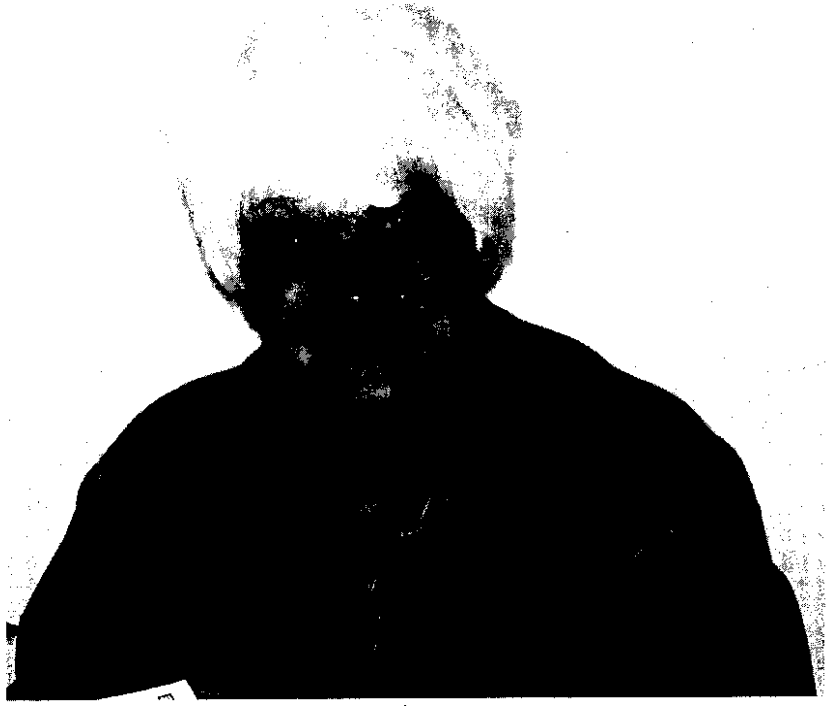
[ST ANDREWS MS 14]



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Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink

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ST ANDREWS MS. 14 AND THE EARLIEST ARABIC *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*: ITS DATE, AUTHORSHIP AND APOLOGETIC CONTEXT

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1. *Introduction*

In the Special Collections Department of St Andrews University Library is an anonymous, unidentified Arabic manuscript. It would seem to have arrived there upon the orders of Mrs Agnes S. Lewis, who died in 1926. Affixed to the inside back cover of the manuscript is a note bearing the message: "Forwarded by directors of the executors of the late Mrs Agnes S. Lewis and Mrs Margaret Dunlop Gibson" and the address "Castlebrae, Chesterton Lane, Cambridge". This was for long the home of these two ladies, who were sisters and natives of Ayrshire in Scotland. Upon the death of their father, they put his substantial financial estate to good use, learning a number of languages and touring the Middle East, in particular Egypt and Sinai, in search of Christian manuscripts. In the course of their travels they made a number of extremely important discoveries, such as the earliest known Syriac version of the Gospels and some fragments of a large corpus of Hebrew material in Cairo that subsequently became famous as the Cairo Geniza and transformed our knowledge of the Jewish communities of the medieval Mediterranean world. They also purchased many texts from antiquities dealers in Cairo and Jerusalem. Indeed, by the end of their lives there was "a vast accumulation" of manuscripts kept in the tower of their Cambridge home.[1] Most subsequently went to Cambridge University, but Agnes presumably wanted to pay her respects to St Andrews University, which conferred an honorary doctorate upon her and her sister Margaret in 1901 at the hands of the then chancellor, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and so gave instructions that one volume be sent to the university library there. Unfortunately, however, we know nothing of where and when it was originally acquired.

