Liberty University

Christological Apologetics:

How Late Antique Christians Contextualized Christology in Inter-faith Dialogue with

Muslims

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by

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Contents

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Abstract

The earliest Christian-Muslim dialogue offers a unique glimpse into how Christians viewed the religion of their neighbors. Much of contemporary American scholarship misplaces focus geographically and linguistically in the West, chronologically late, and theologically narrow. These biases neglect those who had the earliest interaction with Islam, allowing for misunderstanding of how Christians originally understood Islam.

This study examines the apologetic arguments of representatives under Islamic rule, in the late 7th to early 9th centuries, and both inside and outside theological orthodoxy, to understand how they used Christology to distinguish Christianity from Islam, whether as a heretical group or a distinct religious system. Each Christological group interacted with other Christians in one manner and with Muslims in a different manner. They contextualized their Christology in an attempt to build bridges between Christians and Muslims, with syncretistic tendencies being generally avoided. Given the terminology and analogies used by each group, this study found that the earliest Christians to engage Islam argued it was a religious system that was distinct from Christianity rather than a Christian heresy.

Introduction

Throughout history, people have engaged in a variety of religious dialogues. From the Israelites and Pharoah in ancient Egypt to modern apologetic debates, religious dialogue has driven much of the cultural conversation in human history. In the text of the Bible, Jews and Christians are given many commands to engage in dialogue with those who do not follow the God of Israel. Specifically addressing Christians, the apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15-16 (*CSB*), "but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame." Throughout the past two millennia, Christians have sought to follow these verses.

To understand how they were going to engage other faiths, especially after gaining political control, Christians began to have intense theological debates. Perhaps the greatest theological debates in Christian history are those surrounding Christology, leading to intra-faith dialogue as well as interfaith dialogue. Through the fourth and fifth centuries (and beyond), councils were called to determine how the church should think about the person of Jesus Christ. Each of the first four Ecumenical councils addresses a topic of Christological dispute. The fourth century saw Arianism as the principal enemy of orthodoxy. The councils of Nicæa I (325 CE) and Constantinople I (381) led to what is now commonly called the Nicene Creed. The council of Ephesus (431) saw the condemnation of Nestorianism. The council of Chalcedon (451) is, for many, the pinnacle of Christological debate. This council was intended to be the council that ended all councils. Instead, however, Chalcedon caused a significant schism between the Byzantine churches to the west, and non-Roman churches to the east.

Three main positions developed from the split that took place after the council of Chalcedon: the Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and Dyophysite parties.[1] The Chalcedonian position remained strongest in the Byzantine Empire while the Miaphysite and Dyophysite positions often marginalized to areas of Persia and Egypt. Many attempts were made to try to unify the positions, though none were successful. In the centuries following the council of Chalcedon, these branches drifted further apart and their disdain for each other increased.

In the seventh century, a common dialogue partner emerged on the scene. As Islam swept through the Middle East and across North Africa, Christians were further able to put into practice their conviction of giving a defense of their beliefs to those who taught very differently than they did. Each of the three Christological positions had to consider how they would engage with a faith that acknowledged Jesus' status as the Messiah, revered him greatly, and yet denied a core doctrine of the Christian faith. Christians of every Christological position had to engage Islam at various stages of development and in different political contexts. Those near the Byzantine Empire may have engaged differently than those on the outskirts. The different Christological positions may also have contextualized their messages differently in order to reach Muslims with their faith.

This early engagement can offer some significant insights into how Christians and Muslims can build bridges for more fruitful dialogue. Contextualization, clarifying the gospel, is an important aspect of the Christian tradition. Using terms and ideas that can be understood in different cultural contexts is one of the reasons Christianity was able to spread throughout the

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[1] Dyophysite meaning "two natures" was the so-called "Nestorian" view arguing for two natures of Christ both before and after the incarnation. The Miaphysite, or "one nature," often called "Monophysite." view held that there were two natures before the incarnation, but after these were united on the incarnation so that there is "one incarnate Word." These are the extreme positions which developed. The Chalcedonian position was to be a moderating position using arguments from Cyril of Alexandria and the *Tome* of Leo. As noted, this was not the case and will be discussed at greater length in chapter 1.

world as quickly as it did in the first few centuries of its existence, despite persecution. Christians need to be able to contextualize doctrinal positions to continue engaging different cultures.

Rationale and Need

This study helps fill in gaps in research in several ways. First, this research fills a lack of non-Byzantine focus in modern American church history and cultural engagement both from a temporal and geographic perspective. From a temporal standpoint, aside from a few texts,[2] modern American Christians discuss Christian history as if it moved from the council of Chalcedon, to the Great Schism, and then on to the Reformation.[3] Many church history texts divide history into Patristics (pre-451 CE), pre-Reformation, (ca. 1000-1500), and post-Reformation (1500-current).[4] Patristic theologians, such as Augustine, and Scholastics, like Thomas Aquinas, are studied at great length while those in the intervening time period are often neglected. This study seeks to bring some of them to light to draw further interest to these theologians and apologists.

From a geographic standpoint, little attention is paid to those on the edges of the Byzantine Empire, or even outside it to the east. Primary attention has been on how western theologians interacted with other faiths, especially Islam. One example of this is Sweis and

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[2] Donald Fairbairn's *The Global Church - the First Eight Centuries: From Pentecost through the Rise of Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021) offers an excellent introduction to church history inside and outside the Byzantine Empire.

[3] Introductory texts such as Everett Ferguson's Church History: Volume One: From Christ to Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) even go so far as to cover over 1200 years in a volume.

[4] See works such as Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, (New York: Harper One, 2010) as a prime example.

Meister's *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*.[5] Given the emphasis on

primary sources, one would expect a discussion of sources that would span time and geography.

However, the work displays limited engagement with sources outside of the "normal suspects."

Thomas Aquinas is cited extensively, and Saints Augustine and Athanasius receive some credit.

This, however, is primarily a text focused on authors west of Asia Minor. In fact, Athanasius,

Origen, and the writer of the *Epistle to Diognetus* are the only three non-western apologists

engaged at any depth out of 54 chapters.[6] Study of historical cultural engagement seems to stop

on the Asian shores of the Bosporus.[7]

　　Second, most research has been done on simply the earliest encounters with Islam with

the express intention of understanding Islam using the historical-critical method. While this

study is valuable, it is focused on understanding what can be known about Islam rather than on

what it shows about how Christians interacted with other faiths. Most focus more on what the

interaction teaches about Islam and its formation rather than on Christianity and the cultural

formation this kind of engagement produces. Many of these studies also attempt to show either

Christians as merely engaged in polemical debates and arguments, producing more heat than

light, or as not understanding Islam to even be a distinct religious system.

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[5] Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister, eds., *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

[6] Harold Netland's chapter on "Interreligious Apologetics" does discuss the fact that there were apologists outside of the West who engaged in dialogue with other faiths, but other than a mention of John of Damascus and Timothy of Baghdad, all other authors are either westerners or wrote well after 1200.

[7] Daniel Janosik's *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016) is one example of a scholarly work written to an evangelical audience that draws on a non-Byzantine, though thoroughly Chalcedonian, cultural engagement. In addition, *The History of Apologetics* (Benjamin K. Forrest, Josh Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020) offers more of an introduction to church history and cultural engagement, examining Timothy of Baghdad I and Theodore Abu Qurrah along with John of Damascus as non-western theologians and apologists.

This is where the study offers value. This study will engage in a study of comparative religion showing contact points between early Christian and Muslim theological points. Christian and Muslim theology will be engaged to show where there are contact points for building bridges between the two faiths and how early Christians understood Islamic theology as well as the Christian theological position. Islam and Christianity share much in theological, historical, and social content. This study will address some of those contact points and show how Christians contextualized terminology as well as how Christians understood Islam.

The study also offers value in historical theology. Given the intense debates over small terms from Nicæa I to Nicæa II, how Christians outside the Byzantine and Roman empires understood the terms can help shed light on the actual debates between the various parties involved. The debates often included as much political intrigue as theological investigation so moving into more practical territory offers a unique perspective on the root of the issues.

There is also value in the study to church history. As much as theological clarification can be had from studying those outside the Byzantine and Roman empires, political and ecclesiological clarification can be had all the more. Christians often understood the theological terms to be rooted in political and ecclesiological intrigue. The church historian gains value from this study in that these different contexts will be examined from all major Christological views, seeking to shed light on whether anyone was a heretic intentionally, or because of political strain.

Finally, there may also be some value in cultural engagement as the study discusses several different cultures and how they engage a new culture. The three Christological groups represented in the study also represent different cultural backgrounds. Given this, each will present a unique perspective for those studying cultural history and cultural engagement.

This research was prompted in part by a desire to interact more effectively with Muslims. Growing up near Dearborn, MI, I often went on trips to the city to engage Muslims in dialogue. In my undergraduate studies, I had several Muslim colleagues who were staunch defenders of their faith. These discussions did not often produce light. However, they did kindle a desire to better engage. Studying how Christians have engaged with and explained the core beliefs of Christianity with others can offer insight into better engagement today. It can show both how to build bridges and how to avoid burning them.

One additional area of research that is still needs to be examined further is the understanding the geographic locus of Christological views in Arabia at the time of Muhammad's ascendency. There were Christian sects throughout Arabia, as defined by the Byzantine Empire, and more broadly by the populations in the Arabian Peninsula. Being able to better place the Christologies focused in each area would also offer some insight into early Christian and Muslim dialogue. Further research can also be done on the Christology of the Qur'an and the connections it has with various Christian Christological positions.

<div align="center">Research Problem, Sub-questions, Limitations, Terms</div>

In this study I aim to resolve the primary question of how Christians, east of the Byzantine Empire, used their Christology in cultural engagement with Muslims. When considering how Christians engaged in interfaith dialogue with early Muslims, four other questions arise. First, what were the major Christological differences between Dyophysites, Chalcedonians, and Miaphysites? Second, what are the similarities and differences in how these Christians engage their Muslim neighbors considering their Christological positions? Third, how did eastern Christians contextualize Christology with their Muslim neighbors? Finally, how did

the three groups understand their Muslim neighbor's religious views in relation to Christianity (i.e., were they Christian or non-Christian)?

In this study I will argue that Christians did not intend their Christology to be limited to intellectual discussions over technical terms. Christology was contextualized in a way that maintained orthodoxy, according to the Christological tradition being followed, but challenged Islam's understanding of the person and work of Jesus. It was not merely an intellectual exercise. Christians used their Christological position as a way to engage in mission with those of other religions. The goal of this study is to show that Christians in the East, understanding Islam to be a different religion, used Christology as an apologetic. They clearly articulated this Christology in line with their theological tradition while focusing on ways to build bridges with their new Muslim neighbors.

Scope

This study will examine exemplars from Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and Dyophysite traditions in the 7th-9th centuries that have an influence on cultural engagement. Apologetic or polemical works will be examined along with sermons and other teaching materials. Both interaction with the theological other as well as preparation for that interaction will show how Christology was contextualized in cultural engagement.

The Dyophysite position will be represented by Timothy of Baghdad (d. 823) and Abraham, the Monk of Bêt Hâlê (late 8th early 9th century).[8] Next, the Miaphysite position will be represented by Jacob of Edessa (d 708) and Habib ibn Khidma Abu Ra'ita (d. 835). Finally, the Chalcedonian representatives will be John of Damascus (676-749) and Theodore Abu Qurrah

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[8] See note 110 on page 50 for a discussion of the identity of the Monk of Bêt Hâlê.

(750-ca. 825). These are chosen by Christological grouping and attempting to select representatives from texts that engage in Islam aside from simply a passing reference as with many Chronicles on Christian-Muslim relations, as well as before additional clarifying theological development has taken place in Islam.

Limits

In light of the goals of the study, it is necessary to add limitations regarding the date of the sources, and some questions that will not be addressed. As noted in the scope, the sources surveyed in the study will be limited to the 7th through 9th centuries. The seventh century must be the minimal limit, of course, given the timing of Islam's arrival on the world scene. This preserves the texts close to when Islam took the world by surprise as a new world empire. The latter boundary will be helpful because it limits the theological development of Islam before too much theological development has taken place in Islam. The further one moves from the origination of Islam, the more clearly it is seen that Islam and Christianity are distinct from each other and Christian-Muslim dialogue takes on a different character.

Because of this limitation, these sources will likely predate most Muslim historians. The study is not trying to answer the question of how Muslims viewed Christians or Christian theology, though that may be helpful for further study. There may be some tangential mention of this, but it is not critical to the study. The study is focused on the Christian understanding of Islam as a distinct religion and the contextualization of Christology in light of that fact.

Key Terms

Council of Chalcedon- Fourth Ecumenical council. Took place at Chalcedon, just outside the capital of Constantinople in 451 at the request of emperor Marcian.

Nestorian-named after the patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius (428-431) the extreme

      Dyophysite position made popular (generally speaking) by Nestorius.

Qnoma/e ܩܢܘܡܐ-nature "means something like 'individual manifestation'"[9] Close to *hypostasis*

      in West Syriac understanding.

Kyana ܟܝܢܐ-nature. For West Syriac/Syriac Orthodox, similar to *hypostasis* and *qnome*. For

      Church of the East, it is more like substance.

Physis-pertaining to nature

Hypostasis- person, distinct from other persons. The real existence or essence of a thing.

Prosopon-person-individual consciousness, way of perception. Often used in place of *hypostasis*.

Miaphysite/***Monophysite*** -*mono-physis* i.e., "one nature." Monophysite is typically a derogatory

      designation.

Dyophysite-*dyo-physis* i.e., "two natures"

Melkite-Syriac speaking Christians who accepted the council of Chalcedon.

Church of the East- Syriac speaking Christians who rejected the council of Chalcedon.

      Dyophysite Christology.

Syriac Orthodox- Syriac speaking Christians who rejected the council of Chalcedon.

      Miaphysite Christology. Also known as West Syriac.

<div align="center">Statement of Methodology</div>

      This research will be focused in historical and theological disciplines. There must be

overlap between the two as both play significant roles in understanding the terminology used in

the various Christological debates. These discussions took place in specific historical contexts

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[9] S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (September 30, 1996): 28, http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/10.7227/BJRL.78.3.3.

where the political dynamics played no small part in how the final formulas were shaped. However, to argue the Christological debates were merely political is also to miss the mark. As with any debate over which terms to use, there is truth to both sides. History is important because nothing happens in a vacuum. There were real, historical events that played significant roles in the use of terms.

In setting this stage, historical context will be given for the time period as a whole. This will include a discussion of the christological controversies as they were discussed through the third through sixth Ecumenical councils (Ephesus I, Chalcedon, Constantinople II & III). Each of these councils plays a unique role in the development of the christological terminology and thus is important to the use of specific terms in Christological contextualization. The linguistic differences between the three Christological branches develops through this time period. It is significant that the languages of Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac were represented at the different councils. These languages and the cultures that used them were different from one another. Comparison of the terms used by the different groups both in their intra-Christian dialogue and in their inter-religious dialogue will be important to review.

From a theological standpoint, it will be likewise important to set the stage appropriately. The theological contrast between Antioch and Alexandria plays no small role in the development of the terminology. It will be important to show the differences between the understandings of the terms from each Christological viewpoint. The Greek terms *hypostasis*, *prosopon*, *physis*, and Syriac *qnome* will be examined in their theological and philosophical contexts.

The sources to use present an interesting challenge for a textual analysis of the subject. Early Christian sources on Islam are unclear as to what the Christian understanding of Islam was which may or may not indicate clear understanding of Islam as a new religion. It is significant to

the study if Christians viewed Muslims as a different faith as it could impact how they engage. If Muslims are just a different sect of Christians, then Christians of other Christological stripes could engage them as those leading people astray.[10] If Muslims were a different religion altogether, then the Christians could simply engage them as they had other religious groups. An additional complexity on this point is the use of similar terminology, if for no other reason than it could be confusing to hear two people (one Christian, one Muslim) say the same phrases with entirely different meanings. These parallels will be important to note as they will likely be significant points of conversation when Christians engage in dialogue with Muslims.

The research methodology used will be review of primary and works with a focus on textual study. The study will examine the writings of a variety of Christians on the edge of the Byzantine Empire to see how they contextualized their Christology, especially when engaging Muslims. The specific terminology used by each of the primary Christological views will be examined to determine if there are consistent patterns across the individual works as well as those in the various theological camps. Each of the three primary Christological positions will have two individual representatives to develop a broad understanding of terminological usage. If there is divergence between two similar Christological positions, then the use of terms would be less significant. However, if there is a similarity between the terminology, then it will be clear that there are lines drawn, representing distinct contextualization strategies by each party to further their group.

The study will also seek to include artistic depictions to the contextualization story. Contextualization can often be depicted in artwork and not merely in language. This is true of Christians dealing with the iconoclast controversy in the late eight century. This is also true of

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[10] A concern of bishops dating as far back as Cyprian of Carthage (200-258).

Christians living under Muslim rule. Given the assumptions made by standard discussions of Islam, it is fair to suggest that Christians had to contextualize their artwork, and the writing on it, in order to avoid possible persecution from their new overlords. Artwork related to Christ or Mary will be significant given the propensity of Christians to rely on art to explain theological concepts. Since the portions of the church did not go through the same scholastic period as the West, the underpinnings of this might be seen in the years leading up to that time.

The Christological exemplars will also be selected from several different stages in history. This may help to increase the understanding of the use of terms. Again, if there is consistency, it will show signs of active training, both in the Christological position as a whole, and in the specific use in cultural engagement. This will help trace a chronology of terminological development that should be of value to both historical and systematic theologians.

Finally, the research will seek to present a brief discussion of how this impacts Christian-Muslim dialogue today. Any study should seek relate to the contemporary discussion. How Christians contextualized Christology can be very important to Christians considering doing so today. The way that contextualization happens is significant. Perhaps more importantly, the degree to which the contextualization moves away from the original claim can show how Christians might interact with Muslims today.

<center>Literature Review</center>

In reviewing literature, three clear paths arise as to the focus of study. These studies often take an historical, social, or individual approach to understanding how Christians and Muslims first interacted. Each offers a key piece to understanding engagement, while leaving gaps needing to be filled. This section will examine the different approaches and show the value of each as well as areas of opportunity for exploration.

Historical

Using an historical approach to understand how Muslims fit into the Byzantine or Persian empires these texts typically attempt to show how Christians and others viewed Muslims. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook engage in much of this in *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*.[11] In the book, they apply much of historical criticism to Islam, not unlike critical German scholarship did with Christianity in the 18th century. They compare non-Muslim sources to try to recreate an account of Islam. With this historical focus, they are more concerned with Islam than with Christianity. Nevertheless, they bring much to the table for Christian Muslim interaction.

Robert Hoyland has done much research in this area. In his work, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*,[12] Hoyland tries to show how non-Muslim groups, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian, understood Islam and can offer a different picture than traditional Islam offers. This is most clearly shown in the area of history. Along the same lines as Crone and Cook, Hoyland attempts to create a new Islamic history. He uses Christian texts, not to show how Christians engaged with Islam, but rather to construct the historical story of Islam's ascendency. This is certainly helpful and does offer some value to the present study, however, the historical-critical approach dismisses the deeper theological issues prevalent in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Hoyland et al. do explore more of this in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam*.[13] This work seeks to understand how Christians went about their normal practice in various geographic

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[11] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[12] Robert G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam, (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997).

[13] Robert G. Hoyland, ed., The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean, (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2021).

reaches of the newly Islamic world. This text, however, reaches rather broadly so being able to focus on a specific aspect of Christian-Muslim dialogue is difficult.

In *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq*[14] David Thomas *et al*. engage a bit deeper into the specific ways Christians lived in society and what this meant for the arguments they used. From a broad standpoint, this text offers several chapters that will align with this study, though they are limited to chapter length treatments. This also focuses specifically on Arab Christianity, while leaving the others aside. It does address several different Christological positions which aligns with the study at hand.

Some sources look to the situation prior to Islam arriving on the scene which helps understand the reasons Christians choose which arguments to use against Islam. Addressing the historical situation surrounding the development of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Volker Menze argues, that theological terminology, forged in political strife, set the stage for future schism.[15] This helps to understand the social context in which Islam was to arrive. However, it too dismisses the theological reason Christians engaged Muslims the way they did.

In contrast, Romeny disagrees with Menze in *Religious Origins of the Nations?*.[16] Romeny argues that the onset of Islam did allow for development of western Syriac, and thus Miaphysite, culture over against the Church of the East and Chalcedonian cultures. This was because they were no longer persecuted by the state religion. If Islam is the new state, which persecutes all Christians equally when it does, then no one church is able to suppress the others.

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[14] David Thomas, ed., Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[15] Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 275.

[16] R. B. ter Haar Romeny, ed., Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East (Boston: Brill, 2010).

This too offers some historical grounding for why Christians engaged the way they did, but it lacks a fuller engagement with the theology that was at the heart of all Christian engagement, not just that of the Syrian Orthodox.

Baum and Winkler provide some balance to the Syriac Orthodox in their work *The Church of the East: A Concise History*.[17] In this, however, as with many general history texts, the space devoted to discussion of the Church of the East is broad. They do discuss the specific East Syrian influences present in the Qur'an and in the legend surrounding Muhammad's training in Christian theology. This is important to the study as it will help shed light on the theological context and influence that the Church of the East had on Islam as Christians were beginning to engage. It also helps to show the arguments Christians used against Muslims. However, this still falls short in that regard given the scope of the work.

Social and Linguistic

The second major approach taken in literature is to address Christian Muslim interaction from the vantagepoint of a specific social or linguistic group. They do not seek to present how all Christians understood Muslims or vice versa. Instead, they seek to show how specific social groups formed their own identity in light of the new regime. While most scholarship in the West has focused on other western authors in antiquity, several scholars have undertaken work in bringing Christians into broader visibility. Scholars such as Sebastian Brock and Sidney Griffith have greatly expanded the understanding of Christianity in the East. In this vein, there are two principal streams. The first addressing Arabic Christianity, and the second addressing Syriac Christianity.

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[17] Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge, 2003).

In Griffith's phenomenal work, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*,[18] he explains how the church functioned under Islam at its earliest points. Griffith's work is intended to present a clear description of the accomplishments of Arabic Christians in their Muslim contexts. He argues that there has been a lack of study on Arabic Christian advancements in culture and theology.

Griffith presents the text is not a source book, but a history book. Griffith does not provide translations of various texts but presents and account that highlights the achievement of Christians under Muslim rule. By design, Griffith's text seeks to address all Christians writing in "minor" languages under Islam. Christians who wrote in Syriac, Arabic, Coptic, and other languages as well are highlighted. This is an express intention of Griffith's as he argues that too much attention is paid to Greek writers and not enough to those writing in other languages. This aspect of scholarship has been missing for the past several hundred years, stemming from both an intellectual and theological elitism.

In Griffith's work, he does not focus on contextualization of theology in interfaith dialogue. Instead, he seems to argue all engagement is simply polemical. The authors are trying to establish Christian identity as a minority rather than engaging in serious discussion with Muslims to understand their faith and engage in dialogue. One example of this is Griffith's treatment of John of Damascus. He argues that while John would have had intimate knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic teaching given his post in Damascus, his response to Islam is "entirely polemical."[19] In saying this, Griffith argues that John's approach to Islam is not to be commended and should certainly not be followed. The arguments, especially in John's *Heresy of*

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[18] Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[19] Ibid., 41.

the Ishmaelites, "caricature" and "discredit the religious and intellectual claims of Islam. . ."[20] He notes there is some value in the information John provides, but his clearly polemical writing detracts from the overall value of the work.

