

Investigating *Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq’s* Methodology in the Study of Christian Doctrine of Trinity Based on His *al-Radd ‘Alā* *al-Tathlīth (The Response to Trinity)*

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Abstract: This paper seeks to investigate the methodology of *Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq*, the classical Muslim scholar, in the study of Christian doctrine of trinity with special reference to his master piece *al-Radd ‘Alā al-Tathlīth: Al-Juz’ al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd ‘Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (The Response to Trinity: The First Part from the Book in Response to the three Christian Sects). The aim of this research is to investigate *al-Warrāq’s* polemical discourse consisting of arguments, disputes and refutation, while responding to the claims of three Christian sects, *Malkiyyah* (Melkites), *Nastūriyyah* (Nestorians) and *Ya ‘qūbiyyah* (Jacobites) in relation to the concept of trinity. The significance of this research stands on its suggesting of new insights for young scholars and students of comparative religion in dealing with Christian doctrine of trinity, as addressed by the content of *al-Warrāq’s* original script. This study starts with an introduction, which is followed by a discussion on: (1) *Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq’s* brief chronology, (2) his selected work(s) on the study of religion, and (3) his methodology in the study of Christian doctrine of trinity through selected statements from his original work. Descriptive and analytical methods are employed in the entire research. This study concludes that *Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq’s* methodology, which is of a polemical-critical-refutative nature based on pure human reasoning, is relevant to the contemporary scholarship of comparative religion, through which sound responses can be provided to issues related to God, cosmology, man, eschatology, ethics, rights, freedom, tolerance, leadership, etc.

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Key Terms: *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq*, methodology, polemical discourse, Christianity, trinity.

Mengkaji Metodologi Kajian *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq* Tentang Doktrin Trinitas Kristian Berdasarkan Karyanya *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth* (Respon Terhadap Trinitas)

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji metodologi seorang sarjana Islam klasik, *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq*, dalam kajian tentang doktrin trinitas Kristian melalui karya agungnya *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth: Al-Juz' al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (Respon Terhadap Trinitas: Bahagian Pertama Daripada Buku Respon Terhadap Tiga Aliran Kristian). Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji wacana *al-Warrāq* yang bersifat polemik, yang mengandungi hujah, pertikaian dan penyangkalan dalam responnya terhadap dakwaan tiga aliran Kristian, Melkites, Nestorian dan Jacobites berkaitan konsep trinitas. Kepentingan kajian ini terletak pada cadangannya tentang wawasan-wawasan baru bagi para sarjana muda dan pelajar perbandingan agama dalam berhadapan dengan doktrin trinitas Kristian, seperti yang diungkapkan dalam kandungan skrip asli *al-Warrāq*. Kajian ini bermula dengan pendahuluan, yang diikuti dengan perbincangan tentang: (1) Kronologi ringkas *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq* (2) Karyanya yang terpilih dalam kajian agama, dan (3) Metodologinya dalam kajian terhadap doktrin trinitas Kristian berdasarkan pernyataan-pernyataan terpilih daripada karya aslinya. Metode kajian deskriptif dan analitik telah digunakan dalam keseluruhan kajian ini. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa metodologi *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq* yang bersifat polemik-kritikal-sangkalan berdasarkan pemikiran tulen manusia, ialah relevan terhadap bidang perbandingan agama kontemporari, di mana ia dapat memberikan respon yang kukuh tentang isu-isu berkaitan tuhan, kosmologi, manusia, eskatologi, etika, hak, kebebasan, toleransi, kepemimpinan, dan sebagainya.

Kata Kunci: *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq*, metodologi, wacana polemik, Kristian, trinitas.

Introduction

The Muslim scholarship in comparative religion has been developed with the intellectual support provided by many great classical and contemporary scholars through their writings related to the study of different religions. Their sincere commitment to this subject is shown in their various works discussing the historical developments, scriptures, doctrines, rites and rituals of selected religion(s). The literature produced by both classical and contemporary Muslim scholars demonstrates the

