

TESOC
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TEXTES ET ÉTUDES
SUR L'ORIENT CHRÉTIEN

— 5 —

The Caliph and the Bishop

The Caliph and the Bishop

**A 9th Century Muslim-Christian Debate:
Al-Ma'mūn and Abū Qurrah**

by

Father Wafik NASRY, S.J.

CEDRAC

**Université Saint Joseph
Beyrouth - 2008**

**CEDRAC
2008**



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Born in Cairo, Egypt, Fr. Nasry is a member of the California Province of the Society of Jesus. He holds undergraduate degrees in English and Philosophy from St. John's College Seminary. His graduate degrees include a M.Div. from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, a Licentiate in Arabic and Islamic Studies, from the *Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica*, as well as a Licentiate in Missiology, from the *Pontificia Università Gregoriana*. His Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies was earned at the *Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica*. Currently, he teaches in the departments of Classics and Theology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. His interests include the study of languages; the influence of religious beliefs on individual and group behavior and cultures-especially, in socio-political-economic areas; Christian-Muslim inter-religious dialogue; and the study of Ancient Arab-Christian manuscripts.

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TEXTES ET ÉTUDES SUR L'ORIENT CHRÉTIEN (TESOC)

L'Orient chrétien, avec la richesse de ses traditions culturelles, suscite de plus en plus l'intérêt des chercheurs. Cependant, alors que la tradition byzantine est assez bien connue, les autres traditions (syriaque et surtout arabe) demeurent ignorées, voire inexplorées. C'est pour combler cette lacune que la collection "Textes et études sur l'Orient Chrétien" (TESOC) a été conçue.

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2. Louis SAKO, *Le rôle de la hiérarchie syriaque orientale dans les rapports diplomatiques entre la Perse et Byzance aux V^e-VII^e siècles* (Paris 1986), 202 p. (Épuisé)
3. Giacinto Būlus MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec l'émir 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāšīmī à Jérusalem vers 820*. Études, édition critique et traduction annotée d'un texte théologique chrétien de la littérature arabe (Rome 1986), 642 p.
4. *Mélanges en mémoire de Mgr Néophytos EDELBY (1920-1995)* (Nagi EDELBY & Pierre MASRI, édit.), Éditions du CEDRAC (Beyrouth : CEDRAC - USJ, 2005), 504+400 p.
5. Wafik Habib NASRY, S.J., *The Caliph and the Bishop. A 9th Century Muslim-Christian Debate: Al-Ma'mūn and Abū Qurrah*, (Beyrouth : CEDRAC - USJ, 2008), 352 p.

)

During the printing process, the bottom bar underneath the transliterated letters **T** and **H** moved into the following letter. Thank you for taking this into account, and please accept our apologies for this error.

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4. Nagi EDELBY & Pierre MASRI (Edd.), *Mélanges en mémoire de Mgr Néophytos Edelby (1920-1995)*, coll. «Textes et Études sur l'Orient Chrétien» 4 (Beyrouth : CEDRAC-USJ, 2005), 504 (fr.) + 400 (ar.) = ISBN : 995-455-31-7.
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2

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1 The dissertation was defended at the *Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Arabicorum et Islamologiae* (P.I.S.A.I.), Rome, on Monday 11 December 2006, and was approved *Summa cum Laude*.

2

FOREWORD

Fr. Wafik Nasry, S.J. was born and raised in Egypt. He traveled extensively in the region and is familiar with the languages and culture of the Middle East. His religious formation and academic training was done in the United States and Europe which made him very familiar with western languages and culture.

For his doctoral dissertation at the *Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e D'Islamistica* in Rome, Fr. Nasry produced the first Critical Edition of the ancient Arabic manuscripts of an alleged debate between *Abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn*, fully translated and with explanatory notes and a critical study and apparatus. He also created a valuable "Lexicon" of nearly all the words used in the manuscript. These projects are never easy undertakings. They demand a scholarly knowledge and expertise in both Christianity and Islam, their history and theology. They also demand proficiency in various languages, most especially Arabic. In the course of his research, he made many interesting discoveries about 9th century Arab Christian as well as Islamic culture.

Fr. Nasry researches in depth and is very straightforward in his written analysis: About the Arab-Christian-Heritage, he states, "This heritage is vast in its diversity, rich in its roots and universal in its content. Most of all, the Arab-Christian Heritage was composed in times and places where the Christians had to *give a reason for their hope* (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) to those who asked. In spite of these important characteristics, the bulk of this heritage is yet to be unearthed, examined and published." This volume represents a significant forward step towards Arab-Christian cultural recovery.

About interfaith dialogue, he writes, "The word *dialogue* seems to be the popular word in current religious, social and political circles; it is the *moda* at many different levels and in many walks of life today. Many Christian scholars contend that a dialogue with Islam is impossible today. Other scholars exhibit a bit more *naïveté* in their sincere, well intentioned efforts to enter into dialogue with representatives of Islam. They go so far as to

trivialize their basic Christian beliefs for the sake of dialogue. They do this mostly out of ignorance of their own faith and/or that of the other religions. Such well intentioned people often do far more damage than good to both Christians as well as Muslims.”

This is indeed an important piece of research with theological, academic and cultural value “... due to the theological richness of the debate contents.” Such an open dialogue-discussion needs to be revived in our fast changing world, although perhaps without the polemical tone of the debate presented in this book, in order to diffuse any potential for conflict between Christians and Muslims. Among other elements, this debate points to the academic freedom allowed to a Christian bishop to discuss any theological subject with the Muslim theologian-scholars before the Caliph, without fear of retribution. Admittedly some of the issues discussed in the debate were theological “straw men” but the important point remains that the topics were once put to very civil and open discussion between Christians and Muslims. Fr. Nasry’s stated motives for the work was «... claiming our Arab-Christian Heritage» that «helps to clarify and correct some... common misunderstandings» between religious groups and unifies the Arabs and makes them proud «of their common inheritance..., the very issues discussed and debated centuries ago still need to be addressed in a renewed theological dialogue with Islam...». He states clearly that his hope is «to assist Christians to know their faith better... [and] to give Muslims a truthful presentation of the Christian beliefs regarding some of the issues raised and discussed in this particular dialogue/debate».

I am pleased to introduce this latest CEDRAC publication of Fr. Nasry to the academic community and the general public. It marks a real contribution to the field of Arab-Christian studies and may generate interest in renewed authentic dialogue between Christians and representatives of Islam in our world today.

Fr. Samir Khalil SAMIR, S.J.

SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

Consonants				Vowels
ء	’	ض	ḏ	Short
ب	b	ط	t	◌ُ u
ت	t	ظ	z	◌ِ i
ث	ṭ	ع	‘	◌َ a
ج	ǧ	غ	ǧ	
ح	ḥ	ف	f	Long
خ	ḫ	ق	q	◌ُ ū
د	d	ك	k	◌ِ ī
ذ	ḏ	ل	l	◌َ ā
ر	r	م	m	
ز	z	ن	n	
س	s	ه	h	
ش	š	و	w	
ص	ṣ	ي	y	

The *tā’ al-marbūṭah* will be rendered “t” when it occurs in the construct state and otherwise “h” to differentiate between it and the vowel “a” at the end of a word.

The *hamza* will be transcribed only when it forms part of the word (both middle and end) and not when it is the first letter; hence, Abū Qurrah and al-Ma’mūn.

This system of transliteration has been followed throughout the text, except in instances in which other authors have been quoted; in such occasions the quoted author’s system of transliteration has been respected. This does not include earlier work of the present author.

ABBREVIATIONS

--	Omitted
+	And
a	Partial quotation (first part of a verse)
Alep.	Aleppo
ar.	Arab
b	Partial quotation (second part of a verse)
b.	Son of
BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
c.	Century
CEDRAC	Centre de documentation et de recherches arabes chrétiennes
cf.	Confer
coll.	Collection
cm.	Centimeter
d.	Died in
ed./eds.	Editor/Editors
e.g.	For example
Exp.	Excerpt
ff.	and following
fn.	Footnote
fol./F.	Folio
Inc.	Incipit
L	Liturgy
ms. (mss.)	Manuscript (Manuscripts)
n. (ns.)	Number (numbers)
NAB	New American Bible
N.C.	No City
N.D.	No Date
N.P.	No Publisher
p.	Page/pages
Par.	Paris
P.I.S.A.I.	Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi ed'Islamistica
pl.	Plural
r	Retro

sic.	It is so in the original text
STh	The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas
T	Theology
v	Verso
v.	Verse
vv.	Verses
vol. (vols.)	Volume (Volumes)
WN	The numbering system of the Critical Edition

SIGLES OF MANUSCRIPTS

<i>Sigles</i>	Abbreviations	Manuscripts
A =	Cairo, Copt. Patr. Theol. 218	Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate Theology 218
B =	Cairo, Copt. Patr. Theol. 86	Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate Theology 86
C =	Cairo, Copt. Patr. Lit. 212	Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate Liturgy 212
D =	Par. ar. 198	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 198
E =	Par. ar. 215	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 215
H =	Par. ar. 70	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 70
I =	Par. ar. 71	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 71
S =	Aleppo Sbath 1004	Aleppo, Bibliothèque de Manuscrits Paul Sbath 1004
M =	Jer. s. Anna 52	Jerusalem S Anna 52
L =	Par. ar. 258	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 258 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France arabe 4771

PART I
THE STUDY

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PREFACE

This work is divided into two major parts. The first part, titled The Study, contains six chapters. The first chapter provides a general introduction that begins with a brief presentation of the Arab-Christian Heritage. It defines the Arab-Christian Heritage and tells where and how it began. This approach situates the dialogue under study in this work in its proper historical, theological and literary contexts. The initial remarks with regard to the Arab-Christian Heritage are followed by a brief presentation of the dialogue under study in this work (*al-Muğādalāh*¹), namely the debate between Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān and some Muslim theologians in the presence and with the participation of the Caliph, al-Ma'mūn². Finally, the general introduction discusses our motives for choosing this particular text.

The Second Chapter presents the methodology of this work. The chapter includes the following: the point of departure, a section dedicated to what is traditionally known as the choice of the base manuscript, the difficulties encountered and the steps taken to create the Critical Edition, general clarifications, clarifications of certain terms, notes regarding the Arabic text of the Critical Edition³, introductory notes regarding the English translation of the Arabic text, and finally a simple explanation as to the arrangements followed in the lexicon.

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- 1 In this work, the word *al-Muğādalāh* and/or *Muğādalāh* refers to the debate under study in this volume. There exists a publication by Fr. Ignace DICK. Ignace Dick, *La discussion d'Abū Qurrah avec les ulémas musulmans devant le calife al-Ma'mūn* (N.C. : N. P., 1999).
 - 2 He is al-Ma'mūn, 'Abd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Rašīd b. al-Mahdī b. al-Manšūr, b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (786-833). He is the eldest son of Hārūn al-Rašīd and a Persian concubine, *Marāḡil*. He is the seventh Abbasid Caliph.
 - 3 The Arabic text of the Critical Edition is published separately by the CEDRAC (Centre de documentation et de recherches arabes chrétiennes) - Université Saint-Joseph. The Critical Edition, includes a comparison and contrast of a number of different available Arabic manuscripts which document the encounter between Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān and some Muslim theologians in the presence and with the participation of the Caliph, al-Ma'mūn. A number of the original Arabic texts are for the first time compared, verified and documented. The Arabic text is punctuated, grammatically determined by the *taškīl*, and designated with proper titles and subtitles. Parts of additional manuscripts are included separately for further clarification of the points advanced, along with the Arabic critical edition.

The Third Chapter is dedicated to describing the various details concerning the multiple manuscripts studied in order to produce the Critical Edition. The chapter includes a chronological listing of the available manuscripts examined as well as the *sigle* assigned to each. The chapter also contains the schema of the manuscripts examined and a detailed description of the eight manuscripts included, entire or in part, in the Critical Edition. Each manuscript description includes an external as well as internal detailed report of its content. In addition, special attention is given to Abū Qurrah's text in each manuscript, including its pagination, place in the schema, gaps and additions, organization, use of margins and writing characteristics.

The Fourth Chapter centers the attention on the problem of authenticity. It deals with the *status quaestionis* of the text under study and serves as an introduction to Abū Qurrah. Both negative as well as positive arguments for the authenticity of the content of the text of *al-Muğāḍalah* are given, and our own position is clearly stated.

The Fifth Chapter is a commentary on and an analysis of nearly all of the issues discussed in the debate under study. Chapter Five includes an outline of *al-Muğāḍalah* as a whole. The outline is followed by a commentary and analysis: the scribe's introduction and each major section of the debate are discussed in detail, emphasizing the commonality of certain issues in an inter-religious dialogue with Islam through an ongoing reference to another occasion in which the same issues were brought forth in a similar encounter.

The Sixth Chapter serves as a general conclusion. It includes a summation of The Study part of the work and a list of the issues discussed in the debate. Emphasis on the importance of the text and the core issue, which in fact serves as a substratum of the entire *Muğāḍalah*, are also discussed. Finally, a look to the future signals what remains to be done with regard to this particular *Muğāḍalah*.

The second major part includes the English translation of the debate with proper explanatory footnotes, an index, a lexicon, a glossary of idiomatic expressions, a list of the biblical as well as the *qur'ānic* references and annexes. A bibliography of the work cited is also provided.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A. THE ARAB-CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

The Arab-Christian Heritage emerges as one of the Middle East's best kept secrets.¹ This heritage is vast in its diversity, rich in its roots and universal in its content. Most of all, the Arab-Christian Heritage was composed in times and places where the Christians had to *give a reason for their hope* (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) to those who asked. In spite of these important characteristics, the bulk of this heritage is yet to be unearthed, examined and published.

All that was written by the early Arab-Christians, be it original documents or translated manuscripts, religious or secular, represents the Arab-Christian Heritage. A listing would include philosophy, history, science, literature, art, as well as sacred writings. Historically, the Arab-Christian Heritage began centuries before the birth of Islam² and continued even stronger after its spread into the Middle East and Europe.³

1 We follow Fr. Samir Khalil in both his definition and range of the Arab-Christian Heritage. In fact, our presentation of the Arab-Christian Heritage is based on his writings, lectures and private encounters. See in particular, Samir Khalil SAMIR, «Al-Turāt al-'Arabī al-Masīhī al-Qadīm,» in: *Ṣadiq al-Kāhin* (1983), p. 35-49.

2 «... with some poets (such as Zayd b. 'Adī) and orators (such as Quss b. Sā'idah)». SAMIR, *Al-Turāt* (1983), p. 38.

3 The rapid increase in the number of the manuscripts from the eighth century forward is a simple matter of fact. For a verification of this fact, the reader needs only to glance at the dates of the various manuscripts listed in the proper catalogues. These include the following: Georg GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, coll. «Studi e Testi», 5 volumes, 118, 133, 146, 147, 172 (Città del Vaticano: 1944-1953); Georg GRAF, *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire*, coll. «Studi e Testi» 63 (Città del Vaticano: 1934); Gérard TROUPEAU, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, première partie, manuscrits chrétiens*, t. I, ns. 1-323 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1972); Gérard TROUPEAU, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, première partie, manuscrits chrétiens*, t. II, n. 780-6933 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1974); Joseph NASRALLAH, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église Melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle ; contribution à l'étude de la littérature arabe chrétienne*, vol. 2, t. II, 750-x^e siècle (Louvain: Peeters, 1988); Marcus Pasha SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Mss. in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt*, fasc. I –

Geographically, the Arab-Christian Heritage spread from the Middle East to Spain.⁴ Culturally, this heritage drew from rich and various cultural fonts. These include the Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Maronite, Armenian, and Latin.⁵ The Arab-Christians were affiliated with different denominations. Central to their differences was their belief in and understanding of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. There were the Nestorians, who allegedly believed in two natures and two persons;⁶ the Jacobites, who supposedly believed in one nature and one person;⁷ and the Melkites who believed in two natures and One Person.⁸ Hence, this heritage was not limited to one single expression of a certain nationality or denomination, or to a single cultural background. Rather this heritage is comprehensive and derived from the diversity of the national, ethnic and denominational backgrounds of the Arab-Christians. The sum of each group's contribution has informed, formed and enriched the whole heritage.

As pointed out by Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, the Arabic language played an important role in uniting the Arab Christians and bringing them closer to one

Catalogue of the Mss. In the Library of the Coptic Patriarchate, vol. II, Fasc. I. (Būlāq, Cairo: Government Press, 1942); Paul SBATH, *Bibliothèque de manuscrits Paul Sbath, Catalogue*, t. I (Cairo : H. Friedrich et Co., 1928), as well as others in the field.

4 SAMIR, *Al-Turāṭ* (1983), p. 37.

5 SAMIR, *Al-Turāṭ* (1983), p. 37.

6 Today, there are serious questions as to whether this was what the Nestorians really believed. For example, in our study of the debate between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī, the Nestorian belief in the unity of the Person of Jesus, the Christ, is expressed by the highest representative authority of that Church at the time. In that debate, Timothy I, when discussing Jesus, the Christ, expresses One Person. It is the place at which the unity is achieved that seems to differ. A further study of the issue is needed to determine whether this is in fact the case; it seems that the misunderstanding was a result of semantics, that is to say different ways of expressing the same belief in different languages that carry different significances and connotations to the same words and/or expressions. Timothy's own words speak for themselves. Addressing the Caliph al-Mahdī, he writes, «We do not deny the duality of natures, O King, nor their mutual relations, but we profess that both of them constitute one Christ and Son». Alphonse MINGANA, *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, edited and translated with critical apparatus* (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons Limited, 1928), p. 19. And again, he writes, «... the Word-God; He is one with His humanity, while preserving the distinction between His invisibility and His visibility, and between His Divinity and His humanity. Christ is *one* in His Sonship, and *two* in the attributes of His natures». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 20.

7 Doubt has been cast on this long held belief as well. For more explanations of this issue, see Samir Khalil SAMIR, «Maḏāhib al-Naṣārā li-l-Mū'taman b. al-'Assāl», in: *Ṣadiq al-Kāhin* (1983), p. 92-94.

8 There were never doubts about the firmness of their belief; the proof is evident even in the text under consideration in this work.

another.⁹ Before the Arab-Muslim conquest of the Middle East,¹⁰ the Christians of the region spoke different languages¹¹ and lived in diverse cultures. This fact, along with other factors such as politics and economics, contributed to their differences in philosophical and theological areas that sometimes led to conflicts and estrangements.

After the Islamic conquest, Arabic slowly became the official language of the people of the region, and the process of *arabization*, the movement to a heterogeneous culture, began. In different Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the Arabic language and culture acted as unifying factors just as the Greek language and Hellenist culture had done for that culture during the first centuries of Christianity. In his 1983 article introducing the Arab-Christian Heritage, Fr. Samir Khalil Samir lists as examples of the unity of faith among the diverse Christian denominations ten Arabic works of ecumenical literature that were produced between 780 and 1260.¹² These are but a sample of the ancient manuscript treasures that are still waiting to be researched.

B. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF *AL-MUĞĀDALAH* UNDER STUDY IN THIS WORK

Many scholars have found in the records of the ancient past cherished treasures of great literary and historical worth, sociological and scientific importance, and philosophical and theological significance. The ancient manuscripts of the Near-Eastern Arab-Christian literature are a prime example. One important finding is the record of a debate held in 781 between the Patriarch Mar Timothy I¹³ and the Caliph al-Mahdī.¹⁴ The debate is full of precious elements that can guide us in inter-religious

9 SAMIR, *Al-Turāṭ* (1983), p. 40-41.

10 The Muslims conquered Jerusalem (638), Syria, Egypt, Palestine (641), Cyprus, and Tripoli in Africa (644-650) and established a kingdom in Spain (705-717), and the Abbasid dynasty, in which the debate under study is said to have taken place, was established by the early part of the ninth century. Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. xiv-xvi.

11 The main languages of the region were Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Armenian. Cf. SAMIR, *Al-Turāṭ* (1983), p. 40-41.

12 SAMIR, *Al-Turāṭ* (1983), p. 42-44.

13 Timothy I was the Nestorian Patriarch from 780 to 823.

14 Al-Mahdī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad, was the third Abbasid Caliph. He reigned from 775-785.

dialogue with Islam today. For example, the usual polemical tone of debaters towards their opponents on such occasions, a tone which is present in the debate under study in this work, is absent in the celebrated debate of 781. In that debate, we find instead many signs of reciprocal respect and affection between the interlocutors, namely Patriarch Mar Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī.

Another lesser known Muslim-Christian debate is said to have taken place fifty years later in 829. Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān is said to have debated the Muslim elites of Qurayš, as well as other scholars from different centers of Islam. This debate boasted the presence and participation of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.

Through discussion with Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, and Fr. Michel Lagarde as well as through consultations with other scholars in the fields of Arab-Christian studies, Islamic studies and inter-religious dialogue, we determined that a Critical Edition of the Arabic manuscripts of the debate between Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān on one side and the Muslims of his time and place on the other would be a valuable tool for fostering an authentic and meaningful Christian-Muslim dialogue today.

A preliminary reading of the document shows it to be rich in content with over thirty theological issues, most of which are still in need of further discussion. Among the more critical theological issues in the debate are the following: The differences between the commandments of Jesus and the mandates in the Law of Moses, the unity of Divinity and humanity in Jesus; God's omniscience and human freedom, the impassibility and immutability of God, and Jesus' freedom in giving up His life on the cross. Other religious-social issues emerging in the 829 debate include freedom of speech, human and angelic freedom of choice, the *Qur'ān's* view of Christians, *takfīr* (declaring another to be an infidel, a non-Muslim), the image of paradise, and *ḡihād*¹⁵ (holy war) as a way to heaven.

It is clear, even from the short list¹⁶ presented above, that the topics and issues debated by Christians and Muslims over eleven hundred years ago remain current in the contemporary world. Many of these issues are in fact

15 Cf. Samir Khalil SAMIR, *Cento Domande sull'islam* (Genova, Italia: Marietti, 2002), p. 34.

16 For a fuller list of the topics discussed in *al-Muḡāḍalah*, see «Abū Qurrah and the central issue of *al-Muḡāḍalah*: Who do you say that I am?» section of the «General Conclusion» chapter in this work.

plaguing contemporary Muslim society and causing much damage to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The issue of *al-takfir* is a prime example.¹⁷

C. MOTIVES FOR CHOOSING THIS PARTICULAR DEBATE

In his book *As Bread That is Broken*, Fr. Peter G. van Breemen, S.J. observed "One of the deepest needs of the human heart is the need to be appreciated. Every human being wants to be valued."¹⁸ For one to be appreciated, however, one must first be known to the other. Similarly, the Arab-Christians and their Heritage need first to be known in order to be valued. Our motives for choosing to study this particular debate that focuses on an Arab-Christian church leader are simple and straightforward. They can be classified into three categories, namely cultural, academic-theological and pastoral.

1. Cultural motives

Although the Arab-Christian Heritage is known among specialists and theologians today, it is unknown to the majority population of Arabs as well as non-Arabs, both Christians and Muslims. This heritage remains hidden, mostly in western museums and libraries. Hence, our endeavor stems, in part, from a profound desire to return this cultural heritage to its rightful owners and to share it with all people.

In addition, many Westerners have heard neither of the role of the Arab-Christians in the history of the Church nor of the crucial role of their presence in the world today. For example, many cultured and highly educated people in the United States as well as in Europe are surprised to know that I was born to a Catholic family in Egypt. «When did you convert to Christianity?» is a common, but irritating question posed to many Arab-Christians by Westerners. The questioners are completely ignorant of the fact that Egypt, as well as other parts of the Middle East, was evangelized by

17 An example demonstrating the importance of and the harm caused by this issue today is briefly discussed in the «The importance of this text» section of the «General Conclusion» chapter in this work.

18 Peter G. VAN BREEMEN, *As Bread that is Broken* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1974), p. 9.

apostles, disciples and first-generation Christians.¹⁹ Many Westerners are unaware that at one time, before the Islamic conquest of Egypt, almost the entire Egyptian population was composed of Christians. They are oblivious, as are many Egyptians, that even the word *Coptic*, which many associate with being *Christian*, simply means Egyptian.

In addition, among modern Arab-Christians, as well as some Muslims, the word *Arab* is seldom used to identify themselves. Rather, they are *Coptic* or *Maronite*. They will say that they are of *Egyptian* or *Phoenician* origin but not Arab. In fact, some people are insulted if the word *Arab* is attached to their identity, as if an Arab race exists some place. This might be due to the fact that Islam identifies itself with the word *Arab*, and many Christians desire to make it very clear that they are not Muslims. In addition, some Muslims wish to detach themselves from the currently widespread image of Islam.

When applied to a person, Arabic is an adjective used to portray a person who was raised in and/or who adopts a specific culture, namely the Arabic culture, regardless of one's religious beliefs. The Arabic culture includes many different ethnic, religious, political and other diverse groups. We hope that claiming our Arab-Christian Heritage helps to clarify and correct some of these common misunderstandings and unify the Arabs and make them proud of their common inheritance.

2. *Academic and theological motives*

In theology, the bulk of the Arab-Christian Heritage is marginalized, in spite of sporadic attempts to reverse the situation. During my many years of theological studies in the United States, not one of the courses offered in the seminary curriculums concerned the works of any Arab-Christian Father of the Church. In fact, when I discovered that the Church of Alexandria was the world's leading theological center for a long period in the church's history,²⁰ I surprised my fellow seminarians with the research finding.

19 For example, according to tradition Egypt was evangelized by St. Mark, the evangelist, himself.

20 This was before the Arab conquest of Egypt. The point is simply the marginalization of certain important parts of the common Christian heritage. The same can be found in the history text books in Egypt; therein, one finds no mention of any of the important Egyptian Fathers of the church or the role they played in shaping Christianity as it is today, although the history of Islam is abundantly presented.

Furthermore, in the past, scholars were content to study their own religion and deepen their own faith, while ignoring other religious belief systems. That might have sufficed in the past, but judging from the history of the modern world, this method did not work very well. People of different religions still do not understand one another.

Today, we have to come to realize the importance of comparative studies in religion, not only for understanding the other faiths but also for better knowing oneself and one's own faith, belief system, and world view. With the recent advances in the fields of transportation and communication, the world is indeed becoming ever closer. Regardless of where they live and/or what they do, Christians today cannot ignore Islam. Therefore, it is important to know what members of the religion of Islam actually believe in order to help Christians better understand Muslims as well as one another. Similarly, it is valuable to know the Muslim's perception of Christianity as well as what objections Muslims have towards basic Christian beliefs.

Producing a Critical Edition of the manuscripts recording the debate between Bishop Abū Qurrah and the Muslims of his time is of considerable academic and theological value due to the theological richness of the debate contents. It can be especially valuable with regard to reopening a true theological dialogue with Islam at the present time. As pointed out above and will become clear below, the very issues discussed and debated centuries ago still need to be addressed in a renewed theological dialogue with Islam.

3. Pastoral motives

The word *dialogue* seems to be the popular word in current religious, social and political circles; it is the *moda* at many different levels and in many walks of life today. Many Christian scholars contend that a dialogue with Islam is impossible. Other scholars exhibit a bit more *naïveté* in their sincere, well intentioned efforts to enter into dialogue with representatives of Islam. They go so far as to trivialize their basic Christian beliefs for the sake of dialogue. They do this mostly out of ignorance of their own faith and/or that of the other religions. Such well intentioned people often do far more damage than good to both Christians as well as Muslims.

In addition, there are many challenges presented by the Muslims to the Christians, in every part of the world today. In some places, there have been attacks launched against Christians by Muslims. Some assert that this is not the way the *Qur'ān* requires a Muslim to dialogue or behave while others confirm it as the authentic way of proceeding that Muslims are required to follow. Christians, for the most part and for many motives, remain silent. Christian silence may be due to ignorance, indifference, timidity and/or fear. Through the discussion of this text, we hope to bring a deepening of understanding of some of the differences as well as the common ideas Christianity shares with Islam.

The study of this debate offers an example of what has been and could be done by dialogue with Islam. It is an example of how an educated Christian responded to the objections and inquiries of Muslims. A study of this dialogue helps us understand how the early Arab-Christians dealt with the challenge of Islam in their own context. In many ways, this study helps Christians understand their own religion and better define and clarify their beliefs. Therefore, in the process of studying this text in a Critical Edition, we hope to assist Christians to know their faith better. We also hope to give Muslims a truthful presentation of the Christian beliefs regarding some of the issues raised and discussed in this particular dialogue/debate.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

A. POINT OF DEPARTURE

Fr. Samir's prolific writing on the subject has provided an invaluable comprehensive bibliography of Abū Qurrah's collected works which serves as the starting point of this study.¹ The bibliography directed us to the proper catalogues indicating the survival of different manuscripts in which the account of the debate between Abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn is documented.

The first catalogue, that of Georg Graf,² gives the references and the general whereabouts of most of the manuscripts concerning our text.³ Graf lists the debate under section eighteen for Abū Qurrah, entitled «False Writings»⁴. He justly points out that «... the manuscript tradition is not uniform», and he adds, «With the popularity of such writings, linguistic and content-alterations, namely additions and copy and paste could not fail to occur in the traded-on text»⁵. Nevertheless, before listing the different references of the manuscripts, he notes a «first group of texts that are the relatively closest to the original despite many variations»⁶. Under this group, he lists twelve different manuscripts. These are the following:

Borg. ar. 135 (karš.), ff. 157v-172v (J. 1408). Par. ar. 70 (15. Jh.), ff. 147r-201v, 206r-215v; 198 (15. Jh.), ff. 21v-82r ; 215 (J. 1590), ff. 228v-260v. Par. syr. 204 (karš., 17. Jh.), ff. 1v-24r. Jerus. s. Anna 52, S. 294-324 (17. Jh.). Kairo 465 (18. Jh.), ff. 71r-123r; 469 (18. Jh.), ff. 127r-159v ; 537 (17. Jh.), ff. 249r-300v. Sbath 1004 (18. Jh.), S. 243-309. [he adds] To these belong also one indicated by L. Delaporte in *Nouvelles archives des missions*

1 Cf. Samir Khalil SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah wa-l-Marāḡi'*, coll. «Mawsū'at al-Ma'rifah al-Masīhiyyah», vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 2000), p. 9-32; see also, Samir Khalil SAMIR, «al-Ġadīd fī-Sīrat Tāwudūrus Abū Qurrah wa-Ātārihi», in: *Al-Mašriq* 73 (1999), p. 417-449.

2 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 7-25.

3 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21-22.

4 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

5 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

6 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

scientifiques et littéraires 17 (1908) 46 in Ṣaidā and one (coming from Yabrūd) in the possession of Ḥabīb Zayyāt, *Ḥazā'in al-Kutub*, etc. p. 181; compare *Orientalia Christ. Per.* 6 (1940) 88.⁷

Graf gives another list of manuscripts, which he assigns to the Jacobite tradition. They are the following:

Par. ar. 5141 (J. 1887), ff. 73v-86r. Par. syr. 238 (karš., J. 1473), ff. 167r-188r. Berlin syr. 199 (karš.), ff. 1v-6v, unvollst.; 247, ff. 1v-47v (karš., J. 1845). Mingana syr. 190 (karš., J. 1874), ff. 1r-24r; 444 (karš., J. 1890), ff. 131v-170r. Bairut 670 (J. 1886).⁸

However, even with the sum of both groups, the list is not complete.

The second catalogue we examined was that of Nasrallah,⁹ which adds three other manuscripts to Graf's first list, namely,

Par. arab. 71 (xvi^e s.), ff. 12v-41v; 258 (xv^e s.), ff. 231r-247, et Nasrallah 2 (xvii^e s.), pp. 45-76.¹⁰ [Nasrallah adds four manuscripts to the Jacobite tradition. These are] «l'Orientale 671 (xix^e s.), le Mār 'Abda 77 (xvi^e-vii^e s.), le Par. arab. 5141 (1884), 72v-85v et le Nasrallah 5 (xix^e s.), pp. 1-19...¹¹

The sum of the known manuscripts of the Melkite family, indicated by Graf and Nasrallah, is fifteen. At this point, the list of all *known* manuscripts with regard to our text is complete.

Next, we examined the particular catalogues of the various libraries housing the manuscripts as well as the ones indicating their actual locations. These include libraries in Italy, France, Egypt and Syria.

Due to the large number of manuscripts present in different languages, alphabets and traditions, it was decided from the outset to limit the Critical Edition to three or four manuscripts. Hence, the decision was made to concentrate our study on the Melkite family of manuscripts and focus our work on the Arabic manuscripts written in the Arabic alphabet.

At this point, we were ready for the collection of the different manuscripts. This was not an easy task. It demanded not only contact with but also many trips to the different places where the various manuscripts are presently housed. For our present research, the most important of all the libraries has been the BnF.

7 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21-22.

8 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 22.

9 NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 124-125.

10 NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 124.

11 NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 125.

B. THE CHOICE OF THE BASE MANUSCRIPT

The first issue facing a researcher, once all the available manuscripts have been collected and examined, is to determine which of the manuscripts at hand is the most authentic. This document would then become the base manuscript for the Critical Edition. The variants in the other manuscripts would be documented in footnote citations.

In our debate manuscripts, at this point in time, it is almost impossible to determine which single Abū Qurrah debate manuscript is the most authentic. First, none of the manuscripts at hand goes back to Abū Qurrah's time. Second, no manuscript available is, or claims to be, written by or a copy of a manuscript written or dictated by Abū Qurrah himself. Third, it is clearly evident that additions and omissions have been made by every scribe who transcribed the text. Fourth, due to the gap of several centuries between the actual debate in the early ninth century and the recording of it in the oldest manuscript at hand, in the fifteenth century, the possibility that a more recent manuscript may have been copied from a document older than the oldest manuscript at hand is always plausible. As a matter of fact, a sixteenth or a seventeenth century manuscript could have been copied from a manuscript recorded in the thirteenth or the tenth century. For all of these reasons, we apply another method for developing our Critical Edition, one that would allow us to include as much as possible of the important contents of the various manuscripts incorporated into the Critical Edition.

We examined all the above mentioned manuscripts with the exception of Nasrallah 2 and the «one indicated by L. Delaporte in *Nouvelles archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires* 17 (1908) 46 in Şaida and one (coming from Yabrūd) in the possession of Ḥabīb Zaiyāt, *Hazā'in al-Kutub*, etc. p. 181; compare *Orientalia Christ. Per.* 6 (1940) 88»¹². That is to say, we examined eleven manuscripts from the list of twelve indicated by Graf and the three indicated by Nasrallah as belonging to the Melkite family. Borg 135 was excluded, as it is not written in Arabic alphabet but in *garšūnī*. In addition, we were not able to locate Nasrallah 2 and the «one indicated by L. Delaporte in *Nouvelles archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires* 17 (1908) 46 in Şaida and one (coming from Yabrūd) in the possession of

12 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21-22.

Ḥabīb Zaiyāt, *Ḥazā'in al-Kutub*, etc. p. 181; compare *Orientalia Christ. Per.* 6 (1940) 88»¹³.

After studying the available manuscripts carefully, we noted that the story line is the same in all the Arabic Melkite-origin manuscripts written in Arabic. We also recognized that these form three different branches and within a given branch, the variants are almost always editorial or have to do with a scribe's style and/or eccentricities. Thus we made the decision to follow the eclectic-critical method and way of proceeding developed by Fr. Samir Khalil Samir. This method we identify as the «eclectic-critical Samir method» or, abbreviated, «Samir method».

The «Samir method» includes determining as much as possible of the original debate from what is recorded in the various manuscripts and/or from what we deem might have been the original thought of the author; and in our case we also made judgments based on what we estimate important to an inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and Islam. This was not a simple method to adopt. It demanded a great deal of humility before the texts and familiarity with the author's writing and arguing styles, recurring expressions, favorite examples, philosophical and theological positions, and thought patterns. In the eclectic-critical Samir method, the text of the Critical Edition remains in flux until all the manuscripts have been studied and compared and all pertinent material carefully incorporated into the edition.

The stabilized final text is by no means a copy and paste of different parts from different manuscripts. It is a carefully studied and educated hypothesis. In our case, with exceptions, we are closely following but not entirely dependent upon, *as if* a base text, a 16th century manuscript designated as E.¹⁴ E in turn is almost identical to, with few exceptions, the 16th century manuscript designated as D.¹⁵ In combination with E and D, we have also included and made use of H, a 15th century manuscript. H is heavily followed by I, a 16th century manuscript. In addition, upon the advice of Fr.

13 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21-22.

14 For a complete list of our designations, see the «List of the available Arabic Melkite manuscripts examined in chronological order» in the following chapter of this work.

15 We have serious doubts that this manuscript is in fact a 16th century production. It is more likely a 15th century as says Graf; cf. GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21, but since we cannot be sure, we have made the cautious decision, following Fr. Samir's advice, to follow Troupeau. Cf. TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 51.

Samir Khalil Samir, we have included Dick's publication, giving it the same treatment as a manuscript, but with no weight in determining our choices. Dick's publication has been given the minuscule letter "f" to further differentiate it from the original Arabic manuscripts. All variants are meticulously documented in the footnote citations, unless otherwise mentioned beforehand. The Critical Edition, therefore, incorporates manuscripts D, E, H and I as well as Dick's publication in their entirety.

As can be seen in our schema of the eleven examined manuscripts,¹⁶ the Melkite family has three main branches; we name them V, W, and X. The V branch includes the three manuscripts H, I and L. The W branch includes six manuscripts A, B, C, D, E, and Par. ar. 4771. As indicated above, D and E have been completely incorporated in the Critical Edition. A, B, and C have been determined to add nothing more substantial to the debate and would make the footnotes even heavier than they already are. They have been completely incorporated only in the scribe's introduction and the first two major sections of the debate, as a sample, to demonstrate their identity.

Par. ar. 4771 is a very recent and incomplete manuscript and in its entirety would add nothing more than footnotes. It has been excluded. Aleppo 1004 does not belong exclusively to one branch or the other: it is a mixed manuscript that follows both V and W and would contribute, for the most part, no more than footnotes. It has been given the *sigle* S, entered and made use of only in the scribe's introduction and the first two major sections of the debate to demonstrate its identity. Jer. Sainte-Anne 52 is of a different branch of the Melkite family, what we name X, and incorporating it would make the Critical Edition exceedingly and intolerably heavy with footnotes. Therefore, it is deemed beneficial to produce from it yet another separate Critical Edition at a latter date, if necessary. In addition, in the Arabic publication of the Critical Edition, we have included «face to face» section in which samples of the X branch further demonstrates that its addition would not add a new reading.

16 The schema can be found in the following chapter of this work.

C. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE STEPS FOR CREATING THE EDITION

The first difficulty encountered regarded the collection of the various manuscripts. Since all the manuscripts are not housed in the same library, we contacted the different locations and requested copies of the different manuscripts. Not all libraries were favorable to allowing us a copy. The Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, for example, allowed us to examine the manuscripts at location only, which meant a trip to Egypt only to find out that the manuscripts had been removed for restorations to another location, thereby resulting in a long and complicated process of obtaining permission to examine them.

The second difficulty was having a satisfactory copy of each manuscript. The BnF, for example, gave us a hard copy of the proper sections of the manuscripts at request. However, due to the formidable prices of a colored hard copy,¹⁷ the hard copies sent from the BnF were in black and white, and they proved insufficient. An examination of the original manuscripts was necessary, which meant a trip to Paris.

Another related difficulty is the fact that to determine a dependable schema one has to not only look at but also study and compare all the available texts, including the incomplete ones.

Still another difficulty was that of dividing the text into sections and subsections. This basically seemed an impossible endeavor, for the texts appeared as if a *bavard*, circular, with issues coming in, going out and coming back in again with an unknown purpose. Once again, thanks go to Fr. Samir. His persistent demand encouraged us to continue the attempt, and we were able to find the internal logic of the debate, which in turn was translated into the debate's proper table of contents. At this point the value of the texts became vividly clear.

The greatest difficulty of all was to stay the course and resist the temptation of taking the easy way out, which some might consider the right

17 At the time of our request the normal price of a colored hard copy was 20 euros per page, for it seems that they are given for commercial use.

way (and it is certainly the safer route), namely to endorse a manuscript and choose it as a base text, work on it and document the variances of all the others. For example, one can easily make a strong argument for H. According to both Graf and Troupeau, with regard to the text under study, H is one of the oldest known Arabic manuscripts written in Arabic alphabet.¹⁸ H is also shorter, and it is supported by an almost exact copy in I. A similar argument can be made with regard to L. In fact, the latter might be the oldest of them all. It is certainly the shortest, and it is also supported, although not by an exact copy. One can construct an argument for M.¹⁹ However, this would have not been the best way to proceed. The «Samir method» is much more rigorous, but the result is worth the accompanied difficulties. For example, the section 511-580 WN,²⁰ an important section and a beautiful piece of Arab-Christian literature, would have been lost in the footnotes and disregarded as a scribal addition to the original if H were endorsed as the base text.

D. PROPER STEPS FOR CREATING THE EDITION

Based on our own experience of this work, the proper order of steps for producing a Critical Edition of Arabic manuscripts is the following:

1. Determine the exact locations of the manuscripts.
2. Verify the existence of the actual manuscripts.²¹
3. Carefully study all available manuscripts.
4. Draw the proper schema.
5. Decide on the texts necessary to be incorporated into the edition.
6. Incorporate the manuscripts, documenting all variances.

18 See GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21; see also TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 51.

19 We have finished working on and can publish the manuscript if necessary.

20 The Critical Edition is divided not only to sections and subsections but also to different verses, so to speak. As noted in the «Abbreviations», the letters «WN» are the abbreviation for «our numbering system». Hence, the numbers 511 and 580 are the exact verses in our numbering system.

21 For example, Ignace Dick twice reports that Par. ar. 1541 is a model of the Jacobite tradition. Cf. DICK, *La discussion d'Abū Qurrah* (1999), p. 36-37. This is in fact an error, for the aforementioned manuscript does not contain the text referred to by Fr. Dick. In fact, the manuscript is found in Par. ar. 5141, and ordering a copy of the manuscript without verifying the data could have been a waste of funds, time and energy.

7. Do the *taškīl*.
8. Add the proper punctuation.
9. Divide the text into the proper sections and subsections.
10. Translate the text.
11. Add the proper explanatory notes.
12. Create the appropriate lexicon, indexes and table of contents.

E. GENERAL CLARIFICATIONS

All the translations of *qur'ānic* verses in this work are taken from the English translation of the *Qur'ān* by Muhammad M. Pickthall.²² However, with regard to the translation of Arabic text of *al-Muḡāḍalah*, outside of direct quotations of the *Qur'ān* which are placed in the footnotes, the translations in the corresponding phrases in the translated text of *al-Muḡāḍalah* itself are our own in faithfulness to the manuscript texts. That is to say, our translation is to that which is stated in the manuscripts and not the *Qur'ān*, although we provide at the same time the necessary references and explanations in the footnotes. In addition, on a few occasions, a translation of a particular word, while given between quotation marks as it appears in Pickthall's version, is accompanied by our own explanations in order to clarify the meaning further. All *qur'ānic* verses in this work are placed within the normal western quotation system.

As noted above,²³ the italicized capital letters WN refer to our numbering system in the Critical Edition; hence, 735 WN refers the reader to the verse that reads, «Al-Ma'mūn said, "You told the truth (By God!), O Abū Qurrah"».

All the translations of biblical verses in this work are taken from the English translation of the *New American Bible*. With regard to the dates, unless otherwise stated, all dates are of the Common Era.

22 Muhammad Marmaduke PICKTHALL, *The Glorious Qur'an: Text and explanatory translation*, 3rd U.S. edition (Elmhurst, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2004).

23 Cf. «Abbreviations» section as well as fn. n. 20 in this chapter.

F. CLARIFICATIONS OF CERTAIN TERMS

Divine attributes, as well as the eulogies frequently placed after certain names, such as «عَزَّ وَجَلَّ» - all of which are dear to Near-East Muslims and Christians alike - will be left in their original places to preserve the Near-Eastern flavor of the text. We have opted for our own translations of these and other expressions. A list of these as well as their translations is presented in a separate index.

The term «The Word of God and His Spirit» is used differently in different parts of the manuscript. In general, it means «Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ». It is used this way simply because it is the Muslim's own expression with regard to Jesus in the *Qur'ān*.²⁴ These instances include the following: 68, 290, 292, 295, 303, 337, 338, 389, 342, 349, 388, 389, 429, 445, 509, 516, 576, 577, and 699 WN. Occasionally, the text speaks of «The Word of God and His Spirit» as the Second and Third Persons of the Blessed Trinity while still retaining the sense of the Oneness of the Trinity. Abū Qurrah speaks of "Creators" (cf. 138 WN) but follows it immediately with the singular "creature" and "slave", indicating the Oneness in the distinction (cf. 139 WN). Other times, however, the term is used, as just mentioned, to indicate both the Second and the Third Persons of the Blessed Trinity. These occasions include the following: 296, 356, 357, 507, 511, 525, 533, 534, 701, 703, 707, and 709 WN. Other occasions are ambiguous as to whether the text indicates only Jesus or both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. These include the following: 300, 336, 433, 471, 477, 568, 575, 628, and 708 WN.

Personal as well as relative pronouns referring to Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit are capitalized when a Christian is speaking and not capitalized when a Muslim is speaking, for these pronouns do not indicate Divinity for a Muslim.

The term *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf*²⁵ can be translated as «the ordering of what is known»; that is to say, the ordering of what is acknowledged to be good

24 Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:171 b,

«... إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَىٰ مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ...»
«... The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him...»

25 For an excellent article on clarification of the meaning of the *qur'ānic* expression *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf*, see Ary ROEST CROLLIUS, «Mission and Morality», in: *Studia Missionaria* 27 (Roma: Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1978), p. 257-283.

by the Muslims. In this work, it can be rendered «ordering what is accepted» or the shorter «ordering the accepted». Likewise, the opposite expression, *al-nahī* 'an *al-munkar*, can be translated as «the forbidding of what is rejected», again among Muslims, and here it can be rendered «forbidding what is rejected» or the shorter «forbidding the rejected».

The word “*da'wah*”²⁶ can be literally translated, among others, as “invitation”, “invocation”, “a call”, or even “a curse”. It can also mean a petition type of prayer. In the present context, it carries a particular religious meaning and could be translated as «the religious missionary activity of promulgating Islam», to “proselytize”. In this work, it will not be translated, in order to keep the word’s meaning particular to Islam and to differentiate it from its Christian missionary counterpart activity of evangelization.²⁷ The related word “*dā'ī*”, (pl. *du'āh*), meaning the person who performs the “*da'wah*”, will be rendered “*dā'ī*” and the plural *dā'īs*.

The term «مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ» «I take refuge in God» is part of the common speech in the Middle East to this very day. It carries the connotation that what has come before is far from the thought of the speaker and/or the individual is distancing himself and asking for God’s protection from such thing/utterance.

The word “جَوْهَرٌ” rendered in the translation of *al-Muḡāḍalah* Essence / essence is a delicate and thorny theological term. It could have been rendered at times as *Nature*,²⁸ but that would have created some confusion with the word nature used in other contexts of the debate, such as in the discussion of the humanity of Jesus. Each Christian denomination meant by the word “جَوْهَرٌ” something different than the others. In our context, it means «God’s very self» (cf. 349 WN), hence God’s Essence (cf. 341, 386, 468, 550, 566, 666 WN). At times the word is used to signify the essence of creatures (cf. 573, 574, 677 WN). Once the word is used in a philosophical sense to connote *substance* in contrast to *phenomenon* (cf. 643,

26 Not to be confused with the word “*Da'wā*” which means «a claim» or «a lawsuit». Cf. Thomas Patrick HUGHES, *A Dictionary of Islam* (London: Allen & Co., 1935), p. 72.

27 The same was adapted by Roest. See ROEST CROLLIUS, *Mission* (1978), p. 257-283. The same was also adapted by the present author in an earlier work. Cf. Wafik NASRY, *Jesus Christ: The Center and the Summit of the Church's Mission of Evangelization* (Rome: Unpublished Master's Thesis, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004).

28 In fact, this is the way Timothy I uses the word in his debate with al-Mahdī. Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 19.

644 WN); nevertheless, we opted for *Essence / essence*, for it mostly concerns *theological* and *philosophical* concepts, and rendering it as substance could be misunderstood as *matter*. Similarly the word “خَوَاصُّ” is rendered here *Property* (cf. 550, 568 WN). This is also a delicate word to translate. In the singular, it regards an attribute that belongs to a specific Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The noun “مَجْلِسٌ” (pl. “مَجَالِسٌ”) means «a place to sit». It is the noun form that derives from the root “ج ل س”, meaning to sit down.²⁹ *Mağlis* also means a meeting place, an assembly, as in *Mağlis al-a'yān* (the assembly of the elite) or council as in *Mağlis al-wuzarā'* (council of ministers) or *barlamān* as in *Mağlis al-nuwwāb* (the parliament).³⁰

In the Middle East, to hold a *Mağlis* was and continues to be a common activity of the elite, especially but not exclusively, the heads of a group or a tribe, a dignitary or a governor, a chief or a sovereign. These *Mağālis* could be formal or casual, public or private, serious or leisurely.

In our context, the term *Mağlis al-Hilāfah*, speaks of a common Caliph's activity of holding a private or a public audience in which various matters, such as politics, economics, jurisprudence, religion, literature, were discussed, evaluated and/or judged. The scope of these audiences or meetings was not limited to serious matters alone, but they also extended to that of entertainment and recreation, often with music, singing and dancing.³¹

G. NOTES REGARDING THE ARABIC TEXT

The Arabic text of the Critical Edition³² is fully vocalized, punctuated, and classified into various sections and subsections as well as verse numbers, complete with critical apparatus. The Arabic text has also been translated into English, and the translation is included in this volume.

To state the obvious, all words, phrases and/or sentences placed in

29 Cf. *Al-Munğid* (Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 1997), p. 98.

30 See F.C.R. ROBINSON, “Madjlis”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

31 For more information with regard to similar *Mağālis* as the one in which the present debate is said to have taken place, See HAVE LAZARUS-YAFEH, MARK R. COHEN; SASSON SOMEKH & SIDNEY GRIFFITH (eds.), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, coll. vol. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999).

32 Cf. Publication by CEDRAC (Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Arabes Chrétiennes) - Université Saint-Joseph.

brackets are our own. For example, [مَقْدَمَةُ النَّاسِخِ وَتَهْيِئَةُ الْمُنَاطَرَةِ] at the beginning of the Arabic text is our own clarifying addition. As just mentioned, the text is divided into sections and subsections. The entire text is divided into nine major sections and the scribe's introduction. The nine major sections are indicated by Roman numerals I, II, III, etc. Each major section is, in turn, divided into subsections, and these are indicated by the Arabic numbers 1, 2, 3, and so on. These subsections are then divided further, and their divisions are indicated by letters of the European alphabet A, B, C, etc. The scribe's introduction is not included in the nine major sections of the debate to indicate further the fact that it is not part of the debate proper. Nevertheless, it is included in the Critical Edition due to its importance to the understanding of various elements of the text.

All original paginations of all the manuscripts used are included in the Arabic text of the Critical Edition. They are indicated by the proper letter assigned to a particular manuscript and the number of the proper folio, all placed within parentheses. For example, the beginning of the retro of folio seventy-one of manuscript A is cited as such (A 71r). The practice is followed even if a given folio begins in the middle of the sentence. An illustration can be found in the following example, وَتُظْهِرُوا (S 122r) ضَعْفَ; this indicates the beginning of the verso of folio one hundred twenty-two in the original, namely of the S manuscript.

All occurrences of variances of the various manuscripts are meticulously documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text in the normal fashion of regular footnotes; included also are cross reference footnotes, unless otherwise previously noted. Occasionally, the beginning of a certain folio falls within the course of a given footnote. This is treated in the same way it is treated in the main text explained above. In relatively rare occasions, our own clarifying comments needed to be added.

Because the footnotes have become exceedingly numerous, we have lessened them by occasionally including more than one manuscript in a single footnote. This practice also makes clear how certain manuscripts depend upon other older ones. Occasionally, there is a small variance within the same phrase as in one letter within a given word and/or phrase. In these cases, we have included the variance within parentheses after the word in question. To differentiate further between these parentheses and those indicating the beginning of a given folio, we have left them in the same size font and reversed the order of the manuscript's assigned letter and the rest of the information. A clear example of such practice is found in footnote 121 in the first section of the debate in the Arabic. It reads, (I ثم). This indicates the

variance in manuscript I from that of manuscript H, which in this case the scribe wrote “تم”. The footnotes in the Arabic text begin anew with every new major section.

All other comments and explanatory notes are footnoted in the text of the English translation of this volume.

H. NOTES REGARDING THE TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

In the English translation of the Arabic text, our focus has been manifold: First and foremost, the translation strives to guard faithfulness to the various manuscripts and accuracy of the meaning of the original texts. Second, it seizes the milieu of the debate as presented by the various writers of the manuscripts. Third, although much attention has been paid to the smoothness of the translation, it is not at the expense of the above mentioned foci. In fact, we recognize and note the awkwardness of certain phrases in English, and we deliberately left them the way they are to guard faithfulness to the Arabic original.

The English translation of the Critical Edition is presented for the first time. The translation is entirely our own, unless the contrary is noted for some verses of the Bible or the *Qur'ān*. This independence from any English translation of the Bible or the *Qur'ān* for the text of the debate itself, unless otherwise is stated, is followed deliberately because the characters of the debate seem to have cited them from memory; hence, we left any discrepancies as they are actually presented in the manuscripts, for we were not translating the *Qur'ān* or the Bible but the text of the debate under study. In fact, we have avoided comparing what is said in the debate and what is recorded in the *Qur'ān* or the Bible until the very end. In addition, since our familiarity with the *Qur'ān* is in the Arabic, we did not enter the footnotes until the very end, to ensure that our own translation of the text itself would not be influenced by a preconceived notion of what it is in other translations. This is done with one exception, namely «حُورُ الْعَيْنِ». The translation of this term is taken from Yūsuf 'Alī's translation.³³

The verb “سَجَدَ” from the root “س ج د” and the derivatives “سَجْدَةٌ” and “سُجُودٌ” in Arabic are used during the course of *al-Muğādalāh* in different senses, such as prostrating, kneeling, bowing, genuflecting,... etc., and the

33 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'ān: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood & Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1993)

meaning is not hard to understand from the context. In English the differentiations are to be clearly made; hence, they were translated accordingly. Similarly, the word “سَيِّدٌ” derived from the root “س و د” is also used in different senses and the meaning is understood from the context. In English, however, the differentiations must be clearly made.

The verses of the *Qur'ān* are presented in the footnotes in both Arabic and English for specific reasons. First, it has been included to facilitate a comparison. Second, it takes into account that Muslims believe that the Arabic text of the *Qur'ān* cannot be translated; any translation is considered an interpretation. In fact, we whole-heartedly agree with Eric Ormsby who wrote, «English versions, such as those of Arberry, Dawood, Pickthall, Bell, or Yusuf Ali, have their merits, [but] none is completely satisfying»³⁴. The quotation of a given verse, whether from the Bible or the *Qur'ān*, is given the first time the verse is mentioned or referenced. Due to the large number of allusions to the same texts, for the subsequent occurrences of the verses only the citations are given. Occasionally, however, a repetition occurs for one of two reasons. The first reason is to guard the integrity of the translation section. Hence, even if a given verse is mentioned in The Study, it is given again in full the first time it is mentioned in the translation of the text of the debate under study, and at times with the accompanying explanatory notes. The second reason is that the need for an explanation in a subsequent citation of a verse occasionally demands a repetition for clarity and easy reference.

Occasionally during *al-Muḡāḍalah*, the discrepancy between a given word and the way it appears in the *Qur'ān* was a matter of “نُقْطٌ” (dots) under or above a given letter. In that case, we could have opted for following the *qur'ānic* verse, for we would not have changed the “شَكْلٌ” (form) of the word. An example of this can be found in the word “يَتَّبِعُ” (cf. 102 WN). The manuscripts read “اتَّبِعُ” (follows) or “يَتَّبِعُ” (followed) and the *qur'ānic* verse reads “يَتَّبِعُ” (desires). However, we did not adjust the meaning, in keeping with the principle that we are not translating the *Qur'ān* but the text of *al-Muḡāḍalah* as recorded in the manuscripts. In addition, for this particular incident, there is no doubt as to where the scribes have placed the dots. In this and any similar occasion, the original variances of the manuscripts are meticulously documented in the footnotes unless otherwise stated.

In the original Arabic manuscripts, as well as in its counterpart of the

34 Eric ORMSBY, «From Moses to Musa», in: *The New Criterion* 24, n. 2 (2005), p. 28-29.

Critical Edition, the feminine pronouns, personal and/or relative, referring to the Word of God are obviously a grammatical necessity in Arabic,³⁵ for the pronoun, in these cases, refers to the word “كَلِمَةٌ” (Word) and/or the word “رُوح” (Spirit), which are both feminine nouns (cf. 69 WN). This is not the case in English. Hence, these were by design changed to the proper English masculine pronoun, for the reference is to the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ (cf. 340, 341 WN). When, in the context, the pronoun refers to the term «Word of God and His Spirit», the English word is rendered the neutral “It” with capital letter when the speaker is Abū Qurrah (cf. 69 WN - and in the case of the Word as well - cf. 794, 795 WN) and “it” without the capital letter for a Muslim speaker (cf. 68 WN).

The confusion created as to the antecedent of the Arabic pronouns is notoriously known; hence, the reason for the clarifications added between brackets is to ensure smooth understanding in English.

I. NOTES REGARDING THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LEXICON

An Arabic-English lexicon is provided for over 95% of the entire text. The lexicon, however, does not include any additions made by us, such as titles, subtitles, clarifications and/or footnotes. With regard to the arrangement of the lexicon, each root entry begins with the verbs in the following order:

اَفْتَعَلَ	تَفَعَّلَ	فَعَلَ
اِفْعَلَّ	تَفَاعَلَ	فَعَّلَ
اِسْتَفْعَلَ	اِنْفَعَلَ	فَاعَلَ
		اَفْعَلَ

The verbs are then followed by other parts of speech according to Hans Wehr's classification.³⁶

35 However, this is not always the case, even in the *Qur'ān*. In fact, the *Qur'ān* treats the word “كَلِمَةٌ” as feminine except when it referred to Jesus. Cf. *Qur'ān* 3:45,

«إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ» (emphasis ours)

36 Hans WEHR, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, J. Milton COWAN (ed.) (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; London: Macdonald & Evans LTD., 1980).

CHAPTER THREE

THE MANUSCRIPTS

A. INTRODUCTION

As pointed out above,¹ the sum of the known manuscripts of the Melkite family is fifteen and eleven in the Jacobite tradition. From among these manuscripts, our concern is focused on the available Melkite manuscripts written in the Arabic alphabet, a total of eleven manuscripts. Some of these manuscripts are complete while others are incomplete. The following is a general list of the available Melkite manuscripts written in the Arabic alphabet, according to their chronological order.