Another aspect of Griffith's work that leaves the reader wanting is that he nearly eliminates the differences between Christianity and Islam.[21] With Muslims and Christians being "co-believers in *the* one God, creator of all that is. . ."[22], Griffith minimizes the distinctions between Christian and Islamic understandings of who God is. Griffith regularly notes that Christians viewed Islam as being a Christian heresy. Jacob of Edessa and John of Damascus both are representatives of this view.[23] However, he diminishes the fact that Christians did separate themselves from Muslims in describing Jesus' deity. While many may have described Islam as a Christian heresy, it was clear that there were markers in Islamic teaching that were always known to distinguish the two as different religions. Even though John of Damascus, as an example, mentioned Islam last in a line of heresy, it does not necessarily follow that he viewed Islam a Christian sect. John lists pagan sects in the same grouping so to mention Islam as being understood as the same religion seems misguided.

Finally, while Griffith attempts to show the necessity to study Arabic speaking Christians, he often does this at the expense of even lesser languages. While noted above that this was a strength, the issue here is that Griffith sets the stage to do exactly the same with Syriac, as one example, that he accuses scholars of doing with Arabic. Griffith does note consistently that texts were originally composed in Syriac. However, he often quickly moves to the speed at

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[20] Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 41.

[21] Ibid., 21.

[22] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[23] Ibid., 30.

which it was translated into Arabic. Griffith seems to dismiss the importance of the fact that

Syriac was the primary language which many primary authors wrote in, and this would shape

their understanding of various theological and cultural issues with Islam. This undermines, at

least to some degree, Griffith's desire to drive others to recognize the contribution of

marginalized groups. While trying to bring one group to the foreground, Griffith inadvertently

pushes others to the rear.

While Griffith focuses on Arabic Christianity, other texts focus on Syriac Christianity

and conversations had in the earliest Christian encounters with Islam. Michael Penn's *When*

Christians First Met Muslims is a prime example of this.[24] His work presents a set of the earliest

source materials for Christian mentioning of Muslims. Penn argues, administrative use of Arabic

forced many languages, specifically Syriac, out of mainstream use and into specialized

"liturgical" language.[25] Thus, it would be important to understand how the Christians interacting

closest with Muslims would have viewed Muslims to properly understand the setting in which

Islam grew. Penn's focus here, however, is on how Christians understood Islam in light of their

general discussion. His work focuses on more broad engagement with the topic of Islam rather

than the specific engagement of Christians with Muslims. Penn argues Syriac is not studied in

the same depth as other liturgical languages (Greek and Latin) because of the heterodox views of

the Syriac Christians.

It is clear from the texts that Syriac Christians did not have a uniform view of their

Muslim counterparts, though the view does become more consistent as time progresses. This

should be clear even from other, more widely studied writings such as John of Damascus'

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[24] Michael Philip Penn, When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[25] Ibid., 13.

apparent inclusion of Islam as a Christian heresy, but it is often lost on contemporary readers. Penn describes the various genres present in the earliest Syriac writings ranging from "apocalypses, caliph lists, conciliar decisions, chronicles, colophons, disaster lists, disputations, encyclical letters, epistles, flyleaf scribblings, hagiographies, inscriptions, legal opinions, and scriptural exegesis."[26] Syriac Christians discussed their Muslim neighbors with other Christians in ways that they thought would best suit the need of the listener. This looked different at different times and to different audiences.

Penn argues in the introduction that there was absolutely no unified view of Islam in the first 100 years of its interaction with Christianity. However, his own texts show that there was an increasingly consistent understanding of the Arab invaders. Penn's desire to show the inconsistency of Christian views shows itself in the later texts which show a more unified understanding of the Muslim place in history. Christians increasingly understood Islam similarly progressing from the "downright friendly" to increasingly hostile. While there was not a uniformed view at first, it did progress in that direction. Some of that may have come from the influence of writings such as John of Damascus. John Damascene did spend the majority of his life in Damascus after all. His view of Islam would hardly have been unique to himself, and he begins writing almost 50 years prior to Penn's cut off. John left his post when the language of Arabic was required in all governmental positions. It would seem that there may have been growing consensus on the Christian view of Islam.

Penn echoes much of this in *Envisioning Islam*.[27] He, like Griffith, argues that too much ink has been spent on the response of Greek speakers to Islam. Instead of addressing those who

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[26] Penn, When Christians First Met Muslims, 6.

[27] Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

had the earliest engagement, scholars, in Penn's estimation, have given too much credence to the

more prevalent language of the day instead of focusing on the geographically and temporally

closer language. His work here seeks to show how Christians "navigated a world in which

Christianity and Islam were much less distinct than is commonly imagined."[28] As he expressed in

When Christians Met Muslims, Penn argues from the position that early Christians saw Islam as

more similar than different, and this shaped how they engaged.

While Penn's work here is noble, as there is a treasure trove of information that can be

gleaned from Syriac sources, to limit one to only the Syriac sources is to place too strict a

linguistic barrier. Early engagement by those such as John of Damascus, who would have lived

under Islamic rule, while speaking and writing in Greek, is important to understanding Christian-

Muslim dialogue in the time period.

Griffith also addresses Syriac writing specifically in *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the

Religious Challenge of Islam*.[29] In this work, Griffith seeks to show Syriac Christians engaged

Islam in the earliest stages. His focus is on the Syriac Christian cultural context in which Islam

arrives on the scene. He also discusses several Syriac works against Islam. As with most of his

other works, Griffith is critical of the posture taken by the Christian writers against Islam. He

argues that they did not take the time to understand Islam as a religious system, nor was that their

purpose. He suggests that the sole purpose of these texts was polemical.

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[28] Penn, Envisioning Islam, 5.

[29] Sidney H. Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, reprinted from the 1995 Kottayam edition, Moran Etho (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012).

One work that focuses on Christian-Muslim dialogue that offers significant advances in scholarship is that of Emmanouela Grypeou, et al.[30] The desire of the editors in the work is to present the interaction between Christianity and Islam in the earliest centuries in which Islam grew exponentially.[31] The focus of this work is on the reciprocal nature of theological development between Christianity and Islam. Of particular note to this study is the discussion of Christology as it relates to Christian-Muslim dialogue. Grypeou writes, "the understanding of the Islamic invasions depended, at least in part, on interpretations of the Christological crisis, and so the sectarian differences that existed both before and after the Islamic conquests bear a particular importance."[32]

Christians and Muslims clearly influenced each other in many ways. As Muslims invaded the Byzantine Empire, they brought about gladness from those oppressed by the Byzantines theologically and politically, which were often the same people. However, as time progressed, these Christians understood that Islam was a different religion that was not compatible with Christian belief. This text examines how various groups answered the call to defend the faith in light of the changes to their social and political surroundings.

Individual

The final stream of study has been on the Christian individuals who engaged in interfaith dialogue with Muslims to some degree or another. One of the primary examples of this is John of Damascus. Two prominent studies of John's work have shaped much scholarship. Daniel J.

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[30] Emmanouela Grypeou, "Introduction," in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas, *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam: Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Boston: Brill, 2006).

[31] Ibid., 2.

[32] Ibid., 3.

Sahas[33] and Andrew Louth[34] each present John's historical significance, especially in how he shaped Christian dialogue regarding the veneration of icons. John does this, of course, writing from a Muslim majority context, or at least from the position of one who was in a Muslim majority context. However, their focus is more on John's theological contribution as a whole rather than examining the contextualization of theological themes that he offers. Given the transition into a Muslim majority context, rather than one that is distinctly Christian is an important piece in understanding how Christians viewed themselves and others.

Daniel Janosik breaks from the emphasis with John Damascene in introducing some contextualization into his engagement. Janosik argues, contrary to Griffith, that John is not intending to merely be polemical, but he is also laying the groundwork for distance theological education with those to whom he is writing. He explains that throughout church history, Christians have had to contextualize their message to fit the needs of the day.[35] Janosik's work focuses primarily on John Damascene's Trinitarian theology to show how he engages with Islam. While this is helpful, especially given the consistency of Trinitarian thought the middle of the fifth century, the larger contested issue of the day would have been Christology. Thus, how different groups used their Christology as an apologetic would be more helpful in understanding the earliest Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Iskandar Bcheiry blends the final two approaches in his published dissertation *An Early Christian Reaction to Islam*.[36] In this, Bcheiry presents the relationship of Isuʻyahb III, bishop of

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[33] Daniel J. Sahas, John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites" (Boston: Brill, 1972).

[34] Andrew Louth, St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology (Oxford University Press, 2002).

[35] Janosik, John of Damascus, 5.

[36] Iskandar Bcheiry, *An Early Christian Reaction to Islam: Išū'yahb III and the Muslim Arabs*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 57 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019).

the Church of the East, with the new Arab leaders. He focuses on how Isu'yahb builds bridges between the Church of the East and the Caliphate. He does this to secure political stability as well as to convert Arabs to Christianity. Bcheiry presents three lines of argument used by Isu'yahb III throughout his lifetime to engage Muslims. In this Bcheiry, himself ordained in the opposite tradition of his study subject, does focus on the theological interaction of the Church of the East leader with the Muslim leadership. As only one line of argument presented, this thought bears further investigation.

The literature surveyed focus on bracketing the Christian-Muslim dialogue around historical, social, and individual interfaith engagement. Those with historical focus, note how Christianity influenced Islamic theology and how Christians viewed Islam. Those with a social focus engage in a discussion of Arabic and Syriac speaking Christians responded to Islam, forming their own social identity in the process. Those examining individuals look to show how society shaped them and how individuals respond to Islam from a purely polemical standpoint. This leaves a gap in the explicit theological contextualization of Christians under Islam. This work seeks to show how a specific theological concept, Christology, was used by Christians in the East to engage in meaningful dialogue with Muslims. Christians sought to understand their Muslim neighbors and sought to explain their view of Jesus Christ as a way to build a bridge of dialogue between the two faiths. They were certainly interested in converting non-Christians to Christianity and keeping Christians in the faith, but to simply dismiss the arguments as polemical or "pure apologetic"[37] is to oversimplify the issue. Christians in the East did seek to build bridges. They understood Islam as a new religion and used their Christology to show Christ as the Son and Word of God who was truly God and truly human.

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[37] Griffith, *Syriac Writers*, 28.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter one will set the historical and theological stage. Examining the cultural setting as well as the political landscape will help shape the undertones which influence the different positions. It will be important to address, briefly, Byzantine, Persian, and Arab/Islamic history. This will set the social and political context for Christological engagement. In addition, a discussion of the theological context of the three Christologies will provide a background the theological nuances between the groups. It will also address terminological concerns most important to each group. Understanding the theological context will show some of the unique aspects of Christological engagement for each of the three traditions.

In Chapter two, the study will turn to apologetic engagement between the Christological groups and Islam. Specific attention will be given to the similarities and differences in how the Christological positions engaged Islam. Where key terms are used by the positions in their engagement with Islam, those will be assessed in relation to their Christological significance.

Chapter three will discuss the theological contextualization. It will explore how Christians explained the impact of their Christology on how they understood who God was and how that related to their activity in the world. Specific attention will be paid to the terminology used by Christians and its acceptability to Islam. Some terms in Christian theology would have been conversation ending and Christians generally sought to avoid them when possible. This chapter will also briefly discuss the level of syncretism present in the social spheres the Christological positions moved in.

Finally, the paper will address the question of whether Islam was considered a distinct religion from Christianity, or merely a Christian sect. This will show that it was, indeed, distinct from the other religious systems at the time and was understood this way from the earliest

interactions. Christians used specific Christological terminology in their interaction that shows they understood Islam to be teaching a different Jesus than revealed in the Bible. They even argued that Islam went beyond the other Christologies which they considered heterodox at best (and often simply heretical and non-Christian). They used this to show that Muslims, since they did not worship the same God that Christians did, should turn to the Christian understanding of God and act appropriately. They clearly saw Islam as a distinct religious system, using contextualized terminology to demonstrate this.

Chapter One: Historical and Theological Context

Political and theological settings play a major role in how individuals use specific

arguments and how different topics are understood. This chapter begins by explaining the

historical setting of the Roman/Byzantine and Persian Empires from the fourth through seventh

centuries. Examining the political and cultural setting as well as the political landscape helps

shape the background which influence the different Christological positions and their

engagement with Islam. After discussing the historical context, a discussion of the theological

context of the three major Christological views of Chalcedonian, Miaphysitism, and

Dyophysitism will explain major differences and nuances between each position.

Historical Context

The political contexts in which the church moved in the Roman/Byzantine and Persian

empires prior to the Arabic invasion is complex. Political interests and ambitions often clouded

issues so that it is hard to see through them to the theological issues. In the second through fourth

centuries, the status of Christians in these empires was each the opposite of the other. If the

church experienced peace in Persia, it experienced hardship in Rome. Likewise, if there was

peace in the Roman Empire, there would be challenge in the Persian Empire. This continued

until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century. At

this point, Christians had peace in the Roman Empire. Persecution of the orthodox in the Roman

Empire ended after the ascension of Constantine (r. 312-337).

This peace was not achieved in the Persian Empire given the theological distance

between Christianity and Zoroastrianism. As the official religion of the Persian Empire,

Zoroastrianism required strict adherence, much like Christianity in the Roman Empire after 391.

In fact, when Constantine's promotion of Christianity reached the point where it was simply the

religion of the emperor, Christians in the Persian Empire were "declared enemies of the state, Roman auxiliary troops, and soon after were officially persecuted – for political rather than religious reasons."[38] From the fourth to late sixth century, the relationship between the Byzantine and Persian empires was directly proportional to how Christians were received in Persia. If the empires were at war, Persia persecuted Christians. When they were at peace, Christians had relief in Persia.

For the better part of the 150 years between the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the last stage of peace between the Persian and Byzantine empires in 628, the theological position of the Byzantine Empire had implications on the state of the church in Persia. For the most part, the Byzantine Empire pushed the council of Chalcedon on all Christians so as to unify them under one branch.[39] This had many unintended consequences. One was that the Persian Empire, while not fully understanding the issues, viewed Christians as Byzantine sympathizers. Through this time, and often before, Christians in Persia were viewed as loyalists to the Byzantine Empire. Christians who supported Chalcedon were viewed as "melkites" (ܡܠܟܐ *malka*-king) or those who follow the Byzantine king. This placed animosity between the two groups almost immediately.

However, by the end of the sixth century there was relative peace between the empires. Byzantine Emperor Maurice (r. 582-602) even took in the Persian King Chosroes II during his exile from Persia due to mutiny. Chosroes II even took a rather pro-Christian position, marrying

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[38] Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 219.

[39] This is an oversimplification of the state of affairs in the Christological positions of the Byzantine Empire. However, the Persian Empire would not have had as clear an understanding of the moderating positions and actions occasionally taken by the Byzantine Empire, so it is useful from an historical standpoint.

a Christian woman which was against Persian law.[40] Through this time, it seemed that peace might be achievable between the two nations.

This peace, however, was short lived. The Byzantine Empire was rocked by the assassination of Maurice by a usurper Phocas in 607-8. The Persians saw the action as a Christian revolt and waged war against the Byzantines, taking over Antioch around 611.[41] In 610, Heraclius I avenged the death of Maurice and executed Phocas, assuming leadership over the empire. While this act of vengeance would seem to have brought peace between the Byzantines and Persians, it did not, and they would continue warring for 18 years of Heraclius' reign.[42]

The war with Byzantium impacted Christians in Persia directly. Christians in Persia, formerly allies with Chosroes II, became political enemies again. In 614, Persian troops besieged Jerusalem with the intention of obtaining the relic of the Holy Cross. The relic was taken to Ctesiphon in Persia, much to the dismay of the entire Christian world.[43] Heraclius would eventually reclaim the cross in 630 as part of peace negotiations following his successful military advances in the preceding 6 years.[44] Persian treatment of Christians began to recede back to toleration before the Arab conquests and ultimate downfall of the Persian Empire.

This consistent movement from one extreme to the other plays a significant, though not exclusive, role in shaping the understanding of key Christological ideas. It is to those Christological ideas that this study now turns.

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[40] Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 228-9.

[41] John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.*, ed. John Meyendorff, vol. II, The Church in History (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 271.

[42] Ibid., 333.

[43] Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 117. "Entire" meaning all Christians who knew this took place.

[44] Ibid., 151.

Theological Context

To understand how Christians contextualized Christology in light of Islam, it is important

to understand the primary Christological positions of the seventh to ninth centuries. Arising out

of the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) came three principal groups: Dyophysites,

Miaphysites, and Chalcedonians.[45] The Christological positions will be examined below setting

the stage for how Christians engaged their Muslim neighbors.

Dyophysite Christology

The Christological position of the Church of the East is often referred to in derogatory

fashion as Nestorian. The name derives, rather infamously, from Nestorius bishop of

Constantinople (d. ca. 451). Nestorius argued that Christ should be thought of as having a "two

natures" formula after the incarnation, thus the term Dyophysite.[46] Before the incarnation, all

sides of the Christological divide agreed that there were two natures, one divine and one human.

After the incarnation came the point of contention. Nestorius argued that there were two natures

still since, in his view, this was the position of Scripture and reason.

Nestorius and his Antiochene supporters placed the primary emphasis in Christology on

the distinction between the persons and natures of Christ. Nestorius' followers, especially in the

Church of the East, argued for their own understanding of the natures of Christ over-against the

position stated at Chalcedon and that taken by their opposites, the Miaphysites.[47]

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[45] It should be noted that these names are considered the extreme positions and the attempted moderate position. Each position has an extreme version, as well as a moderate version. Brock suggests a sevenfold model rather than the threefold mode presented above (S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (September 30, 1996)).

[46] *Dyo*-two, *physis*-nature.

[47] Mia-one, physis-nature.

The *Dyophysites* argued for the two natures position because they saw it as a logical necessity because of a linguistic challenge in translating from Greek to Syriac. In Greek, the term *hypostasis* was translated into that two natures could have fewer than two persons which meant there was an ontological distinction that remained. The two natures could not be ontologically connected in one nature. Nestorius "could not conceive of a human nature (*physis*) without a person (*prosopon*) attached to it."[48] Thus ontologically, there must be two persons of Christ since there are two natures and the natures cannot be unified.[49] For Nestorius, the term *prosopon* did not have the definition available for him to be able to use the term in the way Cyril did. To say that the "concrete nature" of something could be unified with another "concrete existence" was impossible for Nestorius.[50]

Grillmeier notes that Nestorius "regards 'Christ' superficially only as the sum of the two natures and sees these in turn merely as a collection of qualitative expressions."[51] Nestorius argued that "Christ" was the name for the incarnate person. "Logos" was the name properly referring to the divine nature, and "Jesus" was to the human nature. This distinction led him to argue that there were times when Scripture referred specifically to the activity of the Logos and at others the activity of the human Jesus. The various titles of Christ, Nestorius argued, required the acceptance of a distinction of the duality of his natures after the union.

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[48] Roger E. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). 215.

[49] This thought is rooted in his Antiochene interpretive method as well as several other church fathers which influenced his thought. Susan Wessel notes that the Antiochene rhetorical style that Nestorius learned used a set formula to respond to an argument which included five arguments: the obscure, the unconvincing, the impossible, the inconsistent, the improper, and the irrational (242). See Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic*, (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[50] Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition-- From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, vol. 1 trans. John Stephen Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 460.

[51] Ibid., 454.

Nestorius, and those following the Antiochene Christological tradition to its logical extreme, argued that Scripture allowed him to make this distinction between terms for the "Son" and, biblical passages explicitly stated there was always a distinction in nature. Specific passages required one to understand the distinction between the natures. Nestorius argued that Matthew's opening line referred to Jesus Christ rather than to the "Son of God."[52] He also argued from passages such as Phil. 2:5-8 where there is a distinction between the "form of God" and the "form of man" both remaining distinct rather than being unified.[53]

This explicit reference to differing persons led the opposing side to charge him with presenting a "two Sons" Christology. He denied this outright arguing that "God the Word was by nature one and the temple by nature another."[54] He tried to balance the distinction between the division and unification of persons and natures. However, Antiochene Christology lacked the theological terminology to support this balance. The definitions of the terms used could not be bent for him to understand the position any other way.

Nestorius argued that there were ways around some of the concerns he had with the one nature Christology, especially with its devotion to the term *theotokos*.[55] There were significant problems with this term from Nestorius' perspective, so he suggested adding an additional term to its use. He suggested the term *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer) as a substitute. This would more consistently and appropriately explain how Mary, a mere human, could carry the divine person. It would be a better exposition of the Nicene Creed "the grammar of which made clear that the

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[52] Wessel, Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy, 249-50.

[53] Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, 460-1.

[54] Ibid., 455.

[55] It is Nestorius' issues with the term "*theotokos*" that created the fifth century Christological debate. Without his attacking this term and allowing it to be attacked by those under him, it is possible the entire Christological debate would have been addressed calmly and with much greater grace from all parties.

name given to the one born of Mary was 'Jesus Christ.'"[56] Nestorius saw himself as a defender of

the Nicene faith in its fullest understanding. It was his desire to root out heresy that led him to

this position.

It must be recognized that Nestorius was often trying to avoid the heresies toward which

he saw the opposite position leaning. Much of his Christological discussion was a way to avoid

those issues. He wanted to avoid a mixing of the natures which would result in the utter

diminishing of the human nature of the Son, similar to what the Arians did, who he persecuted

intensely for diverging from the Nicene Creed. Nestorius wrote, "It is my earnest desire that even

by anathematizing me they may escape from blaspheming God."[57] Nestorius believed that to say

that the natures of the divine and human were unified in a real sense led immediately to

Apollinarianism. The "natural" union of the divine and human natures was logically connected to

the heresies of Arianism and Apollinarianism. For this reason, Nestorius objected to Cyril's use

of the phrase "from two natures" in the formation of the unified nature after the incarnation.

Rather than "from two natures" Nestorius preferred, in proper Antiochene fashion, "in two

natures" which allowed for the distinction of the natures both before and after the union. To

argue "from two natures" implied that there had been a confusion of the two natures so that

something different was formed. If this were the case, then salvation could not be possible

because the incarnate One was neither human nor divine.[58] To say Christ had two *hypostases*

required that one also affirm he had two natures.

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[56] Mark S Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea in the Early Church Councils, AD 431-451* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 38.

[57] Frances M Young and Andrew Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2010), 288.

[58] Several other Antiochene theologians argued this position as well. Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 466) was one of the more prominent supporters of the position. He did, however, eventually agreed to condemn his teaching on the two natures of Christ. Theodoret wrote to Nestorius after his deposition in Ephesus I. Theodoret even wrote to

Further focusing the context on the later linguistic development of the Church of the East, it is clear that while the Church of the East rejected the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, they actively sought to avoid the name of Nestorius. In addition, the political discord between the Persian and Byzantine Empires drove those outside of Byzantine borders to define their position in ways that would make them look independent from Byzantine rule. Even following the Byzantine imperial Christological position could appear hostile to the enemies of the Empire.

From a linguistic standpoint, in addition to the definitional issues noted above, there were also issues stemming from the Church of the East's use of Syriac rather than Greek. This caused tensions during translation that brought the philosophical differences to light as well. The Council of Isaac (410) translated ὑπόστασις from the third anathema of the Nicene Creed using the term *qnome* (ܩܢܘܡܐ).[59] In the reading of the Nicene creed by the Church of the East, *hypostasis* and *ousia* were, at best, parallel terms intended to convey almost exactly the same meaning. Given the linguistic ambiguity, it could be understood that *qnome* would function in a similar fashion. However, as Brock notes, *qnome* does not always carry the same understanding of being a "self-existent instance."[60] Instead of matching exactly the "essential or basic structure/nature of an entity,"[61] *qnome* can function in multiple ways. Interestingly, and to be discussed further in the next section, different Syriac speakers could understand the term in different ways. For the Dyophysites, *qnome* functions as "individual manifestation" rather than

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Nestorius and others presenting a case for the orthodox understanding of the "Egyptian" church, though Theodoret was clear to express his disgust for the one who wrote the orthodox position.[58]

[59] W. A. Wigram, An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church or The Church of the Sassanid Persian Empire 100–640 A.D. (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; E. S. Gorham, 1910), 98.