diversity of methodologies utilized by them in this field of study. The Islamic Sources, al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah have inspired the Muslims in the past and present to use appropriate methods in their writings about the other religions. Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq (?-861C.E.), Ibn Nadīm (935C.E.-990C.E.), al-Bīrūnī (973C.E.-1048C.E.), Ibn Ḥazm (994C.E.-1064C.E.), al-Shahristānī (1086C.E.-1153C.E.), Ibn Taymiyyah (1263C.E.-1328C.E.), Ibn Baṭūṭa (1304C.E.-1368C.E.), al-Fārūqī (1921C.E.-1986C.E.), Fattāḥ (1933C.E.-2007C.E.), and others, have employed descriptive, documentary, travelogue, objective, analytical, critical, polemical and refutative methodologies in their writings about other religions. Indeed, all these methods are used by different people in their day-to-day life in a form of engagement and conversation, as well as in the form of writing. Their intention is to describe, present, promote or defend their views directly and indirectly, while engaging into a verbal discourse with each other and the members of other religions. Some of them would go beyond the verbal discourse by documenting their discourses with others in a written form.

The emphasis of this research is on the investigation of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's methodology in his responses to the claims of three Christian sects, *Malkiyyah* (Melkites), *Nasṭūriyyah* (Nestorians) and *Ya'qūbiyyah* (Jacobites) concerning the concept of Christian doctrine of trinity. Even though in the past many Muslim scholars who came after Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq mentioned him in their writings, yet they did not study his methodologies. There are a few contemporary scholars who have undertaken studies on Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's works. 'Abdurrahmān N. al-Ṭūsī has written on Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's book, *al-Maqālāt* (The Articles), an outstanding master piece dealing with Jewish, Christian, and Dualists sects, as well as issues related to the Muslim sects and philosophers, by highlighting his contribution to the science of comparative religion (al-Ṭūsī, 2014, 26-37). The main focus of al-Ṭūsī in this work is on the description of the content of *al-Maqālāt*.

David Thomas asserts in his paper "Early Muslim Relations with Christianity" within two short paragraphs that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq "is one of the most intriguing early Muslim thinkers...interested in the teachings of other religions....he gave authoritative accounts of Zoroastrianism..., Indian religions, Judaism, and Christianity.... The one work that survives is his refutation of Christianity, an exhaustive series of arguments against the trinity and incarnation..." indicating "...

how well he knew his opponents' beliefs by the subtlety with which he exposes the contradictions between them." (Thomas, 1989, 29-30) In addition, Thomas has produced another great work on "Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity," in which he discusses Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's *Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalātha Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (The Book of Response to the Three Christians Sects) (Thomas, 1992). In the introduction of this work, Thomas presents general information about Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's biography and his works on different disciplines, followed by the description of the original text in Arabic with the English translation. Thomas has neither analyzed, nor criticized Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's master piece. Rather, he has presented the claims of the Christians sects on the Christian doctrine of trinity and Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's responses towards them. Another contemporary scholar, Jon Hoover, has mentioned in his work very briefly about Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's book on the response to the three Christian sects of his time about the doctrines of trinity and incarnation. Besides, Hoover has described in his paper within two short paragraphs the refutative arguments of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq towards the two Christian doctrines of trinity and incarnation (Hoover, 2018, 170-172). Both, Thomas and Hoover have described the work of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq and mentioned the ways he responded to the claims of the three Christian sects by using pure human reasoning without referring to the Bible and *al-Qur'ān*.

The abovementioned writings on Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq have not discussed the methodologies utilized by him in the study of Christian doctrine of trinity based on his master piece *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlith: Al-Juz' al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (The response to Trinity: The First Part from the Book of Response to the three Christian Sects). Rather, a general picture in a descriptive way about the contribution of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to the study of other religions has been given. Therefore, this paper finds it substantially important to embark on a study on this subject by providing accurate answers to the following questions: (1) who is Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq (a brief chronology about him)?, (2) what are his selected works on the study of religion (description and analysis of his selected works are done in this section)?, (3) what are the methodologies used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq in the study of Christian doctrine of trinity?, and (4) why and how did he use these methodologies (identifying, investigating and then, analyzing his methodologies through selected texts from the original work)?

