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from Theology to Migration

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Preface

The Christian cultures of the Orient build—next to its Greek and Latin expressions—one of the three most important traditions of Christianity,¹ which unfortunately is threaten to be uprooted from the very soil where it was born. Ongoing tensions between Christians and Muslims in the last century in some regions of the Near and Middle East created circumstances in which Christians are no longer a self-evident presence among the political, social, and cultural actors in the public sphere. The phenomenon of migration, especially to Europe and North America, generated strong intercultural and interreligious tensions due to fears of diluting or even losing cultural and religious identity. These realities brought special interest to the history of relations between Christian and Muslim communities and their coexistence, as well as proliferating both social-political and academic dialogue initiatives. Looking at Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, Armenian, and Greek sources from early Islamic contexts, one discovers a variety of reflected and reconceived coexistence models, but also reports about great tensions and uncertain tolerance. These sources, which are various in their literary forms and genre, provide insights into the complex interactions between members of two major religions of the Orient. Political, social, and cultural turns challenged Christians to respond to tensions not only between different religious convictions, but simultaneously within their own communities, which were strongly influenced by the majority Islamic context. Conversion to Islam or rejection of specific confessional practices (e.g., veneration of the cross and of the icons) owed to social pressure through restrictive Christian participation in public life and exclusive Islamic claim of designing the public sphere, urged Christian theologians to formulate plausible responses and to develop a persuasive contextual theology.

Literary sources reveal the most disputed topics between Christians and Muslims, and how Christian theological discourse moved from Greek- or Syriac- oriented patterns to an Arabic model. The Arabic language thus became not only the main medium of social, cultural, religious, and theological understanding between Christianity and Islam, but also an organic component of Eastern Christian cultural identity.² Arabic Christianity's theological discourse is characterized by a self-evident consideration of religious otherness, either through dealing with the same controversial topics Muslims themselves engaged in (e.g., God's essence and His attributes) or through direct or indirect references to qur'ānic verses. Religious otherness became an integrative part of argumentation, when Christian theologians first sought common terminological or thematic grounds, then dissociated themselves from commonalities through critiques, contrasts, or antithetical assertions, and finally tried to

1 See S. Brock, *The Syriac Orient: A Third 'Lung' for the Church?*, OCP 71 (2005), 5–20.

2 See R. Coquin, *Langue et littérature arabes chrétiennes*, in M. Albert / R. Beylot / R.-G. Coquin / B. Outtier / C. Renoux / A. Guillaumont (ed.), *Christianismes Orientaux. Introduction à l'Étude des Langues et des Littératures*, Paris 1993, 35–106; A. Shboul / A. Walmsley, *Identity and Self-Image in Syria-Palestine in the Transition from Byzantine to Early Islamic Rule: Arab Christians and Muslims*, MA 11

Arab-Christian Theologies in Dialogue:
Comparative Analysis of the Doctrines of the Melkite Sa'īd Ibn
Baṭrīq, the Copt Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa',
and the Nestorian Elias of Nisibis

Bishara Ebeid, Rome

Abstract: Usually scholars studying Arab-Christian heritage and theological literature highlight its interreligious intent, especially in dialogue with Muslims. In my paper I focus on another important aspect of this Christian tradition: the dialogue between different Christian confessions of the East. For the first time, in fact, the three major Christian confessions of the East, Chalcedonians (Melkites), Miaphysites and Nestorians (East Syrians) expressed and developed their Trinitarian, and especially their Christological doctrine through the same language, Arabic. However, sometimes these three traditions understood the same philosophical terms in somewhat different ways. I study three authors, representing each of these major confessions: Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq, Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa', and Elias of Nisibis. The study of their work is significant because they wrote Christian theological works in Arabic; in fact, they wrote Christological polemics against each other. In this paper, I analyze their theological thought, showing that their Trinitarian and Christological doctrines, although expressing some differences and disagreements, can actually be included in one scheme. This paper aims to highlight the real meaning of the metaphysical terminology; some differences can be overcome when we understand what the authors really wanted to affirm and reject, i.e., the content they gave to terminology, sometimes unaware that their supposed opponents were using the same terms in a rather different way.

Key words: hypostasis, nature, essence, substance, person, natural property, particular property, hypostatic property, attributes of God, essential attributes, Christology, Trinity, enhypostatos, union, will, Communicatio Idiomatum, Theopaschism, Word.

Introduction

On June 12, 2014 I discussed my doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical Oriental Institute–Rome. It had the title “La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane dell’Oriente nel X e XI secolo. Studio comparativo delle polemiche del melchita Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq e le risposte del copto Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' e del nestoriano Elia di Nisibi.”¹ I compared these authors who represent the three major Christian confessions of the East: the Melkite (Chalcedonian) Church, the Coptic (Miaphysite) Church and the Church of the East (the so called Nestorian).²

1 The title can be translated as: “The Christology of the Big Confessions of the East during the 10th and 11th Centuries: Comparing the polemics of the Melkite Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq, with the answers of the Copt Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' and the Nestorian Elias of Nisibis.” See Bishara Ebeid, *La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane dell’Oriente nel X e XI secolo. Studio comparativo delle polemiche del melchita Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq e le risposte del copto Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' e del nestoriano Elia di Nisibi*, Dissertatio Ad Doctoratum (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 2014).

2 For more details on the terminology used by modern scholars, see Sebastian Brock, “Il dibattito cristologico del V e VI secolo nel contesto del dialogo teologico moderno,” in *Le chiese sire tra IV e VI*

This paper presents the research that helped me propose an inclusive Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. This proposal took into consideration the theological terminology and the philosophical concepts used by the three authors, and evaluated the doctrines and major steps taken by these authors.³

The Melkite author, Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq (d. 839/840), was the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria. He wrote a historical work known as "The Annals" where we find polemics against the other two Christian confessions, Jacobites and Nestorians.⁴ Ten years after his death, a Coptic Bishop, Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffā' (d. 987) wrote a response to Ibn Baṭrīq, a work in two tomes, called "The History of the Councils." He also wrote other polemics against the Melkites and the Nestorians which were taken into consideration in my dissertation.⁵ Elias, the Nestorian Metropolitan of Nisibis (d. 1046/1049), in his work "The Book of the Demonstration" mentions these two authors by name, and responded to the polemics made either directly by them or in general by theologians of their confessions.⁶

1. Trinitarian Doctrine

According to the three authors, the three Christian confessions of the East agree in Trinitarian doctrine. My analysis will show that among the three authors there are strong similarities in explaining the doctrine of the Trinity, but at the same time, we can observe some differences in their respective understandings of the same metaphysical terms⁷ used to express this doctrine. In addition, we should notice that the authors develop their Trinitarian doctrine in view of their Christological one.

secolo. Dibattito dottrinale e ricerca spirituale. Atti del 2° incontro sull'Oriente cristiano di tradizione siriana Milano Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 28 marzo 2003, ed. Emidio Vergani and Sabino Chialà (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 2005), 76–77.

- 3 The dissertation was published recently, Bishara Ebeid, *La Tunica di al-Masīh. La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane dell'Oriente nel X e XI secolo*, Valore Italiano - Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, Rome 2018, for more details regarding our proposal one might read the fourth part, and especially pp. 637–659.
- 4 About his life and works see Uriel Simonsohn, "Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2 (900–1050), The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 224–233. See also, Bishara Ebeid, "Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq, the Theologian. New Considerations on his Historical Work, 'The Annals,'" *Parole de l'Orient* 42 (2016): 165–190.
- 5 About his life and works, see Mark N. Swanson, "Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffā'," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2 (900–1050), The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 491–509.
- 6 About his life and works see, Juan Pedro Sala Monferrer, "Elias of Nisibis," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2 (900–1050), The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 727–741.
- 7 It is clear that Christian theologians, Fathers of the Church and intellectuals, used the ancient Greek metaphysics to express the Christian dogma. By metaphysical terminology, then, we mean the

1.1. The Oneness of God and the Three Divine Hypostases

Living among Muslims who proclaim one God with a strong emphasis on monotheism, Christians had to write apologies to explain to Muslims, and also to the Jews of the time, that the Christian doctrine of Trinity is not contrary to the uniqueness of God.⁸

For the three authors, the oneness and uniqueness of God consists, first of all, in considering God as one nature and substance. As consequence, according to Elias of Nisibis⁹ and Ibn Baṭrīq,¹⁰ God has one lordship, eternity, and will. For Ibn al-Muqaffā' God is one *ḡawhar* 'substance,' one *ṭabī'ah* 'nature,' and one *kiyān* 'essence.'¹¹ For him, calling God a single substance means that God is neither body nor accident.¹² This divine substance, therefore, is simple and invisible. For the three authors, the terms *ḡawhar* 'substance,' *ṭabī'ah-kiyān* 'nature,' and *kiyān-dāt* 'essence,' are synonyms, and mean the *qā'im bi-dātihi* 'subsistence' that exists in itself.¹³

God is not just one nature, according to Christian doctrine and belief; He is also three hypostases: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian doctrine of the Cappadocian Fathers¹⁴ and their use of the philosophical terminology in it is considered a common heritage for the three Christian confessions. The three hypostases are distinct through their hypostatic properties—the Father is not generated and is not proceeded; the Son is generated, He cannot generate and He is not proceeded, while the Spirit is proceeded, but

8 We have, therefore, a new era of apologies that renewed the ancient ones, redirecting and giving them a new function, causing, at the same time, an interesting development, the use of philosophy as a common base for all religions at that time.

9 See Ms vat. ar. 180, ff 187rv; This MS includes the unedited work of Elias entitled the *Kitāb al-burhān 'alā ṣaḥīḥ al-īmān* (*Book of the Demonstration of the Correctness of the Faith*).

10 See Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Book of the Demonstration* (*Kitāb al-burhān*), Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 192/ AR. 20, Part 1, ed. and trans. Pierre Cachia (Louvain: ch. de Wavre, 1961), 27. The authenticity of this work and its attribution to Ibn Baṭrīq was discussed in my dissertation, and I consider that this work could actually be attributed to Ibn Baṭrīq; see Ebeid, "Sa'īd," 181–183.

11 See Ibn al-Muqaffā', *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-'Aql* (*The Lamp of Understanding*), Al-Turāṭ al-'Arabī al-Masīḥī 1, ed. Samir Kh. Samir (Cairo: Dar al-'ālam al-'arabī, 1978), 12.