[60] Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church," 28.

[61] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), .sv. "ὑπόστασις," 1040.

the essence of the thing being described.[62] For the Dyophysites, they insisted that if *qnome* and

nature do mean the same thing, then it is impossible to accept the definition of Chalcedon and

then the decisions of Constantinople II (553).[63]

Constantinople II offered a distinction of the Chalcedonian formula. It offered specific

translations of Syriac terms with their Greek counterparts. Given the challenges in interpretation

between the various languages present at the council of Chalcedon, the Church of the East

followed a similar Christological formula to that of the Antiochene theologians. Given this

understanding, affirming Christ had two natures in one *qnome*, as the Council of Chalcedon did,

was seen as illogical and not found in Scripture or nature.[64] Instead of rejecting the council based

merely on social or political grounds, the Church of the East, at least to some degree, had a

legitimate disagreement in terminology.

Miaphysite Christology

As the dust settled on the Council of Ephesus (431), a new Christological view crept into

the light. This view, called Miaphysitism, or "one nature,"[65] presented a view of Jesus that was

the opposite of the Dyophysite view. This view was brought to prominence by an archimandrite

named Eutyches (378-454) of Constantinople. Meyendorff writes that Eutyches became the

"spokesman of monophysitism."[66] Meyendorff notes the Eutychians explained Christ's nature

"as if His humanity, united "naturally" with divinity, was immediately and totally "deified" from

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[62] Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church," 28.

[63] Marijke Metselaar, "The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul: Another Perspective on the Christological Formula of Babai the Great," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1515/zac-2015-0021.

[64] Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church," 25.

[65] An alternate term for this position is "Monophysitism." This often carries negative connotations and thus the term is actively being avoided unless directly cited in another work.

[66] Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions, 86.

the time of His conception by Mary, so that it could not be described any more as being identical or "consubstantial" with *our* humanity."[67] Flavian (d. 449) describes Eutyches' position to Leo the Great writing, "he said that the Virgin who bare him was indeed of the same substance with us according to the flesh, but the Lord Himself did not assume from her flesh of the same substance with us: but the Lord's body was not a man's body, although that which issued from the Virgin was a human body."[68] The Miaphysite view, taken to the extreme, leads to an entirely new creation that is not fully God and fully man. Instead, the being is one who has a nature that is mixed, mingled, or confused.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), in opposition to Nestorius, argued that the persons of Christ (human and divine) were united in "hypostatic union" in contrast to Nestorius' division of the natures of Christ. Cyril believed that if one separated the two natures of Christ, it created a God who could not save. In contrast, Cyril, writing to Emperor Theodosius, argued "As far as I am concerned, you ought not to allow any division after the union, nor may you reshape Emmanuel into two persons by splitting him up individually into a man and God the Word."[69] By this Cyril did not mean that there was a complete and indistinguishable union. He argued that the union was unique in that the natures were still preserved without any division which he saw the Nestorian position creating.

One analogy Cyril makes with this is the human body and soul. He argued that when a human is born and the soul and body are "brought together as if into one natural unity and so

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[67] Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions, 166.

[68] Flavian of Constantinople *Letter to Leo* 22.3 in *Leo the Great, Gregory the Great*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Lett Feltoe, vol. 12a, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895).

[69] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Three Christological Treatises*, trans. Daniel King, vol. 129, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 59.

joined with each other that each communicates to the other what is proper to itself."[70] In the same way, the "only begotten" became united with manhood in a natural union between the two. This led Cyril to accept, albeit in more orthodox terms, the Apollinarian "one nature . . .of the divine Word."[71] Cyril here assumed that the human nature the Word put on was fully human and that it had a rational soul.[72]

By this union, Cyril meant that that the Son cannot be separated from the humanity of Christ, as he saw Nestorius arguing. Instead Cyril argues that "Christians do not worship the man Jesus 'along with' (σύν) the Word, but rather 'one and the same Christ,' because his body cannot be separated from the Word, as the former language suggests."[73] Instead of using the terms "Son," "Lord," and "Christ" to allow for the natures to be distinct from each other in concrete being, as Nestorius did, Cyril instead argued that this meant there could only be "one and the same" Son or Christ.[74] Cyril presents his argument based on the exact terminology in the Nicene Creed. He notes that he, following the Nicene Creed, does not "set up a division and distinguish the man and God"[75] since the Nicene Creed states that there is "one Lord Jesus Christ."[76]

Adding to the confusion in the discussion, Cyril was inconsistent in his terminology. In addition to stating that Jesus Christ could not have two natures he wrote, "I assert that no fusing together [of the natures] took place, nor putting together, nor a refusion as some say."[77] His

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[70] Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters* 1.21.

[71] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 319.

[72] Cyril, *Letters* 1.15, 19; 4.3, 7; 11.5; 33.10, etc. Also, in *On the Unity of Christ* the phrase is used 5 times to refer to the fully human nature of Christ.

[73] Christopher A Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 260.

[74] Ibid., 260-1.

[75] Cyril, *Letters*, 17.9 (Third letter to Nestorius).

[76] Cyril, *Letters*, 17.6.

[77] Cyril, *Letters,* 33.10.

successors along this line did not take his position so strongly. Cyril's lack of precision in his use of key terminology in the debate was a thorn in the flesh of Miaphysites, Chalcedonians, and Dyophysites.[78] Cyril focused on the union of the two natures in Christ. His discussion of the term *physis* mixed with the term *hypostasis* left much to be desired. Meyendorff notes that Cyril used the terms in the same sense which would easily lead to Apollinarianism.[79] Adding to the confusion, Kelly notes that even terms like "indwelling" were no longer sufficient for Cyril since they could be used to divide the natures between the divine and human.[80] Cyril, however, used the terms in ways that were very similar. Following the Cyril's correspondence with John of Antioch, culminating in the "Formula of Reunion" in 433[81] Cyrillian Christology was considered orthodox. The Council of Chalcedon, though not using Cyril's specific terminology, confirmed his argument.

After the Council of Chalcedon, extreme Miaphysites took Cyril's statement to its furthest logical ends. Miaphysitism pushed Cyril's "one nature" language to the extreme by insisting on specific definitions of the terms *hypostasis* and *phusis*. Miaphysites rejected the typical Chalcedonian use of the terms. Chalcedon affirmed that Christ was "truly God and truly man" and maintained that there was a distinction in his natures as divine and human.[82] Miaphysites affirmed this in part, but they continued to use a definition of nature that allowed them to push the definition further than the council intended. Meyendorff writes "they. . .clung to

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[78] Beeley notes four phases in Cyril's argumentation on the unity of Christ which are the Pre-Nestorian, anti-Nestorian, Post-Nestorian reconciliation, and a return to the anti-Nestorian position. *The Unity of Christ*, 258-9.

[79] Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions, 165.

[80] Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 320.

[81] Cyril, *Letters,* 39.

[82] James Stevenson and B. J. Kidd, eds., Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church A.D. 337-461, 8th ed. (New York: SPCK, 1989), 353.

a meaning of the word "nature" (φύσις), which gave it an exclusively *concrete* meaning, practically synonymous with the term *hypostasis*"[83] This created significant issues between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites.

Miaphysites denied the distinction that Chalcedon used regarding nature (*phusis*) and *hypostasis*. They argued that the terminology could not be used in any way other than the heretical Nestorian use of the terms. If Chalcedonians wanted to argue that there were two natures, there would be by logical necessity two hypostases. Severus of Antioch argued that any discussion of two natures separated the two natures of Christ in Nestorian fashion so that salvation would no longer be possible. Steven Need writes, "For Severus . . .Chalcedonian christology involves a contradiction because a single hypostasis or person necessitates a single nature: there could not be two natures if there was only one hypostasis."[84] As noted above, to affirm two natures in Christ would be to affirm there were also two persons in Christ which had been anathematized by several councils leading up to Constantinople II.

On the borders of the Roman Empire, this distinction between the Miaphysites and Dyophysites, as well as the Chalcedonians to follow, would be shown in several ways. First was the emphasis on the Cyrillian formula of "One Nature of God the Word."[85] Given that the Christological debate was primarily in Greek, the Western Syrians tended to use terminology that was in line with that of the Greek speaking church. In this, they sought to be more consistent than Cyril given the developments of the council of Chalcedon following Cyril's death (444).

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[83] Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions, 216.

[84] Stephen W. Need, Truly Divine and Truly Human: The Story Of Christ And The Seven Ecumenical Councils (London: SPCK, 2008) 115.

[85] Theresia Hainthaler, "Theological Doctrines and Debates Within Syriac Christianity," in *The Syriac World*, ed. David King, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019), 378. This formula was thought by Cyril to be Athanasian in origin, when in fact it was Apollinarian and spread by Apollinaris' followers after his condemnation.

Hainthaler notes that the Syrian Orthodox used the formula saying, "one of the Trinity who was embodied," clearly echoing the single nature of God the Word formula.[86]

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[86] Hainthaler, "Theological Doctrines and Debates," 383.

Chalcedonian Christology

Chalcedonian Christology attempts to be a moderating voice between the Dyophysites, following the Antiochene interpretive tradition, and the Miaphysites, following the Alexandrian tradition. Chalcedonian Christology is the Christology most familiar in the West, given its prominence as the only of these three positions supported by an ecumenical council. The Council of Chalcedon, convened in 451 at the request of the relatively new emperor Marcian. Marcian desired to see all of the church come together under one Christological roof. The trouble was that no one could determine how to build the roof.

As noted above, the Eutychian heresy was the primary Christological reason for the council of Chalcedon.[87] In contrast with Nestorius and Eutyches, Chalcedonians presented a case that argued Scripture required that the Son is fully divine and fully human, yet without mixing or division. In Jesus Christ there was one person (*prosopon*) with two natures (*hypostases*). In contrast with both the Miaphysite heresy, for which the council was called, and the Nestorian controversy, the Chalcedonian position tried to hold to the tension of this mystery. Chalcedon did this using the same pattern of opposites that Leo used in his *Tome*. The phrases "perfect in Godhead" and "perfect in manhood" are placed together in the Definition produced by Chalcedon to display the deity and humanity of Christ. It walks the fine line between the extreme Miaphysitism of Eutyches and extreme Dyophysitism of Nestorius.

As a deacon, Leo sought to bridge the gap between the Eastern and Western understanding of Christology. Leo had also been in correspondence with Cyril of Alexandria for several years before the Christological controversy erupted. Meyendorff writes that, in Leo's

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[87] There were numerous political and ecclesiastical reasons for the council, not the least of which was the Council of Ephesus II, more commonly called the Robber Synod. At this council, the Alexandrian position was emphasized with a heavy hand by Dioscorus, Cyril of Alexandria's successor.

understanding, "St Cyril, with his insistence on the divine Logos, as the only personal subject of Christ and the only "actor" of salvation, was closer to Augustine than was Nestorius."[88] This would link Cyril to the Western thinking, strengthening the acceptance of the position in Rome and the West to those who wanted to follow Cyril in his Christological formula.

Leo's *Tome* is arguably the single most important document in the Chalcedonian Christological controversies not so much for the development of the theological language, but for the style in which it was presented. Scholars agree that Leo does not provide any substantial development of the theological position.[89] Leo lays out his understanding of the Dyophysite formula using three points of emphasis. First, he emphasized the identity of Christ as the divine Word. Leo consistently refers to the Christ as the "Son of God." By this he means to identify the person of Christ with the Son of God as defined by Scripture and the Nicene Creed. He notes that the "the only begotten of the eternal Father was born eternal of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary."[90] It is the Son and Word that was born. This would link his terminology clearly to the Miaphysite position since that was one of their primary concerns.

Second, he emphasized the duality of the natures of Christ incarnate, though they are unified in thought. Leo's thought clearly emphasizes the duality of natures. He expresses the distinction by using antithetical statements about each nature. He writes, "Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one

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[88] Meyendorff, Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions, 148.

[89] Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, 537; Leo Donald Davis, The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology. (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1990), 133; Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 337; Sergiĭ Bulgakov, The Lamb of God (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 53. Bulgakov argues Leo's position is "outside theology" in the Eastern sense, but still provided useful "religious evidence."

[90] *Tome* 2.1.

person."[91] From this confession of the union of the person of Christ, Leo lays out several opposing characteristics of deity and humanity. He notes that Christ, being perfect God became perfect man. He uses the Cyrillian friendly phrase that "God was born" in time with a perfect nature of true man, "complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours."[92] He presents a union of the natures so that both are recognized as being distinct, yet one. He writes, "For He who is true GOD is also true man: and in this union there is no lie." [93]

Finally, he presented this duality of natures in connection with the unity of the Person of Christ legitimizing the *communicatio idiomatum*.[94] Here Leo presents the tension of the union but provides terminology that offers a way forward. For Leo, the unity of the distinct natures is a natural one because, "we read of the Son of Man also descending from heaven" and "the Son of GOD is said to have been crucified and buried."[95] In each nature, the unity of the person is so strong that there is a real, or natural, union. Leo explains it is this confession of the unification of two distinct natures, while supporting their distinction, that Peter's confession in Matt. 16:16 is an effective confession.[96] It is this connection which will allow the Tome to be included as part of the foundation of the new definition produced at Chalcedon. It helps to build a bridge to connect the Dyophysite position and the Miaphysite position.

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[91] *Tome* 3.1.

[92] *Tome* 3.1.

[93] *Tome* 4.1.

[94] *Communicatio idiomatum*: This concept is the "communication of properties" between the human and divine natures of Christ. It is present throughout Cyril's writing, though he does not use the term. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss further, but the concept suggests a sharing of properties of the natures such that the divine can be said to take on properties only proper for the human and the reverse as well.

[95] *Tome* 5.1.

[96] *Tome* 5.1.

Chalcedonians argued that Scripture supported the position as did the history of the church. They claimed they agreed with Cyril of Alexandria, who died just a few years before the council in 444. Using the now famous *Tome* of Leo I (d.ca. 461), the council condemned the Miaphysite and Dyophysite positions.[97] The council eventually presented a new formulation for the doctrine of Christology, which is used to this day by most Christians throughout the world.

The Christological controversies that led to the council of Chalcedon are complex. Political intrigue combined with theological error provided a recipe for disaster. The aftermath of the council shows that it can only barely be called successful. The goal of the council was to unify the entire church under one Christology. The definition provided by the council produced almost as much division as it brought unity. The extreme Dyophysite and extreme Miaphysite positions remained at odds even after both won victories at the council. Each side could make significant claims that their views had been accepted as the orthodox views, and yet each side could also decry the council as heretical. Many churches in East Syria and Persia thought the Definition was too Eutychian. Churches in West Syria and Egypt thought the definition sounded too much like that of Nestorius' own position.

Conclusion

This historical and theological context shaped how non-Byzantine Christians who first interacted with Islam understood Jesus Christ. While there is nuance between each point on this spectrum, there are three main Christological positions. The Dyophysites understood Jesus to have two hypostases. They argued that to say otherwise was to have a confusion between the natures of Christ which would lead to heresy and make salvation impossible. At the other

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[97] Nestorius would later argue that he agreed with the council. See the *Bazaar of Heraclius* for further information on Nestorius' position.

extreme, the Miaphysites understood Christ to have a single hypostasis and single nature after the incarnation. They viewed the Dyophysite position as dividing the person of Christ into two Christs, also making salvation impossible. The Chalcedonian position attempted to offer a mediating position between the two. It sought to refine the terminology used to place boundaries within which one could speak of the person and nature of Christ without losing the divine or human nature of Christ. The varied emphasis from each of these three positions is highlighted in the way they contextualize Christology in interaction with Islam.

Chapter Two: How Christological Positions Engaged Islam

Christians have used a variety of arguments to engage with their Muslim neighbors throughout the centuries. From the time of Islam's arrival (ca. 600), Christians have presented arguments for the truth of Christianity. In doing so, they show that Islam is a distinct religion from Christianity. The three primary Christological positions (Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and Dyophysite) engaged Islam with their Christology in both similar and distinct ways. This section will show the specific arguments used by the Christological positions in their engagement with Islam. Specific attention will be given to the similarities and differences in how the Christological positions engaged Islam. Key terms of each Christological position will be assessed in relation to their Christological significance.

It must be noted here that not all arguments against Islam are explicitly directed toward a Muslim audience. At times, the argument is implicitly against Islam. A text may be written to a particular person, but with the view of all who might read the interaction. Griffith notes that this was part of the style of the time suggesting that it's incorrect to assume that the apologetic was directed only toward the group mentioned. He writes, the apologetic enterprise of any one group. . .was necessarily conducted in view of all of the others."[98] This seems to be the case with John of Damascus as well when he writes *On Heresies* as part of his fuller *Fount of Knowledge*. Timothy I of Baghdad likewise seems to indicate his letter would be read by more than just the one to whom he addresses it.

Given that Islam was the religious system of those in power and their objections were, in many ways, similar to those of other Christological groups, each group's response to other

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[98] Sidney H. Griffith, "Habib Ibn Hidmah Abu Ra'itah, a Christian Mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 168.

Christological positions should be understood as being both a refutation of the Christian position and a response to Muslim Christological objections. This does not mean that Christians viewed Islam as being simply a Christian heresy. Rather, this should indicate that they understood Islam to understand the person of Jesus in ways similar to what they would deem heretical positions.

Throughout this paper, this reasoning will be used in understanding how Christians interacted with their Muslim neighbors. Each position has points at which they transition from writing directly against Islam and moves into an argument in support of Christology that directly counters what a Muslim would argue. In doing so, the representatives are training their readers to engage Islam through their specific Christological heritage.

Dyophysite Representatives

Timothy of Baghdad I

As his name suggests, Timothy I (727-823) was the bishop of Baghdad for the Church of the East beginning in 767. Timothy is best known for his letter detailing his encounter with the Caliph Mahdi (r. 775-785).[99] Timothy's engagement offers significant insight into how early Christians viewed the faith of their Muslim neighbors.

The letter takes on a dialogical format. In this question-and-answer format, the writer focuses attention on the response to the question rather than the exchange. After briefly presenting a question, the reader is presented with a clear refutation of the argument, along with supplemental argumentation to further defeat the argument of the antagonist. The antagonist

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[99] Sydney Griffith notes the unfortunate nature of Timothy's reception in scholarship in a review of Hans Putman's *L'Église et l'islam Sous Timothée I (780-823)*. He argues for a greater need to study Timothy's letters alongside the *Apology*. Sidney H. Griffith, "*L'Église et l'islam Sous Timothée I (780-823): Étude Sur l'église Nestorienne Au Temps Des Premiers ʿAbbasides Avec Nouvelle Édition et Traduction Du Dialogue Entre Timothée et al-Mahdi*. Hans Putman," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (July 1980): 243–243, https://doi.org/10.1086/372823.

often simply accepts the argument with little to no pushback, as if he had never thought of the argument in that manner.[100] The structure is important to note as it highlights Timothy's focus on the specific arguments he uses to respond to the Caliph. He wants his readers to understand how to engage their Muslim neighbors using arguments that are in line with the teaching of the church. Here, Timothy presents three primary arguments for the truth of Christianity based on dyophysite Christology.

First, Timothy argues that God has not "married a woman from whom He begat a son."[101] The Caliph poses this as his first challenge to the Christian faith. Timothy understands this to be the key issue between Christianity and Islam and desires to address it immediately. Rather than outright denying the charge, Timothy side steps slightly by asking the Caliph who "ever uttered such a blasphemy concerning God?"[102] Timothy then pivots in his response that Christ is the Son of God. He acknowledges that Christ is the Son of God, though not as humans are born. This subtle shift in language is important in his dyophysite understanding of who Jesus is.

For the dyophysite, recall as mentioned above that the language of the "mother of God" or *Theotokos*, was not an acceptable formula for Mary. If this terminology was not suitable for Mary, it would not be correct to assert that the Son of God was a product of the union between God and his wife. In Timothy's response to the Caliph's challenge that Christ was born of Mary, he chooses his words carefully. Timothy explains that "Christ is the Word born of the Father, and a man born of Mary."[103] Timothy carefully establishes a distinction between the natures of Christ

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[100] In some cases, as will be discussed with John of Damascus later, the protagonist actually pushes back on the antagonist and begins asking questions. Timothy does this in a more muted form.

[101] Timothy I of Baghdad, *The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch Before the Caliph Mahdi*, trans. Alphonse Mingana (Piscataway, NY: Gorgias Press, 1928), 17.

[102] Timothy, *Apology*, 17.

[103] Timothy, *Apology*, 17.

as part of his response. This phrasing is uniquely dyophysite. While the other Christological positions will take varying positions on how to address this, it is clear that Timothy wants to stay in the boundaries set by the dyophysite position of the Church of the East.

After explaining Mary's perpetual virginity, the Caliph shifts the question back to the nature of the one born of Mary. He asks, "How was that Eternal One born in time?" This is clearly setting up Timothy in the hopes of showing a logical fallacy. The Caliph tries to drive Timothy to one of two positions. The first is that God truly did have marital relations with Mary and thus be guilty of the same views as the pagans. The second position would be one held by Miaphysites, that God was born of the Mary. In this, the Caliph would likely also drive to say that God cannot be born, a position that the dyophysite would agree with.

The second argument Timothy uses in his response to the Caliph is that of the natures of Christ. Timothy explains that there must be two natures in Christ after the incarnation. He writes, "We do not deny the duality of natures. . .nor their mutual relations, but we profess that both of them constitute one Christ and Son."[104] The Caliph charges him with bad math. If Christ has one nature, he cannot have two. Conversely, if he has two natures then he cannot have one.

Finally, Timothy responds to the Caliph's challenge that "God died."[105] Timothy engages in standard dyophysite fashion against theopaschism. In this argument he turns to the nature distinction. He argues that the death of the human nature is parallel to a dishonoring of the King if someone were to tear apart a piece of purple cloth and damage the royal insignia.[106] This does no actual damage to the king, but is dishonoring, nonetheless. In Christ, his human nature dies, but the nature of deity remains distinct.

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[104] Timothy, *Apology*, 19.

[105] Timothy, *Apology*, 40.

[106] Timothy, *Apology*, 40.

The Caliph's questions digress to the divine will and the logic of the resurrection but return to Christology at Timothy's bidding. Timothy discusses the judgment that would befall the Jews because they crucified Christ. However, as part of this discussion, he mentions specifically that Jesus is two natured. He suggests that the Jews wish to destroy "the temple of the Word of God" as unique from the Word itself. He reiterates this a few short sentences later, again emphasizing the distinction between the Word of God and the temple. Distinctions like this show the uniquely dyophysite response given the formulation of the temple discussion.

Yet again, Timothy engages in discussion of the distinction of natures after the incarnation. In response to the objection that the biblical texts have been corrupted, he explains that the Old Testament writings teach "with the voice of thunder" that Christ is divine and human.[107] He cites several passages that indicate the divine nature before the incarnation such as Isaiah 53:8 and 51:9. In both of these passages, the author notes the subject as being one who does not have a beginning. Timothy applies this explicitly and only to Christ's divine nature. He makes certain that his argument does not indicate Christ took on a human nature prior to being born. It is specifically in the act of being born that Christ takes on flesh.