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Brief Chronology:

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's full name is *Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad bin Hārūn bin Muḥammad al-Warrāq*. He is a Muslim scholar of the ninth century, who contributed through his writings to the Muslim scholarship of comparative religion. His versatility in dealing with the study of various religions made him to be known as an influential, as well as independent scholar of his time. Comparative religious literatures produced by him are very impressive, although most of them are known only from their titles, as only few of them have survived. It is reported that his master piece *Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalātha Firaq min al-Naṣārā* (the Book of Response to the three Christian Sects) survived because of Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī¹, a Christian theologian, who quoted it extensively about a century after his (Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's) death (Thomas, 1996, 275). Besides, it is unsure whether the entire content of his *Kitāb al-Radd* has survived (Thomas, 2002, 61). Nevertheless, his *Kitāb al-Radd* became a source of reference to many later Muslim scholars, who used polemical and refutative approaches in the study of others religions, especially Judaism and Christianity.

His personal life cannot be described accurately as a result of insufficient literature. Even though some of his writings have mentioned information concerning him, yet they are contradictory to each other (Thomas, 1996, 275). The years of his direct involvement in various activities, like debates and writings in relation to the science of comparative religion are presented with uncertainty, as they were also arguable among scholars of his time (Thomas, 2002, 17). It is stated in an account that the reasons for his imprisonment were his heretical views on Islam and its tenets, especially on the miraculous aspects of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) and *al-Qur'ān*. Besides, it is mentioned that his blind admiration for Mani's² teachings led him astray from

¹ Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī ibn Ḥamīd ibn Zakariyyā al-Takrītī al-Manṭiqī is one of the most outstanding Christian Arab thinkers of the 10th century. He was a Jacobite theologian and a philosopher, born in the then Christian town of Takrīt in 893C.E. or 894C.E. He spent his active life in Baghdad. He died in 13 August 974C.E. (Platti, 2020)

² Mani was born in Southern Babylonia (now in Iraq). With his "annunciation" at the age of 24, he obeyed a heavenly order to manifest himself publicly and to proclaim his doctrines establishing the new religion, which Mani preached throughout the Persian Empire. Mani founded *Manichaeism a dualistic*

the teachings of Islam (Thomas, 1989, 29). This shows that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's personality was not matured enough to provide him with the right understanding of the teachings of Islam. Perhaps, he was influenced by the views of those who were skeptical about the Islamic Truth during his time.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Date of Birth and Death: His date of birth is unknown. There are also contradictory accounts about the date of his death. According to Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq died in 247H./861-862C.E. (Watt, 2019). He also said that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq died at his birthplace, Baghdad, but more specifically in the Ramla quarter (Al-Zarkalī al-Dimashkī, 2002, 128; Thomas, 2002, 23), where he was left in the prison till his death (al-Ṭūsī, 2014, 29).

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Education: The ninth century found Muslims and Christians to engage themselves in debates, where their religious differences were discussed greatly in public spheres. It is mentioned that later, Christians attempted to create confusion and doubt among ordinary Muslims by dealing with Hadiths that have weak chain of transmitters. The polemical accounts of Islam by Christians like John of Damascus and 'Abd al-Masīh al-Kindī (Thomas, 2002, 7), existed since the eighth century. In response to that, the discipline of *al-Kalām* associated with *Mu'tazilah*, was established and bloomed into a distinctive systematic science with its own methodology. Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's writing on anti-Christian polemic had become a constituent part of Muslim theology, as it is considered as a response to the Christian doctrines of trinity and divinity of God (Thomas, 2002, 10, 17, & 18) by a Muslim scholar.

It is significant to mention that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq studied the main belief systems and religions of his day with sensitivity and sympathy. Besides, he wrote detailed refutations of what the Christians taught, including arguments that pursued to their logical limits. His works also reveal that he engaged in many polemical discussions that were common among third/ninth century *al-Mutakallimūn* (the polemicists) (Thomas, 2002, 31, 35). The only association that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq had in record was with Ibn al-Rāwandī, his pupil, who together with him wrote books in support of the Imamate as they both embraced

Rafidism (rejecters)³. This is supported by the claim that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq passed on a statement from a companion of the leading Rafidi theologian, Hishām Ibn al-Ḥakam. However, they later became enemies as Ibn al-Rāwandī was among *al-Mu'tazilah* (the rationalists), who accused Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to be a dualist (Thomas, 2002, 26, 32).

