Voices of the Converted: Christian Apostate Literature in Medieval Islam

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2015

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to discuss the dialectical (kalām) and scriptural (both biblical and Qur’ānic) reasoning used to justify Christian conversion to Islam during the medieval period (750 - 1492 C.E.). With this objective in mind, I will compare and contrast the manners in which five different Arabophone authors, ʿAlī ibn Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 860), al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb (fl. ca. mid-tenth century), Naṣr ibn Yahiyya (d. 1163 or 1193), Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (d. ca mid-thirteenth century), and Anselm Turmeda (d. 1423), all Christian converts to Islam, utilized biblical and Qur’ānic proof-texts alongside dialectical reasoning to invalidate the various tenets of Christianity while concurrently endorsing Islamic doctrine. These authors discuss a wide variety of contentious issues pervading medieval Christian-Muslim dialogue. Within the doctrinal sphere, these authors primarily discuss the Trinity and Incarnation, the nature of God, and the corruption of the Bible (taḥrīf). Within the exegetical realm, these authors primarily discussed miracles, prophecy, and prophetology. Moreover, this dissertation seeks to discern how these authors and their works can be properly contextualized within the larger framework of medieval Arabic polemical literature. That is to say, aside from parallels and correspondences with one another, what connections, if any, do these authors have with other contemporary Arabophone Muslim, Christian, and, to a lesser extent, Jewish apologists and polemicists?
In the course of my research on Christian apostate literature, I have come to two primary conclusions. First, as opposed to the growing fashionability and usage of dialectical reasoning (kalām), Christian converts to Islam principally relied upon scriptural proof-texts in their works. Subsequently, the cultural bifocality with which Christian converts to Islam refuted their former faith produced a unique genre within the greater field of Muslim anti-Christian polemical writing, particularly due to their typological exegesis of the Bible and its use as an apologia for conversion to Islam as well as a validation of Muḥammad’s prophetic office. Second, the foundation of a standardized Muslim narrative concerning the image of the Christian convert to Islam was largely established in early Islamic literature (Qur’ān and Sīra) and during the ninth century with the conversion of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. In many ways, subsequent Christian converts to Islam simply recycled and repackaged the personal accounts and arguments presented by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in his polemically titled “The Refutation of the Christians” (al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā) and his apologetic defense of Islam titled “The Book of Religion and Empire” (Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla).
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my friend and colleague

Allen Tuazon
Vita

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“When we look at the polemical literature as a social phenomenon, the point is not so much the contents but the occasions on which, the precise reasons why and aims for which particular tracts were written by particular individuals for specific groups.”

— Jacques Waardenburg

During the medieval period numerous refutations of Christianity were written by Muslims of various sects and disciplines. The authors of these works hailed from many different regions and wrote in a wide range of cultural contexts. Some of these authors included Christian converts who were from diverse traditions and circumstances as well. Throughout the medieval period (800-1400 C.E.), anti-Christian polemics included many schematized and formulaic works. However, written alongside these conventional polemics were many writings that demonstrated both innovative style and encyclopedic knowledge. No individual Christian, regardless of status, reputation, or intellectual acumen, was protected from religious confrontation, nor was the discussion of Christian belief, whether theological, historical, or even seemingly inconsequential considered illicit, rude, or futile. Who better to explicate and confute Christian doctrine than former

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2 This six hundred year period roughly coincides with the birth of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī (b. ca. 780) and the death of Anselm Turmeda (d. 1424-1430). In other words, “medieval” has been arbitrarily placed within the parameters of the Christian apostate literature discussed in this dissertation.
Christians themselves? Indeed, the Qurʾān, in Sūrat Yūnus (10:94), states, “So if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book [revealed] before you…” In this sense, the dual heritage of Christian converts to Islam made them a repository of revealed knowledge. Therefore converts, especially priests and intellectuals who knew multiple languages and were conversant with ecclesiastical works and pre-qurʾānic scriptures, i.e., the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel referred to in Arabic as the Tawrāh, Zabur, and Injīl respectively, possessed a well-sought-after theological capital in the Muslim community. Additionally, prior to the translation and subsequent widespread distribution of the Bible in Arabic during the ninth and tenth centuries, a demonstrable expertise in biblical materials would have been valuable for polemical purposes.

In the mid-ninth century a Nestorian Christian physician named ʿAlī ibn Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 860) converted to Islam. Subsequently, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī penned two refutations of his former faith, thus inaugurating a distinct sub-genre of anti-Christian polemic, which will be referred to as “Christian apostate literature.” During the mid-ninth century when ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was writing his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Refutation of the Christians) and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla (The Book of Religion and Empire), the lands under

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Islamic control were largely, demographically speaking, Christian. Therefore, there would have been an impetus for Christian apostate literature on account of demography. Likewise, the novelty of the genre coupled with its combination of polemic and apology would have attracted both a Muslim and Christian readership. What is more, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was writing amidst the first generation of Arabic-speaking Christian apologists, specifically, Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 825), Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Ra’īṭah (d. ca. 830), Ṛmmār al-Ṭaṣrī (d. ca. mid-ninth century), and Abū Zayd Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq al-‘Ībādī (d. 873) to name the most prominent.6

Subsequently, for the first time in Arabic since the rise of Islam, Muslims were exposed to Christian theology, philosophy, dialectic, and scripture. Previously Christians living under Muslim dominion had written primarily in Greek and Syriac. Therefore, Muslims were subject to troubling Christian-Arabic polemics. Although Christian Arab apologists were often cautious and reticent in their writings on Islam and Muḥammad, they were still perceived as antagonistic. Dimitri Gutas writes, “The Christians and Jews, though from a legal perspective they had an unambiguous social standing and thus presented no political threat, were nevertheless formidable intellectual opponents with centuries of experience in inter-faith debate.”7

5 According to Richard Bulliet, during the mid-ninth century, when ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was writing, Iraq was approximately sixty to seventy percent non-Muslim. However, this percentage was precipitously falling. By the end of the ninth century, Iraq had become a majority Muslim region. See Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82.


During the ninth, and, to a lesser degree the tenth century, Christian were still perceived as a polemically, theologically, and intellectually productive and formidable presence in the Arabic-speaking world. For this reason, David Thomas states:

More or less every Muslim theological thinker of note from the eighth and ninth centuries is credited with a work against Christianity, as well as one or more other faiths, though nearly all of these have been lost.\(^8\)

In a similar fashion, Thomas’ statement can be applied to nearly every Christian theologian at this time as well. In the case of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, his refutations had a twofold approach. First, these works were produced by a distinguished and well connected former Christian who refuted Christianity using Christian sources. As a result, these refutations would have been accessible to a diminishing Christian community during the ninth and tenth centuries who would have been more familiar with the Bible than the Qurʾān. Moreover, Christians were not well acquainted with the hadīth and ṣīra literature.

Consequently, the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī would have included familiar and approachable sources used not only to allure future potential converts, but also to entrench the newly-converted within the Muslim population. Second, these works presented a new avenue of religious validation mainly in the form of extensive polemical proof-texting. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī will succinctly describe a particular Christian belief – more often trinitarian rather than christological – followed by a series of biblical passages refuting this belief. In many instances, he intersperses short explanations and rationalization between proof-texts, but more often than not, the proof-text alone is presented as sufficient evidence.

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This is not to argue that Muslims prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī did not utilize the Bible for apologetic and polemical purposes, but, as ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī explains in the introduction to his *Kūtb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, Muslims had not been effective in their use of the Bible. More specifically ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claims that previous Muslim refutations of Christianity failed in three ways. First, Muslim polemicists offered insufficient proof with unsatisfactory explanations. Second, Muslims were ignorant of the Bible and Christian writings. Third, anti-Christian works were written in “a most elaborate and difficult discourse.” Moreover, no anti-Christian polemicist prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had used the Bible so extensively for both apologetic and polemical purposes. For example, in the famous debate between the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–785) and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (r. 780-823), which predates the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī by several generations, al-Mahdī only offers a handful of biblical proof-texts.

Furthermore, the popularity and impact of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments and methodology can be seen in the widespread influence of his works across the centuries. At the same time, his works would have helped ease Muslim uncertainty regarding the sincerity of converts’ newly adopted religious beliefs. As an illustration, consider al-Jāhiz’s words in the ninth century with respect to Christian conversion to Islam,

> Indeed no other people have furnished so many hypocrites and waverers as the Christians. This results, naturally, when weak minds attempt to fathom deep problems. Is it not a

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10 This work is written from the perspective of Timothy I, therefore, al-Mahdī could have offered the patriarch a multitude of proof-texts. See Clint Hackenburg, “An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī” (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, 2009), 79-84, 89-98, and 126-129.
fact that the majority of those who were executed for parading as Muslims, while hypocrites at heart, were men whose fathers and mothers were Christians? Even the people who are under suspicion today have come mostly from their ranks.\textsuperscript{11}

This wariness on the part of al-Jāḥiẓ and certainly other sectors of the Muslim population was essentially mandated in the Qurʾān. \textit{Sūrat al-Baqara} (2:8) states, “And among the people are those who say, ‘We have faith in Allah and the Last Day,’ but they have no faith.” Aside from any need for a convert to validate his or her conversion, it appears that Muslims may sometimes have questioned a Christian convert’s motives for becoming Muslim, particularly during the first several centuries of Islamic rule. In the case of al-Jāḥiẓ, he was willing to cast aspersions upon the entire Christian community. This matter was compounded by Christian accusations as well. For example, in his \textit{Kayfiyat idrāk haqīqat al-diyāna} (\textit{How to Discern the Truth of Religion}), a contemporary of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 873) delineates six untenable and unjustifiable reasons for conversion. Unquestionably, although not explicitly stated, Ḥunayn had Islam and Christian apostates in mind when formulating this schematic.\textsuperscript{12}

Moreover, if ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s method of argument relied heavily upon proof-texts, and his polemical point of departure was a disregard for a seemingly Christian dogmatic intractability and incomprehensibility as well as a stubbornness toward Islamic truth, then he could conveniently and effectively skirt theological subtleties of Christian doctrine or,


in many instances, ignore them entirely. In this sense, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works were less technical than many of the refutations of his contemporaries. Therefore, refutations anchored in reason, philosophy, and logic, which often highlighted the perceived irrational foundations of Trinitarianism and its esoteric trinitarian terminology, were simply replaced by uncomplicated and nontechnical biblical proof-texts.

In this regard, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was following a precedent established in the Qurʾān and other early Islamic sources, both of which suggest that the Bible was of divine provenance and therefore legitimate as a source of sacred knowledge. A conspicuous example of scriptural intertextuality common to both the Bible and Qurʾān is John 14:16, which reads, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” The Qurʾān offers a clarification concerning the identity of this “Helper” who in Greek is called the Paraclete (παράκλητος). Sūrat al-ʿṣāf (61:6) states:

And when Jesus son of Mary said, ‘Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.’ Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, ‘This is a manifest sorcery.’

Thus, the association of Muhammad, understood to be Aḥmad, with the Paraclete in John 14:16 was established in the Muslim community at a very early stage. In his Sīra, Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767) identified the Paraclete more definitively with Muḥammad. Speaking on this matter, Ibn Isḥāq stated:

Among the things which have reached me about what Jesus the Son of Mary stated in the Gospel which he received from God for the followers of the Gospel, in applying a

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13 All subsequent Bible quotations will be taken from the English Standard Version except where otherwise noted.
term to describe the apostle of God, is the following. It is extracted from what John the Apostle set down for them when he wrote the Gospel for them from the Testament of Jesus Son of Mary: ‘He that hateth me hath hated the Lord. And if I had not done in their presence works which none other before me did, they had not had sin: but from now they are puffed up with pride and think that they will overcome me and also the Lord. But the word that is in the law must be fulfilled, ‘They hated me without a cause’ (i.e. without reason). But when the Comforter has come whom God will send to you from the Lord’s presence, and the spirit of truth which will have gone forth from the Lord’s presence he (shall bear) witness of me and ye also, because ye have been with me from the beginning. I have spoken unto you about this that ye should not be in doubt.’ The Munahhemana (God bless and preserve him!) in Syriac is Muhammad; in Greek he is the Paraclete.14

Additionally, a contemporary of Ibn Ishāq, the exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) identified Muḥammad with the Paraclete in the Book of John.15 In many ways, Sūrat al-Saff (61:6) and Ibn Ishāq’s aforementioned passage established the foundation for the drawing of Islamic typological proof-texts from the Bible that would become prevalent in later anti-Christian polemics, particularly in Christian apostate literature.

Nevertheless, the question remains, why did Christian converts to Islam, unlike many anti-Christian polemicists, rely so heavily upon biblical proof-texts? In the case of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî, he stands in stark contrast to many of his new coreligionists. For instance, a contemporary of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî, Abū Ísā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn ibn Muḥammad al-

14 ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām and Muhammad Ibn Ishāq, The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Strät Rasīl Allāh, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 103-104. Ibn Ishāq’s quotation from the Book of John is distinct in that he includes verse seventeen in which the Paraclete is clearly identified with the Holy Spirit. In many later works, this particularly prevalent proof-text concerning the Paraclete was represented by John 14:16 exclusively. The following verse, “even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you,” is nearly completely absent. In his debate with al-Mahdī, Timothy I uses John 14:17 to invalidate Muslim claims that Muḥammad is the Paraclete.

Warrāq (d. ca. 861 or 864) concerns himself almost entirely with matters other than the Bible. Preferring rather to detail theological subtleties of the Trinity and Incarnation, specifically christological sectarianism and its accompanying abstruse terminology, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, in the words of Gabriel Reynolds, engaged Christianity “while almost entirely ignoring Christian history, scripture, and practice.” Despite these predominant trends in anti-Christian polemics, the popularity and influence of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kītāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla transcended the boundaries of apologetic and polemical literature produced throughout the entire medieval period. To a great extent, the success and impact of these two works is inextricably bound to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s intended audience.

It should not be assumed that during the medieval period the majority of the Christian or Muslim populations understood the intricacies and technicalities of trinitarian terminology and theology, precisely or at all. Accordingly, in certain instances the meticulous and specialized polemical techniques with which al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860), Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. ca. 861 or 864), Abū Yūṣuf al-Kindī (d. 870), al-Nāshiʿ al-Akbar (d. 906), Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944), Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), and ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) refuted the Trinity and Incarnation would have required not only an understanding of Islamic and Christian doctrine, but also expertise in logic, philosophy, and kalām (speculative theology). To put it another way, some anti-Christian polemical works would have been too erudite and not intended for popular consumption by the various Arabic-speaking populations. In contrast to these authors and their works,

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even the more technical of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works, his al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā, which in large part is dedicated to refuting trinitarian theology, specifically the Nicene Creed, avoids specialized language and complex methods of argumentation. Rather, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was satisfied with simple proof-texts. Nevertheless, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works may have attracted potential converts and helped to integrate recent converts, but it would especially have fortified Islamic principles and doctrines (specifically God’s oneness tawḥīḍ), the legitimacy of Islamic rule, and Muḥammad’s prophethood as being both Qur’ānically and biblically based. Accordingly, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works offered a more accessible refutation with respect to technique and overall intelligibility than the majority of his contemporary anti-Christian polemicists.

As the caliphate began to shift toward a majority-Muslim population, Christian converts to Islam, simultaneously, continued to enter the ranks of Muslim intellectual spheres. Naturally, certain Christian converts to Islam needed to legitimize themselves explicitly; therefore, they attempted to propitiate their new coreligionists through written abjurations and repudiations of their former faith in the form of Christian apostate literature. Tijana Krstić correctly advances the idea that religious conversion, more often than not, necessitated additional personal metamorphoses, some of which include adopting new languages and physical relocation. Krstić states:

> The importance of the ‘language of transformation’ or the necessity of adopting the rhetoric of a specific religious or social group one is joining should not be underestimated in the process of fitting in and distancing oneself from the previous membership group.¹⁷

One of the most universally adopted aspects of anti-Christian polemic that also found a permanent home in Christian apostate literature was an emphatic and repeated accusation of biblical misinterpretation and eisegesis (henceforth referred to as tahriṣ al-maʿnā or corruption of the meaning). At times, apostates held Christians accountable for altering or removing portions of the biblical text (referred to as tahriṣ al-nass or corruption of the text).

However, early Christian apostates did not stress tahriṣ al-nass over tahriṣ al-maʿnā as emphatically as did the anti-Christian polemicists. In reality, building upon the viewpoints found in Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 1064) Kitāb al-fīṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-nihal (The Book of Judgement Regarding the Confessions, Inclinations and Sects), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī’s (d. 1285) al-Ajwība l-fūkhira ‘an al-asʾila l-fūjīra (Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions), and finally Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) al-Jawāb al-sinhaḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masih (The Correct Answer to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of Christ), the Muslim community eventually understood the Bible to be irrecoverably altered. Martin Accad argues:

The popular discourse that has developed between Christians and Muslims since the venerable time of the few citations we have just surveyed has much deteriorated. This is not really surprising, since the popular discourse is rarely analytical. Instead, it mostly follows developmental trends. I have demonstrated elsewhere that the writings of Ibn Ḥazm in the eleventh century marked a significant turning point in the literary discourse. Everything points to the fact that by the thirteenth century, Muslim writers were not citing the Biblical text directly any longer, but were dogmatically drawing from collections that had been put

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together within Muslim circles for the specific use of Muslim polemicists.\textsuperscript{19}

However, this approach would have in turn weakened the polemical potency of Christian apostate literature due to the recurrent and abundant use of biblical proof-texts, which were assumed to have maintained their textual integrity. In this respect, even Ibn Ḥazm argued that God had preserved prophecies and testimonia of Muhammad in the Bible.

Arguing along similar lines as Krstić, Richard Bulliet states:

Therefore, formal conversion, in the sense of utterance of the confession of faith, is not as significant as what might be termed social conversion, that is, conversion involving movement from one religiously defined social community to another.\textsuperscript{20}

These claims are no more apparent than in the conversion of al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb (d. before 987) and Anselm Turmeda (d. 1424-1430). In the foreword to his refutation of Christianity, al-Ḥasan emphasized the rationality and deliberation behind his decision to convert; however, al-Ḥasan also offered a genuine glimpse into the social pressures surrounding his conversion as well. He claimed his sense of Christian camaraderie whereby “fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, and neighbors” had suppressed his urge to convert to Islam.\textsuperscript{21} In the case of Anselm Turmeda, a Franciscan monk turned Muslim, his physical relocation from Mallorca to Tunis represented one of the most critical moments in his life. Upon his arrival in Tunis, Anselm formally

\begin{flushend}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Richard W. Bulliet, \textit{Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period}, 33.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushend}
converted to Islam and within one year he claimed to have mastered Arabic and adopted the name ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān.\textsuperscript{22}

More importantly, with respect to polemical rhetoric, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī not only adopted the established qurʾānic proclamations and accusations against Christianity, but he also, generally, established in his \textit{al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā} and \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla} what would become the standard polemical blueprint of Christian apostate literature. In terms of method, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī often interwove various apologetical and polemical techniques. However, regardless of his particular method, whether abundant proof-texting, which fill the pages of his works, or the use of uncomplicated dialectic, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments consistently fall within the limits of five categories: (1) identifying ontological distinctions between Christ and the Father; (2) recognizing incompatibilities in Christ’s titles; (3) de-divinizing Christ’s miraculous acts; (4) criticizing doctrinal and logical incommensurables; (5) recovering or exposing biblical predictions of the coming of the Arabs, Islam, and Muḥammad. And, although later generations of Christian apostates at times supplemented, and at other times curtailed ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s style and content, their arguments, nevertheless, remained within the parameters of these five categories.

With this fivefold framework for analysis in mind, the following five Christian apostates and their works will be examined: (1) the aforementioned ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 860) and his \textit{al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā} and \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla}; (2) al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb (d. before 987), a convert to Islam whose non-extant epistolary work \textit{Risāla ilā akhīhi ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb (A Letter to His Brother ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb)} has survived in the form of extensive quotations

\textsuperscript{22} For an outline of Anselm Turmeda’s life, see Zaida I. Giraldo, “Anselm Turmeda: An Intellectual Biography of a Medieval Apostate, Including a Translation of the Debate between the Friar and the Ass” (PhD Diss., City University of New York, 1975), 10-40.
by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) in his *Jawāb*; (3) Naṣr ibn Yahyā or possibly Yahyā ibn Yahyā (d. 1163 or 1193), a Basran or Baghdadī Christian and author of *al-Nasīha l-ʾināniyya fī faḍāḥat al-milla l-Nasrāniyya* (*The Faithful Advice Regarding the Dishonor of the Christian Religion*); (4) Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (d. ca mid-thirteenth century), an unknown former Christian priest whose name is ascribed to a unique thirteenth-century manuscript titled *Risāla fī l-radd ʿalā l-Nasrā* (*A Letter Regarding the Refutation of the Christians*); (5) Anselm Turmeda (d. 1424-1430), a former Franciscan friar (who was later known by the name ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān) and author of a semi-autobiographical refutation of Christianity titled *Tuhfāt al-adīb fī l-radd ʿalā ahl al-ṣalīb* (*The Gift of the Learned Man in Refuting the People of the Cross*).

Naturally, over a period of approximately six centuries, each of these Christian apostates would have been writing under different circumstances and in different environments. Consequently, the present objective is first and foremost, to identify the points of convergence and divergence in Christian apostate literature regarding biographical tropes, argumentation (polemical and apologetic methodology), and scriptural usage. By situating ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments as well as the those of later converts within the above-mentioned scheme, the content and stylistic trends of Christian apostate literature, even when observed throughout the entire medieval period, can be charted. This will in turn elucidate to what degree time, status, geography, background, cultural and intellectual atmosphere, social and political circumstances, and theology affected the manner in which a convert not only attacked his former faith, but also how he defended his newfound faith. The question, then, is during the approximately 550 hundred years separating ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 860) and Anselm Turmeda (d. 1424-1430), what general characteristics can be attributed to Christian apostate literature and what
differences can be attributed to the individual Christian apostates? Furthermore, to what
degree, if any, were ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-
Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda conforming or adapting to an idealized image of the
Christian convert to Islam?

Relatively little research has been conducted on the aforementioned converts and
the literature they produced, apart from ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. Moreover, no scholarly research
has attempted to analyze Christian apostate literature (written in Arabic) as a distinct
genre of literature. For example, even the al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣīḥa and his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-
dawla of the most well-studied of medieval converts to Islam, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, lack modern
critical editions with English translations.23 Likewise, the work of al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb is
translated solely into Dutch,24 Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā’s al-Naṣīḥa exists only in Arabic,25 and
Yūsuf al-Lubnānī’s Risāla fī l-radd ʿalā l-Naṣīḥa exists only in manuscript form.26 Although
Anselm Turmeda, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, has received academic attention, the primary
research done on his Tuḥfa has been conducted primarily in Spanish.27 For the first time in

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23 Currently, Professor David Thomas of the University of Birmingham is preparing a critical
edition and English translation of both of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s texts. Thomas’ work will collate additional
manuscripts to earlier editions of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s work.

24 Floris Sepmeijer, “Een weerlegging van het Christendom uit de 10e eeuw. Der brief van al-
Hasan b. Ayyūb aan zijn broer ‘Ali” (PhD diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1985). Sepmeijer’s Dutch
translation is an attempted recreation of al-Ḥasan’s Risāla using Ibn Taymiyya’s and Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā’s
extended quotations. Martin Accad has questioned the accuracy and success of this venture. For a critical
edition of Ibn Taymiyya’s quotations of al-Ḥasan, see Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala din al-
Masīh, eds. ʿAlī ibn Ḥasan Ibn Naṣır, Abīd Al-ʿAzīz ibn Ibrāhīm ʿAskar, and Ḥamdān ibn Muḥammad

25 Maḥmūd al-Shaqīqāwī prepared a critical edition of Naṣr’s al-Naṣīḥa. See Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā ibn ʿĪsā
Maḥmūd al-Shaqīqāwī (Cairo: Dār al-ṣalwa, 1986).

26 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek - 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), 27 fols (1226).

27 Mikel de Epalza prepared a critical edition of Turmeda’s Tuḥfa. See Mikel de Epalza, Fray Anselm
Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭarfūmān) y su polémica islamo-cristiana: Edición, traducción y estudio de la Tuḥfa (Madrid:
Hiperión, 1994).
English, this study will offer a detailed analysis of individual works of Christian apostate literature as well as an evaluation of the genre as a whole. This will include contextualizing Christian apostate literature within the larger field of Christian and Muslim apologetics and polemics.

Despite the fact that the converts in question are limited chronologically to the ninth through fifteenth century and geographically to the Arabic-speaking world, Christian apostate literature displayed a remarkable degree of continuity which transcended the medieval period as well as the Arabic-speaking world well into the modern Ottoman period (1453-1922). Just as Christian apostate literature written in Arabic evolved throughout the medieval period, so too did Christian apostate literature written in Turkish. During the Ottoman period, Christian apostate literature transformed into Christian renegade literature in which theological and religious merged with the political. In this respect, certain emblematic imagery and literary motifs prevalent in Ottoman and Turkish works are quite conspicuous in Anselm Turmeda’s Tuhfa, which only gained notoriety after it had been translated into Turkish.28 Furthermore, Ottoman converts not only continued many of the literary tendencies established by their Arabic-speaking predecessors, but the production and function of their works in Ottoman society also paralleled earlier refutations as well. Tijana Krstić claims:

Ottoman converts to Islam often felt compelled to produce or disseminate works that validated the choice they had made, distancing them from their old and integrating them into their new community. Whereas some converts produced original works and openly promoted them, others copied existing works and edited them to suit their own

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particular concerns. Such edited and adapted polemical texts can be found in personal notebooks and miscellanies known as the mecmūʿa, which abound in Ottoman manuscript libraries and constitute a treasure trove for the study of Ottoman literate audiences’ tastes and personal universes. Altogether these narratives constitute a polemical corpus developed by converts for other converts and reflect concerns about the identity of the Messiah, apocalypse, and the role of the Ottoman sultan in the events of the Last Days.²⁹

In this sense, in addition to detectable instances of textual reworking and borrowings, conversion literature written during the Ottoman period preserved one of the most noticeable features of earlier Christian apostate literature: accessibility. It appears that Ottoman apostate literature, like its Arabic predecessor, remained appealing to a broad audience that often included potential converts, recent converts, and Muslims of various stripes.

Although Christian apostate literature exhibited a rather remarkable consistency in its polemical methods and arguments, it should neither be considered static nor uniform, particularly regarding the biographical details of its authors. However, in certain instances, romanticized biographical details were used to enhance the authority and impact of an individual’s polemic. This is most apparent in the Ṭuhfa of Anselm Turmeda. In reality, each of the five aforementioned converts, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda, contributed — of course, in varying degrees and manners — to the evolving narrative of the Christian convert to Islam as well as the enduring popularity of Christian apostate literature. For example, unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb integrated formulaic features of anti-

²⁹ Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 77.
Christian polemic into his *Risāla*, specifically issues of Christology and Christian sectarianism. In the case of Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, the dissemination of his *Nasīḥa* is critical. Lejla Demiri claims that Naṣr’s work was copied between 1494 and 1566 as an addition to the private library of Suleiman I (r. 1520-1566). Yūsuf al-Lubnānī’s *Risāla* adopted not only the style, methods, and arguments of previous apostate literature, but he also appropriated biographical details as well, many of which had become standard to the genre. Anselm Turmeda’s *Tuhfa* is distinct due to the fact that significant portions of his refutations may not have been written by him, or even by a Christian. Nevertheless, these authors and their works represent integral components, in their polemical and apologetic methods, chronological distribution, and historical influence with respect to Christian apostate literature throughout the medieval period. Moreover, the discernible cumulative character of this subset of anti-Christian polemical literature exhibits an impressive degree of textual interdependence for over half a millennium.

Christian apostate literature presents its readership with certain challenges, particularly in regards to authenticity, originality, and plagiarism. Even ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* was met with considerable resistance concerning the legitimacy of its composition. David Thomas states, “From the time it was first published the authenticity of this work has been disputed, most vehemently by M. Bouyges.” Anselm Turmeda’s *Tuhfa*, which includes a lengthy refutation of Christianity, was written by an author who penned additional works, the *Cobles de la Divisió del Regne de Mallorques* (The

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31 Thomas concludes this discussion by asserting that Floris Sepmeijer, Camilla Adang, and himself have demonstrated that the *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* is indisputably attributable to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. See David Thomas, “*Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*” in *CMR I*, 672.
Songs of the Division of the Majorcan Kingdom) and the Llibre de Bons Amonestaments (The Book of Good Admonitions), in which he extols the Trinity, baptism, the Bible, and the religious order of Mallorca apparently after having converted to Islam. This, as well as other telling details, has led certain scholars, most notably the modern editor of Anselm’s *Tuḥfa*, Mikel de Epalza, to argue that later editors (possibly Muslim exiles from Spain), who were working with the text approximately 180 years after it was originally written, significantly reworked the text. Finally, issues of originality and plagiarism surround the works of the lesser known converts, Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, whose works at times (due to significant unacknowledged borrowings) are difficult to differentiate from al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb’s *Risāla*

However, when analyzing Christian apostate literature in its totality as a genre of anti-Christian polemic, the primary objective is not to distinguish between the fictitious and the factual, or the original from the plagiarized for that matter. Certainly, there is an unmistakable and inextricable mixture of each of these elements. In other words, ascertaining the historicity of the lives and works of these converts is not paramount. Rather, the aim here is to unravel and contextualize Christian apostate literature, regardless of authenticity, within the Muslim community and the anti-Christian polemical works this community produced. Proving certain aspects of a convert’s autobiographical to have been false or portions of his polemical plagiarized would not retroactively preclude the influence or importance of the individual and his works. To put it another way, Mercedes García-Arenal, speaking of conversion literature, states:

Their tales of conversion will be compared with fictional qīṣṣas in which a story of conversion appears. This is not to say that these narratives are fictive: on the contrary, their texts correspond to a real conversion experience. Rather, the point is to show how topoi and stereotypes appear in both fiction and narratives of real facts. This will lead to questions about the extent to which one responds to the image of oneself which one perceives in the other; i.e. how one interiorizes stereotypes as well as how one recounts how great things as they are generally known to happen.34

In the case of Christian apostate literature, over the course of nearly six centuries, converts not only demonstrated an observable effort in their refutations to absorb earlier motifs common to the qur’ānic understanding of Christians and Christianity, but also to assimilate topoi found in the ḥadīth and sīra literature as well. In addition, Christian converts to Islam continually advanced their genre by retrofitting certain formulaic methods and arguments common to anti-Christian polemics as a whole.

Therefore, an ancillary objective here is to contextualize Christian apostate literature within the larger framework of medieval Arabic polemic. Aside from parallels within Christian apostate literature, what correlations do these refutations have with other contemporary Muslim, Christian, and, to a lesser extent, Jewish apologies and polemics written in Arabic? The question then remains, to what degree were Christian converts actually reiterating traditional Muslim anti-Christian polemic, and to what level were they developing new lines of argumentation? Should these converts’ refutations be considered a distinct genre of medieval Arabic polemical literature? The evidence reveals that Christian apostates’ refutations of their former faith offered a bifocal approach that,

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although not entirely dissimilar from other anti-Christian polemical works, did exhibit
distinctive characteristics, particularly in their usage of biblical proof-texts and in their
understanding of *taḥrīf*. Over the course the medieval period, beginning with ʿAlī al-
Ṭabarî in the ninth century, a genre of anti-Christian polemic written by converts to
Islam emerged and began to steadily crystalize. As a result, a distinct argumentative style,
which was rooted in the Qurʾān as well as early *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, *tafsīr*, and *tārīkh* works,
coalesced into Christian apostate literature, which eventually came to be written by
paradigmatic, idealized, Christian converts to Islam.

As previously stated, when analyzing the apologies and refutations of ʿAlī al-
Ṭabarî, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyûb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda
against later Ottoman conversion works, even a superficial examination of these two
literatures betrays significant degrees of consistency between the lives and works of
medieval Arabic-speaking Christian converts and their subsequent Ottoman counterparts.
Nevertheless, why have these particular individuals been chosen for investigation?
Limiting the investigation to the five individuals in question may appear arbitrary, but it is
not without reason. First, on a more practical level, these authors wrote refutations which
are today extant and available to the modern reader. Second, these authors, having been
aristocrats or clergy members, would have understood the social, theological, and
intellectual trends shifting in society more than the average populace. Although his
statements are related to the Christianization of the late-antique population of the Near
East, Greg Fisher’s observations are nevertheless applicable to the social and cultural
vicissitudes of Islamic society as well. He states, “Stratification (or differentiation) involved
a change in identity which was most acutely felt by the elite, who had to contend the most
with the realities of new institutional, religious, political, or cultural affiliations.”

Third, these five particular converts turned polemicists were born, raised, lived, and wrote across the Muslim-dominated world, including northern Persia, the caliphal court in Baghdad, the islands of al-Andalus, Tunis, southern Mesopotamia, and the mountains of Lebanon. Fourth, the individuals in question composed works which spanned six centuries. Fifth, all of the authors in question composed their works in Arabic. Therefore, considering such an assortment of authors and diversity of sources over a long period affords one the opportunity to reflect upon, compare, and contrast the various literary manifestations of the Christian convert to Islam in the medieval Arabic-speaking world. Moreover, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492, the ascendency of Ottoman imperial authority throughout large portions of the Arabic-speaking world, and the subsequent rapid expansion of early modern European colonialism, the fifteenth century presents a suitable point of demarcation.

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CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHING THE PARAMETERS FOR MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

*Early Islamic Sources and Christianity – A Framework for Dialogue*

Ignaz Goldziher once fittingly stated that the Qurʾān was, “Das älteste Buch muhammedanischer Polemik gegen die Schriftbesitzer ist unstreitig der Koran selbst.”