St Andrews 14 contains 162 leaves of parchment, re-mounted on paper and bound in leather. It is written in a fine, legible hand in black ink

[1] A. Whigham Price, *The Ladies of Castlebrae*, Gloucester, 1985, p. 223; this work provides the principal account of the lives of these two ladies.

with chapter headings and sundry other markers in red ink, though unfortunately it shows some water damage at the top of each leaf. The catalogue at St Andrews offers only a very brief description of the manuscript: "A work on Christian theology. The MS perhaps dates as early as the ninth century. No place of writing indicated". This entry is perfectly correct as far as it goes, but it is possible to expand this notice considerably and since the manuscript is at present unknown to the scholarly world it seems that such an expansion is desirable. This will be the task of this article, which I fondly dedicate to Dr. Gerrit Reinink, with whom my studies of Christian apologetic literature began.[2]

2. *Identification of the text*

The work is a quite wide-ranging one, comprising numerous aspects of the Christian faith. It is very quickly obvious that it was composed during the Islamic period, in part because of the very liberal use of Muslim Arabic vocabulary (numerous examples given in transliteration throughout this article) and in part because it was evidently written at a time when Christians were more defensive of their faith, since there is a clear intent to restate the essentials of the Christian creed, to demonstrate its truth and to emphasize the need to adhere fully to it with no dilution or backsliding. The contents are as follows:

1. The beginning is missing, but the chapter clearly aims to describe Christianity's earlier successes and to urge loyalty to it in these harder times (fols. —17b)
2. On the oneness of God (17b-21a)
3. The threefold nature (*tathlīth*) of the oneness of God (21a-24a)
4. The indwelling and incarnation of the word of God in the Virgin Mary (24a-27a)

5-8. Four motives for God becoming man: to honour mankind (27b-28b); to bring them knowledge of the trinity (28b-30b); to free them of their subject and accursed position (30b-32b); to convince them of the resurrection (fol. 32b—)

9-12. Missing

[2] I would also like to thank my students Jamie Branda and Ben Taylor, who wrote undergraduate dissertations on this manuscript; our discussions together enlightened me on many aspects of this text. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Special Collections of St Andrews University Library and the Reproduction Services of the British Library for their prompt provision of electronic versions of these two manuscripts and permission to publish on them.

13. Biblical testimonies for the descent of God the word to earth (—57a)
14. Tenets (*wujūh*)[3] that exclude people from being Christian (57a-70a)
15. A believer (*mu'min*) should adorn his faith with love for all people (70a-72b)
16. In what way can we say that Mary gave birth to God and Christ (72b-78a)
17. Questions from the Gospel and their answer (78a-96b)
18. Questions of the (non-Christian) monotheists and dualists with answers thereto (96b-120b)
19. Arguments for Christianity as the oldest religion (120b-124b)
20. Why God first chose the Jews as His people and how the Christians replaced them (124b-129a)
21. Testimonies from the prophets regarding God's plans for the Jews (129a-137a)
22. Why the gentiles chose Christianity (137a-147a)
23. The necessity of and method of prayer (147a-153a)
24. God's becoming man and his omnipresence (153a->)

The text finishes abruptly and this is clearly not the natural ending of the text, but it is not clear from the manuscript itself how much further the original work extended. However, a comparison of the table of contents above with that given by Georg Graf in his *History of Christian Arabic Literature* for a composition found in the British Library manuscript Or 4950[4] reveals that the latter and St Andrews 14 are copies of the same text. This means that as well as knowing what is contained in St Andrews 14, we also have another witness to this very important Christian Arabic text (and one that is more neatly written than BL Or 4950!), which otherwise is only extant in partial versions.[5] With this

[3] I translate *wujūh* as tenets because this chapter lists sixteen *wujūh* that exclude their holder from being a Christian; the usual formula is "the one who claims x / doesn't testify x is not a Christian"; so *wujūh* would seem for the author to have the sense of tenets of the faith.

[4] *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, Vatican City, 1944-53, II, pp. 16-19.

[5] J. Nasrallah, "Dialogue islamo-chrétien à propos de publications récentes", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 46 (1978), pp. 131-132, lists: Mss Sinai 330 (chs. 12-13, 17); Sinai 431 (chs. 3-9, 14-17), Sinai 448 (chs. 5-8, 11), Sinai 483 (chs. 3-25), Munich 1071 (chs. 12-13); see also S.H. Griffith, "A Ninth-Century Summa Theologiae Arabica", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 226 (1986), pp. 127-128. I should just note here that the wording of the treatise in BL Or 4950 and St Andrews 14 is almost identical.

identification made, we are now in a position to say much more about the work in St Andrews 14 and BL Or 4950.