12 See al-Muqaffā', *Miṣbāḥ*, 13–15.

13 It is very interesting to see agreement, but at the same time differentiation between the Coptic and the Nestorian authors. The Copt states that calling God *ḡawhar* 'substance' — thus following two Muslim schools: *al-ḡadaliyyah* and *al-mantiqiyyah* — means that He is subsistent, eternal, and not made. For Elias of Nisibis, calling God *kiyān*, the arabized Syriac term for nature, means that He is subsistent, eternal, and not made. For him, if someone needs to use the term *ḡawhar* — which for the Arab grammarians means created substances — he must give it the meaning of the term *kiyān*. It is notable that the two authors use two different Muslim backgrounds, a fact which reflects the philosophy used in different areas where each author lived. For Elias' opinion, see Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 189r. For Ibn al-Muqaffā''s opinion, see al-Muqaffā', *Miṣbāḥ*, 15–17.

14 They were three Greek Fathers born in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey: Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (330–379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389), and Gregory of Nyssa (c.332–395).

He is not generated, and even He cannot generate.¹⁵ It is clear, however, that the explanation given to this doctrine by theologians of these three confessions is not always the same.¹⁶

The generation of the Son from the Father and the procession of the Spirit from the Father, as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed says, make the Father to be the cause and principle of the Trinity. The Father is principle, but as hypostasis or as nature? The response of the three authors to this question is that the Father is a hypostasized nature. Each author, however, develops this opinion in a different way, but following the same principle that says there is no hypostasis without nature, or nature without hypostasis.¹⁷

Ibn Baṭrīq calls the Father “eternal substance.”¹⁸ For Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, the Father is “essence” and “cause,”¹⁹ while Elias of Nisibis calls the Father “essence,” “cause,” and “nature.”²⁰ This means that for all three authors, considering the Father as the unique source of the Trinity demonstrates the oneness of God, who is a unique Trinitarian nature with a unique source. This does not mean that the Father can be identified with the divine nature that belongs also to the other two hypostases. The Father, as hypostasized nature, is the source from which come the other two hypostases of the Trinity.²¹

The Melkite makes a more clear distinction between nature and hypostasis.²² The Nestorian, however, has trouble explaining how the Father is “cause,” being *kiyān* ‘nature,’ and at the same time is *uqnūm* ‘hypostasis,’ as the other two divine hypostases, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that are, however, “caused.”²³ In contrast, the Copt points out that among the

15 For the Trinitarian theology of Cappadocian Fathers, see the following: Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Philip Kariatis, “St Basil’s Contribution to the Trinitarian Doctrine: A Synthesis of Greek *Paideia* and the Scriptural Worldview,” *Phronema* 25 (2010): 57–83; Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York Oxford: University Press, 2009).

16 An example is the controversy of the Jacobite theologian *Abū Rāʾiḥ al-Takrītī* against the Melkites. In his opinion, they had introduced a difference between nature and hypostasis in God; see Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidma *Abū Rāʾiḥ*, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidma Abū Rāʾiḥ*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 130/ AR. 14, ed. Georg Graf (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1951), 69.

17 See Χρυσόστομος Σταμούλης, *Περὶ φωτός. Προσωπικές η φυσικές ενέργειες; Συμβολή στην σύγχρονη περὶ Ἁγίας Τριάδος πρόβλημα στον ορθόδοξο χώρο*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναράς, 1999), 102–105.

18 See Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini, *Annales (Kitāb al-tarīḥ al-magmūʿ alā al-tahqīq wa-l-tasdiq. Taʿlīf al-Batriyark Ifṭīsyūs al-mukannā bi- Saʿīd Ibn Baṭrīq Katabahu ilā aḥīhi ʿIsā fi maʿrifat al-tawarīḥ al-kullīyyah min ʿahd ʿĀdam ilā sinī al-ḥīgrah)*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 50 / AR. 6, ed. Louis Cheikho (Beryti-Parisiis-Lipsiae: Typographeo catholico, 1905), 4.

19 See al-Muqaffaʿ, *Miṣbāḥ*, 28–29.

20 See Elias of Nisibis, *Risālah fi ḥudūt al-ʿālam wa-wahdāniyyat al-Ḥāliq wa taṭlīl al-aqānim in Vingt traités philosophique et apologétique d’auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX au XIV siècle*, ed. Paul Sbath (Cairo: H. Friedrich, 1929), 100–101; see also Samir Khalil Samir, “un traité nouveau d’Elie de Nisibe sur le sens des mots *Kiyān* et *ilāh*,” *Parole de l’Orient* 14 (1987): 137.

21 See Samir Kh. Samir, “Entretien d’Elie de Nisibe avec le vizir al-Maghribī sur l’Unité et la Trinité,” in *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979): 91–93; See also Hyacinth o.p., “Risālah fī al-Ḥāliq li-Ḥīyā Naṣībīnī,” *al-Nadīm* 7 (1935): 338.

22 See Eutychius, *Demonstration*, 27.

three hypostases, the differences are neither substantial nor essential, because the three hypostases are the divine nature.²⁴ He does not make a strong distinction between hypostasis and nature, because for him it is clear that the principle of the Trinity is the Father as hypostasized nature.²⁵

The three authors, in addition, call the Father “intellect,” to describe the uniqueness of the cause as a hypostasized nature with the property of fatherhood. This gives them a way to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. The idea of generation can be found, as all three authors explain, in the relationship between the intellect and the word, which is generated from the intellect. The fact that the Son is named Logos ‘Word’ in Scripture enables our authors to use and develop such analogy. In fact, these authors follow the thought of the apologists of the first Christian centuries who based their doctrine on the platonic philosophy.²⁶ This analogy leads to the triad of intellect—word/reason²⁷ — soul (spirit)/life.²⁸ Having this natural triad as an analogy, they explain the Christian Trinity. The Father is the “intellect” of the Trinity, the Son is His Word, consequently the “reason,” and the Spirit is the “life” and “soul.”²⁹ This analogy expresses the co-eternity of the three divine hypostases, while also affirming the uniqueness of their principle, which is the intellect-Father. Moreover, the analogy demonstrates the distinction and non-separation between the three parties-hypostases.

The philosophical triads³⁰ by which our three authors explain Trinitarian doctrine can help us understand more fully the differences between these authors.³¹ It is easy to see how the triads used by them are similar to each other. First, the Spirit is called “life” by all three. This probably comes from the doctrine of God, the giver of life, which is the attribute of the Spirit in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople.

24 See Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Réfutation de Saʿīd Ibn-Batriq (Eutychius) (le Livre des Conciles I)*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 12 [3.2], ed. and trans. Pierre Chébli (Paris: Firmin-Didot et socii, 1906), 144; see also Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 64r. This MS has Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ’ s *Kitāb al-bayān li-muḥtaṣar al-imān*.

25 See al-Muqaffaʿ, *Miṣbāḥ*, 19–20.

26 See Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum 2007), 24–25.

27 The Arabic term *nutq* means “pronounce,” but also “word” and “reason”—that is, the Greek word “logos.” I translate *nutq* as “reason,” and the adjective form *nātiq* as “rational.” Meanwhile, the Arabic *kalimah*, which can also be translated in Greek as “logos,” I translate into English as “word.”

28 Elias of Nisibis and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ have “life” as the last part of the triad. To explain the relationship of life with the soul, we should note what *Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ* notices: in the Old Testament the soul is what gives life to the human being, and without it the human being is dead; see al-Muqaffaʿ, *Miṣbāḥ*, 23–24, he cites Ps 104:29 and Gn 2:7.

29 For the analogy in Ibn Baṭrīq see Eutychius, *Demonstration*, 24–25, 36–37.46; In Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ see Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Histoire des Conciles (second Livre)*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 29 [6.4], ed. trans. Lucien Leroy (Paris: Firmin-Didot et socii, 1911), 532; In Elias of Nisibis, see Elias, *Ḥudūt al-ʿālam*, 97, 101.

30 The Arab-Christian authors were not, in fact, the first to use philosophical triads to explain Trinitarian doctrine. This is a heritage received from the Fathers of the Church; to give an example from the West, Augustine and his triads, see Rowan Williams, “Trinitate, De,” in *Agostino Dizionario Enciclopedico: 1399–1400*; as an example from the East, John of Damascus, see Rachid Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050*, *Beauchesne Religions* 15 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 115, 124–125.

31 In Ibn Baṭrīq see Eutychii, *Annales*, 4; for Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ’ s opinion, see al-Muqaffaʿ, *Miṣbāḥ*, 19–20; al-

The Son is called the Word of God by the evangelist John.³² Because of this, from the beginning, the Church Fathers reflected on the relationship between God and His Word. Some Fathers, starting from the Apostle Paul, have identified the Logos-Christ with the divine “wisdom” mentioned in the Old Testament.³³ We see this in the triad of Ibn Baṭṭīq, who uses the term “wisdom” for the Son. Elias of Nisibis uses this term too, but also uses the term “reason” (Logos).³⁴ Ibn al-Muqaffa’, however, always calls the Son “reason.”

To emphasize the fact that the Father is the principle of the Trinity, the Melkite and the Nestorian indicate Him with the term “substance.” He is the source of the divine nature and for this reason Elias of Nisibis calls Him “nature.” The Father is the cause of the other divine hypostases, and therefore the Coptic and Nestorian authors call Him “cause.” These two also call the Father “essence,” to emphasize the same thing.

In addition, these two authors identify the substantives of the triads with their adjectives and apply them to describe the divine nature. It is clear that Ibn al-Muqaffa’ and Elias of Nisibis could formulate such triads, since they identify the hypostasis with the hypostatic property.³⁵ As we shall explain further, however, in their thought there is no distinction between hypostatic and natural property. The cause of the Trinity, then, is rational (wise) through its “reason” (wisdom) and alive through its “life.” In this way, they try to explain the relationship between the caused hypostases and their cause, which is also hypostasis. The Melkite, however, could not have come to this triad, because for him the hypostasis is not identified with property. Therefore, even if the Father, as hypostasized nature, is the principle of the Trinity, the three hypostases are of the same nature—they manifest their nature, and are not identified with it.³⁶ I should mention that Elias of Nisibis describes the divine nature with the three adjectives “subsistent,” “wise” (rational,) and “alive.” In this, it is clear that he cannot identify the nature with just the Father. The Father, however, being described as “subsistent” is the source of essence to the other two hypostases.³⁷

32 See Jn 1:1.

33 See 1 Cor 1:24; Pr 3:19.

34 See here footnote 27.

35 Hypostatic property is the idiom (attribute) that the hypostasis possesses makes it distinct from the other hypostases of the same nature. In Trinitarian doctrine it manifests also the relation between the divine hypostases. In the Trinity, then, the properties are “fatherhood,” “sonship,” and “procession.” The problem in our authors, however, who make such identification between hypostasis and property under the influence of the Islamic doctrine on the divine attributes, is the confusion they make between the two kinds of properties the Eastern Christian philosophy teach, i.e., the natural-general and the hypostatic-particular properties. On this topic see the references given here in footnote 15. On the Islamic doctrine on the divine attributes, see Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 112–232; Richard M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (New York: SUNY press 1978). For the use of this doctrine by Christian authors, see David Thomas, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era,” in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 78–98; Sidney Griffith, “The Unity and Trinity of God: Christian Doctrinal Development in Response to the Challenge of Islam—an Historical Perspective,” in *Christian Theology and Islam*, ed. Michael Root and James J. Buckley (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 11–21.

