effect good works
of piety without Him either working that we may will, or co-
working when we will".[66] Once the Western Latin speaking church
accepted Augustine's interpretation of the fall of Adam at the
Second Council of Orange in 529, the gap between Western and
Eastern churches became wide indeed.

ʿAmmār mentions the possibility of Augustine's view in his
answer to question twenty-eight which asks why the Creator
should hold humans guilty of error that they inherit. ʿAmmār
replies by repeating the centrality of reward for obedience. The
Creator filled the minds of humans with the hope of receiving a
reward for obeying Him, and gave them an incentive for not only
doing good to achieve a reward from Him but also for doing good
to their fellow human beings. Failure to do good would have

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[64] Augustine, 'On Rebuke and Grace', p. 31, in Knell, *Sin, Grace and Free
Will,* pp. 211–212.
[65] Augustine, 'On Merit and Forgiveness of Sins', 1:14–15, in Knell, *Sin,
Grace and Free Will,* p. 219.
[66] Augustine 'On the Spirit and the Letter', 5, in Knell, *Sin, Grace and Free
Will,* 231.

consequences not only in the next life but in this one. This link
between the afterlife and this life is set out by ʿAmmār in a series
of comparisons between the actions of God and the actions of
Humans. If God pardons the wrongdoing of humans then they
should pardon the wrongdoing of their fellow humans. If God
does not compel humans to do good then they should not compel
others, but if God willed that they behave with kindness towards
others then they should not act unjustly towards others. ʿAmmār
sums up, "Therefore, whoever does it succeeds and is victorious,
and whoever strays from it is unsuccessful and loses".[67] In other
words, Humans do not inherit wrongdoing from Adam. His fall
into sin did not drag his descendants down into an automatic
compulsion to disobey God. Humans in all generations have the
capability of choosing to obey despite any past examples of
failure. God wills that humans choose good but he does not
compel them. He provides incentives for humans to choose good
in terms of a reward in the next life and good community relations
in this life.

Early ninth century Arabic speaking Christians from
different denominations upheld human free will along with
muʿtazili Muslims. Yet it is significant that both Theodore Abū
Qurra and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī sought to argue against *traditionist*
Muslims who held that God chose actions for humans before they
acquired them. This appears to indicate that by the early ninth
century the traditionist position was gaining ground over the free
will view of the *muʿtazila*. Arabic speaking Christians were
naturally drawn to the latter in putting forward their arguments
for the importance of genuine human choice for good or evil.
While they inherited this conviction from the Greek and Syriac
Christian tradition, they sought to align themselves with those
Muslims who supported free will. Certainly, ʿAmmār knew that
the Caliph upheld this position and so gave weight to defending
free will in his writing addressed to him. He ended the first
section of his *Book of Questions and Answers* with this defense of
free will in the knowledge that the Caliph would have found little
to disagree with in his presentation. However, the second section

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[67] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 127.

of his *Book of Questions and Answers* deals with an issue that might have been more difficult for the Caliph to accept. ʿAmmār turns to the accusation by Muslims that the Christian gospels do not represent the teaching of Jesus Christ accurately, and that the followers of Jesus altered his sayings to suit their own views. The next chapter analyses ʿAmmār's defence of the authenticity of the gospels.

CHAPTER FOUR.
DEFENDING THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE GOSPELS

The second section of *The Book of Questions and Answers* is concerned with defending the authenticity of the four Christian gospels from a Muslim charge that the followers of Jesus Christ altered his teaching to suit their own beliefs. It is at this point that ʿAmmār turns from arguments about the existence of one Creator who willed to be benevolent to human beings by granting them freedom to choose to follow Him that would have been supported by some Muslims at least, to arguments that no Muslims would have easily accepted. By commencing with a defense of the gospels as representing the teaching of Jesus, he has decided that securing the authenticity of the text of the gospels is essential to demonstrating that the Trinity, which is the subject of the third section of *The Book of Questions and Answers*, and the incarnation, and the crucifixion of Christ, which are the concerns of the fourth section of *The Book of Questions and Answers,* are true because they derive from what is found in the gospels. In *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* ʿAmmār has a section on proof for the true religion before a section on proof for the authenticity of the gospels. These two concerns are separated out from the discussion in section two of *The Book of Questions and Answers,* where they are combined. Here ʿAmmār argues that Christianity is the true religion sent by God because the messengers faithfully passed on the message that God intended, and the gospels faithfully contain their message. The oral teaching and miraculous signs brought by the messengers are

confirmed by the written account of the teaching and miraculous signs brought by Jesus Christ in the gospels. Other Christians in the early Islamic period sought to defend either the apostolic messengers or the text that they passed on. But ʿAmmār is alone among them in developing such a thorough defense of the text. He was responding to the fact that Muslims were in the habit of alleging that the message brought by the apostles was not an accurate reflection of the message that God sent in the Qurʾan.[1]

MUSLIM ACCUSATION OF ALTERATION OF THE GOSPELS

The earliest known example of a Muslim accusing Christians of altering the message brought by Jesus in the gospels comes from the Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–784), who had invited Timothy I, the Patriarch of the Church of the East to answer questions about Christianity in 781, not long after he had been elected Patriarch in 780. Timothy gave an account of his two-day encounter in a letter to a priest called Sargis.[2] During the meeting, the Caliph accused Christians of removing references to the Prophet Muḥammad from the text of the gospels. "Many proofs and testimonies existed in your books concerning Muḥammad but you corrupted your books and altered them".[3] When Timothy asked, "Where have you found that the gospel is corrupted"? he received no reply. Timothy went on to say, "If I saw one prophecy in the gospel about the coming of Muḥammad then I would leave the gospel and follow the Qurʾan".[4] The Caliph returned to the absence of Muḥammad from the gospels at a later stage of the discussion. "If you did not change the Torah and the gospel why

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[1] This chapter builds on M. Beaumont, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels', in D. Thomas, (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity,* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 241–255.

[2] See Epistle 59 in R.J. Bidawid, (ed.), *Les Lettres du Patriarche Nestorien Timothée I,* pp. 42–43.

[3] See 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823),* appendix, p. 21.

[4] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823),* appendix, p. 21.

do you not bear witness that Muḥammad is also among the prophets"?[5] This reference to the Torah being changed reflects accusations made in the Qur'an that the Jews corrupted the Torah in Q3:78 and 7:162. However, the Qur'an does not explicitly accuse Christians of changing the gospel. Yet this combination of Jews with Christians in the alteration of their scriptural texts is made by the Caliph, and he was surely guided by Muslim scholarly opinion. It is clear that Muslims were now accusing both Jews and Christians of removing prophecies of the coming of Muḥammad from their texts. The Caliph was no doubt reflecting the view found in the earliest biography of the Prophet Muḥammad by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767) in which the announcement of the coming of a prophet "whose name is Aḥmad" in Q61:6 is connected to Jesus' promise of the paraclete in John 14:16. Ibn Isḥāq claimed that the Syriac word for the paraclete had the same meaning as the Arabic name Aḥmad, a form of the name Muḥammad, and that Jesus was looking forward to the arrival of the Prophet of Islam.[6] When Timothy pointed out that the paraclete was the Holy Spirit and that according to John's gospel the Holy Spirit will interpret everything for the disciples after Jesus has ascended to heaven, the Caliph replied, "All of that points to the coming of Muḥammad, on him be peace".[7] In other words, by the late eighth century, Muslims had come to read a prophecy of Muḥammad in the gospel of John and had become accustomed to accusing Christians of altering that reference.[8]

Along with the charge that Christians had removed prophecy of Muḥammad from the teaching of Jesus in the gospels, Muslims

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[5] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823)*, appendix, p. 26.

[6] See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of (ibn) Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah"*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 103–104.

[7] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823)*, appendix, p. 23.

[8] For a fuller discussion see M. Beaumont, 'Early Muslim interpretation of the Gospels', *Transformation* 22, (2005), 20–27, pp. 20–21.

were accusing them of adding teaching to the mouth of Jesus that he could not possibly have uttered. When Timothy quoted the command of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28:19, "Make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", as supporting Jesus' teaching concerning the Trinity, the Caliph wondered how Christ could have spoken such words.[9] Muslim scholars were obviously comparing the gospels with the Qurʾan, and finding evidence for the shortcomings of the former in the light of the latter. The fact that the Caliph himself was prepared to use such findings in his questioning of the leader of the Church of the East signals just how embedded this critique of the gospels had become in the Islamic community.

ʿAmmār nowhere refers to the debate about Jesus prophesying the future arrival of Muḥammad, but he does have a Muslim ask how Jesus could have used the Trinitarian formula. This does not come in his treatment of the accusation of alteration of the gospels but in section four of *The Book of Questions and Answers* where he defends the incarnation. Question forty-three is, "How could Jesus command his disciples to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Isn't this text evidence of the corruption of the message of Christ by Christians"? ʿAmmār responds by saying that Christ claimed to have a relationship of equality with the Father in other gospel texts, so the Trinitarian statement is not a unique aspect of the teaching of Jesus.[10]

ʿAMMĀR'S DEFENSE OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE GOSPELS IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

There are fourteen questions in this second section of *The Book of Questions and Answers.* The opening question asks,

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[9] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I', in H. Putman, *L'Église et L'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823)*, appendix, p. 15.

[10] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 249.

> If this Creator is kind, generous, merciful, and compassionate as you have described, then He saw the deviation of His creation from His path and their turning aside from His way, why did He not warn them out of His kindness and mercy? And what prevented Him from sending His messengers to them concerning this and to deal with it?

ʿAmmār answers that the Creator encouraged them to accept his warning "by revealing His signs through those who carried them to their nations".[11] Question two seeks more information about what prevented the Creator from sending messengers to warn deviant people. The reply is that He did send messengers at various times to call people to obey Him. The third question asks about the content of the promise of the Creator to those who obeyed Him, and the means by which they could know about it. ʿAmmār replies that the promise was delivered in the gospel written down in "His book that has been propagated and disseminated in the possession of the nations and peoples".[12] The questioner wants to understand in question four how the written gospel provides evidence for a person who was not there to witness the work of the messengers who brought it. The evidence is the same for someone who did not witness the signs of the Creator as for someone who saw them, replies ʿAmmār. The gospels contain the evidence of the teaching of Jesus that accords with "the principles of the true religion agreeing with all of the norms of the Generous Benefactor, without misguided leaders inventing their false laws which they fabricated in their books and their creeds". Jesus promoted the generosity of God when he called on his audience to love their enemies and promoted the justice of God when he said to them, "As you want to be done to you, you should do to everyone".[13] The gospels preserve the authentic teaching of Jesus which has the power to impact the behavior of anyone from any generation that takes these commands to heart.

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[11] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 128.
[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 129.
[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 129–130. ʿAmmār quotes from Luke 6:13, and 27–28.

> In the keeping of these two commandments is avoidance of all
> evil deeds such as murder, adultery, theft, anger, envy, lying,
> false witness, prevention of the desire for women,
> authorization of the separation of married couples, and
> similar things on the path of corruption. This is the love which
> prevents someone from killing his friend, from taking his
> possessions, from stealing his money, from envying what he
> has, from removing him from his home, from bearing false
> witness against him, from ill-treating him, violating him, or
> dominating him in any of his concerns.[14]

The fifth question turns to the issue of fabrication of the teaching
of Jesus. The questioner suggests that, "Those who accepted this
religion and this book set up a conference concerning it and made
it up among themselves to attract people to their cause and obey
them, without God having sent this down to them and
commanding them to proclaim it".[15] ʿAmmār has four replies to
this suggestion. Firstly, nobody who witnessed Jesus saying these
things denied that he said them. Secondly, the teaching of Jesus
was disseminated by the messengers in the various languages of
the people to whom they proclaimed it. God demonstrated His
wisdom and justice by not forcing anyone to accept the message
"by means of a language other than the language and tongue
known to him".[16] Here ʿAmmār makes an oblique contrast to the
fact that Islam was propagated in Arabic and that Muslims never
sought to proclaim the message of God in the languages of those
they ruled. By default, the untranslated Qurʾan demonstrates that
it does not reflect the wisdom and justice of the Creator towards
humanity. Thirdly, Jesus' parables show the truth of the hidden
supernatural realm amid everyday life. The parable of the
mustard seed demonstrates the growth of the rule of God among
many nations, the parable of the net catching many fish shows
the diversity of peoples in the Kingdom of God, the parable of the
yeast which leavens dough reveals how the teaching of Jesus has
incremental power in those who hear and obey, and the parable
of the king who called all kinds of people, whether reputable or

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[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 130.
[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 130.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 131.

disreputable to a banquet in honor of his son is an indication that God desired to call "people from the worship of captivating idols, people who were following Satan, with a free invitation".[17] Fourthly, the fact that several nations accepted the message shows that they were not in doubt about its truth. As a result, "rational people are convinced by what they witness of the agreement among the tribes of our nations".[18] They did not collude to fabricate the message.

Question six raises the problem of "scattered nations professing different religions, and possessing different books containing commands and prohibitions".[19] How can the claims of each of these religions be assessed when "each group claims that their book is the promise of God to His creation which His messengers gave them and He revealed through them His signs and His proof".[20] ʿAmmār suggests that there are six criteria by which different religions can be assessed; consent, concession, the sword, incentives, tribalism, and control of spirits. When a nation consents to false teaching such as the Greeks who hold to materialism or the Persians who believe in two deities then it is clear that their religion lacks the proof of the one Creator.[21] When a religion makes concessions to the weakness of people by making laws easier to obey, "like a sect which is founded on the incitement of slave girls, daughters and noblemen by permitting all that people crave and endless pleasure",[22] then it is clear that it lacks the proof of the wisdom of the one Creator. Here ʿAmmār alludes to the lax rules about sexual behavior permitted by Islamic law. When a religion forces acceptance by using the sword, the subjugated people hate the subjugators and long for freedom from the religion they have imposed.[23] Here is criticism of the way Islam imposed its laws by force on conquered peoples.

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[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 131–132. ʿAmmār quotes from Matthew 13:31–33, 47, and 22:2–10.

[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 132.

[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 135.

[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 136.

[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 136.

[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 136.

[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 137.

When a religion offers worldly gifts, people respond eagerly to "escape from necessity and need".[24] Perhaps ʿAmmār has the incentive of tax breaks in mind. Christians were regularly converting to Islam to avoid paying the annual poll tax for remaining in the Christian community. When a religion is promoted by tribal loyalty then people follow whatever they are taught without thinking.[25] ʿAmmār probably has in mind the fanatical loyalty of the Arab armies who conquered the Middle East to the message of Islam brought by their leader, Muḥammad. Lastly, when a religion is promoted by magicians then what people accept is nothing more than a magic trick with no reality.[26] It is not clear which kind of religion ʿAmmār has in mind here. After surveying these six criteria for establishing the truth of a particular religion, ʿAmmār argues that if none of these six criteria are present in a particular religion then it qualifies as the religion which truly comes from the one Creator.[27]

The seventh question raises the fundamental issue that people accept what their "hearts incline to".[28] ʿAmmār responds that the Christian religion was not likely to attract the hearts of those who heard the message. "Given that its appearance is deemed to be ugly and its report is found to be repulsive, and minds have an aversion to its ugliness and hearts are alarmed at its vulgarity, then there is no way to suspect its acceptance by means of compliance to accept it by approving of it".[29] ʿAmmār lists the teaching of the gospels that would not have been easily accepted.

> It is said that a virgin becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child without a husband. Then it is proclaimed that the one born of the virgin is the Son of God. Then it is said that after that he was crucified and killed, he was resurrected and raised to life. Then it is said that after his resurrection and being raised to life he ascended to heaven and sat down on the right

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[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 137.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 137.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 137.
[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 138.
[28] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 138.
[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 138.

side of God above the angels and the Cherubim and Seraphim. Then it is said that he was given rule over every creature and that humans and angels together serve him. Then it is said that he will return to earth to raise the dead and resurrect those who are in their graves. He will judge angels and humans on the day of resurrection, and he will promote the righteous to happiness and commit the unrighteous to hell. Then it is said that he sent his messengers, commanding them to summon people to faith and belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, one Creator, one Lord. Then he called people after this to renounce the world and abandon its enjoyment. He did not announce a greater reward for those who trusted in him than being in heaven like the angels.[30]

ʿAmmār concludes, "How can they possibly claim that the nations accepted this and received it with pleasure? Rather is it not clear to everyone who has reason that it is repulsive, demanding, burdensome, false, untruthful and unsuitable"?[31]

Question eight asks whether the gospel made the laws of God easier to obey. ʿAmmār denies this by quoting from the gospels commands of Jesus that were difficult to follow. He paints a picture of a leader granting his followers permission to satisfy their bodily desires for sexual indulgence, and consumption of food and drink, and the leisure and wealth to enjoy them.[32] Then he refers to the teaching of Jesus, "Whoever divorces his wife and takes another woman has committed adultery, and whoever forsakes his wife except for indecency has sinned greatly", and comments, "It is asserted clearly here that it is forbidden to a man to take a woman other than his one wife".[33] By selecting this particular prohibition, ʿAmmār decided to show how the gospels contradict the permission for a man to divorce in the Qurʾan, and the permission for a man to marry up to four wives, without actually quoting the Qurʾanic texts.[34] He follows this up with

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[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 138–139.

[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 139.

[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 139.

[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 139. See Luke 16:18 and Matthew 19:9.

[34] See Q2:227–241, and 4:3.

references in the gospels to giving away wealth to the poor, and not being anxious about food and clothing, as further examples of Jesus cutting off "all worldly pleasure and desire".[35] Other examples of teaching that prohibit sensual indulgence include Jesus, "urging humility and bearing injustice and patience in experiencing wrong, and devotion to prayer and fasting. He threatened the one who abuses his brother or who looks at a woman with lust with the punishment of hell".[36] ʿAmmār turns to the questioner and states, "Yet you consider all of this to be concessions and a means of attracting gullible people to a false religion".[37]

The ninth question suggests that people submitted to the gospel rules because they were forced to by the ruling authority. ʿAmmār argues that force was prohibited by the same Jesus who promulgated the rules. When Jesus sent his disciples with the message he said, "I am sending you as lambs among wolves. So, go but do not take a club or a stick on your mission".[38] It was impossible for them to defy their master by using force to gain adherents to their preaching.

Question ten then wonders "could it not be that its acceptance was because of greed for money that was given"?[39] But ʿAmmār can quote Jesus once again to remove this possibility. When he sent his disciples on mission he said, "Do not take gold, silver or copper," which "shows that they were forbidden to offer anyone money or a bribe".[40]

In question eleven, the issue of tribalism is raised. "Perhaps it was accepted as a result of the tribalism and fanaticism of those who brought the book".[41] ʿAmmār easily refutes this suggestion

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[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 140. See Matthew 5:52, 19:16–30.

[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 140. See Matthew 5:10–12, 21–22, 27–30; 6:5–18.

[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 140.

[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 140. See Matthew 15:9–16.

[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 140.

[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 140–141. See Matthew 15:9.

[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 141.

by reminding his questioner that a variety of ethnic groups embraced the gospel message. This was all the more amazing given that their accepting the message meant "worshipping a dead Jew, despite the particular reasons of hatred, war and animosity between them and the Jews".[42]

The twelfth question asks whether the messengers used magic tricks to dupe their hearers. The answer lies in the command of Jesus to his disciples to demonstrate the truth of the message with signs and wonders. He told them, "Go and call the nations to this religion, drive out demons, and heal the sick and the lepers by my name, and if you drink deadly poison in my name, it will not harm you".[43] Their ability to heal could not have been based on illusion. People really were healed. This is proved by the fact that Christians gained a solid reputation for being followers of science rather than magic. "How and why did they become accepted by leading kings, philosophers of the nations and astronomers of the peoples to be entrusted with all kinds of science, from the practice of medicine, the wisdom of philosophy and the precision of mathematics"?[44] Interestingly, ʿAmmār depends on the developed scientific method of generations of Christian doctors to refute the charge of magic tricks, rather than on miraculous healing at the hands of the original disciples.

Question thirteen concerns whether the message was accepted without much thought or due attention to the possible falsehood of their proclamation.[45] ʿAmmār now depends on the working of miracles by the first messengers to demonstrate that the hearers of their message witnessed signs and wonders which authenticated the message. The various nations that accepted the message with all its difficult commands could not possibly have meekly accepted them unless they had witnessed signs and wonders at the hand of the messengers. The willingness of these different nations,

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[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 141.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 141. See Mark 16:15–18.
[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 142.
[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 142.

to accept their book, to believe the truth of their preaching could not get going without their asking for the proof of their proclamation, and in each of their countries a person who is struck down from weakness, chronic illness or possession by Satan, desires healing from his illness, shows himself to them or is brought to them and is healed by them. Would this not prompt the inspection of the miracle that had happened to him?[46]

The final question in section two on the authenticity of the Gospels asks whether the first messengers might have used money or force to get their hearers to accept them but later wrote the gospels to include Jesus' prohibitions of such things, to suggest that they had established Christianity simply by the consent of the nations.[47] There are two considerations to refute this, Firstly, the various nations testify that those who brought the message followed the teaching included in the gospels.[48] Secondly, if the gospels were written by later generations of Christians to include prohibitions that were not actually followed by the first messengers then the various nations that were given the written gospels would not have accepted that they were an authentic record of the message. They would have rejected the difficult commands found in the gospels and "then they would have returned to what they were at first in their religious community and the ease of the way of life of their ancestors".[49] ʿAmmār points to the sacred writing of other religions as evidence that the text matches the original proclamation of those who proclaimed the message. The written Torah of the Jews is not different from the oral proclamation of those who brought it. The text of the Manichaeans does not diverge from the preaching of Mani, and the Qurʾan does not diverge from the message that Muḥammad brought.[50] Given that the gospels are just the same despite being in different nations and languages then there can be no doubt that what is contained in them is exactly the same as the message and

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[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 142–143.
[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 143.
[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 144.
[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 144.
[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 145–146.

actions of the first messengers who proclaimed the gospel. "If there is agreement in the current transcription of our books in the nations that is evidence of the prevention of corruption and the declaration of the source from which they originated".[51]

ʿAMMĀR'S DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE GOSPELS IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

In his later *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy,* ʿAmmār has a third section on reasons for the acceptance of Christianity before a fourth section on defending the authenticity of the gospels. In this book he defends the oral proclamation of the message before defending the written form of the message in the gospels. The defence of the oral proclamation is similar to that in the earlier *Book of Questions and Answers.* ʿAmmār studies the same group of possible worldly reasons for the acceptance of a religion. For example, while Jews and Muslims were prepared to use the sword, Christians were not. In this book he is much more forthright about force being central to the propagation of the message of Islam, and the contrast with Christian preachers who relied solely on verbal persuasion and miraculous signs.

> The religion of Islam used the sword, not rejecting it but rather describing and depicting its strength and how it invaded territory by using it.[52] But the impetus of those who

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[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 146.

[52] ʿAmmār hardly needs to appeal to the Qurʾan to verify the historical reality that the area from which he writes was taken by force early in the history of the Islamic movement, and that he is living in a situation where the exercise of Muslim rule has encouraged the migration of many Christians to the fold of Islam. Yet his implication is that God commanded the use of the sword to promote the spread of Islam according to the Qurʾan. Q2:190–193, 216–218, 244–246, 3:142, 4:74–77, 84, 95, 5:54, 8:72, 9:12–16, 29, 36, 38–39, 86–88, 111, 123, 16:110, 47:4, 48:15–17, 57:10, 59:6, and 61:4 all testify to this obvious difference from the command of Christ to leave the sword behind when preaching the gospel.

> proclaimed the Christian religion was the Holy Gospel in
> which is found the prohibition of the sword.[53]

ʿAmmār also appeals to the universal testimony of other religious
people that the first Christians had a reputation for peaceable
propagation of their message. "Everyone in the world who
opposes the Christian religion, such as the Jews, the Magians, the
Muslims and others, agrees that the disciples of the Messiah did
not compel people with the sword".[54]

In discussing one of the other possible reasons for the
acceptance of Christianity, offering easy regulations to follow,
ʿAmmār emphasises in this later book the evidence for the
difficulty that the early disciples made for men to accept the
message of sexual continence. He appeals to examples from the
history of the Jews concerning David and Solomon. "We are told
that David the prophet, despite his purity, desired women so
intensely that he murdered a man for his wife;[55] and that
Solomon, the son of David, a fount of wisdom and an ocean of
proverbs, so desired women that they defeated his wisdom".[56]
ʿAmmār contrasts these examples with the requirements laid
down by the preachers of Christianity that men remain faithful to
the one wife they marry, and that the law is the same for both
small and great.

> Those who proclaimed the Christian religion commanded
> kings and others, no matter how overwhelming their desire

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[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', pp. 33–34.

[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 34.

[55] See 2 Samuel 11:1–27. ʿAmmār's use of the term 'prophet' for David is
an indication of his awareness of Muslim sensibilities, since David is
listed among the prophets (al-nabiyyin) in Q4:163, and was chosen from
among the prophets (al-nabiyyin) to be gifted with the psalms (al-zabūr)
in Q17: 55.

[56] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 38. I Kings 11:1–9 relates how
Solomon's marriages to several foreign princesses led him to worship
their deities. While not openly discussing the permission in the Torah for
a man to have more than one wife, ʿAmmār is attempting to engage a
Muslim reader in the stories of two prominent men from the Bible, David
and Solomon, whose names appear linked together in the Qurʾan at
Q21:78–79, 27:15–16, 34:10–14, and 38:30.

for women might be, that a man should marry only one woman. And even if she is afflicted by all kinds of illness, which in turn would not allow them to be together, he is forbidden to look at a woman besides her until death.[57]

ʿAmmār certainly sharpens the discussion of Christian regulations in the later book by clarifying the divergence between Christian and Muslim rules concerning marriage and divorce.

With respect to the possibility that the Christian preachers used magic tricks to appeal to people, ʿAmmār highlights in this later book the difference between such illusions and genuine miraculous healing. Anyone who had an illness would come to seek healing if travelling preachers came by offering to heal them through miraculous signs. This is in fact what happened when the disciples of Jesus preached. They did not offer potions to remove illness but the laying on of their hands and the command of Jesus. ʿAmmār contrasts them with the doctors known to the people.

> If people hurry to doctors who do not claim to have the power to heal by words which have no harm in them, but give people drastic and unpleasant treatments, how would people not rush to someone who claimed to have the power to heal by words which do not cause any pain or trouble for them.[58]

If these people had not actually been healed by touch and command then they would not have accepted the message that was brought.

When ʿAmmār turns to the text of the gospels that the preachers passed on in the fourth section of his *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy,* he affirms that the gospels match the oral proclamation of the first disciples just as he did in his earlier *Book of Questions and Answers.* But in the later book he deals at some length with the accusation that the king of Byzantium had the original text of the gospels altered to suit his purposes. ʿAmmār asks a question of the person who proposes this.

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[57] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', pp. 38–39.
[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 40.

> O you who claims that the king of Byzantium has corrupted the gospel which is in his possession, how is it that no difference is found between his gospel in his language and the gospels which are in the languages which differ from his which are not under his power and they have not received his instruction about the corruption?[59]

Given the historical impossibility of the King of Byzantium being single-handedly capable of altering the text of the gospels already in the possession of other nations not under his control, "The King of Byzantium is acquitted of the charge of having changed his gospel by the testimony of all the Gospels in many languages which were not under his power and did not accept his instruction, and they agree with his text and his text agrees with them".[60] If someone goes on to allege that many different kings colluded together to alter the text of the gospels, ʿAmmār points out the inherent improbability of this ever taking place. "Where did they gather together, and in whose kingdom? It must be the case that all of them traveled to the kingdom of one king. Who is he? How did they trust one another, and how did everyone submit to the other, and how do you know this"?[61]

Then ʿAmmār makes allowance for the view that the text of the gospels was not changed, but that the text was misinterpreted. He has someone say, "We claim that it was not possible for them to corrupt the revealed text; they did corrupt the revealed text from its purpose and its meaning, but they did not corrupt the actual words themselves".[62] This softer allegation of altering the text will not work, since the actual teaching in the gospels is clearly contrary to the teaching of the Qurʾan. There can be no doubt about the clarity of such teaching and no room for the kind of ambiguity that might lead to corrupt interpretation of an authentic text. ʿAmmār speaks on behalf of all Christians to the Muslim who makes the allegation of corrupt interpretation of an authentic text.

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[59] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 43.
[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 43.
[61] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 43.
[62] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 44.

We say, "The gospel commands us to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[63] It states that the Word is eternal, and is God, by whom all things were created;[64] the Spirit is the Lord;[65] there is no marriage, or food or drink in the afterlife;[66] and many other things which are too countless to mention. This and many other similar things are in the text of the book without interpretation. See if any of these agree with your book".[67]

ʿAmmār gives short shrift to the kind of Muslim who attempts to align the interpretation of the gospels with the teaching of the Qurʾan.

How then can the Gospel be turned in the direction of the meaning of your book? This is absolutely impossible. If it was not for the weakness of your argument about this, I would have multiplied the testimonies which invalidate your statements. But I find it sufficient to refute you by your own words.[68]

ʿAmmār sums up the fourth section of his *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* by painting a picture of someone who follows an easy road yet is ambushed on the way. It would have been better for him to follow a more difficult road that leads to success. The kind of people who allege that the gospels have been altered either in their writing or in their interpretation "are like the person who follows a broad path such as this by his ignorance, and pursues pleasure, which will lead him into a thicket where a lion will eat him, instead of following

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[63] See Matthew 28:19.
[64] See John 1:1–2.
[65] See Matthew 12:32 where Jesus warns that sinning against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, and John 14:17, 25; and 15:26 where Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father.
[66] See Matthew 22:30, where Jesus denies that at the resurrection people will be married, and states that they will be like the angels with a different form than the physical body which needs food and drink to be sustained.
[67] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', pp. 44–45.
[68] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 45.

the narrow and difficult path which will lead him to what is good for him".[69]

ʿAmmār devoted considerable space in both of his writings to the defense of the authenticity of the messengers and text of the gospels. Theodore Abū Qurra also argued for the validity of the messengers but was less concerned to defend the authenticity of the text of the gospels. Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭā, a West Syrian theologian also made a defense of the gospel messengers.

THEODORE ABŪ QURRA ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE APOSTOLIC MESSENGERS OF THE GOSPEL

While ʿAmmār did not mention the Muslim accusation that Christians had removed the prophecy of Muḥammad from the gospels, Theodore is reported to have responded to a Muslim accusing Christians of doing just that. John the Deacon, who claimed to have accompanied Theodore Abū Qurra on trips around the Middle east, quotes the following conversation between Theodore and a Muslim.

> Theodore: No earlier prophet declared Muhammad to be a prophet.
>
> Saracen: That's not true. In the gospel, Christ wrote: "I shall send to you a prophet named Muhammad."
>
> Theodore: The gospel has no such prediction.
>
> Saracen: It used to, it's only that you all deleted it.
>
> Theodore: If someone goes before a judge against a debtor with a written document concerning the loan, but one without any mention of what he is seeking or claiming – what would the judge decide that he should receive?
>
> Saracen: Nothing.

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[69] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Proof', p. 46. See Matthew 7:13–14, where Jesus calls his listeners to enter the kingdom of God through a narrow gate rather than go through a wide gate that leads to destruction. He warns them that many people go through the wide gate but few go through the narrow one that leads to life because only a few find it.

Theodore: Accordingly, you have nothing from the gospel.[70]

It is interesting that Theodore did not refer to this accusation in his own writing in Arabic addressed to Muslims, but John the Deacon recorded it in Greek for a Greek speaking Christian audience. Nevertheless, the dialogue shows how popular this point was for Muslims who spoke to Christians, and that Muslims were regularly claiming that Christians had altered the text of their gospels to deny prophethood to Muḥammad.

Theodore wrote in Arabic to defend the authenticity of the gospel messengers in three treatises. In 'On the Characteristics of the True Religion', Theodore notes three characteristics of the true religion. Firstly, God sent His messengers to all nations. He would not be just if he judged all nations without having sent messengers to warn them of judgment. Secondly, the messengers had to perform signs and wonders to demonstrate that they were messengers from God. Thirdly, the messengers had to teach the nations in languages known to those nations. If the messengers had only spoken their own language then the nations could rightly claim that they had not properly understood the message when faced with judgment on the day of resurrection. God would not be just to condemn these nations for not understanding the warning given by His messengers.[71]

A second treatise addressing this issue is 'On the Confirmation of the Gospel'. Here Theodore examines four reasons why the nations might have accepted the message brought by the Christian messengers. These are making regulations easy, using force, appealing to tribalism, and being popular with ordinary people. The Christian messengers were not guilty of doing any of them. For example, they taught difficult regulations such as turning the other cheek when struck, giving clothes to a thief, not lusting after women, and not calling anyone

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[70] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens by Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Haran, as Reported by John the Deacon', in Lamoreaux, 211–227, p. 215.
[71] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Characteristics of the True Religion', in I. Dick, (ed), 'Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Le Museon* 72 (1959), 53–67, pp. 63–64.

a fool.[72] They did not use force to promote their message since Christ had said they would be like sheep among wolves, and that those who killed them would think they were offering a sacrifice.[73] There was no tribalism involved because the messengers were Jews who were considered to be objectionable people by the very nations who accepted the message about a Jew who was proclaimed to be the Creator of everything. This message was the very opposite of being a popular proclamation.[74]

A third defense of the authenticity of the messengers is found in his *On the Existence of God and the True Religion.* In this treatise, Theodore mentions other possible reasons for the acceptance of the message, the appeal of the messengers' status, the use of magic tricks, and appealing to the ambition of their hearers.[75] He points out that the disciples of Jesus were ordinary men with lowly status. They had been sent with one piece of clothing and food for one day.[76] They hardly appealed to the ambitions of their hearers because they taught them to deny the pleasures of the world to follow Christ.[77] They did not employ tricks to dazzle people but performed miracles of healing.[78] The very message that they proclaimed was not likely to appeal to the taste of the people who heard it. They said that,

> God sent His Son from heaven, who came to a young virgin and took his human nature from her. He was born from her both as divine and as human. He grew up in the world like one of us. When he called the Jews to believe in him, they did not accept him. Rather they rejected him, were insolent to him, hit him, crucified him, killed him, and buried him. After three days, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. People can only be saved from sin and hell and enter the

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[72] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Confirmation of the Gospel', in Bacha, 71–75, p. 72. Theodore quotes from Matthew 5:39–40, 28, and 22.

[73] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Confirmation of the Gospel', p. 72. See Matthew 10:16 and John 16:2.

[74] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Confirmation of the Gospel', p. 72.

[75] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 259.

[76] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 262. See Matthew 10:10.

[77] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 263.

[78] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 263.

kingdom of heaven through believing in him. He is both God
and the Son of God. He sent us to preach this message to all
people so that they may be saved.[79]

Theodore argues that the nations accepted their message as a
result of the power of God and His wonders, for there was little
to commend such a message from a worldly point of view.[80] In
sum, the gospel message is the only true religion from God.[81]

Then Theodore has someone say that the nations accepted
the message because Paul and his companions led them astray.
This allegation had been made by some Muslims. It had been
suggested that the true message of Jesus had been changed by
Paul to what was found in the four gospels of the Christians. This
was first put forward by Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī (d, 797) in his
Book of Conquest and Apostasy. According to Sayf, Paul infiltrated
among the disciples of Jesus claiming that he had received a
vision of Jesus who told him to teach that his followers should
not retaliate against anyone who does evil to them. They should
turn the other cheek and give clothes to those who steal from
them. The Christians accepted this as a true vision and gave up
jihad.[82] Theodore is aware of this Muslim view of Paul and replies,
"How was that possible"?[83] Paul passed on the very same message
that the first disciples of Jesus brought. The nations indulged in
the best food and drink but Paul and the disciples taught them to
fast with bread and water. The men of the nations enjoyed
women, committing adultery and taking concubines, but Paul and
the disciples urged them to marry one woman and be content with
her. The nations used to eat the flesh of their defeated enemies
but Paul and the disciples taught them to be like sheep among

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[79] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 263.
[80] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 264.
[81] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 265.
[82] Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī, *The Book of Conquest and Apostasy,* pp. 132–133, quoted by Michael Kuhn in 'Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for Taḥrīf', in I.M. Beaumont, (ed), *Arab Christians and the Qurʾan from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period,* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150–173, pp. 156–157.
[83] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 265.

wolves, to bear insults, to turn the other cheek, to give clothes to one who steals them, and to bless rather than curse.[84] Theodore turns the tables on his Muslim questioner.

> My friend, you are the one who is astray. For you, being rightly guided means the exact opposite. You insult others yet will not accept to be insulted by them. You strike others yet will not accept to be struck by them. Rather, if you are insulted, you will strike, and if you are struck, you will kill. You have turned right guidance into error and error into right guidance.[85]

Theodore emphatically denies the allegation that Paul corrupted the message of the disciples, who were united in faithfully proclaiming the power of God revealed in Jesus. He illustrates this reality from the tradition about the disciple Thomas who was said to have visited India. He impacted the polytheistic Indians through demonstrating the signs of the one Creator. When the kings of India heard his message they said Thomas was mad. He told them he would prove his sanity by raising a body from death to life. He asked them if any other than God could raise the dead to life. They agreed that only God was able to accomplish this. Thomas said to the dead person, "In the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified in Jerusalem, rise up". After the dead person rose up alive the kings put their faith in Christ.[86] Theodore concludes the story by arguing that the kings accepted Thomas because of the demonstration of signs and wonders, not through the power of Thomas or his trickery, or because of their ambitions or erroneous views.[87] All the messengers, including Paul, proclaimed the same message taught by Christ and performed sings and wonders as Christ had done.

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[84] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 266–267.
[85] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 267.
[86] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 269.
[87] Theodore Abū Qurra, 'On the Existence of God', p. 270.

ḤABĪB IBN KHIDMA ABŪ RĀʾIṬĀ ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF
THE APOSTOLIC MESSENGERS OF THE GOSPEL

The West Syrian theologian, Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭā, was a contemporary of Theodore Abū Qurra with whom he claimed to have debated the nature of the Incarnation.[88] In his treatise *On the Confirmation of the Christian Religion,* Abū Rāʾiṭā seeks to argue that the messengers who brought the gospel demonstrated that the message was from God by performing miracles that could only come from Him. Other religions were accepted for one of six reasons; desire, greed, fear, concession in regulations, approval, and tribal loyalty.[89] But the Christian religion was not accepted for any of these reasons. Rather, people accepted the message of the gospel when they witnessed the miracles at the hand of the messengers who brought the gospel. Just as Moses proved that God had sent him by performing miracles that only God could have done through him, and just as Jesus proved that he had come from God by performing miracles, so the apostles that Jesus sent proved that their message was true by performing miracles that only God could have done through them.[90]

> The religion of God depends from first to last on His establishing His religion, and setting up the knowledge of it, and setting forth His argument to His creatures, by confirming through clear signs and wonders which the intelligence of creatures cannot comprehend, the heart of creatures cannot fathom, and no amount of opinions can bring forth the words to describe.[91]

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[88] Abū Rāʾiṭā opens 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 'Reply to the Melkites on the Union', in G. Graf, (ed.), *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Hidma Abū Rāʾiṭā, CSCO* 130 (Louvain: 1951), 65–72, p. 65.

