Jacobite Explanation of the Trinity in the Context of Muʿtazilite Theology: Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti

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Abstract

The Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians were the main Christian communities under Muslim rule. Several pre-Islamic Arab Christian authors wrote treatises concerning their beliefs in Arabic, some of which date back to the early Islamic centuries. The multiplicity of such polemical works suggests an intellectually open society and a degree of tolerance shown by Muslim leaders. Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti (d. 835) was one of the most influential Jacobite authors, who wrote treatises on the Trinity and Incarnation. His era shows the new challenges raised by Muslim surroundings, some of which were unprecedented in the Christian world. As such, Arab Christians like Abu Raʾitah were compelled to use new methods and respond to novel objections. Abu Raʾitah tried to explain the Trinity in the framework of Islamic theology (*kalam*). Therefore, he introduced the hypostases as God's attributes. According to him, Knowledge (Speech) and Life are two substantial and eternal divine attributes. Abu Raʾitah also referred to the Bible and the Quran and used various analogies in order to defend the doctrine of the Trinity.

Keywords: Abu Raʾitah, Muʿtazilites, Trinity, hypostasis, substance.

Introduction

The history of Christian-Muslim relations, at least in its earliest and formative period, illustrates an environment of inter-religious dialogue

rather than "clash of civilizations." The works of the Christians under Muslim rule in the ninth century show that they had the freedom to defend their doctrines and even criticize Islamic beliefs both in the written form and in oral debates. By the ninth century, the Christians and Muslims could study and criticize one another's beliefs, and this led to an intellectual interaction that reinforced the "dialogue of civilizations." The fact that Christians freely defended their doctrines shows that they lived in an open social environment. Feeling peace is the main requirement of religious dialogue, and the Christians had that advantage. However, our main concern is to show how a Christian thinker could use the methods of Islamic theology to introduce his Trinitarian doctrines.

As in the following pages, we will show that the Christians in general and Abu Raʾitah in particular found themselves in close contact with Islamic thought and practice. Consequently, they used Islamic terminology in their writings. Abu Raʾitah frequently referred to and used Muʿtazilite themes in order to explain and defend the doctrine of the Trinity. This sort of response may be called a creative reaction. The main question is whether this creativity on behalf of Abu Raʾitah was successful or not. Perhaps his arguments and methods were not so successful, but he seriously endeavored to convince his audience and to show that Christian doctrines were not contradictory.

The Jacobites

In about two centuries before the emergence of Islam, the Church had been split by differences over Christology. As a result, those Christians who did not accept the conciliar formulae were condemned and gradually marginalized by mainstream Christians. Finally, they left the Byzantine Empire and resided in the Arabian Peninsula or Persian Empire. These marginalized Christians generally included Melkites

(Greek orthodox Christians who adhered to the Council of Chalcedon), Nestorians, and Jacobites (who wrote and spoke in Aramaic and Syriac and did not accept the Council of Chalcedon).[1] After the rise of Islam, these three sects had more religious, cultural, and social relations with Muslims than the other Christians.

In the Byzantine world, the Jacobites were known as Monophysites—those who believed that Christ possessed only the divine nature and lacked humanity. Nevertheless, in the Muslim world, they were called Jacobites, after the founder of their sect, Jacobus Baradeus (ca. 500-578). Jacobites sought to propagate their faith in areas such as Iraq and Syria. In the writings of pre-Islamic Arabia, Jacobites were known as venerable scholars and learned citizens. Sergius, the Jacobite saint, for example, was honored in pre-Islamic poetry (Oaks 2011, 300-4; Ali 1970, 6:628, 630). In addition, we can say that chronologically *The Dialogue between the Patriarch John 1 and the Amir of the Hagarenes* is the earliest Jacobite treatise that has come down to us. In this short dialogue, which seems to have taken place in 639 CE in Syria, there is a reference to the Trinity. Towards the end of the dialogue, the Amir of the Hagarenes was allegedly convinced that God had a Son (Newman1993, 25-26).

Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti: His Life and Works

Habib Ibn Khidma Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti (755-835 C.E) was a famous Monophysite, or Jacobite, theologian and apologist. He lived in the ancient Christian city of Takrit, north of Baghdad (Bosworth 1984, 10:141). Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1063), a Muslim heresiographer reluctantly referred to him as a person who tried to distort the views of Muʿtazilite

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1. For more details on their history, beliefs, and relation with Muslims, see Azraqi (1969, 1:111), Shahid (2006, 19-21), Osman (2005, 68-7, 95), Hajebrahimi and Abdi (2017, 50-51ff), Cheikho 1989 (37, 54, 59-60), and Francoise (2008, 5:377).

theologians concerning the grace of God and other principles (Ibn Hazm 1995, 3:170). This report shows that Abu Raʾitah had at least some relations and interactions with the Muslims in the early ninth century. However, there is no more information about Abu Raʾitah's life. Certainly, Theodore Abu Qurrah (d. ca. 829) and Ammar al-Basri (d. ca. 850) were his contemporary Melkite and Nestorian counterparts. With the latter, he claimed to have discussed face to face (Beaumont 2000). It seems that Abu Raʾitah was temporarily the bishop of Takrit, but his reputation was for his theological and philosophical writings. He also is one of the first Christians who wrote apologetic works in Arabic (Keating 2006, 55). At that time, Arabic was the official and bureaucratic language, and therefore, between 750 and 850, along with the Bible, many Christian texts were translated into Arabic (Griffith 2008, 49, 76; Keating 2006, 20). Moreover, this period was the most important era in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, during which Christians and Muslims became familiar with one another's beliefs for the first time and formed approaches that have continued to be influential even to present day (Thomas and Barbara 2009, 569). Furthermore, during this period, instead of attacking each other, Christians and Muslims tended to discuss their beliefs, and discussing religious ideas, especially in a clear and free manner, signifies a dialogical setting.

Abu Raʾitah probably wrote eleven works in defense of the western Syrian Jacobite church, but only nine are known to be extant. Two of his works deal especially with the doctrine of the Trinity and are in Arabic: *al-Risala al-ula fi al-thaluth al-muqaddas* (The First Treatise on the Holy Trinity). The second treatise that contains a defense of the doctrine of the Trinity is a more general apology for Christianity entitled *Risalat li Abi Raʾita al-Takriti fi ithbat din al-nasraniyya wa ithbat al-thaluth al-muqaddas* (The Treatise of Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti

on Proving the Christian Religion and Proving the Holy Trinity) (Dakkash 1996, 96; Keating 2006, 57). In these works, he has tried to defend the truthfulness of Christianity in Arabic and respond to the questions of the Muslims and Melkite Christians about the Trinity. He also wrote another treatise entitled *al-Risalat al-thaniya li-Abi Raʾita al-Takriti fi al-tajassud* (The Second Treatise of Abu Raʾitah al-Takriti on the Incarnation). However, *al-Risala al-ula* is his most important work, which includes the two latter treatises. This treatise comprises three chapters: On Monotheism and the Trinity, Controversies over Monotheism and the Trinity, Biblical Testimony to the Trinity. In his writings, Abu Raʾitah uses Christian scriptures, traditional apologetic methods, and principles of Hellenistic philosophy to defend Christianity against Islam (Thomas 2009, 569; Keating 2006, 54). [1] However, as we will show, he has also used Muʿtazilite principles to show that his Jacobite doctrine of the Trinity was not paradoxical and that Christianity was the true religion.

