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Can the Qur'ān be read in the light of Christ? Reflections on some Melkite authors and their use of the Holy Book of Islam

Introduction

The first Scripture for Christians was the Old Testament, which, however, they read in the light of Christ. For them, in disagreement with the Jews themselves, the prophecies of the OT regarding the Messiah were realized in Jesus Christ. In this case, Christians read the OT differently than did Jews, who continued to read the OT according to their tradition while refusing to accept Christ as the Messiah. The Qur'ān, however, accepts that Jesus Christ was *al-Masīh*, but rejects the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ as the incarnate Son of God the Father. This was, in fact, one of the main differences between the two religions. For their part, Christians, although they did not recognize prophecy in *Muḥammad*, used the Holy Book of Muslims in their different writings, especially as proof-texting for apologetic purposes.¹

¹ See among others, Gerrit Reinink, "Bible and Qur'ān in Early Syriac-Islamic Disputation", in Martin Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of Middle Ages*, col. «Beiruter Texte und Studien» 117 (Beirut-Würzburg: Ergon-Verl, 2007), pp. 57-72; Sidney Griffith, "The Qur'ān in Arab Christian texts; the development of an apologetic argument. Abū Qurrah in the *maglis* of al-Ma'mūn", *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999), pp. 203-233.

Some modern scholars, such as L. Massignon, I. Moubarak, M. Hayek and F. Daou, have tried to find a kind of prophecy in the Qur'ān from a Christian perspective: while the Qur'ān would be a prophecy post-Christ, chronologically speaking, they regarded it as theologically pre-Christ.² This approach was developed on the basis of the so-called “Abrahamic Religions”, and even if it sounds, in its ecumenical and interreligious context, significant it was criticized.³

In this paper, in the contrary, I would like to go back in time, to some of the first Arabic Christian writings of the Melkites in Palestine and Syria,⁴ and to examine their reading of the Qur'ān, their use of its verses and their application of the Christian exegesis on it. S. Griffith, who examined some medieval Arab-Christian texts, says that «while Christian apologists argued that the Qur'ān is a flawed scripture, they nevertheless also often quoted from it as a testimony to the truth»⁵. This opinion was rejected by C. E. Wilde who asserts that «Christian Arabic texts should not be used as a reliable indicator of the textual history of the Qur'ān, since it is difficult to determine if a Qur'ānic reference is a direct quotation, a paraphrase, or simply an allusion to an interpretation of a Qur'ānic passage».⁶ Even if Wilde's opinion was confuted in some way by M. Takawi,⁷ in this paper, I will examine again whether these early Arabic Christian texts, at least indirectly, could see a kind of divine inspiration in the Qur'ān. I mean, I aim to show that although they affirm that the Qur'ān remains the Holy Scripture of Muslims and not for Christians, they use it as a proof and confirmation of their Christian faith.

² Cf. Fadi Daou & Nayla Tabbara, *al-Rahabab al-ilāhiyyah: Labūt al-aḥar fī al-mashīyyah wa-l-islām* (Jounieh: al-Maktabah al-būlusiyah, 2011).

³ Concerning the whole discussion see Bishara Ebeid, “Le ‘religioni abramitiche’: due letture arabe”, in Andrea Pacini (ed.), *Raccontarsi e lasciarsi raccontare. Esperimenti di dialogo islamo-cristiano*, col. «Meticciati» 6 (Venezia: Marsilio, 2018), pp. 57-75 (e-book).

⁴ On this particular Christianity see Sidney Griffith, “The Church of Jerusalem and the ‘Melkites’: The Making of an ‘Arab Orthodox’ Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750-1050 CE)”, in Ora Limor & Gedaliahu Stroumsa (ed.), *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land. From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, col. «Cultural encounters in late antiquity and the Middle Ages» 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 173-202; Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, col. «Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World» (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁵ Cf. Sidney Griffith, “The Qur'ān in Arab Christian texts”, p. 204.

⁶ Cf. Clare E. Wilde, *Approaches to the Qur'an in Early Christian Arabic Texts (750-1258 C.E.)* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2014).

⁷ Cf. M Mourad Takawi, “The Trinity in Qur'anic Idiom: Q 4.171 and the Christian Arabic Presentation of the Trinity as God, his Word, and his Spirit”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 30 (2019), pp. 435-457, see especially the conclusion where the scholar asserts: “Mitigating the predominantly unilateral instrumentalist schemes that emphasize the process of Arabophone usages of the Qur'an as primarily exploitative or manipulative (e.g. Wilde 2014, p. 149), this article presents a model of elective affinity between the language of the verse and the rich tapestry of traditional Christian Trinitarian theology”.

In other words, I shall highlight a different reading of the Qur'ān: reading some of its verses in the light of Christ. A method that should be seen from a pastoral perspective and studied within the context of the Christians in the Islamic world when these texts were composed. This analysis aims also to understand the proposal and the eventual contribution of this reading of the Qur'ān to the modern interreligious dialogue.

This paper will start by presenting the authors and the texts taken into examination. Next follows an analysis of some examples from these texts where Christian authors use Qur'ānic verses as proof texts for Trinitarian dogma and Christological faith to arrive at the end to some finale concluding remarks.⁸

Texts and authors taken into examination

A) *An Apology for Christian Faith*

In 1899, Margaret Dunlop Gibson published an apologetic Arab Christian work that she found in a manuscript in the monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai which contains also an Arabic translation of the Acts of the Apostles and of the seven Catholic Epistles.⁹ The manuscript dates back to the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century, and is cataloged under the code Ms. Sinai Arabic 154.¹⁰ The scholar gave this work the title *On the Triune Nature of*

⁸ We are aware that recently there is a discussion regarding the validity of the function of isolated biblical verses as proof-texts for the Christian faith, Cf. Michael Allen & Scott Swaion, "In Defense of Proof-Texting", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (2011), pp. 589-606. The same one might also say concerning the consideration of isolated Qur'ānic verses as proof-texts for the Christian faith. Although the critics regarding this method by modern systematic theologians and some biblical scholars, it cannot be ignored that such a method was used by the Fathers of the Church and, in our case here, by Arab Christian authors. Therefore, even if for modern scholarship such a method risks to have an authentic validity, for those authors, and for lots of modern eastern Christian theologians and Muslim thinkers, such a method still has its authentic validity. The purpose of this paper, then, is not to demonstrate the validity of this method and its correctness; my aim, in fact, is to show simply 1) that it was used by some Christian Melkite authors as an exegetical method applied in their reading of the Qur'ān, and 2) how such method, even today, can be helpful for those Christians who leave among Muslims.

⁹ Cf. Margaret Gibson, *An Arabic version of the Acts of the Apostles and the seven Catholic Epistles from an eighth or ninth century ms. In the Convent of St Katherine on Mount Sinai, with a treatise On the Triune nature of God with translation, from the same codex*. Edited and translated by M. Gibson (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1899), English translation in pp. 2-36, Arabic text in pp. 74-107.

¹⁰ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid", in David Thomas & Barbara Roggema (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: (600-900), col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 11 (Leiden-

God.¹¹ Although this title fits the first part, the whole work is still today known among scholars and specialists under the title given by Gibson. We however, following the proposal of M. Swanson, will call this work *An Apology for Christian Faith*.¹²

Gibson was not able to read several places in the manuscript. Therefore, S. Kh. Samir re-read the published edition and checked again the manuscript, in an attempt to correct some errors that Gibson made in her reading, and he was indeed able to read some of the places that Gibson found difficult. In addition, Samir noted that there are some quotations from this apologetic work in another manuscript, which is today in the National Library of Paris under the code BNF Ms. 6725. Until today, we are still waiting for Samir's new and corrected edition of that work, so that we can complete our opinion regarding it, its content and its conclusion.¹³ Despite this delay, Samir, through two articles, offered some information on the corrections he applied to Gibson's text, and published some of the passages that Gibson was not able to read.¹⁴

One of the most important elements that Samir was able to read is the following sentence: «If this religion had not truly been from God, it would not have been established and would not have stood firm for 746 years!».¹⁵ This sentence helped scholars to determine the date of the composition of this work. Despite the disagreement among researchers on a specific and exact date of composition, we can be certain that this work is one of the first apologetic Christian works written in Arabic and known to us, and the date of its composition goes back towards the end of the Umayyad period.¹⁶ In fact, as A. Treiger has recently demonstrated, this

Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 330-333; Mark Swanson, "Some considerations for the dating of Fī tathlīth Allah al-wāḥid (Sinai ar. 154) and al-Ġāmi' wuḡūh al-īmān (London British Library or. 4950)", *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), pp. 115-141, here p. 117.

¹¹ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Beyond proof texting (2): The use of the Bible in some early Arabic Christian apologies", in David Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, col. «The History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 6 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 91-112, here p. 92. See also Rendel Harris, "A Tract on the Triune Nature of God", *American Journal of Theology* 5 (1901), pp. 75-86.

¹² Cf. Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", in Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), pp. 40-59, here p. 41.

¹³ Cf. Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", p. 40.

¹⁴ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c. 750)", in Samir Khalil Samir & Jorgen Nielsen (ed.), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, col. «Studies in the history of religions» 63 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 1994), pp. 57-60; Samir Khalil Samir, "Une apologie arabe du christianisme d'époque umayyade?", *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990-1991), pp. 5-106.

¹⁵ Cf. Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", p. 55.

¹⁶ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Some considerations", pp. 118-141.

apologetic work was composed between 753/754 or 754/755 A. D., i.e., the beginning of the second half of the 8th century.¹⁷

It is known that a monk by the name *Mūsā al-Sina'i* copied the manuscript Ms. Sinai Arabic 154,¹⁸ but he, unfortunately, did not mention the name of the author of the apology, who remains unknown to this day. Scholars were able to confirm that the work was written by a unique author¹⁹ who belonged to the Melkite Church and was a monk in the region of Judaea or Sinai.²⁰ Particularities in his Arabic prove that he was an inhabitant of Palestine; we know that he also spoke Aramaic, since the work is full of influences of Aramaic-Syriac language of the region.²¹ Indeed, the author's language belongs to what J. Blau called the "Old Arabic of South Palestine", the language used by Christians who lived in South Palestine, that is, from Judaea to Sinai.²² Our work, then, is a Christian apology²³ written in the spoken Arabic²⁴ of South Palestine. Despite the simplicity of the work, it shows that the author knew very well the Bible, the tradition of his Church,²⁵ as well as the Qur'ān and Islamic doctrine until his time.²⁶ In this paper I will use the English partial translation of M. Swanson,²⁷ and that of M. Gibson for the passages that are not translated by Swanson. I will also offer in footnotes the Arabic text according to Gibson's edition.²⁸

¹⁷ Cf. Alexander Treiger, "New Works by Theodore Abū Qurra Preserved under the Name of Thaddeus of Edessa", *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 68 (2016), pp. 1-51, here pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Some considerations", p. 117.

¹⁹ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c. 750)", pp. 60-61.

²⁰ Cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, p. 57.

²¹ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c. 750)", p. 107.

²² Cf. Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic. Based mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium Fasc. Introduction-Orthography & Phonetics-Morphology*, col. «Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium» 267, «Subsidia 27» (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966), p. 22.

²³ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Beyond proof texting (2)", p. 92.

²⁴ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c. 750)", pp. 65, 107-108.

²⁵ Cf. David Bertina, "The development of testimony collections in early Christian apologetics with Islam", in David Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, col. «The History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 6 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 151-173, here p. 163.

²⁶ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid", pp. 330-331.

²⁷ Cf. Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", pp. 42-58.

²⁸ To be noted that there is also an Italian translation with introduction and comments, see Maria Gallo., *Palestinese anonimo: Omelia arabo-cristiana dell'VIII secolo*. Translated and commented by M. Gallo, col. «Testi patristici» 116 (Rome: Città nuova, 1994).