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's School of Thought: His school of thought is not very clear, as he is considered by many scholars to be a complicated or misunderstood individual, especially concerning his beliefs. This was probably due to his impartiality in studying other religions that brought him to such consequence. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq was "one of the brilliant theologians who was a *Mu'tazilī*, but confused (the doctrines) until his confusion caused him to be accused of belonging to the sect of the adherents of dualism. Ibn al-Rāwandī drew upon (his ideas)" (Ibn Nadīm, 1970, 419).

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, who was known as an expert on dualist sects during his time with so much knowledge and apparent sympathy made his works on dualism as the main references used by later Muslim intellectuals. However, his known writings on dualism indicate that he not only explained dualism, but attacked it. According to some reports, his interest in *Shī'ī* approach towards Islam was made clear, when he expressed freely his own criticisms towards Islamic beliefs that led him to dualism. It is mentioned that he refused to accept that the claims to Prophetic status and inspiration of Muḥammad (PBUH) or anyone else could be based upon miraculous acts or insights. For him, the exercise of reason alone can provide the criteria for moral conduct and reality. Thus, his approach towards the authority of revelation (Thomas, 2002, 26-29) has placed him in opposing position with Islamic teachings. It needs to be noted here that these statements were taken in fragmentary forms from the works of Ibn al-Rāwandī (Ibn Nadīm, 1970, 419-

³ *Al-Rāfiḍah* or *al-Rawāfiḍa* (Rejecters), are among *al-Shī'ah* Muslims, who rejected the Caliphate of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)'s two successors Abū Bakr (r.a.) and 'Umar al-Khaṭṭāb (r.a.) and condemned them as unlawful rulers of the Muslim community. *Al-Rāfiḍah* were also considered by some to be one of three main groups that compose *al-Shī'ah*, the other two being *al-Ghulāt* and *al-Zaydiyyah*. (Ibn Manẓūr, "Rafaḍa," 1690; and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Rāfiḍah," 2020).

423), and hence, it is hard to judge whether Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq really expressed those convictions or otherwise.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Major Works: Most of his works written on different issues and especially related to other religions, as well as *Shī'ah* denominations, did not survive in the text form. They are known to the contemporary readers in the title form only. The topics of his writings reveal the fact that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq had deep knowledge and understanding of other religions of his time and their major teachings. For instance, his book *al-Radd 'Alā al-Naşārā* (the Response to Christians) is among the surviving works of this scholar in the field of comparative religion. His other writings can be classified into four categories (Ibn Nadīm, 1970, 419; al-Ṭūsī, 2014, 28; Thomas, 1992, 22-24):

- *The first category* includes his works on other religions: *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Nās wa-Ikhtilāfihim*, *Kitāb Radd 'Alā al-Yahūd*, *Kitāb Iqtisāş Madhāhib Aşhāb al-Ithnayn wa al-Radd 'Alayhim*, *Kitāb Radd 'alā al-Mājūs* and *Kitāb Radd 'alā al-Naşārā*.
- *The second category* contains outstanding works on the aspects of Shī'ī beliefs: *Kitāb Ikhtilāf al-Shī'a*, *Kitāb al-Imāmah*, *Kitāb al-Saqīfah*, *Kitāb al-Majālis* and *Kitāb al-Naqd al-Uthmāniyyah*.
- *The third category* comprises his works that are critical of Islam: *Kitāb al-Ḥukm 'Alā Shūrā*, *Kitāb al-Zumurruda*, *Kitāb al-Gharīb al-Mashriqī* and *Kitāb al-Nawh 'Alā al-Bahā'im*.
- *Finally, the fourth category* involves his works concerned with questions of Kalām: *Kitāb al-Ḥadath* and *Kitāb Mas'alah fī Qidam al-Qisam ma'a Ithbātihī al-A'rād*.

Although most of his works have ceased to exist now, his surviving works are very influential and still benefitting to many intellectuals in the field of comparative religion.

The Methodology of Abū 'Īsā Al-Warrāq's Kitāb Al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalātha Firaq Min al-Naşārā:

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq has written a few works on the study of religion especially in the study of the major teachings of Christianity. Among his writings on the subject of comparative religion that have survived until today is his *Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalātha Firaq Min al-Naşārā*

(The Book of Response to the Three Christians Sects). It continues to be one of the leading sources that the contemporary comparative religion researchers look for in the study of early Muslim polemic against other religions. *Al-Radd* is no longer available in its original form, and all that survives were three hundred and fifty-one or so paragraphs that were made available in Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī's *Kitāb "Tabyīn Ghalat* (discrepancy) *Muḥammad bin Hārūn al-Ma'rūf bi 'Abī 'Īsā al-Warrāq,*" through which Yaḥyā responded to *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's* refutation (Thomas, 2002, 61). This section discusses, *firstly*, the content of his book and, *secondly*, the main methodologies illustrated with the analysis of selected texts as examples.

