



## **Theology of John of Damascus on The Antichrist in the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church**

**Yusak Tanasyah**

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang  
ytanasyah@gmail.com

**Gerald Frederico John Laoh**

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta  
gerald.laoh@gmail.com

**Bebas Pinem**

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta  
bebaspinem@indonesiastt.ac.id

**Robby Robert Repi**

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta  
robbyrepi@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This study explores the theology of John of Damascus on the Antichrist within the context of the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church. Addressing a gap in existing scholarship, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of John of Damascus's eschatological views, particularly his depiction of the Antichrist, and examines their theological, historical, and cultural implications. Employing a historical-theological method, the research involves a detailed textual analysis of John of Damascus's works, contextualization within the Byzantine era, comparative analysis with contemporary and preceding theologians, and interpretation through theological frameworks. The study reveals that John of Damascus articulated a clear and systematic portrayal of the Antichrist, integrating it within his broader eschatological framework. His views were shaped by the historical and political milieu of the Eighth Century, notably the rise of Islam and internal theological disputes within Byzantium. John of Damascus emphasized the Antichrist as a significant heretical threat, advocating for vigilance and steadfastness in faith among the Christian faithful. His teachings were deeply woven into Orthodox doctrine, reinforcing the eventual triumph of Christ and the necessity of maintaining orthodox beliefs against heretical challenges. The findings underscore the lasting impact of John of Damascus's theology on the Antichrist in the Orthodox tradition, influencing subsequent theological developments and the Church's understanding of end-time events. This study highlights the importance of his eschatological perspectives, demonstrating how they were both reflective of and responsive to the theological and historical challenges of his time.

**Keywords:** John of Damascus; Antichrist; Eighth-century; Orthodox Church

## INTRODUCTION

In the annals of the Orthodox Church, John of Damascus—also called Saint John Damascene—was a prominent theologian, hymn writer, and philosopher. Living in the eighth century, primarily in the region of Damascus, he faced the challenge of articulating and defending Christian doctrine in a time of significant theological and political conflict. His contributions to theology, particularly in his defense of icons and his comprehensive theological works, have had a lasting impact on the Christian tradition. This essay explores John of Damascus's theology in the context of the eighth-century Orthodox Church. John of Damascus also wrote about apocalyptic themes, including the Antichrist. He viewed the Antichrist as a personification of evil and opposition to Christ, who would emerge in the end times to deceive humanity. His teachings on the Antichrist were grounded in scriptural authority and aimed to prepare the faithful for the trials of the end times. John of Damascus's theology works have been influential in shaping the Orthodox understanding of Christian doctrine and have been referenced in theological discourse for centuries.

Saint John Damascene, commonly known as John of Damascus, was a well-known scholar, hymnographer, and

theologian who was instrumental in the development of the Orthodox Church. His life and works have left a lasting impact on Christian theology and liturgy. The life and contributions of John of Damascus are examined in this essay, along with his background, professional trajectory, and theological impact. He joined the Monastery of Saint Sabas, which is close to Jerusalem, and entered the monastic life, dedicating his time to writing, studying, and prayer. John was renowned for his extensive theological knowledge, eloquence, and capacity to explain difficult theological ideas. He became a respected theologian and a prominent figure in the monastic community.

John of Damascus was born around 675 CE in Damascus, in what is now modern-day Syria. He came from a Christian family of noble origin, and his father, Sergius, was a senior official in the Islamic caliphate that governed the area at the time. Despite living under Islamic rule, John received a solid Christian education, learning the Greek language and studying philosophy, theology, and classical literature. John's early career involved serving in the administration of the caliphate, following in his father's footsteps. However, his primary interest was in religious studies and theology. Eventually, he decided to leave his position in the caliphate to pursue a life dedicated to

the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Saint John Damascene, lived in a period when the Umayyad Caliphate, a political entity dominated the Muslim world, especially Syria, his native land. His position as a Christian scholar and theologian living under Islamic rule placed him in a unique position to engage in apologetics with the Muslim world. During John's lifetime, the Islamic caliphate had expanded significantly, encompassing the regions of Syria and Palestine. John's family held a privileged position within the Islamic administration, which gave him insight into both Christian and Islamic thought. However, the dominant Islamic rule posed challenges for the Christian community, and John found himself defending Christian beliefs in a predominantly Muslim environment.