[89] Abū Rāʾiṭā, 'On the Confirmation of the Christian Religion', in G. Graf, (ed.), *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn Hidma Abū Rāʾiṭā,* 131–159, pp. 131–132.

[90] Abū Rāʾiṭā, 'On the Confirmation of the Christian Religion', pp. 138–139.

[91] Abū Rāʾiṭā, 'On the Confirmation of the Christian Religion', p. 139.

Abū Rāʾiṭā is arguing that Judaism and Christianity were established by miracles. No other religions were confirmed in this way. Judaism was a forerunner of Christianity, and a preparation for the fulness of the religion established by Christ. Although Abū Rāʾiṭā does not spell out what he wants to say, he silently implies that Islam fails to meet the criteria of a true religion, since it was not established by the performance of signs and wonders.

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār committed considerable space in his two books to arguing for the authenticity of both the oral and written gospel. Like his older contemporaries, Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭā, he sought to eliminate false reasons for the acceptance of the message of the gospel. All three apologists systematically worked through a variety of possible reasons for a religion to be embraced, which are basically similar to all three writers. Sidney Griffith wonders who was the first to produce such a list but is not able to determine the originator. He points out that no Christian apologist before these three attempted such an argument, and concludes, "The argument is an original contribution to apologetics on the part of anti-Muslim apologists of the first Abbasid century".[92] Given that ʿAmmār wrote after 838, and that Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭā may not have lived longer than 830, it is less likely that the East Syrian theologian came up with the idea. Perhaps Abū Qurra developed the pattern of argument, since it appears in three different pieces of his writing, whereas Abū Rāʾiṭā has only one brief presentation of the argument.

While ʿAmmār shared the concern of his older contemporary apologists to demonstrate that the messengers of the gospel did not resort to the use of false inducements to accept their message, he was much more concerned to defend the text of the gospels from allegations by Muslims that Christians had altered the original teaching of Jesus. This accusation of corruption of the

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[92] S. H. Griffith, 'Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians', in *Proceedings of the PMR Conference, volume 4,* (1979), 63–87, p. 75.

text was not really a focus for Abū Rāʾiṭā. However, Abū Qurra referred to allegations that the apostle Paul altered the text of the gospel. His response was to ask how this was possible, but he did not actually enter into a historical vindication of the activity of Paul. Perhaps this was because he was already aware that Muslims disregarded the letters of Paul as secondary to the witness of the gospels to the teaching of Jesus. So he defended the apostolic testimony found in the four gospels without reference to Paul, and trusted that Muslims would be convinced of the integrity of that witness. Of course, the Muslim anxiety with the four gospels was the absence of clear prophecy of the coming of Muḥammad by Jesus as stated in the Qurʾan. Abū Qurra is reported by John the Deacon to have responded to this Muslim concern, but this is in a Greek text designed for a Greek speaking Christian audience. Here Abū Qurra rejected the Muslim conviction that a prophecy of Jesus that the Prophet Muḥammad would come had been removed from the gospels by a subsequent generation of Christians. It is significant that Abū Qurra did not include this discussion of Muḥammad in his writings addressed to Muslims in Arabic. Given that criticism of the status of Muḥammad was regarded as a crime by the Islamic legal system of the Abbasids, it would have been counter-productive for Christian theologians to write anything in Arabic that brought them under suspicion of breaking the law. John the Deacon's willingness to include a discussion of Muḥammad in his report in Greek of Abū Qurra's dialogue with a Muslim is most likely a sign that he intended his work for the Greek Orthodox church setting within the Byzantine Empire beyond the boundary of Islamic rule.

ʿAmmār did not refer to this Muslim claim that Jesus prophesied the coming of Muḥammad, but he did pit the teaching of the gospels against the teaching of the Qurʾan. After listing a series of items found in the gospels ʿAmmār stated that none of these are found in the Qurʾan. How can Muslims claim that Jesus taught what the Qurʾan says he did, when the previous record in the gospels shows the opposite? This very bold critique of the Qurʾan put ʿAmmār in a different category from Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭā. They did not mount a direct attack on the teaching of the Qurʾan. Abū Rāʾiṭā made the case that the true religion of God

is established by signs and wonders. He could rely on Muslims to agree that Moses and Jesus proved the truth of their message through sings and wonders because the Qurʾan testified that they did this. There is no critique of the Qurʾan here, only reliance on its clear teaching. Abū Qurra listed several items from the gospels that a Muslim would not agree with, but he did not openly state that they are not found in the Qurʾan. He preferred to leave the Muslim to figure this out for himself. One area of agreement between the three apologists which arose out of the desire not to openly criticise Muḥammad, was their unwillingness to state that Muḥammad did not promote Islam by signs and wonders. All three emphasised the miraculous activity of the apostolic messengers that Jesus sent, but they were all silent about the equivalent messengers of Islam. None of them actually denied that Islam had been promoted by signs and wonders. By denying that the Christian messengers had used force of arms to gain followers, all three apologists wanted to show that the method of the Christian messengers was quite the opposite of the messengers of Islam. ʿAmmār was particularly open in his assessment of the use of military conquest by Muslims to spread Islam.

ʿAmmār was more concerned to analyse the role of signs and wonders than Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭā. He raised the question why signs and wonders were no longer a means of promoting Christianity in his time. Abū Qurra more than once reported the miraculous activity of Thomas who according to tradition visited India and convinced Indian kings to accept Christianity as true through raising a dead man to life. But Abū Qurra probably understood Thomas to be the disciple who doubted Jesus' resurrection in the gospel of John, so it was not a question of a post apostolic miracle. Mark Swanson has pointed out that alone among the three apologists, ʿAmmār argued that "evidentiary miracles had come to an end after the apostolic age".[93] According to Swanson, ʿAmmār explained that God had to change the

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[93] See M.N. Swanson, 'Christians, Muslims and the True Religion', in D. Pratt and C.L. Tieszen, (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History,* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 73–97, p. 92.

method of convincing people of the truth of the true religion of Christianity lest miracles would "have become a kind of bludgeon coercing people into faith".[94] However it would be more true to say that, for ʿAmmār, the miracles performed by the apostolic messengers were a support for the truth of the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The value of Christianity was the promise of resurrection after death for all those who put their faith in the resurrection of the Messiah, something repeated regularly in both of his books. Since people can only experience their resurrection after death, the fact that miracles could be performed by the messengers of Christ was only of secondary importance to the exercise of faith in the risen Christ by those who heard the message. After the time of the first messengers the offer of resurrection to eternal life became the main attraction for hearers to embrace Christianity without the supporting attraction of miracles performed by the messengers.

ʿAmmār appealed to psychology and history to defend the accuracy of the gospels. How could converts invent a text that perverted the message that had so recently changed their lives completely? How could people accept a text invented by their rulers? When and where could the invented text have been put together? How could the Roman Emperor have produced the text when he was antagonistic to Christians and could not have produced a text in one language alone? How could the apostles have invented the text when people would have realised the difference between their oral teaching and what turned up in the text? By framing these questions, ʿAmmār was implicitly questioning the way Islam was propagated. If Muslims use arguments against the gospels, they have to apply the same criteria to their own religion. Without explicitly asking the question, the fact that the Qurʾan was promoted in one language that was not to be translated into any other, and enforced on nations by the Muslims who had conquered them, raises questions about the authenticity of the Muslim text. Christianity spread without political power and linguistic control, but he implies that Islam has a case to answer that Christianity does not. Michel

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[94] M.N. Swanson, 'Christians, Muslims and the True Religion', p. 92.

Hayek has argued that ʿAmmār's defense of the authenticity of the gospels is "finer than any that are to be found in subsequent apologetic literature".[95]

ʿAmmār's concern to uphold the authenticity of the gospels was vital to the defense of the Trinity to which he turns in the third section of his *Book of Questions and Answers.* After all, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was taught by Jesus himself in Matthew's gospel and could be inferred from John's gospel.[96] By first defending the accuracy of the gospels in containing the actual teaching of Jesus, ʿAmmār could more easily seek to defend the Trinitarian way of speaking found there. ʿAmmār's defense of the Trinity is the concern of the following chapter.

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[95] See M. Hayek, *Apologie et Controverses,* p. 52.
[96] See Matthew 28:19, John 5:17–30, 10:24–39, and 14:8–20.

CHAPTER FIVE.
DEFENDING THE TRINITY

ʿAmmār's third section of the *Book of Questions and Answers* has fourteen questions on the Trinity. Having established the authenticity of the gospels in section two, he now embarks on a defence of the Trinity that he has indicated is taught in the gospels. He adopted this procedure as a result of Muslim doubt about that teaching as being truly representative of Jesus' own words. By the ninth century, Muslims had come to suspect that Christians had written up the gospels to include the Trinity in the teaching of Jesus. However, from a Muslim perspective, Jesus had been faithful to the proclamation that there was only one true God and that his hearers needed to be warned to forsake the worship of other gods. How shocking then, that Christians had deviated from this stringent message and put in the mouth of Jesus a testimony that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This seemed to Muslims to be a declaration that the Christian God was actually three distinct, individual divine beings, something impossible to hold that the real Jesus uttered. Christian apologists had the task of explaining the Trinity in terms of upholding the oneness of God. A particularly fruitful method was to use the Qurʾan to defend the Trinity. In Q4:171, faith in God and His word and spirit are urged. Christians from the eighth century onwards depended on this statement to uphold the Trinity of God the Father, God the Word, and God the Spirit. ʿAmmār was indebted to this text for his articulation of the Trinity being God and His Word and His Spirit. He argues that both Word and Spirit are essential to the nature of God, unlike other attributes. *The*

Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy has a section on the Trinity which is a shorter treatment than that in his *Book of Questions and Answers* and summarizes his earlier writing.[1]

MUSLIM BELIEF IN THE ONENESS OF GOD AND REJECTION OF THE TRINITY

There are two passages in the Qurʾan that appear to directly criticise Christians who confess the Trinity. The first of these, Q5:72–73 warns Christians to give up adding gods to the One True God.

> They are unbelievers who say that God is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah 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 associating another god with the true God is the concern of this text, which charges Christians with making Jesus a second god alongside God. While Jesus as a second god is mentioned here, there is no reference to a third god. The second text which challenges the Trinity is Q4:171.

> People of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion. Only speak the truth about God. The Messiah, 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 from Him to have a son.

Here another reason is given for Christians to give up believing in the Trinity. The fact that Christians speak about God having a son is the reason for their deviance from upholding the oneness of God. The reason why the sonship of Jesus is denied is stated in

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[1] This chapter is a development of I.M. Beaumont, 'Speaking of the Triune God: Christian Defence of the Trinity in the Early Islamic Period', *Transformation* 29, (2012), 111–127.

Q72:3, "Our Lord has neither taken a wife nor a son". Here sonship is defined in terms of family life created by God, but sonship cannot be attributed to God Himself. The People of the Book, the Christians, must refrain from naming Jesus as Son of God, since God does not procreate like humans do. Q4:171 does not refer to a third member of the Trinity, although there is a reference to 'a spirit' from God being in Jesus. A third passage in the Qurʾan accuses Christians of adding gods to the One God. In Q5:116–117, 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 replied, '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'.

In this dialogue between God and Jesus, it is made clear that Jesus proclaimed to his audience that they should worship the one true God, his Lord and their Lord. The text implies that Christians put into Jesus' mouth the proclamation that he and his mother Mary were to be worshipped as two gods. However, the Qurʾan has been revealed to challenge this falsehood. As a result of this denial of the divinity of Jesus and his mother, the other texts that deny the Trinity could be interpreted as denying a Trinity of God, Jesus, and Mary.

Evidence for Muslim belief that Christians held to a Trinity of Father, Son and Mary comes from the dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Patriarch Timothy in 781. The Caliph opened his interrogation by quoting Q72:3, "Our Lord has neither taken a wife nor a son". He then asked Timothy, "How can someone like you, knowledgeable and wise, say that the most high God took a wife and had a son"?[2] Timothy was being asked to respond to the accusation that the sonship of Jesus proclaimed by Christians was the result of a physical union between God and Mary. Timothy simply denied that Christians believed such a thing. After discussion of the Incarnation al-Mahdī asked Timothy, "Do you believe in three gods"? Timothy replied that

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[2] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 7.

Christians believe in "three hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which are together one God, one nature, and one essence".[3] Timothy went on to state that Jesus taught this as recorded in the gospels. He then argued that the Trinity could be proved from studying created things. For example, the Caliph is one person in his mind and spirit which cannot be separated from him. In the same way, God is one person in His Word and Spirit. A person who speaks cannot be without life or spirit, so "if someone says that God exists without Word and Spirit then he blasphemes".[4]

This argument that God has essential attributes of Word and Spirit is key to ʿAmmār's defense of the Trinity, and it is clear that he is indebted to Timothy for setting him an example of using it in dialogue with Muslims. However, it was not just the Church of the East Patriarch Timothy who appealed to Q4:171 to support the Trinity. In the eighth century, this text was mentioned by the Chalcedonian John of Damascus and an anonymous treatise on the Trinity and Incarnation written by a member of the same Chalcedonian church. Thus, different denominations in the Middle East shared similar approaches to Islam.

JOHN OF DAMASCUS DEFENDING THE TRINITY

John of Damascus (d.c. 750) gives the earliest extant Christian response to the denial of the Trinity in the Qurʾan. John wrote in Greek for a Christian readership though he may have engaged in oral debate with Muslims in Arabic. In the fourth decade of the eighth 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 one hundred 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

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[3] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 13.
[4] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, pp. 13–14.

the Trinity in terms now familiar from earlier Greek theology as one essence (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostaseis*), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[5] In "The Heresy of the Ishmaelites" he defends the Trinity against Muslim attack not by quoting the above definition but by referring to Q4:171 as support for a Trinitarian faith. While John regards Islam as the most recent of the one hundred heresies he is condemning, he finds echoes of truth within the scriptures of the Muslims. John says that Muslims accuse Christians of wrongly associating Christ with God because Christians say that "Christ is the Son of God and God".[6] 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".[7] But if Muslims deny that the Word and spirit are in God then Christians should accuse Muslims of cutting off these attributes of God from Him, by saying to them, "Thus trying to avoid making associates to God, you have mutilated him".[8] John assumes that the hypostases of Christ the Word and the Holy Spirit are referred to in Q4:171, "Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was the messenger of God, and His word which He cast on Mary, and a spirit from Him". Given that John regards the Muslim scriptures as a collection of absurd stories, and that he condemns the one he calls the false prophet of Islam for proclaiming a deviant message, it is all the more remarkable that he should be attempting to retrieve the Trinity from the Qurʾan. In addition, John is urging Christians to defend the Trinity in dialogue with Muslims not by appealing to the Bible but to the Qurʾan, so that Muslims might see that the Trinity is supported by their own scriptures. This advice was taken to heart in an anonymous apology for the Trinity which refers to Q4:171.

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[5] John of Damascus, 'The Orthodox Faith', F.H. Chase, (trans.), in *St John of Damascus: Writings,* (Washington D.C.: 1958), 165–406, p. 167.
[6] John of Damascus, 'The Heresy of the Ishmaelites', D.J. Sahas, (trans.), in *John of Damascus on Islam,* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 132–141, p. 137.
[7] John of Damascus, 'The Heresy of the Ishmaelites', p. 137.
[8] John of Damascus, 'The Heresy of the Ishmaelites', p. 137.

AN EIGHTH CENTURY ANONYMOUS APOLOGY FOR THE TRINITY AND INCARNATION

This apology is the earliest extant Christian text written in Arabic for a Muslim audience. The anonymous writer comes from the same Chalcedonian community as John and shares John's use of the Qurʾan to support the Trinity.[9] 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 eighth century not long after John's writing.[10] The writer attempts to defend the Trinity by quoting from the Qurʾan in order to convince Muslims that the Trinity is acceptable for Muslims, and to show his fellow Christians a method of dealing with Muslim criticisms of the Trinity. Sidney Griffith has pointed out that this Arabic treatise shows how the language of the Muslim rulers was becoming used in some Christian communities by the mid-eighth century.[11] At the beginning of the treatise the writer addresses a Muslim reader by stating, "We do not distinguish God from His Word and His Spirit. We do not worship

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[9] The Arabic text (Sinai 154) is edited and translated into English by M.D. Gibson as *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1899).

[10] S.K. Samir discovered this statement on one of the pages of the manuscript not included in the printed version by Gibson 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 S.K. Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)', in S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen (eds), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258),* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57–116, p. 61. M. Swanson calculates the date not from the birth of Christ but from the beginning of the church and suggests 788. See M. Swanson, 'Some Considerations for the Dating of *fī tatlīt allāh al-wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-gāmiʿ wugūh al-īmān* (London, British Library op. 4950)', *Parole de L'Orient* 18, (1993), 118–141, p. 140. However, S.H. 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 S.H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 54.

[11] See S.H. Griffith, 'The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic', *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), 1–28.

another god alongside God in His Word and His Spirit".[12] The first sentence repeats 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 refers to Q5:72–73 which alleges that Christians worship gods alongside the One True God and reshapes the text to include Christ the Word and the Holy Spirit in the definition of the One True God. 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".[13] The writer is refuting the accusation made in Q5:73, "They are unbelievers who say that God is one third of a Trinity", and in Q4:171, "Believe in God and His messengers and do not say 'Trinity'". Several Qurʾanic texts are brought together by this writer to persuade Muslims that the Trinity is not incompatible with Islam. He quotes from Q4:171 and 16:102 to challenge his Muslim reader to accept the truth of the Triune God.

> 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 Qurʾan 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.[14]

This unknown Christian apologist relies on the argument of John of Damascus that the Word and Spirit of God mentioned in Q4:171 cannot be separated from the essence of God. He goes beyond John by referring to Q16:102 which says that the Holy Spirit brings guidance from God. In this way he can indicate that the Qurʾan speaks of the action of the third member of the Trinity who brings revelation to humans. The writer is much more positive about the scriptures of the Muslims than John who pointed out several absurdities in the teaching of Islam. He does not ridicule his Muslim reader but appeals to one who "knows the

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[12] *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God,* M.D. Gibson, (ed.), p. 75.
[13] *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God,* M.D. Gibson, (ed.), p. 76.
[14] *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God,* M.D. Gibson, (ed.), pp. 77–78.

truth and opens his breast to believe in God and His Scriptures".[15]
The writer remains respectful even when he challenges his
Muslim reader to desist from quoting Qurʾanic texts that attack
the Trinity. He argues that Christians and Muslims can come to
agreement about the nature of God if they interpret their
Scriptures in a careful way.

ʿAMMĀR'S DEFENSE OF THE TRINITY IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The third section of *The Book of Questions and Answers* is entitled,
"On establishing the oneness of the Creator in three hypostases".
ʿAmmār introduces the section by arguing that he has established
the authenticity of the gospels in which the oneness of the Creator
in three hypostases has been presented. He does not intend to
analyse in detail those aspects of the gospels that affirm the
Trinity.

> When we regard ourselves obliged to accept the authenticity
> of the books which speak of these things which we have set
> out as proofs of the veracity of what we have held to be true,
> we do not have to set out the argument letter by letter or word
> by word. But we will graciously comment on the questions we
> receive to elucidate for the benefit of the person who requests
> knowledge of this wholeheartedly and with true sincerity.[16]

The first of nine questions asks, "How is it possible that one is
three or three one, when you also introduce in your establishment
of His oneness and your belief that He is one, that there is none
like Him and that He has no image or likeness"? ʿAmmār defines
the Trinity as one substance in three substantial properties.

> We mean that the one eternal substance eternally exists in three
> substantial properties. There are not three perfect essences, or
> three perfect gods, but each of them in his property (*khawāṣṣ*)
> is perfect God, not differentiated or divided. All three properties
> belong to the one eternal substance – in other words He is not
> three in this particular meaning – He is not divided or
> partitioned in His person or in His perfection, and He is not

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[15] *A Treatise on the Triune Nature of God,* M.D. Gibson, (ed.), p. 75.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 148.

three in number, in the sense that He is one – one in number, but with three properties.[17]

By selecting the Arabic term *khawāṣṣ*, ʿAmmār avoids giving the impression that the three members of the Trinity are individual persons, which the Qurʾanic texts seem to imply, and Muslims tended to understand. By choosing properties over persons he is able to argue that oneness adheres to the one eternal substance, who has three substantial properties. Therefore, ʿAmmār can state, "There is none like Him in His substance and there is no similarity between His actions and the actions of His creatures".[18] Whereas created beings have bodies that move to act, and depend on other created beings for assistance, the Creator has no need of any other being. "He invents something by command and decree without movement or effort, and by will and decision without trouble or help".[19] While the Creator does not need to depend on any other being to act, He does depend on His speech to command created beings, and His speech issues from His life.

> It will not be possible to imagine the will, the decision and the decree unless He possesses word or speech. Speech cannot be imagined unless He has life. From the point of view of the affirmation of our teaching it is necessary that the improbability of any similarity between the substance of the Creator and the substances of His creatures and between His work and the works of His creatures proves that He has three properties and one substance, that is the essential substance which His life depends upon, and His word which is the source of His wisdom, and His life which is the source of His spirit, one for all eternity.[20]

Here ʿAmmār defines the relationship between the Creator and His three properties. The first property is His eternal substance, the second is His speech, and the third is His life. His speech is His word, and His life is His spirit. His indebtedness to his

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[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 149.
[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 149.
[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 149.
[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 149.

Christian predecessors is clear in isolating word and spirit as essential properties.

The Muslim questioner then argues that the speech and life of the Creator point to his oneness and Christians are mistaken for thinking that they support threeness in Him. He says,

> From our point of view we see from the perfection of the making of the creation and the wise manner of its structure complete evidence that its Maker, and its Creator, and its Administrator is one, living and wise, so that we would be misled by futile thought if we insisted on His existence first of all, then we asserted life for Him secondly, and wisdom thirdly, and we counted this threeness by division and separation.[21]

In reply, ʿAmmār points out that division and separation apply only to beings that have bodies, but the Creator has no body. "We say, as for separation and division, these are not among attributes of one who does not have a body or of one who exists in His eternity. Rather, these are attributes of created, composed and joined up bodies".[22] Turning to the Muslim questioner's definition of the Creator as one, living and wise, ʿAmmār argues that His life and wisdom are essential attributes. "Because if their Creator is found to be eternally living, we must acknowledge that He is necessarily endowed with life and speech".[23] He wonders whether the Muslim insistence that life and speech are non-essential attributes is due to their belief that life and speech are attributes only of created beings.

> If they deny this because their senses do not lead them to admit that a substance has life and speech unless it is created and formed, we say that they also deny that He exists living and wise, because their senses do not lead them to admit that He exists living and wise unless He is brought into being and created, and they deny that He is a maker and producer, because their senses do not lead them to admit a creator and producer, unless He is brought into being and created, and

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[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 152.

[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 152.

[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 153.

they deny that He has dominion, power and authority, because their senses do not lead them to admit dominion, power and authority unless He is brought into being and created.[24]

The fear of attributing to the Creator that which adheres to created beings lies behind the Muslim denial that He is necessarily endowed with life and speech. Applying attributes of created beings to the Creator would bring Him down to the level of His creation. Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf was known to deny that the statement "God is living" meant that God had the attribute of "life". For Muʿtazili thinkers like him it was not possible to affirm that God had attributes, since these were characteristics of created beings only. The complete otherness of the creator from His creation necessitated that He be free from any of the characteristics of the creatures He created. ʿAmmār argues on the contrary that the Creator shares His attributes with His creation. He shares His life with animate beings and he shares His speech with rational beings. But the life and speech of the Creator are altogether different from the life and speech of created beings.

> You know that the agreement between the Creator and his creation in these things is such that He exists before the sharing of names. Concerning the meaning, there is no similarity or agreement between the Creator and his creation. Likewise, there is no similarity between them and him in life and speech apart from the sharing of the names.[25]

ʿAmmār asks the Muslim what he means when he says that God is living and wise, if he does not mean that God has life and wisdom. He has the Muslim answer, "We intend, by our saying life and wisdom, to keep Him from ignorance and death, we are not obliged to regard life and wisdom as you claim we are obliged".[26] ʿAmmār responds by pointing out that to fail to attribute life and wisdom to the Creator must entail that He is capable of dying and ignorance. "When you reject life and

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[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 153–154.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 154.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 154–155.

wisdom, you call Him one who is ignorant and one who dies".[27] The Muslim protests that he is isolating God from base and lowly attributes of death and ignorance.

ʿAmmār follows previous apologists for the Trinity by selecting two attributes of God, in this case life and speech, giving the impression of a divine essence having two essential properties. There is clear gap between this presentation and the accepted Trinitarian formula of one essence in three hypostases. Yet ʿAmmār 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-ʿAllāf is reported to have denied that the names did refer to actions of God. He argued that 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, but 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".[28] 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. ʿAmmār deals with this reticence by isolating life and speech as inherent qualities in God which are distinct from actions that are not.

The Muslim then asks whether Christians believe that there are other attributes of God which are essential to Him.

> Do you not believe, along with your saying that He is living and wise, that He is hearing, seeing, powerful, merciful, almighty and kind? Do you not also establish in him hearing, sight, power, might, mercy and kindness as substantialities when you call him hearing, seeing, powerful, merciful, almighty and kind, and similar things to these? And do you not specify in him threeness which you have described apart from fourness, fiveness, sixness or more?[29]

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[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 155.

[28] See R.M. Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian school of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period,* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1978), p 12.

[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 155–156.

ʿAmmār replies that there is a difference between essential attributes such as life and speech and other attributes which are not essential such as hearing and seeing. In the created world, birds and animals have hearing and seeing but they do not have speech which is essential only to humans who also have hearing and seeing. All animate creatures have hearing and seeing but only humans have speech. "Life and speech are among the properties of the structure of the substance and the form of the essence and nature. As for hearing and sight, they are not of the structure of the essence of the nature and do not share in the form of the substance".[30] Other attributes are also only found in humans and not in other animate creatures.

> Concerning mercy, compassion, justice, generosity, graciousness and what is like them, they are the effects revealed by substances that possess speech and thought in particular, but not from any substances that lack intelligence and speech. You will not see a merciful donkey or a gracious horse or a just camel or a fair lion, or any kind of animal that lacks speech being described by any of these attributes.[31]

Thus, even in the creation there are distinctions between attributes that are essential to humans and attributes shared by humans with other animate creatures. ʿAmmār admits that appealing to the structure of the created world to determine the nature of the Creator is limited, but still has value in understanding the speech and life of the one who created speech in humans. At the end of his lengthy six-page discussion of the second question he states, "We will not continue arguing about the truth by means of analogy which gathers together this thinking about the essence of His word and spirit".[32]

The third question asks whether word and spirit are needed by the Creator in a way that hearing and seeing are not.

> Is He in need of His word and His spirit or does He not need them? If you claim that He is in need of them then surely you have described Him as being in need, weakness, and deficiency,

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[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 157.
[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 158.
[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 158.

> and if you claim that He does not need them then they are
> removed from Him as you also have removed from Him what
> is indispensable like hearing, seeing and such like.[33]

ʿAmmār dismisses the question as absurd. By analogy with the
created world, it would also be absurd to ask whether fire needs
its heat and dryness. The eternal Creator cannot need what are to
Him two natural substances. "But you can ask, does the eternal,
living and speaking One need a place or a location or hearing or
sight, or anything that he created and made, so you should be
told, God forbid that we impute any kind of need to him".[34]
Having already explained at the end of question two that he
would not appeal to analogy ʿAmmār once again repeats his
intention to move on from arguments based on analogy. "This
ends our attempt to explain the truth of the oneness of the
substance of the Creator and the threeness of his properties by
rational analogies".[35]

At this point ʿAmmār shifts to citing Biblical testimonies to
the threeness of the one Creator. He dismisses the charge by
Muslims that Jews and Christians corrupted the text of their
scriptures, "The claim that we and our enemies the Jews agreed
with us and together concocted the fabrication of these books and
corrupted them according to what our religions agreed with".[36]
He appeals to Genesis 1:26, where God said that in creating
Adam, "We are creating a man in our image and our likeness",
and argues that "by saying our image and our likeness he
indicates by this His oneness and His threeness in one saying".[37]
ʿAmmār then cites texts that support the word and spirit as
essential to the Creator.

> Job says, "The spirit of the Lord created me". God's prophet
> David says, "by the word of God exist the heavens and by his
> spirit all its armies". He says in another place: "The winds and
> the waves his word created". David also says: "May the word

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[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 158–159.

[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 159.

[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 159.

[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 160.

[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 160.

of God be praised". He says in another place: "He sends his word and heals them and delivers them from corruption". David also says: You send your spirit and change them". The prophet Isaiah says: "God sent me and his spirit".[38]

ʿAmmār sums up the scriptural witness as demonstrating that the eternal Creator created with the help of his word and spirit.

> If God, may His greatness be exalted, has been described in some of His books as having created the creation or performed an action by His hand or by His arm, and you explain His speech, you will find that the meaning of 'by His arm' and 'by His hand' is His command, His prohibition, and His will generated from His word and His spirit.[39]

Question four raises the problem of Christians referring to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons. "If you call these three properties three persons then the hearers of your speech may think you are setting up three gods".[40] ʿAmmār insists,

> We do not call them three persons (*ashkhās*), and nobody should think that we call them persons, because the person, according to us, is each body limited by its parts and its limbs separating between it and what is like it among bodies. But we call them in the Syriac language three hypostases (*aqānīm*).[41]

There are four aspects to the concept 'substance', according to ʿAmmār. Firstly, substance (*jawhar*) itself is like universal humanity, fire, and water. Secondly, there is the power (*quwa*) of a substance like speech from a human being and heat from fire and movement from water. Thirdly, there is contingency (*ʿarḍ*) in a substance like whiteness in snow and blackness in tar. Fourthly, there is the hypostasis of a substance like a servant of God who is human by his soul and his body, and like the angel Gabriel who

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[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 161. See Job 33:4, Psalm 33:6, Psalm 147:18–20, Psalm 107:20, Psalm 138:7, and Isaiah 6:8.

[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 161.

[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 161.

[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 162.

is an angel by his spiritual condition.[42] He says that, "The hypostasis in the Syriac language as we have indicated means the perfect particular property, self-sufficient, and not being compelled by others in the existence of its essence".[43] ʿAmmār appeals to the categories of Aristotle, substance (*jawhar*), power (*quwa*), accident (*ʿarḍ*), 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.

ʿAmmār points out that Syriac theologians in the past used the term 'hypostasis' to speak of the essential property of each of the members of the Trinity. This was because,

> They found from the teaching of the Messiah about this the permission to name them hypostases, when he said, "Since there is life in the Father in His hypostasis, so He conferred life on His Son and so there is life in his hypostasis". If the Father has a hypostasis then the Son has a hypostasis, and so the Spirit also must have a hypostasis.[44]

The fifth question asks, "Why do you call these three hypostases which you have written down, Father, Son and Holy Spirit"?[45] The answer lies in the testimony of the gospels. The apostle Matthew ended his book with the words of "the Lord of the worlds",[46] when he sent his apostles to the nations, saying, "Go and attract all peoples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".[47] The writer of the fourth gospel wanted to explain this statement of Jesus,

> So he makes the opening of his writing an interpretation of the teaching of the Son with which the first evangelist ended his previous report. He said, "In the beginning was the Word

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[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 162.

[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 162.

[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 163. See John 5:26.

[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 164.

[46] Here ʿAmmār gives Jesus the name of God found in the Qurʾan forty-one times.

[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 164. See Matthew 28:19.

and the Word was with God and the Word was God and
always existed with God. Everything exists by him and
nothing in creation exists without him". Then he continues his
writing to call the Word "Son" and he says clearly and openly,
"Nobody has seen God; his Son is the one who makes him
known".[48]

The Son then proclaimed the nature of the Holy Spirit in the
fourth gospel, when he said,

> The Holy Spirit who is the Spirit, the Spirit of truth who is
> poured out from the essence of God, he will inspire you, and
> enable you to recall everything that I have told you, and he
> will direct you to the whole truth because he will be with you
> and will empower you, but the people of this world will not
> see him because they cannot comprehend him.[49]

'Ammār wonders why Muslims find these names, Father, Son, and
Holy Spirit so objectionable. "Is it because they only understand
Father and Son in terms of sleeping with a woman and sexual
intercourse"?[50] But even if fatherhood and sonship apply to
creatures through physical relations, it does not follow that they
require physical relations between the Eternal Father and Son.
"But this meaning cannot exist at all in the substance of the
Creator, may He be glorified and exalted, since there is nothing
like Him among all things that exist".[51] In the end, the reason why
Christians refer to the Eternal Creator as Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit is because God Himself has chosen to name Himself this
way.

> We do not want to frighten you, oh listener, when you hear
> His books name Him with the meaning Father, Son and Holy
> Spirit, so that you believe that they are like fatherhood and
> sonship which pertain to creatures before their birth. Rather
> it is like He has rule, authority, godhead, lordship, might, and

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[48] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 165. See
John 1:1–3, and 18.

[49] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 165. See
John 14:17 and 26.

[50] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 165–166.

[51] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 166.

wisdom, according to what He called himself and described Himself by them, He has the absolute right, creatures do not, likewise also He has fatherhood, sonship and the eternal Holy Spirit, just as He has named and described the properties of His substance by absolute right, creatures do not.[52]

The sixth question raises the possibility that Christians have interpreted these terms, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by analogy with concepts that existed before the appearance of the writing down of the words. Do Christians have any certainty that they have understood the meanings of these terms properly? In reply, ʿAmmār points out that he has made the case that the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit can only be interpreted by means of the rest of the writing in which they are found.

> We have established that rational people do not perceive of their own accord the meanings of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, without the instruction of the book. Just as they also do not perceive any of the names of the Creator and his attributes except from the instruction of the book.[53]

ʿAmmār argues that it is not that the terms, Father, Son and Holy Spirit were imposed on those who heard the message, so that they accepted them by blind faith. Uneducated tribal people accepted the written message as a result of the signs that the messengers brought. Thus, the faith these people exercised in the book that they were given was based on their acceptance of these signs seen in the work of the messengers. It may have been difficult for their minds to understand everything in the book, but they had no doubt that the book represented the teaching of the messengers. In other words, these various peoples did not impose an interpretation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from their own religious traditions but rather read the book and worked out what the book intended by these terms.

Question seven turns to analysing the Trinity. Do Christians wish to state that each member of the Trinity is perfect God?

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[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 168–169.
[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 169.

> Do you claim that the Father is perfect God, and the Son is perfect God, and the Holy Spirit is perfect God? If you say, yes, you must name them in life and speech three perfect Gods. If you say, no, not all three of them are perfect God, unless they are joined together as one perfect God, you have made them unequal and you have made them parts of one God. There is absolutely no escape for you from choosing one of these two ways of speaking.[54]

ʿAmmār says that there are two meanings to the term "God". There is a substantial meaning and a contingent meaning. His substantiality means that he has an attribute of oneness that no other being has. Therefore, no created being shares in His oneness. As for the contingent meaning, created beings share the name of "God". This can be seen in the Bible where other beings are given the name "God" by David when he says, "Our Lord is greater than all the gods", and, "We did not forget the name of our Lord and we did not stretch out our hands to another god".[55] ʿAmmār argues that, "These sayings point to gods who are contingent or dependent upon adoration and prostration, they are not gods that are substantially eternal".[56]

Considering the substantiality of God, ʿAmmār reminds the Muslim questioner that he has already claimed that the three members of the Trinity are of the substance of God.

> We have already said that the Father is perfect God, I mean that He has an eternal substance which is a perfect property. And the Son is perfect God, I mean that he has an eternal substance which is a perfect property. Then all of them together are one perfect God, or one common universal eternal substance.[57]

Since they share this one common universal substance they do not need to be called "perfect gods" or "perfect substances".[58] He refers to the common universal substance of human beings which

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[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 170.
[55] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 170. See Psalm 4:2, 77:13, 86:8, 95:3 and 44:20.
[56] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 170–171.
[57] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 171.
[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 171.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob share. We do not say that they are three perfect human substances, but rather that they share in common one perfect human substance. By analogy with how humans are described, we should not name the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three perfect Gods, because we would be making a difference in the common universal substance they share. There are not three perfect essences, or three perfect gods, but "each of them in his property (*khawāṣṣ*) is perfect God".[59]

The Muslim questioner follows this up in question eight with the allegation that the Christian wants to make the three hypostases perfect substances, and in so doing has to accept that he has made three perfect Gods. ʿAmmār reminds the Muslim that a hypostasis is not equivalent to a substance in every respect. Continuing with his human analogy, he makes the point that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is each a perfect hypostasis of the one common universal substance. But they should not be described as three perfect substances. "This proves to you that the meaning of the hypostasis does not apply to the meaning of the particular substance in every aspect".[60] Applying this distinction between substance and hypostasis in humans to God, ʿAmmār maintains that the three hypostases of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share one common universal substance of Godhead, and should not be described as three perfect Gods.

> Our saying that the Father is a perfect hypostasis, the Son is a perfect hypostasis and the Holy Spirit is a perfect hypostasis, and the three of them together are perfect hypostases, does not compel us, when we say that each of them is perfect God, to say that together they are three perfect Gods.[61]

ʿAmmār concludes this discussion with references to the perfect divinity of each of the three hypostases in the Bible. "The Father calls Himself Lord and God and Godhead, likewise His Word is called Lord and God and Creator and Godhead. Likewise, His

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[59] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 171.
[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 173.
[61] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 173.

Spirit is called Lord and God and Creator, and Godhead".[62] Because of this, Christians describe them as,

> One Lord and One God, and One Creator and One Godhead, so you should understand that each of them in his property is essentially perfect eternally and the three of them are together united in one divinity, one universal substance in countable hypostases.[63]

The ninth question is missing from the manuscript but from the answer it can be figured out that the question concerns how each of the three members of the Trinity has life and speech, when Christians claim that life and speech adhere to the Godhead rather than the hypostases. The answer lies in granting that each of the three hypostases has life and speech which issue from the essence of the common universal substance of God. ʿAmmār argues that, "It is not necessary for the living one to have another life apart from the life of the substance, or for the speaking one to have another speech apart from the speech of the substance".[64]

ʿAMMĀR'S DEFENSE OF THE TRINITY IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

In the fifth section of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy*, entitled "Debate about the Trinity", ʿAmmār goes on the offensive by asking the Muslim questions about the oneness of God.

