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Tradition and Renewal in 18th-Century Arabic Theology: ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir’s *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* on the Trinity and Christology*

The theological legacy of the 18th-century Melkite Church in the age of print remains an underexplored field. Positioned at the crossroads of Islamic intellectual dominance and the increasing influence of Western Catholicism, Melkite thinkers such as ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir (1684-1748) found themselves navigating a delicate theological and cultural balance. Their efforts reflect a simultaneous commitment to Patristic teaching and an openness to the intellectual and ecclesial currents of their time. Zākhir’s *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* (The Evident Proof), a theological treatise composed in 1721 at the request of a Muslim jurist (*mutafaqqih*) and published in Shuwayr in 1764, stands as a testament to this combination. It offers a rare and valuable lens into how Arabic-speaking Christians of the period articulated doctrinal coherence on the Trinity and the Incarnation, while subtly engaging Islamic critiques and integrating elements of Roman Catholic Scholasticism.

At the heart of this study lies the paradox of Zākhir’s identity at the time he composed *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*: though still a member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Aleppo, he was simultaneously a zealous proponent of Catholic theology. This dual affiliation raises essential questions: how does *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* present Trinitarian and Christological theology in conversation with Patristic sources and medieval Arabic Christian thought? How does it appropriate Aristotelian logic and Thomistic structures to frame these doctrines? And most notably, how does Zākhir’s bold emphasis on *ta’alluh* (deification), a theme often downplayed in earlier Arabic Christian apologetics to avoid accusations of *shirk* (associating partners with God), signal a theological shift? In recovering deification as essential to salvation, Zākhir does not merely echo Patristic theology; he reasserts its centrality and expands the intellectual and spiritual horizons of Arabic Christian discourse.

This paper argues that *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* represents a key development in the trajectory of Melkite theology. It stands as a connection between the medieval Arab Christian tradition and the new theological currents of the early modern era, anticipating the emergence of a distinct Melkite Greek Catholic identity following the 1724 split in Antioch. Through a close reading of Zākhir’s Trinitarian and Christological formulations, this study

* This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 883219-AdG-2019 –Project TYPARABIC).

shows that the treatise serves a dual purpose. It is both apologetic, defending Christian dogma against Islamic objections, and catechetical, aiming to educate the Christian faithful, especially through its printed form. Special attention is given to Zākhir's ability to synthesize the Antiochian heritage with Latin theological influences: does he maintain a balance, or does he ultimately lean more toward one tradition?

The study proceeds in three parts. It begins by outlining the historical context of 18th-century Antioch, then examines the principal theological themes of *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, and finally assesses the significance of these findings for researchers of Christian Arabic thought and theology. In conclusion, this article holds that Zākhir's work invites contemporary scholars to reconsider the richness and relevance of the broader Melkite tradition, especially its capacity to shape Christian identity in the Middle East today.

Historical Context of Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ

The Arabic Christian theological tradition under Islam was fundamentally shaped by Aristotelianism in the form of *ʿilm al-kalām* (rational discourse), an interreligious intellectual movement where Christian *mutakallimūn* (scholars of *kalām*) engaged Muslim and Jewish scholars through court debates (*mujādalāt*), question-answer treatises (*asʿilawa-ajwiba*), and doctrinal treatises (*mayāmīr*).¹ This tradition prioritized reason (*ʿaql*) to verify theological claims,² employed proof-texting strategies blending Biblical and Qurʾanic citations, and focused intensely on defending the Trinity and Incarnation against Islamic critiques.

The 18th century presented unique challenges for Arabic Christian theology, particularly within the Melkite Patriarchate of Antioch. Under Ottoman rule, Melkite theologians were compelled to articulate core Christian doctrines, especially the Trinity and the Incarnation, in ways that avoided accusations of *shirk* (polytheism) while remaining accessible both to their own faithful and to Muslim interlocutors. This task was further complicated by the split of 1724, which divided the Melkite community into two factions: the Greek Catholics, who favored union with Rome, and the Greek Orthodox, who upheld the traditional rejection of union as formulated at the Council of Florence.³ For the Melkite Catholics, particularly in the spirit of the Shuwayr Monastery, alignment with Rome required a delicate balance: preserving their Byzantine liturgical and theological heritage while also engaging with post-Reformation Catholic thought, including Scholastic theology newly translated into Arabic.⁴

¹ Cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 77-92.

² Cf. Najib George Awad, "Creatio ex Philosophia: Kalām as Cultural Evolution and Identity-Formation Means in the Early Abbasid Era", *The Muslim World Journal* 4, no. 109, (2019), pp. 510-534.

³ Cf. Bernard Heyberger, "La division de l'Église d'Antioche dans son contexte local et global", in Bernard Heyberger, Ronney el Gemayel and Željko Paša (ed.), *La division du patriarcat grec d'Antioche en 1724*, (Beyrouth/Rome : Université Saint-Joseph/Institut pontifical oriental, 2024), pp. 1-84, esp. 49-55.

⁴ Cf. Charbel Nassif, "La scission de 1724 et ses répressions jusqu'à 1729 racontées par les Annales chouérites", in Bernard Heyberger, *La division du patriarcat grec d'Antioche en 1724*, pp. 405-438, esp. 427-431.

The origins of the division were complex, rooted in competing ecclesiastical visions, but its theological consequences were profound. The newly established Melkite Catholic Church sought to assert its identity through education and print, a project dear to the hearts of Antiochian Patriarchs since the 17th century.⁵ The Shuwayr Press, founded in 1734, became a cornerstone of this effort, producing thirty-three Arabic-language books, primarily liturgical, spiritual and catechetical, to strengthen Catholic identity among Arabic-speaking Christians.⁶ Among these, *Al-burbān al-ṣariḥ*, authored by ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir, stands out as an influential text. Born in Aleppo in 1684 to a family originally from Ḥamāh, Zākhir became one of the leading Melkite figures inclined toward Catholicism in the 18th century. Educated in Arabic literature and Christian theology under prominent scholars, he collaborated closely with Jesuit missionaries due to his exceptional command of Arabic. He was likely drawn to Catholicism after reading the anti-Latin *Kitāb Al-silāḥ al-qāṭi‘ wa-lsayf al-murbaḥ al-lāmi‘*. Later, he played a vital role alongside Patriarch Athanasius III Dabbās (1685-1694, 1720-1724) in the transcription and printing of Arabic Christian texts in Aleppo.⁷