John's apologetics to the Muslim world can be understood through his writings and theological positions. John of Damascus defended the central Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity against Islamic criticism. Muslims viewed the Christian beliefs in these doctrines as contrary to monotheism. John argued that the Incarnation of Christ and the Trinity were consistent with the nature of God as

revealed in Christian scripture. John critiqued Islam from a Christian perspective, particularly in his work "Heresy 101" in "On Heresies." He gave a history of the development of Islam and criticized its doctrines, saying that Islam deviated from the genuine faith. While some of his critiques may be considered polemical, they reflect the theological tensions between the two faiths.

Historians have documented the significant influence of Byzantine philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, medicine, alchemy, and the arts that John of Damascus (c. 655–c. 749) had on the Arabs, especially in the years of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833). There is an unusual connection between the Umayyad caliphate (661–750), Syro-Palestinian Byzantine life and culture, and the so-called "Dark Ages" of Byzantium.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, not much is discussed about the subtle but crucial interplay between these two eras, which is historically at odds with this experience. For some strange and illogical reason or lack thereof, early historians and modern Byzantineists abandoned the treatment of the inhabitants of these former eastern provinces as heirs of Byzantium and ignored the emergence of

<sup>1</sup> Armand Barus, "The Known Christ of Islam in Religious Dialogue," *Jurnal Amanat Agung* 11, no. 1 (2015), <https://ojs.sttaa.ac.id/index.php/JAA/article/view/197>.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel J. Sahas, "Cultural Interaction

during the Umayyad Period: The 'Circle' of John of Damascus," in *Byzantium and Islam* (BRILL, 2021), 327–357, <https://brill.com/view/book/9789004470477/BP000027.xml>.

Syro-Palestinian Hellenism and its impacts on its peoples, Christians, and Muslims, throughout the Umayyad caliphate. This was after the Syro-Palestinian region was conquered by the Arabs.<sup>3</sup> The novelty of this research lies in its focused examination of John of Damascus's theology of the Antichrist, its integration of historical context, comparative analysis, and thorough exploration of doctrinal impact. By providing new insights into his eschatological views and their significance, the study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of early Christian theology and the Orthodox Church's doctrinal evolution.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach for John of Damascus's theology of the Antichrist within the framework of the eighth-century Orthodox Church: qualitative library research. Clearly define the research that John of Damascus conceptualizes the Antichrist within the theological framework of the eighth-century Orthodox Church. Conduct a comprehensive search of qualitative literature related to John of Damascus, theology, eschatology, and the eighth-century Orthodox Church.

Utilize academic databases, library

catalogs, and specialized journals focusing on religious studies and church history. Establish criteria for selecting relevant literature, considering factors such as publication date, language, geographic focus, and relevance to the research question. Give primary sources and academic interpretations of the writings of John of Damascus and the eighth-century theological context top priority. Employing a theological and hermeneutical framework to interpret John of Damascus's writings provides a fresh perspective on his eschatology. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of his theological intentions and the doctrinal significance of his views on the Antichrist. This methodological novelty offers deeper insights compared to previous research that may have employed more straightforward historical or textual analyses without delving into the interpretive frameworks

### DISCUSSION

#### The context of the eighth-century Orthodox Church

The theology of John of Damascus, particularly his views on the Antichrist, represents a critical aspect of early Christian eschatology that has not been thoroughly explored in contemporary

Damascus.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Sahas, “Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad Period: The ‘Circle’ of John of

scholarship. Despite his significant influence on Orthodox Christian doctrine, there remains a gap in understanding how his eschatological views, specifically regarding the Antichrist, shaped and were shaped by the theological and cultural contexts of the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church. This research is essential to bridge this gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of John of Damascus's contributions to eschatological thought.

This research addresses analyzing John of Damascus's writings, the research seeks to clarify his theological position on the Antichrist, an area that has often been overshadowed by his other theological contributions. This clarity is crucial for a deeper understanding of Orthodox eschatology and the doctrinal development of the Church. The study situates John of Damascus's eschatological views within the broader historical and cultural context of the Eighth Century. This period was marked by significant religious and political upheaval, including the rise of Islam and internal theological controversies within the Byzantine Empire. Understanding this context is vital for appreciating the nuances of his theology and its relevance to his contemporaries.