> Tell me, oh you who believes in the 'One', "do you say He is 'living'"? If he says, "Yes", we say, "Does He have life in His eternal essence, as the soul of a human being has life in his substantial essence, or, is this life accidental, as a body has life which it receives from the outside and does not have life in the essence of its substance"?[65]

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[62] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 175.
[63] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 175.
[64] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 177.
[65] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 46.

ʿAmmār has the Muslim deny that the One has life in His eternal essence. To this ʿAmmār protests, "How are you entitled to use the name 'the living One' when the name 'the living One' is derived from life, because we call a human being 'living' as long as life is in him, but when his living spirit leaves him, we call him 'dead'"?[66] He adds to this discussion of 'life' the ability to speak. "Animals are not called 'speaking' because there is no 'speech' in their essences. But the soul of a human being is called 'living' and 'speaking' because it has 'life' and 'speech' in its essence".[67] ʿAmmār argues that by analogy with human beings who have life and speech in their essential nature, the One who created them has life and speech in His essential nature. In sum, ʿAmmār depicts the Muslim as rendering God speechless and lifeless. "It is clear that he does not call Him 'living' since he does not affirm that He has 'life' and 'speech' as we have explained, and he deprives his God of 'life' and makes Him lifeless. May God be greatly exalted above that"![68] ʿAmmār continues his interrogation of the Muslim by asking, "Why do you call Him 'living' when you do not want to attribute 'life' to Him"? The Muslim replies, "In order to deny that He is dead".[69] This reply replicates the view of Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who held that to say that God is 'living' is to say that he does not have death,[70] and indicates that ʿAmmār is attempting to refute Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf's arguments. ʿAmmār affirms his previous argument that the denial of life in God entails the admission of death in Him.

> You must affirm what you have fled from in your saying that you have denied this, because if you call Him 'living' in order to deny that He is 'dead', you are absolutely obliged to attribute

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[66] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 47.

[67] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 47.

[68] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 47.

[69] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 47.

[70] Sidney Griffith argues that the opponent of ʿAmmār is Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who held that to say that God is 'living' is to say that he does not have death. See S.H. Griffith, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', *Le Muséon* 96, (1983), 145–181, p. 169.

'death' to Him when you deny Him 'life' and do not make it necessary for Him.[71]

The denial of life and speech as essential to God results in a lifeless and speechless God, argues ʿAmmār.

> It is clear that the source of life and wisdom can only be described by the names, 'life' and 'wisdom'. But he has negated their meaning and necessitated that He is 'non-living' and 'non-speaking'. Since he has fled from affirming 'the Word' and 'the Spirit' in order to avoid making three realities necessary in the essence of the Creator and by nullifying his confession of the oneness of God, he has ended up completely nullifying the Creator, making Him lifeless, without 'life' or 'speech' like idols which are called gods.[72]

ʿAmmār then turns to the Muslim accusation that Christians believe in three gods, based on Q4:171, where Christians are urged not to say 'three' when speaking of God.

> We are blameless before God concerning the accusation of speaking of three gods. Rather, in our saying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we only want to affirm the teaching that God is 'living' and 'speaking'. The Father is the one we refer to as having 'life' and 'word'. 'Life' is the Holy Spirit, and 'Word' is the Son.[73]

He understands that Muslims interpret the Christian belief in the threeness of God based on Q72:3, "Our Lord is greatly exalted; He has not taken a female partner or a son". This is further evidence of the linking of Q4:171 with Q72:3 in Muslim exegesis of the Qurʾan. ʿAmmār points out that Christians do not hold the Trinity to be the outcome of the birth of a son from the union of God with a female partner. He emphatically states, "This is not, as our opponents attribute to us, that we make a female partner for God, and a son from her. May God be exalted far above that".[74] The Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not an admission of three

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[71] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 47.
[72] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 48.
[73] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 48.
[74] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 48.

gods by Christians. When Christians speak of the Word and Spirit
they do not mean to add two gods alongside God. After all, argues
ʿAmmār, when the soul of a human being is described as having
life and speech, "it does not for that reason become three souls".[75]
But this raises a question from the Muslim who has been paying
attention to this argument. "How can you call 'the Word' and 'the
Spirit' hypostases (*qunūm*) in God, but you do not call the 'word'
of the soul and its 'life' hypostases (*qunūm*)"?[76] The use of the term
'hypostases' on the lips of the questioner is surprising given that
the Christian has not introduced his definition of the Trinity.
ʿAmmār does not explain, as he does in *The Book of Questions and
Answers*, that theologians from all three main denominations in
the Islamic empire agreed that God is one in essence and three in
the hypostases of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that they
inherited this definition from Greek and Syriac traditions, and
used the Syriac word for hypostases when speaking and writing
in Arabic. ʿAmmār does explain that hypostases are perfect and
do not depend on anything, unlike the life and speech of the
human soul that depend on the Creator for their existence, so
using the term 'hypostasis' for the life and speech of the human
soul would be inappropriate. Here he employs a different Arabic
term (*maʿānī*) "reality" for the hypostases than he did in *The Book
of Questions and Answers,* where he used (*khawāṣṣ*) "property".
Sara Husseini has argued that this change of terms from the
earlier to the later work may be because ʿAmmār changed his
approach from *The Book of Questions and Answers,* where he was
answering questions Muslims asked Christians to enable Christian
leaders to defend their faith, to a more polemical approach in *The
Book of the Proof* designed to demonstrate weaknesses in Muslim
arguments.[77] Wageeh Mikhail argues that ʿAmmār particularly
understood that the Qurʾanic accusation that Christians believe in
three gods was the new challenge for Christian theologians, which

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[75] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 49.
[76] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 50.
[77] See S.L. Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God,*
(Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 138.

"shifted the focus of the Trinitarian formulations and made the oneness of God the focal point of the defense".[78]

He admits that using analogies for the Creator from that which He has created is not without problems. "When we make this comparison, even though nothing can be compared with God, the comparison is made to Him in the similarity that we have found in one thing known in three meanings".[79] ʿAmmār refers to Q42:11, "He is the creator of heaven and earth. He has made couples for you among yourselves, and couples among cattle, and has developed you by this means. There is nothing like Him, and He is hearing and seeing". This text was the basis for the doctrine of the Muʾtazila, shared by Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, that God could not be compared to anything in His creation. ʿAmmār concedes that comparisons between the creation and the Creator are not suitable "in every aspect, because they are not alike, and you will not find any created thing perfect like the Creator to the extent that it has what the Creator has, so that it would be like the Creator in all aspects".[80] ʿAmmār gives an example from life to show that making comparisons between creation and the Creator is not totally invalid.

> Just as if someone had asked you to make a statue of a king whom he had never seen, and when you sculpted it, he did not find it moving, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or walking, and he said to you, 'That man moves, sees, hears, tastes, smells, and so on, but this one has none of these qualities, so how can you say that you have made it like him?' He would have treated you harshly because it was impossible for you to make the statue identical in every way to the one whose likeness you had made. If this was not called a likeness then surely it would be the original thing, particularly when the thing which is represented by it is not in your power to represent in all aspects.[81]

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[78] W.Y.F. Mikhail, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān', p. 175.
[79] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 50.
[80] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 50.
[81] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 50.

ʿAmmār goes on to define 'hypostasis' as a fourth category alongside the three categories of Aristotle, substance, power, and accident as he did in *The Book of Questions and Answers*. However, he alleges here that Muslims have described the Creator by "the most despicable and poorest things".[82] He does not specify at this point what these are, but he probably has in mind body parts, such as hands, feet, mouth and eyes. But he alleges that Muslims have been content to describe the Creator with base aspects of creatures but not the more elevated aspects of human beings.

> In your narrow description of Him, you are not allowing Him to have 'life' and 'word' so that He is complete in His essence by His 'life' and His 'word'. You could have attributed to Him the most honorable meanings you could have found, and not attributed to Him the most despicable, the meanest, and poorest meanings you have witnessed.[83]

ʿAmmār has the Muslim move on to question why Christians do not regard other attributes of God, such as hearing and seeing, as essential to Him along with life and speech. This is a repetition of the same question in *The Book of Questions and Answers*. He replies as he did in the earlier work. "We have affirmed 'life' and 'speech' in our description of the substantial essence of the Creator, since we have found that these two are original to the substance".[84] But other attributes, like hearing and seeing are not essential to the substance of God because "they are two members of the body installed in bodies which have been composed, but God does not have a body in which two members can be installed".[85] Other attributes relate to the essential quality of speech in God. "As for justice, compassion, kindness, generosity, grace, mercy, and forgiveness, these are actions, since He uses them with His creatures . . . These actions are attributed to one who is 'speaking'. Since 'speech' is essentially affirmed in him, He can employ them and use them".[86] Speech is the necessary component for all these

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[82] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 51.
[83] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 51.
[84] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 53.
[85] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 53.
[86] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 53.

attributes. ʿAmmār affirms as he did in *The Book of Questions and Answers* that such attributes are found in speaking beings.

> For we do not say, "We have seen a just lamb, or a kind or a good elephant, or a compassionate or a gracious horse, or a merciful or a forgiving bull", because animals lack speech that the qualities of these and similar actions come from.[87]

The same is true for wisdom and knowledge.

> When you see someone who has 'word' understanding existing things as they are and distinguishing between them, then you call his 'word' 'knowledge'. When you see him understanding by his 'word' how they exist and the reasons for their existence, you call it 'wisdom'.[88]

ʿAmmār sums up this study of attributes by affirming that, "It is clear that nothing ought to belong to the structure of the substance and the essence of its nature except 'life' and 'word'".[89]

ʿAmmār then argues that the Bible testifies to this distinction between the essential attributes of life and speech in the Godhead. "For this reason, the Holy Gospel and the books which preceded it, attribute the Spirit and the Word to the essence of the Creator".[90] As a result, Christians must testify to God being One in three hypostases, but they are not guilty of introducing division into His oneness. ʿAmmār insists that, "Christianity was not obliged by this to incorporate partition or division in the Creator, because partition and division only apply to bodies, and God does not have a body".[91] His final words in his defense of the Trinity are a confession of faith. "We believe that He is one substance known in three hypostases; that He surrounds heaven and earth without being limited; that He is invisible, eternal, never ending; and that He lasts forever and ever".[92]

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[87] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 53.
[88] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 55.
[89] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 55.
[90] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 55.
[91] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 55.
[92] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 56.

The defense of the Trinity by ʿAmmār builds on the work of Timothy, his Patriarch, and can also be compared with the ways Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa defended the Trinity.

TIMOTHY'S DEFENSE OF THE TRINITY

The Caliph al-Mahdī asks Timothy, "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*)".[93] Timothy states that Jesus taught this and it can also be found from studying the creation. Just as the Caliph is one person in his mind and spirit which cannot be separated from him, so God is one person in his Word and Spirit which cannot be separated from Him. He points out that 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".[94]

While Timothy makes the same point about the Word and Spirit not being separated from God as the writer of the *Anonymous Apology,* he explains the Trinity in a way that the writer of the *Anonymous Apology* did not, by speaking of God as one essence (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*), translated into Arabic as one *jawhar* in three *aqānīm.* The latter term is a transliteration of the Syriac "*qenômê*", but the former is a newly coined Arabic word for the Syriac "*ousia*" itself a transliteration of the Greek.[95] At this point, Timothy appeals to the Bible as evidence for the Son and the Spirit as members of the Trinity. The Caliph then asks, "How are the Son and Spirit not the same, since you say that God is simple and not composite"?[96] Timothy says

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[93] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 13.

[94] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, pp. 13–14.

[95] See S.H. Griffith, 'The Concept of *Al-Uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity', in S.K. Samir, (ed.), *Actes du Premier Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes* (Rome: 1982), 169–190, p. 179.

[96] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 16.

that there is a distinction between the essence and the hypostases. There is no distinction in the essence, but there are distinctions in the hypostases. The Son is begotten (*yūlad*) and the Spirit proceeds (*yanbathiq*).[97] From eternity the Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit emanates (*yuṣdir*) from the Father. The begetting of the Son and the emanating of the Holy Spirit are without bodily separation or by means of bodily members, since God is not composite or embodied. Timothy offers an analogy from human nature to explain this. "From the human soul 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".[98] Begetting and emanating are both found in the created world. For example, smell and taste emanate from an apple, but do not come from a part of the apple but from the whole fruit. Just as the smell of the apple is not the taste of the apple, 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".[99]

The Caliph concludes from this exposition of the Trinity that the three hypostases must never be separated. He argues, "If the hypostases are not separated or divided one from another, then the Father and the Holy Spirit became human along with the Word".[100] Timothy wants to affirm the different functions of the hypostases within the inseparability of the essence of God. He suggests that the written word of the Caliph 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 air but cannot be separated from the soul and mind. People talk not about hearing the soul or mind but about

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[97] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 16.
[98] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 17.
[99] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 17.
[100] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 18.

hearing the word of someone.[101] There is no record of the Caliph's response to these examples.

ABŪ QURRA'S TREATISE ON THE TRINITY

Abū Qurra's defense 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".[102] He refers to a Muslim interlocuter as, "The one who negates Christian teaching".[103] The first half of the treatise is taken up with an argument for the role of reason to defend faith and a list of proofs for the Trinity from the Bible. The second half of the treatise presents arguments that belief in God as one and three is rational. He states that the negators of Christian teaching refuse to accept 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".[104] The negators hold that rational people believe either that none of the hypostases is a god or each of them is a god. Abū Qurra opens his effort to persuade such negators that God is three in one by quoting texts from the Bible. He refers to the way angels appear in Genesis 16:7-13, 22:12, 23:11-13, 48:15-6, and Exodus 3:2-6 as evidence of the functioning of the Triune God.[105] He argues that rational people must accept that these passages demonstrate that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy

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[101] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 18.

[102] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, 23–47, p. 23. See also the English translation of the Treatise in J. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah,* pp. 175–93.

[103] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 3.

[104] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 27.

[105] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, pp. 29–31.

Spirit is God, but that God is always one. Nevertheless, since rational people can be unduly influenced by sentiment, he will put forward rational arguments for the Trinity.[106]

He begins with an analogy from life for the nature of the hypostases. The human names, Peter, Paul and John refer to persons (*wujūh*), and the humanity shared by these three names is analogous to the divinity shared by the hypostases. Rachid Haddad has pointed out that Abū Qurra uses *wajh/ wujūh* to translate the Greek term *prosōpon* (person) which was a synonym for *hypostasis* in Greek theology.[107] Abū Qurra argues that there are "three persons (*wujūh*), one God . . .because the term 'person' (*wajh*) is attributed to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".[108] However, the analogy of the three persons with three men does not mean that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are separated or differentiated. If that were the case, they would be three divine beings rather than one divine being.[109] Abū Qurra goes on to argue that the three divine persons (*wujūh*) share the same non-physical nature,[110] the same essence (*dhāt*),[111] and the same oneness of divinity (*wāḥidiyya al-lāhūt*).[112] Najib George Awad has argued that Abū Qurra's choice of the Arabic term *wajh* as a translation for the Greek term *hypostasis* was original to him. "He introduced a new term in order to speak creatively of the three divine persons in the Triune Godhead (i.e., *wajh/ wujūh*), a term,

[106] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 33.

[107] See R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750-1050*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), p. 172.

[108] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 34.

[109] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 35.

[110] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 38.

[111] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 39.

[112] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara*, p. 37.

that is, which none of either contemporary or later Christian *mutakallims* use".[113]

He presents three more analogies are to support the notion that the three persons share one divinity. Three lamps in a house each give light but the light is one and indivisible. When three speakers recite the same poem at the same time only one poem is heard. Three pieces of gold are one kind of gold not three kinds of gold. Abū Qurra concedes that the oneness of God is "purer and higher" than the oneness in any of these analogies.[114] In the end, he insists that the three persons share the same nature.[115]

When a negator of Christian teaching asks whether the world was created by one or three of the hypostases then he should be told that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were all 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 interrogator, "Do you say that God has word or not"? Abū Qurra states that if he replies "no" then God is dumb, but if he replies "yes" then the word must be perfect man and perfect God as Christians believe.[116] This is Abū Qurra's version of the argument, used by John of Damascus and the writer of the *Anonymous Apology,* that since Q4:171 speaks of Jesus Christ as a word from God, Muslims ought to believe in the divine nature of the Word. Seppo Rissanen has argued that Abū Qurra is engaging here in the debate among Muslims about whether the Qurʾan was eternal or created. He holds that Abū Qurra posed difficulties for both sides in the debate. The Muʿtazila denied the eternity of the Qurʾan and thus denied the eternity of the word. The Traditionists held to the eternity of the Qurʾan but would not

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[113] See N.G. Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms,* (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 266.

[114] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara,* p. 36–37.

[115] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres Arabes de Theodore Aboucara,* pp. 39, and 44.

[116] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Trinity', in C. Bacha, (ed.) *Les Oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara,* p. 44.

accept the personification of God's word.[117] Abū Qurra is joining in the now traditional use of Q4:171 where the language of God's word being cast into Mary is made to refer to the functioning of the Trinity. Abū Qurra's attempt to defend the Trinity begins with textual proofs from the Bible and ends with a textual proof from the Qurʾan. In between, there are analogies from the created world to support the triune nature of God which should encourage rational people to admit that God is three in one. Abū Qurra does not enter into debate with Muʿtazila concerns about the attributes of God. Sara Husseini has pointed out that he "never really engages with the concept of particular divine attributes referred to by Muslims and their potential comparability with the hypostases".[118]

ABŪ RĀʾIṬA'S LETTER ON THE TRINITY

Abū Rāʾiṭa said he had debated with Abū Qurra over the correct way to describe the union of divinity and humanity in Christ,[119] but they both adhered to the Trinitarian formula, "One essence in three hypostases". Nevertheless, they had divergent vocabulary for the Trinity in Arabic, and their approach to Muslims was dissimilar. Abū Rāʾiṭa writes his letter on the Trinity to a fellow West Syrian Christian who asked him for help in answering Muslim questions about the Trinity, from someone who had experience of debate with Muslim intellectuals.[120] Abū Rāʾiṭa, unlike Abū Qurra, refers to Aristotelian concepts in his bid to

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[117] See S. Rissanen, *Theological encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule,* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1993), p. 142.

[118] See S.L. Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God*, p. 76.

[119] Abū Rāʾiṭa 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 G. Graf, (ed.) *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḫidma Abū Rāʾiṭa,* CSCO 130 (Louvain: 1951), 65–72, p. 65.

[120] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', S.T. Keating, (ed. and trans.), in *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭa,* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 164–215, pp.166–167.

engage with Muslims who had begun to utilise the translations of Aristotle into Arabic made in the late eighth and early ninth centuries by Christian translators. Sidney Griffith mentions that Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 873) was an example of such a Muslim who used Aristotle's ideas to refute the Trinity "on the grounds of Greek logic".[121]

Abū Rāʾiṭa opens his letter with his attempt to reply to "the People of the South" that the oneness of God means that Christians are prohibited from believing in the threeness of God.[122] He says that "the People of Truth" should agree with "the People of the South" that God is one, but that they should ask them what they mean by oneness. Do they mean one as genus (*jins*), one as species (*nauʾ*), or one as number (*ʿadad*)?[123] These three types of oneness are taken from Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* and it is clear that Abū Rāʾiṭa holds that debating with Muslims about the Trinity depends on such foundations.[124] Sandra Keating points out that among the Christian apologists in the early Islamic period, "he is one of the first to build his argument using principles of logic and elements drawn from Greek thought".[125] 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".[126] Timothy and Abū Rāʾiṭa are examples from two different denominations of Christian

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[121] See S.H. Griffith, 'Ḥabīb ibn H̱idmah Abū Rāʾiṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 161–201, p. 175, and A. Perier, 'Un traité de Yahya ben `Adi, defense du dogme de la trinité contre les objections d'al-Kindi', *ROC* 22 (1920-1), pp. 3–21.

[122] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 168–169.

[123] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 170–173.

[124] See Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', 5.6, in H. Tredennick, (trans.) *Metaphysics. Books I–IX, vol. 17*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1933).

[125] S.T. Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭa,* p. 157.

[126] See H.P.J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du Langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothee I (728–823) à Serge* (Rome: PISIO, 1983), p. 60.

theologians using a common intellectual language inherited from Greek thought.

Abū Rāʾiṭa argues that if Muslims mean oneness of "genus" then God must encompass various species, and this is impossible for the One who created all species. If they mean "number" then God must be subject to division because the number "one" is a species of number which is included in the perfection of number, and this is impossible for God who is perfect. If they mean "species" then God must be comprised of different beings which is impossible.[127] As a result, no Aristotelian concept of oneness is adequate to describe God. Muslims who depend on Aristotle's ideas of oneness inevitably undermine the perfection of God. Abū Rāʾiṭa advises the recipient of his letter to reply to Muslims 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 description of God is sound for two reasons: first, it affirms the utter difference of God from His creation in His essence so that nothing can be compared with Him; and, second, it affirms that God encompasses all of the species of number, even and odd, in His hypostases.[128]

Abū Rāʾiṭa refers to Aristotle again in his discussion of the attributes of God such as "living", "knowing", "hearing", and "seeing".[129] 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", but predicated names are related to something else such as "knower" and "knowledge", because a knower knows through knowledge. This is a differentiation made by Aristotle in his *Categories*.[130] If a Muslim holds that "living" and "knowing" are 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. Sidney

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[127] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 172–174.
[128] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 174–176.
[129] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 176–177.
[130] See Aristotle, 'Categories', 1–7, in H.P. Cooke & H. Tredennick (eds and trans), *The Categories vol. 1,* (London: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Griffith indicates that these distinctions were made by Muslim *Mutakallimūn* who distinguished between "attributes of the essence" (*sifāt al-dhāt*) and "attributes of action" (*sifāt al-fiʾl*).[131] Abū Rāʾiṭa argues firstly that "life" and "knowledge" are eternal in God because there cannot be a time when God does not have life and knowledge. Secondly, "life" and "knowledge" cannot be parts of God's nature but must be perfect entities that can be distinguished, which are united with one another in Him. "We describe Him by continuity in essence (*jawhar*), and by dissimilarity in the individuals (*ashkhās*) or hypostases (*aqānīm*)".[132]

If Muslims reply that God cannot be divided, then a Christian response should be to refer to three lamps in one house that each give the same light, or Moses and Aaron who are distinct individuals yet share a common humanity.[133] Abū Rāʾiṭa uses the example of Adam, Eve and Abel to explain the relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Adam begets Abel, Abel is begotten, and Eve proceeds from Adam and is neither begetter nor begotten, yet they all share the same humanity. Likewise, the Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, yet they all share the same essence (*jawhar*). If the Muslim says that there are three individual gods, the Christian should say, "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".[134] He refers to 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 Christian should reply, "God possesses knowledge and spirit, and the knowledge of God and His spirit are permanent and perpetual, not ceasing. For it is not permitted

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[131] See S.H. Griffith, 'Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rāʾiṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', p. 182.

[132] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 182–183.

[133] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 184–187.

[134] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp. 188–189.

in a description of God for Him in His eternity to be without knowledge and spirit".[135] Abū Rāʾiṭa, unlike John of Damascus, the author of the *Anonymous Apology*, Timothy, Abū Qurra and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, does not refer to word and spirit here. Sidney Griffith argues that Abū Rāʾiṭa deliberately avoids referring to Q4:171 in preference to keeping closely to the terms of debate concerning the attributes of God among the Muslim *mutakallimūn.*[136] Nevertheless, he is making the same kind of argument as the five writers referred to above.

Abū Rāʾiṭa appeals to the way God speaks in the first-person plural in the Bible and the Qurʾan, whether in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness", or in many places in the Qurʾan, "We said", or "We created". He argues that both scriptures indicate that the hypostases were involved in the creative work of God. He gives further analogies of plurality from the Bible and argues that although Muslims accuse Christians of altering their scriptures, they cannot prove the allegation.[137] At the end of the letter Abū Rāʾiṭa answers the Muslim charge that because the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, He must be more worthy of praise and worship. Abū Rāʾiṭa refers to the analogies of the sun, its light and its heat, and Adam and Eve, to argue that the Son and the Spirit are not less than the Father from whom they originate. The Son and the Spirit are "two perfect beings (*dhātān*) from one perfect being (*dhāt*)".[138] Rashid Haddad notes that Abū Rāʾiṭa previously used (*jawhar*) to refer to the essence of God rather than (*dhāt*), and argues that Muslims may have regarded Abū Rāʾiṭa's argument as confusing. He also indicates that there is an oscillation between the language used for the members of the Trinity. Sometimes Abū Rāʾiṭa speaks of three individuals (*ashkhās*), and sometimes of three hypostases (*aqānīm*).[139] A Muslim could ask why the Son and the Spirit are

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[135] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp 196–197.
[136] See S.H. Griffith, 'Ḥabīb ibn H̲idmah Abū Rāʾiṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century', p. 195.
[137] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp 198–200.
[138] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'The First Letter on the Holy Trinity', pp 202–206.
[139] See R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050,* p. 166.

not two perfect essences (*jawharain*) from one perfect essence (*jawhar*). Sara Husseini argues that when Abū Rāʾiṭa enters the debate with Muslims over the status of the attributes of God he places his Christian interpretation side by side with a Muslim one. "He does not go as far as to equate hypostases with attributes, but simply makes use of Muslim language and concepts to lay the groundwork so that the doctrine of the Trinity might be more palatable to a Muslim audience".[140]

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār shares with his predecessors a common approach to presenting the Biblical basis of the Trinity, and analogies for the Trinity based on created realities and human nature. He shares with Abū Rāʾiṭa an appeal to Aristotelian categories to argue that there are attributes in God which are essential to Him in contradistinction to actions of God which are not. Clearly these two theologians were willing to enter into the debate among Muslim intellectuals of the early ninth 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 Abū al-Hudhayl's arguments are lost. However, two Muslim contemporaries should provide some indication of the kind of response from the Muslim side.

THE REFUTATION OF THE CHRISTIANS BY AL-QĀSIM IBN IBRĀHĪM

The Zaydī Imam Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860) wrote *The Refutation of the Christians* possibly after debating with Christians in Egypt between 815 and 826.[141] He quotes from the Qurʾan those verses that criticise people who associate with God other persons who they make worthy of worship. He picks out for special attention Q112:1–4, "Say, He is God the One, God the

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[140] See S.L. Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God,* p.103.
[141] See W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965), pp. 88–90.

Eternal, who does not beget and who is not begotten, and there is no-one like Him", and 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".[142] 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".[143] 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*)".[144] Al-Qāsim does not develop arguments against this formulation because he is more concerned to refute the divinity of Jesus. Yet he is sure that the Trinity goes beyond the boundaries set by the Qurʾan 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".[145] 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. In making this terminological choice ʿAmmār demonstrates a greater sensitivity to Muslim preconceptions than Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa.

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[142] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'al-Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā', I. di Matteo, (ed.), in 'Confutazione contro I Cristiani dello zaydati al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm,' *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921–1922), 301–364. p. 310.

[143] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'al-Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā', pp. 314–315.

[144] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'al-Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā', p. 315.

[145] See D. Thomas, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Period', in L. Ridgeon, (ed.), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity,* (London: Curzon Press, 2001), 78–98, p. 84.

THE REFUTATION OF THE TRINITY BY ABŪ ʿĪSĀ AL-WARRĀQ

The refutation of the Trinity by Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. 860) is the most thorough of any of the Muslim refutations that are extant from the early Islamic period. He knows that different Christian denominations disagree about how to describe the uniting of the divine and human in Christ but that they agree about how to describe the Trinity. He reports that Christians all define the Trinity as "one essence (*jawhar*), three hypostases (*aqānīm*)", and that the three hypostases are Father, Son and Spirit.[146] He says that Christians have different terms for the hypostases, properties (*khawāṣṣ*), or individuals (*ashkhāṣ*), or attributes (*sifāt*). But he is aware that, "despite their differences over explanation and terminology they keep more or less the same meaning, as they themselves admit".[147] Unlike Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq does not quote from the Qurʾan to support his argument but depends solely on logical reasoning. He subjects the language of the Trinity to a sustained critique based on the presupposition that God must be one, and that the definition of oneness necessarily excludes threeness.

Abū ʿĪsā responds to the argument put forward by John of Damascus and those who followed him that God's Word and Spirit are eternally of God. Abū ʿĪsā argues that if the three hypostases are equivalent to the essence then the threeness of the hypostases must attach to the oneness of the essence. "Every number attaching to the properties will attach to the essentiality (*jawhariyya*)".[148] He stresses that Christians must admit three essentialities rather than one and thus the Trinity is impossible. The same reality applies to the concept of divinity. If Christians claim that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are divine then there must be three divinities that share the one divine essence. As a result, there are two definitions of divinity, one for the essence and the

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[146] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity: The First Part of the Refutation of the Three Christian sects', D. Thomas, (ed. and trans.), in *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66–181, pp. 66–67.

[147] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 68–69.

[148] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 78–79.

other for the hypostases.[149] This 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.[150]

Abū ʿĪsā does not usually refer to individual Christian writers but prefers to speak about the teaching of the three main Christian denominations of his time, the Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians. However, 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 (*khāṣṣatān*) which confer perfection on His essence".[151] This choice of life and speech as the essential properties of God reflects most accurately ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's language and it is likely that he is the unnamed *mutakallim* here. Abū ʿĪsā responds 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 specified by "life" is by a cause (*ʿilla*) 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.[152]

He regards Christian 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 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.[153] As a muʿtazilī, Abū ʿĪsā refused to accept

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[149] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 112–113.
[150] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 126–129.
[151] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 130–131.
[152] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 132–133.
[153] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 166–171.

analogies from the created and temporal world for the uncreated and eternal God since "there is nothing like Him" (Q112:4). Christians fail to understand that it is inappropriate to compare God with what He resembles. In the final analysis, "they are openly introducing anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), and they do not remove anthropomorphism from their teaching".[154]

These two Muslim reactions to the Trinity demonstrate just how Christians were challenged in the early centuries of early Islamic rule. The consensus of all the Christian denominations that God is "one essence in three hypostases" was confronted 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 agree on Arabic terminology to express the Trinity. Abū Qurra chose nature (*ṭabīʿa*) or essential being (*dhāt*) whereas Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār used essence (*jawhar*) to translate the Greek term "*ousia*". When it came to finding Arabic terminology for the Greek term "*hypostasieis*", all three apologists writing in Arabic transliterated the Syriac "*qenômê*" as (*aqānīm*). Abū Qurra frequently used (*wujūh*), a translation of the Greek "prosopon" meaning "person", and Abū Rāʾiṭa preferred (*ashkhās*) to indicate the individual persons. ʿAmmār chose not to use (*ashkhās*) because he thought that Muslims would understand from this term that Christians believed in three individuals, and chose instead the term (*khawāṣṣ*) to indicate properties of the essence. In this choice ʿAmmār demonstrated deeper appreciation of Muslim conceptions than his contemporary Christian apologists. Sara Husseini has indicated that among Christian apologists of his period, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's explanation of the Trinity is the most creative and displays the deepest engagement with Islamic thought".[155]

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[154] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Trinity', pp. 168–169.
[155] See S.L. Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God,* p. 200.

When Muslims asked why there were only three hypostases in the Godhead and not more all three apologists writing in Arabic fell back on the Biblical testimony that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār both defended three rather than four, five, or six hypostases by distinguishing between "attributes of the essence" (*sifāt al-dhāt*) and "attributes of action" (*sifāt al-fiʿl*). Abū Rāʾiṭa argued that God creates by means of His "life" and "knowledge" which are attributes of His essence and not through "seeing" and "hearing" which are attributes of His action. ʿAmmār held that the attributes of essence are "life" and "speech", but his argument is similar to that of Abū Rāʾiṭa. Only two attributes are chosen which might be understood to represent the essence having two hypostases rather than three. Nevertheless, this was the longstanding approach in describing the Trinity in Greek theological writing. The third century Irenaeus began this tradition when he spoke about the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of God.[156]

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[156] See Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', 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 Spirt. Through them and in them he created all things of his own free will. And to them he says, "Let us make man"'. H. Bettenson, (trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 85.

CHAPTER SIX.
ON THE UNITING OF THE DIVINE AND HUMAN NATURES OF JESUS

The fourth section of ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers* is concerned with the relationship between the divine and human natures in Jesus, the possibility of God becoming human, and the ending of Jesus' life in his death by crucifixion, followed by his resurrection to life and ascension to heaven. The fact that this section of fifty-one questions is by far the longest of the four indicates the importance of these issues surrounding the status of Jesus in Christian dialogue with Muslims. These issues are separated out in *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy*. In the later work, section six is Debate about the Uniting of divine and human natures in Jesus, section seven is Establishing the incarnation, and section eight is Debate about the crucifixion. ʿAmmār reserves discussion of Jesus until after his treatment of the oneness of God in three properties or realities. In his thinking, establishing the possibility of the Word of God being essentially divine enables him to proceed to locate the Word of God in the human Jesus. In the end the divinity of Jesus is the driver for the Trinity, and the latter ensures the full and complete divine nature in him. However, for Muslims the full and complete humanity of Jesus is the driver for denying the Trinity. How could a human being be at one and the same time God in human flesh? Muslim insistence on the otherness of God from His creation meant that entry into that creation was ruled out. Muslims had

come to believe that Christians had made a categorical error in elevating Jesus, a servant of God, into a deity in his own right.[1]

MUSLIM INSISTENCE THAT JESUS IS ONLY HUMAN AND NOT DIVINE

The Qurʾan portrays Jesus as a messenger of God to the Jews, in a line of messengers to them, and in step with their message that Jews should not deviate from worshipping the True God, the Creator of all things. In Q5:72, Jesus challenges the Children of Israel, "Worship God, my Lord and yours". Q61:6 shows that Jesus had come to affirm the message of Moses. "Children of Israel, I am God's messenger to you, to confirm the *Torah* which you already possess". This confirmation of the law brought by Moses means that Jesus is sent by God to remind the Jews of the legislation revealed to Moses and to urge them to keep what God commands. Q3:50 indicates that Jesus came to tell the Jews what they were allowed to eat, making lawful what had been forbidden by faulty interpretation of the *Torah*. He was the true interpreter of the law of God that had been misunderstood over the years, because he had been given authority to do this by God. In Q43:63 Jesus claims that he has come to make clear to the Jews what they disagreed about. "I have come to you with wisdom to clarify what you disagree about. Fear God and do what I say". The nature of the disagreements is not specified in these texts but Q43:64 suggests that the Jews had deviated from worshipping God wholeheartedly, when Jesus says to them, "God is my Lord and yours, so worship Him. This is the straight path". The crooked path is defined more clearly in Q5:116–117. Here God questions Jesus concerning his teaching. "Jesus, Mary's son, did you say to people – take me and my mother as gods alongside God"? Jesus responds by denying any such thing. "I only told them what you commanded me – worship God, my Lord and yours". This might be an example of the disagreement mentioned in Q43:64, where

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[1] This chapter depends on M. Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries,* (Regnum: Oxford, 2005), pp. 67–112.

Jesus challenges the Jews to worship God and not anyone else. While Jesus spoke with the authority that came from God, he did not want Jews to begin to regard him as a person who could be worshipped. He performed signs and wonders according to Q5:110, where God reminds Jesus that He had given him permission to heal the blind and the lepers, and to raise the dead to life. Such amazing feats could easily lead people to worship Jesus as a deity. However, Moses had also been given permission by God to perform signs and wonders. Q2:60 mentions that Moses produced water from a rock, Q7:107 tells of him turning a rod into a snake, and Q7:117 says that Moses' rod turned snake swallowed up other rods that had become snakes. Since both Moses and Jesus had been granted permission by God to perform His signs and wonders, then Jews would be misguided if they began to believe that these messengers had divine power within themselves. It seems likely that the Qurʾan is criticising those people who had come to worship Jesus as a result of his authority to interpret the law of Moses and his marvellous miraculous activity. According to the Qurʾan, Jesus did not want people to worship him or his mother. Mary might have been worshipped by some people because of her role in bearing Jesus. Q19:19–21 tells of an angel visiting Mary and announcing that she would bear a pure boy. When Mary protests that no man had touched her, the angel insisted that it would happen because it was easy for God to do what He had decreed. Any possibility that the virginal conception of Jesus might lead to people worshipping him as divine is denied by Q3:59, where the conception of Jesus from his mother without a human father is compared to the creation of Adam, who had neither father nor mother. God created Adam from dust and said to him, "be" and Adam came into existence. "The example of Jesus for God is like the example of Adam". Since Adam is not divine then neither is Jesus, according to the Qurʾan. The virginal conception confirms, not the entrance of the divine into the human, but the excellence of the creative power of God.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE UNITING OF DIVINITY AND HUMANITY IN JESUS FROM THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Section four of *The Book of Questions and Answers* opens with a discussion of the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus. The first question is missing in the manuscript but the answer shows that the question was concerned with the relationship between the divinity and humanity in Jesus. ʿAmmār answers, "the uniting which was between them was not a substantial uniting of one of them being transferred from the essence of its particular substance to the substance of its owner and then they became one substance brought together but not as they were".[2] Therefore the question probably was, "Does the uniting of the divinity with the humanity not mean that the essential natures of divinity and humanity resulted in a third reality which has lost the essential natures that were joined together"? The questioner seems to regard the uniting of divinity and humanity as inevitably diminishing the essential natures that are supposedly united. ʿAmmār concludes, "It was not that a powerful one over them became three with them, and their oneness was the result of it making them so".[3] In other words, the questioner thinks that Christians must admit that Jesus is a kind of third reality composed of divine and human aspects. This can be seen in the follow up question which challenges the Christian claim that Jesus is one reality.

> You tell us that the Messiah is one reality in his Messiahship. Is he eternal or contingent? If you claim that he is eternal then surely you negate his created humanity which you claim is one of his two natures. . . If you claim that he is eternal and contingent together, you negate for oneness the one reality which you have described and you have returned to saying what you have denied, since you claim that he cannot be said to be one together as two and the two are him, with what you have described him being eternal and contingent or two substances which are eternal and contingent.[4]

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[2] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 178.
[3] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 179.
[4] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 179.