3. *The title*

Although BL Or 4950 is also missing its opening page,[6] the author/copyist would seem to repeat its title after giving the contents of the work: "This completes the naming of the twenty-five chapters of 'The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith in the threefold nature of the oneness of God and His incarnation as God the word through the Holy Virgin Mary'".[7] The title might seem not particularly apt, since the text covers a much broader range of topics than the title implies, as can be seen from the list of contents above (and the missing entries below), and yet it is true that the issues of the trinity and the incarnation predominate. On account of this breadth of subject matter Sidney Griffith, the scholar who has written most on this text, has appropriately designated it an Arabic *Summa Theologiae*.

4. *The missing chapters of St Andrews 14*

On its first extant page BL Or 4950 (fol. 1a) lists the contents from chapter 10 to chapter 25; the first nine were presumably on the missing opening page, but since the title is repeated at the beginning of each chapter we can fill in the titles of all those chapters missing in St Andrews 14:

[6] BL Or 4950, fol. 1a, begins in the middle of the table of contents with the end of the title of chapter 9. The first line of St Andrews 14, fol. 1a, equals the penultimate line of BL Or 4950, fol. 2b, so it is not lacking much of the treatise. It does have one side of a leaf before this, but it does not belong to chapter 1 of the treatise; it may be one of the missing pages from later on in this work or it may have been included inadvertently from another manuscript during the restoration of the sisters' collection. Note that the folio numbering is somewhat erratic in St Andrews 14; someone also numbered the pages counting from the end of the work (i.e. as though it were a Western-language book).

[7] BL Or 4950, fol. 2a. The word after *al-kitāb* in the body of the text is unclear; it looks like the scribe initially wrote *li-jumlah* and Griffith, "Ninth-Century Summa", p. 125 takes this to be the correct reading, so translating "the 25 chapters belong to the book, to the Summa (*jumlah*)..."; Idem, "Greek into Arabic: life and letters in the monasteries of Palestine in the ninth century", *Byzantion* 56 (1986), p. 134. But the final *ha* has been overwritten by a final *'ayn* and in the margin after *al-kitāb* was written *al-jāmi'*; it seems likely then that the scribe wanted to write *al-kitāb al-jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*, i.e. (literally) "the book (treatise, composition etc) that collects the tenets of the faith" (taking *al-jāmi'* as a participle and *wujūh al-īmān* as its object, equivalent to *alladhī yajma' wujūh al-īmān*).

1. The reason why the gentiles were brought to believe in the threefold nature of the oneness of God and in his incarnation and the reason for the council of the 318 Church Fathers.
9. The motive for Christ's dwelling and suffering on earth
10. God's dispensation for the Israelites and Christ's dispensation
11. Incitement to faith
12. Further indications that Christ is the Lord
25. Sayings of the prophets (*al-rusūl*) and the Fathers to the effect that eating, marrying and consorting with outsiders are forbidden.

5. *The date and authorship*

There are three indications of the date of this text. The first is contained in the colophon that survives at the end of BL Or 4950 (fol. 197b):

> The volume has been completed with the help, strength and beneficence of God. The writing/copying of it was completed on the first day of September in the year 6369 according to the year of the world as accepted in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem; in the year 1188 according to the year of Alexander; and in the year 264 according to the years of the Arabs, in the month Rabī' I [= 877 AD]. The poor miserable sinner Stephen son of Ḥakam, known as al-Ramli, wrote/copied it in the monastery of Mar Chariton [near Jerusalem] for his teacher, the virtuous and spiritual Abba Basil, God grant him long life.[8]

This at least gives us a terminus ante quem for the date of the text's composition. A second indication comes at the end of chapter 21 amid a discussion of the interpretation of some Biblical passages that predict the return of the exiled Jews to their ancestral home in the Holy Land:

> These prophets of God testify to God's loyalty to you, o community of the Jews, in the building of the immaculate temple, and in returning you together from afar and settling you in your own country. But subsequently you were exiled and scattered to the furthest horizons. The temple was destroyed and it has remained in ruins for eight hundred years and more. Then God brought forward the gentiles, among them the Christians, and made them the heirs to the immaculate temple and its remains.[9]

[8] For a photograph of the colophon see A.S. Lewis and M.D. Gibson, *Forty-one Facsimiles of dated Christian Arabic manuscripts*, Cambridge, 1907, pl. II.

