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MEDIEVAL MUSLIM POLEMICS AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN CREED
THE CRITIQUE OF ŠĀLIḤ B. AL-ḤUSAYN AL-ĠA‘FARĪ (D. 668/1270)

SUMMARY: After introducing Šāliḥ b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ġa‘farī (d. 668/1270), the Egyptian Muslim author of an important work of anti-Christian polemic entitled *Tahḡīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrah wa-l-Inḡīl* ('The Shaming of Those Who Have Corrupted the Torah and the Gospel'), this article offers an annotated translation of the book's eighth chapter, devoted to exposing the alleged corruption and self-contradictoriness of the Christian creed. The charges are fundamentally two: that some parts of the creed logically contradict other parts; and that the creed is based neither on the revealed law of the Gospel nor on the words of Jesus or the Apostles.

I have known some opponents who refute this creed (*amāna*) and say that it was the three hundred and eighteen bishops [assembled at Nicaea] who devised the doctrine of the Trinity, put it down in writing and propagated it in their cities and among their flock, and that the religion which the Messiah brought is the religion of monotheism to which they adhere, while we devised this [religion] which they claim is a corruption and a substitution.

Sāwīrus b. al-Muqaffa‘ (d. after 987), *Kitāb tafsiṛ al-amāna*¹

We do not know much about Abū al-Baqā‘ Taqī al-Dīn Šāliḥ b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭalḥa b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Hāšimī al-Ġa‘farī al-Zaynabī (d. 668/1270). The last two names indicate that he traced his descent from the family of

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¹ Arabic text and French trans. in L. Leroy, "Sévère ibn al-Moqaffa‘, évêque d’Aschmounaïn: Histoire des conciles (second livre)", *Patrologia Orientalis* 6, fasc. 4, i (1911), 501.

the prophet Muḥammad. The name al-Ġa'farī points back to Ġa'far b. Abī Ṭālib, the cousin of Muḥammad and brother of 'Alī, the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph. Al-Zaynabī refers to the descendants of 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ġa'far b. Abī Ṭālib, whose mother was Zaynab al-Kubrā, daughter of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima, and granddaughter of Muḥammad². Šāliḥ b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ġa'farī was born in 581/1185, when the legendary Saladin, the founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, still reigned as Sultan of Egypt. Al-Ġa'farī died in Cairo on the first of Dū al-Qa'da 668/22 June 1270, during the reign of the Mamlūk sultan Baybars, at the advanced age of eighty-seven. He was buried the next day in the Qarāfa cemetery at the base of the Muqaṭṭam Hills. His earliest biographer, al-Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326), describes him as an eminent person, knowledgeable in *belles lettres* and other subjects, and a leader remembered for his refinement and nobility³. Al-Ḍahabī (d. 748/1348) reports that al-Ġa'farī studied under the *ḥadīṭ* scholar 'Alī b. al-Bannā' (d. 622/1225)⁴ and that he himself transmitted *ḥadīṭ* to 'Abd al-Mu'min b. Ḥalaf al-Dimyāṭī (d. 705/1306)⁵. Al-Ḍahabī also mentions that al-Ġa'farī was the author of sermons and orations (*ḥuṭab*)⁶, works of poetry and prose, and several books⁷. Al-Ġa'farī served as judge in the city of Qūš in Upper Egypt, which was at that time, according to the traveller and scholar Yāqūt (d. 626/1229), the third

² On the arrival of the Ġa'fira confederation in Egypt, see 'Abd Allāh Ḥūrīd al-Barrī, *al-Qabā'il al-'arabiyya fī Miṣr fī al-qurūn al-ṭalāṭa al-ūlā lil-ḥiğra*, al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma lil-Kitāb, Cairo 1992, 114. See also Maḥmūd al-Sayyid, *Tārīḥ al-qabā'il al-'arabiyya fī 'aṣr al-dawlatayn al-Ayyūbiyya wa-l-Mamlūkiyya*, Mu'assasat Šabāb al-Ġāmi'a, Alexandria 1998.

³ Mūsā b. Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Ḍayl mir'āt al-zamān*, Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uṭmāniyya, Haydarābād 1954-1961, 2:438.

⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī al-Karam Naṣr b. al-Bannā' was a *ḥadīṭ* scholar from Baghdad who later taught in Egypt (Alexandria, Miṣr, Damietta, Qūš) and Mecca, where he died in 622/1225. See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī, *Tahdīb siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Šu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ, Mu'assasat al-Risāla, Beirut 1991, 3:206.

⁵ 'Abd al-Mu'min b. Ḥalaf al-Dimyāṭī (d. 705/1306) was a Šāfi'ī *ḥadīṭ* scholar born in the island of Tūnā, near Damietta. As a young man, he travelled extensively in search of traditions. He later settled in Cairo, where he held positions in some of the leading teaching institutions. He is considered as one of the most important transmitters of traditions of the last third of the thirteenth century. He is also the author of a dictionary of authorities (*Mu'ğam al-šuyūḥ*), which is often cited by subsequent historians and biographers. See Asmaa Sayeed, "'Abd al-Mu'min b. Khalaf al-Dimyāṭī", in G. Krämer et al. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (hereafter EI3), Brill Online 2007–.

⁶ Interestingly, the Ḥanbalī scholar Nağm al-Dīn Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Qawī al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316) mentions al-Ġa'farī among authors who wrote on the contradictions within the Gospels, referring to him as Taqī al-Dīn Šāliḥ al-Ḥaṭīb al-Qūšī. See L. Demiri, *Muslim Exegesis of the Bible in Medieval Cairo: Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī's (d. 716/1316) Commentary on the Christian Scriptures*, Brill, Leiden 2013, 34. Although Nağm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī was born in the vicinity of Baghdad, he eventually moved to Egypt where he lived in different towns including Qūš. See L. Demiri, "'Al-Ṭūfī", in D. Thomas et al. (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* (hereafter CMR), 8 vols. to date, Brill, Leiden 2009–, 4:724-731.

⁷ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī, *Tārīḥ al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mašāḥir wa-l-a'lām: ḥawādīṭ wa-wafayāt, 661-670 H*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut 1999, 262.

city of Egypt, after Cairo and Alexandria⁸. Apparently, al-Ġa‘farī also served as financial inspector or controller (*nāzīr*) of the same city at a different period of his life, an appointment about which al-Dahabī speaks less favourably⁹. From his writings, it is evident that al-Ġa‘farī was Aš‘arī in his theological persuasion. As for his legal doctrine, we can presume that he was a Šāfi‘ī, the school favoured by the Ayyūbids upon their coming to power in Egypt and up to the time of Baybars’s reforms of the judiciary system in the 660s/1260s¹⁰. Three books written by al-Ġa‘farī are known, of which the second and the third are later abridgements of the first and most important, the *Tahḡīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Inḡīl* (‘The Shaming of Those Who Have Corrupted the Torah and the Gospel’)¹¹. The other two are entitled *Kitāb al-‘ašr al-masā’il al-musammā Bayān al-wāḏiḥ al-mašhūd min faḏā’ih al-Našārā wa-l-Yahūd* (‘The Book of the Ten Questions, or Exposition of the Clear and Attested Ignominies of the Christians and the Jews’), and *al-Radd ‘alā al-Našārā* (‘Refutation of the Christians’)¹².

⁸ See J.-C. Garcin, “Kūš”, in P. Bearman et al. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (hereafter EI2), 11 vols., Brill, Leiden 1954-2003, 5:514-515. In addition to being an important centre for sugar production, the prosperity of this city was due to its strategic situation, which made it an important staging-post on the major trade-route with Yemen. The city had a Christian majority until the middle of the sixth/twelfth century. The first Sunnī madrasa of Qūš was founded in 607/1210, after which the city became a centre for the propagation of Sunnism in Upper Egypt. See also J.-C. Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale : Qūš*, Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 1976; D. Gril, “Une émeute anti-chrétienne à Qūš au début du XIIIe-XIVe siècle”, *Annales islamologiques* 16 (1980) 241-274; and M. ‘Abduh al-Ḥaḡḡāḡī, *Qūš ft al-tārīḥ al-Islāmī*, al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb, Cairo 1982.

⁹ See also Ḥalīl b. Ayybak al-Šafadī (d. 764/1363), *Kitāb al-Waḡf bi-l-waḡayāt*, ed. Aḥmad Arnā’ūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā, Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāṭ al-‘Arabī, Beirut 2000, 16:148-149; Baybars al-Manšūrī (d. 725/1325), *Zubdat al-fikra fī tārīḥ al-Ḥiḡra*, ed. D.S. Richards, al-Šarika al-Muttaḥida lil-Tawzī’, Beirut 1998, 127. It has been erroneously suggested that al-Ġa‘farī served as governor of Qūš. See L. Demiri, “Al-Ja‘farī”, CMR 4:480; D.R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean: The Splendid Replies of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285)*, Brill, Leiden 2014, 75.

¹⁰ On this important reform of the judiciary system, see Y. Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of Taqlīd: The Four Chief Qāḏīs under the Mamluks”, *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003) 210-228.

¹¹ The *Tahḡīl* was first edited by Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Qadaḥ, 2 vols., Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, Riyadh 1998. There is a more recent edition by Ḥalīd Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Maktabat al-Nāfiḏa, Giza 2006. Unless otherwise stated, all references hereafter to the *Tahḡīl* will be from Qadaḥ’s edition.

¹² The *Bayān* was first edited by Amal bt. Mabruk b. Nāhis al-Luhaybī, PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 2011. References hereafter will be to this edition of *Bayān*. There is a more recent edition by Hamza al-‘Āyīš, *Kitāb al-‘ašr al-masā’il al-mašhūr bi-Bayān al-wāḏiḥ al-mašhūd min faḏā’ih al-Našārā wa-l-Yahūd*, Kitāb Nāšīrūn, Beirut 2014. The *Radd* was edited by Muḥammad Muḥammad Ḥasānayn, Maktabat al-Madāris, Doha; Maktaba Wahba, Cairo 1988. In addition to al-Ġa‘farī’s own abridgements, there is also an epitome of the *Tahḡīl* written in 942/1536 by Abū al-Faḏl al-Mālikī al-Su‘ūdī, entitled *al-Muntaḥab al-ḡalīl min Tahḡīl man ḥarrafa al-Inḡīl* (‘A Splendid Selection from the Shaming of Those Who Have Corrupted the Gospel’), an early edition of which was prepared by F.J. van den Ham, *Disputatio pro religione Mohammedanorum adversus Christianos. Textum Arabicum e Codice Leidensi cum Varr. Lect.*, Brill, Leiden 1890. There are two more recent editions by Bakr Zakī ‘Awad, Dār al-Ku-

Date of Composition, Sources and Structure of the Taḥḡīl

The introduction to the *Bayān* provides some information concerning the circumstances of its composition and its relation with al-Ġaʿfarī's previous book. In the year 618/1221, the "tyrant of the Romans" (*tāġiyat al-Rūm*) sent a series of questions to the Ayyūbid Sultan, al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 615/1218-635/1238), demanding a response. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Francis Triebs assumed that the Christian ruler referred to by al-Ġaʿfarī had to be the Byzantine emperor of the time, Theodore I Laskaris, resident at Nicaea after the Crusaders' capture of Constantinople in 600/1204¹³. This hypothesis was generally accepted in Western scholarship, even though Theodore's initiative is not mentioned by any other historical source. However, it is more likely that the "tyrant" in question, if the exchange did take place, was Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, who held the title of King of the Romans since 609/1212 and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome on 25 Ramaḡān 617/22 November 1220¹⁴. Be this as it may, al-Ġaʿfarī describes these questions as "useless and devoid of benefit, resembling the trifles of women and children more than anything else"¹⁵. The Sultan nevertheless requested him to prepare a response exposing the falsity of the Christian doctrine. He indicated that writing such a work was an act of defence of the religion and a contribution to the struggle to subdue the ungodly, then recited Qurʾān 29:69, "But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause: God is with those who do good". To comply with al-Kāmil's request, al-Ġaʿfarī says, he turned to his book *Taḥḡīl man ḡarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Inġīl*, which he had composed in the days of youth and intellectual vigour, structuring the new book around ten questions, each of which summarized a chapter from the *Taḥḡīl*.

tub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo 1993; and by Ramaḡān al-Ṣafanāwī al-Badrī and Muṣṭafā al-Zuhbī, Dār al-Ḥadīṭ, Cairo 1997. On the author of this epitome, see C. van Arendonk "al-Suʾūdī, Abu ʿl-Faḡl al-Mālikī", EI2, 9:905; and L. Demiri, "Abū l-Faḡl al-Suʾūdī", CMR 7:639-643.