ʿAmmār replies by stating that, "The Messiah is contingent from the aspect of his Messiahship which began after he became Messiah".[5] He agrees with the questioner that Jesus is not eternal but contingent. He will not attempt to defend eternity for him. Discussion of Jesus as "the Messiah" demonstrates that ʿAmmār is willing to engage with the Islamic language of the questioner, for this title is commonly used for Jesus in the Qurʾan.[6] The name "Jesus" is not used by ʿAmmār in the defence of the incarnation because it is not given to the Messiah in the Qurʾan. ʿAmmār goes on to explain how the Eternal Word related to the contingent Messiah. "We mean by this that the Eternal Word and the created contingent human being became one contingent Messiah. . . He was not the Messiah in the timelessness of his eternity before the joining".[7] ʿAmmār turns to the analogies of a fire and a lamp to illustrate his meaning.

> Like an eternal fire and a contingent coal become one contingent live coal; like an eternal fire and a contingent wick become one lamp; the fire does not exist in advance before being united with the coal and the wick as live and is not one lamp before being united with the coal and the wick; a live coal or a lamp are not included in the meaning of the lamp or the live coal at all. Likewise, the eternal substance, in the timelessness of his eternity before becoming incarnate in the created humanity and uniting with it, was not Messiah and is not included in the root meaning of the Messiah.[8]

Therefore, according to ʿAmmār, the eternal substance of the Word of God united with the contingent substance of the humanity to become "the Messiah" who did not exist in eternity before the becoming.

Question three asks about the point of time at which the divinity and humanity united.

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[5] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 179.
[6] Jesus is called the Messiah seven times in the Qurʾan at 3:45, 4:157, 5:17, 5:72, 9:31.
[7] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 179.
[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 179–180.

> Are the two substances united? If you claim that they already existed and were not united . . . was he Messiah by the uniting of the two hypostases? Because the first existence of the creature is when it is in the womb after conception. If you say however that they did not exist at all apart from the uniting, it will be said to you, what is the point of you continuing to call them two in the joining in one from one aspect among other aspects, and not at all at the same moment apart from one Messiah?[9]

ʿAmmār replies that one of the two substances existed eternally as he has already explained, and the two substances were united when the Messiah "was formed as a creature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who was equally a creature".[10] He explains that the two substances united in one Messiah, "without transfer of their essences". Because they are "not transformed into each other, this means that the two hypostases exist according to what separates them".[11] ʿAmmār then gives the definition of the uniting of the Church of the East. "When we call them in our way of thinking two natures and two hypostases in the one Messiah, may the hearers understand that we do not mean that this uniting between the substances and the hypostases is a substantial or hypostatic uniting".[12] That there were two substances and two hypostases in the uniting is the distinctive formulation of the East Syrians to which ʿAmmār is faithful. He upholds the Church of the East denial that the uniting is substantial or hypostatic, though he does not explain at this point that the uniting was of the will of the divinity with the will of the humanity, which was also the belief of the East Syrians.

The fourth question is concerned with the relationship between the substances and hypostases.

> Tell us about the Messiah that came from each of the two substances and hypostases. Do you claim that he is contingent, not existing by himself, and his essence is without a substance or a hypostasis? If you claim that then you must exclude him

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[9] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 180.

[10] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 180.

[11] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 181.

[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 181.

from one substance of the two. Or do you claim that this contingent being was born and grew up and ate and drank and died and was crucified then was raised alive and ascended to heaven?[13]

ʿAmmār replies that "the name 'the one Messiah' is classified from the two substances or the two hypostases, God and humanity, by uniting and composition".[14] He calls on the analogy of a necklace composed of different precious stones. These are different substances joined together in one necklace. This is similar to a live coal composed of coal and fire. We understand the unity of a necklace or a live coal being a composition of substances. "Likewise, the Messiah is the Son of God in one meaning comprising two hypostases, divine and human, established by the attachment of their two essences".[15] Here ʿAmmār involves the title, "Son of God" in his exposition. He will discuss the meaning of this title later but introduces it at this point in anticipation of the discussion of Fatherhood and Sonship, the usual Christian terms for the relationship between God and the Messiah.

Question five goes back to the charge in the opening question that the Messiah must be a third reality other than the two substances which united. "If the two hypostases do not merit the name of the Messiah except by the uniting which is between them, then they do not therefore become by themselves one Messiah, but when they become one Messiah it is a contingent being other than them".[16] The questioner then comes out with the true reason for his rejection of the uniting of the eternal and contingent substances. "May you be forgiven for your description of the Eternal One receiving createdness and contingency, which is sheer ignorance and blindness".[17] It certainly is sheer ignorance and blindness from a Muslim perspective that Christians insist on holding a union of eternal and contingent realities. The otherness of God dictates the impossibility of His substance uniting with

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[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 181–182.
[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 182.
[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 182.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 183.
[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 183.

created humanity. ʿAmmār denies that the Eternal One becomes contingent after this uniting. "When he made equal the humanity itself with His power and rule and authority, He did not make Himself equal with the humanity in the limitation of the nature of its substance".[18] The sonship of the Messiah has two aspects. He is the son of his mother and the Son of his Father. These sonships are not similar. The sonship from his Father is not affected by the sonship from his mother. This is just like fire that gives heat to coal but does not share its blackness. "Likewise, the Eternal received the humanity and its meagreness together and united with it in all that was in it of sonship and meagreness, and he did not share with the humanity in anything that he had in his essential being".[19]

The sixth question is, "Was this humanity an existing human being in the womb of the Virgin Mary before it became incarnate as a body and a dwelling place"?[20] The questioner asks about the incarnation for the first time here. Incarnation (*tajassud*), the action of taking a human body, was coined by Christian theologians who wrote in Arabic. Abū Qurra may have been the first to use the term in his treatise *On the Incarnation and Passion of the Eternal Son of God,* but it became standard terminology in the ninth century, and so would have been used by Muslims in dialogue with Christians as depicted by ʿAmmār in this instance. In reply to the question, ʿAmmār denies that the humanity was a complete human being before the conception of the Messiah in the Virgin Mary. The complete human being came at the birth not the conception.

> Concerning the conception of him and the birth from her, the Messiah possessed two hypostases, divine and human, from which he united as one Messiah. . . Concerning the body growing created from the material, it was created and united together at the same time. . . The chaste Virgin Mary conceived the Messiah

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[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 183.
[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 183–184.
[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 184.

existing by his hypostases, then she gave birth to him when the time of her pregnancy was complete, a perfect Messiah.[21]

Question seven concerns the "created being taken from Mary".[22] The Muslim knows that Christians call the Messiah, "Son of God". Is this Son of God a different person from the Messiah, since the latter is contingent and not eternal? He asks, "Are you not required to say that she gave birth along with the Son of God to him who is not the Son of God"?[23] ʿAmmār replies, "We have already told you at the beginning of our discussion that he was only the Son of God as the Messiah, and the Messiah only existed by the connection of the two hypostases".[24] He affirms that after the conception of the Messiah, by the uniting of the divine with the human, the name "Son of God" and the name "Messiah" share the same meaning. What took place at the conception was a uniting of the virtues of the eternal substance with the virtues of the contingent substance. Therefore, the eternal substance willed by his kindness and generosity to bestow on the contingent substance "the Lordship, the authority, the rule and the power and everything to do with his kingship".[25]

The Muslim questioner comes back with a challenge. If the eternal substance willed out of kindness and generosity to be called "Son" after the uniting, then how exactly does the uniting bestowed on the contingent substance merit the name "Son"?[26] ʿAmmār refers to the way a human being is named. The body of a human being is formed from the seed of his father, but he is not named a "man" without the soul being united with the body. He can only be called a "son" after the uniting of the body and soul. "Likewise, with the hypostasis of the humanity of the Messiah made from the nature of the Chaste Mary, it is not appropriate that he be called Messiah, according to his separateness, without the hypostasis of the divinity, or called Son of God without it".[27]

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[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 184–185.
[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 185.
[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 185.
[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 185.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 186.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 186.
[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 187.

Therefore, just as a human being is made up of the human substance from his father, and a soul that is not from his father, so the Messiah is made up of the human substance from his mother, and the eternal substance from the Godhead. As a result, "When you call him the Messiah or describe him as Son of God since that time, then indeed you make common the two hypostases by the uniting which gives the meaning of equivalence between them in this sonship and makes equal the movement between them".[28]

Back comes the questioner in the eighth question with the problem of Mary's contribution to the reality of the Messiah.

> If there is no Son of God apart from the Messiah, and there was no existence for the Messiah apart from the two united substances, and you claim that the Messiah is born from Mary, and he ate, drank, walked about and was changeable, then surely you claim that Mary gave birth to two united substances, and they together ate, drank and were changeable.[29]

ʿAmmār continues with the analogy of the way human beings are understood.

> Do you not see, oh man, that you were born from your mother as a complete human being, eating and drinking. . .You do not exist in your humanity apart from the joining together of the two substances of the body and the soul. Do you now claim that your mother gave birth to your soul and your body together at the same time, and the two ate, drank, walked about, were changeable?[30]

It would be foolish for anyone to think that the soul is transferred from mother to child. Given that the soul is spiritual rather than physical, it is clear that spiritual beings do not need food or drink, and do not go through conception, birth and upbringing. ʿAmmār retorts, "When you understand the truth of these things it is certain that your mother gave birth to you as a man who has a spirit by your body receiving birth and growth and decrease and

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[28] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 187.
[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 188.
[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 188.

increase, not by your spirit being weakened by these things and these conditions and frailties".[31] This makes clear that,

> Mary gave birth to her son, a perfect Messiah who had two perfect substances, divine and human, and she did not give birth to him by both of the substances, but she gave birth to him by his humanity taken from her. By his humanity he was nourished, ate, drank, developed and grew, not by his divinity.[32]

ʿAmmār points out that the eternal substance of the Messiah "was generated from his Father in an eternal generation . . . and his mother generated him by a timebound humanity. So, despite the different conditions and the alternative generations he is one Messiah who has two substances, one Son who has two hypostases".[33]

This provokes question nine,

> In that case the Messiah was born from two births, one of them from the Father and the other from the mother. . .How can you claim that the Messiah was formed with the two essential substances and the uniting of the two hypostases at the moment of the conception?[34]

ʿAmmār argues in response,

> We do not claim that the Messiah was born twice but we say that the Messiah our Lord had two births of two kinds and by two methods. The hypostasis of his divinity was eternally born from the Father and was not eternally born from him at a particular moment. There was no beginning for it and no ending. Understand this from our discussion.[35]

He goes on to argue that "at the time of his birth from the mother in his humanity he was also born from the Father in his divinity. . .Therefore, that which began came to an end and that which did

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[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 189.
[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 191.
[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 191.
[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 191–192.
[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 192.

not begin remained according to what was eternal in it without end".[36]

Question ten asks "As for the timebound created humanity which was not from the substance of the Creator, how was sonship from the eternal Creator necessary for Him"?[37] ʿAmmār responds that "The one who is eternal desired by his grace and kindness that the substance of humanity share in his sonship and affirm the truth of the Fatherhood of His Father".[38] This desire resulted in the one who is eternal forming a pure righteous person by taking "the substance of humanity as clothing for his divinity to confirm the truth of the sonship which is eternal and to make that conform to it".[39]

ʿAMMĀR ON THE UNITING OF DIVINITY AND HUMANITY IN JESUS FROM THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

The sixth section of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is entitled, "Discourse on the Union of divinity and humanity in the Messiah". Rather than answer detailed questions about the entry of the eternal divine nature into the timebound creation as he has done in *The Book of Questions and Answers,* ʿAmmār concentrates here on answering the Qurʾanic charge that Christians believe that God took a female partner and had a son through her. His approach is reminiscent of the debate between Caliph al-Mahdī and Patriarch Timothy where the Caliph quotes quoting Q72:3, "Our Lord has neither taken a wife nor a son", and asks Timothy, "How can someone like you, knowledgeable and wise, say that the most-high God took a wife and had a son"?[40] This most likely indicates that ʿAmmār is dealing with two different Muslim audiences in the two books. *The Book of Questions and Answers* is designed to answer the kind of questions that Muslim intellectuals were asking, whereas *The*

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[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 192.

[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 193.

[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 193.

[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 193.

[40] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 7.

Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy is designed to provide his fellow Christians with answers to questions that a wide spectrum of Muslims might ask.

In answer to the allegation from Q72:3, ʿAmmār states categorically that "We cannot be suspected of saying that He took a female companion".[41] He explains that Christians call the Word of God, 'Son', because this name is found in the gospels. But he immediately wants to refer to the qualities of the Word of God before he gets down to the discussion of the nature of sonship. He asks, Don't Muslims admit that the human soul generates words in ways that are beyond comprehension, so why do Muslims not admit that the Word of God is also beyond comprehension?[42] When he does begin his debate about sonship, ʿAmmār says, "I would like to ask them why they find repugnant our naming of the Word as 'Son' just as in the books of God"?[43] He provides the Muslim answer in the reality "that our sons only exist through sexual intercourse".[44] The Christian response is to affirm that,

> We are blameless before God from all of this, because in our opinion the Son does not have a body and he does not possess members, or flesh or blood. His eternal birth is not from the body of a woman, rather he is the Word of God that is not confined or perceived.[45]

ʿAmmār suggests a second reason why Muslims reject the name 'Son'. It might be because "our sons exist in a moment of time".[46] The Christian should reply "that the Son is eternal and has no beginning in time".[47] A third reason for rejecting the name 'Son', could be that Muslims think that the name 'son' only applies temporarily to male human beings. They cease to be called sons when they become fathers and grandfathers. The Christian reply should be that the sonship of the eternal Word of God eternally

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[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.
[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 57.

exists. In fact, human sonship is predicated on the reality of the eternal sonship.

> The sublime sonship which is in the essence, does not change, is not transferred, and is not negated, but becomes an example of sonship so that others can be inferred from it, even though the example does not contain the completeness of the thing that it represents.[48]

ʿAmmār argues that human fathers and sons are named after the divine Father and Son. Fatherhood and sonship are "loaned names of what belongs to the Creator in His essence, because He has given us all of the noble names which He has in His essence, such as 'living', 'wise', 'knowledgeable', and 'speaking', among others".[49]

ʿAmmār says that the Christian ought to remind the Muslim that the divine Father and Son are both equally eternal and time does not impact them. In other words, the divine Fatherhood did not precede the divine Sonship. "We must know that fatherhood and sonship in the essence of the Creator are eternal, one did not precede the other, since there is nothing in the essence of the Creator that is created or which precedes or follows".[50] A fourth reason for the rejection of the name 'Son' could be that Muslims can only think of sons as physical beings. So, the Christian response should be to "inform them that the meaning of fatherhood and sonship is not that of a physical father and son for us".[51] Fatherhood and sonship originate in the Godhead and are only given to human beings by the Creator Himself. ʿAmmār summarises the Christian reply to Q72:3.

> Oh, human being, your Creator, may His praise be exalted, has honored you with what is not in your substance. You suppose that it is from your essence, and it has become an imperfection for you, and you have changed what is worthy of praise to slander and rebuke. We will tell you after this that the Son of God does not have a body but embraces everything,

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[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 58.
[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 58.
[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 58.
[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 59.

he is not limited, and cannot be comprehended by rational minds.[52]

A fifth reason for the rejection of the name 'Son' may be because of the statement in Q112:3, "He does not beget and is not begotten". Muslims interpret this to mean that God is to be praised for not begetting or being begotten.[53] Yet there are creatures He created that do not beget or are begotten. He lists insects and birds that do not give birth, and all the inanimate parts of creation. Muslims "only see deficiency and despicability in that which does not beget and is not begotten, and honor and rank in that which is begotten and begets".[54] ʿAmmār applies the principle to the story of Eve being tempted by Satan.

> If that which was not begotten is the most exalted thing, then Eve who was not begotten would have been more exalted than anything; and Satan who does not beget and is not begotten would have been more exalted than Abraham the friend of the Most Merciful.[55]

Here ʿAmmār appeals to characters familiar both to Christians and Muslims from the Bible and the Qurʾan, and adds the title for Abraham found only in the latter. His advice to Christians on how to deal with Muslim objections to the title 'Son' includes making suitable references to the Qurʾan when possible without undermining Biblical premises.

ʿAmmār argues that, "Since we have found that a human being is the most dignified of all things, and more honored by God than them or even the angels, we know that dignity and exaltation are in what is begotten and begets".[56] It must follow that, "Our dignity and our high rank are given to us by the application of the names 'fatherhood' and 'sonship'.[57] These two names are "properties of the Creator, may His praise be exalted,

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[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 60.

[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 60.

[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 60–61.

[55] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61. See Q4:125, where Abraham is called the friend of God.

[56] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61.

[57] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61.

as He reported in His pure and holy book which was established in the world by the resurrection of the dead and wonders which cannot be described".[58] So while ʿAmmār suggests to his fellow Christians that they use Qurʾanic terminology when it is suitable, he ultimately advises them to depend on the clear teaching of the New Testament for their beliefs. He goes on to argue that God has shown His generosity in calling humans by the names which He has.

> He has called us by them, such as living, knowing, wise, speaking, king, powerful, mighty, strong, capable, kind, generous, merciful, and similar things that are in Him. A human being is called by all of these names yet the Creator alone merits them and not His creation. Praise be to Him for His favor, His beneficence and blessing.[59]

He then suggests to his Christian readers that they challenge Muslims with the logical conclusion that if Muslims do not wish to attribute fatherhood and sonship to God "because it is not appropriate to attribute to God what human beings have, then we say that if a human being is called living, knowing, generous, kind, gracious, full of favor, and what is similar to these, then they cannot call the Creator by them as well".[60] Muslims might come back and say that fatherhood and sonship would be deficiencies in God. ʿAmmār looks at Qurʾanic names for God that could be thought of as deficiencies, such as mercy, anger and contentment.

> I would like to oppose them over what, according to them, they find to be a deficiency, like mercy which only exists for them by pain to the heart through it being squeezed, and anger which does not exist for them until it changes what existed before it, and contentment which only happens for

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[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61.

[59] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61. Wageeh Mikhail points out that Abū Qurra argues in a similar way for similarities between God and Adam, and observes that many human characteristics can be ascribed to God. See Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the Existence of God', pp. 224–227, and W.Y.F. Mikhail, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān', pp. 206–207.

[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 61.

them for the cause of advancing their knowledge of what was decreed for them after it, so that they exclude that and also everything that is similar to it from the Creator.[61]

But if Muslims agree that mercy, anger and contentment are deficient characteristics in humans then logically they must admit that God is deficient when the Qur'an describes Him having such characteristics. "Yet if they do not attribute these to Him, surely it will entail they themselves being judged by Him, for they do not believe in Him and His books which describe these things about Him".[62] He warns Christians that Muslims may try to affirm the names for God found in the Qur'an but deny the deficiencies that are found in these names when applied to humans.

> They may come back and say, "We name Him by these things, yet we exclude from Him the deficiency that is evident in us". I answer, "Why do you not attribute to Him fatherhood and sonship, while excluding from Him the deficiency which exists in us"?[63]

'Ammār concludes section six of *The Book of the Proof* with a final word of advice for his Christian audience. Muslims have no logical case against fatherhood and sonship being applied to God. Their refusal to admit these names stems from fear of what God might think of them on the Day of Judgment.

> I do not think they have an argument besides being afraid of this, for their hearts are not on intimate terms with Him because of their timidity concerning what they might experience in the future from Him, because of fear of the appearance of things without examining their inmost secrets.[64]

'Ammār's contemporaries, Abū Qurra and Abū Rā'iṭa both wrote treatises defending the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus. These will be analysed before studying the responses of Muslim writers.

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[61] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 62.
[62] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 62.
[63] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 62.
[64] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 62.

ABŪ QURRA'S TREATISE GOD HAS A SON WHO IS HIS EQUAL IN NATURE AND WHO EXISTS FOREVER WITH HIM

Abū Qurra attempts to answer the question posed by a Muslim, "How can God give birth in the light of the fact that a man only has offspring after intercourse with a woman? Surely it is not right to speak this way about God"?[65] In his reply, Abū Qurra asks the Muslim whether it is right for them to speak of God seeing and hearing. Does such language not mean that God has eyes and ears like human beings do?[66]

He then puts another question to the Muslim. "If you accept that God can be called the One who hears and is wise, and these titles do not demean Him, why can't you accept that He can be called the Father in the same way"?[67] He provides further help to the Muslim by pointing out that, according to the Bible, the Son is not part of creation and has no beginning in time. When Muslims accuse Christians of teaching that God took a son to Himself, they are wrong since the Son lives forever with the Father and is equal in nature to him.[68] Abū Qurra goes on to discuss the wisdom of God. He interprets wisdom in the book of Proverbs as the personification of God. Similarly, the New Testament speaks of the Son of God as personally distinct from the Father yet being fully divine.[69] As a result Christians believe that, "the Messiah is perfect God and perfect Man. He has two natures, one divine and the other human".[70] Abū Qurra here gives the definition of the Council of Chalcedon to which he was faithful.

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65 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', in Bacha, *Les Oeuvres arabes,* 91–104, p. 94.

66 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', p. 95.

67 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', pp. 96–97.

68 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', pp. 97–98.

69 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', p. 98.

70 Abū Qurra, 'God has a Son who is His Equal in Nature and who Exists Forever with Him', p. 99.

ABŪ RĀʾIṬA'S LETTER ON THE INCARNATION

Abū Rāʾiṭa wrote a lengthy letter on the Incarnation which answers forty-four questions posed by a Muslim. Questions thirty to forty-one deal with the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus. Question thirty asks, "How is it possible that one who is without flesh be born of a corporeal woman"?[71] Abū Rāʾiṭa replies that the birth relates to the flesh of the woman from whom the human body was taken by the Word of God. Just as humans are born as embodied spirits from their mothers so the Word was "born into the state of having a body, which was taken from Mary".[72] The Muslim comes back with the question, "How does something without a body become incarnated"?[73] The reply acknowledges that nobody knows how God creates, or how the spirit indwells human beings, "but this does not hinder us from acknowledging the creation of creatures and the dwelling of the spirit in the body".[74] Nobody can know how the Word united with the flesh but Christians believe it without understanding the process.

Question thirty-two turns to the sonship of the Messiah. "Is the Messiah adopted without being a real son or did He beget him from His essence".[75] Abū Rāʾiṭa states that the Messiah is not adopted because "an adopted son is not a true son".[76] The sonship of the Messiah relates to his being begotten outside of time. But the Muslim presses the point in question thirty-three that since Mary gave birth to the Messiah how can Christians claim that God did not adopt a son? The response of Christians, according to Abū Rāʾiṭa, is "We do not describe the Messiah as Son of God because of what was born of Mary but because he was begotten of the Father before time and without beginning".[77] The Muslim then

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[71] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', in S.T. Keating, (ed. and trans.), *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period. The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah,* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 222–297, p. 261.

[72] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', pp. 261–263.

[73] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

[74] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

[75] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

[76] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

[77] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

alleges that the Son was born twice, from the Father and then from Mary. Abū Rāʾiṭa accepts that this is the case. The Muslim insists that in that case the Father existed before the Son. Back comes the reply, The Father had no beginning and neither had the Son, so the fact that the Son is begotten of the Father does not mean that the Father is prior to the Son in time. If the Muslim cannot accept this because this contradicts what is known in creation, then he should be told that God is not tied to the way of creation when he does things. In question thirty-seven, the Muslim quotes Q2:111, "When God wills something, He says, "Be" and it is", and argues that God cannot be tied to the Christian description of His activity. Abū Rāʾiṭa replies, "Does this not happen with the actions of humanity"?[78] But the Muslim insists in question thirty-eight that "The actions of God are not things like the actions of His servants, because He is powerful over them".[79] To this Abū Rāʾiṭa responds that God is not restricted to the way people do things. "God is exalted above the needs of His servants when they do something, so His birth is eternal, everlasting, and exalted above the birth of His servants".[80] The Muslim reaffirms the impossibility of a begetter begetting offspring apart from the known manner of begetting. Abū Rāʾiṭa repeats that God does not need to do anything the way that creatures do. Question forty asks, "If His begetting is different from the begetting of creatures, it is not correct to name Him as 'father' and 'son', since the father is only named 'father' because he precedes the son".[81] Abū Rāʾiṭa replies that with created fathers and sons the names 'father' and 'son' are given at the time of the begetting. "The father and the son are together equally, one of them does not precede the other".[82] He chides the Muslim, "Why do you find our teaching hard when with God it has a more subtle and precise meaning than it has with creation"?[83]

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[78] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 265.
[79] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 265.
[80] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 265.
[81] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 267.
[82] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 267.
[83] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 267.

Question forty rounds off the set of questions on the uniting of divinity and humanity in the Messiah. The Muslim quotes from the gospels to argue that Jesus talked about his Father being God above all and that he saw himself as a human servant of God rather than being equal to God in Lordship.

> How is it possible that the Messiah be God and Lord, and consented to be a servant, when he so named himself along with his disciples as he said, "I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God", and "My Father who sent me is greater than I". He denied he had knowledge of the hour, and said to the two men, when they asked him for the seats on his right and his left in his kingdom, "This is not mine to give".[84]

Abū Rāʾiṭa quotes other sayings of Jesus that imply his divine status, "The one who sees me sees my Father", "I am in my Father, and my Father is in me", and "I and my Father are one". He adds "one substance (*jawhar*)".[85] He sums up the duality of these sayings by arguing that the Messiah "is true God and true human being, and he is one, not two. The words of humility that he uttered are a clear confirmation of his humanity, and the sublime, exalted words are an affirmation and confirmation of his divinity".[86]

EVALUATION

Muslim critique of the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus can be found in Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's *Refutation of the Christians*. He outlines the different beliefs about the uniting of the divinity and humanity in the Messiah of the three main Christian communities. The Melkites believe that the Messiah had two natures, divine and human, in one hypostasis. The Jacobites hold that the divine nature and the human nature are one, "just as the

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[84] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 269. The quotations are from John 20:17, John 14:28, Mark 13:32, and Matthew 20:21 and 23.

[85] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 269. The quotations are from John 14:9, John 10:38 and John 10:30.

[86] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 271.

human spirit and body are one".[87] Nestorians believe that the Messiah had two natures and two hypostases. Al-Qāsim has accurately described the tensions between the three denominations that were divided over the correct way to describe the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus. But he does not find any of this in the gospels. The creeds of the Christians have misrepresented the teaching of Jesus found there. The notion that God is uniquely Father to Jesus the Son of God is simply not true to the actual words of Jesus himself. He points to the teaching of Jesus that his disciples are sons of the Father.

> The testimony of the Messiah to his disciples was that they were all sons of the Father. If God was the Father of all of them then it demonstrates that the interpretation of fatherhood and sonship is not what you Christians say in your teaching.[88]

A similar criticism was aired by ʿAlī ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 855) in his *Refutation of the Christians*. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claimed to have been a Christian for seventy years before embracing Islam so his refutation is later than the Christian writings presented above. He points out that the Bible presents the Messiah as human but not divine. For example, the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament such as that in Psalm 8 expect the Messiah to be a human being without any suggestion that he would also be divine.[89] The Father-Son terminology in the gospels has been radically re-interpreted by Christians in their creedal formulations. In the gospels, the term 'father' is metaphorical just like clan leaders and aged men are called 'father' by people who are not their own children. Similarly, the term 'son' is figurative just like the 'sons' of leaders who are not their biological offspring. The problem with Christians is that they "hold the literal truth of these names".[90] They believe that God the Father

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[87] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'Refutation of the Christians', p. 316.

[88] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'Refutation of the Christians', p. 324.

[89] al-Ṭabarī, ʿAlī ibn Rabban. 'Refutation of the Christians', in R. Ebied and D. Thomas, (eds and trans), *The polemical works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī,* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 84–163 pp. 158–159.

[90] al-Ṭabarī, ʿAlī ibn Rabban. 'Refutation of the Christians', pp. 160–161.

is a parent while arguing that He is outside the process of creation, and they claim that the Son of God is born outside of time. Yet neither of these beliefs is taught in the gospels. As a result, they get themselves muddled in their thinking to the extent that they hold that the Son is equal to the Father, making their teaching logically incoherent.

> To say on the one hand that the Son is like his Father in His eternity, and on the other hand that he is not like his Father because he is born, is to deprive the words [father and son] of any meaning. . .If the Father and Son are equal in power and eternity then what authority remains for the Father over the Son?[91]

Christians, according to al-Ṭabarī, should return to their gospels and interpret them faithfully.

Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's *Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting* was the most thorough Muslim analysis of Christian teaching concerning the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus in the early ninth century. He shows how Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians were inconsistent in the language they employ to describe the uniting of divinity and humanity in the Messiah. He argues that Nestorians and the majority of Jacobites say that the eternal Son united with "a particular human being", but the Melkites teach that the eternal Son united with "the universal human nature" which is shared by all human beings "in order to save everyone".[92] The Melkites think that if the Son "had united with one human being then he could only have intended to save this individual and not everyone".[93] Abū ʿĪsā lists seven metaphors used by Christians for the uniting of the divinity and humanity; first, the Word united with the human body in the sense of mixing and mingling with it; second,

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[91] al-Ṭabarī, ʿAlī ibn Rabban. 'Refutation of the Christians', pp. 162–163.
[92] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', D. Thomas, (ed. and trans.) in *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87–277, p. 87.
[93] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 87.

the Word took the body as a temple; third, the Word took the body as a garment; fourth, the Word dwelt in the body; fifth, the Word appeared in the body without dwelling in it; sixth, the Word appeared in the body like a seal in clay without being transferred to the clay itself; seventh, the Word appeared in the body as a face appears in a mirror without being part of it.[94] It is interesting to observe that Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa only use the metaphor of indwelling, whereas ʿAmmār employs the metaphor of indwelling along with the temple and garment analogies. The divergences between the various Christian groups tell against the coherence of their beliefs, according to Abū ʿĪsā.[95] He goes on to demonstrate in great detail how the concept of the uniting of divinity and humanity is simply impossible to maintain without defying logic. For example, Abū ʿĪsā questions how the actions of the divine nature relate to the actions of the human nature in the Messiah. He quotes the Christian claims that the Messiah said he was "the son of man", and also said, "I and my Father are one". When Christians claim that the Messiah meant that he was son of man with respect to his humanity and one with the Father with respect to his divinity, Muslims should point out to Christians that the Messiah cannot be divided up into two distinct speakers. Surely when the Messiah spoke it was one voice not two. Therefore, he cannot equally claim to be both human and divine in reality, unless one statement is metaphorical.[96] Since the reality of the humanity of the Messiah is true then the reality of the divinity must be false. Claims for divinity can only be regarded as figurative.[97]

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[94] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 89.
[95] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 89.
[96] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 199.
[97] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 201.

This review of Muslim criticism of the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus shows how Christians were under pressure in the early ninth century to make a coherent response to the Muslim critique. The lengthy replies written by Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār demonstrate just how affected Christian theologians were by Muslim opposition. These two apologists shared similar answers to similar Muslim questions. They both argued that the sonship of Jesus was eternal rather than timebound, that fatherhood and sonship adhere to the essence of God as essential attributes and are given to humans, that the Messiah was a unity of eternal divinity from God the Father with contingent humanity from Mary the mother. While they held different views of the correct way to describe this union of divinity and humanity, both the West and East Syrian theologians were at one in their defense of the union before a Muslim audience. The fact that they shared similar questions and answers also demonstrates the closeness of Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār in the practice of dialogue with Muslim intellectuals. It is quite probable that they met one another in the work of oral debate with such Muslims where they may have represented their denominations and so come to exchange opinions now seen in their writing.

The advice given to fellow Christians by ʿAmmār in his *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is rather different from the questions and answers in his *Book of Questions and Answers.* In *The Book of the Proof* ʿAmmār gives a series of five possible reasons why Muslims object to Jesus being called "Son of God". In this work, ʿAmmār is not concerned to answer questions about the uniting of the eternal divinity with the contingent humanity as he was in *The Book of Questions and Answers.* This is no doubt because everyday conversations between Muslims and Christians would have focussed on the language of the Qurʾan which denied that God had taken a female partner and had a son. The philosophical concerns about the relationship of eternity to time discussed in *The Book of Questions and Answers* would not have preoccupied the majority of Muslims. In addressing two quite different audiences in his two pieces of writing, ʿAmmār shows how adept he was in adjusting his communication to different circumstances.

In responding to Muslim questions about the uniting of divinity and humanity in Jesus, ʿAmmār indicates the technical language of his denomination, the Church of the East, only once in each of his books. It is notable that he does not set up the Muslim questioner to interrogate the definition of two natures and two hypostases in the Messiah. This most probably reflects the reality that Muslims found such a construct as far too complicated to engage with. For them, Jesus was a profoundly spiritual human being, one of the four key messengers of God, alongside Abraham, Moses and Muhammad. The notion that he was divine as well as human was the central anathema to Islamic thought. There was little point debating whether Jesus had a divine nature as well as a divine hypostasis. In the final analysis, ʿAmmār presented arguments for holding to a divine nature in Jesus arising from his eternal sonship, a conviction shared by the Chalcedonian, Abū Qurra, and the West Syrian, Abū Rāʾiṭa. Intriguingly, the latter hardly deviates from the presentation of the other two theologians who held to two natures in Jesus, despite the fact that West Syrians believed that Jesus had only one divine nature in a human body. He was quite content to argue that Jesus spoke from his divine mind at times and from his humanity at other times. This might be construed by the reader to support a human mind in Jesus, something not normally accepted by West Syrian theologians. His support for the two births analogy, Jesus being born from eternity as Son of God and born from Mary as a human being, seems to imply his support for the two natures theology of the Chalcedonians and East Syrians. In other words, the way that the three apologists present their arguments for the divinity and humanity of Jesus to Muslims shows how close they were to each other in developing apologetic positions that might make sense to Muslims without having to engage in detailed defence of their respective beliefs about the uniting of divinity and humanity in the Messiah. Abū ʿĪsā's instinct that the three denominations really believed the same thing about Jesus even though they used different terminology to describe the uniting is close to reality.

ʿAmmār indicates why the two natures, two hypostases definition is preferable to the two natures, one hypostasis

definition of the Chalcedonians and the one nature definition of the West Syrians when he comes to defending the incarnation of God in the Messiah. After dealing with the entry of the eternal Word into the created world through the uniting of the Eternal Son with the human offspring of Mary, ʿAmmār turns to defending the embodiment of God in that human being. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN.
DEFENDING THE INCARNATION

Having defended the entry of the eternal Word of God into time in the divinity of the Messiah, ʿAmmār turns to the defense of the embodiment of the Word in the Messiah. The issue of the eternal becoming timebound moves on to the issue of the Creator becoming bound to a particular aspect of His creation. Concerns about time change to concerns about space. If it was possible for the eternal Word to enter the Messiah it then meant that the Word of God might be trapped in one human being among all such that He would be unable to govern the whole universe. Muslims who conceived of God as utterly transcendent were concerned about the confinement of the Creator in His creation. How could Christians defend the transcendence of God while arguing for His embodiment in Jesus? ʿAmmār attempts to answer this question in the next part of his *Book of Questions and Answers.* Section seven of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is also dedicated to defending the incarnation.[1]

MUSLIM INSISTENCE ON THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

The Qurʾan testifies of God's transcendence in Q112. "Say, He is God the One, the Eternal. He did not beget, nor was He begotten. There is no one like Him". This is expanded in Q42:11 to include

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[1] This chapter depends on M. Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims,* pp. 67–112 and I.M. Beaumont, 'Defending the Incarnation in the early Christian Dialogue with Muslims', in D.E. Singh, (ed.), *Jesus and the Incarnation: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts,* (Regnum: Oxford, 2011), 155–168.

the false comparison of creatures with the Creator. "The Creator of the heavens and the earth made partners for you from among yourselves, and partners for the animals, to multiply you. There is nothing like Him. He is the hearing and seeing One". The implication of this text is that those human beings who think that God can be compared with anything in His creation are totally mistaken. Q42:11 was interpreted by the Muʿtazila as closing the door on any attempt to regard God as possessing creaturely characteristics. According to al-Ashʿari (d. 935–936), "All the Muʿtazila agree that God is one with nothing resembling Him. He is the hearing and seeing One without being matter, spirit, body, shape, flesh and blood, person, substance or accident . . . He is not limited by space or time".[2] Given that ʿAmmār was responding to Muʿtazili thinkers such as Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, it is obvious that he would need to deal with this assertion that God is not limited by space.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE INCARNATION FROM THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question eleven opens up the problem for the Muslim of the confinement of God in the human body of the Messiah. "How is it possible that he became incarnate and clothed himself and indwelt in the human body and he was not contained by it, yet it constrained him and he was embodied with it and it enclosed him".[3] ʿAmmār replies that just as the sun is not confined by the light and heat it brings to the earth so the Eternal Word of God was not confined to the human body but brought life to it.

> The body which he clothed himself with did not give life to him, his dwelling place did not constrain him, did not govern him, and his temple from which he spoke to people did not restrict him, but he was surrounded by it, gave life to it, and was made visible by it.[4]

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[2] Al-Ashʿari, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Musallīn,* p. 155.
[3] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 194.
[4] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 194.

ʿAmmār goes on to indicate that he does not wish to speak about the human body of the Messiah as "the body of God".[5] This is the answer to missing question twelve which must have been "Why do you speak about the body of God"? He points out that the body belongs to the Messiah. He uses the analogy of the human soul in the human body. We do not talk about the body of the soul but rather the body of the human being.

> When the soul becomes incarnate in a body . . . and from the composition of the two of them is established one human being, the body is called the body of the human being and the soul is the soul of the human being. . . If the soul is not composed with the body then the unity of the human being is never established from the two of them.[6]

ʿAmmār appeals to another analogy of a person putting on clothes or armor. "When a person puts on clothes or weapons or a turban, it is not that he becomes a turban or weapons or clothes".[7]

> This is similar to our saying that the Word of God became incarnate and became human or produced a body and clothed himself with it and created a human being and clothed himself with him and constructed him as his hypostasis in order to appear in him and for his speech and actions to be made visible in him and in order that he would be united with him in his sonship.[8]

ʿAmmār insists that the Muslim must not attribute the humanity of the Messiah to God. "It is necessary that the humanity is called the humanity of the Messiah and the divinity is called the divinity of the Messiah, not the humanity of the divinity and not the divinity of the humanity".[9] He is aware, however, that some Christians make life difficult for Muslims in that they talk about the body of God. ʿAmmār boldly dissociates himself from them.

> It is astonishing that rational people claim that he, in their naming of him, is one substance and one hypostasis, intending

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[5] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 196.
[6] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 196.
[7] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 196.
[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 196.
[9] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 197.