1.2. Terminology and Philosophical Concepts

Our three authors use the philosophical concepts, i.e., the theological terms of the dogmatic doctrine, of their traditions already translated from their predecessors into Arabic. The difference between them is found in the precise meaning given to the same terms by each one. This difference is either because of their personal understandings of the metaphysical meaning of each term, or because of the meaning coming from the proper tradition: Greek, West Syrian-Coptic, and East Syrian (Nestorian).³⁸ The term *kiyān* could be an example of this fact. As a term, it has its roots in the Syriac language, in which *kyānā* means nature, i.e., the translation of the Greek *fyssis*. For the Melkites and Copts, who for the translation of *fyssis* used the Arabic term *ṭabīʿah*, the term *kiyān* took on the sense of essence.³⁹

Regarding the divine nature, the three authors employ the terms *ṭabīʿah-kiyān* ‘nature,’ *ḡawhar* ‘substance,’ and *dāt-kiyān* ‘essence.’ The divine nature exists in itself (it is a subsistence)—it is neither accident nor body.⁴⁰

For hypostasis, Ibn Baṭṭīq uses the terms *uqnūm* and *waḡh*.⁴¹ The first translates the Greek *hypostasis*, while the latter translates *prosopon*. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ is in agreement with the Melkite. He, in addition, adds the term *ṣahṣ* as a synonym for *waḡh*, ‘person.’⁴² Elias of Nisibis, on the other hand, faithful to his Nestorian tradition, refuses to apply the term *ṣahṣ*⁴³ (*parṣopā*, ‘person’) in Trinitarian doctrine,⁴⁴ using instead the arabized Syriac term *uqnūm*.⁴⁵

The difference between our authors is found in the meaning that each one gives to the term chosen for hypostasis. Elias identifies it with *ḥāṣṣah* ‘property,’⁴⁶ as does also Ibn al-Muqaffa’. The latter, in addition, identifies it with the term *maʿnā* ‘meaning,’ and *ṣifah* ‘attribute.’⁴⁷ Ibn Baṭṭīq, however, remains faithful to the doctrine of the Cappadocians, with the clear distinction between hypostasis and property (idiom,) relating hypostasis to nature and properties to hypostasis.⁴⁸ Although Ibn Baṭṭīq describes the Word and the Spirit with the adjective *ḡawharī*

38 For more details on the Trinitarian terminology used by the Arab-Christian authors, see Haddad, *La Trinité divine*, 129–186.

39 See also Georg Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 147 / Sub. 8 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1957), 99.

40 In Ibn Baṭṭīq, see Eutyclus, *Demonstration*, 6–9, In Ibn al-Muqaffa’ see al-Muqaffa’, *Miṣbāḥ*, 15; In Elias see Maʿlūf, “Waḥdāniyyat,” 116; Elias of Nisibis, *al-Maḡlis al-ṭānī in Iliyyā al-niṣībīniyy*, ed. Louis Sāko (Beirut: Dāar al-maṣriq, 2009), 30.

41 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 145–146.

42 See al-Muqaffa’, *Miṣbāḥ*, 31; al-Muqaffa’, *Histoire*, 538; al-Muqaffa’, *Réfutation*, 165–166.

43 Another reason for rejecting this term could be its use for material individuals. For Elias, using it in Trinitarian doctrine might be risky since Trinity, in this case, could be comprehended as *Tritheism*. It is the same reason that he identified hypostasis with property.

44 On the use of the technical terms by the Church of the East, see Patros Youkhana Patros, “La cristologia della Chiesa d’Oriente,” in *Storia, Cristologia e tradizioni della Chiesa Siro-orientale. Atti del 3° Incontro sull’Oriente Cristiano di tradizione siriana Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 14 maggio 2004*, ed. Emidio Vergani and Sabino Chialà (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 2006), 28–33. See also Bishara Ebeid, “The Christology of the Church of the East: an Analysis of the Christological Statements and Professions of Faith of the Official Synods of the Church of the East before A.D. 612,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 82 (2016): 354–355.

45 See Ms Vat. ar. Neofiti 52, f 88v.

46 See Ms Vat. ar. Neofiti 52, f 88v. See also here footnote 35.

'substantial,'⁴⁹ he means that they are of the substance of the Father, whom he also calls "substance," rather than substantial attributes of the Father. In this way, the Melkite could say that "God has three hypostases," or that "God is manifested in three hypostases."

Ibn al-Muqaffa', to indicate the principle of the Trinity, uses the term *qiwām* 'hypostasis,' but he always links it to the term *dāt* 'essence.'⁵⁰ In this way the Father is a *qiwām-dāt* 'hypostasized nature' and He is the cause of the other two divine hypostases. But Ibn al-Muqaffa' identifies hypostasis with property, defining it as an immutable attribute of the divine substance.⁵¹ It is possible to affirm that, according to him, the three hypostases are three attributes of God, and for this reason he could say that "God is in three hypostases."

Elias of Nisibis, finally, who also identifies hypostasis with property, illustrates how the divine *kiyān* 'nature,' is, at the same time, the cause of the created world and the cause of the other two divine hypostases. In addition, in Elias we find the following statements: 1) God is three hypostases: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; he calls each of them "natural" and "substantial" properties.⁵² 2) In another place, however, he says that only the Son and the Spirit are "essential" properties.⁵³ In my opinion, the first statement is his way of affirming that the three properties describe the divine nature—in this case property is natural. However, in the second statement, he means that the two hypostases, the Son and the Holy Spirit, describe the essence of the Father as their cause—in this case property is hypostatic. Elias explains the relationship between the hypostases by indicating the Father with *kiyān* 'nature,' as cause and principle of the Trinity, and by indicating Him with *dāt* 'essence,' as the cause of relation for the other two hypostases.⁵⁴ For this reason, he could use the phrase "God is three hypostases."

1.3. Inclusive Proposal of the Trinitarian Doctrine

The problem between the three confessions is in their ways of explaining the relation between the general/common and the particular/concrete, and that of the particulars between them. We need, therefore, to define again the philosophical terminology and to reformulate the metaphysical meaning of each term, basis to express my theological Trinitarian proposal. The Trinitarian doctrine of the Cappadocians can be considered the basis of my proposal.

For the common and general, I use the term *ṭabī'ah/kiyān* 'nature,' which is identified with that of the *ḡawhar* 'substance' and *dāt/kiyān* 'essence.' The general and common nature, according to the metaphysical principles, is not concrete, but abstract. This means that it does not exist without that which can manifest it and make it concrete, i.e., give it an existence. This function is for the particular, that I call *uqnūm* 'hypostasis.' Since the divine nature is

Cappadocians see the references given here in footnote 15.

49 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 162.

50 See Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Al-dūr al-ṭamīn fī ṭāh al-dīn*, (Cairo: Abnā' al-bābā Kirillūs al-sādis; second edition, n.d.), 24.

51 In fact, in him we notice an influence of the Islamic doctrine on the attributes of God, reason for identifying, as we said here in footnote 35, the hypostasis with the properties and attributes, see also, Mark N. Swanson, "Are Hypostases Attributes? An investigation into the Modern Egyptian Christian Appropriation of the Medieval Arabic Apologetic Heritage," *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990–1991): 239–250.

52 See Ma'lūf, "Waḥdāniyyat," 114.

53 See Elias, *Hudūt al-'ālam*, 102.

immaterial, incorporeal, and spiritual, the hypostases cannot be considered as individuals, as those of the created world, since individuals are material and corporeal; for this reason, I avoid the use of the terms *šahṣ* or *waḡh*, 'person.' Neither term can give the meaning of personalization of the common divine nature, since both have a material aspect and give the meaning of individual, which must not be applied to the Trinitarian doctrine, because of the risk of being understood as *Tritheism*, especially by Muslims. In addition, and as a consequence, between the hypostases of the common divine incorporeal and spiritual nature there is no separation, but union.

We need to note also that between the general and the particular there is a difference. We can find the properties of the general in all the hypostases of the same common nature. However, each hypostasis has its special properties, the hypostatic ones, which distinguish the hypostases that belong to the same common nature. I can use, then, the term *ṣifāt dātīyyah* 'essential attributes,' for the properties of the common and general nature, while for those particular I can use the term *ḡaṣṣah/hawāṣṣ*, a term that has two meanings: 'particular' and 'attribute/property.' Consequently, the particular nature, i.e., hypostasis, contains both categories of properties together: natural-general and specific-particular, namely, essential attributes and particular (or hypostatic) properties.

The hypostasis, therefore, manifests its union and participation in the common nature to which it belongs through the essential attributes, and its distinction from the other hypostases of the same common nature through its own particular properties. This was the point where Trinitarian heresies had problems; Sabellianism, Arianism, Pneumatomachianism, Apollinarianism (in its Trinitarian doctrine), and other heresies have failed to maintain the uniqueness and distinction in the divine nature.⁵⁵

Christian orthodoxy in the East, in opposition to these Trinitarian models, speaks of three divine hypostases of one common divine nature.⁵⁶ For my proposal then, we can affirm that the uniqueness of God is not found only in the oneness of the divine nature, but also in the perfect union between these hypostases: union with distinction, and especially in the oneness of the cause and principle of the Trinity. Therefore, the only cause and principle of the three divine hypostases is the hypostasis of the Father from whom the Son is generated and the Spirit proceeds. In this way, we can see a relation between the three hypostases as "cause" and "caused." Having the Father as cause does not introduce subordination in the Trinity, since there is no introduction of time in uncreated reality, and the Father was always Father with the Son and the Spirit. In addition, eternity is an essential attribute, that is, natural

55 See Kariatlis, "Contribution," 62–66. Some have introduced a hierarchy and subordination in the interior of the divine nature, erasing, in this way, the co-eternity of the hypostases, which is an essential property and belongs to the common nature. Others have used the Greek term *prosopon* with its ancient meaning, i.e., 'mask' or 'appearance,' erasing, in this way, the particular in the divine. The Cappadocians fought against these doctrines in developing their Trinitarian doctrine. They used the Greek terms *hypostasis* and *prosopon*, but gave them a new metaphysical meaning; *hypostasis* gives essence to the general nature and manifests it perfectly in a particular and concrete nature; *prosopon* personalizes the general nature. Thus, these two terms took almost the same meaning and metaphysical role.