In other words, any discussion of Christian-Muslim relations as well as Islam’s understanding of Christians and Christianity must begin with the Qurʾān. It is here that Christian apostate literature will anchor many of its arguments. Unfortunately, what the Qurʾān defines as Christianity and whom the Qurʾān defines as Christian are complex issues. Gabriel Reynolds describes this complexity accordingly:

> It is no easy task, however, to describe the Qurʾān’s evaluation of Christianity, for the precise historical context of the Qurʾān’s origins is far from clear, despite the elaborate biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad written during the ‘Abbāsid period (132/750-656/1258). Meanwhile, Qurʾānic language, essentially homiletic and referential, is often sparing with details. It can therefore be elusive to readers removed from its original context.

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Many scholars argue that this scriptural equivocation resulted in a somewhat ill-defined and problematic Muslim understanding of Christianity. Hugh Goddard states, “Here too, as in most other aspects of Christian-Muslim relations, there was no single Muslim attitude, but rather a range of attitudes which shifted over the course of time and displayed a considerable amount of diversity.”\(^\text{38}\)

Two of the most difficult Qur’ānic verses regarding Christianity can be found in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:62) and Sūrat al-Ṭawba (9:29). Without delving into the complexities of Qur’ānic exegesis, particularly issues of naskh (abrogation),\(^\text{39}\) in Sūrat al-Baqara God promises righteous Christians paradise while Sūrat al-Ṭawba commands Muslims to fight, subdue, and impose the jizya (poll-tax) upon dissolute Christians. The question, then, is who were the faithful and who were the faithless of the Christians? With many additional incongruous verses of this kind, Tarif Khalidi describes the Qur’ānic mood toward Christians as “conciliatory, reassuring, diplomatic, as well as menacing.”\(^\text{40}\) While at first glance it may appear that we are left with a changing and imprecise Qur’ānic understanding of Christianity, the Qur’ān does, however, offer specific characteristics of a “true Christian.” In Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4:162), a true member of the ahl al-kitāb is described as being not only mindful of prayers, alms, and Judgement Day, but he or she is also rooted


\(^{39}\) Naskh can be defined as “a theory of repeal of one verse of the Qur’ān by another, or of one Sunnah of the Prophet (specifically, a hadīth) by another. See Raj Bhala, *Understanding Islamic Law: Shari‘a* (New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis, 2011).

in knowledge, faithful, and committed to the Bible and Qurʾān (what has been sent down
to thee, and what was sent down before thee).

Although the Qurʾān often presents a contrasting and difficult evaluation of
Christianity, Jane D. McAuliffe, nevertheless, attempts to encompass what she calls Islam’s
“divergent assessment” of Christianity within a limited set of Qurʾānic passages: Sūrat al-
Baqara (2:62), Sūrat al-Imrān (3:55) and (3:199), Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:66) and (5:82-83), Sūrat al-
Qaṣaṣ (28:52-55), and Sūrat al-Hadīd (57:27). Sūrat al-Baqara (2:62) establishes the most
fundamental similarity between Christianity and Islam, i.e., belief in God and the Last
Day. However, the remaining sūras are not only more complex, but they also provide
critical details and qualifications for the concept of “Qurʾānic Christian.” To clarify, a
portion of Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:66) states, “Some of them are a just nation; but many of
them -- evil are the things they do.” Likewise, Sūrat al-Hadīd (57:27) combines two
antithetical descriptions of the followers of Jesus, “And We set in the hearts of those who
followed him tenderness and mercy,” and “many of them are ungodly.” Furthermore,
Sūrat al-Imrān (3:199) suggests that true Christians recognize the Qurʾān, “And some there
are of the People of the Book who believe in God, and what has been sent down (the
Qurʾān) unto you (Muḥammad).” In Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:82-83), Christians weep at the
sound of the Qurʾān and its truth. In other words, from a Qurʾānic perspective, to disavow
the Qurʾān and its messenger would prevent meriting the title of “Christian.” This frame
of reference was a hallmark of Christian apostate literature. The converts ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī,

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41 For an outline of these Qurʾānic verses, see Jane D. McAuliffe, Qurʾānic Christians: An Analysis of

42 The words in parentheses have been added for clarification and are not part of the original
translation provided by Arberry.
al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda considered themselves to be true Christians, whereas the words, “but many of them -- evil are the things they do” were attributed to trinitarian Christians by the previously mentioned Christian apostates and various other Muslim polemicists alike.

After presenting her framework of Islam’s “divergent assessment” of Christianity, McAuliffe asks:

These verses prompt several questions: How have Muslims understood this apparent divine praise of Christians? What have these verses meant to Muslims in both the classical and modern periods of Islamic history?\(^\text{43}\)

Generally speaking, anti-Christian polemicists did not associate their contemporary Christians neighbors with the Christians described in the Qurʾān. This is evident in the conventional tripartite classification and invalidation of Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian doctrines in the vast majority of anti-Christian polemics. However, occasionally Christians who were active in Christian-Muslim dialogue as well as apologetics attempted to capitalize on specific Qurʾānic verses by presenting themselves as the personification of the Qurʾān’s Christians. This occurs in one of the oldest surviving Christian apologies written during the early Islamic period. In the *Drāshā da-hwā l-ḥad men Ṭayyāyē ʿam iḥidāyā ḥad b-ʿumrā d-Bēṭ Ḥālē* (The Disputation That Took Place Between One of the Arabs and a Certain Monk from the Monastery of Bēṭ Ḥālē), an emir in the entourage of Maslama (d. 738), the governor of Iraq and son of Umayyad Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 705), praises his contemporary Christian neighbors. According to the monk, the emir states:

> You certainly possess the truth and not a false worship, as some people thought. Muhammad, our prophet, also said

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\(^{43}\) Jane D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 7.
about the inhabitants of the monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom. Truly, God will not reject any person who, according to this point of view, as you told me, possesses your belief and is purified from wickedness and sin.\textsuperscript{44}

The Christian author of this Syriac text is referring to \textit{Sūrat al-Mā'īda} (5:82), which states, “and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say ‘We are Christians’; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud.”

This type of Christian apologetic appropriation of qur’ānic passages was met with significant opposition. For instance, in his commentary of \textit{Sūrat al-Mā'īda} (5:82-83), al-Jāhiẓ stated in his \textit{al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā}:

The wrong interpretation of the above verses supplanted that of the learned, and the Christians craftily used it to seduce the common and vulgar. In the very verses lies the proof that here God is not referring to the Christians we are acquainted with nor to their associates the Melkites and Jacobites, but rather to the type of Bahira and the kind of monks whom Salman used to serve. There is a vast difference when we consider the phrase ‘Who say we are Christians’ (as an insinuation) that these monks misnamed themselves or as a real term to be taken like the word ‘Jews’ (which refers to the Jews who plotted against Muḥammad in Medina).\textsuperscript{45}

Al-Jāhiẓ, along with most Muslim polemicists (converts turned polemicists included), did not associate trinitarian Christianity with the praiseworthy and righteous Christians described in the Qur’ān. Moreover, al-Jāhiẓ mentions Christian deception. Muslim

\textsuperscript{44} Gerrit J. Reinink, “Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation Between a Monk of Bêt Hālē and an Arab Notable,” in \textit{The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam}, eds. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 161. See MS Diyarbakir 95, fol. 8r. Reinink also confirms that this position was stated in John bar Penkāyē’s \textit{Kūṭā bād-rēsh mēlē} (\textit{The Book of Main Points}) written in the 680s.

\textsuperscript{45} Charles D. Fletcher, “Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam,” 66.
polemicists commonly accused Christians of using their theological, exegetical, and terminological wiles against the simple-minded and uneducated in society.

As a point of departure, evaluating the Qurʾān’s assessment of Christianity within McAuliffe’s parameters is analytically beneficial. Nevertheless, in spite of the concision and utility of her approach, McAuliffe appears to be somewhat unnecessarily limited given that controversial issues such as the Trinity (specifically issues of Christology), the Incarnation,46 tahrīf,47 and the prophethood of Muḥammad48 are all absent in her qurʾānic selections. These issues are necessary for any proper discussion of anti-Christian polemical works, including Christian apostate literature. And like most qurʾānic verses pertaining to Christianity, many of these passages are not without significant exegetical challenges of their own. Tārif Khalidi states:

If one begins with the Qurʾān, one finds that apart from its general conceptual and revelatory affinities with Jewish and Christian scriptures, traditions, and lore, verbatim quotations from the Old and New Testaments are very infrequent.49

Therefore, alongside Christians, the Bible also occupied a difficult place in the Qurʾān.

Speaking of the depiction of Jesus in the Qurʾān, Tārif Khalidi states, “In sum, it is difficult to arrive, from all these contrastive images, at a single vivid synthesis, a formula

46 Qurʾānic verses concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation, include, but are not limited to: Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4:171), Sūrat al-Māʾida (5:73) and (5:116), Sūrat Maryam (19:86-93), Sūrat al-Muʾminūn (23:91), and Sūrat al-ʾIkhlāṣ (112:1-4).

47 See note 18. It is also important to remember that the charge of tahrīf was not a unilateral accusation leveled upon Christians by Muslims. For example, the Christians Abū Ḥanāfī Abū ʿUmar al-Māʾṣūrī (fl. ninth century), ʿAbd al-Masīh ibn Shāhīl al-Khulāsī (fl. ninth or tenth century), and Leo III (r. 717 - 741) all accused the qurʾānic text of various forms of corruption.

48 Qurʾānic verses concerning Muhammad’s prophethood, include, but are not limited to: Sūrat al-Māʾida (5:19), Sūrat al-An’am (6:84), Sūrat al-Muʾminūn (23:23-52).

which captures the essence of the image of Jesus in the Qurʾān.” In a like manner, any attempt to synthesize the Qurʾān’s understanding of Christians, Christianity, and the Bible is equally complex. Concerning the place of Christian scripture in the Qurʾān, Khalidi states, “what exactly the Qurʾān meant by these two scriptures (Tāwrah and Injīl) remains uncertain.” Therefore, it is not surprising that the Qurʾān became the basis for the Muslim validation and rejection of the Bible. To complicate matters more, Christians maintained that the Bible was the source of their trinitarian beliefs while Christian converts to Islam argued that the Bible not only foretold of Muḥammad’s prophethood but also preached Islamic monotheism. Both parties offered proof-texts to support their claims — often, ironically, using the same biblical passages.

Even later hadith were limited regarding verbatim quotations from the Bible. Aside from claiming that Jews received considerably more attention than Christians in the hadith literature, David Cook states:

> Early writers, such as al-Muʿāfā ibn ʿImrān al-Mawṣili (d. 801) and the hadith collector Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 889) contain equally random citations. Some of these are accurate citations of the New Testament, but most are paraphrases.

With so few direct references to these topics, specifically the Trinity and Incarnation, Muslim polemicists must have gained significant knowledge of these doctrines from living amongst a sizable Christian population. Although Muslims may have obtained details about Christian doctrines from sources other than the Qurʾān, their arguments,

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50 Ibid., 15.

51 Ibid., 20. The parentheses have been added for clarification.

52 David Cook, “Christians and Christianity in the hadith works before 900,” in CMR I, 76.
nevertheless, remained rooted in a qurʾānic framework. Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:48) states “And We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it.”53 As a result of this verse, and others of its liking, certain Muslims, Christian converts in particular, sought to legitimize not only their religious transformation, but also Islam, using the words of both the Old and New Testament.

However, this apologetic method, i.e., an Islamic typological reading of the Bible was neither universally accepted nor employed outside of Christian apostate literature.54 Khalidi aptly states:

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\text{It is probable that the overall thrust of the Qurʾānic teaching on revelation—} \text{that is to say, the invitation to the ‘People of the Book’ to recognize and accept the finality of the Qurʾān—overshadowed all other considerations.}^55
\]

In other words, the Qurʾān validated the Bible, not vice versa. If the Qurʾān was unable to authenticate a particular biblical claim, then Muslim readers considered that biblical passage to have been corrupted or fabricated. Speaking of the manner in which Christians and Jews have failed to preserve the trustworthiness of their scriptures, Sūrat al-Baqara (2:79) states:

\[
\text{So woe to those who write the Book with their hands, then say, ‘This is from God,’ that they may sell it for a little price;}
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53 There exist a multitude of passages in the Qurʾān which presents the Bible as being directly revealed from God without any reference to tahrif. See Sūrat al-Baqara (2:4), (2:41), (2:87), (2:91), Sūrat Al Imrān (3:3), Sūrat al-Nisaʾ (4:47), (4:163), Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:46-48), Sūrat al-Anʾām (6:92), Sūrat Yūnus (10:94), and Sūrat Fāṭir (35:31).


so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.

In a similar vein, Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:78) reads:

And there is a sect of them twist their tongues with the Book, that you may suppose it part of the Book, yet it is not part of the Book; and they say, ‘It is from God,’ yet it is not from God, and they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly.\(^{56}\)

Even so, the aforementioned words in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:79), Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:78), and various other verses concerning tahrīf are not as straightforward as they may appear.

Additional verses in the Qurʾān expressly describe God’s words as immutable, such as Sūrat al-Anʿām (6:34) and (6:115), and Sūrat Yūnus (10:64). In other words, as David Marshall states, “…believers are bidden to believe in the plurality of books which God has revealed.”\(^{57}\) However, from an Islamic perspective, where do the Old and New Testaments – written, translated, and maintained by contemporary Christians – fall within God’s undifferentiated revelations? Jane McAuliffe summarizes the Muslim approach to the Bible in the following manner:

From the position of normative Muslim teaching, the matter is quite simple. While acknowledging a connection with earlier revelations, the Qurʾān understands itself to be a direct disclosure from God to the last of God’s prophets.

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\(^{56}\) The Qurʾān abounds with verses concerning tahrīf and various associated words. These terms include: ḥarrāfa or tahrīf (distort or bend), ḥawā ṣ (distort or bend), baddala or ṭabīl (replace or substitute), ḥīr mān or iklīfā (concealment). Jane McAuliffe adds ḥaṣ, ṭayy, and niṣyān. For a discussion on the various terms utilized to denote textual corruption and the manners in which scholars have classified them, see Munʿim A. Sirry, Scriptural Polemics: The Qurʾān and Other Religions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 101. In addition to the word tahrīf, the Qurʾān uses five other words denoting a similar meaning of falsification: (1) ṭabīl in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:59), Sūrat al-ʿĀṣīf (7:162); (2) ḥīr mān in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:42), (2:140), (2:146), (2:159), (2:174), Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:71), (3:187); (3) ḥaṣ in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:42), Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:71); (4) ṭayy in Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:78), Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4:46); (5) niṣyān in Sūrat al-Māʾṣūma (5:13), (5:14); Sūrat al-ʿĀṣīf (7:53), (7:165).

The doctrinal mandate, then, is divine dictation, not verbal inspiration...Consequently, the ‘stream of revelation,’ as conceptualized within a Muslim perspective, is not a continuous and cumulative process. God has revealed his guidance to many messengers and prophets, but each instance is best understood as a re-presentation of the same message in a medium and a manner specifically suited to its intended recipients. Theoretically, at least, there can be no discrepancy in the content of these revelations because they all proceed from the same source.\textsuperscript{50}

McAuliffe’s succinct summation helps one account for the varying and critical Muslim opinions and approaches toward the Bible and its integrity throughout the medieval period. Furthermore, McAuliffe’s claim is reminiscent of \textit{Sūrat al-Nīsā’}\textsuperscript{(150-151)}:

\begin{quote}
Those who disbelieve in God and His Messengers and desire to make division between God and His Messengers, and say, ‘We believe in part, and disbelieve in part,’ desiring to take between this and that a way -- those in truth are the unbelievers; and We have prepared for the unbelievers a humbling chastisement.
\end{quote}

God’s revelation was not delivered piecemeal. In their discussion of Jesus, specifically while renouncing and denouncing Christ’s divinity, Christian apostates reiterate that they make no distinction between God’s prophets and messengers. Due to the difficulty of this issue, Muslim polemicists’ use of the Bible has ranged from a definitive, liberal, and authoritative application of biblical proof-texts to a categorical rejection and outright hostility towards its textual integrity.

For as much as the Qur’an is inconclusive concerning the integrity and validity of the Bible, it is equally evasive in its appreciation of Christian clergy. In \textit{Sūrat al-Mā‘īda} (5:82) monks are lauded and described as being one of the groups who are closest to those

who believe, that is to say, Muslims. However, in *Sūrat al-Ta’wba* (9:31-34) monks, along with rabbis, are described as miserly deceivers who await a terrible doom. Additionally, Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) recorded a *ḥadīth* in which monastics are likened to demons. When speaking to an unmarried man, Muḥammad stated, “You are a brother of the devil. If you were a Christian you would be one of their monks. Ours is the way (*ṣunna*) of marriage. Bachelors are the worst of you all…”

However, two of the earliest individuals to acknowledge Muḥammad’s prophetic future were the ascetics, Sergius Bahīrā and Waraqa ibn Nawfal. Moreover, Muḥammad is believed to have spent a month every year in a cave on Mount Hirā’ as a form of religious devotion. In the Qurʾān and early Islamic literature, Christian ecclesiastics and ascetics represent the best and worst of Christianity. Later, Christian apostates will accentuate their ambivalence toward Christian clerics throughout their works: In Christian apostate literature, it was often clerics who acknowledged the true meaning of the Bible and its relationship to the Qurʾān and Muḥammad, but it was also clerics who invented the false doctrines of the Trinity.

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59 Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, “Christians and Christianity in the Qurʾān,” in *CMR I*, 24-25. Additionally, in *Sūrat al-Ḥadīth* (57:27) monasticism is described as a blasphemous innovation.


62 Waraqa ibn Nawfal is believed to have been Khadija’s cousin, who at an early period recognized Muḥammad as a true prophet. Waraqa is mentioned by Ibn ʿIṣḥāq in his *Ṣira*, Ibn Saʿd (d. 845) in his *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, and al-Baladhi (d. 892) in his *Ansāb al-ashraf*. See, C. F. Robinson, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, s.v. “Waraqa b. Nawfal.”

Similar to most anti-Christian polemics, Christian apostate literature presented early clergymen and Christian forefathers as the source of corruption and sustained deviation from God’s original message. The terms “forefathers, ancestors, early ones” indicate pre-Islamic church figures involved in establishing trinitarian Christianity, specifically individuals involved in the adulterating ecumenical councils. More importantly though, blind Christian adherence to these innovated doctrines is routinely censured as well. Christian apostates rarely offer sympathy for what they perceived as Christian ignorance or blind faith. *Sūrat al-Áyráf* (7:172-173) states, “Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?” Moreover, in a ḥadīth attributed to Ibn Masʿūd (d. 652), an early companion of Muḥammad and reciter of the Qurʾān, Muḥammad claimed “the Ahl al-*Kitāb* perished because they devoted themselves to the books of their scholars rather than to the Book of their Lord.”⁶⁴ As will be seen, Christian apostates believed that Nicene orthodoxy had outweighed biblical teachings. On the one hand, early church fathers, specifically participants in the ecumenical church councils, were depicted as inveigling deceivers preying on the intellectually inept. On the other hand, non-trinitarian Christians, monks, and ascetics, epitomized by Sergius Bahīrā and Waraqa ibn Nawfāl, were portrayed in early Islamic literature as sources of scriptural foresight who were able to confirm Muḥammad’s prophetic office. It was the latter of the two groups that Christian apostates believed themselves to be imitating.

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Therefore, the Qur’ānic portrayal of Christian churchmen straddled a world between damnation and redemption. Nevertheless, many Muslim muḥāfīṣīn (exeges), muṭakallīmūn (speculative theologians), and polemicians were clear in their understanding of who deserved the title “Christian.” If God’s word is immutable, then why have the Ahl al-Kītāb (People of the Book), who have been reading the Torah and Gospel for centuries, not recognized the Qur’ān as part of God’s uninterrupted revelation? This question, at least for many Muslims, was quite simple: their Christian contemporaries were not actually Christian. For example, in discussing Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī’s (d. 767) interpretation of Sūrat al-Qaṣṣās (28:52), Claude Gilliot observes:

It is clear that, in the religious imagination of the commentators, the true Christians are Muslims, and that Muslims are the true followers of Jesus: “People of the religion of Jesus are the Muslims (al-muslimūn, those who submit to God) above all the religions.”\footnote{65}

Likewise, in a ḥadīth attributed to Abū Hurayrah (d. 681), recalcitrant and unconverted Jews and Christians are doomed, “The Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said, ‘I swear that any from this community of Jews or Christians who hear of me and die without believing in my message will be among the people of hell.”\footnote{66}


\footnote{66} Ibn Hanbal, Musnad al-Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 2:317, 350; 4:396, 398. This hadīth can also be found in Muslim ibn al-Haḍrājī, Sahīḥ Muslim, 5 vols., ed. Muhammad Fū‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Al-Halabī, 1955). Marston Speight, Christians in the Hadith Literature, 42.
Muslim Approaches Toward the Bible

Believing themselves to be the idealized Christians described in the Qur’ān, converts to Islam attempted to arbitrate a new and corrective biblical reading whereby the “true” Islamic message of the Bible would be reappropriated and the continuity of God’s revelation would be reestablished and made clear. Moreover, Christian apostates and their rereading of scripture did not simply lend credence to an Islamic typological interpretation of the Bible. For example, in a reworked Gospel story in Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal’s al-Zuhd, Tarif Khalidi contends that in the original Arabic the story is narrated by “a monk” in order to lend it legitimacy.

Christian apostate literature capitalized on this as well. Biblical proof-texts supporting Islam, whether justifiably so or not, were considered more impactful coming from the mouths of former Christians. Equally significant, however, was the role and importance of Christian converts to Islam concerning the dissemination of the biblical materials, which Khalidi refers to as the “Muslim Gospel”:

Doubtless the slow but steady increase in the number of converts from Christianity played an important intermediary role, as witnessed in the isnads of some sayings and stories as well as in the putative Christian origins of several transmitters, which is revealed in their proper names. But the Qur’ānic fascination with Jesus must also have been a powerful stimulus in the assembly and diffusion of the gospel in the Muslim environment.

It is quite clear that neither Christianity nor biblical commentary dominate the pages of the Qur’ān. With respect to content, the Qur’ān has very little to say about the Bible.

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67 Tarif Khalidi, The Muslim Jesus, 72.
68 Ibid., 30.
Nevertheless, passages concerning both the Torah and the Gospel are scattered throughout the sūras. David Thomas states:

What cannot be disputed is that Christianity is integral to the biography of Muḥammad and to the Qurʾān, not a major element in either, maybe, but always present in both, sometimes admired and often disdained.⁷⁰

As a result, early Christian converts to Islam brought with them coveted historical and exegetical information pertaining to various scriptural personalities common to both the Bible and Qurʾān.

In most respects, the Muslim community’s common understanding of Christianity and the Bible is bound to the subject of tahrīf; whether tahrīf al-maʾnā or tahrīf al-naṣṣ. Ignaz Goldziher claimed that tahrīf was “the central point of Muslim polemic.”⁷¹ This position was reiterated by Jean-Marie Gaudeul, Robert Caspar, and John Wansborough as well.⁷² What is more, Martin Accad argues:

The general scholarly opinion leans towards the impression that the accusation of tahrīf is the starting point of the Muslim polemical discourse. For example, Fr. Thomas Michel, in his extensive introduction to Ibn Taymiyya, asserts that ‘the question of tahrīf was a central issue in all polemical debates between Christians and Muslims.’⁷³

Whether speaking of the Trinity and Incarnation or Muḥammad’s name in the Bible, tahrīf was the starting point. If a particular religion and its holy scripture view previous religions and previous scriptures from a supersessionist frame of reference in which an

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earlier religion’s historical narrative and theology have been reoriented to varying
degrees, claims of corruption and restoration are an inevitability.

Generally speaking, Muslims during the medieval period dealt with the Bible in
three distinct ways, each of which ranges across the entire gamut of biblical exegesis. The
first approach is a nearly categorical and candid rejection of the biblical text. This stance
is most famously adopted by the Andalusian Ţāhirī scholar, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064).
However, both Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qarāfī (d.1285) maintain that although the Bible has
been irredeemably corrupted, it has nevertheless preserved foretellings of Muhammad.
Diego Cucarella calls this approach a “providentialist solution.”74 To a lesser degree, this
particular manner of biblical analysis and application was adopted in the fourteenth
century by Anselm Turmeda in his Ṭuhfā. The second approach, which is extremely rare,
was an endorsement of the Bible as an authoritative and even clarifying scripture. This
position is most accurately exhibited by the Mamluk scholar, al-Biqā‘ī (d. 1480) in his al-
Aqwāl al-qawīma fi ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīma (The Just Verdict on the Permissibility of
Quoting from the Old Scriptures). Walid Saleh claims that al-Biqā‘ī—

wrote a commentary on the Qurʾān in which he uses the
Bible to explain the Qurʾān. Never before had anyone used
the Bible in such a manner; for this amounted to an
endorsement of the Bible as Scripture.75

On the one hand, certain Christian apostates, notably ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn
Ayyūb, appear to have considered portions of the Bible trustworthy, although it is difficult
to ascertain to what degree this trustworthiness is applicable to the Bible in its entirety.

74 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 230.
However, on the other hand, neither ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī nor al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb used the Bible to spell out any perceived qurʾānic uncertainties.

The third and final approach, which encompasses the majority of Muslim authors interested in the Bible, was an intermediate approach in which Muslim scholars offered concerted criticisms coupled with selective and reluctant approval. In this sense, the Bible was used rather polemically and apologetically. Diego Cucarella clarifies:

> Muslim interest in the Bible throughout the formative centuries of Islam is marked by an abiding tension—already present in the Qurʾān—between the processes of ‘Biblicizing’ the Islamic prophetic claims, and ‘Islamicizing’ the biblical material. For while, on the one hand, biblical authority is invoked as warrant for the authenticity of Muḥammad’s revelations, on the other hand, biblical material is adapted and retold in ways that conform to the developing criteria and self-understanding of the new community.76

This middle-of-the-road approach toward the Bible was not only adopted, but emphasized by the converts, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, and Yūṣuf al-Lubnānī. Having said that, each work of Christian apostate literature (beginning with ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and ending with Anselm Turmeda’s Tuhfā) progressively demonstrated a heightened dissatisfaction and reduced appreciation of the Bible.

Much like the Muslim use of the Bible, Christians also utilized the Qurʾān in a variety of ways. Abū Nuḥ al-Anbārī (d. after 780s), the secretary of the governor of

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Mosul, Mūsā ibn Muṣʿab, composed a formal refutation of the Qurʾān titled in Arabic Tafsīd al-Qurʾān and in Syriac Shurrāyā d-Qurʾān (The Refutation of the Qurʾān). In a late eighth-century work which was given the title Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid (On the Triune Nature of God), the anonymous Christian author begins with a prayer in which Qurʾānic terms and phrases had been fully assimilated into his apology. At times, Christians attempted to Christianize the Qurʾān. Paul of Antioch (d. ca. thirteenth century), the Melkite Bishop of Sidon, penned his Risāla ilā baʾḍ aṣdiqāʾ al-Muslimīn (Letter to Some Muslim Friends) in which the Qurʾān, according to Diego Cucarella, was effectively transformed into “a ‘crypto-Christian document’ that confirms the central affirmations of the Christian faith.” Moreover, Paul claimed that the Qurʾān was intended exclusively for the Arabs to whom Muḥammad was preaching. According to Theodore Pulcini, Paul argued that “The Qurʾān actually requires Christians to remain faithful to their religion, as indicated by the positive things it says about Christ, his mother, monasteries and churches, and the Gospel.” In this sense, Paul’s work strongly parallels the objective of Christian apostate literature, albeit in an opposite manner.


Mark Swanson, “Abū Nūḥ al-Anbārī,” in CMR I, 397-400.

78 Mark Swanson describes the title On the Triune Nature of God as, “somewhat misleadingly called Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid and ‘On the Triune nature of God’ by its first editor (Gibson, Arabic version); in fact it is a wide-ranging apology for the Christian faith, at a number of points addressed explicitly to Muslims.” Mark Swanson, “Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāḥid,” in CMR I, 330-331.

80 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 3-4.

At any rate, although the Qurʾān may offer relatively few particulars regarding the actual substance of the biblical text, it nevertheless assumes a significant acquaintance with the general narrative of the Old and New Testament. Even a cursory perusal of the Qurʾān will reveal a quite thorough awareness of the Bible, or at least expected awareness of the Bible. Sidney Griffith states:

> When recollections of the biblical narratives and the words and actions of the patriarchs and prophets actually come up in the Qurʾān, the first thing that strikes the reader is, as we have seen, the high degree of familiarity with the drāmatūs personae and their stories that the texts presumes in its audience.82

In other words, the narrative of the Qurʾān becomes quite chaotic and decontextualized without any link to the Bible. This complicates several matters. First, if the Qurʾān assumes a familiarity with the Bible, what does this tell us about the demographic and religious composition of seventh-century Arabia? Were Arabic-speaking polytheist versed in biblical stories and lore?83 Second, what does this say about the status of the Bible in pre-Islamic and early-Islamic Arabia?84 All of these questions, which involve lengthy and contested scholarship, are important to the study of early Islam and early Christian-Muslims relations. However, they will not be discussed here.85


85 See note 4.
Needless to say, some Muslim polemicists were conversant enough with the Bible to make definitive claims regarding its contents and integrity. Concerning the earliest surviving critical analysis of the Gospels, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm’s Kūtb radd ‘alā al-Nāṣārā (The Book against the Christians), written between 815 and 826 in Egypt, Mark Beaumont states:

Al-Qasim’s Reply to the Christians was an attempt to show that the gospels portray Jesus as a human messenger sent by God to his people and that the developed Christologies of Middle Eastern Christians were a denial of the very scriptures Christians claimed to follow.86

Certain Muslim polemicists, including several authors of Christian apostate literature, maintained that those believers adhering to concocted and blasphemous trinitarian doctrines were unworthy of the title “Christian.” However, Gabriel Reynolds states, “For our purposes, however, it is enough to conclude that the Qurʾān’s statements on Christianity and Jesus, here and elsewhere, are elusive.”87 Therefore, the complexity of the relationship between the Qurʾān, Bible, and Muslims is apparent. First, the Qurʾān assumes that its readership is acquainted with the Bible and, as a result, the Qurʾān offers limited particulars pertaining to its contents. Second, the Qurʾān’s limited biblical details are evasive. Third, there is no physical evidence that an Arabic Bible was in circulation during the seventh century. The questions remains: Where did early Muslims gain knowledge of Christianity and the Bible? Muslims were not content with limiting themselves to the Qurʾān, tafsīr, and hadīth when attempting to understand Christianity.

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Therefore, polemicists and Christian converts turned to the next most authoritative source, the Sīra.\footnote{There are many works which can be considered biographical concerning Muḥammad, however for the purposes of this work, Sīra will specifically refer to the biography composed by Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām.}

\textit{The Sīra and Early Islamic Histories}

The Sīra of Muḥammad, as presented by Ibn Ishāq (d. 768) and Ibn Hishām (d. 833), had a lasting influence upon the arguments and methods of Muslim polemicists toward the Bible and Christianity. Although it was the Qurʾān that established the claim of a biblical foretelling of Muḥammad in Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:6), it was the Sīra which added the subsequent clarifying details many medieval Muslim polemicists would build upon, mainly that the “Helper” (Gr. παράκλητος) promised in the Gospel of John (14:16) was Muḥammad. In the Sīra, “true” Christians were typified by several groups of idealized and romanticized Christians. First, the Sīra describes several Christians who accepted the legitimacy of Muḥammad’s prophethood and the divine origin of the Qurʾān as described in Sūrat al-ʿImrān (3:199);\footnote{Sūrat al-ʿImrān (3:199): And some there are of the People of the Book who believe in God, and what has been sent down unto you, and what has been sent down unto them, men humble to God, not selling the signs of God for a small price; those -- their wage is with their Lord; God is swift at the reckoning.} however their latent beliefs were only manifested once they met Muḥammad. This category of Christian is represented by Sergius Bahīrā, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, and the Negus of Abyssinia. For example, during the first emigration in 615, early Muslim believers fled to the neighboring Abyssinian kingdom, which today is located in modern-day Eritrea and Ethiopia. Here, the benevolent Negus (Ge’ez King) not only welcomed the persecuted Muslims, but he also declared Muḥammad a legitimate
prophet, accepted that Muḥammad had been visited by the Nāmūs (Gabriel), and tacitly equated the Bible and Qurʾān. Moreover, the famous historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) in his Tārikh al-Rasul wa-l-Mulūk (The History of the Prophets and Kings) declared that the Negus formally converted to Islam, which would make him an early Muslim figure as well. Again, the story of the Negus reaffirms the idea that a “true” Christian is a Muslim.

Similar to the story of the Negus is the account of the Najrānī bishop, Abū Ḥāritha. In the Sīra, the Najrānī bishop acknowledged the prophethood of Muḥammad but refrains from any outward or public confession fearing that he would have his ecclesiastical privileges revoked. Eventually, despite his fears, Abū Ḥāritha confesses his belief in Muḥammad to his brother, who later converted to Islam. This scenario is very similar to the conversion story of the former Franciscan Anselm Turmeda. In the Franciscan friar’s story, his aging mentor confides in Anselm that the Paraclete in the Book of John is Muḥammad. Only out of fear and his advanced age does he himself not convert to Islam. But, like the brother of Abū Ḥāritha, Anselm Turmeda understands his mentor’s words and converts to Islam.