¹³ Francis Triebs (ed.), *Liber decem quaestionum contra Christianos*, Typis Caroli Drobnig, Bonn 1897, iii.

¹⁴ Unlike Theodore, Frederick is known to have corresponded with al-Kāmil, and Muslim writers set out to answer Frederick's scientific and philosophical challenges. Furthermore, the same questions that al-Ġaʿfarī mentions in the introduction to the *Bayān* are ascribed to "the Franks" in the *Taḥḡīl*'s second abridgment (see *Radd*, 56), which supports the likelihood that the ruler who wrote to al-Kāmil was the Latin Roman Emperor and not his Greek counterpart. On the intellectual life at Frederick's court and the philosophical and scientific exchanges that the emperor maintained with the Muslim world, see D. Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor*, Oxford University Press, New York 1992, 251-289, especially 256-258.

¹⁵ According to him, one had to do with the visions that the sleeping person sees while dreaming, and another with whether a child is created from the man's discharge or from the woman's discharge (see *Bayān*, 102). These are suspiciously close to some of the questions that, according to Muslim tradition, the Jews of Medina asked Muḡammad to test the authenticity of his prophetic claim. See Ibn Iṣḡāq (re-cension of Ibn Hiṣām), *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, 3rd ed., Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, Beirut 1990, 2:184-185; trans. A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Iṣḡāq's Sirat rasūl Allāh*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1955, 255.

Thus, writing in or shortly after 618/1221, when al-Ġa'farī was about thirty-seven years old, he refers to the *Tahḡīl* as a work of youth. This information allows us to push back its composition to at least a decade earlier, that is, sometime around 606/1210, if not earlier. In the introduction to the *Bayān*, al-Ġa'farī also attests to the popularity of his first book among the scholars of Fustāt, in Cairo, who had found much pleasure in the *Tahḡīl* and readily referred to it for refuting Christians. Indeed, the *Tahḡīl* appears to have become a bestseller among the Muslim population of Cairo where, if we are to believe al-Ġa'farī, there were many eager to engage in debate with Christians and Jews: “The book brought something uncommon in its art, the ultimate in its genre. And no sooner had rulers and ruled alike heard of it, than they obtained a copy of it, and, by means of it, realized their long-sought desire to debate with the People of the Book”¹⁶.

We find a confirmation of al-Ġa'farī's testimony about the popularity of the *Tahḡīl* in the fact that the Coptic Patriarch Cyril III Ibn Laqlaq (r. 632/1235-640/1243) requested the eminent Coptic scholar al-Ṣafī b. al-'Assāl to write a refutation of it, which the latter did, entitling it: *Nahḡ al-sabīl fī ḡawāb tahḡīl muḡarrifī l-Inḡīl* ('The Procedure Along the Way in Response to the Shaming of Those Who Corrupt the Gospel')¹⁷. In the introduction, al-Ṣafī explains that someone had sent him a copy of the *Tahḡīl* and asked him to respond to it. He studied the book and realized that its author had based himself on the *Kitāb al-naṣā'ih* ('The Book of Advices'), that is, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's refutation of Christianity, to which al-Ṣafī had already replied with his *al-Ṣaḡā'ih fī ḡawāb al-naṣā'ih* ('Truths in Response to Advices'). He thus thought it unnecessary to write another rebuttal¹⁸. A few months later, however, the Patriarch's request had reached him. When told about al-Ṣafī's previous book, the Patriarch decided that, nevertheless, he should add a brief response to those arguments in the *Tahḡīl* which were not found in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī¹⁹. In a later passage, al-Ṣafī writes that it has reached his notice that the author of the *Tahḡīl* was chief judge of a province and

¹⁶ Al-Ġa'farī, *Bayān*, 110.

¹⁷ Arabic text published by Murqus Ġirḡis, *Kitāb nahḡ al-sabīl fī tahḡīl muḡarrifī l-Inḡīl*, by al-Ṣafī b. al-'Assāl, Maṭba'at 'Ayn Ṣams, Cairo 1926/1927. On this Coptic author, a member of a distinguished family, the Awlād al-'Assāl, some of whose members played an important role in the Arabic literary renaissance of the Copts during the thirteenth century, see Wadi Awad, “al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl”, *CMR* 4:538-551. See also G. Schwarb, “The Coptic and Syriac Receptions of Neo-Ash'arite Theology”, in S. Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, 553-555.

¹⁸ See Kh. Samir, “La réponse d'Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl à la réfutation des chrétiens de 'Alī al-Ṭabarī”, *Parole de l'Orient* 11 (1983) 281-328. On this author, who was active in the mid-third/mid-ninth century and whose full name was Abū al-Ḥasan Alī b. Rabban Sahl al-Ṭabarī, see D. Thomas, “'Alī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī: A Convert's Assessment of His Former Faith”, in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, Orient-Institut, Beirut; Ergon, Würzburg 2007, 137-156; and R. Ebied and D. Thomas (ed.), *The Polemical Works of 'Alī al-Ṭabarī*, Brill, Leiden 2016, 1-24.

¹⁹ Al-Ṣafī, *Nahḡ al-sabīl*, 3-4.

that he became a *warrāq*, copyist-bookseller²⁰. Al-Ṣafī also mentions an unnamed table companion of the Sultan, who made an abridgment of the *Tahğīl*, adding that he does not know these people personally and is not sure about the information. At any event, he considers it unlikely that the power of the truth of the Christian doctrine will impact those who intend to oppose it stubbornly and who wish its destruction. It is possible that this unnamed person who sits at the Sultan's table and who made an abridgment of the *Tahğīl* is al-Ġa'farī himself, who, as mentioned above, composed the *Bayān* at the direct request of al-Kāmil. Moreover, al-Ġa'farī also served as judge and financial inspector of Qūṣ, a position which the Sultan would entrust to someone within his circle of confidence.

If true, al-Ṣafī's information suggesting that al-Ġa'farī was a *warrāq*, in addition to being a legal scholar, would go a long way to explain his manifest erudition and the extraordinary wealth of sources, Muslim and Christian, that he collected for the purpose of writing his first book. Fortunately, al-Ġa'farī himself provides a detailed account of them in the introduction to the *Tahğīl*:

The author said: *Kitāb tahğīl man ḥarrafa al-Inğīl* contains the refutation of the Christians and the Jews from the books which they have, such as the Torah of Moses (the five books), the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the Psalms of David, the Prophecies of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk and Daniel; the Letters of Paul the Apostle; the Book of Kings and the Lives of the Disciples (*siyar al-talāmīd*).

The author – may God forgive him – said: I became acquainted with many of their works and compositions in defence of their religion, the proofs they adduce for their captious arguments, the refutations that each of their three sects (Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites²¹) wrote of one another, and their apologies for their doctrines. I also read a number of refutations of the Christians written by our fellow Muslims, such as the book of al-Ruhāwī²², the book of 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Ġāḥiz²³, the

²⁰ Al-Ṣafī, *Nahğ al-sabīl*, 45. As M.A.J. Beg notes (see "Warrāk", EI2, 10:150-151) the profession of *warrāq* attracted men of letters of all descriptions, such as poets, theologians, Qur'ān commentators and *ḥadīth* scholars. See also J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1984, 43-53.

²¹ Although Melkite, Nestorian and Jacobite were originally polemical names assigned to these ecclesial communities by their own Christian adversaries, Muslim authors adopted them to refer to the three main groups of indigenous Christians in the Islamic world. See S.H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2008, 131-139.

²² *Radd al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians'), by 'Abd al-Qādir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ruhāwī (d. 612/1215). See D. Thomas, "Al-Ruhāwī", CMR 4:157-158.

²³ *Al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians'), by 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Ġāḥiz (d. 255/869), of which ten excerpts of different lengths survive: *al-Muḥtār fī al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā: ma'a dirāsa taḥlīliyya taqwīmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Ṣarqāwī, Dār al-Ġīl, Beirut; Maktabat al-Zahrā', [Cairo] 1991; trans. C.D. Fletcher, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: A Translation and Analysis of Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Ġāḥiz's risāla: Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā (A Reply to the Christians)", MA thesis, McGill University, Montreal 2002.

book of ‘Abd al-Ġabbār al-Mu‘tazilī²⁴, the treatise of Abū Bakr²⁵, the Kalām of al-Ġuwaynī²⁶, a book by one of the people from the West²⁷, the book of Ibn al-Ṭayyib²⁸, the book of al-Ṭurṭūšī²⁹, a book by Ibn ‘Auf³⁰, the book of al-Dimyāṭī³¹, and a book by one of our contem-

²⁴ Most probably the *Taḥḥīṭ dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (‘The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood’), by ‘Abd al-Ġabbār b. Aḥmad al-Asadābādī (d. 415/1025), ed. and trans. G.S. Reynolds and S.Kh. Samir, *‘Abd al-Jabbār: Critique of Christian Origins: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 2010. However, al-Ġa‘farī could also be referring to chapter five of ‘Abd al-Ġabbār’s *al-Muḡnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl* (‘Summa on the Matters of Divine Unity and Divine Justice’), on which see D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, Brill, Leiden 2008, 226-377.

²⁵ *Kitāb al-tamhīd* (‘The Introduction’), by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013). See D. Thomas, “Al-Bāqillānī”, CMR 2:448-450.

²⁶ Al-Ġa‘farī is most probably referring to the *Kitāb al-šāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* (‘The Complete Book on the Principles of Religion’) of ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ġuwaynī (d. 478/1085), which includes a long refutation of Christianity. On this work, which has not survived in full, see D. Thomas “Al-Juwaynī”, CMR 3:121-126.

²⁷ Most probably the *Maqāmi‘ al-ṣulbān* (‘Mallets for Crosses’) of Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Šamad al-Ḥazraġī al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī (d. 582/1187). On this author and the circumstances of the composition of the *Maqāmi‘*, see F. de la Granja Santamaría, “Milagros españoles en una obra polémica musulmana (El ‘Kitāb Maqāmi‘ al-ṣulbān’ del Jazrayī)”, *Al-Andalus* 33 (1968) 311-331; T.E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050–1200*, Brill, Leiden 1994, 80-84; and J.P. Monferrer Sala “Al-Khazraġī”, CMR 3:526-528. The *Maqāmi‘* was first edited by ‘Abd al-Maġīd al-Šarfī (Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūṭ al-Iqṭisādiyya wa-l-Iġtimā’iyya, Tunis 1975), on which see the extensive review of Kh. Samir, “Maqāmi‘ al-ṣulbān li-Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd aṣ-Šamad al-Ḥazraġī (519/1125–582/1186), éd. critique par ‘Abd al-Maġīd ash-Sharfī, Tunis, 1975”, *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980) 242-254. It has also been edited by M. Šāma under the title of *Bayna al-Islām wa-l-Masḥiyya: Kitāb Abī ‘Ubayda al-Ḥazraġī*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo 1979.

²⁸ Perhaps the *Radd al-Naṣārā* (‘Refutation of the Christians’) of Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Saraḥsī (d. 286/899), mentioned by M. Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden, nebst Anhängen verwandten Inhalts*, Brockhaus, Leipzig 1877, 142-144.