56 For the discussions between heresies and orthodoxy in the East during the first four Christian centuries see, Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicaea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*

property of the common divine nature, and it belongs to all the hypostases, as does lordship. The hypostatic properties distinguish each hypostasis from the other, so the Father has “fatherhood” as hypostatic property, the Son has “sonship,” and the Spirit “procession.” We can say that the hypostatic properties manifest also the intra-trinitarian relations, i.e., the perfect communication between the three divine hypostases.

The common nature’s will and energy is common in all its hypostases. The one will and energy of the common divine nature is manifested by the concord and agreement between the three hypostases in their actions and deeds. Having natural will and energy does not mean that the hypostases do not differ from each other through the particular and hypostatic will and energy. Since the divine nature is spiritual and immaterial, its common will and energy is manifested by each hypostasis, but each according to its particular way.

God also communicates with the created world through His deeds and actions that show another type of His attributes. We can say that He possesses *ṣifāt fi’l* ‘attributes of actions,’ besides the other two kinds: *ṣifāt dāt* ‘attributes of the essence,’ which I have also called *ṣifāt dāṭiyyah* ‘essential attributes,’ and the *ḥawāṣṣ* ‘particular and hypostatic properties.’ In this case, the essential attributes manifest the uniqueness of the divine nature and the union between its hypostases, the hypostatic properties manifest the distinction between the divine hypostases as well as their intra-trinitarian relations, while the ‘attributes of actions,’ which are natural and common attributes, manifest the relation between the Creator and His creatures.⁵⁷

The Trinitarian analogies and the philosophical triads that our authors use are in accord with my proposal for the Trinitarian doctrine because with their use, the authors want to show the uniqueness of divine nature—the Father as principle and cause, the union and distinction of the hypostases, and the common and the particular properties.

But for the Coptic and Nestorian authors hypostasis is identified with property. My proposal distinguishes between two kinds of properties and attributes, hypostatic and natural. In their traditions, however, the approach of the Cappadocians’ Trinitarian doctrine, the basis of my proposal, was accepted.

Making this distinction between these two categories: general-common and particular-singular, allows me to find a concord between the three sentences with which I have tried to distinguish the different approach to the Trinitarian doctrine of each author. God as one divine nature *has* three hypostases and manifests Himself *in* them: this is the sentence of Ibn Baṭrīq. God has three hypostatic properties and so He *is* characterized by them; sentence accepted by the Nestorian Elias. Finally, God has three particular properties and manifests Himself through them, i.e., He *is in* three hypostases, the sentence of the Copt Ibn al-Muqaffa’.

57 It was not Gregory Palamas and the *hesychastic* movement in Byzantium of the 14th and 15th centuries who first developed the distinction between substance and action in God, substance reflecting communication between the hypostases, and action reflecting communication between God and His creatures. See John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (London: The Faith Press, 1964). As I have shown in my paper “The Trinitarian doctrine of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib: An interpretation of Babai the Great’s metaphysical system in the world of Islam” given during the 10th Arab-Christian International Congress, Rome, 2–7 September, 2016, the Arab-Christian authors had started already from the 9th century, in reaction to Islamic doctrine on the divine attributes, to speak of distinct attributes in God—the essential, and those of action, besides the hypostatic. See Bishara Ebeid, “The Trinitarian doctrine of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib: An interpretation of Babai the Great’s metaphysical system in the world of Islam,” *Journal of Arab Christian Theology* 1 (2017): 1–15.

2. Christological Doctrine

It is clear that all the three confessions agree on the fact of the Incarnation of the Word, since it is a dogma of the Christian faith. The problem arises when they explain “how” the union between the divine and the human natures in Christ took place. This means that we need also to point out the “when” of the union and the “where.” Since the “where,” the “when,” and the “how” of the union are related to the “result,” we need to see exactly how the three authors explain every one of these points to understand where the accords and the discords between them are.

2.1. The “When” of the Union

Our three authors agree that the union between the humanity and the divinity in Christ took place at the annunciation of the Virgin, i.e., at the act of conception. This means that the human nature in Him never existed alone without the divine. So, from the moment of the annunciation and without the seed of man, God created in the womb of the Virgin human nature and united with it.⁵⁸ At the same time, however, it becomes a central argument against the beliefs of their respective other.

Ibn Baṭrīq, in his controversy with the Nestorians, says that if the humanity was united to the divinity after the act of conception, this humanity would have its own hypostasis, which is unacceptable for him. Confirming, however, that the humanity was united during the act of conception has two important consequences: First, the humanity has as hypostasis that of the eternal Word. This is an argument in favor of the doctrine of the *enhypostatos* concept through which the Chalcedonians tried to explain the hypostatic union. According to this doctrine, the human nature has as hypostasis the one of the Word and not its own human hypostasis.⁵⁹ The second consequence is the claim that Mary generated the God-Man and, therefore, she can be called the “Mother of God.”⁶⁰

58 In Ibn Baṭrīq see Eutychie, *Annales*, 160–161; for the opinion of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ see Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 64v; while for the opinion of Elias of Nisibis see Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 182v.

59 This concept is the result of the neo-Chalcedonian movement that interpreted the definition of Chalcedon according to the doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria. The questions that moved this development of the doctrine were: “How can two natures be united in one hypostasis?” and “To which nature does this hypostasis belong?” The question was whether the beginning of the act of the Incarnation that is, the hypostasis of the Word who united to himself a human nature, was also the result of this act, that is, “the one and the same” of which the definition of Chalcedon had spoken. See the definition in Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum. Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1995²), n. 302. With the introduction of the concept of *enhypostatos* in Christology by the neo-Chalcedonians, the beginning of the Incarnation was identified with its result; that is, the hypostasis of the Word had become even hypostasis of the human nature to whom the Word had been united. This means that the human nature of Christ is *enhypostatos*, i.e., does not have its own human hypostasis, but only the one of the divine hypostasis of the eternal Word. With this concept, they protect the uniqueness of the subject, i.e., the hypostasis of the Word. The two natures remain united but distinct. This gives them a basis for stating that the hypostatic union is a union according to hypostasis and not according to nature, and by doing so, keeping the distinction between nature and hypostasis. On the concept of the *enhypostatos* and its development from its origins until John of Damascus, see Benjamin Gleede, *The Development of the Term ἐνυπόστατος from Origen to John of Damascus*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae. Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language

Ibn al-Muqaffa' uses the same doctrine, but develops it in a different direction. Arguing with the Nestorians, he says if their doctrine is correct, namely, that in Christ there are two natures and two hypostases, that would mean that the union of the divine nature with the human would take place after the creation of Christ's humanity, i.e., after the act of the conception. Ibn al-Muqaffa' rejects the idea that the human nature has its own hypostasis because there was already another hypostasis, the one of the eternal Word—this does not allow the human nature in Christ to have its own hypostasis. Although the doctrine is similar to that of Ibn Baṭrīq, Ibn al-Muqaffa' inserts it into his own philosophical and theological system. The hypostasis manifests only one nature; having one hypostasis, i.e., that of the Word, means that with the union of the two natures, a new nature was composed, and this composed nature is manifested by one hypostasis, that of the Word. All this is because the humanity was united to divinity in the act of conception.⁶¹ In his polemic against the Melkites, Ibn al-Muqaffa' says that if there are two natures in Christ, the human body of Christ was for some time alone without the divine nature.⁶² It is clear that for the Coptic author, nature and hypostasis are connected to each other even if he distinguishes between them, pointing out that the one who is incarnated is the hypostasis of the Word.⁶³ In my interpretation, he is speaking here about the concrete nature, i.e., the hypostasis that manifests the general nature. Thus, to say that there is one hypostasis in Christ means that there is one nature, since the hypostasis manifests only one nature. The unique nature of Christ results from two natures, the divine and the human.

Elias of Nisibis, in his response to Ibn Baṭrīq, takes this doctrine, i.e., about the “when” of the union, as a basis for his claim that Mary is the “Mother of Christ” and not the “Mother of God.” To say that the two natures were united at the annunciation, the one born of the Virgin is not only God and not only man, but Christ, both God and man.⁶⁴ He does not connect, as the other two authors do, the “when” of the union with the question regarding the human nature: whether it is a singular nature or not, or whether it has its own hypostasis or not. For him, the hypostasis is not what makes the concrete nature, but what makes it recognizable. However, he confirms that the union took place at the act of conception and therefore, it means that in Christ there are two recognizable natures, i.e., each with its hypostasis, united without separation.

2.2. The “Where” of the Union

If our three authors agree on the “when” of the union of the two natures in Christ, they differ in indicating the “where” of this union. Both the Melkite and the Copt speak of union which occurred in the hypostasis of the Word, but differ with respect to their understanding and explanation of the hypostatic union. The Nestorian, who has a different understanding of the philosophical concept of *uqnūm* ‘hypostasis,’ cannot accept this doctrine, and speaks only of the “result” of the union.

61 See Ms vat. ar. 138, ff. 67rv.

62 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 64v.

Ibn Baṭrīq, consistent to his tradition, bases his doctrine on the “where” of the union on the philosophical concept of the *enhypostatos*.⁶⁵ He could develop such doctrine through the use of the Arabic language. In Arabic there are two terms for hypostasis: one that comes from the Syriac, *uqnūm*, and one from the Arabic, *qiwām*. When Ibn Baṭrīq talks about the uniqueness of the subject in Christ, he uses the term *uqnūm*, but when he talks about the “where” and the “how” of the union he uses the term *qiwām*. This last term comes from the root *q/w/m* from which we can build the verb *qawwama*, which means ‘to give an essence to.’ Thus for Ibn Baṭrīq, understanding the Word as hypostasis, *qiwām*, also provides him a way to describe how an essence is given to the human nature. In this way, the hypostasis of the Word became hypostasis for two natures, the eternal and the temporal. Such use of the term *qiwām*, as well as the explanation of the concept *enhypostatos*, leads, in my opinion, to the doctrine of a composed hypostasis which manifests simultaneously two different natures;⁶⁶ in fact, he calls this hypostasis *al-uqnūm al-mu'allaf* ‘composed hypostasis.’⁶⁷ With the phrase *qawwama bi-qiwāmihi*, Ibn Baṭrīq affirms that the Word gave existence to His human nature through His divine hypostasis.⁶⁸

Because of this doctrine some additional questions arise: what is the human nature in Christ, if it does not have its own hypostasis? Is it a concrete nature or a general nature? The author is aware of these questions. Basing his opinion on his tradition and the furtherance of that tradition in his own thinking, he precisely argues that the human nature of Christ was divinized at the moment the union was made because it has as hypostasis the divine one of the Word. Thus, it differs from the other humans who have a human hypostasis.⁶⁹ Consequently, he refuses to say that the human nature in Christ is an *insān ḡuz ī* ‘single man,’ which has its own human hypostasis;⁷⁰ but also refuses to say *insān 'ām* ‘general man,’⁷¹ because it is not a general nature, but a human nature that has as hypostasis the one of the

65 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 162–163, 176–169

66 I mean here the doctrine of John of Damascus on the composed hypostasis of the Word, distinguishing it from the teaching of the Miaphysites on the composed hypostasis-nature of the Word. See John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, III, VII in *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 1008C–102D.