B) *Al-Muğādalab* between *Abū Qurrah* and *al-Ma'mūn*

Theodore Abū Qurrah was born in the city of Edessa (*al-Rabā*), likely between 740 and 755 AD. He studied medicine, philosophy, theology, and spoke Greek, Syriac and Arabic. According to some sources—although scholars today dispute this as a matter of historical fact²⁹—he became a monk in the monastery of St. Saba in the desert of Judea that belonged to the Melkite Church. In the monastery, he studied in depth the Bible and the Church Fathers. Despite the doubt regarding this information, a connection of our author with the monastic life of Palestine is probable. He frequently went to Jerusalem for religious rituals. He was consecrated in the year 795 the Bishop of the city of *Harrān* (today in south Turkey at the border with Syria). According to one source,³⁰ Abū Qurrah left the episcopate, or he was deposed, and returned to Jerusalem, to his monastery, and spent his time studying and writing. It is known also that for many years he was the theologian of the Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem Thomas I (807-820). He was sent to Armenia where he had a dispute with the Miaphysite theologian Nonnus of Nisibis. Such a dispute probably took place between the years 813-817.³¹ He traveled also to Baghdad and participated in dialogues with Muslim scholars (*Mutakallimūn*) and with other Christian theologians of different confessions. In the year 829, he met with the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 833) and as requested by the Caliph, he participated in a dispute with Muslim scholars of the *Mu'tazilab*.³² Abū Qurrah died shortly after this dispute, probably in the year 830.³³ He wrote in Arabic, Greek and Syriac, and his

²⁹ Cf. John Lamoreaux, “The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah Revisited”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002), pp. 25-40.

³⁰ Cf. John Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah*. Translated by J. Lamoreaux, col. «Library of the Christian East» 1 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), pp. xiii-xv; John Lamoreaux, “Theodore Abu Qurrah”, in Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), pp. 60-89, here p. 61.

³¹ Cf. John Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah*, pp. xvii-xviii; John Lamoreaux, “Theodore Abu Qurrah”, p. 61.

³² Concerning the literal genre of the disputation in the Emir's courts see Sidney Griffith, “The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period”, in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (ed.), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, col. «Studies in Arabic language and literature» 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), pp. 13-65, here pp. 13-17 and pp. 60-65.

³³ For more details regarding his life see Najib Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms. A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context*, col. «Judaism, Christianity and Islam» 3 (Boston-Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Wafik Nasry, *The Caliph and the Bishop. A 9th Century Muslim-Christian Debate. Al-Ma'mūn and Abū Qurrah*. Translated by W. Nasry, col. «Textes et études sur l'orient chrétien» 5 (Beirut: CEDRAC, Université Saint Joseph, 2008), pp. 89-94; John Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurrah*, pp. xi-xvii; John Lamoreaux, “Theodore Abu Qurrah”, pp. 60-65; John Lamoreaux, “The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah Revisited”, pp. 25-40; John Lamoreaux,

literary corpus is large, even though not all the works attributed to him should be considered authentic.³⁴

In this paper, I am interested in the dispute of Abū Qurrah with the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. We know that the dispute really took place since it is mentioned by the historians of the time. In the last century, however, there was considerable debate among scholars concerning whether the text that reached us by a large number of manuscripts describes actually, what happened at al-Ma'mūn's court from the perspective of Abū Qurrah himself, or a composite dispute attributed to him. The editor of the critical text, W. Nasry, after making a detailed and in depth analysis of the content of the dispute, comparing it with other writings of Abū Qurrah, and searching for the historical information regarding the dispute, as well as, other points that we cannot present here, argued the authenticity of work and maintained that the content of the dispute and its doctrine scan be indeed attributed to Abū Qurrah. Moreover, he concluded that the text, as it arrived to us through the manuscripts, is not the one which, according to Michael the Syrian, was written by Abū Qurrah himself.³⁵ Even if there are still doubts among scholars regarding the authenticity of attributing this text to Abū Qurrah, it was chosen to be analyzed in this paper. We follow the English translation made by Nasry³⁶ giving in footnote the Arabic text of his critical edition.³⁷

“Theodore Abū Qurra”, David Thomas & Barbara Roggema (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: (600-900), col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 11 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 439-491; Sidney Griffith, “Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah”, *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), pp. 143-170; Alexander Treiger, “New Works by Theodore Abū Qurra”, pp. 1-51; Samir Khalil Samir, *Abū Qurrah: al-Sirah wa-l-marāğīʿ*, col. «Mawsūʿat al-maʿrifah al-masīhiyyah, al-Fikr al-ʿarabī al-masīhī» 1 (Beirut: Dar al-mašriq, 2000); Samir Khalil Samir, *Abū Qurrah: al-Muʿallafāt*, col. «Mawsūʿat al-maʿrifah al-masīhiyyah, al-Fikr al-ʿarabī al-masīhī» 2 (Beirut: Dar al-mašriq, 2000).

³⁴ For more details see John Lamoreaux, “Theodore Abu Qurrah”, p. 61 and the references there.

³⁵ Cf. Wafik Nasry, *The Caliph and the Bishop*, pp. 94-123.

³⁶ Cf. Wafik Nasry, *The Caliph and the Bishop*, pp. 171-270.

³⁷ Cf. Wafik Nasry, *Abū Qurrah wa-l-Maʿmūn: al-Muğādalab*. Edited by W. Nasry col. «al-Turāṭ al-ʿarabī al-masīhī» 25 (Beirut: CEDRAC, Université Saint Joseph, 2010, 94-254).

C) *Al-Muǧādalah* between Abraham of Tiberias and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī

The third text taken into examination is a dispute occurred at the court of the Emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī³⁸ when he was in the city of Jerusalem. The debate happened between the Emir and other Muslim *Mutakallimūn* on the one hand,³⁹ and a monk of Galilee named *Ibrāhīm* (Abraham), belonging to the Melkite Church.⁴⁰ Whether this dispute truly took place remains a point of debate among scholars.⁴¹ Nothing in the text, in its contents and the persons’ names mentioned in it, can prevent its historicity.⁴² The information we possess on the monk

³⁸ «His full name, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Šālīh ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abdillāh ibn al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalīb, tells us that he was a lineal descendant of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalīb, the Prophet’s grandfather, and of al-‘Abbās, the Prophet’s uncle and progenitor of the Abbasid dynasty ruling at the time. His father, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Šālīh ibn ‘Alī, was a cousin of the first two Abbasid caliphs and a distinguished pillar of the dynasty most of his life. No source records ‘Abd al-Raḥmān as the governor of the district of Palestine, but his family had strong connections to Syria and owned estates in Palestine, especially at Ramlah», Krisztina Szilágyi, “The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias”, in Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), pp. 90-111, 300-308, here footnote 5 p. 300, see also Paul Cobb, *White Banners: Contention in ‘Abbasid Syria, 750-880*, col. «SUNY series in medieval Middle East history» (Albany: State University of New York Press 2001), pp. 27-31 and footnote 41 on p. 157; Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade avec ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*. Edited and translated by G.-B. Marcuzzo, col. «Textes et tudes sur l’orient chrétien» 3 (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1986), pp. 120-127; Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tibériade, Dialogo con l’Emiro ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī. Un dialogo islamo-cristiano ambientato a Gerusalemme agli inizi del IX secolo*. Translated by D. Righi, col. «Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano» 13 (Bologna: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2018), pp. 71-72 and footnotes 108, 109 in these pages; Muḥib al-dīn abī Sa‘īd ‘Umar b. Ğurāmah al-‘Amrūrī, *Ibn. ‘Asākir. Tārḥ madīnat Dimašq wa ḍikr faḍlihā wa tasmīyat man ḥallahā min al-amāṭil aw iġtāza bi-nawāḥihā min wāridihā wa-ahlihā*. Edited by al-‘Amrūrī, part 37 (Beirut, Dar al-fikr, 1996), pp. 22-23.

³⁹ Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 127-133; Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tibériade*, pp. 71-73 and footnotes 110-112 in these pages.

⁴⁰ Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 106-120. See also Georges Vajda, “Un traité de polémique chrétienne-arabe contre les juifs attribué à ‘Abraham de Tibériade”, *Bulletin: Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes* 15 (1967-1968), pp. 137-150.

⁴¹ Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 97-105; Davide Righi, “The Dialog Attributed to Abraham of Tiberias: New Research of his Historical Environment”, *Parole de l’Orient* 34 (2009), pp. 35-49; Mark Swanson, “The Disputation of the monk Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī”, in David Thomas & Barbara Roggema (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: (600-900), col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 11 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 876-881; Krisztina Szilágyi, “The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias”, pp. 90-93; Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tibériade*, pp. 53-71.

⁴² Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 95-133; Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tibériade*, pp. 53-71.

Abraham remains this that the same work offers to us. If this debate happened truly, it probably might be occurred between the years 813-838 in the city of Jerusalem.⁴³ It must be mentioned however that some scholars, such as K. Szilágyi, have some doubts concerning the authenticity of the text, not however regarding the historicity of a real debate that took place in Jerusalem. The text is considered as fictionalized account by an anonymous author of Palestine who heard about a real disputation in Jerusalem between the Emir and a Christian theologian, and he wrote this disputation. As a result, they date it after 840.⁴⁴ The text, according to its Melkite recension (*alpha*),⁴⁵ is critically edited and translated into French by G-B. Marcuzzo.⁴⁶ In addition, Szilágyi published an English translation of some parts of this disputation.⁴⁷ Since Szilágyi did not translate the passages I quote here, the English translation provided is mine; the Arabic text in the footnote is that of Marcuzzo's edition.

D) Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*

The last text taken into consideration in this paper is the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* written by the Melkite Bishop of Sidon, Paul, probably during the first half of the 13th century.⁴⁸ Information

⁴³ Cf. Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tiberiade*, pp. 69-71.

⁴⁴ Cf. K. Krisztina Szilágyi, "The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias", pp. 91-92; For more details on this text see Krisztina Szilágyi, "Christian Learning about Islam in the Early 'Abbāsid Caliphate: The Muslim Sources of the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias*", in Jens J Scheiner & Damien Janos (ed.), *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750-1000 C.E.*, col. «Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam» 26 (Princeton: Darwin Press, Inc., 2014), pp. 267-342, here pp. 269-280.

⁴⁵ In fact, already in the year 1908 Karl Vollers had published a German translation of these same texts according to a Nestorian and more developed recension, Cf. Karl Voller, "Das Religionsgespräch von Jerusalem (um 800 AD)" in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 29 (1908), pp. 29-71, 197-221, which Marcuzzo calls recension *beta* while the Melkite *alpha*, Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade*, pp. 200-208. The Arabic text of recension *beta* is still unedited, but in 1993 N. A. Newman published an English translation based on the German translation, Cf. N. A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue. A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632-900 A.D.)*, (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), pp. 269-353.

⁴⁶ Cf. Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tiberiade*. A publication of the same edition and an Italian translation with introduction and comment was published recently by Davide Righi, Cf. Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tiberiade*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Krisztina Szilágyi, "The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias", pp. 93-110.