Abu Raʾitah's Notion of the Trinity: Trinity in Unity

Whether *kalam* was developed in order to meet the challenges of non-Muslims or emerged in inter-Muslim discussions (van Ess 1973, 101), it was popular in the ninth century. Islamic theology began as a systematic discipline with Muʿtazilites and thus in Abu Raʾitah's era this school of *kalam* was prevalent. By using Muʿtazilite principals, Abu Raʾitah tried to explain the doctrine of the Trinity in terms that his Muslim audience might understand.

Firstly, He explains the unity of God and then responds to Muslim polemical questions. Abu Raʾitah asserts that there is no inconsistency between monotheism and the doctrine of the Trinity: "God as one, who has never and will never cease to be living, knowing, seeing, and

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1. On the style of his works, see Keating (2006, 61, 132-42) and Griffith (2008, 24-25).

hearing, without a companion in His substantial nature or His dominion. He is the first and the last" (Dakkash 1996, 64). It is clear that Abu Raʾitah from the outset lists divine attributes that are accepted by both Muslims and Christians. According to Abu Raʾitah, the central difference between Christians and Muslims is not their conception of God but that Muslims misunderstand what Christians mean by their doctrine. He then starts with asking his opponents whether they understand God's oneness in terms of oneness of genus (*jins*), species (*nawʿ*), or number (*ʿadad*). He claims that if Muslims consider God one in His genus, then they believe in plurality in God's substance. In other words, their description of God entails a necessary plurality in the Godhead. If they consider Him one numerically, then they are anthropomorphists, because human beings are described by this kind of oneness. And for him, this idea contradicts the Quranic verse that states, "He has no similarity" (42:11). He states that Muslims should describe God as one in species, and species is the substance (*jawhar*) of things; therefore, they have to confess that God is one species (*jawhar, ousia, ουσια*) and three hypostases (Dakkash 1996, 64-70, 100-1; Keating 2006, 172). Abu Raʾitah says that this statement about God is perfect in two ways: when Christians describe Him as one in *ousia*, then He transcends all His creatures. His *ousia* is near everything without any mixing. On the other hand, He is one in number and includes all characters of the number. The number is either odd or even, and the two kinds are included in the three hypostases. Consequently, He is one in *ousia* and three in hypostases, and this is the perfect way to describe God (Keating 2006, 176, 198). At this point, Abu Raʾitah puts forward the mainstream Christian traditional conception of the Trinity, because he describes God as one in substance (*nawʿ, jawhar*) and three in hypostases. But he does not clarify why his Muslim audience should assign three hypostases to God.

The *Ousia* and the Hypostases

In his attempts to clarify the relation between the *ousia* and the hypostases, it seems as if Abu Raʾitah combines Aristotelianism with the ideas of church fathers and Muʿtazilites. In his discussion of categories, Aristotle divides the names or determinations into absolute and relative. In his opinion, absolute names are independent, or "themselves in themselves" (αυτα καθ'αυτα), but relative determinations are predicative, or "in relation to the other" (προς αλλος). Accordingly, the names such as slave (δουλος) implies a master (δεσποτης) and master implies a slave (Aristotle 1962, 48; Brentano 1981, 8:88ff.; 1975, 7-10). Basil of Caesarea (d. 330) has also divided the names into absolute and relative (Schaff 1895, 282). Finally, Muʿtazilite theologians have mainly classified the attributes of God ontologically in two categories: the attributes of act (*sifat al-fiʿl*) that apply to God on account of something created by Him, and the attributes of essence (*sifat al-dhat*) that are predicated on Him from all eternity (e.g., knowing, powerful, and living). Moreover, for Muʿtazilites, all attributes of God are, in fact, identical with His essence.