67 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 170.

68 I am aware of the issue regarding the Arabic term used in Ibn Baṭrīq's “Book of the Demonstration.” In fact, the editor of this work, P. Cachia, had noted that some manuscripts only use the term *uqnūm*, while others use the two, *uqnūm* and *qiwām*; see Eutychieus, *Demonstration*, x. In my research, I noticed, however, that the citations of Ibn Baṭrīq's “Book of the Demonstration” found in the work of Elias of Nisibis use the two terms, *uqnūm* and *qiwām*. In my opinion, the unification of the two terms into one, *uqnūm*, was made in some manuscripts by copyists. This shows the Syriacism found in these manuscripts that contain the “Book of the Demonstration.” In fact, Joshua Blau had noted this Syriacism in his *A Grammar of Christian Arabic. Based mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium Fasc. Introduction-Orthography & Phonetics-Morphology*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 267 / Subs. 27 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966), 22–23. Despite the fact that some manuscripts have only used the term *uqnūm*, this does not change the basic argument of my hypothesis. The term *uqnūm* can be used to explain the two concepts of the *enhypostatos* and of the composed hypostasis, without differentiating terminology. For example, I mentioned above how Ibn Baṭrīq called the composed hypostasis using the term *uqnūm*, and not *qiwām*, forming the expression: *al-uqnūm al-mu'allaf*, ‘the composed hypostasis.’

69 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 171–173.

70 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 169.

Word. For him, this nature is the new Adam, the Man par excellence, the perfect image of God, the new creature.⁷²

The Melkite author arrives at this point of his doctrine as a result of the distinction between nature and hypostasis not only in Trinity but also in Christology. In this way, he gives a new metaphysical and philosophical function to the concept "hypostasis:" it can manifest two different natures and make them concrete. This distinction has not been applied by the Miaphysites in Christology; for that they have always spoken of a nature-hypostasis of the incarnate Word.⁷³ Ibn al-Muqaffa', while desiring to be faithful to his tradition, marks a fundamental step forward in the Christology of the Miaphysites by the distinction he makes between nature and hypostasis. For him, in fact, the beginning and the result of the Incarnation is the hypostasis of the Word.⁷⁴ This does not mean that the hypostatic union is done on the level of the hypostasis. Ibn al-Muqaffa' considers the union to be made at the level of nature, and for that he speaks of one nature from two, which is the composed nature of the Word.⁷⁵ The function of the hypostasis is limited to manifesting the one composed nature from two. It is not what makes the general nature concrete, since according to the definition given by the Coptic author, hypostasis means immutable attribute of the nature.

For this reason, we cannot talk about *enhyposatos* or a union according to the hypostasis in the doctrine of Ibn al-Muqaffa'. Since, however, the result of this union is the hypostasis of the Word that reveals the unique nature composed of two natures, there are some consequences to the human nature. Because of the union, and having as hypostasis the one of the Word, the human nature does not have a need for natural things such as drinking, eating, sleeping, and so on. But the incarnate Word has manifested them to hide the fact of His Incarnation from Satan.⁷⁶ In my view, in the Christological understanding of his Miaphysitism: in Christ there was no "normal"⁷⁷ human nature because of the union with the divine nature, and the formation of the unique composed nature manifested through the divine hypostasis of the Word.

Elias of Nisibis, unlike the other two, does not speak about the "where" of the union. He emphasizes only that the two united natures form a unique subject, Christ. He does not

72 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 162.169.

73 See Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthale, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604). The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1995), 505–507.

74 See al-Muqaffa', *Réfutation*, 144.

75 See Ms vat. ar. 138, ff. 63v–64r, see also f. 66rv.

76 See Ms vat. ar. 138, ff. 18v–19v.

77 What I mean here is that according to the Coptic author, humanity in Christ was real, but different from ours. While the Melkite speaks of divinization of Christ's humanity because of the union with His divinity, the Copt does not apply the concept of divinization, declaring rather that the only reason the humanity of Christ manifested the necessity of human needs, such as drinking, eating etc. was to cheat Satan. Although there is a danger that such a doctrine could be understood as *Docetism*, or as other doctrines developed in the Monophysite movement, such as Aphantodocetism, or even the true, radical Monophysitism of Eutyche, (see Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II/II, 79–128), it is clear that our author does not hold such doctrines. For him, humanity in Christ was real, and according to it, He manifested all the human essential and natural properties. However, this humanity being united to the Word, composing with Him the nature and hypostasis of the incarnate Word. C. ...

mention the common *prosopon*, as his tradition does,⁷⁸ although for him the concept Christ-Son comes very close to its philosophical and metaphysical function.⁷⁹

2.3. The "Result" of the Union

That the result of this union is identified with Christ is a teaching on which our three authors agree. The problem lies in the question of what is identified with the term "Christ" the nature, the hypostasis, or something else? For the Nestorian tradition, Christ is the name of the common *prosopon*, or to use its Syriac correspondent, the common *paršopā* 'person,' i.e., where the union took place. It is the result of the union that indicates the two natures together, the human and the divine. This is also clear in Elias of Nisibis. He points out that the name "Christ" and the name "Son" are common names that belong to the two natures united.⁸⁰ Saying "Christ" indicates God and man together. He also refuses to identify Christ with the eternal Word. According to him, calling Christ "God" alone, which is a common name for the three divine hypostases, is a big mistake because it could be understood as saying that Christ is the three divine hypostases. This was also a reason to not accept the title "Mother of God" for the Virgin Mary. The name Christ is only proper for the result of the union of the two natures.⁸¹

For Ibn al-Muqaffa', however, "Christ" is an appropriate name for the Word as hypostasis and nature. To support this opinion, he develops the following principle: "Between the words and the meanings we need to have an accord."⁸² If we call the only subject of the union "Christ," this name should agree with the result, that is, the result must be one. This one is the unique nature from the two natures manifested through the hypostasis of the Word. But since the arrival of Christ was announced by the prophets centuries before the Incarnation, for Ibn al-Muqaffa', the name "Christ" is identified with the eternal Word and Son of God.⁸³ With this identification he also justifies the use of the title "Mother of God."⁸⁴ Therefore, the name "Christ" is understood as the hypostasis of the eternal Word. Since, however, after the union with humanity, that hypostasis also became the hypostasis of the one nature from two,

78 The common *prosopon* is the metaphysical concept that the Nestorian tradition used to highlight the oneness of the subject in the Economy. This means that Christ is one subject who manifests the two natures through the one common *prosopon*. It is clear that the understanding of this one *prosopon* as metaphysical concept had a development in time, but this is not the place to enter into such details. On the concept of *prosopon* used by the Church of the East in its Christology until the year 612AD, see Ebeid, "The Christology." On the common *prosopon* in Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius, see Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 144–175; also Roberta C. Chesnut, "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius' Bazaar of Heraclides," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978): 392–409. On the use, finally, of such concept by Babai the Great, one of the most important thinkers of the Church of the East see, Louise Abramowski, "Babai der Grosse: Christologische Probleme und ihre Lösungen," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 41 (1975): 289–343.

79 Ibn Baṭṭīq and Ibn al-Muqaffa' say nothing about the common *prosopon* of the Nestorians' doctrine, except for a few allusions by Ibn Baṭṭīq; see Eutychie, *Annales*, 165. This inclines me to think that at the time of our authors, the Nestorian thinkers and theologians did not often use this concept. It was in use a generation before, as is clear in the writings of the Jacobite Abū Rā'īṭah; see Abū Rā'īṭah, *Die Schriften*, 107.

80 See Ms vat. ar. Neofiti 52, f 77r; See also Samir, "Entreien," 113.

81 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f 182v.

82 See al-Muqaffa', *Histoire*, 562.

83 See al-Muqaffa', *Mishāh* 34–35–36. See also al-Muqaffa' *Histoire* 554.

i.e., the result of the Incarnation, this result also is called Christ.⁸⁵ In addition, he calls the result “incarnate Christ,”⁸⁶ thus showing that Christ is the name of the hypostasis-nature of the Word who manifests His divine nature before the Incarnation, while after the Incarnation, the same hypostasis manifests the embodied divine nature, i.e., the unique nature from two.

Even Ibn Baṭrīq, following his tradition,⁸⁷ identifies Christ with the eternal Word. For him it is clear that Christ is the name of the hypostasis and not of the nature.⁸⁸ Since the hypostasis of the Word is the beginning of the act of Incarnation and it is also its result, this result is called Christ. It is notable that for the Melkite, the “where” and the “result” of the union coincide—they are the hypostasis of the Word. This identification of Christ with the eternal Word is also a reason to justify the use of the title “Mother of God.”

2.4. The “How” of the Union

The three authors agree that in this one subject two different natures are united, the divine and the human. These retain their properties, are distinct but not separate, since their union is true, i.e., without separation or confusion. The real difference is found in the explanation of that union.

2.4.1. What Kind of Union Took Place?

All of them agree that the union in Christ took place between a light nature—a, immaterial, incorporeal, and spiritual nature—and a heavy nature—an extended, material, and corporeal nature.⁸⁹ This union is real, i.e., there is no separation between the two natures after the union.

Ibn Baṭrīq calls the union *ḥuḷṭat al-ḥaqq* ‘mixture of truth.’ The union is such that between the two natures there is no *iḥtiyāl wa-lā fasād wa-lā furqat inqītā* ‘mutation, corruption, or separation.’ This union is called also *ḥuḷṭat nafāḍ*, i.e., a union in which the immaterial and spiritual nature spreads throughout the body and the material nature. In this way, the union is real and the natures remain, at the same time, distinct.⁹⁰

Ibn al-Muqaffa’ calls the union which took place in Christ *ittiḥād tarkībī* ‘composed union,’⁹¹ which, for him, means *ta’līf al-ittiḥād* ‘composition of the union.’⁹² This means that we have a new result composed from two natures, the nature of the incarnate Christ. This does not mean that the component natures have changed or have suffered corruption or mutation.⁹³

Elias of Nisibis, however, speaks of an *ittiḥād* ‘union’ and of a *ḥulūl* ‘indwelling.’ For him, these concepts are synonymous, and he describes them in the same way. He speaks of the *ittiḥād al-mašī’ah al-kāmilah wa-l-riḍā wa-l-waqār wa-l-ittiṣāl* ‘union according to the

will, good pleasure, honor and conjunction,’⁹⁴ and of the *ḥulūl al-waqār wa-l-riḍā wa-l-mašī’ah* ‘indwelling according to the honor, pleasure, and will.’⁹⁵ This real union has as a consequence the uniting of the two natures without separation and, at the same time, protecting them from any change or mutation. Thus, both the natures and their hypostases remain distinct but united.⁹⁶

It seems clear to me that the general content of the three authors on this point is the same. In all three cases they speak of a true union without separation or mutation, the two natures are united and distinct, and the result is unique and one.