The research examines how John of Damascus's views on the Antichrist influenced and were received by the Orthodox Church. It explores the extent to

which his teachings shaped Orthodox doctrine and how they were integrated into the Church's broader eschatological framework. This research is necessary to provide a comprehensive and contextual understanding of John of Damascus's theology on the Antichrist, addressing gaps in current scholarship and contributing to a deeper appreciation of Orthodox eschatological thought. The phenomenon this article wrestles with is the portrayal and theological significance of the Antichrist in the writings of John of Damascus and its impact on the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church. Understanding the Antichrist as depicted by John of Damascus as a significant eschatological threat, embodying heresy and apostasy, and how this shaped the faithful's perceptions and responses to perceived religious threats.

Early in the eighth century, Umayyad Palestine was a religiously heterogeneous area with conflicting identities that existed both inside and within Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The spectrum of monotheism is a "continuum," according to Arietta Papaconstantinou, where a person could easily move between categories socially without even realizing it.

Jack Tannous, who established the idea of the "simple believer" representing the average person in late antiquity, highlights the idea that not every Christian,

in our case while on the life of John of Damascus, would have naturally recognized the difference between a Chalcedonian, Melkite, or Syrian Orthodox Christian. This situation was also relevant to modern forms of Judaism and Islam. Tannous presents a variety of responses to the intricate interplay between politics, religion, and ethnicity that underpins notions of religious community membership in this way.<sup>4</sup>

The political and religious significance of Jerusalem is the reason Mu'awiya (661–80 CE) picked the city as his caliph, according to both Islamic and non-Islamic sources. The closest account of the occurrence is found in the Maronite Chronicle, which states that after arriving in Jerusalem, Mu'awiya prayed at Golgotha and then went to Gethsemane to pray at Mary's tomb. According to Al-Maqdisi, Mufawiya was given the oath of allegiance in the mosque while serving as caliph. Al-Maqdisi claims that this was formerly a mosque constructed (or reconstructed) by caliph 'Umar, Jacob, al-Khidr, David, Solomon, and others.<sup>5</sup>

Jerusalem's political and theological

prominence is attested to by Mufawiya's decision to become its caliph, despite coming from one of Mecca's most prominent and powerful families. Al-Maqdisi's claim that 'Umar built the mosque and that Mu'awiya followed suit, however, cannot be accepted since it is extremely late and his use of the terms "build" and "mosque" is too ambiguous and imprecise: neither al-Khidr nor David, nor Jacob, erected a mosque anywhere on the Temple Mount.<sup>6</sup>

The indications of a newly forming religion and the reasons behind its construction can be identified from the inscription found inside the Dome of the Rock. One of the first examples of the classical shahada (testimony of faith) may be found there, along with a strong stress on God's unity, with the words "There is no god but God, One with no partners."<sup>7</sup> We notice that Muhammad's prophetic status is emphasized. The oldest dated Qur'anic allusions can also be found in inscriptions (e.g., Qur'an 3:18–19, 4:171–2, 19:33–6, and 112:1–4). These specific verses from the Qurfan are significant because they cast doubt on Jesus' divinity, which leads to one

<sup>4</sup> Anna Chrysostomides, "John of Damascus's Theology of Icons in the Context of Eighth-Century Palestinian Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 75 (2021): 263–296, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27107158>.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner, eds., *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State* (Chicago: THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Suleiman A. Mourad, "Umayyad Jerusalem: From a Religious Capital to a Religious Town," in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham (New York: Routledge, 2021), [https://sophia.smith.edu/~smourad/SA\\_Mourad--Umayyad\\_Jerusalem.pdf](https://sophia.smith.edu/~smourad/SA_Mourad--Umayyad_Jerusalem.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Milwright, *The Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 215.

of the main reasons for building the Dome of the Rock: to signal Islam's claim to Jerusalem and challenge the validity of the Christian claim.<sup>8</sup>