Timothy sets these passages up as those which would indicate the distinction would continue throughout the course of the Christ's life. In the same way, Timothy presents the human nature of Christ. He distinguishes this from Christ's deity by citing Isaiah 7:14. Here he explains that prophets show that Christ's life would be marked by miracles. He uses an interesting turn of phrase in noting some of these miracles. He writes that the prophets foretell of Jesus' "passion, His crucifixion, and His death in the flesh. . ."[108] In particular, the last phrase "in the flesh" would

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[107] Timothy, *Apology*, 56.

[108] Timothy, *Apology*, 56.

be notable for a Dyophysite. He does not want to affirm theopaschism, but instead focuses on the death as it is attributed to the humanity of Christ.

In all of Timothy's arguments, there is much to be said of his demeanor toward the Caliph. This could be simply because he was afraid for his life. Perhaps he knew that if he were to go too far, the Caliph would make haste to end his time on earth so as to avoid embarrassment. This could be the case except Timothy is writing to a Christian audience. If Timothy were offering a transcript of sorts to the Caliph, then it would be clear that he would be on his best behavior because the Caliph could deny what was said.

Abraham, The Monk of Bêt Hālê

Another author that clearly engages Islam from a Christian dyophysite perspective is the text now known as *The Disputation Between a Monk of Bêt Hālê and an Arab Notable*. The letter was written at the end of the eighth century by a monk, given the name Abraham by most citations of the work, of the monastery Bêt Hālê.[109] In the work, Abraham presents a clearly Dyophysite perspective to a Muslim. at the request of one "Father Jacob."[110] According to the letter, Jacob requested Abraham's retelling of his encounter with a Muslim. Abraham recounts this interaction differently than Timothy of Baghdad. While Timothy views retelling the story as borderline contemptable, Abraham is happy to tell his story. He believes it will be "profitable"

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[109] Bêt Hālê is one of two monasteries in Iraq either near Mosul or south of Baghdad. Griffith "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hālê and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 3, no 1, (2000) 29-54. gives more weight to the southern location while Hoyland (*Seeing Islam*) is undecided. This paper will use Abraham as the monk's proper name for readability, though the true name of the monk is not known. See David G.K. Taylor, "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation," in *Christsein in Der Islamischen Welt: Festschrift Für Martin Tamcke Zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein, 1st ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015) for a fuller discussion on location and naming of the individual.

[110] Taylor, "The Disputation," 12.

and "useful."[111] Over against Timothy, his earlier counterpart. The discussion is with an individual who "served before the emir MAs lama."[112] While the text offers many of the standard questions from a Muslim to a Christian, it also offers unique perspective into the ways in which the Christology played a role in monastic apologetics and evangelism. The monk shows his Christology in three distinct ways.

First, the monk uses explicitly Dyophysite terminology in his description of who Jesus is. As is typical with Muslim-Christian dialog in the 8th century (and beyond) the Muslim asks Abraham how, if Jesus is both divinity and humanity, the divinity "which was with him on the cross and in the tomb, did not suffer and was not harmed?"[113] The Muslim understanding of Jesus Christ is that he did not claim to be deity and is only human. It rejects any attempt to explain that Jesus is fully divine in any sense. In this line of questioning, the Muslim is trying to get the Christian to say that God died. This position, known as the *Theopaschite* position, was argued against by Dyophysite Christians in argument against those who held to a Miaphysite Christology. The question was one that is often present in Muslim-Christian dialog throughout history and is still used in modern encounters.

The monk argues against the *Theopaschite* position using his Dyophysite understanding of Christology. Abraham responds to the Muslim's question saying, "Truly it was with Him [Christ], but not through mingling and mixture and confusion, as the heretics say, but through will."[114] Here, the monk wants to distance the Christian position that Jesus is both divine and human from the Eutychian heresy of the late 5th/early 6th centuries. This heresy, which will be

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[111] Taylor, "The Disputation," 13.

[112] Taylor, "The Disputation," 14.

[113] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22.

[114] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22.

discussed further in the next section, seemed to argue that Jesus had two natures before the union but was so unified in the hypostatic union that there was a blend or mixing of Christ's deity with his humanity. Thus, after the incarnation, there was only "one nature" (*mia-physis*).

Abraham clearly knew that there was a significant difference in Christological terminology. He made it a point to address the exact terms that were used by opponents of Miaphysitism so the emir's servant would know that his Christology was important. He did not want that to be a stumbling block between the Muslim and his coming to faith in Christ. Terminology was important both in distinguishing the Christological positions and those when engaging in apologetics.

He continued this line by offering some examples of how Christ's deity and humanity should be understood. He writes, "and the fact that Isaac was bound upon the altar is a symbol that (Christ's) divinity was accomplishing it. and that (passage): 'Remove your hand from the boy, and do nothing to him... and behold a lamb hanging on the tree,' it is a symbol of the body which He received from us, which suffered on the cross, whilst His divinity was unharmed."[115] Taylor notes that this example was rejected by Miaphysites but allowed by most Dyophysites. Here again, Abraham is arguing that there is a distinction between the divinity and humanity such that there is no way that God could die. The divine nature in Jesus Christ remained fully divine while the human remained fully human. The divine nature cannot die but the human nature can. This distinction is important in the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Finally, Abraham pushes the Muslim to admit that Jesus is the Word and Spirit of God. The Muslim begins by trying to catch the monk off guard by asking if God "is in every place but

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[115] Taylor, "Disputation," 21.

is not limited by any place, why do you thrust Him down into baseness and proclaim that He has a Son?"[116] As with before, the Muslim position is that God did not have a Son since that would require a physical sexual act meaning there is either another divine being (distinct from God) or God had a child with a human woman. The Christian denies both of these options. He responds by shifting the question. Abraham asks who Muslims say Jesus Christ is. The Muslim is forced by the Qur'an (Surah 4:171) to respond, "According to Muhammad our (prophet), -we also bear witness to what he said, -(He is): 'The Word of God and His Spirit '"[117] At this point Abraham turns his Christological sword back on the Muslim and thrusts, "Now, I require one of two things from you; either you alienate the Word of God and His Spirit from Him, or you correctly proclaim Him to be the Son of God."[118] Abraham's argument is that if Jesus is God's Word and Spirit, then he must be divine as well since God could never be without his Word or his Spirit. If this happened, then God would cease to be God. He would even be lower than a man since man always has his word and spirit with himself.

Christology was vitally important to the Church of the East. This factored into their apologetic and evangelistic encounters with Muslims as much as it did in their engagement with Miaphysites and Chalcedonians. Arguing that Jesus Christ has two natures before and after the incarnation offered many solutions to Christological challenges for the for Church of the East theologians. They were able to explain how Christ was able to die on the cross without God dying. They were also able explain Christ's humanity and deity using a story that Christianity and Islam share, attempting to build a bridge with their Muslim neighbors. Christological distinction was vital to the Church of the East monks who engaged in evangelism and

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[116] Taylor, "Disputation," 24.

[117] Taylor, "Disputation," 27.

[118] Taylor, "Disputation," 27.

apologetics with their Muslim neighbors. With this in mind, it is to the Miaphysites that this paper now turns to show the focus on Christology in apologetics there as well.

<center>Miaphysite Representatives</center>

Jacob of Edessa

Jacob of Edessa is one of the most well-known West Syriac theologians. During his time as bishop (684-708), he wrote many letters, and commentaries. In addition, he attempted to revise the Syriac translation of the Old Testament using Hebrew and Greek texts.[119] The majority of Jacob's writings were on specific issues related to how to engage in Christian living. This ranged from discussing canon law to the age of Seth when he had his first child in his commentary on Genesis 5. Jacob was one of the most prolific authors in Syriac Christian history. During Jacob's bishopric, he was chastised as being too strict. Because of this, Jacob's home was relatively unstable. He moved from monastery to monastery, first welcomed as a teacher and then pushed out for his extremism.[120] Jacob's first bishopric lasted only four years before he was relieved of his post. He moved between several monasteries for the next 20 years before he was finally asked to return to Edessa as bishop once again. Jacob's final assignment as bishop only lasted four months.

Jacob's first reign as bishop coincided with the second Arab civil war (683-692).[121] Christians would have been looked to as those who would take sides. Taking a side in a civil war

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[119] Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church, AD 681-1071*, The Church in History, v. 3 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2007), 24.

[120] Alison Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work: A Biographical Sketch," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008). 2.

[121] Robert Hoyland, "Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa" in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 14.

could have far reaching implications to one's ability to engage in business. The social stakes could be even higher than they were in a time of peace. In general, however, it is clear that Jacob was able to communicate with others. Of Jacob's writings, at least 50 letters remain extant, in addition to his *Hexameron*, ecclesiastical history, and translation of the Peshitta. He also wrote regarding Christian canon law and other theological issues. Jacob is well known for his prolific. Many of these were directed at how to engage those who had fallen away from the faith and how to engage those who differ in beliefs from the "orthodox" (meaning Miaphysite) belief.

Christology figured highly in Jacob's apologetic against Islam. While known for his stringent views on interpreting canon law, Jacob displayed his theological acumen in addressing the religion of the new government. One way Jacob does this is with his use of specific Miaphysite theological language. In Jacob's third letter to his friend John the Stylite, Jacob answers a question about the lineage of Mary. Jacob's goal is to show that the Messiah, namely Jesus, was of the lineage of David. This is contrary to what Jews accept, but in line with what Muslims would accept about Jesus. Jacob specifically calls out Muslims as those who could be confronted with this argument.

The verb *yalad* (ܝܠܕ) indicates the act of giving birth in a natural sense.[122] The term is used 123 times in 83 verses in the *Peshitta* New Testament. In nearly every instance the term is used to show the relationship between a parent and a child. In Jacob's use, however, the word takes on additional theological baggage. However, Jacob's Christological focus in the argument is that Mary is the "bearer of God" (ܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ).[123] This is clearly in line with Miaphysite Christology.

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[122] Analytical lexicon of the Syriac New Testament: based on the SEDRA 3 Database of George Anton Kiraz, s.v. "ܝܠܕ," Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003.

[123] Jacob of Edessa, trans. François Nau "Lettre de Jacques d'Édesse Sur La Généalogie de La Sainte Vierge," *Revue de L'Orient Chretien* 6, no. 1 (1901): 519.

Jacob is communicating the idea that Mary is the *Theotokos*. Mary is the one who gave birth (ܝܠܕܬ) to God (ܐܠܗܐ). This terminology is indicative of a natural birth. When used together with the one who is born, namely God (ܐܠܗܐ), the term becomes a title. Jacob is making a focused effort to insert his Christological position. The phrase *yaladat alaho* is as much a title as it is a descriptor of the action of Mary. Jacob is using his Christology to make a specific point about the lineage of the Messiah through Mary. Mary does not function simply as one who gives birth to the human Jesus. In Jacob's argument, she gives birth to God.

It is interesting that Jacob makes this specific connection to Islam given the Muslim views of "begetting" in Christian theology.[124] This connection shows that there was at least some Muslim interest in the concept, or that Jacob thought it would be a helpful tool in the apologetic toolbelt of his Christian readers. He says that this is an apologetic argument that should be convincing to Muslims given their views of Jesus as Messiah. In this section of his letter, he oscillates back and forth between responding to Jews and to Muslims. He says the argument should be shown "to any Christian or Muslim who inquires. . ."[125] He clearly believes it will be an effective argument against Islam.

In Jacob's other works, it is clear that he is trying to bolster the faith of his reader in the Miaphysite Christological position. Given the religious context, it would stand to reason that Jacob was offering a positive case for his Christological position because he is preparing the reader for a defense of the faith. A common misconception is that a text must be explicitly written against another religious system in order to be considered an argument against it. As will

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[124] The Qur'an addresses the possibility of God having a child in multiple places (e.g., Surah 4:171; 6:100-1; 25:2, etc). In each instance the Qur'an assumes a physical relationship between God and the one who would bear the child. The Qur'anic translation used throughout this paper is Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

[125] Jacob of Edessa, *Sur La Généalogie*, 519.

be seen later as well, a common way to argue against what one believes to be false is to present the truth clearly. At times the writer may explicitly make arguments against another system. Other times the arguments may be implicit.

Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa

One of the lesser-known theologian-apologists of the Miaphysites is Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa (d. 835). With the appended name "al-Takrìtì," Abū Rā'iṭa was likely from the ancient town of Takrit, just northwest of Baghdad.[126] As Bishop of Takrit, Abū Rā'iṭa was in a position of authority within the Miaphysite community. He was even tasked with arguing the Miaphysite, or Jacobite, Christological position against the Chalcedonian, or Melkite, position held by Theodore Abū Qurrah (750-c 825).[127]

One argument Abū Rā'iṭa uses comes through his response to Theodore Abu Qurrah. Foreseeing how he will engage Muslims on this topic, Abū Rā'iṭa engages the Melkite Christology of Abu Qurrah by focusing on the one who is the source of will in Christ. Abū Rā'iṭa argues that in the Trinity there is only one will which comes from the eternal Word.[128] If the one will of the Trinity comes from the Word, Abū Rā'iṭa argues, then it would also follow that the one will of the person of Christ would not forfeit this to the human nature. There could only be one will in Christ because there could only be one source of thought in a person. The complete

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[126] Sandra Toenies Keating, "Habib Ibn Khidma Abù Rà'Ita Al-Takrìtì's 'The Refutation of the Melkites Concerning the Union [of the Divinity and Humanity in Christ]' (III)," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 40.

[127] Sidney H. Griffith, "Habib Ibn Hidmah Abu Ra'itah, a Christian Mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 164.

[128] Mark Beaumont, Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 46.

unity of Christ was of the utmost importance to a Miaphysite, especially in response to Chalcedonian Christology which was viewed as Dyophysite.

A second argument made by Abū Rā'i<u>t</u>a in his argument for the Incarnation against the Islamic understanding of Jesus is in his argument for Christology as logical. He positions his argument carefully not to positively demonstrate the incarnation to be true, but to show that it is not illogical as his Muslim neighbor would argue.

He offers a clear statement on what he considers the Christian position of who Jesus is. He writes, "the Word of God which has always existed and will always endure, became flesh in a body with a rational soul from the pure virgin Mary."[129] This act of becoming flesh on behalf of the Word brought the two natures together into a single nature. Abū Rā'i<u>t</u>a notes that the Word and flesh are "united. . .in nature and substance."[130] This connection, as with Jacob's above, was uniquely Miaphysite. The two natures were essentially united to the point that there is no distinction between them in the one being. He also notes that neither the Word, nor the flesh are changed in the process of union, much like the human soul and human body are not changed from their normal states when they are united into one being.[131]

The result is that the Word unifies the two natures in the Incarnation so that they only exist because of the one nature of the "Word become flesh with a rational soul."[132] This is a Miaphysite distinction as well. As noted above, a common phrase for the Miaphysites was the "one nature of the divine Word." Thinking to be Athanasian in origin, Cyril of Alexandria used the term throughout his writing. Abū Rā'i<u>t</u>a uses it here to defend against the Islamic argument

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[129] Habīb ibn Khidma, Abū Rā'ita, *Die Schriften Des Jakobiten Habib Ibn Hidma, Abu Ra'ita*, trans. George Graf, vol. 131, Corpus Scriptorum Christlanorum Orientalium (Louvain L Durbecq, 1951), 183.

[130] Abū Rā'ita, Letter on the Proof of the Christian religion and the Proof of the Holy Trinity, Ibid.,183.

[131] Ibid., 183.

[132] Ibid., 183.

that the incarnation is illogical. If the body and soul are united in a similar way, argues Abū Rā'iṭa, then there is no reason to dismiss the incarnation as illogical. He continues that God is "one and the same, not two" though he has predications of both Godhood and Manhood. He recognizes the distinctions between the Word and the "body with a rational soul" but wants to put them in context of being one in being. He is the One (not two) who has the predications of both being "immortal, passionless, and limitless" in his divinity, and "mortal, passable, and limited" in his humanity.[133] Without the human flesh being unified with the Word, it would be a contradiction to call Jesus eternal and mortal, passible and impassible. However, since he is numerically one it is appropriate, argues Abū Rā'iṭa, to apply the terms to him and this happens without contradiction.

<div align="center">Chalcedonian Representatives</div>

John of Damascus

John of Damascus, often called the first apologist to Muslims,[134] wrote from the monastery of Mar Sabas after a long career in the government of Muslim governed Damascus. According to Daniel Sahas, John was the treasurer of the city until around the time when Arabic became the primary language of the empire.[135] After this, John retired to the monastery at Mar Sabas around 705. Here he wrote extensively, producing, perhaps the earliest true *Summa Theologica*. As part of this, John mentions Islam as the latest in a line of heresies. In addition, John wrote a treatise addressing several arguments Muslims of his day used against Christianity. Through these works, John used his Christology to respond to Islam in two distinct ways.

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[133] Abū Rā'ita, Letter on the Proof of the Christian religion, 184.

[134] For fuller discussion of the title "first," see Daniel Janosik, *John of Damascus*.

[135] Sahas, John of Damascus on Islam, 42.

First, John argued against the mere humanity of Jesus that Islam presents. John does this both in his principal work, *The Fount of Knowledge*, as well as in his apologetic works. In the section on Islam in *On Heresies*, John argues from a Chalcedonian position. He mentions both Jesus' humanity and his deity as being prophesied by "all the Prophets from Moses on down."[136] Jesus' humanity was not in question by Muslims as they argued he was only human. However, John uses the term "Christ God" and "incarnate Son of God" to demonstrate that this position was the position held by all those Islam recognized as authoritative.[137]

In his apologetic work entitled *Disputation Between a Christian and a Saracen*[138] John argues similarly. He presents the Saracen asking how God can become man. John responds by using the Qur'an against the Muslim, as he does when he defines the position in *On Heresies*. He says that the Muslim holy book notes that God purified Mary and his Word and Spirit entered her.[139] He notes that this is exactly what the New Testament says of the birth of Christ. Therefore, if this is a problem for the Christian it is a problem for the Muslim as well. However, the Christian position was able to handle the objection. John is trying to present a quick response for someone to be able to stop the mouth of a Muslim.

John also argued, much like Abraham of Bet Hale, that Jesus was the "Word of God" as stated in both the Bible and the Qur'an. In *On Heresies*, John explains Muhammad's position that Christ is "the Word of God and His Spirit, but a creature and a servant, and that He was

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[136] John Damascene, "*On Heresies,*" in *Writings*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr., vol. 37, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 101.2.

[137] John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101.2.

[138] Saracen is another term for Muslim or Arab throughout church history. John notes the name is derived from "Σάῤῥας κενοί, or *destitute of Sara.*" *On Heresies*, 101.1.

[139] John of Damascus, Disputation between a Christian and a Saracen, trans. from Janosik, John of Damascus, 274.

begotten, without seed, of Mary the sister of Moses and Aaron"[140] Islamic Christology, as noted previously, argues that Jesus is only human. However, Islam does admit that Jesus is born of the Holy Spirit. John points this out writing, "the Word and God and the Spirit entered into Mary and she brought forth Jesus."[141] It is interesting to note that John is accurate in his understanding of Islamic Christology so early in the Islamic theological development. As much as he is polemical in his writing, he does try to accurately represent the theological beliefs of those Muslims he likely engaged when in Damascus. If John did not accurately represent the views of his dialog partners, they would easily be able to prove him wrong. Doing so would be of little value for the Christians that John is trying to teach.

John makes the implicit statement to his reader that they should avoid the term "Son of God" when talking to a Muslim.[142] Instead, the reader should use the term "Word of God" for the exact reason mentioned above. A Muslim will not be able to object to the term simply because of the term itself. They lose some of their argumentative punch if the terminology is changed. He positions this as being entirely orthodox, assuming one might object to avoiding the term "Son of God," since Scripture uses multiple terms to describe Jesus. John shows this terminological move by using "Word of God" more than 20 times in his apologetic works compared to just 5 uses of "Son of God." In his didactic work, John more than reverses this, using "Son of God" at least 30 times compared to 10 uses of "Word of God." Both are orthodox terms in Chalcedonian terminology, but John is trying to help contextualize his argument for the culture he is engaging.

John Damascene takes the argument further than Abraham of Bet Hale did. He continues by going on the offensive rather than simply arguing that the Islamic position is the same as the

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140 John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101.2.

141 John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101.2.

142 John of Damascus, *Disputation*, 273.

Christian position. In the *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, John argues that it is the Muslim, rather than

the Christian, who disparages God. According to John, Muslims call Christians "associators"

because they "introduce in addition to God a partner when we declare that Christ is the son of

God and God."[143] This is true in as far as Christians claim that God is Triune instead of

Unitarian. Islam presents God as being unitarian rather than Trinitarian. Three times in Surah 4

alone Allah, through Muhammad, states that those who ascribe "partners" to God will not be

forgiven.[144] John is clearly well aware of the Muslim view of Jesus.

However, in his turn on the argument from Jesus being the Word and Spirit, John makes

three key points. First, he submits that the Word and Spirit of God must be with him eternally.

He writes, "For the word, and the spirit, is inseparable from that in which it naturally has

existence.[145] For God to be God, he must have a Word and Spirit. Those are part of what it

means to be God in any sense. If you remove the Word and Spirit of God from God, then, John

argues, "It would be far better for you to say that He has an associate than to mutilate Him, as if

you were dealing with a stone or a piece of wood or some other inanimate object."[146] John pulls

no punches in his discussion of Islam.

John makes a similar argument in the *Disputation*. Here, he offers a more nuanced

phrasing of the same argument. He tells the Christian who will be reading the text to turn the

tables back on the Muslim. The Christian is to ask what the Muslim's Scripture calls Jesus. As

noted above, Jesus is called the Word and Spirit of God in Surah 4:171. If the Muslim is honest,

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[143] John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101. 4.

[144] Surah 4:36, 48, 116. It is mentioned in almost 80 verses (77 by the author's count) in the Qur'an. Fewer than 10 verses mention "partner" as meaning a human partnering with another human. In almost every case, the verse speaks against associating a partner with Allah.

[145] John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101. 5.

[146] John Damascene, *On Heresies*, 101. 5

which John expects them to be after some dodging of the question, they will admit this. Instead of moving directly to assert that God's Word must be with him always, John moves slightly and has the Christian ask if the Word of God, here meaning words of the Qur'an. John expects the Muslim to follow the dominant view of the day and say that the Word is uncreated. If uncreated, then Christ, who is the Word, is also uncreated. If Christ is uncreated, then Christ is God.[147]

John does also acknowledge that there is a minority position that might respond that the Word of God is created. His response to this would be the same as in *On Heresies*. However, instead of making the assertion, John would have the Christian phrase it as a question. This was not something that John expected the Christian to encounter often so he doesn't engage further.

As John instructed his readers, he made sure to keep Christ the focus of his work. He recognized the specific points of contact Christians and Muslims had because he lived in that world for the majority of his life. He argued that Christians should focus on using their Christology as an apologetic. He presented positive cases for the use of Christology as well as responses to Muslim arguments using Christology as a defensive tactic.

Theodore Abu Qurrah

John's arguments and tactics were furthered and expanded by another early Christian apologist to Muslims, Theodore Abu Qurrah (750-c 825). Abu Qurrah is one of the more well-known Arabic Christian writers in Late Antiquity. He was the first known to write in Arabic instead of Greek.[148] He was clearly a student of John of Damascus, though direct tutelage would have been impossible since John died around 750. Abu Qurrah was much more engaged in direct

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[147] John Damascene, *Disputation*, 273.

[148] John C. Lamoreaux, trans., *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2015), xii.

dialog with Muslims than John at their respective times of writing. As Bishop of Harran in Syria Abu Qurrah would have had active conversations with Muslims.[149] Abu Qurrah addressed Islam both directly and indirectly, as did many other authors at this time.