2.4.2. How does Each Author Regard the Other Christological Visions?

To Ibn Baṭrīq, the union in Christ in the doctrine of the Jacobites is illustrative of mutation and alteration, *al-iḥtiyāl wa-l-taḡyīr*. Such a union, in his opinion, is between two material natures, and through it occurs confusion. In Jacobite doctrine, the result is a new nature that is different from the component natures. This means neither of the component natures has preserved its properties.⁹⁷ Ibn Baṭrīq attributes to Nestorians *ḥuḷṭat al-furqah wa-l-inqītā* ‘the union that involves separation and division.’ In such a union between two bodily and material natures, there is a need for an extraneous tool through which the two natures can be united. Although the two component natures maintain their properties, the result is not one, because it involves a division and separation of them.⁹⁸

Ibn al-Muqaffa’ knows that the Nestorians call the union “according to the will.” For him, such a union would not be true, because it is not according to substance and nature. The doctrine of the Nestorians, therefore, from his point of view, involves separation and division.⁹⁹ His understanding of the Nestorian doctrine is the same as his understanding of the Melkite. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ refuses any dualistic expression, and for this reason, in his view, the Melkite doctrine of the union is close to that of the Nestorians, thus dualism is inevitable. He knows that the union for the Melkites is according to the hypostasis, even though, for him, this union is not true because it is not according to the nature.¹⁰⁰

Elias of Nisibis declares that the Jacobites teach an *ittiḥād ṭabī’ī* ‘natural union;’ he understands it as *ittiḥād iḥtiḷāṭ* ‘union of mixture,’¹⁰¹ as does Ibn Baṭrīq. The understanding of natural union for Elias and Ibn Baṭrīq is the same: a union of this kind involves a change and a mutation in the component natures. The union of the Melkites is described by Elias of Nisibis as *al-qnūman ittaḥadā fa-ṣārā qnūm wāḥid* ‘union according to the hypostasis.’ For Elias of Nisibis, even such a union is understood as a change and corruption, but at the level of hypostasis—although he is aware that the Melkites claim to preserve in their doctrine the natures and their properties.¹⁰²

85 See Ms vat. ar.138, f. 10r; See also al-Muqaffa’, *Histoire*, 521.

86 See al-Muqaffa’, *Réfutation*, 214.

87 See for example the opinion of John of Damascus in *De Fide Orthodoxa*, III, III in *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 988B–990BC.

88 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 175.

89 In Ibn Baṭrīq see Eutychie, *Annales*, 166–167; for Ibn al-Muqaffa’’s opinion see Ms vat. ar.138, ff. 6rv–7r.63r; while for the opinion of Elias see Ms Vat. ar. Neofiti, ff 77rv.

90 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 166–167.

91 See al-Muqaffa’, *Miṣbāḥ*, 50.

92 See Ms vat. ar.138, f.20rv.

94 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f 140r.

95 See Elias, *al-ṭānī*, 30.

96 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f 187v.

97 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 164.

98 See Eutychie, *Annales*, 165.

99 See Ms vat. ar.138, f. 66rv.

100 See Ms vat. ar.138, ff. 61v–62r; see also chapter XXIV of the book *Tarīḥ al-kahanūt* of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ in Butrus K Mudawwar, “*Fī al-farq bayna al-qibt wa-l-malakiyyah*,” *al-Maḥarrat* 56 (1970): 255.

101 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f.140r.

It is undeniable that the three authors know the doctrines of the other confessions. The content of the teaching about the union is similar in each author, while their understanding of the doctrines of the other confessions is based on ideological refusal *a priori*. The Melkite and Nestorian agree that the Miaphysite Christology involves a change in the nature. The Melkite and Miaphysite agree that the Christological doctrine of Nestorians involves a division, while the Nestorian and Miaphysite see the same error in the doctrine of the Melkites—it involves a change, but at the level of hypostasis.

2.4.3. Analogy of the Union of Body and Soul

The union of the human and divine in Christ is likened to the union of body and soul in all human beings. This analogy is used by all three authors, and it summarizes what we have discussed to this point:

Ibn Baṭṭīq ¹⁰³	Ibn al-Muqaffā' ¹⁰⁴	Elias of Nisibis ¹⁰⁵
As the union between the body and the soul [that produces] one human being, each one is united to the other. This does not mean either that the soul has been changed or its substance has been altered, so it is not to be recognized by its works; or that the body has been changed, or has been altered in himself or in his works.	... and we can see this [the union of the Word and the body], because it is present among us, as [the union] between the soul and the body. If [the Nestorians] were saying that the union between the soul and the body is not similar to that between the divinity and the humanity, we would say that the union of the soul to the body was understood only through the works of the man, so that the truth of the union of the Word and the body was understood only through the works of Christ.	The name of Christ, and [that] of the Son belong to the eternal Word together with the human taken from Mary, as the name "man" and [that of] "son of man" belong to the soul and body together ... and if we say that a man holds something, it is clear that he took it through his body, not his spirit, because the spirit, according to its spiritual and light [nature], brings nothing, but only the body brings [things]. [Such action,] however, has been accomplished by the unique man.

As an explanation of the union in Christ, the union of body and soul that is offered by the Melkite is a good example; it explains the uniqueness of the subject and the distinction between the two natures. It is different natures, that of the body and that of the soul, which are united with the result of a unique man. It is this man who operates the acts that belong to the soul and those that belong to the body. This explanation is also used in his discussion of the fact that in the union between a spiritual and a material nature, the spiritual spreads in the material, as happens with the body and the soul. The spiritual soul spreads throughout the material body, making a union without separation but with distinction.

Ibn al-Muqaffā' also uses this analogy to explain the diffusion, because of the union of the spiritual nature with material nature. For the Coptic author, though, the result is a new nature composed from two. At the same time, it is only the new nature—which in the analogy is the man—that reveals the two different component natures, i.e., reveals what belongs to the soul and what belongs to the body.

103 Eutychiei, *Annales*, 164. The translation is mine.

104 *Manuscript*, no. 129, f. 70r. The translation is mine.

On this last point the two authors agree. Applying this idea to Christology, however, the Melkite sees it as the single hypostasis of the Word, while the Copt sees it as the only subject, the new nature composed from two. The Nestorian, however, considers that the man is the common name of the soul and the body, and by this he seeks to emphasize the uniqueness of the subject. This is a real distinction between the body and the soul that are united in a man, who is not a nature but the result of the union. For this reason, in fact, Elias said that the name "man" belongs to both natures, the body and the soul. In addition, and according to his perspective, using this analogy, he emphasizes that the actions of the body and thus of the soul are attributed to the only subject, i.e., the man.

It is notable that the analogy is always oriented to support that author's particular doctrine, even if the general content is the same. Here is a summary:

	Melkite	Miaphysite	Nestorian
<i>The body and soul</i>	Two natures united and distinct.	Two natures united and distinct.	Two natures united and distinct.
<i>Man as only subject</i>	Hypostasis of the two natures, reveals the works of the two natures.	One nature from two, reveals the works of the two component natures.	One person with two natures and hypostases, reveals the two natures-hypostases through their works.
<i>Consequences</i>	Works are attributed to the one hypostasis.	Works are attributed to the unique nature.	Works are attributed to the one person/subject.

2.5. Philosophical and Metaphysical Concepts and Principles

While the three authors use the same terms and philosophical and metaphysical concepts in their Christological doctrine that they use in their Trinitarian doctrine, the understanding of these concepts and their content differ in each of them. The essential terms used for the general and abstract are: *ṭabī'ah* 'nature,' which is identified with the *ḡawhar* 'substance,' and *kiyān-dāt* 'nature-essence.' For the particular they use: *uqnūm* 'hypostasis,' *ḥaṣṣah* 'property,' and *ṣaḥṣ* 'person.'

If for all three authors, "nature" as a general abstract concept has the same function, it becomes a problem of differentiation between them when the general nature has to reveal its particular aspect, namely the concrete and singular nature. This means that they disagree on how to define or explain the relation between nature and hypostasis, i.e., general-abstract and singular-concrete.

For Ibn Baṭṭīq, the hypostasis has the metaphysical function of manifesting the nature perfectly. Thus in the Trinity, the three hypostases manifest the common divine nature perfectly. The hypostasis manifests the nature perfectly but is not identified with the total general nature. Therefore, it was possible for the Melkite tradition to teach that the hypostasis can manifest two different general natures.

For Ibn al-Muqaffā', the hypostasis also manifests the general nature, but can manifest only one, because for him the general nature is hypostases and does not only manifest itself in hypostases. The hypostasis includes the nature in itself perfectly, but it is not the total general nature.

Elias goes in quite a different direction. Identifying the hypostasis with the property, he

not make the general and common nature concrete, as it is in some way in the doctrines of the Melkites and Miaphysites.

Property, then, for the Nestorian author, is related to nature. Ibn al-Muqaffa' also identifies the hypostasis with the property, but for him, in opposition to Elias of Nisibis, hypostasis manifests the nature and makes it concrete. The Melkite, however, is more faithful to the doctrine of the Cappadocians, so for him, the property is related to hypostasis and describes it. Perfect nature for the Nestorian means that it has its hypostasis, i.e., is recognizable. For the Melkite, perfect nature means that hypostasis gives existence to the general nature and makes it concrete. The same is true for the Coptic author.

To apply all this to Christology, the differences between these theologians can be explained by taking into consideration all that we have just presented. Christ as a single subject for the Melkite is a hypostasis that manifests two different natures. This is the one hypostasis of the Word that gives existence to both the divine and the human nature. Since the concept of hypostasis is synonymous with that of person, Christ is also a single person.

Ibn al-Muqaffa' did not accept this doctrine. Although he states that the hypostasis of the Word was incarnate, this hypostasis must manifest just one nature. Speaking of natural union for him means that we have the composition of a new nature, the divine-human, that of the incarnate God. It is clear that the Coptic author closely approaches the doctrine of the *enhypostatos*, but his philosophical and theological background did not allow him to think of such development because he supported, *a priori*, the doctrine on the unique nature of Christ. Since the hypostasis is of the Word, the component natures belong to Him. This hypostasis manifests the new nature and also reveals the different actions of the one subject. Revealing different actions leads us to recognize the different natures from which the one nature of the incarnate Christ is composed. Therefore, this new nature is concrete, i.e., exists through the one hypostasis, through whom the actions of the component natures are manifested. The body drinks, eats, etc., and through this body, the divine powers are manifested, as in the miracles.¹⁰⁶

The Nestorian author could not agree with either of them, because for him the hypostasis simply makes the nature recognizable. If there are two natures in Christ, there must be two hypostases, so both natures are recognizable. Hypostasis cannot make recognizable two different natures, as it is a property of the nature; since there are two different natures in Christ, it requires two different hypostases.¹⁰⁷ With this distinction we can identify the reason for Elias' refusal to accept the hypostatic union and the doctrine of *enhypostatos*. He points out that the result of the union of the two natures must be one, but this one result cannot be called hypostasis.