> to promote the truth of the union between the divinity and
> the humanity, and the joining of the number two in all aspects
> in the oneness of the Messiah as the one established from the
> two of them. Then the body of the Messiah is called the body
> of God, and they reject the setting up of the two hypostases
> and the formation of the two substances and they negate the
> oneness of the Messiah in the strength of their fleeing from
> it.[10]

He notes that the argument of such Christians is based on the
statement of Paul in Romans 9:5 that "the Messiah is God over
all". They interpret this to mean that the body of the Messiah is
"the body of God and Mary who bore God".[11] ʿAmmār believes
that this is a false inference from the text. Addressing them
directly he argues, "You have attributed the bearing of Mary to
God and not to the Messiah; as a result, you are not permitted to
say that the body is the body of the Messiah or that Mary bore
the Messiah".[12] In addition, speaking about the body of God
undermines the Trinity. "The name of God rests upon the Messiah
and on others who are not the Messiah, such as the Father and
the Spirit. For this reason, it is not possible to say "the body of
God" and that Mary bore God".[13] The text in Romans should be
interpreted to avoid ruining the Trinity. "It should not be said that
Mary bore the Messiah, God who is God over all. If it is said that
Mary bore God over all who is the Messiah, his saying will not be
treated harshly".[14] ʿAmmār quotes from other New Testament
texts to back up his argument. He challenges his Christian rival,
"Where do you find God, may He be exalted and glorified,
mentioning in any of His books that Mary bore God and that this
body was the body of God"?[15] He points out that Matthew 1:1
mentions "the birth of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of
Abraham", not the birth of God, son of David, son of Abraham.
Luke 2:11 says that the angels announced good news to the

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[10] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 197–198.
[11] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 198.
[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 198–199.
[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 199.
[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 199–200.
[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 200.

shepherds saying to them, "A savior has been born to you, the Lord, the Messiah, in the town of David". They did not say God has been born to you in the town of David.[16]

'Ammār turns from debating with the Miaphysites who held that the body of the Messiah was the body of God to answering another question raised by the Muslim. "Why is it that you name the body the temple of God and you do not name it the body of God"?[17] The answer lies in scriptural teaching. The Messiah taught in John 5:19 that his Father dwelt in him. Paul said in Colossians 1:19, "Jesus the Messiah is the one in whom all the perfection of divinity dwells". These texts explain that "The Trinity indwelled him in a perfect concealment".[18] In other words, "He by his divinity and his humanity was one Son not one Father or one Spirit".[19] The Father and the Holy Spirit indwelled the Messiah but the Father and the Holy Spirit did not become incarnate in him. "For this reason we say, the body of the Messiah without the body of God".[20]

The Muslim asks for evidence of the Incarnation in question seventeen. The evidence is clear in the books that God has given replies 'Ammār, who affirms, "If you read you will see and understand and if you see you will know and become certain".[21] He quotes from Psalm 2:7, "From eternity you are my son I have begotten", Psalm 45:7, "God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness preferring you to your brothers", Isaiah 9:6–7, "A son will be given to us . . . and his name will be called, wonderful, God, almighty", and Isaiah 7:14, "His name will be called Immanuel and the interpretation of this is, our God is with us".[22] Then follows a lengthy set of texts from the gospels demonstrating that Jesus was called the Son of God. 'Ammār points out that the sayings and actions of Jesus show the uniting of divinity and humanity in the Messiah. Examples of his actions are that Jesus

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[16] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 200.
[17] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 201.
[18] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 202.
[19] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 202.
[20] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 202.
[21] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 206.
[22] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 206–207.

fed a multitude from a few loaves yet was hungry and approached a fig tree looking for fruit to eat. ʿAmmār argues that, "This clarifies that the power that defeated the hunger in his nature was not the essence which created from four loaves what fed the stomachs of thousands of hungry people, and yet the two commands were spoken by one Messiah".[23] Jesus spoke both of his humanity and divinity on numerous occasions, says ʿAmmār.

> The evidence is obvious and the testimony is clear from the evidence of his two substances and the embracing of the two of them in one sonship from his saying, "I am the man who will be despised and humiliated and killed and crucified and raised alive", and "I am the bread which has come down from heaven", and "I am truly the Son of God."[24]

Question eighteen raises the issue of exactly how the divinity and humanity are united. ʿAmmār responds by repeating that "God the Word took this humanity to himself as a body and a temple and a dwelling".[25] As a result, the humanity shares the sonship of the Word of God so that whatever pertains to the sonship is experienced by the humanity. The Messiah is equally divine and human.

> It is not possible for him to have equality in the substance of the eternity of his essence and his spirituality without a contact conferring the eternity of any of that or composition or mixing or blending or corruption or anything that happens to created bodies in their results and their situations; but it is higher and more exalted than everything that the imagination can describe of contingent created things.[26]

Here ʿAmmār concedes that the equality between the divinity and humanity is beyond our human understanding.

Question nineteen then probes the equality between the two natures. Surely the divine nature is compromised by union with the humanity. ʿAmmār simply states that the manner of the incarnation is not open to knowledge. "Concerning the meaning

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[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 210.
[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 212.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 213.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 213.

of His incarnation and His uniting we have already stated what
you have heard. Concerning how He became incarnate and how
He united there is no way to arrive at an answer".[27] Nevertheless,
it is essential to preclude certain kinds of language when talking
about the incarnation.

> We can be absolutely sure without any doubt that the eternal
> substance, may He be exalted and glorified, was beyond
> touching bodies, mixing with them, blending with them,
> being composed with them, being limited by them and
> receiving contingency and accidental qualities from them. We
> necessarily reject such things from the affirmation of the
> uniting and the incarnation when we talk about it from his
> books.[28]

In question twenty the Muslim asks, "If you cannot describe the
manner of this incarnation and uniting, then tell us why He
became incarnate and united and what called Him to this. You
have already claimed that the Wise does not do anything futile
with no meaning".[29] ʿAmmār replies that just as it was the
generosity of the Wise that began the creation so it was His
generosity that led Him to become human to share sonship with
all human beings in order to honor "each individual human
among all human beings".[30]

The following question asks "If this incarnation was correct
for Him, after he wished to complete His grace to the creatures
when the creation began, why did he not think of taking all of
them as his body"?[31] The Wise knew that he should not impose
His generosity on all human beings. If he did this, "They would
not find the possibility for thanksgiving for the immensity of its
significance".[32]

In question twenty-two the Muslim then asks, "Why did He
take this incarnation from among human persons rather than in a

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[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 214.
[28] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 215.
[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 215.
[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 215.
[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 215–216.
[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 216.

noble spiritual person from among the angels"?[33] ʿAmmār retorts that,

> If he incarnated in a person from among the angelic persons rather than being incarnated in a person from among human persons, His life and His kindness would not have embraced all of the creatures, since there is no genuine comparison between spiritual and bodily beings in the original essence of the substance.[34]

The Muslim then returns in question twenty-four to the proposed generosity of the Wise in uniting with one human being in particular. "How is it possible for the Wise to be fair in favoring one of the children with some of the gifts by excluding others"?[35] ʿAmmār replies that God already knew that he would favor those humans who "were devoted to righteousness and goodness".[36] He desired to be generous to all but the response of each human being would be central to the reception of His generosity.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE INCARNATION FROM THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

Section seven of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is entitled "Confirmation of the Incarnation". ʿAmmār produces four reasons for the incarnation designed to enable fellow Christians to defend this truth before Muslims. The first reason has to do with the generosity of the Creator towards humanity. "The first reason manifests His wisdom and justice and His love for His creatures in drawing them step by step to knowing Him, and establishing Himself among them, since He could not be comprehended by the way they comprehend and understand".[37] To achieve this the Creator planned "to reveal Himself in a body like ours".[38] The revelation of the Creator in a

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[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 216.

[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 217.

[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 219.

[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 219.

[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 64.

[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 64.

human body was an acknowledgement that human beings perceive reality through sense experience. ʿAmmār argues,

> We needed our Creator to make Himself known to us, since He called us to know Him, and ordered us to worship Him, yet He is not limited to a place, but embraces all places. For He and all angels and humans are comprehended by our senses, since we only comprehend things by them, and our minds only know what is indicated by them.[39]

According to ʿAmmār, what humans believe to be true relies on the imagination using words to describe what the senses have discovered. "What is not pictured in the imagination is not firmly fixed in the soul, and believing in it is exceptionally difficult, and it is only possible through words, as well as through the conviction of evidence that the senses have also perceived".[40] He refers to God speaking to Moses from a burning bush as evidence for the willingness of the Creator to confine Himself to an aspect of the creation in order to reveal Himself. Both Bible and Qurʾan contain this story so it is useful for Christians to rely on it in arguing with Muslims. "He spoke to Moses from a bush, just as our opponents believe", says ʿAmmār.[41] Christians can derive the following argument from the revelation of God in the burning bush. "He became contained and confined, while not being affected by anything which depended on Him, so that people might turn back from denying Him and disbelieving in Him".[42] Christians can also point out to Muslims the saying in the Qurʾan, "That He has a house which He commanded them to pray towards from every place".[43] They should interpret this to mean that God

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[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 65.

[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 65. Mikhail points out that the same argument is made by Abū Rāʾiṭa. See Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* p. 116. See Mikhail, p. 230.

[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 66.

[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 66. Mikhail notes that Abū Qurra does not understand how Muslims who believe that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush can so easily deny the manifestation of God in the Body of Christ. See Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara,* p. 185. See Mikhail, p. 230.

[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 66. See Q2:144, 149–150.

wanted Muslims to pray towards that house "as if He were in it and not anywhere else, and the house were only known by its owner dwelling in it, and his acquaintance with it, and He made them believe that the house confined Him in order to affirm Himself among them, and to show the need for people to turn their faces towards one place which He referred to Himself".[44] The Christian can press his conclusion on the Muslim by affirming that the appearance of God in a human being is far better than His appearance in a bush or a house.

> They and all rational people who believe in the books must know that the appearance of God to people in a human being from among them is a better likeness of His favor, His generosity, and His kindness, and a stronger confirmation of His being and existence among them, and a clearer proof of His kindness to them and His honoring them in His appearing in the image and likeness of a human being, than in a house of stone.[45]

The second reason for the incarnation is that the Creator wills to fulfil the desires of his human creatures. Their greatest desire, according to ʿAmmār, is to see their Creator. "What is of greater value, more important, or more desirable to them than seeing their Creator, the one who brought them into being, who is in charge of their development, who made heaven and earth for them"?[46] ʿAmmār helps his Christian reader to realise that the desire to see God is embedded in Qurʾan. First of all, "Moses, son of ʿImrān, the prophet, wanted this, so he asked his Lord to show Himself to him".[47] Here ʿAmmār quotes the name "son of ʿImrān" from Q7:143, to demonstrate the reliability of his knowledge of the Muslim scriptures for his Christian audience. Secondly, "many of our opponents say they will see God on the day of

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[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 66.

[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 67. Mikhail shows that Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa both cited the generosity of God as the reason for the incarnation. For Abū Qurra see Bacha, *Les Œuvres de Théodore Aboucara*, p.180, and for Abū Rāʾiṭa see S.T. Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth"*, p.120. See Mikhail, pp. 226–227.

[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 67.

[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 67.

resurrection".[48] ʿAmmār refers to Q75:22-23 which speak of the Day of Resurrection when "some faces will look at their Lord". He goes on to point out to his Christian readers the supreme importance of this hope to many Muslims. "There is no grace greater in value to them or more important to them than seeing Him".[49]

ʿAmmār concludes this argument by insisting that appearing in a human body is a far better act of generosity than appearing in a bush or a house. "It is understandable that He would do this in a real body of theirs, which was more honorable for Him, and by which He honored them more".[50]

The third reason for the incarnation is the need for God to be seen by humans on the Day of Resurrection when he judges them. Muslims hold that God will divide humanity into those who receive a reward for their obedience and those who are rejected for their disobedience. Q75:22-24 state that "some faces on that Day will be gleaming and other faces will be gloomy". This is because the Qurʾan was sent to "warn those who do evil and bring good news to those who do good", so that, "Those who follow the straight path will be the people of Paradise who receive a reward for their deeds", according to Q46:12 and 14. The evildoers will be brought to the fire of punishment, according to Q46:20. Given this Muslim conviction of judgment by the Creator of his human creatures, ʿAmmār argues that it is only just for the judge to be seen by those he judges.

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[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 67.

[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 67. Mikhail argues that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī does not say that "all Muslims" believe that they will see the face of God, but refers rather to "many of our opponents", a clear reference to the variety of Islamic interpretations and understandings of the abovementioned text. According to Al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf argued that God can only be seen by the heart. But the adherents of the ḥadīth and sunnah, on the other hand, maintained that on the Day of Resurrection God will be seen just as "humans can see the crescent moon". See Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt, pp. 218, and 321. See Mikhail, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-burhān,' pp. 236–237.

[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 68.

> It is revolting that the judge is hidden from those he judges, which is not just according to rational people, and which is not good according to God either, that in the place where a division between heaven and hell is decided and carried out, the judge sees the one he judges, while the one being judged by him does not see the judge.[51]

If it is right that God should be seen on the Day of judgment as many Muslims agree, ʿAmmār insists that He must veil Himself lest His essence be revealed. "He must appear to us in something which our senses can perceive, but since He cannot reveal Himself in His essence, He therefore made a veil between us and Him".[52] Therefore, when humans see God on the Day of Judgment they will see the veil which He has taken rather than God in Himself. This veil is the Incarnation. Only the incarnate one meets the criteria for an appropriate veil, argues ʿAmmār when he says in conclusion, "The worthiest, the most notable, the most honorable, the noblest and the most similar thing for His veiling is the substance of a human being".[53]

The fourth reason for the incarnation is to grant human beings authority in the eternal world. ʿAmmār argues that,

> There is nothing greater in value to us, or more profound in honoring us and honoring all of His creatures which are gathered together with us, since He gave us authority in this passing world over everything which is in it, than that He completes this by giving us authority in the eternal world.[54]

Having set forth these four reasons for the Incarnation, ʿAmmār sets out a description of the Incarnation that comprises the four reasons.

> Since God, may His praise be glorified, made humanity by His generosity and kindness and knew that humanity would need to know Him and to have evidence of His generosity, because human sight does not perceive Him and a human mind does not completely grasp Him, He made Himself known to him in

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[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 68.
[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 68.
[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 69.
[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 69.

a way that he could comprehend, that his senses could perceive, and in which his soul could be at peace. Thus, He set out His plan for doing this and appeared to him in His image at one time, and in a bush at another time, and in a cloud at another, and appeared to humanity in other ways too. Was there anything of greater value to humanity, more important and more desirable than His appearing to him in what was closer to him than the things in which He had appeared, than in an image which does not have a body and does not change and such like? Rather, He appeared in a real body from the substance of humanity through which he could know Him, and through which his soul could be at peace, and by His appearing to him in this body he is given dignity, honor, and authority, just as the soul gives the body its life and speech. Then He completes the authority that He gave him over some of His creatures by making it extend over the rest of His creatures, and by this he reaches the highest rank of honor. This is the reason He created him, not because He needed him. When He judges him, He will have a body which he can look at, and the judgment will not be delivered to him without him knowing where the judgment comes from.[55]

After a further explanation of the relationship of the divine and human in the Messiah which repeats what was said in section six of *The Book of the Proof*, ʿAmmār asks, "Why do our opponents despise this great grace and huge honor that creatures fail to comprehend and to give thanks for"?[56] Muslims reject the incarnation because it implies deficiency and weakness in God. He asks, "What deficiency affected God when He manifested Himself in a miserable, fruitless bush, and spoke to Moses who was a mute shepherd"?[57] In contrast, when God spoke to humanity through the one man he had chosen to indwell, ʿAmmār asks,

> What deficiency affected Him in His manifestation in a human being from among us, who are more honorable and loved than

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[55] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 69–70.
[56] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 75.
[57] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 75. Q20:27, and Q26:13 record Moses asking God to remove his speech impediment.

the bush which He created for us, and in His speaking to all people, including the philosophers, wise men, kings, powerful, good, and excellent people, since they are more numerous than a mute shepherd who at first neither listened nor obeyed?[58]

ʿAmmār then turns to the reward God will grant to humans in eternity. "What deficiency affected God when He gave humans authority over what is on earth, so that it will affect Him when He gives them authority over what is in heaven"?[59] By chiding Muslims for failing to trust in the generosity of God towards humans because of their fear of denigrating Him, ʿAmmār appeals to Muslims to put their faith in the unfailing kindness of God. "How much more appropriate it is for you to know that your Creator does what you fail to do, in a way that cannot be described and words cannot explain".[60]

Finally, if Muslims object to the incarnation because Christians disagree about it then the reply should be, according to ʿAmmār, "Their disagreement is about the body which they see, so that some of them say one hypostasis, and others say two hypostases, whereas their agreement is that the one in whom the Creator manifested had a body and a soul".[61] ʿAmmār sums up the differences between diophysites like himself and miaphysites like Abū Rāʾiṭa. While miaphysites held that the divine hypostasis indwelt the human body, diophysites held that there was a union between the divine hypostasis and the human hypostasis. ʿAmmār concedes that miaphysites believed that the Messiah possessed a human soul as well as a body, despite the criticism by diophysites that the miaphysite belief tended towards viewing the Messiah as

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[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 75. Q20:25–35 show how Moses responded to the call of God at the burning bush to go before Pharaoh in Egypt and demonstrate the signs of God to him. Moses pleaded for help with his speech impediment and asked that his brother Aaron help him speak to Pharaoh so Pharaoh would understand what Moses was trying to say. In Q28:33, Moses says to God that he is afraid to appear before Pharaoh because he killed an Egyptian and fled to the wilderness to save his life.

[59] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 75.

[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 76.

[61] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 79.

possessing only a divine mind in a human body. Diophysites like ʿAmmār were convinced that the Messiah must have both divine and human centers of thinking, feeling, and decision.

ABŪ QURRA'S TREATISE A REPLY TO THE ONE WHO REFUSES TO ATTRIBUTE THE INCARNATION TO GOD

Abū Qurra begins the treatise by answering the following question posed by Muslims about the incarnation. "You ask us how the divine Son could take a body and experience suffering. We answer that God is not effaced or cancelled out by appearing to his creation".[62] Abū Qurra then quotes several Old Testament texts to demonstrate that God is seated on his throne yet at the same time rules the whole world, and deduces that God is simultaneously in one location and in all places. He goes on to argue that this is also true for the eternal Son of God who, "is in every place . . . He is not at all limited or restricted, apart from being in the body in which he experienced pain and suffering".[63] The body of the eternal Son is compared to God's throne as a location of divinity so that it does not restrict the divine nature of the Son when it is united with the human body. Abū Qurra's decision to refer to Old Testament texts concerning God being seated on His throne was probably a reflection of the fact, as Seppo Rissanen has pointed out, that Muslims in the late eighth and early ninth centuries were in the habit of discussing texts from the Qurʾan that mentioned God sitting on a throne.[64] Abū Qurra never mentions the Qurʾan in his discussion of the four Old Testament texts that speak of God's session on His throne, but he is indicating to the Muslim questioner that the Bible contains the

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[62] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', in Bacha, *Les Oeuvres Arabes de Théodore Aboucarra Évêque d'Harran,* 180–186, p. 180.

[63] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 182.

[64] See S. Rissanen, *Theological Encounters of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule,* pp. 120–123. There are eighteen references to God's throne in the Qurʾan. See Q7:52, 9:130, 10:3, 13:2, 17:44, 20:4, 21:22, 23:88 and 117, 25:60, 27:26, 32:3, 39:75, 40:15, 43:82, 57:4, 81:20, and 85:15.

same belief about God clearly depicted in the Qurʾan. If the Muslim is willing to accept that the unlimited God can limit Himself to one place, then he might be willing to accept that the eternal Son could limit himself to one human body. However, the Muslim replies, "It is undeniable that God sits on the throne but he does not take up residence in the body . . . The throne is pure but the human body is not suitable for God".[65] Abū Qurra argues that the human body is more than suitable for God given that it is the supreme result of the creative work of God. He points out that the body taken from Mary was free from corruption. "God does not abhor residence in the finest aspect of his creation . . . God does indeed abhor impurity in humanity, but the body taken from Mary was not touched by sin".[66] He refers to the purity of the Messiah according to The Letter to the Hebrews 4:15, and offers several quotations from Isaiah that mention the Messiah's righteous character, and concludes, "The body was not taken from the Virgin Mary before the Holy Spirit cleansed it from all trace of sin. The eternal Son took from Mary a body which was pure, clean, immaculate, and beautiful in order that the divine could reside there".[67] Abū Qurra indicates that since God was able to create a pure human nature from Mary then the Muslim has no grounds for objecting to the Incarnation as the taking of impure human nature. He argues that the purity of the human body was never lost throughout the life of the Messiah.

> After taking up residence, the divine nature became the source for the human nature of all of the glory of divinity, righteousness, wisdom and power. However, the eternal Son restricted the glory of his divinity and did not reveal it in his body when he lived among people. He let human activity appear in his divinity; eating, drinking, sleeping, and the like.[68]

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[65] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 183.
[66] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 183.
[67] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 184.
[68] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 185.

Abū Qurra presses home his argument. "It would be astonishing for anyone to deny the residence of God in the human body which we have shown is the most perfectly suited aspect of his creation".[69] If the Muslim continues to object to the transcendent God becoming part of His creation then how can he accept that God was present in a thorn-bush from which he spoke to Moses or in the pillar of cloud that guided Israel? God sat between the cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant when he spoke to Moses in the Tabernacle yet He was sustaining the world at the same time. Abū Qurra applies these realities to the incarnation. "Therefore, the eternal Son was in heaven and on earth and in every place necessary to communicate with people in this human body which he took from the immaculate Mary".[70]

Abū Rāʾiṭa's Letter on the Incarnation

The first part of the letter deals with the embodiment of God in the Messiah. Questions one to six relate to the relationship between the incarnate one and the Trinity. Abū Rāʾiṭa explains that only the Word of God becomes incarnate, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Trinity create and will together but only the Word appears in the human body. Question five asks, "Does the body ever act independently from the Word"? Abū Rāʾiṭa replies, "The Word took a body in such a way that the body never acted independently of the Word".[71] Questions seven to twelve concern the problem for the Muslim of limits imposed on God by being enclosed in a human body. Question eight is, "Do you claim that God dwelt in the body"? Abū Rāʾiṭa responds, "We describe Him as dwelling in the body but not like His dwelling in other creatures".[72] This leads the Muslim to ask in question nine, "If He dwells in the body then the body confines Him, and what is confined is limited, and what is limited is

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[69] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 185.

[70] Abū Qurra, 'A Reply to the One who Refuses to Attribute the Incarnation to God', p. 186.

[71] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 224.

[72] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', pp. 232–233.

created. Is God a creature"?[73] Abū Rāʾiṭa points out just as light is not enclosed in the sun or the personality in the human body, so the Word is not enclosed in the body. When the sun's rays light up the ground the sun is not limited to that spot. In the same way, the body is not a limiting factor for the Word. He applies all this to the incarnation of the Word. "The teaching about the Word of God is that He became incarnate in a body which had a soul from Mary the immaculate without changing His condition or changing His substance, without being limited by the body, but rather the body was limited by Him".[74] The Muslim probes the nature of the human body taken by the Word of God in question twelve. "Is there a difference between the body in which He became incarnated and the rest of bodies"?[75] Abū Rāʾiṭa replies that they are similar in that they are part of creation but they are different in that there is a union of the Word and the body. "He filled it with His holiness, so that it became living, pure and holy".[76]

Questions thirteen to eighteen are related to the necessity for God to become human. Why should God wish to become human? Abū Rāʾiṭa replies that He did this to release human beings from the punishment coming to them for disobeying Him and to return them to their original condition. The Muslim asks in question sixteen, "Did He not have the power to deliver them without becoming human"?[77] God can do what he wants, replies Abū Rāʾiṭa. However, "He did not will that their salvation and deliverance would be an act from Him alone without them, in order not to deprive them of the reward for following Him".[78] If any fault remained in the human personality God could not demonstrate his complete goodness, and so he had to become human to fully renew His creation. The Muslim wants to know in question eighteen why God could not have sent an angel or a pure person to save the world without doing it Himself. Abū Rāʾiṭa answers, "Because their deliverance is the renewal of their

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[73] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 233.
[74] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 234.
[75] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 239.
[76] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 239.
[77] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 241.
[78] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 241.

creation, it is impossible that someone other than the One who was entrusted with producing them renew their creation".[79]

The Muslim moves on to questioning whether the human body of the Word meant an addition to the essence of God in questions twenty-two to twenty-four. Abū Rāʾiṭa answers that the body adds nothing to the essence of God because before the incarnation the Word was a unity and after the incarnation the Word was still a unity.[80] The Muslim comes back with question twenty-three, How can the body not be an addition to the Word when there was a time when he did not have a body? Abū Rāʾiṭa replies, "The body was not an increase in Him, because this is not necessary for God, since it is only predicated of bodies". He then asks the Muslim the question, "What do you say about the human being: do you see an increase in his body when his spirit is in him"?[81] The implication is that people do not talk about the body being an addition to the human spirit.

Questions twenty-five to twenty-nine are concerned with the problem of possible limitations to God posed by the incarnation. Question twenty-six asks whether the Word is limited by anything. Abū Rāʾiṭa responds, "The Word is not limited by anything, but rather everything is limited by the Word".[82] The Muslim retorts, "The Word is in everything"! and Abū Rāʾiṭa affirms this by adding, "Indeed! The Word is in everything and exalted over everything".[83] The Muslim regards this as a declaration that the Word of God is in everyone and that the body is also in everyone. Abū Rāʾiṭa points out that the Word is spiritual so "we are not compelled to describe the body as being in everything in the same way we describe the Word".[84] Question twenty-nine is asked by Abū Rāʾiṭa of the Muslim. "Do you not describe God as being in heaven and on the throne? Is He in heaven and on the throne in His entirety or is part of him in

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[79] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 245.
[80] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 255.
[81] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 255.
[82] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 256.
[83] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 257.
[84] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 257.

heaven and on the throne, and a part of Him in something else"?[85] He supplies the answer given by the Muslim, "He is in heaven and on the throne and in everything". Abū Rāʾiṭa retorts, "It is necessary for you to describe heaven as being in everything too, so that nothing of Him remains that is not in heaven and on the throne".[86] He has the Muslim reply, "Our statement that God is in heaven and on the throne only means that He is Lord of heaven and Lord of the throne, not that He is in them".[87] The Muslim goes on to say that God is in heaven and on the throne at the same time, so Abū Rāʾiṭa argues that this means that God is limited by His creation. The Muslim replies that God is in them both simultaneously but is not limited by them. Abū Rāʾiṭa concludes that Muslims agree with Christians that God is in aspects of His creation without being confined to them.

Questions thirty to thirty-one deal with the difficulty of God becoming embodied. The Muslim asks "How is it possible that one who is without flesh be born of a corporeal woman"?[88] Abū Rāʾiṭa replies that "being born only belongs to the state of the body which is taken from the woman and unified with the Word".[89] The Muslim asks, "How does something without a body become incarnated"? Abū Rāʾiṭa admits that he does not know the process. "We believe it even if this is so subtle that we do not understand it".[90]

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār was engaged in the struggle to justify the incarnation before Muslims who held tenaciously to the complete transcendence of God over His creation. He shared with his contemporary apologists from other denominations the desire to produce arguments for the entry of God into His creation in the Messiah that might convince Muslims of the truth of the incarnation. His two works offer quite different approaches to

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[85] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 259.
[86] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 259.
[87] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 259.
[88] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 261.
[89] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 261.
[90] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 263.

that defense. *The Book of Questions and Answers* deals with issues raised by Muslims in debate with Christians, whereas *The Book of the Proof* provides advice to Christians about how to demonstrate to Muslims the reasons why God became human. This difference between the two books reflects the two different audiences. The earlier work attempts to answer a full range of questions that Muslims ask about exactly what Christians mean when they speak about God becoming human. The later work offers help to Christians who might encounter Muslims who reject the possibility of the incarnation completely.

In *The Book of Questions and Answers* ʿAmmār addresses Muslim questions about the Christian belief that God entered space in the Messiah. Muslim concern centered around the problem that God would be confined and restricted if the Christian claim that He became human were true. ʿAmmār uses analogies from life to answer this concern. Just as the sun gives light and heat to the world and yet is not confined or limited by doing this so the Godhead is not confined by becoming united with human nature in the messiah. Just as the soul is united with the body in a human being and yet is not restricted by this union so the Word of God is not limited by being united with the human being born from Mary. When the Muslim wonders exactly what the union is supposed to be like ʿAmmār turns to analogies of clothing. Just as when a person puts on clothes or armor he does not become these so when God clothes Himself with human nature He does not become the human nature with which He has clothed Himself. At this point ʿAmmār distances himself from other Christians who speak about the body of God. They have made the mistake of minimising the reality of the Messiah as a union of divinity and humanity. Christians must speak about the body of the Messiah rather than the body of God, because God dwells in the temple that is the Messiah. So Miaphysites and Chalcedonians who call Mary the mother of God are at fault for not interpreting the New Testament adequately and end up implying that the Trinity became embodied in the Messiah. A far better way of speaking is to restrict the Incarnation to the Word of God indwelling the body taken from Mary who was the mother of the Messiah. When the Muslim presses for an answer to the question how it was possible for God to allow

Himself to be united to humanity ʿAmmār admits that Christians do not know the process of the incarnation.

ʿAmmār shares some of these arguments with Abū Rāʾiṭa who also set out systematic answers to questions posed by Muslims about God entering space and thus being limited and constrained by the incarnation. Like ʿAmmār, Abū Rāʾiṭa refers to the analogy of the sun giving light and heat to the earth without being limited to the earth, and he applies the analogy of the soul in the human body to the union of the Eternal Word with the human body. However, as a Miaphysite, Abū Rāʾiṭa presents the Eternal Word as the equivalent of the human soul, thus implying that the thinking, feeling and acting of Jesus were the product of the Word of God. Nevertheless, Abū Rāʾiṭa argues along with ʿAmmār that the Word of God is not restricted to the body that he has taken.

Towards the end of his defense of the incarnation Abū Rāʾiṭa refers to the Muslim belief that God sits on a throne as a way of supporting the entry of God into space without implying that He is confined there. This reference to the throne of God from the Qurʾan is also central to Abū Qurra's argument that Muslims accept God appearing in aspects of His creation such as the burning bush though which He confronted Moses, a story found both in the Bible and the Qurʾan. ʿAmmār, while mentioning the appearance of God to Moses in the burning bush and the dwelling of God in the house built for Him, does not mention the Qurʾanic references to the session of God on His throne. Perhaps he felt that the debate among Muslim intellectuals surrounding the throne texts of the Qurʾan was already distracting Muslims from listening to Christian arguments. After all, ʿAmmār was a generation younger than Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa and might well have noticed such a distraction in his debates with Muslims in Basra and possibly Baghdad. If the throne of God was located in heaven by Muslims then it would not serve as an analogy for God entering an aspect of the earth as a bush or a building did. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillāni (d. 1014) illustrates the kind of response to Christian appeal to the throne texts of the Qurʾan by Muslim intellectuals. In his review of Christian arguments for the incarnation, he refers to "Those who say that the Word indwells

the human nature without being confined to it, just as the Creator descends on His throne without being confined to it". But he dismisses this comparison as irrational because, "The Creator is not on His throne in the sense that He indwells it".[91] Thus, the concept of the indwelling of the Word in human nature was the key problem for Muslims who did not interpret God indwelling any of the aspects of creation mentioned in the Qurʾan. ʿAmmār's use of the burning bush as a parallel for Jesus would also have met the same criticism from Muslims who would not have been convinced that the voice of God from the burning bush required God to actually indwell the plant.

Al-Bāqillāni also rejected the appeal made by ʿAmmār and Abū Rāʾiṭa to the soul indwelling the human body as a support for the indwelling of the Word in the human nature of Jesus. He pointed out that, "The idea that the mind is the essence of the person and yet is not affected by the body is futile".[92] Christians, he indicates, wish to maintain that the Word of God was not tainted by association with the body, but this is practically impossible. No wonder that Abū Qurra spent time attempting to argue that when the Word took flesh from Mary, He purified it of any taint of sin. Only by this means could the Word not be brought low by human frailty. The problem of human weakness affecting the Word was the obstacle to Muslims accepting that the Word could go through the intense suffering of crucifixion and death.

Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq subjected the Incarnation to intense scrutiny. By interrogating the language employed by Christians for the way the divine united with the human he argued that there was no possibility for the divine to be unaffected by the human. As a result, he believed that he had demonstrated that Christians could not avoid bringing the divine into disrepute. For example, Abū ʿĪsā comments on the analogies used by ʿAmmār of the Word putting on clothing or inhabiting a dwelling. "You have made the

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[91] Abū Bakr al-Bāqillāni, *The Book of the Introduction,* R.J. McCarthy, (ed.), (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1957), p. 88.
[92] Abū Bakr al-Bāqillāni, *The Book of the Introduction,* p. 90.

Word into a restricted, mobile physical body".[93] The basic problem with Christian attempts to restrict the divine to a human body is that God does not need to do such a thing. "When He orders someone to control a thing God, blessed and exalted, does not have to be united with him, nor does the order require him to have worship from creatures or to be Lord of the worlds".[94] In other words, the Incarnation is a completely unnecessary innovation of the Christians that only serves to reduce the glory and honor of the Creator by trapping Him in one human being that He created. Moreover, since Christians claim that this human being suffered and died, they cannot also claim that they have not brought the shame of suffering and the weakness of death on the Creator Himself, which is an offensive proposition.

> If the Messiah was in truth the Divinity . . . then the Divinity was in truth the son of man, as you say about the Messiah, and son of Mary, of David and Adam, and a child of Adam. He sucked at the breast, ate, drank, slept, woke, he was the one who was crucified, killed, died in reality. It was he whom all this affected and to whom it happened and not the human, with all the consequences.[95]

Abū ʿĪsā goes on to drive home the dilemma for Christians. "If this was possible for the Son, who according to you is divine, the same was possible for the Father and the same for the Spirit. Otherwise, they overturn the realities of the cross and the killing and these events, and so they abandon their religion and fall into ignorance".[96]

This Muslim abhorrence of the death by crucifixion of the Messiah and the apology for the Christian view by ʿAmmār is the subject of the next chapter.

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[93] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 169.

[94] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 173.

[95] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 239.

[96] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 239.

Given the hostility of Muslims to the notion that the Creator would wish to confine Himself to an aspect of His creation it is less likely that ʿAmmār's set of reasons for God becoming incarnate in *The Book of the Proof* would have had much apologetic traction in dialogue with Muslims. The idea that the generosity of God meant His condescension to human beings by appearing in one of them would most probably have been met with the reaction that such a demeaning action would never have crossed the mind of the Creator. Appealing to the justice of the judge being seen by those he judges would most likely be dismissed as a sentimental picture of the Day of Judgment that was completely out of touch with the spirit of the message of warning to humans to get their lives straightened out before the great and terrible day arrived. In any case, for Muslims, the divine judge needed no assistance from the Messiah in His task of judging humanity, which appears to be the point of ʿAmmār's argument that God became human to enable humanity to see His face. In the final analysis, ʿAmmār's admission that we cannot know the process of Incarnation should also apply to the decision for Incarnation which is in the inscrutable will of God. Christian belief in the Incarnation arose from the life of the Messiah, and the revelation of his divinity to eye witnesses. ʿAmmār next turns to the witness to the Messiah's humanity and divinity from the gospels and the Apostolic writings.

CHAPTER EIGHT.
DEBATING THE SUFFERING OF GOD IN THE DEATH OF JESUS

Since Christians believed that God became human in Jesus then Muslims saw a serious problem in the death of Jesus involving the suffering and death of God. This is the issue that ʿAmmār deals with in *The Book of Questions and Answers.* He does not refer to Q157–159 where the death of Jesus by crucifixion is denied, but it may be that ʿAmmār reflects the true reason for that denial in tackling the weakness and suffering of God implied in the death of the Messiah. However, in *The Book of the Proof of the Course of the Divine Economy* ʿAmmār attempts to defend the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus by comparing it to the execution of John the Baptist who is mentioned in the Qurʾan as a prophet who is close to the Messiah. He argues that if Muslims can accept that John was beheaded then they should surely accept that Jesus was crucified.[1]

MUSLIM REJECTION OF THE DEATH OF JESUS BY CRUCIFIXION

In a series of criticisms of the Jews the Qurʾan includes the claim of the Jews that they put Jesus to death by crucifying him. Q4:157–158 state that,

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[1] This chapter depends on M. Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims,* pp. 79–92, and M. Beaumont, 'Debating the Cross in Early Christian Dialogues with Muslims', in D.E. Singh, (ed.) *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts,* (Regnum: Oxford, 2008), 55–64.

> The People of the Book said, "We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God". But they did not kill him or crucify him, it only seemed so to them. Those who disagree about this are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge but only supposition. They certainly did not kill him. Rather, God raised him to Himself. God is Almighty and Wise.

The Qurʾan indicts the Jews for claiming that they got rid of the Messiah by having him crucified. According to the Qurʾan, the reality was that they only thought that they had removed him by such means, but that in fact God the Almighty and Wise had removed the Messiah from their grasp by raising him up to Himself in his transcendent glory. Subsequent belief in the crucified Jesus was based on conjecture rather than knowledge.

By the time of ʿAmmār, Muslims had come to interpret Q4:157–158 as a repudiation of the Christian belief that Jesus had been crucified. The true version of the ending of Jesus' life was that God raised him up to Himself alive without going through the process of death. This can be seen in the discussion of Caliph al-Mahdī and Patriarch Timothy where the Caliph quoted Q4:157 as proof that Jesus was not crucified.[2] Timothy declined to comment on Q4:157, choosing to quote another text from the Qurʾan, Q19:33, where the infant Jesus says, "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive". Timothy interprets this to mean, "Jesus died and was brought to life".[3] However, al-Mahdī did not accept Timothy's chronological reading of Q19:33 and explained, "Jesus is not yet dead but he is going to die".[4] The Caliph confirms Muslim traditions about the exaltation of Jesus to heaven and his return to earth before the Day of Judgment to preach Islam, to break crosses and to die before being resurrected along with the rest of humanity on the Day of Resurrection, which became written down in various collections of Traditions.[5] Jesus himself, according to such an account, will repudiate the calumny of his crucifixion by

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[2] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I, Patriarch of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church', in H. Putman, app, p. 45.
[3] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 45.
[4] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 45.
[5] See for example, *Saḥīḥ Muslim* 1:72, 287–293.

destroying all the Christian crosses that he can find. No wonder
that al-Mahdī was confident that Islam had the true story of Jesus
and that Christians needed to be confronted about their
suppositions that were not based on knowledge. Nevertheless,
Timothy pressed the chronological case for the priority of death
over exaltation. He argued, "If Jesus is not dead, he would not
have ascended to heaven. But it is affirmed by you that the
ascension of Jesus to heaven and his resurrection took place a
long time ago, as your book testifies".[6] Timothy appeals to the
Qurʾan to support the raising of Jesus after his death. The plain
meaning of the prophecy of the infant Jesus in Q19:33 is that he
predicts his death before his being raised alive. It strains the usual
use of language to reverse the normal stages of the end of a
person's life.