The Content of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Kitāb al-Radd:

David Thomas has edited and translated this work in a way that Arabic, the original language of the text, appears on one page and the English translation of the text on the other page facing it. Its content is divided into two main parts, starting with an introduction to the doctrines of trinity and incarnation in Christianity. The *First Part* deals with Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's polemical views on the Christian doctrine of trinity (Thomas, 1992). The *Second Part* provides Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's arguments against the Christian concept of incarnation (Thomas, 2002). Besides, the text of this work is arranged according to Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī's quotations from the original form of *al-Radd* (Thomas, 2002, 82).

This section describes the content of the *First Part* of *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth: Al-Juz' al-al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (The Response to Trinity: The First Part from the Book –The Polemical Response to The Three Christian Sects), *Malkiyyah* (Melkites), *Nasṭūriyyah* (Nestorians) and *Ya'qūbiyyah* (Jacobites) in relation to the concept of trinity. Indeed, Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq has presented his arguments towards the doctrine of trinity based on the claims of the three Christian sects in a point form, consisting of 150 points, with a length of 58 pages in Arabic language, which is the original language on which this work has been written.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's *Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth* (Thomas, 1992, 66-181) is written to discuss issues related to both religious communities, the Muslims and the Christians. Its aim is to: (1) expose the errors, shortcomings and contradictions in Christian teachings as presented by the three Christian sects of his time; (2) inform Christians

that their belief system is full of inconsistencies; (3) show to the Muslims the reality about Christian teachings; and (4) remind them to not blindly accept what Christians say about the Truth, rather, to respond through sound reasoning.

The content of the *First Part* of his book that deals with the Christian doctrine of trinity is divided into two main sections. In the *First Section* (Thomas, 1992, 66-77), which covers six pages of discussion, Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq mentions the teachings of three Christian sects based on their claims about the doctrine of trinity and its three main hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Spirit. According to all of the sects, the Son is the Word and the Spirit is the Life, which is known among them as the Holy Spirit. They claim that the three hypostases are related with one another and such become one single body, meanwhile each of them is a specific substance. Besides, there is one comprehensive substance that is common to them. Their claims are described by Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq in a very thorough manner. In addition, their teachings about the dual nature of the Messiah, divine and human, have been mentioned in a very lengthy manner by him. The differences and similarities regarding their claims have been written in a detailed form. Furthermore, Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq argues that the three Christian sects claim that the Messiah was crucified, as well as killed. However, they differ with each other over the crucifixion and killing in relation with Messiah’s dual nature, divine and human. He asks which one of these two natures was affected by the crucifixion and killing?

In the *Second Section* (Thomas, 1992, 77-181), which covers one hundred and five pages of discussion, Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq informs about the way he has refuted the main views of the three Christian sects on the doctrine of trinity, as mentioned in the first section of the book. He has responded to the claims of the Christian sects through three categories of questions. In the *first category of questions* (Thomas, 1992, 77-113), he begins his argument by responding in a very polemical way to “the questions of the relationship between the substance and hypostases,” as claimed by the three Christian sects. He replies to the Nestorians and Jacobites in a very argumentative way focusing on two important issues related to the doctrine of trinity: (1) *One substance is identical with the three hypostases*, and (2) *the three hypostases are identical with the substance*. Then, he replies to the third sect, the Melkites, in a critical-refutative approach about the relationship between the substance and

the hypostases concerning the trinity focusing on the following four different subjects: (1) *the substance is identical with the three hypostases in all respects*, (2) *the substance is identical with the three hypostases in some respects*, (3) *the substance is different from the three hypostases in no respect*, (4) *the three hypostases are identical with the substance though individually differentiated*.