[9] BL Or 4950, fol. 154r; first noted by J. Blau, "Über einige christlich-arabische Manuskripte", *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), p. 102; more recently see Griffith, "Ninth-Century Summa", pp. 131-32, and Idem, "Greek into Arabic", p. 137.

Counting from the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, this would take us to 870+ AD, which, given the words "and more", corresponds very closely to the date when Stephen of Ramla was writing down this text. On the basis of this coincidence it has been suggested that we might regard Stephen as the author of the work and BL Or 4950 as the autograph copy.[10]

There is a slight snag, however, to this neat solution. The above passage is also found in St Andrews 14 (fol. 136b) and it is identical bar one slight difference; it reads "for eight hundred and twenty-five years and more", giving us 895+ AD. What are we to make of this? Let us first look at the third indication of the date. It comes near the beginning of chapter 22, which considers why the gentiles adopted Christianity. After explaining how Judaism has been surpassed, the author notes:

> The realization of Christianity (*taḥqīq al-naṣrāniyya*) as the religion of God and the eclipse of Judaism and of the Jewish claim to return to their former state [has lasted now] for eight hundred and twenty-five years (BL Or 4950, fol. 156a = St Andrews 14, fol. 138a).

The question is to what does "the realization of Christianity" refer? It sounds similar in expression to the apologetic claim made in a number of Christian Arabic texts about the durability of Christianity, adduced as evidence of its truth. For example, a treatise entitled "On the threefold nature of the one God" (*Fi tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*), advances the assertion that: "If this religion were not truly from God, it would not have endured and stood (*lam yathbut wa-lam yaqum*) for 746 years". There are two contenders for the event to which such statements allude, either the incarnation (birth of Christ) or the Crucifixion/Resurrection of Christ, but modern scholarly opinion tends to favour the latter option. According to the Alexandrian world era, which prevailed in the Near East at that time, this would mean 42 AD (or 9 AD for Christ's birth).[11]

[10] Griffith, "Greek into Arabic", pp. 137-138; Idem, "Ninth-century Summa", p. 135; Idem, "Stephen of Ramla and the Christian Kerygma in Arabic in 9th century Palestine", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), pp. 43-44.

[11] See M. Swanson, "Considerations for the Dating of *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān* (London, British Library Or. 4950)", *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), pp. 115-141. It has also been suggested that the Melkite era of the incarnation was used; this places Christ's birth in 9 BC and resurrection in 25-26 AD, and would date our text to 816 or 850-51 (S. Khalil, "La somme des aspects de la foi", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 226 [1986], pp. 93-121; he also discusses here whether Theodore Abu Qurrah was the author of the text, but this seems now decisively refuted by Griffith — see next note), but Swanson demonstrates that "up to the year A.D. 900 it is exclusively the Alexandrian world era that we find used in the Melkite circles of Palestine and Mount Sinai".

If we took this insight and applied it to our text, we would get a date of 825 + 42 = 867 AD (or 834 AD for the incarnation).

Unfortunately, this additional information rather spoils the easy solution of Stephen of Ramla being the author of the whole text and completing it in the year 877 AD. It could still be salvaged — we could assume that the first 825 in St Andrews 14 is a mistake for 800, a confusion with the ensuing 825, and the date of 867 AD given by the third indication is not so far from 877, perhaps reflecting an earlier stage of Stephen's writing of this text (which could have been drafted by Stephen over a long period of time) or just a simple calculating error (he meant "835 years" after the Crucifixion, which would then equate to 877 AD) — but it now requires a certain degree of special pleading. Sidney Griffith has suggested that Stephen might have been a compiler rather than an author,[12] which would allow us to posit that the individual constituents of the Summa were written at different times. However, there are a few instances of cross-referencing in the text,[13] which argue for it being more of a single-author work, even if drawing on/reworking older texts. Questions remain therefore, but on the positive side, all indications point towards the fact that we are dealing with a text composed in the mid-ninth century give or take thirty years, which makes it a very early example of Christian Arabic literature and so an important witness to the development of that tradition.