An additional group of romanticized Christians who accepted Muḥammad and the Qurʾān can be found in the Sīra as well. Like the Negus and Abū Ḥāritha’s brother, they are distinguished by their formal conversion to Islam. Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 656) is described in the Sīra as a Persian of Iṣfahānī extraction who embraces Christianity in order to join the retinue of several different monks. Eventually, after an arduous and

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90 Suleiman A. Mourad, “Christians and Christianity in the Sīra of Muḥammad,” in CMR I, 64.
91 Ibid., 70.
92 Ibid., 65.
circuitous journey, Salmān providentially arrives in Medina where he meets Muḥammad and converts to Islam. The story of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641) and his bishop, Ṣaghāṭir, is presented in almost identical fashion to Abū Ḥāritha and his brother. Heraclius cannot convert for fear of retribution because he is the emperor of the Christian Byzantine Empire, although, like Abū Ḥāritha — according to Islamic sources — he privately accepts Muḥammad’s message. However, Heraclius’ fears are realized in the bishop, Ṣaghāṭir. According to Ibn Isḥāq, Muḥammad sent several letters inviting various Christian leaders to embrace Islam, including Heraclius, the Negus of Abyssinia, the governor of Egypt in Alexandria al-Muqawqis, and the King of the Ghassānids in Syria, al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shāmir. In the case of Heraclius, Muhammad sent a envoy named Dīhya ibn Khalīfa al-Kalbī to deliver his invitation. Suleiman Mourad succinctly summarizes Heraclius’ response and the ensuing events:

He then called for Dīhya, Muḥammad’s envoy, and informed him that Muḥammad was indeed a true messenger, whom the Byzantine Christians had been expecting and about whom they had read in their scripture, though, for fear that the Byzantines would harm him, Heraclius could not convert. He asked Dīhya to give the news of Muḥammad to Bishop Ṣaghāṭir, who had more popularity and authority among the Byzantines than the emperor. When Dīhya did so, Ṣaghāṭir confirmed what the emperor had affirmed to the envoy, went out to the church and proclaimed his conversion to Islam, saying, ‘I am attesting that there is no god but God and that Aḥmad is his servant and messenger.’ The crowd turned on Ṣaghāṭir and killed him.

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93 Ibn Isḥāq, The Life of Muḥammad, 95-98.
95 Ibid., 68-69.
Many of the motifs found in these stories reappear later in Christian apostate literature. Therefore, the stories of Sergius Baḥīrā, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, the Negus of Abyssinia, Salmān al-Fārisī, and the other romanticized Christians specifically contributed to the formulaic biographical details found in Christian apostate literature. In this regard, it appears that certain Christian converts to Islam, notably ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, may have perceived themselves as walking in the paths of these earlier idealized Christians. However, as the authenticity of later Christian apostate works is called into question, it will become apparent that the medieval Muslim community attempted not only to perpetuate the image of the ideal Christian found in early Islamic literature, but also to create an entire romanticized genre of conversion literature.

The narratives of these early Christian figures are also intimately connected with Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:6) and John 14:16, which, in turn, was foundational to the issue of tahrīf. According to the Sīra, Waraqa, who in Islamic tradition had mastered the Torah and the Gospel,96 proclaimed:

Waraqa cried, ‘Holy! Holy! Verily by Him in whose hand is Waraqa’s soul, if you have spoken to me the truth, Oh Khadija, that there has come unto him the greatest Nāmūs (Gabriel) who previously came to Moses, and behold, he is the prophet of this people.97

Earlier in the Sīra, Muḥammad was already declared to be the Paraclete (Munahhemana) described in John 14:16. The identity of the Paraclete is often considered by Muslim authors to be an unambiguous case of tahrīf. Having said that, many Muslims believed that Muḥammad’s name had not been completely excised from the Bible (tahrīf al-nass),

97 Ibid., 107. Some of Guillaume’s language has been updated with minor emendations.
but rather it had simply been misunderstood or overlooked (تاریخ المان). For instance, according to the سیره, the Negus, after the first emigration of the Muslims, sends a delegation of Abyssinian Christians to Arabia. While the Christians are there, upon hearing Muḥammad recite the Qurʾān, they convert to Islam having realized that Muḥammad was indeed the awaited prophet mentioned in the Bible.98

Similarly, Salmān al-Fārisī traveled to Wādi Qurā in western Arabia in order to await a prophet who will restore the true monotheism of Abrahām.99 Again, according to the سیره, there were Christians prior to the rise of Islam who were anticipating, and in the case of Salmān seeking, a prophet promised by Jesus. In the case of Sergius Baḥīrā, the سیره identifies the source of his knowledge of a coming prophet:

When the caravan reached Buṣrā in Syria, there was a monk there in his cell by the name of Baḥīrā, who was well versed in the knowledge of the Christians. A monk had always occupied that cell. There he gained his knowledge from a book that was in the cell, so they allege, handed on from generation to generation.100

Baḥīrā gained his knowledge not from the Bible, but from “a book” that was preserved in monastic isolation. Later, Baḥīrā looked upon Muḥammad and “saw the seal of prophethood between his shoulders in the very place described in his book.”101 However, an identical prophecy is not found in the Bible, this implies that Baḥīrā and his eremitic

100 Ibid., 79.
101 Ibid., 80. This prophecy could have connections with Zechariah 13:2-6, specifically verse six which reads, “And if one asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your back?’…” It appears that the original meaning of these verses have been misconstrued or reinterpreted through an Islamic lens. I would like to thank Sam Meier for bringing this connection to my attention.
predecessors had maintained an uncorrupted Bible in which the predictions of Muhammad were safeguarded. From the examples above, it is clear that the Sīra interwove aspects of both tahrīf al-nass and tahrīf al-maʿnā concerning the identity of the Paraclete. In this way, the Sīra helped establish what would become the most foundational anti-Christian proof-text of the medieval period. As will be seen in the Anselm Turmeda’s Tuhfa, the true identity of the Paraclete is the sole reason for his conversion.

In addition to identifying biblical predictions of Muhammad, Ibn Ishāq’s Sīra helped establish a second hallmark of anti-Christian literature. The Sīra, unlike the Qurʾān, does not simply attack the Christian deification of Christ, but it also inveighs against Christian reasoning for divinizing Christ. According to the Sīra, Christians divinize Christ on account of his prognostications, raising the dead, curing the sick, and miraculous and fatherless birth. However, the Sīra attempts to emphasize the indistinctive nature of Christ’s various miracles. Concerning Christ’s miraculous birth, Ibn Ishāq asserts that the Immaculate Conception was no more miraculous than Adam’s parentless birth. And although the Sīra does not offer additional parallels with earlier biblical figures, the implication is clear: Christ’s supernatural acts do not legitimize his deification. Moreover, Ibn Ishāq states that Christ’s miracles were performed with the authority and permission of God. Throughout Muslim polemical literature, prophets, including Christ, were passive agents in the production of their miracles. No prophet performed any miracle, however great or small, of his own volition. The systematic

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102 Ibn Ishāq, The Life of Muhammad, 271-272, 276-277. Ibn Ishāq also includes apocryphal and Islamic miracles attributed to Christ as well. For example, he claimed that Najrāni Christians consider Christ God because he breathed life into clay birds and spoke in the cradle.

103 Ibid., 277.
juxtaposition of Christ’s miracles with those of other prophets, including Muḥammad, became a trademark of Christian apostate literature. In fact, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda all made a concerted effort in their works to downplay Christ’s miracles by demonstrating that Muḥammad and previous prophets performed equivalent — and at times greater — miracles. And like Ibn Isḥāq, each of the above-mentioned Christian converts stressed that various marvels and wonders were accomplished through Christ by the will and determination of God.

Apart from the Qurʾān, early sources were not limited to exegesis, ḥadīth literature, and the Sīra. Al-Wāqīdī’s (d. 822) Kitāb al-Maghāzī (The Book of Expeditions), Ibn Saʿd’s (d. 845) Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā (The Book of the Major Classifications), and al-Balādhurī’s (d. 892) Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān (The Book of the Conquests of the Nations) contain numerous passages directly or indirectly concerned with Christianity. These sources propagated many of the same earlier folkloric elements found in other early Islamic literature, many of which found a permanent home in Christian apostate literature. The story of Bahīrah, popularized in the Sīra, was also detailed by Ibn Saʿd and al-Balādhurī. Moreover, the stories of Waraqa ibn Nawfal, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Christian delegation from Najrān were all commonplace in early Islamic biographical and historiographical works. Again, this reinforced the early established belief amongst Muslims that “true” Christians acknowledge Muḥammad’s prophethood, accept the veracity of the Qurʾān, and in many cases convert to Islam.

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**Christians, Muslims, and Tahrīf**

The first ʿAbbāsid century (750-850) witnessed the transformation of Christian-Muslim relations. Many of the contentious issues that had divided Christians and Muslims, including *taḥrīf*, were now being discussed at length in Arabic by Christians, Muslims, and Jews. However, the importance of *taḥrīf* can be seen in several important Christian works prior to the ninth century as well. Shortly after the rise of Islam, the Christian community appears to have been well informed of the accusations being made against them and their scriptures. As a result, *taḥrīf* played an important role in the colloquy between the Jacobite Patriarch John Sedra (r. 631 - 648 C.E.) and an emir, often believed to be ʿUmayr ibn Saʿd al-Anṣarī (ca. 644).¹⁰⁵ This dialogue is often considered one of the earliest examples of Christian-Muslim interaction to have survived in literary form. The primitiveness of this account can be seen in the nature of the questions posed by both the Christian and Muslim interlocutors. Additionally, the discussion describes several crucial issues concerning Christian-Muslim relations around the turn of the eighth century. The first question posed by the Muslim emir can be read as follows:

> The blessed one and father of the Christian community was asked by him: ‘Is the Gospel one and the same, which has not changed anything, and which is adhered to by all those who are called Christians throughout the entire world?’ The blessed one answered him: ‘It is one and the same amongst the Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Egyptians, Cushites, Indians, Armenians, Persians, and the rest of all the nations and languages.’¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁵ See François Nau, *Un colloquy du patriarche Jean ave l’émir des Agaréens,* *Journal Asiatique,* 11th series, 5 (1915): 225-279. Although the text purports to describe an event that took place in 644, Sidney Griffith claims the text “in the form in which we have it” can be dated to the early eighth century, see Sidney Griffith, *Shadow of the Mosque,* 77.

Furthermore, regarding the integrity of the textual transmission of the Torah (lit. the “law” Syriac ʿūrāylā), the patriarch claims that Christians, Jews, Samaritans, and even Muslims (ḥanpē) maintain and accept the same Torah.\footnote{Ibid.} Although an explicit discussion of biblical corruption occupies no more than a few short paragraphs, its influence permeates the subsequent questions of the dialogue. A similar argument is continued by the Nestorian Patriarch, Timothy I (r. 779-823) and the Jacobite mutakallim, Ḥabīb Abū Raʿīṭah (d. ca. 830). Both Timothy and Ḥabīb argue that two vehemently antagonistic communities such as the Christians and the Jews could never have collaborated in an effort to maintain the exact same text. Ḥabīb states, “[but] what is in the hands of the Jews is in harmony with what we possess.”\footnote{Sandra Toenies Keating, Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Ḥabīb Abū Raʿīṭah (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 209.} Likewise, Timothy defends Christian and Jewish maintenance of the Bible. In response to al-Mahdī’s accusation of tahrif, Timothy states:

Then, if we suppose that we changed and falsified the Torah and the (Books) of the Prophets, which we possessed amongst us, how were we able to change and falsify those which were in the hands of the Hebrews? Then, if anyone objects, saying: ‘Surely, the Christians have changed and falsified the books that were in their hands, and the Jews have done likewise with theirs,’ then we would say: ‘For what reason have the Jews not changed and omitted the existing verses in their books, of which the Christian religion is proud and of which it (the Christian religion) is based upon, because you do not find an enmity in the world - previously or currently - like that between the Christians and Jews.’ And if we said that the Jews definitely changed and falsified their books, then how would we keep silent regarding these falsified verses of theirs, for it is upon them that the object of our religion rests? But, neither Christians
nor Jews changed or falsified the books, as is testified by the existing enmity between them, which because of it, it is not possible that they would agree with each other on such an important matter.109

The ninth-century Arabophone Christian ʿAlī ibn Dāwud al-Arfāḏī added a sectarian dimension to his defense of the Bible, stating, “Thus when I studied these three sects (Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians) in relation to the Gospel, I did not find one from amongst them whom differed in relation to it (Gospel) from the other, neither adding to it nor subtracting from it.”110 Just as certain proof-texts were used by Christians and Muslim for antithetical arguments, so too was the integrity of the Bible, specifically its maintenance by the Jews, Samaritans, and Christians. Contrary to the patriarchs John Sedra and Timothy I, the Muslim geographer al-Maqdiṣī (fl. mid-tenth century) argued in his Kitāb al-badʿ wa-l-tārīkh (The Book of Creation and History) that the Jews, Samaritans, and Christians preserved divergent renditions of the Torah.111

In both the Muslim and Christian communities, the primacy of scriptural integrity (or a lack thereof) was not isolated to the Qurān and a handful of polemic and apologetic works. David Thomas argues:

Muslims, for their part, appear to have come to a set of attitudes towards Christians and their faith at an early stage. To the extent that this is articulated in polemical literature, it began with the Bible, or specifically the Gospel. Some authors implied that, while the text itself remained unaffected by time, Christian interpretations had distorted its true meaning and laid over it doctrines that a proper


111 Theodore Pulcini, Exegesis As Polemical Discourse, 39.
reading could not sustain. And they often proceeded to show how the Bible, when it was read without presuppositions, actually supported the Qur’ānic-based view of Jesus and God, and also looked to the coming of Islam.\textsuperscript{112}

However, it is important to realize that during the first several centuries of Islam Muslim accusations of \textit{tahri̇f} were not limited to misinterpretation and eisegesis (\textit{tahri̇f al-ma’ānā}). Christian apologists were cognizant of accusations of \textit{tahri̇f al-na’ss} as well. In a small dialogical Greek work attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah, a Muslim interlocutor asks Theodore about John 14:16.

\begin{quotation}
\textit{Theodore}: My father taught me to accept someone as a messenger only if he was prophesied by an earlier prophet or through signs established himself as worthy of belief. Your Muhammad, however, could appeal to neither of these conditions. No earlier prophet declared him to be a prophet and he did not engender faith in himself through signs. \textit{Saracen}: That’s not true. In the gospel, Christ wrote: ‘I shall send to you a prophet named Muhammad.’ \textit{Theodore}: The gospel has no such prediction. \textit{Saracen}: It used to, it’s only that you all deleted it.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quotation}

Christians understood that many Muslim polemicists were actively engaging in intertextual exegesis whereby the Bible was retrospectively and restoratively interpreted through a Qur’ānic lens. To be sure, this type of biblical exegesis and Islamic typology would become the edifice upon which Christian apostate literature was built.

Nevertheless, the Christian response to Muslim charges of \textit{tahri̇f} during the first ‘Abbāsid century was swift and comprehensive. Christians responses were composed in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic. The most famous theological compendium composed in Greek was

\textsuperscript{112} David Thomas, “Introduction” in \textit{CMR I}, 16.

John of Damascus’ (d. 749/764) Pēgē Gnōseōs (The Fount of Knowledge). Sidney Griffith argues that John composed his work in “response to the commanding intellectual challenge of Islam.” Moreover, Mark Beaumont contends that John built portions of his apologetic arguments on foundations and grounds acceptable to Muslims.

Perhaps the most well-known Syriac doctrinal compendium is the Nestorian Theodore bar Kōnī’s (fl. ca. 792) Scholion (d. late eighth century), which Herman Teule describes as a “general biblical, theological and ecclesiastical encyclopedia.” Likewise, Theodore thoroughly defends Nestorian church doctrine in the form of an extended exegesis of both the Old and New Testaments. With respect to Theodore and his work, Sidney Griffith, states, “He called it simply Scholion because it is in the form of scholia, or commentaries, on what are taken to be difficult passages in the several biblical books.”

The Scholion is composed of between 10-12 chapters depending on which recension you consult. Memrā (chapter) ten of the Scholion is a Christian apology in the form of questions and answers between a mallfānā, or teacher, who is portrayed as the Christian, and an eskāliyān, or pupil, who is portrayed as the inquisitive Muslim. Theodore wrote

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114 Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 42.


117 Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 43.


119 Much like the works of the earlier Syriac writers, the words “Muslim” and “Islam” never appear in the text. Throughout Theodore’s Scholion Muslims are consistently called ḥanṭē. This word carries with it a discussion in and of itself. Generally speaking, this word can be translated as “pagan” or “heathen.” However, it shares a common Semitic root with the Arabic ḥanīf, which can be translated ironically as “monotheist.” Undoubtedly, Syriac writers were well aware of the double meaning.
his *Scholion* in response to the growing need of such works in the face of advancing claims of Islamic exceptionalism and biblical criticism. For instance, throughout the *Scholion* the Muslim student claims that the sonship, baptism, Eucharist, Incarnation, and salvation are all emendations or unwarranted extrapolations, which he implies were created by the disciples, who unlike Moses, the prophets, and Jesus, he openly rejected. Although the earlier converts ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb exhibited a considerable degree of deference toward the disciples and apostles of Christ, later converts, most notably Anselm Turmeda, demonstrated an unmistakable hostility toward Christ’s early followers.

In the opening paragraph of chapter ten of the *Scholion*, Theodore elucidates his reasoning for writing such a work:

> The refutation, confutation, and discussion (in question-and-answer format) was composed with simple language, against those who, while professing to accept the Old Testament and believe in the coming of our Lord the Messiah, are far removed from both of them.\(^{120}\)

Theodore, who was writing at the end of the eighth century, asserts that his contemporary Muslims were requiring explanations of what they perceived to be inconsistencies in biblical passages and Christian doctrine. Additionally, Theodore intimates at a growing fear regarding Christian apostasy by asserting that his work is also intended to aid the weak minded within the Christian community. Accusations of manipulating the impoverished and uneducated was a multidirectional and interfaith phenomenon. In fact, conversion through chicanery was often imputed to Christians and Muslims alike. Both

al-Jāḥīz (d. 868) and Abū Saʿīd al-Ṣīrāfī (d. 979) express their annoyance and disgust with perceived Christian attempts to hoodwink intellectually unfit Muslims.

**The First ‘Abbāsid Century – A Watershed for Christian-Muslim Relations**

At any rate, quite early in the *Scholion* the growing philosophical atmosphere of the ‘Abbāsid Empire begins to reveal itself. Scriptural evidence was no longer adequate as the sole source of undisputed evidence in apologetics and polemics written by either Christians or Muslims. Consider the following exchange in the *Scholion*:

The Teacher said: ‘Do you confess that God is one or many?’ The Student said: ‘One.’ The Teacher said: ‘Is He prior to creation or contemporaneous with creation?’ The Student said: ‘Prior to creation.’ The Teacher said: ‘From where were you shown that He is one and that He is prior to all and that He is Creator?’ The Student said: ‘Through reasoning, physical evidence, and through the testimony of Blessed Moses’.121

A simple scriptural quotation or proof-text no longer sufficed as a sufficiently persuasive argument. In other words, scripture as proof must be qualified. Some apologists and polemicists (Christian and Muslim) tacitly endorsed the superiority of revelation over reason, whereas others were much more assertive in their convictions. Nevertheless, scripture and rationality were often used in tandem throughout their works. However, one of the most salient features of Christian apostate literature was its persistent utilization of scripture, even in the face of a growing reliance on rationality. In many ways, the importance of rationality and reason, particularly in inter-religious and intra-religious

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dialogue, was due to the influence of the Muʿtazila whose productivity and influence was indisputable during the first three centuries of ʿAbbāsid rule.

In the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the Muʿtazila embodied the polemical vanguard. The Muʿtazīlī authors .Dirār b. ʿAmr (d. 815), Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. ca. 841), al-Naẓẓām (d. 840), al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868), Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāṭī (d. 915-16), Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbāṭī (d. 933), Ibn al-Ikhshīd (d. 938), Ibn Khallād (d. 961), Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Baṣrī (d. 980), and ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) all wrote a variety of works refuting Christianity. However, the Muʿtazila did not exclusively attack Christians and Christian doctrine. G. Monnot stated that the Muʿtazila exerted considerable effort to “the passionate struggle against all systems of thought, Muslim or not, that could threaten their doctrine.”

These Muʿtazila heavily influenced the manner in which Christian apologists defended their faith. Wageeh Mikhail argues that the Nestorian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d. ca. mid-ninth century) composed his Kitāb al-Burḥān (The Book of Proof) “to provide rational proof of the credibility of Christianity by structuring the entire argument to correspond with Islamic views of God’s attributes.” Mikhail continues, “As for the Muslim thinkers, ʿAmmār’s main concern is to point out that the Trinity is the ultimate solution to the dilemma of the depiction of God found in Muʿtazīlī thinking.” Although the Muʿtazila were very active in Christian-Muslim dialogue, it is important to realize that significant works and contributions to Christian-Muslim dialogue were produced by non-Muʿtazīlīs as well. For

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123 Ibid., xxvi.


125 Ibid., 176.
instance, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 936), composed in the later years of his life a work entitled Kitāb fiḥā l-kalām ‘alā l-Naṣārā mimmā yuṭaṭjū biḥi ‘alayhim min sāʾir al-kutub allatī yaṭarīfūna (A Book Containing Arguments Against the Christians from What Can Be Brought Against Them from All the Books They Acknowledge). This work appears to have concentrated on the Bible as opposed to Christian doctrine. In this regard, David Thomas states that al-Ashʿarī’s work resembled ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā.126

Under the influence of rationalistic lines of argumentation (kalām),127 Muslims often included lengthy refutations of what they perceived to be the most logically untenable of Christian doctrines: the Trinity. Consider what David Thomas states of the early ninth-century Muslim polemicists:

From the early third/ninth century, among the major surviving polemical works are al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm’s incisive Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā, which disproves the Trinity on logical grounds and the divinity of Christ on Biblical grounds; the philosopher Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī’s work with the same name, which refutes the Trinity in terms of Aristotelian philosophy; and Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq’s elaborate Radd ‘alā al-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā, which exposes in almost prolix detail the internal contradictions and logical shortcomings of the Trinity and Incarnation.128

From a Muslim perspective, the Trinity was believed to have originated from one particular source, the Nicene Creed, or at least what many Muslim polemicists believed to be the Nicene Creed. Al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb goes so far as to call the Nicene Creed the

126 David Thomas, “Al-Ashʿarī” in CMR II, 216.

127 Generally speaking, the first ʿAbbāsid century is considered the “great age” of Muʿtazilism. However, Daniel Gimaret states that the systematization of Muʿtazili doctrine occurred between 875-1050. After the eleventh century the Muʿtazila enter a period of steady decline and eventual disappearance. See, D. Gimaret, Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, s.v: “Muʿtazila.”

128 David Thomas, “Early Muslim Responses to Christianity,” in Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in Abbasid Iraq, ed. by David Thomas (Leiden, Brill: 2003), 250.
muhaj (lifeblood) of the Christian community. Polemicists often paraphrased and in many instances quoted a particular creed; however, Diego Cucarella notes that the creed referenced by so many Muslim authors is actually not the Nicene Creed:

Rather, it appears to be a Syrian creed used by the Nestorian Church of the East, which bears a remarkable resemblance to the baptismal creed of the Antiochene theologian and teacher of Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). The creed in question contains the key-phrases of Nicene orthodoxy (‘not made, true God from true God, of one substance with the Father’), as it also reflects concerns typical of Eastern creeds, such as the Father’s pre-cosmic begetting of the Son (“born of His Father before all ages”), the assertion that the Son was the Father’s agent in the work of creation (“by Whose hand the ages were framed and all things were created”), and the indication of the motive of the Incarnation (“Who for the sake of us men and for the sake of our salvation came down from heaven”).

Muslim polemicists often juxtaposed the “key-phrases” of Nicene orthodoxy with biblical passages they believed unequivocally invalidated various components of creedal Trinitarianism. Nevertheless, disagreements concerning theology and doctrine remained bound within the parameters of tahrīf. The Nicene Creed was not only described as the source of errant Trinitarianism, it was also seen as the misconstruing lens through which Christians continued to read the Bible. In other words, the Nicene Creed was the sustainer of Christian eisegesis.

Building upon crucial earlier developments, the first ‘Abbāsid century, specifically 800-850, was much more than a period of gradual transition. In many ways, the social

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129 Furthermore, Cucarella claims that the origin of this creed and its subsequent variations was popularized by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī in his al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā, see Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 181. It is important to realize that Muslim authors displayed no awareness that the words they were citing were anything other than the Nicene Creed. Therefore, any subsequent discussion of the Nicene Creed is specifically referring to the Syrian creed that was unknowingly masqueraded as the Nicene Creed in numerous Arabic anti-Christian polemics.
and theological seedlings of the Umayyad era came to fruition during the early ʿAbbāsid period. This resulted in numerous unprecedented milestones. First, the ʿAbbāsid era presented many new challenges for the non-Muslim populations. Dimitri Gutas states:

The encroachment of Arabic Islam into the religions in the Near East was felt on many fronts, and indeed in unexpected ways of which non-Muslims had no experience from Umayyad times. Hence the palpable need to explain themselves and to maintain, enlarge, and at times even re-establish their rights and positions. As a result, the first ʿAbbāsid century saw an unprecedented rise in Arabic Christian apologetic writings directed against Islam.\(^{130}\)

To a certain degree, in reaction to the birth and spread of Christian Arabic apologetics, the ninth century also witnessed a widespread proliferation of anti-Christian polemical works. David Thomas writes, “More or less every Muslim theological thinker of note from the eighth and ninth centuries is credited with a work against Christianity, as well as one or more other faiths, though nearly all of these have been lost”\(^{131}\). The apologetic and polemical methods developed during the ninth century by both Muslims and Christians had a lasting influence upon later authors and their works. This is to say nothing of pioneering works and developments in the fields of hadīth, jurisprudence (fiqh), exegesis (tafsīr), philosophy (falsafa), and translation all of which occurred amidst radical demographic shifts throughout the caliphate.

Moreover, during the ninth century the intellectual members of the subject populations, specifically the Christians, carved out several exclusive niches within the ʿAbbāsid society. Dimitri Gutas states that the ʿAbbāsid state cultivated a culture of

\(^{130}\) Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 66.

\(^{131}\) David Thomas, “Introduction” in *CMR IV*, 16.
translation which “cut across all lines of religious, sectarian, ethnic, tribal, and linguistic
demarcation.” However, the large majority of translations from Syriac to Arabic or
Greek to Arabic (or any permutation of the three) were conducted by Christians.
Likewise, Christians came to dominate the medical field as well. The Bukhtīshūʿ family
functioned as a Christian dynastic medical family which often worked at the caliphal
court. On account of their multilingual heritage, the Christian population offered an
expertise that was welcomed by many Muslim authorities.

By the beginning of the ninth century Christians and Muslims were well aware of
the fairly uniform set of issues that divided them; and with the growing availability of an
Arabic Bible during the ninth century, Christians and Muslims had become embroiled
in the exegesis of one another’s scriptures. David Bertaina states, “by means of socio-
political, cultural, and religious structures, Muslims in the eighth and ninth centuries
began to develop coherent methods of perceiving, judging, and engaging Christians
through descriptive and evaluative markers within the framework of Islam.” One such

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133 One of the most notable exceptions was the Sabian, Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 901). As a translator
Thābit is believed to have translated several of the works of Archimedes, Euclid, and Ptolemy. See Rashed,


135 The earliest dated manuscript containing an Arabic translation of the Gospels is housed in the
library of the Monastery of St. Catherine, which, according to its scribe, can be dated to 859. Additionally,
Sinai Arabic MS 151 contains the Epistles of Paul, which, according to its colophon, was copied in 867.
There are also contemporaneous reports by Muslim authors affirming the translation of the Bible into

136 David Bertaina, “An Arabic Account of Theodore Abu Qurra in Debate at the Court of
Caliph al-Maʾmun,” 59.
method was an Islamic prophetic and typological reading of the Bible.\textsuperscript{137} In this sense, Muslims not only considered Muḥammad to be the fulfillment of John 14:16, Deuteronomy 18:15, and various other biblical verses, but they also understood Muḥammad’s life to parallel the lives and trials of several notable biblical figures, specifically Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Muḥammad resembled these earlier characters in that he called people to an unadulterated monotheism (Abraham), he led an exodus from Mecca to Medina (Moses), he became a ruler (David), and he preached a universal message (Jesus).

Arabic-speaking Christian apologists were also attempting to coherently comprehend Islam and its place within a Christian framework. Prior to the ʿAbbāsid period, Christian literature with respect to Islam was primarily apocalyptic and heresiographical.\textsuperscript{138} However, by the ninth century Christians were responding in a variety of apologetic manners. In his Kitāb al-masāʾıl wa-l-ajwiba (The Book of Questions and Answers), ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī outlined what he believed to be the existing parameters of Christian-Muslim dialogue during the mid-ninth century. These topics included the existence of God, Muḥammad’s prophethood, defining the true religion, taḥrīf, the Trinity, Incarnation, Crucifixion, and various expressions of faith (such as baptism, the

\textsuperscript{137} In their book Idolatry, Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit make note of the distinction between a prophetic and typological reading of the Bible. They define the two in the following manner: “Prophetic readings come to reveal hints and signs in the Old Testament in order to support the fulfillment of prophecies and promises at the time of the New Testament. Typological readings, however, are not solely or mainly intended to describe the fulfillment of prophecies and promises but indicate basic types that are repeated in the New Testament with greater intensity.” See Moshe Halbertal, and Avishai Margalit, Idolatry, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 100.

Eucharist, and veneration of the cross). ʿAmmar al-Baṣrī’s programmatic approach in his Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwība was common in disputatious literature during the ʿAbbāsid era. These issues – many of which were delineated by the Qurʾān and other early Islamic literature – were reiterated throughout the entire medieval period (with very limited deviation) by Christians and Muslims alike. Christian apostate literature operates — almost without exception — within theological categories set forth by ʿAmmar al-Baṣrī.

In due course, Christian-Muslim relations became as much an intellectual and social rivalry as it was a religious one. Both inter- and intra-religious dialogue, which are often mutually reinforcing, became replete with philosophical and dialectical posturing. Certain intellectuals even scoffed at anti-intellectual sentimentality. The renowned Nestorian thinker, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 873), stated:

Indeed, if someone says that belief has come to him by way of his ancestors, or if he says that belief has come to him by way of a book, or from a prophet who has performed miracles, or from his own opinion, since he holds to a certain viewpoint and to him his own religion is confirmed to be true through it, all the adherents of the religions who disagree with him would be able to say something similar.

Growing trends of intellectualism and rationalism notwithstanding, many Christian and Muslim works remained steeped in biblical and Qurʾānic fideism. Of the various genres of Muslim polemical literature, this is most evident in Christian apostate literature. It is


through the Bible that Christian converts to Islam attempt to refute the Trinity and defend Muhammad’s status as a prophet. Christian apostate literature is essentially devoid of extended rationalistic expositions and philosophical grandstanding. Therefore, the increased accessibility of this polemical style (more likely than not) would have contributed to the enduring popularity of Christian apostate literature. Although learned men of every stripe at times opposed introspection and supernaturalism in favor of shrewd and logic-based argumentation, more often than not a fusion of reason and revelation were used throughout the medieval period. Even the “philosopher of the Arabs,” al-Kindī (d. ca. 870) believed that the revelation of the Qur’ān surpassed the value of Greek philosophy.141

During the ʿAbbāsid era, why were so many apologists and polemicists engaging in non-scripture-based arguments? What was the allure of rationalism and philosophy for polemical purposes? In many ways, Christians and Muslims sought to draw one another into the religiously neutral arenas where biblical and qur’ānic proof-texts held less sway. Sidney Griffith states:

In this light then the Jacobite, Nestorian, and Muslim teachers in Greek logic and philosophy appear to have flourished at a time in Baghdad when interconfessional and interreligious interest in the works of the Alexandrian Aristotelians went hand in hand with a concern among both Christians and Muslims to show that their own religious traditions accorded best with the requirements of the life of reason lived in pursuit of the highest knowledge, and to argue that they and their coreligionists alone were the truest heirs of Aristotle.142


142 Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 117.
Likewise, David Thomas states:

There are clear signs that, from the early ninth century onwards, Christian theologians who were born Arabic speakers and knew the currency of Muslim theological debate accepted the challenge presented by their counterparts, and in partly defensive, partly creative employment of concepts and methods native to Muslim theological debate demonstrated how their main doctrines were not only viable in the terms agreed but also inescapable if reason was to be maintained.143

As previously stated, despite ‘Abbāsid-era intellectuals’ penchant for dialectic and ratiocination, converts turned polemicist remained fastened to scriptural proof-texts. This is not to say that Christian apostate literature was fundamentally opposed to rationality. In a sense, converts believed that the proof-texts they presented were self-evident. In most instances, Christian apostates considered various aspects of Trinitarianism to be irrational extrapolations of the Bible. Therefore, Christian apostate literature can be understood not only as a biblical defense of Islam and Muḥammad’s prophethood, but also as an attempt to establish who were the true heirs of Christ’s message. In this respect, converts perceived themselves to be truer Christians than Christians themselves. However, by relying on God’s revelation to invalidate false claims, converts to Islam also perceived themselves as the truest Muslims as well. In the opening lines of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, the Nestorian convert to Islam criticizes his new coreligionists’ poor understanding and use of the Bible.

During this watershed century Christians and Muslims were in constant contact and discussion. David Thomas says, “by the time Abū ʾĪsā composed the Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā in the middle of the third/ninth century, anti-Christian polemical writing had become an

143 David Thomas, “Introduction” in CMR I, 15.
integral part of theological discourse in Islam.” Abū Mūsā ʻĪsā b. Șubayḥ al-Murdār (d. 841), a disciple of Bishr ibn al-Muʿtamir (d. 825) the founder of the Baghdad Muʿtazila, wrote a refutation against Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 823) titled Kitāb ʿalā Qurra al-Nāṣrānī (The Book Against Qurra the Christian). Al-Murdār also authored a general refutation al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Refutation of the Christians). Likewise, Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. ca. 840-850), the founder of the Baṣra Muʿtazila, wrote several refutations of non-Muslims, including a refutation against ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī titled Kitāb ʿalā ʿAmmār al-Nāṣrānī fī l-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Book against ʿAmmār in the Refutations of the Christians), in addition to his Kitāb ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Book against the Christians) and Kitāb ʿalā Ahl al-Adyān (The Book against the People of the (other) Religions). Even the littérature al-Jāḥiz (d. 868) contributed to the ʿAbbāsid anti-Christian polemical enterprise with his Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (A Reply to the Christians), which was caliphally sanctioned by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861).