Likewise, Abu Raʾitah discusses God's names and attributes whether because of his affinities with Muʿtazilite principals or due to his familiarity with Aristotelianism and mainstream Christian tradition. Although Abu Raʾitah asserts that both Christians and Muslims describe God as living, hearing, seeing, and knowing, he asks whether these names are absolute or relative. Were these names pre-eternally present in the Godhead or not? He explains that names such as "earth," "heaven," and "fire" are absolute or simple names, for they are not predicated of other things. On the other hand, predicative names are related to something else. For instance, "knower" and "knowledge," "seer" and "seeing, "wise" and "wisdom" are related to each other. Now, did the attributes of God belong to His *ousia* pre-eternally, or did

He gain them only later? If they are relative or predicative names, then there was a time when God had no life, no knowledge, and no wisdom, and for Abu Raʾitah this idea is a contradictory statement about God. Consequently, Muslims have to admit that these attributes are substantial or absolute. He then asks, whether they are perfect issuing from a perfect being or perfect issuing from an imperfect being. Are they separate or connected attributes? He concludes that these attributes are perfect issuing from something perfect (Dakkash 1996, 72-74, 75-76; Keating 2006, 178, 182). In addition to this, as we will show in the following pages, Abu Raʾitah uses various analogies to show that the hypostases or attributes are connected and divided simultaneously.

Proof Texts on the Doctrine of the Trinity

After arguing that Scriptures are not corrupted, Abu Raʾitah mentions various Biblical proof texts to support the doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, from his written and available works, it is clear that he had substantial knowledge of Islam. For instance, he refers to Moses as the son of ʿImran, which indicates his awareness of Quranic epithets (e.g., Quran 17:110; 20:8; 59:24) (Keating 2007, 269; 2006, 208; 2005, 49ff.; Dakkash 1996, 96). He uses those Biblical verses in which God refers to Himself in the plural sense, and this kind of speech, he asserts, appears both in the Bible and the Quran (e.g., Genesis 1:26; 2:18; 3:22; 11:7; 18:1-3; Psalms 33:6; Isiah 48:16; Daniel 4:31; Quran 2:34, 15:26, 4:161, 6:6, 10:14, 17:17; 26:172). Thus he considers these instances to be references to the Trinity. By using one or two biblical proof texts, he tries to show how God pointed to both His "three-ness" and His "oneness." In his view, plural pronouns in these verses do not signify reverence but rather three hypostases and one substance (Dakkash 1996, 91-92, 95; Keating 2006, 202, 204).

Analogies of the Trinity

The use of analogy in the Trinitarian discussions has had a long history and dates back to the church fathers. For instance, Justin (d. 165) and Tatian (d. 172) explain the birth of Son by natural analogies. They refer to "the fires kindled from a fire," which by no means become less but remain the same (Schaff 2001, chap. 128; Schaff 2004, chap. 5, 102). Both these church fathers have tried, on the basis of analogy, to show that the Son came into being by participation (κατα μετοχη), not by abscission (κατα μερισμον).

Abu Raʾitah also uses analogies to explain the Trinity. For instance, he mentions the analogy of three torches to show the oneness of the Godhead in terms of the substance and its plurality in terms of the hypostases. The torches agree with each other in lightness; there is no difference among them in terms of light and illumination. On the other hand, the light comes from three distinct torches, so there are three distinct lights. These lights are not identical with each other. Abu Raʾitah suggests that his opponents should know that the light described is one and three in number simultaneously—one in terms of its quiddity and three in terms of its sources. He is careful to acknowledge that the analogy is limited and God is above all analogies (Dakkash 1996, 77-78; Keating 2006, 104). In his view, the sun, light, and heat are similar to the Trinity. The light and the heat never separate from the sun, and no one can differentiate them. Moreover, the sun is never without them. Thus, the attributes of God are not separate from Him, and there would be no time when God is neither knowing nor living (Dakkash 1996, 83, 84, 88).