²⁹ Perhaps the *Radd al-Naṣārā* (‘Refutation of the Christians’) of Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūšī (d. 520/1126), mentioned by Steinschneider, *Polemische*, 144-146. See also M. Fierro, “Al-Ṭurṭūshī”, CMR 3:387-396.

³⁰ Most probably the *Radd ‘alā al-mutanaṣṣir* (‘Refutation of the Convert to Christianity’) of the Mālikī jurist from Alexandria, Abū al-Ṭāhir Ismā‘īl b. Makkī b. Ismā‘īl b. ‘Isā b. ‘Awf al-Zuhrī al-Quraṣhī al-Iskandarānī (d. 581/1185), mentioned by Ibn Farḥūn (d. 799/1396), *al-Dībāġ al-mudāhhab fī ma‘rifat a‘yān ‘ulamā’ al-maḏhab*, ed. Ma‘mūn b. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ġannān, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut 1996, 157. Elsewhere in the *Taḥḥīl*, criticizing the Christians for passing judgments not resting on a revealed text, al-Ġa‘farī quotes Abū al-Ṭāhir b. ‘Awf to the effect that the juridical compendium of the Christians contains only five hundred and some questions and that they are not taken from the Messiah (*Taḥḥīl*, 617). On this author, see also L. Demiri, “Ibn ‘Awf”, CMR 5:675-678.

³¹ In his famous bibliographical encyclopaedia, the eleventh/seventeenth-century Ottoman scholar Ḥaġġī Ḥalīfa (Kātip Çelebi, d. 1067/1657) mentions a *Radd al-Naṣārā* (‘Refutation of the Christians’) written by a certain Ḥalaf al-Dimyāṭī, without further explanation (see *Kaṣf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, 2 vols., Istanbul 1941-1943, col. 838). This could be the abovementioned *ḥadīṭ* scholar ‘Abd al-Mu‘min b. Ḥalaf al-Dimyāṭī (d. 705/1306). See also D. Thomas “Al-Dimyāṭī”, CMR 4:695-696. However, it is perhaps more likely that the al-Dimyāṭī referred to by al-Ġa‘farī be the Abū al-Manṣūr b. Faḥ

poraries³². Then, from among the ancients, I studied part of a book by Ibn Rabban³³. I hope that, God willing, this compendium will bring together what is scattered in them and supply what they omitted³⁴.

As for the structure of the *Tahğīl*, the work is divided into ten chapters, whose topics, briefly presented by al-Ġa'farī in the introduction³⁵, are as follows: (1) on the Messiah's being one of God's servants; (2) on his office of prophet and messenger; (3) on the interpretation of the literal meaning of expressions in the Gospel such as 'Father,' 'Son', 'God' and 'Lord,' and the Messiah's equality with other prophets and friends of God; (4) on the corruption of the Gospel, as shown by the lies and contradictions of the four gospels used by the Christians; (5) on the fact that the Messiah, even if they sought to harm him and looked for him, was neither crucified nor killed because of God's protection of His prophet; (6) responses to various questions raised by the Christians; (7) on the falseness of their claim concerning the union of the divinity with humanity; (8) on the self-contradictoriness of the Creed; (9) on the ignominies of the Christians and the Jews, such as the tricks and ruses of priests and monks, the absurdities which they recite in their prayers³⁶, and the fabrications of the Jews with regard to the prophets and friends of God in their Torah; and (10) on the divine tidings of Muḥammad and his prophetic mission contained in the Torah, the

al-Dimyāfī, author of a refutation of the Christians entitled *al-Lum'a al-muḍt'a* ('The Shining Gleam'), to which the Coptic scholar al-Ṣafī b. al-'Assāl replied. See W. Awad, "Al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl", *CMR* 4:549-551.

³² This could be the *al-I'lām bi-mā fī dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām wa-iḡhār maḥāsin dīn al-Islām wa-iḡbāt nubuwwat nabīyyinā Muḥammad* ('Information about the Corruptions and Delusions of the Religion of the Christians and the Presentation of the Merits of the Religion of Islam and the Establishment of the Prophethood of Our Prophet Muḥammad') of the Mālikī jurist and *ḥadīṭ* scholar, 'Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Umar b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī. Also known as Ibn al-Muza-yīn, he died in Alexandria in 656/1258 and was a contemporary of al-Ġa'farī. There is a published edition of the *I'lām* by Aḥmad Ḥiğāzī al-Saqqā, *Dār al-Turāṭ al-'Arabī*, Cairo 1980. Another complete but unpublished edition of the *I'lām* was prepared by Fāyiz Sa'īd Ṣāliḥ 'Azzām, PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 1985. The first two parts of the *I'lām* were also edited and translated into French by P. Devillard, *Thèse sur Al-Qurtubi, Thèse de troisième cycle, Université d'Aix-en-Provence, 1969*. Aḥmad Āyt Bil'ayd edited the third part under the title, *Iḡbāt nubuwwat Muḥammad*, *Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, Beirut 2004. More recently, Yūsuf al-Kallām and Nādiya al-Ṣarqāwī published a complete edition under the title *Naqḍ kitāb Taḡlīl al-waḥdāniyya fī ma'rifat Allāh: numūḍğ li-'ilm al-'aqīda wa-l-kalām 'inda Mālikīyyat al-ğarb al-Islāmī*, *Ṣafaḥāt lil-Dirāsāt wa-l-Tawzī'*, Damascus 2012.

³³ On this author, see note 18 above.

³⁴ Al-Ġa'farī, *Tahğīl*, MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Reisülkuttap 6 (1239), fol. 2a, transcribed in Qadaḥ, *Tahğīl*, 62-64.

³⁵ *Tahğīl*, 106-110.

³⁶ Al-Ġa'farī is referring principally to the seven Offices of the Coptic Horologion: Morning Prayer (First Hour), Terce, Sext, None, Vespers (Eleventh Hour), Compline, and the Office of Midnight Prayer which comprises three sections of Nocturns. He quotes and criticizes several passages in them (*Tahğīl*, 629-642). Although al-Ġa'farī refers several times to "their eight prayers" (*Tahğīl*, 102, 109, 582, 643), this appears to be a mistake resulting from his counting as two different prayers what in reality is one sin-

Gospel and the Prophecies³⁷. There is no doubt that the encyclopaedic character of the *Tahğīl*, both in its contents and in its sources, made this polemical treatise so popular.

On Explaining the Self-Contradictoriness of the Creed

Al-Ğa'farī devotes chapter eight of the *Tahğīl*, entitled *Fī al-ibāna fī tanāquḍ al-amāna*, to showing what he sees as the corruption and self-contradictoriness of the Christian creed³⁸. The charges are fundamentally two: some parts of the creed logically contradict other parts; and the creed is based neither on the revealed law of the Gospel nor on the words of Jesus or the Apostles³⁹. According to al-Ğa'farī, the Christians refer to their creed as 'the rule of faith', *šarī'at al-īmān*, and as 'the confession', *al-tasbīḥa*⁴⁰, and do not consider their celebrations and Eucharists complete without it. Yet, for al-Ğa'farī, this creed only reveals the ignorance of those who fabricated it and their mockery of the Christian religion. Al-Ğa'farī begins by recalling that it was composed by Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and a group of the attendees at the Council of Nicaea in refutation of Arius. They agreed upon the text after many discussions and multiple changes. He then quotes the text of the creed entirely, allegedly established at Nicaea.

The creed reproduced in the *Tahğīl* is not, however, the credal formula promulgated by the three hundred and eighteen bishops gathered at Nicaea in 325, nor the enlarged formula conventionally known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

gle office, namely, "the first prayer, which they call *šalāt al-saḥar* or *šalāt al-ḡağr*" (*Tahğīl*, 629) and "the prayer of the first hour" (*Tahğīl*, 631).

³⁷ In fact, the biblical prediction of Muḥammad is the topic of only the first part of chapter ten (*Tahğīl*, 651-722). The second part (pp. 723-896) deals mostly with the miracles performed by Muḥammad and his followers. It also includes a few pages on the attestation of Muḥammad by ancient Arabian heroes, renowned figures of pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism, Jewish and Christian scholars, soothsayers, etc. (pp. 851-865), as well as a defense of his prophecy in face of biblical warnings against false teachers and prophets (pp. 885-896).

³⁸ As Pierre Masri notes, the word *amāna* is the term used most often by medieval Muslim authors writing in Arabic to designate the Christian creed. It appears to be cognate to the Syriac word *haymānūtā*, used for the same purpose. On these and other expressions used by Arabic-speaking Christians to refer to the creed, see P. Masri, "Tafāsīr «qānūn al-īmān» al-'arabiyya al-qadīma", *Al-Machriq* 74 (2000) 457, n. 14, and, by the same author, "Šīġa 'arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān yatanāquḥā al-mu'allifūn al-muslimūn bayna al-qarn al-tāsi' wa-l-ḡāliḡ 'ašar al-milādī", *Islamochristiana* 20 (1994) 3, n. 1.

³⁹ Al-Ğa'farī's charge is not new. Writing in the mid-fourth/mid-tenth century, Sāwīrus b. al-Muqaffa' (d. after 376/987), the first known major Coptic figure to write in Arabic, already dedicates chapter six of his *Kitāb tafṣīr al-amāna* ('Commentary on the Creed') to counter the Islamic polemical assertion that the bishops gathered at Nicaea were responsible for inventing and spreading the doctrine of the Trinity in contradiction to Jesus' professed monotheism. On this work, see Masri, "Tafāsīr «qānūn al-īmān»", 458-463; Arabic text and French trans. L. Leroy, "Sévère ibn al-Moqaffa'", 465-600.

⁴⁰ This Arabic term translates the Syriac word *homolōgiyā*, itself a transliteration of the Greek word *homologia*, 'confession', 'profession'.

associated with the First Council of Constantinople, held in 381⁴¹. Rather, the text quoted by al-Ġa‘farī appears to be a Syrian creed used by the Nestorian Church of the East, which bears a remarkable resemblance to the baptismal creed of the Antiochene theologian and teacher of Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428)⁴². The creed in question contains the key-phrases of Nicene orthodoxy (“not made, true God from true God, from the substance of his Father”), as it also reflects concerns typical of Eastern creeds, such as the Father’s pre-cosmic begetting of the Son (“born of his Father before all ages”), the assertion that the Son was the Father’s agent in the work of creation (“by whose hand the ages were framed and all things were created”), and the indication of the motive of the Incarnation (“who for the sake of us, humankind, and for the sake of our salvation came down from heaven”)⁴³.

The origin of this creed, which is quoted with minor variants by several medieval Muslim writers, is in all likelihood the aforementioned ninth-century Nestorian convert to Islam, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, who quotes it in his refutation of Christianity and then exposes what he considers its internal contradictions and inconsistencies⁴⁴. The same or very similar contradictions are mentioned in the *Tahḡīl*, which further pursues ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s line of critique⁴⁵. Al-Ġa‘farī wonders, for instance, how the Father and the

⁴¹ See texts in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed., David McKay, New York 1972, 215-216 and 297-298. The exact number of bishops attending the Council of Nicaea is uncertain, with different sources offering different figures. The traditional number of 318 is given by Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) in his synodical letter *To the Bishops of Africa (Ad Afros Epistola Synodica 2)*.

⁴² Theodore’s baptismal creed is expounded in his catechetical lectures, which have only survived in Syriac. See *Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentary on the Nicene Creed*, ed. and trans. A. Mingana, Heffer, Cambridge 1932; *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste. Reproduction phototypique du Ms. Mingana 561 (Selly Oak College’s Library, Birmingham)*, trans. R. Tonneau with R. De-veesse, Bibliothèque Vaticane, Città del Vaticano 1949. See also Kelly, *Christian Creeds*, 187-188.