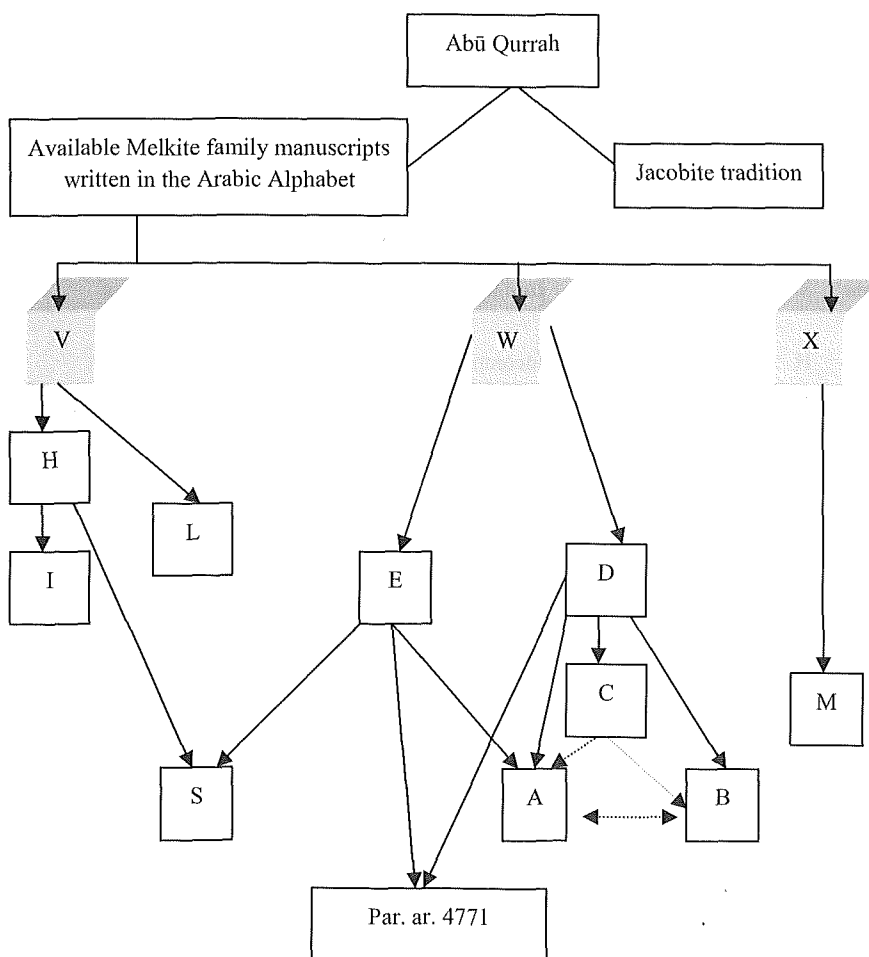
1. List of the available manuscripts examined in chronological order

Date	Sigle		Remark	Incorporation into the edition
15 c.	H	Par. ar. 70	Incomplete	Fully incorporated
15 c.	L	Par. ar. 258	Incomplete	Partly presented in the additional manuscript section of the Arabic edition
16 c.	I	Par. ar. 71	Complete	Fully incorporated
16 c.	D	Par. ar. 198	Incomplete	Fully incorporated
16 c.	E	Par. ar. 215	Complete	Fully incorporated
17 c.	C	Cairo L 212	Complete	Partly incorporated
17 c.	M	Jer. s. Anna 52	Complete	Partly presented in the additional manuscript section of the Arabic edition
18 c.	A	Cairo T 218	Complete	Partly incorporated
18 c.	B	Cairo T 86	Complete	Partly incorporated
18 c.	S	Alep. 1004	Complete	Partly incorporated
19 c.		Par. ar. 4771	Incomplete	Discarded

¹ See the «Point of departure» in the “Methodology” chapter in this work for more details.

Once again, we note that we have also examined and included in the Critical Edition the published *Muğādalāh* of Ignace Dick. The publication has been treated as if it were a manuscript, although it was not given any weight in determining the choice of a given word or expression. This privilege is given to the original manuscripts alone. Moreover, to differentiate between Dick's publication and the actual manuscripts at a glance, the publication has been assigned the minuscule letter "f".

2. The schema of the manuscripts examined



The following is a detailed description of the eight manuscripts included, entire or in part, in the Critical Edition. These are A, B, C, D, E, H, I, and S.

B. PAR. AR. 70² (= H)

- Date: 15th Century.
- Dimensions: 16x11 cm.; with 12x7 cm. of written space; each page contains 9 lines.
- Writing and copying: Syrian *nashīr* (Plate 1). The scribe is not named nor is the manuscript dated, although on page 147r, there is a mark of ownership of deacon ‘Abd Allāh and the mark’s date indicates the year 1069 without specifying to which system the year belongs.³
- Content: Abū Qurrah’s text occupies the fourth and final section of the manuscript. The manuscript contains a total of 215 folios. The following is a list of the different parts:
1. F. 215v, 1v-49v, 207, (one folio lost) 202-205v. The story of Rechabites,⁴ the sons of Jonadab,⁵ by Zūsīmā. There is some

2 Cf. TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 50-51; GRAF, *GCAL II* (1947), p. 21. Graf includes 207r-207v as a part of Abū Qurrah’s text while Troupeau notes the fact that these pages do not belong to the text. The latter is correct. Troupeau also remarks that the manuscript was bought in Constantinople by Sevin and that there is a mark of ownership by the deacon ‘Abd Allāh. The mark bears the year 1069 of an unspecified system; it is on folio 147 - [Anc. Cote: A. F. 170]. There is also a note of J. Ascari in Aramaic. This bears the year 1855. Finally, there is also the emblem of Napoleon I.

3 For additional details see the previous footnote.

4 The story of the Rechabites is part and parcel of the Old Testament: «Rechab was the father of Jonadab who... appears as a fervent supporter of Jehu’s attack on the House of Achab in his endeavour to root out the idolatrous worship which that dynasty had encouraged. The characteristic principles which actuated his descendants, the Rechabites, we gather from Jeremias, xxxv, where the Rechabites, being invited to drink wine, answered: We will not drink wine: because Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: “You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your children, for ever: Neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any, but you shall dwell in tents all your days, that you may live many days upon the face of the earth, in which you are strangers” (Jeremiah 35:6, 7). It was evidently the belief of Jonadab and the Rechabites that settled life with its forms of civilization led to apostasy from the Jewish religion». James F. DRISCOLL, «Rechab and the Rechabites». *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. Retrieved on August 19th 2008 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12676a.htm>. See also 1 Chronicles 2:55.

5 Jonadab was the son of Rechab. The sons of Jonadab are called Rechabites, for they as well as their father are descendants of Rechab.

confusion with the pagination, and the text is incomplete at the end.⁶

- Inc. اعلموا ايها الاخوة المباركين والاولاد الروحانيين ان هذا الرجل
الالهى انبا زوسيمما جزم في اول رهبانيته خدمة مرضيه.⁷
Exp. كان له. واخذ معه الانجيل المقدس وصليت في يده وسار في البرية
طالبًا الرب من كل قلبه.⁸

2. F. 50-126r. The legend of the monk, Baḥīrā. The text is missing a part of its beginning (cf. ms. Arabe 215, folio 155, 9th line). According to Troupeau, two pages are missing between 55r-56r (cf. *Ibidem*, folio. 156v 9-157, 6th line). One page missing between 63r-64r⁹ (cf. *Ibidem*, folio 159, 8-17).¹⁰

- Exp. ... وابصرت اسد ابيض وقد اقبل من داخل البريه. واكل الشرق
والغرب والبريه. والشام وشرب ما البحر. وانحدر الى الغرب.¹¹
3. F. 126v-147r. The wisdom of Sabīlā.¹²

- Inc. كان هذا من بعد خروج بني اسراييل وبعد ان سلكوا في البرية اياما
معلومة.

4. F. 147v-191v, 194r-201v, 206r-v, 208r-211v, 192r-194v, 212r-215r.¹³ Controversy between Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān and Muslim theologians in the court of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.¹⁴

- Inc. لما كان في زمان السيد المامون امير المومنين احضر الاب الاسقف
ابو قرة الى مجلسه واجلسه بين يديه باكرام.¹⁵

6 GRAF, GCAL I (1944), p. 215; GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 487.

7 We completed the sentence that Troupeau began both in the middle and the end.

8 The excerpt is different than that of Troupeau.

9 There is a misprint in TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 50, namely that it reads, «*lacune de 1 fol. entre les fol. 63 et 54*».

10 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 145.

11 The excerpt is lacking in Troupeau.

12 GRAF, GCAL I (1944), p. 294.

13 The order given by Troupeau is the following: 147v-201v, 206r-206v, 208-215. Troupeau fails to mention the internal confusion within the arrangements of the folios.

14 Troupeau points out that there are two pages missing between 211v-212r, referring his reader to ms. Arab 215, folio 254v, 8th line from the bottom to folio 256v, 8th line from the bottom. In fact one folio is not missing but misplaced. These pages can be found in 194r-194v. See also GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

15 We completed the sentence that Troupeau began.

1. *Abū Qurrah's Text*

- Pagination: 147v-191v, 194r-201v, 206r-v, 208r-211v, 192r-194v, 212r-215r. There are two different paginations: one Coptic and the other Arabic; both are in the upper left corner of the retro. We are following the Arabic numbering.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the "V" branch of the Melkite family. The manuscript is the oldest of its branch.
- Gaps and additions: In the absence of an older manuscript of this branch, it is impossible to determine, at this time, whether the gaps and additions are editorials. They can be considered, at best, part of the original and a more authentic account. However, they may also be a summarization of an older account or the manuscript might be a copy of old fragments of a slightly different account. Whatever the case may have been, these gaps and additions are present in many occasions as a matter of fact. The scribe's introduction is a clear example of such gaps (cf. H 147v-148r). The missing portion corresponds to 2c-16 WN. Another example can be found during al-Kūfī's interventions, the scribe skips Abū Qurrah's question and presents the point as if it were al-Ma'mūn's admission of Abū Qurrah's correctness. In addition, the scribe omits the description of al-Ma'mūn's sentiments towards Abū Qurrah (cf. H 190v-191r). This section corresponds to 478b-490 WN. This is to cite one of the shorter examples, but there exist many other more substantial gaps. For example, one such gap corresponds to 511-580 WN. These, as well as other variances, are all documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text.
- Organization: H is not well organized and has many sudden leaps back and forth. Due to such leaps (mentioned above in the pagination and in more details in the footnotes of the Arabic text), confusion arises in the mind of the reader and the manuscript can be hard to follow if one is unaware of these leaps. In addition, the scribe of this manuscript does not begin the retro with the usual *réclame*.¹⁶ This the scribe does with one

16 The *réclame* is the normal system of citing the last word of the verso as the first word in the following retro.

exception (cf. H 158v and H 159r). The absence of the *réclame* might have caused, and/or added to the confusion of arranging the text. It is clearly evident that there exist some mistakes in gluing the folios together, even with the addition of some folios not belonging to our text (cf. 202r-205v WN).

As a result, at first glance, the text seems very muddled and confused. However, after careful examination, one finds the order is as pointed out above in the pagination of the fourth section of the manuscript as well as the "Pagination" section of «Abū Qurrah's Text». Once this information is taken into consideration, the text can be followed without difficulty.

Use
of margins:

The scribe uses the margins in various ways. He uses them to finish a sentence (cf. H 150v, H 152v, H 158r, and H 159v) or just to add a word or two as in the addition of "وتحريرمك" (cf. H 185r) or "عن" (cf. H 194v). Hence, for the scribe, the margin is part and parcel of the text. He also uses the margins to fill in what he missed from the body of the text. An example of such practice can be found with regard to the word "كلمته" (cf. H 186r).

2. Writing characteristics

- Calligraphy: The scribe of this manuscript has a lucid calligraphy. Hence, the manuscript is clear to read. The pages are adorned with red rubrics and red punctuations.
- Punctuation: The punctuation does not seem to follow a particular clear order. It sometimes comes after one word (cf. H 148r = فقال .) (ابو قره) or as on the same page after a phrase (قال ابو قره) or after a sentence (انا اريد ان اسالك عن شيئاً).
- Orthographic notes: In general, the scribe does not utilize the *hamza*. For example, he writes "الوزراء" instead of "الْوُزَرَاءَ" (cf. H 174v) and "جابه" instead of "جَاءَ بِهِ" (cf. H 184v). Other times, he seems to write the *hamza* "ي". As in "الخلايق" in place of "الْخَلَائِقُ" and "الخاطبة" instead of "الْخَاطِطَةُ" (cf. H 196v) and "ليلا" instead of "لَيْلًا" (cf. H 211r). On rare occasions, however, the *hamza* appears, as in "الانبياء" (cf. H 155v) and "يشاء" (cf. H 188v) where it is found in one word and missing, as usual, from the very same word in the following line.

In general, the scribe writes “ت” instead of “ث” as in “الثلاث” instead of “الثلاث” (cf. H 147v), “تم” instead of “ثم” (cf. H 161r), “حيث” instead of “حيث” (cf. H 187r). On few occasions, however, the “ث” appears as in “ثم” (cf. H 153v).

The scribe is not consistent with regard to the letter “ذ”. He writes “د” in the place of “ذ” as in “الدبايح” instead of “الدَّبَائِح” (cf. H 151r) and “ذلك” instead of “ذَلِكَ” (cf. H 153v) and “الدي” instead of “الذِي” (cf. H 188v), but uses it on other occasions as in “ذبح” (cf. H 151v), “اذن” (cf. H 154v, 184v), and “ذلك” (cf. H 153v).

The scribe is inconsistent in differentiating between the “ط” and the “ظ” as in writing the proper dot of the “ظ” and not writing it with the “ط”. As a consequence, the “ط” sometimes looks as if it were “ظ” as in “ظمئًا” instead of “طَمِئًا” (cf. H 188v). Other times, he writes the “ط” correctly as in “طويلا” (cf. H 148v, 151v) and “اطرق” (cf. H 151v). However, in such instances, the proper letter is clear from the context.

Contractions: On occasion, the scribe contracts certain prepositions, namely “في” and “من” into “فيمن” instead of “فِي مَنْ” (cf. H 212r). H also contracts “كل” and “من” into “كلمن” instead of “كُلِّ مِنْ” (cf. H 152r, 156r).

Special remarks: In H, there exists more than the usual confusion as to who is the speaker; all of these variances are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text.

C. PAR. AR. 71¹⁷ (= I)

Date: 16th Century.
 Dimensions: 16.5x11 cm.; with 12x6 cm. of written space; each page contains 14 lines.
 Writing and copying: Syrian *nashī* (Plate 2). The scribe is not named nor is the manuscript dated.
 Content: Abū Qurrah’s text occupies the second section of the

17 Cf. TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 51; NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 124. Troupeau also remarks that the manuscript bears the mark of Louis XV *estampés à chaud*.

manuscript, which contains four different sections, with a total of 98 folios. The following is a list of the different parts:

1. F. 2v-12r. The wisdom of Sabīlā. This is an identical text to the third section of Par. ar. 70.
- Inc. قال كان هذا من بعد خروج بني اسرائيل وبعد ان سلكوا في البرية اياما معلومة اذ دخلوا الارض مملكة اليونانيين وكان فيما بينهم انبيا ومعلمين.¹⁸
2. F.12v-41v. Controversy between Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān, and Muslim theologians in the court of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. It is an almost identical text to the fourth section of Par. ar. 70.
- Inc. لما كان في زمان السيد المامون امير المومنين احضر الاب الاسقف ابو قرة الى مجلسه واجلسه بين يديه باكرام.¹⁹
3. F. 79r-80v, 98r-98v, 42r-47v, 2r. The legend of the monk, Baḥīrā. The text is missing a number of parts: at its beginning (cf. ms. Arabe 215, folio 154v, 12th line); and between 80v-98 (cf. *Ibidem*, 156-157, 2nd line); and between 98v-42r [sic] (cf. *Ibidem*, 3rd line of 157v to 2nd line of 158).
- Exp. ... وتخير به كل العالمين. اعلمك يا اخي انني كنت رجل خاطي من اهل انطاكية فمضيت في بعض الايام الي جبل طور سينا لاستبارك باثار القديسين واخذ صلاة الرهبان المقمين هناك.²⁰
4. F. 81r-97v, 75r-78v. The story of Rechabites, the son of Jonadab, by Zūsīmā. The text is missing a part in the beginning (cf. ms. Arab 70 4th line of folio 20), and there exist some confusion with regard to the pagination. It is also missing a part between folio 97v-75. Furthermore, the text is incomplete at the end²¹
- Exp. ... الاب والابن والروح القدس وبارك اسمه القدوس الذي وهب لجنس البشر هذه المواهب الجليلة.²²

18 The incipit is lacking in Troupeau.

19 The incipit is lacking in Troupeau.

20 The excerpt is lacking in Troupeau.

21 GRAF, GCAL I (1944), p. 215; GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 487.

22 The excerpt is lacking in Troupeau.

1. *Abū Qurrah's Text*

- Pagination:** 12v-41v. There is only one pagination system in this manuscript. It is in Arabic.
- Schema:** In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the "V" branch of the Melkite family.
- Gaps and additions:** The gaps and additions are almost identical to that of Par. ar. 70. All variances, including gaps and additions are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.
- Organization:** The scribe is well organized, adding the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso. However, he places the *réclame* not at the end of the last line in the verso, but in the bottom margin. For the most part, the scribe is consistent. As evident from close comparison, this manuscript is almost identical to H. The variances between the two are, predominantly, the different characteristics between the two scribes. A clear example of the differences can be found in the differentiation between the "ت" and "ث". The scribe of this manuscript writes the "ث" with its three proper dots while H's, as explained above, sometimes writes it as if a "ت".
- Use of margins:** The manuscript has very clean margins, and the scribe uses them for one of four reasons only. The first is for the *réclame*. The second is to finish a word as in the addition of "ن" for the word "مكان" (cf. I 14r) and "ل" for the word "يقول" (cf. I 19r). He is consistent in such practice. This happens ten more times (cf. I 21r, 22r, 23r, 24r, 30r, 31r, 32r, 35r, 36r, and 42r). The third reason the scribe uses the margins is to fill in what he missed from the body of the text. He does so four times: « آيها » (cf. I 17r) and « سيدي » and « هذا شيء » (cf. I 18r) and « قال ابو قرة هدا اوضح دليل علي تعطيل كتابك » (cf. I 35v). Hence, for the scribe, the margin is part and parcel of the text. The margins also contain the numbers of the different folios.

2. *Writing characteristics*

- Calligraphy:** The scribe has a beautiful calligraphy with colorful embellishments of red crosses and red rubrics.

Punctuation: The punctuation is almost non-existent.

Orthographic notes: With regard to the *hamza*, the scribe uses it for other than its purpose. The *hamza* appears in strange places; often, but not consistently, in the end of a line, as in “دخلاء” “فيء” “والحيوانء” “وليسء” “فلماذاء” “فمنء” (cf. I 17r). It seems that the scribe of this manuscript used the *hamza* in these and similar occasions for decoration purposes. Repeatedly, he does not write the *hamza* in its proper place as in “شيء” instead of “شيءء” (cf. I 29r). Other times, it is present where it ought to be as in “السماءء” (cf. I 29r). Often, however, he writes its proper “كُرْسِيء” as in “ياذنء” (cf. I 14v), “قايلاءء” (cf. I 15r), “راواء” and “الحايطةء” (cf. I 29v). The *hamza*'s absence as well as its addition will be noted only if there is confusion as to the meaning of a word, unless there are other reasons for citing the word in question.

It is interesting to note that with regard to the letter “ت” the scribe at times writes it “ة” as in “نكرةء” instead of “أُنكُرَت” (cf. I 17v) and “فصارةء” instead of “فَصَّارَت” (cf. I 22r) and “آياتء” instead of “آيات” (cf. I 23r) and “الموتء” instead of “الموت” (cf. I 29v and I 37r).

With regard to “د,” the scribe is not always consistent. On a few occasions, he does not differentiate between “د” and “ذ”. For example, he writes “ذلكء” instead of “ذَلِكَ” (cf. I 13r and I 14r). However, in more instances, he writes it, as in “هذاءء”, “ياذنء” and “ذلكء” (cf. I 14v).

With regard to the letter “ض”, the scribe might appear inconsistent in writing it. At times, he writes it “ظ” as in “الظلالهء” instead of “الضَّلَالَة” (cf. I 14r and I 33r) and “ظللء” instead of “ضَلَّ” and “ظلالء” instead of “ضَلَالًا” (cf. I 23r) and “ظلمتء” instead of “ضَلَمْتُ” (cf. I 28r). This type of occurrence seems to happen with the root “ض ل ل” in its different forms, as evident from the examples presented here. Other times, the scribe writes “ض” in the normal manner as in “عوضء” (cf. I 14r) and “رفضهمء” (cf. I 14r).

It might look as if there is some confusion in the use of the relative pronoun where the scribe writes “الذىء” instead of

“الَّتِي” in reference to “كَلِمَةَ اللَّهِ” (cf. I 25r). However, with a close look at the scribe’s use of the relative pronouns on other occasions, one finds that the scribe follows this use when referring to Christ, hence the masculine.

Contractions: At times, the scribe contracts “كَلَّ مَنْ” into “كلمن” (cf. I 14v) while other times he does not (cf. I 16v). He also contracts “عَنْ” into “عنما” (cf. I 15r) and contracts “فِي مَنْ” into “فمن” (cf. I 17r). He also contracts “إِنْ كَانَ” into “انكان” (cf. I 18r) and then writes it correctly in another place on the same page. As another example, see also “فانكان” instead of “فإن كان” (cf. I 17r).

D. PAR. AR. 198²³ (= D)

Date: 16th Century.

Dimensions: 14.5x10 cm.; with 10.5x7 cm. of written space; each page contains, for the most part, 10-11 lines. However, occasionally, the number of lines increases even to 16 lines per page (cf. D 83r).

Writing and copying: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 3). The scribe is not named nor is the manuscript dated.

Content: Abū Qurrah’s text occupies the third and final section of the manuscript. The manuscript contains a total of 84 folios. The following is a list of the different parts:

1. F. 1r-20r. Anonymous commentary on the Nicæan creed, entitled *al-Risālah al-Ġāmi‘ah li-Taḥsīn al-Amānah al-Muqaddasah*²⁴

23 Cf. TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 166; see also GRAF, *GCAL II* (1947), p. 21. There is a bit of discrepancy between Graf and Troupeau as to the date of the manuscript; the former dates it in the XV c. while the latter in the XVI c. We are following Troupeau. Troupeau also remarks that the manuscript was bought by Vansleb in the Near East, and that the numbers are stamped by Vansleb; there is also a non-dated mark of an anonymous reader as well as a mark of possession of ‘Aḥā Allāh b. Sulaymān dated of 9 Tūt 1535 J.C. This is in folio 84v - [Anc. Cotes: 425 (Regius); A.F. 116]. This manuscript bears the emblem of Napoleon I. Finally, the manuscript ends with a magic prayer. These are found in folios 82v-84. This prayer is considered a separate section neither by Troupeau nor by us.

24 The title is found at the end of the piece, namely on page 20r.

- Inc. ابونا الثلثماية وثمانية عشر لم يعبروها من ذواتهم ولا دُونوها من قلوبهم.
2. F. 20v. There is a list of the Coptic and Syrian names of the months of the year.²⁵
- Inc. اسما شهور الروم وتحتها القبطي²⁶
3. F. 21r-82r. Controversy between Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān, and Muslim theologians in the court of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. The text is incomplete at the end.²⁷
- Inc. قال امير المومنين الخليفة المامون يا ابا قرة ان الغلظة قطعة من النجس. قال ابا قرة. اليس يعلم امير المومنين. ان الله تعالى خلق ابونا ادم من تراب.²⁸

1. Abū Qurrah's Text

- Pagination: 21r-82r. There are two different paginations: one Coptic and the other Arabic; both are in the upper left corner of the retro. We are following the Arabic numbering.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the "W" branch of the Melkite family. It is our opinion that it is the oldest of its branch.
- Gaps and additions: The scribe's introduction is shorter than that presented in the Critical Edition. This gap corresponds to numbers 3-16 WN. There exist other gaps as well. See for example, numbers 160b-161 WN. These as well as all other variances are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.
- Organization: The manuscript is well organized, with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso. Although the scribe includes the usual *réclame*, he does it in his own way: At times one finds it in its proper place (cf. D 21v and D 23v); other times in the margin below the last line of the page (cf. D 22v and D 24v); and on occasion in the left margin, next to the last line (cf. D 25v); still in other occasions, it is completely omitted (cf. D 28v).

25 This section is mentioned by Troupeau, but he does not consider it a separate section; we do.

26 The incipit is lacking in Troupeau.

27 Cf. GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

28 We added a few words to Troupeau's quotation. His quotation ends with the word "النجس".

In addition, sporadically, the scribe repeats not only a single word but also an entire phrase (cf. D 62v = «فسيحان الله» «العظيم») that corresponds to the next folio (cf. D 63r). This practice is not to be confused with the practice of repeating a phrase for the beginning of the next quire,²⁹ for he does not do the latter.

Use
of margins:

In the margins, from time to time, one finds additions and corrections. The scribe occasionally uses the margins to add a word (cf. D 21r = “ادم”) or to correct a mistake (cf. D 30v). Hence, for him, the margin is part and parcel of the text.

2. Writing characteristics

Calligraphy: The manuscript is clear to read, with red colored rubrics and dotted red crosses.

Punctuation: The scribe seems to have his own punctuation system, and he seems consistent in following it. He defines the four corners of the writing space with a dotted cross at each corner. That is to say, in the beginning and end of the first and last lines of each page. In addition, his periods seem to follow a certain pattern, namely the periods are used in places where one might wish either to pause or to accentuate a word/phrase while speaking. Although they are many, the periods do make their own sense when the text is read vocally. The following is an example:

قال ابو قرة. اما نحن. ما نعدم يا ابا محمد حجه. نحتج بها عن
تصحيح ايماننا. وانما اوجب لكم مدمه ديننا. وقدفكم لنا بالقبيح.
وسكوتنا عندكم. وتركنا الجواب. واقامه الحجه. حتى طن كل
واحداً منكم. او معاند. او مجادل. انه ليس لنا حجه. نحتج بها في
ديننا. وننطق بها عن نفوسنا. فصرنا من كثره سكوتنا عنكم
محقورين. دليلين. ناقصين. في اعينكم.

Orthographic
notes:

In general, as in the majority of the manuscripts of the same period, the scribe does not utilize the *hamza*. For example, he

29 «The quires consist, in most instances, of eight leaves, that is, four folded sheets, *τετράς* or *τετράδιον* (sic) or *quaternio* (a term which eventually losing its strict meaning came to indicate a *quire*, without regard to the number of leaves composing it)». Sir Edward Maunde THOMPSON, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 53.

writes “جَا” instead of “شَيْئًا” (cf. D 21v), “مَجَى” and “جَا” instead of “مَجِيءٌ” and “جَاءٌ” (cf. D 23r). The most common, however, is what seems as if writing the *hamza* as “ي” or “ى” as in “الشرايع” instead of “الشَّرَائِعُ” (cf. D 23r) and “البدى” instead of “الْبَدءُ” (cf. D 39r). This practice is in fact adding the “كُرْسِيّ”. Suddenly, however, a *hamza* appears, as in “السماء” (cf. D 35v, D 41v and D 53v). Hence, the scribe is inconsistent with regard to the *hamza*. Some examples are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text for illustrating the point. However, we consider this mention sufficient to point to this practice.

The scribe writes “ت” instead of “ث” as in “تم” instead of “ثُمَّ” and “مِثَاله” instead of “مِثَالُهُ” (cf. D 21v) and “امتتلو” instead of “امْتَثَلُوا” (cf. D 23r) as well as many others. Some incidences are noted in the critical apparatus of the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.

The scribe writes “د” instead of “ذ”, as in “معاد” instead of “مَعَادٌ” (cf. D 21v) and “ردلها” instead of “رَدَّلَهَا” (cf. D 22v) and “نفاد” instead of “نَفَادٌ” (cf. D 43r) and so on, but seemingly unpredictably the “ذ” will appear, as in “ذنوب” in (cf. D 62r). In general, it is noted only when there is a need for clarification.

The two previous observations may not constitute writing mistakes as much as they may be an indication of the scribe's vernacular manner of speaking or simply his way of writing; the matter cannot be definitively decided due to its inconsistency. For example, phonetically in Upper Egypt, even to the present day, we find many such phenomena. Some pronounce the “ت” instead of “ث” as in the word “تاره” and “د” instead of “ذ” as in the word “أحد”, and use the expression “أخذ تاره” instead of “أَخَذَ تَأْرُهُ”. The scribe might have simply written the word as it sounded.

An interesting point one notices when reading this manuscript is the scribe's spelling manner. At times, but without any consistency, he writes “ت” instead of “ة” at the end of certain words as in “سعت” instead of “سِعَة” (cf. D 54v) and “قلت”

instead of “قِلَّة” (cf. D 56r). This can be seen in the footnotes of the Arabic text when there is confusion in the meaning of a word.

The scribe is inconsistent in adding the proper dots to the letter “ش”. As a consequence, sometimes, the “ش” looks as if it were “س” as in the word “السمس” instead of “الشَّمس” (cf. D 48r). Other times, however, a “ش” is written with the proper dots as in “نشبه” (cf. D 22r) and “الشرايع” (cf. D 23r).

Similarly, the scribe is inconsistent with writing the proper dot of the “ظ”. As a consequence, the “ظ” sometimes looks as if it were “ط” (cf. D 46r). One finds examples of both incidences in the same page as in the word “تعطموا” where the dot is absent and the letter reads “ط” and in the very next line the word “ظهرت” with the proper dot present in the letter “ظ”. A few lines later, one finds the same, in the word “طافراً” where the dot is absent again. However, in such instances, the proper letter is clear from the context.

Another irregularity in this manuscript is found in the manner of writing the letter “ك”. It is sometimes complete as in “فكيف” and “ذلك” (cf. D 22r); at other times it is incomplete as in “بكل” (cf. D 24r) and “لمتكلم” (cf. D 26r). In the latter two examples the word is understood from the context as well as familiarity with the scribe’s habits of writing.

At times, the scribe clearly mixes the masculine and feminine pronouns (“مُسْتَتِر” or “ظَاهِر”). For example, in referring to God, he writes “افتخلق” instead of “يَخْلُق” or “أَفِيخْلُق” (cf. D 21v) and he writes “فيه” instead of “فِيهَا” in referring to Mary (cf. D 42v).

There exists some confusion in the use of the relative pronouns as well. The scribe writes “الدى” instead of “التي” in reference to the feminine noun “البهايم” (cf. D 41r), and he writes “الدي” in reference to Mary (cf. D 42v). One finds the same type of confusion between “هَذَا” and “هَذِهِ”. He writes “هده” instead of “هَذَا مَجْلِسٌ” (cf. D 35r), “هده الاسم” instead of “هَذَا الإِسْمُ” (cf. D 43r) and “هده” instead of “هَذَا” in reference to Abū Qurrah (cf. D 54r).

- Contractions: The scribe contracts “كُلُّ مَنْ” into “كلمن” (cf. D 29v, D 79v and D 75r) and contracts “فِي مَنْ” into “فيمن” (cf. D 75r).
- Special remark: It is worthy to note that in his introduction, the scribe states that he writes the *explanation* of the debate between Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān and the elite of Qurayš in the presence of al-Ma'mūn (cf. D 21r).

E. PAR. AR. 215³⁰ (= E)

- Date: 16th Century (1590-1591).
- Dimensions: 18x12.5 cm.; with 12.5x9 cm. of written space; each page contains 17 lines.
- Writing and copying: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 4). The scribe is not named. The scribe has dated each section after having copied it. These dates are found in the following pages: 6 Bāba (folio 49v), 2 Hatūr (folio 83), 13 Kiyahk (folio 119v), 6 Ṭūba (folio 176), 24 Baramhāt 1306 of the year of the martyrs (folio 185v), and the 13th Tūt 1307 of the year of the martyrs (folio 228). Pages 1v-2r, 120r-120v, 262v are left blank.
- Content: Abū Qurrah's text occupies the fourth section of the manuscript. The manuscript contains ten different sections and a total of 262 folios. The following is a list of the different parts included in the manuscript.
1. F. 2v-49v. Anonymous apologetic treatises in the form of answers to questions posed by Muslims.³¹
- Inc. قد وافا كتابك وانت تذكر فيه ما جرى بينك وبين رجل من اهل القبله من المناظره واحتجاجه عليك بالكتاب التالت الذي في يديه وان النصراري واليهود حرفوا التوراة والانجيل.³²
- Exp. بعد انفصاله من هذا الكون الكثيف ومن الرب نسال ان يلهمنا الى العمل.

30 Cf. TROUPEAU, *Catalogue* (1972), p. 187-189; GRAF, *GCAL II* (1947), p. 21. Troupeau also remarks that the manuscript came from the *Bibliothèque Séguier-Coislin*, and that there is wax stamp with the letters F.D. [Anc. Cotes: A. 20 (Séguier); N. 276 (Saint-Germain-des-Prés); Suppl. arrabe 107] - a note from Renaudot.

31 Cf. GRAF, *GCAL II* (1947), p. 472.

32 We completed the sentence that Troupeau began. His quotation ends with the word “المناظره”.

2. F. 50r-83r. Controversy between the monk Ibrāhīm of Tiberius and al-Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. al-Ṣālīḥ al-Hāšimī. It is an identical text to the second section of Par. ar. 214.³³
- Inc. قال ان الامير عبد الرحمن تفكر في داته كيف المسيح ابن الله
وقصد الفحص عن ذلك وتحقيقه فلم يزل في فكره وتعجبه.³⁴
3. F. 83v-119v. Untitled, anonymous apologetic treatises. *Kitāb al-Burhān ‘alā Buṭlān al-Ṣarī‘ah al-Mūsawiyyah wa-Taḥqīq al-Ṣarī‘ah al-Masṭhiyyah*.³⁵
- Inc. سالتني ايها اليهودي انار الله قلبك للهداية وقيمك من يوم الغفله
والغوايه ما السبب في اتحاد كلمة الله وروحه بجسد انسي من
الطبيعة البشرية... وقد جمعت هذا الكتاب واوضحت فيه بطلان
القرابين والسنة العتيقه.³⁶
- Exp. ونحن نسال ان يوهلنا لحفظ وصاياه الالهية والعمل باوامره المحيية
ويجعل لنا نصيبا مع مختاربه في داره الابدية.
4. F. 121r-154r. The reply of Abū Qurrah, the bishop of Ḥarrān, to the four questions of the Caliph al-Ma’mūn. The text is incomplete in its beginning.³⁷
- Inc. بصفاته وانما نومن به على ما في كتبه الثابت صدقها.
- Exp. قال ابا قرة فدعوت له دعا فاضلا وانصرفت من عنده ذلك اليوم
على هذا الحال.
5. F. 154v-176r. The legend of the monk, Baḥīrā. It is an identical text to the second section of Par. ar. 70 and third of Par. ar. 71.
- Inc. انا مرهب الخاطي بينما ادور في البرية زمانا طويلا اذ قد نظرت
عن بعد ديرا عظيما فقصدته فلما اتيت اليه ودخلته فوجدت فيه
راهبًا شيخًا يسمى بحيرة.³⁸

33 Cf. The Critical Edition of this section is published by Giacinto Bülus MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*, coll. «Textes et études sur l'Orient Chrétien» 3 (Beirut & Rome: CEDRAC, 1986).

34 The incipit is lacking in Troupeau.

35 Cf. GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 472.

36 We added to the sentence that Troupeau began both in its middle and end.

37 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 115-118.

38 We completed the sentence that Troupeau began. His quotation ends with the word "عظيما".

6. F. 176v-185v. The reply of the Catholicos Timothy I to thirteen questions of the Caliph al-Mahdī³⁹

- Inc. قال امبر المومنين المهدي يا جاثليق اخبرني كيف كان مولد
المسيح بن مريم كما تزعمون.⁴⁰
- Exp. انه يسهل على الحمل ان يدخل في عين الابرة من ان يدخل غني
الى ملكوت السما وهو اخر ما عندي.

7. F. 186r-202v. The controversy between John, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and a Jew.⁴¹

- Inc. كان في ذلك الزمان مضى الاب بطريرك يسلم على عبد العزيز
المذكور فبينما هو جالس عنده.
- Exp. وامر الملك باكرام البطريرك وحفظ جانبه واجلاله وسرحه بسلام.

8. F. 203r-228r. An epistle from the island of Cypress to Taqī al-Dīn b. Taymiyyah in Damascus, in 716 *Higriyyah*. It is an identical text to the fourth section of Par. ar. 204.

- Inc. اما بعد الذي يعلم مولانا الشيخ المكرم الرئيس... سالتني ان
افحص لك فحصا بينا.

9. F. 228v-260v. Controversy between Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān, and Muslim theologians in the court of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. It is almost an identical text to the fourth section of Par. ar. 70, but a different introduction.

- Inc. وكان المامون يحب ابا قرة ويجلسه ويسيط له مجلس الخلافة.

10. F. 261r-262r. Poetical question and answer between al-Šayh Zayn al-Dīn al-Ramlī and the Patriarch of Alexandria, Yūḥannā b. Ġubayr with regard to the Christian question.⁴²

This section is entitled:

سؤال مولانا شيخ الاسلام قدوة الانام الشيخ زين الدين الرملي الي
البطريرك وجماعة النصاري بمحروسة مصر.⁴³

39 Cf. GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 118.

40 We completed the sentence that Troupeau began. His quotation ends with the word "المسيح".

41 Cf. GRAF, GCAL I (1944), p. 478.

42 This section is mentioned by Troupeau but he does not consider it a separate section; we do.

43 The Arabic excerpt is lacking in Troupeau.

1. *Abū Qurrah's Text*

- Pagination: 228v-260v. There are two different paginations in this manuscript. Both paginations are in the upper left corner of the retro, and both are written in Arabic, one above the other. We follow the lower positioned number.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the “W” branch of the Melkite family.
- Gaps and additions: The most noted addition is the scribe's introduction. All gaps and additions are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.
- Organization: Manuscript E is very well organized and for the most part consistent with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso. However, the scribe consistently places the *réclame* in the lower margin, under the last word of the last line.
- Use of margins: The manuscript has clean margins. In addition to the *réclame*, the scribe uses them infrequently to add missing words. This happens only twice (cf. E 239v = “شبه لهم” and E 247v = “النار”)

2. *Writing characteristics*

- Calligraphy: The scribe has a lucid calligraphy, and the manuscript is very clear to read.
- Punctuation: In this manuscript, the punctuation is non-existent. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to read.
- Orthographic notes: With regard to the *hamza*, the scribe in general does not write it as in “بقاه” instead of “بِقَاءُهُ” and “شي” instead of “شَيْءٌ” (cf. E 229r) and “أحياء” instead of “أَحْيَاءٌ” (cf. E 235v). Often, however, he writes its proper “كُرْسِي” as in “لساير” and “تسال” (cf. E 244r). Rarely, the *hamza* is present, as in “هُؤلاء” (cf. E 229r).
- The scribe does not differentiate between “ب” and “ث”. For example, he writes “التالوت” instead of “الثالوث” (cf. E 228v) and “تم” instead of “ثم” and “متاله” instead of “مثاله” (cf. E 229r).
- With regard to “د”, the scribe does not differentiate between “د,” and “ذ”. For example, (cf. E 228v) where he writes “دلك”

instead of “ذَلِكَ” and “هدا” instead of “هَذَا” and “مدهبه” instead of “مَذْهَبِهِ” as in (cf. E 228v) and “معاد” instead of “مَعَادٌ” in (cf. E 229r).

Occasionally, the scribe writes the “ض” as if it were a “ظ” (cf. E 229r = “يناضروك” and E 128v “بحظرت”). The latter, however, might be an indication of the scribe’s vernacular while the former may be mere carelessness (cf. E 128v = “تناظروه”).

With regard to the letter “ة”, often at the end of a word when connected to a previous letter, the scribe does not place the proper dots on top of it. For an example of this practice, see “معرفة” instead of “مَعْرِفَةٌ” (cf. E 229r). However, there exist some exceptions as in “بنية” (cf. E 230r), “قلة” and “شماتة” (cf. E 235r).

With regard to the letter “ه”, when it is at the end of a word and is not connected to another letter, the scribe writes it “ة”. See for example “وجوة” instead of “وَجُوهٌ” (cf. E 228v).

With regard to the letter “ي”, the scribe does not differentiate between the “ي” and “ى”. He consistently writes “ي” in place of “ى” as in “النصاري” instead of “النَّصَارَى” and “الي” instead of “إِلَى” (cf. E 228v).

As has been noted above, the scribe is not always careful with adding the proper dots to the proper letters. This as well as other variances are documented in the footnotes of the Arabic text in the Critical Edition.

In reference to Abū Qurrah, the scribe writes “ابا”. This he does regardless of the proper grammatical form to be used in a particular sentence structure as in “أَبُو” or “أَبِي”; this use he follows with only few exceptions: (cf. E 229r, E 239r and E 260v = “لابي”).

There are also inconsistencies in the use of the relative pronouns. The scribe sometimes writes, “الدى” instead of “التي”; see an example of this practice, in reference to Mary (cf. E 240r).

Contractions: Occasionally, the scribe contracts “كُلِّ مِنْ” into “كلمن” (cf. E 259r).

Special remarks: It is worthy of note that according to our modern standards, the entire manuscript is one unfinished sentence; that is to say, the entire manuscript has no punctuation.

F. CAIRO COPT. PATR. LIT. 212⁴⁴ (= C)

Date: 17th Century.

Dimensions: 21x15 cm.; with 17x10.5 cm. of written space; each page contains 12-13 lines.

Writing: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 5).

Content: Abū Qurrah's text occupies the seventh and final section of the manuscript. The manuscript contains a total of 193 folios.⁴⁵ The manuscript contains legends and other writings. The following is a list of the different parts⁴⁶:

1. F. 79r-88v. The dream of the hundred wise men taking place in Rome during the same night. The dream was explained to them by Sabilā, the wise.

Inc. كان بعد خروج بنى اسرائيل من مصر وسكنوا فى البرية اياما معلومة ودخلوا الى ارض اليونانيين.

2. F. 89r-115r. Ten questions, concerning the objections Muslims make against the Christian religions, addressed by the disciples to the master and the answers the master gave to them.⁴⁷

a) It is not true as the Muslims think that the Christians believe that God married Mary and together they give birth to the Christ?

b) Regarding what prompted the Incarnation of Christ.

c) On the duty of prayer.

d) More on the duty of prayer.

44 Cf. SIMAIKA, *Catalogue* (1942), p. 352; GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 202-203.

45 Graf reports 194 folios with primitive numbers [read Coptic numbers] 79-208, 236-300, but points out that 101 is blank on both sides.

46 Simaika divides the manuscripts into eight sections while Graf divides it into seven sections. The added section is that of a petition that is to be read every morning. Graf seems to include it with the fifty prayers of Buṭrus al-Sadamantī. We are following Graf, except for the fifth part, for Simaika is more accurate with regard to its details.

47 Graf gives the details of these questions, and we have included them here while Simaika does not.

- e) On fasting.
- f) On giving alms.
- g) Was Adam worthy to be favored by God in front of the devil?
- h) Why did Christ rest inside the womb of his mother?
- i) An exegesis of the words «I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God» (John 20:17).
- j) Why was it necessary to create the devil?

3. F. 115v-209r. The fifty prayers of Buṭrus al-Sadmantī.

4. F. 236v-245r. The letter which descended from heaven and contained the commandment of Sunday and was received by Athanasius, the Patriarch, at the Church of St. Peter in Rome, in the year 1750 of Alexander.⁴⁸

5. F. 245v-247v. The story of the monk who was injured by Satan (*al-Šayṭān*) and what happened to him with the physician.⁴⁹

Title and Inc.

قال خير الراهب الذي تادى من الشيطان وما جرى له مع الطبيب. قال
ذكر ان احد الرهنان خرج من قلايته يريد برودة لنفسه وراحة
لقلبه من الافكار الردية والهجوم الشيطانية الذي لا يستطيع احداً
دفعها عنه.

6. F. 247v-249r. The conversation of Moses with God.⁵⁰

7. F. 249v-300v. The discussion of Abū Qurrah with *Banū Hāšim*, of the tribe of Qurayš, in the presence of al-Ma'mūn, Commander of the Faithful.⁵¹

1. Abū Qurrah's Text

Pagination: 249v-300v⁵². The manuscript has three different paginations, two written in Coptic numbers and one in *Hindī*. One set of the

48 Cf. GRAF 456, fifth section. However, Graf points out that the Church is not that of St. Peter but St. Peter and Paul. Many Arabic reviews with regard to this section were edited by M. BITTNER, *Der rom Himmel gefallene Brief Christi*, in 1905.

49 Graf reads, «The story of the monk who implored Satan». He made a mistake.

50 Cf. GRAF 457, fifth section. Graf adds that the conversation was at the summit of Mount Sinai.

51 Cf. Cairo, Copt. Patr. Theol. 218. Simaika adds that there is an index. The latter is the *fihris* we noted in the special remarks section below.

52 The pagination followed by Graf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 203.

Coptic numbers is in the left upper corner of the verso while the other is on the right upper corner of the verso; the latter has been omitted from certain pages, but traces of it can still be seen on some pages. The *Hindī* numbers are placed in the right upper corner of the verso and it is numbered from the left to the right; that is to say from the back of the manuscript to the front. To avoid confusion with the two different sets of Coptic numbers, we are following the *Hindī* pagination (50v-1r).

- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the “W” branch of the Melkite family.
- Organization: This manuscript is well organized and consistent, with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso.
- Use of margins: The margins are dedicated to the pagination numbers and the *réclame*, with occasional dotted cross in the middle of the upper margin.

2. Writing characteristics

- Calligraphy: This manuscript is clear to read, has beautiful calligraphy, and is adorned with red colored rubrics and red colored punctuation.
- Punctuation: The scribe uses periods, dotted crosses and red colored words as part of his style of punctuation.
- Orthographic notes: The scribe of this manuscript does not utilize the *hamza* with consistency. For example, he writes “شرايع” instead of “شُرَّايِع” and “جا” instead of “جَاءَ” (cf. C 48r). The most common, however, is what seems as if writing the *hamza* as “ي” or “ى” as in “اسراييل” instead of “إِسْرَائِيلَ” (cf. C 48r). This is in fact the “كزسي”; however, a *hamza* does occasionally appear, as in “النساء” and “السماء” (cf. C 35r).
The scribe writes “ت” instead of “ث” as in “تم” instead of “ثُمَّ” and “متاله” instead of “مِثَالَهُ” (cf. C 49r) and “امتتلو” instead of “امْتَثَلُوا” (cf. C 48r ff.).
With regard to “ذ”, the scribe does not differentiate between “د” and “ذ”. He writes “د” in both occasions as in “معاد” instead of “مَعَاذَ” (cf. C 49r).

Contractions: The scribe contracts “كَلَّ مَنْ” into “كلمن”, as (cf. C 51r) and “فِي مَنْ” into “فيمن” (cf. C 8r).

Special remark: Unique to this manuscript is the presence of an original Table of Contents, complete with corresponding page numbers. The scribe also explains the reason behind its presence. He writes,

«فَهَرَسْتُ هَذَا الْكِتَابَ لِيَسْهُلَ عَلَى الطَّالِبِ مَا فِيهِ»

(Vocalization added).

At the end of the Table of Contents, the scribe declares the fact that he ended it, greets the reader and gives us his name, namely, «ابراهيم ابو طبل بن سمعان الخوانكي».

Worthy also to note is that the scribe of this particular manuscript has his own unique preface (cf. C 52v-50v).

For the most part, the scribe of this manuscript follows manuscript D and is in agreement with B in certain respects. An example of this can be found in the absence of part of the scribe's explanatory introduction. This section corresponds to numbers (cf. 4-16 WN). Individual words suggest knowledge of E but extended gaps deny E.

This manuscript is currently without a cover. Some pages are stuck one to the other. Other pages are not well glued. It is clear that the manuscript was poorly restored previous to its arrival to Mār Minā. It seems that humidity had harmed it considerably. At the time of our examination of it, it was awaiting its new restoration.

G. CAIRO COPT. PATR. THEOL. 218⁵³ (= A)

Date: 18th Century.

Dimensions: 20x15 cm.; with 15x10 cm. of written space; each page contains 12 lines.

Writing and copying: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 6). The scribe is not named nor is the manuscript dated.

53 SIMAIKA, *Catalogue* (1942), p. 138; GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 176.

Content: Abū Qurrah's text occupies the fourth section of the manuscript. This manuscript contains six different sections, with a total of 175 folios. The following is a list of the different parts⁵⁴:

1. F. 1r-30v. A homily of St. John Chrysostom that he delivered in front of the two orthodox kings Arcadius and Ammonius⁵⁵, son of the faithful king, Theodose, the Great, when they came to him to inquire about the life-giving passion of Christ. Habitually, this homily is read on the eleventh hour of Good Friday.

2. F. 31r-63r. The formula of the belief of the Jacobite Syrians composed by the priest Michael the Syrian when he met Anbā Buṭrus, the 105th Coptic Patriarch (it was the 104th Patriarch, to be exact. He reigned from 1718 to 1726).⁵⁶

3. F. 63v-70v. A reply against the Franks who omit the fasts of Wednesdays and Fridays and eat meat and drink wine on those days.

4. F. 71r-123r. The discussion of Abū Qurrah with 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn, the Commander of the Faithful, in the presence of the Muslim theologians, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī, Zayn b. Baṣrah, Ḍa'ḍa'ah b. Hālid al-Baṣrī, Salām al-Hamaḍānī⁵⁷ and a number of the elite of Qurayš.⁵⁸

5. F. 123v-148r. Refutation of him who professes the two natures of Christ.⁵⁹

6. F. 148v-175r. Treatise of the monophysite faith. The section bears no title.⁶⁰

54 Simaika divides the manuscript into eight sections while Graf divides it into six sections. We are following Graf.

55 Simaika wrote «Honorius (Anūrūs)».

56 Simaika divides the following section to *A Formula of Confession* above into two sections while Graf considers them one.

57 As noted below in the «Orthographic notes» section, the scribe does not differentiate between “س” and “س”. Hence, the variance of the name; we consider it “Hamaḍānī” while Graf writes “Hamadānī” as it is written in the manuscript.

58 Cf. Georg GRAF, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abū Qurrah* (Germany: Paderborn, 1910), p. 78-83.

59 Simaika divides this section into Explanation of the Holy Faith and Discourse by one of the Fathers to refute those who profess «the two natures».

60 Simaika reads, «Miracles of the Christ drawn from the Gospels; Arabic».

1. *Abū Qurrah's Text*

- Pagination: F. 71r-118v. There are two different paginations: one in cursive Coptic numerals and the other in *Hindī*; the Coptic is in the upper left corner of the retro, and the *Hindī* is to its right towards the middle of the upper margin. We are following the *Hindī* numbering.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the “W” branch of the Melkite family.
- Gaps and additions: In its present form, manuscript A lacks page 82v. The missing portion corresponds to 164-175 WN. A has in common with E part of the introduction that is included in the Critical Edition and lacking in most other manuscripts. This portion corresponds to numbers 3-16 WN.
- Organization: Manuscript A is well organized, with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso, and for the most part, the scribe is consistent.
- Use of margins: The scribe uses the margins for adding the pagination numbers and the *réclame*. This he does consistently, with one exception only (cf. A 96v = «وَجَرَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِ وَاسْتِحْلَالِكَ مَا حَرَمَهُ اللَّهُ»). This phrase is missing in the body of the text.

2. *Writing characteristics*

- Calligraphy: This manuscript is very clear to read. The text is adorned with red crosses and red titles.
- Punctuation: The punctuation seems to follow almost exactly that of D.
- Orthographic notes: With regard to the *hamza*, in general, the scribe does not write it as in “بقاه” instead of “بَقَاءَهُ” and “شي” instead “شَيْءٍ” (cf. A 72r). Often, however, he writes its proper “كُرْسِيٍّ” (cf. A 73r = “شرايع” and A 81v = “مومنون”). Occasionally, one finds a peculiar way of indicating its place, namely with an “آ” followed by “ ” = “آ” (cf. A 96v = “الانبيآ”; A 107v and A 116r = “السمآ”).
- The scribe, at times, does not differentiate between “ت” and “ث”. For example, he writes “بتالوت” instead of “بِتَالُوتِ” (cf.

A 104r) and “متاله” instead of “مِثَالِه” (cf. A 72r). Other times, A makes a clear distinction between them (cf. A 73v = “امتثلوها”). With regard to the letter “د”, the scribe does not differentiate between “د” and “ذ”. In both cases, he writes a “د” as in “مدهب” instead of “مَذْهَب”, “هدا” instead of “هَذَا” and “مدهبه” instead of “مَذْهَبِه” (cf. A 71v).

With regard to “ه” when it is not connected to another letter, the scribe writes it “ة”. See for example “وجوة” instead of “وُجُوهُ” (cf. A 71r).

With regard to “ة” at the end of a word when connected to a previous letter, the scribe often does not place the proper dots on top of it. See for example “معرفة” instead of “مَعْرِفَةٌ” (cf. A 71v). Occasionally, the scribe also writes “ت” in its place as in “جماعت” instead of “جَمَاعَةٌ” (cf. A 78v) and “قلت” instead of “قِلَّة” (cf. A 83r) and “شماتت” instead of “شِمَاتَةٌ” (cf. A 83v).

With regard to “ي”, the scribe writes it consistently in place of “ى” as in “موسى” instead of “مُوسَى” and in “الي” instead of “إِلَى” (cf. A 73r).

He is inconsistent in his spelling of the word “ذَلِكَ”. He often writes it “دالك” (cf. A 71r and A 75v) while some times he writes “دلك” (cf. A 75v and A 113v). The scribe is not careful in his spelling of other words as well. The following are some examples of misspelled words: “الماكل” instead of “المَالِك” (cf. A 77r), “ضايقة” instead of “ذَائِقَةٌ” (cf. A 116r).

Special
remark:

The scribe of manuscript A follows manuscript D not only in punctuation but also in other respects. For example, A follows D in particular expressions that can be found in the same place in both manuscripts. The examples are many. We mention just a few (cf. A 71r and D 21r = «تعالى وحسن توفيقه»; A 74v and D 24v = «مولانا»; and A 75v and D 26r = «وفرح»).

Peculiar to A is the occasional substitution of the name “محمد” for “فلان” (cf. A 75r, A 75v, A 79r). It is also worthy to note that the name “صعصعه” becomes “ضعضعه” (cf. A 71r) and at times “ضعضيعة” (cf. A 84r).

H. CAIRO COPT. PATR. THEOL. 86⁶¹ (= B)

- Date: 18th Century (1506 A.M.).
- Dimensions: 23x16 cm.; with 17x12 cm. of written space; each page contains 16-17 lines.
- Writing: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 7).
- Content: Abū Qurrah's text occupies the eighth section of the manuscript. In its entirety the manuscript contains nine different sections. This manuscript contains a total of 209 folios. The following is a list of the different sections⁶²:
1. F. 1r-7v. A maymar by St. John Chrysostom taken from the commentary on the epistle to the Colossians.⁶³
 2. F. 8r-57v. Prophecies taken from the Old Testament «with which the faith of the Apostles and of all the councils are in agreement». The fourth chapter treats «the doctrines of the Fathers in relation to the primacy (الرياسة) before the divisions of faith [read among the faithful] and what happened after the division»⁶⁴.
 3. F. 58r-69r. «The faith the 318 Fathers (of the council of Nicea) have written and the proof of its truth based on the prophecies»⁶⁵.
 4. F. 69v-93r. The miracles which were manifested through a particle of the Cross in the presence of Anbā Yu'annis, Patriarch of Alexandria and «the conversion of the king of the Jews and of the Melkite into the faith of the Copts»⁶⁶.

61 SIMAIKA, *Catalogue* (1942), p. 186; GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 178-179.

62 Simaika divides the manuscript into twelve sections while Graf divides it into nine sections only. We are following Graf and noting the differences between him and Simaika.

63 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 369, seventh section.

64 Simaika has divided this and the following section into five sections. These are the following: Explanations of the belief of the Disciples. The Councils and the reason why they were assembled. The teachings of the anti-Nicene Fathers on the question of the primacy before the schism and what happened afterwards, and a commentary on the Nicene Creed.

65 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 369, fifth section.

66 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 369, ninth section.

5. F. 93v-96v. «Our reply is the reply of the Jacobite Christians to those who say that our Lord Jesus Christ did all that which human nature has to do»⁶⁷.
6. F. 97r-109r. Exhortations of the saintly Fathers on love and distancing hate and anger.⁶⁸
7. F. 109v-127r. A book on the Unity and the Trinity of God by Severus b. al-Muqaffa'. This is the first chapter of b. al-Muqaffa' 's book, «كتاب الدر الثمين في إيضاح الدين».⁶⁹
8. F. 127r-159v. The discussion between Abū Qurrah and many from the people of Qurayš in the presence of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.⁷⁰
9. F. 160r-209r. A religious conference of the monk Ġirġis al-Sim'ānī of the monastery of St. Simeon and three Muslims. It took place at the city of Aleppo in front of the Amīr al-Malik al-Mušammar during the time of the King al-Zāhir Ġāzī b. Yūsuf b. Ayyūb al-Šalāhī in the year 6615 of the creation of the world when b. Iṣṭafān reigned over the Armenians in Antioch.⁷¹

1. Abū Qurrah's Text

- Pagination: 127v-159r. There are two different paginations: one Coptic and the other Arabic; the former is in the upper left corner of the retro. The latter is in the middle of the upper margin of the retro. We are following the Arabic numbering.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript belongs to the "W" branch of the Melkite family.
- Organization: Manuscript B is well organized, and the scribe is consistent with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso.
- Use of margins: The margins are dedicated entirely to the pagination numbers with one exception, namely adding a forgotten word in the body of the text (cf. B 127v = "اولاد").

67 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 369, sixth section.

68 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 369, eighth section.

69 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 115.

70 Cf. GRAF, *Catalogue* (1934), p. 465, fourth section.

71 Graf points out that this section has been edited by Paul CARALI, *Le Christianisme et l'Islam* (Beit Šabāb 1933).

2. Writing characteristics

- Calligraphy:** Manuscript B is clear and legible.
- Punctuation:** The scribe of manuscript B shares almost exactly his punctuations with that of D.
- Orthographic notes:** With regard to the *hamza* in general, the scribe does not write it as in “يسايله” instead of “يُسَائِلُهُ” (cf. B 125r). Often, however, he writes its proper “كُرْسِي” as in the previous example as well as “شرايع” (cf. B 128r). Occasionally however, there is a peculiar way of indicating its place, namely with a “ ُ ” (cf. B 155r = “الانبياء” and B 157r “السما” and “جا”).
- The scribe, at times, does not differentiate between “ت” and “ث”. For example, he writes “بتالوت” instead of “بِثَالُوتِ” (cf. B 147r) and “متاله” instead of “مِثَالِه” (cf. B 127v).
- The scribe is not consistent with regard to the letter “ذ”. He often writes it “ذ” as in “ذلك” (cf. B 141r) while at other times he writes “د” as in “دكره” instead of “ذكره” (cf. B 141r).
- The scribe is not consistent with regard to the “ة”. Sometimes, he does not place the proper dots on top of it as in “الحليفه” instead of “الحليفة” and “الغلفه” instead of “القُلْفَةُ” (cf. B 127v); we note that the scribe wrote “غ” instead of “ق”, but this is not our concern here. Other times, he does place the proper dots as in “الوصية” and “بوصية” (cf. B 128r).
- With regard to “ي”, the scribe writes it in place of “ى” as consistently in “موسي” instead of “مُوسَى” and as in “الي” instead of “إِلَى” (cf. B 128r).
- Special remark:** B shares with D not only most of the punctuation but other aspects as well. For example, there are particular additions both manuscripts have in common. The following are some of the examples: (cf. B 127v and D 21r = «وحسن توفيقه بنسخ شرح
«قال امير (مجادله ابو»
«المومنين الخليفه المامون»
«والان فليس = D 26v and A 76r-76v =
«اجادلك. الا من كتابك. ولا تضجر»

I. ALEPPO SBATH 1004⁷² (= S)

Date: 18th Century.
 Dimensions: 20x15 cm. Each page contains 13 lines.
 Writing: Egyptian *nashī* (Plate 8).
 Content: Abū Qurrah's text occupies the fifth section of the manuscript. The manuscript contains seven different sections and a total of 330 folios. The following is a list of the different parts:

1. F. 1. The chronicle of Skandas al-Ḥakīm and the reason for controlling his tongue from speaking until his death. The piece belongs to an anonymous author.

