

## THE LOST LEGACY OF CHRISTIANITY : AN ARAB CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY UNDER THE ABBASID CALIPHATE FOR MODERN MISSIONARIES AND DHIMMI CHURCH NO. 2

### KITAB AL-BURHAN OF AMMAR AL- BASRI, AN ARABIC THEOLOGY IN THE NINE CENTURY ABBASID AND ITS MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS TODAY

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저자 (Authors) Paul In Young Kim

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Paul In Young Kim\*

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\* Academic Dean of Zarephate Bible Seminary in Pakistan

## INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Why should we pay attention to a ninth century Arab Nestorian Christian? What do contemporary evangelical theologians have to do with the legacy of the Eastern Church? This paper developed from these questions and its examinations.

Interreligious discourse has become relevant field which theology must take seriously. Notably, Islam draws increasing attention from the Christian community for dialogue and apologetics. For more fruitful and informed dialogue with Muslim, evangelical Christianity requires drawing its rich theological heritage from the Eastern Church traditions.

Can the Eastern Church legacy be a tradition for the evangelical Christians? As D.H. Williams rightly argues, “all Christians are Catholic.” All Christians from Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox share the belief in “one holy catholic church,” are founded on Scripture and Great Traditions.<sup>1</sup> Thus, evangelicalism is called to “retrieve the Tradition”<sup>2</sup> to be a renewed, authentic Catholic Church. Doing theology is to live in a continuity of traditions, by reception and preservation and a “handing over” of it.<sup>3</sup> In this trajectory, doing contextual

1 D.H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 221.

2 Ibid., 36. Williams agrees that most scholars accept the delineation of Tradition: the one apostolic and patristic foundation which is the common history we have as Christians, one that is longer, larger, and richer than any of our separate and divided histories...

3 Ibid., 35.

theology in a particular context should be a part of continuing to “handing over” traditions. In that sense, what Arab Christians under Muslim rule during the ninth century produced is a part of the legacy of the universal Catholic Church and continuity of tradition, which will save Evangelical Christians from impoverishment by breaching from its rich heritage.<sup>4</sup>

This paper draws attention to *Ammar al-Basri* as an intersecting point of the Christian tradition of Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians being founded on Great Traditions, responding to the challenges that the Eastern Church faced in an Islamic context. In his historical trajectory, he received, preserved the Great Tradition handed down to him, and eventually transmitted to the next generations by doing contextual theology that responded to Muslim challenges.

As a *Dhimmi*<sup>5</sup> in Abbasid Caliphate, doing theology for *Ammar al-Basri* was a matter of Christian witness among the majority Muslim population and a way of expressing his identity as a Syrian Nestorian. Syrian Christians who produced Arabic literature in the interaction with the Abbasid Islamic context are not monophonic, but multiphonic with voices of three main Christian communities. *Theodore Abu Qurra* spoke Melkite voice; *Habib Ibn Hidma Abu Raitah* was for Jacobites; from *Ammar al-Basri* we can hear Nestorian (Eastern Syrian) voice. This paper will be assigned to introduce *Ammar al-Basri* as a contextual theologian

4 Ibid., 221–228.

5 *Dhimmi* refers to the occupied and “protected people” under the Muslim rule.

in his time and context. The method of this paper will be two layers. Firstly, this article will examine the peculiar features of the contents of *Kitab al-Burhan* that *Ammar al-Basri* produced as a contextual theology. The second layer will be the interaction with a contemporary scholarship to make *Ammar's* theology understandable and sensible to 21st-century readers of multi-religious context. During the research these questions will guide the discussion: What made him be a contextual theologian in his time and context; how can his theology be relevant and fruitful in a contemporary context?

## CONTEXT OF *AMMAR AL-BASRI*

*Ammar al-Basri* is known to be associated with the city of Basra and with the East-Syrian church.<sup>6</sup> His name appears in *Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim*, which writes that *Abu l-Hudhayl al-Allaf* wrote a book against *Ammar* in refutation.<sup>7</sup> This fact indicates that *Ammar* is a contemporary of *Abu l-Hudhayl al-Allaf* (died 840–850) and likely of *Mutawakkil* caliph (847–892). During the reign of *Mutawakkil* caliph (847–892), a decree issued to enforce discrimination for *dhimmis* (Christians and Jews) that “all *dhimmis* were required to wear yellow on their clothes.”<sup>8</sup> The legal

6 Beaumont, *Ammar al-Basri in Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, volume 1 (600–900) (Boston: Brill, 2009), 604.

7 Ibid.

8 Hugh Kennedy, *When Bagdad Ruled the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2006), 240.

measure of *dhimmi* originated from discriminatory policies such as “differential taxes” formulated by ‘Umar II of Umayyad caliph, but it can be traced to “Byzantine curbs on Jews (not building new synagogues, not giving testimony against Christians, not defaming Christianity, etc.) and Sassanian Persian regulations for distinguishing between nobles and commoners (not wearing the same headgear, overcoats, belts, shoes, and hairstyles of the superior group, etc.).”<sup>9</sup>

*Dhimmi* status is a peculiar and prevailing condition which Christians are under Muslim rule. Bat Ye’or defined the term “*dhimmis*” in the historical context of Islamic *Jihad*,

The *Jihad* was regarded as Islam’s instrument to transform the *Dar-al-Harb* into *Dar al-Islam*. After the conquest, the indigenous populations who submit to the rule of Islam are tolerated –if they are Jews or Christians –under a set of rule or “*dhimma*.” Those peoples subjected to these rules are called “*dhimmis*.” The pragmatic political factor that decided the fate of a *dhimmi* people is essentially a territorial dispossession. Therefore, *dhimmi* people are not just religious minorities...A possible definition of a *dhimmi* people is: “a non-Muslim people whose national territory has been conquered by *jihad*, subjugated to Islamic rule, and thereby Islamized.”<sup>10</sup>

9 Robert G. Hoyland, *In God’s Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 198.

10 Bat Ye’or, “Christians and Jews under Islam,” *Understanding Dhimmitude* (New York: RVP Press, 2013), 69.

The contextual reality of *dhimmi* was the crisis of Christian identity and survival as a *dhimmi* has been a serious problem in the long-term standpoint. Historical fact shows that the discriminatory status eventually presses “a steady decline through debilitation” of the Christian populations under Islamic rule throughout the centuries.<sup>11</sup> The context of *dhimmi* and sense of crisis of Christians spurred the Christian writers on to produce Arabic apologetics for their community against Islamic challenges.