⁴³ See Kelly, *Christian Creeds*, 193-201. Interestingly, al-Ġa‘farī quotes a different version of the creed in his first abridgement of the *Tahḡīl* (see *Bayān*, 316-318), where we can easily recognise the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed with some minor omissions. See Appendix at the end of this article.

⁴⁴ ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959) 136-138; French trans. J.-M. Gaudeul, *Riposte aux chrétiens par ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī*, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, Rome 1995, 33-38; Arabic text and English trans. Ebied and Thomas, *The Polemical Works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī*, Brill, 115-121. References hereafter to ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā* will be to the translation of Ebied and Thomas. On the transmission of this Nestorian creed among Muslim authors, see Masri, “Ṣīġa ‘arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān”. See also ‘Abd al-Ġabbār, *Critique*, 5-7. For an explanation of the typically Nestorian expressions in the creed, see “Sévère ibn al-Moqaffa’, évêque d’Aschmounain: Histoire des conciles (second livre)”, 519-521.

⁴⁵ That the creed reported by al-Ġa‘farī in the *Tahḡīl* goes back to ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī is already noticed by al-Ṣafī b. al-‘Assāl (*Nahḡ al-sabīl*, 82), who explicitly describes it as following the way of recitation of the Nestorians from Iraq. See also Samir, “La réponse d’Al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl à la réfutation des chrétiens de ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī”, 287. This contradicts Wadi Awad’s recent assertion that *Nahḡ al-sabīl* would be in fact a refutation of the *Bayān*, rather than of the *Tahḡīl* itself (“Towards a New Edition of al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl’s Apologetic Works”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2 [2014] 231). As already mentioned, the creed quoted by al-Ġa‘farī in the *Bayān* is substantially different from the creed quoted in the *Tahḡīl*, lacking the typically Nestorian expressions noticed by al-Ṣafī.

Son can be both creators of everything, as the creed appears to say, or, even more bafflingly, how the Son can be the creator of his own mother before she gave birth to him, or the creator of the clothes in which he was wrapped, the manger that sheltered him when he was a child and the food that made his organs grow. “That is an exaggeration”, complains al-Ġa‘farī, “whose corruption cannot be hidden from a person of intelligence!”.

In addition to these internal logical contradictions, al-Ġa‘farī finds that the creed also opposes the Christian scriptures, wondering, for instance, how he “by whose hand the ages were framed and everything was created” can be at the same time “son of David”, as the Gospel proclaims (Mt 1:1), or how the Messiah can be “of one substance with his Father”, when he confessed that only the Father knew the day of resurrection (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36). For al-Ġa‘farī, this lack of knowledge proves rather that Jesus was of one substance with David and with the rest of the prophets, who likewise did not know the day.

Yet another contradiction between the creed and the Gospel is the former’s declaration that the Son of God “was incarnate from the Holy Spirit”, which for al-Ġa‘farī contradicts Matthew’s report that John the Baptist saw the Spirit descending like a dove upon Jesus at the time of his baptism, that is, when he was already thirty years old (Mt 3:13-16). According to al-Ġa‘farī, “the information brought by God’s prophet, John son of Zachariah, is more entitled to be acknowledged as truth than the information brought by those who came long after the Messiah and composed this contradictory creed”.

As for the creed’s statement that, after he was crucified and died, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of his Father, al-Ġa‘farī considers it “a monstrous lie and a corrupt belief”, wondering who among the Christians has come down from heaven with this information. Furthermore, to affirm that the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father implies that both of them are bodies (*ağsām*), for only bodies can be said to possess ‘sides’ (*ğihāt*), which is something that Christians deny of God.

Al-Ġa‘farī’s reference to God’s attribute of knowledge (*‘ilm*) in his fifth argument as well as his concluding argument against the doctrine of the Trinity at the end of the chapter reflect the centuries-old effort by Christian writers living in the Islamic world to defend the reasonableness of their Trinitarian belief against Muslim objections. In order to make the doctrine intelligible to their Muslim critics, these writers often sought to explain the Trinity by relating it to Muslim debates over the ontological status of the divine attributes (*şifāt Allāh*)⁴⁶. The triad mentioned by al-Ġa‘farī – existence (*wuğūd*), knowledge (*‘ilm*) and life (*ḥayāh*) – is only one among the several triads which Arab Christian writers had employed to explain the Trinity since early

⁴⁶ The literature on the divine attributes in Islamic theology is very extensive. The article “Attributes of God” in EI3 (C. Gilliot) provides a brief survey of the debate as it developed in Sunnī theology and a comprehensive bibliography.

‘Abbāsīd times⁴⁷. These explanations usually included an argument as to why the hypostases are only three in number. It is precisely on this point that al-Ġa‘farī concentrates his critique: God’s majesty and perfection requires that one describe God not only as living and knowing, but also as powerful and willing. Christians, therefore, should acknowledge the hypostases of power (*qudra*) and will (*irāda*) in addition to the hypostases of knowledge and life.

One of the most interesting passages of the chapter is al-Ġa‘farī’s commentary on the creed’s words: “who for us, humankind, and for our salvation (*ḥalāṣ*) came down from heaven”. Al-Ġa‘farī demands his imagined Christian interlocutors to be more precise about salvation, inasmuch as obtaining it was supposedly the only reason for the incarnation, suffering and crucifixion of God the Son. He asks: “Tell us then about this salvation that the pre-eternal God and Lord meant when he did to himself the disgraceful things that befell him according to your claim. What is it? Or from whom did he save you?” The salvation that Christians claim for themselves is obviously not from worldly trials and tribulations, diseases, defects, old age and death, in which the Christians share in equal measure with the rest of human beings, observes al-Ġa‘farī. Likewise, the Christians have no advantage over others as regards the worry of seeking their livelihood and the sustenance of those for whom they provide. The salvation that they claim is also not from the observance of religious duties such as prayer, fasting and other obligations, which are still part of their religion. Finally, this salvation cannot be from being held accountable for their actions on the day of resurrection, since Jesus declared that all will be judged according to their deeds: “I shall set people at my right hand and at my left hand on the day of resurrection and I

⁴⁷ The most comprehensive study written so far is R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes: 750-1050*, Beauchesne, Paris 1985. For the early period, see, among others, H.A. Wolfson, “The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity”, *The Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956) 1-18; D. Thomas, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era”, in L. Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2001, 78-98; and S.H. Griffith, “The Concept of Al-Uqṭm in ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity”, in S.Kh. Samir (ed.), *Actes du premier congrès international d’études arabes chrétiennes (Goslar, septembre 1980)*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 218, Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Rome 1982, 169-191; Idem, “The Unity and Trinity of God: Christian Doctrinal Development in Response to the Challenge of Islam—An Historical Perspective”, in M. Root and J.J. Buckley (ed.), *Christian Theology and Islam*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge 2014, 11-21. See also the recent works by S.L. Husseinī, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century C.E.)*, Brill, Leiden 2014, and T.W. Ricks, *Early Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology: The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2013. For the later period, see S. Noble and A. Treiger, “Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī and his Discourse on the Holy Trinity”, *Le Muséon* 124 (2011) 371-417. See also the chapter ‘The Trinitarian Dialogue between Islamic Monotheism and Medieval Christianity’ in M. Ippgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality*, Peter Lang, Oxford 2003, 181-300. A survey of Muslim polemical attacks on the Trinity can be found in I. Di Matteo, *La divinità di Cristo e la dottrina della Trinità in Maometto e nei polemisti musulmani*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1938, 50-83.

shall say to those at my right hand: you did so and so; thus, go to the bliss prepared for you before the foundation of the world. And I shall say to those on my left hand: you did so and so; thus, go to the punishment prepared for you before the foundation of the world”⁴⁸. Thus, if Christians have no apparent advantage over the rest of human beings neither in this world nor in the hereafter, concludes al-Ġa‘farī addressing his imagined interlocutors, “where is then the salvation for which you claim that God toiled and came down to earth, ate, drank, was disturbed by concerns and sorrows, and tasted death in order to obtain it for you, and for which reason you call him the saviour of the world? If the salvation that you claim did not happen to you, then your creed is false!”⁴⁹

* * *

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON EXPLAINING THE SELF-CONTRADICTION OF THE CREED

In this chapter we explain the corruption of their creed, which they call ‘the rule of faith’, without which they do not consider a celebration or a Eucharist complete; and how some parts of the creed show that other parts are a lie, contradict them and oppose them; and that it has no basis in the revealed law of the Gospel.

The author – may God pardon him – said:

Historians and those skilled in transmission mentioned that what prompted the early Christians to compose the creed, which is also called ‘the confession’ and ‘the rule’, and to curse and excommunicate those of them who disagreed with it, was that Arius, one of the early Christians, and his party believed in the oneness of the Creator, did not associate anything else with Him, and did not see in the Messiah what the [other] Christians saw, but rather Arius believed that the Messiah was [only] a prophet

⁴⁸ See Mt 25:31-46.

⁴⁹ We can find a very similar argumentation, most probably drawing on al-Ġa‘farī, in a work entitled *Adillat al-wahdāniyya fī al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣrāniyya* (‘Proofs of Divine Oneness in Refutation of Christianity’) which has been erroneously ascribed to the Mālikī scholar Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285) by the editors of its two published editions: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad Sa‘īd Dimāšqiyya (s.n., Riyadh 1988) and Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih and Tawfiq ‘Alī Wahba (Maktabat al-Nāfiḍa, Giza 2006). The passage in question can be found on pages 101-102 of Dimāšqiyya’s edition. On the false ascription to al-Qarāfī see, Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean*, 44-45. The author of *Adillat al-wahdāniyya* could be a certain Burhān al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍā’il Ġa‘far b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Abd al-Qawī al-Ḥaṭīb al-Iskandarī, who was active in Egypt during the reign of the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. See E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache*, Müller & Seifert, Breslau 1930, 18; and D. Thomas, “Al-Khaṭīb al-Iskandarī”, *CMR* 4:264-266. See also the unpublished MA thesis of Fāṭima bt. Haydar Āl Mu‘āfā, *Kitāb adillat al-wahdāniyya fī al-radd ‘alā al-Naṣrāniyya li-Burhān al-Dīn Abī al-Faḍā’il Ġa‘far b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Abd al-Qawī al-Ḥaṭīb al-Iskandarī (dirāsa wa-taḥqīq)*, King Saud University, Riyadh 1429/2008.

and a messenger, and that he was created, body and spirit. Arius' doctrine spread among the Christians. As a result, they wrote to each another and gathered in the city of Nicaea before King Constantine, and disputed with one another. Arius explained his doctrine and Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria refuted him and declared his doctrine to be repugnant before King Constantine. Then, Alexander and a group of the attendees sat and disputed with one another. Their dispute lasted long, such that the King was astonished at the disparity in their doctrines and the extent of their differences. He provided accommodation for them and ordered them to search for and reach a satisfactory doctrine. Alexander and a group agreed on the composition of this creed after corrupting it several times with additions and subtractions⁵⁰.

The creed is as follows:

“We believe in one God, the Father, controller of all⁵¹, ruler of all things, maker of what is seen and unseen.

And in the one Lord Jesus (Īsū‘)⁵² the Messiah, the only Son of God, the first-born of creatures, who was born of his Father before all ages, not made, true God from true God, from the substance of his Father, by whose hand the ages were framed and everything was created; who for us, humankind, and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit⁵³ and became man; he was conceived and was born of the Virgin Mary; he suffered and was crucified in the days of

⁵⁰ The source of al-Ġa‘farī’s account appears to be the Melkite author Sa‘īd b. Baṭrīq, also known as Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 328/940), whose historiographical treatise *Kitāb al-tārīḥ al-mağmū‘ ‘alā al-taḥqīq wa-l-taṣdīq* (‘The Book of History Compiled through Investigation and Verification’) became an important source of information on Christian history and Christian inter-confessional rivalries for many Muslim scholars. For Eutychius’s account of the Arian controversy and the convocation of the first ecumenical council, see *Eutichio, Patriarca di Alessandria: Gli Annali*, trans. B. Pirone, Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, Cairo 1987, 195-197.