Inc. وذلك انه كان انسان جليل المقدار كثير المال والعبيد والاماء وذلك رزق ولدًا فسماه سكندس ولم يكن له ولد سواه ففرح به فرحًا عظيمًا ولما نشأ الغلام اسلمه الى المكتب فتعلم ما يحتاج اليه في زمن قليل لانه كان ذكيًا جدًا.

2. F. 124. The Biography of a monk of the seventh century, Baḥīrā. The piece belongs to an anonymous author.

Inc. قال انا مرهب الخاطي فينما انا ادور في البرية زمانًا طويلًا اذ قد نظرت دير عن بعد فقصدته فلما اتيت اليه ودخلته فوجدت راهبًا يسمى بحيرة فلما رأني سلم علي وفرح بي قائلاً سبحان الله الذي اوراني وجهك فان لي اليوم اربعين سنة ما رأيت وجه نصراني غيرك.

3. F. 171. Biography of al-Wāḍiḥ Yūsuf b. Raḡā, the martyr, from the people of Egypt, as is in the biography of the Patriarch Anbā Fīlātāwus who is from the sixty-third number. The unknown author says that b. Raḡā was a friend of the tenth century Sāwīrus (Severus)⁷³, bishop of al-Mūnayn, who is

72 SBATH, *Bibliothèque* (1928), p. 122-125; GRAF, *GCAL II* (1947), p. 22. S bath begins the pagination with p. 243.

73 Severus was a writer in Egypt and became the bishop of al-Mūnayn in Upper Egypt. He thrived during the tenth century. The Caliph al-Mu'izz gave him permission to debate with the Muslim judges with regard to religious matters. He was the first, among the Copts, to compose in Arabic. Twenty-six works carry his name, most notably among them *Kitāb al-Siyar*, known as *The History of the Patriarchs*. Cf. Ṣubḥi ḤAMAWI, *Mu'ḡam al-Īmān al-Masīḥī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 1994), p. 256.

known as b. al-Muqaffa' and who wrote twenty pieces and mayāmir, commentaries, answers and inquiries.

Inc.

قال اتفق في ايام هذا السيد البطريك في زمان المبعر ان شاباً من المسلمين من اولاد اليهود المعدلين بمصر الذين يحضرون مجلس قاضي الحكم بها وابوه رجل شاهد يعرف بابن رجا.

The following are the titles of his works:

- كتاب التوحيد
- كتاب الاتحاد
- الياهو رد على اليهود
- الشرح والتفصيل رد على النسطورية
- كتاب في الدين كتبه للورقزمان بن مينا
- كتاب نظم الجواهر
- كتاب المجالس
- طب الغم وتنفس الحزن
- كتاب الجامع
- تفسير الامانة
- التبليغ رد على اليهود
- كتاب الرد على سعيد بن بطريق
- كتاب في معنى اطفال المؤمنين والكفار
- الاستيضاح وهو مصباح العقل
- السير
- الاستبصار
- ترتيب الكهنوت
- اختلاف الفرق
- الاحكام
- ايضاح الاتحاد

Next, the scribe cites three works of b. Raḡā against the Muslims

كتاب الاعتراف اظهر فيه غور المسلمين واخصمهم من كتابهم...
والكتاب الثاني نوادير المفسرين وتحريف الخالفين احرق

المخالفين أي المسلمين بهذين الكتابين... وصنف كتابًا ثالثًا سماه كتاب الابانة في تناقض الحديث.

4. F. 222. *Kitāb al-Wāḍih* of b. Raḡā, a Muslim converted to Christianity in the tenth century.

Inc.

بسم الآب آب الدهور والابن ابن النشور وروح القدس محي من في القبور الواحد بالتثليث المثلث بالتوحيد رب الارباب والاه العالم والاحقاب الذي خلقنا من تراب وصورنا في الاحشاء والاصلاب... فوضعنا هذا الكتاب وسميناه الواضح بالحق اوضحنا فيه على مخالفينا خطأهم وكفرهم واستفرغنا في ذلك مجهودنا.

The section is incomplete; it is abruptly severed before its end, which reads

ولا يكون ذلك الا من عقل باهر وحكمة معجزة قد كان احدهم يعمد الى صنم من حجر او ذهب او فضة او غير ذلك.

5. F. 243. The controversy between Theodore Abū Qurrah and the Caliph al-Ma'mūn.⁷⁴

Inc.

وقالوا له تجلس في مجلسك رجلاً نصراني. وتبسط له مجلس الخلافة. فقال لهم المامون. هذا الرجل عالمًا وخبيرًا في دينه. ومدهبه.

Exp.

بسم الله الرووف الرحيم نبتدى بعون الله بنسخ مجادلة ابو قره مع الخليفة المامون انه كان فى ايام المامون رجل يعرف بابو قره وكان المامون يحبه ويجلسه نحوه.

6. F. 309. A transcript of the covenant which was written by Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to all the Nazarenes.

Inc.

هذا عهد الله امر بكتبه محمد بن عبد الله بن عبد المطلب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وعلى اهل كافة النصارى بسائر الاماكن حفظا منه لهم ورعاية منه لهم لانهم وديعة الله في خلقه ليكون الحججة له عليهم.

7. F. 323. A story on the authority of our sovereign, al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh, copied from another copy, at its end, it is written,

74 Sbath directs the reader to the second section of ms. 542. We note that both the incipit and the excerpt are not mentioned by Sbath.

«the book ended and thanks be to God, the Lord of all. It was written by Ġa'far b. Muḥammad with his own hand in the month of Ġamād al-Awwal, in the year 386», (996 A.D.). In it he speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ as God and man.

Inc. قال اخبرنا الشيخ ابو الفوارس الحسين بن محمد المهدي قال رواه محمد بن احمد الحارثي للقاضي الراعي رضي الله عنه وعن مولانا المعز لدين الله امير المؤمنين وعن صلوات الله عليهم اجمعين سألت رحمننا الله واياك عن معرفة السيد المسيح بحقيقته وكمال نور ابيه وظهوره في خلقة البشرية.

1. Abū Qurrah's Text

- Pageination: 122r-153r. There are two different pageinations: one Coptic and the other *Hindī*; the Coptic number is in the upper left corner of the retro while the *Hindī* is in the middle of the upper margin of the retro. While Paul Sbath follows the Coptic pageination, we are following the *Hindī* numbering.
- Schema: In our schema, this manuscript draws from both the "V" and the "W" branch. In many occasions, the scribe of S summarizes the content of a particular section, and in others, he also rewords many different parts. It seems that the scribe had available to him manuscripts from both branches and compiled his own. Hence, it is a mix manuscript.
- Gaps and additions: Many are the gaps and additions in S. An important element in S is the fact that it has in common with A and E part of the scribe's introduction that is included in the Critical Edition (and lacking in the other manuscripts studied). This portion corresponds to numbers 5-16 of our numbering system.
- Organization: S is very clear to read, with the usual *réclame* at the end of the verso. The manuscript is organized and the scribe is, for the most part, consistent.
- Use of margins: The scribe uses the margins for the page numbers. However, twice he uses them for adding the *réclame*. In Abū Qurrah's text, these occasions are the following: "ولكن" (cf. S 129v) and "الاب" (cf. S 148v). He also uses the margin to add a missing

word. This he does twice: the word “جميع” in the left margin of the page (cf. S 131r) and the word “السمّا” below the left end of the last line (cf. S 132r).

2. Writing characteristics

- Calligraphy:** S is clear to read, with red colored dots, rubrics and occasional four dotted crosses.
- Punctuation:** The scribe adds red periods in a seemingly haphazard manner. They seem to be for decoration purposes.
- Orthographic notes:** With regard to the *hamza*, the scribe, in general, is not consistent in writing it. See for example the absence of the *hamza* in “بقاه” instead of “بَقَاءَةٌ” (cf. S 122v) and it is present in “هولاء” on the same page; and he writes “السمّا” instead of “السماء” (cf. S 126r) and then “السماء” on the same page as well as others (cf. S 132v, 134v, and 135r ff.). Often, however, he writes its proper “كزسي” as in “الخلايق” and “شاوا” (cf. S 126v) and “اوليك” and “قايمه” (cf. S 128v). Occasionally, a *hamza* appears again, as in “للنساء” (cf. S 127v), but it is also placed where it ought not to be as in “ازواجاء” on the same page.

The scribe does not differentiate between “ت” and “ث”. For example, he writes “متاله” instead of “مِثَالِه” (cf. S 123r) and “التيران” instead of “الثَّيْرَانِ” (cf. S 124r) and “حيث” instead of “حَيْثُ” (cf. S 125v).

With regard to “د”, the scribe does not differentiate between “د,” and “ذ,” he writes “مدهبه” instead of “مَدْهَبِه” (cf. S 122r) “ذلك” instead of “ذَلِكَ” and “ادن” instead of “اذن” (cf. S 122v), and “معاد” instead of “مَعَادُ” (cf. S 123r).

Similarly, the scribe is inconsistent with writing the “ض”. Occasionally, he writes the “ض” as if it were “ظ”. Other times, however, he writes it “ض”. Many are the examples as in the word “ظميرك” instead of “ضَمِيرِكَ” and in the same line the “ض” is present in “اوضح” (cf. S 124v). The same can be found on another page where he writes “الظلاله” instead of “الضَّلَالَة” but he also writes “المغضوب” (cf. S 125v) and “ظللنا” instead of “ضَلَلْنَا” and on the next line, he writes “مضلا” (cf. S 146r).

However, in such instances, the proper letter is very clear from the context.

There is also a bit of inconsistency in the use of the relative pronouns. The scribe sometimes writes “الدى” instead of “التي”; see an example of such practice in (cf. S 152r); this he does in reference to “الجنة”.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABŪ QURRAH AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

A. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to ascertain whether the debate under study is in fact the authentic account of the dialogue that took place between Abū Qurrah, the bishop of Ḥarrān, and the Muslim theologians in the presence and with the participation of the Caliph 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn in the first part of the ninth century or whether it is a fabricated, highly dramatized, apologetic text.

1. Status quaestionis

The question of the authenticity of the debate accounts has occupied many scholars for over a century, and they do not all agree. In 1903-1904, Fr. Quṣṭanṭīn Bāšā takes the credibility of the account recorded in the manuscripts under study for granted. He asserts that Abū Qurrah lived during the time of al-Ma'mūn, and as a substantiation of his assertion, he points out that there are copies of Abū Qurrah's religious debate with al-Ma'mūn in the library in Paris as well as in other places. He writes,

Abū Qurrah was alive up to the time of al-Ma'mūn who seized power from 813 until 833 of Christendom and the proof of this is that in Paris' library and elsewhere there are copies of a religious debate that occurred with him in the presence of al-Ma'mūn.¹

1 Quṣṭanṭīn Bāšā writes,

«وعمّر ابو قرة الى عهد المأمون الذي تولى الامر من سنة ٨١٣ الى ٨٣٣ مسيحية والدليل على ذلك ان في مكتبة باريس وغيرها نسخًا من جدال ديني جرى له في حضرة المأمون».

Quṣṭanṭīn BĀŠĀ, *Mayāmir Tāwudūrus Abū Qurrah, Usqf Ḥarrān: Aqdam Ta'līf 'Arabī Naṣrānī* (Beirut: Al-Fawā'id, 1904), p. 3.

Georg Graf on the other hand decidedly places the debate under the subtitle of «False Writings»², and he justly points out that «the manuscript tradition is not uniform. With the popularity of such writings, linguistic and content-alterations, namely additions and copy and paste could not fail to occur in the traded-on text»³.

Joseph Nasrallah's commentary with regard to the authenticity of the account of the manuscripts is vague if not contradictory;⁴ on one page, Nasrallah seems to assert the authenticity of the account of the debate and bases his conclusion on the fact that the controversy is mentioned by the anonymous serious historian from Edessa.⁵ Nasrallah then adds that he wishes to restore to Abū Qurrah his work that others have denied him.⁶ However, on the very next page Nasrallah states his own theory as to the progression between the actual event of the debate and the manuscripts presently found. He asserts that the original setting was Ḥarrān and the debate was originally in the form of questions directed by al-Ma'mūn and answers given by Abū Qurrah, but the original report was lost and a reconstruction was developed before 1363.⁷ Hence, his position is not clear, for if the original was lost, on what basis would Nasrallah then *restore to Abū Qurrah his work that others have denied him*? And how can he assert that *the debate was originally in the form of questions directed by al-Ma'mūn and answers given by Abū Qurrah*?

2 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

3 GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21.

4 Note that according to Ignace Dick, Nasrallah in 1976 has asserted that *al-Muḡāḍalah* is fiction and was composed at the end of the thirteenth century, but then changed his mind in a subsequent article. Cf. DICK, *La discussion d'Abū Qurrah* (1999), p. 38.

5 NASRALLAH writes, «Nous avons mentionné dans la notice d'Abū Qurrah que d'après le témoignage de l'Anonyme de la *Chronique de 1234*, l'évêque de Ḥarrān a rencontré al-Ma'mūn "et il y eut entre eux une longue discussion au sujet de la foi des chrétiens. Cette discussion, continue l'Anonyme, pour qui veut la lire, est écrite dans un livre spécial"». NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 124.

6 NASRALLAH asserts, «Ce passage d'un historien sérieux, originaire d'Edesse, nous permet de restituer à Abū Qurrah une œuvre que la plupart des auteurs lui dénie de nos jours». NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 124.

7 He writes, «Nous sommes partisan d'une présentation de la religion Chrétienne, faite sous forme de questions et de réponses devant al-Ma'mūn. Elle a eu lieu à Ḥarrān. Elle a du être perdue comme nombre d'œuvres d'Abū Qurrah. Un arrangement en a été fait quatre ou cinq siècles plus tard, en tout cas avant 1363». NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 125.

Ignace Dick insists that the present account in the manuscripts at hand represent the text referred to by the anonymous historian from Edessa. Dick points out that this is not a literal record of the oral and spontaneous *Muğāḍalah*, but he allows for summation and/or elongation of the text by the scribes. He notes that the additions are taken from Abū Qurrah's other writings.⁸

Sidney Griffith asserts that «the very existence of the debate reports testifies to Abū Qurrah's fame in the Christian communities as an effective apologist and spokesman for the Christian cause»⁹. Based on independent confirmations of historicity by «the fourteenth century Coptic writer, Abū l-Barakāt Ibn Kabar (d. 1324)» who associates Abū Qurrah with a famous debate or the writings of the anonymous historian from Edessa, Griffith states «there is every reason to conclude that the later debate texts are elaborations on an earlier one which itself has not survived»¹⁰. Samir Khalil Samir also states that the debate is authentic, allowing for scribal adjustments.¹¹

All the respected scholars noted above provide no definitive answer. One of them clearly denies the authenticity of these accounts. Another takes their authenticity for granted. One changed his mind, but his reason for doing so is not clear. Others, however, assert its authenticity, but until now no one has actually edited the texts. This is what this work is about, namely to begin an examination of the texts which record the debate. However, to begin to answer the basic question with regard to the authenticity of the account recorded in the manuscripts at hand, one must first get to know the person to whom the debate under study is attributed or denied, namely Theodore Abū Qurrah, the bishop of Ḥarrān. According to an anonymous historian from Edessa, we know that Abū Qurrah negotiated and had a religious debate with al-Ma'mūn and that the debate was recorded in a special manuscript; we also

8 For the details of Fr. Dick's argument, see DICK, *La discussion d'Abū Qurrah* (1999), p. 37-40.

9 Sidney GRIFFITH, «Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah», in: *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), p. 156.

10 GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 158.

11 Samir Khalil SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Mū'allafāt*, coll. «Mawsū'at al-Ma'rifah al-Masīhiyyah», vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 2000), p. 35.

know that the debate took place in a city called Ḥarrān.¹² The place of the debate, the city of Ḥarrān, could help us understand not only the geographical but also the historical setting of the debate. That is to say, it helps in substantiating whether the parties of the debate were ever present therein.

2. Ḥarrān¹³

Ḥarrān is an ancient city situated in the North of Mesopotamia.¹⁴ According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, «it is believed to have been the birth place of Abraham»¹⁵. However, according to Genesis,¹⁶ it was only the city from which Abraham departed for the Promised Land. Earlier one reads, «Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and brought them out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached Haran, they settled there»¹⁷.

The Greeks called the city *Kappāv*, the Romans *Garrhae*, and the Fathers of Church called it *Hellenpolis* (the heathen city) due to its pagan population, for it was the abode of the Moon-god, Sīn.¹⁸

12 The anonymous historian from Edessa writes,

«وَصَلَ المأمونُ إلى حَرَّانَ. وَإِنَّ نَاوَدوروسَ أَشْفَفَ حَرَّانَ، المَكْنَى أبا قُرَّةَ، تَفَاوَضَ مَعَ المأمونِ. وَحَرَّتَ بَيْنَهُمَا مُحَادَلَةٌ طَوِيلَةٌ حَوْلَ إِيمَانِ النَّصَارَى. وَمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَقْرَأَ هَذِهِ المُحَادَلَةَ، فَهِيَ مُدَوَّنَةٌ فِي كِتَابٍ خَاصٍّ»

SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 40-41.

13 See G. FEHÉRVARI, "Ḥarrān", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003)

14 Not to be confused with one of the villages of *Halab* or another two cities in Baḥrayn or one in al-Ġūḥāh of Damascus. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'ġam al-Buldān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1993), p. 235-236.

15 FEHÉRVARI, *Ḥarrān* (2003).

16 «Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran» Genesis 12:4. In the Bible the name Haran is mentioned twenty-one times. In the Old Testament, it is mentioned as the name of Abram's brother and the father of Lot in Genesis 11:26, 27 -twice-, 28, 29, 31 and as the name of the father of Gazez, who was the son of Ephah and his concubine Caleb in 1 Chronicles 2:46. Haran was also the name of the son of Shimei and brother of Shelomoth and Haziel. The latter three were the heads of the families of Ladan in 1 Chronicles 23:9. As the name of the city, it is mentioned in Genesis 11:31, 32; 12:4-5; 27:43; 28:10; 29:4; 2 Kings 19:12. The city is also mentioned twice in the New Testament in Acts 7:2, 4.

17 Genesis 11:31.

18 FEHÉRVARI, *Ḥarrān* (2003).

Ḥarrān was located on the major caravan routes to and from Asia Minor, Syria and Mesopotamia. It was first occupied by the Arabs in 640, during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar. Marwān II made it the capital of the Umayyad Empire. The city was enhanced during the time of Hārūn al-Rašīd, who constructed a canal to ensure the city's water supply.¹⁹

During his war against the Byzantines, in 829-830, al-Ma'mūn reached Ḥarrān. There, he obviously encountered the city's population; among them were the pagans of Ḥarrān. Al-Ma'mūn offered them «the choice between the adoption of Islam, or of any one of the tolerated religions, or extermination»²⁰. According to b. Nadīm, some became Christians, others became Muslims, and still others alleged to be *Ṣābi'ūn*, for it is one of the four accepted religions by Islam (cf. *Qur'ān* 5:69). The city is now part of modern Turkey. As noted above, the meeting between al-Ma'mūn and Abū Qurrah is mentioned by the anonymous serious historian from Edessa to have taken place in Ḥarrān.

3. Abū Qurrah

Ample research has been done and many biographical sketches have been written about the life of Theodore Abū Qurrah.²¹ The name Theodore comes from the Greek *θεοδωρος*. It means the gift of God. Abū Qurrah is his Arabic *Kunyah*.²² Theodore Abū Qurrah was a Melkite bishop in Ḥarrān. The dates of Abū Qurrah's birth and death are currently unknown. Georg Graf assigns a birth date in 740²³ while Nasrallah suggests his birth to be somewhere around 725.²⁴ Ignace Dick designates 750 as a birth date²⁵ and

19 FEHÉRVARI, *Ḥarrān* (2003).

20 FEHÉRVARI, *Ḥarrān* (2003).

21 For biographies of Abū Qurrah see Ignace DICK, «Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abu Qurrah, évêque melkite de Ḥarrān», in: *Proche Orient Chrétien* 12 (1961), p. 209-223, 319-332 ; 13 (1961), p. 114-129. NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 104 ff. GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 143-170; SAMIR, *Sirat Abū Qurrah* (1999), p. 417-449; SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 3-46.

22 *Kunyah* comes from the root «ك ن ي». It means «to speak of someone or something in an allusive way, without direct reference». Christopher Paul CLOHESSY, *Methodology: A Synopsis* (Rome: P.I.S.A.I., 2004), p. 6.

23 GRAF, *Abū Qurrah* (1910), p. 20, in GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 149, fn. 21.

24 NASRALLAH, *Histoire* (1988), p. 110.

25 Cf. Ignace DICK, *Théodore Abu Qurrah: Traité de l'Existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion*, coll. «Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien», vol. 3 (Jounieh: Librairie Saint-Paul & Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1982), p. 57; See also SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 34.

Samir Khalil elects 755.²⁶ Sidney Griffith also assigns a birth date to be 755.²⁷ In concrete fact, very little is known with certainty with regard to the exact dates of birth and death of Bishop Theodore Abū Qurrah, and every construction and/or reconstruction of these dates is hypothetical, although based on an educated hypothesis. In the absence of new documents being unearthed that would shed more light on and substantiate such dates, they are at best probable. Hence, an allowance of error is to be expected.

Even with the lack of certitude with regard to Bishop Abū Qurrah's birth date, we know that he met with al-Ma'mūn during the war against the Byzantines. In fact, there is abundant information known about Abū Qurrah not only with regard to his meeting with al-Ma'mūn but also with regard to other aspects of his life. Most of this information comes from Abū Qurrah himself through his own writings. Other information, however, is deduced by different scholars and based upon other historical writings and/or events.

It is a well know fact that the bulk of Abū Qurrah's work was not written in Arabic, but in Greek. He also wrote in Syriac. This is due to the fact that most of the church's writings of his time and place were written in Coptic, Greek or Syriac. In addition, Abū Qurrah was among the very first church Fathers to write in Arabic.²⁸

The best introduction to any individual is what the person reveals of himself through his own words. Through his writings, Abū Qurrah reveals much valuable information that has geographical, historical, literary and theological significance. His own expressions, ideas, beliefs, style of writing, philosophical and theological stances, favorite citations from popular proverbs and/or expressions, biblical and/or *qur'ānic* verses, parables, metaphors, similes, etc. are rich sources for understanding this church leader as well as the time in which he lived.

26 SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 34.

27 Sidney GRIFFITH, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān (C. 755-830 A.D.)* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), p. 1, 12. See also GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 149.

28 For a complete list of Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic works as well as the studies of his writings, see SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Mū'allafāt* (2000), p. 19-50; see also SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 9-32.

We know that Theodore Abū Qurrah was a Melkite bishop of Ḥarrān.²⁹ From his writings, we know he was a defender of the teachings of the ecumenical councils of the Church up to his own time.³⁰ These councils included Chalcedon³¹ and Constantinople.³² We know that Abū Qurrah knew Greek, Syriac and Arabic, as evident from the fact that he wrote in all three languages. We also know that he was known to Ibn Nadīm, who mentions two books concerning Abū Qurrah: one written by Abū Qurrah against Nestorius and the other written against Abū Qurrah. The latter is simply called «Against Abū Qurrah, the Christian»³³.

From the anonymous historian from Edessa, we know that Abū Qurrah negotiated and had a debate with al-Ma'mūn.³⁴ The chronicle of Michael the Syrian tells us that Abū Qurrah made a number of apostolic journeys to defend the faith in Egypt and Armenia around the years 813-817; from the same chronicle we also know that Abū Qurrah «had been deposed as bishop of Ḥarrān by the Melkite patriarch of Antioch, Theodoret, who is now

29 This is evident from the introductions to his various writings. These do not leave room for doubt. Cf. BĀSĀ, *Tāwudūrus* (1904), p. 9, 23, 71, 75, 91, 180; see also Dick, Ignace, *Théodore Abu Qurrah : Traité du culte des icônes*, coll. «Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien», vol. 10 (Jounieh: Librairie Saint-Paul/Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1986), p. 85.

30 If the Council of Jerusalem can be considered the first Council of the Church, the following is a list of the rest up to the present day, a total of twenty-two Church councils: Nicea I (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), Constantinople III (680-681), Nicea II (787), Constantinople IV (869-870), Lateran I (1123), Lateran II (1139), Lateran III (1179), Lateran IV (1215), Lyons I (1245), Lyons II (1274), Vienne (1311-1312), Constance (1414-1418), Basel-Florence (1431-1445), Lateran V (1512-1517), Trent (1545-1563), Vatican I (1869-1870), Vatican II (1963-1965). Norman Paul TANNER, *The Councils of the Church: A Short History* (New York: A Herder and Herder Book. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), p. 125.

31 Qusṭanṣīn BĀSĀ, «Maymar Abū Qurrah fī al-Naṣrāniyyah», in: *Al-Maṣriq* 6 (1903), p. 801.

32 BĀSĀ, *Maymar* (1903), p. 802.

33 GRIFFITH depends on Gustave FLÜGEL, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (Beirut: New photo-ed. 1964), p. 24 and Johann Wilhelm FÜCK, «Some hitherto Unpublished Texts on the Mu'tazilite Movement from Ibn-al-Nadīm's Kitāb-al-Fihrist», in: S. M. ABDULLAH (ed.), *Professeur Muhammad Shaḥī Presentation Volume* (Lahore 1955), p. 62. See GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 155, fn. 45, 46.

34 Cf.

«وَصَلَّ الْمَأْمُونُ إِلَى حَرَّانَ. وَإِنَّ ثَاوَدُورُسَ أُسْقِفَ حَرَّانَ، الْمُكْتَنَى أَبَا قُوَّةَ، تَفَاوَضَ مَعَ الْمَأْمُونِ. وَحَزَّتْ بَيْنَهُمَا مُجَادَلَةٌ طَوِيلَةٌ حَوْلَ إِيمَانِ النَّصَارَى. وَمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَقْرَأَ هَذِهِ الْمُجَادَلَةَ، فَبِهَا مَدُونَةٌ فِي كِتَابِ

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SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 40-41.

believed to have reigned... around 785 to 799»³⁵. We also know that Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807-821) had asked Abū Qurrah to compose a letter to the Armenians who were participating in a heresy and that Abū Qurrah wrote it in Arabic and Michael Synkellos «translated it into Greek and dispatched it»³⁶.

It is thought that Abū Qurrah was a monk of St. Saba's monastery in Judea. There is no concrete evidence of this unless one considers the story of Fr. Basil³⁷ of St. Saba to be factual, at least, in that regard.³⁸ The assumption that Abū Qurrah was a monk of St. Saba's monastery is based upon the concrete influence of St. John of Damascus³⁹ in the writings of Abū Qurrah in his tract regarding the veneration of the holy icons.⁴⁰ Another reason for this assumption is the fact that «in Syrian circles Abū Qurrah's name is also associated with that of John of Damascus»⁴¹. However, there is some doubt as to whether or not Abū Qurrah actually met John of Damascus. Quṣṭanṭīn Bāšā asserts that it is probable,⁴² but even if they did not meet, one can confirm from Abū Qurrah's own writings that he was certainly a disciple of John of Damascus.

In his *Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, Abū Qurrah writes, «our city Al-Ruha, the blessed»⁴³. In fact, in the same tract he also displays an intimate knowledge of that city, with specific details that are indeed

35 GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 145-146.

36 GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 147.

37 He «is the reputed narrator of the passion story, the same Basil who, as Basil of Edessa, which is later credited with the composition of the life of St. Theodore of Edessa». GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 151. See also Alexander VASILIEV, «The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa», in: *Byzantion* 16 (1944), p. 165-225.

38 The story is considered «hagiographical fiction based on the life of Theodore Abu Qurrah». GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 151.

39 St. John Damascene was born in Damascus around 676 and died sometime between the years 754-787. His father Mansur was a prominent chief financial officer of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik. St. John Damascene is known for his tracts in favor of the venerations of the icons against the Byzantine monarch, Leo the Isaurian. Leo XIII has included him among the doctors of the Church. Cf. John Bonaventure O'CONNOR, «St. John Damascene», in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). Retrieved on August 19th 2008 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08459b.htm>.

40 For the Arabic Critical Edition, see DICK, *Théodore* (1986); and for an English translation see GRIFFITH, *Veneration* (1997).

41 GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 150.

42 Cf. BĀŠĀ, *Tāwudūrus* (1904), p. 3.

43 «مدینتنا الرها المباركة». Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 208. See also GRIFFITH, *Veneration* (1997), p. 11.

useful to our inquiry. He writes, «As for the icon of Christ, our God Incarnate from the Virgin Mary, we mention it from among the icons here, for it is revered by genuflection...»⁴⁴. Pointing to these phrases, scholars have asserted that Edessa was his birth place.⁴⁵ We also know that Abū Qurrah was familiar with Jerusalem, for he mentions it as a place in which he encountered a friend while praying in the holy places.⁴⁶

From the anonymous Syriac chronicle *ad annum 1234*, we know that Abū Qurrah was the bishop in Ḥarrān when he had a debate with al-Ma'mūn and that the debate was preserved in a special manuscript. In addition, the year of the debate is established to be 829.⁴⁷ Most of all, Abū Qurrah was and is still known for his zeal against heretics and as a defender of the faith, especially in regards to the teachings of Chalcedon.⁴⁸

The above are some biographical facts known about Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān. In addition to the above information, we also have many of Abū

44 Abū Qurrah writes,

«فَأَمَّا صُورَةُ إِلَهِنَا الْمَتَجَسِّدِ مِنْ مَرْيَمَ الْعَذْرَاءِ، فَإِنَّا إِيَّاهَا نَذْكُرُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّوَرِ هَا هُنَا، لِأَنَّنَا نُكْرِمُ
بِالسُّجُودِ».

DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 208.

45 Cf. SAMIR, *Abū Qurrah, Al-Sīrah* (2000), p. 1, 33. Griffith also asserts that Abū Qurrah was born in Edessa, quoting Abū Qurrah in «On the veneration of the holy icons» as saying «Of all the icons, we will mention here the icon of Christ our God, incarnate from the virgin Mary, because in our city, Edessa “the Blest”, it is honored with prostration...». GRIFFITH, *Veneration* (1997), p. 91.

46 Cf. BĀŠĀ, *Tāwudūrus* (1904), p. 104.

47 Venance GRUMEL, *La chronologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p. 250.

48 As noted above, the Patriarch of Jerusalem depended on Abū Qurrah for composing his letter to the heretics in Armenia. This letter supports the teachings of Chalcedon. The Council of Chalcedon was convened by Emperor Marcian, with the prior consent of Pope Leo the Great; the Council opened on the 8th of October 451 and closed on the 1st of November of the same year; the number of the members of the Council extended to about six hundred, making it more numerous than any previous Council. In spite of the great number, however, the members were mostly Eastern Greeks and Orientals. The Council dealt chiefly with Eutyches heretical teaching, namely that although Christ had two natures, the human was absorbed by the Divine. The heresy was heightened by the support and manipulation exercised by Dioscorus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, during the Second Council of Ephesus (449). The Council of Chalcedon affirmed once and for all the Orthodox position of the Church's teaching on the two natures of Jesus, the Christ. Among its actions, the Council annulled the decrees of Latrocinium (the Robber-Synod); declared the orthodoxy of Flavian's, the Archbishop of Constantinople, faith; deposed of Dioscorus and Juvenal, the Bishop of Jerusalem; and condemned Eutyches. For a detailed discussion on the council, see Charles Joseph Hefele RIGHT, D.D., *A History of the Councils of the Church, from the original documents*, vol. III, A.D. 431 to A.D. 451. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1883).

Qurrah's undisputed authentic writings as well as the manuscripts claiming to contain the account of his encounter with the Muslim elite in the presence and participation of al-Ma'mūn. Together, they can help us determine whether the accounts of the debate under study are authentic.

B. ARGUMENTS AGAINST AUTHENTICITY

There are many legitimate arguments against the authenticity of the content of the manuscripts containing the debate under study. A quick glance at the texts leaves one with the impression that it is a fairy tale. A closer look reveals other problematic elements in the texts. From the outset, the names given to the Muslim theologians cannot be found in the Islamic records of the time and could be judged fictitious. As one reads on, one finds confusion with regard to the speakers.

This problem is created by the scribes' identification of almost all the individual interlocutors or lack therein. One also notices that the Caliph al-Ma'mūn seems to be on the side of Abū Qurrah and not on the side of the Muslim theologians and/or Islam, and the Muslim theologians are presented more incompetent than is believable. In addition, the depth and frequency of Abū Qurrah's attacks on the *Qur'ān*, Muḥammad, the messenger of Islam, and the Muslims in their own court is hard to believe. Furthermore, Abū Qurrah is presented as freely quoting and misquoting both the Bible and the *Qur'ān*. Finally, the presence of linguistic errors and theological mistakes shed doubt upon the authenticity and weakens one's ability to attribute the account to Abū Qurrah. The following is a fuller discussion of these problems that can indeed be taken as negative arguments against authenticity.

1. The account reads as a fairy tale

Understandably, a cursory glance at the texts of the manuscripts recounting the encounter between Abū Qurrah on the one side and al-Ma'mūn with the Muslim theologians on the other would leave one with the impression that it is difficult to believe that this is an authentic tale,

especially if one first looks at Par. ar. 5141, particularly its conclusion.⁴⁹ It reads as a fairy tale out of *Thousand and One Nights*.⁵⁰ It is full of mystery and intrigue with war stories and hidden treasure. In addition, the name of the invading king Šahrīzār, could be an adaptation from Šahrayār. In that manuscript, the name of Abū Qurrah is changed to Šam'ūn Abū al-Qurā, who is then from Ḥabsnās; in Arabic this name “حَسْنَس” can be divided to “حَبْس” and “نَس” meaning «to imprison people». This word play is in agreement with the story of the war prisoners taken by Šahrīzār. It may be a word play made by the scribe of Par. ar. 5141. The hero of the story in Par. ar. 5141 is Šam'ūn Abū al-Qurā. He wishes to free the prisoners and use the treasure freely with the permission of the Caliph, hence the reason for his visit to al-Ma'mūn. In that tale, one finds an enormous number of soldiers granted Šam'ūn Abū al-Qurā by the Caliph. Moreover, there are great numbers of Churches as well as Mosques reported to have been built by Šam'ūn Abū al-Qurā, not to mention rest houses, stores and gardens. All of this renders the story incredible.

2. Most of the names of the different characters are fictitious

The second negative element in the texts of the manuscripts at hand concerns the names given to the Muslim theologians. According to the

49 Both the introduction and the conclusion of Par. ar. 5141 are included in the *additional manuscripts* section in the publication of the Critical Edition by CEDRAC.

50 Also known as *Arabian Nights*, *Thousand and One Nights* is a series of anonymous tales. Many of these tales can stand on its own right. Together, however, they are linked with a unified plot. Most famous among the tales within the whole are the following stories: Ali Baba, Sinbad and Aladdin. The name, *Thousand and One Nights*, stems from the fact that the collection contains one thousand and one stories, although the main plot tells us that each story took one night to tell. Many are the translations of the original that is considered a world class literature. These translations include, «The first European edition was a free translation by Abbé Antoine Galland into French (1704-17). Most subsequent French, German, and English versions lean heavily upon Galland. Among the English translations include the expurgated edition of E. W. Lane (1840), with excellent and copious notes; the unexpurgated edition by Sir Richard Burton in 16 volumes (1885-88); that of John Payne in 9 volumes (1882-84); Powys Mathers's translation from the French text of J. C. Mardrus (rev. ed., 4 vol., 1937); and that of Husain Haddawy (2 vol., 1990, 1995)». Cf. «Thousand and One Nights», in: *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition (Columbia University Press 2001-05). Retrieved February, 02, 2006 from <http://www.bartleby.com/65/n/-N-1001Nigh.html>.

texts, «They were Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī, Hārūn b. Hāšim al-Huzā'ī, Salām al-Hamaḍānī, Ṣa'sa'ah b. Hālid al-Baṣrī, and a group of the elite of Qurayš» (cf. 4 WN). Then, additional debaters are made present as the debate progresses: one finds an unnamed man from al-Hāšimī's ministers (cf. 310 WN), an unnamed man from the people of Damascus (cf. 326 WN), Ismā'īl al-Kūfī (cf. 459 WN), another unnamed man from the people of Iraq (cf. 598 WN), an unnamed man who is identified as the closest relative to al-Ma'mūn (cf. 756 WN), and another identified as the minister (cf. 760, 836 WN), and finally, the judge.

Searching the lists of names of the Muslim elites during the time of al-Ma'mūn in different sources, one finds that with the exception of al-Ma'mūn and possibly the judge, the names seem to be and in all probability are fictitious. One then may conclude that the account is not credible or at least that the presence of the fictitious names does indeed lessen the credibility of the debate accounts under study.

3. Confusion with regard to the identity of the speaker

Another related negative factor is the occasional confusion present in the manuscripts with regards to the identity of the speakers. Many of the speakers are not clearly identified. In addition, at times, it seems that if a Muslim is speaking, his identity matters not to the scribe. Moreover, the scribes do not all agree on the proper names assigned to some speakers. For example, at one point, D reports the speaker is "الاشدى" and E says "الاسدي" (cf. 421 WN). Granted the difference is a matter of dots and can be ignored, but neither personage was ever introduced. Rather, the individual speaker appears and disappears without an explanation as to his identity, so the character remains vague. With regard to this particular section, the confusion is compounded by the fact that H and I affirm that the speaker at this point was "الفارسي" (cf. 425 WN). It would seem that if the accounts were indeed factual, then the opponents, since they were from the elite, ought to be easily recognizable in the Islamic records of the time.

As for the possible exception of the judge, one of the known elite of al-Ma'mūn's court, appears only at the very end, after the debate seems to have ended, the Muslims have left and Abū Qurrah has received his reward. Indeed, this confusion weakens the credibility of the account and seemingly

renders unreliable the attempt to attribute the debate accounts to Abū Qurrah, the bishop of Ḥarrān.

4. Al-Ma'mūn seems more of a Christian than a Muslim

Often the Caliph al-Ma'mūn seems to be on the side of Abū Qurrah and not on the side of the Muslim theologians and/or Islam, not only in affection but also with regard to conflicting beliefs. The scribes place strange affirmations in al-Ma'mūn's mouth. For example, on one occasion, Abū Qurrah is reported to have asked, «Is it not, O Commander of the Faithful, that Islam admits that the Christ, Whom I follow and keep His commandments, is the Word of God and His Spirit, and that He [the Christ] is from His [God's] very Self and Essence, Creator not created?». And al-Ma'mūn is simply reported to have answered with an unqualified, «Yes». (cf. 348-349 WN). Indeed, al-Ma'mūn can agree with the first part of the question, namely that «... Islam admits that the Christ... is the Word of God and His Spirit», for this is witnessed to by the *Qur'ān*, but as for the second part, «that He [the Christ] is from His [God's] very Self and Essence, Creator not created», Islam does not admit any such thing. In fact, this is indeed a clear contradiction of Islamic beliefs and the core conflict of the entire debate. Hence, one may conclude that the writer was either not aware of the differences or was careless and presented his own beliefs as if they were that of the debater, but neither of these attributes can be said of Abū Qurrah. Thus, these negative elements in the debate accounts are indeed characteristics that make it difficult to attribute the debate record to Abū Qurrah.

5. The Muslim theologians are presented more incompetent than is believable

Not only does al-Ma'mūn agree to statements that a Muslim cannot agree with and remain a Muslim but also the Muslim theologians in this *Maḡlis* seem to be incompetent. The examples are many: when Abū Qurrah declares that the Christ is not only in heaven but also «to Him belongs the superiority over all the prophets» (cf. 98 WN), one hears no objection from any of the Muslim elites present with regard to this point. It is true that the *Qur'ān*

presents Jesus in a very bright light, attributing to him remarkable deeds and unique titles, but it is hard to believe that a Muslim would agree that Jesus has superiority over all the prophets, for that would include the one the Muslims consider the prophet of Islam, Muḥammad himself.

Another curious statement is very similar to the previous. Abū Qurrah asserts that his interlocutor knows that «our Lord, the Christ, did not say to the people, "Take Me and my mother as two gods". Rather, He said, "Take Me as God"» (cf. 231-232 WN). This is in fact an attack on the book the Muslims consider to be the word of God, the *Qur'ān*. Again, there is no reaction from the Muslims following Abū Qurrah's claim. Instead, Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd seems to have been easily distracted and preoccupied with Abū Qurrah's next question, regarding God's omniscience in contrast to human knowledge and that of the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad.

Further in the text, Abū Qurrah asserts that the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad, said «those who believe and lead the right way are the Nazarenes, the ones who speak about the superiority of God. These are from the victors on the day of the resurrection» (cf. 261 WN). No objection or claim to the contrary was given by the Muslims present.

Then when the unnamed man from the people of al-Baṣrah hears Abū Qurrah's question, «Do you not claim that the Christ died?» he readily agrees, thereby undermining his own argument and betraying his own *qur'ānic* beliefs (cf. 315 WN).

In addition, an unnamed man from the elite of Qurayṣ is confronted with Abū Qurrah's statement «And your book witnesses that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and every thing, and that He is Creator not created» (cf. 442 WN); the Qurayṣī, who can agree with only the first half of the statement but not the second part, says nothing, and in Arabic culture «السكوت علامة الرضا» (silence connotes contentment and/or agreement).

Abū Qurrah asserts again, «your book witnesses that the Christ is My Lord and My God, and the God» (cf. 493 WN). Granted, al-Kūfī was vexed, but he makes no objections. Instead, he continues the debate regarding the unity of the Christian God saying, «Tell me about the father and the son and the holy spirit. [Are they] three or two or one?» (Cf. 494 WN); never does al-Kūfī contest the claim made by Abū Qurrah with regard to the *Qur'ān*'s witness to the Divinity of the Christ. After Abū Qurrah's response to al-Kūfī, the latter disappears and others take turns with Abū Qurrah; al-Ma'mūn, *Al-'Irāqī*,

Abū al-Qāsim as well as others: all of these leave unchallenged similar statements made by Abū Qurrah (cf. 715, 716 and 767 WN). These examples do weaken an argument for the authenticity of the account presently under study.

In addition, in all the Arabic manuscripts written in the Arabic alphabet, the scribes would have one believe that one after the other, the Muslim elites admit their inability to debate with Abū Qurrah and leave ashamed; Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh (cf. 167 WN), al-Dimašqī (cf. 360-361 WN), al-Fārisī (cf. 406 WN) al-Hāšimī as well as the rest of the group all leave defeated (cf. 754 WN). This depiction of a glorious and undisputed Abū Qurrah portrays a somewhat one sided debate and seems unrealistic, thereby diminishing the credibility of the accounts.

6. The debate is full of not only delicate but also forbidden topics of discussion

The depth and frequency of Abū Qurrah’s attacks on the *Qur’ān*, Muḥammad, the messenger of Islam, and the Muslims⁵¹ in their own court seem to be an exaggeration to say the least. In spite of these attacks, one hears that al-Ma’mūn still «loved Abū Qurrah, seated him, and made him welcome in the Caliphate’s court» (cf. 5 WN). Although sad at the end, al-Ma’mūn admires Abū Qurrah for defeating Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh and showers Abū Qurrah with compliments: «Abū Qurrah is the sea of knowledge», and «No one is prepared to resist him in theology and the knowledge of religions» (cf. 168-169 WN). These exaggerations and al-Ma’mūn’s sentiments, when placed side by side, render the authenticity of the account almost unbelievable.

Furthermore, al-Ma’mūn is portrayed as joining in Abū Qurrah’s attacks. Al-Ma’mūn not only «admired him and was [made] joyful by him» (cf. 772 WN) but also taunts the Muslim elite theologians, asking repeatedly, almost consistently after every defeat, whether there remains among them a debater to debate with Abū Qurrah (cf. 720, 773, 789, 820, and 855 WN).

It is a well known fact that the Islamic pride in their messenger is undisputable, and due to tribal mentality and a deep sense of the sacred,

51 For exact references, see the «Commentary and Analysis» Chapter below.

belittling, not to mention insulting Muḥammad, can provoke havoc.⁵² Abū Qurrah clearly states that Muḥammad is not a prophet:

You also antagonize us for what has been verified and became clear to us: that God, after [sending] His anointed One, did not send anyone [else] to forbid the people, [to point out to them] the necessity of obeying Him and following His commandments and [seeking] His approval. 140-141 WN.

Abū Qurrah asserts that Muḥammad was too busy with his wives to do anything else. One reads, «there was no occupation for this [man] except marriage» (281a WN).

Abū Qurrah asserts that Muḥammad did not provide any credentials to prove his claim to be a prophet, and as far as Abū Qurrah is concerned, Muḥammad is «one who died and was buried in the dust and decayed, and [there] was no sign manifested from his deeds to excel over us by it» (279 WN), and «whoever wishes to boast of his religion, and claim that God has led him from going astray [and lead him] to the light, must clarify the matter of his religion and prove it by manifesting on his hands a sign that is manifested by God in his religion; thus, his superiority over another⁵³ would be known» (490-491 WN).

Abū Qurrah asserts that Muḥammad claimed divine inspiration to legitimize and achieve his own ends. The example given is with regard to Zayd, Muḥammad's adopted son and Muḥammad's daughter-in-law. One reads, «Greater than this was when he saw Zayd's wife and desired her, he said that inspiration came down upon him and then said, When Zayd had fulfilled his purpose from her, We [God] gave her to you in a new marriage» (281b-282 WN).

Abū Qurrah states clearly that Muḥammad «contradicted himself» (641 WN). Abū Qurrah does not stop there; he goes on to charge the *Qur'ān* with corruption: «your book is the one that has corrupted [the Scripture]» (607 WN), and he gives examples to support his claim:

52 Even in our own time, some caricatures depicting Muḥammad appeared in a European publication, and were offensive to Muslims. They caused untold damage to social and political relations between Christians and Muslims all over the world, not to mention the reaction to the Pope's Address at the University of Regensburg.

53 This could mean «another belief» or «another person». Any determination would be an interpretation. Linguistically, it would be «another belief». Logically, however, it means «another person», namely one who claims to be speaking on behalf of God yet contradicting what God has revealed previously.

Tell me, O Muslim, wherein you say the lie about your Lord [namely] that He said, "We have given you the Kawtar. Pray, then, to your Lord, and slaughter. The one who abhors is the one cut off". Tell me, O Muslim, who is this cut off enemy? And where you also say, "Perished be the hands of Abū Lahab and be perished. He did not profit from his wealth nor did he gain; and his wife the hauler of firewood, [has] around her neck a rope of palm fiber". This thing does not resemble inspiration nor [something] sent down, and it cannot be believed that your messenger said anything of this [sort]. 610-613 WN.

Is it really possible that someone would accuse the *Qur'ān* of corruption in the Caliph's court with immunity? Is it really possible that someone could charge Muḥammad with all the accusations placed on the mouth of Abū Qurrah and as a result be admired, received in the highest Islamic court of his time, rewarded and honored by the highest representative of the world of Islam of the time? It seems hard to believe, which in turn makes the authenticity of the account less credible.

7. The manner in which the Bible and the Qur'ān are quoted

On many occasions, Abū Qurrah freely quotes and misquotes both the Bible and the *Qur'ān*. For instance, in the examples given from the Bible to support the legitimacy of Christians' kneeling/bowing as a sign of reverence to one another during their communal prayer, Abū Qurrah mentions Daniel's kneeling/bowing before Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 815 WN). This reference cannot be found in the Bible; in fact, the opposite is true, namely that the king, Nebuchadnezzar, «fell upon his face, and did homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him»⁵⁴. Could such a mistake be attributed to Abū Qurrah?

Quoting the *Qur'ān*, Abū Qurrah asserts that in *sūrat al-Baqarah*, the messenger of Islam said «The Most Gracious has begotten a son. Rather, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth» (cf. 293 WN). Immediately following this statement, Abū Qurrah notes that the *Qur'an* and/or the messenger of Islam also says, «The Most Gracious has begotten a Son. We are the first to worship» (cf. 294 WN). The *Qur'ān* in *sūrat al-Baqarah* clearly reads,

54 Daniel 2:46.

«وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قَانِتُونَ»⁵⁵

«And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him»

If Abū Qurrah made an error with regard to the right *sūrah*, then the closest verse one can find is *Qur'ān* 43:81, which reads

«قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ»

«Say (O Muhammad); The Beneficent One hath no son. I am first among the worshippers».

Whether it is the former or the latter, neither states what is attributed to Abū Qurrah in the texts of the manuscripts. Did Abū Qurrah have a different *Qur'ān*? We hear no objections from the Muslims present. What we do hear is Abū Qurrah's affirmation to what he had just said, namely that «Your book and your prophet say that God has chosen His Word and Spirit and called Him Son» (cf. 295 WN). As a consequence, al-Hāšimī is confounded and his knowledge is weakened (cf. 304 WN), and he admits his inability to give an answer (cf. 305 WN). These types of errors cannot be justly attributed to the historic Abū Qurrah; hence they render the account seemingly less credible.

8. The existence of both linguistic errors and theological mistakes

Finally, judging by 21st century standards, the texts of the manuscripts at hand are full of linguistic errors⁵⁶ and theological mistakes. See for example the following verses: «You know that our Lord, the Christ, did not say to the people, "Take Me and my mother as two gods". Rather, He said, "Take Me as God". This is correct» (231-232 WN). Obviously, there is no record of Jesus saying these words.

In addition, Abū Qurrah denies heaven to Adam; one reads, «the matter would also have been in accordance with your foul claim that he is in heaven with our Lord, the Christ» (657 WN). It is difficult to believe that such mistakes would come from someone on the level of Abū Qurrah, a thinker, a philosopher, a theologian, a well versed debater and a bishop of the Church.

55 *Qur'ān* 2:116.

56 These are too many to mention here, but they can all be found in the footnotes of the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.

Moreover, the examples given in the previous section can be considered Islamic theological errors, namely where Abū Qurrah makes the assertion that the *Qur'ān* says, «The Most Gracious has begotten a son. Rather, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth» (293 WN). Again, in the *Qur'ān* one actually reads,

«وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قَانُونٌ»⁵⁷

«And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him»,

and again,

«قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ»⁵⁸

«Say (O Muhammad); if the Beneficent One hath a son, then, I am first among the worshippers»

These occasional errors in the texts do indeed shed doubt upon the authenticity and the ability to attribute the account to Abū Qurrah.

C. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF AUTHENTICITY

Granted, a quick glance at the manuscripts would cause difficulty in accepting the account as credible; however, a careful study of the texts recording the Melkite tradition of *al-Muḡādalāh* renders one hesitant to judge the account unauthentic, especially if one is familiar with the language of the time, the condition of most manuscripts written around the same period and, most especially, the writings of Abū Qurrah.

Familiarity with the language of the time reveals that it is neither classical Arabic nor simply a dialect but a mixture of both. Familiarity with the condition of most manuscripts written around the same period divulges the fact that a certain polemical tone seems to have colored much of their writings and reveals the fact that many elements are due to scribal interventions. Familiarity with the writings of Abū Qurrah, his style of arguing, the words and phrases he uses, his favorite similes and metaphors, quotation of verses, make it evident that this is basically an authentic account, at least in that it depends on Abū Qurrah's thought, if not the original account that might have been written or dictated by him.

57 *Qur'ān* 2:116.

58 *Qur'ān* 43:81.

This section is divided into two subsections. The first is concerned with answering the arguments against authenticity. The second focuses on advancing the positive arguments for authenticity present in the debate documents.

1. The arguments against authenticity can be explained

- 1.1. There is no denying that the conclusion of Par. ar. 5141 follows that of the famous fairytale of *One Thousand and One Nights* style of writing and exaggerations. However, the introduction and the conclusion of that manuscript are present in the Jacobite tradition only. They do serve a purpose, namely to render the story entertaining for a popular audience. Hence, it is possible from the popularity of the text that *al-Muġāḍalah* was used as a popular form of catechesis and rewritten in times and places where Christian beliefs were challenged by Muslims. Such writings and accounts were frequently used to protect Christians from doubts cast over their beliefs and to inform new converts and/or those who were seeking to understand the teachings of the Church.
- 1.2. As for the fabrication of the names given to the different Muslim debaters, the names of the Muslim elites are not given haphazardly to fill a blank. In fact, these names seem to be deliberately chosen, a point which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five of this study.⁵⁹
- 1.3. The confusion of the speakers' names does not in fact constitute a serious challenge, for the confusion of names is relatively limited. In fact, the reader is prepared for this type of occurrence/mishap as well as for the sudden appearance and disappearance of some participants by the simple introduction in which the scribe states that «the elite of Qurayš came to al-Ma'mūn's court, along with those who were literate and knowledgeable» (cf. 12 WN). That is to say, the list given in the beginning is left open for additions. Pointing out the place

59 See the «Scribe's Introduction» section in the following chapter of this work.

from which a particular individual is presented seems to be more important for the scribes than the individual himself. We will return to this point in more detail in the commentary section of the scribe's introduction.

- 1.4. As for al-Ma'mūn seeming more of a Christian than of a Muslim, one must consider al-Ma'mūn and the circumstances surrounding his ascension to power, the theological crises during his time and place as well as his desire to silence the elite and show the superiority of his friend, Abū Qurrah. One then can imagine al-Ma'mūn's tolerance plausible as a way to use Abū Qurrah in order to silence his opposition. Indeed, knowing al-Ma'mūn and the time in which he lived renders his praise, tolerance and allowances to Abū Qurrah plausible as a way not only to silence his opposition but also to provoke them. Hence, the historical identity and context of al-Ma'mūn is an important component for understanding the text.

As noted above,⁶⁰ al-Ma'mūn was the eldest son of Hārūn al-Rašīd and the Persian concubine, *Marāḡil*. He was the seventh Abbasid Caliph. More importantly, however, the beginning of al-Ma'mūn's reign was full of the perils of civil war and much intrigue.⁶¹ Gradually but surely, he succeeded in restoring unity to the empire and entered Baghdad as his capital in 819.⁶² Al-Ma'mūn was a well educated man in religious sciences, jurisprudence, literature, music and art. In fact he is said to have been the most intellectual of the Caliphs of the entire Abbasid dynasty. Others maintained that people thought him to have been «bewitched and mad»⁶³. Moreover, it is an undisputed fact that his reign involved intense intellectual activities, and many works of Greek and Syriac philosophy, astronomy, mathematics and medicine were translated into Arabic.

60 See fn. 2 of the Preface, above. See also M. REKAYA, "Al-Ma'mūn", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003)

61 Cf. Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad b. Ġarīr AL-ṬABARĪ, *Tārīḥ al-Ṭabarī: Kitāb Aḥbār al-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk*, vol. 10 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), p. 134 ff.

62 Cf. ṬABARĪ, *Tārīḥ* (1998), vol. 11, p. 3.

63 Cf. ṬABARĪ, *Tārīḥ* (1998), vol. 10, p. 263.

Furthermore, al-Ma'mūn is known to have encouraged politico-religious controversies among representatives of different religions as well as the different tendencies of Islam. He himself preferred *al-mu'tazilah*⁶⁴ and asserted their teachings as the official doctrine of Islam in 826, for *al-mu'tazilah* helped his position as *Imām*. One also recalls the fact that during the reign of al-Ma'mūn, not long after *al-Muğādalāh*, in 833, there existed a grave internal *miḥnah* (crisis) within the Muslim community, namely over whether the *Qur'ān* was created or eternal.⁶⁵ The scribes seem to be aware of these facts.

In addition, there is a curious phrase that means a great deal in the context of the Arab-culture, namely the assertion that «Al-Ma'mūn wished to manifest the superiority of Abū Qurrah over the elite of Qurayš, for he [al-Ma'mūn] truly loves him [Abū Qurrah]» (cf. 170 WN).

These facts may render al-Ma'mūn's allowances, praise, and tolerance of Abū Qurrah plausible; however, his agreement to certain statements remains a difficulty. These could be considered as scribal additions and/or exaggerations. Or, there still exists one other possibility: as mentioned by Sidney Griffith, «In the Arabic version of the story of St. Theodore of Edessa, the saint [read Abū Qurrah] is said to have brought about the conversion of Al-Ma'mūn to Christianity!»⁶⁶.

- 1.5. As for the incompetence of the Muslim theologians, particularly regarding Abū Qurrah's attacks on the *Qur'ān*, the messenger of Islam and the Muslims, they can be explained, in

64 *Al-Mu'tazilah* was «a theological school which introduced speculative dogmatism into Islam». Cf. WEHR, *A Dictionary* (1980), p. 610. *Al-Mu'tazilah* were a group of *Mutakalimūn* that depended on logic and syllogism in discussing religious issues. The name goes back to the fact that their *Imām*, Wāṣil b. 'Aḡā' has retreated from *Mağlis* al-Ḥasan. Their most important teachings are with regard to Human Freedom of Choice, the Creation of the *Qur'ān*, the Oneness of God, Justice and Divine Attributes. Al-Ma'mūn supported this group, and they tested people with regard to the creation of the *Qur'ān*, and that test was called «المحنة» (crisis). Cf. *Al-Munğid*, p. 537.

65 Cf. ṬABARĪ, *Tārīḥ* (1998), vol. 11, p. 35-43.

66 GRIFFITH, *Reflections* (1993), p. 158, fn. 52. Griffith depends on Ignace DICK, «Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abu Qurrah», in: *Le Muséon* 72 (1959), p. 53-67.

part, by the freedom of speech specially granted by al-Ma'mūn⁶⁷ and the particular atmosphere created by the presence of *al-Mu'tazilah* during that period. In part, they can also be explained as scribal additions and/or omissions.

- 1.6. The above two points with allowance of scribal embellishments respond to the fact that the debate is full of delicate and forbidden topics of discussion, for they are not the same in the different branches.
- 1.7. As for the manner in which Abū Qurrah freely quotes and misquotes both the Bible and the *Qur'ān*, one must note that the quotations were cited from memory and as shown by Fr. Samir Khalil, Abū Qurrah's quotations of the Bible varied even in the same piece of writing.⁶⁸ Hence, it is possible that this is in fact an argument in favor of and not against authenticity, namely the scribes could have corrected the mistakes if they were aware of them, but they either left them as they were or did in fact add to the problem.
- 1.8. Finally, the linguistic errors and theological mistakes can be easily ascribed to the scribes, for in fact they vary from one branch of manuscripts of the Melkite family to the other. In the example given above regarding the theological mistake, namely Abū Qurrah's assertion «You know that our Lord, the Christ, did not say to the people, "Take Me and my mother as two gods". Rather, He said, "Take Me as God". This is correct» (231-232 WN), one can consider this to be an inference from John 10:30 where it is reported that Jesus said, «The Father and I are one».

2. Internal evidence in support of authenticity

The most important evidence of authenticity of a given text is the text itself, a matter to which we now turn. First, in all the manuscripts examined, the basic story line is the same in spite of the variants in vocabulary and elongation of one point or another.

67 See as an example 56-61 WN.

68 Cf. Samir Khalil SAMIR, «Note sur les citations bibliques chez Abū Qurrah», in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 49 (1983), p. 184-191.