The connection between Rock and the Day of Resurrection is the main theme of the explanation. This concept is central to the earliest accounts of Fada'il. The inscription written on the inner arcade of the Dome of the Rock, which speaks of Muhammad's intercession on behalf of the Muslims on the Day of Judgment, lends credence to the idea that Muslims had preconceived beliefs of the location's eschatological relationship with the Day of Judgment at the time of construction. The Dome of the Chain, which is located slightly to the east and is thought to be the oldest Islamic structure in Haram, provides additional compelling evidence. An oral tradition outside of the Bible about King David's or King Solomon's Chain of Justice, which stood in front of the Temple and served as a divine tribunal for the ancient Israelites, is connected in certain Islamic accounts to the Dome of the Chain.<sup>9</sup>

Probably the most influential early caliph, Abd al-Malik instituted several key reforms. Under his leadership, the empire broke with the customs of its Persian and

Byzantine ancestors and developed a unique character that would later define Islamic countries. Abd al-Malik asserted that Islam was the official religion and that he was the head of the Muslims as well as the empire. He built mosques using public funds and also built the Dome of the Rock, one of the most significant structures in Islam.<sup>10</sup>

Making the distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs was vital during the post-conquest era. Being Arab means belonging to a higher social level and being elite. Despite receiving generally good treatment, non-Arabs were forced to pay taxes to their new rulers, which was seen as a sign of social inferiority. The elite class was made up of the conquering Arabs.<sup>11</sup>

The Arabs referred to this "second class" of people as customers (mawali). The customers were Muslims who had converted. Islam was primarily an Arab religion during the invasion and was described as a religion of "peace" (Sur. 2: 208; 8: 63). The conquered populations were not subjected to Islamic rituals and beliefs. According to Hitti, there is no indication that the captured people converted in large numbers to Islam until after the Abbasid al-Mutawakkil (847-861)

<sup>8</sup> Mourad, "Umayyad Jerusalem: From a Religious Capital to a Religious Town."

<sup>9</sup> Mourad, "Umayyad Jerusalem: From a Religious Capital to a Religious Town."

<sup>10</sup> "The Umayyads: The First Muslim Dynasty," *The Saylor Foundation*,

<https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HIST101-9.2-Umayyads-FINAL1.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Barus, "The Known Christ of Islam in Religious Dialogue."

and Umar II (717–720) imposed strict rules.<sup>12</sup>

Christians, Jews, and Sabians were among the *Ahl al-dhimma*, or “protected peoples,” who made up the third class of society. They were considered “peoples of the Book,” that is, followers of the earlier recorded revelations, and the Prophet Muhammad had established a covenant with them. This tolerant stance was maintained by the Caliphate, the Prophet's successors, and it was eventually extended to Zoroastrians as well.<sup>13</sup>

### **John of Damascus on the Incarnation and the Trinity**

The Holy Trinity belief has a significant bearing on how Christians conceive God. In Christianity, God is a personal, triune God; it does not have an abstract or ambiguous meaning. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In terms of his essence, God is transcendent at the same time. God differs from Creation (pantheism), but he is not the same as it. Based on the aforementioned teachings, Saint John of Damascus makes an effort to describe the essence of God in the context of Orthodox theology. Three fundamental

concepts form the basis of this teaching about God: a) Evidence for God's existence; b) God is one and transcendent; and c) The Trinity of God.<sup>14</sup>

As a writer for the Orthodox Church, John expresses the difference between the created and the uncreated. The essence of God, according to Orthodox theology, transcends all created reality. This was stated succinctly by Saint John of Damascus, who said: “The God who is incomprehensible is also undoubtedly nameless.” So let's not try to give His essence a name since we do not know what it is. Names serve as descriptions of real objects. However, God... did not only not reveal His essence to us, but He did also not even provide us the ability to know it. Since nature is unable to completely comprehend the supernatural.<sup>15</sup>

John emphasizes the total unity of the three elements of the Holy Trinity as well as their need for one another because the Word cannot exist without the Father and the Spirit. John adopts a similar linear Trinitarian argument to that of Basil in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, namely, to demonstrate that the Spirit and the Word are neither creaturely nor distinct from God (i.e., from-

<sup>12</sup> Barus, “The Known Christ of Islam in Religious Dialogue.”

<sup>13</sup> Barus, “The Known Christ of Islam in Religious Dialogue.”