‘Abd Allāh Zākhir’s 18th-century *Al-burbān al-ṣariḥ* inherited this framework and, perhaps unconsciously, anticipated his post-1724 split context. He retained kalām and avoided direct polemics, combining Patristic theology with Latin Scholasticism to create a catechetical defense of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Notably, his unapologetic emphasis on deification, a doctrine earlier Christian *mutakallimūn* often muted to avoid *shirk* accusations, marked a theological boldness rooted in Byzantine tradition. Zākhir’s work drew on a rich legacy of Arabic Christian thought. Yet, it also reflected newer influences: Roman Catholic Scholasticism, imported via missionaries and translations, infused his arguments with Aristotelian logic and Thomistic precision. This hybrid approach is evident in *Al-burbān al-ṣariḥ*’s structure, unapologetic yet philosophically robust treatise that avoids direct polemics against Islam while simplifying complex doctrines for pastoral use. By marrying Chalcedonian Christology with Scholastic distinctions, Zākhir offered a template of what

⁵ For more information, see Ioana Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

⁶ Cf. Būlus Nazhā, 250 *‘amanalāwafāt al-ṣammās al-‘allāmah ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir 1848-1998 mu’assis al-maṭba‘ah al-‘arabiyyah al-ūlā*, (Khenchara :Monastère Saint-Jean, 1998), p. 35.

⁷ For a detailed information on Zākhir’s life, see: MS Ḥarīṣā, Bibliothèque de S. Paul – 209, 3° (numbering according to Joseph Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban* [s.l.], 1958, vol. 1, p. 173; edited in *Al-Masarrah* 4 (1913), pp. 201-209; 34 (1948), pp. 386-396; contains a short biography of Zākhir probably written by his disciple Yuwākīm Muṭrān [1696-1766]; French trans. in Joseph Kahale, *Abdallah Zākhir. Philosophe, théologien et fondateur de l'imprimerie arabe en Orient. Son époque. Sa vie. Ses œuvres*, (Paris: 2000), pp. 39-54; Paul Bacel, “Abdallah Zākhir. Ses premiers travaux (1680-1722)”, *Échos d'Orient* 71 (1908), pp. 218-226; Paul Bacel, “Abdallah Zākhir et son imprimerie arabe”, *Échos d'Orient* 72 (1908), pp. 281-287; Paul Bacel, “Dernières années d’Abdallah Zākhir”, *Échos d'Orient* 73 (1908), pp. 363-372; Yūsuf Sāyig, “Tarḡamat ḥayāt al-faylasūf alṣammās ‘Abd Allāh al-Zāḥir”, *Al-Masarrah* 34 (1948), pp. 385-396; Ronney el Gemayel, “‘Abd Allāh Zākhir”, en David Thomas, John Chesworth (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 101-107.

would become a Melkite Catholic theology: one seeking to preserve its roots while adapting to its Roman Catholic intellectual context.⁸

Al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ stands as a landmark work of 18th-century Arabic Christian theology. Composed in 1721 while working with Patriarch Athanasius III Dabbās in Aleppo, and published, posthumously in 1764 by the Shuwayr Press, this work systematically defends Christianity's central mysteries, the Trinity and the Incarnation, while addressing the intellectual and religious challenges of its Ottoman context. Unlike most works from the Shuwayr Press, which focused on liturgical or spiritual material, *Al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ* stands out as a somewhat comprehensive theological treatise designed to present and defend Christian doctrine in the Arabic-speaking world. Significantly, it is the only book, authored by Zākhir, that was printed at the Shuwayr Press. An analysis of *Al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ*'s structure, methodology, and rhetorical strategies reveals how Zākhir navigated the tensions between Patristic tradition, Scholastic reasoning, and Islamic theological discourse.

Ronney el Gemayel provides a comprehensive overview of the book's structure as it appears in the Shuwayr edition:

Al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ comprises: the front page (p. 1); a warning (*tanbīḥ*) written by the editors (pp. 2-6); the preface (*fātiḥa*, pp. 8-9); a table of contents (*fihris*, pp. 10-13); the introduction (pp. 14-21); the first treatise (*baḥṭh*) on the Trinity (pp. 21-79); the second treatise on the Incarnation (pp. 80-157); and finally, a conclusion (*khātima*, pp. 158-69).⁹

The full title, as it appears on the front page, is: *Kitāb al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ fī ḥaqīqat sirray dīn al-Masīḥ, wa-humā sirr al-tathlīṭ wa-sirr al-tajassud al-ilāhī* (The Book of Evident Proof of the Truth of the Two Mysteries of Christ's Religion: The Mystery of the Trinity and the Mystery of the Divine Incarnation). On the same page, the publishers explicitly attribute authorship to Zākhir, describing him as: "The working scholar, the consummate philosopher, unique in his age, unmatched in his land, steadfast in the pure faith, the deacon 'Abd Allāh Zākhir, Aleppan by origin, Catholic in denomination (*madhhab*)".¹⁰ The publishers also state that the book was written at the request of "one of the *mutafaqqihs*", who had asked for a theological explanation of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The *Tanbīḥ* (warning), written by the publishers, explains further the reason behind printing this treatise. Though brief, it is of great value, serving as a resume of what many theologians have explained regarding the mystery of the three hypostases and the one nature of God, as well as the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ. The book is presented as dealing with a subject of superior importance, responding to a great need, and offering countless benefits. A series of biblical citations is provided to expand each point: for the superior subject, 1 Timothy 3:16 is cited: "The mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was

⁸ Cf. Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 284, (Rome : École française de Rome, 1994), pp. 433-453.

⁹ El Gemayel, "'Abd Allāh Zākhir", p. 103

¹⁰ 'Abd Allāh Zākhir, *Al-burbān al-ṣarīḥ fī ḥaqīqat sirray Dīn al-Masīḥ, wa-humā sirr al-tathlīṭ wa-sirr al-tajassud al-ilāhī*. (Shuwayr – Saint John Monastery, 1764), p. 1.

preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory”; for the great need, Hebrews 11:6 is referenced: “without faith it is impossible to please God”; and for the countless benefits, John 17:3 is quoted: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”. All three quotes emphasize that God’s mystery is ultimately beyond full human understanding, highlight the essential role of faith in seeking true knowledge, and affirm that genuine knowledge consists in knowing God personally. These three principles form the foundation upon which Zākhir organizes his arguments. One important observation in the *Tanbīh* is the acknowledgment that most Christians are ignorant of these two mysteries, either due to the scarcity of theological sources in Arabic or the absence of formal theological education.¹¹ This highlights that the primary aim of printing the treatise, though apologetic in nature, is to enable Christians to understand and defend their faith with confidence, preventing it from being ridiculed by others. In this way, the work also assumes a catechetical function.¹²