Alongside the *dhimmi* context, Christians in ninth century–Abbasid Bagdad situated at the context in where three main forces converged. Firstly, Arabic-speaking Christians began to write their treatise or apologetics in the Arabic language for articulating their Christian doctrines in response to Muslim challenges. Secondly, the influence of Greek philosophy within Abbasid Caliphate became a formidable intellectual tool as a result of the translation movement. Moreover, thirdly the emergence of Mu'tazila and Islamic theological debate regarding divine attributes and Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) is prominent.<sup>12</sup>

Ninth-century Abbasid was a multifaceted fabric intertwined by many social, political, and religious threads and its religious fabric were colored by Islam, Christianity (Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites), and Zoroastrianism. Arabic became a *Lingua Franca* during Abbasid caliphate, and Syrian Christians even–

11 Ibid., 37.

12 Rick, Thomas W. *Developing the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu: Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*. Ph.D. Diss., (Washington: The Catholic University of America 2012),1.

tually accommodate the Arabic language while they kept using Syrian language in their liturgy and writings. Arabicization of language brought strong religious-cultural flavor in Abbasid society, and Syrian Christians actively involved translation project carried by Abbasid court, from Greek to Arabic or Syriac to Arabic. Moreover, this translation activity, with the linguistic ability and philosophical tools mainly Aristotle's, empowered Syrian Christians to produce contextual theology for both of Muslim and Christian readers.

Ricks well summarizes how translation movement created an intellectual milieu that enables Arabic Christians utilized its benefit for theological works. A great deal of Greek philosophy has become available as an intellectual apparatus for a Christian response to Islam. Some materials from Greek philosophy became a highly influential source for the art of public disputation utilized developed in Christian Arabic literature. Translation movement created a kind of neutral, intellectual criterion by which Muslims and non-Muslims alike could be measured, and used to prove the validity of the religious claim.<sup>13</sup>

In a wider perspective, the civilization of Abbasid Caliphate headed toward two main courses: "Arabization and Islamization."<sup>14</sup> The translation movement is a part of the process of Islamization. The accumulation of learning of Greek philosophy and science traditions enabled the development of the discipline of

13 Ibid., 12–15.

14 Hoyland, Robert G. *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 213.



Islamic ‘philosophical theology’ or *Kalam*.<sup>15</sup>

It is necessary to point out that the Abbasid is religiously plural society. Since Muslim conquered the Syria and Mesopotamia in the middle of the seventh century, Abbasid dynasty consisted of a large population of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Muslims. Moreover, as educated Christians participated in the intellectual formation of the Abbasid dynasty, a significant amount of Greek and Syriac literature was translated into Arabic by Syriac Christians.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, the theological debate was developed between different religious groups. So, they needed a standard tool for the religious dialogue and discussion since each religion rejected the Scriptures of other faiths. They found the Greek philosophies, neo-platonic philosophy with Aristotelian logic during the time, for the common tool for discussing in the assumption that “the most reasonable religion should be the correct one” by the standard of neo-platonic philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

Another political factor for the promotion of Intellectualism

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15 W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 37.

16 See Griffith’s *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, chapter 5, Christian Philosophy in Bagdad and Beyond, which discussed how Syrian Christians and Philosophers contributed the intellectual development of Abbasid at Bagdad, Christian’s contribution to the development of Islamic civilization is admitted by the fact that Christians worked in the court of Caliphate as translators of Greeks and Syriac literatures to Arabic. House of Wisdom and “translation movement” became the “house of knowledge and reason” of the Abbasid caliphate and the entire Islamic civilization in wider perspective. See Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom: How Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), Chapter 3 The House of Wisdom; Jim Al-Khalili, *The house of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Save us the Renaissance*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) Chapter 3 Translation.

17 Inman, 4.

can be found of early Abbasid's alliance with Mu'tazila and Hellenistic intellectual traditions to enforce his state Deputyship. Particularly Caliph Al-Mamun (813-33) promoted Mu'tazilites, the school that emphasized the role of rational argument in religious discourse, and applied caliphal official doctrine such as createdness of Qur'an to suppress rival "proto-Sunni Reporters," literal-minded groups.<sup>18</sup> In this situation, *Kalam* as "speech" or "talk" of the interreligious conversation was developed to articulate the formal, intellectual exercise in the systematic defense of the credibility of doctrines.<sup>19</sup>

It is a scholar's consensus that Syriac Christians of Iraq played an important part in translating Greek philosophies and scientific works into Arabic.<sup>20</sup> As Christians and Jews as "the protected people" became a part of Islamic civilization, and eventually they were able to "make a substantial contribution to the intellectual life of the Islamic world."<sup>21</sup> Christians found their place to involve in the project of translation movement as Caliph al-Mamun (813-833) founded an institution called 'House of

18 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 26-27.

Richard C. Martin schematizes "Mu'tazilites" versus "traditionalist" "as the contrary and conflicting intellectual religious trends" in Abbasids that formed on opposite edges of Islamic society and strove to "influence the religious, intellectual, and political center."

Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, DWI S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 12.

19 Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 46, 219.

20 John Watt, "Greek Philosophy and Syrian Culture" in "Abbasid Iraq" in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq*. Ed. Erica C.D. Hunter (Gorgias Press, 2009).

21 Hoyland, 219.

Wisdom (*bayt al-hikma*)<sup>22</sup> reinforced at a large-scale. Unequivocally, the House of Wisdom (*bayt al-hikma*) created an intellectual climate in that Christians vigorously involved in translation movement from eighth to tenth centuries Baghdad. This intellectual opportunity enabled Syrian Christians to imitate the way of Greek Church fathers' contextual theologizing. As Greek fathers had done theology with the source of Hellenistic philosophies in Hellenistic context, Syrian Christians did with Arabic language and Islamic sources with the Hellenistic intellectual apparatus in Arabic-Islamic context. Syrian Christian's biggest struggle was to "redefine their theological identity in a way that would make