<sup>14</sup> Dimitris Athanasiou, “The Divine in the Theological Thinking of Saint John of Damascus in Relationship with Relevant Teachings of Theodore

Abu Qurrah,” *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10, no. 4 (2019), <https://www.orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/4.2019/DimitrisAthanasiou.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> John Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Bk 1, Ch. XII*. (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 27.

without God). For example, Basil's justification of the oneness and non-differentiation of the three in a linear form supports his assertion that "He who rejects the Spirit rejects the Son, and he who rejects the Son rejects the Father."<sup>16</sup>

Basil principally structures the reciprocity between the three hypostases in a linear and mediatorial order, departing from the emphasis that the Father alone continues to be the source or the center of the Godhead. Before elucidating the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, John of Damascus highlights the unity of God. Christians, in his words, "believe in one God, one beginning."<sup>17</sup> According to John of Damascus, the Deity herself, not the Father, is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes that there is only "one essence, one divinity, one power, one will, one energy, one beginning, one authority, one dominion, and one sovereignty" as his main point of emphasis about the unity and uniqueness of Deity.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the Saint emphasizes that the three Divine substances are mutually surrounded, but this does not imply that they are confused with one another. He writes on the following in a

typical manner: The subsistence coexists and are firmly rooted in each other. Because they are intertwined and cannot be separated from one another, they must maintain their trajectories inside one another rather than merging or mingling but rather cleaving to one another. Since the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father and the Son, and the Father is in the Son and the Spirit, there is no fusion, mixing, or confusion.<sup>19</sup>

"The Son is everything God the Father is in essence, except in playing the Father's role of begetting; he is the begotten, while the Father is the begetter," says John, pleased by the Orthodox tradition. However, the Holy Spirit is not begotten like the Son; rather, the Holy Spirit is a continuation of the Father and all that the Father and the Son are in nature.<sup>20</sup>

John of Damascus describes the Holy Spirit as having two generations. Firstly, he states that the Spirit is the production of the Son specifically by the Father's causal will. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is derived from the Father and rests in the Son, not by generation but by procession. This is one of the fascinating aspects of John of Damascus' exposition of

<sup>16</sup> Stephen M. Hildebrand, ed., *Basil of Caesarea, On the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea, On the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>18</sup> Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Bk I, Ch. XII*.

<sup>19</sup> Athanasiou, "The Divine in the Theological Thinking of Saint John of Damascus in Relationship with Relevant Teachings of Theodore Abu Qurrah."

<sup>20</sup> Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Bk I, Ch. XII*.

the Trinitarian faith of orthodoxy.

John of Damascus does not appear to be endorsing the (filioque) teaching despite the aforementioned phrase. Following the teachings of the Orthodox church, Saint John rejects the idea that the Holy Spirit is a direct offspring of the Son. In order to converse, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit adhere to the interpersonal community of this singular substance, which is Divinity. They all exist as one, uncreated substance.<sup>21</sup>

### **John of Damascus on Antichrist**

Evidence for the need to expose Christians to rebuttals and the emerging theological philosophies that were eroding churches throughout the Middle East may be found in John of Damascus. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Heresies have helped the church throughout history by helping to develop and contextualize its doctrines. John was no different. He was well aware of the church's past, the threat posed by heresies, and the challenges faced by the early fathers in dealing with them.

He therefore viewed it as imperative to write his book *On Heresies* and formulate his *Summa* to educate the church about its orthodox beliefs. These writings addressed

the criticisms Christians leveled against Christianity, explained the heresies, and showed them why their ideas were false.<sup>22</sup>

John Damascene, the first Christian theologian to provide us with the earliest detailed conversations regarding Islam, freely mentions Islam in his writings. There is very little information accessible about his life; his works are the only way to piece together his beliefs and perspectives on Islam. Unfortunately, there is not much to learn about Islam from a close reading of his texts.

Based on all of St. John Damascene's references to Islam, it is clear that the Holy Father, who was of Arabic descent and served as an official in the Caliph of Damascus' court, was familiar with the religion throughout the early decades following its founding. It was during this time that he became acquainted with Islam, which enabled him to focus his criticisms on the new religion. Unfortunately, this component of the Damascene conflict is not covered in the works that have appeared in our nation, making his disagreement with the new religion less well-researched. This clarifies the reason behind St. John Damascene's diminished recognition as a prominent figure in the Christian-Islamic religious

<sup>21</sup> Nikos Matsoukas, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology 2* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras Publications, 2006), 82.