In this way, *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, though apologetic in nature, also assumes a catechetical character, an outcome shaped by its manner of presentation. While it displays the typical features of an apologetic treatise, particularly in its defense of foundational Christian doctrines, it is clearly, if implicitly, addressed to a Christian audience. Supporting this view, Zākhir states in his introduction that he agreed to write “when the one whose love compelled me to submit to his command asked me, and the obligation to bear witness to the truth urged me to comply with his counsel, to write something brief and accessible”,¹³ thus hinting at an ecclesiastic authority, possibly Patriarch Dabbās. One of the more intriguing aspects of the work is that, despite its apologetic purpose, it does not engage directly with Islamic critiques. Instead, Judaism is invoked in response to objections concerning Christian beliefs about the Messiah and the Trinity. Zākhir’s conscious decision to avoid polemical confrontation gives the text an instructive tone, prioritizing the clear articulation of Christian doctrine. His aim appears to be the strengthening of faith and the reinforcement of theological foundations through teaching rather than argumentation.

Since the structure of *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* has been thoroughly outlined in Ronney el Gemayel’s presentation,¹⁴ the current study will focus only on its most distinctive theological themes. The thematic organization of *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* reflects its dual purpose: to defend and to teach. Its content may be divided into four major thematic sections:

1. The different levels of knowledge of God and the superior role of faith, presented in the introduction of the book.
2. The distinction between created and uncreated natures, which implies differing modes of categorization, discussed in the first treatise on the Trinity.
3. Deification as the primary motive for the Incarnation, the strongest theme in *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, addressed in the treatise on the Incarnation. Deification is presented as the spiritual purpose of human life, enabling human beings to glorify God adequately.
4. The defense of Scripture, treated in the conclusion of the book.

¹¹ Cf. Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, pp. 139-179.

¹² Cf. *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p. 2-6.

¹³ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p. 8.

¹⁴ El Gemayel, “‘Abd Allāh Zākhir”, pp. 103-107.

Given this distinctive combination of catechesis and theological defense, marked by attachment to tradition and openness to innovation, *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* emerges as a singular contribution to the body of Melkite theological literature produced at the Shuwayr press. It underscores Zākhir's role not only as a theologian but also as an educator deeply concerned with the transmission of doctrine to the Arabic-speaking Christian faithful.

Core Themes of Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ

In *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, Zākhir organizes his presentation of Christian theology around several key themes. His approach combines rational explanations, natural analogies, and Scriptural references to present complex theological ideas. The emphasis is on the Trinity, the Incarnation, framed within the limitations of human reason in comprehending divine mysteries.

The Levels of God's Knowledge and the Role of Faith

The first foundational theme concerns the degrees of the knowledge of God. Zākhir opens with a general reflection rooted in apophatic theology, emphasizing the fundamental incapacity of human reason to comprehend the divine essence. Although rational inquiry is acknowledged as valid, he insists that divine truths ultimately transcend reason and must be approached with humility and faith. Here, he sets a methodological principle: Christians should refrain from probing what lies beyond human comprehension and instead base their knowledge on what God has revealed in the Scriptures. This premise supports his later discussions on the Trinity and the Incarnation, in which he repeatedly reminds the reader that these doctrines are, by nature, supra-rational. He writes:

However, since this knowledge surpasses the human intellect, and cannot be comprehended by it, for the intellect is a finite creation, while the essence of God, exalted be He, is an infinite creating nature, necessity thus required that God be known by His creation by means of a trustworthy intermediary, appointed by Him for His servants. This trustworthy intermediary is the complete submission and assent of the intellect to what God, exalted be He, has testified about Himself in His Holy Book. For since we are unable to comprehend the essence of God by the light of human reason or to understand His divine mysteries by natural means, God elevated our intellect to the knowledge of His essence by a means surpassing nature: namely, faith in what He has testified to in His Book.¹⁵

Although this passage resonates deeply with the Cappadocian apophatic tradition, it also reflects the structure and terminology of Scholastic theology, particularly in its conception of grace as elevating the intellect beyond its natural capacity, rather than illuminating or

¹⁵ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp.15-16.

purifying it, as the Byzantine tradition would emphasize.¹⁶ Scholastic theologians, most notably Thomas Aquinas, affirmed that while some truths (such as God's existence) are accessible to natural reason (*Summa Theologiae* I, q.2, a.2), the divine essence and mysteries like the Trinity and Incarnation lie beyond its reach and are disclosed only through revelation.

In scholastic theology, faith is described as a supernatural assent of the intellect to divine truth, based on the authority of God who reveals, in Aquinas' words: "The act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God".¹⁷ In a similar vein, Zākhir describes faith as the total surrender of the intellect to divine testimony, even when such truths surpass understanding or appear to conflict with natural reason:

Therefore, this submission, which is the essence of faith, consists in the complete yielding and surrender of the intellect to what God has testified in His Book, even if it remains unknown to us, surpasses our understanding and comprehension, or even appears to contradict our natural light. This submission and yielding we are necessarily bound to uphold.¹⁸

This theological convergence raises a crucial question: to what extent does Zākhir's synthesis reflect a point of contact between Cappadocian apophatic theology and the scholastic concept of grace as an elevation of the intellect? Might Zākhir's emphasis on the limits of reason and the need for divine initiative suggest a partial convergence in the understanding of man's relationship with God between Byzantine and Scholastic theology? This convergence could be in contrast to their ultimate divergence on the highest form of knowledge, where Byzantine theology affirms the vision of God (*θεωρία*) as the goal of union, a notion largely absent within the scholastic framework.

The Distinction Between Created and Uncreated Natures

The second striking feature of *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* is Zākhir's treatment of the mystery of Trinity with an interplay between traditional Byzantine language and Scholastic categories. He begins his doctrinal exposition on the Trinity, focusing on the concept of one divine nature in three distinct hypostases (*aqānīm*) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He presents the Trinity as the central mystery of Christian faith and defends it using a combination of rational arguments, analogies, and scriptural references. His thought demonstrates an engagement with classical patristic theology, while introducing additions that resonate with scholastic concerns, especially regarding the relationship between divine unity and hypostatic distinction. One of Zākhir's major achievements lies in his insistence

¹⁶ Cf. Paul O'Callaghan and Catalina Vial De Amesti, "Grace in Roman Catholic Theology", in Brendan N. Wolfe (ed.), *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, (University of St Andrews, 2024) <<https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/GraceinRomanCatholicTheology>>

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, Online Edition Copyright © 2017 by Kevin Knight, (Second and Revised Edition, 1920), II, q.2, a.9.