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22 The widespread conception of the house of wisdom (*Bayt al-hikma*) is some away from the truth. Gutas devotes careful investigation to this topic and suggests a reconstruction of the nature and function of the *bayt al-hikma* (The house of wisdom): "It was a library, most likely established as a 'bureau' under *al-Mansur*, part of the 'Abbasid administration modeled on that of the Sassanians. Its primary function was to house both the activity and results of translations from Persia to Arabic of Sassanian history and culture. As such there were hired translators capable of performing this function as well as book binders for the preservation of book. This was its function in Sassanian times, and it retained it throughout the time of Harun *ar-Rashid*, i.e, the time of Barmkids. Under *al-Mamun* it appears to have gained an additional function related to astronomical and mathematical activities." Then, what is the relation of *bayt-al-hikma* with translation movement? Gutas concludes: "What the *bayt al-hikma* did do for the Greek-Arabic translation movement, however, is to foster a climate in which it could be both demanded and then conducted successfully. If indeed the *bayt al-hikma* was an 'Abbasid administrative bureau, then it institutionalized the Pahlavi into Arabic translation culture. This means that all the activities implied or suggested by this culture—the Zoroastrian ideology of the recovery of ancient Avestan texts through the retranslation of Greek works and all that implied—could be conducted as semi-official activities, or at least as condoned by official policy... the example set by the caliphs and the highest administrators was naturally followed by others of lesser rank, both civil servants and private individuals. Once the existence of this additional translational official—though indirectly so—sanctions for Greco-Arabic translations is realized, the origins and rapid spread of the movement in early 'Abbasid times is better understood." *Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th -10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998) 58-60.

senses to both the philosophers and the common Muslims,” and Greek philosophy and logic became an essential apparatus for it.<sup>23</sup> Griffith maintains, Christian scholars “also employ philosophical and logical thought in support of their faith commitments and to commend the philosophical life itself as a fruitful development that might provide the social possibility for harmony between Christians and Muslims in the caliphate.”<sup>24</sup> Christian apologetic treatises in the time of *Ammar* were to build an intellectual tradition in a way that Christians employ philosophy to interact with Muslims and shape Christian theology. The Christian philosophical endeavor becomes a major partner of classical Islamic intellectual culture. Consequently, the Church of the East eventually develops a contextual theology and self-identity in Arabic through inculturation in the world of Islam apart from the Constantine Christianity after the rise of Islam.

This intellectual opportunity enabled Syrian Christians to imitate the way of Greek Church fathers’ contextual theologizing. As Greek fathers had done theology with the source of Hellenistic philosophies in Hellenistic context, Syrian Christians did with Arabic language and Islamic sources with the Hellenistic intellectual apparatus in Arabic-Islamic context. “Syrian Christian’s biggest struggle was to redefine their theological identity in a way that would make senses to both the scholars and the common

23 Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, “*Ammar al-Basri’s Kitab al-Burhan: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Theology in the Ninth Century*,” Ph.D. Diss., (University of Birmingham, 2013), 29.

24 Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 108.

Muslims.”<sup>25</sup> Syrian Christians were successful not only to survive but stand firm “maintaining its liturgical tradition, theology, life and confess.”<sup>26</sup>

*Ammar’s* treatise appeared in this milieu as Christian apology against Islamic challenges. As the name of the book *Kitab al-Burhan* indicates, *Ammar* likely wrote the book in response to the challenges of the Qur’an suras “Produce your proof (*Burhan*) if you are the people who speak truth”(2:111). *Ammar* wrote “the book of the proof (*Kitab al-Burhan*)” for apologetics to defend his Christian faith against Muslim’s accusation.<sup>27</sup>

In the context of a formative period of the *Abbasid*, he was one of the first generation of Christian theologians to take Islam seriously, as to theologize in the midst of the Islamic context.<sup>28</sup> It is plausible to assess *Ammar al-Basri* as a contextual theologian in the milieu of the *Abbasid* rule.

## MAIN THEOLOGICAL FEATURES OF *AMMAR AL-BASRI*

*Ammar al-Basri* is known to have produced two works: *the book of questions and answers* and *the book of proof*. His first book belongs to the popular genre of “questions and answers” among

25 Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, “*Ammar al-Basri’s Kitab al-Burhan: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Theology in the Ninth Century*,” Ph.D. Diss., (University of Birmingham, 2013), 29.

26 Ibid., 30.

27 David H Vila, *Arab Christians and Islam: Conflicts and Contributions* (Christian Scholar’s Review; Summer 2005;34,4; ProQuest Central), 451.

28 Mikhail, 34–35.

Christian writers who responded to the issues raised by Muslims. His precedent Theodore Bar Koni seems to be a first Syriac writer who wrote *scholion*, “Question and Answer” style of literary work written in response to the religious challenge of Islam.<sup>29</sup> *Ammar’s* first work, *Kitab al masail wa l-ajwiwah*, the “Book of Questions and Answers” represents the highly developed form of “questions and answers” literary work defending the credibility of Christianity in the dialogue of his contemporary *mutakallimun* Arab speaking Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

The second work, “Book of the Proof” belongs to the literary genre of the systematic treatise, which Arab Christians produced to discuss all the topics at issue between Christians and Muslims.<sup>31</sup> *Burhan* is “the earliest known apology” for Christianity written in Arabic. Its significance is the fact that *Ammar’s* defense “relies more on rational arguments than on Scripture and tradition.”<sup>32</sup> The topics discussed in “Book of the Proof” appear as a standard and relevant topic for theological discussion with Muslims.<sup>33</sup> The examination of *Ammar’s* “Book of the Proof (*Kitab al-Burhan*)” the paper will refer to the translation produced by Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail.<sup>34</sup>

*Ammar* starts his discussion to prove that Christianity is the

29 Griffith, 80.

30 Ibid., 83–84.

31 Griffith, 88.

32 Beaumont, 609.

33 Mikhail, 48.

34 Wageeh Y.F. Mikhail, ‘*Ammar al-Basri’s Kitab al-Burhan: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Theology in the Ninth Century* Ph.D. Diss., (University of Birmingham, 2013).

true religion of God. *Ammar* proposes ‘generosity of God’ as a proof for true religion, and the concept of kindness is shared by his contemporary *Mu’tazili* theologians such as *Abu al-Hudhayl al-Allaf*.<sup>35</sup> To persuade readers, *Ammar* utilized shared doctrines with Muslim counterparts as a starting point for apologetics.<sup>36</sup>

Above all, *Ammar* presents a lack of miracle as the proof of false religion. However, in the context of Islam, which punishes any disrespect remarks against Muhammad and Islam, Christian writers including *Ammar al-Basri* either avoided speaking of Muhammad or spoke in a vague manner about his validity of prophethood.<sup>37</sup>

## Method

*Ammar* employed and even quoted Greek sages, Plato and Aristotle as the starting point of his discussion on the oneness of God: “We see that Greek sages such as Plato and Aristotle testifying that God is one.”<sup>38</sup>

In the section of “Proofs of the True Religion,” he presents three arguments of evidence. God is wise and generous; God commanded to love another and forbade them from harming one another; God will regard our prayers to Him in a way that are most beneficial to us.<sup>39</sup>

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35 Ibid., 50.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 68.