In his direct apologetic works, Abu Qurrah addresses the Muslim argument that "God died." Abu Qurrah's *Refutations of the Saracens*, written down by John the Deacon, details several arguments between Abu Qurrah and a Muslim. This is not likely a direct conversation, but a recounting or, more likely, a preparatory document for Christians who would engage in dialogue with their Muslim neighbors. In a section on the crucifixion, Abu Qurrah directly addresses the death of Christ in relation to his deity. Here, Abu Qurrah argues for a Chalcedonian theopaschism.

Abu Qurrah's Muslim dialogue partner, referred to simply as "one of the more clever Saracens," asks about the death of God on the cross.[150] The argument, which is common in contemporary Christian-Muslim dialogue, is that if God died on the cross, then God would cease to exist. If God ceased to exist, then He could not be God, thus falsifying Christianity. The Muslim further clarifies the argument at Abu Qurrah's request, explaining that as a human is united by two "parts," body and soul, if God was united by two parts, his single hypostasis would cease to exist upon his death.[151] It is important to highlight that the Muslim suggests a "single hypostasis." Here, Abu Qurrah brings in his Chalcedonian Christology. He responds to this with

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[149] Sidney H. Griffith "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalim: Theodore Abu Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, Studies in the History of Religions, vol. 63, eds. Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, Mingana Symposium on Arabic Christianity and Islam, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 6-7.

[150] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *Refutations of the Saracens*, 222.

[151] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *Refutations of the Saracens*, 223.

a specific distinction between what the Muslim has described and what Christ's nature and hypostasis actually were.

The Christian God maintains the duality of the natures in his humanity and divinity. He remained "perfect God. . .and became a human being."[152] He was not distinguished from his humanity or deity upon his death since his hypostasis was a unified, though not single, hypostasis, both deity and humanity. He argues that the Word deified both the human body and soul so that, even in separation in death, both were unified.[153] Abu Qurrah presents his Christology in clearly Chalcedonian terms, making a distinction of the natures, yet a unity of hypostasis against his Muslim dialogue partner.

In his indirect work on Islam, Abu Qurrah presents his arguments with reference to his encounters with Islam. He carefully crafts his arguments so that his reader would be able to use them in engagement with a Muslim or other Christian. In his work *On the Incarnation*, Abu Qurrah presents at least two arguments.

First, he argues for the distinction of the natures of deity and humanity. Abu Qurrah presents the incarnation as the hypostasis of the Son takes on the nature of man.[154] In direct contrast to nature taking on nature, something he would likely accuse a Miaphysite of arguing, Abu Qurrah argues that everything of "man-ness" is taken on by the one hypostasis of the Son. In this, he guards the divine nature from taking on the nature of "man." Instead, it is a single hypostasis of the Son, not the Father or the Spirit, who takes on the properties of human nature. This is directly related to Muslim argument in that it would be argued God would no longer be God if He were limited by humanity. Likewise, there is so great a gap between Creator and

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[152] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *Refutations of the Saracens*, 223.

[153] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *Refutations of the Saracens*, 223.

[154] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *On the Union and Incarnation*, 103.

creation that human nature could not contain the divine. Abu Qurrah anticipates this objection, arguing that it must be the hypostasis of the Son that takes on humanity rather than humanity taking on deity as human nature cannot possess the divine nature or the divine would cease to be divine.[155]

Second, this distinction guards the divine nature from suffering, another common Muslim objection as noted above. Since the Son unified two hypostases, yet did not change them into a single hypostasis, the divine nature did not suffer. The Son still suffered in humanity and thus it can be stated that "God suffered" because everything that is said of the Son is by nature deity. However, the divine nature itself could not suffer since it is "incorruptible and indestructible."[156] Here Abu Qurrah uses the exact same argument that would later come to use in his *Refutations*. He explains that a person's soul does not feel suffering in the same way that the human body does, though one would simply say "Socrates has been cut" without assuming his soul was pierced.[157]

Conclusion

Each of the three Christological positions addressed Islam in their own unique ways. Each position argued for their specific understanding of the person of Christ in contrast with the other Christological positions. The Dyophysites, Miaphysites, and Chalcedonians each positioned their views so that they would be able to engage their Muslims neighbors with what they saw to be the one true religion. Christians still had to live with their Muslim neighbors. In this, there were aspects of Christology that each position needed to frame in ways that could

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[155] Theodore Abu Qurrah, On the Union and the Incarnation, 104.

[156] Theodore Abu Qurrah, On the Union and the Incarnation, 106.

[157] Theodore Abu Qurrah, On the Union and the Incarnation, 106.

build bridges between Muslims and Christians. This project now turns to the specific ways in which Christians adapted their arguments toward Muslims and ways they went further in their adaptation which may have resulted in blurring lines between Christianity and Islam.

Chapter Three

In all Christian-Muslim dialogue it is important to consider theological contextualization. Christians understood how they needed to engage their Muslim neighbors with an attempt to build bridges and draw them together as well as reach them with the Gospel of Christ. They also wanted to be clear in their understanding that Islam was a unique religion and in their application of Christology as an apologetic. However, there were instances where these lines were blurred. This chapter will explore how Christians explained the impact of their Christology on how they understood who God was and how that related to their activity in the world. Specific attention will be paid to the terminology used by Christians and its acceptability to Islam. Some terms in Christian theology would have been conversation ending and Christians generally sought to avoid them when possible. This chapter will also discuss the level of syncretism present in the social spheres in which the Christological positions moved.

Before moving into a discussion of how Christians contextualized their Christology in apologetics against Islam, it is important to understand some basic definitions for contextualization and syncretism. In any historical study, it is easy to fall into the trap of anachronism. Importing one's concepts onto those in the past as if they should have understood them is to be avoided. Contextualization and syncretism were not familiar terms to the six exemplars analyzed and the concepts were not always understood or practiced. Many in the early church, as well as others in antiquity-regardless of religion, were not concerned with the way their faith interacted with a new culture as culture. As also happens today, the polemicist would interject their own culture into the conquered (intellectually or otherwise) culture. The dominant culture often was viewed as being part of the gospel and part of the message being spread.

However, it has also been seen throughout history, that Christians seeking to engage another culture with the message of the Cross have clarified Christian themes and ideas in terms that are relevant to the hearer. This was done for the purpose of minimizing opposition and maximizing the impact of the Christian message. This is the essence of contextualization. Contextualization is "clarifying the unchanging message [of Christianity] for the cultures and people groups of the world."[158] Christians throughout history have sought to adopt images, metaphors, and pieces of culture that fit within Christian orthodoxy so that they can reach non-Christians with the message of the Cross. A key to contextualization in this case, is the maintaining of a distinctly Christian identity, while making the message relevant to the receiving culture. Maintaining orthodox Christian beliefs is vital to contextualization.

Contextualization, however, was also taken to an extreme. In this case, contextualization moves past maintaining orthodox beliefs and into blending with the receiving culture. This is known as "syncretism." For the purposes of this study, syncretism is defined as the assimilation of one culture or religion's themes into Christianity so that the two either become indistinguishable or form a third religious system. This is seen throughout history. While Christians engaging cultures around them desire to see their neighbors follow the message of Christianity, they also desire not to make them outsiders in their own culture. If one was found to be an outsider from the religious tradition of his/her family, it could be devastating to their livelihood and could result in their death. Alienation from families, especially in ancient cultures was especially challenging because of the interconnectedness of economics with family, far beyond what is seen in modern Western contexts.

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[158] Edward L. Smither, *Mission in the Early Church: Themes and Reflections* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014) 110.

Given this stressor, there were instances where the contextualization pushed beyond the realm of adapting the terminology of a religious system to culture. Instead, there were times this led to syncretism. This is not to say that each of the exemplars made an argument for syncretizing Christianity with Islam. Rather it is meant to show that some may call into question whether Islam was viewed as a unique religion based on the syncretistic tendencies of some early Christian arguments.

In this chapter, each Christological position's contextualization and syncretism will be examined in three parts. The argument contextualized and syncretized will first briefly be explained in its Christian context. This will provide more specificity than the discussion in Chapter two on the Christological systems as a whole. Next, the Muslim understanding of the topic will be engaged to show parallels between the Christian understanding and the Muslim understanding. Finally, the specific way the Christological positions respond to Islam will be unpacked. This balance of contextualization and syncretism will be used as the grounding for the final chapter which will show that the Christians in the earliest Islamic periods understood Islam to be a unique religion which they used their Christological views to address.

<center>Dyophysite Contextualization</center>

Shortly after the Islamic takeover of the Middle East, Dyophysites had a desire both to show their faith to be true to their new neighbors as well as to commend it to their Christian neighbors so they would not leave the faith. This meant that they needed to explain their faith in terms that would be understood by both in proper context. Since that context was shifting, their terminology needed to shift as well. The Dyophysites engaged in contextualization of three principal Christological topics: the Word of God, the transcendence of God, and the Son of God.

The first way Dyophysites contextualized their Christology in engaging Islam was in their use of the Christological term the "word of God." In the first hundred years of Christian thought, the term "Word" (Greek *logos*) was used of Jesus. In the text of the New Testament, especially in John 1:1-18, the "Word" is connected with God as sharing in the divine nature. This "word" is later identified with Jesus Christ. This took place throughout Christian history, so much that each Christological tradition uses this term to speak of the Second Person of the Trinity.[159]

The Dyophysites understood the Word to be "coeternal with the father" yet was unable to suffer, was not "begotten," and did not rise "from the dead when raising his destroyed temple."[160] This Word retained the whole of deity and was in some way united with the person of Jesus Christ, though there was clear distinction. This is especially seen as relevant in the Islamic challenge of Theopaschism. Theopaschism is the theological position that God suffered in His deity in some fashion. The Dyophysites clearly denied this position. One of the great fathers of the Church of the East, Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), clearly stated this position in his commentary on Philippians. He writes that Jesus Christ's being obedient to death on the cross (Phil 2:8) was only to be applied to the human nature since the Son was both in the form of God and the form of a human.[161] This carried into Nestorius' writing as noted above and into the future Dyophysites as well.

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[159] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the importance of the Greek philosophical idea of *logos* on Christological development in the first six centuries of Christianity. For an extensive treatment, see Alois Grillmeier, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon,* vol. 1, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, trans. John Stephen Bowden, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975). This paper will present a basic sketch of the use of specific Christological terms as needed.

[160] Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, preserved in St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter*, 5.3.

[161] Theodore, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: The Commentaries on the Minor Epistles of Paul*, trans. Rowan A. Greer, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World, v. 26 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 319.

Muslims in the seventh through ninth centuries knew that Christians argued Jesus was both the Word of God and because of that was divine in some sense. They understood Jesus, as the Word, had a unique place in Christianity that he did not have in any other religious system at the time. For the Jews, Jesus was at best a good teacher and at worst a false prophet who led people astray. In Islam the focus shifted from Jesus' divine status to that of a prophet, while still maintaining that Jesus was the "Word" and "Spirit" of Allah. Surah 4:171 clearly states this concept of Jesus as God's Word and Spirit, though it is simply seen as his being used in a special way by Allah.

This required the rejection of some of the claims about Jesus' ontological status as divine. One of the primary Muslim arguments against the Trinity, and thus a divine Christ, is that Christians are "associators." In the Qur'an there are several instances where the Christians are called to avoid calling humans "lord" instead of Allah. One of the most prominent examples of this is Surah 5:72-3. Here, the Qur'an is specifically arguing against Christianity. Other Surat in the Qur'an could be said to argue against any polytheistic claims and not specifically the Trinitarian claims of Christianity. However, at this point, that cannot be the case. Surah 5:72 explicitly mentions Christians saying God is "the Messiah, the son of Mary." It continues with Jesus denying the worship that is offered to him saying explicitly, "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." This argument is continued in various Islamic objections to Christianity.

Dyophysites further developed this term in their engagement with Islam. In his *Apology*, Timothy I presents a clearly Dyophysite discussion of the Word of God. His Muslim dialogue partner challenges him to explain who Christ is. Timothy's answer is that He is the "Word-

God."[162] Here, Timothy is beginning to contextualize his Christology to his Muslim neighbor so as to not offend. He knows the Islamic understanding of who Christ is. The Caliph does not let him avoid the issue, but Timothy is clearly trying to do so. The Caliph follows the question asking about Christ as the Son of God. Timothy continues to try to pivot on the terminology to the "Word-God, who appeared in the flesh for the salvation of the world."[163] Following his understanding of the Nicene Creed,[164] Timothy explains that the Christ, as the Word, was born before the beginning of time. For the Word before time and in time as a human from the Virgin Mary. He notes "from the Father He is. . .born eternally, and from the Mother He is born in time, without a Father. . ."[165] The focus here is not on Jesus as the Son, though that will be discussed later. Timothy is trying to emphasize the dyophysite phrasing that the "very same Christ is the Word born of the father, and a man, born of Mary."[166] Timothy clearly presents the one Person of Christ with a distinction in natures between the Word and the humanity. Timothy is directly contradicting the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria. The phrasing he uses here regarding the Word's divine birth and the human birth from Mary is directly opposed to Cyril and the Miaphysite position. Cyril in his first letter about Nestorius' teaching wrote, "Therefore, the Word, though being in the form and equality of God the Father, humbled himself when, being made flesh as John says, he was born of a woman, and having a begetting from God the Father, he also endured to experience a birth like ours for our sake."[167] Timothy wants to avoid this

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[162] Timothy, *Apology*. 17.

[163] Timothy, *Apology*. 17.

[164] The Nicene Creed was not accepted by the Church of the East until the Council of Isaac in 410 CE. See Baum, Wilhelm, and Dietmar W. Winkler. *The Church of the East: A Concise History*. London: Routledge, 2003 14-17 for fuller discussion.

[165] Timothy, *Apology*. 17-18.

[166] Timothy, *Apology*. 17

[167] Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter* 1.26.

terminology so that the concept of the Word being distinct from humanity could be acceptable to his Muslim dialogue partner. This has further implications in dyophysite discussion of the Word being connected to the divine essence.

Abraham of Bet Hale presents this argument more succinctly. He does directly explain what he means by the use of the term "Word of God." He assumes his Muslim dialogue partner knows the direction his argument is taking. He draws his dialogue partner into the conversation asking for clarification of who Jesus is to the Muslims. The Muslim responds with the passage noted above from Surah 4:171. In this, Abraham of Bet Hale then turns to tell his companion that he must either "alienate the Word of God and His Spirit from Him, or correctly proclaim Him [Jesus] to be the Son of God."[168] Here, the Muslim must, in Abraham's estimation, admit that if Jesus is the "Word" of God, then there can never be a time when he did not exist with God. God could never be without His Word, or he would cease to be God.

A second topic that the Dyophysites contextualized was God's transcendence over creation in his Christological defense. The doctrine of God's transcendence plays a significant role in Christology. For the Dyophysites God must be utterly distinct from His creation. The Second Person of the Trinity must be distinguished from the humanity in a way that allows for the deity to be only loosely connected. This was a critical distinction between the Dyophysite conception of "person" compared to the Miaphysite position. For the Dyophysite, the Son was "in" two natures rather than "from" two natures. This subtle distinction, it was argued, kept the distinction between the natures.

Islam certainly understands Allah to be utterly transcendent over creation, yet he can still interact with creation. Siddiqui notes in Islam that Allah hides and reveals himself, in a similar

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[168] Taylor, "The Disputation," 27.

way God does in Christianity.[169] There are notable differences in how this is accomplished, but the fact that deity is self-revelatory in both cases allows for common theological and philosophical context. In Islam, Allah's transcendence is displayed in many *ayat* (verses) in the Qur'an. In places such as surah two, *al-Baqarah*, the Qur'an states in Surah 2:106-7, "Dost thou not know that God is Powerful over all things? Dost thou not know that unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and that you have neither protector nor helper apart from God?" Here, Allah is shown to be the owner over all creation. The passage also clearly states that Allah is the one who is in control over all things that happen in nature. In at least twenty-two different places, Allah is said to have "power over all things."

A final example of a doctrine the Dyophysites had to contextualize was their understanding of the Christological term the "Son of God." Throughout Christian history, the idea that one would be called the "Son of God" took on at least three different entailments, depending on the dialogue partner engaged. Either God was just like the pagan deities who impregnated humans, there was a female deity with whom God birthed a child, or the "Son of God" was a specific term applied to a specific Person. The latter is the orthodox Christian position. In the text of the New Testament, Jesus Christ refers to himself as the "Son of God." In Each of the four canonical Gospels Jesus is called the "Son of God." The Greek term "υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ" is used of Jesus Christ (in various forms) over 100 times in the New Testament. In these cases, it is clear that there is no physical union being mentioned either between God and a human or God and another deity.

In Islam, it was heretical to suggest that God has a son, or any child. Time and again, the Qur'an denounces this claim. Surah 2:116 clearly states that it is false to say God has "taken a

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[169] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, & Jesus*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 6.

child." Instead, God only has to speak (117), and something exists. This would seem to imply the understanding that physical procreation would be necessary for God to have a child. In addition, Surah 6:100-1, when asking how God has children if he "has no consort," the Qur'an again suggests that physical procreation is the only means by which someone could be called a child of God. Surah 5:72 moves a different way in noting that granting God children would require this consort as well as the child to be a divine heir. Making this claim would be committing *shirk* or attributing "partners" to God. This is ultimately a denunciation of polytheism since the Christians of the day (regardless of Christological viewpoint) did not argue for tritheism, or more for those that may have considered Mary divine. Instead, Christians have presented the Trinitarian doctrine as being monotheistic.[170]

Each of the aforementioned passages could be attributed to non-Christians as easily as Christians. In Surah 4:171, however, that is no longer a possibility. The Surah clearly argues that Jesus was only a messenger of God, implying Christians argued that he was more than this. The Surah then moves to deny any Trinitarian formula by saying "Say not 'Three'. . .God is only one God." The critical issue here, however, is when again the Qur'an argues that God is beyond having a child. The text says, "Glory be to Him that He should have a child." Sydney Griffith argues that the terms used in the Qur'an reflect "a polemically inspired caricature, the purpose of which is to highlight in Islamic terms the absurdity, and therefore the wrongness, of the Christian belief, from an Islamic perspective."[171] This is certainly true, and it is clear that the Qur'an understands Christians to be arguing that the Son of God is deity.

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[170] There are some "Christian" sects that would argue for tritheism, though they are clearly on the fringes and are condemned by the rest of the Christian sects, even those who disagree sharply on other issues.

[171] Sidney Griffith, "Al-Naṣārā in the Qur'ā n" in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Quran 12 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 311.

The Dyophysites contextualize their understanding of the term the "Son of God," both in response to objections and positive arguments for the term. The first example of this is Timothy I's response to Caliph Mahdi. Retelling the story of his encounter with the Caliph, Timothy relates this as the first words the Caliph spoke to him. According to Timothy, he hardly had his greeting out of his mouth when the Caliph "did something to me, which he had never done before."[172] The Caliph directly challenged Timothy's understanding of God having a son by asking how God "married a woman from whom he begat a son?"[173] The Caliph sees this as a significant issue with the Christian Christological view. As noted above, Islam requires *Allah* to be so far above humanity that to even consider God to have a son is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable. Multiple *ayat*[174] of the Qur'an state the exact opposite of this. They even go so far as to condemn those who would make this claim.

Timothy, understanding his need to explain his view to the Caliph, argues that the term Son of God should not be understood as being a "son in the flesh as children are born in the carnal way, but an admirable and wonderful Son. . ."[175] Timothy understands that the Caliph's position is that any attribution of "having a son" to God assumes a physical relationship between God and another being. Timothy wants to distance Christology from this idea as much as possible. He argues that Christ was conceived "without any marital contact, and without any break in the seals of the virginity of His Mother."[176] He may know already that the Caliph will agree with this statement. The Qur'an also teaches that Jesus did not have an earthly father. Islam

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[172] Timothy, *Apology*. 17.

[173] Timothy, *Apology*. 17.

[174] *Ayat* (pl.) is equivalent to the term "verses" (sing. *ayah*).

[175] Timothy, *Apology*. 17.

[176] Timothy, *Apology*. 18.

follows Christianity in noting that Jesus was born to the virgin Mary.[177] In this way, Timothy is contextualizing his Christology to build a bridge for his Muslim neighbor to better understand his theological position.

Likewise, this claim must be defended by the Monk of Bêt Hālê. He too seeks to contextualize the doctrine so that it can be understood in terms familiar to the emir. When the emir presents the challenge to the Monk, he too notes that the Christian view "thrust[s] [God] down into baseness and proclaim[s] that He has a Son. . ."[178] The Monk, after addressing the first question on the Trinity, grounds his answer in Jesus' being the Word and Spirit of Allah according to the Qur'an itself.

<div align="center">Dyophysite Syncretism</div>

A major challenge to contextualizing theological doctrine is that it can quickly blend with other theological doctrines. This blending, or syncretism, has been a challenge for all religious systems. Many religious systems hold to similar ideas and concepts which can, at times, make it difficult to distinguish one from another. Early Christian dialogue with Muslims is no exception to this rule. From the Dyophysite Christological position, the major position that lends itself toward syncretism is the emphasis on the humanity of Jesus.

The Dyophysite understanding of Jesus' humanity allows for a potential syncretism given the prominent role Jesus plays in Islam as well as the Muslim reverence for Jesus as a messenger of God. For the Dyophysites, one of the greatest concerns was that Jesus' humanity would be lost amidst a "confusion" or "mixture" of the divine and human natures which it accused of the

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[177] Timothy records as much when the Caliph responds, "That He was born of Mary without marital intercourse is found in the Book, and is well known. . ." Timothy, *Apology*. 18.

[178] Taylor, "The Disputation," 24.

Miaphysite and Chalcedonian positions. The Dyophysites required a degree of separation that placed an emphasis on the distinct nature of the humanity of Jesus. This too is why the attempted reconciliation using the Monothelite and Monenergist formulas failed. These positions, it was argued, blurred the lines between the human and divine. Monenergism argued that there was only one center of activity in Christ. Since the human "body was the instrument of the soul and both were the instrument of the Word."[179] To the Dyophysites, this reeked of Apollinarianism, where the person of Jesus Christ was not "fully" human in that the place of the soul was filled by the divine *Logos*. The Dyophysites rejected this doctrine and instead argued that there must be a distinction between the two. Monothelitism, similarly, argued for one will in Christ. This too appeared to effectively nullify Christ's human nature to the Dyophysites.

Thus, Christ must be distinctly human and only things pertaining to his humanity could be said of his humanity. This shows itself in Islamic theology in two ways. First, in Islam, the prophets are nearly entirely rejected as mere human representatives of God. In the Qur'an it is regularly noted that God sends messengers who are primarily human. In Surah 5:75, a proof is offered that Jesus is merely human. The verse notes three ways that Jesus is simply human. First it states that as an assertion. The text says, "The Messiah, son of Mary, was naught but a messenger." The emphasis on the sonship of Jesus is a specific assertion that Jesus was born physically of a human woman which implies that God could not have had a son. Only three verses prior, the Qur'an states that God has no partners nor is God the "Messiah, son of Mary." Instead, Jesus is directly connected to humanity through Mary. Second, the text states that the messengers of God have died before him. He, as a messenger, is liable to death just like the other messengers. There is no reason, according to the Qur'anic assumption, to think Jesus is any

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[179] Davis, The First Seven Ecumenical Councils, 261.

different than those who came before him. Again, since he is the son of Mary, he is a human and all humans die. Finally, the text notes that both Jesus and Mary ate food. If Jesus ate food, then he was most certainly human. The assumption of the Qur'an here, is that God would not have a need to eat food since God is not a physical being. More specifically, God is not a human being. In this, the Qur'an suggests these "signs [are] clear. . .yet behold how they are perverted" (Surah 5:57).