¹⁸ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p. 17

on the impossibility of applying the categories of created, finite nature, to the uncreated, infinite divine nature.

In fact, a central principle in Zākhir's reflection on the Trinity is the impossibility of knowing the divine essence. This position stands firmly in the patristic tradition, particularly echoing the apophatic theology of the Eastern tradition. Zākhir maintains that the divine essence is utterly transcendent and cannot be comprehended or measured by human reason. Any attempt to apply human categories to the mystery of God risks distorting the reality of the divine. This theme is explicitly articulated in his writings, where he warns against transferring properties of the finite to the infinite. He writes:

Thus, according to what appears to us, we first assume that a nature subsists in a single hypostasis, and that a multiplication of hypostases implies a multiplication of natures. However, we must be attentive to the fact that this is not actually the case, though it may seem impossible when considering finite created nature. Therefore, it must not be deemed possible for the infinite creating nature, whose essence extends to three hypostases, even if created nature does not exhibit such a reality, because the latter is finite, while the former is infinite. And it is a manifest error to judge the infinite by the measure of the finite.¹⁹

Here, Zākhir confronts a key philosophical challenge: in the realm of finite beings, multiplicity of persons or subjects necessarily implies multiplicity of essences. This is observable in the created order, where each human being possesses a distinct substance. However, he insists that this pattern cannot be applied to the divine reality. God's nature, being infinite, admits of a mode of existence entirely beyond human categories. Thus, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to affirm a multiplicity of hypostases without positing a multiplication of essences.

But is Zākhir's position totally rooted in Patristics? Yes, but not only Eastern but also Western Patristics, to be more specific Augustine's explanation of the Trinity as a community of relations. Zākhir came to this idea from the scholastic tradition, particularly in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas explained the multiplicity of persons within the Godhead through the distinction of relations. According to Aquinas, the divine persons are distinguished not by their essence but by their relations of origin (paternity, filiation, and procession). Although Zākhir does not explicitly use the scholastic terminology of "relations of opposition" here, his approach shows a comparable concern to safeguard simultaneously the divine unity and the personal distinctions without introducing division into the essence. Like Aquinas, Zākhir places greater emphasis on the difference between finite and infinite natures as the starting point for his reasoning.²⁰ He further strengthens his argument by emphasizing the infinitude of the divine essence. He states:

Thus, the unity of the divine essence does not result in the unity of the divine hypostases, nor does the Trinity of the divine hypostases result in a trinity of the divine essence, because

¹⁹ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p. 23.

²⁰ "The infinite cannot be traversed by the finite, nor by the infinite. But equality suffices for comprehension, because that is said to be comprehended which has nothing outside the comprehender". Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, II, q.14, a.12.

of the infinitude of the divine essence, which must not be measured by the standard of finite nature.²¹

This affirmation highlights Zākhir's fidelity to classical Trinitarian doctrine: the one divine essence subsists wholly and indivisibly in three distinct hypostases. The unity of essence is not diminished by the trinity of persons, just as the plurality of hypostases does not entail a division of the divine substance.

Zākhir's presentation of the Trinity, particularly his distinction between hypostasis and essence, aligns with the Patristic heritage which presents the Trinity as three distinct hypostases sharing one essence, emphasizing that the hypostases are distinct in their personal properties (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but identical in their shared divine essence. Zākhir mirrors this approach, using similar terminology to explain the unity of God and the distinction of persons. His analogies of the Sun (planet, light, and warmth) reflect the Patristic use of natural analogies to illustrate how the Trinity can be both distinct and unified.²²

His dependence on scholasticism becomes more apparent as he treats the questions of the procession of Holy Spirit, which for Zākhir, proceeds from both the Father and the Son. In his own words:

The Father and His essence are the same; likewise, the third hypostasis is called the Holy Spirit because He proceeds from the Father and the Son by an action comparable to the stirring of the will by love toward its beloved. And this is the most fitting manner by which He is named".²³

The idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in a manner analogous to the movement of love toward the beloved is a classical image, particularly prominent in Latin theology, notably in the writings of Saint Augustine. In *De Trinitate*, especially in Books IX and XV, Augustine explains that within the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is to be understood as the mutual love between the Father and the Son, describing Him as the *vinculum caritatis* (bond of love) uniting them. Augustine further draws an analogy between the internal movements of the human soul, memory, understanding, and will (love), and the inner life of the Trinity, using the dynamic of love moving toward the beloved as an explanatory model. Thus, the first clear articulation of this idea in Christian theology is found in Augustine's thought in the 4th and 5th centuries. Later scholastic theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, developed this understanding further, particularly in his treatment of the procession of the Holy Spirit (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q.36). In Eastern theology, although there is a rich reflection on love, notably in the writings of Saint Maximus the Confessor, the notion of the Holy Spirit proceeding as the bond of love between the Father and the Son is not a traditional formula and would generally be approached with greater caution.

²¹ *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ*, p. 25.

²² Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ, The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, Frederick Williams & Lionel Wickham (tr.), «Popular Patristics Series» 23, (New York: SVS Press, 2002), pp. 117-148.

²³ *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ*, pp. 49-50.

In ending this treatise, Zākhir offers biblical references to support the doctrine of the Trinity. Key verses include: Genesis 1:26 “Let us make man in our image” where the use of plural reflects clear evidence of the Trinitarian action; Genesis 18: the appearance of three men to Abraham, whom he addresses as one Lord, serves as another symbolic proof of the Trinity; Isaiah 48:16 “And now the Lord God has sent me, and His Spirit” a reference to both the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father; Matthew 28:19 that is the baptismal formula, where Christ commands the disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” solidifying the threefold nature of God.²⁴

Compared to the Patristic tradition, Zākhir’s treatment of the relationship between hypostasis and essence lacks a clear articulation of particular-general distinction, which central to Gregory of Nazianzus. In his *Theological Orations*, Gregory emphasizes that while the divine essence is one and shared, each hypostasis, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, has a distinct mode of existence: the Father as source, the Son as begotten, and the Spirit as proceeding. Zākhir’s omission of this conceptual framework indicates a discontinuity with this foundational Cappadocian insight.²⁵

However, in his use of natural analogies, Zākhir aligns more closely with both Gregory of Nazianzus and John of Damascus. He employs examples such as the sun, its orb, light, and heat, to illustrate how distinct realities can subsist within a single essence. Though such analogies remain theologically limited, they effectively serve to convey the tension between unity and distinction in the Trinity, following a method familiar from the early Church Fathers through medieval Arabic theologians