⁵¹ In Arabic, *qābiṭ al-kull*. As Masri explains, this Arabic phrase seeks to express the meaning of the Greek *pantokrator* and the Syriac *āhed kul*, which were variously translated into Arabic as *mālik* (or *malik*) *kull šay‘*, *māsik* (or *mumsik*) *al-kull*, *ḥawī al-kull* and *qābiṭ al-kull*. See Masri, “Šīġa ‘arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān”, 21.

⁵² Īsū‘ is the transliteration into the Arabic script of the East Syriac form of the name, Iṣō‘ (West Syriac is Yeššū‘). See J.P. Monferrer Sala, “Algo más acerca de ‘Īsà, el nombre de Jesús en el Islam”, *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 47 (1998) 399-404.

⁵³ In Arabic *rūḥ al-quḍus*, literally, ‘the Spirit of Holiness’. Griffith notes that the Arabic phrase *rūḥ al-quḍus*, which also occurs four times in the Qur’ān, is related in origin with the Syriac expression *rūḥā d-qādšā*, used in Christian Aramaic texts as the name of the third person of the Christian Trinity. See S.H. Griffith, “Holy Spirit”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. J. Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2, Brill, Leiden 2002, 442-443. In fact, some English translators of the Syriac Peshitta retain the expression the Spirit of Holiness to refer to the Holy Spirit. See, for instance, J.W. Etheridge, *The Syrian Churches: Their Early History, Liturgies, and Literature: with a Literal Translation of the Four Gospels from the Peshito, or Canon of Holy Scripture in Use among the Oriental Christians from the Earliest Times*, Longman, Green, Brown and Longmans, London 1846, 478: “And I knew him not: but he who sent me to baptize with water, he said to me. He upon whom thou seest the Spirit descend and remain, this baptizeth with the Spirit of Holiness” (Jn 1:33).

Pontius Pilate⁵⁴, he was buried and rose on the third day, as it is written; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of his Father; he is ready to come again to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from his Father, a life-giving Spirit⁵⁵; in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; in one holy and catholic⁵⁶ Church; in the resurrection of our bodies, and in life everlasting forever and ever”.

The author – may God pardon him – said:

This is the creed on which all the Christian sects – Jacobites, Melkites and Nestorians – agree today, claiming that no celebration and Eucharist is complete without it, despite it having no basis in the revealed law of the Gospel and despite its not being taken from the words of the Messiah nor from those of his disciples, and despite it being confused, contradictory and absurd, parts of which make manifest that other parts are a lie, contradict them and oppose them. This is obvious for a number of reasons:

The first reason is their statement: “We believe in one God, the Father, controller of all, ruler of all things, maker of what is seen and unseen”. This is the beginning of the creed, in which they have established that God alone possesses divinity, lordship and oneness; that He alone has control over creation and direct production⁵⁷; and that He is the creator, controller and ruler of all things. These creatures include, among others, the Messiah and the Holy Spirit. Now, if these two are visible, such as the bodies and the accidents, the one Father is their creator; and if these two are invisible, such as the spirits and the intellects, the Father is likewise their creator and maker.

This could have been a sound statement, if they had remained on it and had not muddled it with associationism. However, they immediately nullified that by saying: “We also believe that, with this one God, who alone has control over the creation of what is seen and unseen, there is another one Lord, by whose hand the ages were

⁵⁴ The two edited texts of the *Tahḡīl* have here *Fīlāṭuṣ al-Nabaṭī*, “Pilate the Nabatean”, instead of *Fīlāṭuṣ al-Bunṭī*, Pontius Pilate. The error is easily explicable by the transposition of the diacritical dot of *nūn* and *bā*’.

⁵⁵ The two edited texts of the *Tahḡīl* have here *rūḥ maḥabbatihi*, ‘the Spirit of his love’. This is likely to be a misreading of *rūḥ muḥyiya*, ‘a life-giving Spirit’, which corresponds with the standard creedal formulation. See Masri, “Šiḡa ‘arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān”, 23; see also Ebied and Thomas, *The Polemical Works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī*, 114.

⁵⁶ In Arabic, *ḡāṭaliqiyya*. As Reynolds notes, this form reveals the influence of the East Syriac language, used by the Nestorian churches. The East Syriac *qatolīqā* (Arabicized as *ḡāṭālīq*, *ḡāṭalīq*, or *ḡāṭīlīq*, pl. *ḡatāliqa*), from the Greek *katholikós*, was a title used for the patriarch or head of the Nestorian churches, the highest metropolitan who had authority above all other metropolitans. Melkite and Jacobite writers usually give the title as *kātūlīk*. See Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 73, n. 272. See also G. Graf, *Verzeichniss arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, L. Durbecq, Louvain 1954, 33 and 95.

⁵⁷ Creation (*ḥalq*) is bringing something into existence from something else, while ‘direct production’ (*iḥtirā*’, literally ‘invention’) is bringing something into existence from nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*.

framed and all things were created”. In the beginning of the creed, [they said] that God is the creator of everything. Then, they did not linger before they said: “No! Rather the Messiah, the son of Mary, is the creator and framer of everything”. This is the utmost contradiction⁵⁸! It implies the worship of a man amongst the children of Adam together with God, may He be praised, because ‘Jesus the Messiah’ is a name for the human being who was separated from Mary. This also contradicts the belief of their ancestors, the eminent people of their religion and those who wrote down their Gospel, as we have presented it above. Furthermore, this contradicts what the Torah, the Psalms and all the Prophecies contain regarding the profession of God’s oneness and His being unequalled in lordship and divinity.

The second reason is the creed’s statement: “Jesus (Yasū‘) the Messiah, the [only] son of God, the firstborn of creatures, who was born of his Father”, which makes known the temporality of the Messiah, for his being God’s son can have no other meaning except his posteriority with regard to God and the anteriority in existence of his begetter, for the child and the begetter cannot come to exist concurrently, their concurrence being impossible in terms of the self-evident truths of reason.

Similarly, stating that Jesus is the “firstborn of all creatures” (*bikr al-ḥalā’iq*), despite the extravagance of the expression, can only be understood to mean that God created the Messiah before creating all other creatures, because the first fruits (*bākūra*) of something is the first of it. This contradicts their statement in the creed that the Messiah is not made but rather is true God. Thus, whereas in the creed he is [said to be] born and made, at the same time they have described him as being not made⁵⁹. Therefore, the result of these statements is that the Messiah is a creature that is not created! This is enough to show their ignorance and their God-forsakenness, because either the Father has begotten a child who was pre-eternal, or He has begotten a child who did not exist [before]. If they say: “He has begotten a son who was pre-eternal”, we say to them that He has not begotten anything, since the son was pre-eternal; and if [they say:] “He has begotten a son who did not exist [before]”, then the child is temporal and created. This denies the statement in the creed that he is “true God from true God, from the substance of his Father, by whose hand the ages were framed and everything was created”⁶⁰.

The third reason is the creed’s statement that the Messiah is “true God from true God, from the substance of his Father” is refuted by the words of the Messiah in the Gospel when asked about the day of resurrection. He said: “I do not know that, and no one knows it except the Father”⁶¹. Thus, if he were from the substance of his Father, he would have surely known what the Father knows; but he is true man from true

⁵⁸ See a similar argument in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 75, 117.

⁵⁹ The same argument is found in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 119.

⁶⁰ The same argument is found in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 119, 121.

⁶¹ Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 87, 91. Translations of biblical texts are based on the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

man, from the substance of his father David, because David and the other prophets were asked about the day of resurrection and about many other matters and they said what the Messiah said: ‘We do not know this, and no one knows it except God’.

If someone said that the substance of water is from the substance of fire, he would be a fool and likewise would be someone saying that the human body, which is composed of flesh, blood, hair, fingernails, filth and teeth, is from the substance of God, because it is impossible to ascribe such things to the divinity⁶². Furthermore, if it were possible that a god comes from another, previous god, then it would be possible for a third god to come from the second, and a fourth from the third, and so forth endlessly. Since this is shown to be invalid in its [logical] basis, one should go back to the words of the Messiah: “The first of all commandments is that the Lord is one”⁶³; and to his words in the Gospel of John that God, the true God, is the one who sent Jesus the Messiah⁶⁴; and to his words in the Gospel of Mark and elsewhere: “No one is good except God alone”⁶⁵; and to the beginning of the creed: “one God, ruler of all things, maker of what is seen and unseen”.

The fourth reason is the creed’s statement that Jesus the Messiah framed the ages and created everything, which contradicts and denies the Gospel, because Matthew says: “This is the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David”⁶⁶. He who framed the ages and created everything cannot come after the ages, the ages cannot precede him. Furthermore, the world includes his mother Mary, so how can he be described as the creator of his own mother before she gives birth to him? The world also includes the clothes in which he was wrapped, the manger that sheltered him when he was a child and the food that made his organs grow. That is an exaggeration whose corruption cannot be hidden from a person of intelligence!

Was there not among the doctors [who established] the creed one person who considered attentively the corruption of such a statement before committing it to writing? Did they not listen to the words of the Gospel: “The Devil said to the Messiah: ‘Bow down to me and I will give you all that is in the world and make you the owner of everything’”⁶⁷. Now, according to their claim, the Devil is a part of the whole that the Messiah created. So how can the creator of the ages be held captive in the hand of a part of the world, who drags him along and intervenes as an obstacle between him and his goal, hoping that the Messiah will worship him and hoping to make him one of his followers? I seek refuge in God from blindness and error, and from the exaggeration of men!

⁶² The same argument is found in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 119.

⁶³ This appears to be a paraphrase of Jesus’ answer to the lawyer’s question: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” in Mt 22:35-38. In his reply, Jesus simply takes the questioner back to Deut 6:4-5; 10:12; 30:6.

⁶⁴ See note 99 below.

⁶⁵ Mk 10:18. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 71.

⁶⁶ Mt 1:1. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 71, 111.

⁶⁷ Mt 4:9. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 71.

The fifth reason is the creed's statement that the Messiah, the true God who created everything, came down from heaven for the salvation of men, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and [became] man, he was conceived and was born [of the Virgin Mary]. In this statement, there are a number of [logical] flaws:

One of them is that 'the Messiah' is a name that neither belongs to the Logos (*al-kalima*), nor to the [human] body exclusively; rather, it is a name that belongs to that body taken from Mary and the Logos together. The Logos was not called 'the Messiah' from pre-eternity. Therefore, it is false that the one who came down from heaven was the Messiah. The proof for this is their statement [in the creed] that he was incarnate from the Holy Spirit, because if the one who came down from heaven was the Messiah, then it was meaningless to be incarnate again, the incarnation of the incarnate being absurd⁶⁸.

Another flaw is their saying that he came down from heaven. This one who is described as descending [from heaven] is either the Logos or the humanity. If they claim that the one who came down is the humanity, this is denied by the Gospel passages that declare that the humanity was acquired from Mary's body. And if they claim that [the one who came down] is the divinity, then we ask them: do you mean the Father or His attribute, that is, the [attribute of] knowledge? If they claim that it was the Father who came down and was incarnate, then it is necessary for them to ascribe deficiencies such as eating, drinking, being killed, being restrained by Satan, etc., to the Creator; but no one among them admits this! And if they claim that the one who came down and was incarnate was the [attribute of] knowledge, which is referred to as the Logos, we tell them: If what you described as incarnation were possible, then one of the following two calamities⁶⁹ would also be possible: (1) either the Creator remains without knowledge in Him, or (2) He is made to know through a knowledge that subsists in a being other than Him. Moreover, it is impossible to ascribe descending, ascending, movement, change of location, vacation and occupation of space to the Creator or to His attributes. Such being the case, it is false that the one who came down from heaven was the Messiah, because 'the Messiah', according to them, is a name assigned to the two referents [together]: the Logos and the [human] body.