According to Gabriel Reynolds in his analysis of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, the writing of polemics was an intellectual and spiritual rite of passage. Reynolds states, “Indeed, Muḥammad’s refutation of Christianity, according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, is one of the apologetic signs that verifies his prophethood.” Furthermore, Suleiman Mourad claims:

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The material about encounters between Muhammad and Christians exhibits some interesting features. First, it reflects an effort on the part of early Muslim scholars (and one might argue that this could also have been one of the major preoccupations of Muhammad and his early followers) to show that the authenticity and veracity of Muhammad’s claim to prophethood were evident to those learned in the Christian scripture.\textsuperscript{149}

Very few ninth-century Muslim thinkers had any qualms about the seemingly compulsory disapproval of Christianity the Islamic intellectual atmosphere placed upon them. In many ways, Muslim polemicists would have seen themselves as fulfilling a Qur’anic duty as well as walking in the path of Muhammad by composing anti-Christian works.

Moreover, properly situating Muhammad within the succession of God’s prophets and messengers was of the utmost importance to some authors. According to Hugh Goddard, al-Ash’arī (d. 936) opposed the “innovative” theological Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, but he reserved his primary criticisms for the Christian rejection of Muhammad’s prophethood.\textsuperscript{150} Likewise, in an eleventh-century debate between the Nestorian Metropolitan Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046) and a Muslim vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghrībī (d. 1027), the vizier stated (according to Elias), “the matter is as you have said, and I confess that every one who is of this opinion and of this religion (Christianity) is a monotheist, and there is no difference between him and the Muslims except that which concerns the prophethood of Muhammad b. ʿAbdallah.”\textsuperscript{151}

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\item \textsuperscript{149} Suleiman Mourad, “Christians and Christianity in the Sīra of Muhammad,” 59.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Hugh Goddard, \textit{A History of Christian-Muslim Relations}, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Elias of Nisibis, \textit{Trois traités anciens de polémique et de théologie chrétiennes}, ed. Louis Cheikho (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1923), 52; Herbert Fergus Thomson, “Four Treatises by ʿIṣa ibn Zūr’a Tenth Century, Jacobite Christian of Baghdad ” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1952), 131. The translations have been slightly altered and parenthesis have been added for clarification and emphasis.
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During the early ʿAbbāsid period, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic kalām began to flourish. As a result the mutakallimūn of all three faiths engaged in dialogue, some of which was constructive and collaborative and some of which was hostile.\(^{152}\) In addition to cultivating a vigorous culture of apologetic and polemical works, the ninth century saw a variety of developments in many fields. Jacques Waardenburg states:

Indeed, the ninth century saw a growth and flowering of Arabic literature together with a decisive development and formulation of the religious sciences of Islam in Arabic: tafsīr (Qur’ānic exegesis), ʿilm al-hadīth (science of tradition), fiqh (jurisprudence), and kalām (scholastic philosophy and theology).\(^{153}\)

What is more, the ninth century also witnessed the mihna (inquisition)\(^{154}\) under the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 813-833). This imperially sanctioned doctrine also found support in al-Maʾmūn’s next two caliphal successors: al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833-842), and al-Wâthiq (r. 842-847).

The institution of the mihna mandated that all individuals in the service of the caliph endorse the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān. With respect to doctrine, the mihna exclusively affected Muslims; however, the ramifications of these decisions impacted society as a whole. Sara Husseini argues that on account of the mihna “the

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\(^{153}\) Jean Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, 43.

\(^{154}\) The mihna was the caliphaly endorsed doctrine that the Qurʾān was the created word of God. This position was largely espoused by the Muʿtazila who anchored their theology in reason. A leading opponent of the mihna (and supporter of the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān) was Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) who, unlike the Muʿtazila, based his theological doctrines in the traditions of Muḥammad. See, Clare Wilde, “Early Christian Arabic texts: Evidence for non-ʿUthmānic Qurʾān codices, or early approaches to the Qurʾān?” in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel S. Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2011), 362.
Muʿtazila enjoyed a ‘golden period’ of theological and political dominance, which had implications for the nature of Christian-Muslim debate during this period.” More specifically, Christians inserted themselves into the debate concerning the ontological status of God’s attributes. However, the policies of the miḥna were fleeting, and under the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847 - 861) theological stances of the miḥna were completely and categorically reversed, at least with regard to governmental sponsorship. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works were written under the patronage of al-Mutawakkil given the degree to which they significantly scaled back the rationalistic lines of discourse found in the majority of ninth-century anti-Christian polemics.

In addition to the miḥna, the ninth century also saw the codification and canonization of the two most authoritative collections of ḥadīth (in the Sunnī tradition), i.e., the collections of al-Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj (d. 875). Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 888), Ibn Mājah (d. 889), al-Tirmidḥī (d. 892), and al-Nasāʾī (d. 915) all contributed significantly to the collection of ḥadīth as well. Furthermore, with the death of Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal in 855, the four Sunnī schools (madhhab) of Islamic jurisprudence were solidified: the Ḥanafī, Shāfīʿī, Mālikī, and Ḥanbalī. Concurrently, Sibawayhī’s unfinished theoretical grammar, al-Kitāb (The Book), was completed by his pupil al-Akhfash al-Awsat (d. 835). Furthermore, the concept of the iǧāz al-qurʾān (inimitability of the Qurʾān) came to full fruition during the ninth century. 


156 Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, 97.
In addition to all of the previously mentioned events and developments (intellectual and theological), the ninth century is perhaps most renowned for its famous translation movement. Dimitri Gutas states:

> With the accession of the Arab dynasty of the 'Abbasids to power and the foundation of Baghdad (762 AD), a Graeco-Arabic translation movement was initiated that lasted for well over two centuries. By the end of the tenth century, almost all scientific and philosophical secular Greek works that were available in late antiquity, including such diverse topics as astrology, alchemy, physics, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy, had been translated into Arabic.\(^{157}\)

Over and above the obvious tangible translated results of the translation movement, there were additional consequences as well. Although the framework and parameters for Christian-Muslim dialogue were established in the Qurʾān and other early Islamic literature, theological, doctrinal, and intellectual developments of the ninth century solidified many of the arguments and methods which Christians and Muslims would utilize in their works. Mark Swanson summarizes:

> One consequence of the participation of Christians in this shared enterprise—not only of translating Greek philosophy and science into Arabic, but also of constructing a distinctive Arabic philosophical tradition—is that the Christians and Muslims involved in it came to share an intellectual world: they had a common library of works by the sages of the past, a common formation, and common modes of discourse and argument. And thus they had a new language in which to assert and defend their theological claims.\(^{158}\)

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\(^{157}\) Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, i; additionally Gutas claims, “that from about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic.” Ibid., 1.

Therefore, when Sandra Keating claims “…it is clear the Christian community at
the turn of the ninth century living under Islamic rule was confronted with a new
situation that necessitated a creative response,” she has only partially described the
situation. The ninth century necessitated a creative response from the Muslim community
as well. With a desire to be the rightful successors of the empires of antiquity and the
knowledge of their sages, a large-scale translation movement was required. However, in
order for the translation movement to succeed, the ‘Abbāsids would have to curry the
favor of their multilingual speaking minorities, which they did, largely in the form of
economic incentives and sustained governmental support. Subsequently, many
‘Abbāsid caliphs (and other individuals of wealth and influence) created a sustained
intellectual atmosphere in which minority populations (specifically Christians and Jews)
significantly contributed to ‘Abbāsid society. Dimitri Gutas explains, “The policies of
inclusion and ideological accommodation initiated by al-Manṣūr and followed by his
successors had the effect of allowing the unchecked development of a variety of ideas,
ideologies, and disciplines.”

Therefore, the ninth century was not only a century of doctrinal growth and
maturation. It was in this time — an age of antique philosophical and intellectual
revivalism — and in this environment — a scene of creative and theological self-

159 Sandra Toenies Keating, “Introduction,” in Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic
Period, 32.

160 It was rumored that during the peak of his repute and the zenith of the translation movement,
Humayn ibn Ishāq received the weight of his translations in gold dirhams. See Dwight Fletcher Reynolds,
and Kristen Brustad, Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition (Berkeley: University of

161 Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, 76.
articulation — that the most renowned convert from Christianity to Islam, ʿAlī ibn Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī, was born. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla were more than an isolated and innovative literary reaction to the vicissitudes of mid-ninth-century ʿAbbāsid society. Rather, these works mark the beginning of Christian apostate literature, a distinct genre of anti-Christian polemic that would not only outlive the ʿAbbāsid empire but also transcend the Arabic-speaking world.
CHAPTER 2

ABŪ AL-ḤASAN ‘ALĪ IBN SAHL RABBAN AL-ṬABARĪ

Life and Works

During the ninth century, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī (b. ca. 780 or 810) was a preeminent intellectual and physician. Having spent the majority of his life as a Nestorian Christian and the latter portion as a Muslim apologist and polemicist, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s personal life straddled the Christian and Muslim spheres of ‘Abbāsid society. He experienced the provincial as well as the metropolitan. First, he worked as the personal secretary of the ‘Abbāsid governor of Tabaristan, Māzyār ibn Qārin (d. 840). However, with a failed revolt against the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833-842), Mazyār was promptly executed. Thankfully for ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, he did not suffer the same fate as his rebellious employer. Rather, he was summarily brought to the ‘Abbāsid capital, Sāmarrā’, where he worked...


163 Sāmarrā’ functioned as the ‘Abbāsid capital from 836-892 beginning in the reign of al-Mu’taṣim (r. 833-842) and ending during the reign of al-Mu‘taṣid (r. 892-902). In 892, al-Mu’taṣid reestablished Baghdad as the capital of the ‘Abbāsid Empire. See Alastair Northedge, Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, s.v. “Sāmarrā’.”
as a *nadīm* (table companion) and physician for the caliphs al-Muʿtaṣim, al-Wāthiq (r. 842-847), and al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861).\(^\text{164}\)

It was during his years at the caliphal court that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claimed to have converted to Islam at 70 years of age, and although it is not explicitly stated in his works, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī insinuates that the Caliph al-Mutawakkil was instrumental regarding his conversion to Islam. It is likely that he emphasized his advanced age in order to lend credibility to his conversion. The motif of the aged convert would be repeated throughout later Christian apostate literature. Camilla Adang notes that “The number seventy is often used as an equivalent of ‘many’. *Sabʿīn sana* would mean ‘many years’ or ‘a long time’. There are precedents of this use in Islamic literature, and it also has parallels in other Semitic languages.”\(^\text{165}\) This has led scholars to debate the age for his conversion. Among the noteworthy opinions are those of Nöldeke, who calls ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī an “opportunist,” and Macdonald, who calls his conversion “nominal and professional.”\(^\text{166}\) Perhaps the most definitive evidence discrediting ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s claim are the words of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995), who suggested in his well-acclaimed *Fihrist* that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī converted during the reign of al-Muʿtaṣim.\(^\text{167}\) The thirteenth-century Copt al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. ca. 1253-1275) in his refutation of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd ʾalā l-

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\(^\text{167}\) David Thomas, “Ali Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari: A Convert’s Assessment of His Former Faith,” 138
Naṣārā claimed that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s senility led to his conversion to Islam. Camilla Adang notes that his conversion is “almost invariably attributed to ulterior motives” by modern scholars.

Intellectually, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s interests involved both the secular and the sacred. Today, he is known primarily for his three surviving works: the Firdaws al-Ḥikma (The Paradise of Wisdom), al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Refutation of the Christians), and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla (The Book of Religion and Empire).

However, in total, an additional ten or eleven works are attributed to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī under various titles: (1) Kitāb Tuhfat al-mulūk; (2) Kitāb Kununāsh al-ḥadra; (3) Kitāb Manafiʿ al-aʿīma wa-l-ashriba wa-l-ʿaḳāḳīr; (4) Kitāb Irfug al-ḥayūt; (5) Kitāb Ḥīfẓ al-sīḥa; (6) Kitāb fī l-ruqān; (7) Kitāb fī l-hijāma; (8) Kitāb fī tartīb al-aghḍhiya; (9) Bahr al-fawāʾid; (10) Kitāb al-Īḍāḥ min al-simān wa-l-huzāl wa-tahayyuj al-bāḥ wa-ibṭālihi. David Thomas also notes that if ʿAlī b. Rabban al-Naṣrānī mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm is ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, then Kitāb fī l-ādāb wa-l-amthāl ʿalā madhāhib al-Furs wa-l-Rūm wa-l-ʿArab is an addition title.

Of his surviving works, his earliest, longest, and perhaps most celebrated is the Firdaws al-Ḥikma, a medical compendium completed in 850 in which he drew upon Greek, Persian, and Indian sources. It is in his Firdaws al-Ḥikma that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī describes his father as a well-known physician having acquired the title Rabban (Syriac


\[\text{169}\] Camilla Adang, Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm, 25.


\[\text{171}\] Ibid.

“our lord” or “our master”) due to his constant pursuit of knowledge. Nevertheless, written while ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was presumably still a Christian, the *Firdaws al-Hikma* does not significantly contribute to the narrative of his conversion to Islam, his defense of Muḥammad, or his polemic against Christianity. Moreover, due to the neutrality and non-religious nature of its content, the *Firdaws al-Hikma* cannot be considered a piece of Christian apostate literature. Therefore, it will not be discussed further. However, his two remaining surviving works are vital to anti-Christian polemics and Muslim apologetics and foundational to the genre of Christian apostate literature.

**Al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā**

The first of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s disputational works, and the more polemical of the two, was his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā*. Samir K. Samir prefers the title *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾīḥ* (The Book of Advice) in place of *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā* due to the fact that this title does not explicitly appear in the text. However, it is important to realize that the title *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾīḥ* is surmised as well. Rather than appearing in the actual work, which it does not, the title *Kitāb al-Naṣāʾīḥ* is derived from the much later work of al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl’s refutation of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s work, which al-ʿAssāl titled *al-Saḥāʾīḥ fi l-radd ʿalā l-naṣāʾīḥ* (The Truths in Refuting The Advice). Needless to say, both titles are derived and no more original or authentic than the other. David Thomas suggests that it is unlikely that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had

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174 It is safe to assume that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā* is older than his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* considering that he twice references in his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* a previously penned refutation of Christianity.
given this refutation any specific title. The main objective of his work was a forthright critique of what ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī believed to be contrived and falsified Christian doctrines. Although he was convinced of the unquestionable utility and clarity of his refutation, he nevertheless anticipated a disheartening Christian response. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī believed Christians would “turn away their faces and their ears” from his warnings, an expression alluding to Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7:179):

We have created for Gehenna many jinn and men; they have hearts, but understand not with them; they have eyes, but perceive not with them; they have ears, but they hear not with them. They are like cattle; nay, rather they are further astray. Those—they are the heedless.

In the opening lines of his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī details the primary goals of his work. Here, he emphasizes that his intention in writing such a refutation was not to refute Christ or the people of truth, but to refute contemporary Christians who oppose and distort the words of Christ and the Gospels. The phrase “people of truth” can be understood as Christians who have understood the true message of the Bible, i.e., Muslims. The “people of the truth” are contrasted with “the sects of the Christians” who have altered the words of the Bible, that is to say, contemporary Christians: Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians. Much like earlier Islamic literature and the various works of his contemporaries, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī drew a sharp distinction between “true Christians” and trinitarian Christians. After establishing the intended recipients of his polemic, ʿAlī al-

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175 I would like to thank Professor David Thomas for his guidance on this particular issue. See also, Samir K. Samir, “La réponse d’al-Ṣafī Ibn al-ʿAssâl à la réfutation des chrétiens de ʿAlī al-Ṭabarî,” Parole de l'Orient 11 (1983): 290-292.


177 Ibid., 120.
Tabarî begins with a declaration of faith, a short, but quite important, definition of Islam. In this regard, the purpose in writing his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā* was not solely to refute Christianity but also to defend Islam.

ʿAlî al-Ṭabarî begins his work with an apologetic Islamic credo in many ways characteristic of the Nicene Creed. ʿAlî al-Ṭabarî’s Islamic creed reads:

Islam is faith in the Living God, who does not die, the One, the Unique, the King, the Holy, the Giver, the Just, the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, all the prophets, and of all creation, who has neither a beginning nor and end, who has neither equals nor children, who has neither companions nor causes. He is the Creator of everything and is from nothing, he has no limit and no likeness, rather it is as he wills. If he said to it ‘be’ then it was by power alone. He is the Omnipotent, the Merciful, the Munificent, who does not perpetrate one measure of evil. Nothing on the earth or in the heavens resembles him. He is the Conqueror who is not conquered. He is the Giver who is not miserly. He is the Omniscient who is not ignorant. He does not miss the injustice of a tyrant. No secret is hidden from Him. He knows what enters the earth and what proceeds from it. (He knows) what descends from the heavens and what ascends to it. All obey His will.

Verily Muḥammad (may God’s prayers and peace be upon him) is his prophet and messenger just as Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets (may God’s prayers be upon them all). We do not differentiate between any one of his messengers. The hour is coming, there is no doubt in it, when God will raise those in the graves, and surely the just will be in bliss and the licentious will be in hell. This is belief of the people of Islam and their religion.

This statement of belief is presented as a sort of anti-Nicene Creed. In fact, ʿAlî al-Ṭabarî calls this summary of Islamic belief *shariʿat ahl al-Islām* (the belief of the people of Islam)
whereas he calls the Nicene Creed *shārīʿat ʾīmānim* (the belief of their faith). In his credo, he emphasizes the oneness of God as well as the continuity of God’s message and messengers. As previously stated by McAuliffe, in Islam, God’s revelation is not a cumulative process. Moreover, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that Muslims do not differentiate between any of the messengers of God, which is a theological position that permeated many later anti-Christian polemical works including Christian apostate literature. However, as will be shown, certain polemicists suggest, and at times stress, Muḥammad’s distinct and unique position among the messengers of God.

**The Seven Silencers**

Following his Islamic creed, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī posed seven hypophoric questions, which he called *al-muskitāt* (the silencers), in hopes to place Christians in an inescapable theological quagmire.  He explains, “And the Christians, if they are of my opinion, then they are outside of this religion which they profess (Christianity); and if they contradict me, then they contradict the Torah and the Gospel.” For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, trinitarian Christianity could not be reconciled with the teachings of the Bible, a stance that he would elaborate upon in his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* as well. A significant portion of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s refutation revolves around the following seven questions:

1. We ask Christians about this monotheism (Islam) which we have explained and this faith which we have described: Is it the truth or is it error?  
2. We ask them about that which Christ said about himself: Is it, in part, truth, and, in part, false?  
3. We ask them about the Eternal Creator: Is

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the state of His eternality and his substance (jawhar) changeable? Is He, or is He not, susceptible to accidents (ʾimrāḍ) and death? (4) We ask them about this creed (shariʿa) of which there is no distinction between them regarding it. They do not complete a mass without it. Is it true from beginning to end? Is it entirely false? Or is some of it true and some of it false? (5) We ask about the Messiah: Is he the Eternal Creator as in their creed (shariʿat īmānihim)? Is he a chosen man as in our creed (shariʿat īmāninā)? Or is he god and man as certain sects of them say? (6) We ask about the Messiah: Did he live in a specific country and during a specific time? Yes or no? (7) Surely I have found that the disciple John says in chapter five of his Gospel that ‘the Father was life in his essence, so therefore He gave the son life by means of his power.’

By posing these seven questions, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s polemical intentions and methods are clear. Trinitarian theology is at irreconcilable odds with God’s immutable word, which has been delivered flawlessly by his messengers. Moreover, in addition to contradicting God’s word, Christian reasoning and doctrines defy simple logic.

In answering his first question, in which ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī challenged Christians to oppose the veracity of essential Islamic beliefs, the former Nestorian attempts to validate his own principles by accentuating what he sees as ridiculous Christian doctrines. In doing so, he asserts that Christians do not actually worship three gods, but worse yet, they worship four gods: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the eternal human, Jesus Christ. On account of the manner in which Arabic-speaking Christians explained the hypostatic nature of God — a theological discussion which became entangled in the

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183 Ibid., 121-126. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s seventh question (which is not a question) is a rendition of John 5:26, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

184 Ibid.
Muslim understanding of the divine attributes — accusations of tritheism and polytheism were quite commonplace over the centuries. Abū ‘Alī Muhammad al-Jubbā'ī (d. 915) went beyond ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s explanation and argued (as many Muslim polemicists of his time did) that the Christian concept of God could be expanded into an indefinite number of hypostases.185

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī contends that Trinitarianism places a created being as the creator of the universe, which he considers a shameless form of disbelief (kufr) that stands in direct opposition to the teachings of the prophets and messengers of God. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī cites Exodus 3:14 which he renders as, “I am that I am,186 the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This is my name forever and this is my designation for all ages.”187 By quoting Exodus 3:14, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī is attempting to exemplify a chronological disparity in the Trinity. If Christ was born in Bethlehem during the age of Pontius Pilate, then he cannot be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This line of argumentation is often related to an issue of tahrīf al-maʿnā and is reiterated by later Christian apostates as well. Christians are depicted as misunderstanding or deliberately exaggerating Christ’s appellations, specifically “first born.” Christians argue that Christ was (pre)eternally born of the Father, a concept which is universally considered illogical by Christian apostates and many Muslim polemicists alike.


186 In the Arabic text, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī begins the verse with an Arabic transliteration of the Hebrew אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה translated as “I am who I am.” He transliterates the Hebrew into Arabic characters as ihyāʾ asr ihyāʾ.

187 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-ʾNasārā,” 121. Exodus 3:14: God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’
Subsequently, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī quotes a partial rendition of Exodus 20:2-5, “I am the Lord your God; therefore, neither worship a god other than me nor prostrate to him. Nothing of the heavens or of the earth or beneath the seas resembles me.” By recalling Exodus 20:2-5, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī hopes to demonstrate that the Christian divinization of Christ had transgressed the most fundamental of biblical injunctions, the first commandment. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s final citation from the Old Testament comes from Deuteronomy 32:39, “Know that I am (God) alone and that I kill and I enliven, I harm and I heal; no one escapes me.” For ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, the Old Testament is devoid of trinitarian suggestions and replete with verses expounding God’s uncompromising oneness.

After citing several Old Testament proof-texts, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī turns his attention toward the New Testament, which he also believed displayed unmistakable signs of Islamic non-trinitarian monotheism. For most Muslim polemicists, Christ’s genealogy, as it appears in the Gospels, was a nullification of Christ’s divinity. God’s eternality precludes his having a lineage. The fact that the first book and verses of the Gospels (Matthew 1:1) detail Christ’s ancestry made the doctrine of the Trinity all the more scandalous for Muslim polemicists, including ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī who argued that the opening words of the New Testament declare that Christ was neither eternal nor God. Rather

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188 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-ḥ-Naṣārā,” 121. Exodus 20:2-5: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 2 You shall have no other gods before me. 3 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 4 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 5 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

189 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-ḥ-Naṣārā,” 121. Deuteronomy 32:39: See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.
Christ is *mutawallad* (born or generated) and *muḥdath* (created) while God is *mutawallid* (bearer or generator) and *ḥādith* (creator). The comparing and contrasting of active and passive attributes and their relationship to God and Christ can be found consistently throughout Christian apostate literature. Subsequently, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī references a biblical verse resembling Luke 18:19 and Mark 10:17-18, “A man said to Christ ‘Oh Good One.’” Then Christ responded, ‘Do not call me good. Is not good for God alone?” In this proof-text, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī draws attention to Christ demanding an ontological distinction between himself and God. These particular passages from the Gospel are presented as unambiguous proof — at least according to ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī — that Christ cannot be God.

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s biblical quotations are often paraphrased and at times appear to be recollections or impromptu translations. However, there are instances where it appears that he has deliberately manipulated and Islamicized biblical passages. For instance, in his rendition of John 17:1-3, he writes, “Christ raised his gaze to heaven and supplicated to God. Then he said that (in order to obtain) eternal life people must know that you are the one true God and that you sent Jesus Christ.” First, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī has removed any

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191 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-n-Naṣārā,” 121. Luke 18:19: And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’ Mark 10:17-18: And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’

192 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-n-Naṣārā,” 122. John 17:1-3: When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
reference of Jesus being called the Son of God. Second, he has deleted verse two entirely in which Jesus is granted authority to give eternal life to humanity. In this particular instance, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī did not cite a biblical proof-text as much as he created one. Moreover, he mentions particular portions of John 17:1-3 in order to reinforce his previous proof-texts. Here, Christ declares that there is only one true God (Exodus 20:3) by whom he had been sent. Christian apostate literature emphasizes repeatedly that Christ has been sent by God. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī claims that to call Christ, who was sent (mabūḥ) by God, the Eternal Creator, “slanders Christ with the ugliest of slander and attributes to him contradiction.” For Muslim polemicists this was not only an issue of biblical or Qurʾānic interpretation: it was a matter of simple logic. If Christ had been sent by God, he cannot be God. Throughout his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī consistently emphasizes that Christ maintained no degree of active divine agency.

Additionally, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī highlights volitional distinctions between God and Christ by recounting John 6:38 in which Christ states, “I did not come to do my will but rather the will of him who sent me.” If Christ proclaimed that his will was distinct from God’s, then Christ cannot be God, for God cannot have two wills. This would add multiplicity to his being. This particular argument is found throughout Christian apostate literature with one of its most common proof-texts being Matthew 26:39.

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193 Ibid., 122.

194 Ibid., 122. This passage also alludes to John 5:30: I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

195 Matthew 26:39: And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’
In his final proof-text concerning the first of his silencing questions, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī accurately quotes Matthew 4:8-10, which he renders as follows:

Satan called Christ to prostrate to him; he showed him the kingdoms of the world and its jewels and adornment, then he said prostrate to me and I will make all of this yours. Then Christ said to him, ‘Flee.’ It is written to not worship but the Lord your God and not to worship anything apart from him. 196

The temptation of Christ appears in each of the five Christian apostate works. For Christian apostates, the temptation scenario described in the Gospel was an ideal opportunity for Christ to unequivocally declare himself God. However, rather than declaring himself Lord, Christ quotes scripture, specifically Deuteronomy 6:16. 197

With these proof-texts, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī attempts to sketch a monotheistic continuity between the Old and New Testaments in which Trinitarianism has no place. Moreover, he questions the bewildering rationale behind the interaction between Christ and Satan. Why would the “Eternal Creator” send his “Eternal Son” to earth to be led into the wilderness by his “Eternal Spirit?” 198 Christ’s temptation in the desert represents an illogical or schizophrenic breakdown within the Godhead wherein one aspect of God (the Father) sent another aspect of God (the Son) to earth where another aspect of God (the Holy Spirit) led the originally sent aspect of God (the Son) into the temptation of a damned and subordinate being (Satan). 199 The temptation of Christ was caustically ridiculed by non-coverts as well.


197 Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test…”


199 Ibid., 133.
ʿAbd al-Jabbār sarcastically remarks:

Have you heard of Satan imprisoning a god, confining him, moving him from place to place, and desiring to make his god his servant? Satan is not able to take the donkey of a Jew! Yet according to the Christians, he took his Lord until an angel came, freed him, and broke his captivity.200

Ibn Ḥazm sardonically claims of the description of the temptation found in Matthew,

“Such things could only be said by someone who should be locked up in an insane asylum or by someone who wants to mock imbecilic people.”201

It appears that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s biblical selections were not entirely haphazard being that many of his selected proof-texts have qurʾānic parallels. In this regard, he selected biblical proof-texts that would have resonated with his Muslim audience. The overall message found in Exodus 3:14, Exodus 20:2-5, and Deuteronomy 32:39 can also be seen in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:133):

Why, were you witnesses, when death came to Jacob? When he said to his sons, ‘What will you serve after me?’ They said, ‘We will serve thy God and the God of thy fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, One God; to Him we surrender.’

Similarly, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s New Testament references complement the qurʾānic image of Christ. In his various proof-texts, Christ is not only depicted as a sent messenger who is ontologically distinct from God, but he is also presented as a messenger who entreats mankind to worship God alone. In many ways these biblical verses correspond to the

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201 Theodore Pulcini, Exegesis As Polemical Discourse, 121.
image of Christ found in Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:72), (5:75), and (5:116). 202 Again ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî is attempting to demonstrate a theological consonance between the “true” Torah revealed to Moses, the “true” Gospel revealed to Jesus, and the Qurān revealed to Muḥammad. In doing so, he attempts to situate Trinitarianism well outside the purview of God’s revelation.

To a certain extent, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî’s second question is a continuation of his first, at least regarding the proof-texts he offers. Here, he discusses whether or not Christ spoke in half truths. Neither a Christian nor a Muslim would affirm that Christ spoke or prophesied in a deceitful manner. Therefore, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî’s intent in this portion of his work is to use Christ’s own words against the trinitarian claims of his contemporary Christians. Martin Accad clarifies ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî’s arguments:

His strategy is to challenge Christians to either reject all of Christ’s sayings, or to take them all at face value, but not to sift between them, accepting some literally and twisting the meaning of others. The implication is that Jesus affirmed his humanity by confessing God as his Father, and he asserted his servanthood by confessing God as his God. 203

In this respect, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî continues to underscore any ontological distinctions between Christ and God. He begins by citing John 20:17, which Martin Accad calls “the

202 Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:72): They are unbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, Mary’s son.’ For the Messiah said, ‘Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Verily Whoso associates with God anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers.’ Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:75): The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger; Messengers before him passed away; his mother was a just woman; they both ate food. Behold, how We make clear the signs to them; then behold, how they perverted are! Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:116): And when God said, ‘O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, “Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God”?’ He said, “To Thee be glory! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, Thou knowest it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within Thy soul; Thou knowest the things unseen.

most extensively used Gospel verse in the whole Islamic exegetical discourse of the second/eighth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries.”

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s version of John 20:17 reads, “Behold I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Unlike al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhim (d. 860), Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. ca. 861 or 864), and Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 870), ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī bypasses direct discussion of Christology. In fact, throughout his Al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī offers very little from the Christian perspective, and with no Christian justifications or explanations, he repeatedly presents biblical texts at face value. For his readers who were unfamiliar with the particulars of the Bible, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī allows himself free reign to present a seemingly unending stream of insuperable proof-texts with the intention of invalidating Christian doctrine. Martin Accad states, “This is proof-texting in its extreme form, with no attempt to understand the other side’s argument or to consider it in a wider exegetical context.” For this reason, Christian apostate literature, which was, to a large extent, built upon a precedent established by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, did not develop a comprehensive exegesis of the Bible. Rather, Christian converts to Islam (as well as the majority of Muslim polemicists) were content relying on a style of biblical interpretation and criticism that was limited to a restricted number of biblical passages, all of which were beneficial to their polemical purposes. With this in mind, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī complements John 20:17 by quoting Matthew

204 Ibid., 200.

205 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 122. John 20:17: Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Matthew 10:40-41 in which Christ declares himself to have been sent by God as well as implicitly stating that he is a prophet. Additionally, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī cites John 6:38-39 which states that Christ was sent by God to do God’s will.

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s methods are simple but effective. The polemicists al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū Īsā al-Warrāq, and Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī meticulously delineated the christological terminology and arguments of the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians. However, part of the appeal of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s work was its uncomplicated approach and nontechnical language. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī offers very little commentary on his selected biblical passages and he presents his proof-texts as self-evident and absolute. Moreover, he chose material that was repetitive and relatable to the Qurʾān. By selecting verses which reiterate that Christ was sent by God, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī can fasten his biblical proof to several qurʾānic passages, most notably Sūrat al-Māʾṣūda (5:46) and Sūrat al-Ḥadid (57:27) both of which begin by stating that Christ was sent.

After having argued that Christ was separated from God with respect to space, time, and being, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī begins to tackle his third (and shortest) question in which

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207 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-ar-Rā‘ūsā,” 122. Matthew 10:40-41: 40Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. 41The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.

208 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-ar-Rā‘ūsā,” 122. John 6:38-39: 38For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

209 Sūrat al-Māʾṣūda (5:46): And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing. Sūrat al-Ḥadid (57:27): Then We sent, following in their footsteps, Our Messengers; and We sent, following Jesus son of Mary, and gave unto him the Gospel. And We set in the hearts of those who followed him tenderness and mercy. And monasticism they invented — We did not prescribe it for them — only seeking the good pleasure of God; but they observed it not as it should be observed. So We gave those of them who believed their wage; and many of them are ungodly.
he asks if any aspect of the Creator can experience change, temporality, or death. Needless to say, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī does not believe that God can experience any modification to his being. This is confirmed throughout the Qurʾān and hadīth, both of which emphasize God’s impassability, immutability, and everlastingness. In many ways, this question gets at the heart of Nicene theology, Christ’s consubstantiality and coevality with God, which ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī believed to be heinously blasphemous as well as biblically and logically untenable. And like many Muslim polemicists, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī equates Christianity with the Council of Nicaea, claiming that whosoever rejects the Nicene Creed is considered a disbeliever (kāfir) by the Christian community. However, if Christ is “Creator and not created” and “true God from true God,” then God was crucified and killed. This leads ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī to conclude, “Therefore, your God experienced change and died.”

What makes this particular line of argumentation intriguing is that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī renounces the doctrines and beliefs of the Nicene Creed, a declaration of faith that is inextricably bound to Christology, from a polemical perspective that categorically disregards Christology. As a well-educated former Nestorian Christian, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī would have been well versed in the christological controversies that had engulfed the Christian communities. However, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s methods were not without reason. According to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the arcane refutations of Christianity composed during the ninth century were overly complicated and ineffective. To a certain degree, Muslim polemicists had been drawn into the very christological controversies they were refuting. With this in mind, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s disinterest in Christology was not a result of authorial negligence or irresponsibility, but rather quite the opposite: polemical intent.

`Alī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd `alā l-Nāṣārā* was written as a popular polemical alternative aimed at a more general Muslim readership. Furthermore, with no christological discussion coupled with very limited biblical exegesis, `Alī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd `alā l-Nāṣārā* was more likely than not intended for an exclusively Muslim audience. As previously mentioned, the appearance of `Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works should come as no surprise. The ninth century had already produced rationally and philosophically minded refutations of Christianity in the works of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, and Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī as well as the nontechnical refutation of al-Jāḥīz. However, unlike al-Jāḥīz, `Alī al-Ṭabarī produced works that, in addition to being both uncomplicated and original, were sought after simply on account of his Christian background.