⁴⁸ Cf. David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch", in David Thomas, Alexander Mallett & Juan Pedro Monferrer (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4: (1200-1350), col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 17 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 78-82, here p. 78.

about the life of Paul is scarce.⁴⁹ It is known that he was a monk from Antioch, and that at an uncertain date became the Melkite Bishop of Sidon.⁵⁰ He wrote a variety of works on different topics, mainly theological, such as Trinitarian doctrine, Christology, the Unity of God etc., and his writings bear the apologetic motive of defending his faith in front of non-Christians, Muslims and Jews, and other Christian confessions, Miaphysites and Nestorians.⁵¹ A large number of his authentic works are edited and translated into French by P. Khoury.⁵² Several other works attributed to him, edited and translated into German by M. Horten⁵³ and G. Graf,⁵⁴ are considered today non authentic. A significant number, however, of his works remain unedited.⁵⁵

Concerning his *Letter to a Muslim Friend* there is no doubt regarding its authenticity. According to Griffith, it was written before 1232,⁵⁶ other scholars date it about 1200.⁵⁷ It is a letter in which the Bishop of Sidon answers some questions of a Muslim friend concerning the opinion of the Byzantines regarding Islam, the Qur'ān and the prophet Muḥammad. According to the text of the letter, Paul had made a Journey in the Land of the *Rūm* (Byzantines) and visited Constantinople, Rome and other places.⁵⁸ Scholars today consider the journey fictional, a literary device created by Paul, and reject that the travel took place as a point of fact.⁵⁹ As a consequence, they do not see behind Paul's text a reply to a Muslim, at least in the direct sense.⁶⁰ According to them, the primary audience of Paul is Arab-speaking

⁴⁹ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: Auteurs chrétiens de langue arabe; Būlusar-Rāhib al-Anṭākī (fin XIIe-début XIIIe siècle)", *Islamochristiana*2 (1976), pp. 232-236.

⁵⁰ Cf. David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch", p. 78.

⁵¹ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", in Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), pp. 216-235, here p. 216; David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 78-79.

⁵² Cf. Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche. Évêque de Sidon (XIIe s.)*. Edited and translated by P. Khoury, col. «Recherches, Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth» 24 (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1964).

⁵³ Cf. Max Horten, "Paulus, Bischof von Sidon (XIII. Jahrh.): Einige seiner philosophischen Abhandlungen", *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 19 (1906), pp. 144-166.

⁵⁴ Cf. Georg Graf, "Philosophisch-theologische Schriften des Paulus al-Rāhib, Bischofs von Sidon", *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und speculative Theologie* 20 (1906), pp. 55-80, 160-179.

⁵⁵ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 216.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 217.

⁵⁷ Cf. David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 80-81; for a detailed analysis and examination concerning the date of this Letter see Samir Khalil Samir, "Notes sur la 'Lettre à un musulman de Sidon' de Paul d'Antioche", in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 24 (1993), pp. 179-195.

⁵⁸ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 217-218.

⁵⁹ Cf. David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 80-81.

⁶⁰ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 218.

Christians “to whom he hoped to show how Christian convictions can be reasonably explained from a Christian perspective in the learned discourse of the now dominant Islamic intellectual establishment, including a Christian reading of passages of the Quran”.⁶¹ Recently, however, A. Treiger maintains that the Muslim friend might be identified with Abū al-Surūr al-Tinnīsī, to whom Paul wrote another letter known as *Response to a Muslim Ṣayb*. Treiger also sustains that Paul’s *Letter to a Muslim Friend* should be considered an elaboration of Paul’s *Treatise on the Oneness [of God] and the [Hypostatic] Union*, where he clarifies, as requested by *Abū al-Surūr*, the Christian faith on Trinity and Incarnation.⁶² In this paper, I follow the English translation made by Griffith⁶³ giving in footnote the Arabic text of Khoury’s edition.⁶⁴

The Qur'ān as a proof-text for Trinitarian doctrine

In some of its verses, the Qur'ān accuses some Christians, or better to say, a group of the People of the Book (*ahl al-Kitāb*), to be infidels or polytheists, as in the following⁶⁵:

Indeed, they who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture and the polytheists will be in the fire of Hell, abiding eternally therein. Those are the worst of creatures. (Q 98:6)
Say, “O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah”. But if they turn away, then say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]”. (Q 3:64)

⁶¹ Cf. Sidney Griffith, “Islam and Orthodox Theology in Arabic: «The Melkite» Tradition from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries”, in Zachary Chitwood & Johannes Pahlitzsch (ed.), *Ambassadors, Artists, Theologians Byzantine Relations with the Near East from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries*, col. «Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident» 12 (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2019), pp. 239-249, here p. 239.

⁶² Cf. Alexander Treiger, “Paul of Antioch’s Responses to a Muslim Sheikh”, in David Bertaina, Sandra Keating, Mark Swanson & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *Heirs of the Apostles: Studies in Arabic Christianity in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith*, col. «Arab Christianity» 1 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 333-346.

⁶³ Cf. Sidney Griffith, “Paul of Antioch”, pp. 219-235.

⁶⁴ Cf. Paul Khoury, *Paul d’Antioche*, pp. 59-83. To mention that there is also a Spanish translation with an introduction and notes, see Diego Cucarella, “Carta a un amigo musulmán de Sidón de Pablo de Antioquía”, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 4 (2007), pp. 189-215; see also a French translation with introduction and comments, Louis Buffat, “Lettre de Paul, évêque de Saïda, moine d’Antioche, à un musulman de ses amis demeurant à Saïda”, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 8 (1903), pp. 388-425.

⁶⁵ In this paper, for the Qur’ānic text I follow the English translation in <https://quran.com/?local=en> (accessed 11/05/2021).

In other places those who are accused of tritheism are not mentioned by name, they are considered however, infidels. Usually, such verses, as the following, are seen also against Christians, or a group of Christians:

They have certainly disbelieved who say, “Allah is the third of three”. And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment. (Q 5:73)

Even if the verse quoted above does not define who the unbelievers are, and what is really intended by “third of three” (*talit talatah*), reading the verses that precede and follow it⁶⁶ one might notice that the unbelievers are probably followers of Christ that consider Him God.⁶⁷

Some modern Muslim thinkers and scholars, however, believe that the Qur’anic verses that condemn the belief in three gods by some of the People of the Book are actually verses against the teaching of tritheism and not the Christian Trinity.⁶⁸ Since such an opinion is still in discussion, I will not enter into more details, what is important for this analysis is to notice that many Muslim *Mutakallimūn* read such verses as polemics against Christians, considering them polytheists, unbelievers and infidels.⁶⁹

Paul of Antioch, quoting other Qur’anic verses, tries to show his readers the opposite opinion, that the Qur’ān does not consider Christians polytheists:

Moreover [in this passage the Quran] specifically denies that the name ‘polytheism’ applies to us by saying, ‘The Jews and those who practice polytheism are the strongest in enmity toward those who believe, and the Christians are the closest to them in affection.’ (Q 5:82) It had already made this point clear when it said, ‘Those who believe, those who act as Jews, the Christians, the

⁶⁶ Cf. Q 5: 72-77.

Cf. Jaako Hämeen-Anttila, “Christians and Christianity in the Quran”, in David Thomas & Barbara Roggema (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: (600-900), col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 11 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 21-30, here pp. 23-24; Sidney Griffith, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur’an’: Who Were Those Who Said ‘Allah Is Third of Three’ according to *al-Ma’ida* 73?”, in Meir Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa & Bruno Chiesa, (ed.), *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Bible and the Quran* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2007), pp. 83-110.

⁶⁸ Cf. Fadi Daou & Nayla Tabbara, *al-Rahābah al-ilāhiyyah*, pp. 149-151.

⁶⁹ One might mention the *Letter about the refutation of the Christians* by al-Ġāhiz or the *Refutation of the Christians* by al-Ṭabarī, for more details see Mun’im Sirry, “Early Muslim-Christian dialogue: a closer look at major themes of the theological encounter”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16 (2005), pp. 361-376, here pp. 363-365.

Sabeans, and those who practice polytheism.' (cf. Q 22:17; 32:25) God will distinguish between them in regard to that about which they differ.⁷⁰

The anonymous author of the *Apology for Christian Faith* also uses the same Qur'ān to defend his Trinitarian doctrine and to prove it through a Christian reading and exegesis of some of Qur'ānic verses:

Also, God said in the Torah: "Let Us create the human according to Our likeness and pattern." (Gen 1:26) God (may His name be blessed!) did not say, "I created the human" but, rather, "We created the human," in order that human beings might know that God, by His Word and His Spirit, created all things and gave life to all things. He is the All-Creating, the All-Knowing. You will find it in the Quran: "We created humanity in affliction," (Q 94:4) and "We opened the gates of heaven with water pouring down." (Q 54:11) And it said: "They shall come to Us individually, as We created them at first." (Q 6:94) And it said: "Believe in God and His Word," (Q 4:171?) and also, with regard to the Holy Spirit, "But the Holy Spirit shall reveal it from your Lord as mercy and guidance." (Q 16:102).⁷¹

It is clear that for our author the plural used for God in the OT, as in Gen 1:26, is a proof that God is Trinitarian.⁷² This was, in fact, the way early Christians and the patristic tradition read the plural forms attributed to God in the OT: these plurals indicate and reveal the three divine persons.⁷³ Referring, then, to such verses and interpreting them in this way was not novel on the part of this anonymous author; what is important, however, and is to be considered a

⁷⁰ Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 224; « ونفى عنا اسم الشرك بقوله "اليهود والذين اشركوا اشد عداوة للذين امنوا، والنصارى اقربهم مودة". وقد اوضح هذا ايضا بقوله: "ان الذين امنوا والذين هادوا والنصارى والصابيين والذين اشركوا، ان الله يفصل بينهم فيما كانوا فيه يختلفون". وليس انه نفى عنا اسم الشرك فقط، بل ووضح ان لا ميزة لغيرنا عنا، بقوله: "ان الذين امنوا والذين هادوا والنصارى والصابيين، من امن بالله وباليوم الاخر وعمل صالحا، فلهم اجرهم عند ربهم ولا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون". فساوا بهذا.»، Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 67.

⁷¹ Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", p. 46; « وكذلك قال الله في التوراة "نخلق الانسان على شبينها وتمثالنا"، ولم يقل الله تبارك اسمه "اني خلقت الانسان"، ولا كنه قال "انا خلقنا الانسان"، ليعلم الناس ان الله بكلمته وروحه خلق كل شيء واحيا كل شيء وهو الخلاق العليم. وتجذونه في القرآن "انا خلقنا الانسان في كبد" و "انا فتحنا ابواب السما بما منهمر". قال "تاتونا فرادى كما خلقناكم اول مرة". وقال "آمنوا بالله وكلمته". وايضا في روح القدس، "بل تنزله روح القدس من ربك رحمة وهدى" Margaret Gibson, *An Arabic version*, p. 7.

⁷² Cf. Scott Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an. A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Qur'an in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Company, 2016), p. 71.

⁷³ Cf. Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, vol. 1: *The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, col. «Bible in ancient Christianity» 1 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 612.

renewal in Christian thought, is that he applies the same exegetical methods Christians used in their reading for the OT to the Qur'ānic verses that use the plural form for God. In the aforementioned passage, it is notable that all Qur'ānic quotations with plural forms attributed to God come from the context of creation. In this way the author tries to make a real comparison between the texts he quotes from the OT, precisely from the Book of Genesis, and from the Qur'ān. In addition, according to our author's reading, the last two Qur'ānic quotations show the belief of Muslims in God, His Word and His Spirit, an indication, from his perspective, to the three persons of the Trinity.⁷⁴ The selection of these Qur'ānic verses, where it is mentioned the Word and the Spirit of God, is related to the verses the same author quotes from the OT where also there is a mention of the Word and the Spirit of God.⁷⁵ This correspondence demonstrates again the desire of our anonymous author to apply his Christian reading and exegesis of the OT to the same Qur'ān: the use of the plural form to God and the mention of the Word of God and His Spirit as an indication, revelation and even proof of the Trinitarian dogma.⁷⁶

Consequently, one might wonder if the author puts the Qur'ān and the Bible on the same level, or to say it in other words, if the Qur'ān and the Bible have the same status as revelation for Christians. A *prima facie* reading of the above quotation would suggest a positive response,

⁷⁴ See in regards the analysis of Mourad Takawi, "The Trinity in Qur'anic Idiom", 435-457, where he studies the exegesis of the Word and the Spirit of God in four Arab Christian authors, among them our Apology and the *Muḡādalab* attributed to Abū Qurrah.