Another flaw is their saying that he only came down, was incarnate and was conceived for the salvation of humankind. By this they mean that when Adam disobeyed [God], he tied his offspring up in Satan's trap and caused them to remain eternally under layers of fire, and that their salvation took place through the exemplary punishment, crucifixion and death of the Messiah. This is a claim without evidence in support of it,

⁶⁸ See a similar argument in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 121.

⁶⁹ Literally, "two things to be feared". Al-Ġa'farī proceeds to draw the absurdities which, in his eyes, derive from the Christian identification of the Son with the divine attribute of knowledge. As understood in Aṣ'arī theology, knowledge (*'ilm*) is one of the eternal attributes subsisting in the divine essence in a relationship of inseparable but irreducible non-identity. From this perspective, the claim that the Son came down from heaven and became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, suggests that an attribute can leave its substrate or subject of attribution, which is impossible.

and we proved it false earlier⁷⁰. Suppose, however, that we grant you this. Tell us then about this salvation that the pre-eternal God and Lord meant when he did to himself the disgraceful things that befell him according to your claim. What is it? Or from whom did he save you? And by what means did he save you? And how is it that he saved you by himself alone without the Father and the Spirit? Is the lordship divided into thirds among them? And how did he become the one who was degraded and humiliated by saving you, apart from the Father and the Spirit? These are a number of questions [to consider].

If they claim that they have been saved from the tribulations of this world, its worries, diseases, defects, old age and death, the senses disprove them, for we see that they have no advantage over other human beings. If they claim that they have been saved from the worry of seeking their livelihood and the sustenance of those for whom they provide, and from employing themselves in obtaining the necessities of life, the senses prove them wrong again. If they claim that they have been saved from the prescribed duties of the revealed law and that the Messiah, with his coming, has put down for them [the burden] of fasting, prayer and all the regular duties, and that they are not to be held accountable for any of them, those who know what they are required to do in terms of prayer, fasting, offerings, etc., disprove them.

If they claim that they have been saved from the judgments of the hereafter and that whoever of them commits an offence in this world – whether he fornicated, stole, murdered, or made false accusations – will not be held accountable for any of these on the day of resurrection, the Gospel and the Prophecies disprove them, because the Messiah says in the Gospel: “I shall set people at my right hand and at my left hand on the day of resurrection and I shall say to those at my right hand: you did so and so; thus, go to the bliss prepared for you before the foundation of the world. And I shall say to those on my left hand: you did so and so; thus, go to the punishment prepared for you before the foundation of the world”⁷¹.

If this is your state both in this world and in the hereafter, where is then the salvation for which you claim that God toiled and came down to earth, ate, drank, was disturbed by concerns and sorrows, and tasted death in order to obtain it for you, and due to which you call him the saviour of the world? If the salvation that you claim did not happen to you, then your creed is false!

This is our examination of the nature of the salvation for which he came, but of which he was incapable, for you reverted to the state in which you were before his coming and even worse. So tell us: from whom did he save you? Did someone take you from him by superior force? Or did someone snatch you from his hand? Did he have a rival over you who caused a calamity to happen to you, obliging him to endure all those deficiencies for your salvation?

⁷⁰ See al-Ġa‘farī’s discussion in the last section of the fifth chapter of his book: *al-mas’ala al-‘āšira min al-muḥimāt* (*Taḥḡīl*, 371-388). He ends this section referring to the Christian claim concerning Christ’s crucifixion and death as “the pivot, or axis, of their unbelief” (*quṭb kufrihim*).

⁷¹ Mt 25:31-46.

If you say that he had an open enemy who ravaged his kingdom until he gained the mastery over it and occupied all its regions, so that his rulings were enforced in them, east, west, south, and north, then we see this enemy, which you claim, as a greater sovereign, mightier and more all-powerful than the Messiah. The one so described is undoubtedly more worthy of the people and the territories than he is. We only see this Lord to whom you refer as someone who disgraces himself in the fight against this enemy, risking his blood, someone of rash opinion, weak mind and feeble judgment, because he wants to combat another who is stronger of heart, mightier in status and with a larger number of supporters.

This is our examination of the one in whose hand you were. Tell us then by what means did he save you? If they claim that he came down to earth and bound Satan, delivered them⁷² from his grip, defeated him, punished him exemplarily, chastised him severely, erased his trace and obscured his marks, humiliated his army⁷³ and those who think like him, then, upon my life, verily he deserves to be worshiped and to be sought after and taken as refuge during calamities! And if they claim that the affair was the opposite, such that the Messiah, the Lord God whom they worship, came down to earth with the desire to save them⁷⁴ and that he acted with prudence and careful consideration, that he dwelt in a woman's womb, examining the matter inside out, approaching it with courage sometimes and withdrawing from it at other times. [If they claim] that he borrowed from her the form of a human being and concealed himself as much as he could, that he fled from Nazareth to Galilee, moving from one friend to the other, and that while Satan was seeking him and watching him, the Messiah stayed away from him and did not come near to him. And [if they claim] that when Satan saw that he employed all means of caution and that he chose to conceal himself with such carefulness for a long time, Satan entrusted a small group of his followers with the affair, and so they gave him a beating and killed him by crucifixion, then they have lied and so has their creed with regards to the salvation which they claim.

This is our investigation of the reason of your salvation on which you rely. Tell us then: are not the three worshipped hypostases⁷⁵ – the Father, the Son and the Holy

⁷² The Arabic text has “delivered you”, which seems to be a mistake.

⁷³ In a parallel passage in the *Bayān*, al-Ġa'farī clarifies that by “Satan's army” and “his followers” (see further below) he means the Jews (see *Bayān*, 332).

⁷⁴ The Arabic text has “save you”, which again seems to be a mistake.

⁷⁵ As Griffith explains, the Greek term *hypostasis* – used in Christian theology to refer to the threeness of the Trinity: God is one substance (*ousia*) in three hypostases – was translated into Syriac as *qnomā*, which was then transliterated into Arabic as *uqnām / aqnām / qunām* (pl. *aqānīm*). Griffith notes that while *qnomā* has a meaning in Syriac, independently of the Trinitarian context, that makes it suitable for rendering the term *hypostasis* as used by the Cappadocian Fathers, “in Arabic the transliterated Syriac term was virtually meaningless”, which led the Arabic-speaking Christian theologians to attempt to explain this notion by relating it to Muslim debates on the ontological status of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*), as mentioned above. See Griffith, “The Concept of *al-uqnām*”, 179-180. See also, more extensively, S.P.

Spirit – eternal, without beginning? What made it necessary for the Son to be particularly distinguished by coming down and battling Satan, and not the Father and the Spirit, given that they are equal in lordship? Was he more compassionate and more merciful towards humankind than the two of them? Or was Satan’s crime against him greater and manifesting more contempt? And what was it that made him more entitled than the Father and the Spirit to change and alteration, though they have the same degree of lordship?

The sixth reason is the creed’s statement “he was incarnate from the Holy Spirit”, which is false according to the text of the Gospel, because Matthew says in the second chapter of his Gospel that when John the Baptist baptized the Messiah, the Holy Spirit came to him from heaven in the form of a dove⁷⁶, and this after the Messiah had reached thirty years of age⁷⁷. If that was so, then it is false that he was incarnate from the Holy Spirit, and therefore the creed has lied⁷⁸. If one must acknowledge the truthfulness of the informer, then the information brought by God’s prophet, John son of Zachariah, is more entitled to be acknowledged as truth than the information brought by those who came long after the Messiah and composed this contradictory creed. Furthermore, the incarnation [of something] from something else would only be plausible if they were from the same genus, like water from water or fire from fire, but there is no homogeneity between God and the human being, between the eternal and the temporal. All this disproves the creed and explains the mistake of those who composed it.

The seventh reason is the claim of all Christians that the Messiah is God’s son. If this were as they say, then the creed would lie when it states that the Messiah was incarnate from the Holy Spirit. If the creed is true, then the Messiah is the son of the Spirit and not God’s son. And so the creed and their belief contradict each other, since in the truth of one lies the falsity of the other.

The eighth reason is the creed’s statement that the Messiah came down from heaven and was conceived by a woman in whose womb he dwelt. This is disproved by Luke the Evangelist, because he says in chapter seventeen of the Stories of the Apostles (*qiṣaṣ al-hawāriyyīn*): “God is the creator of the world and everything in it, and He is Lord of heaven and earth; He does not dwell in temples and human hands cannot reach Him; and He has no need of anything at all, because it is He who gave to people life, so that our existence is in Him and our life and movement are from Him”⁷⁹. Thus,

Brock, “The Christology of the Church of the East”, in A. Muraviev and D. Afinogenov (ed.), *Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East*, Izdatelstvo “Indrik”, Moscow 1996, 159-179, reprinted in S.P. Brock, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2006, III. See also Bo Holmberg, “‘Person’ in the Trinitarian Doctrine of Christian Arabic Apologetics and Its Background in the Syriac Church Fathers”, in *Studia Patristica* 25, ed. E.A. Livingstone, Peeters, Leuven 1993, 300-307.

⁷⁶ See Mt 3:11-17.

⁷⁷ See Lk 3:23.

⁷⁸ See a similar argument in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 137.

⁷⁹ Acts 17:24-28 (abridged). Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 121.

Luke has testified that the Creator and His attributes do not dwell in temples, nor do human hands grasp Him. This disproves the creed's claim that the Logos dwelled in the temple of Mary and that it was transferred to the temple of the Messiah⁸⁰. This also undermines their claim about the Messiah's being crucified and killed, since Luke says that human hands cannot reach the Creator.

Luke has also testified that the Messiah is a creature, because he is part of the world that was created by God. This disproves the Christians' claim and disrupts the order of the creed, since the latter states that the Messiah is God and creator, not a creature. Paul (Fawlus)⁸¹ has testified that the Messiah is God's servant and that God is his God and Lord, since he says at the beginning of his Fifth Epistle: "I have heard about your faith. I do not cease to remember you in my prayer, that the God of my lord Jesus the Messiah, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and explanation and enlighten the eyes of your hearts"⁸². This Paul, whom they regard as trustworthy, testifies that God is the God of the Messiah. This is among the things that render invalid the creed which they contrived. It is more appropriate to place one's confidence in these words of Paul than in the words of others who came after the Messiah. These words of Paul agree with the words of the Messiah where he says: "I am going to my God and your God"⁸³.

The ninth reason is that naming Jesus the 'the Messiah' (*al-masīḥ*) requires an anointer who anointed him, an agent who did the action. Thus, if he was 'the Messiah' meaning 'one anointed' (*mansūḥ*), then the creed has established that he is made, for if the creed said that he is not made, the implication of the statement would be that the Messiah is [at the same time] made and not made, created and not created⁸⁴.

Since the time of Moses, the children of Israel had not ceased to use oil, a mixture of several types of aromatic essences⁸⁵, from a horn that was hanging in the sanctuary⁸⁶: the priests would anoint with this oil whoever they wanted to make king. Sometimes the horn would overflow when the one upon whom the choice had fallen would enter the sanctuary, which was a sign to make him king. David prophesized of the Messiah, saying: "Therefore your Lord has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your

⁸⁰ On the image of the Temple as a metaphor for the indwelling of the Godhead within the person of Jesus see, G.A. Anderson, "To See Where God Dwells: The Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition", *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008) 13-45, and, by the same author, "Mary in the Old Testament", *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007) 33-55. As Anderson explains, after the Nestorian controversy, the Temple-metaphor as a means to understanding the incarnation – the man Jesus was assumed as a temple to God the Word – was transferred to the person of the Virgin Mary.

⁸¹ The form *Fawlus* here seems to reflect the Syriac *Pawlūs* instead of the more common Arabic *Bālus*.

⁸² Eph 1:15-18 (abridged).

⁸³ Jn 20:17. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 113.