Deification at the Center of the Incarnation

As we move forward, we reach the most important theme in the book, that is the deification of man. The theme comes up in the book’s second and largest treatise where Zākhir addresses the question of the Incarnation. His explanation of the hypostatic union is central to his theological framework and reflects both Byzantine and Latin influences for he argues that through the hypostatic union, not only is humanity saved, but it is also elevated to divine life. This issue is brought up as he identifies two principal motives for the Incarnation. The first motive is rooted in God’s infinite generosity (*jūd ilāhī*), a theme consistently emphasized by early Arabic theologians, such as Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, Būlus of Sidon, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, and Būlus al-Būshī, who explain the Incarnation as the supreme act of divine generosity: God bestowing Himself upon humanity through the assumption of human nature. He explains that the Incarnation is the supreme act of divine goodness, by which God united Himself to human nature through the assumption of this nature into one of His divine hypostases. The purpose of this union is that humanity might participate in what belongs to God, becoming deified through its communion with the divine hypostasis. In Zākhir’s words:

²⁴ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp. 61-79. The placement of Scriptural references following logical arguments may be attributed to the author’s intent to address a Muslim audience or to adherence to scholastic methodologies. This approach, however, is not without a precedent in medieval Arabic theology.

²⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ, The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, pp. 69-92.

As for the manner of this infinite divine generosity (*jūd ilāhī*), in which God, exalted be He, gave Himself to His creatures, it is His union with our human nature and the assumption of this nature into a divine hypostasis of His three hypostases. This is so that it may partake in what belongs to God, and this [human] nature is called the nature of God because of its union with His divine hypostasis, by which it is deified and elevated to the supreme majesty of divine lordship.²⁶

This vision of the Incarnation as the perfective act of divine goodness resonates with what Thomas Aquinas describes as the second motive for the incarnation, the hypothetical motive. In the *Summa Theologiae* (III, q.1, a.3, ad 2), Aquinas asserts that even if Adam had not sinned, God might still have become incarnate in order to consummate human glory through union with Himself. Aquinas emphasizes the notion of “union”, whereas Zākhir, following Eastern theological traditions, speaks explicitly of the *tala’ulub* (deification) of human nature. This nuance underlines a significant theological development: while Aquinas focuses on fulfillment and union, Zākhir stresses the elevation and transformation of humanity into the divine life.

Zākhir follows both Byzantine and Latin Christian traditions in teaching that the Incarnation allows humans to participate in and be united with God’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He draws heavily on Athanasius, asserting that “God became man so that man might become God”.²⁷ However, his unique approach is revealed in his insistence on deification being necessary for human to glorify God adequately. He claims that without deification, man cannot offer adequate glory to God because the infinite cannot be glorified by the finite. Plus, deification is also necessary for redemption because the only way to save humanity is by elevating it to the level of divinity through hypostatic union:

And this could not have been possible unless human nature were elevated to the rank of divinity and shared in the nature of God through its union with one of His divine hypostases, so that its actions, attributed to the divine hypostasis united with it, would possess an infinite worth.²⁸

Zākhir uses Scriptures to reinforce his argument. Notable passages include 2 Peter 1:4 which speaks of becoming “partakers of the divine nature”; John 17:22 where Jesus prays, “The glory that you have given me, I have given to them”, signifying the elevation of human beings to share in divine glory.

The second motive Zākhir identifies is remedial: the Incarnation was necessary to save fallen humanity. This understanding is commonplace in Christian theology and corresponds to the principal reason emphasized by Aquinas, who states that the Son of God became incarnate chiefly to redeem humanity from sin (*Summa Theologiae* III, q.1, a.2). Citing Romans 5:20, “Where sin abounded, grace did more abound”, Aquinas underscores that the Incarnation responds to the human condition marked by sin and mortality.

²⁶ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp. 82-83.

²⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, John Behr (tr.), «Popular Patristics Series» 44B, (New York: SVS Press, 2012), 54:3.

²⁸ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p. 88.

Zākhir aligns with this perspective by indicating that divine generosity manifests not only in the deification of human nature but also in its restoration and healing through the redemptive work of Christ. Thus, the Incarnation fulfills both a perfective purpose, communicating divine life, and a salvific purpose, overcoming sin and death. Naturally, this point is a shared heritage in Christian theology in East and West but what is surprising in Zākhir's depiction is prioritizing deification over redemption, a unique approach to the Incarnation. Did he want to highlight to his "*Mutafaqqib*" the larger version of Incarnation avoiding thus making it look accidental or linked to human's sin? This is a probability that reveals a deeply integrated theological vision, where the infinite goodness of God and the need for human salvation are harmoniously combined. His emphasis on the deification of humanity situates his work within the Eastern Christian tradition, while his theological structure reflects a careful engagement with contextual challenges.

One more important element of his explanation of the Incarnation is the grafting analogy where he compares the union of divine and human natures in Christ to the process of grafting two trees together. In the same way that the grafted tree remains one yet carries the characteristics of both types of trees, Christ's human and divine natures are united in one hypostasis while retaining their distinct properties.

We may find a likeness of this paradoxical union in nature, namely, what we observe in the art of grafting, whereby a foreign branch is united to a tree of a different nature, so that, through the process of grafting, the foreign branch and the tree united with it become one single tree.

In a similar manner, we say that our nature was grafted into the hypostasis of the Word by His union with it, so that it became, with it, one single person, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹

In Romans 11:11–24, grafting refers to how the Gentiles, though originally outside of Israel's covenant, are now inserted into the people of God through faith in Christ. They share in the spiritual blessings and promises rooted in the original covenant. However, the use of this organic metaphor to speak about the union of the Christ's two natures is quite unusual in earlier theological discussions, making Zākhir's presentation both unique and accessible.

Zākhir equally shows mastery of conciliar concepts related to Christology such as the concept of *Communicatio idiomatum* (the communication of properties), explaining how Christ's divine and human natures share attributes in one person. He emphasizes that the person of Christ (*uqnūm*) is the subject of all actions, not one nature acting independently from the other. He explains this through simple examples: just as a man laughs, it is his person that laughs, not his nature. This helps clarify how Christ's actions as both divine and human are attributable to the one hypostasis of the Word.

And similar to the previous treatise on Trinity, Zākhir concludes with Scriptural references to explain the hypostatic union. Key verses include: John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" which affirms the Incarnation; Philippians 2:6–7 where Paul describes Christ, who, though in the form of God, took the form of a servant, emphasizing the dual nature of Christ as fully God and fully man.³⁰

²⁹ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp.100-101.

³⁰ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp.118-157.