The Melkite and Coptic authors find a problem in the Nestorian doctrine: the dangerous consequence of the addition of a fourth hypostasis to the Trinity, the hypostasis of the human nature.¹⁰⁸ Elias, even if he does not provide us a specific answer to this question, says in two places that the human nature of Christ could not see and contemplate the divine nature.¹⁰⁹ His explanation is clear: the human hypostasis of Christ does not participate in the internal relation between the three divine hypostases. Moreover, based on his philosophical and

106 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 19rv. See also al-Muqaffa', *Réfutation*, 140–141.

107 See Ms vat. ar. 180, ff. 187v–188r.

108 For the opinion of Ibn Baṭrīq see Eutychiei, *Annales*, 169; For Ibn al-Muqaffa''s opinion see Ms vat. ar. 138 f. 63v.

theological background, Elias declares that the hypostases can be counted only if they belong to the same nature.¹¹⁰ For Elias then, the humanity in Christ is different from the divinity, and therefore the human hypostasis in Christ cannot be counted among the three divine hypostases as an additional hypostasis in the Trinity.¹¹¹

The Melkite affirms that what is generated is the hypostasis, i.e., the concrete nature.¹¹² Because of the hypostatic union, the human nature, having as hypostasis the divine one of the Word, could be generated of the Virgin. In addition, he affirms that both natures in Christ are not abstract and general natures, but concrete. The hypostasis of the Word, which is concrete and perfect divine nature but does not contain all the divinity (the three divine hypostases together), became embodied, uniting to itself the human nature. For this reason, in fact, the human nature is not considered a general nature.

For the Nestorian, nature without hypostasis does not exist, and nature contains many hypostases: therefore, as a consequence, it is necessary that the humanity of Christ has its own hypostasis.¹¹³ For Elias, because of his understanding of the hypostasis as property of the nature, it was unacceptable that the divine property could make recognizable a human nature; human nature can be recognized only by its own hypostasis which is the body. The Melkite could have accepted this doctrine, if it had been agreed that it is the *property of the hypostasis* that allows the concrete nature to be recognizable, and not the *property of the general nature* which indicate the nature's ontological category, i.e., its kind. It is this distinction that explains why Elias asked the Melkites how it was possible for them to accept a perfect man in Christ while at the same time denying his hypostasis, i.e., his body.¹¹⁴ If there is a concrete nature, it must have its own hypostasis to be recognizable. Speaking, therefore, of one hypostasis of Christ as the Melkites and Jacobites teach, means change and mutation of the united natures, which Elias could not accept.

In the view of the Coptic author, hypostasis without nature cannot exist. What is generated by the Virgin cannot be only the hypostasis of the Word without nature.¹¹⁵ Therefore, from Mary is born the composed nature manifested through the hypostasis of the Word. Concerning the Melkite doctrine on the two wills and energies in Christ, the Coptic author, not making a distinction between hypostasis and nature, could not understand the distinction between a natural will and a hypostatic one. Affirming two natures in Christ, the Melkites speak also of the existence of two wills, because the will is of the nature.¹¹⁶ However, they also recognize that the hypostasis has its own will, which distinguishes it from the other hypostases of the same nature; therefore, the humanity in Christ could not have the will of a human hypostasis, because its hypostasis is the divine one of the Word.

All these explanations and teachings of the Melkites could not be understood by our Coptic author, because he was schooled in a different philosophy, epistemology and as

110 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 184v.

111 This, in fact, is the doctrine of the Assembly of the Bishops of 612, when they responded to the accusation of introducing a fourth hypostasis in the Trinity; see Jean-Baptiste Chabot, ed. and trans., *Synodicon orientale, ou, Recueil des synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 572–573.

112 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 168.

113 See Ms vat. ar. 180, ff. 183v–184v.

114 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 188r.

consequence theology. He states that in Christ there is only one nature, and since the will belongs to the nature, in Christ there should be just one will.¹¹⁷ Even though the Nestorian does not write about this issue, he could not accept the doctrine of the two wills, since the type of the union that he supports is the “union according to the will,” which has as a consequence only one will in Christ.

All this requires us to compare how the three authors understood the human nature in Christ. For Elias it was a single man,¹¹⁸ recognized by his hypostasis, that is, his body, and according to the will he was united to the Word of God. For Ibn Baṭrīq, Christ’s human nature was the Man (the Human being), neither as general nature nor as singular human nature; this humanity exists not through a human hypostasis but, because of the hypostatic union with the Word, through the divine hypostasis of the Word. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ refuses to consider Christ’s human nature as a singular man with its own hypostasis.¹¹⁹ In this he agrees with the Melkite author, but due to the natural union, he considers humanity as a component nature, which with the divinity formed the nature of the incarnate God.

For Elias to say that the Virgin generated God, to call her “the Mother of God,” is a blasphemy, because this applies a change to God in that it makes Him capable of receiving passions, *Theopaschism*.¹²⁰ He firmly rejects all the paradoxical expressions that are found in the traditions of the Melkites and Miaphysites, such as “God was born” and “God was crucified.” These are based on the so-called *communicatio idiomatum* ‘interchange of the properties,’¹²¹ and are a consequence of identifying the subject of the Incarnation with the eternal Word.

Ibn Baṭrīq accuses the Miaphysites of *Theopaschism* because, according to him and his tradition, they do not distinguish the two natures in Christ.¹²² Because of *Theopaschism* in the Miaphysite’s doctrine, the Melkite author also notices an ontological problem and danger. Emphasizing the single nature negate the double consubstantiality in Christ, thereby causing confusion between categories uncreated and created.¹²³

Ibn al-Muqaffa’ does not accept these accusations. He emphasizes that the Miaphysites in many works have explained that they do not introduce passions to God. For him it is clear that all operations of human nature are made by the unique subject, namely, the nature of incarnate God, but according to the flesh,¹²⁴ and so the double consubstantiality is not destroyed.

The Melkite and Miaphysite authors agree that there is need to talk about the suffering of God in some way, but not in a literal sense. They support their understanding about the suffering of God from their soteriology: Salvation is an act of God not of man.¹²⁵ There is a

117 See Mudawwar, “*Fī al-farq*,” 255–256.

118 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 180v.

119 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 64v.

120 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 185v.

121 It is the doctrine affirming that even the united natures in Christ were distinct. Thus, the properties of the one may be said of the other, because of the union in the one hypostasis of the Word. Consequently, it could be said, for example, expressions such as “God suffered” and “man made miracles.” It was, in addition, the doctrine through which the title “Mother of God” was explained and then approved by the Churches that accept these doctrines.

122 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 196.

123 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 197.

124 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 65rv.

need to identify the eternal Word with the incarnate Christ. Under this identification, paradoxical phrases are understood and interpreted. This use of paradoxical phrases is rejected by the Nestorian author.

To support his opinion and to show that the use of the title “Mother of God” is correct, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, in his controversy with the Nestorians, develops a philosophical principle: when a real union happens, then the result can be applied to one part of the composite result.¹²⁶ This means that since the divine nature of the Word is called God, then the result also can be called God, and therefore the begotten of Mary, the result-subject of the union, is also God, and Mary can be called “Mother of God.”

Ibn Baṭrīq, following his tradition, and to support the *communicatio idiomatum*, bases his opinion on the uniqueness of the hypostasis of the Word. What belongs either to human nature or to the divine nature is of the hypostasis of the Word, which is the subject-result of the union.¹²⁷ He does not need to discuss this issue with the Miaphysites, because they accept both the title “Mother of God” and the *communicatio idiomatum*; but, at the same time, he is aware that these two doctrines are necessary for the teaching on double consubstantiality, and for the teaching on the distinction between natures and their actions.

Elias of Nisibis also has the same preoccupation. He rejects the title “Mother of God” because this title does not show the true union of the two natures, it excludes the human nature. The correct title for the Virgin is “Mother of Christ,” a title that reveals the two natures united in the unique subject.¹²⁸ Furthermore, to support his rejection, he develops the doctrine on the *common name*.¹²⁹ The name “God” is common to the three divine hypostases. Saying that Mary has generated God would mean that she has generated the three divine hypostases, and this is blasphemy. Elias, therefore, requires precision in doctrine.¹³⁰

The three authors are in agreement in regarding *Theopaschism* as a heretical doctrine, but because of their different philosophical understanding and ideology, they cannot recognize this accord. In addition, because of their rejection of each other *a priori*, they do not even try to understand what the other authors really mean.

3. An Inclusive Christological Proposal

To resolve the problem between the three authors who represent the three major Christian confessions in East, I try to look for terminological similarities and commonalities in thought and make a proposal for an inclusive Christological doctrine as I did for the Trinitarian

126 See Ms vat. ar. 138, f. 67v.

127 See Eutychiei, *Annales*, 167–168.

128 See Ms vat. ar. 180, f. 182v.

129 This doctrine was developed first in Christology by Nestorius in his second letter to Cyril of Alexandria, and then was developed further by later Nestorians. Nestorians started to distinguish between “common natural name,” “hypostatic name,” and “personal name”; see Luigi Scipioni, *Ricerche sulla cristologia del “Libro di Eraclide” di Nestorio. La formula teologica e il suo contesto filosofico*, Paradosis, Studi di letteratura e teologia antica XI (Friburgo, Edizioni Universitarie Friburgo, 1957), 93–97, 146; see also my paper given in the 12th Symposium Syriacum, Rome, 2–7 September, 2016. This paper is to be published in the acts of the conference under the title “The Christology of Ḥabīb’s Chapters: New Considerations.” In Elias we find the doctrine of the common natural name, and also of “Christ” as the common name of the two united natures—which is the doctrine of “personal name,” even if he does

doctrine, incorporating the doctrines of the three authors, and other elements found in their traditions. Historically, some theologians tried to distinguish between theology and economy. Others, however, have fallen into confusion between theology and economy, so they risked being accused of teaching *Tritheism*.¹³¹ My proposal does distinguish between theology and economy, but uses the same philosophical concepts without changing their content and metaphysical definition and theological meaning. It is the content that matters, that is, the meaning and not the term in itself.¹³²

My proposal intends to demonstrate that the different Christological approaches can be found in an inclusive scheme that evaluates the developments made by the three authors. In addition, I will refer to some of the results of the modern Christological dialogue to support my proposal.