<sup>22</sup> Sherene N. Khouri, "John of Damascus'

John of Damascus's Theological Methodology: An Effective Way to Answer Islamic Objections," *Eleutheria* 5, no. 1 (2021).

discourse.<sup>23</sup>

Who might be the antichrist? In actuality, the term “antichrist” refers to “anti-Messiah,” and he is blatantly anti-Semitic. The antichrist spirit attempted to assassinate Jesus three times when He was still a newborn and a small child. The antichrist seeks to rule the entire world. The demonic understood what the Messiah would do since the day God cursed the snake, therefore he made fruitless attempts to thwart God’s intentions to save humanity.

The Antichrist is discussed in John of Damascus’ *The Fount of Knowledge III: On the Orthodox Faith, Chapter XXVI*. One should be aware that the arrival of the Antichrist is inevitable. Thus, everyone who denies that the Son of God became complete in the flesh after being perfect in Godhead is Antichrist. However, in a unique and specific meaning, the person who arrives at the end of the era is referred to as the Antichrist.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, as we have shown, he is the child of adultery and is raised in secret until suddenly he comes up, rebels, and takes

over. And he takes on the role of sanctity at the outset of his rule—or rather, tyranny. However, he exhibits all of his evil and persecutes the Church of God after he gains control. However, he will arrive bearing false signs and miraculous miracles that are unreal. He will also mislead and drive away from the living God those whose minds are built on shaky and unstable foundations, so even the elect will, if at all possible, be caused to stumble.<sup>25</sup>

John only uses polemics and apologies to explain the faith of the Ishmaelites, as he calls them. He calls Islam a religious practice (*θηρησκεία*), a Christian sect, and a heretic (*αἵρεσις*). John thinks Muhammad founded Islam to cater to idolaters, or people who worship the morning star and Aphrodite. John also finds it “laughable” that Muhammad claimed to have received revelations from above. Damascene presents Muhammad’s understanding of Christ, the Word of God: he was created and was a slave. John calls Muslims “the Ishmaelites (or Hagarenes), the forerunners of the Antichrist.”<sup>26</sup>

Le Coz claims that John of

<sup>23</sup> Caius Cuțaru, “A Great Father of the Church in Dialog with Islam: Saint John of Damascus,” *Teolog* 61, no. 4 (2014), [https://www.revistateologia.ro/downloads/Teologia/4\\_2014/Caius.pdf](https://www.revistateologia.ro/downloads/Teologia/4_2014/Caius.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> “John of Damascus, The Fount of Knowledge III: On the Orthodox Faith,” *CatholicLibrary*, [https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Syn](https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Synchronized-)

EN/npnf.000793.JohnOfDamascusExpositionOfTheOrthodoxFaith.AnExactExpositionoftheOrthodoxFaith.html&chunk.id=00000209.

<sup>25</sup> “John of Damascus, The Fount of Knowledge III: On the Orthodox Faith.”

<sup>26</sup> Jan Dominik Bogataj, “Byzantine Theology and Islam: Paul of Antioch’s Irenic Approach,” *Edinost in dialog* 74, no. 2 (2019), <https://www.teof.uni-lj.si/uploads/File/Edinost/74/02/Bogataj.pdf>.

Damascus did not refer to this religious movement and its adherents as Muslims or Islam. He refers to each of them as an “Ishmaelite” in turn. Peter, the bishop of Maiuma, was convicted of a grave offense in 743 when the Fountain of Knowledge was written. He had publicly condemned Islam and called Muhammad a “false prophet” and the forerunner of the Antichrist. However, this expression was not initially intended to belittle just Muhammad and Islam. Emperor Leo III, his son Constantine V, the Patriarch of Constantinople, John VII Grammaticos (836–842), and possibly a few more prominent religious and political people had all made use of it. This serious charge was made against people who were thought to “deceive” believers to divert them from the Orthodox faith.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, John of Damascus labels anyone “who does not confess that the Son of God came in flesh, is perfect God and He became perfect man while at the same time, He was God” as Antichrist in a specific chapter titled “On the antichrist” in *the De Fide Orthodoxa*. John of Damascus gave this moniker to Nestorius, whom he labeled the “son of Satan” and the “Antichrist,” for giving Mary the name