In evaluating Zākhir's Christology, one notes a strong reliance on the doctrinal formulations of the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Second Council of Constantinople (553). His terminology reveals a deep familiarity with the conciliar tradition and the Patristic sources that shaped it, particularly in his treatment of the hypostatic union and the distinction between the two natures and two wills of Christ. Although Maximus the Confessor is not explicitly cited, his influence is evident in Zākhir's affirmation of dyothelitism, the doctrine that Christ possesses both a divine and a human will. Zākhir clearly upholds the orthodox position that each nature retains its distinct will and energy, yet both operate in perfect harmony within the one person of Christ.

Responding to Accusations of Scriptural Alteration

The last theme of importance highlighting Zākhir's contribution is his defense against accusations of Scriptural alteration, a notion refuted in his conclusion. Although he avoids direct polemics with Islam throughout the book, this section engages with the accusation of falsification that has been central to Islamic critiques since Ibn Taymiyyah's *Al-ġawāb al-ṣaḥiḥ li-man baddal dīn al-Masīḥ* (The Sound Reply to Those Who Have Altered the Religion of the Christ).³¹

In *Al-burhān al-ṣaḥiḥ*, Zākhir provides a systematic response to the accusation of scripture falsification, focusing on three primary reasons to defend the authenticity of both the Old and New Testaments. His argument underscores the credibility of the sacred Scriptures, particularly in the face of Islamic claims of their alteration (*tahrīf*). Zākhir's reasoning reflects a profound understanding of historical continuity and the shared nature of Christian and Jewish sacred texts, the preservation of the Gospel across divisions within Christianity, and the consistency of scriptural interpretation over centuries.

Zākhir first points to the undeniable authenticity of the Old Testament, emphasizing its shared possession with the Jews, who, as he notes, are enemies of Christianity. He writes:

For there is no way for anyone to doubt the authenticity of the sacred Scriptures from which these testimonies (Shahādāt) are drawn. First, there is no possibility for anyone to doubt the authenticity of the Torah, which comprises the five books of Moses, the books of the Prophets, the Wisdom writings, the accounts of the Kings, and others; For if these books were in the possession of us Christians alone, there would be reason to claim that we had altered or modified them according to our own design and belief. However, they remain, even to this day, in the hands of the Jews, enemies of our faith, serving as witnesses to the truth of our faith.³²

This argument appeals to the Jews as independent custodians of the same scriptural tradition. Zākhir insists that if Christians had falsified the Old Testament, the Jewish

³¹ The treatise is a comprehensive Islamic polemical work written in the early 14th. The work is significant for its detailed critique of Christian theology (the Trinity, Christology, falsification of Scriptures), and its role in shaping later Muslim apologetics. It also offers insight into interreligious polemics in the Mamluk period and remains influential in contemporary Islamic thought.

³² *Al-burhān al-ṣaḥiḥ*, p. 159.

community, who historically opposed Christian theological claims, would have objected to any such tampering. The continued presence of these texts in the Jewish tradition functions as an external validation of their integrity. While it is true that the Christian Old Testament includes additional books not found in the Jewish canon, Zākhir's point rests on the substantial overlap between the two traditions, especially regarding the Law, Historical Books, and Prophets. His argument is that the core of the Old Testament remains unaltered and is verifiably authentic due to its preservation in both traditions, thereby discrediting claims, such as those advanced by Ibn Taymiyyah, that Christians manipulated earlier scriptures to fit their theology.

Zākhir also addresses the authenticity of the New Testament, noting that despite the various divisions within Christianity, the Gospel has remained unchanged. He writes:

The Apostles of Christ, who proclaimed the Gospel, did not write it in a single language (*lughah wāhidah*), nor in a single place (*makān wāhid*), nor at a single time (*zaman wāhid*), nor through a single mutual agreement (*mashūrah wāhidah*); and none of them knew what the others had written. Then, after them, the Gospel was transmitted into various different languages, and the Christians themselves were divided into many sects and groups. And they all possess the Holy Gospel in their own languages without any total alteration or change, so that it is as though it were one single copy and one single translation.³³

Zākhir highlights the diversity in the early transmission of the Gospel across languages and regions, which provides a safeguard against any single group altering the text. This diversity ensures that despite doctrinal disagreements and sectarian splits, all Christian groups continue to possess the same Gospel text. The consistency of the text, despite different interpretations, points to the preservation of the original scriptures. Zākhir further elaborates that:

For although some may differ in the interpretations, they have adopted due to their failure to grasp the true meaning of the Gospel, yet they do not differ at all concerning the text itself.³⁴

This statement refutes the idea that the Gospel could have been altered by any one group to fit its own doctrinal agenda, since all factions, despite their theological differences, retain the same foundational text.

Additionally, Zākhir contends that the Gospel's preservation is further supported by the historical context of early Christian divisions:

For if such a thing were possible, each sect (*shī'a*) would have altered it according to its own belief. Since, from the time of the Apostles, many factions (*ahzāb*) arose, differing from the sound doctrine (*al-mustaqīm ra'yuhum*) in their opinions, and each group (*firqa*) would deny what the others professed, how then could all of them have agreed upon a single text by altering (*tahrīj*) the Gospel?³⁵

³³ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp. 160-161.

³⁴ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, pp. 160-161

³⁵ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p.162.

The multiple and diverse Christian factions, each with its own interpretation, would not have been able to unite in the alteration of the Gospel. This collective preservation of the text, despite theological disputes, further undermines the possibility of falsification.

Finally, Zākhir argues that the longevity of scriptural interpretation, spanning over six centuries from the time of Christ to the Islamic period, reinforces the authenticity of the sacred scriptures. He states:

Changing (*taghyīr*) these very Books would necessarily require changing the books of their interpreters and also changing their interpretations, since these Books had already been interpreted by many eminent scholars in various languages, from the time of the Apostles of Christ until six hundred years after them, a long period during which even the objectors do not deny the authenticity of the sacred Books.³⁶

Here, Zākhir highlights the extensive history of biblical exegesis by respected Christian scholars, which would have been impossible to alter without notice. The continuity of interpretation over such a long period of time, across various cultures and languages, further affirms the unbroken transmission of the original texts. This makes any claim of widespread falsification unfeasible, as the corpus of interpretations and commentaries would have reflected any such changes.