38 Ibid., 352.

39 Ibid., 353–354.

For *Ammar*, the most compelling proof for the true religion is “the signs”: His revelation of the signs at the hands is more useful to people and more plausible to them for attaining the knowledge of His religion...<sup>40</sup> *Ammar* claimed Christianity as the true religion, which was established by miracles and signs. Also, for *Ammar*, the miracles occurred for a limited period to establish true religion on the earth. Thus, the God-given sign came to an end since God’s true religion was already established through them.

Then *Ammar* examines other religions by this criterion of the sign. Afterward, in addition to miracle discussion, *Ammar* points that religions were devised on the basis of other “five human causes apart from signs.”<sup>41</sup>

The list of worldly motives includes the sword, bribery, and payments, fanaticism, approval, and collusion. *Ammar* analyzed that Judaism and Islam are the religion are established by human cause. *Ammar* concludes, “So these religions that might be established by these things, or by some of them, are not the religion of God.”<sup>42</sup>

Afterward, *Ammar* turns to and examines Christianity by the criterion of human causes such as collusion, bribes and financial payment, fanaticism, reasoned approval (*al-istihsan*), the license on the laws, the illusions, and specious proofs of sorcery. The result of examination shows that Christian religion was not established by any of human causes in contrary to other religions. This list implicitly discloses that the religion of Islam is not exception-

40 Ibid., 358.

41 Ibid., 359.

42 Ibid., 360.



al, and at the same time warns Christian who are converting to Islam by the wrong motives.

A remarkable argument of *Ammar* is that he excludes any possibility of discerning the true religion through human reason.<sup>43</sup> Further, *Ammar* argues that Christianity does not comply with “reasoned approval,” rather it is entirely “at variance with that.”<sup>44</sup> Thus Christianity was not devised by human reason but by God. *Ammar* lists ten doctrines in Christianity, which “reasoned opinion does not devise, that do not arise in mind, that do not come to mind and that reason does not imagine.”<sup>45</sup> Those doctrines are the virginal conception, the virgin birth; the child that was born was Son of God; the Son of God was crucified, died, and was buried; he rose from the grave, he ascended into heaven; he will come again to raise the dead and judge the righteous and the unrighteous; apostle called people to the worship of the Crucified one, to the bearing of heavy burdens; Apostle proclaimed another world without promising worldly pleasure and without looking for the pleasures of food, drink, and sex either in this life or the life to come; belief in a God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> In proving the credibility of Christian religion, *Ammar* concludes,<sup>47</sup>

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So it is clear that the Christian religion was not established

43 Mark N. Swanson, *Apology or its Evasion? Some Ninth-Century Arabic Christian Texts on Discerning the True Religion* (Currents in Theology and Mission 37:5, 2010), 385.

44 Swanson, 396; Mikhail, 36.

45 Ibid.,

46 Swanson, 396; Mikhail 364.

47 Mikhail, 365.

by acceptance on account of the approval of minds, and that neither common opinion, nor lust, nor power was the reason for its acceptance, for it opposed the power of authority and rule and such like, and souls were submitted to the cross and carrying of injury and dishonor. And it opposed to reason and the wisdom of the wise as it contradicts what is not in their wisdom, and it opposed their wisdom. And it opposed pleasure by prohibiting lust and pleasure while commanding devotion to fasting and prayer.

*Ammar's* methodological tension between using human reason for proving Christianity as true religion and incapability of perceiving Christianity through human reason appears in his arguments. He admits that Christianity is not devised and proved by human reason, yet to demonstrate the truth of Christian religion *Ammar* employed mainly human reasoning apart from quoting any scriptures. This method can be understandable since each religion cannot prove its truth from own Scriptures, rather should present the proof based on the conventional method of reasoning.

Afterward, *Ammar* refutes the charge of corrupting the Scripture. He reasons that the miracles established Christian religion and that miracles and wonders confirmed the Scripture” it is impossible that the Scripture was corrupted.<sup>48</sup> Further *Ammar* argues, it is impossible that the Scripture has been corrupted “without the compulsion of miracles just as it was accept-

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48 Ibid., 368.

ed,” and “since miracles are not performed at the hands of those who corrupt the Books of God, it becomes evident that no corruption ever happened after the nations accepted it.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, *Ammar* refutes the accusation of Muslims that Christian kings forced the people to corrupt the Gospel by arguing that it is impossible Christians across over the many nations and even under different religions united to alter or corrupt the Bible.<sup>50</sup> *Ammar* concludes, “it has become obvious that the gospel has never been corrupted or altered, either in its revealed text or its interpretation, from that which Christians agreed upon.”<sup>51</sup>

In a discussion of Qur’an, his arguments were based on the use of reasons since contemporary Muslim counterparts employed a method based on reason. *Ammar al-Basri* also relied on reason as a common ground as well as a strategy to refute that Qur’an’s validity as a tradition. It seems apparently relevant and safe for *Ammar* as *dhimmi* to use rational arguments, rather than direct religious accusation. He is not accusing Islam as “a religion of sword” explicitly. Instead, he refers to Islamic armies utilized the power of the sword in their war against other nations.<sup>52</sup> Thus he avoids taking the risk of bold accusation against Islam, which is punishable severely as the sin of blasphemy.<sup>53</sup>

Due to the regulations for *Dhimmi* not to speak against the

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49 Ibid.,

50 Ibid., 369–370.

51 Ibid., 372.

52 Ibid., 77.

53 Ibid., 78.

Qur'an, Muhammad, and Islam, the possible way for *Ammar al-Basri* was to employ philosophical concepts to defend the validity of Christianity and the validity of the Bible; he had to use reason as a common ground to argue with Muslims. Moreover, *Ammar* used his contemporary *Kalam* concepts to “validate” his Christian position.<sup>54</sup>

### Trinity

*Ammar al-Basri* employed a shared logic used by other Arabic Christians to defend Trinity: ‘Word’ and ‘life’ for the Son and the Holy Spirit; that God is dead without speech and life, and thus became idol without life and speech. His arguments of questioning Islamic concept of the One God without word and life are noteworthy. The debate of both the life and Word are essential and eternal leads to the defending of Trinity. He argues,<sup>55</sup>

We are blameless before God concerning the accusation of speaking of three gods. On the contrary, in saying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we only want to affirm that God is ‘living’ and ‘speaking.’ The Father is the one we refer to as having “life” and “word.” “Life” is the Holy Spirit and the Word” is the Son