However, the Caliph does not respond to Timothy's
argument but proceeds to ask him about another concern he has
with the crucifixion of Jesus involving the shame inflicted on
Jesus if he was crucified. Al-Mahdī argues that it is inconceivable
that God should "deliver him into the hands of the Jews so that
they could kill him".[7] Timothy quotes John 10:17–18, "The Father
loves me because I lay down my life of my own free will",
demonstrating that Jesus volunteered to die and to give up the
protection of God in order to give up his life to honor others.
Timothy does not explain how such a voluntary life-offering
upheld the honor of God despite this being the concern of the
Caliph who sums up his point by stating that the defeat of one of
his prophets would leave God appearing to be weak rather than
almighty.[8]

A third issue arising from the crucifixion for the Caliph is the
problem of the death of God on the cross. Given that Christians
thought that Jesus was divine and human how can Christians
conceive of God dying on the cross? Al-Mahdī asks Timothy, "Is
it possible that God died, supposing that the Messiah is God"?[9] In

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[6] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 46.
[7] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 48.
[8] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 48.
[9] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 44.

response, Timothy argues, "In so far as he was God, the Messiah did not die: but in so far as he was human, in his human nature he died".[10]

The debate between the Caliph and the Patriarch shows how Muslims approached the crucifixion of Jesus by the late Eighth century. They were convinced that Jesus did not die by crucifixion; that God would not allow his messenger to be abused in such a way; and that the crucifixion of Jesus undermines the Christian claim that he was divine since God cannot die.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question twenty-six opens a discussion of the suffering of Jesus asking,

> Was he capable of experiencing difficulty, evil and change after the incarnation of the Creator Himself? If you claim that he was capable of these, then surely you believe that he was not protected from evil and wrongdoing, and that he did not benefit at all by the incarnation of the Creator Himself, and perhaps he did not remain in his righteousness and his goodness, and turned away from them for a short period of time.[11]

ʿAmmār replies, "certainly he was free and capable, and therefore, he was not protected".[12] As for renouncing his Protector, The Messiah "did not allow himself any opportunity" to do so by disobeying Him.[13] The benefits of the Incarnation of the Creator Himself were actually for other human beings who "merit the honor of his divinity, the splendor of his lordship and the equality with him in his sonship".[14]

After a discussion of how other human beings benefit from the Incarnation, question twenty-nine turns to the problem of

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[10] 'Dialogue between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Timothy I', app, p. 44.
[11] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 220.
[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 220.
[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 221.
[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 221.

human weakness being attributed to the divine nature of the Messiah.

> How can you claim that there is no division or difference between the two substances in glory, authority and strength, when you have already described the created one in terms of the obedience of one who is contingent, transitory and frail? You ought to raise the substance of the Creator above that altogether.[15]

ʿAmmār repeats that the Messiah consistently obeyed the Creator throughout his life. He concedes that the human nature of the Messiah meant that he had to strive for perfection.

> We said that we were clear that the created one obeyed Him in these transitory and weak conditions, sometimes the created one lacked perfection because of them, and lacked the patience that He necessarily possessed eternally, and so He finally made him equal by lifting him and exalting him above them and by making him compliant to them like his eternal maker.[16]

Back comes question thirty, "Do you not say that because of all that his Creator united with him and made him equal with Himself, He had already made him perfect in his actions at the moment of his conception"?[17]

In reply, ʿAmmār says,

> We do not claim this. Rather we say that he is like one who inherits, and he merited all the wealth of his father who gave him the inheritance at the time of his being conceived in the womb and he merited it after childhood, and if he was in the situation of infancy and being brought up by teachers and instructors, then the one who gave him the inheritance would not hand it over to him without him being trained by the discipline and strengthened in the knowledge of things.[18]

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[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 224.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 225.
[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226.
[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226.

Thus, the human nature of the Messiah "merited all that was from his Creator since the time of his conception and his incarnation in his sonship".[19] Yet he had to prove through obedience as a man that he merited the inheritance promised to him at his conception. Jesus proclaimed after his resurrection, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth". He did not mean that this was the first time he was given such authority, and he certainly did not intend, "Now I have become free and I have escaped from all claims that I had received as a pledge under those changeable conditions that were outside me and outside my rule and my authority".[20] ʿAmmār introduces another analogy from life.

> This is just like a man purchasing land for himself for a great price yet not paying one coin of the price and having a claim on the condition that the price is called an instalment. The land becomes his property from the time that the name of the purchaser is placed on it, but he still has to pay the price in instalment after instalment, and the land is mortgaged for what remains of its price until the final instalment is submitted, and then his land is handed over to him in its entirety, and with this he is permitted to say, "Now I possess my property and I have a right to my land".[21]

The Messiah had to achieve what had been promised to him the instalments of conception, birth, childhood and manhood. As a man he upheld the Law that God had revealed to the Children of Israel. "He taught them by his performance of the laws and his practicing them that the laws were truly from God, and he quoted from them among the testimonies he spoke concerning himself".[22] He called on his audience to repent and submit to the laws of God. He proclaimed to them that they would rise after death as a result of his resurrection after his death. "He sacrificed himself through being killed and crucified because he willed to guide people and

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[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226.

[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226. Jesus' statement comes from Matthew 28:18.

[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226.

[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 226.

save them from error and unbelief, then from wrongdoing and death".[23] His death was the means whereby he saved them from the results of their disobedience. "The Messiah merited by his humanity the veneration, prostration, praise and thanksgiving from all humans because he saved them from wrongdoing and death by the death which he bore to save them".[24]

Question thirty-one suggests that the saying of Jesus that he was given authority "proves that he was at that time given the authority of heaven and earth".[25] ʿAmmār quotes another saying of Jesus from an earlier part of Matthew's gospel, "All of what is yours, oh my Father, is mine and all of what is mine is yours, but to you is everything that you have given me, oh my Father",[26] and argues,

> He was given the authority of heaven and earth before that time, but he did not take possession of this until after he was raised up, and he did not require people to venerate him and prostrate before him before suffering death and pain on their behalf, like he required this of them after bearing the pain of being killed and being made naked on the cross in order to save them.[27]

The Muslim questioner wonders in question thirty-two why the Messiah voluntarily accepted defeat and death at the hands of his enemies. "According to what you have described of greatness and strength, it should have been right for him to refuse what would cause the loss of them through death, afflictions and weaknesses".[28] ʿAmmār points out that greatness and strength returned to the Messiah after his submission to weakness and death. "This surely is made clear by his resurrection after submitting to them, his being made powerful after their subjugation, suppression and superiority over him, and his being

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[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 227.
[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 227.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 227.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 228. The saying comes from Matthew 11:27.
[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 228.
[28] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 228.

raised above their authority".[29] He goes on to give two analogies from life to illustrate this movement from weakness to strength. Firstly, in a one-to-one combat situation,

> A brave hero who is presumptuous in his power stands against his competitor, despising him and being arrogant before him before he attacks him, until the competitor reaches him with the utmost power and strength and launches an attack on him, and then after his attack he defeats him.[30]

Secondly,

> This is also like a skilful and kind doctor who shows the proof of his knowledge and skill that people demand from him and as a result people trust his science, copy his knowledge, and compete for his medicine. They do not find the proof confirmed for them and firmly established in their hearts until they call for deadly poison and he drinks it before them and when the poison takes effect in his stomach, he takes some of his medicine which follows the poison, and he lives since the poison does not harm him at all because of his medicine; at this point the people looking on know the excellence of his knowledge and they compete to demand his medicine.[31]

ʿAmmār applies these two scenarios to the Messiah.

> What called him to submit to his enemies when they brought death upon him, when they achieved their goal in putting him to death, was his will for those who followed him to rise to life by the power of his Lordship to verify for them his promise to nullify death in the afterlife for the people of his substance.[32]

So, the intention of the Messiah was to secure eternal life for those who had faith in him. In order to achieve this, he had to submit to death so that he could nullify its power over humanity. In question thirty-three the Muslim responds to this argument about the necessity of the Messiah dying to secure eternal life for

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[29] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 229.
[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 229.
[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 229.
[32] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.

humanity by comparing the Messiah to earlier prophets who proclaimed eternal life but did not die to secure it.

> The prophets and messengers who lived before he came called the people to obey their Lord and preached to them about the resurrection from their deaths . . . and not one of them did by himself what the Messiah did by submitting himself to his enemies . . . Moses and David and the rest of the prophets and messengers were not called to this . . . If the teaching was united and their reception by all the people was similar then surely there was no reason why the Messiah should give himself up apart from them.[33]

ʿAmmār replies by asking where Moses and David proclaimed eternal life. "The Torah and the Psalms and what else is in the books of the prophets and messengers are available to you to examine and study with the utmost care, and see if you can find in any of them a single point that agrees with what you have described".[34] He provides some help for his Muslim interrogator by outlining the teaching of Moses who offered a fruitful life in the promised land for those who obeyed God, but who did not once mention a life after death. On the contrary the Messiah taught his disciples to look to eternal life. "Whoever wants to gain his own life should give it up and whoever gives up his own life for my sake in this world that is passing away will keep his life in the eternal world".[35] When his disciples expressed their loyalty to him he said to them, "Truly I say to you who have left everything and followed me, that in the world to come when I sit on my glorious throne you will also sit on twelve seats and you will judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and when I am in heaven you will be with me forever".[36] ʿAmmār pointedly contrasts the promises made by Moses and the Messiah to their followers.

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[33] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.

[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.

[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 232. See Matthew 10:39 and 16:25.

[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 232. See Matthew 19:27–28.

The Messiah did not say to them that when you follow me and have worked to obey me and have left everything for my sake, I will increase your offspring, sheep, cattle, livestock and goods, and I will reward you with the land of your enemies, and I will give you a long life on the earth, and I will provide food and drink for your bodies.[37]

ʿAmmār goes on the offensive concerning the Islamic conception that all the prophets taught the same thing.

If you lift the veil of darkness from your eyes the great differences and the distance of the divergences between them will be made clear to you. Then you will not deny the Messiah when he imposes on the people of his religion such afflictions that he imposes on them which they bear patiently in this world because of the reward for them since he himself suffered for their salvation the pains of death and the afflictions which soften what he imposes on them out of love and compassion and affection.[38]

The Muslim returns to the theme of the Messiah proclaiming the resurrection to eternal life without him going through death to achieve it. Question thirty-five puts the issue according to the Muslim view of Jesus being raised to heaven without going through the process of death.

What if he wanted to verify for them the issue of the resurrection and being raised to heaven and did not die such a death before their eyes but was raised in plain view of them, as you claim, in a spiritual heavenly manner without his enemies being able to achieve their desire by humiliating and killing him?[39]

ʿAmmār replies by focussing on the problem of doubt. By dying at the hands of his enemies, the Messiah removed any doubt about his ability to defeat death for others.

If he died in the same way that someone dies on his bed while sleeping then was raised up and became alive, surely this

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[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 232.
[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 232–233.
[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 234.

would leave the hearts of people in grave doubt concerning this issue. Indeed, most of them would doubt about him, thinking that he did not die at all, and moreover, he would be a worker of deception. Surely, they would be justified in saying, No, he was arrogant in his power and he was successful through his strength, he surpassed his enemies who took him in custody publicly to kill him, then he was raised alive in full view of those who witnessed his being killed.[40]

Question thirty-six asks, "What was the sufficient satisfaction to the onlookers in seeing him being put to death when his enemies carelessly crucified him like a thief, a robber and similar immoral people"?[41] Here the Muslim wonders how such a shameful death would impress people. The answer lies in the willingness of the Messiah to be put to death with immoral men in order to cancel the power of immorality in others. "Concerning the one who bore this ill-treatment, injustice and hostility, and suffered voluntarily to release gifts to people, saving them from destruction by the grace of his innocence from the fault of sins and by his purity from the filth of offenses, that was to him honor, praise and glory".[42]

Question thirty-seven asks,

Did he not come down from his cross after which he appeared alive in spirit to them from his death, like those who crucified him asked him at that time saying, "Save yourself and come down from your cross so we can see and we will believe in you". If he came down at that time alive before their eyes surely it would have been the completion of what he willed to prove himself in his resurrection, then he would have affirmed the proof of his power, strength, and Lordship to those who had completely rejected him.[43]

Here the Muslim suggests another way of seeing the crucifixion as incomplete. If Jesus descended from the cross alive without going through the process of death then the Qurʾanic denial of his

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[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 234.
[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 235.
[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 235.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 235–236. See Matthew 27:40 and 42.

being killed by the Jews could be upheld. The Christian response must be,

> He knew that if he came down from the cross alive at the hour of his death, surely many of the people who harassed him, caused trouble to him, and oppressed him would say, "How can we know that he died a real death? Perhaps he lowered his head dramatically to deceive the onlookers into thinking that he had most certainly died, and this was compounded by the burial in the tomb after the crucifixion where he stayed for a short time in the ground in the presence of the keepers of the dead in order to remove the accusation and the opinion about the truth of his death from the hearts of the people".[44]

The death of the Messiah was a necessary proof to people of his promise that they would rise from death to eternal life.

> It was just as he promised people that he would make their bodies come alive after death and showed them a proof of that in the immediate resurrection of his body from death; likewise, when he promised them that he would raise their bodies and resurrect them from the ground, he wanted to demonstrate a proof of this in his body, so he was buried dead in the tomb and raised from the ground alive.[45]

The Muslim then picks up the difference in the gospel reports of the death and resurrection of the Messiah in question thirty-eight. "You claim that he rose in the sight of only a few people, and he appeared to a group who were only a tenth of the number of those who witnessed his death on the cross".[46] ʿAmmār has four points to make in response. Firstly, "he did not make accessible to his killers an opportunity to see him, and he only made the meaning of it accessible to the pure and the good".[47] Secondly, "Would it have been proper for him to stay on the earth after his resurrection forever"?[48] Only in this way would he have been able to prove that he was alive to all humanity. Thirdly, he could not

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[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 236–237.

[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 237.

[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 237.

[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 237.

[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 238.

treat all human beings equally in any case because they would not have witnessed his death. Fourthly, he gave his disciples the task of proclaiming his death and resurrection to all humanity.

> The Messiah, may his praise be exalted, already strengthened his direction in sending his apostles to confirm the miracles they would perform without him by reason of his resurrection and his ascension, when they raised a man from the dead and said, "Rise up in the name of Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, died and was raised" and he rose up from death at that moment.[49]

Question forty turns to the role of the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus.

> If in his being killed and his crucifixion he was righteousness for particular people, guidance for all of them from error and unbelief, and their salvation from the punishment of the fire, then it was in agreement with the will of the Messiah and he desired it. How do you believe that the Jews sinned in pursuing his being killed and his crucifixion? Rather were they not recompensed for their actions?[50]

ʿAmmār responds by pointing out that unintended killing is treated differently from intended killing. "It is like if a man places his foot on the stomach of someone in the darkness and kills him without premeditation or intention, or commits an error by mistake and does it against the same person; there would not be a judgement against him for killing that person".[51] However, in the case of intentional killing there is judgment against the killer. "It is like if a man attacks another man with his sword and hits him intending to kill him, then he withdraws the strike from killing him, and the one who hits is charged by being given the same strike by the one he hit; and he has merited punishment from God as a killer without doubt".[52] As for the Jews who sought the crucifixion of Jesus, they were full of envy of him and had a "malicious custom of killing the prophets of God, His saints, and

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[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 239.
[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 241.
[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 242.
[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 243.

His messengers".[53] It is clear that "God will punish them with the same intention of theirs in killing him and killing those who shared among His saints with those who pursued in killing him, He will not reward them for their killing".[54]

The Muslim returns with question forty-one.

> How are the Jews blamed for their actions when the Messiah interceded for them to his Father when he was on the cross, when he said, "Oh my Father, forgive them because they do not understand what they are doing"? From each of two aspects it is possible to verify that he was forgiving them for this; one of them is that the Messiah forgave them from his own accord, the other is that he announced that they did not understand what they were doing.[55]

ʿAmmār gives a variety of interpretations of the saying of Jesus on the cross. Firstly,

> Some say that he meant by his saying, "Oh my Father forgive them", Oh my Father overlook them, give them respite, and do not be in haste to punish them, so that they complete their sins and then you punish them for the totality of their sins. This is like when their sins were completed in the time of Titus the Roman who destroyed their houses, ravaged their land, killed those he killed, and captured those he captured among them.[56]

Secondly, "Some say, on the contrary, that he meant, Oh my Father overlook them so that they may repent, as if many of them might regret what had happened inadvertently and might repent of their offence".[57] Thirdly, "Some say that he issued a sincere call for them to be forgiven because they did not understand what they were doing in their treachery, when he said that they did not know what they were doing".[58] Fourthly, "Some say that he made

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[53] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 243.

[54] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 243.

[55] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 243–244. The Muslim quotes the saying of Jesus from Luke 23:34.

[56] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 244.

[57] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 244.

[58] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 244.

the request about the Roman soldiers who were under Pilate, and that these were the ones who did not know him and did not understand who he was".[59] ʿAmmār has a different opinion. "As for us, we say that he did not mean any of these aspects at all, and the purpose of his request was not a request for them to be forgiven or for them to be overlooked".[60] Rather, Jesus gave an example to his followers to pray for those who persecute them as he taught during his life. "He clearly entrusted them to love and bless those who cursed them, to do good to those who persecuted them, and to pray for those who attacked them and were violent to them".[61] Therefore, his prayer to his Father to forgive his persecutors was consistent with his earlier teaching. "It was to teach that he wanted by this particular saying to reinforce for them the need to pray for those who persecuted them".[62]

Coming back to the original question from the Muslim concerning Jesus' prayer that his killers be forgiven, ʿAmmār denies that the target of his prayer was the Jews.

> There was no benefit for the Jews in the request of the Messiah that they be forgiven if the intention of his request for them was his desire to teach people how to merit rewards by praying for those who do evil to them; but he increased shame upon shame and punishment upon punishment for them.[63]

ʿAmmār does not interpret the saying that they did not know what they were doing to mean that they were ignorant of what they themselves did. "Because if they were animals and beasts they would have been ignorant that they had exerted effort to kill him and crucify him".[64] Jesus must have meant "They do not know me in my divinity and my Lordship, and surely their ignorance of these has brought evil upon me in doing what they have done to

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[59] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 244.

[60] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 244.

[61] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 245. See Matthew 5:10–11.

[62] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 245.

[63] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 245–246.

[64] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 246.

me".[65] What Jesus did accuse the Jews of doing during his life was their failure to thank him for doing good to them.

> He blamed them for their own evil reaction to his performance of good deeds to them in his giving life to their dead, healing their sick, curing their chronically ill, and demonstrating to them signs the like of which had not been heard or seen. All this he did in their plain sight to guide them out of a desire for their good. Yet they did not esteem him or thank him for his good deeds, nor did he convince them either.[66]

This leads the Muslim to ask in question forty-two, "If they had seen the signs from him which you have mentioned, surely they would have accepted his teaching for that and other reasons without ending up killing him by crucifixion".[67] ʿAmmār responds at length by indicating that the Jews have had a history of violent intentions and actions towards those sent by God to lead them. Jews wanted to stone Moses to death,[68] to kill Aaron the brother of Moses,[69] and to kill Elijah.[70] They succeeded in killing Isaiah by cutting him in half with a saw.[71] They stoned Jeremiah to death.[72] They slit the throat of Zechariah.[73] In the light of such stories ʿAmmār argues, "How can we deny that their hostility to the Messiah was similar to the preceding hostility between them and the saints of God"?[74]

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[65] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 246.

[66] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 246.

[67] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247.

[68] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. See Exodus 17:4.

[69] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. See Exodus 32:22–24.

[70] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. See 1Kings 19:1–2.

[71] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. See *Ascension of Isaiah* 5:13, and Hebrews 11:37.

[72] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. Jerome in *Against Jovinian* 2:37 mentions that Jeremiah was stoned to death by his fellow Jews in Egypt for protesting at their idolatry.

[73] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247. See 2 Chronicles 24:21 and Hebrews 11:37.

[74] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 247.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

The eighth section of *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is entitled "Discourse on the Crucifixion". ʿAmmār begins by pointing out to his Christian readers that Muslims make three accusations against Christians concerning the Christian account of the end of Jesus' life. Firstly, "They slander us for saying that the Messiah was crucified", and secondly, they accuse "us of attributing weakness to God", and thirdly, they claim that Christians have attributed "deficiency to Christ by this".[75] ʿAmmār does not quote the Qurʾanic text exactly but he certainly refers to the obvious meaning of Q4:157. He engages with the first and second accusations by quoting another Qurʾanic text, Q19:90. "They claim against us that we invented lies about God and attribute to Him what 'makes the heavens almost burst open because of it, the earth split apart, and the mountains crash down completely'".[76] This statement in the Qurʾan is a comment that follows the outrageous claim that God has offspring, according to Q:19:88–89. However, ʿAmmār chooses to apply the criticism to the Christian claim that the Son of God died on the cross.

The second accusation of attributing weakness to God by the crucifixion is questioned by ʿAmmār. "How do we introduce weakness to God when we say that Christ was crucified"?[77] He answers,

> According to them, he is a prophet lower than their prophet in rank, and is not so exalted by them that the heavens would almost burst open by this happening to him. Since He is exalted above what they claim that we say about God, then neither weakness nor imperfection has been introduced to God.[78]

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[75] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 79.
[76] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 79.
[77] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 79.
[78] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 79.

ʿAmmār relies on his previous presentation of the relationship between the humanity and divinity of the Messiah to remind his fellow East Syrian Christians that it was not a question of God suffering death on the cross, so Muslims have no basis for thinking that the death of the Messiah on the cross impacts the almightiness of God.

The third accusation that the Messiah is diminished by the crucifixion is explained to his fellow Christians by ʿAmmār who points out that Muslims "say that he was far more honored by God than being called 'crucified'".[79] He appeals to the execution of John the Baptist which he claims Muslims believe. "I wish I knew what they would say of John, son of Zechariah, about whom they confess that he was beheaded, and that his head was given to a slave-girl, a dancer, who had asked that it be given to her".[80] The story of John the Baptist being beheaded is found in Mark 6:14–29, but is not reported in the Qurʾan. However, ʿAmmār is probably relying on the fact that John the Baptist is mentioned in Q19:15 as dying and being raised up in similar language to Jesus dying and being raised up in Q19:33. ʿAmmār indicates to his Christian audience that since Muslims believe that John the Baptist was favored by God they also believe that they "do not introduce weakness to God by speaking of one they greatly praise".[81] ʿAmmār is referring to Q3:39 which records that angels appeared to John's father Zachariah and announced that John would be born to him as a result of his prayer for a son, and that John would be noble, chaste, and a prophet bearing the word of God. He reminds Christians that although Muslims accept that the execution of John did not bring dishonor on him, they still think that the execution of Jesus brings dishonor on him. "They impose on others the same thing, according to them, attributing weakness to God through bias, prejudice, and lack of justice".[82]

Having dealt with the three Muslim accusations about the cross, ʿAmmār goes on to advise Christians to demonstrate why

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[79] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[80] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[81] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[82] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.

the crucifixion of Jesus is important to them. The key is to report how the humanity of the Messiah had to suffer crucifixion for the sake of the rest of humanity. "We must show what we know of the plan of the crucifixion of Christ in his humanity, and the benefit of this for all humanity".[83] It is advisable to begin with the reality that human beings have always found it difficult to believe that their bodies could be raised from death.

> Most people before the coming of the Messiah were in error and unbelief, and philosophers and wise men were joined together with crude and ignorant people in not knowing that after death, which separates their bodies from their souls, they would be raised from their graves and come to life, since they had never seen a human being freed from death, remaining alive, being raised to heaven, and not returning to death, which was, according to them, the most completely impossible thing that could be.[84]

It was the generous plan of the Creator to help humans to conceive of life for their bodies after death which He had inflicted on them as a result of Adam's disobedience after listening to the persuasion of Satan.

> God, may His Names be made holy, through love for His creation, wanted His creatures to be happy by revealing to them life for their bodies, and releasing them from the problem of death which He had imposed upon them, since it is the greatest misfortune that falls on them in this world, and subduing their enemy Satan, since he was the reason for the sin of Adam which caused death to enter the world.[85]

God had a plan to reveal eternal life to his creatures who had fallen into hopelessness by thinking that their bodies were trapped in decay and destruction.

> God wanted to remove death from them, lift them up from their fall, bestow on them His grace, and bring them the good news of His kingdom which He had prepared for them in the eternal world which never ends or passes away, where no evil

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[83] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[84] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[85] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.

overtakes them, where no hardship or misfortune affects them, where death does not touch them, or destruction, corruption or change.[86]

The Creator planned to raise one human being from death to a new bodily life in order to demonstrate to the rest of humanity that they too could experience the same thing, a new bodily life after death. It would not be sufficient for Him to declare the resurrection of the body to everyone without showing it had actually taken place in one human being.

> God wanted what He had prepared for all of them to come to pass in one of them, since the time of the resurrection of all of them had not yet come, and since one thing can be applied to all, then the resurrection of their substance is more certain for them than what is restricted to words, for action is better than speech.[87]

Hence the plan of God was to indwell one human being who spoke for Him and acted with His authority, and for that human being to be put to death before being raised to life, and taken to God in heaven. This would give certainty to all other humans that they could likewise be taken to God in heaven after their deaths.

> For these reasons, with all that we have explained before, He appeared in a body of theirs, veiled Himself in it, spoke to people from it, entrusted Himself to them and honored them by veiling Himself in it, and united Himself in authority and dignity with it, and then He put it to death to give life to it before them, and He raised it to heaven, proceeding ahead of them.[88]

ʿAmmār comes to the crucifixion specifically by arguing that God wanted to show the death of the Messiah publicly rather than privately to his friends and family. "He made his death public, right in front of their eyes, just as when a person wants to make something public, he makes it known so that people can see it,

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[86] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[87] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[88] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.

raising it above them and setting it in front of them".[89] People could see that the Creator had condescended to veil Himself in a human body which suffered and died, in the same human nature that they possessed.

> When people looked at what the Creator veiled Himself with from them, which had died, his death became clear to them and they knew that it was from their substance that death happened in the constitution his body, and what appeared of his suffering was known to be of their substance.[90]

When people realised that the Messiah rose from death and ascended to heaven with a new body they could be sure that they too would rise from death and ascend to heaven with a new body, as long as they could emulate his character.

> After he arose from the tomb alive and ascended into heaven to be there forever, they knew for certain that all of their substance would be raised from the tombs and would be rescued like him from the authority of death, since he was equal to them in their substance, and that anyone who would make himself like him in righteousness and purity would attain heaven just as he did.[91]

ʿAmmār argues that the death of the Messiah followed by his resurrection and ascension bring immense consolation to human beings who suffer the grief of death.

> The happiness will greatly increase of those afflicted by death which separates their bodies from their souls, of those who are immersed in the grief which it causes, in its clinging to them and in its permanence in all of them, when it is proved true that one of them has escaped from the fate of death for them. Death becomes for them similar to sleep between this world and the hereafter, their hope is enlarged, and they work in search of what has been prepared for them in His kingdom. Death is despised by them, because it is evident that it has no

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[89] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.
[90] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.
[91] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.

hold over them. Their happiness will greatly increase by what is mentioned about their life.[92]

ʿAmmār concludes the section on the crucifixion by appealing to Muslims who deny that Jesus was put to death on a cross. "So, O dying man, this is the grace of God and His gift to you through the crucifixion of the Messiah which you find repugnant, and you turn what ought to be thanksgiving for it to disbelief in it and slander of it".[93]

ABŪ QURRA'S TREATISE THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS FOR SIN WITHOUT THE SUFFERING OF THE MESSIAH ON BEHALF OF HUMANITY

In this treatise, Abū Qurra responds to the Muslim belief that the forgiveness of God may be received by humans without the assistance of an intermediary. He challenges Muslims to recognise that God's mercy is not greater than His justice.[94] The law of God cannot be made ineffective by the kindness of God overruling the just requirements of the law. Since human beings have consistently failed to keep those requirements, "God sent His eternal Son to fulfil the just requirements of His law on behalf of those who had failed to keep them".[95] The Muslim denial of such an intermediary is embedded in the Qurʾan. Q6:70 warns people who "take their religion as an amusing game, who are deceived by the life of this world . . . Each person comes to death with that which he has earned. He has no protector or intercessor apart from God. Even if a complete ransom were offered it would not be acceptable".[96]

Abū Qurra does not refer directly to this Qurʾanic teaching but his presentation of the Biblical case for the Messiah being the only human being to completely fulfil the law of God and thus

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[92] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.

[93] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.

[94] Abū Qurra, 'There is no Forgiveness for Sin without the Suffering of the Messiah on behalf of Humanity', in Bacha, 83–91, p. 83.

[95] Abū Qurra, 'There is no Forgiveness for Sin without the Suffering of the Messiah on behalf of Humanity', pp. 83–84.

[96] Intercession for sin is also denied in Q7:53, 30:13, 32:4, 39:43–44, 40:18, and 74:48.

the one human being to qualify as a ransom for the sins of others is designed to deal with the denial that a ransom is acceptable to God in Q6:70. In this way the justice of God is satisfied by the ransom of the one perfect human for all other humans. Abū Qurra explains to his Muslim audience that the Old and New Testaments state that the forgiveness of God can only come about through the death of the Messiah. His suffering for the sins of humanity was predicted "by all the prophets".[97] After quoting such prophecies, Abū Qurra challenges his Muslim readers, "You have heard from the books of God that there is no forgiveness without the cross of the Messiah. There is no fulfilment of the requirements of the law without the shedding of his blood on behalf of the living and the dead".[98] Abū Qurra does not refer to the denial of the cross in the Qurʾan but apparently believes that exposition of the Biblical case for the cross will suffice to convince Muslims of the truth of the Christian view of the forgiveness of God. He ends his treatise with the blunt alternatives of accepting the ransom paid by the Messiah or languishing in a state of unforgiveness. "We in the Christian community receive forgiveness when we accept the sufferings of the Son for our sins. But non-Christians who do not accept the sufferings of the Messiah for their sins will die in their sins".[99]

ABŪ RĀʾIṬA'S LETTER ON THE INCARNATION

Question nineteen raises the problem for the Muslim interrogator of the death of God in the death of the Messiah. "Is it possible that he is the God who rules the world? When you make it necessary that God died, then He ceased to exist, and when He ceased to exist, then the rule and government of the world ceased".[100] Abū Rāʾiṭa replies, "We only mean killing and death with regard to the body, not with regard to His divinity, which is exalted above

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[97] Abū Qurra, 'There is no Forgiveness for Sin without the Suffering of the Messiah on behalf of Humanity', p. 87.

[98] Abū Qurra, 'There is no Forgiveness for Sin without the Suffering of the Messiah on behalf of Humanity', p. 89.

[99] Abū Qurra, 'There is no Forgiveness for Sin without the Suffering of the Messiah on behalf of Humanity', p. 90.

[100] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 247.

death and change".[101] The following question wonders how the union of divinity and humanity in the Messiah can remain unaffected by the death of the humanity. "You claim that god was united with His body in an eternal union, having no disintegration or separation, then you describe Him as having been killed and died".[102] Abū Rāʾiṭa's response is to make a distinction between the union of the soul with the body and the union between the divinity and humanity. "His death in His body was the separation of His created soul from His created body, not the abandoning of His body and His soul by His divinity. Rather, the divinity was united with them in a lasting union".[103] Question twenty-one asks whether it is more suitable for God to save humans by sending and angelic or human messenger to warn them of judgment or to carry this out Himself, becoming incarnated and suffering, being killed and death. Abū Rāʾiṭa argues that it was much better for human beings that God became human to save them. The one who offered salvation might have done so through an angelic or human intermediary, but this would not have been as clear and obvious as the coming of the offerer Himself to make the offering.

> Their salvation and deliverance is in their following Him, and in their surrender to what He has called them voluntarily, without being compelled, by belief in Him and doing good works in obedience to Him after His accomplishment of the resurrection of His body in their presence.[104]

After a series of questions relating to the incarnation the Muslim turns in question forty-one to the evidence of the four gospels. He quotes several texts that appear to support the Muslim belief in subordination of the Messiah to God rather than his status of equality with God held by Christians. One of these texts is Matthew 27:46, where Jesus cries out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". The Muslim asks, "How is it possible that the Messiah be God and Lord and consented to be a

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[101] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 247.
[102] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 249.
[103] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 249.
[104] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 253.

servant . . . and he called for help from death"?[105] Abū Rāʾiṭa responds by arguing that when the Messiah called to God for help on the cross he was demonstrating that he was truly human because "human beings are anxious before death, having an aversion to it".[106] He showed that he was not some spiritual being in human guise as some who claim to be Christians have believed. "It was shown that His Incarnation was a true incarnation, in a body like our own bodies . . . and by this He refuted the one who proclaims that His Incarnation is from heaven, not from humankind; some people who refer to themselves as Christians allege this".[107] As Sandra Keating points out in a footnote, Abū Rāʾiṭa is referring to Docetists who held that Jesus' body was not a true fleshly body but only appeared to be so.[108]

The Muslim raises the issue of whether the Messiah consented to dying or was forced into it in question forty-two. If he consented to death then those who crucified him deserve a reward for complying with his desire. If he was forced to die then "what god can be compelled to do something"?[109] Abū Rāʾiṭa argues that there are two sides to the death of the Messiah. On the one side, he did not consent to what the Jews wanted to do to him, but on the other side, he consented to death for the salvation of humanity. The Muslim protests in the following question that it is contradictory for the Messiah to consent to death at the hands of the Jews yet not consent to their hatred towards him. Abū Rāʾiṭa asks the Muslim, "What do you say of the one among you who is a martyr: is the act of the unbeliever against him his own act, and is his act their act? If they are one and the same then the martyr is the killer, and the killer is the martyr, and all are blameworthy and praiseworthy".[110] He goes on to apply this to God.

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[105] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 269.
[106] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 285.
[107] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 285.
[108] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 285.
[109] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 289.
[110] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 291.

> Does God consent to the killing of His martyrs, or does He
> abhor it? If you say: "He consented", we say: then it is not an
> outrage for the unbeliever who carried out the killing of the
> martyr, and they would deserve the most abundant reward . .
> . If you say: "He abhors it", we say: Certainly He is a God who
> abhors it.[111]

Abū Rāʾiṭa asks the Muslim, "What do you say about the one who
lies about God, may He be praised? Does He consent to this act
against Himself, or does He abhor it? Your answer to us in this is
the answer to what you have asked us concerning the crucifixion
and killing of the Messiah".[112] The Muslim asks in question forty-
four, "Why should what you have described concerning the
crucifixion and the killing be similar to your statement about a lie
about God? Does anything of slander reach God? Yet you have
imposed killing and death on Him"![113] Abū Rāʾiṭa responds by
quoting the Qurʾan. "You may say: No one slanders God. But your
book is a witness against you when it says: 'They slandered
against God, lying'".[114] He goes on to apply this to the Muslim. "If
you say that nothing of slander reaches Him . . . then we ask you:
what do you say about the one who slanders God, when nothing
of this reaches Him: is he punishable for the slander against God
or is his slander overlooked"?[115] The Muslim replies that the
slanderer is punished even though God is above the slander. Abū
Rāʾiṭa points out that this principle applies to the death of the
Messiah. "He is God incarnated, Whose divine being is not
reached by anything of the crucifixion and death, even though He
is the Crucified and the mortal in His Incarnation".[116] However,
"The Jews are punishable for His crucifixion and killing, because
they intended His annihilation, even if He is exalted above this,

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[111] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293.
[112] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293.
[113] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293.
[114] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293. See Q4:50; 5:103;
10:60, 69; 16:116.
[115] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293.
[116] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 293.

glory be to Him"![117] In other words, the Jews slandered God, but He is far exalted above their slander.

EVALUATION

Muslim objections to the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus can be seen in Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's *Refutation of the Christians.* He understands that the crucifixion of Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith, since Christians believe that his death on the cross solves the problem created by the disobedience of Adam. They hold that all of Adam's descendants inherited a tendency to disobey God because they prefer to follow Satan. Christians regard the death of Jesus as the solution to this dilemma because, "He delivered them from the power of Satan by offering himself on the cross".[118] However, Christians are mistaken in their faith in the crucified Jesus since the crucifixion did not happen as the Qurʾan indicates. Even though the Christian gospels contain the story that the Jews had Jesus executed on a cross, the Jews have never accepted that this account was true, so "The Christians gave their interpretation from their own opinions".[119]

Another approach to the gospel story of the crucifixion is found in *The Refutation of the Christians* by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. He quotes the cry of Jesus on the cross in Matthew 27:46 to argue that Christians cannot call the Messiah divine if he felt rejected by God. "If you say that you call him God because that is what he claimed then you nullify what he did, since he confessed that he had a God in his saying when he was crucified, 'O my God, O my God, why have you forsaken me'"?[120] It is clear that al-Ṭabarī does not actually uphold the truth of the crucifixion or that Jesus really did say these words. He is pointing out to Christians that their gospels demonstrate that the Messiah could be vulnerable and distant from the God that he served. He is at pains to show that the Nicene Creed has gone way beyond the portrait of the Messiah in the gospels, and that rather than the Messiah being the eternal

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[117] Abū Rāʾiṭa, 'Letter on the Incarnation', p. 295.
[118] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'Refutation of the Christians', p. 317.
[119] Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, 'Refutation of the Christians', p. 319.
[120] ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, 'Refutation of the Christians', pp. 156–157.

Creator as the Creed proclaims, he is a spiritual man who is abandoned by God at the hour of his greatest need. The suffering, crucifixion, and terrible death of the Messiah shown in the gospels only serves to prove that he was a real human being who the church has mistakenly divinised. According to al-Ṭabarī who says he was an East Syrian Christian who wrote his refutation after becoming a Muslim at the age of seventy, if Christians studied the gospels more carefully they would like him come to reject the divinity of Jesus that had been superimposed on the gospel stories.

Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's *Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting* is concerned to prove that the supposed death of the Messiah on the cross destroys the union of his divine and human natures. He asks Christians, "What do you say about the moment of crucifixion, the moment of killing and the moment of burial? Was the Word united with him at these moments, or had the uniting been destroyed and obliterated"?[121] If Christians reply that the uniting was destroyed at these moments then they have to admit that the Messiah ceased to be divine during his death. If they say that the uniting remained constant at these moments, "We say: was he living at the moment of killing"?[122] If they say that he was living they "attest that he was killed living and buried living, speaking, divine and controlling".[123] If they say that the Messiah was dead at these moments, then "We say: you have implicated the divine nature with the human nature in death, killing, crucifixion and burying".[124] If they argue that "All of this happened only to the human who was united with, and not

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[121] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 117.

[122] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 119.

[123] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 119.

[124] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 119.

the divine nature, we say: the human alone was not the Messiah in your view".[125]

Abū ʿĪsā spots another problem with the story of the resurrection of the Messiah after his death. "If the Messiah died, then who revived him after death? If they say: he revived himself, say to them: how can someone with no control, knowledge or power revive himself"?[126] If they claim that God revived him then "it follows that the Messiah was not divine and that the Divinity was another than him".[127] This Divinity would then be "a second Divinity other than the deceased, more able to revive the deceased than the Divinity who they claim died. And this one will deserve worship more than the one who died".[128] If they say the one who was deceased is worthy of worship, "they claim that the deceased are worthy of worship".[129]

According to the unerring logic of Abū ʿĪsā, Christians cannot hold together their proposed union of divinity and humanity in the Messiah. If they separate the divine from suffering and death then they give up the coherence of the Messiah. If they claim that the united Messiah suffered and died then they must concede that the divine nature ceased to exist. Since they are incapable of developing a sensible view of the Messiah the Islamic perspective is all the more essential. The Messiah was a human being and no rational person can be persuaded to add a divine nature to him.

This review of Muslim attitudes to the death of Jesus by crucifixion shows just how constrained Christians were in dealing with the historicity of the cross on the one hand, and the problem of introducing suffering and death to God on the other. In terms of defending the historicity of the death of Jesus by crucifixion,

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[125] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 119.

[126] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 121.

[127] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 121.

[128] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 121.

[129] Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, 'Refutation of the Three Christian sects: The Refutation of the Uniting', p. 121.

while Patriarch Timothy was prepared to defend the death of Jesus from the Qurʾan, none of his successors were willing to argue that the Qurʾan could be interpreted to teach that Jesus had died at the end of his life. It is noticeable that Abū Qurra, Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār all avoid giving an interpretation of Q4:157-158 which deny that the Jews succeeded in having Jesus put to death on a cross. Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār have a Muslim raise a question about the intentions of the Jews to crucify the Messiah via the prayer of Jesus on the cross recorded by Luke which implies that Jesus was seeking forgiveness for those who wanted him killed. Muslims were willing to quote the gospel account of the crucifixion, even though they did not believe it happened, as a way of demonstrating the inherent contradictions in the Christian story. The idea that Jesus would seek forgiveness for the leading Jews who had sought his death by crucifixion is plainly absurd to a Muslim who was informed by Q4:157 that these Jews had actively attempted to thwart the will of God in such a heinous fashion. God may be merciful to people who commit unintentional acts but criminal intention must be condemned. Mark Swanson points out, in his study of this Muslim question about the culpability of the Jews being downplayed by Jesus' prayer for their forgiveness, that the Muslim texts "do not record or respond to any Christian counter-questions or -examples".[130] Muslims were merely content to use a Christian gospel text to show the truthfulness of the Qurʾanic account of the criminality of the Jews who wanted the Messiah executed.

Although ʿAmmār notes that some Christians absolve the Jews from the guilt of seeking the crucifixion of Jesus because the Romans were actually responsible for executing him, he does not attempt to make an inference that the Qurʾan might know about this historical reality. He might have argued that when Q4:157-158 state that the Jews certainly did not kill Jesus by crucifying him, the Qurʾan knows that in reality the Romans accomplished the horrific deed but kept this knowledge hidden. Nevertheless,

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[130] Swanson, M.N., 'Folly to the Ḥunafāʾ: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.,' (PhD: Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi arabi e Islamici, 1992) p. 364.

despite the fact that ʿAmmār was definitely aware of the account in the gospels that Pilate sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion, he declined to put this truth forward in dialogue with Muslims over the history of the end of Jesus' life. Indeed, the reluctance of any of the Christian theologians of the period to get involved in a contest with Muslims over the correct presentation of the history of Jesus' end, demonstrates that they felt that there was nothing to be gained from such an argument. Their silence concerning Q4:157-158 is rather loud. The explanation for this silence is of course that direct criticism of the truthfulness of the Qurʾan was out of bounds for Christians in debate with Muslims. Although oral debates between Muslims and Christians were common enough in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the rules governing them meant that Christians could not challenge the truth of the Muslim scriptures without incurring the most severe penalties including the death sentence. It was left to Christian apologists to find a means to indirectly challenge Muslim conceptions of the end of Jesus' life.

ʿAmmār's approach was to appeal to a comparison made in the Qurʾan between Jesus and John the Baptist. In Q19:15, it is said of John the Baptist, "Peace be upon him, the day he was born, the day he dies and the day he is raised alive". Then in Q19:33, Jesus says of himself, "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive". Whereas Timothy had quoted this last text to argue for the death of Jesus at the end of his life before his ascension to heaven, ʿAmmār alludes to the similarities between these statements to argue that there can be no shame in Jesus dying by execution if John experienced a similar fate. He dares to say that Muslims accept that John was beheaded even though the story of the execution of John is not told in the Qurʾan. It seems very likely that the account of the beheading of John was widely accepted by Muslims for ʿAmmār to feel free to depend on it to make a case for the execution of Jesus. Therefore, ʿAmmār develops the argument that if Muslims see no dishonor in the execution of John then why do they find the crucifixion of Jesus so dishonorable? It is this roundabout method of challenging Muslim perceptions of the crucifixion that ʿAmmār favors. At least he avoided the charge

of direct assault on the truthfulness of the Qurʾan by using one text of the Qurʾan to suggest an alternative interpretation of another text. In this he followed the method, but not the actual argument, of the leader of his own East Syrian church, Patriarch Timothy, whom he had most likely met before the death of the latter in 828.

The problem raised by Muslims of the suffering and death of God in the crucifixion of Jesus is dealt with at length by ʿAmmār in *The Book of Questions and Answers.* He shares a similar concern with Abū Rāʾiṭa who tackles a similar range of questions. While Abū Qurra does not deal with this issue in his treatise on the death of Jesus, he does state that the answer to the problem of the implied suffering and death of God in the suffering and death of the Messiah is to separate the experience of the divine nature from the human nature of Jesus. In his *Confession of the Orthodox Faith,* Abū Qurra holds that, "The divinity abides in the Incarnate word, not subject to any limitation, suffering or death, which belong to the human nature".[131] This was the answer given by Patriarch Timothy to the Caliph who asked how Christians could believe that God died on the cross. He replied that only the human nature died there, not the divine. This is the answer of Abū Rāʾiṭa when he is asked how can God still govern the world when Christians claim He died on the cross. Abū Rāʾiṭa protests that Christians confine the death of the Messiah to his body. His divinity was untouched by death because it remained exalted above death and change. Seppo Rissanen notes that all three Christian apologists held that only the human nature of Jesus suffered death on the cross, showing how united these representatives of the three Christian denominations were in their convictions concerning the impossibility of the suffering and death of the divinity.[132]

As for ʿAmmār, he answers the question of suffering being experienced by God in the incarnation by acknowledging that the human nature of the Messiah was exposed to suffering along with

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[131] Abū Qurra, 'Confession of the orthodox Faith', I. Dick, (ed.), in 'Deux Écrits Inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), 53–67, p. 56.
[132] See S. Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule,* pp. 188–189.

all other human beings. He had to develop as a human being with the same weaknesses as other humans, and had to prove he was capable of living a perfect life. His willingness to die for the sake of the rest of humanity meant that all other humans could benefit from his sacrifice by being freed from the power of death and could experience resurrection to eternal life as he had done. *The Book of Questions and Answers* does not concentrate on the denial that God suffered in the Messiah, because ʿAmmār is more concerned to point out that the Messiah was fully human and was faced with the same difficulties as all other human beings relating to their weakness and tendency to disobey God. ʿAmmār's design in dealing with the supposed suffering of God is to relentlessly argue that the incarnation requires the suffering of the human being taken as veil for the divinity. In his advice to his fellow Christians in *The Book of the Proof of the Course of the Divine Economy,* ʿAmmār recommends that they should show what they know of the divine plan for the crucifixion of the Messiah in his humanity and how it benefits the rest of humanity. It is this divine plan he painstakingly expounded in *The Book of Questions and Answers,* without stopping to deal directly with the way the suffering and death of the human nature of the Messiah affects the divine nature of the Messiah. It is enough for Christians to explain to Muslims that the Creator took a human body in which he veiled Himself and granted His authority to it and put it to death in order to give life to it and to raise it to heaven to which He would raise those humans who had faith in what He had done. In such a way, ʿAmmār too denies that the divine nature of the Messiah suffered or died.

The Christian conviction that the Messiah did indeed die on the cross for the sins of humanity is central to the Christian practices of the veneration of the cross, of the celebration of the eucharist, and of baptism as initiation into the church community. These three practices, defended by ʿAmmār in *The Book of the Proof of the Course of the Divine Economy,* are the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINE.
EXPLAINING BAPTISM, THE EUCHARIST AND THE VENERATION OF THE CROSS

In the latter stages of his *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* ʿAmmār turns to suggesting to his fellow Christians how to explain several Christian practices to a Muslim audience. Section nine is entitled "Discourse on Baptism", section ten is "Discourse on the Eucharist", and section eleven is "Debate about the Cross". The last of these is concerned not so much with belief in the death of the Messiah on the cross which ʿAmmār had dealt with in section eight but rather with the way Christians venerate the cross in their worship practices. He depicts Muslims asking questions about the reasons for these Christian activities which had no parallel in the practice of Islam. Muslim worship practices centered around prayer and no doubt by the early ninth century when ʿAmmār sought to explain the very physical acts of baptism in water as initiation into the church, eating and drinking the consecrated bread and wine in thanksgiving for the sacrifice of the Messiah, and kissing the cross in adoration of the Messiah who laid down his life for the redemption of humanity, Muslims had become more aware of the rift between their notions of proper worship and those of Christians.

ʿAMMĀR ON BAPTISM IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

ʿAmmār begins his treatment of Baptism by responding to Muslims who find the idea of washing the body in water to negate sin

ridiculous. He responds by offering his surprise that Muslims have forgotten that they practice washing the body to negate sin as well.

> This is that when sperm, through which the visible human form is created that heaven and earth are created for, is ejaculated from one of them, he is not content to wash the place it came from as he does with his putrid waste from which only worms and similar things are formed, but he washes everywhere from the crown of his head to his feet. He calls this washing of that clean thing from which God created humans, 'purification,'[1] and claims that his sin is forgiven on account of each strand of his hair, and a good deed is counted to him.[2]

ʿAmmār has found a parallel between the Muslim practice of washing the body after sexual intercourse and Christian Baptism in water. They both are regarded as removing sin. ʿAmmār suggests to his Christian readers that they make this comparison when explaining Baptism to Muslims. Yet in reality the reason for Baptism is quite far removed from the reason for washing the body after sexual intercourse. There might be a superficial agreement in the actions as means of removing sin but the import of Baptism is to re-enact the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

> They are surprised at baptism, which is an illustration of the resurrection from the dead. The Messiah our Lord, since he died in the humility of his humanity, and was buried and was raised, wanted to confirm this to us, and to represent it to us in such a way that we would not forget him and we would be reminded that we would be raised from the tomb just as he was.[3]

ʿAmmār depends here on the Pauline understanding of Baptism in Romans 6:3-4 where Paul argues that those who are baptised are buried with Christ Jesus into his death and raised from death to share the new life that Christ experienced after his resurrection from death. It is interesting to observe that ʿAmmār does not

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[1] ʿAmmār refers to the Muslim practice of total body washing after ejaculation of semen.
[2] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 81–82.
[3] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 82.

follow up on his earlier statement that Baptism negates sin. Rather, he limits his reference to the Pauline interpretation of the one being baptised dying and rising with Christ. He visualises the Messiah wishing to confirm the truth of his death and resurrection through the illustration of being immersed in water as he was before coming up out of the water as he did when he was baptised by John the Baptist. His intention in submitting to John's baptism was to create a visual aid of his death and resurrection that could be experienced by those who followed him. ʿAmmār might have quoted Paul in Romans 6:7 and 10 where he holds that believers have been united with Christ in his death such that sin no longer has mastery over them since Christ died to cancel sin. Therefore, Paul argues that believers who have undergone Baptism should count themselves dead to sin and should not allow sin to master them, according to Romans 6:11 and 14. However, ʿAmmār chooses not to engage with the Pauline teaching of freedom from sin in his advice to fellow Christians who wish to explain Baptism to Muslims. This may be because washing the body after sexual intercourse is a repeated action for Muslims, but Baptism is an initiation into membership of the Christian community and is not repeated. Indeed, the Pauline teaching of freedom from sin would have been difficult to defend before Muslims when post-baptismal sin was an all too real experience for Christians.

ʿAmmār then concentrates on Baptism as an illustration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. "Since the Messiah was buried in the ground and rose from it alive having been delivered from death, God wanted to give us an illustration of this".[4] Baptism enables the participant and the witnesses to remember that the death and resurrection of Jesus really took place and also that the one who undergoes Baptism will be resurrected along with him.

> Since he had been buried in the ground dead and raised from it alive, he commanded us to remember this by burying our bodies in water and rising from it, so that we might remember that the true resurrection is like this in our bodies, by his burial in the ground and his resurrection from it, so that we

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[4] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 82.

would understand and remember that the resurrection is true since its illustration is in our bodies.[5]

ʿAmmār appeals to the Pauline concept of the Messiah being the second Adam from Romans 5.

> Adam was pure, without sin, but Satan deceived him, so God condemned him to death on account of the sin. Yet God wanted to renew him from death to life. He truly did this for one human being, [the Messiah] and made him an illustration for all humans, until the time comes when He gives them life through him, and thus their renewal is by means of the illustration of becoming alive through water which, along with dust, initiated their creation.[6]

ʿAmmār calls on the image of God as a potter from Jeremiah 18:6-10 and Romans 9:20-22, as another illustration for Baptism.

> This is likened to the potter who, when making a vessel out of clay, forms it from dust and water, but this vessel is damaged before it is put in the fire, and he renews his work with water alone in order to rescue it. Similarly, since death damages us, the Creator renews our created state with water alone on account of the illustration which He has given us, until the time of the renewal of creatures with the true life. It is like when we are baptized in water then we are adorned with the same life and death is extinguished.[7]

Thus in Baptism, God promises to recreate the person marred by sin by means of the water of life that will be fully experienced after death. In other words, Baptism is a sign of future freedom from sin after the death of the body. Baptism cannot of itself remove sin in the one baptised because it is merely an illustration of the Messiah who alone conquered sin.

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[5] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 82–83.

[6] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 83.

[7] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 83. Khalid Chalfoun indicates that Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 391), who was regarded as the founding father of the East Syrian church, used the picture of the potter in his discussion of baptism. It is likely that ʿAmmār was relying on Theodore for the metaphor. See P.K. Chalfoun, 'Baptême et Eucharistie chez ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī', *Parole de l'Orient* 27 (2002), 321–334, p. 325.

> We say that in baptism is the negation of sin because it is an
> illustration of death from this world which has sin, and of life
> in that world which does not have sin. If the extinction of
> death is true in our bodies, then sin which was the cause of
> our death is negated. We know that it is extinguished, for it
> was the thing which was its cause and through which it
> entered, because we have received an illustration of its
> extinction for all of us, and one of us [the Messiah] has really
> negated it.[8]

The person being baptised understands that the water is a sign of
freedom from sin that will eventually be experienced after the
death of the body and not an actual experience of freedom from
sin in this life. Only the Messiah had such a freedom from sin. It
is for this reason that Christians look to him as the true meaning
of Baptism, because he negated sin and promises to negate sin in
those who have faith in him.

ABŪ QURRA ON BAPTISM

Abū Qurra refers to the Messiah baptising believers in water and
the Spirit as the means to dealing with sin. In a treatise in Greek
entitled, 'That we have five enemies from whom the Savior saved
us, by way of question and answer', an unbeliever asks how Christ
freed us from sin.[9] Abū Qurra has a Christian reply that the sin
which inhabits the soul makes us unable to fulfil the proper aims
and desires of the soul. To the rescue comes Christ who "baptizes
us in water and the Spirit, and the grace of the Holy Spirit
strengthens us, stripping away every sin, weakness, and sickness,
renewing and restoring us to the original strength and beauty that
we had before the transgression".[10] Abū Qurra refers to the saying
of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11, "I baptise you with water

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[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 84.

[9] Abū Qurra, 'That we have five enemies from whom the Savior saved us,
by way of question and answer', in J. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah*,
249–254, p. 253.

[10] Abū Qurra, 'That we have five enemies from whom the Savior saved
us, by way of question and answer', in J. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu
Qurrah*, 249–254, p. 253.

for repentance, but there is someone who is coming after me, more powerful than I am, who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit". John 3:5 also links baptism in water with baptism in the Spirit when Jesus says to Nicodemus, "No-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit". Abū Qurra sees baptism in water as including baptism in the Holy Spirit. He appears to teach that the initiation of water baptism begins the possibility of the operation of the Spirit in the ongoing life of the baptised person.

EVALUATION

The approach to Baptism as freedom from sin varies between Abū Qurra and ʿAmmār since Abū Qurra is more optimistic than ʿAmmār that Baptism brings real power over sin. For Abū Qurra there is the genuine possibility of renewal of the soul in this life, whereas for ʿAmmār there is the more modest admission that sin cannot be entirely defeated in this life. This difference is a reflection of their Christological views. Abū Qurra held that Christ was free from sin at the point of his conception and was protected from sinning by that purity. ʿAmmār believed that Christ had to prove his obedience to God all through his life. He could have disobeyed but chose to submit to the will of God right up to the end. These differences in Christ's ability to sin are seen in the two different approaches to the life of the believer. Abū Qurra had the more optimistic view that the person baptised had the ongoing power of the Spirit to remove the stain of sin once committed. ʿAmmār held that the baptised believer needed to remember that baptism is an illustration of Christ's resurrection from death that will motivate the believer to continue to hold onto the eventual defeat of sin in the resurrection life after death. He is less willing than Abū Qurra to speak about the removal of the impact of sin in the believer during this life.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE EUCHARIST IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

ʿAmmār opens the discourse on the Eucharist with the Muslim rejection of the words spoken by Jesus concerning his body and blood. It was quite natural for Muslims who denied that Jesus was

put to death on the cross to also deny that the Messiah could have predicted his crucifixion by using such words. ʿAmmār responds to this denial by arguing that the Messiah wanted to dedicate the bread and wine as his body and blood.

> As for what they also reject of our saying that the Messiah named the Eucharist, which we receive, his body and his blood, we inform them that the Messiah, our Lord and our God,[11] because he wanted it, in what he intended by it, to be the truth concerning his body by his teaching and his will.[12]

The Messiah wanted to give his followers a demonstration of the world to come after the resurrection from the dead. "He named the bread and the wine, which he made as the Eucharist, his body and his blood, because the concern of the Messiah, our Lord, was to fulfil all of his aims by showing the eternal world and the resurrection from death".[13] The Messiah understood how difficult death is for human beings, and how hard it is for them to be sure of a life beyond death that never ends in death. "For there is nothing in this world harder for its people than death, and nothing more valuable for them than salvation from it, and attaining life which does not pass away and after which death does not come".[14]

ʿAmmār points out that the Messiah knew that he would die, rise from death and ascend to heaven. So before all this took place he wanted to leave his followers with a tangible reminder of these events that they would continue to remember regularly.

> Because the Messiah died in his humanity, rose up and ascended to heaven, demonstrating by this the resurrection of people of his substance and his human nature from the tombs and their accession to life, he wanted to leave them something by which they could remember his death for them in order that their resurrection might be demonstrated by his resurrection,

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[11] This is the first time that ʿAmmār has given the title, 'our God' to the Messiah. He already has argued that it not appropriate to speak of the Messiah as the body of God, so this title comes as a surprise here.

[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 84.

[13] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

> so that his death and resurrection would not be forgotten, since it was in this that there was life for all of them.[15]

He might have been content to leave them with his teaching but he wanted in addition to give them a visual aid to help their memory. Therefore, the Eucharist has a similar visual aspect to Baptism. Both Eucharist and Baptism are physical experiences of spiritual reality argues ʿAmmār.

> He was not satisfied with reminding them by words without making corporeal for them something they could take in their hands, on which he had put the name of his body that had died, had risen, and had ascended to heaven, just as he gave an illustration of his death and resurrection in baptism.[16]

The physical action of receiving the bread enables the believer to remember his death for them and his resurrection to eternal life that guarantees their life in eternity. Taking the bread in their hands brings deep joy to believers, since the physical experience promotes spiritual experience.

> When they take the Eucharist in their hands, because he is the one who named it his body which died and rose, they remember the resurrection and eternal life, and sadness is dispelled from them by remembering the death and they rejoice by remembering the life, and they become like those who have taken confidence in the life which is in their hands, for there is nothing more certain to humans than what they can touch with their hands, and what their palms can hold.[17]

ʿAmmār now turns to the words spoken by the Messiah over the bread and wine.

> Before his death while he was still alive, he gave his disciples bread so that they would not doubt that it was to be his body, and he said to them, "Eat, this is my body which is offered for

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[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.
[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

the forgiveness of sins, and this is my blood which is shed for the pardon of transgressions".[18]

ʿAmmār does not believe that the Messiah taught that the bread and wine was essentially his body and blood because he was not concerned with the power of the bread and wine in themselves to offer new life. ʿAmmār argues, "He did not intend by this that the essence of that bread and that wine was his body and his blood, because his teaching was not about the essence of bodies which do not have the power to demonstrate life or salvation from death".[19] Mere bread and wine have no power to affect the salvation of humanity.

On the contrary, ʿAmmār holds that the Messiah taught his disciples that the bread and wine would prompt their memories about the importance of his death and resurrection. He did not teach them that the bread and wine were in essence his actual body and blood. When the Messiah said, "This which I give to you is my body", he meant,

> The life which appeared by the resurrection of my body from the tomb and its escape from death, is what you should remember, and it will appear to you as you take this bread to which I have given my name, and it is my body in the manner of its appearance to you, and a remembrance for you of eternal life which my body has attained by its resurrection from the tomb.[20]

ʿAmmār sums up his case that the words of Jesus about the bread and wine being his body and blood are intended to mean that when his followers eat the bread and drink the wine they are remembering his death for them and his resurrection to new life that they too will experience after their death.

> So, our life from death and our resurrection from the tombs have been depicted for us and illustrated to us by the physical bread and wine which he named his body and his blood. By his death, his resurrection from the tomb, and his ascension

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[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85. ʿAmmār quotes from Matthew 26:26–28.

[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

to heaven, we know that we will rise from the tombs and that we will come alive from death like he did, since it was with the aspect of our substance that he died, and his rule over death and life is our rule.[21]

ʿAmmār turns to the meaning of the sacrifice that the Messiah offered. He says that such an offering reflected the practice of the Children of Israel who offered sacrifices for their sins which was enshrined in their law. "As for naming his body and his blood an offering for the people of the world, this was according to the law of God for the Children of Israel, because they used to offer sacrifices to God for their sins".[22] ʿAmmār appeals to the idea of the Messiah being the second Adam, repeating the argument of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12-19 which he relied on in the section on the death of the Messiah on the cross. "As a result of the sin of Adam, the Creator decreed death for him, and it passed on to his descendants until God renewed the second Adam who was without seed, who He made a veil between Himself and His creatures, as we described before".[23] ʿAmmār holds that the Messiah was the representative sacrifice for humanity who could negate their sin through his purity.

> It is as if he represented all people of his substance in negating the sin which was the reason for the entry of death into the presentation of the animals which were sacrificed and offered to God for the sins of the Children of Israel. since it was necessary that he should negate death and demonstrate life on account of his righteousness, just as death was necessitated, and life was negated on account of the disobedience of the first Adam.[24]

For ʿAmmār it was necessary that the Messiah become a sacrifice to death so that other human beings could escape from the power

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[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.

[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.

[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86. Wageeh Mikhail points out that this was an important theme in the writing of Theodore of Mopsuestia. See W.Y.F. Mikhail, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-burhān*', p. 305.

[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.

of death. "The negation of death is only demonstrated by his being placed under it, defeating it, and coming out of it, thus he makes it clear by this means that it has no authority or power, and it was negated, and life was established in its place".[25] It was not necessary for the Messiah to die for his own sins because he had never sinned. "He died for the creatures, not because it was necessary for him, since he did not sin as Adam sinned, on whom death was decreed, but to authenticate the negation of death for him and for the people of his substance".[26] As a result, the sacrifice of the Messiah made the sacrifices offered under the law redundant, since they were merely an illustration of his sacrifice. Those sacrifices had not been designed to remove death, but they pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah which would indeed negate the reality of death and usher in a new life beyond death for humanity. Thus, ʿAmmār ends his discourse on the Eucharist with this summary of the achievement of the Messiah.

> He took the place of the offerings which were presented to God for the negation of sins. Those were an illustration of him, and he truly negated sin by negating death which had entered on account of sin. Because those offerings did not negate death which had entered on account of sin, and he did indeed negate it and revealed life from it by ascending into that place where there is no death, that is, heaven.[27]

ABŪ QURRA ON THE EUCHARIST

In a Greek treatise entitled 'Refutation of the Saracens', Abū Qurra presents a dialogue between himself and a Muslim on the meaning of the Eucharist. The Muslim thinks it ridiculous that bread could become the body of the Messiah.

> Bishop, why do you priests delude the Christians? Given two pieces of bread baked from the same flour, one you allow to be eaten as common food; the other you distribute in little pieces to the people, calling it "the body of Christ" and affirming that

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[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.
[27] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.

> it can forgive the sins of those who partake of it. Do you mock yourselves or those over whom you have charge?[28]

Abū Qurra asks the Muslim, "Does or does not bread become God's body"? The Muslim denies this. Then Abū Qurra asks, "Does or does not bread become a human being's body"? The Muslim replies, "I'm at a loss to affirm either part of this contradictory proposition".[29] Abū Qurra then asks the Muslim whether he had grown from infancy. Given the obvious reply, he asks, "What made you get larger"? When the Muslim provides the answer, "by the will of God, food", the Bishop drives home his argument, "Well then, for you at least, bread became body". The Muslim accedes, "I grant you that point".[30]

Abū Qurra demonstrates his familiarity with current scientific knowledge of the process of the transformation of food in the stomach. The liver converts food into blood which is sent through the body, and is converted into various body parts, "bone into bone; marrow into marrow; nerve into nerves; eye into eyes; hair into hair; skin into skin; nail into nails".[31] He concludes, "This is how an infant grows into an adult: when bread becomes, for that infant, body; and drink, blood".[32] Abū Qurra then applies this process to the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

> Understand our sacrament to take place in the same manner. The priest puts the bread and wine on the holy altar; and when he prays the sacred Eucharistic prayer, the Holy Spirit descends on the gifts placed there. Through the fire of his divinity, he transforms the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, no less than the liver transforms food into the body of a person. Or don't you concede, my friend, that the Holy Spirit can do what the liver can do?[33]

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[28] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 219.
[29] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 219.
[30] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 219.
[31] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 220.
[32] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 220.
[33] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 220.

Abū Qurra has the Muslim concede the argument. "The Saracen made the concession, and with a sigh fell silent".[34]

Clearly, Abū Qurra seeks to defend the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ after the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the Eucharist. However, his analogy from the process of absorption of bread into the human body could easily have been denied by the Muslim if Abū Qurra had taken the trouble to allow him to question the validity of the parallel between transformation of bread within the human body into various body parts and the transformation of bread into the body of Christ. The first process is physical and natural but the second is spiritual and unseen.

Abū Qurra also refers to a proper approach to taking the bread and wine in his treatise 'On our Salvation'. He is acutely aware that Christians might not receive the Eucharist with the correct faith. Failure to confess sin while receiving the body and blood of Christ could result in condemnation.

> We beseech Christ to purify our intention, that we might love him more fully and more truly and keep our baptismal covenant with him, lest in exchange for sin we cast away what we received through his pains and eat his flesh and drink his blood in an unworthy manner and thus singe our souls and experience a punishment worse than what we merited through our sins alone.[35]

This rather severe warning is much less optimistic about the capacity of Baptism to keep the believer free from sin than his earlier much more enthusiastic belief that Baptism in water and the Spirit empowers the participant to avoid sinning. In other words, this appeal to continual prayer for God to keep the believer free from sin is a more realistic assessment of the difficulties of the life of the believer than his earlier conviction of the capacity of Baptism to maintain sinlessness in the one baptised.

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[34] Abū Qurra, 'Refutations of the Saracens', in Lamoreaux, p. 220.
[35] Abū Qurra, 'On Our Salvation', in Lamoreaux, 129–149, pp. 134–135. Abū Qurra refers to the Apostle Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 that nobody should eat the bread and drink the wine in an unworthy manner, since judgment would fall on anyone who did so.

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār opens his discussion of the Eucharist with an uncharacteristic statement that the Messiah is God. This comes as a surprise to the reader who has remembered that ʿAmmār has argued that the body of the Messiah is not to be called the body of God. Indeed, he goes back to this basic position in his exposition of the words of the Messiah concerning the bread being his body by interpreting this to mean the body of his humanity. Therefore, the normal belief of ʿAmmār is that the body of the Messiah is the same kind of body that he shares with the rest of humanity. He makes the point that the death, resurrection and ascension of that human body is proof to the rest of humanity that they can share in his resurrection and ascension after their death. This also accounts for his emphasis on the participant in the Eucharist remembering the defeat of death by the Messiah through his sacrifice for sinners. There is no mention of receiving the body of the Messiah in eating the bread. Rather, the participant eats the bread as a visual aid to his faith in the defeat of death, the resurrection and the ascension that the Messiah provides to the one who eats the bread.

This is in marked contrast to Abū Qurra's belief that the prayer of invocation made by the president of the Eucharist transforms the bread into the body of the Messiah. The Chalcedonian Orthodox view is affirmed by Abū Qurra that the bread becomes spiritual food for the nourishment of the life of the participant. Ordinary bread is transformed into spiritual food through the coming of the Holy Spirit to the bread. Just as ordinary bread feeds the human body so the transformed spiritual bread feeds the spiritual life. This view of transformation goes back as far as Irenaeus (b.c. 130), who taught that the '*epiklesis*' or invocation of the Holy Spirit at the consecration of the bread and wine transformed the ordinary elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. "As the bread, which comes from the earth, receives the invocation of God, and then it is no longer common bread but Eucharist, consists of two things, an earthly and a heavenly; so our bodies, after partaking of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the

eternal resurrection".[36]   Irenaeus appears to suggest that consumption of the spiritual food maintains the spiritual life of the believer in such a way that the body of the believer who feeds on the spiritual bread has become incorruptible already in this life before becoming incorruptible after death.

ʿAmmār's view that the participant remembers the death, resurrection and ascension of the Messiah is more characteristic of the teaching of those anathematised by the Orthodox as Nestorians. For example, Theodoret of Cyrus (d.c. 466) initially defended Nestorius but was induced to condemn him at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. However, the second Council of Chalcedon in 553 condemned his writings. His view of the Eucharist is much more in line with that of ʿAmmār. Theodoret writes, in his interpretation of the fourteen epistles of Paul, on Hebrews 8:1–4, which contrast the sacrifices offered by priests in the old covenant with the sacrifice offered by Christ, the high priest, who sat down at the right hand of God. To the question, "Why do the priests of the new covenant perform the mystical liturgy"? Theodoret answers,

> We do not offer another sacrifice, but perform a memorial of that unique and saving offering. For this was the Lord's own command: 'Do this in remembrance of me'. So that by contemplation we may recall what is symbolized, the sufferings endured on our behalf, and may kindle our love towards our benefactor, and look forward to the enjoyment of the blessings to come.[37]

Thus the tradition of the Eucharist as remembering the sacrificial death of Christ and his attainment of eternal life through his resurrection and ascension is embedded in the heritage of the followers of Nestorius who had become a flourishing Christian community beyond the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire that enforced the Orthodox view of the Eucharist.

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[36] Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies', iv. xviii. 5, in H. Bettenson, (trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 96.

[37] Theodoret of Cyrus, 'Detailed Commentaries on the Fourteen Epistles of St. Paul', in H. Bettenson, (trans.), *The Later Christian Fathers,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 277.

Nevertheless, other East Syrian theologians held that the prayer of consecration did transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Messiah. In 'the disputation between a Muslim and a monk of Bēt Ḥālē', set in the early eighth century, the monk explains what happens in the Eucharist to the Muslim enquirer. He says, "The bread is of wheat, and the wine is of the vine, and by the mediation of priests and through the Holy Spirit (i.e. the epiclesis) it becomes that body and blood of Christ".[38] Here is evidence that the East Syrian conception of the Eucharist included the notion of transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Messiah. This has led Charles Tieszen to concur with Chalfoun that "ʿAmmār's explanation is designed to serve an apologetic function, elucidating the Christian practice of the Eucharist but in such a way as to avoid further Muslim objections to the figure of the Holy spirit and the mystical and sacramental elements of the epiclesis".[39]

There is no doubt that ʿAmmār's conception that eating the bread and drinking the wine is a visual aid to contemplating the sacrifice of the Messiah was far more understandable to a Muslim than Abū Qurra's idea that eating the bread and drinking the wine is a new reception of the body of the Messiah every time the eating and drinking happens as a form of regular spiritual nourishment. The emphasis of ʿAmmār on the humanity of the Messiah is in keeping with Muslim convictions that the Messiah was merely a messenger, and the notion that the human Jesus is a forerunner for all the rest of humanity in achieving life after death has a direct appeal for Muslims who held to the exaltation of the messenger Jesus to the presence of God. However, the Orthodox conception of the spiritual energy given by the body of

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[38] See 'The disputation between a Muslim and a monk of Bēt Ḥālē. Syriac text and annotated English translation', in S.H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (eds), *Christein in der islamischen Welt.* (Weisbaden, 2015), 187–242, p. 218.

[39] See P.K. Chalfoun, 'Baptême et Eucharistie chez ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī', p. 330, and C.L. Teiszen, 'Discussing religious practices', in D. Pratt and C.L. Teiszen (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History, Vol. 15. Thematic Essays (600–1600),* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 489–513, p. 506.

the Messiah to sustain the spiritual life of the believer through ingesting the consecrated bread and wine would have been incomprehensible to Muslims who regarded Jesus as a spiritual giant but not as a mediator of spiritual power through eating bread and drinking wine that had been transformed into his body and blood.

ʿAMMĀR ON THE VENERATION OF THE CROSS IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF OF THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

The eleventh section of *The Book of the Proof of the Course of the Divine Economy* is entitled, 'Debate about the veneration of the Cross'. He opens this debate quite abruptly by announcing that he will counter the ridicule of Muslims towards Christian veneration of the cross by ridiculing them for kissing a black stone. He says, "As for their mocking our veneration of the cross, we will turn the argument back on them. Much more surprising than this is their veneration of a stone which the polytheists used to honor and venerate".[40] ʿAmmār is referring to the stone on one of the corners of the *Kaʿba* which pilgrims on the *Ḥajj* to Mecca attempt to kiss.

Before attacking the Muslim veneration of the stone, ʿAmmār explains why Christians venerate the cross.

> As for what we mean by honoring this emblem, it is as if we are describing the manifestation of our Creator in the body which was crucified on it, and the revelation to us of the resurrection, the life, and the negation of sin. We intend, by touching the emblem of that on which the body was crucified which was the veil of our Creator, to magnify our Creator and to bring us closer to Him.[41]

Touching a cross is a form of thanksgiving by believers for the sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross that brings them salvation from sin and resurrection to eternal life. They show their gratitude to God the Creator for revealing Himself in the Messiah who died there by kissing a representative cross. ʿAmmār appeals to the way people venerate their king. "We venerate the king by

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[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 87.
[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 87.

magnifying the hoof of his horse and the dust under his feet in addition to his footwear and his coat".[42] He then appeals to the way Muslims and Christians venerate those who are close to God. "We and you touch the coat of a man who is close to God through worship".[43] He reminds Muslims that they do this as Christians do to become closer to God. "We want by this to become close to our Creator by touching the coat of one of His servants who obeys Him".[44] ʿAmmār then drives home his argument that kissing a cross is altogether appropriate as a means of showing gratitude to God for providing the cross.

> If we touch the coat to honor a man who obeyed the Creator, how much more appropriate is it that we touch the emblem of that on which the veil and clothing of the Creator were crucified. Ignorance should not prevent us from doing this, since we do it to that which is lesser and smaller, as well as to that which is more important and greater, unless a power occurs in our substance that also makes us too proud to venerate the hoof of the king's horse, the coat of the devout man, and the clothing of the Creator. That would be ignorance and error.[45]

ʿAmmār turns to questioning Muslims about their kissing a stone. He suggests a possible answer given by Muslims, "Because it came from heaven".[46] ʿAmmār responds with suggesting that Islam teaches that stones should not be venerated in case they are treated as idols.

> We heard that God has forbidden honoring the stones which He created in this world because people have taken them as idols to worship. So, what makes honoring and venerating that which came from heaven the worthiest thing in this world to you, when God is the Creator of everything?[47]

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[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 87.
[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 87.
[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 87.
[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 87–88.
[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.
[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

ʿAmmār reminds Muslims that the Qurʾan forbids taking objects in the created world as idols to worship. Abraham is said in Q6:74 to have challenged his father over his worship of objects that represented divine power. "You take idols as gods. I see that you and your people are obviously in error". In Q21:58 Abraham was brave enough to destroy his father's idols. When the people discovered his action in Q21:62, Abraham challenged them in Q21:66, "Do you worship alongside God what can do you no good or evil"? The people wanted to burn him but God rescued Abraham. The Qurʾan also shows that God commanded Abraham to initiate a pilgrimage to the house he should build. Q22:26–33 outline the instructions Abraham was given. Q22:30 says that animals may be eaten during the pilgrimage but they must not be treated as objects of worship. "Avoid the abomination of idolatry", pilgrims are told. Q22:31 adds, "Be devoted to God and do not assign partners to Him". According to Q7:138, when Moses led the Children of Israel across the sea, they encountered people who worshipped idols. They said, "Moses, make us gods like they have". In Q7:140, Moses replied, "Should I seek another god apart from God when He has favored you above all other nations"?