Second, when comparing our text with other undisputed works of Abū Qurrah, we found many similarities. These similarities, with one exception, are in the ideas not the articulation, which in turn supports the theory that while the record of the debate at hand was not written or dictated by Abū Qurrah himself, it consists of and depends upon Abū Qurrah's thoughts. These similarities include the following:

- 2.1. Abū Qurrah begins his tract « مَيْمَرٌ فِي وُجُودِ الْخَالِقِ وَالَّذِينَ الْقَوِيمِ » (Treatise on The Existence of the Creator and the True Religion) with a logical discussion of the mind's ability to comprehend through the senses.⁶⁹ In our text, we find an application of the same point and thought process. The point advanced in the aforementioned tract is arriving at the knowledge of the Creator from observing the creation. In our text, one reads,

And behold, you see the fire from which the entire house is illuminated, and nothing from the dirt of the lamp or the oil sticks to it. And behold the sun [light/heat/rays] falling on every entire thing, both good and rotten, the pure and unclean, and nothing defiles her from that which it fell upon. If, then, the Word and the Spirit is the Creator of all that, how is it possible [for Him] to be surrounded by anything or contained by any place? 443-445 WN

Similarly, in the first section of *Treatise on The Existence of Creator and the True Religion*, (numbers 1-33 in Dick), Abū Qurrah argues the possibility of knowing something or someone from the effects of his deeds. This is found in our text as well:

Thereupon, Abū Qurrah also said, «Behold, you see the sun in its orbit and its light on the earth, and she is created as well as her light, and she enters upon you in your house while she remains in her place, not changing. If this is manifested to the eyewitnesses in a created creature, how much more will be the ability of God, the Creator (Lofty is His name!)? Also a letter might come to you from far away lands, and from it you would know the intention of its owner and sender and know

69 The section is too long to quote here in full. What is important to our theory, however, is the concept not the details of the argument. Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1982), p. 173-180, ns. 1-33.

what is in his heart although you did not see his face ... » 453-457 WN.

- 2.2. In the beginning of *al-Muğādalāh*, Abū Qurrah asserts that God does not create what is impure (cf. 22, 27 WN). Abū Qurrah makes the same point in his other writings as well.⁷⁰ Again, we note that the idea is present although the wordings of the expressions are different. In particular, the word “نَجِسٌ” is used consistently in our text while in his treatise *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, he uses the word “دَنَسٌ”. The following are the sentences from the text under study (22, 27 WN on the right) and from *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (on the left):

<p>... ليس شيءٌ دنسٌ في كلِّ ما خلق⁷¹</p>	<p>فَقَالَ أَبُو قُرَّةَ: « فَهَلْ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ شَيْئًا نَجِسًا، وَيُصَوِّرُهُ عَلَى شَبْهِهِ وَمِثَالِهِ، وَيُسْكِنُهُ جَنَّتَهُ » ؟ قَالَ أَبُو قُرَّةَ «اللَّهُ (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى!) خَلَقَ أَبَانَا آدَمَ أَغْلَفَ، وَلَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ شَيْءٌ نَجِسٌ...»</p>
<p>... ليس في ما خلق شيءٌ دنسٌ... إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَأَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَ، فَإِذَا هُوَ حَسَنٌ جَدًّا.⁷²</p>	

- 2.3. With regard to the Cross, Abū Qurrah asserts in his treatise *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* that others would ask, «are you not embarrassed and ashamed to worship a god the Jews crucified?»⁷³ The question is in fact in *al-Muğādalāh*: «O Abū Qurrah, in any case, are you not embarrassed and ashamed to worship a god the Jews crucified, killed, and who died and was buried?» (cf. 791 WN). Again, the words used in the text under study are different from the words used in the treatise *On the*

70 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 183, 190.

71 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 190, n. 14.

72 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 183, n. 16.

73 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 215, ns. 18-19.

Veneration of the Holy Icons, but the idea is exactly the same. The following are the sentences from the text under study (791 WN on the right) and the extract from *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (on the left).

... إذا صَوَّرْنَا الْمَسِيحَ فِي كَنَائِسِنَا
مَصْلُوبًا مَفْضُوحًا، فَأَبْصَرَهُ غَيْرُنَا
قَائِلِينَ لَنَا:

ويحكم! ما تستحون من أن هذا
إلهكم!⁷⁴

«يَا أَبَا قُرَّةَ، أَمَا تَخَجَلُ وَتَحْزَى
أَنْ تَعْبُدَ إِلَهًا عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ
قَدْ صَلَبْتَهُ الْيَهُودُ، وَقَتَلُوهُ وَمَاتَ
وَدُفِنَ؟»

- 2.4. Using a king and/or a king and a son of a king as a way to explain his point seems to be one of Abū Qurrah's favorite ways to explain something in relation to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity. It is present in «مِيمَرٌ فِي النَّصْرَانِيَّةِ» (*Treatise on Christianity*) and is present in our text (cf. 214-215 WN) as well as in others.⁷⁵ The following are the sentences from the text under study (214 WN on the right) and the extract from *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (on the left).

... تشبه الكنيسة
ابن الملك

وتشبه الآباء اطباء قد وكلهم
الملك بابنه⁷⁶

كَمَثَلِ
ابْنِ مَلِكٍ
قَالَ لِغُلَامَانِهِ: قَالَ لَكُمْ مَوْلَايَ
وَمَوْلَاكُمْ

The use of a son of a king to illustrate his point is also present in his tract on The Existence of Creator and the True Religion. The following are the sentences from the text under study

74 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 215, ns. 18-19.

75 BĀŠĀ, *Naṣrāniyyah* (1903), p. 806.

76 BĀŠĀ, *Naṣrāniyyah* (1903), p. 806.

(214 WN on the right) and the extract from *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (on the left).

فرأيت أنه يشبه أمري أمر ابن ملك كان له أب ملك ⁷⁷	كَمَثَلِ ابْنِ مَلِكٍ قَالَ لِغُلَامَانِهِ: قَالَ لَكُمْ مَوْلَايَ وَمَوْلَاكُمْ
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- 2.5. In *al-Muğādalāh*, Abū Qurrah speaks of the heaven offered him by the minister (cf. 836-839 WN) as that of the beasts. One reads, «I do not prefer that delight which they promise me from food, drink, and marriage with companions with big lustrous eyes, without prayer and with no praise to God, for in this I would be in the status of the beasts» (cf. 846-847 WN). In addition, Abū Qurrah likens the status of his opponent to that of the beasts: «... Is not your status with God the same as the status of the beasts, that you and they were created by the Word of God» (cf. 308 WN). The fact that Abū Qurrah thinks of the status of the followers of other religions as that of the beasts, that is to say not living to the fullness of their humanity, is found in other writings as well. For example, in Abū Qurrah's *Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion*, Abū Qurrah writes,

لَأَنَّ فِكْرَهُمْ كُلَّهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ، فِي الْأَكْلِ وَالشَّرْبِ وَالسَّفَاحِ وَنَعِيمِ
 الْجَسَدِ لَا يَعْرِفُونَ غَيْرَهُ، وَلَا تَتَوَقَّ أَنْفُسُهُمْ إِلَى سِوَاهِ كَالدَّوَابِّ الَّتِي
 لَيْسَ لَهَا هِمَّةٌ غَيْرُهُ.⁷⁸

for their thoughts are all in the earth, in food and drink and fornication and the pleasures of the body; they do not know another, and their souls do not long for another, as that of the beasts that has no other occupation.

From this comparison, it is obvious that the idea is exactly the same, although the articulation is slightly different.

In his «مَيْمَرٌ فِي صِحَّةِ الدِّينِ الْمَسِيحِيِّ» (*Treatise on the Correctness of the Christian Religion*), Abū Qurrah himself

77 DICK, *Théodore* (1982), p. 212.

78 DICK, *Théodore* (1982), p. 252, n. 25.

uses not the word “كالدواب” (as does the beast) instead he uses the word “كالبهيمة” (as does the beast). He writes, لان الجاهل إنما همته شهوته كالبهيمة⁷⁹ (for the ignorant has all his preoccupation in his lust/longing as does the beast).

Again, the idea is exactly the same, although the diction is different. Hence, it is not improbable that many parts of the manuscript under study here did depend upon Abū Qurrah's own thoughts and writing.

- 2.6. In *al-Muğādalāh*, there is an interesting expression that Abū Qurrah uses regularly, namely “لَعَمْرِي!” (By my life!). In *al-Muğādalāh*, the expression can be found in 115, 422, 432, 506, and 739 WN. The same expression is found in his other writings as well. For example, in Abū Qurrah's famous treatise, titled «مَيْمَرٌ فِي إِكْرَامِ الْأَيْقُونَاتِ» (*Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*), the expression occurs frequently, at least seven times.⁸⁰ In Abū Qurrah's treatise, titled «مَيْمَرٌ فِي صِحَّةِ الدِّينِ الْمَسِيحِيِّ» (*Treatise on the Correctness of the Christian Religion*), the expression occurs, at least four times.⁸¹ In Abū Qurrah's treatise, titled «مَيْمَرٌ فِي الْحُرِّيَّةِ» (*Treatise on Freedom*), the expression occurs, at least five times.⁸² The list could go on but the point is made.
- 2.7. In the text under study, Abū Qurrah uses examples from the Old Testament to refute his opponents and to justify the fact that Christians, during communal prayer, kneel/bow to one another. In *al-Muğādalāh*, Abū Qurrah states,

Our kneeling one to another is not, for our part, as [our] kneeling to the One God, Trinitarian in Property. Rather, [it is] as Moses knelt before the priest of Midian, and as Jacob knelt before Pharaoh before him [Moses], and Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. 814-815WN.

79 Qusṭanṭīn BAŠĀ, «Maymar fī Šiḥḥat al-Dīn al-Masīḥī», in: *Al-Mašriq* 6 (1903), p. 643.

80 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 113, n. 8; 121, n. 28; 129, n. 29; 163, 14; 197, n. 12; 201, 31; and 203, n. 7.

81 BĀŠĀ, *al-Masīḥī* (1903), p. 640, 701, and BĀŠĀ, *Našrāniyyah* (1903), p. 804, 807.

82 Paola PIZZI, *Teodoro Abū Qurrah: La Libertà*. A cura di Paola Pizzi; testo arabo a cura di Samir Khalil SAMIR S.J. (Torino: Silvio Zamorani, 2001), p. 146, n. 45; p. 154, n. 77; p. 160, n. 99; p. 170, n. 132; and p. 196, n. 225.

In his *Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, Abū Qurrah dedicates even larger space to illustrate this point.⁸³ The following are some examples:

<p>وإخوة يوسف قد سجدوا ليوسف... وإسرائيل سجد ليوسف...⁸⁴</p>	<p>[إبراهيم] خليل الله؟ سجد لبني حيث عندما...⁸⁵</p>
<p>... وابنا يوسف قد سجدا لإسرائيل...⁸⁶</p>	<p>ويعقوب سجد لأخيه عيسو سبع مرار على الأرض⁸⁷</p>

- 2.8. Abū Qurrah differentiates between kneeling/genuflecting for worship and for reverence. In *al-Muğādalāh*, one reads, «This is from us a bow of reverence, not a bow to Divinity. And everyone who reveres his companion or his senior is obedient to him with humility and veneration» (816, 817 WN).

The same idea is found also in Abū Qurrah's other writings. See the example on the left below from his *Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*. The verse on the right is from the text under study (816 WN).

<p>واعلم أن السجود قد يكون على وجه العبادة وعلى غير وجه العبادة⁸⁸</p>	<p>وَهَذِهِ مِنَّا سَجْدَةٌ تَوْقِيرٌ، لَا سَجْدَةٌ أُلُوْهِيَّةٌ</p>
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- 2.9. In *al-Muğādalāh*, Abū Qurrah uses the Muslim's own scripture, the *Qur'ān*, to point out that God ordered the angels to kneel. One reads, «And the *Qur'ān* says that "God created Adam and ordered the angels to kneel before him, and they obeyed and knelt before him, except the deceitful Satan, for he disobeyed and did not kneel"». Abū Qurrah does the same in his *Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*. The following are the sentences from the text under study (818, 819 WN on the right) and the extract from *On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* (on the left).

83 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 126-127.

84 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 127, n. 14.

85 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 126, n. 12.

86 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 127, n. 15.

87 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 126, n. 13.

88 DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 130, n. 34. Abū Qurrah repeats the same in Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 140, n. 3.

أَنْ اللَّهَ أَمَرَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ كُلَّهُمْ أَنْ يَسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ، فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ عَصَى ⁸⁹	وَالْقُرْآنُ يَقُولُ: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ آدَمَ، وَأَمَرَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لَهُ، فَاطَاعَتْ وَسَجَدَتْ لَهُ، إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ الْمَحَالِ، فَإِنَّهُ عَصَى وَلَمْ يَسْجُدْ»
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- 2.10 Abū Qurrah gives great importance to miracles as evidence to support a person's claim that he is a prophet sent by God, and without miracles, Abū Qurrah insists, no one claiming prophecy is to be accepted.⁹⁰ For example, Moses is to be accepted due to the miracles God manifested through him: «based on the Divine miracles that is the proof of the truth of what he brings as from God, and whoever accepts a religion on another basis has forfeited and left behind the judiciousness in the matter which judiciousness was not created in the human being except for it»⁹¹. The disciples of Jesus are to be accepted due to the miracles manifested by God through them.⁹²
- The matter is of even greater importance with regard to accepting the Christ for he not only performed numerous miracles but also gave the disciples the power to perform miracles by His name.

... لان اعاجيب المسيح لاتحصى ولا تُعدّ ولم يقتصر على ما هو عمل من الاعاجيب مباشرة بل اعطى تلاميذه سلطاناً ان يعملوها باسمه... وذلك ان المسيح إله وابن إله وكان قادرًا ان يعمل بقوة نفسه الاعاجيب وان يقوي من احب على ان يعمل مثلها باسمه.⁹³

89 Cf. DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 131, n. 36.

90 BAŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 637.

91 BAŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 637-638.

92 BAŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 638.

93 BAŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 638.

... For the miracles of the Christ can neither be numbered nor counted and He was not confined to the miracles He performed directly. Rather, He gave his disciples the authority to perform them in His name... for the Christ is God, Son of God, and He was able to perform miracles with His proper Might and strengthens whom He loved to do the likes in His name.

In *al-Muğādalāh*, the occupation with miracles as proof of the authenticity of a person's claim to prophecy is clear. When speaking about the necessity of believing the Word of God and His Spirit, Abū Qurrah points out that the Muslim is following not only the one who died and was buried in the dust and decayed but also the one of whom there «was no sign manifested from his deeds to excel over us by it» (cf. 279 WN).

In the course of his discussion with regard to Jesus' miracles, Abū Qurrah writes that they ought to have believed in the Christ due to «the miracles that cannot be counted».⁹⁴ In *al-Muğādalāh*, when miracles are discussed, one reads, «which would take too long of an explanation» (cf. 205 WN).

Most importantly with regard to miracles, Abū Qurrah asserts that he who accepted Moses did so with reason for Moses' miracles cannot be performed except with the power of God. One reads,

فمن قبل الدين الذي اتى به موسى فقد رُشد لأن موسى إنما حَقَّق
نبوته ورسالته من الله بعمل الاعاجيب التي لا تُصنع إلا بقوة الله.⁹⁵

And whoever accepted the religion that Moses came with has followed the right course because Moses has declared the truth of his prophecy and message from God by performing miracles that cannot be made except by the power of God.

Abū Qurrah asserts the same with regard to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. One reads,

94 BĀŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 639.

95 BĀŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 638.

وكذلك المسيح الهنا الحكمة الحق لم يبدأ بشيء من التعليم حتى
 أظهر قوته الإلهية بالاعاجيب...⁹⁶

Similarly, the Christ, our God, the True Wisdom, did not begin anything of His teaching until He manifested His Divine Might with miracles...

In *al-Muğāḍalah*, one reads, «without a helper or an assistant. Rather, [these signs and wonders He accomplished] with a firm order and a resolute utterance» (cf. 206 WN).

Once again, this point shows close affinity among Abū Qurrah's thought patterns, points of emphasis and references both in his undisputed writings and in *al-Muğāḍalah*.

- 2.11 In *al-Muğāḍalah*, Abū Qurrah mentions that the prophecies given with regard to the crucifixion are many. One reads, «When the Jews crucified the Lord, the Christ, they did not wish to agree with Him and fulfill what was prophesied by the prophets» (751 WN). In his *Treaties on the Correctness of the Christian Religion*, Abū Qurrah spells out these prophecies and gives more details. Abū Qurrah mentions the prophecies with regard to Jesus' crucifixion (Isaiah 65:2), the piercing (Zechariah 12:10), nailing the hands and the feet and taking lots over his clothes (Psalm 21:17-19) the spitting on His face (Isaiah 50:6) the flagellation (Psalm 72:14), the teaching that through his wounds he ransoms people from their sins and heals their infirmities and guilt (Isaiah 53:5) and his being given vinegar to drink and myrrh to eat (Psalm 86:22).⁹⁷
- 2.12 In *al-Muğāḍalah*, Abū Qurrah speaks of the right direction to be faced in prayer. It is not a rare subject of discussion in Christian circles of the time; nonetheless, it is one of the issues that seem to be on his mind; he indeed does discuss the issue both in *al-Muğāḍalah* and elsewhere. In *al-Muğāḍalah* one reads, «... and the prayer facing the *qiblah*» (cf. 40 WN). In his *Treaties On the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, Abū Qurrah speaks of the same as well. He writes,

96 BĀŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 638.

97 BĀŠĀ, *al-Masīhī* (1903), p. 639.

... وَجِبَ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا يَكُونَ سَجُودُكَ إِلَّا نَحْوَ الْمَشْرِقِ. لِأَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ فِي الْمَشْرِقِ، كَمَا تَقُولُ التَّوْرَةُ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَرَسَ جَنَّةً فِي عَدْنٍ فِي الْمَشْرِقِ.⁹⁸

... you are obliged to make your prostration towards the East, for the paradise is in the east, as says the Torah that God has planted a paradise in Eden, in the East.

- 2.13 *Al-Muğādalāh* ends with the two sides agreeing on the transcendence of God. When all is said and done, «No one has ever seen God».⁹⁹ One reads,

On the following day, the judge, Yaḥyā b. Aktam, came. He said to Abū Qurrah, «O Abū Qurrah, has anyone seen God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!)?» Abū Qurrah said to him, «What do you say, O judge, in that regard?» He said to him, «No one has ever seen Him». Abū Qurrah said to him, «And I also say the like of your saying». 862-865 WN

This point, namely that *no one has seen God*, Abū Qurrah makes in other tracts as well. For example, the idea is the same in his *Treatise On the Veneration of the Holy Icons* but the vocabulary is different than that of *al-Muğādalāh*, as usual. He writes,

وَلْيُعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ إِنَّمَا يَتَرَاءَى لِلْأَنْبِيَاءِ بِالْأَشْبَاهِ، لَا بِحَقِيقَةِ الْجَوْهَرِ¹⁰⁰

And let it be known that God appeared to the prophets in likeness, not in the reality of the [Divine] Essence

The issue seems to have occupied the Christian community of the time. For example, the Nestorian Patriarch, Timothy I convened a synod to condemn whoever says that the man Jesus could have seen God during his earthly life or could see Him during the afterlife. That is to say, neither the human eye nor that of the human soul is able to see God in His Essence.¹⁰¹

The issue is also brought up again by Iyyā al-Naṣībī in his encounter with the minister Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Mağribī (981-1027).¹⁰² This is indeed an indication of the fact

98 DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 178, n. 13.

99 John 1:18a.

100 DICK, *Théodore* (1986), p. 148, n. 42.

101 Samir Khalil SAMIR, «Entretien d’Elie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn ‘Alī al-Mağribī, sur l’unité et la Trinité», in: *Islamochristiana* 5 (Rome: P.I.S.A.I., 1979), p. 38.

102 Cf. SAMIR, *Entretien d’Elie* (1979), p. 112-115.

that *al-Muğādalāh* discussed issues contemporary to Abū Qurrah's time and place. But that is not all.

Similarities and the fact that the discussions included current issues to Abū Qurrah's time and place are not the only positive elements for an argument for the authenticity. There is more.

- 2.14 In manuscript E's recording of *al-Muğādalāh* (cf. 264 WN), there is a curious "قَالَ" (He said), hanging without identifying a speaker. Who is the speaker here? Logically, from the context, it must be referring to the one who is recounting the story. This might have been Abū Qurrah. That is to say, it might come directly from that famous special book mentioned by the anonymous historian from Edessa, in which the debate was preserved for those who wish to read it.

Similarly, in E, one finds another intriguing expression that can be found in 846 WN:

فَمَا أُؤْتَىٰ ذَلِكَ النَّعِيمَ الَّذِي يَعِدُونِي إِيَّاهُ مِنَ الْأَكْلِ وَالشُّرْبِ وَالتَّكَاحِ
لِلْحُورِ الْعَيْنِ

I do not prefer that delight which they promise me from food, drink, and marriage with companions with big lustrous eyes¹⁰³

Hence, the narrator, Abū Qurrah, on this occasion, is speaking about himself and what was promised him by the Muslims, for he is speaking about the group in the third person plural. In the context, it ought to have read, as one finds in D, «you promise me». Is it possible that E is correct and the adjustment was made by the scribe in D? If so, then, these two occasions of what might seem to be scribal slips are in fact indications of authenticity.

- 2.15 In *al-Muğādalāh*, Abū Qurrah's last interlocutor is reported by E to be called Yaḥyā b. Akīm. He is also identified as *the judge*.

The section in question corresponds to 861-865 WN. It is mentioned in manuscripts B, C, E, H, I and S and is missing from D and A. Once again, we note that D is incomplete at the end and that manuscript A follows in the footsteps of

103 This is a part of a missing section in H and I, and the word in D is «you promise me».

manuscript D. In manuscripts H, B, C, and S, the scribes do not mention the name of the judge; they identify him only as *the judge*.

One wonders whether this is in fact the famous judge, Yaḥyā b. Aktam, who was in fact a contemporary of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. The difference between the two names is a matter of the placement of the dots, as can be seen in the Arabic below.

يحيى بن أكيم | يحيى بن أكتم

The original manuscript from which E has copied might have lacked the dots and the scribe made the mistake in placing them or it might have been a simple scribal error in copying. Either way, the fact that the majority of the manuscripts do not even mention the name of the judge supports the fact that the title refers to a famous person, known as *the judge*; hence, the most famous judge in the time of al-Ma'mūn, namely Yaḥyā b. Aktam. This is not an unknown practice in Arabic culture. The title of many, known as *al-laqaḅ*, suffices for recognizing the individual. Examples include al-Ma'mūn himself. It is our opinion that this is in fact the famous judge Yaḥyā b. Aktam.

The person in question is Abū Muḥammad, Yaḥyā b. Aktam b. Muḥammad b. Qaṭan b. Sam'ān b. Mušnaḡ al-Tamīmī, al-Asayyidī, al-Marwaḏī. He was born in Marw (مرو) and died in al-Rabḏah (الربذة). His contemporaries describe him as a scholar of jurisprudence, a renowned member of *al-Mu'tazilah*, disguised as a *Sunnī*. They praised his books in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (the principles of religion), but they also observed that people did not read them due to their length.¹⁰⁴

Al-Ma'mūn, himself a scholar, loved Yaḥyā b. Aktam and appointed him the judge over al-Baṣrah at a very young age.¹⁰⁵

104 Cf. Abū al-'Abbās Šams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, Iḥsān 'ABBĀS, ed., vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār Šādir, N.D.), p. 151.

105 Ibn Ḥallikān asserts it was during his twenties. See Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 1, p. 84; Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 149. Ṭalḥah AL-ŠĀHID asserts that he was eighteen years old when he became the judge over Baṣrah. Cf. ALI SĀMĪ AL-NAŠŠĀR & 'Iṣām al-Dīn Muḥammad ALI (eds.), *Firaq wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah* (1972), p. 72.

Yaḥyā b. Aktam is decidedly one of al-Ma'mūn's favorite scholars. In fact, al-Ma'mūn's ministers always consulted Yaḥyā b. Aktam in the affairs of the kingdom, knowing that he was shrewd and well informed.¹⁰⁶ According to Alī Sāmī al-Naššār and 'Iṣām al-Dīn Muḥammad Alī, Yaḥyā b. Aktam died in the year 857¹⁰⁷. Ibn Kaṭīr¹⁰⁸ and al-Aṣfahānī¹⁰⁹ agree while Ibn Ḥallikān wavers between 857 and 858. Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥallikān adds that Yaḥyā b. Aktam was 83 years when he died; hence giving us a birth date 774/775.¹¹⁰

- 2.16 Curious in *al-Muḡādalāh* is the fact that Abū Qurrah mentions sodomy to be honored by the Muslims. Whether our hypothesis with regard to Yaḥyā b. Aktam is correct or not (and we maintain it is correct), the fact remains that the issue was present in the time of al-Ma'mūn, especially with regard to the famous judge. Ibn Ḥallikān, in his *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-Inbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, recounts several incidences in which Yaḥyā b. Aktam's homosexual tendencies as well as that of his son are evident. For example, Ibn Ḥallikān mentions that it was said that Yaḥyā b. Aktam was deposed of his post as a result of the verses he recited to the handsome sons of Mas'adah. These verses are the following:

حَيَّاكُمَا اللَّهُ بِالسَّلَامِ إِلَى حَلَالٍ وَلَا حَرَامٍ وَلَيْسَ عِنْدِي سِوَى الْكَلَامِ ¹¹¹	يَا زَائِرِنَا مِنَ الْخِيَامِ لَمْ تَأْتِيَانِي وَبِي نَهْوَضُ يَحْزَنُنِي أَنْ وَقَفْتُمَا بِي
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Other incidences are mentioned as well, the most notable of them involved al-Ma'mūn himself. Ibn Ḥallikān recounts that al-Ma'mūn asked Yaḥyā b. Aktam to identify the author of the following verse:

106 Cf. Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 147-165.

107 NAŠŠĀR, *Firaq* (1972), p. 72, fn. 1.

108 Al-Ḥāfiẓ abī al-Fidā' Ismā'il Ibn Kaṭīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-l-Nihāyah*, vol. 5 (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Taqwā, 1999), p. 385.

109 Aṣfahānī (AL-), *Al-Aḡānī*, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), p. 297, fn. 1. For more information with regard to Yaḥyā b. Aktam, see vol. XIII, p. 128-129 & 275; vol. XIV, p. 99; vol. XV, p. 244; vol. XX, p. 171, 272-273 & 278; vol. XXV, p. 205, 288.

110 Cf. Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 163.

111 Cf. Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 152.

قاضي يرى الحد في الزناء ولا | يرى على من يلو ط من باس¹¹²

«Al-Fāğir Aḥmad b. Abū Na‘īm», answers Yaḥyā b. Aktam, adding that the poet is the one who also said,

لا أحسب الجور ينقضي وعلى الـ | أمة وال من آل عباس¹¹³

These statements as well as similar accounts give credibility to the fact that the issue of homosexuality was in fact a subject of discussion during the time of Abū Qurrah and al-Ma’mūn especially among the Muslims. Hence, the fact that sodomy is one of the issues considered in *al-Muğādalāh* is not as strange as it seems at first glance. On the contrary, it gives more credibility to the account as taking place with the Muslims of the time of al-Ma’mūn. The presence of such a discussion does in fact situate *al-Muğādalāh* where it is claimed to have taken place.

The mosaic formed through these collected evidences images the court of al-Ma’mūn and places the judge as a key interlocutor not only in the debates among Muslims of the same period but also with Christians, as noted in the debate with Abū Qurrah, the bishop of Ḥarrān.

D. DOES AL-MUĞĀDALĀH BELONG TO ABŪ QURRAH

It is obvious that Abū Qurrah did not write the manuscripts examined for this Critical Edition himself nor do the scribes claim to have copied them from an original, written or dictated by Abū Qurrah. The famous special manuscript mentioned by the historian from Edessa may have been in fact written by Abū Qurrah, but whether Abū Qurrah did or did not do so cannot be ascertained at this time, for lack of evidence.

When the research began for this study, Graf seemed the more believable with regard to this particular *Muğādalāh*. However, once the internal logic of the text became clear and the internal evidences were weighed, we are more inclined to believe that the person debating is Abū Qurrah.

Most of the internal evidences mentioned above show clearly that the

112 Cf. Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 153.

113 Cf. Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 153.

vocabulary is not that of Abū Qurrah but that the ideas have much in common with those found in his authenticated writings. Taken individually, the positive elements are not by any means conclusive. Considered as a whole, however, these elements render plausible a conclusion that the work is authentically Abū Qurrah's work. In fact, taken together, it is difficult to deny that the person debating is Abū Qurrah.

Consequently, it is our opinion that Abū Qurrah did not write this text. Allowing for additions and subtractions in more than one place, we nevertheless conclude that, this debate is an authentic account of Abū Qurrah's actual *Muḡādalah* with al-Ma'mūn and the Muslims of his time. This *Muḡādalah* belongs to Abū Qurrah and ought to bear his name.

Our theory is the following: Abū Qurrah told the tale. He perhaps recounted, wrote or dictated the original account of *al-Muḡādalah*. In any case, he definitely told the tale in some form, written or oral. He or others of his time recorded it in a separate manuscript, namely the famous special manuscript mentioned by the historian from Edessa; with the passing of time, the tale was retold, with the addition to the original of certain parts here and there, whether from Abū Qurrah's own works and/or from what was needed by and suited the setting of a particular scribe. Others heard the story of *al-Muḡādalah* or read it; in turn, they wrote it down, adding a bit in one place and forgetting or omitting a bit in another, and dramatizing the setting on many occasions to suit the scribes' particular needs.

It is also possible that knowing that the encounter took place and not possessing the original, some disciples of Abū Qurrah have put the account together while depending upon Abū Qurrah's own teachings/writings. This procedure is not unusual either. In the Old Testament, for example, many of the Psalms attributed to David are in fact written by others; the book of Isaiah has been written by many authors, although the entire book is attributed to Isaiah. In the New Testament, some of Paul's letters are written by his disciples and attributed to him. In these and other cases, one of the reasons for attributing a work to someone else is the fact that it contains that person's thoughts and teachings. This might well be the case here.

Certainly, there are many dramatizations added by the scribes. Graf's understanding of this dialogue is that of a mere assemblage of copy and paste. A closer look reveals clearly a coherent whole, with its own internal logic and reasonable progression. *Al-Muḡādalah* is indeed based on an oral

debate that is by its very nature spontaneous; hence, it is reasonable to expect topics emerging, left for a while and brought up again, especially if we are to believe that the duration of the debate was for more than one day with new interlocutors continually introduced.

A definitive “Yes” of the authenticity of the content of the manuscripts under study cannot be given at this time. The remaining extant manuscripts concerning the debate, whether written in *garšūnī* or Syriac, need to be studied and critically compared before a definitive affirmation or an unlikely denial about authenticity can be given to the content documented as the Abū Qurrah debate.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMENTARY AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a commentary and a brief analysis of nearly all of the issues discussed in the debate under study.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter begins with an outline of *al-Muğāḍalah* as a whole. The scribe's introduction and each major section of the debate are discussed. The chapter serves as an overview of the text under study in this research and points to the internal logic and progression of the debate. Parallel comparisons between *al-Muğāḍalah* and an earlier debate, namely that between the Caliph al-Mahdī and Patriarch Timothy I are made throughout the discussion.

1. Outline

The scribe's introduction and preparation of the debate	1-16 WN
I. The law of circumcision and the Old Covenant	17-35 WN
II. Christ made with the nations a New Covenant	36-91 WN
III. The religion of God is faith in Jesus, the Christ	92-200 WN
IV. Christ came into the world, perfectly human and perfectly Divine	201-433 WN
V. The Incarnation and the unity of the Trinity	434-663 WN
VI. Why the Incarnation	664-701 WN
VII. The Divinity of Christ	702-819 WN
VIII. Al-Ma'mūn praises Abū Qurrah and others invite him to Islam	820-853 WN
IX. The conclusion of the debate: No one has seen God	854-867 WN

2. Scribe's introduction 1-16 WN

The text begins with a general introduction, composed by the scribe.¹ In the introduction, the scribe sets the stage for the debate to come. First, the scribe begins by invoking² the name of God and soliciting His help. Next, he presents the main characters. In that presentation, the scribe names some of Abū Qurrah's opponents, leaving the opportunity open to add more names later during the course of the debate.³ With the obvious exception of al-Ma'mūn and possibly the Judge at the end of the debate, the names of these opponents cannot be found in the Islamic records of the period. They are most likely fictitious. However, they are not chosen haphazardly. Rather, they seem to be deliberately selected to represent different geographic centers of Islam as well as its most important tribe, namely Qurayš. The scribe mentions Baṣrah from the outset (cf. 4 WN), Damascus (cf. 326 WN), Kūfah (cf. 459 WN), and 'Irāq (cf. 598 WN). Qurayš, although a tribe not a city, is also mentioned from the start (cf. 4 WN).

Next the scribe explains that al-Ma'mūn loves Abū Qurrah while Qurayš's elite resent not only Abū Qurrah but also his friendship with al-Ma'mūn. The reason for this resentment is also given, namely that Abū Qurrah is a Christian. One reads, «You sit with a Nazarene⁴ man and welcome him into the Caliphate's court!» (cf. 6 WN) In this section, al-Ma'mūn gives the elite his reason for befriending Abū Qurrah, namely the fact that the latter «is a knowledgeable man, an expert in his religion and sect» (cf. 7 WN). The scribe's introduction provides valuable information

1 This is an obvious deduction indicated by the use of the third person pronoun in reference to the different characters (singular and/or plural). This practice continues throughout the manuscript. Hence, it is one of the indicators pointing to the fact that none of the written texts examined were written or dictated by Abū Qurrah.

2 As clearly indicated in the Arabic text (cf. fn. 1 of the Critical Edition), the invocations used are not the same in all manuscripts. Manuscript Par. BNF ar. 5141 utilizes, بِسْمِ «الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ» as part of the invocation. Cairo T 87 for example uses بِسْمِ «الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ» as part of his own invocation. It is worthy to note, therefore, that بِسْمِ «الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ» was common to both Christians and Muslims.

3 This he does by adding, «and a group of the elite of Qurayš» (cf. 4 WN) and «... along with those who were literate and knowledgeable» (cf. 12 WN).

4 *Naṣrānī* (pl. *Naṣārā*) is a reference to the city of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. A *Naṣrānī* is a person who follows Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ; *Naṣrānī* is another name for a Christian. For more details, see Jean-Maurice FIEY, "Naṣārā", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

with regard to how Abū Qurrah is viewed, namely Abū Qurrah is loved by al-Ma'mūn who considers him a knowledgeable man, and the elite credit him nothing. The elite are not convinced by al-Ma'mūn's response, and they ask, «From where would this Nazarene have a religion or a sect?»⁵ (cf. 8 WN).

The scribe, then, makes it seem as if the debate was provoked by the protest made by Qurayš's elite to al-Ma'mūn as well as al-Ma'mūn's desire for the debate, perhaps with the intention of converting his friend, Abū Qurrah. One reads, «I long (By God!) that you would debate with him, and clarify [for him] the truth of the religion of Islam, and manifest the weakness of the religion of the Nazarenes» (cf. 9-10 WN). There exists another motive given by the scribe for this particular debate, namely al-Ma'mūn's desire to retaliate against Qurayš's elite by showing «the superiority of Abū Qurrah over the elite of Qurayš» (cf. 170 WN). Hence, one may deduce that al-Ma'mūn's desire for the debate is, in part, a way to silence Qurayš's elite and vindicate his friend, for one also hears that al-Ma'mūn truly loves Abū Qurrah (cf. 170 WN). This seemingly passing point is of capital importance, for it explains, in part, al-Ma'mūn's extraordinary tolerance in the face of Abū Qurrah's many attacks against Islam⁶, Muslims⁷, Muḥammad⁸ and the *Qur'ān*⁹. Discussing these issues is not a permitted activity, for it «was, of course, strictly forbidden to criticize Muḥammad, the *Qur'ān* and Islam»¹⁰.

5 It is interesting to note that the elite did not question al-Ma'mūn's assertion that Abū Qurrah is «a knowledgeable man» (cf. 7 WN).

6 Cf. 618-623, and 626 WN where Abū Qurrah differentiates between Islam and faith.

7 Cf. 615, 616, 624, and 625 WN where Abū Qurrah differentiates between Muslims and believers; see also 620-642 WN where Abū Qurrah enumerates some of what he takes against Muslim behaviors as evidence of corrupting their own book, the *Qur'ān*; and 824-826, where Abū Qurrah applies Isaiah 6:10 to his Muslim debater; See also 828-829 WN, where Abū Qurrah likens the authority of the disobedient Pharaoh over the Hebrews as that of the Muslims over the Christians.

8 Cf. 140-141 WN, where Abū Qurrah clearly denies that Muḥammad is a prophet, and 280-285 WN where Abū Qurrah asserts that Muḥammad was too busy with marriage to do anything else, and 279, 490-491 WN where Abū Qurrah asserts that Muḥammad did not provide any credentials to prove his claim of prophecy, and 641, where Abū Qurrah charges the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad, with contradicting himself.

9 Cf. 607 WN where Abū Qurrah charges the *Qur'ān* with corruption, and 610-614 WN where Abū Qurrah gives examples of what he considers corruption in the *Qur'ān*.

10 LAZARUS-YAFEH, *The Majlis* (1999), p. 8.

Such extraordinary and unexpected tolerance from al-Ma'mūn needs to be explained. The scribes knew that, and, as shown above, they do explain the why of such tolerance more than once.

Finally, the scribe notes, Qurayš's elite welcome the opportunity to debate with Abū Qurrah and express their readiness for it by setting the time for the encounter to take place on the very next day.

On the following day, all parties are present, and al-Ma'mūn does not shy from relating to Abū Qurrah the elite's words (cf. 13 WN). Abū Qurrah, in his turn, expresses both his confidence in the outcome of such a proposed debate and his caution (cf. 14-15 WN). Abū Qurrah's acceptance of the debate is conditioned: The Muslims must follow the command of their sacred book, the *Qur'ān*, and not argue with Abū Qurrah except with «ways that are best»¹¹ (cf. 16 WN). The stage is set, and the debate proper begins.

I. THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION AND THE OLD COVENANT (17-35 WN)

Al-Ma'mūn begins the debate with two questions, regarding circumcision: is the foreskin impure? (cf. 19 WN); and how did God bring down circumcision?¹² (cf. 26 WN). The discussions of circumcision lead to the story of the creation of man (cf. 20-24 WN) and to the covenant with Abraham (cf. 32-35 WN). In the discussion of circumcision, the dignity of the human being is implied by the fact that humans are created in the image and the likeness of God. Another issue is also implied, namely the goodness of creation (cf. 22, 27 WN).

The discussion of circumcision is immediately followed by the issue of

11 Cf. *Qur'ān* 16:125a,

«ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ»
«Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way».

12 One cannot help but wonder whether the issue of circumcision is of such importance or if circumcision is just a means to open the discussion, a *warm-up topic*? Circumcision was also one of the issues discussed between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī. Patriarch Timothy I tells us that he was asked by al-Mahdī, «Why then do you not circumcise yourself? If your head and leader is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was circumcised, you should also by necessity circumcise yourself». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 27-28. In the debate under study, the concept of Divine Laws being literally *sent down* is present from the outset.

the Old and New Covenant.¹³ It is plausible to deduce that circumcision is brought up by the Muslim to indicate that Christianity has cancelled, or to use an important Islamic expression, *abrogated*¹⁴, an imperative element of the Covenant with Abraham in the Old Testament.¹⁵ According to the *Qur'ān*, Islam, in contrast to Christianity, is a return to the religion of Abraham, who according to the *Qur'ān* was a Muslim.¹⁶ The Muslim's

- 13 Both issues and in the same sequence are found in Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī as well: One reads, «And our King asked me: "How did Jesus Christ abolish circumcision and what is the meaning of the 'image' you have spoken of?" -And I replied: "All the Torah, was, King, the image of the Gospel. The sacrifices that are in the Law are the image of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the priesthood and high-priesthood of the Law are the images of the high-priesthood of Christ, and the carnal circumcision is the image of His spiritual circumcision...». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 28.
- 14 Many of the *qur'ānic* verses need further explanations in order to be understood. *Qur'ānic* commentators utilize different tools in their efforts to explain, such as the grammatical possibilities of particular structures and their consequent meaning. Muslim scholars also apply the different analytical techniques to the *Qur'ān* as in *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the reasons for the sending down) and *al-nāsiḥ wa-l-mansūḥ* (the abrogating and the abrogated). As a consequence, the understanding of a particular verse is dependent upon a certain explanation/interpretation.
- 15 Genesis 17:10-13, «This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and those acquired with money from any foreigner who is not of your blood. Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact».
- 16 Cf. *Qur'ān* 2:133,
 «أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ. إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ»
 «Or were ye present when death came to Jacob, when he said unto his sons: What will ye worship after me? They said: We shall worship thy God, the God of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, One God, and unto Him we have surrendered»
 and *Qur'ān* 2:135,
 «وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ»
 «And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters»
 and *Qur'ān* 2:136,
 «قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ»
 «Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that

reasoning seems to be the following: if the Gospel *came down* abrogating the Torah, similarly the *Qur'ān* came down abrogating the Gospel. Beside Islam, Muslims believe that there exist three other legitimate religions, namely that of the *Ṣābi'ah*, Judaism, and Christianity.¹⁷

What concerns us here is the fact that Muslims consider Judaism, Christianity and Islam heavenly religions.¹⁸ Muslims also believe that both Jews and Christians have corrupted the Scriptures. Christianity, on the other hand, does not acknowledge Islam as a heavenly religion nor does Christianity believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, abrogated Judaism. Rather, Christians firmly believe that Christ fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. The issue is common in an inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. A famous example is found in the discussion between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī. Al-Mahdī states, «If Christ abolished the Law and all its requirements, He is, therefore, its enemy and its adversary. We call enemies those who destroy and contradict one another»¹⁹. Timothy's serene answer here, in a simple but powerful and telling image, articulates well the Christian belief. He says,

The light of the stars is abolished by the light of the sun, and the light of the latter is not for that the enemy of the former; the functions of childhood are also abolished by those of manhood, and man is not for that enemy of himself; an earthly kingdom is also abolished by the heavenly kingdom, and the kingdom of God is not for that the enemy of men. In this very way Jesus Christ abolished and destroyed the Law by the Gospel, while He is not for that the enemy and the adversary of the Law.²⁰

which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered».

- 17 The reason Muslims believe in the first three is the simple fact that they are mentioned in the *Qur'ān*. Cf. *Qur'ān* 5:69,

«إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِغُونَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ»

«Lo! those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabaeans, and the Christians - whosoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doth right - there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve».

- 18 The Arabic expression used by the Muslims is «الأديان السماوية» (heavenly religions). By "heavenly" Muslims mean «Divinely dictated».

19 Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 28.

20 Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 28-29.

It is worthy to note that this beautiful analogy does not prove anything. It only renders the issue clearer. It explains that the matter, although a mystery, is credible and does not contradict reason. Furthermore, it shows a natural confluence and harmony among the different elements put forth as examples to illustrate the natural union and the accord that exists between the Old and the New Testaments.

II. CHRIST MADE WITH THE NATIONS A NEW COVENANT (36-91 WN)

The discussion of circumcision also leads to the difference between the Jewish and Christian Covenant (cf. 36-43 WN). This discussion leads to the issue of idolatry (cf. 30 WN) and very quickly *al-Muḡādalāh* becomes a debate about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.²¹

Abū Qurrah proclaims his faith in Jesus as «the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,... the Son of God, the Word of God and His Spirit, without separation among them» (cf. 48-49 WN). The expression, «the Son of God» is one of the familiar Evangelical titles attributed to Jesus in Christianity and its use is usual in Christian surroundings. However, the addition of «the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob» before the title «Son of God» is not a familiar one. Nonetheless, the expression of faith is implied in Jesus' words in the Gospel of John.²² This assertion that Jesus is «the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Son of God, the Word of God and His Spirit, without separation among them» understandably provokes the objection of the Muslim, Muḡammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī. Abū Qurrah's assertion and Muḡammad b. 'Abd Allāh's objections are both important points in the debate and their implications constitute one of the principle differences between Islam and Christianity, namely the identity of Jesus.

The objector likens Jesus to Adam (cf. 52 WN), following the teaching of the *Qur'ān*²³ and stressing the Islamic belief that Jesus is only human. Here,

21 In the debate between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī, the question with regard to the identity of Jesus comes in the very beginning. Al-Mahdī asks, «What then do you say that Christ is?». Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 17.

22 Cf. John 8:58, «Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM"».

23 See *Qur'ān* 3:59,

«إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ»

we find Abū Qurrah to be very cautious. He is silent²⁴ (cf. 53 WN). Abū Qurrah's silence speaks volumes, and his caution is another interesting element in the debate. It is caution that reduces Abū Qurrah to silence, and he keeps silent until al-Ma'mūn assures him of his safety and grants him freedom of speech (cf. 56-61 WN). As pointed in the previous chapter, Al-Ma'mūn's elaborate permission of freedom of speech is yet another piece of the puzzle that explains, in part, Abū Qurrah's openness and al-Ma'mūn's allowances. In fact, Abū Qurrah's caution and al-Ma'mūn's reply here render the account more believable, for the debate is approaching the threshold of the forbidden areas of discussion where there may be grave consequences.

Once Abū Qurrah is granted safety and freedom of speech, he responds to his objector, pointing to the inconsistency in the latter's line of thought (cf. 64-72 WN). Al-Ma'mūn admires Abū Qurrah for this.²⁵ Encouraged by al-Ma'mūn's satisfaction, Abū Qurrah continues. He asserts that the Christians possess an argument for the credibility of their faith, *a reason for their hope*. In addition, in this section Abū Qurrah offers some of the reasons for and some of the consequences of Christian silence, inviting his opponent to listen and admit the truth if it becomes evident (cf. 74-83 WN). Then, Abū Qurrah reminds his opponent how Muslims ought to proceed in the dialogue with Christians according to the *Qur'ān*, namely with «ways that are best»²⁶, pointing to the fact that Muslims do not in practice follow this *qur'ānic* commandment; rather, the Muslims' actions are quite contrary to it. Next, Abū Qurrah recites some occasions where the prophet of Islam and the *Qur'ān* praise the Christians (cf. 84-91 WN).

«Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! And he is».

For another example, see *Qur'ān* 4:171. The verse is discussed in more detail in the translation section of the Critical Edition.

- 24 The issue is very important today as well. Many Christians today are reduced to silence, especially with regard to the differences between the Christian and Islamic beliefs. Some of the reasons are obvious, such as ignorance, desire for peace and/or fear of persecution. Most importantly, however, many have substituted proclaiming the Gospel with inter-religious dialogue.
- 25 Al-Ma'mūn's admiration of and joy with Abū Qurrah is another important element in the debate that is repeated many times (cf. 73, 168, 264, 489, and 772 WN).
- 26 Cf. *Qur'ān* 16:125a.

III. THE RELIGION OF GOD IS FAITH IN JESUS, THE CHRIST (92-200 WN)

The recitation of the *qur'ānic* verses in which, according to Abū Qurrah, both the prophet of Islam and the *Qur'ān* praise the Christians leads Abū Qurrah to the discussion of the first *sūrah* of the *Qur'ān*, *al-fātiḥah*. Abū Qurrah begins to explain some of its verses according to his own, unique and logical manner of interpretation (cf. 92-95 WN).

In Abū Qurrah's interpretation of these verses from *al-fātiḥah*, according to the *Qur'ān*, the Christians become the true believers and the Muslims turn out to be the unbelievers. It is the exact reverse of what many Muslims consider these verses to mean.²⁷

At this point, an unnamed Muslim states that Islam is the religion to be followed²⁸ (cf. 102 WN). This statement allows Abū Qurrah to continue, asserting that the religion of God is faith in Jesus, the Word of God and His Spirit, and again Abū Qurrah asserts this conclusion according to his interpretation of the *Qur'ān* (cf. 103-115 WN). In fact, the Muslim's objection, although logical according to the Muslim's belief, seems to serve only as an opportunity for Abū Qurrah to assert his previous claim with regard to the identity of the true believers and the true unbelievers, according to Abū Qurrah's interpretation of the first *sūrah* of the *Qur'ān*.

Understandably, the Muslim group is vexed by this, and one of them, Hārūn b. Hāšim al-Ḥuzā'ī, objects to Abū Qurrah's claim (cf. 116-118 WN). Continuing in the same line of reasoning, Abū Qurrah points out that this is not his own claim but that of the prophet of Islam as recorded in the *Qur'ān*, he then accuses his opponent of believing neither his own prophet nor his book (cf. 119-121 WN). Hence, the Muslims' boasting is meaningless as they depend on empty claims (cf. 122-123 WN). This leads to what seems to

27 See, for example, the interpretation given by Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī for the seventh verse of *al-fātiḥah*; there the authors state clearly that the ones going astray are the *Naṣārā*, insisting that those who are on the right way are neither the Jews nor the Christians. Ġalāl al-Dīn AL-MAḤALLĪ & Ġalāl al-Dīn AL-SUYŪṬĪ, *Tafsīr al-Ġalālayn* (Damascus: Dār al-Ġīl, N.D.), v. 7.

28 Cf. *Qur'ān* 3:85,

«وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ»

«And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allāh) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter».

be a tangent, namely an exchange over the image of heaven in Islam (cf. 124-125 WN). This seeming digression opens the door for a glance at the image of God in Islam, according to Abū Qurrah (cf. 127-137 WN).

Suddenly, the conversation shifts to the reasons why Muslims antagonize the Christians. In this discourse, Abū Qurrah asserts that «God after [sending] His anointed One did not send anyone [else]» (cf. 140-141 WN). Hence, Abū Qurrah denies Muḥammad to be a prophet sent by God.²⁹ Nevertheless, Abū Qurrah encourages the Muslim to follow Muḥammad's council with regard to Jesus and the Christians, as understood the way Abū Qurrah explains it (cf. 142-161 WN).

The Muslim debater, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī, then, admits his inability to continue the debate with Abū Qurrah and gives the following reason:

The religion of Abū Qurrah, O Commander of the Faithful, is ancient and authentic, and its adherent does not become bored or fatigued from the answer [while]... the religion of Islam is succulent, supple and tender, [and] its adherent is content with faith, rich with the love of God, [with no need] to return an answer, in what my mind falls short in its regard and in which my thought is confounded. I have no answer for him. 164-167 WN.

With the admission of inability comes the admiration and satisfaction of al-Ma'mūn. This expression of the inability of the Muslim to carry on a debate with Abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn's admiration becomes a refrain, appearing again and again throughout the debate, except at the very end.

At the order of al-Ma'mūn, Salām b. Mu'āwiyah al-Hamaḍānī is brought to the debate. Salām is described as a powerful man, zealous and self-assured but also short-tempered. Salām's strategy is clear from the outset:

... Abū Qurrah has always been known for his ignorance, hypocrisy, infidelity and boldness against God. But, if he were to be shown the right words, he would neither have a saying nor would [his] words be welcome with the Commander of the Faithful (cf. 176-177 WN).

Hence, Salām's plan of action and council to al-Ma'mūn is simple: «If he [Abū Qurrah] were to see from you the assault of the lion over the foxes, his self-admiration would vanish and he would change from whatever foolishness he is [engaged in]» (cf. 181 WN).

29 The issue is also a subject of discussion between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī. Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 32-35.

Al-Ma'mūn's reaction is just the opposite. He admonishes Salām and blesses Abū Qurrah. «This was hard for al-Ma'mūn's company [to hear]» (cf. 191 WN), so they suggest the presence of yet another debater, Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd, a man from al-Baṣrah (cf. 192 WN). They describe Ṣa'ṣa'ah as one who is «practiced in [these] matters indeed, and studied the books, comprehended the truths of the religion of Islam, and understood the weakness of the opinion of the Nazarenes» (cf. 193 WN). Al-Ma'mūn accepts their advice and orders the presence of Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd al-Baṣrī.

On the following day, all are present including Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd al-Baṣrī, and the debate continues. Al-Ma'mūn reminds one and all of the rules of the debate. He speaks to Abū Qurrah:

Bring us what you have, O Abū Qurrah, and do not fear [any] inconvenience at all. There is no one here who will respond to you except with 'ways that are best', and I will support you by the truth, if you make it clear. This is a just and fair court. No one transgresses against you in it. Whoever is triumphant with the truth, for him will be the victory! 196-200 WN

IV. CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD PERFECTLY HUMAN AND PERFECTLY DIVINE (201-433 WN)

The discussion continues, returning to the central point of the debate, namely Jesus' identity, specifically the two natures of Christ. This time, the identity of Jesus is looked at from the aspect of the prayer of Jesus.³⁰

Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd is very specific in his inquiry. He is concerned with the seventeenth verse of chapter twenty from the Gospel of John, where Jesus says, «I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God». To Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālīd, the humanity of Jesus is very clear from Jesus' own words. That is to say, if Jesus prays, he must be a man, for if he were God to whom and why would he pray.

30 The issue is also discussed between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī. In fact, the exact same verse is brought up with regard to the prayer of Jesus; al-Mahdī asks, «If He says that He is His Father, He is not His God, and if He is His God, He is not His Father; what is this contradiction?». Timothy's answer includes, «... He is, however, from His Father by nature of the Word, born of Him from eternity, as light from the sun and word from the soul; and God is His God by the nature of the humanity of the Word born of Mary...». For the complete discourse with regard to this point, see MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 20-22.

In this section, Abū Qurrah speaks, explains, poses questions, and attacks, while hardly allowing his debater a chance to respond, except for the last point to which Ṣa'ṣa'ah's answer only inspires yet another attack. However, Abū Qurrah points out that the Divinity of Jesus was manifested not only from Jesus' own words but also from Jesus' proper deeds.

Abū Qurrah asserts that Jesus «came to us perfectly human and perfectly Divine» (cf. 207 WN). For the explanation of the verse as understood by the Christians, Abū Qurrah begins using a practical example, namely how a son of a king would speak about his father (cf. 214-215 WN). Then, Abū Qurrah explains logically the difference between the relationship of the disciples to the Father and that of Jesus to the Father (cf. 216-217 WN). In this discourse, Abū Qurrah mentions some of the motives for the Incarnation (cf. 218-223 WN), the Divine origin of the Word of God (cf. 234-235 WN), and the miraculous conception of Jesus and the *Qur'ān*'s witness to it (cf. 226 WN).

In the same section, Abū Qurrah questions Ṣa'ṣa'ah with regard to God's omniscience in respect to the future and the inconsistency of Ṣa'ṣa'ah's image of God (cf. 228-237 and 244-246 WN), and points to an absurdity in Ṣa'ṣa'ah's belief with regard to Muḥammad in reference to God (cf. 240-241 WN).

Next, the issue of word definitions and meanings of terms comes forth. Abū Qurrah asks about the Muslim's belief of Jesus being «the Word of God and His Spirit», explaining the consequences of such belief. The term is used by both Christians and Muslims, but each understands it in a different way. Abū Qurrah does not take this into account and launches yet another attack on Ṣa'ṣa'ah, accusing him of not following the *Qur'ān*, reciting in the process a number of verses to make his point. Abū Qurrah quotes the *Qur'ān*'s admission that the Christians are led by the Truth (cf. 247 WN) and held them in high respect (cf. 250-253, 261, and 263 WN), hence the *Qur'ān*, in certain verses, contradicts Ṣa'ṣa'ah's accusation of polytheism (cf. 248, 254 WN). Next, Abū Qurrah explains what the *Qur'ān* and its narration of Muḥammad's words intends by the word polytheist³¹ (cf. 255-

31 Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:116,

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَالًّا لَا يَعْجِدُ»
 «Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray».

260 WN), thereby differentiating between Islam and faith (cf. 260 WN). Al-Ma'mūn is joyful, and Abū Qurrah is encouraged by this joy (cf. 264-266 WN).

Abū Qurrah then wonders at the fact that Muslims mock Christians for following the Christ, Who created all in heaven and earth (cf. 272, 277 WN), and Who the Muslims themselves admit that He is alive in heaven. Yet, Muslims follow another who has died and was buried in the earth (cf. 267-270; 273 WN). Here Abū Qurrah quotes the Old (cf. 274 WN) and New (cf. 275 WN) Testaments, and the *Qur'ān* (cf. 276 WN) in support of his assertion with regard to the Word of God. At this point, Abū Qurrah attacks certain accounts of Muḥammad's deeds³² (cf. 279-285 WN). No one responds to these attacks.

Without delay, however, a man from Banū Hāšim gives Abū Qurrah the reason why the Muslims accuse Christians of polytheism, namely for saying that God has a Son (cf. 286-287 WN). This is, for the Muslim, a very reasonable accusation, for Abū Qurrah's assertion contradicts the *Qur'ān*'s abundant rejection of such claim. See for example, *Qur'ān* 112:3-4,

«لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ»

«He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him»

See also *Qur'ān* 17:111,

«وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ
وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِّنَ الدَّلِّ وَكَبْرُهُ تَكْبِيرًا»

«And say: Praise be to Allah, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence».

See also *Qur'ān* 19:34; 19:88-92; 21:26; 23:91; 25:2; 37:151-152. In fact, the *Qur'ān* warns those who say that God has a Son. See for example *Qur'ān* 18:4,

During the debate with Timothy I, the accusation of polytheism is made more gently by the Caliph al-Mahdī; he poses it not as his conclusion but in the form of a question, «You, therefore, believe in three Gods?». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 22.

32 Here, Abū Qurrah attacks Muḥammad's legitimization of polygamy and for practicing it (cf. 280 WN) as well as for allowing divorce, all on the authority of God (cf. 284 WN).

«وَيُنذِرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا»

«And to warn those who say: Allah hath chosen a son».

In addition, the *Qur'ān* asks the Christians to stop the assertion that God has a Son or that He is a Trinity.

See also *Qur'ān* 4:171,

«يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ
إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلَّمْتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَيَّ مَرْيَمَ
وَرُوحٌ مِّنْهُ فَأَمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً انْتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَّكُمْ إِنَّمَا
اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا»

«O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “three”—Cease! (it is) better for you!—Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender».

The *Qur'ān* asserts not only that God does not have a Son but that He does not have a wife as well (the logical conclusion and necessity for having a son). See for an example *Qur'ān* 6:101,

«بَدِيعُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ صَاحِبَةٌ
وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ»

«The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, when He created all things and is Aware of all things?»

See also *Qur'ān* 72:3,

«وَأَنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَدُّ رَبِّنَا مَا اتَّخَذَ صَاحِبَةً وَلَا وَلَدًا»

«And (we believe) that He - exalted be the glory of our Lord! - hath taken neither wife nor son».

The *Qur'ān* attributes such claims to ignorance of God. See for example *Qur'ān* 10:68,

«قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ عِنْدَكُمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ بِهَذَا أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ»
 «They say: Allah hath taken (unto Him) a son - Glorified be He! He hath no needs! His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Ye have no warrant for this. Tell ye concerning Allah that which ye know not?»

and *Qur'ān* 18:5,

«مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ كَبِرَتْ كَلِمَةٌ تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنْ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا»

«(A thing) whereof they have no knowledge, nor (had) their fathers. Dreadful is the word that cometh out of their mouths. They speak naught but a lie».

Again quoting the *Qur'ān*, Abū Qurrah points out that if God wishes to have a Son, there is nothing and no one who can prevent Him from doing so (cf. 288-289 and 292 WN); he then accuses his opponent of denying God Whom He chooses (cf. 290 WN), calling His Word and Spirit Son (cf. 292 WN). Abū Qurrah points out to the Muslim that he allows his prophet to be called “messenger” and Abraham to be called “intimate friend” and Moses “interlocutor” (cf. 291 WN) but does not allow God to call His Word and Spirit Son. Abū Qurrah continues quoting the *Qur'ān* and the Old Testament as proof texts in support of Jesus' Divine Sonship (cf. 293-303 WN).

At this point, al-Hāšimī declares himself «confounded... [and] incapable of giving an answer» (cf. 304-305 WN). Nevertheless, Abū Qurrah continues, equating his debater to all other creatures created by the Word of God, including the beasts, and yet making himself equal to Him (cf. 306-309 WN). One of al-Hāšimī's ministers takes issue with the point, as a privileged creature, for unlike the beasts God breathed in human beings from His Spirit (cf. 310-311 WN); al-Hāšimī insists that his spirit is equal to that in Jesus (cf. 312 WN). Abū Qurrah then asks him to raise up the dead as Jesus did (cf. 313 WN).

A man from the people of al-Baṣrah continues the debate, asserting that Abū Qurrah worships a dead god (cf. 314 WN). In the following exchange, Abū Qurrah, quoting the *Qur'ān*, asserts that not only is Jesus alive but also He is in heaven by the *Qur'ān*'s own admission (cf. 315-324 WN), and the group present admits that Abū Qurrah told the truth (cf. 325 WN).