6. *Apologetic context*

In the very first chapter the author of "The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith" makes clear that his intention is to defend Christianity against all who would seek to challenge it. His first target is the Muslim community (*umma*), in which he evidently sees a danger much greater than Christianity had faced before:

> There was not then (among the communities challenging Christianity before Islam) a community like the people of this community among whom

[12] "Ninth-Century Summa", p. 135; "Greek into Arabic", pp. 137-138; "Stephen of Ramla", pp. 43-44. Griffith also argues persuasively here against an older suggestion that Theodore Abu Qurrah was the author of the *Summa*.

[13] E.g. BL Or 4950, fol. 5b = St Andrews 14, fol. 4a: "We have mentioned in chapter 18 in our answer to their questions to us about the trinity and Christ our Lord and His incarnation"; BL Or 4950, fol. 156a = St Andrews 14, fol. 138a: "God chose the children of Israel so as to reform through them the gentiles...as we have mentioned in chapter 19".

> we now find ourselves. That is because the language (*kalām*) of these past communities, I mean the materialists (*dahriyya*) and various dualists (*ahl al-zandaqa*), in respect of their descriptions of the deity was intricate and fiendish. However, the language of this (Muslim) community about God is a clear language, which the common people may comprehend. By this I mean their statement 'there is no god but God'. But by 'there is no god but God' they mean a god other than the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to their own statement god is not a begetter nor begotten (cf. Qur'an 112.3), and the Holy Spirit is in their view only one of the created beings. Hence, their statement 'there is no god but God' and our statement are the same in words but different in meaning. That is because when we Christians say 'there is no god but God', we mean thereby the Living God, possessing a living spirit that is able to give and take life, an intellect that decrees whatever it wills, and a word in which is all being (BL Or 4950, fol. 5ab = St Andrews 14, fol. 3b-4a).

And his second target is those vacillating Christians who spend much time with the Muslim community and seek to make accommodation with them:

> The (Christian) faith in the east and the west is in the hands of its people, who profess it and hold firm to it...except a group in the midst of the people of this (Muslim) community who rule over them, a group who were born among them, grew up among them and were educated in their culture with the result that they hide their faith and divulge to them (the Muslims) only what is acceptable and agreeable to them (i.e. to their Muslim faith) and practise terrible dissimulation. This they have from their forefathers and their children follow them in this restraint and concealment. Others of them (this aberrant Christian group) forbid any who would bear witness openly to their faith... They have taken the easy and weak path that only leads to the failure of those who take it and they have strayed from the path that leads its people to the kingdom of heaven, fleeing from having to testify to the threefold nature of God and His incarnation because of the reproach of outsiders (to the Christian community)... Thus act our brother hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) who are among us, stamped with our impress and standing among our congregations, and yet opposing our faith and forfeiting their souls. They are Christians in name only and deny their Lord God and the Messiah Jesus son of Mary (BL Or 4950, fol. 6ab = St Andrews 14, fol. 4b-5a).

This all sounds very dire, but he soon makes it clear that the form of aberrance he is talking about is not so much denying Christ outright, but rather presenting him to the Muslims in a way that fits with the portrayal of Christ in the Qur'an:

> Their hearts are empty of belief in the truth. If they do utter something in acknowledgement of Christ our Lord, they will only utter what their (Muslim) lords and masters agree with and what they won't take offence at. But they, in what they say to those with whom they are speaking (the Muslims),[14] are contradicting the Christians characterized by unbelief (*kufr*) and enmity towards God in their (Muslim) scripture, which says: "They have disbelieved who say that God is the messiah Jesus son of Mary" and "They have disbelieved who say that God is one of three in a trinity" (Qur'an 5.17, 5.73) and that Christ is the son of God. By agreeing with them (the Muslims) and opposing the Christians, they have departed from Christianity but not entered into their (Muslim) religion, since they do not agree with everything that they say about God and pronounce about the revelation of the Holy Spirit. So they are not Christians and not pagan Muslims (*ḥunafā' muslimīn*), but are vacillators (*mudhabdhabūn*) between the two (BL Or 4950, fol. 7ab = St Andrews 14, fol. 5b-6a).