⁷⁵ Cf. Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", p. 44: «Likewise, it is written at the beginning of the Torah (which God revealed to His prophet Moses on Mount Sinai): "In the beginning, God created heaven and the earth." (Gen 1:1) Then He said: "The Spirit of God was upon the waters." (Gen 1:2) And then He said by His Word: "'Let there be light,' and there was light." (Gen 1:3) Then He said: "'Let there be a firmament,' and there was a firmament" (Gen 1:6-7) —which is the lower heaven. Then He said: "'Let the earth give growth to herbage and greenery and fruit-bearing trees,' etc., and 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures-with-breath: wild animals and cattle, beasts of prey and beasts of burden,' and it was so." (Gen 1:11, 24) Then He said: "'Let the waters bring forth of every sort possessing breath, and every bird flying in heaven, according to their kinds and genera,' and it was so." (Gen 1:20) And then He said: "'Let Us create the human according to Our likeness and pattern." (Gen 1:26) Thus God announced clearly at the beginning of a scripture that He revealed to His prophet Moses that God and His Word and His Spirit are one god, and that God (may He be blessed and exalted!) created all things and gave life to all things by His Word and His Spirit.

⁷⁶ It is important to mention that this reading of the Qur'ānic verses is considered important by modern scholars to the interreligious dialogue, see among others the proposal of Jonas Jørgensen, "Word of God' and 'Spirit of God' in Christian and Islamic Christologies: A Starting Point for Interreligious Dialogue?", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20 (2009), pp. 389-407. The approach, in fact, of our authors can be very helpful for Jørgensen's proposal.

but if we continue reading the text carefully, we should note a subsequent important point. The author, in fact, says:

What could be more clarifying and enlightening than this, when we find in the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospel, and you [Muslims] find it in the Quran, that God and His Word and His Spirit are one god and one Lord? You have been commanded to believe in God and His Word and His Spirit. So why do you fault us, O people, for believing in God and His Word and His Spirit, and worshipping God with His Word and His Spirit: one god, one Lord, and one Creator? God has announced clearly in all the scriptures that the matter is thus in [the way of] guidance and the religion of truth. Whoever is at variance with this has nothing to stand on.⁷⁷

The author then makes a distinction between, on the one hand, his group (Christians) and says «we find in the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospel», and on the other hand, the group of Muslims to whom he addresses his words saying «and you [Muslims] find it in the Quran». Our author then, as Griffith notes, does not consider the Qur'ān a Holy Book for Christians; it is the Muslims' Scripture. But at the same time he reads the Qur'ān in a Christian way, trying to prove that the Christian teaching on the Trinity is found also in the Qur'ān and that therefore Muslims should not accuse Christians of being polytheists or tritheists.⁷⁸ Of course, his use of the Qur'ān, quoting some of its verses as proof-texts, manifests his attempt to read the Qur'ān in a Christian way, a pastoral instrument through which he tried to warn his Christian audience, as Samir notes, not to become Muslims since Islam and its Holy Book do not deny the Christian faith.⁷⁹

The same mechanism of exegesis is found in Paul of Antioch when he tries to demonstrate that God, His Word and His Spirit are one God for Christians. Paul asserts that since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit correspond to God, His Word and His Life, it might be

⁷⁷ Mark Swanson, "An Apology for Christian Faith", p. 46; « فإذا ابين من هذه وانور حين نجد في التوراة والانبياء والزبور والانجيل. وانتم تجدونه في القرآن ان الله وكلمته وروحه اله واحد ورب واحد. وقد أمرتم ام تؤمنوا بالله وكلمته وروح القدس فلم تعيبيوا علينا ايها الناس ان تؤمن بالله وكلمته وروحه ونعبد الله بكلمته وروحه، اله واحد ورب واحد وخالق واحد. والله قد بين في الكتب كلها ان الامر على ذلك في الهدى ودين الحق، فمن خالف على هذا فليس على شي 78.

⁷⁸ Cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, pp. 55-56; Sidney Griffith, "The Qur'ān in Arab Christian texts", pp. 215-216.

⁷⁹ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir, "The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c. 750)", p. 109; Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, p. 56.

affirmed that God is a rational entity and a living being:⁸⁰ the Father is the essence; the Son-Word is the rationality and the Holy Spirit is the life.⁸¹ Also Paul, as the anonymous author, quotes first some verses from the OT, where there is a references to the Spirit and Word of God, then he mentions Matthew 28:19-20 where it is said that Christ ordained His apostles to baptize in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit:

Regarding these names, we Christians do not name Him with them on our own accord. Rather, God, exalted be He, named His own divinity with these [names]. Here is what He said, addressing the sons of Israel, on the tongue of Moses, 'Is not this the Father who made you, created you, and took you for His own?' (Deut 32:6) Also on the tongue of Moses, the prophet, 'God's Spirit was hovering over the waters.' (Gen 1:2) There is also what He said on the tongue of David, the prophet, 'Do not take Your Holy Spirit away from me.' (Ps 51:11) Also on the tongue of David, the prophet, 'By the Word of God, the heavens are strengthened, and by the Spirit of His mouth all their powers.' (Ps 33:6) There is also His saying on the tongue of Job the Righteous, 'The Spirit of God created me, and He teaches me.' (Job 33:4) There is what He says on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah, 'The flower dries up, and the grass too dries up, but the Word of God lasts forever.' (Isa 40:7-8) There is our Lord Christ's saying to His pure disciples in the holy Gospel, 'Go to all the peoples, baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to keep all that I commanded you.' (Matt 28:19-20).⁸²

After putting the OT and the NT in the same level, Paul adds verses from the Qur'ān where there is a mention and a reference to God's Spirit and Word:

⁸⁰ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 225-226: «I said, "[The Muslims] criticize us for our saying Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." [The learned Byzantines] said, "Had they known that when we say this, we intend only to give a sound basis to the statement that God, exalted be He, is a living, rational entity, they would not criticize us for it».

⁸¹ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 226: «The three names are the one God, an eternal, never-ending, living, rational thing. For us the essence is the Father, the Son is the rationality, and the life is the Holy Spirit. [God's life] comes up in the Quran, 'God, there is no god but He, the living one, the everlasting one.' (Q 2:255)».

⁸² Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 226; « وهذه الاسماء، فلم نسمه نحن النصارى بها من ذوات انفسنا، بل الله تعالى اسما « Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 70. لا هوته بها. وذلك قوله على لسان موسى النبي مخاطبا لبني اسرائيل: "ليس هذا الاب الذي صنعك وبراك واقتناك؟" وايضا على لسان موسى النبي: "وكان روح الله يرف على الماء". وقوله على لسان داوود النبي: "روحك القدوس لا تنزع مني". وايضا على لسان داوود النبي: "بكلمة الله تشددت السماوات، وروح فيه جميع قواهن". وقوله على لسان ايوب الصديق: "روح الله خلقتني وهو يعلني". وقوله على لسان اشعيا النبي: "يبس القناد ويحسف العشب، وكلمة الله باقية الى الابد". وقول السيد المسيح في الانجيل المقدس لتلاميذه الاطهار: "اذهبوا الى سائر الامم، واعمدوهم باسم الاب والابن والروح القدس، وعلموهم ان يحفظوا جميع ما اوصيتكم به".

In this scripture [the Quran] it also says, 'He is the One who gives life and brings death. When He determines something He just says to it, "Be," and it comes to be.' (Q 4:68) There is also, 'Our Word has come before to our good servants.' (Q 37:171) And also, 'God said, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, will call My blessing down upon You and upon Your mother; I have aided You by the Holy Spirit.'" (Q 4:164) Also, 'God spoke with Moses in a conversation.' (Q 5:110) Also, 'Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, is the one who guarded her private parts and We breathed of Our Spirit into them. She affirmed the truth of her Lord's words and of His scriptures; she was one of the humble ones.' (Q 66:12) All the Muslims say that the Quran is God's speech; only someone who is alive and rational has speech.⁸³

Paul, then, has as basis the traditional Trinitarian Triad "God the Alive and the Rational", a rational approach used by Christians to explain the Trinitarian dogma.⁸⁴ This triad, Paul argues, is affirmed by Muslims since they believe that the Qur'ān is God's speech and that whoever possesses speech is alive and rational being.⁸⁵ God gives life through His Spirit, which is His

⁸³ Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", p. 227; « وقد قال في هذا الكتاب: "هو الذي يحيي ويميت. واذا قضى امرا، انما يقول له: كن. فيكون". وايضا: "ولقد سبقت كلمتنا الى عبادنا الصالحين". وايضا: "واذ قال الله: يا عيسى بن مريم، اذكر نعمتي عليك وعلى والدتك، اذ ايدتك بالروح القدس". وايضا: "وكلم الله موسى تكليما". وايضا: "مريم ابنة عمران التي احصنت فرجها، فنفخنا فيه من روحنا. وصدقت بكلمات ربها وكتبه. وكانت من القانتين". وسائر المسلمين يقولون ان الكتاب كلام الله، ولا يكون كلام الا لحي ناطق.», Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, pp. 70-71.

⁸⁴ On the Trinitarian Triads, its relation to the divine attributes and the Trinitarian analogies see the following: Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, Harvard University Press 1976), pp. 112-232; David Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era", in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 78-98; Sidney Griffith, "The Unity and Trinity of God: Christian Doctrinal Development in Response to the Challenge of Islam - An Historical Perspective", in Michael Root & James Buckley (ed.), *Christian Theology and Islam*, col. «Pro ecclesia series» 2 (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co 2014), pp. 11-21; Sara Leila Hussein, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century C.E.)*, col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Rachid Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750-1050*, col. «Beauchesne Religions» 15 (Paris: Beauchesne, imp., 1985), pp. 187-246; Bishara Ebeid, *La Tunica di al-Masih. La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane dell'Oriente nel X e XI secolo* (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana - Valore italiano, 2019), pp. 293-320, 453-476; Bishara Ebeid, "The Trinitarian doctrine of Ibn at-Tayyib: An interpretation of Babai the Great's metaphysical system in the world of Islam", *Parole de l'Orient* 44 (2018), pp. 93-131, here pp. 119-123.

⁸⁵ Cf. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 112-232; William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), pp. 242-249; Richard Frank, *Beings and their Attributes. The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1978); Albert Nader, *Le système philosophique des Mu'tazila premiers penseurs de l'Islam* «Recherches» 3 (Beirut: Les Lettres orientales, 1956); Daniel Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam. Exégèse lexicographique et théologique* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988).

Life, and therefore He is a life-giver, as the OT and the Qur'ān testify. Both Scriptures affirm that God creates through His Word. In this way, the OT and the Qur'ān prove that God has a Life and a Word, and since these are called by Christians the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in the NT, the Trinitarian dogma can be founded also through these two Scriptures, the OT and the Qur'ān. In other words, if Christians of the first centuries saw in verses like those quoted by Paul, i.e. the Trinitarian Testimony of the OT,⁸⁶ revelation of the Trinitarian dogma, Paul, and other Christians, as the anonymous of the *Apology* mentioned above,⁸⁷ see the same thing in some verses of the Qur'ān. I think that these verses might be called *Qur'ānic Testimony* especially when the methods used of selecting the verses are similar: choosing the verses that deal with the Christian faith, or can be interpreted through allegory, typology and even rhetoric based on rational argumentations as proof of the Christian doctrine,⁸⁸ and then using them out of their context.⁸⁹

Putting however, the Old and New Testaments on one level and the Qur'ān on another level, as the anonymous author does, suggests to us that Paul, like the anonymous author already discussed, does not talk or debate just with Muslims;⁹⁰ he also addresses his speech to Christians, the people of his religion, and tries to confirm their faith through the Qur'ān so they might remain faithful to their Christian religion. This, as I said above, is a part of the pastoral mission of our authors. Moreover, this differentiation in consideration between the Scriptures putting them in two distinct levels manifests a main difference between the vision our authors have for the OT Testimony and what I call *Qur'ānic Testimony*, for them, as well as for the first Christians and Church Fathers, the OT, even if it is considered the Holy Book of the Jews, is their Holy Scripture, the Qur'ān, in the contrary, is not.