Another debater, a man from Damascus, challenges Abū Qurrah with regard to the «Spirit of God residing in the belly of a woman and afflicted by the afflictions of women» (cf. 327 WN).³³ In his response, Abū Qurrah again quotes the *Qur'ān* and the Gospel, pointing out to his debater that the angels have witnessed to such a marvel and both the Gospel and the *Qur'ān* speak of it (cf. 328-331 WN). Hence, denying the fact and making Christ «an owned slave, created» (cf. 335 WN) would be belying the angels (cf. 334 WN) as well as the *Qur'ān*³⁴ itself while hoping by such actions to be closer to God (cf. 335-336 WN).

This exchange makes the important point that the *Qur'ān* likens Christ to Adam³⁵ and, at one and at the same time, calls Him the Word of God and His Spirit.³⁶ Hence, in what way is Christ like Adam according to the *Qur'ān*?

33 The question here is with regard to the immutability of God. The human nature is united to the person of the Logos, as the Logos is, namely God, immutable and unchangeable. It is the same Divine person, now existing as human. The difficulty in understanding this notion was acknowledged by Aquinas in granting that becoming usually demands change. He goes on to explain that the change is not in God since the very act of being is totally dependent on God. The change happens to the human nature.

«Since therefore God is subsisting being itself, nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him. Now all created perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no one thing is wanting to God» (STh I, 4, 2).

Both God and the temporal order do exist. However, their modes of existence are distinct. At the most radical level, the relationship between the Creator and the creature is due to the fact that the latter was not before and now is; on the other hand, no change occurred in the Creator. In the ontological order of God, creation demands no extra act from God than what God is in Himself. Hence, there is no change occurring in God due to God's act of creation. Aquinas used different analogies to explain the notion; e.g. the relation between the knower and the known. The knower changes due to the act of knowing whereas the known does not, and if the known does then he is not known for who he is since he is changed in the act of being known.

34 See *Qur'ān* 66:12,

«وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ مِنَ الْقَائِمِينَ»

«And Mary, daughter of 'Imrān, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein something of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His Scriptures, and was of the obedient».

35 Cf. *Qur'ān* 3:59.

36 Cf. *Qur'ān* 3:45,

«إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ»

«(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, so of Mary, illustrious in the world

The particular title «the Word of God and His Spirit» the *Qur'ān* does not give to anyone else. It is given uniquely to Jesus. Does this mean anything? According to Abū Qurrah, the uniqueness of the title is to clarify for the Muslim with certitude, and let him know «that this Name [the Word of God and His Spirit] was not given to any one [else] of Adam's sons, ever» (cf. 338 WN) nor to «the angels or others [creatures]» (cf. 339 WN). It is to indicate to the Muslim the uniqueness of Christ's "Being" (cf. 340 WN).

Abū Qurrah continues challenging his debater to find an instance in which God said that Christ is a slave or a creature or even only human (cf. 342 WN). After lamenting the unjust state he finds himself in, under the Muslim rule, Abū Qurrah goes on to assert that due to the fact that the Christ is Lord and Creator, nothing «...is more splendid... for the slave than to believe and obey the Word of his Lord» (cf. 350 WN) the Creator (cf. 349 WN). Abū Qurrah sees the fact that the Muslim has power over him to be due to injustice (cf. 343 WN). The issue comes back up again close to the end of the debate.³⁷

In this exchange, al-Ma'mūn agrees with Abū Qurrah that Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit (cf. 349 WN); nothing is strange here, for each of them understands the terms in his own way.³⁸ However, in the same exchange, al-Ma'mūn agrees with Abū Qurrah that the Christ is from God's very Self and Essence (cf. 349 WN)! This is quite impossible for a Muslim to admit and remain a Muslim. Hence, al-Ma'mūn's affirmation does sound very strange.

The patience of an unnamed man from al-Kūfah reaches its end. He becomes vexed and accuses Abū Qurrah of exceeding his limits in conversing with al-Ma'mūn in such a way, that is to say, as an equal. Al-Ma'mūn, however, reproaches al-Kūfī, defends Abū Qurrah and asks him to continue (cf. 351-354 WN). Abū Qurrah accuses al-Kūfī of «talking back»³⁹

and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah)».

See also *Qur'ān* 2:87, 253; 4:171; 19:17; 21:91; and 66:12.

37 Cf. 828-832 WN.

38 How does the Muslim understand the meaning of the word of God and how a Christian does is not the same. For more on the subject, see Louis GARDET, "Kalām", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

39 The Arabic expression here «زَيَّرْتُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ» (the denotation of the expression means *responds to his messenger*, while the connotation, however, means to talk back to...). In this context, the expression is a very strong accusation, and it loses its force in

to his messenger (cf. 355 WN) and nullifying his *Qur'ān* when he does not admit that the Spirit of God resided in the Virgin Mary.

At this point, someone, perhaps al-Ma'mūn, agrees with Abū Qurrah (cf. 357 WN). Al-Dimašqī then is confounded and asks to be excused from the debate, admitting his inability to debate with Abū Qurrah (cf. 360-361 WN). Seeming to relish the Dimašqī's defeat, al-Ma'mūn asks al-Dimašqī for the reason of his withdrawal. Al-Dimašqī says, «Abū Qurrah shoots me with arrows from my own quiver. Hence, my armament is perishable and his armament is abiding» (cf. 363-364 WN). Next, one hears the usual refrain of al-Ma'mūn's amusement and inquiry whether there remains another debater (cf. 365 WN).

The group suggests reinforcement, namely the presence of a man from the people of al-Šām called 'Alī b. al-Walīd (cf. 366 WN), to debate with Abū Qurrah. 'Alī b. al-Walīd is described as one who has «exceeded in reading the books and has studied the Gospel and the Psalter, and knows the secrets of religion» (cf. 367 WN). 'Alī b. al-Walīd is brought into the debate with yet another, namely Abū al-Ḥasan b. Lu'ayy al-Fārisī (cf. 369 WN). It is the latter who begins the discussion with Abū Qurrah (cf. 370 WN) as directed by al-Ma'mūn (cf. 369 WN).

In this section, the debate continues to be about the Divinity of Jesus. The belief of His Divinity is challenged first with regard to the crucifixion. Abū Qurrah is accused of worshiping the Cross⁴⁰ (cf. 373 WN). This accusation

translation due to cultural nuance and taboos, even today. It indicates disrespect. For example, a son cannot «يُرُدُّ عَلَى» (talk back to) his father or a pupil to his teacher and remain a respected member of the group. Hence, Abū Qurrah is accusing his opponent of being the one with the lack of respect, not to the Caliph but towards the one whom Muslims believe to be the messenger of God.

40 This accusation is not something only of the past. Even today, some Muslims still believe that Christians worship the Cross. For example, a speaker for *al-Qā'idah* in the broadcasted tape aired by *al-Ġazīrah* on the 8th of January 2006, referred to the Christians as «the worshipers of the Cross».

In reality, the Muslim does not believe that Jesus was crucified or died on a cross. Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:157-158,

«وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّنْ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَل رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا»

«And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's

Abū Qurrah denies, asserting that he worships the One Who is the Lord of the Cross and the Lord of everything else (cf. 374 WN). If not for worshipping it, then what are the reasons for exalting it, wonders al-Fārisī (cf. 375 WN). Abū Qurrah responds (cf. 375-380 WN), pointing out the following: Both Christians and Muslims share the custom of revering certain objects for specific reasons; and he gives an example of the black stone revered by the Muslims in Mecca (cf. 375 WN). The Christians exalt the Cross for its miraculous manifestations (cf. 376 WN) and because it is the sign of victory and identity (cf. 377-378 WN). Most of all it is the sign of the Christ (cf. 379 WN), and acceptance of the Christ demands an acceptance of the Cross (cf. 380 WN).

Based on the teachings of the *Qur'ān*,⁴¹ al-Dimašqī denies the fact of the crucifixion, asserting that it was just an appearance (cf. 381 WN). Abū Qurrah's response is very interesting. He declares that if the crucifixion were an illusion, so was the Christ, but if the Christ is truth, so was the crucifixion (cf. 382-383 WN). Immediately thereafter Abū Qurrah adds «we do not doubt that He was crucified, buried, and rose up [from the dead], and His body did not know corruption» (cf. 384 WN). This, Abū Qurrah confesses, is based on his belief in the words of the Evangelists who confessed the resurrection, hence, Christ's ability to «raise Himself up, as He raised others up by His own power»⁴² (cf. 385 WN); in addition, His ascension into heaven is attested to by the *Qur'ān* in *sūrat al-Nisā*⁴³ (cf. 386 WN).

Abū Qurrah then offers some of the effects of the resurrection. As far as Abū Qurrah is concerned the resurrection is one of the ways in which the Christ indicated to humanity that He is of God (cf. 386 WN). Al-Fārisī then asks for proof that the resurrection is true (cf. 387 WN). Abū Qurrah does

messenger - They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise».

Abū 'Alī begins his intervention by pointing out that Abū Qurrah has strayed precisely because of Abū Qurrah's assertion that Christ has been crucified.

41 *Qur'ān* 4:157-158.

42 An assertion that Christ was able to raise up the dead depending on his own ability is a clear contradiction of the *Qur'ān's* affirmation that Jesus performed his miracles «بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ»: «by Allah's leave». Cf. *Qur'ān* 3:49.

43 *Qur'ān* 4:157-158.

not give proof; he uses logic to indicate the credibility of the resurrection: The Muslim admits that Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit; the Word of God and His Spirit is not separate from God. The Word comes from and goes back to God (cf. 387-390 WN). Next, Abū Qurrah makes an analogy. He offers al-Fārisī an example from daily life of his time and place to clarify the point, namely that of an unknown doctor or a snake charmer that comes to town claiming the usefulness and far reaching effects of his medicine and the people refusing to believe him. Thus, if he allows himself to be stung, applying his own medicine to demonstrate its effect, the people would then believe. Al-Fārisī agrees, so Abū Qurrah applies the analogy to death, resurrection and life after death (cf. 391-396 WN).

Understandably, al-Fārisī is still having a hard time with the crucifixion, for it negates the teachings of the *Qur'ān* as well as simple human common sense, and he asks, «How could anyone crucify the word of God and His spirit?» (cf. 397 WN). A reasonable question by all means. The seeming impossibility of the proposition is evident here, but there is more. God's impassibility is the issue here.⁴⁴ At this juncture, Abū Qurrah does not use an argument, but he uses a common example, namely that of the sun⁴⁵ which is created and able to reach all things without being harmed by what befalls them (cf. 398-402 WN). How much more would the ability of the Creator be in comparison (cf. 403 WN)! Surely, the ability of the Creator must be far more reaching than one of His creation. Again, Abū Qurrah's answer does not prove anything. The answer only shows the credibility of his faith and that it does not negate reason. As did others before him, al-Fārisī admits his inability to continue the debate, and Abū Qurrah invites him to follow Christ (cf. 405-407 WN).

Anticipating al-Fārisī's rebuff of the invitation, Abū Qurrah names the reason for al-Fārisī's refusal, namely the Muslim's belief that there is no other religion except his own (cf. 408 WN). Abū Qurrah gave him two

44 The same issue is discussed by Timothy I in his debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī. Al-Mahdī asks, «Can then God Himself die?». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 40.

45 The sun is used frequently by Christian debaters to illustrate their point and to show credibility of the Christian belief in the Blessed Trinity. See for example the frequency in which the example is used by Timothy I in his debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī. Cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 17, 18, 19, 22, 26, 28, 36, 42, 48, 69, 70, 72, 75, 89, and 90.

proposals at one and the same time: «Are you able to say that what the Christ brought is other than the Truth and there is no religion except your religion?» (cf. 408 WN) Al-Fārisī concurs (cf. 409 WN). What does al-Fārisī agree to in Abū Qurrah's proposals? We can deduce it is not the first part, for al-Fārisī believes that Christ brought the Truth and that it was the Christians, like the Jews before them, who corrupted the Scriptures. In addition, the Muslim believes that there are other religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and *Ṣābī'ah*, all of which, as noted above, are mentioned by the *Qur'ān*. However, these are considered "Islam" in their pure form, before they were corrupted by their followers. Abū Qurrah's response indicates that he understood the same.

In an attempt to dissuade his debater from Islam, Abū Qurrah mentions a number of Islamic practices he considers illogical and inconsistent. These practices include the forbidding of certain foods while allowing others, the honoring of sodomy, proclaiming a wife forbidden by divorce then permissible after she has had consummated marriage with another man (cf. 410-420 WN). Forbidding certain food while allowing others and proclaiming one's wife forbidden by divorce then permissible after she has had consummated marriage with another man are familiar issues in Islam, but the honoring of sodomy, at first glance seems odd, to say the least. However, the presence of an illustrious Muslim, namely the judge, Yaḥyā b. Aḩṩam, who was in fact a contemporary of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn and a member of his court, renders the mention of the issue not only plausible but most likely, for as noted above⁴⁶, he was notorious for such practice.

Al-Fārisī, in his turn mentions the most important merit of being a Muslim, namely that he believes in One God (cf. 421 WN). This is not a unique confession, asserts Abū Qurrah, for the Samaritans and Jews believe the same (cf. 423 WN), and in itself such confession is neither a reason to boast nor is it a guarantee of entrance into paradise (cf. 424 WN).

Al-Fārisī expresses his «hope to fulfill the grace of God upon» him in this way (cf. 425 WN); that is to say, the way of Islam. Abū Qurrah mentions, to his debate opponent, yet again, a number of other Islamic practices he considers incompatible with the hope of paradise. It is another attempt to

46 See the «Arguments in favor of authenticity» section in the previous chapter, n. 2.16.

persuade al-Fārisī against Islam. These practices include the boldness against God, permitting of what God has forbidden in the Gospel, insulting of the holy books, defaming of the Christ, annulling of the witness of the prophets of the Christ, and excluding of others from paradise (cf. 426-433 WN).

V. THE INCARNATION AND THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY (434-663 WN)

This section revolves around the compatibility of the Incarnation with the unity and Oneness of God. A man from the elite of Qurayš presents Abū Qurrah with three questions: «when the Christ was in Mary's belly, who managed the heavens and the earth?» (cf. 436 WN) «And since He sent His spirit and His word to Mary, did He not remain without word or spirit?» (cf. 437 WN) «And if Mary had died while she was pregnant with the Christ, who would have been the judge on the Day of Judgment or who would have held creation accountable in the day of extreme crowdedness?»⁴⁷ (cf. 438 WN).

All three questions are concerned with the omnipresence, impassibility and the immutability of God. The issue is whether in fact Jesus is the Word of God and His Spirit, in the way this term is understood by the Christians, namely that Jesus, the Christ, is in fact One with and of the same Essence of God. The Muslim debater argues that if this is true, then who would have managed the universe while the Christ was on earth? And would that mean that during the time Christ was on earth God was separated from His Word and Spirit? Here is where the concern also includes the impassibility of God is clearest. And would that not have placed the Judge of all in danger, if something were to happen to Mary while pregnant with Him?

Abū Qurrah points out that this is a weak argument (cf. 439 WN). The reasoning of Abū Qurrah's debater assumes the imposition of human limits, such as time and space, on God (cf. 440 WN). Abū Qurrah goes on to elaborate that God is everywhere and far from being completely

47 "الحشر" literally means «extreme crowdedness», as in a can of sardines, for example. The expression used here «يَوْمَ الْحَشْرِ» refers to the extreme crowdedness on the «last day» when all are present for judgment. It also connotes a sense of discomfort. It could be translated as «the day of judgment», but the unique image portrayed by the Arabic expression would be lost in such translation.

comprehended (cf. 441 WN). Nevertheless, to illustrate the credibility of his belief, Abū Qurrah gives his debater an example of the fire lighting a house without being defiled by anything in it (cf. 443 WN) and the rays of the sun falling on everything without it being tarnished by any of that on which it falls (cf. 444 WN). The examples offered prepare the answer already given many times before, namely, «If, then, the Word and the Spirit is the Creator of all that, how is it possible [for Him] to be surrounded by anything or contained by any place?» (cf. 445 WN). God is able to do what He wishes; hence, He can send His Word without being separated from Him (cf. 449 WN). God is free in choosing to manifest Himself in whichever way He wishes, even if this means «to reside in a creature of His creation who manifests His image and likeness and takes him as a veil for Himself» (cf. 446 WN). God does not scorn or find hideous the work of His own hands (cf. 447 WN), for, as established in the very beginning of *al-Muğādalāh*, all God's creation is very good (cf. 22-23 WN).

Here Abū Qurrah, in passing, mentions that such choice on God's part reveals «His magnanimity toward His creation, in order [that they might] follow His order and work in obedience [to His command]» (cf. 448 WN). Abū Qurrah declares the wisdom of God's work as motivated by compassion for His creation (cf. 450 WN), and His deeds cannot be questioned by the *Qur'ān*'s own words (cf. 451 WN). This is due to the fact that human minds are unable to contain His will (cf. 452 WN).

Having declared that we cannot comprehend God, Abū Qurrah goes back to the example of the sun and how it sends its light into one's house while it remains in its orbit unchanged, and it is only a creature (cf. 453-455 WN). Similarly, the intention of one's heart can reach another in a letter without leaving the heart of the sender or the receiver having seen the sender (cf. 456-457 WN). Al-Ma'mūn admits that Abū Qurrah has told the truth, but Ismā'īl al-Kūfī is in need of further explanation (cf. 458-459 WN).

At this point, Abū Qurrah paves the way for a discourse regarding the unity of God. He does this by pointing out that one's soul, spirit and word are in one's body but are not manifested to the eyesight. They cannot be seen, yet they are not separate from the body (cf. 460-463 WN).

With the agreement of his debater, Abū Qurrah begins his discourse with regard to the Trinity, asserting that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One God

(cf. 465 WN) and are worshiped as One (cf. 468 WN). God is Three Persons and One Essence (cf. 468 WN). Abū Qurrah goes on and gives the Christian understanding of Each (cf. 466-467 WN). At this point, Abū Qurrah points out that the Christians learned this from God Himself (cf. 469 WN).

Next, Abū Qurrah goes back to the question «if Mary had died while she was pregnant with the Christ» what would have happened to the Word of God (cf. 438, 472 WN). This time, in order to show the absurdity of the question, Abū Qurrah recites a verse from the *Qur'ān*, namely *Qur'ān* 53:8, which reads,

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى

«Then he drew nigh and *came down*» (emphasis ours)

A literal translation of the original Arabic word “فَتَدَلَّى” means suspended, which leads to Abū Qurrah’s point and makes sense of it. Abū Qurrah asks his debater to explain what would have happened if God would have «fallen from the heavens, while He was suspended, and was shattered, who would have guarded the heavens and the earth and guarded His creation?» (cf. 474 WN).

Al-Kūfī points out the Muslim’s position clearly: «[W]e deny you your saying that the Christ is God and that you worship him» (cf. 475 WN). Abū Qurrah marvels at the objection! What else can the Word of God and His Spirit be called but God? (cf. 476-478 WN) What can pure gold be called but pure gold? (cf. 480 WN) What can a fire be called but fire, no matter how many places it may be in at the same time? (cf. 481-482 WN).

At this point, al-Kūfī wishes Abū Qurrah to stop his discourse, asserting that he does not share Abū Qurrah’s convictions that baptism had purified the former or that the cross had given him victory (cf. 483-486 WN). Al-Ma’mūn agrees with Abū Qurrah as usual (cf. 479 WN) and considers «the immensity of Abū Qurrah’s patience, his enlightened heart, and vast understanding and knowledge» (cf. 487 WN) and «preferred his [Abū Qurrah’s] articulation [of ideas] and rapid answers» and «was very joyful» (cf. 488 WN). This obviously encourages Abū Qurrah to discard al-Kūfī’s request of stopping, and he continues his discourse. In the meantime, al-Kūfī is silent.

Abū Qurrah attacks al-Kūfī's silence as a sign of his inability to respond (cf. 489 WN) and accuses him of boasting of his «domination, and self admiration» and embellishing his religion and faulting Christianity (cf. 492 WN). Entering into a delicate area of discussion, Abū Qurrah goes on to attack the prophet of Islam, pointing out that he did not produce a sign from God to prove the authenticity of his prophethood (cf. 490-491 WN).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Abū Qurrah continues asserting that the *Qur'ān* admits Christ's Divinity (cf. 493 WN).

Al-Kūfī is no longer silent. However, he does not respond to Abū Qurrah's accusations against the prophet of Islam, or perhaps he was not distracted by that accusation from his own point of inquiry, namely the Christian belief in the Divinity of Christ and the consequent understanding of God as the Blessed Trinity. Al-Kūfī asks Abū Qurrah to set apart the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit so as to prove that Jesus is only human (cf. 494-503 WN). The issue, once again, concerns the Oneness of God and the compatibility of this belief with the Incarnation. Abū Qurrah rebukes his debater for the hardness of his heart (cf. 504 WN), asserting once again the Oneness of God: «God and His Word and His Spirit is One God, One [Who is] worshiped, One Judge and One Lord» (cf. 507 WN).

Then, Abū Qurrah accuses the Muslims of belittling «The Word of God and His Spirit» (cf. 509 WN), rejecting faith in Jesus (cf. 510 WN), belying

48 The issue of miracles as proof of the authenticity of the prophet is an important matter to the Christians. It is the prophet's credential letter as it were. This same issue is seen in the debate of Timothy I with the Caliph al-Mahdī; the Caliph asks Timothy I, «Do you not believe that our Book was given by God?» One reads, «And I replied to him: "It is not my business to decide whether it is from God or not. But I will say something of which your Majesty is well aware, and that is all the words of God found in the Torah and in the Prophets, and those of them found in the Gospel and in the writings of the Apostles, have been confirmed by signs and miracles. As to the words of your book they have not been corroborated by a single sign or miracle. It is imperative that signs and miracles should be annulled by other signs and miracles. When God wished to abrogate the Mosaic Law, He confirmed by the signs and miracles wrought by the Christ and the Apostles that the words of the Gospel were from God, and by this He abrogated the words of the Torah and the first miracles. Similarly, as He abrogated the first signs and miracles by second ones, He ought to have abrogated the second signs and miracles by third ones. If God had wished to abrogate the Gospel and introduce another book in its place, He would have done this, because signs and miracles are witnesses of His will; but your book has not been confirmed by a single sign and miracle. Since signs and miracles are proofs of the will of God, the conclusion drawn from their absence in your book is well known to your Majesty"». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 36-37.

their own *Qur'ān* (cf. 511 WN) and contradicting its commandments (cf. 512 WN). Likening his debater's request to that of asking someone to separate constituent parts of water from each other, Abū Qurrah attempts to show his debater the absurdity of the request (cf. 519-525 WN).

Next, Abū Qurrah goes back to the examples of the sun, fire and mind (cf. 528-530 WN). Trying again, the Muslim asks who the creator is among the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity (cf. 531 WN). This question is yet another attempt to establish division within God. Abū Qurrah insists «He is One! One Lord! One Creator!... we do not separate between God and His Word and His Spirit, and we do not make something of God far from Him» (cf. 532-533 WN).

The repeated theme then follows: «al-Ma'mūn interiorly knew that the speech of Abū Qurrah was correct» (cf. 538 WN), but he continues the debate by asking, «if the Christ were God..., how, then, did he eat the food, and drink the drink, and go around in the markets?» (cf. 539-540 WN). The issue here is the immutability of God. After confessing his faith in the unity of the Blessed Trinity (cf. 548-567; 572-583 WN) and in the Divinity of Jesus, the Christ (cf. 568-570 WN), Abū Qurrah gives his answer: In His human nature, Abū Qurrah explains, Jesus' own deeds reveal His two natures (cf. 584-597 WN).

At this point, an *'Irāqī* accuses Abū Qurrah of basing his argument on a corruption of the Scripture (cf. 599-600 WN). In turn, Abū Qurrah points out that his argument is based on the *Qur'ān*; hence, the *'Irāqī* is accusing his own scripture of corruption (cf. 601 WN). Abū Qurrah also accuses the *'Irāqī* of contradicting and insulting the *'Irāqī* own scripture (cf. 603-606 WN). Abū Qurrah then accuses the Muslim's book of corruption (cf. 607 WN), giving examples of what he considers corrupted in it (cf. 610-614 WN).

Next, Abū Qurrah continues to differentiate between the Muslims and the believers (cf. 615, 616, 624, 625 WN) and between Islam and faith (cf. 618-623, 626 WN); he asserts that the differentiation is based on the *Qur'ān*'s own words (cf. 627-629 WN). Subsequently, the *'Irāqī* asserts the Divine origin of his book and denies such for the Christian book. Abū Qurrah responds by giving a short list of what he considers aberrant in Muslim behaviors and offers them as evidence of corruption of their book, the *Qur'ān* (cf. 620-642 WN).

Soliciting an admission that the Word of God is Essence and Truth, Abū Qurrah invites his debater to follow Christ (cf. 643-646 WN). This brings the debate to the *Qur'ān*'s statement regarding the likeness of Christ to Adam. In this discourse, Abū Qurrah points to the differences between Adam and Christ; he accuses his debater of disbelieving the Torah, the Psalter, and the Gospel. He does not even believe in the Muslim's own book, the *Qur'ān* (cf. 647-659 WN). Giving the accustomed response, Al-Ma'mūn asserts that Abū Qurrah has told the truth. Abū Qurrah insists then that Christ raised Himself to life and is above all other prophets (cf. 660-663 WN).

VI. WHY THE INCARNATION (664-701 WN)

One of the most beautiful sections of this debate is that in which Abū Qurrah offers some of the motives for the Incarnation (cf. 664-701 WN). Abū Qurrah begins by pointing out that the Incarnation took place out of God's free will in order to examine human fidelity and defeat their enemy (cf. 664 WN).

Both heaven and earth are God's, and the Incarnation is out of God's own desire that the humans may understand God (cf. 665 WN). God's freedom in the Incarnation is expressed simply and straightforwardly: Due to human inability to see God in His Essence, God wished to speak to humanity as a human being (cf. 665-666 WN).

Next, Abū Qurrah begins tracing salvation history from the moment of creation to the Incarnation (cf. 667-700 WN). The motive for creation is neither out of need nor accidental; rather it is out of love and grace (cf. 668 WN). As a consequence of this grace, worship and obedience are required and an account has to be rendered (cf. 669 WN). Hence, freedom of choice is implied.

Even the angels have exercised their freedom of choice; and in spite of their might, honor and intelligence, some of them made the wrong choice and had to bear the consequences. According to Abū Qurrah, the origin of the sin of the Angels is arrogance/pride, a desire for equality with God (cf. 669-685 WN). Satan had «fallen from his honor and had been deposed from his rank» (cf. 687 WN); Satan waged a war on humanity (cf. 689 WN) «and he beguiled them with his ignorance, out of envy of them, and prevailed over

them with his deception, and took them to every base way in order to distance them from God, the Creator, as he [Satan] had distanced himself» (cf. 690-691 WN). God, in His mercy, worked out human salvation both through the prophets and the Incarnation (cf. 693-700 WN). Abū Qurrah asserts that resistance to the Word of God and His Spirit is a clear animosity against the Word of God and His Spirit. One reads, «Thus, whoever resists the Word of God and His Spirit has indeed become a clear enemy to them» (cf. 701 WN).

VII. THE DIVINITY OF THE CHRIST

(702-819 WN)

At this point of the debate, the issue of the Divinity of Jesus is discussed at length. Abū Qurrah begins with the *Qur'ān*'s witness to Christ's ability to create (cf. 702 WN) and raise up the dead (cf. 704 WN); the *Qur'ān* calls Jesus the Spirit of God and His Word (cf. 705 WN). Following his understanding of the *Qur'ān*, the Muslim (here the debater is unnamed) asserts that Jesus raised up the dead by the command of God and that God's Word and Spirit are not from Him (cf. 706 WN).

In the *Qur'ān*, one reads,

وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ
لَكُمْ مِّنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ
الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا
تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُم إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are to be believers. *Qur'ān* 3:49

And again,

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ ادْكُرْ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَتِكَ إِذْ
أَيَّدْتُكَ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَإِذْ عَلَّمْتُكَ

الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَإِذْ تَخْلُقُ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ
الطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَنْفُخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِي وَتُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ
بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ تُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ كَفَفْتُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَنْكَ إِذْ
جِئْتَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ

When Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the holy Spirit, so that thou speakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission; and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how thou didst raise the dead, by My permission; and how I restrained the Children of Israel from (harming) thee when thou camest unto them with clear proofs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed: This is naught else than mere magic. *Qur'ān* 5:110

When these verses are compared with *Qur'ān* 6:2; 32:7-9; and *Qur'ān* 38:71-72, the similarities of the elements of the account as well as the order of the steps of the act of creating might compel one to wonder. Both the elements of the accounts of the act of creation are almost identical.

The similarity between the acts of creation is a significant point, for it illustrates how the Muslim views Jesus' miracles and their relation to His identity. Abū Qurrah answers the Muslim's assertion that Jesus raised up the dead by the command of God and that God's Word and Spirit are not from Him by quoting both the Gospel and the *Qur'ān*. As a result, Abū Qurrah accuses the Muslim of not acknowledging the *Qur'ān* (cf. 716 WN) but of contradicting it instead (cf. 717 WN). As usual, al-Ma'mūn is pleased, praises Abū Qurrah and wonders if there remains a debater (cf. 718-720 WN).

In response, a new debater challenges Abū Qurrah's confession of faith in the Divinity of Jesus. The individual is not named and is identified only as «A man from Banū Hāšim». This time the challenge regards the culpability of those who crucified Jesus, Jesus' freedom with regard to the crucifixion and His omnipotence and weakness in the matter (cf. 721-723 WN).

In response, Abū Qurrah uses his debater's logic to show him the absurdity of his question (cf. 730-734 WN). In this exchange, the Muslim's accusation of polytheism is clear: «Yes, you associate with God, and whoever associates with God has defamed Him, indeed» (cf. 731 WN). Abū Qurrah points out that the debater's arguments illustrate an inconsistency with the Muslim's own logic. Al-Ma'mūn is convinced and is quick to respond, «You told the truth (By God!), O Abū Qurrah» (cf. 735 WN), but the rest of the Muslims present do not agree: «They all cried out, and they said, "This is not analogous to the saying of our companion nor is it a convincing answer"» and they give their own reasoning (cf. 736-737 WN).

Abū Qurrah tries again, quoting the *Qur'ān*; then, he cites a practical example of avenging one's brother in war (738-753 WN). In this example, the issue of *ḡihād* is brought up. With this, the group present is satisfied with Abū Qurrah's answer, admit the inefficiency of their companion, and they leave for the day (cf. 754-755 WN).

On the following day, the discussion begins again with regard to the Divinity of the Christ. This time the accusation is that Jesus is someone «who killed his mother» (cf. 757 WN).⁴⁹ Once again, Abū Qurrah uses his debater's own logic to show him the absurdity of his point (cf. 758-762 WN). As happened previously, the Muslim is not convinced (cf. 763 WN). Abū Qurrah then responds with a step by step syllogism: God does not lie. God does not change His decrees or verdicts. God uttered a decree and gave a verdict that all humans must die. Mary is a human being. Mary had to die (cf. 765-769 WN). Nevertheless, Abū Qurrah points out that although Mary died to this world, she was raised up with the loyal and the righteous (cf. 770-771 WN). The group of Muslims present is now satisfied, and the usual refrain emerges:

Al-Ma'mūn heard the discourse of Abū Qurrah and the goodness of his articulation, [his] rapid answer and the might of his evidence, he admired him and was [made] joyful by him. Thereupon, he said, «Does there remain a debater to debate with Abū Qurrah?» (cf. 772-773 WN).

Al-Ma'mūn's scribe continues the debate with regard to the Divinity of

49 It is worthy to note that unexpectedly this argument is another common issue in the dialogue with Muslims. Indeed, it is posed to Timothy I in his debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī. The latter interestingly asks, «What is the punishment of the man who kills his mother?». MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 52.

the Christ and the culpability of the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus (cf. 774-775 WN). Once again, Abū Qurrah uses his debater's own logic to show him the absurdity of his reasoning (cf. 776-786 WN). After Abū Qurrah's explanation, the usual refrain is repeated once more:

Al-Ma'mūn said, «You did well (By God!), O Abū Qurrah! You did very well. You have prevailed by exposing your opposition, and you have revealed to us what had not occurred to the heart of a human being or occurred to us». Thereupon, he said, «Does there remain among you anyone who would debate with Abū Qurrah?» 787-789 WN

A man from the people of Qurayš continues the debate in an attempt to shame Abū Qurrah who believes in a crucified God. One reads, «O Abū Qurrah, in any case, are you not embarrassed and ashamed to worship a god the Jews crucified, killed, and who died and was buried?» (cf. 790-791 WN).⁵⁰ Abū Qurrah explains once again that death occurred to Christ in His humanity (cf. 792-796 WN). Abū Qurrah uses a practical example, namely that of a wooden door overlaid with plates of gold. In the case of fire, the wood is burned but not the gold, for each element follows its proper nature (cf. 797-798 WN). Abū Qurrah then asserts the origin of the Christ (cf. 803 WN) and the redemptive value of the Incarnation⁵¹ (cf. 804-806 WN).

50 The issue here is the immutability and impassibility of God. It would be centuries before this point was elaborated on and made clearer. Once again we recall the teachings of St. Aquinas who uses the notion of *esse* to explain both the immutability and the impassibility of God. His explanations concerns not only the immutability and the impassibility but also how this is maintained and yet compatible with the Incarnation. He began by pointing out that the nature of all that exists does not necessitate that they have to exist; all but one, namely that whose very nature is to be, God. The *esse* of God then is pure act. All else is a composite of nature and being. God's nature is to be. All else must get existence from the source of being. Since Being as such is pure act, we can find no potency in God, for he is perfection itself; in fact, it is ontologically impossible for God to be more than God is, for God is *Being* as such. It is easy to see how God is immutable in this logical progression, for being pure act is the utmost of actuality, and for something to change, it must first be in potency, but there is no potency in God; therefore no change is possible. For a more detailed discussion on the issue, see Joseph OWENS, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston, Texas: Center for Thomastic Studies, University of St. Thomas, 2003), p. 80-110, 131-164.

51 If God changes in becoming man, then it is not God who became man; hence we are not saved, for only God can save us. In fact, it would make no sense to defend or try to understand the immutability of God in the Incarnation if He is not God who became man. The same applies to the humanity of the Christ. If he did not have a human soul, then it is not man who was assumed, and what is not assumed is not saved. Hence, it must be a full humanity in the person of the Christ otherwise we are not saved.

The issue of Jesus' prayer is brought up again. As before, Abū Qurrah asserts that Jesus in His Divinity was not in need of prayer and that «The prayer mentioned in the Gospel is of His humanity» and it was meant «to teach us to pray» (cf. 807-812 WN).

Al-Hāšimī, following the same line of reasoning, wonders as to the reason the Christians bow/kneel to one another during the course of their prayers. Abū Qurrah assures his debater that such is not a bow of worship (cf. 814 WN), and he gives examples of prophets kneeling before figures of authority (cf. 815 WN). Rather, Abū Qurrah continues, it is a bow of reverence and humility (cf. 816 WN). He cites the example from the *Qur'ān*, where God asks the angels to bow to Adam (cf. 818 WN), which they all do except for Satan, who did not obey (cf. 819 WN).

VIII. AL-MA'MŪN PRAISES ABŪ QURRAH AND OTHERS INVITE HIM TO ISLAM (820-853 WN)

As usual, al-Ma'mūn is pleased; he praises Abū Qurrah and wonders if there remains a debater (cf. 820 WN). At this point, al-Ma'mūn's scribe invites Abū Qurrah to Islam. The scribe gives Abū Qurrah two reasons. The first is that Islam would allow him the advance to power (cf. 821 WN). The second is that «the religion of the Nazarenes is a wretched religion, due to the infidelity of its people, and God is not content with their religion» (cf. 823 WN).

Abū Qurrah's answer is two fold. First, he points out that having power is not a sign of God's approval, as shown in the example of the disobedient Pharaoh. Second, he reminds his debater that "tribulations" are allowed by God to heal (cf. 824-826 WN), judge and purify (cf. 827-832 WN) humanity. Furthermore, Abū Qurrah reminds his debater that not all the Christians are in the wretched condition of those under the Muslim authority; for example, the Christian Byzantine kings are not in such wretched condition (cf. 833-835 WN).

The issue of the image of paradise surfaces again. This time it is placed in the context of *al-da'wah* to Islam. Al-Ma'mūn's minister invites Abū Qurrah to convert, promising him the goods of this world and the goods of paradise. The goods of the latter, according to this minister, consist of «food and drink and marriage with companions with big lustrous eyes» (cf. 837 WN). Abū

Qurrah, on his part, prefers the paradise promised by Jesus. He does not give the details (cf. 850-853 WN), but says that the paradise described by the minister is that of a sterile animal (cf. 844-849 WN).

IX. THE CONCLUSION OF THE DEBATE:

NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD

(854-867 WN)

The elite remain silent (cf. 854 WN). One final time, al-Ma'mūn asks whether there remains among them a debater (cf. 855 WN). At this point, they admit their inability to continue the debate with Abū Qurrah and ask to be released; they leave «ashamed and confounded» (cf. 856-857 WN). This is the one and only time that al-Ma'mūn is not pleased by their defeat. He is saddened and wishes to have lost his sight rather than to have seen such a day. Nevertheless, he keeps his word and bestows honor and gifts on Abū Qurrah (cf. 854-860 WN).

The final point of the debate is presented as having taken place the following day. A question is posed by a judge, the most famous judge in fact, namely Yaḥyā b. Aktam⁵²: «[H]as anyone seen God?» (cf. 862 WN) Both sides agree that the answer is simply “no”. The debate ends here.

To conclude, the scribe ends his account with thanksgiving, proclaiming the victory to Abū Qurrah and giving glory to God (cf. 866-867 WN).

52 For more information with regard to the judge, Yaḥyā b. Aktam, see n. 15 in the «Internal evidence in support of authenticity» section in Chapter Four of this work.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION

A. SUMMATION

Chapter One notes that in spite of the vastness, diversity, richness and importance of the Arab-Christian Heritage, the major portion of its content is yet to be rediscovered. The chapter points to the facts that this rich heritage includes various disciplines and is rooted in diverse cultures, languages, and Christian denominations. It also indicates that the Arab-Christian Heritage historically begins centuries before the birth of Islam and continues ever stronger after the spread of Islam into the Middle East and Europe. Further, the unifying role played by the Arabic language among the different Christian denominations is underlined. The First Chapter also provides the context of the traditional inter-religious dialogues/debates between Christians and Muslims. Belonging to this tradition is the text under study in this work, a text that reveals many of the rich and important issues that even today continue to haunt the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

Chapter Two concentrates on the methodology followed in this work. It explains the steps necessary to produce the Critical Edition as well as the reasons for adapting the «eclectic-critical Samir method». The steps of this method are clearly stated. We also present the difficulties encountered in this particular work in the hope that others can avoid them, or at least the unnecessary ones. Chapter Two includes general and specific clarifications, with notes regarding the Arabic and the English texts as well as the arrangement followed in the lexicon.

Chapter Three introduces the various manuscripts used in producing the Critical Edition. Chapter Three includes a list of the available Arabic manuscripts written in the Arabic alphabet and the schema of the manuscripts examined. A description of the external and internal aspects of each manuscript can be found therein. In addition, a detailed account of the content of each manuscript is presented, with attention given to the various characteristics of the Abū Qurrah sections.

Chapter Four focuses on the problem of authenticity. It begins with a brief account of the *status quaestionis* in which the positions of the various scholars with regard to the question of attributing this work to Abū Qurrah are clearly stated. Next, a brief account of Abū Qurrah's life and his work is presented. Both the negative and positive arguments for the authenticity of these texts are discussed. The chapter concludes with our position on this matter.

Chapter Five begins with an overview of the text under study. It shows the internal logic and progression of the debate. The commentary on each section highlights the important details for an inter-religious dialogue with Islam and points to the popularity of the topics discussed therein. In particular, an on-going parallel is made between the debate under study and that of Timothy I, for the latter is the best example of an inter-religious dialogue with Islam found to date.

Chapter Six serves as a summation of the work. It also numerates the issues discussed in *al-Muğādalāh*, gives examples of the importance of these issues today and highlights the central issue of the debate as well as the reasons we consider this text important. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief look at the future, noting the work still ahead with regard to *al-Muğādalāh*.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TEXT

The value of Abū Qurrah's debate under study in this work lies in the richness and importance of the issues presented, implied and/or discussed in the proceedings. These issues remain as important today as they were in the early part of the ninth century. In fact, many of these issues are still plaguing Muslim societies and causing much damage to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The issue of *al-takfīr* is a prime example of why authentic modes of dialogue, like those of al-Mahdī with Timothy I and Abū Qurrah with al-Ma'mūn, must be rediscovered.

1. Al-Takfīr¹

An example of the harm caused by the issue of *al-takfīr* can be clearly seen with the well-known Egyptian Islamic group, *Jamā'at al-Muslimīn* (the Muslim Group), known as *al-Takfīr wa-l-Hiğrah* (declaring others infidels and abandoning them). *Al-Takfīr wa-l-Hiğrah*, in this case, declares those who do not hold their exact interpretations and practices of what a Muslim ought to be as infidels, and thus *al-takfīr* is an invitation for division and exclusivity within the Muslim community. This is a challenge and obviously a problem, neither isolated nor rare. Many modern Muslims are aware of it, and contemporary Muslim responses do exist. Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī is aware of this issue, and he discusses *al-takfīr* in his book, *Hākaḍā fald'ū ilā al-Islām*², as the first of the three problems on the way of the *dā'ī*.

In his discussion of *al-da'wah*, Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī asserts that the *da'wah* as such has no problems. The problems, however, stem from the *dā'ī*. Problems, according to al-Būṭī, emerge when the *dā'ī* gives rein to his emotions due to ignorance of the true knowledge of Islam and its principles.³ More specifically, he delineates three problems caused by such ignorance. The first problem is that of *al-takfīr*. With the exception of *al-ḥawāriğ*⁴, Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī asserts that there is an *iğmā'* (consensus) on what constitutes grounds for *takfīr*. He limits the grounds of *takfīr* to three kinds. The first kind concerns dogmas. Here *takfīr* means to deny something from the pillars of Islam or to permit what is not permitted or not to permit something that is permitted, from what is *ma'rūf*. Examples of this type include denying the oneness of God, the raising of the

1 This section is based on Wafik NASRY, «*Al-da'wa in Islam*» Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-Ḥakīm al-Šahīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār on the qur'ānic verse: 3:104* (Rome: Unpublished Master's Thesis, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2003). At the time, we have used a different system of transliteration. This has been adjusted for this work.

2 Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān AL-BUṬĪ, *Hākaḍā fald'ū ilā al-Islām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Fārābī, N.D.)

3 AL-BUṬĪ, *Hākaḍā*, p. 74.

4 This was a group that was a part of 'Alī's army, but opposed both 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah. They considered the issue of the Caliphate to be decided by God and not by negotiation. See Cyril GLASSÉ, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 222-223.

dead, the existence of heaven or hell, the obligation of prayer, fasting or giving alms, or teaching something contrary to Islamic teachings with regard to *Ḥağğ* or adultery or interest. The second kind concerns deeds. These must be contrary to the pillars of Islam, as in giving homage to an idol, or placing a cross on one's neck, or kissing a cross, or vesting with clothes designed for men of other religions. The third kind is what includes mocking, ridiculing or belittling any of the principles or precepts of Islam, such as the *Qur'ān*, heaven or hell, *Ḥağğ* or prayer, the prophets or the messengers, or the call to prayer in the Mosques.⁵

The second problem is that of *dār al-kufr* and *dār al-Islām* (the house of unbelief and the house of Islam). In this vision, the world is divided into two types of countries. One is *dār al-Islām* (the house of Islam), and the other is *dār al-kufr* (the house of infidels) or *dār al-Ḥarb* (the house of war). Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī asserts that there is an *iğmā'* among the four founders of the different Islamic schools that if a country is part of the house of Islam, whether it enters under the control of Muslims in a way in which they can proclaim their Islam by conquest or by treaty, Muslims can then defend it and immigrate to it, and its identity, as a Muslim country never leaves it. In this case, even if enemies took this country, Muslims must do everything to get it back.⁶

The third problem is the policy of the Muslim with his family and kinfolk. This takes place between an individual who has found his right way while the rest of his relatives are in the wrong. A Muslim must serve and care for his parents, in spite of how far they are from the right way, as long as doing so does not contradict or impede his duties as a Muslim. A Muslim is to *order and forbid* them gently, by reminding them of God's mercy and the consequences of disobedience, namely hell. The same is true with one's siblings. A Muslim is to serve and take care of them. He is to visit them often while *ordering and forbidding* them gently. All of this is to be done out of compassion, mercy and love. If, however, after frequent visits and attempts, he becomes certain that they will not respond, then he is to sever his relationship with them in obedience to God's word (cf. *Qur'ān* 6:68). But even then, one is not to stop helping them and must always be gracious to

5 AL-BŪṬĪ, *Hākaḍā*, p. 76-88.

6 AL-BŪṬĪ, *Hākaḍā*, p. 89-98.

them: visiting the sick and consoling the mourners is always a holy charge from God.⁷

These explanations are offered by Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī to clarify misunderstandings that would hinder the *dā'is* and cause them problems. However, as can be seen, the clarifications themselves constitute a problem in relations with other religions, and in this case particularly with Christians, namely that of considering the simple religious activity of the Christians - such as placing a cross on one's neck, or kissing a cross, or vesting with clothes designed for men of other religions. Such signs are deemed as rejecting faith in God; hence, persons performing them are considered *kuffār* (infidels) and merit the obvious consequences.

In the absence of authentic dialogue, positions similar to the one advanced by Mr. Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī are left unchallenged and potentially disastrous. An authentic dialogue would demand Christians to be clear as to what they believe. An authentic dialogue would demand Muslims to be more critical of their own methods of interpretation. In the meeting together, both sides would have to understand and agree to respect each other's God given freedom in choosing one's faith.

2. The central issue of al-Muḡāḍalah

The issues discussed in the debate under study have acquired a particular importance today, for many, if not most, of the Christian scholars involved in inter-religious dialogue with Muslims choose, for many reasons, to dilute, downplay, or completely ignore the significance of many of the difficult and/or delicate issues.⁸ It is an obvious fact that many of the Christian beliefs differ from those held by Muslims. However, the fact that beliefs do differ does not make it necessary for one side to eliminate the other. These differences should not be diluted, downplayed, or ignored because they will not disappear. Acknowledging them is just as important as recognizing the beliefs Christians and Muslims hold in common.

7 AL-BŪṬĪ, *Hākaḍā*, p. 98-107.

8 These reasons positively include the desire to ignore what separates the people of different religions and concentrate on what they have in common in an attempt to live peacefully and to avoid conflict. Negatively these reasons include ignorance, *naïveté* and fear.

The ancient documents of dialogues/debates between Arab-Christians and Muslims show that courage, honesty and respect are needed in any dialogue/debate. Courage and honesty are especially necessary when expressing one's true beliefs. Respect for other individuals' freedom to chose and follow what they determine to be the truth is essential for any true and sincere dialogue. Ignoring or not identifying such differences, be it for lofty or lowly reasons, is an indication of a deep seated lack of true respect as well as a lack of true and complete acceptance of another's freedom to chose one's faith and follow one's conscience. It is also a lack of respect of true intellectual honesty.

As displayed in the debate under study, it is very difficult for a Muslim to believe that Christianity is a monotheistic faith. No matter how hard a Christian tries to explain this fact, the possibility of achieving some understanding with regard to the issue is very low. This difficulty stems from the fact that the *Qur'ān* accuses the Christians of associating⁹ with God.¹⁰ For a Muslim, the *Qur'ān* is the Word of God; hence, the denunciation of polytheism against the Christians, as far as a Muslim is concerned, comes directly from God. Thus the difficulty continues in spite of friendly encounters and sincere and well intentioned dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Similarly, Muslims will never agree that Christ was crucified, for the *Qur'ān*, that is to say the word of God for a Muslim, asserts that Jesus was not crucified but that it only appeared to the Jews that He was.¹¹

It is inappropriate and in fact contrary to the Christian belief for a Christian educated in the faith of the Apostles and with sufficient knowledge of Islam to accept that the *Qur'ān* was *sent down*¹² and/or inspired by God, or that the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad, is a prophet.¹³ These two

9 As noted previously, the term «associate with God» in Islamic vocabulary, as well as in this study, means to believe in more than One God, that is to say, to make an equal or a partner in Divinity.

10 Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:171. The verse is discussed in more detail in the translation of the Critical Edition.

11 Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:157-158.

12 As explained earlier, Muslims believe the *Qur'ān* constitutes the words that were literally *sent down* by God, without any human intervention whatsoever, and generally they are to be taken at face value. Hence, the *Qur'ān* is the most profound reference in the life of a Muslim.

13 According to Christian belief, a prophet is someone «inspired by the Spirit of God to speak and/or act in a certain way. Interpreting past and present events and announcing coming events, the OT prophets spoke from a deep knowledge of God». Gerald O'COLLINS & Edward George FARRUGIA, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 214.

fundamental beliefs of Islam, namely that the *Qur'ān* was *sent down* by God and that Muḥammad is a prophet, diametrically contradict the Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is the Incarnate Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. As discussed in the commentary on verse 287 WN, according to the *Qur'ān*, God does not have a Son. This basic Christian belief is considered polytheism by Islam, and God, according to the Muslims, directly labels the Christian belief in the Divinity of Jesus a lie. In addition, many of the teachings of the messenger of Islam patently contradict the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.¹⁴

Rhetorical and theological gymnastics as well as semantic wordplay disguised as modern sophistication do not foster meaningful dialogue between representatives of the two faiths. By way of example, many Christian theologians take the word prophet out of its original and authentic Christian context¹⁵ in order for it to be applied to Muḥammad. Similar theological acrobatics are indeed performed to strip Jesus of His evangelical titles, all for the sake of inter-religious dialogue.¹⁶ Relativizing Jesus in efforts for inter-religious dialogue undermines the authenticity of such interactions and creates a vacuum where two religions are allegedly interacting.

The records of past relations between Muslims and Christians that are exemplified in the inter-religious dialogues between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī and/or Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān and the Muslims of his time, as well as many others,¹⁷ offer the modern world a different model and a far more authentic way of proceeding, most especially with regard to a dialogue concerning the Christian belief in Jesus, the Christ.

14 Examples would include teaching on revenge, marriage, divorce, human freedom of choice, image of paradise, and the relation between God and the Scripture (as in sent down and inspired). In fact, in Christian beliefs, God's very Self-revelation in Christ is contradicted by Islam.

15 A prophet is one «sent by God to form the people of the Old Covenant in the hope of salvation... [and] John the Baptist concludes the work of the prophets of the Old Covenant». *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), p. 895.

16 For an example, see Mīchael AMALADOSS, «Jesus Christ as the Only Saviour and Mission», in: *The Japan Mission Journal* 55, n. 4 (2001), p. 219-226. This article offers one example of the attempt to strip Jesus of His evangelical titles, under the pretext that they are historically conditioned and need not apply today.

17 As in MARCUZZO, *Le dialoghe d'Abraham* (1986). This is yet another example of an inter-religious dialogue with Islam included in our Arab-Christian Heritage.

For a Muslim, it is hard to accept God as Man. This is the single most important issue discussed in *al-Muğādalāh*. Essentially, it is the main concern throughout and up to the end of *al-Muğādalāh* (cf. 861-865 WN). The judge, Yaḥyā b. Aktam asks, «O Abū Qurrah, has anyone seen God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!)?»). In both the Old and the New Testaments, the sacred authors speak of clouds¹⁸, fires¹⁹ and an angel²⁰ when they speak of the unspeakable, of God. «No one has ever seen God», declares John, the Evangelist.²¹ And again, he proclaims, «No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him»²². For a Muslim, this is going too far. The difficulty is expressed well by John Paul II, in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Expressing the Catholic position, John Paul II writes,

Let's try to be impartial in our reasoning. *Could God go further in His stooping down, in His drawing near to man*, thereby expanding the possibilities of our knowing Him? In truth, *it seems that He has gone as far as possible. He could not go further*. In a certain sense God has gone too far! Didn't Christ perhaps become "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23)? Precisely because He called God His Father, because He revealed Him so openly in Himself, He could not but elicit the impression that it was too much... Man was no longer able to tolerate such closeness, and thus the protest began.

This great protest has precise names - first it is called the Synagogue, and then Islam. Neither can accept a God who is so human. "It is not suitable to speak of God in this way", they protest. "He must remain absolutely transcendent; He must remain pure Majesty. Majesty full of mercy, certainly, but not to the point of paying for the faults of His own creatures, for their sins"²³.

As far as a Christian is concerned, in the New Testament Jesus' humanity is as clear as His Divinity. Though extraordinary, it pleased God to reveal Himself in such manner. According to the records of the ancient past, only from here can an honest Arab-Christian dialogue with a Muslim begin.

18 Exodus 13:21; Matthew 17:5.

19 Exodus 13:21; Acts 2:3.

20 Exodus 3:2.

21 1 John 4:12.

22 John 1:18.

23 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 21.

**C. ABŪ QURRAH AND THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF *AL-MUĠĀDALAH*:
WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?**

Indeed, many are the issues discussed and/or implied during *al-Muġādalah*. They include the following:

1. Inter-religious dialogue
2. Freedom of speech
3. Circumcision
4. The creation of human beings in the image and the likeness of God
5. The covenant with Abraham
6. The dignity of the human being
7. The goodness of creation
8. The New Covenant
9. Idolatry
10. The identity of Jesus
11. Jesus' freedom in giving up His life on the cross
12. The reasons for Christian silence
13. The consequence of Christian silence
14. The human duty to search for and follow the truth once it is found
15. The interpretation of the *Qur'ān*
16. Women in Islam
17. Homosexuality
18. The images of paradise in Christianity and in Islam
19. The reasons Muslims antagonize the Christians
20. Definitions and meanings: terms common to Christians and Muslims
21. *Ġihād*
22. *Taḥrīf*
23. *Takfīr*
24. The *Qur'ān*'s view of the Christians
25. The rebellion of Satan
26. Marriage
27. Divorce
28. The veneration of the Cross
29. Who are the *mušrikūn* according to the *Qur'ān*?

30. Who is a prophet, in Christianity and in Islam?
31. Is Muḥammad a prophet?
32. The difference between inspired and *munzal*
33. The concept of missionary activity in Christianity and in Islam
34. The importance of learning Arabic for a study of the *Qur'ān*
35. God's omniscience
36. The immutability of God
37. God's Transcendence
38. The impassability of God
39. The ascension of Mary
40. Free will

At first glance, with such a broad and varied array of subjects, we began this study searching for its cipher, the internal logic and cohesion of this debate. cursory inspection leaves one with the impression that the aforementioned themes have no common ground and appear or disappear without rational explanation. The debate reads as if it were a random collection of unrelated issues, although each of these issues merits its own major work. In fact, we realize that this research presents many more doors than one individual can open. Indeed, far more questions are posed by this text than answers given, and the issues discussed are never quite exhausted. There is always room for more research, more findings and above all more authentic dialogue; hence, our decision is to point to the issues presented and limit the detailed discussion to a minimum. From the outset, in order to comprehend these issues in their dynamic tension, the questions confronting us were several, but simple and straightforward: «What connects these subjects? Why are they being discussed in what seems to be a theological inter-religious dialogue?» These and similar questions begged for an answer. Therein lies the internal logic of the debate, and until one discovers this logic, the debate is a *bavard*, and pointing to anything is anyone's guess.

After much effort and complex analysis, we posit an answer. In attempting to respond to the questions posed to him during the debate, Abū Qurrah was in reality answering Jesus' question «Who do you say that I am?» The central issue of the debate is the identity of Jesus. In all of the questions asked by the Muslims - from circumcision to the Old Covenant, from Jesus' prayer to His offering of Himself on the Cross, from death to

Resurrection - the Muslim scholars are rotating around the charge of idolatry and polytheism. This is the sin of Christianity in the eyes of Islam, not solely in the debate between Abū Qurrah and the Muslim elite of his time and place but also today. For Muslims, as it was for the Sanhedrin two-thousand years ago, Jesus' identity as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is blasphemy. Many dilute this issue, even to the point of relativizing Jesus in an effort to escape its implications. However, as did Patriarch Timothy I before him, Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān in his debate/dialogue with the Caliph, 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn, and the Muslim elite points to the fact that an authentic and honest dialogue between Christianity and Islam cannot avoid the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. A Christian-Muslim dialogue can occur without the polemic tone that often typifies such encounters, including the text under study. This is the reason this and similar Arab-Christian debates, as that of Patriarch Timothy I, are so insightful to our present context.

To illustrate the point above: in *al-Muğādalāh* the questions begin with circumcision, but in substance they are about Jesus. Specifically, did Jesus nullify the Old Covenant? As discussed in the commentary,²⁴ the Caliph's point in discussing circumcision is to assert that Jesus abrogated the Old Covenant. This in turn would allow the Caliph to advance his belief that Muḥammad abrogated the New Testament. Abū Qurrah's response is a very clear, "No". Jesus «nullified those laws which were formulated by Moses» (cf. 36 WN); that is to say, Jesus nullified the human attempt to elevate human-made laws to the same level of Divine Law.²⁵

The distinction is unmistakable.²⁶ Abū Qurrah asserts that Jesus made a New Covenant (cf. 40 WN). He is aware of how the Muslims view the Christians and their relationship with the Christ. Abū Qurrah anticipates the argument with his account of why «God rejected the sons of Israel», (cf. 44-46 WN), namely for the sin of idolatry. The attempt is in vain. Idolatry is the very charge Muslims make against the Christians' belief in Jesus. For a Muslim, it is a clear and unacceptable association with God.

24 See «The law of circumcision and the Old Covenant» section of the previous chapter of this work.

25 As that of not doing certain activities that would be helpful to people on the Sabbath, as in feeding the hungry and healing the sick; see for examples Matthew 12:1-13.

26 That is to say, to elevate human-made law to the same level and/or above Divine law is playing God, hence, living a lie.

The central question of this debate is not new. Jesus Himself asked the question to his first apostles: «Who do you say that I am?»²⁷. Peter answered swiftly for all of them, «The Messiah of God». According to Matthew, Peter's response is even more telling, «You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God»²⁸. Peter's answer may seem simple and straightforward; nevertheless, the issue of Jesus' identity is one that perplexed the Church for centuries, and the answers given, far from being apparent or unified, have caused a great deal of controversy, deliberation and division among the Christians that continue for many even today. Abū Qurrah did not speak from a void. He depended on the Scripture, the Christian tradition, as well as centuries of key theological developments that lead to the solution of Chalcedon. Abū Qurrah, as his writings testify, was a staunch defender of Chalcedon.

To Abū Qurrah, Jesus is «the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob» (cf. 48 WN). Jesus is «God, the Son of God, the Word of God and His Spirit, without separation among them» (cf. 49 WN). God wished to let humanity know what He is like (cf. 219 WN), but He knows fully well that «the human eyes could not have endured to look at God's Might and Glory» (cf. 222 WN); therefore, He «sent His Word and Spirit to the Chaste Virgin Mary» (cf. 220 WN), and «He was manifested to the people Incarnate» (cf. 221 WN). Abū Qurrah professes that Jesus is fully human and fully Divine. Jesus is a human but «without sin» (cf. 224 WN). In His human nature, He prayed (cf. 208 WN). That is not all: Abū Qurrah states that Jesus is fully God. As His signs and miracles witness, Jesus is not just a human being (cf. 204 WN), for He performed these miracles and signs (cf. 205 WN) on His own authority, without anyone's assistance (cf. 206 WN). Jesus cannot be «limited, fashioned, and described» (cf. 68 WN), for He is God (cf. 275 WN). As God, Jesus is alive «in heaven» (cf. 98, 270, 273 WN) and «to Him belongs the superiority over all the prophets» (cf. 98 WN). Jesus is the «Creator» (cf. 138, 146, 272, 274, 277 WN). Abū Qurrah states clearly, Jesus is «perfectly human and perfectly Divine» (cf. 207 WN). Faith proper, for Abū Qurrah, is faith in Jesus, the Christ (cf. 47, 114, 115 WN).