54 Ibid., 148.

55 Ibid., 374.

*Ammar al-Basri* argues to refute the Muslim's accusation of tri-theism is that "God is one with two essential attributes, the attributes of life and speech."<sup>56</sup> To communicate the doctrine of Trinity to contemporary Muslims, Rick observes, Arab Christians of the ninth century including *Ammar al-Basri* employed the triple strategy. That is, to show that Trinity is authentic to God's revelation supported by the prophets; and by the language of the Qur'an itself; and it is also authentic to the philosophical heritage of Aristotelian metaphysics and Plato.<sup>57</sup> As *Ammar's* contemporary *Mu'tazili* theologians are so committed to the Islamic doctrine of *Tawhid* (Oneness of God), he employed their *kalam* logic to prove the credibility of Trinity. *Ammar* concludes, "Therefore, the triune nature of these things does not negate their oneness; neither does their oneness negate their triune nature."<sup>58</sup>

Another remarkable method to defend Trinity of *Ammar* is his various analogies, such as soul with its word and life; Sun with its heat and light, which allude Greek fathers Tertullian and Syrian father Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>59</sup> *Ammar's* using analogies to explain the credibility of Trinity echoes his precedent Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I who presented an apology against the Caliph *Mah-di's* accusation of "three gods" around a century ago.<sup>60</sup> Swanson

56 Ibid., 152.

57 Thomas W. Rick, "Developing the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu: Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology," Ph.D Diss., (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2012), 15.

58 Mikhail, 375.

59 Mikhail, 153.

60 Patriarch Timothy I, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity, trans. and ed. With a Critical Apparatus A. Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic,*

points that Muslim's criticism of Christian tritheism remains as the unchanging issues of Christian-Muslim conversation.<sup>61</sup> The Quranic criticism for the Trinity remain strong as a scandal.<sup>62</sup>

## Incarnation

*Ammar* understands the incarnation in the continuing benevolent divine act of creation of human being. *Ammar* explains

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*and Garshuni*, vol.2 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1928), 69.

In the response to the *Mahdi's* accusation that Christians believe in "three gods," Timothy employs three analogies to articulate the doctrine of trinity: the sun with its light and heat; the analogy of humanity; and analogy of Gold and gold coins. Analogy of human elements employed by Timothy I is similar with the Augustine's "Psychological analogy" for trinity which assumes that human image of God reflects of trinity such as mind, Knowledge and love and; human tri-economy of body, soul and spirit. (St. Augustine, "Psychological: mental Image, First Draft" in *The Trinity*, intro, trans, and notes Edmund Hill, O.P. Ed. E. Rotelle, O.S.A. New York: New City Press, 1991, pt, 1 vol, 5, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, 271-282.) Timothy's remarks of 'Three in the number of the denarii coins and one in its nature' is in parallel with Gregory of Nyssa's analogy of 'Gold-gold coins appeared in "On not Three Gods," Gregory of Nyssa employs the analogy of gold and its many coins and states, "there may be many golden staters, but gold is one" (p.265) Gregory's discussion on the trinity "On not Three Gods" was primarily written to answer to Ablabius, a younger bishop who questioned the false notion on Trinity that compelled others to say that there is three gods; either we must deny divinity to the Son and the Holy Spirit, His arguments may effective to defend the unity of God, however, analogy of the Gold and coins and "mode of divine existence" shows embryonic stage of doctrinal development of trinity. (Gregory of Nyssa, *An Answer to Ablabius: That We Should Not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods, In Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed, Edward R, Hardy, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954, vol. 3, Library of Christian Classics, 265-267.)

61 Mark N, Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation" in *Dialogue* (A Journal of Theology vol, 44:3, 2005), 257.

62 "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messenger, and say not, "Three." Refrain; better is it for you, God is only One God, Glory be to Him- that He should have a son?"(Q4:171); And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, "Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God'?" He said, "To Thee be the glory! It is not mine to say what I have no right to."(Q5:116).

that the reasons for “the manifestation of the Creator to His creatures” are to “perfect what he had begun in humanity out of His generosity and kindness, thus manifesting His wisdom and justice.”<sup>63</sup> The incarnation is to “show His wisdom, justice, and love for His creatures by bringing them closer to knowing Him.”<sup>64</sup> The “imprinted” knowledge of God in human souls is not sufficient and does not stand firm, and only “through His appearance to us” we can find rest and banish the doubts, and then our worship can be pure.<sup>65</sup> To *Ammar*, the second reason of Incarnation is to demonstrate His love for His creatures. Incarnation “introduce joy” to, removes doubts from, and show kindness to humans, and fulfill their needs and their desires.<sup>66</sup> Third reason of Incarnation is to demonstrate His favor and justice. The fourth reason of incarnation is to bestow His generosity on us and make us honorable like Him. Incarnation “does not diminish or belittle God in anyway; rather it assures of God’s favor and generosity…elevating them to a higher place to the benefit of all. The true honor humans can ever be given is that God has manifested God self in a body like their own.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, through incarnation “God in Christ’s body lifted the bodies of humans to the state of sonship.”<sup>68</sup> *Ammar’s* understanding of blessing brought by Incarnation alludes Athanasius’s dictum of “*for he was made*

63 Ibid., 387.

64 Ibid., 388.

65 Ibid.,

66 Ibid., 390.

67 Ibid., 227–228.

68 Ibid., 235.

a man that we might be made God,” and theosis of the Eastern Orthodox theology.<sup>69</sup>

To vindicate credibility of incarnation, *Ammar* uses Islamic understanding of Anthropomorphism regarding God’s thrones: “God seated on a throne.” God is not limited in any physical throne; rather it is a metaphorical understanding likely incarnation does not input God into the created body. *Ammar* asserts, “Christ’s body has become for us like the throne in the heavens.”<sup>70</sup>

*Ammar’s* four arguments of proofs substantiating the Christian doctrine of the incarnation are formidable. The Incarnation stems from divine generosity; it answers the human desire for knowledge of God; it meets the need for people to see the God who will be their judge; it is God’s gift to honor humans by giving them authority over the hereafter.<sup>71</sup> *Ammar’s* explanation on what Incarnation achieved alludes Irenaeus’s idea of ‘recapitulation’ shown in “*Against Heresies*”: “Adam’s disobedience was ‘recapitulated’ by Jesus Christ, second Adam.”<sup>72</sup>

69 St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 107–108. “Let him marvel that through such a paltry thing things divine have been manifested to us, ..., the very Word of God, have been made known, For he was incarnate that we might be god; and he manifested himself through a body that we might received an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured the insults if human beings, that we might inherit incorruptibility...And that by death immortality has reached to all, and that by the Word becoming man, the universal providence has been known, and its giver and artificer the very Word of God, *For he was made man that we might be made God;* and he manifested himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and he endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality.”