⁸⁶ In regards see Gleason Archer & Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983); Jean Gribomont, "Testimonia", in Angelo Di Berardino (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, vol. 3 (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 2008), col. 5331.

⁸⁷ For the testimony in the Arab Christians writing see the following: David Bertaina, "The development of testimony collections", pp. 151-173; Mark Swanson, "Beyond proof texting (2)", pp. 91-112; S Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, col. «Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World» (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 143-146. See also Bishara Ebeid, "Esegesi Arabo-Cristiana primitiva: L'uso della Bibbia nei primi apologeti arabo-cristiani", *Cadernos Patristicos-Textose Estudos* 10/19 (2016), 127-166.

⁸⁸ On the patristic exegesis and its allegorical and typological methods see. Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, pp. 206-269.

⁸⁹ See also the opinion of Sidney Griffith, "The Qur'ān in Arab Christian texts", pp. 203-233.

⁹⁰ Cf. Mark Swanson, "Beyond proof texting (2)", p. 107.

This is evident in the *Muḡādalāh* attributed to Abū Qurrah where the author defends the fact that Christians are not polytheists quoting other kind of Qur'ānic verses and making another approach to the argument:

Your prophet says and witnesses in our regard, in *sūrat al-A'raf*, by his saying 'God said We found a righteous nation that guides [others] to the right way with the truth and dispenses justices there with'. (Q 7:181, 159) And also said in *sūrat al-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]. They believe in God and the Last Day, ordering the accepted and forbidding the rejected; these are the righteous' (Q 3:113-114). And he said 'You find the Christians ruled by what is sent down upon them from their God' (Q 5:47). And due to your infringement on and envy of us, you call us polytheists.⁹¹

To answer the Muslim accusations against the Christians considering them polytheists, Abū Qurrah uses the Qur'ān as a reference to confirm the opposite opinion. He, in fact, mentions some verses, partially and in a full extent. His purpose is to show that the Qur'ān does not consider Christians polytheists. These selected verses confirm that the People of the Book, especially the Christians, the People of the Bible, are a good nation. The Qur'ān recognizes their goodness and the prophet of Muslims confirms the truth of their faith. Consequently, Muslims should not accuse Christians of being polytheists since this would contradict their own Holy Book. The tune of the author is illustrative, he uses expressions like "your prophet", so it can be clear to his readers that even if he quotes verses from the Qur'ān, he does accept it as his Holy Book, and consequently, he does not consider Muḡammad his prophet. Of course, the fact that Abū Qurrah and other Christian authors refer to such verses indicates their importance for the Christians who lived among Muslims, they saw through them, at least indirectly, a recognition of the correctness of their faith on the part of the new religion, its prophet and its Holy Book.

⁹¹ Wafik Nasry, *The Caliph and the Bishop*, p. 192; « قال الله: إنا وجدنا أمة «صالحة يهدون بالحق وبه يعدلون» وقال أيضا في سورة آل عمران: "إن من أهل الكتاب أمة صالحة قائمة، يتلون آيات الله في الليل والنهار، وهم يسجدون ويؤمنون بالله وباليوم الآخر، ويأمرون بالمعروف وينهون عن المنكر، أولئك هم الصالحون". وقال: "لتجدن النصارى «محكمين بما أنزل عليهم من ربهم»، وأنت لبغيت علينا وحسدك لنا تسمينا مشركين Wafik Nasry, *Abū Qurrah wa-l-Ma'mūn: al-Muḡādalāh*, p. 133.

The Qur'ān as a proof-text for Christological doctrine

The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food. Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded. (Q 5:75)

[The Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Pure Spirit and you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission; and you healed the blind and the leper with My permission; and when you brought forth the dead with My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs and those who disbelieved among them said, "This is not but obvious magic'." (Q 5:110)

O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, "Three"; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs. (Q 4:171)

Say, "He is Allah, [who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge, He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent". (Q 112:1-4)

And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen". (Q 5:116)

And [it teaches] that exalted is the nobleness of our Lord; He has not taken a wife or a son. (Q 72/3)

Christ, according to the Qur'ānic verses quoted here as well as others,⁹² is considered a prophet like all the other prophets, though born by a miracle from the Virgin Mary. He is the Messiah, but He is neither God nor the Son of God. There is a confusion between Theology and Economy, i.e. the eternal generation of the Son from the Father and His temporal generation from Mary. The Qur'ān, therefore, consistently rejects that God had a female partner with whom He had sexual relations and, consequently, begot a Son. Such considerations and

⁹² See also Q 9:30; 15:4; 3:45-51; 21:91; 3:59; 4:157-158.

confusion between the two types of generation show that for the Qur'ān Trinity is three gods: Father, Jesus and Mary.⁹³ This means, in fact, that the Qur'ān, despite affirming that Christ did great miracles,⁹⁴ does not recognize a divine character in Him, which of course Christians accept as a principle dogma of their faith,⁹⁵ as it is clear, for example, in the correspondence, occurred during the ninth century between the Muslim Ibn al-Munaḡḡim and the Christian Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā and the topics they dealt with.⁹⁶

As for Trinitarian dogma, the opinion of the Qur'ān and Islam is also clear for Christology. How, then, could Christians use it to prove the divinity of Christ, while the Qur'ān so insistently rejects this? The Apostles and the first Christians, to say nothing of subsequent early Christian tradition and the patristic literature, already in their dialogue with Jews tried to read the OT and its prophecies regarding the Messiah in a special way in order to prove the realization of those prophecies and to demonstrate that the Messiah was really Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word and Son of God.⁹⁷ It is known also that the OT, followed by the different Jewish traditions, despite mentioning the Messiah, does not declare His divinity.⁹⁸ Christians, however, through their different exegetical methods tried to see behind some verses and symbols of the OT indications and proofs for the divinity of Christ the Messiah. With the Qur'ān things are different. The Holy Book of Muslims, as shown above, affirms that Jesus—

⁹³ Cf. Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger, "Introduction", in Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), pp. 3-39, here p. 12; Sidney Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an'", pp. 83-110.

⁹⁴ Cf. Q 4:157-158; 5:110.

⁹⁵ For the doctrine on Christ in the Qur'ān see Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity. The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1991). On a general presentation regarding the response of Christians to the Islamic doctrine regarding Christ see Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims. A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Regnum, 2005).

⁹⁶ Cf. Samir Khalil Samir & Ida Zilio-Grandi, *Ibn al-Munaḡḡim and Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā: Una corrispondenza islamocristiana sull'origine divina dell'Islām*. Edited by S. Kh. Samir and translated by I. Zilio-Grandi, col. «Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano» 8 (Bologna: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2018²).

⁹⁷ Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963); Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine. A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge-London-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1967). pp. 41-61.

⁹⁸ See among others George Barton, "On the Jewish-Christian Doctrine of the Pre-Existence of the Messiah", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 21 (1902), pp. 78-91; Edward Wicher, "Ancient Jewish Views of the Messiah", *The Biblical World* 34 (1909), pp. 403-409; Matthew Novenson, "The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009), pp. 357-373; James Waddell, *The Messiah: A Comparative Study of the Enochic Son of Man and the Pauline Kyrios*, col. «Jewish and Christian texts in contexts and related studies» 10 (London: Bloomsburg, 2013).

whom the Qur'an calls al-Masīh, 'Īsā ibn Maryam—came, but rejects the divinity of Jesus as well as rejecting the Trinity. In the following pages will see how our Christian authors could apply a special reading to some Qur'ānic verses to demonstrate Christ's divinity even if they were aware of the opposite opinion of the Qur'an and Muslims of their time.

A crucial piece of evidence for the divinity of Christ is the miracles He performed.⁹⁹ Such an argument had an important role for the early Christian tradition and its dialogue with Jews.¹⁰⁰ The Qur'an recounts some of Jesus's miracles,¹⁰¹ and this was again a point of reference for our authors. The anonymous author of the *Apology for Christian Faith*, for example, quotes some of the Qur'ānic verses where the miracles of Christ are mentioned to prove that the Qur'an affirms the divinity of Christ:

The Christ created, and no one creates but God. You will find in the Quran "And He spoke and created from clay like the form of a bird, and breathed into it, and lo! It was a bird by permission of God." (Q 5:110; 3:49) He forgave trespasses (cf. Lk 7:48), and who forgives trespasses but God? He satisfied the hungry (cf. Mt 14:1-14; Mk 6:14-29; Lk 9:7-9; Jn 6:1-15), and no one does that nor provides food but God. You will find all this about the Christ in your Book. He gave the Apostles the Holy Ghost, and gave them authority over devils and over all sickness (cf. Jn 20:21-23). No one gives the Holy Ghost but God, He who breathed into Adam, and lo! He was a man with a living soul (cf. Gen 2:7; Q 38:71-74; 15:28-31). He went up to Heaven from whence He had come down, on the angels' wings (cf. Mk 16:19; Lk 24:50-53; Act 1:9-11). No one can do that but God, He who came down from Heaven upon Mount Sinai and talked with Moses and gave him the Law (cf. Es 19).¹⁰²

It seems that our author is aware of the fact that in the Qur'an, only two agents are subjects of the verb "to create" (*halāqa*): God and Christ.¹⁰³ The author quotes Qur'ānic verses that recount this fact without, however, noting that the Qur'an underlines that Christ performed

⁹⁹ Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, pp. 269-290.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. James Kelhoffer, "The Apostle Paul and Justin Martyr on the Miraculous: A Comparison of Appeals to Authority", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 42 (2001) pp. 163-184.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Q 5:110; 3:49.

¹⁰² Margaret Gibson, *An Arabic version*, pp. 12-13; « نخلق المسيح وليس يخلق الا الله. وانتم تجدون في القرآن وقال "وخلق من الطين كهية الطير فنفخ فيه فاذا هو طير باذن الله". وغفر الذنوب ومن يغفر الذنوب الا الله. واشبع من الجوع، وليس يعمل هذا ولا يرزق الا الله. وانتم تجدون هذا كله من امر المسيح في كتابكم، واعطى الحواريون روح القدس، وسلطهم على الشياطين وعلى كل مرض، وليس يعطي روح القدس الا الله. هو الذي نفخ في ادم فاذا هو انسان ذا نفس حية. وصعد الى السما من حيث نزل على «اجنحة الملائكة، وليس يستطيع ذلك الا الله. هو الذي نزل من السماء على طور سيناءكم موسى واعطاه التوراة. *An Arabic version*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁰³ Cf. David Bertaina, "The development of testimony collections", p. 167.

the miracles not by himself but with the permission and willingness of God. This is, actually, how the Qur'ān implicitly denies Christ's divine character. In this case, according to the Qur'ān, God performed all Christ's miracles through him; Christ did not perform these mighty works by his own power.¹⁰⁴ Not noting such an important element is, according to my opinion, one characteristic of the special reading the anonymous author applies to the Qur'ān. The same method, as mentioned above, was used also by the first Christians when they refer to the OT's verses choosing what they consider important for their argumentation and quoting them partially.

The reference to the Qur'ānic verses is not the only proof our author uses. In addition, he incorporates this reference with one of Christ's miracles mentioned in the Qur'ān and puts it in the context of the Christian teaching regarding Christ. In this way Christ: 1) created, as stated in the Qur'ān; 2) breathed into Adam a living soul, a common image of creation in the OT and Qur'ān,¹⁰⁵ to express the Christian faith in the creative Word of God, identified with Christ, as stated in the same Qur'ān (cf. 3:45); 3) forgave sins, fed the hungry and gave the Apostles the Holy Spirit and sent them to preach and ascended to heaven, as the Gospel recounts; and 4) spoke with Moses at Sinai and gave him the Law, according to the Christian interpretation of the OT.¹⁰⁶ Using at the same time the OT, NT and the Qur'ān to prove the Christian faith in Christ is a real challenge. However, our anonymous author is again careful in his use of the Qur'ān describing it "your Book", that is, the Scripture of Muslims.