His next analogy draws on the relationship of Eve and Abel to Adam, who together are one in terms of their human nature and three in terms of their hypostases. This analogy perhaps was rare among Arab Christians, but the church fathers used it frequently. Gregory of Nyssa,

for example, shows that Adam and Abel are the same in terms of their nature but distinct from one another in terms of their attributes (Gregory of Nyssa 1892, book 3, 277). Likewise, for Abu Raʾitah, their relation to one another mirrors that between the hypostases in the Godhead. Begotten and proceeding are the properties of Abel and Eve respectively. Abel and Eve have a common substance, because both have come into being from Adam. Although each of them is a perfect, living, and speaking human being, they are only one human being, one *ousia*. This exactly resembles the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who have only one substance (Dakkash 1996, 79-81; Keating 2006, 186, 188). In another treatise, he states that had the hypostases possessed no common substance, the God of the Old Testament would not have been the same as the God of the New Testament (Keating 2003, 50, 51, 52). He is again careful to acknowledge that analogy is limited. The hypothetical challenge of the Muslims would be offered in the following way: Adam, Eve and, Abel are three separate human beings, then the hypostases should be three beings apart from each other. This would mean that God is three in number, which leads to tritheism. Abu Raʾitah admits the limitation of his analogy: Adam, Eve and Abel are merely human beings and made up of distinct parts, but God has none of these qualities (Dakkash 1996, 82-83).

In another place, he describes Father as the cause of Son and Holy Spirit. However, at the same time, he emphasizes that there is no priority or posterity between them. In response to the hypothetical challenge of the Muslims, Abu Raʾitah claims that the sun is the cause of the light and the heat, but there is no priority between them (Dakkash 1996, 99, 113).[1] Although he uses Aristotelian concepts of cause and effect, he claims that there is no transposition between the persons of

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1. He repeats these analogies in the Ithbat (Dakkash 1996, 106-17; Keating 2006, 210).

the Trinity. The analogy of Moses and Aaron being united in humanity and yet two individuals, the analogy of the soul, intellect, and the faculty of speech, the analogy of the sun with its radiance and heat, and the analogy of the five bodily senses are among Abu Raʾitah's other analogies for the Trinity (Dakkash 1996, 100-4; Keating 2006, 192-94). According to him, in all these analogies, we find things that are one and multiple simultaneously. Their oneness and multiplicity are coexistent and do not precede each other. He emphasizes that these analogies do not mean that God is composed of different things.

God's Essence and Attributes in the Muʿtazilite Context

It is clear from the subject matter that Abu Raʾitah has a Muslim audience in mind, for he conceives the hypostases of Son (Logos, Λογος) and Spirit as God's knowledge (Σοφια) and life (Ζωη). According to him, these are God's substantial attributes, and He has possessed them in Himself eternally. God has only these three substantial attributes, because three is a perfect number and encompasses both even and odd numbers. He envisioned the hypostases as God's attributes in order to introduce the Trinity to his Muslim counterparts. Abu Raʾitah claims that both Muslims and Christians agree that God is "one" but disagree over His attributes. According to Christians, He is one substance and three hypostases. He defines the substance as follows: "Substance (*jawhar*) transcends all seen and unseen beings. Nothing is similar to it. It has no contact with anything. It is simple, spiritual, and incorporeal" (Dakkash 1996, 70). This definition is in harmony with orthodox Christian instructions, but his Muslim counterparts objected to this notion and claimed that if the substance was incorporeal, then it could not be shared by three hypostases. In addition, Muslim apologists did not apply the concept of *jawhar* to God, and their concept of substance differed from that of Christians. Al-Ashʿari, for example, claims that Muslim theologians,

both Muʿtazelites and Ashʿarites consider *jawhar* an indivisible particle (*juzʾ la yatajazzaʾ*) and corporeal. As a result, Muslim theologians felt no need to apply *jawhar* to God (Ashʿari 1979, 306). At this point, the argument of Abu Raʾitah was not acceptable to his Muslim contemporaries.

As Muslims could not accept Abu Raʾitah's understanding of *jawhar*, they were also unable to agree with his notion of attributes and hypostases. Almost all Muslim theologians of his time asserted that hypostases are not identical with attributes. In addition, for Muʿtazilite theologians, the attributes of God were absolute and identical with his essence. In order to show the difference between his conception of attributes and that of Muʿtazilites, let us examine the teachings of Muslim theologians in this regard briefly.