The principal concern of our author, then, is to reach out to these vacillators whose employment and social status (bureaucrats and physicians were, for example, very often drawn from the ranks of Christians) meant that they had much social interaction with Muslims. He wished to draw attention to their error, to convince them of the rightness of the Christian teachings and the falseness of the Muslim doctrines. And he tailors his work to these aims. Most chapters (see the list above) elucidate and emphasize the core Christian beliefs — in particular those that were in conflict with Muslim beliefs: the trinity and God's incarnation and passion — documenting them with a plethora of Biblical testimonies. To ram the point home, one chapter (no. 14) is devoted to tenets that would exclude anybody who held them from being a Christian, and again they mostly centre on the trinity and incarnation, issues where it was all too easy for the average Christian to slip up and, in particular, for them to be swayed by the apparent simplicity of the "no god but God" refrain of Islam, as the author had already noted.

Chapters 19-22 seek to demonstrate that Christianity is the only true religion; mostly they follow old ground, and the enemy is still principally the Jews, but chapter 19 presents a novel argument:

> That Christianity is the religion of God and His ancient dispensation (*dīn Allāh wa-sharī'atuhu al-qadīma*) contemporary with His creation of the first man. With the help of our Lord Christ, we shall make the case that, although the Church Fathers have claimed Judaism to be the ancient one and Christianity to be the modern one, it is Christianity that is the ancient one and Judaism the modern one. That is because God, praise be to him, when He created the first man, he also prescribed (*shara'a*) for him what pleased Him and Adam imitated it and carried it out, and it was the choice of his children until Isḥāq son of Abraham, and it was the religion that the

[14] St Andrews 14 just has: "in what they say", omitting "to those with whom they are speaking".

> Christians follow today. Then the devil, out of desire and envy, seduced man away from knowledge of their creator after the flood and they adhered to him and his demons and masters besides God. So God left them to the other gods that they adhered to, but then began to discipline them until the time when Christianity appeared (BL Or 4950, fol. 137b-138a = St Andrews 14, fol. 120b-121a).

As the author himself notes, the argument is not one that the old church authorities had espoused and one assumes that it was devised as a trump to Islam's claim to be the religion of Abraham. As the religion of Adam, Christianity would be the oldest of all the religions, which added to the arguments in favour of it being the true religion.

Chapter 18 is the only place where the author deals with the Muslims directly. It is entitled: "Questions of the (non-Christian) monotheists and dualists"[15] and is divided into two sections, dealing with the Muslims and the Dualists respectively.[16] Some of the topics are standard fare in Christian-Muslim debate texts, most obviously Christ and the trinity, and some of the questions have previously been posed, such as: "if Christ was content with the Jews' crucifixion of him, shouldn't they be rewarded?", how can "you maintain that God was in the womb where there is filth?", "why do you not marry more than one wife" and "why do you prostrate towards the east".[17] Other subjects are much less familiar — the offering (of Christ's body and blood at mass), baptism, divorce, poverty and wealth, health and sickness, disasters, the resurrection at the end of time and the reward of the believers — but may perhaps have been common questions put to Christians by Muslims in daily life. Particularly interesting are the questions on free will and predetermination, subjects that feature in earlier debates,[18] but are here treated in

[15] *Masā'il ahl al-adyān min al-muwaḥḥidīn wa-aṣḥāb al-ithnayn*; Nasrallah, "Dialogue", p. 131, indicates that some mss have *ahl al-aḥdāth*, i.e. questions of "the new/innovating monotheists", which makes better sense as applied to the Muslims.

[16] A brief survey of the questions is given by S.H. Griffith, "Islam and the Summa Theologica Islamica", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), pp. 247-260. Griffith notes that the contents page of BL Or 4950 states that there are 34 questions in this chapter, but Griffith lists only 30. In general, new questions are indicated by a cross in chapter 18 (in BL Or 4950; St Andrews 14 uses red dots, but erratically and abundantly), and there are indeed 34 crosses, but four of them (two on 116a, one on 119b and one on 125a) do not introduce new topics, and this would seem to be the source of the disparity.