ʿAmmār then offers a second explanation by Muslims for the veneration of a stone during the pilgrimage commanded by God. They may say, "This is on account of Abraham".[48] It is interesting to observe that nowhere in the Qurʾanic accounts of God commanding Abraham to build a house for pilgrims to enter and worship is there any mention of a stone being venerated, despite the fact that Muslims were known to attempt to kiss a black meteorite during their seven circumambulations of the *kaʿba*. ʿAmmār responds by contrasting Muslim pilgrims kissing a stone with Christian worshippers kissing a cross. "You venerate a stone on account of Abraham, and you reject the veneration of wood on account of the veil of the Creator, I mean, the humanity of the Messiah".[49]

ʿAmmār provides a third justification by Muslims for their veneration of a stone. They may say, "God required us to do

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[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.
[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

this".[50] However, ʿAmmār denies that God would require such a practice. "It is not true when you say God prescribed it, since you have already confessed that He prohibited you from doing such a thing, and He commanded you to fight the polytheists over it. If this is not so, what meaning is there in worship by venerating the stone"?[51] ʿAmmār is certainly on very firm ground here given that kissing the stone is not commanded in the Qurʾan. How could Muslims have invented such a retrograde practice that would draw their attention to a stone rather than to its Creator? ʿAmmār concludes the debate by answering the question he posed about the meaning of kissing the stone. "No meaning for this can be counted as acceptable to rational people, so, we drop the debate about this because we know the result of it".[52]

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār's contrast between Christians kissing the cross and Muslims kissing the stone is first found in John of Damascus' 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'. John states that Muslims call Christians idolaters because they venerate the cross. He responds, "How is it that you rub yourselves against a stone by your *Habathan,* and you express your adoration to the stone by kissing it"?[53] John provides two Muslim answers to this question. "Some of them answer that (because) Abraham had intercourse with Hagar on it; others, because he tied the camel around it when he was about to sacrifice Isaac".[54] John adds his own interpretation of the significance of the stone being "The head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate . . . on which those who can understand it exactly can see, even until now, traces of an engraving".[55] By the early eighth century, Christians had begun to respond to Muslim criticism of Christian cross veneration by looking for parallels in Islamic practice. While it would have

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[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

[52] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

[53] John of Damascus, 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites', in D.J. Sahas, (ed. and trans.), *John of Damascus on Islam,* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 137.

[54] John of Damascus, 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites', p. 137.

[55] John of Damascus, 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites', p. 137.

impossible for Christians to attend the circumambulation of the *kaʿba* in Mecca, they were able to hear testimony from Muslims of the ritual and any stories connected to the understanding of Muslims concerning reasons for particular pilgrimage practices. John represents a Christian tradition of seeing the polytheism of the Arabs being carried over into Islam that would be seen in future Christian writing.[56]

ʿAmmār is much more careful in his handling of the kissing of the stone. He does not repeat John's allegation of the stone as a survivor of the worship of Aphrodite or the rather crass Muslim explanations for the significance of the stone. This is in line with his much more positive assessment of Islam compared with John who was looking for ways to draw out the absurdity of the new religion. Nevertheless, ʿAmmār puts forward a restrained argument for the irrationality of Muslim behavior with respect to veneration of a stone that could easily be interpreted as a form of worshipping an aspect of creation rather than the Creator Himself.

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[56] See B. Roggema, 'Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters: A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East', in D. Thomas, (ed.), *Christians at the Heart of the Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbasid Iraq,* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–18, pp. 6–7.

CHAPTER TEN.
DEBATE ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE AFTERLIFE

ʿAmmār completes *The Book of the Proof of the Course of the Divine Economy* with a final section entitled 'Debate about eating and drinking in the afterlife'. There is a sense in which discussion of the nature of the afterlife crowns ʿAmmār's theology in dialogue with Islam. The course of the divine economy certainly progresses towards life everlasting in the presence of God for those who make the possession of eternal life their aim and purpose in this life. Therefore, the analysis of this section will survey the whole book to see how this aim drives ʿAmmār's approach to dialogue with Muslims.

DEBATE ABOUT EATING AND DRINKING IN THE AFTERLIFE IN THE BOOK OF THE PROOF CONCERNING THE COURSE OF THE DIVINE ECONOMY

ʿAmmār begins his discussion of the afterlife with the Muslim belief that there will be eating and drinking and marriage there. He holds that they have rejected the teaching of the Messiah in the gospels that such experiences are abolished. He compares the types of reward offered in the gospel and in Islam.

> As for what they reject of what is in the gospel concerning the abolition of marriage, eating, and drinking in the afterlife, and they presume that this lessens the reward for good people, we will come back to them with the opposite of what they mentioned, because what they mentioned is the lessening, the decrease, and abolition of the reward, and what the gospel

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> mentioned is the correct reward, and the obvious grace that
> rational people reject.[1]

ʿAmmār refers to Mark 12:25, where Jesus states that when the
dead rise they will not marry in the afterlife but will become like
angels. It was on this basis that Christians thought that humans
would no longer need to eat and drink in the afterlife if they were
to become like angels. The Qurʾan promises to believers marriage
and eating and drinking in the afterlife. Q38:50–54 speak of
"Gardens of eternity with gates open to them where they will
recline and call for abundant fruit and drink. Beside them will be
female companions who restrain their gaze. This is what you will
be promised on the Day of Reckoning. Surely such a reward will
never end". Muslims conceived of this future life in physical terms
as a recapitulation of marriage and eating and drinking in this
life. Here was a stark difference between the rewards offered by
the scriptures of Christians and Muslims. ʿAmmār intends to
contrast these different rewards in his exposition of eternal life.

ʿAmmār repeats his earlier understanding of the plan of God
to make human beings within a perishable world. They would
need to depend on what comes from the ground to produce food
to survive. The Creator intended that humans seek for Him in
their weakness that ultimately results in death.

> He made our physical condition weak, imperfect, subject to
> afflictions, and also made our life sustainable only with what
> comes from its soil and is produced from it in order that our
> weakness and our need might be demonstrated, and that we
> are forbidden from the pride and arrogance which would
> harm our souls.[2]

The Creator offers humans the opportunity to live beyond death.
He will transfer them from a life dependant on eating and
drinking to a life that lacks nothing.

> He will transfer us from this base world and from this weak
> and imperfect condition to a strong and venerable condition,
> and after this base life which is only established by something

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[1] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.
[2] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 88.

other than itself, He will transfer us to an eternal life in which there will be no need and no weakness.[3]

ʿAmmār argues that in the world to come humans will not need to eat and drink or be married since these are aspects of life that arise out of the condition of weakness that the Creator placed humanity in. The new life will not be based on weakness and need.

> Our happiness and our joy in it will be different from what we have experienced in this passing world, and of the weakness of our physical condition when we were in it, and of our need for things in this world to sustain our life which among other things include eating and drinking.[4]

ʿAmmār believes that the future life will be happy if there is no need for food or marriage that do not last forever. "The happiness of the creatures with the Creator will last forever and ever, and for all eternity, in one perfect state that is not sustained by the taste of one kind of food after another, or one kind of drink after another, or marriage one time after another".[5] He takes his cue from Jesus' comments that believers will be like the angels in the afterlife. "God will join them with His righteous angels in rank, power, dignity, endurance, and eternal happiness forever and ever".[6]

ʿAmmār makes the suggestion to his Christian readers that Muslims do not think any the less of angels who along with humans live forever. Why should Muslims not wish for the same kind of eternal life as God will grant to angels? "I do not think that the opponents claim that the reward of Gabriel, Michael and all the angels who are close to God is imperfect or base, or that the pleasure in taking women, food and drink is more than the pleasure of the angels in other things then these".[7] ʿAmmār knows that the Qurʾan names Gabriel and Michael as angels in Q2:98,

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[3] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 89.
[4] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 89.
[5] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 89.
[6] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 89.
[7] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 89–90.

and that God warns people not to demean them lest they find God fighting against them.

He goes on to conclude that Muslims wish to keep experiences from this life which humans share with animals rather than look forward to completely new experiences that arise from being released from weakness and need.

> As for what they mention of food and drink and marriage, all of these things were put in this world for us to preserve the base situation which He made us share with animals. So, it is obvious to rational people that since the opponents place a need of these things where there is no need for such things which are redundant and imperfect, then they have diminished the reward of God, may He be exalted, by imperfection, and need, and all that the animals share with us.[8]

ʿAmmār finishes the debate on eternal life with an admission that he does not wish to prolong the argument between Christians and Muslims about the nature of the afterlife. He says, "If the debate were not to be prolonged and the book become much longer than it is, I would have shown at length the imperfections in what they say, but we put it forward for the one who may not understand".[9]

THEODORE ABU QURRA ON THE AFTERLIFE FROM HIS TREATISE ON THE EXISTENCE OF THE CREATOR AND OF THE TRUE RELIGION

Abū Qurra ends his 'Treatise on the existence of the Creator and of the true religion' with a section on the afterlife. He quotes from the gospel of John to show how the Messiah promises eternal life for the righteous and eternal punishment for the unrighteous. According to what Jesus says in John 14:1–3, 15–17, and 23, 16:27–28 and 17:8–12 and 20–24,

> The abode of the righteous is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in heaven, and the abode of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is also the righteous who are one with him in heaven. Therefore, since the abode of God is the righteous and

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[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 90.
[9] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 90.

> the abode of the righteous is God, and they are also one with
> him, then they are in eternal life, without dying or perishing,
> and they are like him.[10]

Abū Qurra concludes from the teaching of the fourth gospel that
the aim of God is to be one with righteous humans in this life and
also in the next where they will be one with Him without any
constraint attached to this life. In other words, they will be like
God in their nature. "As our nature teaches us that it desires God,
and longs to see Him and to abide in Him, and to become like
Him, a god, in His eternal life and in His grace that will never
end, so the gospel has taught and promised".[11] Abū Qurra then
contrasts the offer of eternal life made by the Messiah in the
gospel with that made in the Qurʾan, though he does not actually
quote from the latter. "From this we also know that it is truly
from God because He only created us for this reason, to bless us
along with the holy angels, and not to bless us with food and drink
and sexual relations with women, a blessing that He gives to
donkeys, pigs and other beasts".[12] He quotes Matthew 22:29 and
Luke 20:34–36 where Jesus answered a question about marriage
in the afterlife and said that there would be no marriage there,
but rather that humans would be like the angels of God. Abū
Qurra argues that Jesus meant that the nature of the afterlife
would not be the same as the nature of this life. He concludes his
argument by contrasting the worldly attitudes of other religions
with the other-worldly approach of Christianity.

> This teaching is not found in any of the other religions and it
> does not arise in their thinking at all. Because all of their
> thinking is about this world: about food, drink, sex, and
> gratifying the body, they do not know anything else. They
> only crave such things, like the beasts which only desire them
> and nothing else. Therefore, the gospel is the true religion of
> God, through which He is to be worshipped.[13]

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[10] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the existence of God', p. 251.
[11] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the existence of God', p. 251.
[12] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the existence of God', pp. 251–252.
[13] Abū Qurra, 'Treatise on the existence of God, pp. 252–253.

For Abū Qurra, the goal of becoming like God in the teaching of the gospel is proof of the truth of the teaching of the Messiah found there. He never names Muslims in this presentation, but his references to the teaching of the Qurʾan show how he is attempting to argue that only the scriptures of the Christians contain the real revelation of God.

EVALUATION

ʿAmmār has dealt with the Muslim insistence that there is eating, drinking and marriage in the afterlife by arguing that the teaching of Jesus precludes such experiences, since he taught that humans will be like the angels who do not have physical reality. He shares this argument with Abū Qurra. Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between the two writers in how they interpret the type of life to be enjoyed. ʿAmmār points out that physical needs such as eating, drinking and marriage are part of the nature of this world that God created to enable humans to develop and reproduce. But because this life inevitably leads to death, the Creator planned another type of life which would never end. In that life decay and death will not appear so the experience of eternal life will not include aspects of this life that pass away. The physicality of human bodies that requires nourishment and the fact of death requiring procreation to produce future generations will not be apparent at all. For ʿAmmār, the spiritual bodies of the angels suggest what will happen to resurrected humans. They too will share the kind of bodies that angels have. He holds that spiritual bodies will be much superior to physical ones and that the Christian view of eternal life is much more to be anticipated than a recurrence of physicality in heaven as Muslims believe.

Abū Qurra on the other hand sees union with God as central to the afterlife. In his interpretation of the teaching of Jesus in John's gospel, he holds out the amazing prospect that humans will be like God Himself. Rather than focussing on angelic spiritual bodies, Abū Qurra believes that the union humans have with God in this life through the presence of the Holy Spirit will be altogether more complete in the afterlife. Therefore, the goal of the Creator was to unite with human beings in this life and for humans to become completely like Him in the next life where

there would be no constraints of godlessness to afflict them. He does include the angels in this future, but they seem to share with humans the godlike character that Abū Qurra believes will be the experience of humans there. So while Abū Qurra like ʿAmmār criticises Muslims for desiring physical existence in the afterlife, and they both critique Muslims for seeking the same experiences as animals there, the two theologians reflect different foci from the gospels in their interpretation of the quality of eternal life for resurrected humans.

THE AFTERLIFE AS THE GOAL OF CREATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF ʿAMMĀR

In the opening section of his *Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine economy,* entitled, 'Proof of the Existence of God', ʿAmmār argues that the world that humans live in is filled with dangers to their life that stimulate their desire for peace and rest in another world. "Therefore, these damaging and painful things became of greater benefit to humans than delightful and enjoyable things, because the latter nourish their bodies while the former strengthen their souls, and stimulate them to seek a world where there is no adversity or tribulation".[14] Right from the outset of his apology for the truth of Christianity, ʿAmmār joins forces with Muslims in holding that all human beings will meet God on the Day of Resurrection. While Christians and Muslims disagree about many details concerning the revelation of God to humanity, they agree that God will judge every human life. "We know that on the Day of Resurrection, by our being saved from death, we will all join together in knowing the One who has saved us from death, without doubt or disagreement".[15] Then ʿAmmār points out that humans are prey not only to external dangers such as wild animals, but also to internal dangers such as diseases and illnesses. The latter also "induce us to withdraw from this transitory world and they instil in us a desire for the eternal abode".[16]

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[14] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.
[15] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.
[16] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 22.

Section two, 'Proofs of the True Religion', also includes the goal of the creation of this world being the creation of another world. After arguing that the Creator does not create in order to destroy, ʿAmmār admits that the omnipresence of death for all living things is built into the fabric of creation. He argues, "If God destroys our bodies in death, this does not contradict our conclusion that a wise person does not destroy what he has made".[17] He uses the analogy of the farmer burying seed in the ground in order to get a fresh crop from the seed. "We have seen that wise people destroy in order to improve, like the seed that they sow in the soil to obtain fresher and more nourishing grain".[18] The wise Creator similarly destroys our bodies in death in order to refashion us in a better kind of life that will never experience death. "We know and trust that He did not want to destroy us through death because it would not have been a wise action, but rather He renews us to a higher, more magnificent and more perfect form than the one we now have".[19] The knowledge of this new life may be inferred from examining the world that we are now in but the Creator has ensured that we understand His intentions by sending down His message to that effect which is enshrined in a book so that all generations can learn of His generosity towards them.

> Since there is no doubt that He is going to transfer us from this abode to another, that He would not refrain from telling us what He has prepared for us. indeed, He has sent us the good news about this and set it down in a book lest we forget, and so that future generations may inherit it and have great joy in it.[20]

The fact that God wills that we pray to Him is also a sign of His ultimate intentions for humans. He commands us to pray to Him for out benefit, because he wants us to strive for eternal life rather than simply rest in the assurance that it will inevitably happen.

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[17] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 24.
[18] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 24–25.
[19] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 25.
[20] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 25.

Striving for what is right and good is better for us than merely receiving goodness as a gift.

> Since in His kindness and generosity He has prepared for us a sublime eternal world, we have no doubt that He will regard our prayers to Him in ways that are most beneficial to us. And this would not happen unless He commanded us to attain it by our own striving and effort, because we see that when someone achieves something by his own merit and accomplishes it by his own work and effort, it brings him more pleasure than something that is given to him gratuitously and freely granted to him.[21]

This is also set out clearly in the book God gave.

Section three, 'Reasons for the Acceptance of Christianity', includes ten beliefs of the early Christians. Several of these core beliefs have to do with the defeat of death and the granting of eternal life. The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh beliefs were about the defeat of death by the Son of God and his granting eternal life to those who trusted in him.

> They said that this Son of God was crucified, died and was buried . . . that after his death and burial he was resurrected and he rose from the tomb alive . . . that after his resurrection from the tomb he ascended to heaven . . . that after his ascension to heaven he will descend to earth to raise the dead and to send the good to bliss and the wicked to hell.[22]

The ninth belief was about the nature of eternal life.

> They proclaimed another world, but they did not promise people any pleasure which they knew from what they had seen in this world. Rather, they commanded them to renounce this world and disdain the pleasure of food and drink and marriage and so on. They also called them to another world, informing them that they would not eat or drink or marry there.[23]

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[21] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 25–26.
[22] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 26–27.
[23] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 27.

The fourth section, 'Refuting the allegation of the Corruption of Scripture', includes the hypothetical scenario that those who wished to alter the text of the New Testament might have made the teaching easier to understand and follow. One proof that this did not happen is the fact that the offer of eternal life did not involve eating, drinking and marriage. "They could also have set down in it what they thought would be pleasurable for them in the afterlife; sexual intercourse, eating and drinking and the like, since their contempt for the book of God had reached the point that they corrupted it as they wished".[24] If Muslims claim that Christians did not actually change the wording of the New Testament but merely have failed to interpret the text accurately then the actual teaching found there proves them wrong. Such teaching includes the prospect that there will be no marriage or eating and drinking in heaven. ʿAmmār pointedly contrasts New Testament teaching with what is contained in the Qurʾan. "This and many other similar things are in the text of the book without interpretation. See if any of these agree with your book".[25] He repeats his argument that the teaching concerning the nature of the afterlife in both books demonstrates that it is simply impossible for Christians to have misinterpreted the clear language of the New Testament. "Regarding marriage, food and drink in the afterlife, you affirm these, yet the Gospel negates them. How then can the Gospel be turned in the direction of the meaning of your Book? This is absolutely impossible".[26] The repetition of this argument about the completely disparate teaching about the afterlife shows how central this was to ʿAmmār's apologetic case for the authenticity of the Christian book.

In the seventh section entitled, 'Confirmation of the Incarnation', ʿAmmār argues that the generosity of God is seen in Him showing Himself in the Messiah. The ultimate proof of His generosity is granting eternal life to those who wish to look on the Creator Himself as they looked on Him in the Messiah. Part

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[24] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 44.
[25] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 45.
[26] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 45.

of this experience will be the sharing of humans in the rule of God.

> There is nothing greater in value to us, or more profound in honoring us and honoring all of His creatures which are gathered together with us, since He gave us authority in this passing world over everything which is in it, than that He completes this by giving us authority in the eternal world.[27]

'Ammār believes that God has given humans rule over the earth and that this will be enhanced in heaven.

> Since we have the names of rule and authority which we do not possess in our essence, yet our Creator has conferred on us what He possesses and is entitled to, they will not be taken from us in the situation of our reward in the eternal world, and by being elevated through His dignity in the situation of our reward in the eternal world, we will be worthier and more deserving of the strength of the meaning of this, and God, by completing the generosity which He commenced, will be more like His generosity.[28]

When 'Ammār outlines the teaching that the Messiah commanded his disciples to pass on, he sums it up in the following way.

> He commanded them to preach His manifestation in a body of theirs, to tell people what He had demonstrated in it of His power, might, and authority, to preach what He had prepared for them in His Kingdom, to call them to worship Him and obey Him, and to announce good news of life for their bodies after death, and their destination in the life which does not perish.[29]

Here the focus on the defeat of death and life eternal is held by 'Ammār to be the goal of the teaching.

Later in the section 'Ammār repeats the goal of the completion of the generosity of the Creator in granting a share in His rule to human beings. "When humanity despaired of having any mercy or salvation from death, his Creator manifested

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[27] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 69.
[28] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 69.
[29] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 72.

Himself to him in his substance to raise him from death and to make him a ruler who has authority over what is in heaven and on earth".[30] But Muslims appear to be uneasy about the idea that God grants humans a share in His rule. Why should Muslims be so reluctant to think this is proof of His generosity. They believe that such sharing would mean that God is deficient in his power and authority. He does not need help. ʿAmmār agrees that God needs no help in ruling the creation but out of generosity he willingly invites human beings who He has created to join with Him in his work. Muslims admit that God created humans to manage the rest of the created world so why do they not believe that they will manage in the eternal world as well.

> What deficiency affected God when He gave humans authority over what is on earth, so that it will affect Him when He gives them authority over what is in heaven? Will the generosity not be greater in the eternal situation? Is His commencing him in his perishable place of dwelling on earth not a witness to the termination of his situation by transferring him to heaven which never perishes? Is His giving him authority over what comes to an end on earth not a witness that He will terminate and complete it for him by giving him authority over what never comes to an end in heaven?[31]

Section eight, 'Discourse on the Crucifixion', opens with the reason why God provided the Messiah to defeat death for human beings and pave the way for them to enjoy eternal life.

> Since most people before the coming of the Messiah were in error and unbelief, and philosophers and wise men were joined together with crude and ignorant people in not knowing that after death, which separates their bodies from their souls, they would be raised from their graves and come to life, since they had never seen a human being freed from death, remaining alive, being raised to heaven, and not returning to death, which was, according to them, the most completely impossible thing that could be, then God, may His Names be made holy, through love for His creation, wanted

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[30] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 73.
[31] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 75.

His creatures to be happy by revealing to them life for their
bodies, and releasing them from the problem of death which
He had imposed upon them, since it is the greatest misfortune
that falls on them in this world, and subduing their enemy
Satan, since he was the reason for the sin of Adam which
caused death to enter the world. God wanted to remove it
from them, lift them up from their fall, bestow on them His
grace, and bring them the good news of His kingdom which
He had prepared for them in the eternal world which never
ends or passes away, where no evil overtakes them, where no
hardship or misfortune affects them, where death does not
touch them, or destruction, corruption or change.[32]

'Ammār argues that the resurrection of the Messiah from death
and his ascension into heaven proved to his disciples that they
would also share in his resurrection from death. Because he was
human like them, they had confidence that they as weak human
beings could participate in eternal life along with him if they
followed him in a life of righteousness.

After he arose from the tomb alive and ascended into heaven
to be there forever, they knew for certain that all of their
substance would be raised from the tombs and would be
rescued like him from the authority of death, since he was
equal to them in their substance, and that anyone who would
make himself like him in righteousness and purity would
attain heaven just as he did.[33]

The hope of a future life with the Messiah in heaven is now
possible for all who face death and the grief that it brings. They
can visualise death as a doorway to a much better life beyond.

The happiness will greatly increase of those afflicted by death
which separates their bodies from their souls, of those who
are immersed in the grief which it causes, in its clinging to
them and in its permanence in all of them, when it is proved
true that one of them has escaped from the fate of death for
them. Death becomes for them similar to sleep between this
world and the hereafter, their hope is enlarged, and they work

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[32] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 80.
[33] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.

> in search of what has been prepared for them in His kingdom.
> Death is despised by them, because it is evident that it has no
> hold over them. Their happiness will greatly increase by what
> is mentioned about their life.[34]

It is significant that in a section devoted to the crucifixion,
ʿAmmār concentrates on the way the death of the Messiah opens
up the possibility of eternal life for all who follow him. Rather
than spend time expounding the atonement that the sacrifice of
the Messiah provides, ʿAmmār gives his energy to the fruit of the
crucifixion in the opening up of a life everlasting that is free from
weakness and sin.

The ninth section, 'Discourse on Baptism', describes baptism
as a visual aid for the resurrection. ʿAmmār says that baptism "is
an illustration of the resurrection from the dead".[35] It was the
desire of the Messiah himself that baptism should be a reminder
of his defeat of death and his resurrection from the tomb.

> The Messiah our Lord, since he died in the humility of his
> humanity, and was buried and was raised, wanted to confirm
> this to us, and to represent it to us in such a way that we
> would not forget him and we would be reminded that we
> would be raised from the tomb just as he was.[36]

After arguing that the illustration of something indicates the truth
of it, ʿAmmār points to baptism in water as an illustration of the
truth of we humans being buried in the ground and then being
raised up to a new life.

> Since he had been buried in the ground dead and raised from
> it alive, he commanded us to remember this by burying our
> bodies in water and rising from it, so that we might remember
> that the true resurrection is like this in our bodies, by his
> burial in the ground and his resurrection from it, so that we
> would understand and remember that the resurrection is true
> since its illustration is in our bodies, because if the likeness of

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[34] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 81.
[35] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 82.
[36] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 82.

a thing exists, it proves the truth of the thing which it resembles.[37]

ʿAmmār also points out that baptism is a sign of the negation of sin in the next life.

> We say that in baptism is the negation of sin because it is an illustration of death from this world which has sin, and of life in that world which does not have sin. If the extinction of death is true in our bodies, then sin which was the cause of our death is negated. We know that it is extinguished, for it was the thing which was its cause and through which it entered, because we have received an illustration of its extinction for all of us, and one of us has really negated it.[38]

In the tenth section, 'Discourse on the Eucharist', ʿAmmār regards the eating of bread and drinking of wine as another visual aid for the resurrection. The reason why the Messiah spoke about the bread being his body and the wine being his blood was to give his disciples an illustration of his coming death as a means of opening up eternal life for them.

> He named the bread and the wine, which he made as the Eucharist, his body and his blood, because the concern of the Messiah, our Lord, was to fulfil all of his aims by showing the eternal world and the resurrection from death. For there is nothing in this world harder for its people than death, and nothing more valuable for them than salvation from it, and attaining life which does not pass away and after which death does not come.[39]

ʿAmmār believes that the Messiah did not just wish to teach his disciples with words alone but also with physical and tangible means that would reinforce what he said.

> He was not satisfied with reminding them by words without making corporeal for them something they could take in their hands, on which he had put the name of his body that had

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[37] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', pp. 82–83.
[38] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 84.
[39] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.

> died, had risen, and had ascended to heaven, just as he gave
> an illustration of his death and resurrection in baptism.[40]

In other words, the Messiah was keen to provide two distinct
visual reminders of his victory over death and his opening the
way for others to experience eternal life. Both baptism and the
Eucharist are those visual aids for believers. One is experienced
once and the other regularly.

ʿAmmār explains the words that the Messiah spoke about the
bread and wine being his body and blood were not concerned
with the essence of his body since human bodies have no inherent
power to defeat death.

> He did not intend by this that the essence of that bread and
> that wine was his body and his blood, because his teaching
> was not about the essence of bodies which do not have the
> power to demonstrate life or salvation from death. But his
> teaching was about the meaning of life which was revealed in
> his body by his resurrection from the grave, and his escape
> from death.[41]

When Christians consume the bread and wine they are reminded
that his defeat of death is their defeat of death.

> So, our life from death and our resurrection from the tombs
> have been depicted for us and illustrated to us by the physical
> bread and wine which he named his body and his blood. By
> his death, his resurrection from the tomb, and his ascension
> to heaven, we know that we will rise from the tombs and that
> we will come alive from death like he did, since it was with
> the aspect of our substance that he died, and his rule over
> death and life is our rule.[42]

THE AFTERLIFE IN THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ʿAmmār also regards the afterlife as a proof of the generosity of
the Creator in his *Book of Questions and Answers*. In the first
section 'On establishing the timelessness and oneness of the
Creator and the demonstration of the creation of the world', he

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[40] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.
[41] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 85.
[42] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 86.

answers question eleven by arguing that death was only the door to another life.

> He could speak openly to rational people—when He allowed them death and destruction—that He has for them another destination to which He would raise them. He would establish in them that which He had already begun through His generosity, and would complete in them that which He had already granted them of His grace and goodness.[43]

Question twelve raises the obvious problem of why the Creator did not make the perfect world of the afterlife first rather than forcing humans to go through decay and death. "If He did not wish for them this condition and this state, then what induced Him to create them in these, and not create them in a condition which he intended to transform them into later in the other abode, to which He decided to transfer them afterwards"?[44] ʿAmmār replies that the Creator wanted humans to discover for themselves how generous their Creator was by bringing them out of decay and death.

> He created humans ignorant and susceptible to pain so that they would make themselves—by the goodness of their deeds—knowledgeable and not in pain. . . He began with lowering them into this base dishonorable abode so that they themselves—by their own power and the goodness of their actions—would deserve to dwell in that other honorable abode. . . He made death within them—by His kindness and mercy—like a flash of lightning between their sleeping and their end. Thus, death too—as their ultimate destiny, which He prepared for them in His goodness—is useful and beneficial for them all.[45]

ʿAmmār returns to dealing with the afterlife in section four, 'On reasons for the incarnation of the Word and what follows from it'. He mentions in answering question thirty-two that the Messiah willingly submitted to being put to death by his enemies because

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[43] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 107–108.
[44] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 108.
[45] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 109–110.

he wanted to release others from the hold of death and bring them to eternal life.

> What called him submit to his enemies when they brought death upon him, when they achieved their goal in putting him to death, was his will for those who followed him to rise to life by the power of his Lordship to verify for them his promise to nullify death in the afterlife for the people of his substance.[46]

The Muslim responds in the next question by protesting that all the prophets who came before the Messiah also proclaimed eternal life after death. There was no reason for the Messiah to submit to being put to death by his enemies in order for humans to rise from their graves.

> Moses and David and the rest of the prophets and messengers were not called to this, and they were content to set forth their argument according to what they called to, without doing what the Messiah gave himself up for. If the preaching was united and the teaching was united and their reception by all the people was similar then surely there was no reason why the Messiah should give himself up apart from them.[47]

ʿAmmār replies, "which of the messengers among the messengers of God who lived before the Messiah have you found described to you dealing with the issue of the afterlife and its rewards and punishments, and who called everyone to renounce the world and reject its happiness"?[48] He quotes from the Torah to prove that Moses promised the Children of Israel that they would live in the promised land. He then contrasts this with the words of the Messiah, "Whoever wants to gain his own life should give it up and whoever gives up his own life for my sake in this world that is passing away will keep his life in the eternal world". If the Muslim cares to read the Bible he will see for himself how different Moses and the Messiah were in the promises they made. As a result, the Muslim will come to acknowledge that the

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[46] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.
[47] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.
[48] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 230.

Messiah intended to die for others so that they could experience eternal life.

> Then you will not deny the Messiah when he imposes on the people of his religion such afflictions that he imposes on them which they bear patiently in this world because of the reward for them since he himself suffered for their salvation the pains of death and the afflictions which soften what he imposes on them out of love and compassion and affection.[49]

The final question of section four concerns eating and drinking in the afterlife. The Muslim asks, "What benefits are there in that life over life in this world, when you claim that there is no eating, drinking, marriage and other pleasurable things in the eternal abode"?[50] ʿAmmār responds,

> The afterlife provides a new spiritual heavenly physique, which removes and lifts the need for blessing by appetites and pleasures. Rather, they are given spiritual heavenly blessings like the blessings of the spiritual heavenly angels who do not need the pleasures of eating and drinking.[51]

The theme of the afterlife as the goal of creation so central to *The Book of the Proof concerning the Course of the Divine Economy* is found in the earlier *Book of Questions and Answers,* but is less prominent there. This is because the latter deals with questions that Muslims ask Christians concerning the major differences between them; the corruption of the Bible, the Trinity, the incarnation and the death of the Messiah by crucifixion. The former is ʿAmmār's set of suggestions for Christians in dialoguing with Muslims to present a coherent set of beliefs based on the intention of the Creator to grant humans eternal life.

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[49] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', pp. 233–234.
[50] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 264.
[51] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of Questions and Answers', p. 265.

CONCLUSION

This is the first book length treatment of the theology of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. If it were not for the pioneering work of Michel Hayek in discovering the two works of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in the British Museum and editing them in 1977, this remarkable Church of the East theologian would remain a footnote in the history of Christian theology expressed in the Arabic language. The historian of Christian writing in Arabic, Georg Graf, only had access to a summary of the two works of ʿAmmār held in the monastery of Charfet in Lebanon, which stated that "Christianity has lasted for a thousand years", and he concluded that the two pieces of writing must have been written sometime between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.[1] Rachid Haddad discusses the date of ʿAmmār's writing in his 1985 survey of the Trinity in Christian Arabic theology and notes that the catalogue of the manuscripts at Charfet places the works of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in the eleventh century.[2] He discovered that Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī (d. 974) mentions ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in his *Dialogue with al-Maṣrī,* so concludes that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī lived before the death of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī.[3] It is very surprising that Haddad did not know about Hayek's edition of 1977 since his awareness of Arab theology is encyclopedic. This lack of awareness of Hayek's edition which demonstrates that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī referred to the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim's invasion of

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[1] See G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, vol. 2,* (Vatican City: Studi e testi, 1944–1953) p. 210.

[2] See R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050,* p. 77.

[3] R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050,* p. 77.

Amorium in 838, is a puzzling feature of some of the studies of Arabic theology in the late twentieth century.[4] For example, in Seppo Rissanen's 1993 *Theological encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule,* he compares three theologians representing three Christian denominations in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Timothy I for the Church of the East, Abū Qurra for the Melkites, and Abū Rāʾiṭā for the West Syrians. While Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭā wrote in Arabic Timothy wrote in Syriac. It would have been better if Rissanen had used the 1977 edition of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's two books to analyse the way the Church of the East used Arabic to construct theology in dialogue with Islam.

Hayek points out in his introduction to his edition that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī surely lived in the early ninth century since Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840) wrote a 'Refutation of ʿAmmār the Christian in his reply to the Christians', according to the *Fihrist* of ibn al-Nadīm (d.c. 995).[5] Hayek concludes that this refutation of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī is decisive for the dating of his writing. He believes that ʿAmmār wrote his *Book of Questions and Answers* in Basra before Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf left the city in 818. He thinks that *The Book of Questions and Answers* was dedicated to the Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833).[6] At least we can be certain that Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf would have written his refutation of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī before his death around 840. Hayek also believes that ʿAmmār wrote his *Book of the Proof* after 838, given the reference to al-Muʿtaṣim's invasion of Amorium in 838.[7] Therefore there appears to be a significant gap in time between the writing of the two books.

Sidney Griffith accepted Hayek's arguments about the dating of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's writing in his ground-breaking articles, 'The Concept of *Al-Uqnūm* in ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity', of 1982, and 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān:* Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', of 1983.

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[4] See ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, 'The Book of the Proof', p. 38.
[5] See B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, a Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture, vol. 1,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 388.
[6] See Hayek, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et Controverses,* p. 19.
[7] Hayek, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et Controverses,* p. 20.

Sidney Griffith offered the first serious analysis of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's theology after Hayek's edition, and demonstrated how ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī developed his theology in the Islamic context of the early ninth century.

It was in the course of my research into Christian theologians from the modern period writing about Christ for Muslims that my supervisor, Dr David Thomas, suggested I compare modern writers with Christian theologians who had written about Christ for Muslims in the early Islamic period. in the late 1990's, he introduced me to the Christological writing of Abū Qurra, Abū Rāʾiṭā and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. The result was my 2003 PhD, published in 2005, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries.* I was impressed by all three theologians, but I was particularly drawn to ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī who seemed to me to be able to deal with Muslim questions more thoroughly than the other two.

David Thomas organised the Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam every four years at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Selly Oak, Birmingham. He invited me to present a paper at the fourth Symposium in 2001 based on my research into the way Christians writing in Arabic presented their Christology to Muslims. I chose to speak about ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Christology. I was able to present two more papers on ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's writing at the fifth and seventh Symposia in 2005 and 2013, on ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's approach to the Muslim accusation that Christians had corrupted their scriptures, and on his response to the teaching of the Quʾran. These three papers were published in the collected papers of the Symposia.[8]

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[8] See I.M. Beaumont, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation', in D. Thomas, (ed.), *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule,* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 55–62; I.M. Beaumont, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī on the Alleged Corruption of the Gospels', in D. Thomas, (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity,* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 241–255; I.M. Beaumont, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Ninth Century Christian Theology and Qurʾanic Presuppositions', in I.M. Beaumont, (ed.), *Arab Christians and the Qurʾan from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period,* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 83–105.

Interest in the work of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī has developed in the last thirty years. I consulted Mark Swanson's 1992 PhD on how Christians in the Early Islamic era wrote about the cross for my PhD on Christology.[9] He included ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's treatment of the cross from Hayek's edition. Wageeh Mikhail completed a PhD in 2013 on ʿAmmār's 'Book of the Proof', and added his English translation of Hayek's edition in an appendix.[10] Sara Husseini published her PhD thesis in 2014 on the Trinitarian theology of Abū Qurra, Abū Rāʾiṭā and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī.[11] A German translation of *The Book of the Proof* was published by M. Maroth from the Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies in Hungary.[12] Another product of the Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies was a study of the Arabic terminology of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Book of Questions and Answers* by O. Varsanyi.[13]

Not only was ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī the first theologian to write a Systematic Theology in Arabic as Michel Hayek has rightly argued, but he was also the first theologian to systematically respond to the Muslim thought of his time as Sidney Griffith has rightly indicated.[14] ʿAmmār's influence on Muslim thinkers was

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[9] M.N. Swanson, 'Folly to the Ḥunafāʾ: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.', (PhD: Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi arabi e Islamici, 1992).

[10] W.Y.F. Mikhail, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-burhān*. A topical and theological analysis of Arabic Christian theology in the ninth century', (PhD: University of Birmingham, 2013).

[11] S.L. Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God,* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[12] M. Maroth, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī: Das Buch des Beweises,* (Piliscsaba: The Avicenna Instutute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2015).

[13] O. Varsanyi, *Ninth-century Arabic Christian Apology and Polemics: a Terminological Study of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba,* (Piliscsaba: The Avicenna Instutute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2015).

[14] See M. Hayek, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. La Première Somme de théologie chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du christianisme', *Islamochristiana* 2, (1976), 69–133, and S.H. Griffith, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān:* Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century', *Le Muséon* 96 (1983), 145–181.

notable. Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf thought so highly of him that he wrote a refutation of his work, suggesting that this leading Muslim intellectual regarded ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī as a serious debating partner. Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq included ʿAmmār's Trinitarian theology in his refutation of the Trinity. Even though Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq did not name him, he clearly believed that ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's Trinitarian conception of God's attributes of speech and life being essential to him was more worthy of consideration than the ideas of other Christian theologians.

In the light of these Muslim thinkers taking the trouble to engage with ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's writing, it seems appropriate that his work should be circulated among Christians living in Islamic contexts in our time. This was why I thought it would be good to write a monograph on his theology developing the series of articles and book chapters I have published since 2003.

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