“Christokos” rather than “Theotokos,” according to his meaning. Therefore, it is clear that the term “forerunner of the Antichrist” was used to disparage people who misrepresented the fundamental beliefs of the Church, particularly concerning Christ's divinity.<sup>28</sup>

John of Damascus specifically criticizes Islamic beliefs and practices by the heresy 100 because they are in opposition to Orthodoxy and Christian morals. The definition of heresy as “a commonly accepted opinion by a group of persons but rejected by others” was not ambiguously stated by John of Damascus. It was, in his opinion, a strict case of dogmatic mistake. Muhammad’s teachings are summarized as follows. The core tenet of Muhammad's teachings is the belief that there is only one God, the creator of all things, who is neither begotten nor generated. Christ, the formed and enslaved word of God, was born of the Virgin Mary. God accepted Christ into heaven “because he loved;” he was not slain or crucified.<sup>29</sup>

Following this succinct summary of Muhammad’s teachings, John turns critical. The revelation came to Muhammad when he was sleeping, which is why he compares it negatively to Moses and condemns the

<sup>27</sup> Timothée B. Mushagalusa, “John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy” (University of South Africa, 2008), <https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/2200/thesis.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Mushagalusa, “John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy.”

<sup>29</sup> Mushagalusa, “John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy.”

revelation to Muhammad because there were no witnesses. John then discusses the attacks on Christians by Muslims. He begins by focusing on the accusation of being “associates” (*hetairiastai*), which refers to people who associate with someone—in this case, Christ—with God and so stray from God's exclusive authority. John of Damascus's interaction with a wide range of heresies. We believe that these heresies encapsulate the spirit of Orthodox Christianity in Palestine at the height of the theological rivalry in the Middle East. Additionally, this section shows that he has an awareness of the evolving Islamic frameworks, especially the intellectual ones, in which John of Damascus tries to define Orthodox Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

It is very clear how John applies reason in his apologetic defense of Islam. He enumerates numerous varieties of heresies in his book *On Heresies*. He closes with *Doxarii*, having begun with *Barbarism*. He feels that these heresies, which were allegedly prevalent at the time, needed to be addressed because of the potential harm they could do to Christian beliefs. Each of the 103 heresies receives a varying amount of space and attention from John; some receive a few lines, while others receive several pages. The Ishmaelite

heresy is the most significant heresy related to the topic of this essay. This apology by John against the heresy of the Ishmaelites (Islamic faith) is a good illustration of his methodology's use of reason.<sup>31</sup>

To demonstrate the effectiveness of John's model through the advancement of his concepts and techniques by his successors, the apologetic legacy of the man was examined. Several similar concepts and behaviors that may have resulted from their familiarity with John of Damascus' writings were brought to light via the analysis and comparison of the Trinitarian claims made by three of John's successors with those found in John's writings. The most common of these perspectives holds that God would not have had his Word and Spirit at all if they had not lived in eternal harmony with the Father. The Trinity analogies contained in John's writings were also employed by their successors. The antichrist spirit is more accurately described by the faith of Islam than by any other philosophy, religion, or belief system. Denying all three of the points about Jesus and His relationship with the Father is one of the top priorities of the Islamic faith. Indeed, it is reasonable to argue that Islam is a direct polemical reaction to those central tenets of

<sup>30</sup> Mushagalusa, “John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy.”

<sup>31</sup> Khouri, “John of Damascus' John of

Damascus's Theological Methodology: An Effective Way to Answer Islamic Objections.”

Christianity. According to the Apostle John, a man who completely personifies the antichrist spirit and refutes many of the fundamental scriptural teachings about Jesus' identity and mission will appear in the latter hour. The Antichrist will be that man.

### CONCLUSION

The exploration of John of Damascus's theology on the Antichrist within the context of the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church yields significant insights into early Christian eschatological thought and its doctrinal development. John of Damascus provided a detailed and coherent portrayal of the Antichrist, emphasizing the figure as a central eschatological threat embodying heresy and apostasy. His clear articulation of the Antichrist's role and characteristics contributed to a systematic eschatological framework that reinforced the importance of vigilance and faithfulness among Christians.