[17] See my *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, Princeton, 1997, Chapter 11 (and see relevant terms in the index). For the question about the Jews being rewarded see S.H. Griffith, "Some unpublished sayings attributed to Abu Qurrah", *Le Muséon* 92 (1979), pp. 29-35.

[18] See S.H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: the doctrine of Theodore Abu Qurrah", *Parole de l'Orient* 14 (1987), pp. 79-107.

more detail. The author considers both the adherents of free will (*qadariyya*), who "claim that humans are abandoned, left alone to do what they will", and the pre-determinists (*jabriyya*), who "assert that humans are compelled to their actions be they good or evil" and also profess "that God's knowledge is not prior to creation and that everything in existence exists through God's knowledge".[19] These were two groups that conducted a protracted and heated debate during the early Islamic period, though by our author's day the issue had, as far as mainstream Muslims were concerned, been decided in favour of the pre-determinists, which is perhaps why their refutation occupies more space in "The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith" than that of the free-willers. The next chapter, "On God's decree" (*qaḍā'*), sets out, in essence, the Christian view on this matter:

> It is part of God's decree that he created the heavens, the sun and the moon, and the planets in space... and he executed his decree upon the earth...humans...and animals wild and domestic... And indeed all things, apparent and hidden, are by His decree and determination, both in the past and in the future, except for what derives from God's command and prohibition to mankind... Praise and blame, reward and punishment, are attributable to humans alone, who have received His command and prohibition and have been given the capacity by Him to avoid what they had been forbidden and to do what they had been commanded (BL Or 4950, fol. 129b-130a = St Andrews 14, fol. 112b-113a).

7. *Recourse to Islamic language and style*

Though our author rails against those Christians who would make any accommodation with Islam, it is patently the case that, in language at least, he has himself made considerable steps towards Islam. In the first place, he makes use of some of the favourite disputation techniques of Islamic speculative theology (*kalām*), in particular the dilemmatic dialogue. This involves putting a number of closed questions (i.e. demanding a yes or no answer) to an antagonist that lead him either to agree with the protagonist or to fall into a logically or theologically absurd position. However, though very popular with Muslim theologians, it is true that this polemical strategy was used much by other religious groups as well. It was evidently an argumentative format well suited to debate over detailed and nuanced issues, and one can see from the fol-

[19] BL Or 4950, 126b, 127b = St Andrews 14, 109b, 110b.

lowing two examples that it took a very similar form in both Muslim and Christian circles:[20]

> Tell us: Did God will good for them and then establish it (hell) for them, or did he will evil for them? If they say, He willed good for them, it is said to them: How can that be when He made hell knowing that they would have no use for it and that it would only be harmful for them? And if they assert that He made hell for them in order to harm them, their doctrine is refuted (al-Hasan ibn Muhammad, *Questions against the Qadariyya*, no. 5, ca. 700 AD).
>
> That human will (of Christ) which you profess, was it good or bad? And if good, why did He (Christ) ask that it should not be. For according to your opinion, Christ did not take pleasure in good when He sought to annul his good will and asked that it should not be. And if they say it is bad, the absurdity is patent beyond concealment (*Questions against the Dyotheletes*, no. 3, ca. 680 AD).

The genre began first to blossom, it would seem, in the sixth century, when arguments over such intricate questions as whether Christ had one or two natures, one or two wills, were at their height, and conditions favoured the growth of an interrogative tool that would allow the clarification of subtly differentiated theological positions:

> If you also say that it was in the flesh that Christ underwent death and suffering, you are right. But I would like to know if the flesh is the same in substance as the nature of his divinity or if it is different. If the same, you are professing that God can suffer. If it is different in nature, albeit hypostatically united with God the word, why do you not agree that there are two natures in the one Christ?[21]

And one sees very much this same polemical method deployed by the author of "The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith", as in the following example:

> Ask them about their god who existed before the creation, did he have a spirit and word or did he have no spirit and no word? If they say he had a spirit and word, ask them about the spirit and word that already existed, is it god or other than god. If they say it is god, then they are describing Christ God, the spirit of God and his word, and the spirit and the word are God, and so Christ is God by their own admission. If they say that the spirit and word are other than god and do not co-exist with god, then (they are in difficulty because) what does not co-exist with him to the end is not single or one (as God is). And if they say that the spirit and the word are just created things, they are stripping (i.e. deanthropomorphizing) god by their assertion of his qualities of spirit and word (BL Or 4950, fol. 116a = St Andrews 14, fol. 98b).