70 Mikhail, 245.

71 Ibid., 260.

72 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, The Library of Christian Classics vol. 1 Early Christian Fathers translated and edited by Richardson, Cyril C. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), Book v, 19.



After the first man fell from rank due to his disobedience, and after his departure from paradise when he became the subject of wrath, being placed under the death after having been cut off from any hope of life, He manifested Himself in a human being from among us and took him with Him in dominion and dignity. ...He raised himself from death and made his governing king over that which is heaven and earth.<sup>73</sup>

*Ammar al-Basri* refutes Muslims' charge that belief in Christ's death on a cross imputes weakness to God's being. Rather he maintains that "the cross does not imply any weakness in God's character, but rather that it is God's power that is revealed in the cross of Christ, as God relieves humanity of the anxiety of sin and death."<sup>74</sup> It is noteworthy that *Ammar al-Basri* implies Nestorian interpretations that only human nature of Christ was crucified on the cross, not God himself. Thus, he can avoid Muslim's accusation against Christians about the death of God.

## *KITAB AL BUTHAN AS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY*

Robin Boyd rightly perceived the Syrian tradition as a valid source for doing contextual Indian Christian theology.<sup>75</sup> Syrian tradition has not entirely preserved and developed in the Indian

73 Mikhail, 396.

74 Ibid., 262.

75 Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISFCK, 1975), 7-11.

theological works while Syrian tradition largely preserved in the field of liturgy. The presence of Syrian traditions in Indian church is strong enough to remind them the root of their Christian identity. As Vinay Samuel notes, “affirmation and recovery of their Christian identities” is important and crucial for effective inculturation.<sup>76</sup> In other words, obtaining and development of Christian identity are essential to engage evangelism with surrounding other religious counterparts.

For instance, Pakistan Christians more or less fail to engage with Muslims around them in a meaningful way. The most prominent reason is due to their weak and even underdeveloped Christian identity. Most likely, the Pakistan Christian’s failure of meaningful engagement with Muslim-majority is due to the failure of development of their Christian identity.

Doing contextual theology is a paramount task. It should be faithful to Christian traditions (the Scripture and ecumenical traditions) and also relevant to the contemporary context. Early church fathers and Western church traditions are almost universally accepted as a criterion to assess any theology whether it is orthodoxy or not. However, a western tradition almost keeps silent about the existence of Islam except for John of Damascus, the last Greek Church father, as it has evolved lately. Scholars admitted that study of Christian apologetics during the middle Ages or under Arab world had been marginalized.<sup>77</sup> So, to find

<sup>76</sup> Yung, 202.

<sup>77</sup> Kerry, Inman V. *Christian Apologetics during the Other Middle Ages under Muslim Rule* (Read at the 32nd Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies Conference, 2007), 2.

its resources for doing contextual theology, evangelical churches under Islam are called to pay attention to the most neglected or misunderstood time and region of the Christian Church, the legacy of the Eastern Church during Muslim caliphates.

*Ammar al-Basri* appeared as a representative of a contextual theologian during *Abbasid* caliphate in the 9th century. Again, it should be noted that quest of *Ammar al-Basri* is not purely academic aspiration or a speculative task. He evolved as a contextual theologian.

### Enculturation

*Ammar's* enculturation appeared in his apologetics against contemporary Muslims has two main features. One is his using philosophical concepts, particularly Aristotelian metaphysics to persuade the credibility of Trinity doctrine. The other one is employing Quranic language and contemporary Islamic theology for his arguments. Arabic speaking Christians in ninth century used the *Kalam* logic to articulate Christian doctrines to the modern Muslim counterparts. For example, *Ammar al-Basri* attempted to prove the credibility of Trinity by the reasoning of Trinity “as the divine essence endowed with supreme attributes.”<sup>78</sup> *Ammar's* strategy was to employ *Mu'tazili* debate regarding the relation between absolute oneness of God and attributes such as knowledge, power, and life. Moreover, by the whole, he successfully

78 David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3.

presented “a neat proof” of Trinity by identifying the Holy Spirit as God the life-giver and the Son of God the Word in a way that Muslims theologian would understand.<sup>79</sup>

Mikhail appraises *Ammar's* works as a “true enculturation” through that Arab Christian theology was successfully translated into the context of Islam.<sup>80</sup> Notably, the Quranic terms, “Word” and “Spirit” referring Christ and Holy Spirit has been presented to build his argument to defend the credibility of the Trinity.<sup>81</sup> Samir Khalil resonates likewise that during the *Abbasid* the Qur'an itself became “a part of Arab Christians' mindset,” and Christian apologetics employed the Qur'an as “a source of their theological articulations.”<sup>82</sup> It is appraisal to conclude that *Ammar's* works were a product of an enculturation in his Islamic context and culture. Mikhail description of *Ammar's* method indisputably shows a strategy of enculturation.<sup>83</sup>

The author is impregnated with the Quranic culture. He does not live in a ‘Christian ghetto.’ He shares with Muslims the common Arabic culture, which carries many Quranic words and expressions, and a certain style and even some Muslim thoughts.

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79 Ibid., 4.

80 Mikhail, 320.

81 Rick, 198–204, 233.

82 Samir Khalil and Jorgen S. Nielsen, ed. *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 109.

83 Mikhail, 320–321.

The topics discussed in the *Kitab al-Burhan* are theological problems raised by Muslims, and *Ammar* discussed them in his context. Particularly, the doctrinal matters such as ‘the Trinity and Incarnation’ and accusation of *Tahrif* (the corruption of the Gospel), and practical issues of Christian venerating cross and icons have been prolific subjects having repeated throughout the centuries since Islam occupied the former territory of Christian populations.<sup>84</sup>

Griffith observes that the context provoked the composition of Christian apologetic works written by *Jacobites Habib Ibn Hidmah Abu Ra'itah*, *Melkite Theodore Abu Qurrah*, and Nestorian *Ammar al-Basri* “not only the doctrinal challenge of the Qur'an but the sociological fact of the conversion of Christians to Islam.”<sup>85</sup>

Another notable feature is the relevant way *Ammar* employed Qur'an and Islamic belief. *Dhimmi* status seemed to influence *Ammar al-Basri* to avoid direct criticism of the Qur'an, direct naming *Muhammad* and Islam in a negative way. The *Ammar's* attitude shows that he was conscious well his *dhimmi* status, which was vulnerable to the accusation of being blasphemy against Islam, Qur'an, and *Muhammad*.<sup>86</sup> However, *Ammar* very wisely uses both direct and indirect quotes from the Qur'an. Moreover, his book derives its name from Sura 2:111, which challenges (people of the book) *ahal-e kitab* to present proof (*Burhan*) for the

84 Sidney Griffith, *Syrian Christian Writers in the World of Islam* (unpublished 2015), 2.

85 *Ibid.*, 11.