The research situates John of Damascus's views within the broader historical and political milieu of his time. The rise of Islam, ongoing theological disputes, and the internal dynamics of the Byzantine Empire significantly influenced his depiction of the Antichrist. This context underscores the responsiveness of his theology to contemporary challenges and threats faced by the Orthodox Church. John

of Damascus' teachings on the Antichrist were deeply integrated into Orthodox doctrine, reflecting and shaping the Church's eschatological beliefs. His emphasis on the eventual triumph of Christ and the necessity of adhering to orthodox beliefs against heretical influences had a lasting impact on Orthodox eschatology. The theology of John of Damascus on the Antichrist offers a critical window into the eschatological concerns and doctrinal evolution of the Eighth-Century Orthodox Church. By examining his writings and their historical and cultural context, this research enhances our understanding of early Christian eschatology and the enduring significance of John of Damascus' theological contributions. His portrayal of the Antichrist not only addressed the immediate challenges of his time but also provided a robust framework for Orthodox eschatological thought that has continued to resonate through the centuries.

### REFERENCES

- Athanasiou, Dimitris. "The Divine in the Theological Thinking of Saint John of Damascus in Relationship with Relevant Teachings of Theodore Abu Qurrah." *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10, no. 4 (2019). <https://www.orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/4.2019/DimitrisAthanasiou.pdf>.
- Barus, Armand. "The Known Christ of

- Islam in Religious Dialogue.” *Jurnal Amanat Agung* 11, no. 1 (2015). <https://ojs.sttaa.ac.id/index.php/JAA/article/view/197>.
- Bogataj, Jan Dominik. “Byzantine Theology and Islam: Paul of Antioch’s Irenic Approach.” *Edinost in dialog* 74, no. 2 (2019). <https://www.teof.uni-lj.si/uploads/File/Edinost/74/02/Bogataj.pdf>.
- Borrut, Antoine, and Fred M. Donner, eds. *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*. Chicago: THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, n.d.
- Chrysostomides, Anna. “John of Damascus’s Theology of Icons in the Context of Eighth-Century Palestinian Iconoclasm.” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 75 (2021): 263–296. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27107158>.
- Cuțaru, Caius. “A Great Father of the Church in Dialog with Islam: Saint John of Damascus.” *Teolog* 61, no. 4 (2014). [https://www.revistateologia.ro/downloads/Teologia/4\\_2014/Caius.pdf](https://www.revistateologia.ro/downloads/Teologia/4_2014/Caius.pdf).
- Damascus, John. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Bk 1, Ch. XII*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
- Hildebrand, Stephen M., ed. *Basil of Caesarea, On the Holy Spirit*. Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001.
- Khoury, Sherene N. “John of Damascus’ John of Damascus’s Theological Methodology: An Effective Way to Answer Islamic Objections.” *Eleutheria* 5, no. 1 (2021).
- Matsoukas, Nikos. *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology 2*. Thessaloniki: Pournaras Publications, 2006.
- Milwright, Marcus. *The Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Mourad, Suleiman A. “Umayyad Jerusalem: From a Religious Capital to a Religious Town.” In *The Umayyad World*, edited by Andrew Marsham. New York: Routledge, 2021. [https://sophia.smith.edu/~smourad/SA\\_Mourad--Umayyad\\_Jerusalem.pdf](https://sophia.smith.edu/~smourad/SA_Mourad--Umayyad_Jerusalem.pdf).
- Mushagalusa, Timothée B. “John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy.” University of South Africa, 2008. <https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/2200/thesis.pdf>.
- Sahas, Daniel J. “Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad Period: The ‘Circle’ of John of Damascus.” In *Byzantium and Islam*, 327–357. BRILL, 2021. <https://brill.com/view/book/9789004470477/BP000027.xml>.
- “John of Damascus, The Fount of Knowledge III: On the Orthodox Faith.” *Catholiclibrary*. <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Synchronized-EN/npnf.000793.JohnOfDamascusExpositionOfTheOrthodoxFaith.AnExactExpositionoftheOrthodoxFaith.html&chunk.id=00000209>.
- “The Umayyads: The First Muslim Dynasty.” *The Saylor Foundation*. <https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HIST101-9.2-Umayyads-FINAL1.pdf>.