In the second category of questions (Thomas, 1992, 113-154), Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq provides sound answers in a critical way to the questions directed by him to the three Christian sects about the issue related to "the question of the substance as one and the hypostases as three." He presents his criticism about this subject by asking few questions to the three Christian sects: (1) how the hypostases are differentiated?, when the substance is one in its substantiality, eternal and undifferentiated in its being?, and (2) among the attributes of eternity, lordship, power and divinity, is the Father entitled to any that the Son is not? He continues his discussion on the doctrine of trinity by providing critical views on different interpretations brought forward by the Trinitarian theologians (representing the three Christian sects) in support of the substance and hypostases. According to him, the defenders of the trinity provide different arguments based upon: (1) analogy, and (2) the notion of perfection.

Lastly, in the third category of questions (Thomas, 1992, 154-181), Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq has presented his critical views on the Christian doctrine of trinity by providing sound answers to "the question of different characteristics of the hypostases" focusing on: (1) the individual characteristics of the hypostases, (2) hypostases as attributes of other hypostases, (3) the generation of the Son from the Father, and (4) the hypostases as properties, attributes and individuals. He has discussed all the above-mentioned issues related to the Christian doctrine of trinity, as claimed by the three Christian sects in a very extensive way.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Methodology:

The Methodology used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq in his *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth: Al-Juz' al-al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (The Response to Trinity: The First Section from the Book –"The Polemical Respond to The Three Christian Sects,") is of a philosophical approach based on logical assumptions, in which he first asks questions and then, prepares answers in all possible aspects.

He responds to the Christian doctrine of trinity with logical arguments without referring to the Islamic Sources, *al-Qur'ān* and *al-Sunnah*. Besides, he attempts to argue according to views presented by the Christians themselves on trinity. He refutes their claims from the logic of their statements alone by making observations on the basis of each sect's teachings and claims from the Christian contexts. In this sense, it is understood that his concern was to show the errors made by the three Christian sects in relation to their interpretation(s) of the doctrine of trinity, in ways that, according to Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, they could not easily provide sound answers.

The question that arises here is what helped Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to succeed in defending his cases against the Christian claims? *Firstly*, the ways he describes the information about the claims of the three Christian sects on the doctrine of trinity; and *secondly*, the techniques used by him for his arguments in the core of his *polemical-critical-refutative methodology*. The series of questions posed on the teachings of the three Christian sects about the doctrine of trinity and the answers provided by him are presented in a very critical way based on the rules of logic and rational thinking.

Selected texts from *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth* are examined here to identify and study the methodology used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq in his arguments, disputes and refutations, while responding to the teachings of the three Christian sects, *Malkiyyah* (Melkites), *Nasṭūriyya* (Nestorians) and *Ya'qūbiyyah* (Jacobites) in relation to the concept of trinity. He argued based on observation, listening and historical facts and utilized methods of descriptive, objective, analytical, and polemical nature.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq says in the following statement:

[Za'amat al-Ya'qūbiyyah wa al-Nasṭūriyyah anna al-qadīm jawhar wāḥid 'aqānīm thalathah, wa anna al-'aqānīm al-thalathah hiya al-jawhar al-wāḥid wa al-jawhar al-wāḥid huwa al-'aqānīm al-thalathah; wa za'amat al-Malkiyyah ahlu dīn al-Malik min al-Rūm anna al-Qadīm jawhar wāḥid dhu thalathah 'aqānīm, wa anna al-'aqānīm hiya al-jawhar wa al-jawhar ghayru al-'aqānīm, wa lam yuthbitūhu rābi'an lehā fi al-'adad. Wa za'amat hadhi afraq al-thalathah, Yaqūbiyyahan wa Nasṭūriyyahan wa Malkiyyahan, anna aḥad hadhi al-'aqānīm al-thalathah **Ab** wa al-ākhar **Ibn** wa al-Thālith **Rūḥ**, wa anna **al-Ibn** huwa al-Kalimah, wa anna

al-Rūh huwa al-Ḥayāh, wa hiya al-laṭī Tud'a 'indahum
"Rūh al-Qudus".] (Thomas, 1992, 66)

[The Jacobites and Nestorians claim that the Eternal One is one substance and three hypostases, and that the three hypostases are the one substance and the one substance is the three hypostases. The Melkites, those who follow the faith of the king of the Byzantines, claim that the Eternal One is one substance which possesses three hypostases, and that the hypostases are the substance but the substance is other than the hypostases, though they do not acknowledge that it is numerically a fourth to them. The three sects, Jacobites, Nestorians and Melkites, claim that one of these three hypostases is Father, another is Son, and the third is Spirit, and that the Son is the Word and the Spirit is the Life – this is known among them as "the Holy Spirit".] (Thomas, 1992, 67)

In the abovementioned text, two important methods are identified, which are of the **descriptive** and **comparative** nature.