The action of the Incarnation is of the hypostasis of the Word. In this, in fact, I have to evaluate the clear distinction between nature and hypostasis made by Ibn al-Muqaffa' which I consider a step of development that he makes in his Miaphysite tradition. The hypostasis of the Word is the beginning of the Incarnation. It is this hypostasis which was incarnated and not another divine hypostasis, but without being separated from the other divine hypostases, the Father and the Spirit.

At the Annunciation, the Word, with the blessing of the Father and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, created for Himself human nature in the womb of the Virgin, and at the same time was united to it. The union is completed with the act of conception. Having already a hypostasis, i.e., the one of the Word, the human nature could not have its own hypostasis. In this, we have agreement between the Coptic and the Melkite authors.

The problem that arises now regards how human nature in Christ is understood: is it general or particular? And how can it exist without having its own hypostasis? To answer these questions, I evaluate my previous discussion on the philosophical principles used by the three authors. The human nature in Christ, therefore, could not be a common/general nature, because the common/general nature is abstract and includes all its hypostases, since it is shared by them. Moreover, not having a human hypostasis but the one of the Word, it cannot be considered similar to other human beings, who have their own human hypostases, and with whom it shares the same common human nature. So what kind of human nature is it?

The divine hypostasis of the Word, from the moment of the conception begins to manifest two natures, the divine and the human, and make them concrete, that is to give them existence. Here I consider very important Ibn Baṭṭīq's use of the term *qiwām*, and the distinction he makes between this term and *uqnūm*. The *uqnūm* 'hypostasis' of the Word in the Incarnation gives *qiwām* 'existence,' also to the human nature. Therefore, we can call this hypostasis *qiwām*, as synonymous for *uqnūm mu'allaf* 'composed hypostasis,' another term used by Ibn Baṭṭīq. This is, in fact, the meaning and explanation of the hypostatic union; it does not mean union between two hypostases, but union in the hypostasis of the Word.¹³³

131 See Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. vol. II/III, *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604): The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch from 451 to 600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268–280.

132 The Syriac dialogue had a similar method; see Alfred Stirmemann and Gehard Wilflinger, *Syriac Dialogue*, vol. II, *Second non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna:

To say that Christ's human nature does not have its own hypostasis means that, as a nature, it is consubstantial with us in everything but sin. Sin, in fact, is not of the nature but it is an accident that occurs through the action of the hypostasis. The humanity in Christ is the new Adam; it is a new creation, a deified nature because it is united to the Word. On this, all three confessions agree. According to their soteriological doctrine, Melkites could not accept that human nature in Christ had been hypostasized through a human hypostasis, because in this way, the Word would save just one man, a singular nature, and not general human nature. What is saved by the Word is the general and common human nature; but in order to exist, this nature needs hypostasis, therefore it was hypostasized through the Word. This soteriological understanding, i.e., that all human nature was saved through Christ and not just a single man, is a common doctrine of the three confessions.¹³⁴

The result, then, of the union is one, the hypostasis of the Word. This result is called Christ the Lord, but being also the hypostasis of the Word, we can speak of an identification between Christ and the Word. The Nicene Creed, in fact, calls this one subject the Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God. Although the name "Christ" reveals the truth of the Incarnation, that is, the union of the two natures—having as start and end of the Incarnation the hypostasis of the Word—this identification is valid under the condition that there is no mutation or confusion between the natures.¹³⁵

We need also to take into consideration the two groups of properties, natural and hypostatic, that I talked about in the Trinitarian proposal. Having in Christ a union of two natures without confusion or separation, each nature retains its natural properties. Thus, the properties of the divine nature of the Word do not change; He remains invisible, intangible, spiritual, incorporeal, and eternal. These properties are common in the three hypostases of the divine nature, and they are manifested perfectly by the hypostasis of the Word. The human nature manifests through the same hypostasis its natural properties, i.e., its body, its rational soul, its being thirsty, being hungry, eating, receiving passions, etc. Even if this nature does not have a human hypostasis it is not considered a singular human nature, because its hypostasis is that of the Word. It can, however, be seen as *šahs* 'individual,' in the sense of one rational body, all of whose natural properties are similar to other individuals of the same human nature. In this way, I evaluate the teaching of Elias, who considers the humanity in Christ as an individual, and calls it *al-bašarī al-ma'hūḍ min Maryam* 'the human taken from Mary,' without considering it as a concrete human nature with its own human hypostasis.

Affirming that the human nature of Christ is hypostatized in the hypostasis of the Word means that it does not have the hypostatic properties that each human hypostasis manifests and by which is distinguished from other human hypostases. All this, in fact, is the result of the deification of Christ's human nature during conception. Even the discussion on the two wills and energies can be explained through this consequence. Both the will and the energies are of two

(Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2003), 370–372, 390.

134 For the Nestorian tradition, see for example the opinion of Nestorius of Constantinople, *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1910), 85–86.

135 We see an accord for that identification in the declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Catholicos and Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Dinkha IV; see "Common Christological Declaration," accessed February 23, 2017.

types, natural and hypostatic. In this case, the two natures in Christ have their wills and energies that are common to their general nature. However, in Christ hypostatic energy and will is one. This means that the deification made because of the union is perfect; but that neither means that the human nature was not real, nor that it is not subject to the limitations of being created.

The union is called by Ibn al-Muqaffa' a "union of composition," without meaning mutation of the natures. The term *qiwām* by itself means hypostasis that manifests two united natures, i.e., composed hypostasis. Thus the union is at the level of hypostasis—this means real and true union, as it was called by Ibn Baṭrīq, *ḥuḷḡat al-ḥaqq*. Hypostatic union and natural union may, in fact, be understood as synonyms if both expressions mean union of two natures without confusion or separation—that is, a true and real union.¹³⁶ "Union according to the will" as an expression can be applied to my scheme with the following understanding: in Christ, the hypostatic will is only that of the Word. Thus, his human nature cannot have a human hypostatic will, such that it would desire evil, commit sin, etc. Therefore, Christ's human nature follows the hypostatic will of the divine Word.

As a result of the Incarnation, and according to my scheme, there would not be any addition of a fourth hypostasis in the Trinity. The human nature of Christ participates in the divine glory but without losing its human limitations, despite being deified. This, I believe, was the reason the Nestorian church argued that the hypostasis of the Word is not counted among the three divine hypostases, so the Trinity remains Trinity.

With the preservation of the natural properties and the distinction between the natures *Theopaschism* is prevented. However, since the hypostasis of the Word is the subject of the union, the Word is identified with Christ, and therefore, it can be said that the Word acts according to His divine nature and according to His human nature. This allows the formulation of paradoxical sentences with a soteriological background. For example, saying that the Word was crucified in the flesh means that salvation was accomplished by God, and not by a simple man. This means also accepting the *communicatio idiomatum*.¹³⁷

Does my discussion to this point also permit me to call the Virgin "Mother of God?" To do this, I must answer the question "who was born of the Virgin, the nature or the hypostasis?" While the general nature could not exist, what is born is the hypostasis, i.e., the concrete and hypostasized nature. What is born from the Virgin, then, taking into consideration the explanation of Ibn Baṭrīq, is the human nature hypostasized in the hypostasis of the Word. As a consequence, it can be said that the Word was born according to His human nature, an expression acceptable by Ibn al-Muqaffa' and his tradition. For this reason, Mary could be called the "Mother of God." In addition, I have to make a second clarification of this title for Mary. It does not mean that the Virgin has generated all three divine hypostases, but only the Son, and only according to the flesh. For the Coptic and Melkite authors, such an explanation is accepted. Also Elias, the Nestorian author, could accept the title "Mother of God" for the Virgin, if it means that what is born from the Virgin is not the divine nature, and that this title does not mean that Mary generated the Trinity. This is additionally confirmed by the fact that he agrees to call the human taken from Mary by the

136 In the actual Christological dialogue, we have the same opinion; see Olmi, *Il consenso*, 391.

137 M. Birnie showed that this Church uses such expressions in its liturgical hymns; see Michael J. Birnie,

name "God."¹³⁸ According to this view, Mary, generating this human nature, could be called "Mother of God."¹³⁹

Conclusion

In this paper I provided a comparative study of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines of three representative authors from the three major Christian confessions of the East during the tenth and eleventh centuries: Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq, Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Elias of Nisibis.

Understanding the content of the doctrine, and how the content of the doctrine is explained by each author, is essential to understand each author's rejection *a priori* of what the other authors meant. Although all Christians in Middle East used the same terminology and the same language, they had a different understanding of the metaphysical concepts and their theological meaning. My analysis demonstrates that there is common ground on the doctrinal content but differ in the way they explain it, differing especially in their understanding of the same metaphysical and theological terms. Each applies to the doctrine of the other, his own metaphysical system rather than the other's—thus they could not see such agreement.

Arab Christian theology comes chronologically after the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. Having, however, to defend again the Trinitarian doctrine that was considered *Tritheism* by Muslims, it was necessary to rethink "new" ways to express the Trinitarian dogma. Arab Christian thinkers such as the three examined authors, elaborated their Trinitarian doctrine based on the Christological development made by each of their own distinct traditions during the controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. The main problems which I demonstrated were with the usage of the following concepts: 1) the term hypostasis; 2) the relation between hypostasis and nature; and 3) property.

My analysis of the authors reveals the important developments each made within his own tradition. These developments, such as the distinction between hypostasis and nature by the Coptic author, and the acceptance to call the human in Christ "God" by the Nestorian, were evaluated in order to show that the three systems might be included in one scheme.

In my proposal, then, I: 1) gave to each metaphysical and theological concept one clear definition; 2) distinguished between two groups of properties, trying to resolve the problem of the identification of hypostasis and property made by the Coptic, and especially by the Nestorian author; 3) explained the kind of natures in the one Christ: divinity in Christ was the concrete nature of the Word, while humanity was a real rational humanity that had as hypostasis that of the Word; 4) defined the type of union that occurred between divinity and humanity at the Incarnation: a union in the hypostasis of the Word, the natures being truly united, with distinction but not separation.

Finally, I have shown that Arab Christian theology can be studied not only from the perspective of interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam, but also to gain a richer understanding of the dialogue between Christian churches, seeking to overcome misunderstandings of past centuries.

138 See Samir, "un traité nouveau," 147.149.

139 In the Nestorian tradition we find another example of accepting, under some conditions, the title "Mother of God." Babai the Great does not reject the title by itself, but for him the title "Mother of Christ" is more accurate because it reveals the truth of the two united natures; see Babai Magni, *Liber*