Muʿtazilism as a theological movement was founded in Basra in the first half of the 2nd/ 8th century by Wasil b. ʿAtaʾ (d. 131/748). Muʿtazilites considered divine attributes to be merely names or modes. For them, if the attributes coexisted with God pre-eternally, they would also have a share in divinity (Sharastani 1975, 1:57, 59ff., 94; Abrahamov 1995, 364, 366; Gimaret 1984, 7:787-88). For instance, knowledge by which God knows is nothing other than Himself. According to Muʿtazilite theologians, if the attributes were distinct from one another and from the essence and are co-eternal with God, this would compromise *tawhid* and lead to polytheism. Wasil is reported to have said, "One who regards states (*maʿna*) and attributes (*sifa*) as eternal believes in two Gods" (Shahrastani 1975, 1:60). In fact, Wasil and his followers rejected the existence of any real attributes. Likewise, Abu al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllaf (d. 227/840) made no distinction between God's essence and His attributes. According to him, "God is knowing by a knowledge that is He, and He is powerful by a power that is He,

and He is living by a life that is He" (Ashʿari 1979, 483). Abu al-Hudhayl, therefore, identifies the qualities of God with His essence, and for him God is not distinct from His attributes (van Ess 2014, 1:320). Al-Nazzam (d. 231/845), another Muʿtazilite apologist, viewed the attributes as identical with the essence, and the essence with the attributes (Ashʿari 1979, 486). Ibn Kullab (d. 240/855), one of al-Ashʿari's predecessors, considered God's attributes subsisting in His essence (Ashʿari 1979, 169-70; ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1958, 5:88ff.). Consequently, Muʿtazilites insisted that God's attributes were the same as His essence, and they were not distinct from one another, in order to safeguard God's unity (Adamson 2003, 13:45-77; Shahrastani, 197, 1:64; Wolfson 1976, 133).Thus, the identification of the hypostases with God's attributes by Abu Raʾitah was not acceptable to his Muslim audience.

Analogies of the Trinity from the Muʿtazilite viewpoint

Furthermore, as we mentioned earlier, Abu Raʾitah also uses analogy to show that there are even natural phenomena that are simultaneously one and three. He seems to have used nine analogies to introduce the doctrine of the Trinity (Sadowski 2016, 451-87). However, if we accept that his audience was primarily Muʿtazilite theologians, then his extensive use of analogy could not be useful. Muʿtazilite thinkers were of the opinion that God, unlike created beings, had attributes by virtue of His essence. However, they did not base their idea on "an analogy between God's attributes and the essential properties in created things" (Adamson 2003, 53). For instance, two Muʿtazilite thinkers, Abu ʿIsa al-Warraq (d. 247/861) and ʿAbd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1024), criticized Christian Trinitarian analogies. Abu ʿIsa said that if Christians regard God as absolutely comparable to natural phenomena, then they are anthropomorphists. Moreover, in comparing Him to any created beings, they cannot maintain that the thing to which He is compared is His

creature. In addition, if there are no links between God and these analogies, then why Christians have compared temporal things to transcendent God? (Thomas 1992, 168 [in the Arabic text]; cf. ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1958, 5:102-3). For Muslims, the Trinitarian analogies lead to anthropomorphism and finally tritheism. It seems that Abu Raʾitah was aware of the Muslim dislike of analogy, because he frequently emphasized the imperfect and bewildering nature of analogy but believed that it was a rational means to clarify his explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Analysis