Continuing the idea of Jesus' prophethood as an area of potential syncretism is Timothy's approval of Muhammad as a prophet. Timothy agrees with the Caliph's claim that there are different prophetic witnesses throughout history, though it is hardly a controversial statement. Timothy cites various prophets that foretell of a differing dispensation of God's grace in history.[180] Timothy notes Jeremiah and Joel speak of a change in God's covenant with humanity. For Timothy, these all point to Jesus Christ and his work in his life, death, burial, and resurrection. The Caliph Mahdi then asks if Muhammad is not the prophet from Deuteronomy 18:15 as the Arabs are ". . .brethren of the children of Israel. . ." and Muhammad is a prophet ". . .like unto Moses."[181] Timothy pushes back on this, noting that there are many who are closer blood relations to Israel than the Arabs and other prophets that are closer than Muhammad.

However, in the second day of discourse with the Caliph, Timothy engages the issue more directly due to the direct question of the Caliph. The Caliph asks Timothy for his thoughts about Muhammad. Timothy has much praise for Muhammad. He "walked in the path of the prophets and. . .lovers of God. . ."[182] He taught monotheism and good ethics and morals. Interestingly, Timothy also notes that Muhammad taught "about God, His Word and His

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[180] Timothy, *Apology*. 49.

[181] Timothy, *Apology*. 50.

[182] Timothy, *Apology*. 61.

Spirit."[183] This is interesting because of the groundwork that Timothy has already set. He previously connected the Word and Spirit of God with Jesus, so it appears that he is arguing Muhammad says some correct things about who Jesus was. Timothy then continues offering praise to Muhammad about how he has done things similar to other prophets. Each one focuses on prophets that are noted as shared between Islam and Christianity.

This discussion pivots quickly to the triune nature of God, but Timothy ultimately draws this back in an attempt to show that Muhammad is actually teaching the doctrine of the Trinity in the Qur'an.[184] Timothy compares the use of plural personal pronouns regarding God in the Old Testament with those in the Qur'an that do the same. He argues even that some of the three letter headings in the Qur'an are representative of Muhammad's trinitarian commitments.[185] Timothy suggests that Muhammad taught this way, including the references to God's Word and Spirit, because if he taught openly those he was trying to reach would be "scandalized by it and think of polytheism."[186] With this emphasis on Muhammad teaching clearly Christian doctrines, even in a veiled way, Timothy runs the risk of offering an opportunity for syncretism between Christianity and Islam.

Miaphysite Contextualization

Contextualization was important for the Miaphysites. Miaphysites contextualized their Christology primarily in three ways. Scholarship often suggests that the Miaphysites, in contrast with in the Dyophysites and Chalcedonians, appreciated the Muslim invasion of their land. Some view their reactions to the defeat of the Byzantine Empire and removal of that rule as an

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[183] Timothy, *Apology*. 61.

[184] Timothy, *Apology*. 65ff.

[185] Timothy, *Apology*. 67.

[186] Timothy, *Apology*. 68.

endorsement of Islamic control. If the Miaphysites were pleased with, or relived by, the removal of the oppressive rule they had lived under for two centuries, then they would have greater desire to show their new overlords what their religion was like. They would also key on specific details of the religious thought in order to convert more to the faith. Miaphysites shared several doctrines with Islam that they addressed in their contextualization.

The first way Miaphysites contextualized their message was in their understanding of God's transcendence and how it applies to theopaschism. In Miaphysite theology, the Word of God was united in much more than the "conjunction" suggested by the Dyophysites. For Miaphysites, the Word as a divine person joined itself to humanity, raising humanity up rather than bringing the deity down. This union of the two divine and human natures created a third nature. This nature, specifically the "one nature of the Word Incarnate," was both human and divine. Cyril of Alexandria, one Miaphysites look to as the foundation of their Christology, made several arguments to support his claims. One was in his use of analogies to show this relationship. One of his primary examples is comparing fire and wood. In his analogy, fire represents the divine nature and wood represents humanity. He argues that fire consumes wood in such a fashion as to make it something new. The divine nature brings the humanity up. In the Cyril's argument the "Word of God united to the human nature, yet not losing the being what He is, but rather trans-elementing what He had taken, or united, unto His own glory and operation."[187]

Cyril also uses Philippians 2:6-11 to support this idea. Cyril argues that Paul intends to show the divine nature. That Paul notes that Christ, "did not find equality with God something to be grasped." Cyril argues this could not be something said of a human. Instead, Paul says this of

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[187] Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, 9.

the deity which takes on human flesh, making it new[188]. In this, there is this third nature, and in the third nature, God can act in ways that would normally only be attributable to humans. Specifically, God the Word suffers on the cross. Cyril makes this explicitly clear when he writes, "Word Himself out of God the Father, Very God out of Very God, the Light That is out of Light, was Incarnate and made Man, descended suffered rose from the dead."[189] The distinction of natures made by the Dyophysites was clearly something that the Miaphysite position rejects, leading to the doctrine of theopaschism.

This specific connection of the divine nature with suffering would be problematic to a Muslim. In Islamic theology as has been noted above, God stands outside of created order. God would not be able to enter into creation in this fashion. Islamic theology, broadly speaking, holds to the concept of immutability. In this God is said to not be able to change. God dying would clearly be considered a change. The Mu'tazilites, a group that rose to prominence in the middle of the eighth century, present a clear view of this position.

In addition to this, there are several instances in Islamic apologetics against Christianity. Abu Ra'ita presents the Muslim objection focusing on the fact that the Qur'an notes that Allah only sends his messengers. There are no Qur'anic passages which indicate God himself comes into his creation. On the contrary, Allah is always said to send messengers as his voice. Twenty-five messengers are named in the Qur'an. However, Surah 10:47 says, "For every community there is a messenger. . ." These messengers provide clear instruction from Allah, but they do not act in a way other than as messengers. They call their communities to submit to Allah and his

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[188] Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, 12.

[189] Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, 13.

will. Siddiqui notes that using messengers, "allows God to remain veiled and there is no suggestion in the Qur'an that God wishes to reveal of himself just yet."[190]

There are two ways in which Allah is spoken of as entering into creation. The first is in his common grace to the world. He is said to provide "manna and quails" to Israel (2:57), and he offers "signs" (3:19, 21). Allah's engagement with creation is as one who is transcendent, yet not immanent. Allah is loving to his creation, especially to those who follow him (2:195, 222; 3:76 etc.). Allah is not as distant as a Deist would describe, though he is not as intimate as a Christian would describe.

The second way that Islam speaks of Allah is in the use of anthropomorphisms. In these anthropomorphisms, Allah is spoke of using terms that would only be fitting for a created thing. This anthropomorphism was "derivative in nature, in that it is not a genuine attempt at comprehending God by means of human categories but always a theological problem generated by a text, either a hadith or the Quranic revelation itself."[191] One of these is suggesting that Allah is like light. Surah 24, aptly named *al-Nur* or "light," states this clearly. The Surah begins describing how discipline in regard to sexual sin and the accusation of sexual sin. It calls all to follow Allah's will and avoid the "footsteps of Satan" (21). The Surah then acknowledges that Allah sees everything that is done (30). Allah has sent down his messengers to help to guide those he wills to his path. Ayah 35 says, "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth." In this, of course, the Qur'an is not suggesting that Allah is actually light. However, light is not able to be seen, though its impact is both seen and felt.

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[190] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, & Jesus*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 12.

[191] Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam. Volume 4*, ed. Maribel Fierro et al., trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom, vol. 4, Handbook of Oriental Studies 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 417.

A final way Miaphysites had to contextualize their Christology was in their discussion of who Mary was. One of the great challenges to the Christian-Muslim dialogue, as noted even with the Dyophysites, is the mention of the "Son of God." In order for there to be a "Son" of God, there must, as the term would imply, be a "Mother of God." In Miaphysite Christology, the term *Theotokos*, or "God bearer" filled this role. This term, while not unique to Miaphysitism, was a key term in their Christology.[192] The term *Theotokos* was a necessary term to be used of Mary, the mother of Jesus, by Miaphysites.

In the fifth century, Cyril argued strongly for both the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ. "For he said that the Word was *flesh*, shewing the force of the true union, i.e., understood as one "of Person:" and by saying that He *tabernacled in us*, he does not allow us to conceive that the Word which is out of God by Nature passed into flesh which is of the earth."[193] The term *Theotokos* signified the union of the two natures of Christ into one person. If this unification did not happen, as Miaphysites suggest is the case with Nestorian christology, then salvation is not possible because Christ is not truly human. According to Cyril and the Miaphysites, Nestorius' argument makes the Word inhuman by choosing to not use *Theotokos* as a title for Mary. Severus of Antioch, a Miaphysite, continued this argument and influenced Syrian theology for many centuries following his death.[194]

The Council of Constantinople II (553) further affirmed the Cyrillian use of *Theotokos*. In canon six of the decrees of the council, the Council stated that the one who ". . .will not confess that Mary 'is exactly and truly the Mother of God, because that God the Word who before all

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[192] The term could almost be considered the cause of the Christological debates between Nestorius and Cyril in the 5th century.

[193] Cyril of Alexandria, *Five Tomes against Nestorius* 1.4.

[194] Need, Truly Divine and Truly Human, 115.

ages was begotten of the Father was in these last days made flesh and born of her'" was anathematized.[195] Given the importance of the term in Miaphysite christology, that the council reaffirmed it "entrenched [the Miaphysites] within the formal boundaries of Cyrillian christological language, refusing to admit that Chalcedon. . .only confirmed Cyril's affirmation that One of the Holy Trinity was truly (i.e. humanly) born of Mary, and truly (i.e. humanly) suffered on the cross"[196]

The use of the term *Theotokos* led to a significant emphasis being placed on the position of Mary in Christian thinking. The term *Theotokos* had been in use since the early fourth century (at the latest) and, as with many other saints, Mary had received special honor. Some of this was given due to the biblical texts which seem to provide some honor to Mary. In Luke 1:28 (*CSB*) the angel Gabriel greets Mary as a "favored woman." Other translations of the same passage speak of Mary more highly. The Vulgate translates the passage "Hail Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with thee." The Vulgate better captures the honor given to Mary by the Early Church. As an example of the honor shown to Mary, shortly after the third ecumenical council in Ephesus in 431, Pope Sixtus III constructed the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome with an intricate mosaic of Gabriel's greeting and the epiphany which "gave artistic form to that definition."[197]

Given the above understanding of *Theotokos*, it is not surprising to see the Qur'an react strongly against understanding a human woman to be the "mother of God." It is important here to note the context in which the Qur'an was said to have been received by Muhammad. The Arab tribes in and around Mecca were predominantly polytheistic. It is to this that Muhammad often

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[195] Davis, The First Seven Ecumenical Councils, 244.

[196] Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, 248. "Monophysite" here is Meyendorff's term.

[197] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 56.

refers to in his denouncing God's having a son. However, the Qur'an also clearly addresses explicit teaching from other religious sects, especially Christianity.[198] This occurs more clearly in the context of referring to Jesus' deity as well as to the title of *Theotokos*.

The Qur'an notes that Mary was not the mother of God by referring to Jesus, the Messiah, as merely a human. Surah 4:171 says, "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary. . ." There are two interesting points to note, the first is related to Christ's deity which will be discussed shortly. The second is that Mary is noted to be only the mother of Jesus, not the mother of anything else. She is not the mother of God or the mother of Christ. The Qur'an makes a clear distinction that, while appreciating Mary's status in history, she is no more than a passive participant in Allah's divine plan.

In addition, the Qur'an often shows a rejection of the Miaphysite concept of *Theotokos*, though not the term itself explicitly. The Qur'an presents the veneration of Mary as one among the pantheon of gods in its pagan context. Many different Qur'anic passages deny that Allah could have a consort or could have a son. Surahs 88-92, 23:91, 25:2, 72:3-4 and others make these claims. Three Surahs will be engaged here to show the need for contextualization here.

Surah 5:116 presents a dialogue between Jesus and Allah in heaven. Allah asks Jesus, "O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from Allah?" This is one of the clearest examples of how the Qur'an understands the term *Theotokos*. Here, the Qur'an asserts that there were some who understood Mary as divine along with Jesus and Allah. In this, it is not being argued that Mary is understood to be part of the Trinity. Instead,

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[198] The Qur'an of course makes mention of Judaism as well, though that does not have the same challenge of God having a son in the sense Christianity would or a pagan religion would.

it is simply the Qur'an's understanding of the veneration given to Mary, especially with the term *Theotokos* and the emphasis on the concept of anyone who bears the title bearer of God. The Qur'an would deny that God could have a consort, which would clearly denote a sexual relationship between God and the "bearer of God."

The use of the term *Theotokos*, given the polytheistic background of Western Arabia, would appear to require a physical sexual union between Allah and Mary to produce Jesus Christ. This, of course, is not what Christians ever meant by the term *Theotokos*, but the Qur'an reacts against such a term. Surah 6:101 denies that God could have a consort which would be implied if one understood *Theotokos* as being the one who was God's consort. If God has a son who is called the "son of God," then the "bearer of God" could be understood as the consort of God (the father).

Surah 19:35 briefly notes that God could not take a child after telling how Jesus Christ was given to Mary. In this Surah, the Spirit of Allah came to Mary in the form of a man while she was alone and away from her family (19:17). The Spirit tells Mary she will be pregnant, though a virgin. This takes place and she then gives birth to Jesus. When she gives birth to him, her family believes that she has been in an extramarital relationship. Jesus speaks from the cradle and denies this. Slipped into this context is a denial of Jesus' deity (19:35). Implied in this is that Allah engaged in a relationship with Mary. If not, the statement "He only says to it 'Be!' and it is" would not make sense. This is another connection of the deity of Jesus and the term *Theotokos*. If Jesus were divine, then Mary would be the mother of God. The Qur'an is rejecting both ideas together.

Miaphysites contextualized their understanding of *Theotokos* in their discussions primarily by explaining the Sonship of Jesus. In practice, both Abu Ra'ita and Jacob of Edessa

avoid the term *Theotokos*. It would be objectionable to think of Mary in this way for many reasons stated above. Abu Ra'ita understands his context and seeks to position his view in terms that are acceptable to his audience. Griffith notes that Abu Ra'ita "uses phrases from the Qur'an because they are familiar to Muslims, not because they convey a peculiarly Christian message."[199] While he does not expressly use the term *Theotokos*, he does draw on the intention of the term. In his discussion of Jesus' sonship, he maintains that a human vessel was needed to bring about a renewal of creation. Knowing that the term *Theotokos* would lead his Muslim neighbors into confusion, Abu Ra'ita avoids the term entirely. Instead, he speaks of the Word being born to the Father in eternity past, as a relational "birth," and the Incarnate Word born of Mary in time.

Jacob of Edessa is more direct in his contextualization. Instead of avoiding the term or positioning it against the physical terms which would be understood by a Muslim, Jacob presents Mary as "the begetter of God" in his correspondence with John the Stylite.[200] In standard Miaphysite terms, Jacob makes the direct connection between Mary and her role as the one who provides the human nature which was unified with the divine nature. Here, however, Jacob does make a specific attempt to show that Mary should have a more honored status in the eyes of Muslims. He argues that Mary is descended of the line of David with an emphasis on her royal status and that relation to the Messiah. While the Qur'an does not make this claim anywhere, Jacob's point is that the Muslim who has an open mind will be willing to accept this argument. This point then offers a springboard into which one can present the truth of Christianity to a Muslim.

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[199] Griffith, "Abu Ra'itah," 195.

[200] Jacob of Edessa, *Sur La Généalogie*, 519.

Miaphysite Syncretism

While there was clear contextualization, there were also instances of syncretism which challenged the distinction between Christians and Muslims. In Miaphysitism, in contrast with the other Christological positions, there is less room for syncretism given the emphasis on the deity of Jesus, misconstrued as the denial of his humanity. Mark Beaumont notes this is the case, "since his miaphysite view made no room for genuine human thought and action in Christ."[201] One similarity in Christian and Muslim thought that make Islam an attractive religious partner with Christianity to Miaphysites is the understanding that of Jesus as a prophet.

As explained above, Jesus represents one of 25 prophets named in the Qur'an. However, there are distinct places given to Muhammad, Moses, Abraham, Noah, and Jesus because of the claim of a covenantal relationship with Allah.[202] While there is no distinct theology of prophethood clearly explained in the Qur'an, it is clear that there are some functions of prophets that set them apart from others. In this regard, Jesus was set apart first as a miracle worker. He was given "clear proofs"[203] to the fact that he was sent by Allah. In Surah 5:110, Allah, in a conversation with Jesus on the "day when God will gather the messengers," recounts a time when Jesus created clay birds and they came to life. This echoes several infancy narratives of Christ in which he was able to create life through miraculous means. In each of these works, Jesus is said to have fashioned birds out of clay.[204] After creating the birds, Jesus commanded

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[201] Beaumont, Christology in Dialogue with Muslims, 47-8.

[202] Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, & Jesus*, 15.

[203] Surah 2:87, 252

[204] *Pseudo-Matthew* 27, *Gospel of Thomas* 2/3/4 (Greek forms 1, 2, and Latin), Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour 36, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, vol. VII, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1886).

them to fly, and they flew. These texts played a relatively prominent role in how the different Christological groups understood how Jesus grew into his role as Christ. As these point to the same story and shared background, it would not be difficult to bridge the gap to bring Jesus down from his status as fully divine to a lesser divine being.

Another way Jesus' status as a prophet could allow for syncretism comes from a comment in the Qur'an about prophets eating. Surah 21, *al-Anbiya* or "The Prophets" says that the prophets were all embodied such that they could eat food. For the Miaphysite, it would be clear that the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ also ate food (8). For the Miaphysite, this could be a way to bridge the gap between Islam and Christianity. The Surah goes on to suggest that the messengers did not "precede Him. . .in speech" (27) but acted according to His command. The Miaphysite could say this about Christ as well since the Incarnate Word was the Word from all eternity. Thus, the Miaphysite and the Muslim would have a point of contact which to share. There would be significant hurdles to overcome still, but this could provide a point at which contextualization could bleed over into syncretism.

<div align="center">Chalcedonian Contextualization</div>

As with the Miaphysites, Chalcedonians may have been poorly received by the new Islamic power. Given the connection of this Christological position with the political arm of the Byzantine Empire a real or perceived concept of loyalty was difficult to break. This presented a unique challenge to Chalcedonians where they needed to overcome the cultural differences to a greater degree than the other two groups. This likely developed over time as Christians played a prominent role in Islamic governments into the 8th century.[205]

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[205] As noted, John of Damascus was the treasurer of Damascus before his retirement to Mar Sabas in Palestine.

Despite the potential political issues, the Chalcedonians still engaged their Muslim counterparts trying to prove the truthfulness of Christianity. They contextualized their Christology in at least two significant ways. First, they modified terminology to avoid needlessly offending their Islamic neighbors. Surprisingly, John of Damascus led this charge. John of Damascus is not known as one who would be a prime example of contextualization. His writings often paint Muslims as foolish, ignorant, or outright unintelligent. He would not be expected to contextualize his message in any way. Given his work *The Fount of Knowledge* and its emphasis on what he understands the true Christian faith to be, as well as the section *On Heresies* in the same title, one would be forgiven if he was passed over in a discussion of contextualization. However, John goes through considerable detail in his *Disputation Between a Christian and a Saracen* to contextualize his message. The first way the Chalcedonians contextualized their Christology was in their description of Jesus as God's Word.

As with the Dyophysites, the Chalcedonians had to explain how Christ was the Word of God. The Chalcedonian position tries to walk a middle road between the "two natures, two persons" of Dyophysitism and the "one nature of the Incarnate Word." Against the Dyophysites, the Chalcedonians argued that Christ did have to be one unified nature after the incarnation. However, against the Miaphysites, the natures could not be so intertwined that the distinction between divine and human was lost.

John of Damascus tries to walk this line using the concept of *enhypostaton* of the human nature of Christ. For John, the *enhypostaton* is an "accident," using the philosophical term, rather than the subject. Here, John means to show that the nature is a feature of the person. John uses "Peter and Paul" as representatives of human hypostases where one would not use the term human hypostasis to refer to specific people. In addition, he notes that both soul and body

are brought together into this *enhypostata*.[206] The human nature of Christ did not exist on its own apart from Christ. The human body came into existence at a specific point in time whereas the Word always existed.

In Islam, this distinction between persons and natures is not necessary because person and nature are connected. The Qur'an, like the Bible, does not offer any discussion on distinct hypostases as that was not its principle, other Muslim sources engage Christians on this point. Mark Beaumont notes that several Muslim theologians argued against the Christian use of terms on these points. Citing Abu 'Isa, he summarizes the Chalcedonian view as suggesting that the Word united to the "'universal human' nature shared by all humans, 'in order to save everyone.'"[207] In this, Abu 'Isa is suggesting that the inconsistency between the differing views suggest that it cannot be true. It is not internally consistent and thus does not appear to be proper to speak of Jesus in this way.

The second area of contextualization Chalcedonians focused on was their understanding of the term *Theotokos*. In the first century of Islamic rule in the Middle East, John of Damascus would further entrench the title Theotokos in the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, part of the larger work *The Fount of Knowledge*. In this text, John clearly explains the Christian veneration of Mary and icons of the saints and Jesus Christ. Against the iconoclasts of the western Byzantine Empire, he argues that there are several different forms of "worship.[208] One form of worship (*latria*) could be offered only to God.[209] Another type of "worship" is that

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[206] John Damascene, The Fount of Knowledge: Philosophical Chapters, 44.

[207] Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*, 109.

[208] John Damascene, *On Holy Images and Three Sermons on the Assumption,* trans. Mary H. Allies, (London: Thomas Baker 1898), 1.12. This argument is predominantly against those who would not allow for the veneration of icons. They saw this concept as clear worship of a physical object. The Council of Nicea II (787)

[209] John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, 3.4.1.

which, in a sense, bypasses the one worshipped and instead brings worship to the one above the image. John uses an analogy of an honored servant of a king being honored. If the servant is honored, they may approach the king and offer some gain to the one showing honor. Alternatively, the king may simply see the honor being offered and offer that same gain to the one showing honor.[210] In any case, the honor is different when offered to the servant compared to when it would be offered to the king.

John also wrote that the term *Theotokos* signified that Jesus was both God and man. In his discussion of the significance of the term, he gives a substantial amount of praise to Mary. While he attempts to connect this back to praise of the "Word made flesh of her," the veneration could easily be misconstrued as worship of a deity. He wrote, "It is fitting that we should exalt her who is above all created things, governing them as Mother of the God who is their Creator, Lord, and Master."[211] The term, then, was intended to show Jesus Christ's humanity and his deity and, thus, his ability to be salvation for humanity. He writes, "For the holy Virgin did not bare mere man but true God: and not mere God but God incarnate, Who did not bring down His body from Heaven, nor simply passed through the Virgin as channel, but received from her flesh of like essence to our own and subsisting in Himself."[212] Here, John argues that the body of the Incarnate Word was not fashioned in heaven and brought down to earth. John continues, "He was born after the bodily fashion inasmuch as He became man, and did not take up His abode in a man formed beforehand, as in a prophet. . ."[213] John did not believe it was biblical to support the fact that the Son and Word of God took on the body of a former prophet or a heavenly body.

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[210] John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, 3.5.1.

[211] John Damascene, *Sermon II: On the Assumption* 1.

[212] John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 3.12.

[213] Ibid.