In his fourth question, `Alī al-Ṭabarī continues his critique of Christian creedal theology, which he continued to present as theologically unsettling and irrational. He begins by quoting the opening lines of the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one God, the Father, Possessor of everything, Maker of all that is seen and that is unseen,” which he juxtaposed with previously quoted biblical verses such as John 6:38 and Matthew 10:40-41 in which Christ is described as being “sent” (*mabūth*) to earth. `Alī al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that Christ, who was a physical being, was an unmistakable part of that which is “seen and unseen.” Therefore, Christ is “created” (*makhliq*). If Christ was sent and created, then he cannot be the creator (*khāliq*). Of the 99 Islamic names of God, none are passive, and furthermore, “Father” is not counted amongst them.

Still, certain Qur’ānic descriptions of God bear striking resemblances to the description of God the Father found in the Nicene Creed. The opening lines of the

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211 Ibid.
Nicene Creed read “We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible.” These words are fairly synonymous with the characterization of God found in Sūrat al-Ḥashr (59:22) which states, “He is God; there is no god but He. He is the knower of the Unseen and the Visible; He is the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.” Nevertheless, on account of the unreasonableness of this creed, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī asks, “How can anyone speak such a doctrine about the Eternal Creator?” This is a recurring claim throughout anti-Christian polemics whereby a Muslim polemicist voices their utter disbelief that Christians would speak such blasphemous doctrines against God. And even worse yet, how can anyone believe them?

Moreover, many Muslim authors voiced their incredulity regarding the success of Christianity. In the early eight-century work titled the Mujādalat al-Rāhib Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabrānī (The Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias), the Muslim emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī is dumbfounded, wondering “How can they be so learned, yet favor their ludicrous doctrines over Islam?” Similarly, in a latter work attributed to al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) titled al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyat ʿĪsā bi-sarīḥ al-Injīl (The Fitting Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus through What is Evident in the Gospel), after describing Christian doctrine as weak and disgraceful, the author of al-Radd al-jamīl is astonished at how many minds adhere to it.

In his fifth question, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī begins one the most substantial sections of his refutation by asking whether Christ is God, man, or a combination of the two. If a Christian were to say that Christ was simply a man, then their position would be that of a Muslim. In the following century, the convert al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, describes non-trinitarian Christians as the followers of Arius who were eventually overrun by the trinitarian Christians.216 At any rate, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī argues that if a Christian were to say that Christ was God, then they oppose the message of the Gospels (injīlāt), specifically Matthew 12:18, “Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”217

Just as God cannot be mabʾūth or makhlūq, likewise, he cannot be a “servant” (ʿabd) or “chosen” (mustafā). Additionally, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī quotes Christ’s famous Aramaic words “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani” found in Mark 15:34 or “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani” found in Matthew 27:46. Both renditions are typically translated as “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”218 Christ’s crying out to God as described in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 was a staple proof-text of anti-Christian polemics. The Muslim polemicists al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) as well as the Christian apostates

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al-Ḥasan and Anselm Turmeda all make reference to this biblical scene. For ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and many Muslim polemicists, Christ’s plea creates one of two scenarios: First, Christ is displaying a schizophrenic like breakdown in his personality wherein he is pleading to himself, a position both Christians and Muslims reject. Or, second, Christ is drawing a clear ontological distinction and spacial separation between himself and God.

In many respects, Christianity is the unabashed worship of God incarnate, a blasphemous concept to Muslims. However, in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s mind, one particular Christian practice transgressed God’s perfect transcendence even more so than anthropomorphism, the Eucharist. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī describes the Last Supper in Matthew 26:26-28, which according to his personal rendition reads, “Christ took a piece of bread then broke it, and the disciples took the bread. He said, ‘this is my flesh.’ He gave them a cup with a drink therein, and he said, ‘this is my blood.’” For ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, the practice of the Eucharist typifies Christian blasphemy by attributing a body or vessel to God with its concomitant breadth, depth, measurability, and weighability. This allows ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī to assign additional passive qualities to the Christian conception of God. Therefore, in addition to being sent, created, and chosen, Christ is madhrūʿ (measured), mawzūn (weighed), and mahdūd (limited).

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī opposes the concept of the Eucharist because God would be fixed or bound within determined parameters. This position is incompatible with God’s limitlessness. Likewise, the fourteenth-century convert Anselm Turmeda – much like his

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221 Ibid.
predecessor ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī – reviled the concept of the Eucharist. However, unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the former Franciscan monk argued that rather than limiting God, the Eucharist actually immeasurably multiplied God. Anselm presents God as being broken into thousand of pieces for consumption by the various Christian communities around the world.222 Another approach concerning the Eucharist is that of the polemicist al-Qarāfī, who censures the Christian community for abandoning God’s law in favor of inappropriate innovation. Al-Qarāfī accuses the Christians of *tahrīf al-maʿān* whereby they have inexcusably taken Christ’s words literally, a common accusation leveled against Christians. Diego Cucarella summarizes:

> Finally, as regards their invoking the Apostles to justify the Eucharist, al-Qarāfī argues that the Christians should first establish the reliability of their claims. Now, even accepting that the Apostles did prescribe the offering of bread and wine, they were not entitled in any case to abrogate prophetic legislation, not being themselves prophets. Moreover, the Christians declare publicly that abrogation is not possible to God. Furthermore, after healing the leper, Jesus told him: ‘Go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them’ (Mt 7:4), which shows that the only valid offering for Jesus was that which Moses had prescribed. In short, concludes al-Qarāfī, it is undeniable that the Christians have abandoned the Torah, appropriating for themselves the power to legislate.”223

Like many Christian doctrines and practices, Muslim polemicists depict them as violations of both law and logic. However, the above-mentioned cases notwithstanding, it

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223 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean*, 192
is worth noting that Muslim polemicists in general did not make a concerted effort to
criticize the Eucharist.\footnote{224}

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī continues his discussion of Christ’s personhood by mentioning Luke
2:40, “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God
was upon him.”\footnote{225} If Christ were God (again discounting any duality in his nature), this
would create multiple deficiencies in God’s nature. But how can God grow in stature or
wisdom, wonders ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī? Moreover, how can the Holy Spirit strengthen him
(Luke 2:52). If God grew, then he was immature; if he was filled with wisdom, then he
was not eternally omniscient; if he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit, then he was not
omnipotent. With this in mind, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī concludes his fifth question by citing several
additional proof-texts that underscore apparent ontological distinctions between Christ
and the Father. This includes a conflation of John 3:34 and John 14:24 in which Christ is
once more designated a sent messenger, a shortened rendition of John 14:28 wherein
Christ exalts God, John 14:31 where Christ is commanded by God, John 15:1 in which
Christ and God have different roles and titles (true vine and vinedresser respectively), John
14:16 and 15:26 which discuss the Paraclete, and Luke 24:39 in which Christ is described
as flesh and bones.\footnote{226}

\footnote{224 Wageeh Mikhail, ""Ammār al-Baṣrī's Kitāb al-Burhān,"" 284.}

\footnote{225 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-n-Naṣārā,” 125.}

\footnote{226 Ibid, John 3:34: For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit
without measure. John 14:24: Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you
hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. John 14:28: You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and
I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the
Father is greater than I. John 14:31: But I do not say that I love the Father, so that the world may
know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here. John 15:1: I am the true vine, and my Father is the
vinedresser. John 14:16: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you
forever. John 15:26: But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of
truth, who proceeds from the Father, the will bear witness about me.}
Aside from the simplicity of his polemic, why has ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī chosen not to present the Christian perspective or any conciliar reasoning behind Christian belief? David Thomas suggests that this method of argumentation could be indicative of an absolute break in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī from his former faith:

However, it is not this simple because, as ʿAlī must have known, the great creeds of the fifth and sixth centuries were attempts to formulate the relationship between the divine and human in Christ. It is curious that he chooses to overlook this, and maybe an indication of how completely he had departed from Christianity that he only recalls articles that refer to the divinity of Christ.227

Although, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments may simply be indicative of believer who emphasized scripture over councils. And then again, if ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā was intended to reach a broader audience, then integrating any discussion of the ecumenical councils would have run the risk of hindering the polemical potential and aim of his refutation. Nevertheless, while working at the caliphal court, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī would have met a variety of Muslim intellectuals and been exposed to the various anti-Christian works circulating throughout the empire, possibly the works of al-Jāhiẓ and al-Kindī. It is even possible that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī may have known al-Kindī personally given that the philosopher tutored the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim’s son.228

Generally speaking, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī demonstrates very limited reservations in relying exclusively upon biblical proof in order to substantiate his arguments. With respect to his polemical techniques, he stands in sharp contrast to the works of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, al-Jāhiẓ, and Abū Yūṣuf al-Kindī, as well as many later

228 Ibid., 144.
non-convert polemicists. Although Thomas’ claim is completely plausible, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s conspicuous inattention to Christology may simply reflect an author attempting to set himself apart from the polemicists around him.

After presenting a series of biblical proof-texts, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī proceeds to reiterate several crucial points regarding Christ’s contingent nature by emphasizing that Christ is fashioned (maṣnūʿ) and lording over or subjected to a master (marbūḥ). Here, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī continues to draw a distinction between the al-asmāʾ al-husnā (the beautiful names) of God and his various designations for Christ. As previously mentioned, none of God’s names are passive in any regard; moreover, with respect to grammar, many of these names are active participles. Christ, however, is almost exclusively described with passive characteristics: sent, created, fashioned, commanded, etc. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī links his juxtaposition of active and passive attributes to a rare (albeit simple) discussion of Christology and the dual nature of Christ. He claims the Christian idea that, “part of the Lord is eternal creator and part dead creation” is abominable. Throughout his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī asserts again and again that oppositional traits, qualities, and titles (creator and created) cannot coexist within one entity. Therefore, the Christian claim that Christ is God, but God is not Christ, was a specious and nonsensical attempt to alleviate the unavoidable incomprehensibility of Trinitarianism. Many Muslim polemicists considered technical trinitarian language nothing more than a casuistic attempt to beguile the simple-minded of society.

From ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s point of view, the specific divine characteristics of God and the specific human characteristics of Christ are illogically blended. As a result, God is

both Father and not Father, Creator and not Creator. All through the medieval period Christian apostates as well as various other Muslim polemicists presented this type of duality as a sophistic attempt to harmonize incompatibilities within the Christian Godhead. In this regard, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and the philosopher al-Kindī present strikingly similar arguments. Al-Kindī argues that the Christian idea that the hypostases are in a sense God and in another sense not God to be the “most reprehensible preposterousness.” Nevertheless, the anonymous Christian author of the late-ninth-century work al-Kīṭāb al-jāmīʿ wujūḥ al-īmān bi-tathlīth wahdāniyyat Allāh wa-taʾannus Allāh al-ḳalima min al-ṭāhirah al-ʿadhrāʾ Maryam (The Compilation of the Aspects of the Faith in the Trinity of God and the Incarnation of God the Word from the Pure One, the Virgin Mary), often called the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*, criticized Christians who were unwilling to state the traditional formulations ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Kindī, and other ninth-century Muslim polemicists harshly condemned. Mark Swanson states that the author of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica* criticized believers who had attempted to recast long-established Christian practices and “assimilate their beliefs to Islamic formulations.”

Perhaps more interesting, however, is that some Muslim intellectuals actually endorsed a theological idiom not unlike those detested by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Kindī.

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230 Ibid., 148.
Ibn Kullāb (d. 855), argued that the ṣifāt (attributes) of God were “neither God nor other than him,” more specifically:

And he used to say: the meaning of ‘God is knowing’ is that He has a knowledge and the meaning of ‘He is powerful’ is that He has a power and the meaning of ‘He is living’ is that He has a life and likewise is the teaching on the rest of His names and attributes. He [Ibn Kullāb] used to say that the names of God and his attributes of His essence were not God and not other than Him, and that they exist because of God, it is not conceivable that the attributes exist by virtue of the attributes…and he used to say that…His essence [it] is He, and His soul [it] is He and that He exists not by an [attribute] of existence…and that [the attribute of] knowledge is not [the attribute of] power and not other than it, and likewise each attribute of the essential attributes is not the other attribute, and not other than it.234

Ibn Kullāb is known to have discussed theology with Christians in Baghdad’s Dār al-Rūm quarter.235 As a result of this interaction, he was viewed with a certain skepticism within the ranks of Muslim theologians.236 Similarly, al-Ash‘arī (d. 936), considered by many to be a founder of Sunnī orthodox theology, agreed with Ibn Kullāb’s assessment of the God’s attributes.237

Nevertheless, in the eyes of most medieval Muslim polemicists, trinitarian doctrine – regardless of terminology – endowed God with multiplicity, incoherence, and

233 David Thomas, “Early Muslim Responses to Christianity,” 233.

234 Sara Leila Husseini, Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011), 64.


materiality.²³⁸ But, before proceeding to his sixth question, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī restates a motif found throughout earlier Islamic literature and unanimously in Christian apostate literature, i.e., Muslims are the true followers of Christ. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claims, “We (Muslims) are in agreement with God and Christ, while they (Christians) oppose God and his Christ.”²³⁹ Perhaps in order to substantiate this claim, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī anchors his arguments in copious numbers of biblical proof-texts whereby he can demonstrate a thorough knowledge of Christian scripture. For instance, with respect to biblical and qur’ānic citations throughout his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī cites approximately ten times as many biblical verses.²⁴⁰

In his sixth question, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī continues to place limitations upon Christ’s being, in this particular instance, both spatially and temporally. He begins by quoting Matthew 2:1, “Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.”²⁴¹ Moreover, he states that it is found in the Book of Luke that “He was found swaddled in a manger, and he was killed in the days of Pilate the king.”²⁴² Therefore, the Gospel invalidates the doctrine that Christ is “true God from true God” given that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is arguing from a presupposition that not only precludes any sense of duality in the person of Christ, but that also equates, in the most absolute sense, the Father, Son, and Holy

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²⁴⁰ Jean-Marie Gaudeul, “Riposte aux Chrétiens,” 63.


²⁴² Ibid, Luke 2:12: And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.
Spirit. The concepts of hypostatic distinction and substantial unicity are completely absent, and the standard Scutum Fidei has utterly collapsed.

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Trinity

Christian Trinity Shield

Diego Cucarella explains:

ʿAlī l-Ṭabarī’s assessment of the creed was based on the assumption that all Christians believe that the two natures, human and divine, have become a single nature in Jesus, or put differently, on the assumption that all Christians had adopted Eutychianism, the Christological position named after Eutyches of Constantinople (d. 454), who advocated for a new form of hybrid nature–some sort of divino-human synthesis–after the Incarnation. This critique (purposely?) ignores that the early thinkers who defended the integrity of the two natures after the union elaborated what later came to be called the communicatio idiomatum (communication of idioms), precisely to answer the question of the conditions under which one may predicate divine properties to Christ the man and human properties to God the Word. This doctrine was a corollary of the belief that the difference between the two natures is not removed by the union, but the characteristics peculiar to each nature are preserved in the one person of Jesus. The
doctrine specifically excluded the ascription to either nature of the characteristics proper to the other.\textsuperscript{243}

However, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī does not disregard the \textit{communicatio idiomatum}; rather, he overtly rejects it, as do the later converts al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī approached the Trinity from a strictly biblical perspective. Christian apostates routinely describe the later theological elaborations and extrapolations (like the \textit{communicatio idiomatum}) of the early Christian community as blasphemous. Simply put, God must be uncompromisingly removed from any human attributes. This issue of incommensurability within the Godhead is one of the most significant points of contention between the Christian apostates and their former beliefs.

Although question six is the shortest of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s questions, it expands upon a pervasive and critical matter concerning anti-Christian polemics, the genealogy and birth of Christ, which appears in each of the subsequent Christian apostate works, each of which reiterate very similar arguments put forth by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. However, several generations prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, Timothy I (d. 823) went to great lengths in his attempt to clarify Christ’s birth in a manner he hoped would resonate with Muslims. Timothy I explains to al-Mahdī:

\begin{quote}
But his birth is not like the bodily birth, rather it is a miraculous birth, beyond the comprehension of the mind and description of the tongue, as is befitting for the divine birth. If Christ is the Son born before the ages, then we are not able to examine this birth nor to comprehend it, because God is incomprehensible in all his attributes.\textsuperscript{244}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{243} Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, \textit{Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean}, 183.

\textsuperscript{244} Clint Hackenburg, “An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī,” 43-44.
In a like manner, Timothy I’s fellow Nestorian, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. ca. mid-ninth century) stated in his *Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwība*:

> [Christ’s] eternal birth is not from the body of a woman, but he is the Word of God who is not to be defined or comprehended. His generation is far more excellent than the [generation] of light from the sun, and the word from the soul.\(^{245}\)

Nevertheless, emphasizing the mystery of Christ’s eternal generation would have fallen on deaf ears, particularly amidst the growing importance of rationality. In fact, by describing Christ’s timeless birth as incomprehensible, Christian apologists actually complemented rather than countered many of the arguments put forth by the Muslim polemicists whom they were attempting to refute. Much like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm considers Christ’s birth most damaging to Christian trinitarian claims. Al-Qāsim argued that describing God as father and son forces temporality, accidentality, and mutability upon God.\(^{246}\) In his *al-Ajwība al-fākhira*, al-Qarāfī is more forthright with his appraisal of Christ’s eternal birth, stating that the only people willing to believe that Christ was the creator of the woman who bore him were “the people of a madhouse.”\(^{247}\)

In his final question, which, interestingly, is not actually a question, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī offers several final proof-texts to cap off his seven “silencers.” He begins by quoting John 5:26, “The Father was life in his essence (*jawhar*), so therefore He gave the son life by

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\(^{245}\) Wageeh Mikhail, “‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s *Kitāb al-Burhān*,” 192-193. See ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Apologie et controverses*, 57. It is worth noting that the generation of light from the sun is the most common analogy found in Christian Arab apologetics.


means of his power.” ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī also quotes a conflation of John 5:31-32 and John 5:37 which he also relates to Deuteronomy 17:6. His purpose here is to continue presenting Christ as a sent messenger who has been empowered by God. But, in addition to these verses, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī presents several of the most commonplace proof-texts found in anti-Christian polemical works. First, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī describes Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, a biblical scene which, like the temptation of Christ, is found in each of the later Christian apostate works. Very few passages in the Bible depict Christ in a more vulnerable state than Matthew 26:39, “Oh Lord, if it is possible to divert this cup from me, divert it from me, let it be as you will, not as I will.

This scene epitomize Christ’s humanity in the eye’s of Christian apostates as well as many additional Muslim polemicists. For instance, after quoting Matthew 26:39 in his *Kitāb al-Fīsal*, Ibn Hazm pithily asks, “are these the attributes of a god?” But unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Ḥazm addresses the issue of Christology. However, even if Christ has two natures, human and divine, Christians still cannot justify their claims, for if the divine nature (lāhūt) united with the human nature (nāṣūt), then Christians attribute the attributes of fear, pain, suffering, death, etc. to God as well. With this in mind, Ibn Ḥazm is

248 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 126. John 5:26: For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

249 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 126. John 5:31-32: If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true; John 5:37: And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me…; Deuteronomy 17:6: On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

250 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 127

251 Ibid.


253 Ibid.
neither ignorant nor misinformed of the Christian belief in the interchangeability of the
divine and human attributes in Christ. Rather, he is categorically denouncing it. It is
worth noting that in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s translation of Matthew 26:39 “Oh Father” is
replaced by “Oh Lord.” The substitution of “Lord” for “Father” also appears in the
works of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and Ibn Qutayba. However, there does not appear to
be any unanimity amongst the Muslim community regarding this practice. In this
particular passage, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb and Ibn Ḥazm refrain from exchanging these
terms, but al-Bāqillānī and the fourteenth-century convert Anselm Turmeda alter the
terminology. Nonetheless, this demonstrates that certain Muslim authors at certain
times were uncomfortable describing God using Christian phraseology, even when
quoting the Bible.

Following his example of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī
quotes Mark 13:32, “When they asked him about the Hour, which is the Day of
Judgement (al-qiyāma), that day and that hour no one knows, neither the angels who are in
heaven, nor the son know; rather the Father alone knows it.” Like Matthew 26:39,
Mark 13:32 (or Matthew 24:36) is mentioned by each Christian apostate. In both Islam
and Christianity, God is omniscient. Therefore, if Christ is God (true God from true God)


256 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ‘alā-n-Naṣārā,” 127. Mark 13:32: But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
as Christians claim him to be, then how can Christians reconcile Christ’s self-declared deficiencies in knowledge (manqūṣ al-ʿilm). Again, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī assigns another passive attribute to Christ, manqūṣ (reduced). Ibn Ḥazm argues in his Kitāb al-Fiṣal that this sort of oppositional duality cannot exist within one entity, and, to support such a claim, defies logic and results in disbelief (shirk). 257

Likewise, Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja’farī (d. 1270) reiterates a similar line of argumentation in his Tākhjīl man ḥarrāfa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl (The Shaming of Those Who Have Altered the Torah and the Gospel) as does al-Qarāfī in his al-Ajwiba. 258 In his final proof-text of this section, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī reinforces Christ’s servanthood in relation to the Father by quoting the seldom-cited Mark 10:45, “Surely, I did not come to be served but rather to worship.” 259 This passage does not simply reveal ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s understanding of Christ, it also clarifies his outlook on the Bible. In his citation of Mark 10:45, he alters the passage to exclude the phrase “and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Like his earlier rendition of John 17:1-3, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī has Islamicized the passage. Throughout his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī largely presents a Bible that has been misinterpreted (tahrīf al-maḥānā) by Christians. However, in the cases of John 17:1-3 and Mark 10:45, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī has altered the text by conveniently omitting particular passages. In a similar fashion, he has pruned down his rendition of John 1:18 to “No one has ever see God” leaving out “the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” 260 It

258 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 181.
appears that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī has intentionally emended certain passages as well as excised specific verses. This suggests that in addition to numerous charges of ʾtahrīf ʿal-maʿnā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī also believed that individual biblical passages were textually corrupted (ʾtahrīf ʿal-naṣṣ) as well. Mark Beaumont states, “…it was common for Muslims to accept that the gospels contained genuine sayings of Jesus, even though they found inauthentic sayings in the midst of the genuine.”

According to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā, as a result of both ʾtahrīf ʿal-maʿnā and ʾtahrīf ʿal-naṣṣ, Christians have fabricated an irreconcilable duality in Christ. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī describes this dichotomy as hideous, delusional, and false and likens these beliefs to the Materialists (dahriyya) and Zoroastrians (majūs). Therefore, much like his contemporary al-Jāḥiz, who asserted that the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians were not to be confused with the Christians described in the Qurʾān, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī depicts Trinitarianism as an unadulterated form of polytheism and Christology as bastardized type of dualism.

The Twelve Principles

Following his seven “silencing” questions, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī prefaces the next section of his work by offering a truncated version of ʾSūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:64):

Say, ‘O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that

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261 Ibid., 184.

we will not take each other as lords besides Allah.’ But if they turn away, say, ‘Be witnesses that we are Muslims.’\textsuperscript{263}

With this particular Qur’\textquotesingle anic verse in mind, ‘Al\textl{i} al-\textl{\=T}abar\textl{i} lists 12 principles which he claims are agreed upon by all the nations of the world and all the rightly guided religions:

1. God is eternal, unique, and He has neither peer nor partner in His domain;
2. God does not forgive those who associate things with Him;
3. He has no father, mother, uncles, relatives, or companions;
4. He is limitless and immeasurable with respect to space;
5. God is not susceptible to addition or diminution;
6. God does not eat, drink, hunger, or become satiated;
7. God cannot be compared to His creation in stature, number of limbs, or structure;
8. God’s being (\textit{kunh}) is indescribable;
9. God does not become tired or bored, and He does not rest;
10. God encompasses everything with regards to his knowledge; nothing in the heavens or on earth is hidden from Him;
11. God is mighty; He is neither subdued nor frightened;
12. God neither ages nor dies.\textsuperscript{264} If one were to describe God in a manner opposing these characteristics, then he or she would attribute passivity and transience to the creator resulting in disbelief. Of course, in the previous section of his polemic, ‘Al\textl{i} al-\textl{\=T}abar\textl{i} attempted to demonstrate that Christians had in fact violated each of these “universal” principles on account of their divinizing Christ.

Although these 12 principles mark the beginning of a new section in his work, ‘Al\textl{i} al-\textl{\=T}abar\textl{i}’s subsequent arguments and methods remain unchanged. And although he frames his \textit{al-Radd \textl{\=u}l-Na\textl{\=s}\textl{\=a}r\textl{\=a}} as a programmatic refutation, the placement of his proof-
texts and arguments, however, are somewhat arbitrary. The biblical proof-texts found in
his seven questions could have easily been replaced by later proof-texts cited in his 12
principles. At any rate, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī subsequently cites a rather lengthy and continuous
succession of biblical verses which include: Exodus 33:20, Exodus 20:4, Psalm 121:4,
Timothy 1:17 and 6:16, John 8:41, John 8:42, John 8:48, John 8:49-50, 1 Timothy

From a Muslim perspective, many of these verses reiterate the sharp ontological,
spatial, and chronological distinctions made between Christ and God found in ‘Alī al-
Ṭabarī’s earlier proof-texts in addition to accentuating the various incommensurable
characteristics of God and his creation. For instance, God does not sleep (Psalm 121:4),
but Christ did (Matthew 8:24, Mark 4:38, Luke 8:23). God is unseen and unsearchable
(Psalm 145:3), while Christ is neither (John 1:18, and 1 Timothy 1:17, 1 Timothy
6:15-16). God is eternal (Psalm 145:13), whereas Jesus is mortal (John 8:40, 1 Timothy
1:17, 1 Timothy 6:15-16). Christ had a physical body (Luke 24:39, John 19:34) while God
is incorporeal and transcendental (Exodus 20:4). Throughout this collection of proof-
texts, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī assigns several additional passive attributes to Christ: marzūq
(bestowed), maqṭū‘ (circumcised), mansūṣ (cut, i.e. his hair), muqallam (trimmed, i.e., his
fingernails), maṭʿūn (stabbed), musammar (pierced or nailed). 266 Each of these characteristics
as well as ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s analysis of the previously mentioned biblical selections accent
the various deficiencies in the human condition, none of which are applicable to God.

265 Ibid., 129-130.

266 Ibid., 131.
In a rather curious manner, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī references Christ’s temptation in the wilderness for a second time. However, the two renditions are not the same. Although the two renditions of Matthew 4:8-10 may not have any glaring discrepancies regarding their meaning, the verse order has been slightly modified, several word choices have been grammatically or lexically altered, and in several instances words have been completely omitted. Why would two distinct renditions of Matthew 4:8-10 exist within the same work? What are the possible indications? The first, and most likely, scenario is that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was rendering certain biblical passages from memory. This explanation is strongly supported by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s other periodic conflations and paraphrases. However, he may have been citing biblical passages from a variety of incomplete earlier Arabic sources or partial Arabic translations, a view which is supported by Nöldeke and Taeschner on account of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s mentioning of Marqūs al-Turjūmān in his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla. Additionally, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī could have been producing impromptu translations into Arabic from a Syriac Bible as argued by Mingana, Margoliouth, Fritsch, and Graf. Adang argues that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was drawing from earlier Arabic collections of biblical testimonies circulating throughout the Muslim community, using Ibn al-Layth’s (late eighth century) epistle to support her argument. Moreover, regarding the relationship

\[267\text{Ibid., 122, 132.}\]

\[268\text{‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 67, 81, 84. Camilla Adang, Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm, 110.}\]

\[269\text{Ibid., 110-111.}\]

\[270\text{Ibid., 111.}\]
between the biblical passages in Ibn al-Layth’s *Risāla* and ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* Douglas M. Dunlop claims, “there is no question of borrowing.”\textsuperscript{271}

However, the origins of Ibn al-Layth’s biblical references are quite complicated as well. Douglas M. Dunlop argues that as a Muslim of Iranian stock, who was neither a Jewish nor Christian convert to Islam, “it is next to impossible that Muhammad b. al-Laith knew the original languages, and Syriac also is very unlikely.”\textsuperscript{272} Dunlop suggests that Ibn al-Layth acquired his Gospel quotations from a personal informant. However, due to the extent of his Old Testament quotations, Dunlop also proposed that Ibn al-Layth may have been consulting an early Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{273} Putting Ibn al-Layth’s sources aside, it should be suggested that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī could have been citing from memory, generating personal translations, as well as drawing from existent Arabic material. It seems unlikely that he would limit himself exclusively to one method. On the contrary, in all likelihood, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī would have used a variety of sources at his disposal.

In this regard, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s biblical citations could resemble those found in the work of one of his younger near contemporaries, Ibn Qutayba (d. 889). Albert Isteero analyzed over 300 of Ibn Qutayba’s biblical citations and concluded:

> Ibn Qutayba used multiple sources for these quotations, including written manuscripts of the Pentateuch and Matthew. Oral traditions including that of Wahb ibn Munabbih, who is often quoted by name, are the source of the other quotations, which are less faithful to the original.


\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., 114.
The manuscripts of the Pentateuch and Matthew were written in Arabic translated by a Christian, and based on the Syriac Peshitta or a derivative.  

Ibn Qutayba’s citations in his *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (*The Proofs of Prophethood*) appear to have been reliant upon ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works. However, the source of those biblical passages found in Ibn Qutayba’s *Ṭarīqāl mukhtalīf al-ḥadīth* (*The Explanation of Disputed Hadith*), *Ṭarīqāl mushkil al-qurān* (*The Explanation of the Difficult Passages in the Qurān*), and *Kitāb al-maʿārif* (*The Book of Noteworthy Information*) are more elusive. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh and Vajda deny that Ibn Qutayba was consulting a written Arabic Bible while Graf argues that Ibn Qutayba’s citations are summarizing paraphrases. Goldziher, Lecomte, Altheim, and Isteero argued that Ibn Qutayba was the first Muslim who utilized a written Arabic translation of the Pentateuch.

After citing additional proof-texts, some of which had been previously discussed in his work, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī launches into a detailed discussion of the Nicene Creed, which includes a personal translation:

> We believe in one God, the Father, Possessor of everything, Maker of all that is seen and all that is unseen, and in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the first-born of all creation, coeternal with the Father before all the ages, not made, true god from the substance of his Father, who by his

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274 Albert Isteero, “Abdullah Muslim Ibn Qutayba’s Biblical Quotations and their Source,” ii-iii.

275 According to Thomas Michel, Ibn Qutayba’s biblical citations in his *Kitāb al-maʿārif* are taken primarily from the Old Testament while the citations in his *Ṭarīqāl mukhtalīf al-ḥadīth* and his *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* are mostly from the Gospels. See Thomas F. Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ: A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Christianity,” 24.


277 Again, this creed is presented by numerous Muslim polemicists, including ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and later Christian apostates, as the Nicene Creed. However, in reality, it more closely resembles the baptismal creed of Theodore Mopsuestia (d. 428). See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 187-188. See also, Jean-Marie Gaudeul, “Riposte aux Chrétiens,” 33-34.
hands ordered all the ages, created everything on mankind’s behalf and on behalf of our salvation, he descended from heaven and became incarnate by means of the Holy Spirit and became a man, he was carried and born by the Virgin Mary, he felt pain, suffered, and was crucified in the days of Pilate, he was buried, and rose on the third day as was written, he ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of his Father and he is ready to come again to judge between the living and the dead. We believe in the one Holy Spirit, the spirit of life, which proceeds from his Father as an enlivening spirit, and in one baptism, in the forgiveness of sins, in one catholic church, in the resurrection of bodies, and in life eternal forever and ever. 

Like most Muslim authors who cite this credo, Ṭabarî subsequently and systematically dismantles each one of its clauses. For instance, Abū Īsâ al-Warrāq also offers an alternative rendition of the Creed, which according to David Thomas contains technical terminology and only resembles the original incidentally. But unlike Ṭabarî, Abū Īsâ includes a complex analysis of the Creed in which he summarizes the various positions of the Nestorians, Melkites, and Jacobites. Ṭabarî first discusses the clauses “We believe in one God, the Father” and “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,” claiming that they not only contradict the teachings of the Gospels, but that they contradict one another. Again, Ṭabarî continues to see an irreconcilable variance between the creative power of God the Father and the createdness of Christ. If God the Father is the “Maker of all that is seen and all that is unseen,” then this would include Christ.

Ṭabarî continues by challenging the creedal phrase bikr al-khalâqi (first-born of creation), which he believed signified Christian sophistry. Moreover, Christ is

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contradictorily described as “born” but “not made.” First, if something is the “first-born of creation,” then it is naturally part of creation, and therefore it cannot be the Creator. Second, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī equates bikr with awwal (first). If something is “first-born” or “first,” then it has a beginning. Third, the designations “first-born” and “uncreated” or “not made” are incompatible. For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, this is a matter of simple logic.

Incommensurables cannot simultaneously exist within one being. Centuries earlier, Theodore of Mopsuestia attempted to shield Christians from such accusations and attacks in his commentary on the Nicene Creed in which he argued that certain terms denote radically different things when they are applied to God and when they are applied to man.280 As previously mentioned, suggesting a mysterious interpretation for certain words and phrases was less than persuasive for a Muslim audience. All in all, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī finds Nicene phrascology devious and specious.