27 Luke 9:20.

28 Matthew 16:16.

D. FINAL THOUGHTS REGARDING *AL-MUĞĀDALAH*: A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Looking to the future, what needs to be done is clear. We have examined eleven out of the fifteen known manuscripts in the Melkite family. A Critical Edition of eight of them has been produced. One manuscript has been eliminated. Another edition, of the X branch, has been done. The other three manuscripts, Nasrallah 2 and the two manuscripts mentioned by Graf²⁹, are yet to be found and examined in order to determine whether they belong to one of the now known branches or if they constitute yet a new branch. Finally, the rest of the manuscripts, both in *garšūnī* and Syriac, need to be examined so that a new schema and a Critical Edition can be produced. All editions then are to be examined and compared with Abū Qurrah's undisputed work. Perhaps then, an authentic text can be deduced and a definite decision can be made.

The text under study is by no means a literary masterpiece nor is the debate a theological comparison of Christian and Islamic beliefs. It is not a synthesis of Abū Qurrah's thoughts with regard to Christianity and/or Islam. It is simply an important piece of Arab-Christian literature and an example of what it might have been and/or might be like to dialogue with Muslims. It is a part of the Christian tradition and the immense number of records that make up the Arab-Christian Heritage.

The records of the Arab-Christian Heritage illustrate such authenticity and readiness for sincere dialogue, by explaining repeatedly who they are and what they believe in, they *give a reason for their hope*. Peter clearly counsels the Christians: «Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope»³⁰. In the text under study, Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān, follows this counsel and gives the reason for his hope, namely his belief in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

29 Namely the «one indicated by L. Delaporte, in: *Nouvelles archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires* 17 (1908), p. 46 in Šaida and one (coming from Yabrūd) in the possession of Ḥabīb ZAIYĀT, *Ḥazā'īn al-Kutub*, etc. p. 181; compare *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 6 (1940), p. 88». GRAF, GCAL II (1947), p. 21-22.

30 1 Peter 3:15.

PART II
THE TEXT
TRANSLATED



**[THE SCRIBE'S INTRODUCTION
AND PREPARATION OF THE DEBATE]**

- 1 In the name of God, the Creator, the Living One, the Speaker, the Most Holy Trinity.¹
- 2 We begin with the help of God (May He be praised!) with transcribing the debate of Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Ḥarrān, with 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn, the Commander of the Faithful,
- 3 in the presence of the Muslim theologians² who were in that palace, in the Muslim Caliphate's court.
- 4 They were Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī, Hārūn b. Hāšim al-Ḥuzā'ī, Salām al-Hamaḍānī, Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālid al-Baṣrī, and a group of the elite of Qurayš.

[1. Al-Ma'mūn's love for Abū Qurrah and the opposition of Qurayš's elite]

- 5 Al-Ma'mūn loved Abū Qurrah, seated him, and made him welcome in the Caliphate's court.
- 6 The elite of Qurayš gathered around him [the Caliph] and said to him, «You sit with a Nazarene³ man and welcome him into the Caliphate's court!»
- 7 Then al-Ma'mūn said to them, «This is a knowledgeable man, an expert in his religion and sect».
- 8 They said to him, «From where would this Nazarene have a religion or a sect?»

[2. The purpose of the debate]

- 9 Al-Ma'mūn said to them, «I long (By God!) that you would debate with him,

1 This Trinitarian invocation formula in Arabic is a rhymed proṣe called "سَجْع". In this case, the "سَجْع" is spelled with the consonant "ق" in "الخَالِقِ" and "الْمَخْلُوقِ" and the proper vocalizations; hence the reason for placing the Spirit ahead of the Son. Cf. the corresponding Arabic verse in the forthcoming Critical Edition to be published by the CEDRAC (Centre de documentation et de recherches arabes chrétiennes) - Université Saint-Joseph.

2 *Mutakalimī al-Islām* are Muslim theologians. They study *ʿIlm al-kalām*; that is to say, they study the science of searching in *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (the principles of religion).

3 See fn. 4 in Chapter Five of The Study for *Naṣrānī* (pl. *Naṣārā*).

- 10 and clarify [for him] the truth of the religion of Islam, and manifest the weakness of the religion of the Nazarenes».
- 11 Then, they said to him, «[We give you our]⁴ hearing and obedience. This will be tomorrow».

[3. Al-Ma'mūn's invitation to Abū Qurrah and his conditional acceptance of the debate]

- 12 On the following day, the elite of Qurayš came to al-Ma'mūn's court, along with those who were literate and knowledgeable. And Abū Qurrah came [to al-Ma'mūn's court].
- 13 Then, al-Ma'mūn said to Abū Qurrah, «These people mentioned that you have no religion and no knowledge. They wished to debate with you to declare what is correct»⁵.
- 14 Abū Qurrah then said, «If my sovereign and chief, the Commander of the Faithful (May God lengthen his life!) permits me, I will make void that [claim]⁶,
- 15 on condition that I shall not be accused nor shall I be addressed except with "ways that are best"⁷,
- 16 as it says in the *Qur'ān* "do not argue with the people of the book except with ways that are best"⁸.

4 The omission of the subject and the verb here is not unusual in Arabic, as well as in other languages, for it is clearly understood from the context. Even today such practice is very common as in the familiar expressions "عَفْوًا" (pardon) instead of «أَطْلُبُ مِنْكَ» «أَطْلُبُ مِنْكَ» (I ask, from you, pardon) and/or "شُكْرًا" (thanks) instead of «أَهَيْبُكَ شُكْرًا» (I gave you thanks).

5 The original Arabic is unclear here with regard to the last word in the sentence. The word used is "تصحيح" in A, E, (as well as f) and «على تصحيح ذلك» in S. The expression «to declare what is correct» is our own interpretation according to the context and the proper use of the grammatical form as well as the appropriate vocalization of the word in its present context.

6 The relative pronoun "that" here, "ذلك", in the manuscripts, refers to the elite's claim that Abū Qurrah has no religion and no knowledge.

7 Reference to *Qur'ān* 16:125a,

«أُدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ».

«Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way».

8 This is yet another reference to *Qur'ān* 16:125a. Abū Qurrah insists on his condition for entering the debate, with a repetition of a fuller, although not the entire verse, quotation of the same *qur'ānic* imperative.

[I. THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION AND THE OLD COVENANT]

17 Al-Ma'mūn then said to Abū Qurrah, «I want to ask you about something».

18 Abū Qurrah then said, «What is it, my sovereign?»

[1. *Is the foreskin impure!*]

19 He said, «Do you not know, O Abū Qurrah, that the foreskin is impure?»

20 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you not know, O Commander of the Faithful, that God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) created our father, Adam, from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life?»¹ He [al-Ma'mūn] said, «Yes».

21 Abū Qurrah said, «Moreover, God (May He be praised!) fashioned him [Adam] with His right [hand] after His image and likeness»² He [al-Ma'mūn] said, «Yes».

[2. *God does not create something impure*]

22 Abū Qurrah then said, «Would God, then, create something impure and form it after His resemblance and likeness and give it a home in His paradise?»³

1 Reference to Genesis 2:7, «the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being».

2 Reference to Genesis 1:26, «Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness».

3 A reference to Genesis 1:31a, «God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good». It is also a reference to Genesis 1:26a,27, «Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them». And it is also a reference to Genesis 2:8, «Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed».

See also *Qur'ān* 32:7,

«الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ».

«Who made all things good which He created, and He began the creation of man from clay».

- 23 Al-Ma'mūn said, «I take refuge in God, [lest] God would create something impure!»
- 24 Abū Qurrah said, «We now resemble our father, Adam (Peace be upon him!)».
- 25 Al-Ma'mūn then laughed and bowed his head in silence for a long while; thereupon, he said, «O Abū Qurrah, (May God bless you!); certainly, you told the truth.

[3. *The covenant with Abraham*]

- 26 How then did God bring down circumcision⁴ on Abraham⁵, and what is the reason for that?»
- 27 Abū Qurrah said, «God (May He be praised and exalted!) created our father Adam uncircumcised, and nothing in him was impure⁶;
- 28 and between Adam and Abraham there were thirty-four generations,
- 29 for from Adam to Noah [there were] twenty generations, and from Noah to Abraham fourteen generations, and they were all uncircumcised.
- 30 God never ordered circumcision until the time of Abraham⁷,
- 31 for the people had worshiped idols and prostrated themselves before them in derogation of God (May He be praised!).
- 32 When Abraham came forth, confessed God, believed in Him, rejected faith in idols, and looked down on them,

4 Al-Nawawī in his commentary on «Muslim, *Tahāra*, trad. 50 (ed. Cairo 1283, i, 328), consider[s] “Circumcision is obligatory (*wādjjib*) according to al-Shāfi‘ī and many of the doctors, *sunna* according to Mālik and the majority of them. It is further, according to al-Shāfi‘ī, equally obligatory for males and females”». Arent Jan WENSINCK, “*Khitān*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

5 Both in Christianity and Islam, Abraham is a key figure with an essential role in the history of religion. By many, Abraham is considered the father of faith of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Islam, Abraham is also the destroyer of idols and the founder of *al-Ka'bah*.

6 This is a reminder of Genesis 1:31a.

7 Reference to Genesis 17. In Genesis, chapter seventeen presents the details of the Old Covenant. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, v. 5. Abram means «the exalted one», and Abraham means «the father of many». God promises to “multiply” Abraham “exceedingly” v. 2 and make him «the father of a host of nations» v. 4. God also promises Abraham «the land» in which he was staying v. 8. On his part, Abraham and his entire household had to bear a physical mark, namely circumcision vv. 10-14.

- 33 God wished that he [Abraham] and his tribe, who profess the Creator
(May He be praised!) be marked⁸,
- 34 as he⁹ who marks his sheep and goats, so that the believers would be
visible [in a different way] from the worshipers of idols.
- 35 Thus, Abraham marked all¹⁰ the people until the coming of the Lord,
the Christ.

8 This is another reference to Genesis 17; that is to say, it is yet another reminder of the covenant as God's own desire.

9 The third person pronoun here refers back to an allusion to any shepherd or owner of sheep, not specifically to Abraham.

10 There is a bit of Middle Eastern exaggeration or a figure of speech here, for Abraham did not circumcise *all* the people.

[II. CHRIST MADE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE NATIONS]

[A. THE NEW COVENANT]

[1. On the Laws of Moses and the Laws of the Lord, the Christ]

- 36 When the Lord, the Christ, (Glory to Him!) came, He nullified those laws which were formulated by Moses,¹
- 37 who had formulated for the sons of Israel rules and regulations that they neither accepted nor obeyed.
- 38 Then, the Lord, the Christ, made for the nations a new covenant and replaced the first commandment with a new commandment».
- 39 Al-Ma'mūn said, «And what is it?» Abū Qurrah said, «The laws of the sons of Israel were five, O Commander of the Faithful:
- 40 The Torah, the circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath, the slaying of bulls and sheep, and the prayer facing the *qiblah*².

1 Moses is an important figure in Islam (as well as in Judaism and Christianity). In the *Qur'an*, he is mentioned at least 133 times and is «considered as the precursor of, the model for, and the annunciator of Muḥammad». Bernhard HELLER, "Mūsā", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003). In the Bible, Moses is one of the most important figures; his name is mentioned 799 times. He is the Old Testament's Law giver.

2 *Qiblah* is a certain place to which a believer faces in prayer. For a Muslim it was first towards Jerusalem; then, it was changed to Mecca. Cf *Qur'an* 2:143-145,

«وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِعَافٍ لَعْمَلُونَ».

«Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger be a witness against you. And We appointed the *qiblah* which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. In truth it was hard (test) save for those whom Allah guided. But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind. We have seen the turning of thy face to

- 41 When the Lord, the Christ, came, and the peoples believed in Him, He moved us from going astray to the right way, and from the darkness to the light,³
- 42 and made for us in place of the five laws Moses made for them [the Israelites] a new five:
- 43 The Gospel instead of the Torah, Sunday instead of Saturday, baptism instead of circumcision, the Eucharist instead of the slaying [of animals], and the east instead of the *qiblah*.

[2. On God's rejection of the sons of Israel]

- 44 The reason for which God rejected the Sons of Israel [was]
- 45 that Moses had ascended the mountain⁴ in order to receive the Torah from his Lord, [and]
- 46 he was slow⁵ and did not descend from the mountain until the Sons of Israel worshiped the golden calf⁶ in the desert in derogation of their Lord Who created them.

[3. On the Nazarenes' belief in Christ]

- 47 On the contrary⁷, we [the Nazarenes] accepted Him [Jesus] with good and right intent, and we kept His commandments with all our hearts,

heaven (for guidance, O Muhammad). And now verily We shall make thee turn (in prayer) toward a *qiblah* which is dear to thee. So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it. Lo! those who have received the Scripture know that (this Revelation) is the Truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do».

- 3 Cf. Acts 28:15, «to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God».
- 4 Reference to Exodus 19:20, «When the LORD came down to the top of Mount Sinai, he summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up to him».
- 5 Reference to Exodus 32:1, «When the people became aware of Moses' delay in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will be our leader; as for the man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him"».
- 6 Reference to Exodus 32:3-4, «... all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron, who accepted their offering, and fashioning this gold with a graving tool, made a molten calf. Then they cried out, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"».
- 7 That is to say, «In contrast to the unfaithful Israelites, we [the Nazarenes] accepted Him [God] with good and right intent, and we kept His commandments with all our hearts...».

- 48 and we did not doubt that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,⁸
- 49 and that He is God⁹, the Son of God¹⁰, the Word of God and His Spirit¹¹, without separation among them».

[B. ON THE STATUS OF CHRIST BEFORE GOD]

- 50 Then, a man called Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī got up facing Abū Qurrah
- 51 and said to him, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah! The Christ is the word¹² of God and His [God's] spirit¹³ whom He sent to Mary,
- 52 and his [Jesus'] "similitude before God is as that of Adam. He created him from dust and breathed into him from His spirit"»¹⁴.

8 Cf. John 8:58, «Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM"».

9 Reference to John 20:28, «Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"».

10 Reference to many verses in the New Testament. These include Matthew 14:33; Mark 1:1; 15:39; Luke 1:32, 1:35; John 1:34. The best known is Simon Peter's reply to Jesus' direct question in Matthew 16:15-16, «He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"».

11 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:171b,

«... إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْفَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ...»

«... The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him...».

12 The word "Word" in the above verse is not capitalized due to the fact that when used by a Muslim (who is the speaker here) does not carry within it the same meaning as it does in Christianity; that is to say, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī is not speaking of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

13 The word "Spirit" in the above verse is not capitalized because a Muslim (who is the speaker here) does not mean by it the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity but an angel, namely the angel Gabriel. Cf. Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad b. Ġarīr AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2001), p. 68.

14 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:59,

«إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَى عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ.»

«Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! And he is».

Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hāšimī may be depending on *Qur'ān* 4:171 as well, which begins with asking the people of the book not to "exaggerate" in their talk with regard to Jesus; it reads,

[1. Al-Ma'mūn grants Abū Qurrah safety and freedom of speech]

- 53 Abū Qurrah bowed his head in silence for a long while, did not return an answer, and looked deeply into the ground.
- 54 Al-Ma'mūn, then, said to him, «Why do you not answer him, O Abū Qurrah?»
- 55 He [Abū Qurrah] said to him, «Until the Commander of the Faithful orders me».
- 56 The Commander of the Faithful said to him, «O Abū Qurrah, this is a just, fair, and demonstrative court.
- 57 No one transgresses against you in it.
- 58 Let loose your tongue, present your case, and clarify what is in your conscience.
- 59 There is no one here who will answer you except with “ways that are best”.
- 60 Do not be intimidated by anyone, and let no one be great in your eyes, and do not fear any one,
- 61 for this is a day of demonstration in which the truth will be clarified. Whoever has it in him to affirm the truth of his religion, let him speak!»¹⁵

«يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ».

«O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him...».

The verse continues asking the people of the book to believe in God and His messenger, meaning Muḥammad the messenger of Islam and, not to say “three”,

«فَأْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً انتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا».

«So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “three” Cease! (it is) better for you! Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender».

- 15 One of the most wonderful characteristics of the ancient Arabs, along with their superb hospitality, is their sense of honor and respect for one’s word. If the Caliph gave his word, it can be trusted. Abū Qurrah can in fact speak freely, for he is sure that he can trust al-Ma'mūn’s word.

[2. Adam is a creature and can be described, measured, and limited]

- 62 Abū Qurrah said, «Ask whatever you will, O Abū Muḥammad».
- 63 He [al-Hāšimī] then said to him, «The issue is the similitude of the Christ to Adam».
- 64 Abū Qurrah, then, said to him, «Let me know, was Adam created from something that can be described and known or not?» He said, «From something that can be described and known».
- 65 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Then, it can be measured?» He said, «Yes».
- 66 He [Abū Qurrah] said, «This thing can be limited, then?» He said, «Yes».

[3. Christ, the Word of God and His Spirit]

- 67 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me about the Christ, is He created from something or not?» He said, «Yes, from the word of God and His spirit».
- 68 Abū Qurrah said, «Is the Word of God and His Spirit limited, fashioned, and described?» He said, «No, nor can it be comprehended».
- 69 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me about the Word of God, is It Creator or created?»¹⁶
- 70 Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh bowed his head an hour¹⁷ in silence, and did not return an answer.
- 71 He was thinking: «If he said "Creator", he would be prevailed over, and it did not occur to him to say "created"».
- 72 Then, Abū Qurrah gazed at al-Ma'mūn and said, «What a difference [there is], O Commander of the Faithful, between whom you see and Whom you do not see¹⁸, [the One Who] cannot be limited nor His greatness comprehended and Who is not describable!»

16 During the time of al-Ma'mūn, there was a great debate among Muslim theologians with regard to the *Qur'ān*, namely whether it was eternal or created.

17 An hour in this context does not mean sixty minutes, but a while, a long unspecified duration of time.

18 The allusion to God's Transcendence, expressed in the expression «Whom you cannot see» comes back to the fore of the discussion as the final point of the debate (cf. 861-865 WN).

73 Al-Ma'mūn rejoiced at that [statement] and admired it¹⁹.

[C. ON THE MATTER OF DIALOGUE]

[1. *On the reasons for the silence of the Nazarenes and its consequences*]

74 Thereupon, Abū Qurrah said, «Do not assume, O Abū 'Abd Allāh, that we do not have an argument with which to argue and proclaim the correctness of our religion.

75 But this [our silence] is made necessary by your [political] domination²⁰, scorn and slandering of us

76 to the point that each of you assumes that we have no religion and no argument with which to argue for ourselves.

77 Due to our [the Nazarenes'] frequent silence before you, we descended to the most despicable status with you [or in your estimation], and are most degraded in your eyes,

78 and there is no fairness for anyone [with you] due to your hasty impatience, impudence, impertinence, and [self] admiration.

79 Now that my chief and sovereign, the Commander of the Faithful, has permitted me to speak²¹,

80 I must answer for my religion and [offer] a clarification of the argument for it the [best] way I find,

81 and if you resent me, with your injustice and transgression, and do not hear [me].

82 Now, listen to what your book has uttered, and do not be haughty with me,

83 and do not disdain from admitting the truth if it becomes clear to you from your book.

19 The pronoun used in Arabic here could refer to the Abū Qurrah's response "it", but it could also refer to Abū Qurrah. If that is the case, the translated text ought to read, «... and admired him».

20 By 829, the time of the encounter between Abū Qurrah and the al-Ma'mūn, Muslims have conquered Jerusalem (638), Syria, Egypt, Palestine (641), Cyprus, and Tripoli in Africa (644-650), North Africa and had established a kingdom in Spain (705-717). The Abbasid dynasty was established by early ninth century. Cf. ARMSTRONG, *Islam: A Short History* (2000), p. xiv-xvi.

21 Abū Qurrah with this simple but telling statement is reminding the gathering that he is permitted to speak with immunity. He could also be reminding himself. Or it could be the scribe reminding the reader that Abū Qurrah has permission to speak freely.

[2. On how the Qur'ān commands to address the Nazarenes]

- 84 And do not address me except with “ways that are best”, as you have been ordered by your prophet in your book, which says to those who came forward from the Nazarenes,
- 85 “We have believed what has been sent down upon us and upon you. Our God and your God is One”²².
- 86 And you, because of your [self] admiration, did not accept his saying and [now] do not obey his order.
- 87 Rather, in place of his commandment to you, you hold our religion in contempt and slander us with what is ugly.²³
- 88 You have said that he²⁴ has brought to us the ugly which we neither believe nor see.
- 89 You ought not, O Muslim, to disown your prophet’s honoring of our religion and the virtues that are in it,
- 90 by²⁵ [your prophet’s] ordering you to ask the “Master of the Day of Judgment” to guide you from going astray [and guide you] to “the straight way”,
- 91 the way which He “has bestowed” by His Grace upon [those] “whose portion is not wrath and who go not astray”.²⁶

22 A partial reference to *Qur'ān* 29:46,

«وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ».

«And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender».

23 At first glance, the reference of the word *ugly* is not clear from the text. However, in the context of the conversation, it might well be *idolatry*. That is to say, the charge may be that of infidelity, (cf. M 299).

24 It is unclear from the text to whom the author is referring; it cannot be Jesus, the Christ, for Muslims do not say that he proclaimed His Divinity; rather, they insist that proclaiming Jesus’ Divinity is a later corruption of the Scripture by Christians.

25 We are aware that the English reads awkwardly here. Given that the translation demands the use of “by” in order not to lose the cause and effect relation between the “ordering” as a proof of the “honoring”, this awkwardness is unavoidable.

26 Reference to *Qur'ān* 1:4-7,

«مَالِكِ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ».

«Owner of the Day of Judgment. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path: The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go not astray».

[III. THE RELIGION OF GOD IS FAITH]

[A. ABŪ QURRAH DENIES THE MUSLIMS FAITH AND AFFIRMS THE NAZARENES']

[1. *Abū Qurrah asserts the rightness of the Nazarenes' faith on the light of al-fātiḥah*]

- 92 Who are those “whose portion is wrath”¹ if not the Jews and the worshipers of idols?
- 93 “Those who go astray” are those who ask God to guide them “to the straight way”.²
- 94 “Those upon whom [God] has bestowed His Grace” are the Nazarenes who believe in Him and in His Anointed One,
- 95 and they are under His obedience, complying with His obligations, following His norms.
- 96 You, with your injustice and transgression against us, make us [as if] sharers with them [“those who go astray” and “whose portion is wrath”] and [you] measure us by them and liken us to the worshipers of idols.
- 97 Your book witnesses to us that we are, before you, from the people of the book, believers in the Gospel and in [Him] who brought it down upon us.
- 98 You admit that our Lord, the Christ, is in heaven; to Him belongs the superiority over all the prophets,³

1 Another reference to *Qur'ān* 1:7.

«صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ».

«The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray».

2 The reference here is to those who recite this prayer, namely the ones debating with Abū Qurrah. The evidence that they are going astray is based on Abū Qurrah's own interpretation of the first *sūrah* of the *Qur'ān*, namely that if one is on the straight way, one would not need to ask for guidance to the right way. The mere fact that one is asking for guidance to the right way carries within it the indication that he is going astray and needs help.

3 Muslims do not give Jesus «superiority over all the prophets», and it is a bit strange that Abū Qurrah's assertion did not provoke a reaction from the Muslims gathered in this particular *Maḡlis*.

- 99 and similarly whoever follows Him has superiority over all the [other] religions.⁴
- 100 If you were to say, then, that you are following the Christ and following His laws, I would nullify your saying from your book,
- 101 and I would make known to you that you are far from Him; [you are] not following the Christ, and you are distancing yourself from Him by abandoning His commandments».

[2. It is not rightful for the Muslim to boast his Islam over others]

- 102 The Muslim said, «Whoever follows⁵ a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted⁶ from him [by God], and in the life hereafter he is of the losers»⁷.
- 103 Abū Qurrah said, «Your book, O Muslim, contradicts these words [of yours]

4 It is interesting here that a person is described as being superior to a religion rather than to a follower of a religion. The previous observation is valid here as well, for Muslims are convinced that they are superior to all others due to what they believe to be the words of God in the *Qur'ān*. See for example *Qur'ān* 3:110,

«كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ».

«You are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. And if the People of the Scripture had believed it had been better for them. Some of them are believers; but most of them are evil-livers [sic].»

Here, as far as the Muslims are concerned, according to the *Qur'ān*, God Himself asserts not only that the Muslim belongs to the «خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ» (best community) but also that most of the people of the book/Scripture are the «الْفَاسِقُونَ» (evil-livers).

5 The term used here is «وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ» (whoever follows). Here the *Qur'ān* is not quoted accurately, as usual with Abū Qurrah. In the *qur'ānic* text, the term is «وَمَنْ يَشَاءُ» (whoever desires). The difference is in the placement of the proper «نَقَطَ» (dots). Since we are not translating the *Qur'ān* but the text of the debate as recorded in the manuscripts, and since there is no doubt as to the unanimity of the texts of the manuscripts, we have left it «وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ».

6 What is it that will not be accepted? It is not clear here whether it is the «other religion» or is it that God would not accept “anything” from that person.

7 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:85,

«وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ».

«And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allāh) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter».

- 104 by its saying, “To God has surrendered⁸ all that is on earth and in heaven, voluntarily or grudgingly”⁹.
- 105 Hence, if it were as you said that all people, birds, lions, animals, and devils have entered Islam,
- 106 and all creations have become Muslims, whether they willed it or refused, and your status is no more than one of them,
- 107 why then do you boast over us with your Islam, and you have no superiority over any one who entered it with you?

[3. The religion of God is faith in His Word and Spirit and no more]

- 108 But know, O Muslim, that the religion of God is faith.
- 109 You are the Muslims, and we, the assembly of the Nazarenes, are the believers.
- 110 You have surrendered, as your book mentions on the authority of God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!), and in regard to the Bedouins in their saying “we believed”¹⁰,
- 111 He¹¹ said to them, “You did not believe, but say we have surrendered”¹².

8 The verb used “أَسْلَمَ” carries different meanings, e.g. «to surrender», «to submit», «to forsake», «to betray», «to deliver up», «to become a Muslim» as well as others. We judge «to surrender» to be the most probable meaning. The word comes from the *maṣḍar* (root) “س ل م”. It is the IVth form of the root “س ل م” according to Hans WEHR’s classification.

9 Reference to *Qur’ān* 3:83,

«أَفَعْبِرِ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَتَّبِعُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ».

«Seek they other than the religion of Allah, when unto Him submitteth whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly, or unwillingly, and unto Him they will be returned».

10 Reference to *Qur’ān* 49:14,

«قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ».

«The wandering Arabs say: We believe. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Ye believe not, but rather say “We submit”, for the faith hath not yet entered into your hearts. Yet, if ye obey Allah and His messenger, He will not withhold from you aught of (the reward of) your deeds. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful».

11 The pronoun here refers to the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad.

12 Another reference to *Qur’ān* 49:14.

- 112 Thereupon, he¹³ said on the authority of God also, "it is equal whether you warned them or did not warn them. God sealed their hearts and hearing and sight so that they would not believe"¹⁴.
- 113 Your book and your prophet have, indeed, witnessed against you, on the authority of God, that you did not believe and that He sealed your heart, hearing, and sight so that you would not enter the faith.
- 114 Hence, do not boast, O Muslim, that you did not believe in the Word of God and His Spirit, the Creator of all things.
- 115 (By my life!) It is thus: each one who does not believe in the Word of God and His Spirit has not entered the faith».

**[B. ABŪ QURRAH ASSERTS HIS DENIAL OF FAITH
TO THE MUSLIMS]**

- 116 The group of Qurayš, who were present, became vexed by this.
- 117 Thereupon, a man called Hārūn b. Hāšim al-Ḥuzā'ī advanced toward Abū Qurrah
- 118 and said, «You deny us, O Abū Qurrah, the faith and substantiate it for the Nazarenes alone?»

[1. Your prophet and your book have witnessed that God excluded you from the faith]

- 119 Abū Qurrah said to him, «O Muslim, your prophet and your book both bear witness on the authority of God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) that He excluded you from the faith.
- 120 If your prophet witnesses against God, your God, with other than what He said, you are better informed and more knowledgeable [about it].
- 121 You do not believe what your book came with or what your prophet uttered [with its regard].

13 Again, the pronoun here refers to the messenger of Islam, Muḥammad.

14 Reference to *Qur'ān* 2:6-7,

«إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أُنذِرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَى أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ».

«As for the disbelievers, whether thou warn them or thou warn them not it is all one for them; they believe not. Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts, and on their eyes there is a covering. Theirs will be an awful doom».

[2. Excursive clarification: Heaven and Hell]

- 122 Consequently, there is no meaning to your boasting over me with your claim of what did not come in your book nor was uttered by your prophet».
- 123 Al-Ma'mūn, then, asked, «What is that, O Abū Qurrah?»
- 124 Abū Qurrah then said, «His [Hārūn b. Hāšim al-Huzā'ī's] boasting over us, O Commander of the Faithful, of his Islam and of his claim, alleging his entrance into a paradise containing companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes¹⁵ who were not given in marriage to man or Ĝānn¹⁶.
- 125 This is something¹⁷ God never created a thing¹⁸, ever».
- 126 Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh said, «Yes, this is something prepared for all the Muslims».
- 127 Abū Qurrah said, «If this were, as you recounted, prepared for you, who are the husbands of your wives in the hereafter?
- 128 For behold, you have denied them, and have chosen over them the companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes, and abandoned them [the wives] in anguish and great grief,
- 129 while you are joyful and glad with the companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes.
- 130 You attribute to God tyranny and injustice, for behold He has made wives for the men and did not make husbands for the women.

15 Reference to *Qur'ān* 44:54,

«كَذَلِكَ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ».

«Even so (it will be). And We shall wed them unto fair ones with wide lovely eyes», and *Qur'ān* 52:20,

«مُتَكِينٍ عَلَىٰ سُرُرٍ مَّصْفُوفَةٍ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ».

«Reclining on ranged couches. And We wed them unto fair ones with wide, lovely eyes»,

and they are mentioned also in *Qur'ān* 56:22, «وَحُورٌ عِينٌ».

«And (there are) fair ones with wide, lovely eyes».

16 Reference to *Qur'ān* 55:74, «لَمْ يَطْمِئْتَهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌ».

«Whom neither man nor Jinni will have touched before them».

Ĝānn plural of Ĝinn in Islamic understanding is an invisible spiritual being, other than Angels.

17 This is a reference to the previous verse, i.e. a paradise as described in the previous verse.

18 That is to say, God never created even a part of such a paradise.

- 131 He, indeed, tyrannized them and treated them unjustly, and I take refuge in God from this, and He Who is Powerful and Lofty is far away from this story.
- 132 Are you not embarrassed by this impossibility? You attribute this to your God, and you recount that your prophet says it!
- 133 And you ask God for deliverance, safety, and good health far from the heat of the flaming fire that is witnessed against you by your book,
- 134 for behold it says “none of you but will arrive in it [hell], and that which is from your God is certainly accomplished. Those who have believed prospered, and [God] vowed that the unjust will be in it [the fires] for a while”¹⁹.
- 135 How, then, do you hope for paradise and the companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes, while this promise is for you and in front of you and between your hands?
- 136 And your book, indeed, said, “I will fill Hell with man and *Ginn* all together”²⁰.
- 137 You nullify this threat which your book clarified, and you hope for what your prophet has not declared correct.

[3. Reasons for which the Muslims antagonize the Nazarenes]

- 138 You antagonize us because we did not speak about the Word of God and His Spirit, who are Creators,

19 Reference to *Qur'ān* 19:71, «وَأِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا».
«There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is a fixed ordinance of thy Lord».

20 Reference to *Qur'ān* 11:119,
«إِلَّا مَنْ رَجِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لِأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ».
«Save him on whom thy Lord hath mercy; and for that He did create them. And the **Word** of thy Lord hath been fulfilled: Verily I shall fill hell with the jinn and mankind together» (Emphasis ours).

See also *Qur'ān* 32:13,

«وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدَاهَا وَلَكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ».
«And if We had so willed, We could have given every soul its guidance, but the **word** from Me concerning evil-doers took effect: that I will fill hell with the jinn and mankind together» (Emphasis ours).

Curious here is the fact that Pickthall differentiates between “كَلِمَةٌ” (Word) in *Qur'ān* 11:119 and “قَوْلٌ” (word) in *Qur'ān* 32:13. Unfortunately, there is no explanation given.

- 139 [insisting] that He²¹ is a created creature and an owned slave, as you say yourselves.
- 140 You also antagonize us for what has been verified and became clear to us: that God, after [sending] His anointed One, did not send anyone²² [else]
- 141 to forbid the people, [that is to point out to them] the necessity of obeying Him and following His commandments and [seeking] His approval.

[4. On the necessity that the Muslim be content with the saying of his prophet and the witness of his book]

- 142 And your prophet says in your book that no one of the People of the Book will die, for behold they believe in God and the last day.²³
- 143 You ought, O Muslim, to have been content with the saying of your prophet and the witness of your book.
- 144 Do not witness against the Word of God and His Spirit with slavery, and hope [to be under] His obedience and [gain] His approval,
- 145 while you abhor His Word and Spirit, and enjoy your defiance of Him and contradiction of His norms.
- 146 Just as you know that the Word of God and His Spirit has created all creation, what is seen and unseen, all that is in heaven and earth.

21 This is one of the occasions in which Abū Qurrah speaks of Jesus as «the Word of God and His Spirit». The scribe uses “إِنَّهُمَا” for grammatical agreement with the immediately following pronoun. He then proceeds to speak of one being, «خَلْقٌ مَخْلُوقٌ» and «عَبْدٌ مَخْلُوكٌ» in the singular. Hence, a choice had to be made, and we opted for the singular for the entire phrase in English because the context is clear, although in the Arabic we have left it as it is in the manuscripts; mistakes in the grammatical vocalization are documented in the footnotes to the Arabic text of the Critical Edition, published by CEDRAC.

22 This is one of the clear statements in which Abū Qurrah’s denies Muḥammad as a prophet.

23 This could be a reference to *Qur’ān* 3:113-114. As can be seen, it is not identical to the *qur’ānic* verse:

«لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ».

«They are not all alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of Allah in the night season, falling prostrate (before Him). They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie one with another in good works. They are of the righteous».

- 147 And you attribute infidelity and polytheism to us for our following that Spirit and Word, and we are believers in the Word of God and His Spirit.
- 148 Your prophet says and witnesses in our regard, in *sūrat al-A'rāf*, by his saying,
- 149 "God said We found a righteous nation that guides [others] to the right way with the truth and dispenses justices therewith"²⁴.
- 150 And he said also in *sūrat āl 'Imrān*, "Of the People of the Book, there is a good nation that stands [for the right]; they recite the signs of God in the night and the day, and they prostrate themselves [in adoration].
- 151 They believe in God and the Last Day, ordering the accepted and forbidding the rejected; these are the righteous"²⁵.
- 152 And he said, "you find the Nazarenes ruled by what is sent down upon them from their God"²⁶.
- 153 And due to your infringement on and envy of us, you call us polytheists.
- 154 As if you belie your prophet and disown your *Qur'ān*, nullifying it in regard to what God certainly attributed to us in it.
- 155 He [Muḥammad], indeed, said in your book that "the one who associates with God has clearly strayed far, far away [from the right path]"²⁷.
- 156 He also said that "you find the Nazarenes ruled by what is sent down upon them from their God"²⁸.
- 157 How then [can] you say that we are polytheists, and we, indeed, have accepted what was sent down upon us from the Psalter and the Gospel?

24 This could be a reference to *Qur'ān* 7:181, «وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ». «And of those whom We created there is a nation who guide with the Truth and established justice therewith».

25 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:113-114.

26 The reference cannot be found in the *Qur'ān*.

27 Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:116,

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا».
«Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray».

28 The reference cannot be found in the *Qur'ān*. Abū Qurrah makes the same assertion above (cf. 152 WN).

- 158 And we [the Nazarenes] are older than you, and your prophet witnesses to us with truth and wisdom.
- 159 He²⁹ says, “we brought down the *Qur’ān* [as] light and guidance,
- 160 to affirm the truth of what is between his hands from the Torah, the Psalter, and the Gospel”³⁰, and that it came down confirmed, and you nullify it.
- 161 Your book witnesses and you deny your book, and belie your prophet, and disown your *Qur’ān*, and nullify what it attributed to us».

**[C. REACTION OF THE PEOPLE PRESENT: INABILITY,
PRAISE AND SUMMONS OF OTHERS TO THE DEBATE]**

[1. Muḥammad’s inability to debate with Abū Qurrah and al-Ma’mūn’s praise]

- 162 Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh was perplexed and did not find an answer.³¹
- 163 Al-Ma’mūn said to him [Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh], «Why do I see you falling short of the answer?»
- 164 He [Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh] then said, «The religion of Abū Qurrah, O Commander of the Faithful, is ancient and authentic, and its adherent does not become bored or fatigued from the answer.

29 Reference here is to Muḥammad. See corresponding variance of H and I in the Critical Edition of the Arabic text.

30 This may be a reference to *Qur’ān* 5:48a,

«وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ...».

«And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it...».

31 This may well be an allusion to *Qur’ān* 2:258,

«أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ».

«Bethink thee of him who had an argument with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had given him the kingdom; how, when Abraham said: My Lord is He who giveth life and causeth death, he answered: I give life and cause death. Abraham said: Lo! Allah causeth the sun to rise in the East, so do thou cause it to come up from the West. **Thus was the disbeliever abashed.** And Allah guideth not wrong-doing folk» (Emphasis ours).

If this passage is indeed an allusion to *Qur’ān* 2:258, then the scribe (and/or Abū Qurrah) is calling the debater a *disbeliever*.

- 165 The religion of Islam is succulent, supple, and tender,
 166 [and] its adherent is content with faith, rich with the love of God,
 [with no need] to return an answer to what my mind falls short in its
 regard and in which my thought is confounded.
 167 I have no answer for him».
- 168 Al-Ma'mūn admired that [answer] and said, «Abū Qurrah is the sea of
 knowledge.
 169 No one is prepared to resist him in theology and the knowledge of
 religions».
- 170 Al-Ma'mūn wished to manifest the superiority of Abū Qurrah over
 the elite of Qurayš, for he [al-Ma'mūn] truly loves him [Abū Qurrah].
 171 And they [the elite of Qurayš] denied his [al-Ma'mūn's] love for him
 [Abū Qurrah] and his [al-Ma'mūn's] frequent sitting [with him],
 conversing [with him] and befriending him [Abū Qurrah] all the time.

***[2. The summoning of Salām b. Mu'āwiyah al-Hamaḍānī and dismissing
 him]***

- 172 Al-Ma'mūn then ordered the presence of Salām b. Mu'āwiyah al-
 Hamaḍānī.
 173 Salām was a powerful man, zealous, quick to anger, and self-
 admiring.
 174 When he [Salām] came, al-Ma'mūn looked at him. Thereupon, he [al-
 Ma'mūn] said, «O Abū al-'Abbās,
 175 Abū Qurrah made us hear words that I feared [would] deviate our
 minds towards them [Abū Qurrah's words] from the Truth and we
 would enter his religion».
- 176 Salām then answered and said, «O Commander of the Faithful, Abū
 Qurrah has always been known for his ignorance, hypocrisy,
 infidelity, and boldness against God.
 177 But, if he were to be shown the right words, he would neither have a
 saying nor would [his] words be welcome to the Commander of the
 Faithful.
 178 However, he is [bold in his present position] due to his influence over
 you and little reverence for you, and boldness against you

- 179 because of what honor he sees with you³², your admiration of him and
your receiving of his words with gladness and joy.
- 180 He is joyful by [reason of] your comportment, [and he is] safe from
your treachery.
- 181 If he were to see from you the assault of the lion over the foxes, his
self-admiration would vanish and he would change from whatever
foolishness he is [engaged in] ».
- 182 Al-Ma'mūn then said to him, «Remain silent! May God shame and
damn you!
- 183 Certainly, you have ignorantly spoken insolent and foolish words.
- 184 You see yourself to be from the people of continence and devotion!
- 185 (By God!) If it were not for the malicious pleasure the present
company would take in your misfortune, I would send you to a place
where I would debase your might and belittle your significance.
- 186 Leave us! There is no good in you or in what you have».
- 187 Salām, then, left, saddened and repentant of what had escaped from
him inadvertently.
- 188 Thereupon, he [al-Ma'mūn] said to Abū Qurrah, «Leave! (May God
bless you!)
- 189 Come back tomorrow, so we will bring [to debate] with you one who
is knowledgeable of his religion.
- 190 Otherwise, you would be the triumphant one, [entitled to be] proud of
your victory».

[3. The summoning of *Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālid*]

- 191 This was hard for al-Ma'mūn's company [to hear], and they said,
192 «We know, O Commander of the Faithful, a man from the people of
al-Baṣrah, known as *Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālid*.
- 193 He is practiced in [these] matters indeed, and studied the books,
comprehended the truths of the religion of Islam, and understood the
weakness of the opinion of the Nazarenes.
- 194 If the Commander of the Faithful sees fit to bring him to debate with
Abū Qurrah, then he will come». Thus, al-Ma'mūn ordered his
[*Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālid*'s] presence.

32 This is because Abū Qurrah was honored by the Caliph.

- 195 On the following day, Abū Qurrah came, and Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Ḥālid came
[to the debate].
- 196 Al-Ma'mūn then said to Abū Qurrah, «Bring us what you have, O
Abū Qurrah, and do not fear [any] inconvenience at all.
- 197 There is no one here who will respond to you except with “ways that
are best”,
- 198 and I will support you with the truth, if you make it clear.
- 199 This is a just and fair court. No one transgresses against you in it.
- 200 Whoever is triumphant with the truth, for him will be the victory!»

[IV. CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD PERFECTLY HUMAN AND PERFECTLY DIVINE]

[A. ON THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST]

- 201 Then, Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah b. Ḥālīd said, «Tell me, O Abū Qurrah, about the Christ.
- 202 Did he not say to his disciples, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”¹?». Abū Qurrah said, «Yes».
- 203 Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah said to him: «He is a human, then, from the sons of Adam».

[1. On the saying of Christ «I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God»]

- 204 Abū Qurrah said, «If He were [just] a human from the sons of Adam, He would not have done the signs and wonders that He did,
- 205 such as raising the dead and other [miracles], which would take too long an explanation [to you here],
- 206 without a helper or an assistant.² Rather, [these signs and wonders He accomplished] with a firm order and a resolute utterance.
- 207 However, He came to us perfectly human and perfectly Divine.
- 208 Hence, He said to His disciples, “My Father and your Father”, in His Divinity, and “My God and your God”, in [His] humanity.

1 Reference to John 20:17b, «But go to my brothers and tell them, “I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”».

2 This is in contradiction to the *Qur‘ān*’s affirmation that Jesus performed his miracles «بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ»: «by Allah’s leave». Cf. *Qur‘ān* 3:49, «وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلَقُ لَكُمْ مِّنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُم إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ».

«And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah’s leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah’s leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are to be believers».

- 209 For when God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) placed His Holy Spirit in
 the Chaste Virgin Mary³, He became for us Father,
 210 and He instructed us, when we wished to pray, to say at the beginning
 of our prayers, “Our Father, who art in Heaven”.⁴
 211 God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) has clemency and compassion for
 His worshipers, the Nazarenes.
 212 As for His saying, “My Father and your Father”, God is said to be His
 Father in act⁵ and the Father of the disciples in favor and grace.
 213 As for His saying, “My God and your God”, He is His God as a figure
 of speech and veneration,
 214 as [in the case of] a son of a king who said to his servants, “My master
 and your master said to you”.
 215 He [the king] is their [the servants’] master in act and his [the son’s]
 master in veneration. God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) is the God of
 the disciples [in act] and His [Jesus’] God in graciousness.
 216 If you were to say, “Rather, He [God] is his [Jesus’] God in act”, we
 would say to you, “Make the disciples the sons of God in act”.
 217 As the disciples are not the sons of God in act, so God (Who is
 Powerful and Lofty!) is not the God of our Lord, the Christ, our God,
 [in act].

[2. On the motive for the Incarnation]

- 218 But tell me⁶ about your saying, “If God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!)
 wished to do the wonders that the Christ did on the earth while He is
 in heaven, He would have been able to do that”.

3 Reference to Luke 1:35, «And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God”», and *Qur’ān* 66:12,

«وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَيْنَا فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ».

«And Mary, daughter of ‘Imrān, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein something of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His Scriptures, and was of the obedient».

4 Reference to the Lord’s Prayer, as in Matthew 6:9-10, «This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven».

5 That is to say in actuality as in the philosophical concepts of act and potency.

6 The phrase *tell me* might in fact be a rhetorical device or it might be a scribal addition. Abū Qurrah asks his opponent to *tell him* but proceeds to tell his opponent instead. This might be indeed an addition, for the phrase *tell me* is lacking in D, H, and I of the Arabic text, the section 204-217 WN.

- 219 Rather God (May He be praised!) wished to examine the people and
let them know what He is like,
- 220 for behold, He manifested to them some of His might. Hence, He sent
His Word and Spirit to the Chaste Virgin Mary.⁷
- 221 Thus, she conceived the Light of God⁸, Who is from God, and He was
manifested to the people Incarnate,
- 222 for behold the human eyes could not have endured to look at God's
Might and Glory.
- 223 If it were not for his concealment in that body, He would not have
descended from His heaven to the earth and would not have mingled
with people.
- 224 The Word of God became [Incarnate] in the likeness of a human⁹
without sin¹⁰.
- 225 He is God¹¹, able to do the wonders He did.

7 Reference to *Qur'an* 4:171b.

8 This might be a reference to John's theme of Jesus as the true Light of God. Cf. John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36; but most especially 12:46, «I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness».

9 Reference to Philippians 2:7, «Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance».

10 Reference to 2 Corinthians 5:21, «For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him»; and/or Hebrews 4:15, «For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin»; and/or John 1:5, «the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it»; and/or John 8:46, «Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me?».

11 Reference to John 1:1, «In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God» and in contradiction to *Qur'an* 5:17,

«لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قُلْ فَمَنْ يَمْلِكُ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمُّهُ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ».

«They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: Who then can do aught against Allah, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother and everyone on earth? Allah's is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. He createth what He will. And Allah is able to do all things».

- 226 Furthermore, your book witnesses to this since it says, "We sent to Mary from¹² Our Spirit, and He appeared to her as a human in all respects"¹³.
- 227 I mean by this that He became [man] in the likeness of a human via the body.

[3. God did not make doubtful the Divinity of Christ]

- 228 But tell me about the saying of your book that God said to 'Īsā¹⁴,
- 229 "O 'Īsā, son of Mary, did you say to the people take me and my mother as two gods, in derogation of God?"¹⁵
- 230 Then, He [Jesus] said, "(May You be praised!) If I said it, You knew it, for You know what is in my heart¹⁶, and I do not know what is in Your heart"¹⁷.

12 It seems that Abū Qurrah has mixed some *qur'ānic* verses. See the addition of "من" in *Qur'ān* 66:12 and in *Qur'ān* 21:91 and the verse that Abū Qurrah quotes namely *Qur'ān* 19:17, «فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا». «And had chosen seclusion from them. Then We sent unto her **Our Spirit** and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man» (Emphasis ours).

The capitalization of "Spirit" here is confusing, to say the least. In Christian understanding, the word "روحنا" (Our Spirit) refers to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, hence capitalization is understood. In Islamic understanding, however, «Our Spirit» in this context refers not to the Spirit of the Holy One or the Holy Spirit but to the angel Gabriel, hence, Gabriel is he who «تَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا» (appeared to her as a human in all respects). Cf. ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi'* (2001), vol. 9, p. 68.

13 *Qur'ān* 19:17.

14 'Īsā "عيسى" is Jesus' given name in the *Qur'ān*.

15 *Qur'ān* 5:116,

«وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمَّيَّ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالَ سُبحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ فَلْتُهُ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ».

«And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then Thou knowest it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou art the knower of Things Hidden».

16 The word used here is "نَفْسِي" which means «my soul» or «my self» or «my spirit». We choose "heart" for its traditional biblical meaning. The word meaning "heart" here is most probable, since it is used by a Christian bishop and because the word "heart" in the biblical sense means the center of one's being. In addition, the word "قَلْب" (heart) is the word used by manuscripts H and I in the same context. Cf. 240 WN.

17 Another reference to *Qur'ān* 5:116.

- 231 You know that our Lord, the Christ, did not say to the people, “Take Me and my mother as two gods”.
- 232 Rather, He said, “Take Me as God”¹⁸. This is correct.
- 233 Tell me, O Muslim, did God know that ‘Īsā would answer Him with these words and audible answer,
- 234 or did He not know [it] until He asked him and he [Jesus] let Him [God] know?
- 235 If you were to say, “He did not know”, you would make Him (The Exalted One!) ignorant whose name is Powerful and Lofty above that.
- 236 If He knew, then what is the meaning of His question about what He [already] knew as true?
- 237 And I ask you to let me know when this interrogation took place? Before your prophet or after him?»
- 238 Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah b. Hālid was perplexed for a long hour.
- 239 Thereupon, he said to him, «This will be in the day of the resurrection, O Abū Qurrah».
- 240 Abū Qurrah, then, said to him, «As if your prophet knew what is in the heart of God (May He be praised!) before that hour,
- 241 and He [God] did not know that ‘Īsā was accused falsely until He [God] asks him about it on the day of the resurrection by an anticipated promise»¹⁹.
- 242 Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah, then, said, «God knew that ‘Īsā did not say that.
- 243 However, He wished it to be heard by the people».

[4. God is not angry at those who follow His Spirit and Word]

- 244 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you deny that the Christ is the Spirit of God and His Word?»²⁰. Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah said, «No, I do not deny that».

18 This is not said literally in Scripture. However, there are many verses in the Gospel of John that could be understood this way. These include John 10:30, where we hear Jesus saying, «The Father and I are one», and again in John 17:11, «... that they may be one just as we are». Other verses with the same connotation include, John 5:23; 8:58; 14:9 and 17:5.

19 There is no question that the Arabic here says “promise”, but in English translation the meaning would be better captured by the word “prediction”.

20 Another reference to *Qur’ān* 4:171b.

- 245 Abū Qurrah said, «Then, God threatens by His Spirit and Word and is angered by him who follows Him!
- 246 And your book says that God actualizes²¹ the Truth by His Word and Spirit.²²
- 247 And it calls us in another place, “those who are led by the Truth”²³.
- 248 And you with your pomposity contradict that and call us polytheists.
- 249 And it says in *sūrat al-Mā'idah* that “you would find the strongest among people in enmity with those who believed: those who rejected faith [in God], the Jews and those who associated with God²⁴;
- 250 and you would find the closest among people in affection with those who believed, those who said we are Nazarenes.
- 251 That is because among them are those who are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant”²⁵.

21 That is to say, “accomplishes” or «brings into being» or «proclaims the truth of».

22 This could be a reference to more than one verse in the *Qur'ān*. Cf. *Qur'ān* 8:7, «وَإِذْ يَعِدُكُمُ اللَّهُ إِحْدَى الطَّائِفَتَيْنِ أَنَّهَا لَكُمْ وَتَوَدُّونَ أَنَّ غَيْرَ ذَاتِ الشُّوْكَةِ تَكُونُ لَكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُحِقَّ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَيَقْطَعَ دَابِرَ الْكَافِرِينَ».

«And when Allah promised you one of the two bands (one of the enemy) that it should be yours, and ye longed that other than the armed one might be yours. And Allah willed that He should cause the Truth to triumph by His words, and could the root of the disbelievers».

See also *Qur'ān* 10:82, «وَيُحِقُّ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ».

«And Allah will vindicate the Truth by His words, however much the guilty be averse». And *Qur'ān* 42:24,

«أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا فَإِنْ يَشَأِ اللَّهُ يَخْتِمْ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ وَيَمْحُ اللَّهُ الْبَاطِلَ وَيُحِقُّ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ».

«Or say they: He has invited a lie concerning Allah? If Allah willed, He could have sealed thy heart (against them). And Allah will wipe out the lie and will vindicate the truth by His words. Lo! He is Aware of what is hidden in the breasts (of men)».

There is an ambiguity here with regard to the form of the written “بكلماته” and “بكلّمته” in the *Qur'ān*. It reads, “بكلّمته”. That is to say, it can be easily read “بكلّمته” due to the fact that the “i” is placed as a vocalization.

23 This might be a reference to *Qur'ān* 7:159, «وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَى أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ».

«And of Moses' folk there is a community who lead with the truth and establish justice therewith»

and/or a reference to *Qur'ān* 7:181, «وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ».

«And of those whom We created there is a nation who guide with the Truth and establish justice therewith».

24 The term «those who associated with God» refers to those who believe that Divinity is shared among a number of other gods, the polytheists.

25 Reference to *Qur'ān* 5:82,

- 252 And it [the *Qur'ān*] called them [the Nazarenes] a nation of the righteous; they recite the verses of God;²⁶ and they are led by the Truth, and by Him [of whom] they speak²⁷.
- 253 Your prophet and your book call us righteous and led by the Truth.
- 254 And you with your contradiction and hate attribute to us infidelity and make us polytheists.

[5. The polytheists according to the *Qur'ān*]

- 255 Know that your prophet did not wish to leave you in doubt.
- 256 Rather, he let you know that we are not polytheists or infidels.
- 257 Hence, he said “the one who makes an associate²⁸ for God has clearly strayed far, far away [from the right path]”²⁹.
- 258 And he let you know also that the [true] polytheists are the Bedouins, not the Nazarenes,
- 259 by his statement to them [the Bedouins], “The Bedouins are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy”³⁰.
- 260 He did not intend by this those who worshiped idols, but rather those who surrendered from the Bedouins. Hence, Islam is different from the faith.
- 261 Thus, he said about us, “those who believe and lead the right way are the Nazarenes, the ones who speak about the superiority of God. These are from the victors on the Day of the Resurrection”³¹,

«لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ».

«Thou wilt find the most vehemence of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews, and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud».

26 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:113-114.

27 This could also be translated «and they are led by the Truth, and by it they speak». We opted for “Him” since the bishop is speaking; that is to say, the Truth the Christians are led by is Jesus Who is the Way and the Truth and the Life (cf. John 14:6).

28 This means making an equal to and/or a partner with God in Divinity.

29 *Qur'ān* 4:116.

30 *Qur'ān* 9:97,

«الْأَعْرَابُ أَشَدُّ كُفْرًا وَنِفَاقًا وَأَجْدَرُ أَلَّا يَعْلَمُوا حُدُودَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ».

«The wandering Arabs are more hard [sic] in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which Allah hath revealed unto His messenger. And Allah is Knower, Wise».

31 A reference cannot be found in the *Qur'ān*.

- 262 As for those who go astray and the polytheists, God will render judgment over them in the day of the resurrection.³²
- 263 Your book has distanced all the Nazarenes from polytheism and acquitted them of infidelity by mentioning them as honorable and superior».
- 264 He³³ said, «Al-Ma'mūn smiled and was very joyful».
- 265 Abū Qurrah, then, rejoiced because of al-Ma'mūn's joy.
- 266 His [Abū Qurrah's] heart strengthened and his resolve intensified on raising the argument against them.

[6. It is imperative to believe the Word of God and His Spirit]

- 267 And he [Abū Qurrah] said, «And the most wondrous of things: you mock us for following the Christ,
- 268 Who, you yourselves admit, is the Spirit of God and His Word.³⁴
- 269 And you accept the words of him who died and decayed over Him Who neither dies nor decays.
- 270 And He is in heaven, as you yourselves say.³⁵
- 271 You ought to have believed the Word of God and His Spirit,
- 272 Who created all that is in the heavens and on the earth, what is seen and unseen.
- 273 And He is in heaven, as you admit and do not deny.

32 Reference to *Qur'ān* 22:17,

«إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ».

«Lo! Those who believe (this Revelation), and those who are Jews, and the Sabaeans and the Christians and the Magians and the idolaters - Lo! Allah will decide between them on the Day of the Resurrection. Lo! Allah is Witness over all things».

33 It is not clear who is the speaker here. Is it the one recounting the story to the scribe? Could it be, originally, Abū Qurrah?

34 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:171b.

35 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:55, where it says that God has raised Jesus up to Himself,

«إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ ارْأَيْكَ وَرَأَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَطَهَّرَكُم مِّنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ».

«(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ».

- 274 And David, the prophet, said, “by the word of God all the heavens and the earth were created, and by the breath of His mouth³⁶ all [acquire] their might”³⁷.
- 275 The Holy Gospel says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”³⁸.
- 276 And your book says “God wishes to affirm the Truth by His Word”³⁹ and Spirit.
- 277 And the “Word of God was [He] Who created all creation, and His Spirit gave life to the angels and people”⁴⁰.
- 278 And God is truthful and sincere, and you are nullifying and contradicting His utterance,
- 279 and following the one who died and was buried in the dust and decayed,⁴¹ and [there] was no sign manifested from his deeds to excel over us by it.
- 280 Rather, he made [it permissible] for you [to marry] four women, and he died with fourteen wives.⁴²
- 281 Hence, there was no occupation for this [man] except marriage. Greater than this was when he saw Zayd’s wife and desired her,
- 282 he said that inspiration came down upon him and then said, “When Zayd had fulfilled his purpose from her, We [God] gave her to you in a new marriage”⁴³.

36 The expression «رُوحُ فِيهِ» is a biblical expression and is rendered «the breath of His mouth».

37 Reference to Psalm 33:6, «By the Lord’s word the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host». It is interesting to note that this same verse is quoted by Timothy I in his debate with al-Mahdī, cf. MINGANA, *Woodbrooke* (1928), p. 23.

38 John 1:1.

39 Reference to *Qur’ān* 8:7.

40 Reference to Psalm 33:6.

41 The order of the Arabic is a bit different, namely «مَنْ قَدْ بَلَغَ وَمَاتَ وَدُفِنَ فِي التُّرَابِ» (the one who decayed and died and was buried in the dust), but in respect of common sense and parallel structure in English, we have adjusted it in the translation while leaving it the same in the Arabic.

42 According to Bint al-Šāfi’, he, Muḥammad, the messenger of Islam, had only twelve wives. Cf. Bint al-Šāfi’ (‘Ā’iṣah ‘Abd al-Raḥmān), *Nisā’ al-Nabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1973).

43 Reference to *Qur’ān* 33:37,

- 283 And God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) was the one who betrothed her and Gabriel the witness.
- 284 He [Muḥammad] divorced Zayd from his wife, and he [Muḥammad] married her himself, as ordered by his God.
- 285 You recount this ugliness about your prophet and pray with it in your prayers, and attribute it to the saying of God (The Exalted One!)».

[B. ABŪ QURRAH RESPONDS TO AL-HĀŠIMĪ'S ACCUSATION OF POLYTHEISM]

- 286 Then, a man from *Banū Hāšim* paid attention to Abū Qurrah and said, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah!
- 287 Listen! We did not attribute polytheism to you except for your saying that God has a son»⁴⁴.

[1. God's freedom in choosing His Word and Spirit Son]

- 288 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Listen, O cousin of the messenger, to the saying of your prophet and your cousin in *sūrat al-Zumar*,
- 289 "Had God wished to take to Himself a Son, He would have chosen Him from His creation, whomever He willed"⁴⁵.