This kind of body would not have been "truly" human. It would not have gone through "truly human" experiences, and again, salvation would not have been possible.

The body that the Incarnate Word took on was provided by the Virgin Mary which meant that she was the human mother of the Incarnate Word. John continues that if this were not the case, then the Incarnate Word would not truly be human. He writes, "For if the body had come down from heaven and had not partaken of our nature, what would have been the use of His becoming man?"[214] In John's understanding, there would have been no reason for the Son of God to become a human without truly partaking in the human experience. This experience included that of birth.

John understood Mary's being the "Mother of God" as vital to the salvation of humanity. In his chapter in defense of Mary's title as "Mother of God" John asks, "For how could the very Word of God itself have been made under the law, if He did not become man of like essence with ourselves?"[215] If Jesus Christ, the Son and Word of God, did not have a human mother, he would not have been under the law, and thus would not have been able to be the ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of man.

Finally, John argues that even the term *theotokos* is vital to a proper understanding of the two natures of Jesus Christ. He writes, "The name in truth signifies the one subsistence and the two natures and the two generations of our Lord Jesus Christ."[216] The title *theotokos* shows that the Son and Word of God is *both* fully God and fully human. John even goes so far as to say

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[214] Ibid., 3.12.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

altering the title of Mary to something like "Mother of Christ" leads one to a heretical Christology.[217]

<center>Chalcedonian Syncretism</center>

Since the connection to the Byzantine Empire could have presented challenges to Chalcedonian contextualization, it would also be possible to impact syncretism as well. If one was Chalcedonian, one may also be thought to support the Byzantine Empire. In this case, there was a stronger social distinction and a lower likelihood of adopting the religion of a warring country. However, this political alignment does not eliminate the possibility of syncretism. There were still several areas in which the Chalcedonian position tended to syncretize with Islam.

The first area of potential syncretism was in the use of Word of God for Jesus without saying He was also the Son of God. The same area where Chalcedonians wanted their Muslim neighbors to understand Jesus' deity could also play a role in syncretism between Christian and Muslim belief. The idea of Jesus being the Word of God and the Word of Allah has been explored above, but in the Chalcedonian context, since the emphasis on Jesus as "Word" was placed over against Jesus as "Son" it would not be difficult to see a blending. John of Damascus tries to place a fence around this possibility. He notes that some have argued it is sinful to only refer to Jesus as the Word and not as Son. Why this would be argued is relatively simple to support. At the very least, Christians who did not understand the subtle terminological differences between Christianity and Islam could see the use of the same term and believe they are being used the same way.[218]

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[217] John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 3.12.

[218] This has happened to me in personal conversation with a Muslim in Michigan in 2009. The Muslim man claimed Jesus as the Messiah and moved into another area of discussion. After the conversation ended, another listening to the conversation asked about this and the distinction in terms had to be explained to avoid confusion.

John suggests the opposite. He says that Christians who answer their Muslim debate partner in this way are not sinning by avoiding calling Christ the Son of God. Scripture uses both titles of Jesus Christ. He is *both* the "Son of God" and the "Word of God." John suggests the terminological difference given the Islamic prohibition against assigning children to God. In addition, Islamic theology affirms Jesus' status as the "Word of God." Instead of syncretizing, John argues Christians using this terminology are being "wise as serpents and innocent as doves."[219] That John must defend his view makes it a likely choice as a view that could see syncretism.

A second potential for syncretism in Chalcedonian Christology and Islam is the use of the term Messiah for Jesus. This could be an area of syncretism in all three Christological systems. Christians will quickly recognize that the term "Messiah" is one that brings significant biblical connotations. The term (Syriac- ܡܫܝܚܐ, Greek- χριστός) in the Old Testament is translated often as "anointed one" (Ps 132:7, Isaiah 45:1, etc.) and in the New Testament as "Christ." The term is used in the Qur'an at least 10 different times to refer to Jesus. In Surah 3:45, the term is first used when angels reveal to Mary that she will have a son. The son, Jesus, is given the name "Messiah." The text does not indicate this is a title but appears to place more emphasis on this being an actual name for Jesus. This sets Jesus apart from others in that he is not simply an "anointed" one, but he is named "Messiah." The Jesus has this title in Surahs 4:157 and 171, 5:17-twice, 5:72-one of two instances, 5:75, and 9:31. In each of these cases, the Messiah is Jesus, son of Mary. The potential for confusing the Messiah, Jesus Christ, son of Mary with the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, as a human messenger of Allah is not difficult to see.

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[219] Matthew 10:16.

Conclusion

Each of the Christological systems had significant terminological challenges to overcome when presenting their views to Muslims. The three systems sought to present their views in ways that would be acceptable to Muslims, though not with the express intention of blending the two religious systems. This contextualization was done to build bridges with the hopes of converting Muslims to Christianity. However, at times this overstepped into syncretism where the two faiths seemed to be expressing the same concepts in very similar ways. This paper now turns to show how each of the three Christological systems presented their Christology to Islam in a way that avoided syncretism and expressly set Islam apart as a distinct religious system that was antithetical to Christianity.

Chapter Four

As Islam rose to prominence through the seventh century, there was a unique question about the religious identity of the Arab conquerors. Some suggest that Islam's religious identity was unknown early in the Arab conquest of the Middle East.[220] Others argue that there was little distinction between the Arab rulers and their newly conquered subjects.[221] While some, such as Daniel Janosik, have noted that John viewed Islam as "an aberration from true Christianity"[222] there are significant challenges with this claim. Ohlig writes, ". . .if he [John of Damascus] did not accept the religious orientation of the Ismaelites [*sic*] as a new religion, then it *was not one* at this time."[223] Penn likewise argues that "we should not view early Christianity and Islam as hermetically sealed, self-contained entities" with the effect that it is hard to distinguish where Christians and Muslims maintained borders.[224]

There are significant issues with these positions. This chapter will argue that Christians understood Islam as a distinct religion, not simply a Christian sect using Christology as an example of how this was accomplished. From the earliest interactions, Christians recognized Islam made unique religious claims that were not simply an extension of Christianity, nor another Christian heresy. Based on the contextualized Christological terminology in their interaction, it is clear that the earliest Christians to interact with Islam recognized it to be teaching a different Jesus than the Christian understanding of the person of Jesus. They argued

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[220] Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) 69.

[221] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, Kindle Loc 633.

[222] Janosik, *John of Damascus*, 57.

[223] Karl-Heinz Ohlig, "Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature 'Under Islamic Rule'?" in *Early Islam: A Critical Reconstruction Based on Contemporary Sources*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig (Amherst, NY: Promethius Books, 2013), 229.

[224] Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, 145.

Islam was further removed from the other Christological positions which they considered heterodox at best and heretical at worst. They did this both so that Muslims, since they did not worship the same God that Christians did, would turn to the Christian understanding of Jesus and also to keep Christians grounded in their faith.

This chapter will first present a brief overview of the format in which Christians presented their arguments, looking both to direct confrontation with Islam as well as in a defense of each position's understanding of orthodoxy. The location of these arguments helps to show that the positive articulation of a belief is directed at the surrounding context. Specific terms are used that help the reader know how to respond to other positions should an objection arise. The context or objection being answered is not always explicitly stated as it would be in a polemical work, but it nonetheless influences the arguments made and how they are received. In addition to this preliminary matter, it is important to define when a belief system moves from a sect into a new religion. I will present a brief argument for how a branch of a religious system would be identified as unique rather than as another sect of the same principal religion. Finally, I will turn to each Christological group and show how they used specific Christological language to show that Islam was a distinct religious system from Christianity.

<div align="center">Location of Arguments</div>

One important point to note in the discussion of polemical or apologetic arguments is the location of the argument. Often arguments directed against another group are only viewed in relation to those which are explicitly directed toward that group. These arguments, such as Cyril's letters to Nestorius and to the various people he writes to about Nestorius, are known primarily because they are directed explicitly against Nestorius. Cyril states his intention to his audience explicitly. The audience is not confused as to why Cyril presents the arguments he

does. He explains that these arguments are to confront Nestorius and the teaching he views as heretical.

Likewise, when John of Ephesus (ca 507-588) presents his story of the *Life of Simeon, the Persian Debater* he intends his readers to understand the context of his story. In his setting the story, John presents Simeon as a defender of Miaphysite orthodoxy over against Nestorian heretical teaching out of which one must be saved. As John opens his story, he notes that Simeon went to war "against the fraudulent disciples of the school of Nestorius."[225] In this phrasing, John is suggesting his audience that they should be appalled at the "fraudulent disciples" who follow the Dyophysite Christological position. John's point then is that the work is written explicitly against another view. John uses his work to explain the correctness of the Miaphysite view against the Dyophysite view. His story has Simeon and Babi each present their arguments for their Christological positions to the local governor (*marzban*) who is to be an impartial third party. The *marzban* eventually declares Simeon's Christology the more consistent. If the impartial, unbiased third party understands the Miaphysite to be the more consistent, it should be proper for any Christian to follow this Christological position. John uses this to direct arguments against the Dyophysite position in favor of the Miaphysite position. This style of argument is seen in many other cases as well. However, it is not the only way one can argue against a position.

This is also shown in the format of several of the works from the representatives in this paper. The format of the *drāšā* represented a clear way to distinguish between two opposite

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[225] John of Ephesus, *Life of Simeon*, Patrologia Orientalis, 17:10.137.

views.[226] The format of the *drāšā* is that of a question and answer. The one asking questions was the opposition's view. The one answering does so from the position promoted by the author. In this way the author is able to control the conversation and the narrative so that the reader can understand what the truth is from the author's perspective. This can lead to some challenges in knowing if the author is accurately representing the opposing view. However, in order for the arguments to be effective, the view must be given a reasonably fair hearing. In many cases, the authors present a basic question followed by a developed answer. Then, the questioner either challenges a new point or concedes that the answer is the truth. In any case, the presentation of the arguments is what is of most importance in this study as it will help show the distinction between the views.

Another, equally powerful way that arguments can be presented against a view are in positive arguments for one's position. These would be didactic arguments presented considering the ideological milieu in which they are found. These do not mention the positions against which they argue, however, they do clearly take them into consideration. In some ways, every positive presentation of a view does this. Any argument presented reflects the ideologies around it. In the second and third centuries, Origen (185-253) presents a positive articulation of Christianity in light of many other views. He writes:

> Since many, however, of those who profess to believe in Christ differ from each other, not only in small and trifling matters, but also on subjects of the highest importance, as, e.g., regarding God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit; and not only regarding these, but also regarding others which are created existences, viz., the powers and the holy virtues;6 it seems on that account necessary first of all to fix a definite limit and to

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[226] Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation Between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notablem" in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam,* eds. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Boston: Brill, 2006), 159.

lay down an unmistakable rule regarding each one of these, and then to pass to the investigation of other points.[227]

Origen recognizes that there are multiple views that will shape how he presents his argument. However, his argument will still be presented positively instead of being directly against those other positions.

This happens often in the Christian engagement with Muslims. John of Damascus offers a clear example of this in his *Dialectica*.[228] Andrew Louth presents a probable purpose of the *Dialectica* in particular which may also represent John's purpose for his writings as a whole. Louth writes, "Presumably the purpose of the *Dialectica*, in John's eyes, was to help novice theologians to think clearly and argue convincingly, abilities that are necessary to read *On the Orthodox Faith* profitably, and build on the positions set out in that treatise."[229] John wanted to provide his reader with a way to think clearly about the various theological issues that they would encounter in his writings. This included a full discussion of Christology. If John prepared his reader to thoroughly analyze his theological treatise, it would be clear that his intention was for them to properly understand Christian orthodoxy as a way to prevent them from falling astray. John similarly argues that "'knowledge is the true knowledge of beings.' Consequently, knowledge of what is not is not knowledge at all, but is simply ignorance."[230] Knowing truth was critical to John's apologetic against Islam and understanding Christianity in general. This meant

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[227] Origen, "De Principiis," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 239.

[228] While the authenticity of the entire document has been questioned, it has been well established that John did in fact write at least the first chapter, which is of greatest import to the whole document. See Louth's discussion in *St John Damascene*, 41ff.

[229] Louth, St John Damascene, 47.

[230] Louth, St John Damascene, 45.

that he wanted to present a clear, orthodox view of Christology so that his reader would be able to see error more clearly.

The other representatives offer this example of engagement in their writings which are not directed against Islam as well. As will be shown there are several examples where the Christological arguments are presented in such a way that the Islamic context is being addressed indirectly. Each of the Christological groups engages this way, though they each use their own specific arguments which will show Islam was viewed as a distinct religious system and not a Christian group.

Marks of a New Religion

Religious systems throughout history have dealt with schism and sectarianism. Specifically in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there are several different sects. For Judaism, sects such as Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes were present in the second century BCE.[231] Each of these are considered Jewish sects and not new religious systems. In Christianity, there are clearly multiple sects even based on a single doctrinal difference, yet they are all considered Christian. Islam likewise has branches within it, most notably the Sunni and Shiite sects.

Each of these religious systems claim a common ancestry. They claim to build from the same foundation. The earliest Christians were considered Jewish until it was recognized that they were a different religious system entirely. Islam claims that all true believers before Muhammad were actually Muslim, yet they are clearly distinct in the 21st century. It is thus important to

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[231] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 13.5.9.

understand when this differentiation took place and what parameters should be applied to determine that a new religious system has formed rather than simply a different sect.

I propose two markers of a new religion which would separate it from a sect of a broader religion. These markers are shown by each of the three Christological groups in relation to Islam, but they do not meet them individually. The Christian groups understood that the other groups were still Christian, at least in name, though they were deemed heretical. However, because Islam met these two criteria, it was considered a distinct religious system.

The first criterium is self-identification. Self-identification here is the identification of one's faith as being unique in comparison to contemporaries. This would seem to make it clear that an individual would understand that they were part of a new religious movement. That is not necessarily the case. The key here is the distinction of one's belief from another, not which belief is the original or "true" religion. Muhammad did not understand himself to be starting a new religious system. The Qur'an makes this clear in Surah 5 where there are repeated claims of the message of Allah being given to others who preceded Muhammad. Jews (5:12) and Christians (5:14) both receive covenants with Allah. However, in each case, Allah's covenant was broken. Anyone who received a covenant following these would not be starting a new religious system but would simply be following the religion set forward beforehand which was submission (5:3). The Qur'an is clearly making the claim that it is just an extension of what has been taught before rather than being a new religious system. This is borne out by the claim that those Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who truly believe "in God and the Last Day and works righteousness" will have no fear on judgement day (5:69).

While this is the case, it is also claiming that others have deviated in teaching, making it distinct from them. In addition to noting that covenants were given to those who came before, the

Qur'an likewise notes that there are distinctions between what true religion is and what is being taught by the other religious systems. This distinction is also observed clearly in Surah 5. In 5:13 the Jews are said to have "distorted the meaning of the Word and have forgotten part of that whereof they were reminded." Christians as well, in 5:17 are said to make claims about God being the Messiah the son of Mary and this is viewed as a false claim. In both cases, and many others, the Qur'an is drawing clear distinction between what is teaches and what the other religious systems teach. It is claiming to be the original religious system, not a new religious system. However, it still self-identifies as a distinct system.

The second criterium that marks a new religious system is the denial of a core doctrine of another religious system. If doctrines which form the basis of a religious system are denied, then, by definition, the two religious systems cannot be considered sects of each other. This distinction is made clear in the Christological controversy compared to controversies on theology proper. With theology proper, there are several clear lines which cannot be crossed to be considered sects of another religion. If one understands there to be multiple divine beings instead of a single divine being, the two religious systems must be distinct or fall to the law of non-contradiction. God cannot be one being and more than one being in the same way at the same time.

In the Christological controversies, one can see both the distinction of sects and new religious systems. The various Christological positions alter the expression of that doctrine rather than denying the doctrine. Each position still affirms, at least in name, the full divinity and full humanity of Christ. This distinction in expression is a key component of determining remaining a sect instead of becoming an entirely new religious system.

Dyophysite Understanding of Islam

The Dyophysite Christological position has several syncretistic tendencies, which could suggest Islam was viewed as merely a continuation or a branch group of Christians. The emphasis on Jesus' humanity led one of Caliph al-Mahdi's Byzantine (i.e., Chalcedonian) captives to suggest "the 'Nestorians' ought hardly to be considered Christians and stood nearer the Arabs than the Byzantines."[232] However, the Dyophysite apologetic pushed back against the syncretistic tendencies to reflect a robust argument against Islam as a distinct religious system. For the Dyophysites, Islam was not considered simply a different Christological view or Christian "heresy," but instead, was entirely distinct. Through both direct interaction with Islam and in the positive articulation of their Christology, the Dyophysite representatives did argued against Islam in at least two distinct ways.

The first way Dyophysites showed their understanding of Islam as a unique religion was as part of their contextualization. In contextualizing their message, Dyophysites used specific symbols, and analogies which showed the distinction of religious systems. One example of this is in the discussion of the work of Christ as a symbol and type. For the Monk of Bêt Hālê, one of the strongest types of Christ's work was in the account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac from Genesis 22. Here, the Monk asserts the Jewish and Christian retelling of the story in contrast to the Qur'anic version.

The Qur'an discusses Abraham in multiple places. There is even a Surah named for Abraham (Ibrahim). The story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son is told in Surah 37 (*al-Sāffāt*). Here, Abraham receives a command to sacrifice his son (102).[233] The specifics of the command

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[232] Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 60.

[233] There is no mention of which son this is. However, it is most likely that the son is Ishmael. Surah 37:101 says that "glad tidings of a gentle son" were given to Abraham. After this the son is described as growing older and

are not revealed, but Abraham clearly understands it to be from Allah. Abraham immediately asks his son what he thinks of being sacrificed and the son willingly submits to the command (102). As Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, he is stopped and is "ransomed. . .with a great sacrifice" (107).

While this is broadly the same as the Jewish and Christian understanding of the story, it differs in several very important ways important to this discussion. In Genesis 22:2, God gives the command to Abraham that he is to take Isaac to "the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering." Abraham and Isaac then travel to Moriah where Isaac carries the wood for the offering on his back (3-6). Abraham is restrained from sacrificing his son and instead a ram, caught in a thicket is killed in his place (13-14). This is an important distinction in the story for the Monk of Bet Hale. He makes this specific connection because of the Dyophysite Christological interpretation of the passage. As the Monk continues, he notes that the "lamb" was "hanging on the tree" explaining that this is symbolic of Jesus Christ's dual natures.[234] Isaac had been viewed as a type of Christ for many centuries at this point. In his *Commentary on Genesis*, Ephrem the Syrian (ca 309-373) writes that the ram was a type of Christ. He writes, "[t]he mountain spit out the tree and the tree the ram, so that in the ram that hung in the tree and had become the sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son, there might be depicted the day of Him who was to hang upon the wood like a ram and was to taste death for the sake of the whole world."[235]

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submitting to the sacrifice. The key that suggests this is not Isaac comes in 37:112 where new "glad tidings" are given to Abraham. It is here that the text names Isaac. Since there are no indications that this is an expansion of the verses from 101-104, it would be most likely that this is Ishmael rather than Isaac.

[234] Taylor, "The Disputation," 21-2.

[235] Ephrem the Syrian, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works: Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Exodus, Homily on Our Lord, Letter to Publius*, ed. Kathleen E. McVey, trans. Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, The Fathers of the Church, v. 91 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), XX.VI.

This was typical of early Christian understanding of the story. For centuries Christians have understood the sacrifice of Isaac to be a type of Christ.

The Monk does make a clear Dyophysite interpretive move when he explains the lamb was understood as signifying the human nature while Isaac represented Jesus' divine nature. He also notes that the human nature thus is what suffered death on the cross, while the divine nature underwent no suffering.[236] The Monk makes use of this symbolism as an argument that Islam was unique both given its differences from the Islamic understanding of the story and in his interpretation of the symbols as to Christ. The Monk recognized that Islam made distinct claims about Jesus that could not be followed by the Christian. The Dyophysite position made clear that Jesus has two natures, both divine and human. The Monk emphasized the distinction between the natures in his use of Abraham's testing with Isaac and the lamb. In this, the Monk is clearly driving a line of demarcation between Islam and Christianity. Islam will not allow for the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The Monk knows this and recognizes that this makes it unique from Christianity. He does not argue against an Arian position, which would be closer to Islam and be a Christian heresy. Instead, the Monk makes a claim against the Miaphysite doctrine of theopaschism.

Whether the Muslim would have understood this distinction or not is interesting as well. Christians at this time often engaged in arguments against each other. As will be seen in several of the other representatives, they make explicit arguments against what they consider heretical positions, though they are recognized as still being Christian, though heretical. Here, the Monk would expect his audience to see that he was not addressing Islam as another Christian position

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[236] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22.

as he did by denying God suffering. Instead, his audience would recognize that the position he was engaging was a religion that was entirely different from Christianity.

Timothy I of Baghdad uses similar Dyophysite analogies to show a clear distinction in religious systems. Instead of referring to the Old Testament to show his Christological understanding, Timothy instead refers to several natural analogies, though one will be presented here. In responding to Mahdi's question of how the Son is both divine and human, Timothy presents an analogy of the King and the royal seal of the Kingdom. He notes that these are not "two," but they are "one." This union, Timothy is assuming, is not one that would make these two identical in nature. Mahdi is not of an identical nature with the insignia of his kingdom. However, as Timothy explains, there is still only one king, even though there is some difference between himself and his "dresses."[237] This analogy is specifically based on Timothy's understanding of Dyophysite Christology.

In his doctoral dissertation Thomas R. Hurst notes, Timothy presents his Christology in this way several times. In several of his letters he supports his Christological claims using the Syriac term *sebyānāytâ*, meaning will or desire, as the cause of the union.[238] This Christological formulation denies the union of natures, as in the *hypostatic union* of the Miaphysites and Chalcedonians, though those understand the *hypostatic union* differently. In fact, Hurst notes that Timothy makes this denial clear. Thus, in his response to Mahdi, Timothy is making his Christological understanding clear. The Caliph may not understand exactly why Timothy is using this analogy, except to accomplish the "basic" goal of answering his objection. Timothy,

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[237] Timothy, *Apology*. 19.

[238] Thomas Richard Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): A Study in Christian-Muslim Controversy (Apologetics, Philosophy, Theology)" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1986), 178, ProQuest (303458548).

however, is using this specifically for his broader audience so they have a proper understanding of their Christology. In doing so, Timothy is both presenting his Christology and responding to Islam as a distinct religious system.

A second Dyophysite argument showing Islam to be a distinct religion is the Dyophysite understanding of how Jesus Christ suffered. Both the Monk of Bet Hale and Timothy I of Baghdad have to respond to this objection from their Muslim dialogue partners, though they are positioned differently. The "Arab Notable" addresses the Monk asking, "how is it possible. . .that the divinity, which was with Him on the cross and in the tomb, did not suffer and was not harmed?"[239] The Caliph Mahdi only broaches the subject because of Timothy's engagement with it. For both representatives, however, the issue of Christ's suffering is vital as "heretics" have a different understanding than their "orthodox" position. The Monk, responding to the question by the Arab Notable begins by explaining what "heretics" teach. They argue, the Monk says, that there was a "mingling and mixture and confusion."[240] This is most likely a reference to the natures and hypostases of the divine and human Christ. As noted above, Dyophysite arguments typically explain the Chalcedonian and Miaphysite *hypostatic union* as being heretical on these grounds. The Monk then provides two analogies for how to understand Christ's suffering in his humanity only, and not in his divinity.