Abu Raʾitah's main concern was to defend Christian doctrines, particularly the Trinity, against the accusations of his Muslim contemporaries. Furthermore, he reassured his fellow-Jacobites that their teachings were not contradictory. Abu Raʾitah firstly challenged Islamic monotheistic ideas in order to explain the Trinity. He asserted that Muslims had to confess, like Christians, that God was "one" in terms of His substance. He understood the doctrine in a traditional Christian manner but introduced it in a way that made it more acceptable to his Muslim counterparts. Because of his Islamic environment, Abu Raʾitah had to explain the Trinity in terms of Islamic theological framework and concepts. His Muʿtazilite contemporaries had deeply discussed God's essence and attributes, and Abu Raʾitah clearly knew about these discussions and sought to make use of them. For him, the hypostases of Word and Spirit were God's knowledge and life. Although he likened the hypostases to attributes, he recognized the difference between them. He merely used Muslim language and principles to make the doctrine of the Trinity more acceptable to his Muslim audience. Besides the rational arguments, he also drew on various analogies and proof texts in order to defend the Trinity.

Furthermore, Christian encounters with Muʿtazilite theological discussions had caused serious challenges and questions, and Christian theologians could not answer some of these new questions. Muʿtazilite apologists regarded the attributes as identical with God's essence and never accepted any distinction between them. As a result, they expected the hypostases to be regarded the same. In other words, if the hypostases were just God's attributes, then they would not be distinct persons. As al-Baqillani asks: "Why, after all, has God possessed only these two attributes? Why cannot the number of the attributes be over fourteen or fifteen? Moreover, if they are different from His essence, then Christians are tritheists" (Baqillani 1947, 85).

Christians and Muslims had a different notion of substance. Abu Raʾitah, like his orthodox predecessors, considered it as immaterial and incorporeal. At this point, Muslim theologians objected to such description of the Trinity. For them, the Christian understanding of substance led to its corporeality and materiality. They argued that if the substance was incorporeal, then it would not be divided. And if the hypostases share the same substance, then it is material and corporeal. Consequently, for Muslim theologians, Abu Raʾitah's notion of *jawhar* led to God's contingency (Ashʿari 1979, 306-7; ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1958, 11:310).

Conclusion

Abu Raʾitah faced new challenges in the Muslim environment, which required new answers. Being aware of his environment, he tried to offer new solutions as well as various arguments, analogies, and biblical proof texts to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. He combined Aristotelian thought and his orthodox Christian concepts with Muʿtazilite methods. The most frequent themes in Abu Raʾitah's apologetical works were Christology and the Trinity. He used Muʿtazilite theological terminology in a creative manner and thus

identified the hypostases with God's attributes, though he knew that the hypostases could not be the same as divine attributes.

If Abu Rā'itah's audience were merely Christians, his identification of the hypostases with attributes, his usage of analogy, his understanding of the *ousia*, and his references to Biblical proof texts would be not only creative but also successful. But since he addressed Muslim apologists, especially the Muʿtazilites, then we can claim that his methods and principals were merely creative but not successful. Of course, this does not decrease the value of Abu Raʾitah's works and apologetic defenses from other aspects.

Moreover, Abu Raʾitah flourished during an intellectually open period in which Christians would freely defend their doctrines. Although some of them, such as John of Damascus (d. 749 CE), harshly rejected Islamic instructions and the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad, the Muslims allowed them to express their opinions and views. Due to such tolerance, the Christians would write various apologetical works, which have come down to us. Therefore, instead of the clash of civilizations, one can identify a kind of religious dialogue and tolerance throughout this period. The fact that Abu Raʾitah introduced his beliefs, criticized Muslim doctrines, and combined his Trinitarian teachings with Muʿtazilite prinsiples testifies further to such tolerance. Unfortunately, after the fifth/eleventh century such tolerance gradually disappeared and gave its place to hostility and dogmatism. Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), for example, took a hostile attitude to other religions and denominations. Especially in his *al- Jawab al-sahih*, he condemned Christian doctrines and regarded Christians as unbelievers. The reasons behind the emergence of such intolerance needs further studies.

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