«وَإِذْ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِي أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْسِكْ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَتُخْفِي فِي نَفْسِكَ مَا اللَّهُ مُبْدِيهِ وَتَخْشَى النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَاهُ فَلَمَّا قَضَى زَيْدٌ مِنْهَا وَطَرًا زَوَّجْنَاكَهَا لِكَيْ لَا يَكُونَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ حَرَجٌ فِي أَزْوَاجِ أَدْعِيَائِهِمْ إِذَا قَضَوْا مِنْهُنَّ وَطَرًا وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا».

«And when thou saidst unto him on whom Allah hath conferred favour and thou hast conferred favour: Keep thy wife to thyself, and fear Allah. And thou didst hide in thy mind that which Allah was to bring to light, and thou didst fear mankind whereas Allah had a better right that thou shouldst fear Him. So when Zeyd had performed the necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her unto thee in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no sin for believers in respect of wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of Allah must be fulfilled».

44 As noted above in the Fifth Chapter of the Study, in the commentary on this verse, this is, for the Muslim, a very reasonable accusation, for Abū Qurrah's assertion contradicts the *Qur'ān*'s abundant rejection of such claim. For more details see the commentary on this verse.

45 Reference to *Qur'ān* 39:4,

«لَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا لَأَصْطَفَى مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ سُبْحَانَهُ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ».

«If Allah had willed to choose a son, he could have chosen what he would of that which He hath created. Be He glorified! He is Allah, the One, the Absolute».

- 290 You denied [that] your God chooses His Word and Spirit, dignifies and glorifies Him and calls Him a Son for Himself.
- 291 And you call your prophet messenger, and Abraham is called an intimate friend, and Moses interlocutor?» He said, «Yes».
- 292 Abū Qurrah said, «Who, then, prevents God from calling His Word and Spirit “Son?” For He⁴⁶ is from Him. As he who is from you, you do not deny.

[2. The Psalter, the Qur’ān, and the Gospel admit a Son, and yet al-Hāšimī denies it]

- 293 You know that he⁴⁷ said in *sūrat al-Baqarah*, “he⁴⁸ said The Most Gracious has begotten a son. Rather, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth”⁴⁹.
- 294 And in another place, “The Most Gracious has begotten a Son. We are the first to worship”⁵⁰.
- 295 Your book and your prophet say that God has chosen His Word and Spirit and called Him Son.
- 296 You, we and all creation admit that the Most Gracious has a Word and a Spirit,
- 297 and He is the One Who called the angels by their names.

46 The pronoun used here in Arabic is “هُمَا”. However, the preceding phrase mentioning «His Word and His Spirit» «يُسَمِّي كَلِمَتَهُ وَرُوحَهُ وَلَدًا» speaks of one “Son”, and the entire context makes it abundantly clear that Abū Qurrah is referring to Christ. In addition, both manuscripts H and I use the pronoun “هُوَ” (He) in the following sentence after the masculine relative pronoun “الَّذِي”; hence, the reason for our choice of the singular pronoun in English, although “هُمَا” is left the way it is in the Arabic text of the Critical Edition.

47 The reference here is to Muḥammad, the messenger of Islam. Cf. 288 WN.

48 Again, the reference is to the messenger of Islam.

49 Reference to *Qur’ān* 2:116,

«وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قَائِمُونَ».

«And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him».

50 This could be an approximation from *Qur’ān* 43:81,

«قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ».

«Say (O Muhammad); The Beneficent One hath no son. I am first among the worshippers».

- 298 And David, the prophet, calls Him Lord and Son.⁵¹
 299 And you deny this from the Psalter, the *Qur'ān* and the Gospel,
 300 and you disown the Word of God due to the hardness of your heart,
 and you deceive yourself by deluding yourself that you are absolutely
 correct.
 301 And you are ignorant of God in that you equate⁵² His life-giving
 Spirit, residing in a human body,
 302 which He took from Mary, the daughter of Adam, and Adam was
 created by the Word of God and came forth by His Spirit.
 303 You make for His Spirit and Word an equal and a form».

[3. Al-Hāšimī admits his inability in the debate and returns to Christ and Adam]

- 304 Then, al-Hāšimī said, «Certainly (By God!), O Commander of the
 Faithful, my mind is confounded and my knowledge is weakened.
 305 However, know that “the similitude of ‘Īsā before God is as that of
 Adam”⁵³. Indeed, I am incapable of giving an answer».
 306 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you not know that the Word of God is He Who
 created Adam and said to him “Be”, and he came to be,
 307 and ordered all the beasts to be and they came to be?» He said,
 «Yes».
 308 Abū Qurrah said, «Is not your status with God the same as the status
 of the beasts, that you and they were created by the Word of God?
 309 And you make yourself with God equal to His Word, Who created
 you?»
 310 Then, a man from al-Hāšimī’s ministers said to Abū Qurrah, «O you!
 We do not have the status of beasts.

51 This may be a reference to Psalm 2:7, «I will proclaim the decree of the Lord, who said to me, “You are my son; today I am your father”». And/or a reference to Psalm 110:1-3, «The LORD says to you, my lord: “Take your throne at my right-hand, while I make your enemies your footstool”. The scepter of your sovereign might the LORD will extend from Zion. The LORD says: “Rule over your enemies! Yours is princely power from the day of your birth. In holy splendor before the daystar, like the dew I begot you”».

52 The verb used here is “تَقْيِيسٌ”, which literally means «to measure»; here it means making one thing analogous and/or equal to another. In this context, it is referring to making the Holy Spirit analogous and equal to the spirit of Adam.

53 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:59.

- 311 Rather, God has dignified us and breathed in us from His spirit»⁵⁴.
 312 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Is your spirit now similar to the Spirit of the Christ, God?» He said, «Yes, for from it I was created»⁵⁵.
 313 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Raise the dead for us, then, as did the Christ, so that we may know that your spirit is similar to His Spirit».

[C. ON THE DEATH OF THE CHRIST AND HIS DIVINITY]

- 314 A man from the people of al-Baṣrah then said, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah, is not the Christ your God?» He [Abū Qurrah] said, «Yes». He said, «Then, indeed, your God has died».
 315 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you not claim that the Christ died?» He said, «Yes».⁵⁶
 316 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me, is the Christ, now, in heaven or in the earth or in the tomb?»
 317 He said, «I do not know, except that the Christ has died».
 318 Abū Qurrah said, «Then, tell me is the Christ in heaven or in the earth?» He said, «In paradise».
 319 Abū Qurrah said, «Then, tell me, when did He ascend to heaven or when did He enter paradise?»

54. Reference to *Qur'ān* 32:9,

«ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ».

«Then He fashioned him and breathed into him of His spirit; and appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts. Small thanks give ye».

55 "It" here refers to the Spirit of God. The speaker here is a Muslim; hence, he does not mean by "it" a pronoun referring back to Divinity, the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit or Jesus as understood by Christians; hence, it is not capitalized in the text.

56 This might be a reference to *Qur'ān* 3:55 where the order of the events mentioned indicates that Jesus died before ascending into heaven:

«إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ ارْزُقْنِي إِلَىَّ وَرَاقِعَكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرَكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ».

«(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ».

However, in that case, the Muslim's assertion in this section might be for the sake of argument.

- 320 Al-Baṣrī said, «You, tell me, is he in heaven?» Abū Qurrah said, «Yes».
- 321 He said, «How do you know this?» Abū Qurrah said, «From your book
- 322 wherein it says in *sūrat al-Nisā'*, “They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him. Rather, it was made to appear to them [that way], and God raised him up to Himself”⁵⁷?
- 323 and it says also, “O ‘Īsā, son of Mary, I will make you die and raise you up to Myself
- 324 and purify you over those who rejected faith in you, and I will make those who followed you superior to those who rejected faith in you”⁵⁸, and you are the judge of all”⁵⁹.
- 325 A group from those present, then, said, «(By God!) You told the truth, O Abū Qurrah! Certainly (By God!), our companion has been exposed».

[D. ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD RESIDING IN THE BELLY OF MARY]

- 326 A man from the people of Damascus became vexed at this and said, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah!
- 327 You saw the Spirit of God residing in the belly of a woman and afflicted by the afflictions of women?»⁶⁰

57 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:157-158,

«وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّنْ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا».

«And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise».

58 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:55.

59 The phrase «you are the judge of all» is not found in the *Qur'ān*.

60 For more on this issue, see the commentary on the same verse in Chapter Five, in The Study.

[1. On accusing the angels and the book of lying]

- 328 Abū Qurrah said to him, «You belie the angels who attest to that wherein the angel Gabriel said,
- 329 “O Mary, the Lord will come upon you, and the Holy Spirit will reside in you”⁶¹.
- 330 Tell me, then, who is Gabriel’s Lord?⁶²
- 331 And your book says also, “And Mary, who guarded her vulva, and We breathed into it of Our Spirit; and she believed the words of her Lord, and was one of the devout”⁶³.
- 332 If you, with your flippancy, wish to deny that [that is your affair]!
- 333 One time you make your spirit equivalent to His Spirit, and another time you deny His majesty.
- 334 You do not know how you are lying about the Spirit Whom the angels witnessed to be their Lord,
- 335 and you make Him an owned slave, created. And you hope by this to come nearer to Him!
- 336 You hope, by denying His Word and His Spirit and defaming His Son and Beloved, [to obtain] His paradise and His compassion!
- 337 Your book, indeed, said that Christ is like Adam⁶⁴; thereupon, it called Him [Jesus] the Word of God and His Spirit⁶⁵.
- 338 Rather, he wished by this to clarify for you with certitude, and let you know that this Name [the Word of God and His Spirit] was not given to any one [else] of Adam’s sons, ever.
- 339 Nor did it call any one from the angels or others [creatures] the Word of God and His Spirit except the Christ alone.

61 Reference to Luke 1:35.

62 This is a rhetorical question, for there is no doubt that both Abū Qurrah and his opponent are in agreement as to Who is the Lord of the angels.

63 Reference to *Qur’ān* 66:12

64 Reference to *Qur’ān* 3:59

65 Reference to *Qur’ān* 3:45,

«إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ».

«(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah)».

See also *Qur’ān* 2:87, 253; 4:171; 19:17; 21:91; and 66:12.

- 340 Thus, His [the Word's] name indicated His being, and the realization
of His order [indicated] His authority⁶⁶,
341 and His exaltedness in the heaven [indicated] the greatness of His
might and the majesty of His Essence.

[2. The slave's honor is to believe his master]

- 342 Are you able, O you who admires himself and is proud of his opinion,
to say that God said that the Christ is my slave or my creature or a
human? Rather, He called Him His Word and His Spirit.⁶⁷
343 And if there had been justice for me from you, O Muslim,
344 you would not have had superiority or authority or right over me
345 due to [the fact that] God had placed me before you,
346 and specified for me, excluding you, and [moreover] your book
witnessed about me».
347 Al-Ma'mūn said, «How is that, O Abū Qurrah?»
348 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Is it not, O Commander of the Faithful, that
Islam admits that the Christ, Whom I follow and keep His
commandments,
349 is the Word of God and His Spirit, and that He [the Christ] is from His
[God's] very Self and Essence, Creator not created?». He said,
«Yes».⁶⁸
350 Abū Qurrah said, «What is a more splendid thing for the slave [to do]
than to believe and obey the Word of his Lord?»

[3. Al-Kūfī reproaches Abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn defends him]

- 351 A man from the people of al-Kūfah then became vexed and said,
«You have prolonged your discourse with ignorance, O Abū Qurrah,

66 Cf. Luke 4:32, «and they were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority».

67 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:171b.

68 This is a strange response placed in the mouth of the Caliph. How could a Muslim agree that the Christ is from God's very Self and Essence, Creator not created? "H" might in fact be closer to what was said in the debate. The expression «and that He [the Christ] is from His [God's] very Self and Essence» is lacking therein. However, we included it here for accuracy in presenting the Christian belief.

- 352 and the Commander of the Faithful endured you exceedingly to the point that you return the answer to him as an equal!»
- 353 Then, al-Ma'mūn said, «Abū Qurrah did not transgress against us, nor did he speak except with correct, impartial, and demonstrative words».
- 354 Thereupon, al-Ma'mūn said to Abū Qurrah, «Say what you have [to say]».
- 355 Abū Qurrah then said, «This Muslim responds to his messenger⁶⁹
- 356 and nullifies his book⁷⁰ which says in *sūrt āl 'Imrān* that the Christ is the Word of God⁷¹ and His Spirit Whom He [God] cast into Mary⁷²,
- 357 having gathered together the Word and the Spirit and did not leave a thing out of them». He⁷³ said, «You told the truth»⁷⁴.
- 358 Abū Qurrah said, «If I told the truth, then your book tells the truth.⁷⁵
- 359 And if you were to reject these words of mine, then it is your prophet you reject and from your religion you depart».

[4. Al-Dimašqī admits his inability to debate with Abū Qurrah]

- 360 Al-Dimašqī was confounded by this and said, «If the Commander of the Faithful sees fit, excuse me from what [difficulty] I am in,
- 361 for I have no answer for him nor do I have the ability to belie him».
- 362 Al-Ma'mūn said to him, «And why, O Abū al-Ḥusayn?»
- 363 He said, «Because Abū Qurrah shoots me with arrows from my own quiver.
- 364 Hence, my armament is perishable and his armament is abiding».

69 For further explanation, see the commentary on this verse.

70 Here, we have another accusation, even more serious for «your book» here means the *Qur'ān*.

71 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:45.

72 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:171.

73 It is not clear from the text or the context who the speaker is here. It could be the Caliph or al-Kūfī, or al-Dimašqī, etc.

74 This could also mean «I believe». It depends on how one does the *taškīl*.

75 This could also mean, «If you believe me, you believe your book». This depends on how one understands the previous comment. Both manuscripts H and I support our understanding.

[5. *Al-Ma'mūn summons 'Alī b. al-Walīd and Abū al-Ḥasan b. Lu'ayy al-Fārisī*]

- 365 Al-Ma'mūn laughed for a long while at this, and said to them, «Woe to you! Who has [arguments] to resist him?»
- 366 They⁷⁶ said, «A man from the people of al-Šām, O Commander of the Faithful, is called 'Alī b. al-Walīd.
- 367 He is one of those who have exceeded in reading the books, and [he] has studied the Gospel and the Psalter, and [he] knows the secrets of religion».
- 368 Al-Ma'mūn, then, wrote in his ['Alī b. al-Walīd's] regard and with regard to Abū al-Ḥasan b. Lu'ayy al-Fārisī.
- 369 When they came, al-Ma'mūn said to al-Ḥasan b. Lu'ayy, «Present [us with] what you have, O Abū 'Alī».
- 370 He [Abū al-Ḥasan b. Lu'ayy] said, «What would you like, O Commander of the Faithful?». He [al-Ma'mūn] said, «A debate with Abū Qurrah».

[E. THE CRUCIFIXION, DEATH AND RESURRECTION]

[1. *The Nazarenes do not worship the Cross*]

- 371 Abū 'Alī, then, said, «O Abū Qurrah!». He [Abū Qurrah] said, «Here I am, O Abū 'Alī».
- 372 He [Abū 'Alī] said, «Is it not that the Christ is your God?» He [Abū Qurrah] said, «Yes». He [Abū 'Alī] said, «He was crucified, then?» He [Abū Qurrah] said, «Yes».
- 373 He said, «Certainly, you strayed [from the right way], O Abū Qurrah! And why do you crucify your God and worship the wood that he was crucified on?»⁷⁷

76 The group of Muslims present in the *Mağlis*.

77 As noted in the commentary, this accusation is not something only of the past. Even today, some Muslims still believe that Christians worship the Cross. For example, a speaker for *al-Qā'idah* in the broadcasted tape aired by *al-Ġazīrah* on the 8th of January 2006, referred to the Christians as «the worshipers of the Cross». In reality, the Muslim does not believe that Jesus was crucified or died on a cross. Cf. *Qur'ān* 4:157-158,

- 374 Abū Qurrah said, «We take refuge in God [who protects us] from worshipping [anything] except the Lord God, Who is the Lord of the Cross and the Lord of everything».
- 375 He said, «Why then do you exalt the cross?»⁷⁸. He [Abū Qurrah] said, «As you exalt the stones, kiss them, and caress⁷⁹ yourselves with them without a sign manifested from them⁸⁰».
- 376 We exalt the cross for many things and for miracles that were manifested to us by it.
- 377 Among them [the miracles], no king departs to battle his enemy and [taking] with him the emblem of the cross, except with victory and triumph and he would have possession of his enemy.⁸¹
- 378 Nor is there any one of the kings of the earth except with a banner with which he is to be recognized: who he is, the son of whom he is, and what his ability is, in order to distinguish by it between him and his enemy.

«وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَزِيرًا حَكِيمًا».

«And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise».

Abū 'Alī begins his intervention by pointing out that Abū Qurrah has strayed precisely because of Abū Qurrah's assertion that Christ has been crucified.

- 78 It is worthy to note that here the accusation is lessened from "worship" (Cf. 373 WN) to "exalt".
- 79 The word used in the Arabic here "تَمَسَّحُونَ" rendered "caress" carries, in the context, the connotation of «anointing yourselves». It can be rendered «rub yourselves». We opted for "caress" as that it connotes a gentle touch and/or fondness.
- 80 Reference to part of the practice performed in *al-Haġġ* in Mecca where a Muslim is to kiss the black stone in silence if he can. Cf. Sābiq al-Sayyid, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, vol. I (Ġaddah: Maktabat al-Ĥadamāt al-Ĥadīthah, N.D.) p. 819. As for the origin of the *black stone*, Islamic tradition asserts that it was sent to Adam from heaven. See J. PEDERSON, "Adam", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).
- 81 This is another awkward English structure. What Abū Qurrah is essentially saying is that if a king departs with the Cross as his flag, the king wins the battle and owns/enslaves his enemy.

- 379 The emblem of our Lord, the Christ, is the emblem of the cross.
 380 And as we accepted the Christ with sincere intent and pure, correct fidelity, so we accept His cross, and we exalt it and take refuge in it in all our affairs».

[2. Affirmation of the crucifixion of Christ]

- 381 Al-Dimašqī said, «They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but, it was made to appear to them [that way], and God raised him up to Himself because he is his word and spirit»⁸².
 382 Abū Qurrah said, «We are now His slaves⁸³, and we admit both matters.
 383 If His crucifixion were an illusion, as you claim, then He is like that.⁸⁴ If He is Truth, then our acceptance of Him is truth.⁸⁵
 384 Except that we do not doubt that He was crucified, buried, and rose up [from the dead], and His body did not know corruption.
 385 Because He (Lofty is His name!) is able to raise Himself up, as He raised others up by His own power.⁸⁶
 386 And His ascension into heaven is as your book says and the witness of your prophet in *sūrat al-Nisā'* that He ascended into heaven.⁸⁷ In that way, He indicated to us by His Essence that He is God from God».

[3. An example of the effect of the resurrection]

- 387 Al-Fārisī said, «What is the proof of the veracity of this?»
 388 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Do you not admit that the Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit?» He [Al-Fārisī] said, «Yes».

82 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:157-158.

83 The word “عبيد” could also be translated “servants” as in Isaiah’s «suffering servant» (cf. Isaiah 53:11).

84 That is to say, if the crucifixion were an illusion, so was Jesus, the Christ.

85 This can also be translated as «if the crucifixion was true, then our acceptance of it is truth». The context, however, supports our understanding of the pronoun referring to Christ.

86 Once again, Abū Qurrah emphasizes that Jesus raised the dead with His own Might. Therefore, the statement is an assertion of Jesus’ Divinity, for only God has the power to give life and raise up the dead.

87 Reference to *Qur'ān* 4:158.

- 389 He [Abū Qurrah] said, «The Word of God and His Spirit is, therefore, from Him, and He is not separated from Him, and He returns to Him.⁸⁸
- 390 Just as you say that the *Qur'ān* [contains] the words of God and was sent down, not created; from Him it sprung, and to Him it returns.
- 391 As if a snake charmer or a doctor came to a town, [and] then said, “This, my medicine is far reaching and very useful”.
- 392 And the people denied that of him. The snake charmer advanced, stinging himself voluntarily because of his confidence in his own medicine.
- 393 Would the people not accept that from him and accept his saying and obey him?»
- 394 Al-Fārisī said, «Yes». Abū Qurrah said, «And thus did our Lord, the Christ, our God.
- 395 Because the people would not have believed that there is resurrection after death for them until they witnessed this and as eyewitnesses saw it in His body,
- 396 and [they witnessed it in] His shattering the gates of hell, His rising from death alive, causing death to die, and His ascension into heaven».

[4. On the truth of the crucifixion of the Word of God and His Spirit]

- 397 After that⁸⁹, al-Fārisī said, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah! How could anyone crucify the word of God and His spirit?»
- 398 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me about the sun. Is it Creator or created?» He [al-Fārisī] said, «Created».
- 399 He [Abū Qurrah] said, «If you were to see the sun rise on a stone wall, and [if you were to see] the wall collapse and its stones shattered,
- 400 would the sun suffer pain or hardship from this?» He said, «No».

88 Once again, this is a delicate issue in Islam, and was especially during the time of the actual debate. It concerns the internal Islamic debate of whether the *Qur'ān* is created or eternal.

89 The term «بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ» (after that) can be considered a transitional phrase; hence at the beginning of the current sentence. Or it can be the ending of the previous sentence; it would then read «... His ascension into heaven after that», and the current sentence would then begin, «Al-Fārisī said...». Either way is plausible.

- 401 Abū Qurrah said, «If this was the deed of a created slave from some
of His creation,
402 who has the ability to do these deeds and not be afflicted by a thing of
inconvenience,
403 how much more would be the ability of God, the Word, Who is the
Creator of everything!
404 And if the Word of God Who is the Christ was not crucified, we
would have neither believed in Him nor believed that after death there
is a resurrection».

[5. Al-Fārisī admits his inability in the debate and Abū Qurrah invites him to follow the Christ]

- 405 Al-Fārisī said to him, «(By God!), you told the truth, O Abū Qurrah.
406 Certainly, my mind is confounded. And I do not know with what
thing [argument] to respond to you».
407 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Then what prevents you from following the
Christ and leaving other than Him?
408 Are you able to say that what the Christ brought is other than the
Truth and there is no religion except your religion?»
409 Al-Fārisī said, «It is thus with me».

[6. Abū Qurrah enumerates some of what he takes against the behavior of his debater]

- 410 Abū Qurrah said, «With what [authority], O you insolent one, do you
proclaim permissible [the eating of] the meat of a camel⁹⁰ and
proclaim forbidden [the eating of] the meat of a pig?⁹¹

90 It also could be a "lamb" as in manuscript "D". The difference is just one dot under the "ح".

91 Reference to *Qur'ān* 2:173,

«إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخَنزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ».

«He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swineflesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful».

See also *Qur'ān* 5:3; 6:145; 16:115.

- 411 Similarly, you eat grapes and proclaim forbidden the wine⁹² squeezed from it! And you proclaim permissible the girdle and proclaim forbidden the belt!
- 412 This and also something [else] that is not good to give its description nor is mentioning it permitted in your laws».
- 413 He said, «And what is that, O Abū Qurrah?»
- 414 Abū Qurrah said, «Your honoring of sodomy and your approval of it, and proclaiming your wife forbidden by divorce, and declaring her permissible after [she has had] intercourse with another man?⁹³ and [similar such behavior] other than this.
- 417 What [will] convince you away from it, then?
- 418 You lessen the great and the lofty, and exalt the despicable.

92 Reference to *Qur'ān* 2:219a,

«يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا».

«They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness...».

In the *Qur'ān*, this was the first verdict with regard to alcohol. In Islam, alcohol was not forbidden all at once but gradually until it was completely forbidden. The second occasion of forbidding the consumption of alcohol was *Qur'ān* 4:43a,

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْتُمْ سُكَارَى حَتَّى تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّى تَغْتَسِلُوا».

«O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter, nor when ye are polluted save when journeying upon the road, till ye have bathed...».

The latter verse abrogated *Qur'ān* 2:19. The latter, in turn, was abrogated by *Qur'ān* 5:90,

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ».

«O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed».

93 Reference to *Qur'ān* 2:230,

«فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ».

«And if he hath divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful unto him thereafter until she hath wedded another husband. Then if he (the other husband) divorce [sic] her it is no sin for both of them that they come together again if they consider that they are able to observe the limits of Allah. He manifesteth them for people who have knowledge».

- 419 And thus, you have an oath that has [the capacity for] expiation⁹⁴, and if you were to swear with it, you would make amends.
- 420 Would not some of this [sort of behavior] convince you away from it?»
- 421 He [al-Fārisī] said, «I do not associate [another with] God and do not have any god but Him».
- 422 Abū Qurrah said, «(By my life!) By your saying “there is no god except God”⁹⁵, you witness the delight of paradise for yourself.
- 423 Behold the Samaritans and the Jews give witness⁹⁶ like your witness in the dogma of your sect.
- 424 Hence, there is no meaning to your boasting over people, and your self-recommendation, and self-witness of paradise».
- 425 Al-Fārisī said, «Thus,⁹⁷ I hope to fulfill the grace of God upon me».
- 426 Thereupon, Abū Qurrah said, «By what? By your boldness against God (Lofty is His name!)?
- 427 And [by] your permitting what God has proclaimed forbidden in His holy Gospel?
- 428 And you insult His fine books that were sent down, and you fault the norms of the Christ,⁹⁸

94 This reference to the oath might be referring back to the whole issue of divorce in 414-416 WN. It could also be a general comment on the expiation of oaths. The meaning is not clear from the context.

95 Reference to part of the Muslim's confession of faith called *al-Šahādah*, namely «There is no god but God», cf. *Qur'ān* 37:35 and *Qur'ān* 47:19. The other part of course is that «Muḥammad is His messenger».

96 Reference to Deuteronomy 6:4-5, «Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength». See also Deuteronomy 13:5, «The LORD, your God, shall you follow, and him shall you fear; his commandment shall you observe, and his voice shall you heed, serving him and holding fast to him alone».

97 That is to say, as a consequence of his Islamic beliefs.

98 The expression used here is «سُنَنَ الْمَسِيحِ» (the norms of the Christ). The Arabic expression can also be translated as «the ways of Christ». The adjective is common enough in popular use as in «سُنَنَ الْحَيَاةِ» (the ways of life). However, the expression here takes on a particular significance, for it is in a conversation with the Muslims, and for a Muslim that term recalls the term «سُنَّةَ الرَّسُولِ» (the norms of the messenger). The latter means what was reported as the example of Muḥammad: his words, his deeds or something that happened before him and he agreed with or did not do anything about (hence indicating agreement in the Arabic culture). It is an important and a crucial reference point for a Muslim, second only to the *Qur'ān*.

429 and you defame His Word and His Spirit, Who is the Christ,
430 and by annulling the witness of the prophets of the Christ, (Who is
Powerful and Lofty!).
431 And you do not see one other creature entering paradise with you?
432 (By My life!) It is thus, for God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) will
not admit both of us in one paradise,
433 for behold you did not follow His anointed One or believe in His
Word and His Spirit».

[V. THE INCARNATION AND THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY]

[A. ABŪ QURRAH RESPONDS TO THREE OBJECTIONS OF A MAN FROM THE ELITE OF QURAYŠ]

- 434 A man from the elite of Qurayš then said to him, «Is not the Christ the Word of God and His Spirit?»
- 435 Abū Qurrah then said, «Yes, and in your *Qur'ān* and your book¹ it is thus, if you know the *Qur'ān* by heart».
- 436 He [the unnamed man from the elite of Qurayš] said, «Then, tell me, when the Christ was in Mary's belly, who managed the heavens and the earth?»²
- 437 And since He sent His Spirit and His Word to Mary, did He not remain without Word or Spirit?
- 438 And if Mary had died while she was pregnant with the Christ, who would have been the judge on the Day of Judgment or who would have held creation accountable in the day of extreme crowdedness?»³.

[1. *The Creator is omnipresent and nothing can contain or stain Him*]

- 439 Abū Qurrah said, «(O may God be praised!) How blind is your heart, O Muslim, and how weak is your argument

1 The phrase «your *Qur'ān* and your book» is not referring to two different books. They refer to the same reality, namely the *Qur'ān*.

2 Reference to *Qur'ān* 10:3,

«إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مَا مِنْ شَيْعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ».

«Lo! your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He established Himself upon the Throne, directing all things. There is no intercessor (with Him) save after His permission. That is Allah, your Lord, so worship Him. Oh, will ye not remember?».

3 As pointed out in Chapter Five of The Study (cf. fn. 47), the word «الْحَشْر» literally means «extreme crowdedness». It refers to the «extreme crowdedness» on the «last day» where all are present for judgment. Hence, it could be translated as «the day of judgment», but the unique image would be lost in that translation.

- 440 in which you say that the Creator is in the status of the created, and
you know that God is in all places, and no place is void of Him;
441 nothing defiles Him; nothing is mixed with Him; nothing surrounds
Him, and nothing contains Him, nor are [human] senses and minds
able to comprehend Him.
442 And your book witnesses that He is the Creator of the heavens and the
earth and everything, and that He is Creator not created.
443 And behold, you see the fire from which the entire house is illuminated,
and nothing from the dirt of the lamp or the oil sticks to it.
444 And behold the sun [light/heat/rays] falling on every entire thing, both
good and rotten, the pure and unclean, and nothing defiles her from
that which she fell upon.

***[2. God is able to send His Word and Spirit wherever He wishes without
leaving Him]***

- 445 If, then, the Word and the Spirit is the Creator of all that, how is it
possible [for Him] to be surrounded by anything or contained by any
place?
446 Or how is it not possible [for Him] to reside in a creature of His
creation who manifests His image and likeness and takes Him⁴ as a
veil for Himself?
447 Or perhaps you see God creating with His right hand something
hideous and scorning that which He choose for Himself?
448 And [perhaps you see God scorning] His manifesting Himself
through Him [Jesus] to His creation in order that people would know
His magnanimity toward His creation, in order [that they might]
follow His order and work in obedience [to His command]?
449 And you with your pomp, you attribute to Him the inability to send
His Word wherever He wills in such a way that He is never separated
from Him,
450 and may He be praised Who is the doer of what He wills, how He
wills, for behold all His deeds are entirely wise and compassionate to
all His worshipers.

4 The reference here is to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, Who in Catholic understanding, never existed without the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word of God, hence the capitalization.

- 451 And now, your book says, "Do not question what He does, but they
[the people] will be questioned [for what they do]"⁵,
- 452 for behold, the minds do not contain His will. Blessed be God,
greatly, [for He is] far from what they attribute to Him!»
- 453 Thereupon, Abū Qurrah also said, «Behold, you see the sun in its
orbit and its light on the earth,
- 454 and she is created as well as her light, and she enters upon you in
your house while she remains in her place, not changing.
- 455 If this is manifested to eyewitnesses, in a created creature, how much
more will be the ability of God, the Creator (Lofty is His name!)?
- 456 Also a letter might come to you from far away lands, and from it you
would know the intention of its owner and sender
- 457 and know what is in his heart although you did not see his face».
- 458 Al-Ma'mūn then said, «You told the truth (By God!), O Abū Qurrah».
- 459 Then, Ismā'īl al-Kūfī said, «O Abū Qurrah, how is that?»⁶

[3. A prologue to the discourse on the unity of the Trinity]

- 460 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you not know that the soul, the spirit, and the
word are in the body, and they are not manifested to one's eyes,
- 461 and that eyesight is not capable of describing the mind and the soul
and the spirit?
- 462 Nothing of them is seen, as long as they are in the body,
463 and the body is alive by them».
- 464 He [al-Ma'mūn] said, «Yes, you told the truth».

[4. Defense of the unity of the Trinity]

- 465 Abū Qurrah said, «In the same way, God (May He be praised!) Who
is called Father, and the Word Who is called Son, and the Holy Spirit
are One God also.

5 Reference to *Qur'ān* 21:23,

«لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ».

6 «He will not be questioned as to that which He doth, but they will be questioned».
The "that" here refers to the issue under discussion, namely the possibility of God
«Running heaven and earth» and Incarnate, the Divinity of Christ and the unity of the
Blessed Trinity, the Oneness of God.

- 466 The Father is the Mind, and the Son is the Word Begotten from the Mind, and the Spirit proceeds from the Mind and the Word.⁷
- 467 The Father is the Initiator, and the Son is the One Who gives growth, and the Holy Spirit is the One Who gives life.
- 468 He is the One worshiped, with Three Persons and One Essence, the Eternal.
- 469 Blessed is He Who led us to His knowledge and worship, and from His books indicated Him [God] to us, [He] Who is exalted, greatly exalted!
- 470 And you accuse us with contradicting Him, and we are the believers, as the discourse has proceeded, from the books of God (Lofty is His Holy name!).
- 471 In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the One God. He, by His Word and His Spirit, manages His affair(s).

[5. *Abū Qurrah answers the objection: if Mary died while pregnant with Christ, who would be the judge?*]

- 472 As for your saying, if death were to come to Mary while the Christ was in her belly, this is an obstinate⁸ argument, and its answer is at hand.⁹
- 473 Tell me, O Muslim, with regard to your saying, that the Lord when He “approached and was suspended”¹⁰,
- 474 if He had fallen from the heavens, while He was suspended, and was shattered, who would have guarded the heavens and the earth and guarded His creation?»

7 It is worth noting the accuracy of the Trinitarian formula here for it defines the speaker as a follower and a defender of Chalcedon.

8 The verb used is “تَعَنَّتْ” the fifth form of the verb “عنت” (according to Hans WEHR’s classification). It indicates, at one and the same time, the desire of the questioner to «pick a quarrel», that is to «be out for a fight» but also to «insist stubbornly». In this case, however, the verb, in its present form, fits perfectly if one notes the order of the questions posed by the Muslim (cf. 436-438 WN). On the other hand, one must sympathize with the man, for he is confronted with the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which he believes to be without a doubt a heresy that he must attack and wishes to ridicule, but he also, to some extent, is trying to understand how anyone can believe that the Creator of heaven and earth resides in the belly of a woman.

9 The word used here is “حَاضِرٌ” and literally means “present”.

10 *Qur’ān* 53:8, «ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى».

«Then he drew nigh and **came down**» (Emphasis ours).

A literal translation of the original Arabic means **suspended**, hence Abū Qurrah’s point.

[B. THE WORD OF GOD AND HIS SPIRIT IS GOD]

475 Al-Kūfī said, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah! On the contrary, we deny you your saying that the Christ is God and that you worship him. »

[1. On calling the Word of God and His Spirit God]

476 Abū Qurrah said, «You have heard what had been said previously about Him more than one time: that He Himself is God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!).

477 O this marvel! What can the Word of God and His Spirit be called except God, for They¹¹ are from Him and [go back] to Him.

478 His Word and Spirit is His very self, just as what is from you, you do not deny».

479 Al-Ma'mūn then said to him, «You told the truth, O Abū Qurrah».

480 Abū Qurrah said, «O Muslim, does it appear to you also possible to name a piece of pure gold other than pure gold?» Al-Ma'mūn said, «No».

481 Abū Qurrah said, «Then, if one fire is taken to two and [then] three places, and new fires are lit,

482 is anyone able to call it by two names or say except that it is one fire?»

[2. Al-Kūfī prefers silence and Abū Qurrah opts to continue]

483 Al-Kūfī said, «Cease, O you, your words, for they are very hard!

484 God (May He be praised and exalted!) is not limited nor can He be described nor comprehended nor fashioned.

485 If you were proud of your evidence, strong with your activity,

486 convinced that the baptism had purified you and the cross had given you victory, this is for you but not for me».

487 Al-Ma'mūn, at this point, considered the immensity of Abū Qurrah's patience, his enlightened heart, and vast understanding and knowledge,

11 The pronoun is left in the plural as it is in the manuscripts for, as noted in the clarification of terms in the methodology section, Abū Qurrah used it in two different senses. He used the expression to denote the Second and Third Persons of the Blessed Trinity, and on other occasions he used it to mean Jesus. This is one of the ambiguous occasions in which the meaning is not clear.

- 488 and [al-Ma'mūn] preferred his [Abū Qurrah's] articulation [of ideas]
and rapid answers, and he [al-Ma'mūn] was made very joyful by him.
- 489 Thereupon, Abū Qurrah said, «Why do I see you, O Muslim, silent
and unable to answer me, for have you come to know the superiority
of my evidence over yours?»¹²
- 490 Hence, whoever wishes to boast of his religion, and claim that God
has led him from going astray [and lead him] to the light, must clarify
the matter of his religion
- 491 and prove it by manifesting on his hands a sign that is manifested by
God in his religion; thus, his superiority over another¹³ would be
known.
- 492 On the contrary, you boast of your domination, and your self-
admiration. You embellish your religion, O Muslim, and fault our
religion.
- 493 This is, then, something that will come back to you, for your book
witnesses that the Christ is My Lord and My God, and the God from
[whom] I acquire my help [to prevail] over you».

[3. Al-Kūfī asks Abū Qurrah to separate the Trinity and define the belief in Christ]

- 494 Al-Kūfī was then filled with vexation and said, «Tell me about the
father and the son and the holy spirit. [Are they] three or two or one?
- 495 If they were one, then the Christ is created, as we have said.
- 496 If they were two, then one must be grander than the other and greater.
- 497 If they were three, then assign for us [for our knowledge] the status of
each one of them and his might,
- 498 so that we can discern and look at these words of yours which perplex
rational minds and would escape preponderant¹⁴ [minds].

12 The literal translation of the Arabic text would be «the necessity of my evidence over you». However, the inescapable connotation of the Arabic expression «وَجُوبٌ حُجَّتِي وَعَلَيْكَ» is that what is meant here is the «superiority of my evidence over yours».

13 This could mean «another belief» or «another person». Any determination would be an interpretation. Linguistically, it would be «another belief». Logically, however, it means «another person», namely one who claims to be speaking on behalf of God yet contradicting what God has revealed previously.

14 Preponderant here is meant to call to mind not just minds that consider one argument rationally but which compares a range of different rational arguments.

- 499 How is he? And the Commander of the Faithful would know that you,
 on the contrary, worship a created slave,
 500 [who] ate food, drank drink, rode on a donkey, roamed the markets,
 501 was hit by a whip, and who admitted servitude for himself, and that he
 is a created creature,
 502 and [yet] you make him a god, a judge, [someone who is] worshiped,
 and claim that he was captured, crucified, killed, and rose up [from
 the dead].
 503 This is a very hard matter. ([We] take refuge from this in God!)

[4. On the Oneness of God]

- 504 Then, Abū Qurrah said, «Your heart, O Muslim, is as the granite
 stone¹⁵ which flouts the fire while it remains as cold as ice.
 505 And your request, O Muslim, that I set apart for you the Father and
 the Son and the Holy Spirit is a cold request.
 506 (By my life!) Due to the blindness of your heart and little
 understanding and the shortness of your argument,
 507 for God and His Word and His Spirit is One God, One [who is]
 worshiped, One judge and One Lord (Lofty is His Majesty!).
 508 He is great! He cannot be described or limited or comprehended or
 characterized.

[5. On the meaning of the term «The Word of God and His Spirit»]

- 509 You debased, O Muslims,¹⁶ the Word of God and His Spirit,
 510 and you claimed that He is a created creature and an owned slave, and
 you rejected faith in Him,

15 This may be reference to the hardness of heart spoken of in Psalm 81:13; Jeremiah 11:8; 16:12; Mark 3:5; 16:14; and Ephesians 4:18 as well as other occasions in the Scripture.

16 There is a bit of confusion here in the manuscripts with regard to the use of the singular and the plural, but even E who uses the singular here, continues the sentence in the plural; hence, although up to this point we have been using the singular, we have chosen to continue in the plural in order to be faithful to the original manuscripts.

- 511 and you belied the saying of God (The Exalted One!) in your book, on
the tongue of your prophet; for behold, it says that He [God] created
the creation with His Word and Spirit.¹⁷
- 512 You contradicted his commandment, and place us with the infidels
and accuse us with the polytheists.

**[6. On the impossibility of separating the Trinity and the credibility of the
birth of the Word]**

- 513 Thereupon, you ask me, with that,¹⁸ an issue that has no meaning.
514 Indeed, the preceding discourse [with regard to this point] has
[proceeded] with what we have said and clarified in this our book,¹⁹
515 [namely] that the Christ is God (May the remembrance of Him be
exalted!)). The Muslim said, «And [this] has no meaning?»
- 516 Abū Qurrah said, «Do you not know that the Christ is the Word of
God and His Spirit, Holy from Him? And He is Judge?
- 517 Why, then, do you ask me with your ignorance? And you wish me to
separate the Spirit of God from God?
- 518 O Muslim! Gather now your mind and listen to me with your hearing
and understanding.
- 519 And tell me, if I were to come to you with water from three fountains
and you yourself poured this water in front of you into one container,
520 and thereupon I imposed on you to separate for me each water from
its companion,

17 This might be a reference to *Qur'ān* 6:73,

«وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ قَوْلُهُ الْحَقُّ وَلَهُ الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ
فِي الصُّورِ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ».

«He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth. In that day when He saith: Be! It is. His word is the truth, and His will be the Sovereignty on the day when the trumpet is blown. Knower of the invisible and visible, He is the Wise, the Aware».

18 The “that” is the Muslim debasing the Word of God and His Spirit (cf. 509 WN) by claiming that He is a created creature and an owned slave, and rejecting faith in Him (cf. 510 WN), belying God (cf. 511 WN) and contradicting his commandment, placing the Nazarenes with the infidels and accusing the Nazarenes with the polytheists (cf. 511 WN).

19 Did Abū Qurrah have one of his manuscripts with him in which he explained the matter in question? It is possible but unlikely. Most likely this is an editorial addition in which the scribe alerts the reader to the fact that the matter was dealt with previously in this present book (manuscript).

- 521 would you be able to separate this one and isolate each water
alone?»²⁰
- 522 The Muslim said, «No, I am unable to do that».
- 523 Abū Qurrah said to him, «O I marvel at you! That which you have
seen, and understood where it is from, and touched with your hand,
524 and your knowledge has encompassed it, and your eyes looked at it,
and you managed it with your mind, [and yet] you are not able to
isolate [its parts] from one another,
525 how is it, then, that it occurs to any one to isolate the Spirit of God
and His Word which cannot be limited, nor fashioned, nor known, nor
touched?
- 526 Do you not recognize the Truth or know how to utter it? And do not
be bold against God (The Exalted One!) with your mouth».
- 527 The Muslim said, «I do not have the ability to do that»²¹.
- 528 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Do not come back and ask me about it.
529 And know, O Muslim, that God (May He be praised and lofty is His
majesty!) begot His Word, as the sun begets the ray, and as the fire
begets the heat, and as the mind begets the thought.
- 530 And none of those things had the like of what was begotten from
them, until [they] were begotten such as the heat from the fire, fire,
and the ray from the sun, sun, and the word from the mind, mind».

[7. On the Creator of creation and the unity of the Trinity: One Creator]

- 531 The Muslim said, «When the creation was created, did one create it,
or two or three?»²²

20 At first glance, the analogy does not seem very accurate, for the water came from three different fountains, that is to say three different sources, but if one considers that all water has in fact one source, that is to say the three fountains belong to the source of all water, then the analogy applies. In addition, water is the same; that is to say, it is one substance.

21 It is not clear here as to what is the *that*. Is it «the ability to separate the water parts» or is it to «recognize the Truth, know how to utter it, and not be bold against God (The Exalted One!) with *his* mouth?» (Emphasis added). Grammatically, it has to be the latter. Logically, however, it must be the former.

22 The issue is the same: the Oneness of God, and one cannot help admire the resistance to any sort of polytheism.

- 532 Abū Qurrah said to him, «He is One! One Lord! One Creator!»²³
- 533 Except that we do not separate between God and His Word and His Spirit, and we do not make something of God far from Him. Nor [do we make] something [part] of Him Creator and something [part] created.
- 534 And God did not create anything except with His Word and His Spirit, as it is [written] in the Torah, and in the Gospel, and in all the other prophetic books.²⁴
- 535 By the Word of God the heavens were created, and by the breath of His mouth, He brought forth the Angels and all creation.²⁵
- 536 He was before the creation, alone. And creation perishes but He does not perish».
- 537 Al-Ma'mūn, then, was confounded, along with all the other Muslims who were present in his court, from the quickness of Abū Qurrah's answer,
- 538 and al-Ma'mūn interiorly knew that the speech of Abū Qurrah was correct.²⁶

**[C. IF CHRIST IS GOD, HOW COULD HE HAVE EATEN,
DRUNK, AND WALKED IN THE MARKETS?]**

- 539 Al-Ma'mūn, then, said to him, «O Abū Qurrah, if the Christ were your God, as you claim,
- 540 how, then, did he eat the food, and drink the drink, and go around in the markets, as you say and claim? »
- 541 Abū Qurrah said, «O Commander of the Faithful (May God lengthen your days, make you content with what He gave you, and make me, from all harm, your ransom!).

23 Here one can almost hear and feel the frustration in Abū Qurrah's response and sympathize with his task of explaining the unexplainable.

24 It is interesting to note here that Abū Qurrah does not include the *Qur'ān*, although as we have shown, he could have. The expression the «prophetic books» means «the prophets» in the Old Testament.

25 Another reference to Psalm 33:6; cf. 274 WN.

26 The logical question here is how he, the scribe or Abū Qurrah himself, could possibly *know* that, although clearly this could be surmised in so many ways, such as the tone of voice, facial expression or even a later private conversation.

- 542 I arrived at the correct [response], from what preceded in the
discourse and from what I gave in my previous answer,²⁷
- 543 and indeed, I have begun my discourse, with a clear discourse, which
I am unable to either deny or doubt».
- 544 Al-Ma'mūn said, «O Abū Qurrah, let go of what has passed, and
hasten with an answer and a correct discourse which my mind can
accept and my thought²⁸ will not deny».

[1. Abū Qurrah's faith in the unity of the Trinity]

- 545 Abū Qurrah said, «O Commander of the Faithful (May God be
favorable to you!). Since you have asked me, then I must clarify [my
beliefs] for you, and for all who are present in your court».
- 546 Al-Ma'mūn said, «Say what you will, O Abū Qurrah».
- 547 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Now to our topic, O Commander of the
Faithful, know that the discourse is for you.
- 548 I [now] let you know that the Christ is God.
549 The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God.
550 He [God] is known by the Oneness of His Essence, worshiped in His
Trinitarian Properties.
- 551 He has no equal, nor anyone identical, nor any match, nor is there any
way [to reach Him], nor any opposite, nor any rival.
- 552 The Knower Whose knowledge has no end; the Able [One] with no
instruction to His ability;
553 the First Who has no beginning; the Last Who has no end;
554 the Permanent [One] Who [suffers] no annihilation; the Magnanimous
[One] Who has no end;
555 the Creator Who has no helper, the Exalted Who cannot be reached or
comprehended;
556 the Powerful Who cannot be defeated, the Knower Who cannot be
ignorant; the Custodian Who is not inattentive;

27 The last two verses are beautifully written in Arabic, with “سَجَعُ” in 541 WN with the ending of each phrase with “الْكُ”; in “بِتَاكُ”, “أَعْطَاكُ”, and “نِدَاكُ”. 542 WN achieves the same effect with “أَبُ”; in “الصَّوَابُ”, “الْحِطَابُ”, and “الجَوَابُ”. We regret that the effect is lost in the translation.

28 The Arabic word used here “فِكْرُ” can also be translated as mind and/or intellect.

- 557 the Mighty Who cannot be described; the Truthful Who does not
contradict [His Word/His covenant/Himself... etc.];
- 558 the Living [One] Who does not die, the Permanent [One] without
duration [in time]; the Abiding [One] without end;
- 559 the Able [One], the Conqueror, the [One] Known for His clemency
and compassion,
- 560 Who raised up the heavens by His Word, to Whom the necks bowed
before His power, and to Whom the earth and what is on it
acknowledged servitude, and eyesight²⁹ became fatigued [trying to]
see Him.
- 561 To Him belong the beautiful names;³⁰ [He is] the Eternal God who
does not suffer pain, or mutate, or change, or die,
- 562 nor can visions comprehend Him³¹, nor can He be encompassed by
delusions; nor is anyone able [completely] to know or reach [Him].
- 563 To Him I [now] confess and profess [His] Lordship, Divinity,
Majesty, Greatness and Might;
- 564 and I confess that the Living [One] is the Father, for Fatherhood is the
origin, and that the Word of God and His Wisdom is the Son; each
possessor of fatherhood, possesses a son;
- 565 [and I confess] that the Spirit of the Holy One is the Spirit of God, for
the Living One is not alive without a Spirit.
- 566 And I believe that the Essence of the Father gathers together
Eternality, Lordship, Divinity, Majesty, Greatness and Might.
- 567 And that the Son and the Holy Spirit [possess all of this] that belongs
to the Father.³²

29 In the Arabic the noun used is "الأبصار" which is in the plural and would be literally translated *eyesights* which is not a word in English. It signifies multitudes of people trying to see Him.

30 This could be a reference to *Qur'ān* 20:8,

«اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى.»

«Allah! There is no God save Him. His are the most beautiful names».

31 Reference to *Qur'ān* 6:103,

«لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ.»

«Visions comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) visions. He is the Subtle, the Aware».

32 Cf. 566 WN, «gathers together Eternality, Lordship, Divinity, Majesty, Greatness and Might».

[2. Abū Qurrah's faith in Christ]

- 568 And [I let you also know³³] that the Word of God and His Spirit are in
His worshiped Self, in His Trinitarian properties, the Creator of all
creation.³⁴
- 569 He is the One residing in the Chaste Mary,³⁵ without separation from
Him, or removal from Him,
570 entering without leaving, leaving without entering. Manifested and
hidden.
571 Let this not be too great for you, O Commander of the Faithful.

[3. Examples of the unity of the Trinity]

- 572 As you may know, the sun and the moon and the fire are creatures, and
the might of their glow is born from them without separation³⁶ [from
them], and their heat is manifested from them without cessation.
573 [Moreover,] neither is the essence older than their glow and heat, nor
is the glow and heat newer than that essence,
574 nor is the essence knowable except by the glow and the heat, nor are
the glow and the heat knowable except by the essence.
575 In the same way, God (Who is powerful and lofty His praise!), He and
His Word and His Spirit³⁷ are without separation between [sic] them.
576 He is not older than His Word and His Spirit³⁸, nor is [sic] His Word
and His Spirit older than He.
577 God (May He be praised!) is not knowable except by His Word and
His Spirit, and His Word and His Spirit is [sic] not knowable except
by Him.
578 Let the Commander of the Faithful know and understand this,

33 Abū Qurrah continues his response to al-Ma'mūn. Cf. 547 WN.

34 Another reminder of Psalm 33:6. Cf. 274 and 536 WN.

35 Reference to Luke 1:31-33, «Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end».

36 The expression «بِلا انفصالٍ» we have rendered here «without separation» to make clear the parallel in Arabic, «بغير انفصالٍ منه», cf. 569 WN.

37 The term «His Word and His Spirit» refers to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

38 Again, the term «His Word and His Spirit» refers to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

- 579 and be sure of the truth in our saying that the Father and the Son and
the Holy Spirit are One God, One Lord, and One Creator.
- 580 As for the Father, He is God. And the Son is the Word.
- 581 And the Spirit is the Spirit of the Holy One, by whom all creation was
completed.³⁹
- 582 We, indeed, believed in His name, and we were content with His
blessing, and we were content with His judgment, and we bowed to
His seat of glory.⁴⁰
- 583 To Him be praise, glorification, thanksgiving, and veneration, for ever
and ever, Amen.⁴¹

[4. Christ is perfectly Divine and perfectly human]

- 584 If the Christ, O Commander of the Faithful, ate food, as a human,
585 He indeed filled from five pieces of bread seven thousand persons by
His Divinity,
586 and [afterward] there remained from the eaters twelve baskets full of
[left over] pieces.⁴²

39 Another reminder of Psalm 33:6.

40 This might be an illusion to the image of *Qur'ān* 2:255,

«اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ».

«Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His *throne* includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous» (Emphasis ours).

41 This liturgical formula could be habitual or in fact a scribal addition.

42 Many are the references in the Gospel, such as in Matthew 15:32-39, «Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way”. The disciples said to him, “Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?”. Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”. “Seven”, they replied, “and a few fish”. He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over-- seven baskets full. Those who ate were four thousand men, not counting women and children»; see also Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-15.

- 587 And if he, indeed, drank the water in His humanity, He indeed transformed the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee with the greatness of His divinity.⁴³
- 588 And if He walked in the markets, He healed the illnesses⁴⁴;
- 589 and if He addressed His creation as a human, He indeed transformed the sons of kafr nāḥūm into wolves, swine and apes.⁴⁵
- 590 And if He, indeed, slept in the boat, He rebuked the blowing winds indeed, and they calmed down, and the billowing seas obeyed His order.⁴⁶
- 591 And if He indeed fished for fish, He indeed saved Simon, when He kept him up over the waves of the seas.⁴⁷

43 Reference to John 2:1-11, «On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine". (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come". His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you". Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water". So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter". So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now". Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him».

44 Among the Gospel references we point to Matthew 15:30, «Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them».

45 This might be an allusion to *Qur'ān* 5:60,

«قُلْ هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِشَرِّ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ مُتَوَبِّعًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ لَعْنَةِ اللَّهِ وَعَصَبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمْ الْقِرَدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ الطَّاغُوتِ أُولَئِكَ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَن سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ».

«Shall I tell thee of a worse (case) than theirs for retribution with Allah? Worse (is the case of him) whom Allah hath cursed, him or whom His wrath hath fallen! Worse is he of whose sort Allah hath turned some to apes and swine, and who serveth idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from plain road».

In the *Qur'ān*, the verse is a warning to the Christians.

46 Reference to Matthew 8:23-27, «He got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?"».

47 Reference to Matthew 14:28-31, «Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water". He said, "Come". Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how (strong) the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!". Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"».

- 592 And if He mourned and wept at the tomb of Lazarus⁴⁸, He indeed called him forth and raised him up alive,⁴⁹ four days after his death.⁵⁰
- 593 And if He indeed entered the house of Simon, He indeed forgave the sins of the sinner.⁵¹
- 594 And if He was crucified,⁵² He indeed convulsed the earth and split the veil of the Temple.⁵³

- 48 Reference to John 11:35, «And Jesus wept».
- 49 Reference to John 11:43-44, «And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!". The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go"».
- 50 Reference to John 11:39, «Jesus said, "Take away the stone". Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days"».
- 51 Reference to Luke 7:36-50, «A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner". Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you". "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?". Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven". He said to him, "You have judged rightly". Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little". He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven". The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?". But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace"».
- 52 Many are the references in the Gospels, such as Matthew 27:33-44, «And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull), they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink. After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, (and) come down from the cross!" Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'". The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way»; see also Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:16-30.
- 53 Reference to Luke 23:45b, «then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle».

- 595 And if He was indeed buried.⁵⁴ He indeed rose from among the dead⁵⁵
and ascended into heaven.⁵⁶
- 596 And all that He suffered from pain and affliction was in His humanity.
- 597 And all that He performed from signs and miracles - raising the dead,⁵⁷
opening the eyes of the blind,⁵⁸ cleansing the lepers,⁵⁹ lifting up the

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- 54 Many are the references in the Gospels. See for example Matthew 27:57-60, «When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it (in) clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed». See also Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42.
- 55 Many are the references in the Gospels. See for example, Matthew 28:1-7, «After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. "Behold, I have told you»»; see also Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-29.
- 56 Reference to Mark 16:19-20, «So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.»; see also Luke 24:50-53.
- 57 Cf. Luke 7:12-15, «As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep". He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!". The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother»; see also Matthew 9:22-35; Mark 5:35-43; John 11:1-45.
- 58 Cf. Matthew 20:30-34, «Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "(Lord,) Son of David, have pity on us!" The crowd warned them to be silent, but they called out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have pity on us!". Jesus stopped and called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?". They answered him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened". Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight, and followed him». See also Matthew 21:14; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 7:21; John 9:1-10.
- 59 Cf. Matthew 8:1-3, «When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And then a leper approached, did him homage, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean". He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will do it. Be made clean". His leprosy was cleansed immediately». See also Mark 1:40-42.

paralytics,⁶⁰ and exorcising the demons⁶¹ - was with His Divinity».

**[D. ABŪ QURRAH ANSWERS AL-‘IRĀQĪ,
WHO ACCUSES HIM OF CORRUPTING THE SCRIPTURE]**

598 At that, a man from the people of Iraq woke up⁶² to Abū Qurrah
599 and said to him, «Woe to you, O Abū Qurrah! How is that? On the
contrary, your argument, as I see it, is from a gleaned discourse».
600 Abū Qurrah said, «How is that?» *Al-‘Irāqī* said to him, «For you have
corrupted [the Scripture]».

[1. Your book is the one that corrupted]

601 Abū Qurrah said, «From your book, I came up with that, O Muslim.
602 (May the great God be praised!) How low your opinion has fallen!⁶³
And how little is your understanding!⁶⁴ And how blind is your heart!
And how weak is your argument!

60 Cf. Matthew 9:2-7, «And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven”. At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming”. Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, “Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”-- he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home”. He rose and went home»; see also Mark 2:3-11.

61 Many are the references in the Gospels, such as Luke 4:33-35, «In the synagogue there was a man with the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out in a loud voice, “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be quiet! Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down in front of them and came out of him without doing him any harm». See also Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 5:2-20; 7:25-29.

62 The «man from the people of Iraq» was obviously not asleep, but wide awake and attentive to the details of the argument, reasoning that Abū Qurrah’s discourse of the miracles of Jesus as evidence for His Divinity as corruption of the Scripture. The term «woke up» is a figure of speech.

63 This might be a reference to Sirach 3:23, «Their own opinion has misled many, and false reasoning unbalanced their judgment».

64 This could be a reference to Ecclesiastes 10:2-3, «The wise man’s understanding turns him to his right; the fool’s understanding turns him to his left. When the fool walks through the street, in his lack of understanding he calls everything foolish». Or it might be referring to 1 Timothy 1:7, with regards to those who wish «to be teachers of the law, but without understanding either what they are saying or what they assert with such assurance». Or 1 Timothy 6:3-4, «Whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes. From these come envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions».

- 603 Because you insult your book, and belie the saying of your prophet wherein he says, "You find the people of the Gospel, ruled by what had been sent down upon them from their Lord"⁶⁵;
- 604 and that "among them are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant"⁶⁶; and that "they are closest in affection to those who believed"⁶⁷.
- 605 Hence, your book calls us believers, and you call us infidels, polytheists and blasphemers.
- 606 You wish, by this, to fault us with a false charge, and you hope by this to be redeemed of fault.
- 607 And if you were to know the certain truth, you would have said that your book is the one that has corrupted [the Scripture] ».
- 608 *Al-'Irāqī* said, «How is that, O Abū Qurrah?»
- 609 He [Abū Qurrah] said, «You will know this, if God (the Exalted One!) wills it.

[2. *Abū Qurrah offers an example of what he considers corruption*]

- 610 Tell me, O Muslim, wherein you say the lie about your Lord [namely] that He said, "We have given you the Kawtar"⁶⁸. Pray, then, to your Lord, and slaughter. The one who abhors is the one cut off"⁶⁹.
- 611 Tell me, O Muslim, who is this cut off enemy?
- 612 And where you also say, "Perished be the hands of Abū Lahab and be perished. He did not profit from his wealth nor did he gain; and his wife, the hauler of firewood, [has] around her neck a rope of palm fiber"⁷⁰.

65 This might be a reference to *Qur'ān* 3:23,

«أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا نَصِيبًا مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّى فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ وَهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ».

«Hast thou not seen how those who have received the Scripture invoke the Scripture of Allah (in their disputes) that it may judge between them: then a faction of them turn [sic] away, being opposed (to it)?».