The first analogy is that of the sun resting on a wall. If the wall is destroyed, the sun does not "suffer." The demolition does not impact the sun in any way. The second analogy is of an iron being left in a fire becoming more effective, yet still an iron.[241] In these analogies, as with others, there is a clear distinction in the relation of the nature of the two subjects. In neither case

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[239] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22.

[240] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22.

[241] Taylor, "The Disputation," 22

is the nature of the two subjects united. The natures remain entirely distinct. The union is closer to that of will than nature.

Similarly, Timothy mentions divine suffering in several places. First, he does so in passing reference to "the Kingdom of the Romans" who "attributed suffering and death in the flesh to the one who cannot suffer and die in any way and through any process."[242] This is a clear reference to those who would accept the Council of Ephesus (431) which articulated a Cyrillian Christology, and the Council of Chalcedon (451) which tried to bridge the gap between the Miaphysite and Dyophysite positions. This is followed by a clearer denunciation of these positions when Timothy, in responding to a question about Jesus' status as a prophet, notes that "some people [said] that God suffered and died in the flesh."[243] He then clearly states "the expression that God suffered and died in the flesh is not right."[244]

These arguments present a distinction in Dyophysite Christology when addressed to Muslims. They recognized that Islam made claims to being a distinct religious system, albeit related at some point in the past to Christianity. However, these distinctions show that the Dyophysites understood what other Christian positions were. They were "Christian" positions that differed on how Christ was both divine and human. They did not make these arguments to Muslims with the thought that Muslims different from them on the technical terms by which the natures of the Word were connected to the human nature of Jesus Christ. The engagement with Muslims was with those who denied a core doctrine. They knew that, with the denial of the full divinity of Christ, one could not call themselves "Christian."

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[242] Timothy, *Apology*. 62.

[243] Timothy, *Apology*. 87.

[244] Timothy, *Apology*. 87.

Miaphysite Understanding of Islam

The Miaphysites also engaged Islam with their Christology in an effort to show that Islam represented a new religious system and not only an extension of Christianity. Miaphysites had fewer potential areas of syncretism than the other two Christological positions. Because of this there are places where their arguments more distinctly show Islam as a distinct religion. Jacob of Edessa goes so far as to write that the "Arabians. . .do not acknowledge God to be God and Christ, the Son of God, to be God and the Son of God."[245] Jacob's position is clear from the outset, and it is based on his Christology. While statements like this are not the norm in Christian-Muslim interaction, they do shed light on how Christians understood their new religious neighbors. The Miaphysites used their Christology to show that Islam was a unique religion using two general arguments as part of their arguments with Muslims.

The first way Miaphysites used their Christological position to show Islam was a new religion and not simply a heresy was in their use of analogies. Like the Dyophysites, there were several analogies that were focused on portraying their Christology. At times this was done with the other Christological views clearly in mind. Other times this was done more pointedly in response to Islam. In the former instance, Abu Ra'ita seeks to bridge the gaps between Christianity and Islam by using phrases that a Muslim would relate to. He does this for rhetorical effect, while seeking to maintain the orthodoxy of his arguments. One analogy that Abu Ra'ita uses is that of a human, unified in nature with soul and body. As the human being is composed of both body and soul, which are different substances, they are joined together in the one substance of humanity. This results in a composite being that is both soul and body. Abu Ra'ita notes that

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[245] Mar Jacob, Bishop of Edessa, *Scholia On Passages of the Old Testament*, trans. George Phillips (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 42.

"the soul is always the soul and the body is always a body without the composite of these two being two different things; rather it is the one in the union."[246] This analogy, while sometimes used by other Christological views, carries a specific Miaphysite formulation. The other christological groups would reject the term "composite" as causing a mixing of the natures to the loss of any distinction. Abu Ra'ita denies this in noting that the human body does not become part of the Word. Instead, the body is part of the "composite of the [incarnated] Word."[247]

This distinct Miaphysite Christological argument shows Islam to be a unique religious system in its understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Abu Ra'ita clearly recognizes that Islam is presenting a different view of Jesus, even if he is considered the "Word and Spirit" of Allah. The objections presented against Abu Ra'ita are those of one who denies something essential to his faith. He presents his argument such that one who denies this core doctrine must be considered outside the faith, not just having a different view. Abu Ra'ita knows that the other Christological positions could not use the same analogy that he does, yet he does not reject those formulations as non-Christian outright. He does note that one must accept the fact that the Word did become incarnate, at least in some sense, in order to be considered a Christian.

A second way that Miaphysites used Christology showing Islam as a distinct religion was in their discussion of how the divine and human natures in Christ were united. This direct address of Christology was handled by reactive teaching, as Abu Ra'ita does, and by proactive teaching on the subject as does Jacob of Edessa. In each case, the argument shows that their understanding of Christology led to the understanding of Islam as a unique religion.

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[246] Keating, Defending the "People of Truth," 231.

[247] Keating, Defending the "People of Truth," 227.

Abu Ra'ita presents his argument positively, though on the defensive. He details what it means to understand that Jesus is one in *hypostasis* and not two, and how this is unique from the *hypostases* of the Trinity. His second *Letter On the Incarnation* was a discussion focused on the doctrine of Christ.[248] In his previous work, he defended the doctrine of the Trinity, so Abu Ra'ita lays out some distinctions of his terms in Christological discussion. In his *Letter On the Incarnation*, Abu Ra'ita describes the hypostasis of the human and deity as being united in the same way that gold is even when it is present on multiple pieces of gold. If one is talking generally about pieces of gold, then it would be clear that mentioning "gold" would mean one could be talking about the nature of a single piece of gold or they could mean that they were talking about the nature of all of the gold on earth.[249] In any case, the new person of the incarnation is both God and human. According to Abu Ra'ita, the term "incarnated being" takes on new connotations than the "Incarnated One" doesn't carry. The "Incarnated One" is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word. The "incarnated being" is related to the composite being of the Second Person and the human nature. These two cannot be separated as if you had one without the other, you would either have the Word as a spirit, or a body without a soul.

Jacob of Edessa also presents his arguments in his teaching about Christ's nature through biblical interpretation. In his *Scholium XIII* (on 1 Samuel 16:12-13) Jacob argues that the Word is united to the humanity in a natural manner.[250] The passage he discusses in 1 Samuel is the anointing of David as king of Israel. In the biblical passage, Samuel arrives at the home of Jesse in Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice. Here, Samuel meets each of Jesse's elder sons until finally David is brought in. Samuel anoints David with oil as the next king of Israel. Jacob specifically

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[248] Keating, Defending the "People of Truth," 247.

[249] Keating, Defending the "People of Truth," 225.

[250] Jacob of Edessa, *Scholia,* 24-28.

notes that this is a foreshadowing of the incarnation of the Word. Jacob presents an allegorical understanding of the passage, with each character foreshadowing a type that is to come.

As it relates to the Incarnation, Jacob notes three characters in the story that point to Christ. The first is Samuel who represents the Word being commanded by the will of the Father to enter into humanity. Samuel is commanded to go to the home from which the anointed one would come which parallels the Word being commanded by the Father to take on human nature. Then Jesse and his sons point toward the humanity of Christ. Finally, the animal they are going to sacrifice points toward the coming sacrifice of Christ on the cross. For Jacob, this animal represents the two natures of Christ together into a new composite nature. He explains "All these [three preceding characters] gather together, and become a type figuring a great mystery."[251] It is not one or the other analogy that explains who Jesus is, but all of them together. Each piece of the passage points toward Christ and the unity of his natures into a new, composite being. Later, Jacob affirms this writing that in the animal, not only, "humanity which was bound in union and composition with the Word, God," but also that there would be an end to sacrifices when Christ was anointed as king. In this passage, Jacob even associates Bethlehem with Jesus' mother, Mary, who he refers to in typical Miaphysite fashion as the "mother of God."[252]

Both Abu Ra'ita's argument and Jacob's, when understood against the backdrop of an Islamic context, show they understood Islam to be a distinct religious system. In both arguments, the Christians presented their Christological view as distinct from that of Islam where Islam is a denial of a core doctrine. However, in this distinction, they do not engage in the same way they do other Christian Christological views. Abu Ra'ita's arguments use the form of distinct

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[251] Jacob of Edessa, *Scholia*, 25.

[252] Ibid.

analogies which relate to Islam. These are carefully selected so that he could be understood by his Muslim neighbors but are not the same that are used by other Christian groups. They have a specific focus on Islamic religious arguments. For example, Abu Ra'ita's direct discussion about Christ being "one incarnated hypostasis" as true God and true human, while tangentially addressing the issues in intra-Christian debates, is more focused on Islam. Beaumont argues that Abu Ra'ita presents this distinction because "Muslims used the term when insisting that God did not take a son in debate with Christians."[253] Abu Ra'ita used specific terminology in his debates with Christians and altered that, while maintaining consistent Miaphysite arguments, when talking to Muslims.

For Jacob of Edessa, his references to Mary as *Theotokos* or "bearer of God" along with his direct renunciation of Islam in several places, make it easier to understand his rejection of Islam as a new religious system. It could not be a Christian heresy or offshoot. He clearly understood that it was a unique religious system. While he was critical of other Christological positions, his arguments against Islam were presented as a system that presented itself as distinct and denied a core doctrine.

Chalcedonian Understanding of Islam

The Chalcedonians were not different from the Dyophysites and Miaphysites in their use of Christology to show Islam was a unique religious system. John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah were both direct in their arguments against Islam as a new religious system that was not Christian in any sense. Chalcedonians presented arguments both directly against Islam and in defense of Chalcedonian Christology in light of Islam as a new major

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[253] Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*, 52.

religious system. Two main types of arguments were used by Chalcedonians against Islam as a new religion in contrast to Christianity.

One of the ways Chalcedonians argued against Islam is in their discussion of orthodox Christianity. Orthodox belief was used as a positive defense against falsehood, whether heretical, as seen in the other Christological positions, or against other religious systems as in Islam. Both John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah engage in this. Rather than simply arguing against Islam, which he does extensively, John also desires to protect his readers from falsehood in the first place. The better one understands the orthodox Christian faith, the less likely one will accept falsehood. Daniel Sahas explains one of John's major desires was to strengthen the faith of those who read his work. He writes that while John intended to accurately portray the beliefs his Christian reader's Muslim neighbors, his writings are "a theological condemnation of Islam and, as such, a warning for the Christians."[254] John was not interested in simply attacking the false beliefs of Islam. He wanted his Christian readers to understand that their own theology mattered. John combated incorrect theology in general, and Christology in particular, by teaching correct theology.

Much has been made of John's identification of Islam in *On Heresies*. It has been argued that, because John lists Islam as a "heresy" it should be viewed as an offshoot of Christianity. This, however, ignores John's argument, which lies in his Christology. John arranges his argument in *On Heresies* following works that have come before. In this, he has distinctions between the various sects. For example, in John's first sentence in *On Heresies*, he mentions four "parents and archetypes of all heresies."[255] John labels the four groups of heresies

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[254] Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, 128.

[255] John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, I.

as "(1) Barbarism; (2) Scythism; (3) Hellenism; (4) Judaism."[256] He then explains what each of the four groups are and offers examples of each. These stretch from the beginning of time and are arranged chronologically, ending with Islam and the iconoclasts.[257] In the first twenty, there is no reference to the coming of Christ. These "heresies" were utterly distinct from Christianity as they pre-date the coming of Christ and deny core teaching of Christianity, namely that the Christ, who would be divine, was coming. It is not until the 70th heresy mentioned that John notes one who does not deny a core teaching of Christianity. Here, John specifically notes the "Audians form a schism and faction"[258] For several of the remaining heresies, John takes a more generous tone which does not appear to deny that they are Christian sects.

Turning to the other Christological views of Dyophysitism and Miaphysitism, John is more gracious with the Dyophysites and his early discussion of the Miaphysites. In these, he acknowledges both as having issues with terminology or personality.[259] However, John addresses one specific person of the Miaphysites who pushed the doctrine to the extreme of being called a "tritheist."[260] John sees this as moving beyond the status of a sect since it denies a core teaching of the faith. This helps show that John will allow for some of these "heresies" to be considered Christian, while others clearly make themselves distinct from Christianity by denying a core doctrine. John associates Islam with this latter position.

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[256] John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, I.

[257] There is a textual concern with how many chapters of *On Heresies* there are (100 vs 103). That is outside the scope of this paper. See Janosik, *John of Damascus*, 96-7 for a brief overview of this concern and resolution.

[258] John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, 70.

[259] John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, 81 and 83.

[260] John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, 83.2-3.

Another argument that the Chalcedonians use in their Christological apologetic is their understanding of what the full humanity and full divinity of Christ means. John of Damascus argues that those who did not accept the full deity and full humanity of the Son and Word of God, were the Forerunners of the Antichrist. [261] John writes, "Everyone, therefore, who confesses not that the Son of God came in the flesh and is *perfect God and became perfect man*, after being God, is Antichrist."[262] John is rephrasing 1 John 4:2-3. These verses present the same idea in nearly identical terms. In 1 John 4:2-3 (*ESV*), the author writes that the true "Spirit of God" will be known because "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

John sets the stage of his view of what it means to be a Christian. If one denies the full deity and full humanity of Christ, they are promoting a different religion than Christianity. For John, he saw many of these heretical positions as simply non-Christian positions. Some may have self-identified as Christian, but in John's view, they were distinct. They were separated from the orthodox, biblical position in John's mind because they denied one of the core claims of Christianity.

John's terminology here is important to his understanding of what it means to be Christian. As John is a stalwart Chalcedonian supporter, he is using specifically Chalcedonian language. While the representatives of other Christological groups may offer similar arguments to the deity and humanity of Christ, John's connection is to the Council of Chalcedon (451). The controversial council, after much resistance, put forward a statement on how the church should

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[261] Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, 68.

[262] John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 4.26. Emphasis added.

understand the person of Christ. The phrase John uses of the deity and humanity of Christ is a direct connection to the phrases "perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man."[263] These phrases would be known by the other groups and would not be affirmed in the sense John is using them. It is in this way that all of his discussion of any different view of Christology would be considered a different religion altogether. There was no room in John's argument for a heretical group to be a branch of Christianity. Instead, heresy should be understood to be a separate religious system. There may be shared terminology, as John clearly uses when he discusses the Nestorians and Eutychians. This, however, does not mean that John sees them as Christian. For John, all of these heretical views are non-Christian views.

Theodore Abu Qurrah also makes this argument in noting that the views of non-Chalcedonian views "lay claim to Christianity" but they are actually not Christian but are false forms of Christianity.[264] In his positioning of the Chalcedonian position, even these heretical groups, while being viewed as similar to the orthodox position, are actually non-Christian groups. In *On the Death of Christ*, Theodore writes to the Nestorian and Jacobite positions and calls them back to the true faith. He writes that the Nestorians "refuse God [their] worship and service and give it to this man instead"[265] Likewise, for the Miaphysites, Abu Qurrah suggests they have suggested that "God died in his divine nature" which goes beyond "the beasts in coarseness and Satan and his armies in insolence toward God."[266] These two texts, both written in Arabic, would clearly have stronger things to say about Islam. In this condemnation of the other

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[263] Rick Brannan, "The Symbol of Chalcedon," *Historic Creeds and Confessions* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2001), Logos Bible Software.

[264] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *On the Councils*, trans. John C. Lamoreaux (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2015), 61.

[265] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *On the Death of Christ*, B55.

[266] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *On the Death of Christ*, B56.

Christological groups, Abu Qurrah is showing that Christology is a point that would make one Christian or non-Christian. Since Islam has a lower view of Christ, as it relates to his divinity, than either the Miaphysite or Dyophysite view, Abu Qurrah is implying that it must be a unique religious system. Both John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah make specific arguments which separate them from other Christological groups. They present their arguments in light of what they deem to be heretical groups. In this they show their view to be the only Christian view. Any other views were seen as heretical, or better defined, non-Christian.

The second way that Chalcedonians argued against Islam as a distinct religious group was by arguing directly against what Islam taught using their Christology. Both John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah adjust their terminology to engage Islam with this distinction. As noted above in the Miaphysite arguments, terminological differences can show whether the author believes the reader is engaging a Christian position that is heretical or a position that is entirely outside of Christianity.

As noted above, John of Damascus suggested his readers position their Christology as understanding Jesus to be the "Word of God" as much as the "Son of God." In his discussions on Islam, he was much more prone to position his terminology in a way that taught his reader how to engage their Muslim neighbors, knowing they were trying to convert them to the religion of Christianity over against Islam. In John's argument, he argued that Christians should push on the Qur'anic passages that indicated Jesus was the "Word of Allah." In doing so, they would force their Muslim neighbors to admit that even the Islamic scriptures talk about Jesus in this way. John presents his argument such that to admit that Jesus is the Word of Allah means that if one denied his deity, then they would also deny the deity of their own God.[267] The terminological

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[267] John of Damascus, *Disputation*, 273.

shift shows Islam to be a unique religion because it is inconsistent with itself on the point of Christology.

Theodore Abu Qurrah likewise argues with specific Christological terminology to show Islam to be a different religious system. In his *Refutation of the Saracens* Abu Qurrah engages in a discussion of the suffering of Christ. His Muslim dialogue partner asks whether "God" died. In response, Theodore argues that Christ did die in his human nature, but not in his deity. The Muslim suggests that Theodore's argument requires that God ceased to exist at some point.[268] Theodore denies this using the analogy of the soul and body as two natures, united in a new composite being. In contrast, in a Chalcedonian maneuver, Theodore says that the two are not unified as a composite, as a Miaphysite would, but instead maintains the distinction after the union of natures.[269] This union of natures, not of will or desire as the Dyophysite would claim, means that Christ was able to suffer in his humanity and not in his divinity. The Muslim sees this as an inconsistency and asks how the Word can be "united with both [body and soul] and separated from neither."[270] Theodore's engagement then turns to show that the Christian understanding of Jesus means the Muslim understanding is a different religious system entirely. Theodore states if the claim that Christ being united with both body and soul in death, but separated from neither body nor soul is illogical, then Islam's God is also illogical. The Muslim claim of Allah is that he is omnipresent. In this, he would be able to be in more than one mosque at once. Theodore argues that if the Word cannot be united to body and soul while they were in the grave and hell, then the Muslim God cannot either be in two places at once. His Muslim dialogue partner does not want to follow this argument as he would have to affirm that

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[268] Theodore Abu Qurrah, *Refutations of the Saracens*, 223.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid.

Theodore's claims about Jesus are logically consistent, and thus true. Since it is clear that he would not do this, then it is clear that the two are distinct religious systems.

Conclusion

The earliest dialogue between Christians and Muslims is helpful to understanding the development of both religious systems. In this interaction, one can observe how each group understood the other and what that meant for each system. Islam clearly reacted against the paganism in ancient Arabic civilizations, much like Judaism and Christianity as they rose to prominence in their respective cultural milieu. How Christians understood Islam is also an important area where much can be learned. In the earliest Christian dialogues with Muslims, Christians understood Islam to be a distinct religion that made claims in direct contrast with Christianity. Christians did not view Islam as a Christian movement, but as something entirely unique.

Christianity and Islam have many points of contact, the most important being Christology. Sultan, writing from a Muslim perspective, rightly notes, "there is no question that the specific context of Arabia and the experiences of Prophet Muhammad's religious community form an essential background for Qur'anic teachings."[271] Ideas always have an historical context in which they form. The Qur'an responded to the rampant paganism of its time with an attempt to drive the Arabic people back to worship one god. As part of this, the Qur'an describes Christianity, when it follows its distinct Christological claims, in the same vein as the pagan religions of the surrounding culture. Given these distinct claims, Christians responded against Islam, recognizing that it was a distinct religious system and not merely a heretical branch of Christianity. While there are many potential areas of syncretism between Christianity and Islam, the three major Christological groups engaged Islam as something new. It was not a new

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[271] Sohaib N. Sultan, *The Qur'an and Sayings of Prophet Muhammad: Selections Annotated & Explained*, SkyLight Illuminations Series (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2007), xvi.

Docetism which denied Jesus's death. It was not Arianism restated, minimizing the deity of Christ. It was not a new version of Nestorianism, emphasizing the humanity of Christ while recognizing a unique status. The earliest Christians to engage Islam understood it to be a distinct religion, making claims that no Christian could rightly make. They recognized that Islam was a new religious system and needed to be addressed as such.

In a writing attributed to Abu Ra'ita known simply as *Christological Discussion*,[272] the three Christological views are pitted against each other in front of a Muslim. Arguments for each Christological position are offered, though with varying degrees of strength. The text is clearly Jacobite in composition. However, it still remains that the text was grounded in Christological differences among Christian groups. These positions were presented to another position for assessment as to which one was the most logical. In the way the document is presented, it is clear that the one assessing the arguments was not Christian. The person allowed to review the arguments was one who did not have a position involved in the argument, thus making it a unique religious system.

Other arguments against Islam show Christians recognized the distinction between what Christianity taught in comparison to Islam. These arguments were both positive and negative. Positive arguments commended the truth of Christianity while negative arguments articulated reasons Islam was false. While sharing some of these arguments, the three major Christological groups (Dyophysitism, Miaphysitism, and Chalcedonianism) each engaged Islam with their own unique arguments based on their Christology.

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[272] This is simply the title given to the text based on Graf's Arabic edition of Abu Ra'ita's writing. See Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth,"* 347ff for further discussion.

Much of contemporary scholarship has focused on either specific individuals and their interactions with Islam or along linguistic lines and how people who spoke the same language engaged Islam. This study focused on Christological groups and their interactions with Islam. This allowed a broader group, encompassing both the individuals and language groups to show how a variety of Christians engaged Islam. Each Christological position was represented by two individuals who used Greek, Arabic, and Syriac to dialogue with Muslims.

The Dyophysite Church of the East, represented by Timothy I of Baghdad and the Monk of Bet Hale, used distinct Dyophysite examples and analogies in arguing for their Christology. The Miaphysite Syrian Orthodox representatives, Jacob of Edessa and Hanib Ibn Khidma Abu Ra'ita likewise articulated their Christological position emphasizing the Union of the two natures of Christ. The Chalcedonians John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah presented Christology following the fourth ecumenical council. Each representative did this by pointing out distinctions between their Christological views and the other Christological groups. That this had to be explained is one way it is clear that Christians understood Islam to be a distinct religion rather than simply a branch of Christianity.

This study allows for a number of further areas to be uncovered. Given the surge in the last 20 years of Syriac and Arabic scholarship, additional attention could be offered to the churches from those language groups. As noted at the outset, much of scholarship still focuses on Byzantine reactions to Islam. Focusing further on those who are outside the Byzantine Empire will allow a clearer understanding of how Christians with the closest ties to Islam understood the new religious world power.

In addition, while much caution must be exercised, there could also be opportunity to engage the Qur'anic text to determine what influences there were on the writing of the Qur'an.

Given the terminological specificity in Christological discussions, the terms used in the Qur'an could offer suggestions on further research. A review of the Miaphysite tendencies of the Christians in Arabia would be one such area to explore. The Miaphysite emphasis on the divinity of Jesus along with a significant veneration of Mary could have led to a misunderstanding of what Christians taught about God and Mary's relationship, or even Mary's status as a human or divine being.

The Christian-Muslim dialogue is far from concluded. In the 21st century, it is clear that Christianity and Islam are two distinct religious systems. This has been the case from the earliest point, when early Christians argued, on the basis of their understanding of the person of Christ, that Islam was a unique religion. It was not thought of as an offshoot of Christianity, but instead was viewed as distinct. The representatives of different Christological views surveyed in this project show that they understood Islam to be making claims that could not fit into a Christian context. In their engagement, they sought to contextualize their Christology to help their Muslim neighbors turn to Christianity and to keep their Christian neighbors from moving into a false religious system that was not Christian.

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