⁸⁴ See a similar argument in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 121.

⁸⁵ See Ex 30:22-25.

⁸⁶ See 1 Kings 1:39; 1 Sam 16:1,13.

companions”⁸⁷. Thus, David has testified that the Messiah was anointed, that God is the one who anointed him, that he is a vassal and God is his Lord, and that he has companions who were anointed before him. This contradicts the creed’s statement that the Messiah is creator, not created. David also prophesied of the Messiah in Psalm 45: “You are the fairest of people; mercy is poured upon your lips”⁸⁸. Thus, David explained that the Messiah is a human being, that he is fair and that God poured mercy upon his mouth. If the Messiah himself were God or one of His attributes, then the anointer and the one anointed, the one speaking and the one spoken to, would become one. This is among the things that undermine the creed and cause its pillars to waver.

The tenth reason is the creed’s statement that, after he was crucified and died, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of his Father. This is a monstrous lie and a corrupt belief. As for its being a monstrous lie, indeed no one of those who say such thing has ascended into heaven, seen this with his own eyes, and come back to earth to inform about it. As for its being a corrupt belief, indeed when a thing sits at the right hand of another thing or at any of its sides, it indicates that both things are temporally produced. Furthermore, there is no disagreement among them that the [human] body of Jesus is temporal. Thus, if they say that this temporal body is seated at the right hand of God, they believe that the Creator Most High is a body. In that they have entered into a mutual fight with the *ḥašwiyya*⁸⁹ among the Jews, who say that God Most High has the form of an old man with white hair and white beard, and that He comes down to the earth and visits it frequently⁹⁰.

In this matter, they have joined two contradictory things. They stated at the beginning of the creed that the Messiah is true God, creator of everything. Thus, if they say here that he was crucified, killed and buried among the dead, then they have admitted that the creature killed the Creator and that the one who was made crucified his Maker!

The eleventh reason is the creed’s statement that Jesus, this Lord who was crucified and killed, is ready to come again to decide the judgment of the living and the

⁸⁷ Ps 45:7. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 123.

⁸⁸ Ps 45:2. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 123.

⁸⁹ Derogatory term used by Muslim authors for those who interpreted literally the anthropomorphic expressions found in the revealed books. In his work *Iqtisād fī al-i’tiqād*, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) defines the *ḥašwiyya* as those “believing themselves bound to a blind and routine submission to the criterion of human authority and to the literal meaning of the revealed books” (quoted in A.S. Halkin, “The Ḥašwiyya”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54, no. 1 [1934] 12). According to Halkin, the term probably derived from *ḥašw*, meaning ‘redundant speech’, ‘prolixity’. The *ḥašwiyya* were “the loose speakers, people who do not make careful statements, who do not knit their thoughts into a logical, well developed system, but say words aimlessly and meaninglessly” (p. 23). On the *ḥašwiyya* see also, W.B. Hallaq, “Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984) 9.

⁹⁰ On the Jews’ depiction of God as an old man with white hair and white beard who comes down to earth, see *Tabḡīl*, 530, 556, 558. See also C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Haḏm*, Brill, Leiden 1996, 78, 257.

dead. The one who rebukes them [for saying this] may say: the first time [he came down from heaven] he suffered at the hands of Satan and his band the harm, humiliation, crucifixion and death that you have described; then he escaped to his Father to rest for a while, regain consciousness and recover his strength, and to seek assistance with military equipment and troops from his Father; then he will come a second time to fight his enemy, and he may win or lose. However, the creed's statement is that he will come back to decide the judgment of the living and the dead, and thus he comes down in the status [described] in the words of one who said:

May I not find you mourning me after death and in my life you did not supply me with provisions⁹¹.

If they claim that the first time he was unable to save himself, to the point that he had to undergo what he underwent from his enemies, how will he be able to save all of them the second time⁹²?

The twelfth reason is the creed's statement, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from God". It contains a declaration that the Messiah and the Holy Spirit are brothers and that God is the Father of them both, since the creed states that Jesus was born from his Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from his Father as well. This is disproved by Matthew's words in his Gospel, where he relates that the one to whom Mary gave birth is from the Holy Spirit⁹³. Thus, if the Messiah is from the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit is from God in the creed, then the Gospel and the creed contradict one another, since the creed makes them two brothers born from God, whereas the Gospel says that the Messiah is from the Spirit. This is an enormous insanity! It has become clear to you the falsity of the creed's statement that the Messiah was born of the Father before all the ages and that he is the firstborn of all creatures. For how can he exist before all the ages and [at the same time] the Holy Spirit precede him, according to the testimony of the Gospel?

The thirteenth reason is the creed's statement: "We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins". It contains an enormous contradiction of their theological principles, for the Christians' belief is that their sins are not forgiven without the

⁹¹ This verse is from the pre-Islamic Arab poet 'Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ, who lived in the first half of the sixth century C.E. See *Dīwān 'Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ*, ed. Ašraf Aḥmad 'Adra, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut 1994, 56. See also 'Umar b. Šabba (d. ca. 262/875), *Kitāb tāriḥ al-madīna al-munawwara*, vol. 3, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Šaltūt, Ḥabīb Muḥammad Aḥmad, Mecca 1979, 796; and Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), *Tāriḥ madīnat Dimašq*, ed. 'Umar b. Ġarāma al-'Amrawī, vol. 60, Dār al-Fikr, Beirut 1997, 181-182.

⁹² See a similar argument in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 105, where the author writes: "They have said that the reason for his descent was expressly to free people from the bonds of sin, and then they claim that he himself became a prisoner. He came to help people, but he had to call for help from God against Satan; he came to save people from Satan, but the bonds bound him because after this Satan attacked him, stole up on him, carried him off, treated him violently, and then killed him". He goes on to say with dismay, "I reckon that since the world came into being no one has mocked God, blessed and almighty, or praised Satan more than this that the Christians say".

⁹³ See Mt 1:18,20.

killing of the Messiah, and for that reason they call him the lamb of God who carries the sins of the world. They also call him the one who saves of the world from its sin.

Therefore, if they believe that it is the one baptism that forgives their sins [and saves them]⁹⁴ from their offences, then they have declared that there is no need for the killing of the Messiah, for baptism alone can bring about salvation and forgiveness. If baptism is sufficient, then they have admitted that the killing of the Messiah happened in vain. And if forgiveness cannot be obtained without his being killed, then the creed contradicts itself and has lied in claiming forgiveness through baptism, since the killing was necessary.

The fourteenth reason is the creed's statement: "We believe in one holy catholic Church". They mean those who formulated this creed for them, whose contradictions we are discussing and whose corruption we are highlighting. Any group of people who places faith in it disbelieves in the Messiah and rejects his words and those of his disciples.

The explanation of this is that the Messiah, peace be upon him, filled up his Gospel with the profession of God's oneness, His glorification, His sanctification, His elevation above the second and the third [god] and His singularity in regard to lordship and divinity. He, peace be upon him, said: "God is one. He is God"⁹⁵; and "No one has ever seen God"⁹⁶. He also said: "No one should serve two lords"⁹⁷, and "No one is good but God alone"⁹⁸, and he lifted up his face to heaven and said: "My God, you are the only true God who sent the Messiah"⁹⁹. These are the sayings of the Messiah which his disciples transmitted from him. In them there is neither duplication nor triplication, but rather the pure profession of the oneness of the Creator, exalted and glorified is He.

Therefore, if they say in the creed that they believe in three pre-eternal gods, that one of them has begotten another god like him; that a woman from amongst the children of Adam gave birth to her Lord, that she breastfed her Creator and spread her lap for him; that the Lord who framed the ages by his hand and created everything got into a fight and was killed, they tried to defeat him and he was vanquished and was buried in a graveyard, as they have placed it in a sequence in their creed; then there is no doubt about their disbelief in the Messiah and his disciples, for whoever believes in the Trinity disbelieves in the oneness of God. If the creed is truthful, then the Gospel lies; and if the Gospel is truthful, then the creed lies and the deceit of those who composed it is revealed.

Moreover, may God have mercy upon you, the Messiah, his disciples and his most eminent companions stayed for a short time in Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem and

⁹⁴ The text has been reconstructed from a parallel passage in al-Ġa'farī's *Bayān*, 333.

⁹⁵ Mk 12:29.

⁹⁶ Jn 1:18.

⁹⁷ Mt 6:24.

⁹⁸ Mk 10:18. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 71.

⁹⁹ Jn 17:3 Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 71.

other places, praying to God, the God of Abraham, and worshipping Him. Did anyone remember to have heard from them or from anyone who transmitted from them, that when the Messiah went to the place of prayer and began to confide in his Master he recited this creed that includes the worship of three gods, one of whom is a father and another a son, one a killer and another killed, one a begetter and another begotten? That the Messiah and the best of his companions did not pass on any one of the above-mentioned words or expressions indicates the fabrication of the creed and the ignorance of the one who formulated it, his mockery of the Christian religion, and his aim at belittling the Christians and exposing their flaws.

The fifteenth reason is that in the course of investigating this creed and attempting to know what truth and what falsity are in it, what is sound in it and what is corrupted, investigating in light of the sayings of the prophets who prophesized of the Messiah, and in light of the sayings of his companions who witnessed him and transmitted from him the words which are narrated in the Gospel, we say to the one who composed this creed and formulated this rule [of faith]:

You claimed that the Messiah is true God and that he framed the ages by his hand and created everything. We will quote for you the texts of your Scriptures, the verses of your books, the sayings of your elders and ancestors, what the prophets prophesized about him for whom you claim lordship, and we will let you judge for yourself.

We say: the Torah states in countless verses that God Most High is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, one God, who has no associates. In the Ten Words of the Torah, He says: "I am God, your Lord, who brought you out of Egypt with my mighty hand. You shall not have another god besides me"¹⁰⁰. He also said: "You shall not liken me to anything in the heaven or on the earth or in the waters. I am God, one God, mighty and jealous. Do not take other gods besides me"¹⁰¹. Such instances are many in the Torah and they disprove those responsible for this creed in their saying that with God there are two other gods, one of whom is a human being, from amongst the children of Adam.

Isaiah said in his prophecy: "Thus says the Lord of Israel: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god"¹⁰². He also said: "The donkey and the ox know their master, but the children of Israel do not know"¹⁰³. Isaiah has thus revealed their lying in composing this creed and in claiming that there are three gods, eternal, without beginning.

David said in his psalm while he was confiding in his Lord: "O Lord, when You passed through the wilderness, the earth quaked at Your awe-inspiring appearance and it was greatly shattered"¹⁰⁴. Then he said: "Why is it, O sea, that you flee and foam?"

¹⁰⁰ Ex 20:2-3; Deut 5:6-7. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Ex 20:4-5; Deut 5:8-9. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 69, 93.

¹⁰² Is 44:6.

¹⁰³ Is 1:3. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 75, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Ps 68:7-8.

And you, O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams?"¹⁰⁵ Then he himself answered, saying: "The ground¹⁰⁶ shook at the awe-inspiring appearance of the Lord and the mighty mountains trembled"¹⁰⁷. This is what befits God's majesty and greatness, and not the hunger and thirst, the weariness and sleeplessness, the weakness and powerlessness, the confinement in the womb, crucifixion and killing which the Christians attributed to Him – may He be greatly exalted above their folly! The Messiah said in his Gospel: "No one has ever seen God"¹⁰⁸. He also said, according to what his disciples transmitted from him: "The first of all commandments is: Hear, O Israel! The Lord is one. You shall love Him with all your heart and with all your strength. On this commandment [hang] all the commandments of the prophets"¹⁰⁹. He also said, according to what John the disciple transmitted from him: "My God, You are the only true God who sent Jesus"¹¹⁰. A man said to him: "Good teacher", and the Messiah said to him: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone"¹¹¹. He also said: "I am going to my God" and "My God is greater than I"¹¹², and "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹¹³

Luke said that Gabriel said to Mary: "You will bear a son. He will be great. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David"¹¹⁴. Thus, Luke testified on the authority of God Most High that the Messiah is the son of David.