The origins of such arguments can be traced back to the early Church Fathers. Irenaeus appeals to the harmony among the four Gospels, despite their different human authors and audiences, as evidence of their truth.³⁷ Origen underscores the early diffusion of Scripture into multiple languages, arguing that this wide dissemination served to preserve its authenticity.³⁸ Later, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa contra Gentiles* (Book I, chs. 6-7), develops a related line of reasoning: the Gospel, having been proclaimed throughout the world and translated into various languages, was preserved by diverse groups, even those divided by heresy, thus rendering any possibility of deliberate falsification implausible. Zākhir's contribution lies in his ability to integrate these strands into a single, cohesive argument, strengthening the case for the authenticity of Scripture.

Al-Burhan al-ṣarīḥ's Novelties, Value, and Implication on Research

One of the most striking aspects of *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* is its bold articulation of theological themes that appear to extend beyond established medieval Arabic Christian sources. Chief among these is the concept of deification, which 'Abd Allāh Zākhir presents not merely as a result of the Incarnation but as an essential and natural element of Christian soteriology. This emphasis on deification may reflect either Zākhir's original theological development or the integration of teachings not commonly found in other medieval Arabic Christian

³⁶ *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, p.163.

³⁷ Cf. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 11.8.

³⁸ Origène d'Alexandrie, *Philocalie 1-20 Sur les Écritures et la lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne*, Nicholas De Lange (tr.), Sources Chrétiennes 302, (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1983), PG 11: 48-86.

sources. Whether these positions constitute genuine innovation or draw on less-known traditions remains an open question for further scholarly inquiry.

Zākhir maintains that through the Incarnation, Christ not only redeems humanity but also elevates human nature to present adequate glory to God. This theological stance seems to go beyond what is typically found in the works of medieval Christian authors such as John of Damascus. In *De Fide Orthodoxa*, John discusses the deification of Christ's human nature as a singular reality tied to the unique hypostatic union, viewing the Incarnation primarily as a means of restoring humanity's original dignity. He does not, however, frame universal human deification as the central aim of the divine economy.³⁹

By contrast, Zākhir presents deification as the ultimate goal of human existence: not simply to be saved, but to be divinized, sharing in the divine nature in a way essential to rendering adequate glory to God. This broader application of deification in *Al-burbān al-ṣariḥ* is notable, as it treats the doctrine not as a mystical or peripheral theme but as a central tenet of Christian theology. In this regard, Zākhir's vision evokes earlier Patristic voices, particularly Athanasius of Alexandria,⁴⁰ who famously affirmed linked the knowledge of God with deification, and Maximus the Confessor, for whom deification lies at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation.⁴¹ Zākhir's presentation of deification as the culmination of the Incarnation marks a notable departure from the caution characteristic of medieval Arabic Christian theology. Melkite and Jacobite theologians, writing in Islamic contexts, were generally restrained in articulating the divine-human relationship, aware of the theological sensitivities it raised among Muslim interlocutors.⁴²

Zākhir exhibits a striking boldness in asserting that elevation of human nature to the level of divine nature is not only possible but essential for salvation. His unambiguous stance suggests a possible shift in Melkite theological discourse, one that may signal the emergence of a more confident theological voice within the Catholic milieu. This approach pushes beyond the boundaries maintained by earlier Arabic Christian writers, potentially inviting renewed theological reflection on deification within the Arabic-speaking Christian world.

It is worth considering whether this development reflects the influence of post-Reformation Catholic theology. While the concept of deification appears in Scholastic and later Catholic thought, often framed as participation in divine life or adoption as sons of God, it never occupied a central place as it did in Eastern theology. Zākhir's emphasis may thus represent a retrieval of the Eastern tradition within the broader Catholic theological currents, offering a distinctive synthesis that enriched Melkite Christology.

Another aspect of Zākhir's work that stands out is his use of unique analogies and explanations that do not have clear precedents in earlier theological literature. For example, the Grafting Analogy employed to speak of the Hypostatic Union. Zākhir's use of the analogy of grafting, where the human and divine natures are united without losing their distinct characteristics, is a curious and potentially original contribution to Christological

³⁹ Cf. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Ch. 61.

⁴⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 11-13.

⁴¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7.22.

⁴² Cf. Būlus Hūrī, *Al-Kalima al-mutajassida 'inda al-masīḥiyyīn* 2 (The Incarnate Word according to the Christians, part 2), (Lebanon: Paulist Press, 2004), pp. 203-233.

thought. While the grafting image is not commonly found in earlier Patristic works, it serves as a powerful metaphor for explaining how two distinct natures can coexist in the one person of Christ. Whether Zākhir derived this analogy from a specific source or whether it was his own theological invention remains an open question that further research could clarify.

In assessing the value of *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ*, one must highlight its timely clarification of essential Christian doctrines, particularly the Trinity and the Incarnation. Amidst a period of ecclesial and cultural transition, Zākhir's systematic exposition served to reinforce the faith of Melkite believers, an impact evidenced by the numerous surviving copies preserved in monastic libraries. Ronney el Gemayel notes that the treatise was equally admired by Protestants, who reprinted it in Malta in 1834.⁴³ The significance of the work lies in Zākhir's ability to elucidate theological mysteries through natural analogies, such as the sun to explain the Trinity and grafting to illustrate the hypostatic union, thus rendering abstract doctrines more accessible, especially in catechetical contexts. By reaffirming the core theological tenets of the Byzantine tradition while integrating select Catholic influences, Zākhir contributes to shaping a distinct Melkite Catholic identity, faithful to its liturgical heritage yet open to constructive engagement with Scholastic theology.

From a historical and academic perspective, *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ* offers valuable insight into the intellectual landscape of the 18th-century Melkite Church. The text functions as a connection between medieval Arabic Christian thought and the developing theological currents of the early modern period. It provides a lens through which scholars can examine how Eastern Christian theology was articulated amid both Latin Catholic and Islamic influences. Although Zākhir refrains from direct polemical engagement with Islam, his robust defense of the Scriptures and his emphasis on deification reflect the broader intellectual challenges encountered by Melkite Christians living under Islamic rule. His refutation of the accusation that Christian scriptures had been altered indicates an acute awareness of Muslim critiques and reveals his pastoral intent to reinforce the faith of his community by addressing such concerns within a systematic theological framework.

With that in mind, the implications of this treatise for the study of Arabic Christian thought prior to the *Nabda* should not be underestimated. The analysis of *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ* underscores the significance of Arabic-language theology within the wider Christian tradition, demonstrating that, while trying to remain attached to ancient doctrinal foundations, it also exhibits originality in developing and articulating new theological insights. The work of 'Abd Allāh Zākhir illustrates that Arabic Christian theologians were not merely passive transmitters of Greek or Latin traditions, but active contributors who engaged these sources to respond to the particular theological and cultural challenges confronting Middle Eastern Christians in their historical context.