86 Mikhail, 316.

validity of their faith. Accordingly, it is plausible to conclude that *Ammar* is among Arab Christians who took the Islamic theology seriously as an intellectual undertaking and began to use it to defend the Christian faith.<sup>87</sup>

### Pastoral and Missional Concerns of *Ammar*

In *Kitab-Al-Burhan*, *Ammar's* pastoral and missional concerns are undoubtedly displayed. Mikhail rejects Sidney Griffith's claim of *Ammar's* works as being a Christian *Kalam*<sup>88</sup> in the sense of Christian corresponding to Muslim *mutakallimun*.<sup>89</sup> He declines to see *Kitab al-Burhan* as a mere "intellectual treatise corresponded with the *Mu'tazili*"<sup>90</sup> However, more or less it is not deniable that *Ammar* employed the method of contemporary *Mu'tazili* as common ground to discourse religious reputations.

87 Thomas, 5.

88 Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, DWI S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 8.

Arabic term "kalam" Literal meaning is "speech" or "discourse," and accurately implies "the discipline of disputing religion" or simply "theology."

89 Mikhail, 328.

Mutakallimun are theologians who "pursued verbal controversy about the matter of religious belief." Theological disputes includes topics of "nature of God and His attributes, scripture, prophets, good and evil, and the religious foundations of political authority and order." Richard C. Martin, 8.

90 *Mu'tazili* implies a Muslim "rationalist" theological school which began in the teaching circle of the ascetic and pious Shaykh al-Hassan al-Basri (d.728)<sup>25</sup>. For the historical development of *Mu'tazili* school, see Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, DWI S. Atmaja, "Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol" (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997). Chapter Two. "The Rise and Fall of the *Mu'tazilia* in Premodern Islam."

By and large, *Kitab al-Burhan* was a “testimony to the unfolding of the divine economy.”<sup>91</sup> Mikhail maintains that *Burhan* is a work written out of his pastoral concern and offered to Christians who were demanded to present proof of credibility of Christianity and were enforced to convert to Islam under intense socio-political pressures as *dhimmis*.<sup>92</sup> So it is right to see *Burhan* as pastoral concerns to support the Christian community in “*Dar al-Islam*” to stand firm and “ready to give a reason for their hope.” (1Peter 3:16) “*Ammar* was a man of his age who was under pressure to provide a proof of credibility of Christian faith. The socio-religious circumstance seems to provoke a crisis of faith, which led him to compose his *Kitab al-Burhan* as a ‘literature of resistance.’ The *Burhan* is the fruit of *Ammar*’s struggle against the crisis and evolved as his strategy to-articulates his religious identity.”<sup>93</sup>

One of the main factors which brought out the crisis of Christian community at the time of *Ammar* was “the enhanced incentive to convert to Islam started to develop for the eighth century. *Abbasids* promoted the conversion of non-Muslims, and a large number of Christian was tempted to convert to Islam for the upward mobility to better or maintain their social position. Thus, Christian leaders felt pastoral pressures to produce persuasive apologetics for Christians to prevent further apostasy.”<sup>94</sup> *Ammar*’s

91 Mikhail, 328.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 330.

94 Ricks, 5–6.

two works reflected these pastoral concerns, and *Kitab al-masail wa al-ajwibah* is primarily written for Christians exclusively as a manual of theological dialogue with Muslims and *Kita al-Burhan* for both Muslims and Christians. It is apparent that *Ammar* aims to “re-articulate the truth of Christianity in vocabulary for his Muslim context,”<sup>95</sup> out of his compelling pastoral and missional concerns.

## RELEVANCY OF *BURHAN* IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

In his compelling scenario in “God’s Continent,” Phillip Jenkins echoed the impending crisis of “*Eurabia*” (new terminology implying Arabized Europe) due to the demographic change of low fertility rate in Europe and Muslim immigration into Europe.<sup>96</sup> The fact of the growing population of Muslims in Europe and prevailing fertility rates of the Muslim population should not be dismissed lightly. The sense of crisis introduced by the contemporary Islam is reminiscent of the struggles of Christians under the Muslim rulers in early Islamic centuries.

*Ammar’s* theology apparently reflects the Christian struggle under Islamic context to define their doctrinal identity as well as demonstrates missional and pastoral concerns. Arguments used

95 Mikhail, 330.

96 Phillip Jenkins, *God’s Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe’s Religious Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–4, 8.



in *Ammar's Buran* appear in works of his predecessors, his contemporaries, his successors, and even modern contemporary Arab Christians. Particularly *Ammars'* arguments for Trinity appeared in several modern Arab Christians. As Mikhail rightly observed, the primary factor of continuity of theological topic is the fact that Islam's objections to Christianity have not changed fundamentally.<sup>97</sup> Hugh Goddard's findings are not different from Mikhail's. The conclusions of Goddard's examination suggests that modern Muslim materials on Christianity published in Egypt mainly reproduce the medieval themes with few exceptions.<sup>98</sup> Mikhail notes, "The fact that such objections have remained unchanged has enabled Arab Christians, especially those living within *Dar al-Islam*, to draw insights from their long heritage to utilize ancient answers once again."<sup>99</sup> However, as a result, it negatively impeded the development of new theological thoughts among Arab Christians, as they engaged exhaustively in responding to unchanging

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97 Mikhail, 335.

98 Hugh Goddard investigates the themes and features of the medieval period, which reappears consistently and significantly in the modern period, particularly in Muslim works related to Christian-Muslim discourse in Egypt. The five major subjects which dominated in the medieval discussion is suggested: Christology, the Trinity, the Bible and *tahrīf*; the position of Christians within the Islamic society, and finally the historical corruption of Christianity. Goddard's short analysis of modern Egyptian Muslim literature on Christianity is a productive attempt to answer the question whether the medieval themes of Christian-Muslim discussion remains unchanged or develop significantly. According to Goddard's findings, the medieval themes are reproduced significantly with only a few exceptions and developed by several influences. Goddard, Hugh, "The Persistent Medieval Themes in Modern Christian-Muslim Discussion in Egypt." *In Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil and Joregen Nielsen. (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 225-237.