Nevertheless, just as ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī interpreted the Trinity in the strictest of manners, he too approached Nicene theology from a similar position. Each subsequent clause is dissected and presented as irrational and counter to biblical teachings. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is left confounded by the decisions of Nicaea, claiming “I discovered that the 318 priests who gathered together from every distant direction to conclude the Creed discarded the abundant [?] verses and preferred the few ambiguous ones.”281 Similarly, ʿAbd al-Jabbār claims that the Nicene Creed is nothing more than a sly declaration of tritheism in which Christians do not openly declare that they believe in three gods, but, as


ʿAbd al-Jabbār states, they “gave the details” of their tritheism. Speaking on the importance of Nicaea, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī becomes one of the earliest Muslim polemicists to suggest a Romanization of Christianity, a theme that would gain considerable traction in later Muslim polemical works. He claims that Christians acted out of their own desires to placate or harmonize Christian doctrines with the methods of the “kings of the Roman philosophers and others from amongst the Materialists and Manichaeans.” Similar suggestions are made by the later converts al-Ḥasan (fl. ca. mid-tenth century) and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (d. ca mid-thirteenth century). However, this stance would be taken up more vigorously by ʿAbd al-Jabbār, al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), and al-Qarāfī.

In response to the claims made in the Nicene Creed, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī paraphrases Luke 1:28-35, which he interprets as an anti-Nicene proof-text. Gabriel announces that Mary will give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High, not the eternal Creator. Moreover, if David is the father of Jesus, how can Jesus be God? ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī argues that these verses have been unmistakably misconstrued. However, the arguments and methods employed by Muslim polemicists were neither static nor universal. Unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāḥiz critiques the impropriety of the title “Son of God,” arguing that the term son

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283 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 138. The Arabic text appears as nabuwiyya, however the text should be read as manuwiyya (Manichaeans) or thanuwiyya (Dualists).


285 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 140. Luke 1:28-35. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”
(walad) requires some aspect of engendering and physical engagement, and, as a result, he as well as various other Muslim polemicists, believed that the title “Son of God” required a copulative dimension which profaned God’s absolute transcendence. Mahmud Ayoub states:

Ibn (‘son’), which is used only once in the Qur’an in relation to Jesus, may be understood metaphorically to mean son through a relationship of love or adoption. The term walad, on the other hand, means ‘offspring,’ and thus primarily signifies physical generation and sonship. It is this latter term that is often used by Qur’an commentators to argue against the Christian concept of Christ’s divine sonship.

In the tenth century, al-Māturīdī (d. 944) notes that Ibn Shabīb (d. ca. mid-ninth century) was informed that certain Christians understood, as Ayoub has noted, that ibn (son) was to be understood in an adoptive rather than generative sense. In his eighth-century debate with Timothy I, al-Mahdī wonders how Mary could become pregnant by means of the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit does not have reproductive organs. Nevertheless, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was less concerned with analyzing the propagative implications of the word “son” than with detailing Christ’s passive and contingent nature. Therefore, he quotes Matthew 3:16-17, and once Christ is baptized by John, a voice from heaven states, “This is my beloved son, whom I have chosen.” He explicitly expresses

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287 Ibid., 66.


that someone who is chosen (mūṣṭafā) cannot be God. For ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāḥiz, the term “Son of God” is an unbefitting appellation for Christ, albeit for different reasons.

Moreover, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī finds the events following Christ’s baptism found in Matthew 11:2-6 and in Luke 7:19-23 to be an ideal scenario for Christ to declare his divinity. In this regard, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī views the post-baptismal exchange between John the Baptist and Christ in a similar manner to his interpretation of the temptation of Christ by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Christ is asked, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” In response, Christ offers an evasive answer, which ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī interprets as a bold declaration of Christ’s humanity and prophethood, not his divinity. If he were God, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī states, he would have declared “I am your Creator.” Furthermore, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī could have understood Matthew 11:2-6 and Luke 7:19-23 in relation to John 14:16 in which a future comforter is promised. When John the Baptist asks if the people should expect another to come, Christ neither confirms nor denies. Therefore, in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s eyes, this verse could support the common Muslim interpretation that Muḥammad is the promised Paraclete in John 14:16 and the “one who is to come” in Matthew 11:3 and Luke 7:20.

Next, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī reassesses the words of John the Baptist found in Luke 3:16, “Christ is stronger than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” Although Christ is deeply honored and respected here, John the Baptist does not call Christ

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291 Ibid. Matthew 11:2-6: 2Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ 4And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6And blessed is the one who mis not offended by me.’

“Creator.” The fact of the matter, for ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, is simple: if Christ is not unambiguously called God, Creator, Almighty etc., then he cannot be interpreted to be anything other than a prophet and human being.

In any case, regardless of the Christian doctrine discussed, and despite the proof texts used, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī presents a one-sided refutation of Christianity. David Thomas states:

But this former Christian appears to show no awareness at all of the beliefs that underlie the doctrinal formulas he scrutinizes, and rather treats them as uncontextualised propositions that stand or fall by their own logical coherence. He appears to have surrendered all sympathy and insight when he abandoned Christianity, and instead stands by the characteristic Islamic, and maybe Muʿtazilī, criterion of tawḥīd, which denies any similarity between God and the created order and therefore posits a necessary contradiction between what qualifies the one and the other.

However, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is not necessarily unaware of certain Christian beliefs. Having converted to Islam, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī considered many Christian beliefs irrelevant or polemical fodder. In fact, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s lack of sympathy for Christian is nothing out of the ordinary; rather, like their predecessor, the later converts al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda all refrain from displaying any semblance of support or approval for their former faith.

Again, by approaching his refutation in such a manner, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā appears to have been written for an exclusively Muslim audience as a popular less technical refutation of Christianity. Mark Beaumont believes that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s

293 Ibid., 141.

polemical techniques were influenced by the individual who may have commissioned the work: the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mutawakkil. Beaumont claims:

> Thus it seems that the patronage of al-Mutawakkil was probably an underlying feature of al-Ṭabarī’s *Refutation*. Perhaps this is why he refers only to those Gospel texts that could straightforwardly be read to support Islamic conceptions of Jesus, and avoids those which obviously deny them.\(^{295}\)

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**The Miracles and Titles of Christ**

In comparing Christ’s miracles with those of other prophets, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī greatly elaborated upon an important, but somewhat infrequent, argument found in earlier Islamic sources. Ibn Isḥāq in his *Sīra*, the Caliph al-Mahdī in his debate with Timothy I, and Ibn al-Layth in his letter to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VI each liken Adam’s miraculous origins to Christ’s virgin birth — thus (in their eyes) invalidating Christ’s nativity as a sign of his divinity. Unlike Ibn Isḥāq and al-Mahdī, Ibn al-Layth cites additional miracles which he regarded as definitive proof against the deification of Christ: (1) Enoch’s ascension to heaven (Genesis 5:21-24, Hebrews 11:5); (2) Ezekiel and Elisha’s quickening the dead (Ezekiel 37:1-14, 1 Kings 17:24, 2 Kings 4:18-36); (3) Moses’ parting of the Red Sea and causing springs to gush forth from a stone (Exodus 14:21, Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:11). In this regard, Ibn al-Layth argues that ascension to heaven and raising the dead do not justify the Christian divinization of Christ. Moreover, Ibn al-Layth asserts that Moses’ parting of the Red Sea dwarfs Christ’s various healing of

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sicknesses. Additionally, Camilla Adang calls Ibn al-Layth’s biblical references “the oldest more or less substantial collection of biblical testimonies to the Prophet of Islam that has come down to us…” D.M. Dunlop also states that Ibn al-Layth’s Risāla is “the earliest Muslim work in which such quotations are used,” with the exception of Ibn Ishāq. Nevertheless, these biblical references and arguments will be greatly expanded upon by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī.

Therefore, in addition to his unprecedented and extensive use of biblical prooftexts, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī helped popularize a comparative approach to Christ’s miracles, and with this, he contributed another enduring influence to the field of anti-Christian polemics, particularly Christian apostate literature. In this portion of his work, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s objective was to equate Christ’s miracles and other aspects of his life with the miracles and lives of earlier biblical figures (as well as Muḥammad) in order to relegate Christ to his appropriate (non-divine) prophetic status.

Fittingly, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī begins with Christ’s birth. Like Ibn Ishāq, al-Mahdī, and Ibn al-Layth before him, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī wonders why Adam’s birth, which required neither a mother nor a father, does not warrant Adam’s divinization. In fact, this comparison is suggested in Sūrat ʿAl ʾImrān (3:59), “Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God’s sight, is as Adam’s likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him, ‘Be,’ and he was.” Moreover, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is curious as to why the parentless generation of angels


297 Camilla Adang, Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, 21.

and spirits along with their incorporeality are not deserving of similar praise. Ibn al-Layth makes a similar argument concerning angels in his epistle to Constantine, again suggesting a direct borrowing or common source for the two works.

In a similar fashion to Ibn al-Layth, when discussing Christ’s marvels, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was not solely concerned with finding direct miraculous correspondences. On more than one occasion, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and later Christian apostates both implicitly suggested — and at times explicitly asserted — that Christ’s miracles were less wondrous than those of the other prophets, including Muḥammad. Like Ibn al-Layth, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī states that both Enoch and Elijah ascended to heaven; therefore, Christ’s ascension does not warrant divinization. Both Elisha and Elijah quickened the dead, yet neither are called God. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī recounts that Christ fed thousands with a loaf of bread, whereas it is described in Exodus 16:35 that Moses fed his people for 40 years in the desert. Still, Moses was not called God. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī compares Christ’s silencing of the sea found in Mark 4:39 with Moses’ parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21 and the striking of the rock in Rephidim (Exodus 17:6) or in Meribah (Numbers 20:11). Additionally, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī recalls the plagues of Egypt described in Exodus 7:14-11:10, which he believed surpassed any of Christ’s miracles.

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300 Hadi Eid, Lettre du calife Hārūn al-Rašīd à l’empereur Constantin VI, 179.
302 Ibid., 144.
304 In his description of Moses’ striking of the stone, it is difficult to distinguish if ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is referencing Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:11 or Sūrat al-Baqara (2:60). He states that 12 springs gushed forth from the rock, a detail which is found in the Qurʾān’s description of this biblical scene.
However, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s rendition of the biblical plagues is slightly divergent from its biblical version. His plagues (signs of punishment) include: (1) The serpentinization of Moses’ staff and its devouring of the swallowing of the Egyptian priests serpent; (2) The putrefaction of Egypt’s waters and the death of its sea-life; (3) An inundation of frogs; (4) Lice infestation; (5) Flies; (6) Death of livestock; (7) Boils; (8) Hail which destroys Egypt’s greenery; (9) Ants and Locusts;305 (10) Three days of darkness.306 In addition to several of the plagues being slightly amended, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī conspicuously excludes the final plague, the death of Egypt’s first-born. Similar to several of his previous biblical renditions, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s additions or alterations (at times subtle, at other times overt) to the ten plagues included the complete absence of the tenth plague, once again suggesting that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī was generating some of his biblical passages from personal recollections.

In the remaining pages of his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī compares the various titles Christ is given in the New Testament and Nicene Creed, including Lord, Messiah, Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David, prophet, beloved son, and Immanuel. To some extent, this argument is a continuation of his comparative miracles. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī describes different instances in which biblical figures as well as groups of individuals are designated by the same epithets Christians use in order to divinize Christ. In this sense, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī argues that Christians have fundamentally misunderstood Christ’s various appellations, and moreover, all of these names, regardless of how

305 I have followed Gaudeul’s suggested amendment to the text which reads naml (ants) for dimāʾ (blood). Jean-Marie Gaudeul, “Riposte aux Chrétiens,” 53.

306 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā,” 144. The Biblical ten plagues include: the turning of Egypt’s water to blood, an inundation of frogs, an infestation of lice, swarms of flies, disease upon Egypt’s livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of Egypt’s first-born.
honorific, verify that Christ was a human being and not God. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī begins by arguing that various figures throughout the Old Testament were figuratively called gods and lords. For example, he refers to the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:4. In Exodus 7:1, God tells Moses “I made you a God to Pharaoh.” David tells the children of Israel in Psalms 82:6 “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.” Nevertheless, the Nephilim, Moses, and the children of Israel are not literally considered gods. Rather they are called gods in order to assign respect and status to their rank.

This argument resembles al-Jāhīz’s discussion of the manner in which he believed the Jews described Ezra:

> When they say that the Jews do not claim that Ezra is ‘son of God’, it is necessary to consider that the Jews are divided into two groups: one of them expresses this belief in a specific way and the other in a more general way. The ones of the first group see that Ezra repeated words for them [from] the Tevrat of his own accord after its lessons and separated its decrees they exaggerated [his role and said he was the son of God]. It is well known among their order and [one still finds] a group from their remnant [who live] in Yemen, Northern Syria including the country of Rum (Byzantines). These with their elite are saying: ‘Israel of God are his sons’ by which they do not mean by blood relation. The name Ezra became associated with ‘son of God’ because of his obedience, and great learning. Those who express the belief in a general way see that every Jew who descends from Israel is directly a son of God thus they are not sons of sons. [So in this way Ezra can be spoken of as a son of God.]  

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307 Genesis 6:4: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.


In their refutations, both ʿAlī al-Ṭabarāʾī and al-Jāḥiẓ critique what they interpret as a poor understanding of language by the Jewish and Christian communities. In the case of al-Jāḥiẓ, he candidly expressed his belief in the superiority of the Muslim *mufassirūn* (exegetes). This line of argumentation will be taken up further by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarāʾī in his *Kītāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* and later by Christian apostates in their refutations as well.

**Conclusions of al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā**

As an affluent and well-educated physician and scholar at the caliphal court of a religiously and ethnically diverse metropolis, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarāʾī would have been well acquainted with the arguments of the ninth-century Arabophone Christian apologists as well as his fellow Muslim polemicists. Be that as it may, what distinguishes ʿAlī al-Ṭabarāʾī’s *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (as well as al-Jāḥiẓ’s) from the other major works of this period was its disregard not only for the painstaking Christian justifications for their trinitarian beliefs, but also his inattention to the meticulous manners in which Muslim polemicists crafted arguments in order to refute them. As previously stated, it has been suggested that the Caliph al-Mutawakkil was instrumental in commissioning the works of both ʿAlī al-Ṭabarāʾī as well as al-Jāḥiẓ.\(^{310}\) Due to the distinct style of their refutations and the possible involvement of the caliph in contracting the works, this could suggest a concerted awareness by the Muslim community, particularly its leadership, during the mid-ninth century of the need to produce a more popular and marketable anti-Christian polemic that could be attached to recognizable intellectual figures.

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During the first and second ʿAbbāsid centuries, ideas – whether secular or religious – were not isolated within particular communities. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim intellectuals were well aware of the inter- and intra-religious apologetics and polemics of their age. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s slightly younger Jacobite Christian contemporary, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṭah is a case in point. In his analysis of the apparent weaknesses of the arguments with which Muslims refuted Christianity, Ḥabīb highlights the recurrent biblical proof-texts found throughout Muslim anti-Christian polemics, many of which are found in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s refutation as well as later Christian apostate literature. Ḥabīb is worth quoting in full:

If they say: ‘How is it that the Messiah be God and Lord, and consented to be a servant, establishing [this] when He so named Himself along with His disciples as He said: ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’, and ‘My Father Who sent me is greater than I’, and He denied He had knowledge of the Hour [of Judgment], and He said to the two men, when they asked Him for the seats on His right and His left in His Kingdom, ‘this is not mine to give’. And He called for help from death, and other things, similar to what has [already] been said’.

It should be said to them: If the Messiah, may He be praised! had spoken [only] the words of a humble person when He confirmed His humanity, as you have described, [and] not spoken with sublime speech pointing to His divinity and His lordship, then you would be [correct] in this contention. However, since He spoke with both [types of] statements and described Himself with both predications, it is necessary for you to study the difference

311 John 20:17.
312 John 14:28.
313 Mark 13:32.
314 Matthew 20:23.
315 Matthew 27:46.
between the statements and predications. Because He Whom you describe as saying: ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’, {this reference is from [His] words of humanity}, is He Who said: ‘The one who sees me sees my Father’,316 ‘I am in my Father, and my Father is in me’,317 and ‘I and my Father are one’,318 that is one ousia.

And He described Himself as ‘Lord of the Sabbath’,319 and ‘Lord of the disciples’,320 and ‘Lord of the World’,321 and [said] that He always was [even] before Abraham existed,322 and [made] other sublime statements that point to His divinity. He has the right to say both [types] of statements and describe Himself with both predications, because He is true God and true human being, and He is one, and not two. The words of humility that He uttered are a clear confirmation of His humanity, and [those] sublime, exalted [words] are an affirmation and confirmation of His divinity.323

Habib demonstrates in the above passage that he was well apprised of the Muslim polemical arguments of his day, specifically those arguments using biblical proof-texts. It appears that both Christians and Muslims actively engaged one another’s works and at times deeply ruminated upon the arguments of individual authors.

Although ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī does not carefully delineate the various christological formulations throughout his works as did most of his contemporary Muslim and Christian authors, he nevertheless made precise and distinct arguments against the

316 John 14:9.
317 John 10:38.
318 John 10:30.
319 Matthew 12:8.
321 Matthew 28:18.
322 John 8:58.
323 Sandra Toenies Keating, Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period, 269-271.
Christians. For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, understanding the true nature of Christ was nothing more than a matter of simple exegesis and common sense. The ninth century witnessed a newly founded and an increased reliance on rationalism under the influence of the Muʿtazila, and although scriptural proofs remained paramount to both ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, rationalism was not simply disregarded. In the opening pages of his Radd, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī states, “He who does not utilize reason is ignorant; he who is ignorant is astray; he who is astray is a disbeliever.”

Thomas Michel claims that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, although his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā should be considered as well, was the earliest example of a polemical style that relied upon practical sense and reasonableness over complex refutation; he states:

A number of Muslim writers attempted to show that considered purely on grounds of common sense, the dignity of man, the glory of God, and the advancement of society, Islam must be considered superior to all other religions. In this type of argument by comparison, the cultic practices and the moral imperatives of Islam are juxtaposed to those

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of Christianity and other religions and judged more excellent.\textsuperscript{326}

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claims that all in all he had discovered upwards of 20,000 verses declaring Christ’s humanity whereas only ten problematic and equivocal verses purport to maintain his divinity.\textsuperscript{327} At a very early stage in Christian-Muslim encounter, both parties fervently discussed the complicated nature of Jesus Christ as presented throughout the New Testament. Complicating matters even further, many biblical passages were used by both Christians and Muslims to argue theologically antithetical positions. Writing a generation prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah ascribed divinity to Christ in his Greek work titled the \textit{Refutation of the Saracens} (\textit{Ek tôn pros tous Sarakēnous antirrhēseōn}) by recounting Christ’s various miracles and likening him to Moses, precisely the same argument utilized by Ibn al-Layth, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, and later converts to de-divinize Christ. Abū Qurrah stated:

\begin{quote}

\textit{Theodore}: Now then, when Christ came, he confirmed that he had been sent by God in two ways: engendering faith in himself not just by means of Moses’ prophecy, but also, after that, through signs, wonders, and diverse miracles. \\
\textit{Saracen}: What kinds? \\
\textit{Theodore}: A seedless conception, a mother but no father, birth from a virgin, changing water into wine. Later, not in obscurity but openly, he restored the sight of the blind, cleansed lepers, strengthened paralytics, healed diverse sicknesses, revealed his divinity on the mountain, cast out demons, filled many multitudes with a few loaves and fish, raised the dead as if from sleep, and in general, repaired the faults of nature. Saracen, what do you say to this? Did
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{327} ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, “ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Nāṣārā,” 138.
not Christ engender faith in himself with proofs that were no less impressive than Moses?328

When analyzing the various manners in which Christians and Muslims divergently approached Christ’s miracles, it is worth noting two key distinctions. First, Muslim polemicists were more prone to compare and contrast Christ’s miracles individually with those of other scriptural figures. Christ raised the dead as did Elijah, Christ calmed the seas whereas Moses parted the sea, and so on, until each isolated miracle has been found an equivalent. Muslim polemicists, like Christian apologists, were willing to acknowledge every one of Christ’s miracles but, unlike Christians, Muslims polemicists refrained from recognizing that no biblical figure performed an equivalent array of miracles. Second, Muslims, like Christians, openly confessed that Christ quickened the dead on several occasions. However, Muslims polemicists draw little or no attention to the fact that Christ himself rose from the dead (Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6, Luke 24:6, John 20:1-10).

Amidst the various refutations of Christianity written in Arabic during the ninth century, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā was distinct, but it was also somewhat expected. Muslims polemicists had attempted to refute Christianity using a variety of methods ranging from the logic-based arguments of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq to the more anthropological approach of al-Jāhiz. However, prior to the ninth century, Muslims had only scratched the surface ofbiblically-based refutations of Trinitarianism. Although the Qurʾān and many Muslim authors found fault with the

textual integrity of the Bible, Muslim polemicists still seemingly added credence to their arguments by citing internal biblical evidence, often in the form of proof-texts, when refuting Christian doctrines. Gabriel Reynolds considers this approach to the Bible “a strategic tactic, not a medium of constructive exegesis or theological speculation.”329 As previously mentioned, Diego Cucarella refers to this approach as a “providentialist solution.”

Unlike ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s contemporary Christian communities, which were hemorrhaging adherents at a precipitous rate, Muslims were gaining believers. Moreover, as a result of major demographic shifts as well as Islamic legal positions concerning apostasy, the Muslim community could offer something that the Christian community could not, an extended refutation written by a convert to Islam. Therefore, Muslims would have been drawn not only to the creativity and magnitude of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments, but also to the novelty of a new genre of polemical conversion literature. The importance of early converts to Muslim polemics and apologetics should not be underestimated. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh states, “…Islamic literature shows clear signs of Biblical knowledge that increased over the years, as well as many indications that this knowledge was imparted in the beginning through both Christian and Jewish converts to Islam.”330 Therefore, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī should be considered instrumental in the transmission


of biblical material to the Muslim community and its use in refuting conciliar doctrines, specifically Niceno-Constantinopolitan Trinitarianism.

By mining the Bible with the sole intention of pinpointing proof-texts and testimonia, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî and other early Muslim scholars of the Bible significantly contributed to generations of stunted and stilted Muslim exegesis of Jewish and Christian scripture. Lazarus-Yafeh argues:

Muslim authors up until the thirteenth century seem to have used only specific lists of Biblical verses to be expounded as alluding to the Prophet and Islam (like the Christian ‘Testimonia’). They never tried a comprehensive typological prefigurative approach to a whole Biblical text, which was apparently not available to them. In fact, their Biblical interpretation never developed into a literary genre of its own…

Nevertheless, by the end of the medieval period, Muslims were working with a significant collection of biblical testimonia that had been accumulated throughout the entire ‘Abbāsid period, many of which had been popularized by ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî in his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kātib al-dīn wa-l-dawla. Therefore, authors like al-Jaʿfārī and al-Qarāfī — writing in the thirteenth century — were able to cite dozens of verses from the Old and New Testaments predicting Muḥammad and Islam.

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331 Ibid.

Like many medieval Muslim authors, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī approached the Bible in a very scrupulous and pragmatic manner. That is to say, the Bible is employed as a viable source when relevant and fruitful to both the topic and intentions of the Muslim author employing it. Theodore Pulcini summarizes early Muslim exegesis of the Bible accordingly:

Their attitudes toward the earlier scriptures were often quite ambivalent, characterized by a reluctance to condemn them unreservedly. The ninth-century authors al-Qāsim, al-Jāhiz, Ibn Rabban, and Ibn Qutayba viewed the Jewish and Christian scriptures quite positively, as we have seen. Al-Qāsim held that if interpreted correctly, they were sources of truth. Al-Jāhiz faulted not the Hebrew Bible itself but the Jews’ faulty Arabic translation of it. Both Ibn Rabban and Ibn Qutayba held the Old and New Testaments in high enough esteem to mine both documents for what they considered to be reliable prophecies of Muḥammad’s advent. Both Yaʿqūbī in the ninth century and al-Masʿūdī in the tenth considered the earlier scriptures reliable enough to serve as sources of data for their histories.

Even the tenth-century authors al-Maqdisī and al-Ṭabarī, who were willing to believe the earlier scriptures only where they conformed to Islamic doctrine, do not polemicize against them nor the People of the Book for corrupting them. In fact, we saw that al-Ṭabarī does not hold the Jews in general, or even their ordinary scribes, responsible for the falsification of their holy books but only their learned, i.e., the rabbis. Moreover, we saw that, despite his view that the Jewish and Christian scriptures had been falsified, al-Birūnī still found their prophecies of Muḥammad worthy of credence.333

It is important to remember that extensive usage of the biblical text is in no way tantamount to approval, direct or indirect.

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333 Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis As Polemical Discourse*, 43.
On the one hand, in his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā*, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī expanded upon previously cited biblical passages – notably those found in Ibn al-Layth’s *Risāla* – and, in doing so, he helped establish what would become the stock-list of polemically feasible anti-trinitarian biblical proof-texts utilized by subsequent Muslim polemicists. On the other hand, it was his later apologetic work, the *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, again building directly or indirectly upon the work of Ibn al-Layth and certainly other unknown earlier scholars, which contributed to a larger and more definitive list of biblical testimonia to Muḥammad and Islam.

**The Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla and the Earliest Biblical Testimonia**

In the prologue of his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī outlines the objectives of his apologetic, which he claims is not only to divulge the secrets and truths of the Bible, (which Jews and Christians have obscured or denied), but also to capitalize on the heretofore underutilized and latent potential of Islam’s convert (non-Muslim born) population. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s work can be seen as part of a concerted effort during the ninth century by the Muslim community to answer the challenges of their Christian neighbors. Writing approximately a century prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the Christian theologian John of Damascus requested the Muslim community in his *De Haeresibus* (*On Heresies*) to substantiate Muḥammad’s prophetic office by means of the Bible:

> And We ask: ‘And which is the one who gives witness, that God has given to him the scriptures? And which of the prophets foretold that such a prophet would arise?’ And because they are surprised and at a loss (we tell them) that Moses received the Law by the Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people when God appeared in cloud and fire and
darkness and storm; and that all the prophets, starting from Moses and onward, foretold of the advent of Christ.  

Muslim polemicists and apologists across the caliphate unknowingly answered John’s challenge — and certainly those of other Christians’ as well — in a variety of ways during the course of the eighth and ninth centuries. Sarah Stroumsa maintains:

The earliest ‘signs of prophecy’ books written by Muslim mutakallimūn are, unfortunately, lost. What we find in the ninth century is already a well shaped prophetology. In the discussion, old ‘biblical’ arguments were adduced together with new ones, which were shaped and reshaped in the course of the interreligious debate.


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336 Clint Hackenburg, “An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī,” 90, 126. Deuteronomy 18:18: I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. Isaiah 21:7: When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently.


It has generally been assumed that Ibn Rabban’s Kitāb al-dīn wa’l-dawla was the fountainhead from which many later writers took the testimonies they needed for their own works. Thus according to Margoliouth, Ibn Rabban’s collection of aʿlām formed ‘a sort of armoury, whence weapons could be taken’; a mine whence other authors drew their information. Perlman uses a similar metaphor in terming Kitāb al-dīn wa’l-dawla ‘a Bible quarry for Muslim controversialists’. However, as we have seen, there is evidence that even prior to Ibn Rabban, lists of testimonies had been compiled: Ibn al-Layth, who predates Ibn Rabban by at least a half a century, seems to have used one…Moreover, the popularity of his work—if ever it was popular—seems to have been eclipsed by a tract of a similar nature written by Ibn Qutayba…

At any rate, not all Muslim scholars believed that the Bible was critical to Muslim anti-Christian polemics. Contrary to ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī’s emphasis on biblical testimonia, al-Jāḥiẓ argued in his Hujaj al-Nubuwwa (Proofs of Prophecy) that biblical proof was superfluous and that no miracle beyond the inimitability of the Qurʾān was necessary to confirm Muḥammad’s prophethood. Although Ibn al-Layth and ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī believed that Muḥammad had unquestionably performed a myriad of miracles, they, nevertheless, like al-Jāḥiẓ, believed that the Qurʾān and its unsurpassable eloquence validated Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. The positions of Ibn al-Layth, ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī, and al-Jāḥiẓ were elaborated upon and adjusted by several later authors, notably al-Qurṭubī and al-Ja'farī, as well as al-Qarāfī, who in his al-Ajiwiba al-fākhira stated:

Let us limit ourselves to these fifty predictions for fear of wordiness. There is enough in one of them for whoever is impartial and seeks the truth. How much more in fifty! If

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341 Hadi Eid, Lettre du califé Hārūn al-Rašid à l’empereur Constantin VI, 46-47.
they say: Why do you cling to these scriptures while they are not sound according to you? We respond: The prophetic status of our Prophet is established by means of miracles. It does not need these scriptures. We only mention the indications of his prophetic status contained therein to compel the People of the Book, who believe in the soundness of these scriptures, to accept it. In relation to their soundness, these scriptures are like all their books: if it is correct to draw inferences from them, our objective has been accomplished; if it is not correct, then all that the People of the Book have is invalidated, since everything is like these scriptures. How is it possible for them to believe in the soundness of these scriptures and yet not accept the indications of Muhammad contained therein, whose abundance is such that it leads to certitude?342

The words of this thirteenth century polemicist have diverged significantly from those of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī. Al-Qarāfī admits that he is not writing in order to remedy any legitimate needs of the Muslim community. Rather, he is engaging in a polemical exercise whereby he is able to taunt the Christian community, which, by the time al-Qarāfī was writing, had ceased to be a real threat to Islam for over two centuries. In any case, the Muslim position vis-à-vis miracles and their ability to confirm truth and prophecy fluctuated greatly from author to author and century to century. Writing three centuries prior to al-Qarāfī, the Jacobite Yahyā ibn ‘Adī refrained from using scriptural proofs — whether Old or New Testament — believing that they would undermine his apology on account of the Muslim conception of of tahrīf.343 In this regard, Yahyā ibn ‘Adī anticipated what would eventually become the mainstream Muslim position with respect to the Bible.


However, although ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, like al-Qarāfī, believed that miracles confirmed an individual’s prophetic office, he nevertheless utilized the Gospel narrative of Christ’s life in order to obviate the need for miracles in verifying the veracity of a divine messenger. In the closing pages of his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī argued that the disciples believed in Christ without any demonstration of miracles, specifically citing Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthew 9:9. With these verses from the Book of Matthew, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī accentuates the fact that several of the disciples of Christ followed him simply as a result of faith as opposed to his ability to perform miracles. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī again is suggesting that Muḥammad and Islam are being held to an unfair and inconsistent standard by Christians. He continues his discussion of miracles by quoting Matthew 12:39 in which several scribes and Pharisees demand a sign, to which Jesus responds, “The evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there will be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Therefore, according to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī a prophet is well within his rights to deny a request for miracles outright. In this regard, he suggests that Christians are not justified in denying Muḥammad for his lack of miracles.

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344 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 148. Matthew 4:18-22: While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Matthew 9:9: As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.

345 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 149. Additionally, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī supports this stance by quoting Matthew 21:23-27 in which Jesus refuses to tell a group of Jews on whose authority he is working.
A New Apology: Motivations and Lasting Influence

Regardless of the techniques and arguments employed — whether biblical testimonia and proof-texts, the inimitability of the Qurʾān, or rationality and philosophy — ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī recognized the initiatives and diversity of approach taken by Muslim controversialists in both their refutations of Christianity and apologies for Islam. However, he also acknowledged several pivotal weaknesses in their approaches: (1) Muslim refutations of Christianity were “shortened, curtailed, and contracted;” (2) Muslim polemicists possessed an “ignorance of their Books,” i.e., the Bible and other historical and ecclesiastical works; (3) If their works were not too abridged, then they were protracted and discursive and, therefore, bewildered their audience. In response to these shortcomings, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī hoped to create a lucid apology of “general utility.”

Even with the works of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿIsā al-Warrāq, al-Jāhiz, and Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī circulating amongst the Muslim community, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claimed that Muslims, prior to his lifetime, had failed to adequately refute Christianity. However, in reality, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla is a defense of Islam and Muḥammad’s prophetic office as seen through the corrected lens of a Christian convert to Islam. Therefore, in a way, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī saw himself (an intellectual Christian convert) as the linchpin to future Muslim polemical and apologetical success. In the opening lines of his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, he insinuated that converts, on account of their scriptural knowledge, would be an important bulwark against growing Arabophone Christian and Jewish claims. Be that as it may, throughout the medieval period, the importance of the

convert-turned-polemist was not unique to Christian converts to Islam. The Jewish population was quite active in conversion literature as well.

Concerning the Jewish convert Samuel al-Maghribī (d. ca. 1180) and his *Iffām al-Yahūd* (*Silencing of the Jews*), Moshe Perlmann states:

The polemic literature of Islam is directed, for the most part, against the far more numerous and powerful Christians; the Jews are considered only in passing. Still, from time to time, specifically anti-Jewish polemic tracts have appeared, and it is not surprising to find that it was the Jewish converts to Islam who produced them, supplying the font of information and argumentation against Judaism. Christian converts to Islam also served as a quarry of Islamic polemics against both scriptural faiths. Indeed, Christian views and attitudes concerning Jews, brought along by the ever-growing mass of Christian converts to Islam, could not fail to percolate into Islam.348

Like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Maghribī was a well-respected physician and intellectual; and moreover, he too believed that he had produced an unprecedented refutation:

In the evening of that day, i.e. the night of the feast of sacrifice, I began writing the arguments for silencing the Jews and compiled them in a book I entitled *Iffām al-Yahūd* (*Silencing the Jews*). The book became well known, its fame was widespread, and numerous copies of it were made under my supervision in many places in the regions of Mosul, Diyārbakr, Iraq, and Persia. Later I added to it many sections of polemics against the Jews on the basis of the Torah, so that it became an excellent work on polemics against the Jews, the like of which had never been produced in Islam.349

Al-Maghribī’s mentor, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 1165), was likewise an influential Jewish convert to Islam who penned his *Kitāb al-Muṭabar* (*The Book of Things*

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349 Ibid., 86.
Considered), a work that was often cited by later Muslim intellectuals. Al-Baghdādī was an ʿAbbāsid palace physician to caliph al-Mustanjid (r. 1160-1170) and, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, he converted to Islam at an advanced age. Additionally, al-Baghdādī’s companion and disciple Ishāq the son of Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1164) also converted to Islam; however, unlike his mentor, Ishāq reverted back to Judaism. Similarly, several centuries prior, the Jewish mutakallim Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ converted to Christianity under the influence of the Christian Nonnus of Nisibis (d. ca 862). Later, al-Muqammiṣ abandoned Christianity and returned Judaism. After reverting, he wrote his Ishrūn maqāla (Twenty Chapters) in which he criticized the Christian understanding and description of God.