It is worthy of note, moreover, the anonymous author's method. He, in fact, refers to those Qur'ānic verses that are in agreement with the Christian image concerning Christ, even if such references are partial and selective. A selective reading of the Qur'ān is applied also by Paul of Antioch in order to convince his readers that, since the Qur'ān affirms the basic doctrines of the Gospel and Christian life, there is no need for conversion to Islam:

Then too we found in the Quran an expression of great esteem for the Lord Christ and His mother. God made the two of them a sign for the worlds. Here is what He said: 'We breathed of Our Spirit into the one who guarded her chastity and We made her and her Son a sign to the worlds.' (Q 21:91) There is also, 'The angels said, "O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you above the women of the worlds".' (Q 3:42) There are accompanying testimonies to the Lord

¹⁰⁴ Cf. David Thomas, "The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39 (1994), pp. 221-243.

¹⁰⁵ On this topic see Bishara Ebeid, "L'uomo creato ad immagine e somiglianza di Dio secondo la teologia Cristiana e Musulmana", *Teologia i Czowlietk* 34 (2016), pp. 169-190.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Thomas Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church*, col. «Society for New Testament Studies» 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 80, 84, 128, 292-298.

Christ by way of miracles. [According to the Quran], He was conceived without any intercourse with a man. Rather, it was by way of the Annunciation of God's angel to His mother. (cf. Q 3:47; 19:20-21) He spoke in the cradle, He brought the dead to life, He cured the lame, He cleansed the leper, He made clay into the shape of a bird and breathed into it and it flew away, by God's permission. (cf. Q 3:49; 5:110) He was God's Spirit and His Word. (cf. Q 4:171) This is all in agreement with what we think and believe. We also found there that God raised Christ up to Himself, (cf. Q 4:158) and He put those who followed [Christ] above those who disbelieved, up to the day of the resurrection. That is what it says: 'God said, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, I am going to take You to myself and raise You up to Me; I am going to cleanse You of those who have disbelieved and I am going to put those who follow You above those who have disbelieved, up to the day of resurrection."' (Q 3:55) There is also, 'We sent Jesus, Mary's Son; We brought Him the Gospel and We have put mercy and compassion into the hearts of those who have followed Him.' (Q 57:25) We have also found [the Quran] extolling our Gospel, putting our monks' cells and churches before the mosques, and testifying in their regard that God's name is much recalled in them. That is what it says: 'Were it not for God's repelling some people with others, the monks' cells, the churches, the synagogues, and the mosques, in which God's name is much recalled, would have been destroyed.' (Q 22:40) These and other things require us to hold on to our own religion and not to neglect our doctrinal allegiance, neither to abandon what we have, nor to follow someone other than the Lord Christ, the Word of God, and His apostles, whom He sent to us to warn us.¹⁰⁷

According to Paul's exegesis, the Qur'ān affirms what Christians believe: 1) the election of Mary; 2) Christ and Mary are signs for the World; 3) Christ performed miracles; 4) Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit; 5) the ascension of Christ; 6) the Gospel of Christ is from God; and 7) the prayer of Christian to God in churches and cells are exalted and mentioned before those in the mosques. All these elements and doctrines are truly mentioned in the Qur'ān.

¹⁰⁷ Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 221-222; « ثم وجدنا في الكتاب ايضا من تعظيم السيد المسيح وامه، وان الله جعلهما « اية للعالمين، وذلك قوله: "والتي احصنت فرجها، فنفتحنا فيها من روحنا، وجعلناها وابنا اية للعالمين". وايضا: "واذ قالت الملائكة: يا مريم، ان الله اصطفاك وطهرتك على نسا العالمين". مع الشهادات للسيد المسيح بالمعجزات، وانه جبل به لا من مباضعة رجل بل ببشارة ملاك الله لامه، وانه تكلم في المهدي واحيا الميت وابرا الا كنه ونقى الابرص، وعمل من الطين كهية الطير ونفخ فيها فطارت باذن الله، وانه روح الله وكلمته، ما يوافق راينا فيه واعتقادنا. ووجدنا فيه ايضا ان الله رفع المسيح اليه، وجعل الذين اتبعوه فوق الذين كفروا، الى يوم القيامة. وذلك قوله: "واذ قال الله: يا عيسى بن مريم، اني متوفيك ورافعك الي، ومطهرتك من الذين كفروا، وجعل الذين اتبعوك فوق الذين كفروا، الى يوم القيامة". وايضا: "وقفينا بعيسى بن مريم، واتيناه الانجيل، وجعلنا في قلوب الذين اتبعوه رافة ورحمة". ثم وجدناه ايضا يعظم انجيلنا، ويقدم صوامعنا ويبننا على المساجد، ويشهد لها بان الله يذكر فيها كثيرا. وذلك قوله: "ولولا دفع الله الناس بعضهم ببعض، لهدمت صوامع وبيع وصلوات ومساجد يذكر فيها اسم الله كثيرا". وهذا وغيره اوجب لنا التمسك بديننا، وان لا نهمل «مذهبنا ولا نرفض ما معنا، ولا نتبع غير السيد المسيح كلمة الله وحواريه الذين ارسلهم الينا ليندرونا. Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, pp. 62-63.

Paul, however, in this passage does not refer to the main disagreement in faith, i.e., the divinity of Christ himself. Paul alludes to Christ's miracles and to the fact that for the Qur'ān Christ is the Word of God and His Spirit, but he does not argue here the question of His divinity. One might suppose that Paul avoids making this argument because the Qur'ānic evidence militates so strongly against it, but later in his letter, we actually read the following:

He became incarnate as a perfect man from the Holy Spirit and the Lady Mary, the virgin. He was born of her in human nature, not in divine nature, since no accident impinges upon the divine nature. She gave birth to Him without any corruption impinging on her virginity, since she became pregnant without intercourse with any man. Rather, she kept her virginity, just as the burning bush which the prophet Moses saw was afire without burning up. (cf. Es. 3:2) This removes from us the charge that when we say Christ is the Son of God we mean fleshly sonship, or that the Father is before the Son, or that He has a child from a female companion. We have already been cleared of this charge by the Qur'ān when it says, 'The Originator of the heavens and the earth, how is it that He would have a child, as He has no female companion.' (Q 6:101) And it also affirms the Son who we say is 'rationality,' when it says, 'Say, indeed I swear by this land, you are a settler in this land, and [I swear] by a Begetter and what He has begotten.' (Q 90:1-3) As for the incarnation of the Word of God as a perfect man, it is because the Creator, exalted be He, does not address any one of the prophets except from behind a veil, according to what comes in the Qur'ān, 'It is not for a man of flesh and blood that God should converse with him except by way of revelation or from behind a veil.' (Q 42:51) Given that subtle things do not become manifest except in material things, would the Word of God, exalted be He, which created the subtle things appear in something other than the material? No, indeed! For this reason, He appeared in Jesus, Son of Mary, since man is the most exalted of what God created. Therefore, it is through [Jesus' humanity] that He addressed the creatures, who witnessed Him, just as He addressed Moses the prophet through the box-thorn bush (Es 3:2). He worked miracles in His divinity and manifested weakness in His humanity, and both actions belong to the one Lord Christ. It is just as it is said: In his soul, Zayd is abiding, immortal, and incorruptible, while in his body, Zayd is perishing, mortal, and corruptible. Both statements apply to one and the same Zayd. According to this same analogy we say that Christ was crucified, meaning that He was crucified in His humanity, but He was not crucified in His divinity. It comes in the Qur'ān, 'They did not kill Him, nor did they crucify Him, but it seemed so to them.' (Q 4:157).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", pp. 227-228; « فتجسم انسانا كاملا من روح القدس ومن السيدة مريم العذرى. وولد من غير فساد دخل على عذريتها، كما حبلت منها بالطبيعة البشرية لا بالطبيعة الالهية، اذ الطبيعة الالهية غير داخل عليها عرض. وولده من غير فساد دخل على عذريتها، كما حبلت من غير مباحضة رجل، بل حفظ عذريتها كما حفظ العليقة التي راها موسى النبي تنقد زلا تحترق. فهذا ينفى عنا التهم انا اذا قلنا المسيح ابن الله انا نريد بنوة بشرية، او ان الاب قبل الابن، او ان له ولدا من صاحبة، وان كان نفى عنا ذلك في هذا الكتاب بقوله: "بديع

Paul's argumentation in this passage starts with one clarification concerning the Incarnation of God the Word and His generation from Mary. It has been mentioned above that the Qur'ān confuses the eternal and the temporal generation of the Son of God, and thus rejects the idea that God has a wife and a son. Paul seems aware of such rejection and he states that Christ was generated by Mary according to His human nature. To found the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary —a doctrine held in common with the Qur'ān, or at least with Islamic tradition¹⁰⁹— our author applies, as Griffith notes, the patristic allegorical and typological reading of the burning bush that Moses saw aflame without burning up.¹¹⁰ Paul clearly affirms that such an event was seen as prophesy realized already in Christ's birth. Explaining this dogma, our author affirms that Christians do not believe that God generated a son through sexual relations with a wife. Consequently, Paul was able to see an agreement with the Qur'ān itself which rejects such doctrine. It is interesting, according to me, to note how Paul succeeds to transform the Qur'ānic accusation against Christians into confirmation of Christian faith. He bases his argumentation on Qur'ānic verses where it is said that God is not begotten and has not begotten, explaining it as rejection of human generation and sonship, but affirmation of the Father and the Son. Along with his use of some exegetical methods, it is evident that Paul argues this topic using rationality and syllogisms.

In addition, our author explains the reason for the Incarnation, referring to the Qur'ānic verse which uses the image of the veil. References to this image were defused in many Arab Christian writings.¹¹¹ According to the Qur'ān God can speak with humans through a veil; and

السموات والارض انى يكون له ولد ولم يكن له صاحبة. وثبت الابن الذي نقول انه النطق بقوله: "قل: لا! اقسام بهذا البلد، وانت حل بهذا البلد ووالد وما ولد". فاما تجسم كلمة الله انسانا تاما، فلانه لم يخاطب البارى تعالى احدا من الانبيا الا من وراء حجاب، حسب ما جا في الكتاب: "وما كان لبشر ان يكلمه الله الا وحيا او من وراء حجاب". واذا كانت اللطائف لا تظهر الا في الكايف، افكلمة الله تعالى التي خلقت اللطائف تظهر في غير كثيف؟ - كلا! ولذلك ظهر في عيسى بن مريم اذ الانسان اجل ما خلقه الله، ولهذا خاطب الخلق الذي شاهده منه، كما خاطب موسى النبي من العويجة. ففعل المعجز بلاهوته واطهر العجز بناسوته، والفعالان فللسيد المسيح الواحد، كما انه يقال: زيد باقى غير ميت ولا مضمحل بنفسه، وزيد دائر ميت مضمحل بجسده، والقولان مطردان على زيد الواحد. وعلى هذا القياس نقول ان المسيح صلب، يعني انه صلب بناسوته وانه لم يصلب بلاهوته. وقد حا في الكتاب: "وما قتله ولا صلبه، ولكن شبه لهم".

¹⁰⁹ In regards see Jane Smith & Yvonne Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary", *The Muslim World* 79 (1989), pp. 161-187.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "Paul of Antioch", footnote 85 on p. 330, where the author states that: «The Orthodox Fathers of the Church commonly interpreted the phenomenon referred to in Exod. 3:2 typologically; the fire in the Burning Bush, in which the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, prefigures the living fire that came into Mary's womb, purifying her and preserving her virginity».