Peter the Apostle said in the seventh chapter of his First Epistle: "God is the God of all grace. He is the one who called us to his lasting glory in our lord the Messiah. To Him be the praise and the power for ever and ever"¹¹⁵.

Such is the professing by the prophets of God Most High of the oneness of their Creator and their declaring Him above all imperfection, all of which is written and documented in their books. They made it manifest to their followers, who received it from them. All of this disproves the creed and refutes those who formulated it. For the creed says that the Messiah is God, that he framed the world by his hand and created everything, whereas this Gabriel informs on the authority of God that he was born from human beings and that his father was David. This is something that the Messiah also informs about himself in what we have written above. Consequently, no attention should be given to the absurdity included in the creed, which is indeed its own corruption.

¹⁰⁵ Ps 114:5-6.

¹⁰⁶ Literally, "the patches of ground".

¹⁰⁷ Ps 68:8,15; Ps 114:7.

¹⁰⁸ Jn 1:18. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 95.

¹⁰⁹ Mt 22:37-40 (abridged); see also Deut 6:4-5.

¹¹⁰ See note 99 above.

¹¹¹ Mk 10:17-18. in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 71.

¹¹² See Jn 14:28. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 79. Note that al-Ġa'farī has replaced the word "Father" in the Gospel of John with "God".

¹¹³ Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 147.

¹¹⁴ Lk 1:31-32. Also quoted in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 129.

¹¹⁵ 1 Pet 5:10-11.

David said in the Psalms that the Messiah was the fairest of people¹¹⁶ and he likened him to a priest who served in Jerusalem at the time of Abraham, the friend of God. For he said in his psalm: “O Messiah, the Lord has sworn that you are a priest rendered victorious, like Melchizedek”¹¹⁷. How is it that David did not say that the Messiah is the true God who framed the ages by his hand and created everything, and that he is born of God before all times, as they stated irrationally in this creed of theirs? How can God’s prophet, David, say that the Messiah is a man, an Adamite, who resembles one of the priests? Yet, the people of the creed say: “Not at all! He is rather the God who created the priest Melchizedek and others than him”.

If they say that Gabriel informed Mary, when he announced the good news to her, that the Lord was with her, and said to her: “Mary, the Lord is with you”¹¹⁸, we say: It is not as you have believed; rather, by “with you” here he only meant assistance, support, gentle companionship and the promise of help. A proof of this is God’s words to Moses in the Torah: “Deliver my message to Pharaoh and I will be with you, guarding your tongue”¹¹⁹. He also said to Joshua after Moses’ death: “As I was with my servant Moses, so I will be with you”¹²⁰. Those who bore in their memories, knowing by heart, the Gospel said: “And God was with the boy”¹²¹. God has said in His Noble Book: “There is no secret conversation between three people where He is not the fourth, nor between five where He is not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them, wherever they may be”¹²².

The Messiah also said that he was greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon¹²³. Paul also said that Jesus was greater than Moses¹²⁴, and when the Baptist baptized the Messiah, he said: “This is he of whom I said: He comes after me and he is mightier than I”¹²⁵. Thus, we see neither the Apostles, nor John [the Baptist], nor Paul saying what the creed says, namely, that the Messiah is true God and that he created everything.

The strange thing about the Christians is that they inform us that the Messiah was a man who conformed to the condition that applies to the Adamites; that he remained with Satan¹²⁶ for forty days restrained in the wilderness, while the latter

¹¹⁶ See Ps 45:2.

¹¹⁷ Ps 110:4. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 153, 155.

¹¹⁸ Lk 1:28. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 129.

¹¹⁹ Ex 4:12.

¹²⁰ Josh 1:5; 3:7. Also quoted in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, 131.

¹²¹ Lk 1:66.

¹²² Q 58:7.

¹²³ See Mt 12:41-42.

¹²⁴ See Heb 3:3.

¹²⁵ Mk 1:7; Jn 1:30; see also Mt 3:11.

¹²⁶ The Arabic text reads ‘satans’ (*ṣayāṭīn*) in the plural; however, the grammatical construction of the sentence requires a singular here. This conforms, moreover, with the New Testament account of the temptation of Jesus.

dragged him from place to place; that he experienced hunger and thirst, joy and sadness; that he wore clothes, rode a donkey and paid the poll tax like the rest who were oppressed. How can the creed state that the Messiah is the God who framed the world and created everything¹²⁷? What is this but sheer stupidity and thoughtlessness?

Thus, if the creed is true, then the Gospel lies; and if the Gospel is truthful, then the creed lies and so whoever composed it. It becomes evident then that this creed is broken, corrupt and devoid of the slightest breath of the truth.

Let us conclude this chapter with the invalidation of the Trinity that is written in this creed:

We say to the Christians: you have claimed that the object of your worship consists in three hypostases, which are existence, life and knowledge. What is then your evidence of their being limited to this number? What are your arguments to refute one who thinks that the hypostases are four and adds the [hypostasis of] power, so that the Trinity becomes a quaternity¹²⁸?

If they say that there is no need for that, as in the hypostasis of knowledge is that which removes the need to affirm the [hypostasis of] power, we say: We do not concede that to you, for why should it be that the occurrence of knowledge entails the occurrence of power? One can be knowing without being powerful. The role of knowledge is uncovering the thing known and knowing it as it really is, while the role of power is producing out of nothing and bringing into existence. However, knowing something does not entail bringing it into existence. Moreover, if it were possible to be contented with knowledge without power, then it would be possible to be contented with life without knowledge. Just as it is not necessary for the living to be knowing, so too it is not necessary for the knowing to be powerful. And just as knowledge cannot be lost unless it is replaced by its opposite, which is ignorance, so too power cannot be lost unless it is replaced by its opposite, which is powerlessness.

The Creator Most High has brought the world into existence after it was not. Now, this is the effect of power, not the effect of knowledge. Otherwise, knowledge would exist in act in God Most High before bringing [the world] into existence, while knowledge involves a connection [between the knower and the known]. Thus, it is necessary to attribute power to the Most High. Once it is established that He must have the attribute of power, it is necessary to attribute will to Him, for the role of power is producing out of nothing and originating, while the role of will is specifying measures, shapes, times and conditions. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is false and it is necessary to attribute majesty and perfection to the Most High. This requires describing the Most High as one, living, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing and speaking. These attributes exceeding the Trinity are articulated in the books of the

¹²⁷ See a similar argument in 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 101, 103, 107, 109.

¹²⁸ The objection had already been employed by previous Muslim scholars. See the Index of D. Thomas's *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Brill, Leiden 2008) under 'Power as divine hypostasis'.

People of the Book. They are in the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms. If we wished to extract them from their books and establish them in this brief account, this would not be difficult for us, but we prefer brevity.

It has been established, through the above fifteen reasons, the falsity of the creed, its contradiction and the disarray of its structure. If the rule [of faith] of a religion is false, then the religion that is built upon it is also false. It is necessary to go back to the sayings of the prophets concerning the profession of the oneness of God – may He be praised – and His singularity in regard to lordship – may He be praised, there is no God besides Him and no Lord except Him.

APPENDIX

We believe in one God, the Father, controller of all, ruler of all things, maker of what is seen and unseen.

And in the one Lord Jesus the Messiah, the only Son of God, the firstborn of all creatures, who was born of his Father before all ages, not made, true God from true God, from the substance of his Father, by whose hand the ages were framed and everything was created; who for us, humankind, and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and became man; he was conceived and was born of the Virgin Mary; he suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate; he was buried and rose on the third day, as it is written; he ascended into heaven and is sited at the right hand of his Father; he is ready to come again to judge the living and the dead.

نؤمن بالله الواحد الأب، ضابط الكل، مالك كل شيء، صانع ما يرى وما لا يرى، وبالرب الواحد إيشوع المسيح ابن الله الواحد، بكر الخلائق كلها، الذي ولد من أبيه قبل العوالم كلها، وليس بمصنوع، إله حق من إله حق، من جوهر أبيه، الذي بيده أتقنت العوالم وخلق كل شيء، الذي من أجلنا معشر الناس ومن أجل خلاصنا نزل من السماء وتجدد من روح القدس، وصار إنساناً، وحبل به وولد من مريم البتول، واتجمع وصلب أيام فيلاطس النبطي، ودفن وقام في اليوم الثالث كما هو مكتوب، وصعد إلى السماء وجلس عن يمين أبيه، وهو مستعد للمجيء تارة أخرى للقضاء بين الأموات والأحياء،

We believe in one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from his Father, a life-giving Spirit; in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; in one holy and catholic Church; in the resurrection of our bodies, and in life everlasting forever and ever.

We believe in one God, Father all-ruler, creator of heaven and earth, of what is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus the Messiah, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not created, equal to the Father [in essence], through whom all things existed; who for us, humankind, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us [under Pontius Pilate], and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day [according to the Scriptures] and ascended into heaven and is sited at the right hand of his Father, and will come in his glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom has not end.

ونؤمن بروح القدس الواحد روح الحق الذي يخرج من أبيه روح محيية، وبعمودية واحدة لغفران الخطايا، وبجماعة واحدة قديسية جاثليقية، وبقيامه أبداننا وبالحيوة الدائمة إلى أبد الآبدين. (*)

نؤمن بإله واحد أب ماسك الكل، خالق السماء والأرض ما يرى وما لا يرى،

ونؤمن برب واحد يسوع المسيح ابن الله الوحيد، المولود من الأب قبل الدهور كلها، نور من نور، إله حق من إله حق، مولود غير مخلوق، مساو للأب [في الجوهر]، الذي كل شيء كان به، الذي من أجلنا معشر البشر ومن أجل خلاصنا نزل من السماء وتجدد من روح القدس ومن مريم العذراء، وتأنس، وصلب عنا [على عهد بيلاطس البنطي] وتألّم وقبر، وقام من الأموات في اليوم الثالث [كما في الكتب]، وصعد إلى السماء وجلس عن يمين أبيه، وأيضاً يأتي في مجده ليدين الأحياء والأموات، الذي ليس ملكه انقضاء،

(*) Ṣāliḥ b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ġa‘farī, *Taḥḡīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Inḡīl*, ed. Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Qadaḥ, Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, Riyadh 1998, 2:501-502.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, our Lord [the giver of life], who proceeds from the Father, whom we worship and glorify with the Father and the Son, [who speaks through the prophets]; and we believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

ونؤمن بالروح القدس ربنا [المحيي]، المنبثق
من الأب، نسجد له ونمجده مع الأب
والابن [الناطق في الأنبياء]، ونؤمن بكنيسة
واحدة جامعة رسولية مقدسة، ونعترف
بعمودية واحدة لمغفرة الخطايا، ونرتجي قيامة
الأموات والحياة الدائمة. (*)

RÉSUMÉ

Après avoir présenté Ṣāliḥ b. Ḥusayn al-Ġa'farī (m. 668/1270), auteur musulman égyptien d'un important ouvrage sur la polémique anti-chrétienne intitulé *Tahḡīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Inḡīl* ('Honte à ceux qui ont corrompu la Torah et l'Évangile'), cet article offre une traduction annotée du huitième chapitre du livre consacré à l'exposition de la prétendue corruption et des contradictions internes du credo chrétien. Les accusations se limitent fondamentalement à deux, à savoir que certaines parties du credo contredisent logiquement certaines autres et que ce credo n'est basé ni sur la loi révélée de l'Évangile ni sur les dires de Jésus ou des apôtres.

(*) Ṣāliḥ b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ġa'farī, *Kitāb al-'aṣr al-masā'il al-musammā Bayān al-wāḍiḥ al-maṣhūd min faḍā'iḥ al-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd*, ed. Amal bt. Mabruk b. Nāhis al-Luhaybī, PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 2011, 316-318.