66 Reference to *Qur'ān* 5:82.

67 Another reference to *Qur'ān* 5:82.

68 The *Kawtar*, according to Muslim belief, is the name of a river in Paradise. Josef HOROVITZ & Louis GARDET. "kawthar", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

69 Reference to *Qur'ān* 108, «إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ».

«Lo! We have given thee Abundance [sic]; So pray unto thy Lord, and sacrifice. Lo! It is thy insulter (and not thou) who is without posterity».

70 Reference to *Qur'ān* 111,

- 613 This thing does not resemble inspiration nor [something] sent down, and it cannot be believed that your messenger said anything of this [sort].
- 614 Rather, he said, "I have brought down the *Qur'ān*, confirming what is between his hands from the Gospel and the Torah"⁷¹.

[3. *Abū Qurrah distinguishes between the Muslims and the believers*]

- 615 And he also said, "The Muslim men and the Muslim women and the men believers and the women believers"⁷².
- 616 Tell me, then, O Muslim, who are they, the Muslim men? And who are they, the believing men?»
- 617 The *'Irāqī* said to him, «We are they, O Abū Qurrah, the Muslim men and our women are the Muslim women. And we are the believing men and they [our women] are the believing women».

[4. *Abū Qurrah distinguishes between Islam and faith*]

- 618 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «Tell me, O Muslim, is Islam one or two?»
- 619 The *'Irāqī* said, «Islam is one and faith is one».

«تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ وَامْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ».

«The power of Abu [sic] Lahab will perish, and he will perish. His wealth and gains will not exempt him. He will be plunged in flaming fire, And [sic] his wife, the wood-carrier, Will [sic] have upon her neck a halter of palm-fiber».

- 71 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:3,

«نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ».

«He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel».

- 72 Reference to *Qur'ān* 33:35,

«إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا».

«Lo! men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty) and men who remember Allah much and women who remember - Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and vast reward».

- 620 Abū Qurrah said, «You have corrupted [the scripture], O Muslim». The Muslim said, «And how is that, O Abū Qurrah?»
- 621 Abū Qurrah said, «If Islam were one and faith were one, your prophet would not have separated Islam from faith.
- 622 Nor would your prophet have superiority over all the Muslims.
- 623 And if it were as you say, you would not have guaranteed for yourself a paradise with companions with big and lustrous eyes.
- 624 And if the matter were as you say, then as to your women, the believing women, who will their husbands be in the hereafter, if you were to have, in derogation of them, the companions with big and lustrous eyes?
- 625 Indeed, you ought not to have wished to exchange your women, either in this world or in the hereafter, for behold, they are, as you say, Muslim women and believing women.
- 626 Islam and faith are not one religion. You are the Muslims, and we, the assembly of the Nazarenes, the believers.

[5. The messenger of Islam distinguished between Islam and faith]⁷³

- 627 For in the same way, the Bedouins⁷⁴ said, “We believed”. Then, your messenger said to them, “I deny this to you. You did not believe. Rather, say we have surrendered”⁷⁵;
- 628 he intended their submission in order that they believe in the Word of God and His Spirit.
- 629 And your messenger had indeed come forward to guard us, so he left opposing our religion and debating with us, except with “ways that are best”⁷⁶.

[6. Abū Qurrah enumerates some of what he takes against the behavior of his debater]

- 630 You forsook his commandment, and practiced impatience and pomposity, and desired to annul our book which was sent down to us».
- 631 Then, a man from the people of Iraq said, «O Abū Qurrah, it is not your book that was sent down but our book».

73 This is, of course, according to Abū Qurrah.

74 E and D wrote «the Arabs».

75 Reference to *Qur'ān* 49:14.

76 Reference to *Qur'ān* 16:125a.

- 632 Abū Qurrah said to him, «With what [evidence]? Your witness to yourself that no one enters paradise except you?
- 633 And you enter it and see that it is admissible for you alone
- 634 with your boldness against God, and shedding the blood proclaimed forbidden, and lying down with many women who are proclaimed forbidden to you,
- 635 and turning your face from the east, and sodomizing your companion's son, and marrying divorcees,
- 636 and proclaiming your brother's wife permissible after his death, and avoiding your wife with divorce,
- 637 and lying with her after another strange man had intercourse with her,
- 638 and having intercourse during Ramaḍān⁷⁷? And your saying "have intercourse on Friday?"
- 639 And you do not believe what came from the prophets and the scriptures with regard to the torment on the Day of Judgment and standing between the hands of God, the Ruler.
- 640 And you believe in a paradise in which there is food, drink, and intercourse.⁷⁸ And this is a matter that will not be, ever. Nor is it permissible to be.

77 Ramaḍān is the month of fasting in Islam, and it is the only month of the year mentioned by name in the *Qur'ān*. Cf. *Qur'ān* 2:185,

«شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ».

«The month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the *Qur'ān*, guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you; and (He desireth) that ye should complete the period, and that ye should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that peradventure ye may be thankful».

78 Reference to *Qur'ān* 2:266; 13:35; 17:91; 43:72-73; 47:15. We include here the text of the latter,

«مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِّنْ مَّاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّنْ لَّبَنٍ لَّمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّنْ حَمْرٍ لَّذَّةٍ لِّلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّنْ عَسَلٍ مُّصَفًّى وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَالِدٌ فِي النَّارِ وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ».

«A similitude of the Garden which those who keep their duty (to Allah) are promised: Therein are rivers of water unpolluted, and rivers of milk whereof the flavour changeth not, and rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of clear-run honey; therein for them is every kind of fruit, with pardon from their Lord. (Are those who enjoy all this) like those who are immortal in the Fire and are given boiling water to drink so that it tearth their bowels?».

- 641 Thereupon, you say, "indeed, you have corrupted the Gospel", and you abandon your prophet's statement and the response to him who has contradicted himself.⁷⁹
- 642 Moreover, you belie the honest Spirit and the truthful Word which God sent with the Angel Gabriel.

[7. The Word of God is Essence and Truth: An invitation to follow Christ]

- 643 Tell me, then, O Muslim, this Word, [is It] Essence or phenomenon? And Truth, is It or not?»
- 644 The Muslim said, «Essence it is and truth, and I am not able to deny that».
- 645 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Then, follow the Christ and enter under His obedience,
- 646 for He is God and His Spirit which directed the prophets to invite the people to the obedience of God».

[E. A RETURN TO CHRIST AND ADAM]

- 647 At that moment, a man from the people of al-Ġawr⁸⁰ called Abū al-Qāsim took the initiative against Abū Qurrah

79 This is another occasion where Abū Qurrah not only enters into a forbidden topic of discussion in a Christian-Muslim dialogue but he also accuses the messenger of Islam with contradicting himself.

80 The expression used in the Arabic is «مِنْ أَهْلِ الْغَوْرِ». It can be understood in more than one sense, namely it could mean «People of profound reflection» from the root «غ و ر». It can also mean «the people of a "designation of that part of the Syrian Garden which constitutes the Jordan valley"». WEHR, *A Dictionary* (1980), p. 687. We deem the reference ambiguous. It cannot be determined from the text itself, for the expression used here, namely «مِنْ أَهْلِ» has been used in both senses in different places. For example, it has been used to connote «the people of the book» (cf. 16, 97, 142, 150 WN) and «the people of the Gospel» (cf. 603 WN) but also «the people of continence and devotion» (cf. 184 WN) and «the people of God» (cf. 827 WN) and «the people of the religion of the Nazarene» (cf. 829 WN). The expression is also used to denote a place as in «the people of al-Baṣrah» (cf. 192 WN) and the people of Damascus (cf. 326 WN) and «the people of al-Kūfah» (cf. 351 WN), «the people of al-Šām» (cf. 366 WN), «the people of Iraq» (cf. 598, 631 WN) and «the people of Egypt» (cf. 828 WN). It is also used in reference to a tribe, as in «the people of Qurayš» (cf. 790 WN). Therefore, we left it in the transliterated form to allow for either understanding.

648 and said, «O Abū Qurrah, the spirit of ‘Īsā, the Christ, is “as the spirit which was in Adam”⁸¹; He [God] said to her, “Be”⁸², and she came to be».

[1. Abū Qurrah marvels at Abū al-Qāsim’s denial of what came regarding the Christ]

649 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Woe to you, O Abū al-Qāsim! I have not seen a more wondrous opinion than yours and your likes!

650 Neither in what was sent down in the Torah do you believe! Nor in what is in the Psalter do you believe, nor in what was sent down in the Gospel do you believe! Nor in what your book uttered do you believe!

651 I am amazed at your foul conviction and base words, and your pomp, and your denial of the saying of God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!).

652 And you wish to lead the people in order that they [may] believe your sayings which have no truth in them.

653 And you do not see anyone believing in what you say, unless he is like you, convinced of your conviction.

[2. Unlike Adam, Christ did not obey Satan and did not sin, and raised himself and others up from death]

654 If the spirit of Adam were like the Spirit of Christ,

655 he, indeed, would have prevented himself from defying God, and would not have obeyed the malignant Satan,

656 so that God was indignant with him [Adam], drove him out of paradise, and caused him to die.⁸³

657 And the matter would also have been in accordance with your foul claim that he is in heaven with our Lord, the Christ,

658 and he would have prevented death from himself, and he would have raised himself, as the Christ raised Himself and others from death.

81 Reference to *Qur’ān* 3:59.

82 Another reference to *Qur’ān* 3:59.

83 Death here means separation from God.

659 And you know that no one from the sons of Adam is able to push death away from himself, or save it [oneself] from anything». ⁸⁴

[3. Al-Ma'mūn agrees with Abū Qurrah: no one is able to raise himself up to life, and Abū Qurrah repeats: Christ raised Himself up]

660 Al-Ma'mūn, then, said, «You told the truth (By God!), O Abū Qurrah, no one is able to save himself or push death away from himself».

662 Abū Qurrah, then, said, «the Christ, O Commander of the Faithful, raised Himself up, and He is [now] in heaven,

663 and He is superior to all the prophets who are in the earth. ⁸⁵

84 This is an allusion to the Muslim belief in *predestination*, a topic which Abū Qurrah dedicates an entire book to its contrary; namely *human freedom*. Cf. PIZZI, *Theodoro Abū Qurrah* (2001).

85 Here Abū Qurrah continues his attack on the messenger of Islam.

[VI. ON THE MOTIVES OF THE INCARNATION]

664 However, He [Jesus] trod¹ the earth according to His will, and wished to examine the minds of humans and their fidelity, and defeat their enemy.²

[A. HE VESTED HIMSELF WITH A HUMAN TO SPEAK TO THE BODY WITH THE BODY, OUT OF LOVE FOR HUMANITY]

665 Hence, He descended from the exaltedness of His heaven to His earth,³ and vested Himself with [a human] body to address the body with the body,
666 for behold bodily eyes are incapable of looking at the Essence of the Divinity.⁴

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- 1 Reference to Micah 1:3, «For see, the LORD comes forth from his place; he descends and treads upon the heights of the earth».
 - 2 This is a notable biblical theme, namely that *God fights on behalf of His people*. One of the most beautiful hymns of this theme can be found in Exodus 15.
 - 3 The phrase «His heaven to His earth» is a simple but telling assertion of God's dominion over all. Not only here but the entire section is filled with echoes of liturgical settings. In fact, this verse, as a beginning of this section, recalls the «Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your most holy glory» during Divine Liturgy, in turn recalling Isaiah 6:3, «Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts... All the earth is filled with his glory!».
 - 4 Reference to Exodus 33:22-23, «When my glory passes I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen»; 1 Kings 19:12-13, «After the earthquake there was fire-- but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, "Elijah, why are you here?"».

**[B. HE VESTED HIMSELF WITH A HUMAN BODY
TO SAVE THE HUMAN FROM THE BONDAGE OF SATAN:
HISTORY OF SALVATION]**

[1. God loved His creation, so He created them, poured His grace upon them, and required their obedience to Him]

- 667 He (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) created all creatures, not that He needed anything from them,⁵ or anything else [that He might create].
- 668 And He did not create them frivolously;⁶ rather, He created them as He loved⁷ in His wisdom, and He poured forth His grace⁸ upon them,
- 669 and He bestowed upon them His Holy Spirit⁹, and consequently He

5 Here one hears the echo of the priest's prayer in the Gregorian Divine Liturgy,

«... خلقتني إنساناً كمحب البشر، ولم تكن أنت محتاجاً إلى عبوديتي، بل أنا المحتاج إلى ربوبيتك...»

«... You created me, O Lover of humanity, and You were not in need for my servitude; rather, it is I who needs Your Lordship...».

Cf. *Saint Gregory Mass* (Los Angeles, Ca: Melton Printing Co., 1995), p. 70. This is a simple assertion of God's freedom in creation.

6 For a reference in the Bible, see the structure of the first story of creation (cf. Genesis 1). It makes the point of deliberate and ordered purpose. See also *Qur'ān* 3:191,

«الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ».

«Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): Our Lord! Thou createdst not this in vain. Glory be to thee! Preserve us from the doom of Fire».

and *Qur'ān* 21:16,

«وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَاعِبِينَ».

«We created not the heaven and the earth and all that is between them in play».

7 This is a reminder of the principle motive for creation in Christian understanding, namely Love.

8 Much theological investigation and many doctorate dissertations focused on "Grace". We use the term, when without qualification, to mean the «Divine Presence and Activity».

9 It is the Holy Spirit that allows one to believe; cf. Romans 8:14-15, «For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!"». See also Galatians 4:6. Worship is seen as a consequence of faith.

required of them prostration before Him¹⁰ and work in obedience¹¹ to him until the Day of Reckoning.¹²

[2. God created the Angels and placed them in the most honorable of places]

- 670 The stronger reason for His coming down is that God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) first created the Angels, pure, intelligent spirits, subtle and radiant,
- 671 unlike the creation of humans, [who have] dense bodies, and [God] embellished them [the Angels] with intellect,
- 672 and strengthened them with might, and gave them a home in the highest and most honorable of places, I mean heaven, and made them the closest of His creation to Him and most honorable.

[3. Satan's desire for equality with God]

- 673 Satan, the damned, was their chief; [and among them] he was loftier in rank, grander in status, highest in grade, greatest in might, and the most reaching in authority.
- 674 Thus, when he looked at the exaltedness of his status, the greatness of his majesty, the honor of his might, and the exaltedness of his significance with God (May He be praised!), vanity and pride crept into him [Satan].
- 675 And the damned [one], in his ignorance, said to himself, "What superiority has the Creator over me?"

10 References in the Bible include the following: Leviticus 26:1, «Do not make false gods for yourselves. You shall not erect an idol or a sacred pillar for yourselves, nor shall you set up a stone figure for worship in your land; for I, the LORD, am your God»; Deuteronomy 5:8-9, «You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God,...» and the most important, Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

11 The reason for the human fall was *disobedience* and the basis for salvation was *obedience*: Cf. Romans 5:19, «For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous».

12 Literally, the expression used in Arabic «يَوْمَ السَّاعَةِ» means «the day of the hour».

- 676 And in what is He more honorable than I? Or higher in rank? Or more
subtle in nature? And in what is He worthier of Kingship?
677 I am from the essence of fire,¹³ and under my hands are these troops,
who listen to me and obey my order”.
- 678 When his base proclivities and his vile thought prevailed over him,
679 and [when] several angels had veered towards him, and indeed they
became his troops, and they listened to him, obeyed him, accepted his
order,¹⁴ and followed him,
680 at this point, he erected for himself among them a podium.

[4. The Divine reaction to Satan's arrogance]

- 681 This is when the anger of God was stirred against him [Satan],
682 and He [God] hurled him [Satan] and his troops, who were listening
and obeying him [Satan],
683 into the lowest abyss, and threw them down from their most
honorable high ranks into the lowest chasm.
684 Their authorities were abolished, and He [God] left them under the
feet of the saints and the righteous,
685 and let them know [the consequences of] dueling with God, and
rejecting faith in His grace, in which they had existed, and which He
had bestowed on them.

[5. Satan's attempt to distance humans away from God]

- 686 When the damned [one], then, knew that he had no power against the
Mighty God,
687 and indeed he [Satan] had fallen from his honor and had been deposed
from his rank,
688 and that there is no way of returning to his previous honor,
689 at this point, he came to the poor, weak sons of humans, who were
created in his stead,

13 This might be a reference to *Qur'ān* 7:12,

«قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ»
«He said: What hindered thee that thou didst not fall prostrate when I bade thee? (*Iblis*)
said: I am better than him. Thou createdst me of fire while him Thou didst create of
mud».

14 This expression «وَقَبِلُوا أَمْرَهُ» could be rendered as «accepted his affair».

690 and he beguiled them with his ignorance, out of envy of them,¹⁵ and prevailed over them with his deception, and took them to every base way

691 in order to distance them from God, the Creator, as he [Satan] had distanced himself. The people followed him [Satan], and veered towards him.

692 And he made them worship the human-made [idols] and the stars of the heaven and the sea.

[6. God began His salvific work, sending His prophets, calling people to His worship]

693 God (Who is Powerful and Lofty: Blessed be His holy name, and may the remembrance of Him be exalted!) was not content to abandon the people under the worship of devils.

694 Hence, He sent to them His prophets,¹⁶ calling them [the people] to Himself and to His worship. They [the people] did not accept [the call] from them¹⁷ [the prophets], and Satan kept their hearts from answering.

695 Then God saw [fit], with His abundant clemency and kindness and honorable Nature, to manifest His Majesty and redeem the work of His holy hands from the captivity of the deceitful enemy.

15 Reference to Wisdom 2:24, «But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it», and again the echo of Divine Liturgy written by St. Basil is distinct and clear; it reads, «... Death came into the world through the envy of Satan, that You [God] destroyed it [death] through the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son...». *Saint Basil Mass* (Los Angeles, Ca: Melton Printing Co., 1995), p. 17.

16 This could be influenced by St. Basil's Divine Liturgy, *Saint Basil Mass*, p. 20 «Yet, You never abandoned us. You always sought us through Your Holy Prophets [sic]».

17 The Old Testament is full of various examples, testifying to the point, such as 1 Kings 19:10; 2 Chronicles 36:16; Nehemiah 9:26; Jeremiah 29:19; Daniel 9:6, 10 and Amos 2:12. They can be summarized in one verse from the New Testament, namely Luke 13:34, «Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!».

[7. In the fullness of time, He took a human body and became man so that humans might recognize the weakness of their enemy and discredit him]

- 696 Hence, He descended from the exaltedness of His praises to the virgin Mary,¹⁸ and He became Incarnate in her by the Holy Spirit,¹⁹ with a body like that of our form,²⁰
- 697 to let us know the weakness of our enemy,²¹ for behold He [God] advanced towards him [Satan] in the likeness of a human.
- 698 And as [in the case of] a vile slave, if he escaped from his master, cannot rest in a place that can be reached by his master,
- 699 thus, the Word of God and His Spirit became Incarnate, to discredit, our enemy, the devil, away from us.
- 700 Thus, when he [Satan] looks at them [The Word of God and His Spirit], he [Satan] would escape and his authority would vanish.
- 701 Whoever resists the Word of God and His Spirit has indeed become a clear enemy to them.

18 Reference to Luke 1:30-33, «Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end”».

19 Reference to Luke 1:35, «And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God”».

20 Reference to Philippians 2:7.

21 Here again, Abū Qurrah is presenting his opponent with a compact theological teaching, namely the weakness of Satan. Many, as did Mani and his followers, think of Satan as if an equal power to that of God, where in fact it is a clear Christian teaching that Satan's power is nothing in comparison to that of God. In fact, as any other creature, God created the angels, including Satan, from nothing.

[VII. ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST]

[A. THE QUR'ĀN WITNESSES TO THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST]

[1. *The Qur'ān witnesses to Christ's ability to create, and to raise up the dead, and calls Him the Word of God and His Spirit*]

- 702 And your book witnesses that the Christ made the form of birds from clay and breathed [life] into them from His Spirit, and ordered them to fly, so they flew.¹
- 703 And whoever separates God and His Word and His Spirit is, indeed, ruined in this world and the hereafter.²
- 704 And you make a judgment over God when you say that the Christ raised the dead by the command of God.³
- 705 And your book says that the Christ is the Spirit of God and His Word».

1 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:49 and *Qur'ān* 5:110,

«إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ اذْكُرْ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَتِكَ إِذْ أَيَّدتُّكَ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَإِذْ عَلَّمْتُكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَإِذْ تَخْلُقُ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَنفُخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِي وَتُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ تُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ كَفَفْتُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَنْكَ إِذْ جِئْتَهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ».

«When Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the holy *Spirit*, so that thou speakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission; and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how thou didst raise the dead, by My permission; and how I restrained the Children of Israel from (harming) thee when thou camest unto them with clear proofs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed: This is naught else than mere magic» (Emphasis ours).

As pointed out in the commentary (Chapter Five in *The Study*), when these verses are compared with *Qur'ān* 6:2; 32:7-9; and 38:71-72, the similarities of the elements of the account as well as the order of the steps of the act of creating would compel one to wonder as to what one might conclude. The capitalization of "Spirit" is curious.

- 2 This is perhaps an allusion to the Christological controversies that occupied the Church in the first few centuries A.D.
- 3 Notice the insistence of «My permission» in *Qur'ān* 5:110 and «بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ», «by Allah's leave» in *Qur'ān* 3:49.

- 706 The Muslim, then, said, «He [Jesus] raised the dead by the command of God,⁴ and His [God's] word and His [God's] spirit is not from Him»⁵.
- 707 Abū Qurrah said to Him, «As if He [God] had commanded and His Word and His Spirit had not been with Him?

[2. On denying that Christ is God defaming God]

- 708 Know, O Muslim, that whoever has denied that the Christ is God has indeed defamed God and His Word and His Spirit,
- 709 for if you were to say that the Word of God and His Spirit raised the dead without their own proper permission, you would be ignorant in your words and would be speaking without correctness,
- 710 and you would be ignorant [with regard] to the good Word and the Chaste Spirit, of whom the Angel Gabriel had witnessed,
- 711 by his saying to the chaste virgin Mary, “The Lord will come upon you, and the Spirit of the Holy One will reside in you”⁶.
- 712 And you, with your ugliness and ignorance, attribute ignorance to and belie the witness of the Angels,
- 713 and you deny the saying of your book, wherein it says in *sūrat al-Zuhruf*, “If The Most Gracious has taken a son”⁷.

4 Again, notice the insistence on «My permission» in *Qur'ān* 5:110 and «by Allah's leave» in *Qur'ān* 3:49.

5 From a Muslim point of view, this is an obvious assertion. For the Muslim, that the word of God is not of the Essence of God is obvious from the examples of the *qur'ānic* citations. That is to say, the spirit of God is not of the Essence of God as in the example of breathing into creation; in the *Qur'ān* God does not place Himself in His creation. The expression “the spirit of God” in Islamic thought is sometimes thought of as an angel as shown above. See fn. n. 13 in the «II. Christ made a new covenant with the nations» section of this translation above.

6 Reference to Luke 1:35. 709-711 WN are thus according to Christian belief, but this understanding is completely foreign to Islamic understanding. Hence, Abū Qurrah's assertion to his opponent: «ignorant in your words and would be speaking without correctness and you would be ignorant [with regard] to the good Word and the Chaste Spirit, of whom the Angel Gabriel had witnessed» makes sense because Islam does not recognize the fact that the Blessed Trinity is One God, as the angel witnessed (cf. Luke 1:35).

7 The sentence is not completed here. Abū Qurrah is reminding his opponent of the verse, expecting him to complete it, for Muslims usually do know the *Qur'ān* by heart. Cf. *Qur'ān* 43:81,

- 714 God (The Most Gracious, the most compassionate!) is He who called the Angels by their names before He created the human.
- 715 I do not see your messenger, O Muslim, except admitting a Son.
- 716 Why, then, do you deny what your messenger had acknowledged and to which your book had witnessed, unless you wish to anger and contend with us.
- 717 And this⁸ is not permissible because your book and your prophet belie you in what you have spoken». At this, the group of ministers was perplexed.
- 718 And the Commander of the Faithful said, «(May God bless you!), O Abū Qurrah! Certainly, (By God!) you have improved the discourse, and defined the answer for whoever resisted you. And you clarified what has not [even] occurred in people's thoughts».
- 720 Thereupon, al-Ma'mūn glanced at the group of his ministers and said to them, «Does there remain, among you, he who has knowledge to debate with Abū Qurrah?»

**[B. ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST
AND HIS CRUCIFIXION]**

[1. Christ went to the cross freely]

- 721 A man from Banū Hāšim, then, advanced towards him and said to him, «Tell me, O Abū Qurrah, [with regard to] the Christ, did the Jews crucify him according to his wish or without his wish?
- 722 For I see you, the assembly of the Nazarenes, claiming that the Christ is your God and that the Jews indeed crucified him.

«قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ».

«Say (O Muhammad); The Beneficent One hath no son. I am first among the worshippers».

The translation here is an interpretation, for it omits and/or ignores the presence of “إِنْ” (if). Cf. «Say: If (Allah) Most Gracious had a son, I would be the first to worship». ‘ALĪ, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’ān* (1993). Yūsuf ‘Alī is more faithful to the original here.

- 8 The “this” refers to Abū Qurrah’s opponent’s denial that «Christ is God» or «you deny what your messenger...» or to the fact that the opponent wishes «to anger and contend with» the Nazarenes or is a reference to two or all three of these.

- 723 Hence, if the Jews indeed crucified him according to his wish, then there is no guilt upon them with him, and if it were with other than his wish, then he is a weak lord.
- 724 Tell me, then, O Abū Qurrah, about what I have asked you».
- 725 And there were [people] from Qurayš and Banū Hāšim and others from the Muslim elite, a large group, which al-Ma'mūn had brought to debate with Abū Qurrah.

[2. Abū Qurrah asks the group to bear witness against their companion]

- 726 Abū Qurrah answered them and said, «Indeed, the saying has gone before in the preceding discourse,
- 727 but tell me, O cousin of the messenger, if you long that I should speak?». He said to him, «O Abū Qurrah, speak!»
- 728 Then, Abū Qurrah said, «Be witnesses against⁹ your companion that he should not blame [anyone] except himself». They said, «We witness against him».
- 729 Abū Qurrah said to al-Hāšimī, «Are you content that I speak?» He said, «Yes, I am content».

[3. An analogous example, clarifying the silliness of the intervention]

- 730 Abū Qurrah said, «You say, O Muslim, that we have defamed God?»
- 731 The Muslim said, «Yes, you associate with God, and whoever associates¹⁰ with God has defamed Him, indeed»¹¹.

9 Abū Qurrah is asking the group present to be honest witnesses and judge the argument honestly about what their companion says.

10 As noted above, this means assigning partner(s), anything or anyone, to God in Divinity.

11 The Muslim here depends for his assertion on *Qur'ān* 4:48,

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يُشْرِكُ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا»
 «Lo! Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgiveth (all) save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners to Allah, he hath indeed invented a tremendous sin».

See also *Qur'ān* 7:37,

«فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا يَتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قَالُوا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ».

- 732 Abū Qurrah said, «And that¹² is according to His wish or other than His wish?
- 733 If you were to say that we defamed Him and rejected faith in Him according to His wish, then we have no guilt with Him or punishment.
- 734 And if you were to say, with other than His will and wish, then indeed it would be verified for the present company that He is a weak god, because He did not guide us to the right faith».

[4. *Al-Ma'mūn's praise of Abū Qurrah, the people present object and Abū Qurrah affirms*]

- 735 Al-Ma'mūn said, «You told the truth (By God!), O Abū Qurrah».
- 736 They all cried out, and they said, «This is not analogous to the saying of our companion nor is it a convincing answer,
- 737 for God has indeed led you to the right way, but you did not go to the right way».
- 738 Abū Qurrah said, «Your messenger witnesses on the authority of your God, that He said, "Whoever We guide astray, no one can lead to the right way. And whoever We lead to the right way, no one can guide astray"¹³.

[5. *A practical example, clarifying the folly of the intervention*]

- 739 Tell me, then, O Muslim, if you were to invade the lands of the Byzantines, would you not in a holy war,¹⁴ for the sake of God, and

«Who doth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah or denieth Our tokens. (For such) their appointed portions of the Book (of destiny) reacheth them till, when Our messengers come to gather them, they say: Where (now) is that to which ye cried beside Allah? They say: They have departed from us. And they testify against themselves that they were disbelievers».

12 This is a reference to the accusation of associating with God in the previous verse.

13 Reference to *Qur'ān* 18:17,

«وَتَرَى الشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَزَاوَرُ عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ الشَّمَالِ وَهُمْ فِي فَجْوَةٍ مِنْهُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِي وَمَنْ يُضِلِلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُرْشِدًا».

«And thou mightest have seen the sun when it rose move away from their cave to the right, and when it set go past them on the left, and they were in the cleft thereof. That was (one) of the portents of Allah. He whom Allah guideth, he indeed is led aright, and he whom He sendeth astray, for him thou wilt not find a guiding friend».

See also *Qur'ān* 4:88, 143; 7:178, 186; 13:33.

14 Cf. SAMIR, *Cento Domande* (2002), p. 34.

- you assume that this would [secure] your arrival in paradise?»¹⁵ Al-Hāšimī said, «(By my life!) It is thus».
- 740 Abū Qurrah said, «Hence, if you went to invade, you and your brother, the son of your mother and your father, and your cousin,
- 741 and then an infidel encountered you, and he came close to you and struck your brother a blow that wounded him and brought him close to death,
- 742 tell me, would you, if you were able to overcome that infidel, would you not revenge [your brother] against him?»
- 743 Al-Hāšimī said, «I would kill him as ransom for my brother».
- 744 Abū Qurrah said, «Is it not a duty,¹⁶ for he [the infidel] had given your brother his wish, for he [your brother] was certain that if he were to be killed, he would enter the paradise?
- 745 Why do you, then, kill him who had enabled you to attain your wish and lead you to your intention?
- 746 For this infidel is the reason for your brother's entrance into paradise! His [the infidel's] murder, then, is not a duty».
- 747 Al-Hāšimī was confounded for a protracted hour; he bowed his head to the ground in silence; thereupon, he said to Abū Qurrah,
- 748 «That infidel did not seek [anything] from my brother except his murder, and he [the infidel] did not wish him [the brother] to enter paradise, but sought his destruction.

15 According to Muslim belief, a person killed in a religious war is considered a martyr and alive with God. Cf. *Qur'ān* 2:154,

«وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنَّ لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ».

«And call not those who are slain in the way of Allah 'dead.' Nay, they are living, only ye perceive not».

See also *Qur'ān* 3:169,

«وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرزُقُونَ».

«Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provisions».

In fact, «A large body of traditions describes the bliss awaiting the martyr. All his sins will be forgiven; he will be protected from the torments of the grave; a crown of glory will be placed on his head; he will be married to seventy-two hours and his intercession will be accepted for up to seventy of his relations». See Etan KOHLBERG, "Shahīd", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-Rom edition (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

16 At first glance, this might seem a bit confused. In Arabic, it reads, «أَلَيْسَ أَنَّهُ بِوَاجِبٍ» and to some, it might not make sense and the temptation is to change it into «إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِوَاجِبٍ». That would be a mistake. Abū Qurrah here is being sarcastic; the entire verse is written with *tongue in cheek*, and it is intended to demonstrate the folly of the intervention.

- 749 Likewise, I would reward him in proportion to what he did to my brother»¹⁷.
- 750 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Reason this now and discern it!
- 751 When the Jews crucified the Lord, the Christ, they did not wish to agree with Him and fulfill what was prophesied by the prophets.
- 752 On the contrary, their certain [intention] was His destruction, and the eradication of His name, and the obliteration of His memory from the world.
- 753 Hence, He [the Christ] judges and rewards them [according to their intentions]. »

[6. The admission of the group present that al-Hāšimī is unable to debate with Abū Qurrah]

- 754 The group present admitted [the logic of the reasoning], and they said, «Certainly, our companion (By God!) has been exposed.
- 755 And this is a correct and convincing answer». And they all left.

**[C. DIFFERENT INTERVENTIONS
ABOUT THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST]**

[1. Abū Qurrah refutes the intervention that Christ is a god who killed his mother]

- 756 On the following day, they all came [back]. Then, the closest relative to al-Ma'mūn said,
- 757 «What do you say, O Abū Qurrah, about him who killed his mother?»
- 758 Abū Qurrah said, «And what do you say about Him who killed his intimate friend?»

17 This is based on *Qur'ān* 5:45,

«وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَا أَنْ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَالْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصًا فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَهُ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ».

«And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoso fortieth it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are wrong».

- 759 He said, «And who is that, O Abū Qurrah?». Abū Qurrah said, «Your God whom you believe in and worship».
- 760 The minister said, «And how is that, O Abū Qurrah?».
- 761 Abū Qurrah said to him, «What do you say (May God guard you in happiness!) about Abraham? Is he not God's intimate friend?».
- 762 Al-Hāšimī said, «Yes!» Abū Qurrah said, «Your example is analogous to that of Abraham».
- 763 The Muslim said, «It is not analogous».
- 764 They said to him, «Tell us, O Abū Qurrah, your Christ is a god who killed his mother and did not raise her up. Why is she not with him in heaven?».
- 765 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me, O Muslim, about God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!), did He ever lie?».
- 766 The Muslim group said, «(We take refuge in God!) God would never lie! Far be it from God that lying would [ever] be attributed to Him!».
- 767 Abū Qurrah said, «If He were to utter a saying or decree a verdict, would He go back on it or change it?». The group said, «No».
- 768 Abū Qurrah said, «Similarly, He [God] caused the death of His mother because He decreed death upon all His creatures of the sons of Adam.
- 769 However, if He had caused the death of some people and raised up some people, He would have contradicted His saying.
- 770 As for His mother, He caused her to die the death of this world in order that His saying would be fulfilled, and He raises her up in the hereafter with the loyal and the righteous,
- 771 who have heard His saying and kept His commandments and left the world and what is in it and sought the hereafter and its delight».
- 772 When al-Ma'mūn heard the discourse of Abū Qurrah and the goodness of his articulation, his rapid answer and the might of his evidence, he admired him and was [made] joyful by him.
- 773 Thereupon, he said, «Does there remain a debater to debate with Abū Qurrah?».

[2. On the Jews and the Cross]

- 774 Al-Ma'mūn's scribe said, «I see that the Jews have a better opinion than you, O Abū Qurrah,
- 775 for they crucified your god and enabled him to attain the fulfillment of his intention».

- 776 Abū Qurrah said, «Tell me, if you had a severe ulcer in your eye,
 777 and because of its great pain you wished death as an amiable friend,
 778 and [if] I were your enemy and brought you to the *Sultān*,
 779 and he ordered me to hit you in whatever place I fancied,
 780 then, I hit you on that ulcer of yours seeking an increase in your pain,
 781 and from that ulcer seeped much blood and a great amount of
 substance, and you had recuperated from your pain as a consequence
 of that hit,
 782 would you perhaps kill me?» The Muslim said, «Yes, I would kill you
 as a duty». Abū Qurrah said to him, «Why?
 783 I have indeed given you rest and released you from your anguish!».
 784 The Muslim said to him, «Because you did not hit me wishing my
 healing and good health.
 785 Rather, you wished an increase in my pain, and you indeed hit me on
 my ulcer and your intent was to murder me».
 786 Abū Qurrah said to him, «Similarly runs the matter with whoever
 crucified the Christ, my Lord».
 787 Al-Ma'mūn said, «You did well (By God!), O Abū Qurrah! You did
 very well!
 788 You have prevailed by exposing your opposition, and you have
 revealed to us what had not occurred to the heart of a human being or
 occurred to us»¹⁸.
 789 Thereupon, he said, «Does there remain among you anyone who
 would debate with Abū Qurrah?».

**[3. On the Christian worship of a god the Jews crucified and killed, and
 who died and was buried]**

- 790 At this point, a man from the people of Qurayš advanced towards him
 and said,

18 This may be an echo of Paul's words, cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9, «What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him».

- 791 «O Abū Qurrah, in any case, are you not embarrassed and ashamed to
worship a god the Jews crucified, killed, and who died and was
buried?»¹⁹.
- 792 Abū Qurrah said, «Indeed, the preceding discourse has advanced that
[issue], and now I take refuge in God [from the thought] that my God
would have been killed and have died.
- 793 Rather, the saying that the Christ was crucified and died is as the
saying that He ate and drank in His humanity.²⁰
- 794 The Eternal, Creator-Word of God befell It that [the experiences of a
human] and It had no need for food or drink,
795 for It is not restricted or tangible, nor can It be surrounded by the
heavens or the earth, and It has no equal,
796 and what had befallen the body [occurred] without afflicting pain to
the Word or the Divinity.
- 797 And that, a wooden door overlaid with plates of gold; thereupon lit by
fire,
798 and the wood burned, due to its nature [being] susceptible to burning,
and no detriment befell the gold.
- 799 In the same manner, the Word of God is veiled by the human who was
afflicted with the pain of the crucifixion, death, burial, hunger and
thirst,
800 without detriment or weakness afflicting the Word, Who is above all
that, without separation of the Word from the human in any state of
his circumstances.
- 801 And he [the messenger of Islam] said in your *Qur'ān* with His regard
that God said, “O ‘Īsā! I will make you die and raise you to Myself,
and I will make those who followed you superior to those who
rejected faith in you to the Day of Judgment”²¹.

19 The issue is the immutability as well as the impassibility of God. For more on this issue, see the the commentary on this verse in the Fifth Chapter of the Study.

20 This is the *communicatio idiomatum*.

21 Reference to *Qur'ān* 3:55.

[4. *Abū Qurrah defines, once again, his faith in the Divinity of Christ and enumerates some of the effects of His death*]

- 802 Hence, My God did not die nor does He die, for He is from God the Father.
- 803 He came from heaven to the virgin Mary and embodied through her a human, in all respects, and ascended with him²² to heaven from whence He came.
- 804 and He is alive in heaven. He neither perishes nor dies, and He will judge the living and the dead, and those about whom it was said that “every soul shall have a taste of death”²³.
- 805 And if the Christ, my God, did not die in His human nature, there would have been no amends made on our behalf nor [would] we have made amends for the debt imposed upon us by our father Adam.
- 806 Thus, when the Christ, my God, became a dead human, the form was redeemed by the form, and the ancient debt was settled; through Him and by Him, we have been redeemed».

[5. *On the prayer of Christ*]

- 807 Al-Hāšimī said to him, «O Abū Qurrah, the Christ, did he not pray? Then, to whom did he pray?».
- 808 Abū Qurrah said to him, «O you, many discourses have preceded that the Christ is not in need of prayer,
- 809 for the prophet says that “all the Angels and all the kings of the earth and their provinces prostrate themselves before Him, and to Him they are subjected”²⁴.

22 Reference here is to the human nature. Hence, it is not capitalized.

23 *Qur’ān* 3:185,

«كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَمَنْ زُحِرَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ».

«Every soul will taste of death. And ye will be paid on the Day of the Resurrection only that which ye have fairly earned. Whoso is removed from the Fire [sic] and is made to enter paradise, he indeed is triumphant. The life of this world is but comfort of illusion».

24 Reference to Psalm 103:20, «Bless the LORD, all you angels, mighty in strength and attentive, obedient to every command».

- 810 For He is King over all. And His Kingship is a Kingship that neither passes away nor is annihilated.
- 811 The prayer, mentioned in the Gospel, is of His humanity to teach us to pray.
- 812 Hence, with regard to His Divinity, He is not pursued by prayer, nor has he a need for prayer, for behold He is the Eternal Creating Word».

[D. ON THE NAZARENES' REVERENCE ONE TO ANOTHER]

- 813 Then, Al-Hāšimī said, «Behold we see you, in your prayers, kneeling one to another».
- 814 Abū Qurrah said, «Our kneeling one to another is not, for our part, as [our] kneeling to the One God, Trinitarian in Property.
- 815 Rather, [it is] as Moses knelt before the priest of Midian²⁵, and as Jacob knelt before Pharaoh²⁶ before him [Moses], and Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar²⁷, the king of Babylon.
- 816 This is from us a bow of reverence, not a bow to Divinity.
- 817 And everyone who reveres his companion or his senior is obedient to him with humility and veneration.
- 818 And the *Qur'ān* says that "God created Adam and ordered the angels to kneel before him,
- 819 and they obeyed and knelt before him, except the deceitful Satan, for he disobeyed and did not kneel"»²⁸.

25 Reference to Exodus 18:7, «Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down before him, and kissed him. Having greeted each other, they went into the tent». Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was the priest of Midian.

26 Allusion to Genesis 47:7, «Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh. After Jacob had paid his respects to Pharaoh».

27 No reference could be found for this. In fact, the opposite is true, namely that the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and did homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him; cf. Daniel 2:46. In the *New American Bible*, the verse reads, «Then king Nebuchadnezzar fell down and worshiped Daniel and ordered sacrifice and incense offered to him».

28 There are many *qur'ānic* references: Cf. *Qur'ān* 2:34; 7:11; 15:27-32; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:71-76.

[VIII. AL-MA'MŪN PRAISES ABŪ QURRAH AND OTHERS INVITE HIM TO ISLAM]

820 Al-Ma'mūn said to him, «How wonderful! How very wonderful of Abū Qurrah!» And he said, «Does there remain among you a debater?».

[A. AL-MA'MŪN'S SCRIBE INVITES ABŪ QURRAH TO ISLAM BECAUSE THE RELIGION OF THE NAZARENES IS A WRETCHED RELIGION]

821 His [al-Ma'mūn's] scribe also advanced towards him [Abū Qurrah] and said, «O Abū Qurrah, if [only] you, the assembly of the Nazarenes, were to become Muslims and be powerful,
822 for the likes of you ought to be in permanent power.
823 Because the religion of the Nazarenes is a wretched religion, due to the infidelity of its people, and God is not content with their religion».

[B. ON GOD ALLOWING TRIBULATIONS AND THAT THE BYZANTINE CHRISTIAN KINGS ARE NOT WRETCHED]

[1. *God allows tribulations for the healing of humans*]

824 Abū Qurrah said, «What the prophet said is fitting, “I will give them a hard heart and darkened eyes,
825 so they do not understand with their hearts, and they do not see with their eyes [lest] they return to me and I would heal them. And they do not hear”¹.
826 Truthfully, you are [one] of them.

1 Allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10, «And he replied: Go and say to this people: Listen carefully, but you shall not understand! Look intently, but you shall know nothing! You are to make the heart of this people sluggish, to dull their ears and close their eyes; else their eyes will see, their ears hear, their heart understand, and they will turn and be healed». See also Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10.

[2. God allows tribulations for the pruning of humans]

- 827 Except that you may know, O protester, you and every one, that the sons of Israel were the people of God and the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [that is the descendents of] His approved prophets with their works.
- 828 And Pharaoh [was] contradicting Him [and] defiant; he did not obey Him at any time, so He gave him authority over the people of Egypt, to punish them [the Jews] for four hundred years.
- 829 And we, the people of the religion of the Nazarene: [God] has sanctioned over us a whip of torment for our discipline,
- 830 and this is good for us, according to the saying of Solomon, the son of David,
- 831 "For whom the Lord loves, He reproveth, and He chastises the humans whom He favors"².
- 832 For whoever is from those without discipline is a foreigner.

[3. The Byzantine Christian kings are not wretched]

- 833 This does not include him who is under the authority and discipline of the Nazarenes.
- 834 They perhaps have been given the option to choose, and they do not choose the old meat of those who have authority
- 835 similar to the believing Byzantine Nazarene kings, in all the regions of the earth».

[C. THE PARADISE IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY]

[1. Al-Ma'mūn's minister invites Abū Qurrah to Islam, promising him the goods of this world and the goods of paradise]

- 836 The minister said, «O Abū Qurrah, you know that with us, if you were lead to the right way,³

2 Reference to Proverbs 3:12, «For whom the LORD loves he reproveth, and he chastises the son he favors».

3 The expression «lead to the right way» here means to convert to Islam.

- 837 you would gain the goods of the world and the goods of paradise,
from food and drink and marriage with companions with big lustrous
eyes.
- 838 Let go from you what Paul has recommended to you, along with all
your preceding bishops, of asceticism and self-mortification,
- 839 and this appointment for you in the paradise of praise and strenuous
prayers.

[2. Abū Qurrah prefers the paradise promised by Jesus, the Christ]

- 840 When Abū Qurrah heard [this], he laughed for a long while internally,
841 and said, «You know that asceticism and detachment from this world
is what is pleasing to God
842 and [they] make loveable to Him His worshipers who practice them,
with the reverence of the people.
- 843 Similarly, the scholar with you has such a fine status, which deserves
a lifetime and two lifetimes.
- 844 This [the food and the drink and marriage with companions with big
lustrous eyes] is a preoccupation in the phenomena of this world.
- 845 As for the delight in the hereafter, which you claim for me,
846 I do not prefer that delight which they⁴ promise me from food, drink,
and marriage with companions with big lustrous eyes,
847 without prayer and with no praise to God, for in this I would be in the
status of the beasts,
848 and similar to a sterile horse pastured in the pasture, pasturing towards
the shepherd, with rivers and jewelry, [and] with him many wild
broods, as well as much sand.⁵
- 849 While his eyes are covered with the sand, he eats and drinks and
chooses with what to have intercourse, and without a prayer upon it.

4 This is an interesting use of the pronoun. Is the third person referring to the “goods” promising, or is it the Muslim promising (hence, it is an editorial sentence), or ought it to be in the second person (hence addressing the Muslims present). E is unclear as to the “نقط” (dots), D is clearly in the third person plural, and the portion is missing from H and I. Hence, one must respect the only possible certainty in the manuscripts, hence, D.

5 This sentence is very awkward in the original and gave us the most trouble in understanding and translation. However, its meaning is not that ambiguous. It simply means fruitless.

- 850 I do not wish, O friend, that paradise [you offer me]; rather [I wish]
the paradise which is promised by my Lord Jesus, the Christ, my Lord
and my God, the Creator-Word of God.
- 851 It is the delight that no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor has it
occurred to the heart of a human,⁶
- 852 for it is loftier and sweeter than all that is in the world.
- 853 This is the matter I hope from my Lord and my God, not another».

6 Reference to 1 Corinthians 2:9.

[IX. THE CONCLUSION OF THE DEBATE: NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD]

[A. SILENCE OF THE MUSLIM ELITE LAMENTATION OF AL-MA'MŪN AND THE REWARD TO ABŪ QURRAH]

- 854 Thereupon, they all remained silent.
- 855 Then, al-Ma'mūn said, «Does there remain, among you, who would debate with Abū Qurrah?».
- 856 They said, «If the Commander of the Faithful sees fit, excuse us from debating with Abū Qurrah, for we have no capacity for him».
- 857 Thereupon, they left ashamed and confounded.
- 858 Al-Ma'mūn said to him, «How I wish I would have been deprived of sight [even] to such day,
- 859 and [so] I do not see the cessation of the Muslims and that they have no argument in their religion».
- 860 And he ordered the robe of honor and the reward for Abū Qurrah. He gave him the robe of honor and ordered him to remain in his palace.

[B. BOTH SIDES AGREE THAT NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD]

- 861 On the following day, the judge, Yahyā b. Aktam, came.
- 862 He said to Abū Qurrah, «O Abū Qurrah, has anyone seen God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!)?».
- 863 Abū Qurrah said to him, «What do you say, O Judge, in that regard?».
- 864 He said to him, «No one has ever seen Him».
- 865 Abū Qurrah said to him, «And I also say the like of your saying»¹.

1 Reference to John 1:18, «No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him», and 1 John 4:12, «No one has ever seen God».

[C. THANKSGIVING TO GOD]

- 866 And the debate ended. We thank our Lord and God, who gave him the victory, the might, the theology and the evidence, and helped him against the obstinate [persons].
- 867 To the Lord, the Christ, the glory, the veneration, the power and the prostration, now and in all times, forever and ever. Amen.

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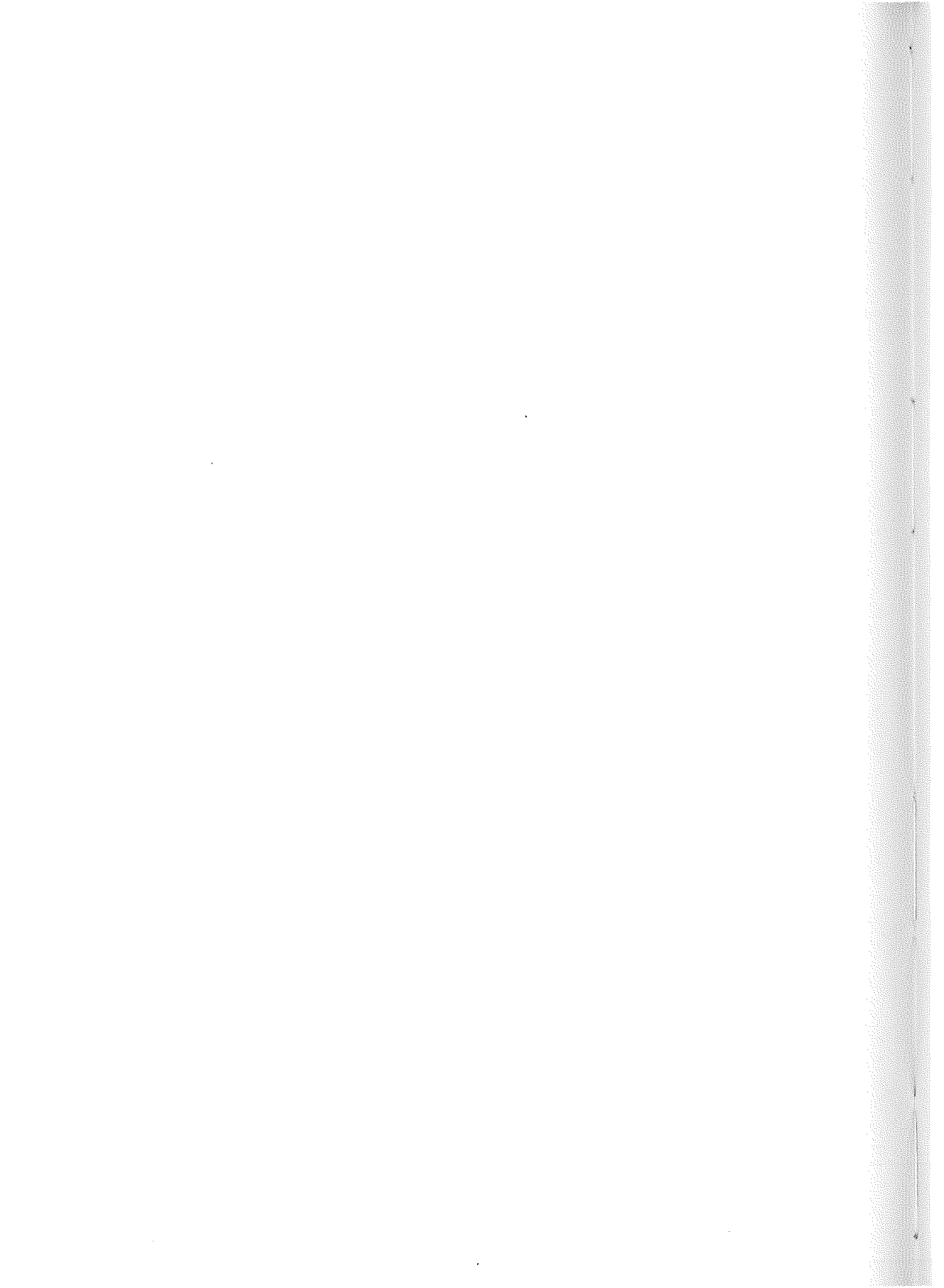
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GLOSSARY OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

أَصْلَحَكَ اللهُ!	May God guard you in happiness!	761
أَطَالَ اللهُ بَقَاءَهُ!	May God lengthen his life!	14
أَطَالَ اللهُ بَقَاكَ، وَهَتَّكَ بِمَا أَعْطَاكَ، وَجَعَلَنِي مِنْ كُلِّ سُوءٍ فِدَاكَ!	May God lengthen your days, makes you content with what He gave you, and make me, from all harm, your ransom!	541
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Qur'ān 21:16	248.	Qur'ān 108	240.
Qur'ān 21:23	224	Qur'ān 111	240.
Qur'ān 21:26	136.	Qur'ān 112:3-4	136.
Qur'ān 21:91	140, 200, 211.		
Qur'ān 22:17	204.		

ANNEXES

لم لا تجيبه يا ابقه قال حتى
 يادك في سدي في مولاى امير
 المؤمنين اهل الله تعالى فقال
 الامور هذا محض عندك فانما
 لا يعتدى احد فيه فانك
 واجيبه هيبه فليتها هيبه
 الابا التي هي احسن ولا يهولك
 ولا يعظم في عينك احد فان
 هذا اليوم يتضح فيه الحق كل من

Plate 1 = Par. ar. 70 (H)

يعقبتني ما انا فيه فلاحوب لكلامه عندي
 قال المأمون ولم يا ابا الحسين قال لا نه
 يا امير المؤمنين زما في سهام من جعته و
 سلاحي فان سلاحي قاني وسلاحه باقي
 فضحك المأمون طويلا ثم قال ويلكم فمن له
 حبرة قالوا من رجل من اهل الشام فامر

Plate 2 = Par. ar. 71 (I)

۞ رَبِّ دَاخِلِهِ خَالِقٌ وَاحِدٌ غَيْرَ أَنَا لَا أُنْفِثُ ۞
 هُنَّ لِلَّهِ رِجِينٌ حَكِيمَةٌ وَرَوْحُهُ وَلَا حَمَلٌ يَجِبُ
 مِنَ اللَّهِ بَعْدَ إِسْمِهِ وَلَا تَنِي مِنْهُ خَالِقٌ وَتَنِي
 مِنْهُ مَخْلُوقٌ وَلَمْ يَخْلُقِ اللَّهُ تَنِي إِلَّا بِعَظْمَةٍ وَرَوْحِهِ
 كَمَا فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَفِي سَائِرِ الْكُتُبِ
 الْبَيِّنَةِ أَنْ يَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ
 وَرَوْحُهُ فِيهَا أَسْمَاءُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رِجِيمُ الْخَالِقِ

Plate 3 = Par. ar. 198 (D)

قولنا ان الاب والابن والروح القدس اله واحد
 ورب واحد وخالق واحد واما الاب هو الاب
 والابن هو الكلمة والروح هي روح القدس الذي كلمه
 بها الخليقة كلها وقد اسما باسمه وتنعبا برزته
 ورضينا بحكمه وسجدنا لكرسي مجده وله الشيع
 والتعبد والشكر والاکرام الى الدهر والداهر من ابد
 فان كان المسيح بايمر المؤمنين اكل الطعام مثل
 انسان فقد اشبع بلاهوته من خمسة خبزات
 سبعة الان نفسا ونضل عن الاكلين اثني عشر سلا
 ملحوة كسروا ان كان قد شرب الماء بنا سوته فقد
 حول الماء حرا في عرمرقنا بالليل يعظم لاهوته
 وان كان مشا في الاسواق فقد اشفا الامراض
 وان كان خاطب خلقه كاستان فقد يدرك
 اولاد كنزنا حوهر دياب وحنان بر وقرود وان
 كان قد نام في السنينه فقد زجر الرياح العاصف
 بهدوت واطاع لامرة البحار الزاهرة وان كان
 قد اصطاد السمك فقد جأ سمعان لما ان اسكه
 على

على امواج البحر وان كان حزين عند قبر العازر
 وبكى فقد دعاه واقامه حيا بعد موته باربعة
 ايام وان كان قد دخل بيت سمعان فقد غفر
 ذنوب الخاطيه وان كان قد صلب فقد رزق
 الارض وشق حجاب الهيكل وان كان قد تبر
 فقد قام وصعد الى السما حيا وجميع ما احتمله
 من الالم والوجع بنا سوته وجميع ما عمله من الايات
 والعرايج وافاضته الموتى فتح اعين العمى وتطهير
 البصر واسماض المتعدين واخراج الشياطين
 بلاهوته كان فعند ذلك استيقظ ابا بقره
 رجلا من اهل العراق فقال ويحك يا ابا بقره كيف ذلك
 وانما محنتك فيما اري من قول ملقوط قال ابا بقره
 كيف ذلك قال له العراقي لانك حرفت قال ابا بقره
 من كتابكم انت ذلك يا سكر سبحان الله العظيم
 فاستقط رايتك واقبل فهمك واعني قلبك واضعني
 محنتك لانك تهين كتابك وتكذب قول نبيك
 حيث يقول ليجردن اهل الانجيل حكيم من انزل

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 وَلَا يَهْلِكُ ثَاوِدًا وَلَا يَعْظُرُ فِي عَيْنِكَ أَحَدًا
 وَلَا تَحْشَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ فَإِنْ هُوَ يَوْمَ بَرَهَانَ
 يَوْضَعُ فِيهِ الْحَقُّ مَنْ كَانَ عِنْدَهُ تَحْقِيقُ
 دِينِهِ فَيَتَكَلَّمُ **قَالَ أَبُو قُرَّة** أَسْأَلُ
 عَمَّا بَدَأَكَ يَا مُحَمَّدُ **قَالَ لَهُ** فِي تَشْبِيهِةِ
 الْمَسِيحِ لِأَدَمَ **قَالَ لَهُ أَبُو قُرَّة** هَلْ أَدْمُرُ

Plate 5 = Cairo L 212 (C)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْخَالِقِ الْحَيِّ النَّاطِقِ، وَبِهِ نَسْتَعِينُ
 نَسْتَدْعِي بِعَمَلِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَحَسْبُ تَوْفِيقِهِ
 بِنَسَخِ مَجَادِلَتِ ابْنِ أَبِي قُرَّةِ اسْتَقْفَ حُرَانَ مَعَ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ
 الْمَأْمُونِ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِمَحْضَرِ مَسْطُورِي
 الْإِسْلَامِ لَمَّا كَانُوا فِي دَاكِلِ الْقَصْرِ
 فِي مَجْلِسِ الْخِلَافَةِ الْإِسْلَامِيَّةِ
 وَهُمْ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْهَاشِمِيُّ وَمُزَيْنٌ

Plate 6 = Cairo T 218 (A)

يا ابا قره انت تعلم ان عندنا لو انه ديم لتنا لورا
 طبيبات الدنيا وطيبات الجنة من الاكل والشرب
 والنكاح لخور العين ودع عنك ما ارضاك
 به بولس وجميع اساقفتكم المتقدمين للكر من
 القسطنطين وتعب انفسكم وهذا الموعد للكر في
 الجنة بالشيخ والطوات المتعبه قال ابرقره
 ثم صحت طويلا في نفسه وقال انكم تعلمون ان
 القسطنطين والزهر في الدنيا هو الذي يرضي الله تعالى
 ونحب

Plate 7 = Cairo T 86 (B)



Plate 8 = Aleppo S bath 1004 (S)

Many scholars have found in the records of the ancient past cherished treasures of great literary and historical worth, sociological and scientific importance, and philosophical and theological significance. The ancient manuscripts of the Near-Eastern Arab-Christian literature are a prime example. This volume presents a Muslim-Christian debate that is said to have taken place in 829. Bishop Abū Qurrah of Ḥarrān is said to have debated the Muslim elites of Qurayš as well as other scholars from different centers of Islam. This debate boasted the presence and participation of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. A preliminary reading of the text shows it to be rich in content with over thirty theological issues, most of which are still in need of further discussion. Among the more critical theological issues in the debate are the differences between the commandments of Jesus and the mandates in the Law of Moses, the unity of Divinity and humanity in Jesus; God's omniscience and human freedom, the impassibility and immutability of God, and Jesus' freedom in giving up His life on the cross. Other religious-social issues emerging in the 829 debate include freedom of speech, human and angelic freedom of choice, the *Qur'ān's* view of Christians, *takfīr* (declaring another to be an infidel, a non-Muslim), the image of paradise, and *ǧihād* (holy war) as a way to heaven.