¹¹¹ Cf. Barbara Roggema, "Hikāyāt amthāl wa-asmār ... King Parables in Melkite Apologetic Literature", in Samir Khalil Samir, Rifaat Ebied & Herman Teule (ed.), *Studies on the Christian Arabic heritage*, col. «Eastern Christian Studies» 5 (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), pp. 113-131; Bishara Ebeid, *Elias of Nisibis, Commentary on the*

this veil, according to Christian faith expressed in our case by Paul, is the body of Christ. In fact, in the Semitic Christian tradition, the Incarnation was described through the image of dressing or putting on humanity-body.¹¹² In my opinion, the existence of such tradition was one of the reasons to use the Qur'ānic image of veil. The veil and the dress were symbols of Christ's humanity, through which Christians tried to explain the reason of the Incarnation. God cannot talk to humans directly, as Paul affirms referring to the philosophical principle "subtle things do not become manifest except in material things".¹¹³ Therefore God talked to prophets through a veil, to Moses through the box-thorn bush, and to us through His perfect body, i.e. the human nature, the most honorable thing God created.¹¹⁴ In this case the veil mentioned in the Qur'ān is not simply interpreted allegorically, i.e. a type of Christ's flesh (humanity), like the way patristic exegesis saw Christ in some persons, figures and images of the OT types, but rather it is used as a confirmation of the Christian doctrine on the Incarnation.

The dogma of the two natures of Christ was the means through which Paul again transforms an Islamic accusation against Christians into confirmation of Christian faith. The Qur'ān denies the crucifixion of Christ (cf. Q 4:157).¹¹⁵ Stating however, that Christ was crucified in His humanity and not in His divinity is in agreement, according to Paul, with the Qur'ān's doctrine in this regard. In other words, the Qur'ān, according to Paul's Christian reading, rejects not the crucifixion itself but the consideration that Christ was crucified

Creed. Edited and translated and commented by B. Ebeid, col. «Syro-Arabica» 3 (Córdoba: UCOPress, 2018), pp. 67, 74, 117.

¹¹² Cf. Sebastian Brock., "Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition", in Margot Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter: Internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt, 1981* (Regensburg: F. Pustet 1982), pp. 11-40; Bishara Ebeid, "Ο συμβολισμός του «ενδύματος» στην Συριακή Θεολογική παράδοση", *Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς* 95 (2012), pp. 277-305; Bishara Ebeid, *Il Signore è il mio sposo. Simboli battesimali nella spiritualità siriana antica*, col. «Il Filo Scarlatta» 17 (Napoli: Chirico, 2019), pp. 13-50.

¹¹³ It is the philosophical doctrine regarding the union between materials that was also an argumentation in Christological controversies, Cf. Bishara Ebeid, *La Tunica di al-Masih*, pp. 165-166, 615-623.

¹¹⁴ Considering humanity the most honorable creature is because it was created in the image and similarity of God, such doctrine was defused among Church Fathers and Arab Christian writers, Cf. Bishara Ebeid, *La Tunica di al-Masih*, pp. 624-627.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72.2 (2009), pp. 237-258; Mark Swanson, "Folly to the *Hunafa'*: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy", in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson & David Thomas (ed.), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, col. «History of Christian-Muslim Relations» 5 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 7-56.

The fact that Christ is called in the Qur'ān "Word of God" remains for Abū Qurrah, as for other authors such the anonymous of the *Apology for the Christian Faith*,¹²¹ an essential indication for His divinity:

And he [Abū Qurrah] said "And the most wondrous of things: you mock us for following the Christ, Who, you yourselves admit, is the Spirit of God and His Word. (cf. Q 4:171; 3:45) And you accept the words of him who died and decayed over Him Who neither dies nor decays. And He is in heaven as you yourselves say (cf Q 3:55). You ought to have believed the Word of God and His Spirit, Who created all that is in the heavens and on the earth, what is seen and unseen. And He is in heaven, as you admit and do not deny. And David, the prophet, said 'By the Word of God all the heavens and the earth were created, and by the breath of His mouth all [acquire] their might'. (Ps 33:6) The Holy Gospel says 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (Jn 1:1-3). And your book says 'God wishes to affirm the Truth by His Word and Spirit' (Q 8:7). And the Word of God was [He] who created all creation, and His Spirit gave life to the angels and people.¹²²

In his argumentation Abū Qurrah starts by affirming that the Qur'ān states that Christ is the Word of God and that He is alive in heaven. For him, however, following the Christian faith, the Word of God is the Creator. Such faith was revealed in the OT and in the NT, and therefore he quotes as support 1) a verse from a psalm of the prophet David, and 2) the beginning of the prologue of John's Gospel. The reader might expect now a quotation from the Qur'ān that confirms this doctrine. The author however, who knows that no Qur'ānic verse clearly considers the Word of God as Creator, or that God created through his Word, quotes a verse that does not contain such a doctrine. The Qur'ānic verse, however, as Griffith notes,¹²³ functions again as a confirmation of the Christian faith regarding the role of the Word of God and His divine character. In addition, as J. Bridger notes, our author supports his argumentation stating that Muslims agree that God Created through His Word.¹²⁴ He, in my

¹²¹ Cf. Scott Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, pp. 72-80.

¹²² Wafik Nasry, *The Caliph and the Bishop*, pp. 204-205; « وأعجب الأشياء أنكم تستهزئون بنا لاتباعنا المسيح، الذي تقرون « أنتم أنه روح الله وكلمته ... التي خلقت جميع ما في السماوات وما في الأرض، ما يرى وما لا يرى. وهو في السماء، كما تقرون ولا تتكلمون ذلك. وقد قال داوود النبي: "إن بكلمة الله خلقت السماوات والأرض، وروح فيه جميع قواتها". والإنجيل المقدس يقول: "في البدء كان الكلمة، والكلمة كان عند الله، والله هو الكلمة". وكأبك يقول: "إن الله يريد تحقيق الحق بكلمته وروحه". وكلمة الله هي التي خلقت جميع الخلائق، وروحه أحييت الملائكة والناس. » Wafik Nasry, *Abū Qurrah wa-l-Ma' mūn: al-Muǧādalāh*, pp. 150-152.

¹²³ Cf. Sidney Griffith, "The Qur'ān in Arab Christian texts", p. 229.

¹²⁴ Cf. Scott Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, p. 93.

opinion, bases his opinion on later Islamic doctrine. In fact, Muslim scholars interpreting the Qur'ānic expression from the context of creation «He (God) only says to the thing, 'Be' and it is» (cf. Q 36:82; 40:68; 2:117) affirmed that God created the world by His word.¹²⁵ This reading and interpretation of the Scriptures in the light of the Christian faith, described by Takawi creative,¹²⁶ allows Abū Qurrah to use the Qur'ān as a proof-text to confirm his faith.

We can note the same method of reading and exegesis in the *Apology for Christian Faith*, applied this time to the event of the ascension of Christ. For the anonymous author, Christ's ascension, as an event mentioned also in the Qur'ān, might be a proof of Christ's divinity.¹²⁷

David also prophesied by the Holy Ghost and said about the Christ “The Lord said unto my Lord, ‘Sit Thou at my right hand, until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy footstool’” (Ps 110:1). The Christ went up to heaven and [from] heaven was not separated,¹²⁸ and sat at the right hand of the Father (cf. Mk 16:19; Lk 24: 50-53 and Act 1:9-11). He put His enemies who were disobedient to Him below His footstool, and below the feet of those who believe in the Christ. Thus you will find in the Qur'ān “I have appointed Thee and raised Thee up to Myself, and have purified Thee from those that are unbelievers. I will make those who follow Thee above the unbelievers until the day of the resurrection” (Q 3:55). Say not that we believe in two Gods, or that we say there are two Lords. God forbid! Verily God is one God and one Lord in His Word and His Spirit.¹²⁹

Our author tries to prove that 1) the OT, Psalm 110 in particular, prophesied about the ascension of Christ, and this is a Christian reading of the Law and the Prophets;¹³⁰ 2) the prophecy was realized by the ascension of Christ to heaven attested in the NT; and 3) the Qur'ān affirms and confirms this event. Again, then the anonymous author quotes a Qur'ānic

¹²⁵ Cf. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 355-465; William Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1977). See also Thomas O'Shaughnessy, “Creation with Wisdom and with the Word in the Qur'ān”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971), pp. 208-221.

¹²⁶ Cf. Mourad Takawi, “The Trinity in Qur'anic Idiom”, p. 444.

¹²⁷ Cf. Scott Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'an*, pp. 84-85.

¹²⁸ In the translation is written “divided”.

¹²⁹ Margaret Gibson, *An Arabic version*, p. 16; « قال الرب لربي اقعدي يميني حتى اضع اعدائك تحت منصب قدميك. فقد صعد المسيح الى السما ولم يفارق السما فتعد يمين الاب ووضع اعدايه الذين عصوه تحت منصب قدميه وتحت اقدام الذين امنوا بالمسيح. وكذلك تجدون في القرآن "اني متوفيك ورافعك الي ومطهرك من الذين كفروا وجاعل الذين اتبعوك فوق الذين كفروا الى يوم القيامة"», Margaret Gibson, *An Arabic version*, p. 88.

¹³⁰ Ps 110:1. On how Christians read this psalm and interpreted as a messianic prophecy see David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand. Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, col. «Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series» 18 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

verse to demonstrate the difference of Christ from the other prophets. Christ ascended to heaven and is alive there; he cannot be like the other prophets, and thus for the anonymous author, the Qur'ān affirms Christ's divinity. It is clear, in addition, that the author puts this Qur'ānic verse together with the prophesy of David, but each has a distinct function for him: the Psalm, revealed before Christ, was a prophesy on Him, while the Qur'ān, which is chronologically after Christ, read and interpreted in the light of Christian faith, is considered an after-the-fact confirmation of the realization of Davis's prophesy in the person of Christ, revealed in the Gospel.

As said above, Christ for the Qur'ān is a simple prophet. He is considered created as Adam, as attested in the following verse "Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, 'Be,' and he was" (Q 3:59). This analogy between Adam and Christ was an argumentation in the *Muḡādalab* of the monk Abraham of Tiberia, where, as Griffith has already noted "the author employs the words and phrases of the Qur'ān explicitly, much more frequently than is the case with almost any other Christian text from the early Islamic period":¹³¹

The Bāhili said "don't you say that the Christ is created, son of created [woman]?" The monk said "according to His Father's substance, He is the Creator, but according to His mother's substance He is born from a created [woman]". The Bāhili said "So it is not correct to adore Him". The monk said "don't you say that a created nation adored a created [being], and [this created nation] is the most honorable nation to God? And I tell you regarding a nation that said 'don't adore a created [being]', which now is the worst nation to God". The prince said "We don't know this nation!" The monk said "Is it not written in your book 'When God said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers' (Q 2:34). The Bāhili said "This is God's saying [and] it is true and certainty no one can deny it". The monk said "So, are the angels polytheists or are Iblis and his soldiers believers? Or do you see that God (Who is Powerful and Lofty!) is in favor of the angels and unjust regarding the demons?" The Bāhili said "No, I swear with my life that it is not like this, but the angels are obedient and the demons are disobedient and disbelievers!". The monk said "My lord, you should know and should be certain that God did not create the creatures, and did not manifest the signs and the miracles, in the past through the righteous and the good [people] and then through the prophets and the messengers, if not in favor of His Christ, because when He [the Christ] would be manifested [in flesh], no one of His followers can deny Him. And as He [God] said to the angels 'adore Adam', and who adored him was the most honorable creature to Him, and who did not accept [to adore him] and chose to be arrogant became directly the most evil creature to God, so He said to the angels and the people in regards

¹³¹ Sidney Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*", p. 29.

of His Christ "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, hear Him and follow Him and do not have doubt [in Him]" (Mt. 17:5). Then, there is no doubt that those who heard Him and followed Him made a good choice [in the eyes] of God, and those who rejected and were arrogant [got] fear and shame [from God]. And the second thing is that the Christ is higher and more honorable than Adam".¹³²

To answer the question of the Muslim scholar "Why Christians adore a creature?" our monk makes a reference to the Qur'ān and its teaching about the creation of man and the adoration of the angels to him,¹³³ and then, he uses a rational argumentation based on syllogism to prove the divinity of Christ, quoting eventually an evangelical verse, and underling that Christ himself is higher than Adam, and if the angels adored Adam, it is more correct that humans adore Christ.