As previously mentioned, conversion late in life is a motif found in a variety of Jewish and Christian apostate works. Conversion late in life may have been seen as a means to alleviate any suspicions and possible superficial motivations surrounding an individual’s religious transformation. In any case, the Jewish Baghdādī physician and philosopher Sa’d ibn Manṣūr ibn Kammūna (d. ca. 1285) quoted al-Maghribi’s Iḥām al-Yāhūd in his Tanqīḥ al-ʿabḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth (Inquiries into the Three Faiths), considering it “the most representative and typical summary of Muslim polemics directed against Jews.” What is more, al-Qarāfī in his al-Ajwība al-fākhirā and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) in his Kitāb hidīyat al-ḥayārā fī ajwībat al-Yāhūd wa-l-Nāṣārā (Guiding the Confused, On

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Responses to the Jews and the Christians) and Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣāʾid al-shayṭān (Aid for the Yearning One in Resisting Satan) made extensive use of al-Maghribi’s Iḥām.\textsuperscript{354} It appears that the disputation works of converts to Islam, both Jewish and Christian, were well circulated amongst renowned and respected Muslim intellectual throughout the medieval period.

Although it was the Islamic conquests of the seventh century that placed a relatively small Muslim population in command of an overwhelming non-Muslim population, it would be through conversion, specifically conversion during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, that would drastically change the demographic makeup of the Caliphate. During his reign, the ‘Abbāsid Caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809), recognized Jewish and Christian conversion amongst the various signs which he believed confirmed the veracity of Muhammad’s prophetic mission as well as the validity of Islam.\textsuperscript{355} Admittedly, the conversion of the caliphal populations to Islam differed regionally with respect to rate and manner. Nevertheless, the converted populations represented a important segment of society. According to Richard Bulliet:

The altered composition of the Muslim population in turn affected the course of development of the Islamic religion. Non-Arab converts and their descendants made contributions in every area of cultural life under the aegis of Islamic rule, and the customs and outlook of the non-Arab peoples in general became accommodated in various ways within the developing institutions of the Islamic state and religion.\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{355} Hadi Eid, \textit{Lettre du calife Hārūn al-Rashīd à l’empereur Constantin VI}, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{356} Richard W. Bulliet, \textit{Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period}, 2.
This is no more evident than in the lasting influence of Christian apostate literature upon the popular perceptions of Christianity that have persisted to the present day.

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nasārā and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla stand apart, in certain respects, from the works of later converts to Islam, all of whom integrate certain conventional christological definitions and arguments found in most anti-Christian works. However, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s disinterested approach recasts itself in the later works of al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yāḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda in the form of a more engaging and often hostile polemic. Additionally, later converts amplified their polemical stances vis-à-vis the Bible as well, which often manifested itself in the form of increasingly critical remarks concerning biblical transmission, exegesis, and textual integrity. Yet, even as their views hardened, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, later Christian apostates remained reliant upon biblical proof-texts in order to frame their refutations, vindicate their conversion, and validate Muḥammad and Islam.

David Thomas calls the Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla “one of the earliest examples of the dalāʾīl al-nubuwwa, ‘proofs of prophethood,’ genre, and the most innovative that is known in marshalling evidence from the books of the Bible.” In many ways, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla functions as little more than an extended series of biblical proof-texts. Theodore Pulcini declares:

> Nearly half of Ibn Rabban’s apology, however, is based on a single conviction: that Muhammad was clearly foretold by the Jewish prophets and by Christ and his apostles. To prove this contention, Ibn Rabban combs the Old and New

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357 David Thomas, “ʿAlī l-Ṭabarī,” in CMRI I, 673.
Testaments for passages which he considers to be testimonies to the coming of the Prophet.\^{358}

The tenacity with which Muslim apologists and polemicists defended Muḥammad must have come in reaction to considerable Jewish and Christian assaults not only on his prophetic status but his personal character as well. While many Christians were reluctant to lambast Muḥammad explicitly, those Christians who did often penned their works pseudonymously or outside Muslim dominated lands. ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, writing in the ninth or tenth century, presented Muḥammad as sexually uncontrolled.\^{359} Although writing slightly later than ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ashʿarī differed from many anti-Christian Muslim polemicists in the manner in which he classified Christian blasphemies. As previously mentioned, al-Ashʿarī maintained that the Christian rejection of Muḥammad’s prophethood eclipsed the blasphemous doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation.\^{360}

As a Christian convert to Islam and an author of several pieces of Christian apostate literature, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī expectedly discusses the various motives behind conversion. During the ninth century, both Christians and Muslims were fervently debating Christianity and Islam respectively as the one true divinely inspired faith. These arguments included a mapping of justified and unjustified reasons for converting to a particular religion. In his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī outlined the four main reasons he believed Christians rejected Islam. In polemical fashion, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī states:

\[\text{\begin{center} Theodore Pulcini, }\textit{Exegesis As Polemical Discourse,} 23. \end{center}\]

\[\text{\begin{center} Laura Bottini, “The Apology of al-Kindī,” in }\textit{CMR I,} 588. \end{center}\]

\[\text{\begin{center} Hugh Goddard, }\textit{A History of Christian-Muslim Relations,} 61. \end{center}\]
I have found that people who have contradicted Islam, have done so for four reasons: firstly, because of doubts about the history of the Prophet (may God bless and save him); secondly, because of disdain and egregious insolence; thirdly, because of tradition and custom; fourthly, because of folly and stupidity.361

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī placed himself within the third and fourth categories on account of his misuse of reason, drunkenness, confusion, and unquestioning acceptance. In his letter to his brother, the tenth-century convert, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, clearly states that the power and pressure of tradition and custom dissuaded him from conversion for many years.

In equally polemical fashion, a contemporary of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the Nestorian Ḥunayn ibn ʿIṣḥāq,362 listed his criteria, which elaborated upon the reasons individuals adhered to a false religion:

The reasons for the acceptance of a falsehood are six in number. The first reason is that the one who accepts falsehood is forced to accept that which is made compulsory for him against his will.363 The second reason is that a person willingly tries to escape from hardship and oppression, since he was not able to bear them, so as to be delivered from them to what he hopes is ease and comfort. The third reason is that a person favors great might over humiliation, honor over inferiority, and power over weakness, so that he leaves his religion and converts to another. The fourth reason is that the one who speaks (falsehood) is a wicked man, deceitful in word, with the


362 Due to the fact that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and Ḥunayn both worked at the caliphal court as physicians and that for a long period of their lives both were members of the Nestorian community, it is plausible that they were acquainted with one another and that their works represent a type of reactionary intellectualism.

363 The Christian association between violence, Muhammad, and the spread of Islam is as old as Islam itself. This alleged link can even be seen in texts as early as the Greek *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (c. 634). The *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* can be found in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VIIe siècle,” in *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 70-219. Recently, Sean Anthony has challenged the traditional scholarly dating of this text, claiming that the 670s is more likely than the 630s or 640s. See Sean Anthony “Muhammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the *Doctrina Iacobi*: A Late Antique Puzzle,” *Islam Zeitschrift Fur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Islamischen Orients* 91, no. 2 (2014): 243-265.
result that he beguiles and overwhols whomever he invites (to accept falsehood). The fifth reason is that (the one who invites to falsehood) exploits the ignorance of his invitees and their lack of literacy. The sixth reason is that there is a natural kinship between the invitee and the inviter, so that the invitee, not wishing to sever that shared kinship, agrees with him in his religion.\textsuperscript{364}

Likewise, each of the three most prominent Arabophone Christian apologists, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Rāʾīṭah, and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī offered similar sets of undignified reasons for conversion.

ʿAmmār argued that the masses were drawn to a false religion by the sword, bribes and cajolery, ethnic bigotry, personal preference, tribal collusion, and licentious laws and practices.\textsuperscript{365} Similarly, Ḥabīb Abū Rāʾīṭah believed that material gain, desire for the Hereafter, fear and compulsion, permissibility of the forbidden, improvement of personal status, and tribal solidarity diverted adherents away from God’s true religion, Christianity.\textsuperscript{366} The Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah produced a list much like his coreligionists. Mark Swanson states “each item in Theodore’s list of humanly comprehensible reasons for accepting a religion–coercion by the sword, worldly gain, license with regard to fleshly appetites, simplified doctrine–corresponds to well-known Christian charges against Islam.”\textsuperscript{367}


\textsuperscript{365} For additional details on these characteristics as well as their absence from Christianity, see ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, \textit{Apologie et controverses}, 30-38. Wageeh Mikhail, “ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī’s Kitāb al-Burhān,” 61.

\textsuperscript{366} Sandra Toenies Keating, \textit{Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period}, 82-82.

Diego Cucarella suggests that Theodore may have been the first to articulate this apologetic strategy. Moreover, Sidney Griffith concludes that theme of the “unworthy incentives to religious faith” formulated by the authors above represents “an original contribution to apologetics on the part of the anti-Muslim apologists of the first Abbasid century.” In the face of such Christian claims and accusations, in his earlier work, al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī attempted to dispel what anyone may have misconstrued or perceived as suspicious and worldly motivations for his conversion when he claimed “God called me to compose such a book to renounce the Christian religion, to warn, and to advise,” but he also asserted that he was not persuaded by wanton materialism or earthy pleasures. The accusations of the Christian apologists against the motives behind conversion to Islam could have provided one of the original impetuses for the composition of Christian apostate literature.

Much like his earlier work, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī continued in his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla to draw clear distinctions between what he believed to be “true” biblical teaching and derivative, inconsistent, and blasphemous ecumenical trinitarian theology. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī states:

So also are the Christians; having said at the beginning of their profession of faith: ‘We believe in God, creator of every thing visible and invisible,’ and then adding that the Christ is creator and not created, contradiction appears in their utterances. And if we turn to the Books of their faith, we find that they are not in alignment with their belief,

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368 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 173.
because all of them affirm that God is creator and everything else is created.\(^\text{371}\)

Like the overwhelming majority of Muslim polemicists, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī saw a rather flagrant and clashing incongruity between Nicene trinitarian doctrine and biblical teaching.

\textit{Muḥammad: Signs of Prophethood}

However, after several pages of introductory remarks, some of which discuss trinitarian issues dealt with more extensively in his \textit{al-Radd ‘alā l-Naşārā}, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī frames the remainder and lion’s share of his \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla} around a ten point vindication of Muḥammad’s prophet office:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{First}, the Prophet—may God bless and save him—called to One, Eternal, Omniscient, and Just God, whom no one can overcome and hurt; in that he was in conformity with all the prophets. 
  \item \textit{Second}, he was pious, upright, sincere, and his laws and prescriptions are praiseworthy.
  \item \textit{Third}, he—peace be with him—wrought clear miracles which only prophets and the chosen ones of God can work.
  \item \textit{Fourth}, he prophesied about events hidden from him, which took place during his lifetime.
  \item \textit{Fifth}, he prophesied about many events concerning this world and its kingdoms, which were realized after his death.
  \item \textit{Sixth}, he produced a book which by necessity and by undeniable arguments is a sign of prophetic office.
  \item \textit{Seventh}, his victory over the nations is also by necessity and by undeniable arguments a manifest sign of prophetic office.
  \item \textit{Eighth}, his missionaries who transmitted his history are most honest and righteous men, to whose like nobody can attribute lie and falsehood.
  \item \textit{Ninth}, he—peace be with him—is the last of the prophets, and if he had not been sent, the prophecies of the prophets about him and about Ishmael—peace be with both of them—would have been in vain.
  \item \textit{Tenth}, the prophets—peace be with them—prophesied about him long before his appearance, and described his mission, his
\end{itemize}

country, his time, and the submission of nations to him, and of kings to his nation.\textsuperscript{372}

The prophetic blueprint presented here by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is repeated throughout the later works of Christian apostates. In a letter written to Ḥūnayn ibn Isḥāq, Ibn al-Munajjim first invites Ḥūnayn to embrace Islam, then proceeds to outline the merits of Muḥammad’s prophethood.\textsuperscript{373} To varying degrees, Ibn al-Munajjim includes each of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s criteria with the exception of biblical fulfillment and prophecies.\textsuperscript{374} All the same, various aspects of this prophetic sketch are discussed by Christians and Muslims alike.

Certain Christians openly acknowledged Muḥammad’s success in preaching the oneness of God to the various polytheists of Arabia, one of the first being Timothy I, who stated that Muḥammad “followed in the path of the prophets and of the friends of God.”\textsuperscript{375} This stance is repeated in the late-ninth century work reporting a disputation between Abraham of Tiberias and several Muslim notables. In this work, Abraham disavows the Muslim claim that Muḥammad is the khātam al-nabīyyīn (Seal of the Prophets) — and even more, that he is not a prophet at all. Rather, like Timothy I, Abraham calls Muḥammad, “a king in whom God was pleased, and in and by whom

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\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 14-15.

\textsuperscript{373} Identifying the author of this work is complicated with various scholars taking different positions. For more information, see Barbara Roggema, “ʿAlī ibn Yāḥyā ibn al-Munajjim,” in \textit{CMR I}, 764-766.


\end{flushleft}
God has fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Ishmael.”

Patriarch Timothy I also claimed that Muḥammad “walked in the path of the prophets.” In reality, Christian admiration for Muḥammad predates the first generation of Arabic-speaking apologists. The Armenian bishop and historian Sebeos (fl. ca. mid-seventh century), John bar Penkāyē (fl. late-seventh century), a Christian Monk of Bēt Ḫalē (wr. ca. 720s), and the Chronicle of Thomas Presbyter (wr. ca. 630s) displayed signs of respect toward Muḥammad.

It is quite important to realize that not all Christians shared a respect for Muḥammad and the faith he preached. The anonymous Christian author of Leo III response to ʿUmar II claims that al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 714) falsified the Qurʾānic text. Likewise, ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī leveled multifaceted attacks upon Muḥammad, the Qurʾān, and Islam. In the thirteenth century, Gregory bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) criticized the integrity of the transmission of the Qurʾān as well. Regarding this, Sidney Griffith states:

Bar Hebraeus argues that while there have been no changes of sense in the transmission of the text of the Bible, the same cannot be said for the Qurʾān. And he goes on to cite changes or additions to the text of the Qurʾān that he found mentioned in the work of Ibn Maʿṣūd, the Muslim authority on the collection of the Qurʾān involving the

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activity of Zayd ibn Thābit, Muḥammad’s amanuensis, when the text was first collected in writing.\textsuperscript{380} Christian apologists were careful to avoid making any implicit confirmation of Muḥammad’s prophetic office. Christian apologists were careful to avoid making any implicit confirmation of Muḥammad’s prophetic office.

Some Muʿtazili authors, like al-Jāḥiẓ, argued that only the sixth criterion (the inimitability of the Qurʾān) was necessary, but as a keen critic of Jewish and Christian translations and transmission of biblical material he also believed that the unanimous and unimpeded transmission and safeguarding (criterion eight) of the Qurʾān was an unmistakable miracle of Muḥammad and the early Muslim community. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī likewise lauds the pious and prudent care with which early Muslims transmitted written material. The miracle of sound textual transmission can be understood more in the sense of divine providence than the customary supernatural event. Furthermore, Ibn Qutayba, according to Ronny Vollandt, acknowledged “the existence of multiple Arabic versions of that are observably so different from one another attests to the lack of reliable transmission.”\textsuperscript{381} Ibn Qutayba’s assault on the intercity of Christian scriptural transmission should be classified as an accusation of ṭahrīf al-maʾnā.

In his prophetic outline and the remainder of his work, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī placed a special emphasis on Muḥammad as both a miracle worker and prognosticator, claiming that Muḥammad “wrought clear miracles.” This position was perpetually assailed by


\textsuperscript{381} Ronny Vollandt, \textit{Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch}, 46.
Christian apologists. In this regard, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* is representative of a trend which will become nearly universal in later apologetics, that is to say, presenting miracles as a critical element in authenticating Muḥammad’s prophetic office. However, this was not always the object in Muslim apologetic works. In his *Kitāb al-Burḥān* (*The Book of Proof*), ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī argues with a hypothetical Muslim interlocutor claiming that miracles had ceased with the establishment of Christianity. Wageeh Mikhail claims:

This imaginary opponent is most likely a Muʿtazilī thinker of the day, who gave reason the ultimate authority in distinguishing truth, to the extent that many contemporary Muʿtazilīs dismissed the value of miracles and even denied the miracles attributed to Muḥammad. To them, miracles were not reasonable; rather they were believed to be “beyond reason.” According to their view, miracles were not an appropriate means of determining truth or discerning between religions, since reason is the ultimate and most reliable means for knowing the truth. Later Muʿtazilī thinkers took a different position.

To a certain extent, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī appears to be reacting directly to common Christian accusations and recriminations. As a result, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī recounts the various miracles performed by Muḥammad beginning with those mentioned in the Qurʾān. First, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī references the midnight journey (*al-Isrāʾ*) and the ascension to heaven (*al-Miʿrāj*) in *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* (17:1). After recalling Muḥammad’s miraculous journeys, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī calls attention to *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (15:95), in which Muḥammad is mocked by a group of polytheists. Knowing full well of the Christian accusations and attacks leveled against Muḥammad concerning violence, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī nevertheless recounts several instances in which Muḥammad miraculously (and somewhat gruesomely) brings death upon his enemies by means of infection, edema, and suppuration as well as by having one

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382 Wageeh Mikhail, “ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī’s *Kitāb al-Burḥān*,” 58.
individual eaten by a lion.\textsuperscript{383} This is not unlike Jewish and Christian approaches toward the violence found throughout the Old Testament. This again marks a complete dissociation between moral rectitude and violence when a divine hand is at play, and by recounting these specific events, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî illustrates the significance he placed upon presenting Muḥammad as a miracle worker, even when the miracle resulted in violence and death. It is worth noting that Muḥammad’s splitting of the moon in Sūrat al-Qamar (54:1) is conspicuously absent Muḥammad’s qur’ānic miracles.

Subsequently, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî proceeds to catalog an impressive list of Muḥammad’s non-qur’ānic miracles, several of which have clear biblical correspondences: (1) Muhammad was born in a prostrating position whilst emitting light; (2) causing confusion, hysteria, and death amongst his enemies; (3) controlling nature; (4) precipitating amnesia in his enemies; (5) multiplying food and water for his armies; (6) transforming kindling into a sword; (7) making a stone praise God; (8) communicating with animals; (9) knowing the secrets of his enemies; (10) predicting the faithfulness and illnesses of his followers; (11) foresight of the struggles and violence of the Rashidun Caliphate; (12) causing water to gush from his fingers; (13) additional miscellaneous prognostications.\textsuperscript{384} Several of these miracles were established in the earlier ninth-century work of Ibn al-Layth (d. after 819), notably Muḥammad’s ability to control nature, communing with animals, and feeding multitudes.\textsuperscript{385}

\textsuperscript{383} ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî, \textit{The Book of Religion and Empire}, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid., 32-42. These miracles are taken from the sīra and hadīth literature as well as early Islamic historiography.

\textsuperscript{385} Hadi Eid, \textit{Lettre du calife Hârûn al-Rašîd à l’empereur Constantin VI}, 51-52.
The Old Testament is replete with similar examples of God confusing the enemies of his chosen people: Exodus 23:27, Deuteronomy 7:23, Joshua 10:10, Psalm 55:9, and Jeremiah 20:11. And, like Muḥammad, various biblical figures manipulated the elements, including Moses’ parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21, Elijah’s and Elisha’s parting the Jordan with an article of clothing in 2 Kings 2:8 and 2 Kings 2:14, and Jesus’ calming the stormy seas in Matthew 8:23-27 and Mark 4:35-41. Moreover, the same individuals (Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus) are associated with miraculous feedings as well. Moses and the Israelites are fed with bread from heaven in Exodus 16:1-36, Elijah multiplies the flour and oil of the widow of Zarephath described in 1 Kings 17:8-16, Elisha increases the widow’s oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7, and Jesus feeds the multitudes (on two different occasions) in Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew 15:32-39, Mark 6:30-44, Mark 8:1-10, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-15. Similar to Muḥammad, Moses caused water to gush forth in order to quench the thirst of the Israelites in Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī presents Muḥammad as a thaumaturge of the highest rank who in many instances outshines his biblical predecessors.

In fact, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī claims that the aforementioned miracles only comprise a fraction of Muḥammad’s wonders, stating, “This is enough for this work; had we intended to exhaust the subject, the book would have been too bulky.” Nevertheless, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī argues that neither miracles nor prophecy are mandatory in affirming an individual’s prophetic status. He maintains that some prophets are not foretold in the Bible such as Moses, David, and Isaiah; some prophets performed miracles but did not prophesy, like Elisha, while others prophesied but performed no miracles as was the case

386 Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 36.
with Hosea and Ezekiel; some prophets performed no miracles nor did they prophesy, like Malachi, Haggai, and Nahum. Finally, Hannah and Miriam have no biblical book, but are considered prophetesses.  

Many of the aforementioned miracles would play an important role in later Christian apostate works as well. Like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the later converts al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yāḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda, used the miracles of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha to disprove the Christian deification Christ as well as to elevate the status of Muḥammad. This is quite indicative of the divergent manners in which Christians and Muslims have historically understood and approached miracles. Sandra Keating states:

> The New Testament and other early Christian writings abound with miracles that are understood to affirm God’s will in the lives of individuals and in the church as a whole. For Muslims, on the other hand, miracles associated with Muḥammad did not play a crucial role as an affirmation of the truth of Islam. In fact, the early Muslim community made very little claim to miracles…However, later Muslim traditions attribute a great number of miracles to him.

The major Arabophone Christians of the ninth century, Timothy I, Abraham of Tiberias, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raiṭah, and ʿAmmār al-Ḥaṣīr all, directly or indirectly, criticized Muḥammad’s inability to perform miracles, a criticism of which ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and other Muslim authors were well aware.

As previously mentioned, in the face of steady ninth-century Christian criticisms, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī helped established a new precedent in Muslim polemics and apologetics in

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387 Ibid., 16.

which a wide range of Christ’s miracles (as opposed to isolated or limited examples) were equated with the miracles of other prophets. On several occasions, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, subsequent Christian converts, and various Muslim polemicists argued that some of Christ’s miracles were inferior to those of other prophets, including those performed by Muḥammad. This polemical method had a lasting impact on the Muslim community even during the peak of Muʿtazilī influence. David Thomas states:

During the early centuries, when Muslims directly encountered the beliefs of the Christian populations among whom they lived, polemicists predictably tended to focus upon the major doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. And in their attacks upon the latter of these, one of their favourite procedures was to compare the miracles performed by Jesus with those of major prophets in order to refute claims of his divinity based upon the uniqueness of his actions. This form of argument is referred to in nearly all the main polemical works of the early Muslim centuries, and the ways in which different writers made use of it cast a clear sidelight upon developments in early Islamic theological thought.389

Notably, the Shīʿī al-Nawbakhtī (d. 912-23), al-Māturīdī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Bāqillānī all produced arguments similar to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in which the miracles of the prophets were compared and equated.390 Be that as it may, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī still argued that according to the beliefs of the Jews and the Christians an individual’s prophetic office cannot be solely validated by the performance or production of miracles. In speaking of David and the Psalms, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī stated:

389 David Thomas, “The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic,” in Journal of Semitic Studies 39, no. 2 (1994): 221. For a list of the commonest comparative miracles, see Thomas, 222. It is also important to note that this trend gained traction in Jewish anti-Christian polemic as well. See Sa’d ibn Mansūr ibn Kammūna, Ibn Kammūna’s Examination of the Three Faiths, 86-87.

The answer to their saying that in the Qurʾān there is no mention of a miracle wrought by the Prophet—may God bless and save him—and that he who has no record in his book of a sign or a miracle has no reason to be acknowledged, is this: let them show us the miracle wrought by David and recorded in his Psalms; if they do not find it for us, why and for what reason have they called him a prophet, while no prophet has previously prophesied about him, and there is no record of a miracle in his Book.\(^{391}\)

**The Inimitability of Scripture**

Christian apologists were well aware that the majority of Muslims considered the Qurʾān to be undeniable proof of the veracity Muḥammad’s prophetic calling, and as a result, it was at times cautiously critiqued by Christians. Although open criticisms (at least written in Arabic) of the Qurʾān were relatively rare throughout the medieval period, nevertheless, there were still instances of high-ranking Christian officials assailing the Muslims’ holy scripture.

An early example is that of Abū Nuḥ al-Anbārī (b. ca. 730), the Nestorian secretary of the governor of Mosul, Mūsā ibn Muṣ‘ab. Abū Nuḥ is believed to have composed a formal refutation of the Qurʾān titled in Arabic *Tafrīd al-Qurʾān* and in Syriac *Shurrāyā d-Qurān* (*The Refutation of the Qurʾān*).\(^{392}\) Likewise, a friend and colleague of Abū Nuḥ, Timothy I critiqued the Qurʾān as well, although not in the form of a sustained refutation. In his debate with al-Mahdī, Timothy is asked whether or not the Qurʾān was revealed by God:

\(^{391}\) Ḍalī al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, 16. The spelling in Mingana’s translation has been slightly updated. Henceforth, Kurʾān has been consistently rewritten as Qurʾān.

\(^{392}\) Mark N. Swanson, “Abū Nūḥ al-Anbārī,” in *CMR I*, 397-400.
I answered him saying: ‘If it was revealed by God, I am not able to judge that, but I say that the Word of God, written in the Torah, the (Books) of the Prophets, the Gospel, and (Books) of the Apostles, had been entirely confirmed by signs and miracles, which is known by your Majesty as well; however, I say this book (the Qurʾān) was not confirmed by one solitary sign.’

Like Timothy I, Theodore Abū Qurrah argue that the alleged inimitability of the Qurʾān was not a legitimizing sign of Muhammad’s prophethood. David Bertaina asserts, “The reason that Muslims do not read the Qurʾān properly, according to Abū Qurra, is because it is a flawed scripture. Thus one cannot come to certain knowledge through its claims.”

For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, Christian criticisms of the Qurʾān are presented as a polemical and personal matter, he even attributes Qurʾānic disapproval to his Christian uncle:

When I was a Christian, I did not cease to say in accordance with an uncle of mine who was one of the learned and eloquent men among Christians, that rhetoric was not a sign of prophetic office on account of its being common to all nations. But when I waived tradition and customs, and broke with the promptings of habit and education, and examined the meanings of the Qurʾān, then I found that the question was as its holders believed it to be. I have never met with a book written by an Arab, or a Persian, or an Indian, or a Greek, which contained, like the Qurʾān, unity, praise, and glorification of the Most High God.

In addition to the more tacit Christian Arab evaluations of the Qurʾān, several vitriolic refutations of the Qurʾān were written outside of the caliphate as well. For example, the Greek-speaking Nicetas of Byzantium (d. 912) wrote a scathing attack of the

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Qurʾān in his work titled *The Refutation of the Book Forged by Muhammad the Arab* (Lat. *Nicetae Byzantini philosophi confutatio falsi libri, quem scriptit Mohamedes Arabs* / Gr. Νικήτα Βυζαντίου φιλοσόφου πρόγραμμα τῆς ὑπογεγραμμένης ἀνατροπῆς τῆς παρὰ τῶν Ἄραβος Μωάμετ πλαστοσγραφηθείσης βίβλου) Nicetas claimed that Muḥammad fabricated his qurʾānic passages from his own wants and desires or, worse yet, from satanic inspiration. Nicetas also stylistically attacked the Qurʾān, claiming (as Kees Versteegh summarizes) that its structure was neither historical, nor narrative, nor poetic, nor gnomic resulting in a chaotic and incomprehensible work. Likewise, the Cluniac monk, Peter the Venerable (d. 1156), composed equally harsh critiques of Muḥammad and Islam in his *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum* (*Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens*) and his *Liber contra sectam siue haeresim Saracenorum* (*Book Against the Sects, or Heresy, of the Saracens*). According to John Tolan:

Peter’s reading of the Koran was guided by the annotations in the margins of the manuscript, minicommentaries that guided the reader of the ‘diabolical Koran’ by pointing out passages that would seem particularly shocking to the Christian (and especially monastic) reader. The reader is constantly told to note the ‘insanity,’ ‘impiety,’ ‘ridiculousness,’ ‘stupidity,’ ‘superstition,’ ‘lying,’ and ‘blasphemy’ of what he is reading.

At least from the perspectives of Nicetas of Byzantium and Peter the Venerable, medieval Christian polemicists did not seemed concerned with engaging in a comprehensive

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397 Ibid., 57.


exegesis of the Qurʾān. In this regard, these two authors mirrored their Muslim counterparts who often shied away from exegesis in favor of polemical proof-texting. Christians were not unique in their evaluations of the Muslims’ holy text. Neither were the challenges to the ʾiʿjāz al-Qurʾān limited to a certain time, location, or religion. The tenth-century Karaites al-Qirqisānī (fl. first half of the tenth century) and Yefet ibn ʿAlī (fl. tenth century) as well as the Andalusian Jewish poet Moses ibn Ezra (d. 1139) all attacked the alleged inimitability of the Qurʾān. In eleventh-century al-Andalus, Ibn Ḥazm wrote an attack against the Jewish poet, philologist, and Talmudic scholar, Samuel ibn Naghrīla (d. 1056) who allegedly penned a refutation of the Qurʾān based on what he perceived as contradictions within the text. With these types of appraisals — whether reservedly critical or aggressively vituperative — Muslims were expectedly defensive of both Muhammad and the Qurʾān, which at times resulted in apologetic hyperbole and wishful thinking. For instance, Ibn al-Layth claimed that Christians consent to the commonly held Muslim view that Muḥammad was the most intelligent and eloquent of all mankind.

As the inimitability of the Qurʾān was solidifying itself as an essential aspect of Islamic doctrine and apologetic during the ninth century, an important counterclaim was put forth by at least one Christian contemporary of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, ʿAmmār al- Baṣrī, who argued for the concept of the inimitability of the Gospel (ʾiʿjāz al-Injīl). In his Kīṭāb al- Burhān, ʿAmmār, like most Christian apologists, contended that Christianity had been

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400 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, 16.
401 Ibid., 27.
unmistakably established through the miracles of Jesus and his disciples and, as a result, there was no longer any need for new wonders. However, with this in mind, ʿAmmār maintained that the Gospels had become “the miracles of God,” similarly to many Muslims, particularly Muʿtazila, who argued a comparable case for the Qurʾān. As a former Nestorian Christian, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī may have been acquainted with the works of ʿAmmār al-巴šrī who had drawn the direct attention of the Muʿtazili Abū Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. between 840 and 850).

As was often the case, the Jewish community was involved as well, and claims of scriptural incomparability were not limited to Christians and Muslims. Writing in the twelfth century, the Jewish philosopher and poet Jehuda Halevi (d. 1141) ascribed inimitable characteristics to the Mishna. There were scholars, however, who attempted to articulate a more nuanced position regarding scriptural incomparability. Writing approximately two hundred years after ʿAmmār al-巴šrī and ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the Ashʿarī theologian al-Bāqillānī took an intermediate position vis-à-vis the inimitability of the Bible. Unlike the Qurʾān, al-Bāqillānī alleged that the Bible was not stylistically unparalleled, but, like the Qurʾān, the Bible contained divinely-inspired and miraculous knowledge of the things unseen. This stance afforded al-Bāqillānī the opportunity to conveniently and pragmatically utilize the Bible for his own purposes, all the while maintaining the Qurʾān’s superiority over the Bible as well as a qurʾānically rooted and reluctantly respectful position toward the Bible. Al-Bāqillānī’s somewhat tolerant position

403 ʿAmmār al-巴šrī, Apologie et controverses, 41
404 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, 15-16.
405 Ibid., 15.
would eventually be re-articulated and transformed by polemicists like Ibn Hazm and al-Qarāfī whose recognition of divinely-inspired biblical knowledge will only be acknowledged in the most convenient sense.

**Translation, Tranmission, and Tahīf**

The alleged matchlessness of the Qurʾān put Arabophone Christians, Muslims, and Jews at loggerheads with the Arabic language. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī actually argued that the various translations of the Bible were one of the authenticating features of the Christian scripture rather than a source of corruption as many Muslim and Jewish polemicists insisted. For ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, the sheer fact that the Gospels had been translated and disseminated in a multitude of languages by various Christianized communities and still preserved the same texts testifies to the truthfulness of its message. Unlike the Qurʾān, which was fervently preserved exclusively in Arabic, the Bible, not only the New Testament, which had been translated into various languages by the ninth century, but also the Old Testament, had a long history of translations as well, particularly the Greek Septuagint (referenced by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*) and the Aramaic Targums. ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī believed that the corruption or falsification of a scripture would have been more plausible if it only had to be corrupted in one language rather than many languages by many different people.  