[20] The following two pieces are cited in M. Cook, "The Origins of Kalam", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 32-43, at p. 37 and p. 35. I owe my acquaintance with this genre to conversations with Dr Fritz Zimmermann.

[21] John the Grammarian of Caesarea (fl. 520s), "17 Chapters against the Monophysites", in: M. Richard (ed.), *Iohannis Caesariensis presbyteri et grammatici Opera quae supersunt*, Corpus Christianorum Ser. Graeca 1, Turnhout, 1977, pp. 62-63.

In the second place, "The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith" is saturated with distinctively Islamic theological vocabulary. Of course, our author is writing in Arabic, so one would expect him to use quite a number of theological terms that are also used by Muslim Arabic-speakers, but he goes a lot further than that. He goes out of his way to deploy blatantly Islamic phraseology, referring, for example, to the prophets as *rusūl* (rather than simply *anbiyā'*), to Christ as "lord of the worlds" (*rabb al-'ālamīn*) and to dissimulating Christians as *munāfiqūn* (instead of a less loaded word like *mutaẓāhirūn*), all of which are overtly Qur'anic terms.

The point to note here is that the author could have chosen theologically neutral words, but he makes a deliberate decision to use Qur'anic vocabulary. Sometimes he even cites whole verses. Thus in the course of question 2 of chapter 18, on whether Christ is creator or created, he explains the incarnation as God's veiling himself behind human flesh, for "mankind has no access to the speech of God except 'by inspiration or from behind a veil'".[22] These last words are quoted directly from Qur'an 42.51 (though *bi-waḥy* instead of *waḥyan*), and quite cleverly twist the sense of the expression in the Qur'an to support the idea of the incarnation. Our author will also adopt typically Qur'anic literary structures, such as the way it opens a simile/parable with the construction: "the likeness (*mathal*) of x is the likeness (*ka-mathal*) of y".[23] This construction is not commonly used in standard Arabic prose; where it does occur, it is usually a self-conscious reference to the Qur'anic expression, and it is therefore highly significant that our author should choose to

[22] BL Or 4950, fol. 117b = St Andrews 14, fol. 100a; cited also by M. Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'an in some early Arabic Christian apologies", *Muslim World* 88 (1998), p. 300, who incorrectly states it to be in question 3 and on fol. 114r of BL Or 4950.

[23] Pointed out and examples adduced by B. Roggema, "King Parables in Melkite Apologetic Literature", in: R. Ebied and H. Teule (eds.), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage in honour of S.K. Samir*, Louvain, 2004, pp. 122-123. On the Qur'anic *mathal* see J.D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Leiden, 2001-2006, s.v. "form and structure", "language and style", "parable", "simile"; J. Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, London, 1977, pp. 239-243; R. Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, London, 2004, pp. 117-119; though none discusses the nature and origin of this construction, in particular the pleonasm *ka-mathal*.

employ it. Mark Swanson has recently emphasized that "the early Arabic Christian literature is not merely a literature of translation, in close relationship to Greek and Syriac exemplars; it is also a literature in some inter-textual relationship with the Qur'an".[24] "The comprehensive treatise on the tenets of the faith" certainly bears witness to this phenomenon and illustrates how much Christians of the ninth-century Middle East were becoming influenced by the Muslim intellectual worldview. It is to be hoped that this discovery of another relatively complete witness to this very interesting and significant text will facilitate the production of a critical edition and a more extended and in-depth discussion.

[24] Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting", p. 298. It is also a two-way process in that we see Muslims acting in a similar way towards the Bible; see D. Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), pp. 29-38.