Descriptive Method: This method is utilized by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to present the teachings of the three Christian sects about the doctrine of trinity. He describes their views on the ways they interpret the doctrine of trinity and its elements based on what he heard from them directly. Besides, his descriptive style is very unique, as it shows clarity in the way he arranges, displays, and correlates their claims concerning trinity and its three main hypostases.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq is well-organized in the description about the teachings of the three Christian sects. *Firstly*, he starts his description with the two Christian sects, the Jacobites and Nestorians, followed by their claims/teachings. *Secondly*, he continues with the third Christian sect, the Melkites and their claims in a detailed form. *Lastly*, he describes the common opinion of the three Christian sects, as far as the hypostases of the trinity are concerned.

Comparative Method: This is another important method used by him in the selected text aiming at comparing and contrasting between the claims of the three Christian sects. *Firstly*, he shows the differences between them concerning their justification about the interpretation of the three elements of trinity (God = the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and their relationships. *Secondly*, he exposes the contradictions

between the teachings of the three Christian denominations on the subject of trinity. *Thirdly*, he indicates at the end of the selected text, the similarities between them in relation to the terms used for the three elements of trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Other similarities are shown between the first two sects, Jacobites and Nestorians that share the same views, while interpreting the doctrine of trinity.

Another illustration from Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's work, reveals his **dialogical, polemical, critical, refutative** methodologies, which are apparent in the following text:

[*Yuqāl lil-Nastūriyyah wa al-Ya'qūbiyyah: akhbirūna 'an al-jawhar al-wāḥid al-ladhi zamatum annahu qadīm; 'am mukhtalif huwa? Famin qawulihim: lā, wa lā yuqqa'ūna 'alayhi al-ikhtilāf wa lā al-'adad bi dhikri jawhar wāḥid. Yuqālu lahum: fakhabbirūnā 'an al-'aqānīm; am mukhtalifah hiya? Famin qawulihim: Na'am, wa bidhikr al-'aqānīm yaqa'u al-ikhtilāfu 'indahum wa al-'adad, yadhabūna bil-'adadi ilā al-tathlīth. Yuqālu lahum: faidhā za'amtum anna al-jawhar huwa al-'aqānīm, faqad za'amtum anna al-mukhtalif huwa al-ladhi laysa bimukhtalifi, wa hadhihi munāqadatun.*

Fain qālū: inna al-'aqānīm mukhtalifah fi al-'ashkhāṣ wa fi al-khawāṣṣ lā fi al-jawhariyyah, qulnā: fal-kalāmu 'alayhim ba'du qāim, idhā za'amtum annahā mukhtalifah min jihati min al-jihāt wa al-jawāhir wāḥid laysa bi mukhtalifi min jihati min al-jihāt, thumma za'amtum anna al-jawhar huwa al-'aqānīm, faqad za'amtum anna mukhtalif hiya al-ladhī laysa bimukhtalifi, wa hadhihi hiya munāqadatu.] (Thomas, 1992, 76)

[The Nestorians and Jacobites should be asked: Tell us about the one substance which you claim is eternal, is it differentiated? They will say: No, for they do not apply differentiation or number to it when referring to one substance. Say to them: Tell us about the hypostases, are they differentiated? They will say: Yes, for according to them differentiation and number apply when referring to the hypostases (by number they mean the Trinity). Say to them: Then if you claim that the substance is the hypostases you are claiming that what is differentiated is what is not, which is contradictory.

If they say that the hypostases are differentiated as individuals and as properties though not in substantiality, say: The argument against you stands as long as you claim that they are differentiated in any way and the one substance is not. Further, you claim that the substance is the hypostases, and so you claim that what is differentiated is not. And this it is contradictory.] (Thomas, 1992, 77).