99 Ibid.

theological topics that Muslims address.<sup>100</sup> Goddard concludes that Muslim-Christian discussion still repeats the medieval themes consistently with only limited development. His critical reflection points out that the unparalleled lack of Christian literature written in response to Muslim criticism can be a severe deficit in Christian-Muslim Relation in modern Egypt considering the inflammatory relationship between Muslims and Christians.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, this unbalance in Christian-Muslim discussion calls for more robust and faithful Christian discourse and equally breaking new ground for Muslim-Christian discussion.

As Mikhail rightly observed, *Ammar's Burhan* is “an excellent example of an attempt to contextualize Christianity within *Dar al-Islam*.”<sup>102</sup> Mikhail questions the relevancy of the Greek formulations in the Arab context: How can Greek theologian formulae create to address Greek concerns and theological issues in a Greek Milieu, be useful today in a Muslim context?<sup>103</sup> Mikhail presents *Ammar's Burhan* as a positive example that maintained “a balance between his Christian heritage and his contemporary Islamic context.”<sup>104</sup> Mikhail calls to contextualize theology relevant to Arab context that “Modern Arab Church will succeed in preserving its apostolic faith, having Arabicized it.”<sup>105</sup> To defend the Christian faith, *Ammar* demonstrates his Christian

100 Ibid.

101 Goddard, 232–233.

102 Ibid., 342.

103 Ibid., 343–344.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

ecumenism by emphasizing that Christian groups agree that “God appeared in the flesh,” even while he disagrees with Christology of Melkites and Jacobites.<sup>106</sup>

In the modern Christian–Muslim relation, it should be noted that Modern Muslims acknowledge that Modern Muslims cannot ignore the common obstacle interreligious dialogue with Christianity. *Tariq Ramadan*, renowned as the Muslim Martin Luther and a reformer of modern Islam admits the standoff of religious discussion since Christians are accused as *Kafir* (infidel) or polytheist because Christians believed that “God was the Messiah, the son of Mary.”<sup>107</sup> Well-known Muslim scholar *Mahmoud Ayoub* calls for “interreligious ecumenism based on a sincere dialogue of faith.”<sup>108</sup> However, his conciliatory voice seems buried amongst polemical views of traditional Muslims. *Ayoub* narrates a Modern Muslim polemic view of Christianity,<sup>109</sup>

According to Qur’an, Jesus believed and taught the religion of absolute divine Oneness (*Tawhid*). This is of two kinds, the Oneness of God as the sole creator of all things, and His Oneness in Himself, in that His essence (*djat*) is free from anthropomorphism, composition, and change. Furthermore, Jesus received from God a Book which is the Gospel (*Injil*), confirming

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106 Mikhail, 303.

107 Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 205.

108 Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue* by Mahmoud Ayoub, Ed. Irfan A. Omar (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 4.

109 Ibid., 222.

the *Torah*, revitalizing its laws, and supporting its true sanctions. It is a book of light and guidance to the God-fearers. It announced the coming of an apostle after Jesus, whose name was to be *Ahmad* (Q.61:6). It is the Gospel by which the Qur'an challenges both Jews and Christians to abide (Q.5:47).

It is the Muslim invitation (*Dawah*) for Christians to “rejection of Trinity and returns to the worship of the One God.”<sup>110</sup> Modern Muslims resonates with the repeating disputes on the scandalous Christian faith, particularly the doctrine of Trinity and divinity of Christ.

In this challenging Cristian-Muslim relation, *Kitab al-Burhan* of Ammar remarkably retells the compelling story of Christian discourse with their contemporary in their context throughout the history. *Ammar* reminds evangelical Christians today how the former Christians under Muslim rule (*as dhimmi*) reinterpreted Christian faith and rearticulated “handed down” Tradition, through converging three Christian traditions of Melkites, Jacobites and the East Syrian Church (Nestorian)<sup>111</sup> and eventually transmitted it to coming generations by producing a contextual theology. Moreover, he maintained faithfully to the apostolic faith and Great Tradition. His theology evolved from his pastoral and missional concerns in the situation of crisis of conversion to Is-

110 Ibid., 229.

111 As though this categorization admittedly is too oversimplified yet understandable: Melkites-EuroRoman Christianity, Jacobites-African Christianity, and Nestorians-Eastern Christianity.

lam and the particular context of *Dhimmitude*. Undoubtedly, *Am-mar* appears as a noteworthy context theologian who addressed theological topics which are pertinent and meaningful for modern evangelical Christians having discourse with Muslims such as Christianity as the true religion, Trinity, and Incarnation, particularly by successful inculturation of Islamic culture and language.

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## ■ ABSTRACT

# The Lost Legacy of Christianity : An Arab Contextual Theology under the Abbasid Caliphate for Modern Missionaries and *Dhimmi* Church No.2

Paul In Young Kim

This paper draws attention to *Kitab Al-Burhan* of *Ammar al-Basri* as a contextual theology founded on Great Traditions responding to the challenges that the Eastern Church faced under the dominion of Islamic power. It investigates how *Ammar's* theology is relevant and fruitful to address present Muslim-Christian relations. For that purpose, the paper studies his context as a *dhimmi* and flourishing *Abbasid* intellectual milieu with translation movement, then examines the peculiar features of the contents of *Kitab al-Burhan* that *Ammar al-Basri* as a contextual theology.

It is noted that *Kitab al-Burhan* of *Ammar* remarkably retells the compelling story of Christian discourse with his contemporary Muslims. *Ammar* reminds today's evangelical Christians how the

former Christians as a *dhimmi* under Muslim rule reinterpreted Christian faith and rearticulated the “handed down” Tradition and eventually transmitted them to coming Christian generations by producing a contextual theology. Moreover, he maintained faithfully to the apostolic faith and Great Tradition. His theology evolved from his pastoral and missional concerns in the situation that substantiative Christian’s conversion to Islam and the particular challenging context of *Dhimmitude*. *Ammar* was a significant contextual theologian who addressed theological issues which are pertinent and meaningful for modern evangelical Christians such as Christianity as the true religion, Trinity, Incarnation, and critical enculturation of Islamic culture and language for doing contextual theology.

**Keywords:** *Dhimmi*, Contextual theology, Christianity, Mordern Missionary, Trinity, Incarnation, Islamic culture