What are the implications of Zākhir's *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ* for theological research today? Beyond its historical value, does it not challenge us to reconsider the place of Arabic-written theology in the broader Christian tradition? Too often marginalized in favor of Latin or Byzantine sources, this tradition reveals, in works like *Al-burhān al-ṣariḥ*, a theological creativity and depth that remain largely unexplored.

⁴³ Cf. El Gemayel, "'Abd Allāh Zākhir", p. 106.

Can this heritage offer something vital for Middle Eastern Christians today, many of whom face existential questions of identity and continuity? Zākhir's emphasis on deification and the Incarnation, presented with clarity and pastoral concern, suggests that Arabic theology is not merely a relic but a resource. His approach models how to remain faithful to tradition while responding to the cultural and religious context with intelligence and confidence.

What, then, might the global Church gain from engaging with this forgotten chapter of Christian thought? Studying Arabic Christian theology could broaden ecumenical understanding and enrich both Catholic and Orthodox traditions. It also opens a path to understanding how theology develops not only through Councils and schools but also through lived interaction with other faiths.

Conclusion

Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ stands as a formative work in 18th-century Arabic Christian thought, embodying both apologetic and catechetical dimensions. Zākhir's theological discourse combines traditional Eastern Christian teachings with a distinctive reliance on Scholastic methodology, positioning the work at a critical intersection of two theological traditions. It serves simultaneously as a defense of core Christian doctrines and a tool for catechesis, making it a significant contribution to the Melkite Church's intellectual and pastoral mission during a time of shifting cultural and intellectual landscapes.

Although Zākhir writes in an Antiochian Arabic style enriched by Patristic vocabulary and doctrinal references, the dominant theological method in his exposition is unmistakably Scholastic. His treatment demonstrates a thorough grasp of classical Patristic doctrines: the distinction between essence and person, apophatic caution in speaking of divine realities, the differentiation between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union, and the soteriological theme of deification. Yet these elements, while faithful in content, are reframed within a structure of logical demonstration, systematic argumentation, and dialectical reasoning, features more characteristic of Latin Scholasticism than of traditional Arab Christian expression.

This gives Zākhir's work a distinctive character: a nuanced double-method of theological reflection. While rooted in Eastern tradition, he integrates Scholastic tools such as syllogism and dialectic to articulate doctrine with precision and clarity. This synthesis reveals not only intellectual creativity but also a conscious attempt to reconcile Byzantine and Latin modes of theological reasoning. The text ultimately leans toward a Scholastic framework and compromise core Patristic insights.

Among his notable contributions are Zākhir's treatment of deification, framed within an apologetic structure responsive to the Islamic intellectual milieu. While his references to Islamic critiques are indirect, the theological balancing act is evident, revealing how Arabic Christian theologians maintained doctrinal integrity under Islamic rule while subtly addressing external challenges.

Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ thus emerges as both a theological and cultural connection. Its impact within the Melkite Church and the broader Arabic-speaking Christian world is significant, particularly as Eastern Catholics navigated identity formation amid increasing Latin influence. Zākhir's selective appropriation of Scholasticism while remaining grounded in Patristic thought raises critical questions for contemporary Eastern Catholic theology: did his synthesis preserve the distinctiveness of both traditions, or does it risk becoming a veiled expression of Latin theology within an Eastern context?

In our current theological climate, Zākhir's work offers important insights for Christian communities seeking to remain faithful to their heritage while engaging a pluralistic world. His model prompts a broader reflection: should Eastern Catholicism preserve its traditional identity, embrace Scholastic theological models, or attempt a third path that integrates both traditions meaningfully? Zākhir's theological vision is not only of historical interest but also a living invitation to reimagine how the Eastern Church can inhabit its identity in dialogue with tradition, modernity, and the global Church.

Abstract: This article examines *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* (The Evident Proof), a theological treatise written in 1721 by ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir, a key figure in the 18th-century Melkite Church. Composed in Arabic at the request of a Muslim jurist and later printed at Shuwayr in 1764, the work stands as a rare and significant example of systematic theology articulated in the Arabic Christian tradition during a period marked by both Islamic dominance and rising Catholic influence. While Zākhir adopts the vocabulary and tone of Eastern Arabic Christian theology, his method reveals a distinctly scholastic orientation, particularly through the use of Aristotelian logic and Thomistic structure. This paper argues that *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* is more than an apologetic defense: it is a catechetical synthesis that bridges the Antiochian theological heritage with early modern Catholic intellectual currents. By boldly reasserting the notion of *ta’alluh* (deification) within a context where such language was often suppressed to avoid Islamic accusations of *shirk*, Zākhir revives a core Eastern doctrine and marks a turning point in the history of Arabic Christian thought. This study thus reassesses Zākhir’s work as a foundational moment in the Melkite theological resurgence following the 1724 split, and as theological synthesis across traditions and contexts.

Keywords: ‘Abd Allāh al-Zākhir; *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*; Melkite Catholic Theology; Arabic Christian theology; Deification (ta’alluh), Christian-Muslim polemics.

Resumen: Este artículo examina *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* (*La prueba evidente*), un tratado teológico escrito en 1721 por ‘Abd Allāh Zākhir, figura clave de la Iglesia melquita del siglo XVIII. Compuesta en árabe a petición de un jurista musulmán e impresa posteriormente en Shuwayr en 1764, la obra constituye un ejemplo excepcional y significativo de teología sistemática articulada en la tradición cristiana árabe durante un período marcado tanto por el dominio islámico como por la creciente influencia católica. Si bien Zākhir adopta el vocabulario y el tono de la teología cristiana árabe oriental, su método revela una orientación marcadamente escolástica, en particular mediante el uso de la lógica aristotélica y la estructura tomista. Este artículo argumenta que *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ* es más que una defensa apologética: es una síntesis catequética que conecta la herencia teológica antioquena con las primeras corrientes intelectuales católicas modernas. Al reafirmar con audacia la noción de ta’alluh (deificación) en un contexto donde dicho lenguaje se suprimía a menudo para evitar acusaciones islámicas de *shirk*, Zākhir revive una doctrina oriental fundamental y marca un punto de inflexión en la historia del pensamiento cristiano árabe. Este estudio reevalúa así la obra de Zākhir como un momento fundacional en el resurgimiento teológico melquita tras la escisión de 1724, y como una síntesis teológica que atraviesa tradiciones y contextos.

Palabras clave: ‘Abd Allāh al-Zākhir; *Al-burhān al-ṣarīḥ*; Teología católica melquita; Teología cristiana árabe; Deificación (ta’alluh); Polémica cristiano-musulmana.