In the abovementioned text, Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's creativity and innovation are reflected in his arguments by using the following methods:

Dialogical Method: It is a method used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to present the claims of the three Christian sects and his polemical response in a dialogue form. He plays the role of both, the sender and the receiver in a dialogue form between two people with two different backgrounds, where the first person asks a question and the second one responds to it. In other words, one party is being informative and the other one responds by using logical arguments in a polemical way by providing reliable evidences as justification in order to defend his view.

Polemical-Critical Method: It is a method used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq in the abovementioned text to show his stand. He argues and criticises the claims of Nestorians and Jacobites through a continuous polemical argument, where he tries his best to provide accurate rational evidences in order to support his views against theirs about the doctrine of Trinity. This method is presented directly through selected terms or phrases like "*fal-kalāmu 'alayhim* - the argument against you." It means that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq disagrees with and criticises their claims.

Refutative Method: It is a method used by Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to show his disapproval towards the claims of Nestorians and Jacobites about – One Substance identical with the numbers of Hypostases. At the end of each abovementioned paragraphs, he argues that what they believe contradicts to their own teachings. His refutation is expressed directly through the term or phrase as mentioned at the end of the first paragraph: "*wa hadhihi munāqadatun* – and this is contradictory" and at the end of the second paragraph: "*wa hadhihi hiya munāqadatu* – and this it is contradictory." His refutative arguments are based on logical assumptions expressed through the usage of "idhā - If", which denotes an advanced preparation in answering to all possible questions raised by

his opponents (the three Christian sects). This is shown in the rational justification used by him in his arguments to refute the three Christian sects' interpretations of trinity's hypostases that are differentiated and the one substance is not. According to him, their claim "the substance is the hypostases," is contradictory to their claim "what is differentiated is not." Therefore, he argues that the way they explain their claims about the relationship between the substance and trinity's three hypostases leads to contradiction within their own teachings. This shows clearly that his approach is very straightforward by using a continuous refutative methodology without indicating any evidence from neither Islamic, nor Christian sources to stand against their claims. He uses in his arguments the rules of logic by refuting the context of their own claims, which makes it hard for them to reply to his polemical arguments. Another important thing to be mentioned is his brilliantly planned framework, through which he in advance assumes all the probable questions that could be raised by his opponents, in this case the three Christian sects of his time.

It is understood from the above discussion that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's presentation of the three Christian sects' claims about the Christian doctrine of trinity, serves as a platform to guide the Muslims in using the appropriate methods in dealing with the claims/teachings of other religions. Besides, it reminds the contemporary young Muslim intellectuals that the use of logical arguments approved by Revelation provides sound answers to any claim about the existence of God, the creation of universe, man, animals, life after death, and other fundamental issues pertaining to one's worldview. However, if they do not understand the concept of *al-Tawhīd* rightly based on *al-Qur'ān* and the Prophetic *Sunnah*, and do not live according to it, the Christian doctrine of trinity and similar teachings of other religions might influence them directly or indirectly, especially those among them: (1) who understand Islam and its teachings mechanically, without appropriate knowledge and performance, and (2) who easily and blindly accept whatever others claim without any objective investigation.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, a classical Muslim scholar, has contributed remarkably through his writings in the study of other religions in general, and Christianity in particular. The methodologies

used by him in his original work, *al-Radd 'Alā al-Tathlīth: Al-Juz' al-al-Awwal Min Kitāb al-Radd 'Alā al-Thalāth Firaq Min al-Naṣārā* (the Response to Trinity: The First Part from the Book of Response to the three Christian Sects) bring to light the power of logical reasoning, while responding to the claims of the three Christian sects about the doctrine of trinity. Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's straightforward approach by using the rules of logic in his *polemical-critical-refutative methodology* to stand against their claims proves that it is hard for them (the Christian sects) to respond to his arguments. His brilliant way of thinking and planning in advance enables him to assume all the possible questions to be raised by his opponents. Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's mindfulness in the selection and utilization of various methodologies in answering to the doctrine of trinity, a sensitive subject in the study of Christianity for most of the contemporary young scholars in this field, made him to be admired by many classical and contemporary Muslim polemicists. His methodology, which is of a *polemical-critical-refutative nature* based on pure human reasoning is relevant to the contemporary scholarship of comparative religion through which sound responses can be provided to issues related to God, cosmology, man, eschatology, ethics, rights, freedom, tolerance, leadership, etc.

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