The theological logic in this passage, in my opinion, is very important and deserves an analysis: despite the fact that angels prostrated to Adam, a creature, under the command of God, they are still believers and obedient to God. The devil and his angels, by contrast, refused to prostrate to Adam the creature and were arrogant, so they thus find themselves forsaken even though they had made the seemingly superior decision to avoid the worship of a creature. In this way our author proves that if prostration to a creature were an error this would oppose the Qur'ān and its teaching, making God unjust in his treatment of the angels and the demons! As for Christ, He is not a creature, but as the Gospel states, He is the Son of God, and He is

¹³² قال الباهلي: "أليس تقول إن المسيح مخلوق، ابن مخلوقة؟" قال الراهب: "أما بجوهر أبيه، فهو الخالق، و« أما بجوهر أمه فهو مولود من مخلوقة". قال الباهلي: "فإنه لا يستقيم أن يسجد لمخلوق". قال الراهب: "ما تقول في أمة سجدت لمخلوق، وهي أكرم الخلق على الله؟ وإني أثبتك بأمة قالت: "لا تسجد لمخلوق" وهي أشر الخلق عند الله حالاً. قال له الأمير: فإننا لا نعرف هذه الأمة". قال الراهب: "أليس في كتابك إذ قال ربك للملائكة: "اسجدوا لآدم فسجدوا، إلا إبليس أبى واستكبر وكان من الكافرين؟" قال الباهلي: "هذا قول الله حق يقين لا ينكره أحد". قال الراهب: "فأينما ترى، الملائكة هم المشركون، أو ترى إبليس وجنوده مؤمنين؟ أو ترى الله، (جل وعزاً)، محابي الملائكة وظالم الشياطين؟" قال له الباهلي: "لا، لعمرى، ما هو كذلك، بل الملائكة مؤمنون طائعون، والشياطين عصاة كفرية". قال الراهب: "يا سيدي، اعلم واستيقن أن الله لم يخلق الخلاق، وسبق بإظهار الآيات والعجائب على يد الأبرار والأخبار في القديم وعلى يد الأنبياء والرسل من بعد، إلا لكرامة مسيحه لكي، إذا ظهر، لا يكون لأحد في اتباعه إنكار وفكر. وكما قال للملائكة: "اسجدوا لآدم"، فمن سجد له، كان أكرم الخلق عليه، فمن أبى واستكبر، صار أشر الخلق عليه حالاً، كذلك قال في مسيحه للملائكة والبشر: "هذا ابني الحبيب الذي به سررت، فله اسمعوا واتبعوه ولا تمتروا". فلا شك بالذين يسمعون له ويتبعونه أنهم حسنوا الحال عند Giacinto-Bulus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 441-447.

¹³³ Concerning the recount of Creation in the Quran, its sources and its differences from the one in the OT see Bishara Ebeid, "L'uomo creato ad immagine e somiglianza", pp. 169-190; in the same article there is a discussion regarding the Christian sources, apocryphal mainly, that have a similar recount. See also Davide Righi, *Abramo di Tiberiade*, footnote 499 on p. 301.

The approach to the Qur'ān of the four authors is not always identical. From one hand, all of them use it as proof text for the Christian faith considering it Holy Book just for Muslims, from the other, however, there is a difference in the way they quote the Qur'ān and in the grade they use it. In addition, because of the different literal genre of the texts taken into examination, the tune of the interpretation the authors give to the selected verses is different: the two authors of the disputes refer to the Qur'ān defending themselves from direct accusations that, according to the texts, were addressed to them from Muslim scholars present with them in the court of a Muslim authority, and therefore, one might feel the tune in Abū Qurrah's *Muḡādalab* more violent; the other two texts, in the contrary, refer to the Qur'ān to explain the Christian faith, therefore they quote its verses along with Biblical ones, applying to them identical methods of exegesis.

If the selection of OT verses by the first Christians and the Church Fathers were called Old Testament Testimony of the Christian faith, one might call the selected Qur'ānic verses, used by our authors here, Qur'ānic *Testimony* for Christian doctrine, especially when one note that a significant group of these verses becomes an integral part in the apologetic writings of the Arab Christians against Muslim accusations. In both cases, the way of selecting the verses is similar: they are taken out of their context to be interpreted as proof of the Christian faith. Moreover, if the OT Testimony, being chronologically before Christ, was seen a Messianic prophesy realized in Christ, the Qur'ānic *Testimony*, being chronologically after Christ, might be considered a confirmation of the Gospel. This can be noted in the way and the order the authors usually quote Biblical and Qur'ānic verses: they begin with quotations from the OT (prophesy), then verses from the NT (realization), and finally verses from the Qur'ān (confirmation).

Using Qur'ānic *Testimony* as confirmation of the Christian faith is a common method applied by the four texts taken into examination. It is clear, moreover, that the hermeneutic our authors apply to the Qur'ān differs from that of the Muslims themselves, similarly to the way that the Church's reading of the OT differs from that of the Jews. In both cases the applied hermeneutic is done in the light of Christ's Incarnation. This explains the similarity in some of the exegetical methods our authors use interpreting the quoted Qur'ānic verses with those methods applied by the first Christians and the patristic tradition interpreting the Bible, like allegory and typology. The example of considering Adam as "type" of Christ, applied by Abraham of Tiberia to a Qur'ānic verse is plausible, since he sees in the mentioned in the Qur'ān prostration of the angles to Adam a "type" and "pre-figuration" of the prostration before Christ from His believers. Being, however, the Qur'ān chronologically after Christ, our author does not use technical terms like "type", "figure" or "figuration"; but, since the prostration of the angles took place before the Incarnation, the approach of Abraham to these Qur'ānic verses remains based on this exegetical method. The same one might say concerning

the approach of Paul of Antioch to the two Qur'ānic expressions used for Christ: the "Spirit of God and His Word" and "Jesus, Son of Mary". He interprets them as indications to Christ's two natures, a method based on the exegesis the Church Fathers, especially in the Antiochene school, applied to the evangelical expressions "son of man" and "Son of God". In this way our authors tried to demonstrate that also the Qur'ān affirms the Christian faith, and consequently they attempted to transform the Islamic accusations against Christians into confirmation of Christian faith, purpose that we do not find in the Christian interpretation of the OT Testimony, and therefore, we can consider it an originality of the Arab Christians' approach. Moreover, the way of presenting the verses and their interpretation is also different from that of the Church Fathers, our authors, in fact, use more syllogisms and rational elements.

In addition, it is also worthy of note the fact that when some of our authors quote in the same passage both Biblical and Qur'ānic verses they apply to them the same exegetical methods, like allegory, typology, rationality and syllogism, as when they: 1) interpret the use of the first-person plural attributed to God as indication of the Trinity; 2) consider the mention of the Word and Spirit of God as allusions to the Son and the Holy Spirit; and 3) use the Biblical account when God talked to Moses through a box-thorn bush and the Qur'ānic verse where it is said that man can converse with God just from behind a veil as an affirmation to the philosophical principle "the subtle things do not become manifest except in material things" which was then used to confirm the correctness of the Incarnation and that God was manifested and spoke to us through the flesh. Despite, however, the same way they approach both Biblical and Qur'ānic Testimonies one must notice a very essential difference of consideration: the Old and the New Testaments are their Holy Scriptures, the Qur'ān, in the contrary, remains a Holy Scripture for Muslims.

Taking, finally, into consideration that these authors address their texts mainly to Christians, trying to confirm their faith through the Qur'ān in order to encourage them to remain faithful to their Christian religion and not to convert to Islam, one might understand that this Christian reading and especial use of the Qur'ān is part of their pastoral mission. And even if for them the Qur'ān remains the Holy Scripture of Muslims, one might maintain that, by using it as a proof-text of their doctrine through the selection of those verses which, applying to them a Christian exegesis, can realize their objective, they could see in the Qur'ān, indirectly, a divine inspiration, based on the early Christian doctrine of *Semina Verbi*. Therefore, the contribution of such texts can be significant for the modern Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Abstract: Even Christians' first Scripture was the Old Testament they read it in the light of Christ. For Christians, in disagreement with the Jews themselves, the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah were realized in Jesus Christ. Christians thus read the Old Testament in a different way from that of the Jews as these latter continued to read the Old Testament according to their tradition, refusing to accept Christ as the Messiah. The Qur'ān, however, accepts that Christ was the Messiah, but rejects the Christian doctrine on Trinity and denies the divinity of Christ and that he is the incarnate Son of God the Father. This is, in fact, one of the main differences between the two religions. For their part, Christians, although they did not recognize prophecy in Muḥammad, used the Holy Book of Muslims in their different writings, especially as proof-texting for apologetic purposes. In this paper, I will examine the reading of the Qur'ān by some Christian Arabic writings of the Melkites in Palestine and Syria, namely the *Apology for Christian Faith* known as *On the triune nature of God*, the *Al-Muḡāḍalah between Abū Qurrah and al-Ma'mūn*, the *Al-Muḡāḍalah between Abraham of Tiberias and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī* and *Paul of Antioch's Letter to a Muslim Friend*. My analysis will include an investigation concerning the exegetical methods and instruments these texts and authors used in their making apology. It will be argued, then, whether these early Christian Arabic texts, although affirm that the Qur'ān remains the Holy Scripture of Muslims, they, at least indirectly, could see a kind of divine inspiration in it, and therefore could read some of its verses in the light of Christ.

Resumen: Incluso la primera Escritura de los cristianos, el Antiguo Testamento, fue leída a la luz de Cristo. Para los cristianos, en desacuerdo con los judíos mismos, las profecías del Antiguo Testamento sobre el Mesías se realizaron en Jesucristo. Así, los cristianos leen el Antiguo Testamento de una manera diferente a la de los judíos, ya que estos últimos continuaron leyendo el Antiguo Testamento según su tradición, negándose a aceptar a Cristo como el Mesías. El Corán, sin embargo, acepta que Cristo era el Mesías, pero rechaza la doctrina cristiana sobre la Trinidad y niega la divinidad de Cristo y que es el Hijo encarnado de Dios Padre. Ésta es, de hecho, una de las principales diferencias entre las dos religiones. Por su parte, los cristianos, aunque no reconocieron la profecía en Mahoma, utilizaron el Libro Sagrado de los musulmanes en sus diferentes escritos, especialmente como prueba de texto con fines de disculpa. En este artículo, examinaré la lectura del Corán por algunos escritos árabes cristianos de los melkitas en Palestina y Siria, a saber, la Apología de la fe cristiana conocida como Sobre la naturaleza trina de Dios, el *Al-Muḡāḍalah* entre Abū Qurrah y al-Ma'mūn, el *Al-Muḡāḍalah* entre Abraham de Tiberias y 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī y la Carta de Pablo de Antioquía a un amigo musulmán. Mi análisis incluirá una investigación sobre los métodos e instrumentos exegeticos que estos textos y autores utilizaron para pedir disculpas. Se argumentará, entonces, si estos primeros textos árabes cristianos, aunque afirman que el Corán sigue siendo la Sagrada Escritura de los musulmanes, ellos, al menos indirectamente, pudieron ver una especie de inspiración divina en él, y por lo tanto podrían leer algunos de sus versos. a la luz de Cristo.

Keywords: Christian exegesis of the Qur'ān; Qur'ānic testimony; Abū Qurrah; Abraham of Tiberias; Paul of Antioch.

Palabras clave: Exegesis cristiana del Corán; Testimonio coránico; Abū Qurrah; Abraham de Tiberias; Pablo de Antioquia.