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To the contrary, al-Jāḥiẓ argued, “You know that the Jews if they take the Qurʾān, even they translate it into Hebrew,⁴⁰⁷ they take from it meanings in order to change it for their own purposes.”⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, al-Jāḥiẓ considered it scandalous that Christians did not have the Bible in its original language. So too did ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who stated:

Furthermore, there is no Gospel in Hebrew, the language of Christ, which he and his companions spoke, the language of Abraham the close friend [of God] and the rest of the prophets, the language which they spoke and in which the books of God came down to these and other Israelites…The avoiding of [Hebrew] occurred because of your first companions’ attempt to camouflag[e] their accounts, plotting to disguise the lies that they set down in writing and to cover up their plots out of desire for leadership.⁴⁰⁹

In the thirteenth century, the Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna (ca. 1215–1285) offers his assessment of the translation and transmission of Christian scripture:

The Christians do not have the Torah in the original language of revelation, that is, in Hebrew, but in Syriac translation which is available among them in two versions; one is like that of the Jews except for a few words in the interpretation of which there is some difference, and which the translator rendered in the other language according to his own notion of their meaning; and the other version called the Septuagint, differs also in a few words, and to no considerable extent on the computation of ages in the early chapters of the Torah. That is only because the Christians do not worship by reading the Torah and the other prophetic writings to the extent that the Jews do, or even nearly so; and therefore, with some of the Christians, negligence occurred in copying or translating it into a

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⁴⁰⁷ The word al-Jāḥiẓ uses here is ʿibrānīyya which can be translated as either Hebrew or any variety of Aramaic.


⁴⁰⁹ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 95. Like al-Jāḥiẓ, ʿAbd al-Jabbār uses the word ʿibrānīyya which is translated by Gabriel Reynolds as “Hebrew.”
foreign tongue, as happens with many works when copyists neglect to check, or for some other reason.\textsuperscript{410}

Here, Ibn Kammūna explicitly argues for a synthesized understanding of *tahrīf* in which instances of *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* existed alongside instances of *tahrīf al-maʾnā*. This position is put forth by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā* and his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*.

Furthermore, Ibn Kammūna’s evaluation of the “Christian” Bible is not entirely unlike that of al-Jāhiẓ centuries earlier. For both al-Jāhiẓ and Ibn Kammūna and, to a lesser extent, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, failed biblical translations were more of an issue of incompetence than deceitfulness. The Muslim philosopher al-ʿĀmirī (d. 992) in his search for Muḥammad’s name in the Bible, concluded that his prophet’s name was simply lost as a result of an unfortunate by-product of Syriac to Arabic translation.\textsuperscript{411} However, ʿAbd al-Jabbār attributed alterations to the Bible as a result of the deliberate intentions of the translators as opposed to their inadvertent incompetence. The scheming and dishonestly ambitious scribes and translators described by ʿAbd al-Jabbār are absent the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāhiẓ. Keep in mind that the translation of scripture was not always a matter of inter-religious contention, but intra-religious tension as well. Al-Qirqisānī insisted that the Aramaic Targum Onkelos was well stocked with “absurd” translations, which according to Meira Polliack included semantic and grammatical inaccuracies.\textsuperscript{412} Nevertheless, in his *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib* (*The Book of Lights and Watchtowers*), al-

\textsuperscript{410} Saʿd ibn Maṣūr ibn Kammūna, *Ibn Kammūna’s Examination of the Three Faiths*, 51-52.


Qirqisānī, like ‘Abd al-Jabbār, voiced a more unforgiving opinion regarding the willingly deceitful translations of the Christians:

As a matter of fact the Christians rely in many of their doctrines upon nonsense and insolence, since persons who acknowledge and admit the truth of the Jewish religion never profess these doctrines. Therefore, it became evident to them that in their translations of our holy books many changes and alterations have been introduced, their insolence prompted them to assert that the Syriac language is the earliest.413

The translation of scripture was not frowned upon by a select few. Rather, Muslims routinely questioned both the proficiency and motivations involved in translation. Although he was speaking of the transmission of Greek philosophical works, the Muslim grammarian Abū Sa’īd al-Sirāfī, in his debate with the Nestorian Christian and logician Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 940), asks, “How, then, can you rely on any work which you know only by translation, after this account.”414 Al-Sirāfī seemingly questioned the ‘Abbāsid translation movement as a whole — which incidentally challenges the integrity of the Bible as well. During al-Sirāfī’s life, the Bible would have been reaching an efflorescence of translation in which both Jews and Christians were writing their scriptures in Arabic.415 Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956) wrote in his Kūtb al-tambīh wa-l-ishrāf (The Book of Notification and Verification) that the Septuagint had been “translated numerous times, by earlier and more recent translators. One of them was Ḫūnayn ibn


Ishāq…” Additionally, Ibn al-Nadim catalogued biblical books and their translators, including the work of Sa’adyah Ga’ön (d. 942). Al-Sīrāfī asked, “although you translated from Syriac, what do you say about ideas distorted through translation from the Greek language to another language, Syriac, then from this to another, Arabic?” Unlike the previously mentioned authors, al-Sīrāfī seems to believe that translation corrupted the meaning of a text (tahrīf al-ma’rūf).

Each of these authors could have been borrowing from a precedent popularized by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who in his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla concedes that changes have been made to the biblical text. He accounts for any possible discrepancies found in the Bible by stating, “As to me, I count this also as an alteration and corruption in the text of the Gospel, by translators and copyists.” Therefore, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, at least in isolated instances, asserted a position of tahrīf al-nasṣ, although without malicious intent, much in line with the arguments presented by al-Jāhiz, al-ʿĀmirī, and Ibn Kammūna.

However, Thomas Michel argues that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was a proponent of tahrīf al-ma’rūf, based upon a quotation from his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nasārā, “those who have opposed Christ and the gospels, and have corrupted words from the books of the Christians.” Michel corroborates this claim by stating, “Most telling in his acceptance of the Gospels is

416 Ronny Vollandt, Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch, 47.
417 Ibid., 48.
418 David S. Margoliouth, “The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Saʿid Al-Sirafī,” Arabic text, 95; English translation, 114.
419 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 150.
that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī makes constant use of them in his argumentation against Christian beliefs. He never accuses the text of being incorrect, but of Christians failing to interpret it correctly.”\textsuperscript{421} Camilla Adang argues that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī favored ṭahrīf al-maʿnā using the same line of argumentation as Michel.\textsuperscript{422} Certainly ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī argued that, for the most part, the Bible had been misinterpreted, albeit with occurrences of textual corruption as well. John C. Block states, “What makes ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s argument so compelling is his total respect for the Christian scriptures, and his total disrespect for the confessions of faith that the three main branches of Christianity draw from them.”\textsuperscript{423}

Still, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s understanding of the Bible is not as uncomplicated as many scholars perceive it to be. His works more accurately present a total disrespect for Christian confession, doctrine, and exegesis. A “total respect” for Christian scriptures would not entail amendments, acknowledgment of scriptural variants, and the censuring of Christian translators and copyists. Moreover, when a Muslim author — irrespective of how extensively — cites biblical proof-texts for their own polemical or apologetic intentions, they are not endorsing the textual integrity of the Bible as a whole. Rather they are citing individual biblical passages which demonstrate positions and beliefs harmonious and reconcilable with their own. Several of the most strident Muslim opponents of the textual integrity of the Bible, including Ibn Ḥazm, argued that even an irredeemably and satanically corrupted Bible had nevertheless preserved various testimonia of Muhammad. Therefore, limited or extensive usage of the Bible does not demonstrate

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{422} Camilla Adang, \textit{Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm}, 224-225.

that an author believed in the overall textual integrity of the Bible. In reality, proof-texting
simply demonstrates that Muslim polemicists believed in the soundness and utility of
particular verses. Certainly, on many occasions, biblical passages were utilized by various
Muslim authors as definitive evidence. For instance, according to Martin Accad, both
Ibn Qatayba (d. 889) and al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897) considered the Bible to be an authoritative
text. More accurately they considered portions of the Bible to be authoritative.
Furthermore, Accad claims, “the fact that this same text is sometimes used even as final
authority in Hadīth authentication tells us that any simplistic approach to the Islamic use
of the Gospel text is doomed to failure.”

It is difficult to determine whether or not there was a mainstream Muslim
understanding of tahrīf during the first ‘Abbāsid centuries. However, that being said, many
Muslim authors articulated a position which combined — to varying degrees — tahrīf al-
ma‘nā and tahrīf al-nāṣ. Many Muslim authors were not specific in their accusations of
corruption; rather, more often than not, Muslim polemicists simply spoke of corruption
using a wide variety of terms. Modern scholarship has drawn the distinction between
textual and interpretive corruption. The position of tahrīf al-ma‘nā is often considered the
predominant approach of the early Muslim community of scholars who made use of the
Bible; however the perspective of tahrīf al-nāṣ was also quite prevalent. Perhaps more
important than the categories of tahrīf al-ma‘nā and tahrīf al-nāṣ, were the matters of
intention and motivation. If Christians and Jews had unconsciously altered the Bible,

1424 For more information on the various Muslim opinions on the Bible and tahrīf, see Gordon
Nickel’s Narratives of Tampering 16. Here, Nickel discusses the stances of al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), Abū al-
‘Abbās al-Ṣinhājī al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), al-Maqrīzī
(d. 1442), and Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1657).

1425 Martin Accad, The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse, 68.
then they could theoretically be absolved of any guilt by the Muslim community. In other words, the *ahl al-kitāb* were inept rather than ill-intentioned, as some early Muslim polemicists and apologist argued.

However, as the Arabic-speaking world slowly became the Muslim world, the Bible began to be assessed through a new lens; and with the ascendency of the more polemically aggressive works of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qarāfī coupled with the straining repercussions of the Crusades and Reconquista, the corruption of the Bible began to be viewed as a premeditated offense. As a result, the more positive and neutral positions of al-Bāqillānī, al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), each of whom, according to Thomas Michel, “basically accept the authenticity of the Biblical text,” grew less and less popular. In connection with these trends, we begin to see the Bible and its compilers being described as evil, satanically inspired, and deserving of God’s punishment. Yet, Muslims authors still continued to use the Bible in a variety of way and for a variety of purposes. Thomas Michel claims:

The activity of searching the Old and New Testaments for prophecies of Muḥammad persisted throughout the middle centuries of Islam. The repertory of passages which were used to point towards the advent of Muḥammad or whose fulfillment was said to be found in the mission of Muḥammad or in the emergence of the Islamic community increased; the technical skills of the Muslim authors in interpreting Biblical passages sharpened in the course of time.

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427 Ibid., 39.

428 Ibid., 29.
Furthermore, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî discusses a critical distinction between Islamic and Christian revelation, namely divine inspiration versus divine dictation. He compares the apostles of Christ to the biographers of Muḥammad along with his ḥadīth collectors (muḥaddithūn). On the one hand, the Qurʾān is presented as an unequaled paragon of divine rhetoric, while on the other hand, the Torah, and subsequently the Gospels, are presented as a repository for the histories of the Israelites and the life of Christ respectively. In a more general sense, the Bible is put forward as a historical work as much as it is a purely theological resource. Therefore, to a certain degree, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî’s understanding of the Bible is in accordance with the manner in which al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Maṣʿūdī, and al-Birūnī utilized the biblical text for their histories.

Moreover, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî presents the apostles in a neutral manner, claiming that there are reliable and deceitful transmitters much like the muḥaddithūn. However, the Muslim opinion of the disciples and apostles of Christ were quite diverse, ranging from reluctantly positive to outwardly hostile. For instance, writing two centuries after ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî, Ibn Ḥazm proclaimed that the apostles of Christ are the “disbelieving faction” described in Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:14) and Sūrat al-Baqara (2:39). In Anselm Turmeda’s fifteenth-century Tuḥfa, he describes the apostles as being directly responsible for adding and deleting from the Gospels. As previously mentioned, as the Muslim grasp of tahrīf hardened, so too did the Muslim appreciation of the early Christian community.

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429 Theodore Pulcini, Exegesis As Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures, 138. Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:14): O believers, be you God’s helpers, as Jesus, Mary’s son, said to the Apostles. ‘Who will be my helpers unto God?’ The Apostles said, ‘We will be helpers of God.’ And a party of the Children of Israel believed, and a party disbelieved. So We confirmed those who believed against their enemy, and they became masters. Sūrat al-Baqara (2:39): As for the unbelievers who cry lies to Our signs, those shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.’

430 Anselm Turmeda, Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭarŷumān), 277.
Islam and Violence

In his *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla,* ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī also contended that the unprecedented success of the Islamic conquests reaffirmed Muḥammad’s prophethood as well as the veracity of Islamic principles. He boasted that Islam’s spread from Sūs in Morocco to the deserts of Turkestan and Tibet was divinely sustained. Likewise, Ibn Ḥazm claimed that Muḥammad’s victory over the Jews represented God’s wish to abrogate Judaism. But contrary to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Ḥazm’s claim, many Christians associated conquest with bloodshed and non-prophetic behavior. The rapid and expansive success of the Islamic conquests motivated Christian writers to contrast the spread of early Christianity with the spread of early Islam. This resulted in an indivisible link between Muḥammad, Islam, and violence in the Christian mind. In one of the earliest works of Christian-Muslim encounter, the Greek work titled *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (*The Teachings of Jacob, the Newly Baptized*), whose composition most likely dates to the 670s, the Christian author stated of Muḥammad, “He is a false [prophet], for prophets do not come with a sword and a war chariot.”

In another seventh-century source, the history attributed to Sebēos (d. ca mid-seventh century), the author claimed that the unrivaled success of the Muslim armies was

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431 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire,* 58. This position was argued by many Muslim authors including Ibn Ḥazm in a *qasīda* preserved in al-Subkī’s *Tabaqāt.* See Thomas F. Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s al-Jawāb al-ṣāḥīḥ: A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Christianity,” 68.


433 Sean Anthony, “Muhammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the Doctrina Iacobi: A Late Antique Puzzle,” 243-263.

due to the fact that they represented the fourth beast described in the Book of Daniel.  

During ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî’s lifetime, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī juxtaposed the peaceful spread of Christianity as demanded by Matthew 26:52 with the violent spread of Islam. This argument was restated repetitively throughout the work of ‘Abd al-Masîh ibn Ishâq al-Kindî (fl. ninth or tenth century) in his fictional exchange with ‘Abdallâh ibn Ismâ‘îl al-Hâshimi. In addition to being described as a violent and licentious false prophet, Muḥammad was also associated with satanic influences. Needless to say, throughout the medieval period Muslim apologists were compelled to defend Muḥammad’s character, personal conduct, and prophetic mission by any scriptural and intellectual means necessary.

The Qur’ān presents manifest condemnations of Satan in Sūrat al-Mujādala (58:19), Sūrat Fāṭir (35:6), Sūrat Sād (38:77-78, 85), Sūrat al-Nūr (24:21), and Sūrat al-Nās (114:1-4). With these verses in mind, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî attempted to exonerate Muḥammad of these accusations by likening such defamations to the vilification experienced by Christ in Matthew 12:24-26. As a result, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî considered Muḥammad to be scripturally and logically fortified from satanic accusations, much like Christ. Throughout his work, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî continued to combat the association between Islam and violence by recalling several instances of unchecked brutality found in the Old Testament. Not

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436 Wageeh Mikhail, “‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s Kitāb al-Burhān,” 77. Matthew 26:52: Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’

437 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî, The Book of Religion and Empire, 59. Matthew 12:24-26: “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.’”

438 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarî, The Book of Religion and Empire, 59. Matthew 12:24-26. “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?’
only did he present biblical violence as being more severe than Qur’ānic violence, but he also portrayed the bloodshed depicted in the Old Testament as a spiritually fruitless endeavor, which ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī insinuates is actually worse than the actual carnage. First, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī calls attention to the fact that Abraham waged war in Genesis 14. Second, Joshua slaughtered 31 kings in addition to exterminating the population of Ai in Joshua 12:24. Third, in 1 Samuel 27:9, David massacred populations during his raids killing men and women in addition to plundering the cities.438 ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī does not openly condemn these actions; however, he does claim that these hostilities were perpetrated “without calling the inhabitants either to religion, or to pay tribute, or to submit.”439 Therefore, with respect to violence, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī presents Islam as an abrogation to the earlier revealed religions whereby Islamic modes of conquests, specifically those conducted by Muḥammad, have moralistically supplanted the militaristic endeavors of earlier biblical figures.

Nevertheless, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī neither underscores nor disregards the alleged violent nature of the early Islamic conquests. Rather his position is clear: the spread of Islam was divinely orchestrated and, due to the intractable nature of mankind, coercion was an inevitability and unfortunate necessity. In regards to Islam and violence, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī unapologetically stated, “When he (Muḥammad) noticed that they were rejecting his order, thinking evil of him, and not entering willingly into the religion and the grace of God, he made them enter into it by force.”440 This position is recapitulated centuries later

438 Ibid., 153-154.
439 Ibid., 153-154.
440 Ibid., 57
by al-Qarāfī. Diego Cucarella states, “For al-Qarāfī, the question at issue is not the moral quality of fighting in God’s cause, but whether or not this has been prescribed by God.”  

Knowing that Christians incessantly associated Islam and its prophet with violence, the positions of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Qarāfī were representative of polemicists and apologists who had reconciled various qur’ānic passages concerning religion, warfare, and force, most notably Sūrat al-Baqara (2:256), which states that there is no compulsion in religion, with Sūrat al-ʿAsr (110:1-3), Sūrat al-Nūr (24:55), Sūrat al-Tawbah (9:33), and Sūrat al-Fath (48:16), all of which authorize Islam’s indomitable success, irrespective of means.

Likewise, the Muʿtazilī ʿĀbd al-Jabbār attempted to dissociate any correlation between violence and the correctness or incorrectness of any religion. Like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Qarāfī, ʿĀbd al-Jabbār claimed that the use of force and violence cannot prevent a religion from being divinely inspired. However, ʿĀbd al-Jabbār additionally argued that the spread of a religion by peaceful means, often emphasized by Christian apologists, can in no way demonstrate a religion’s veracity either. He claimed that Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and various Indian religions, which he of course believed to be manifestations of categoric disbelief, have spread as far, if not farther, than Christianity without the use of any form of compulsion and force. Therefore, like coercion, pacifism in the spread of religion is irrelevant. Moreover, ʿĀbd al-Jabbār scoffs at the idea of a peaceful Christianity spread by lowly missionaries using no more than the word of God and an array of miracles. In its place, ʿĀbd al-Jabbār claims that Christianity spread through sieges, starvation, warfare, and enslavement, leading him to claim:

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The calamities that they brought upon them would take too long to explain. And so it has been with this community, from its origin to its end. No sword has been carried with so much iniquity, in any era, as the sword of Christianity, as we have demonstrated.\footnote{Abd al-Jabbār, \textit{Critique of Christian Origins}, 140.}

\textit{The Bible and the Qurān: Conflict or Congruence}

Continuing a message presented in his \textit{al-Radd‘ulā l-Nāṣārā}, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī also makes a concerted effort throughout his \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla} to portray a Qurānic God consistent with the God of the Bible. In attempting to do so, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī presents his audience with an exhaustive list of Qurānic verses which he claimed espouse the oneness (\textit{tawḥīd}) of the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob. He offers no analysis of these verses, rather he simply lists them one after the other. Self-evident proof-texts constituted a significant portion of his \textit{al-Radd‘ulā l-Nāṣārā} and they continued to significantly contribute to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s style and arguments in his \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla} as well. The following Qurānic passages, several of which are only partially rendered, are included, \textit{Sūrat al-Ikhlās} (112:1-4), \textit{Surat Āl Imrān} (3:18), \textit{Surat Āl Imrān} (3:26), \textit{Sūrat al-Baqara} (2:28), \textit{Sūrat Fuṣṣilat} (41:26), \textit{Sūrat al-Shûrā} (42:23), \textit{Sūrat al-Ẓalzalah} (99:7-8), \textit{Sūrat al-Nisā‘} (4:79), \textit{Sūrat al-Baqara} (2:286), \textit{Sūrat al-Nisā‘} (4:40), \textit{Sūrat Hūd} (11:101), \textit{Sūrat al-Ṣaff} (61:5), \textit{al-Munāfiqūn} (63:3), \textit{al-An‘ām} (6:160), \textit{Surat Āl Imrān} (3:25).\footnote{ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, \textit{The Book of Religion and Empire}, 20-22.} In this list of Qurānic passages, only \textit{Sūrat al-Ikhlās} (112:1-4) and \textit{Surat Āl Imrān} (3:18) explicitly entreat its readers to embrace the oneness of God. The remaining verses digress from the issue of God’s unicity and focus rather on a multitude of issues discussing God’s benevolence, prudence,
omnipotence, omniscience, and judgement, as well as the extent of humanity’s capacity and responsibility for their actions.

Moreover, throughout these passages, only one prophet is mentioned: Moses, in Surat al-Ṣaff (61:5). ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī insinuates in the opening lines of this chapter that the subsequent Qur’ānic proof-texts have clear connections with biblical precedents established by earlier prophets. However, in this particular instance, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī does not cite any biblical verses, and without a thorough knowledge of the Bible, his arguments would have to be taken at face value. Therefore, he is presenting his audience, many of whom would not have been knowledgeable in the Bible, with an assumed biblical and Qur’ānic equivalency. Upon finishing his list of Qur’ānic verses, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī claims that “This is the faith of Adam, of Noah, of Abraham, and of all the prophets and righteous men…”445 According to his conclusion, the previously mentioned Qur’ānic verses represent a total congruence between biblical and Qur’ānic revelation to God’s prophets. God’s unicity was not revealed through an aggregate of disparate biblical and Qur’ānic revelations, rather God’s message is unchanging. Therefore, a Muslim reader would have no reason to believe that the Qur’ānic passages listed by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī were not in total harmony with the teachings of Adam, Noah, and Abraham found in the Bible. In many ways, it is for this reason that any Muslim discussion of the Bible was intimately entangled in the issue of tahrīf. And as the Arabic Bible became more widely available, Muslims increasingly recognized that the Bible and Qur’ān significantly diverged on many issues. In this sense, the development of the concept of tahrīf was an inevitability, as was the eventual predominance of tahrīf al-nass.

445 Ibid., 22.
Following this ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī presents Muḥammad as a Moses-like prophet prescribing God-given laws to all mankind. In an attempt to justify his claim, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī references Sūrat Āl Īmārn (3:134), Sūrat al-Baqara (2:274), Sūrat Aʿrāf (199-200), Sūrat Luqmān (18-19), Sūrat al-Baqara (2:225), Sūrat Yūnus (10:49), Sūrat al-Baqara (2:185), Sūrat al-Ahzāb (33:35), Sūrat al-Nahl (16:90), and Sūrat al-Qalam (68:10-13). These verses emphasize a particular code of conduct which includes almsgiving, modesty, patience, fasting, and being just. However, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s intention is to present Muḥammad as an ideal lawgiver and not just a virtuous and humble prophet. Therefore, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī underscores that “the Torah which is in the hands of the People of the Book says ‘Everyone who kills should be killed,’” whereas Sūrat al-Nisāʾ(4:93) correctively supplements Mosaic Law by stating “And whoso slays a believer wilfully, his recompense is Gehenna, therein dwelling forever.” In relation to this particular law found in the Torah, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī states “This is a restricted, limited, corrected, and polished order.” ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī continues his treatment of abrogation by referencing Deuteronomy 19:15 and 17:6, Matthew 18:16, John 8:17, 2 Corinthians 13:1, 1 Timothy 5:19, and Hebrews 10:28 which state that the law requires two or three witnesses. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī cites Sūrat al-Ṭālāq (65:2) which “limited” and “enlightened” the biblical law by requiring two men of equity. But if God has only revealed one eternal and continuous revelation,

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446 Ibid., 23-24.
449 Ibid.
450 Ibid., 28-29.
why have these biblical prescriptions needed to be abrogated, even if only slightly? The rectifying of the biblical “eye for an eye” and “two or three witnesses” can be explained as an issue of abrogation rather than corruption. However, by referring to the Torah as “the Torah which is in the hands of the People of the Book,” ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī intimates that there is a Torah not “in the hands of the People of the Book,” thus insinuating that textually distinct versions of the Torah exist. Here, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī flirts with the issue of tahrīf but skirts any overt accusations. Margoliouth suggests that this lack of commitment concerning the textual integrity of the Bible may have contributed to a poor reception of the Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-Dawla.⁴⁵¹

At any rate, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī defended his presentation of Muḥammad as a just and honest abrogator against potential Christian complaints and accusation. In doing so, he likened Muḥammad to Christ, who not only amended but voided various Jewish laws, notably circumcision, sacrifices, feasts, laws of retaliation, decisions, priesthood, and altars.⁴⁵² Therefore, if Christians reprobated Muḥammad’s abrogations, then they would be unjustly holding Muḥammad to an unreasonable and inconsistent prophetic standard. Moreover, they would be harming their own arguments and beliefs concerning Christ and his new covenant. Additionally, apart from Christ, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī considered Muḥammad to have been the only other prophet to have preached a universal religious message.

The universality of Muḥammad’s message was an important assertion to make in the face of growing ninth-century criticisms. Arabic-speaking Christian apologists routinely attributed Islam’s rapid success and spread to compulsion, tribal chauvinism,
and ethnic solidarity, each of which appeared in Christian Arabic literature as indisputably unacceptable reasons to adopt a religion. This position was argued by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṣah, ‘Ammār al-_clicked anc3169927e6959998903999, and Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq. This allegation was in no way limited to the early centuries of Islam. The Melkite bishop of Sidon, Paul of Antioch, explicitly argued in his thirteenth-century Risāla ilā baʾd aṣdiqā ʿthi alladhīna bi-Ṣaydā min al-Muslimīn (often called Paul’s Letter to a Muslim Friend) that Islam was an exclusively Arab religion, and therefore not truly universal.453 This position was continued (possibly under the direct influence of Paul’s letter) by the Copt al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʻAssāl (d. 1265). In his refutation written against none other than ʻAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʻAssāl states:

We the Copts reply just as the kings of the Christians said when they were told that a man had appeared among the Arabs saying that he was God’s messenger and that a book from God had been sent down to him. They said: ‘We had this book brought to us and we found in it what indicates that he [i.e., the Arab messenger] did not claim to have been sent to us, but only to the Arabs of the Hijaz.454

In addition to challenging both the integrity of the Qurʾān and Muḥammad, ʻAlī al-Ṭabarī contended that Christians had unfairly judged the Muslim community, not only by holding Muḥammad to an inconsistent prophetic standard, but also by unjustifiably upbraiding the early members of the Muslim community as well. Both Muḥammad and the early Muslim polity were regularly accused of wanton violence and


454 Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 71.
sexual immorality. ʿAmmār al- Başrī acknowledges the sexual misconduct of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, Solomon’s lusting for foreign wives in 1 Kings 11:1-9, and Samson’s interaction with Delilah in Judges 16. However, he states, “There is no religion under the sun that prohibits desire more, and destroys pleasure more and has more restrictive commands than the Christian religion.” Likewise, Ḥabīb Abū Raiḥān attributed Islamic successes to polygamy, concubinage, ease of divorce, and a sexualized depiction of the afterlife. Theodore Abū Qurrah argued that Muslim polygamy was at odds with the natural order set in place by God, given the fact that Adam lived in paradise on earth and he was given only one wife.

Unlike his justification and explanation of violence and its relation to Islam, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī does not make any direct statements in his Kītāb al- Dīn wa-l-Dawla with respect to sex and some of the commonplace Christian accusations concerning perceived Muslim sexual appetites. However, al-Jāḥiz is more outspoken, claiming that polygamy was not so much an issue of morality as it was an issue of practicality. Furthermore, he was stupefied by Christian perceptions of sexuality:

And how marvellous is this! We know that the Christian bishops as well as all inmates of monasteries, whether Jacobites or Nestorians, in fact all monks of every description, both male and female, one and all practice celibacy. When we next consider how great is the number of the monks and the most of the clergy adhere to their

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457 Sandra Toenies Keating, Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period, 74-75.

practices and when we finally take in account the numerous wars of the Christians, their sterile men and women, their prohibition against divorce, polygamy and concubinage - (is not strange) that, in spite of all this, they have filled the earth and exceeded all others in numbers and fecundity? Alas! This circumstance has increased our misfortunes and made our trials stupendous! Another cause for the growth and expansion of Christianity is the fact that the Christians draw converts from other religions and give none in return (while the reverse should be true), for it is the younger religion that is expected to profit from conversion.\footnote{Charles D. Fletcher, “Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam,” 119.}

\'Alī al-Ṭabarī continues this argument by defending the integrity of the early Muslim community, who he argues must have been motivated by righteous reasons. Why else would men of “power, pride, wealth, cattle, flocks, property, and possessions” exchange their lofty positions for ridicule and poverty?\footnote{\'Alī al-Ṭabarī, \textit{The Book of Religion and Empire}, 74.} Furthermore, he described the Rashidun Caliphs as remarkably pious, unworldly, and humble servants of their God and their community. More specifically, \'Alī al-Ṭabarī describes the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr (d. 634) and ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb (d. 644), as anti-Caesars and anti-Shahs, each of whom ruled as caliph with uncompromising moral character and abstemious personal conduct. According to \'Alī al-Ṭabarī, ʿUmar insisted on “refraining his soul from every passion and pleasure, and rejecting and despising the treasures of Chosrau.”\footnote{Ibid., 65. Khosrau II (r. 590-628) was the Sasanian ruler prior to the Islamic conquests.} On one occasion, a visiting Persian aristocrat was flabbergasted at the sight of such an unassuming leader unaccompanied by any sort of pomp or grandeur and absent of all the panoply he envisioned of caliphal rule. Moreover, ʿUmar is presented as a staunch defender of the poor and needy, particularly slaves. In addition to his praise of Abū Bakr

\footnote{Ibid., 65. Khosrau II (r. 590-628) was the Sasanian ruler prior to the Islamic conquests.}
and 'Umar, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī honors 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) as well as the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Azīz (r. 717-720). It is worth noting that Mu‘awiya (r. 661-680), Yazīd I (r. 680–683), and al-Walid ibn Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (r. 705-715) are portrayed as licentious and ostentatious gourmards much akin to their Byzantine and Sassanian counterparts.

'Alī al-Ṭabarī not only argued that Qur‘ānic teaching supplemented, and, at times, corrected, earlier biblical verses, but he also portrayed Muḥammad as well as the early Muslim community as the embodiment of biblical promise and apostolic modesty. First, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī begins by referencing Genesis 17:20 in which God blesses Ishmael and promises to make him a great nation or, more precisely, the father of 12 nations. Genesis 17:20 can be found in the works of numerous Muslim polemics and apologists, including Ibn Qutayba, al-Māwardī (d. 1058), al-Bīrūnī, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), and al-Qarāfī. 462 'Alī al-Ṭabarī also calls attention to Genesis 16:8-13 and Genesis 21:13-21, both of which reiterate God’s promise to Ishmael. By not recognizing that God has fulfilled his promise to Hagar and Ishmael by means of the Arab-Islamic conquests, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī contends that Christians have misinterpreted or, worse yet, outrightly neglected scriptural promises.

As with many biblical issues, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī’s discussion of Ishmael is embroiled in the topic of tahrīf, specifically Christian eisegesis; and with this, he is not reluctant to voice his frustration concerning the Christian interpretation of Genesis 16:12 in which Ishmael is described as a “wild donkey of a man.” Much like his contemporary al-Jāḥīz, 'Alī al-

Tabarî believed that Muslims were more adept in the science of scriptural exegesis.

Speaking of a particular Christian’s interpretation of this verse, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî states:

 Were it not for his stupidity and the weakness of his intelligence, he would have known that the words of revelation have meanings and mysteries understood only by people who are far advanced in science.463

Believing that Christians have misunderstood the true allegorical meaning of Genesis 16:12, ‘Alî al-Ṭabarî proceeds to mock Christian exegetical skills by referencing Numbers 24:9, in which God is described as a lion, and Exodus 24:17, in which God appeared as a burning bush. In the New Testament, Simon is called Kepha (Aram. rock or stone) throughout the Gospels. Furthermore, Christians are likened to sheep while Christ is called the Lamb of God.


 These, in a remarkable way and in repulsive teaching, prove that the means of expression of the Jews is bad and that the companions of the book are unable to apply allegorical interpretation and are ignorant of the metaphors of words and the alterations of languages; [They are ignorant also of] the way of translating one language to another and what is allowed and not allowed [to be used] about God.464

Al-Jâhiz goes on to say:

 By my life if they had the intelligence of the Muslims and their knowledge of what is permitted in the words [language] of the Arabs and what is allowed to apply to God, they would have added to their knowledge of the Hebrew Language and would have found for these


expressions good interpretations and a plain extract and an
easily understood meaning.\textsuperscript{465}

The younger contemporary of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāḥiz, Ibn Qutayba, put forth a
similar argument using the same biblical references.\textsuperscript{466} Muslims polemicists regularly
accused Jews and Christians of linguistic incompetence and exegetical ineptitude
throughout the medieval period. In the twelfth century, Samuel al-Maghribī, a Jewish
convert to Islam, hearkened back to an argument made by al-Jāḥiz when he argued that
Jews do not recognize the inimitability of the Qurʾān because they do not sufficiently
know Arabic.\textsuperscript{467} Likewise, in \textit{al-Radd al-jamīl} attributed to al-Ghazālī, the author
challenges the Christians linguistic capabilities as well, notably their failure to distinguish
metaphoric and literal language.\textsuperscript{468}

In all likelihood, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāḥiz, and Ibn Qutayba were influenced by Ibn
al-Layth, who in the early ninth century argued that Christians have misinterpreted
(possibly purposefully) the figurative language of numerous biblical verses. Ibn al-Layth
argued that Christ was not to be considered the literal son of God, citing Psalms 2:7,
Matthew 28:10, and John 20:17 as instances of familial language (son, father, and
brother) being used figuratively.\textsuperscript{469} Moreover, he believed that Christians, specifically
deceptive priests, had deliberately adopted unintended or improbable interpretations of

\textsuperscript{465} Ibid., 84.

\textsuperscript{466} Albert Isteero, “ʿAbdullah Muslim Ibn Qutayba’s Biblical Quotations and their Source: An
Inquiry into the Earliest Existing Arabic Bible Translations,” 208-212.


\textsuperscript{468} Sidney H. Griffith, \textit{The Bible in Arabic}, 200; Mark Beaumont, “Appropriating Christian
Scriptures in a Muslim Refutations of Christianity: The Case of \textit{Al-radd al-jamīl} attributed to al-Ghazālī,”

\textsuperscript{469} Hadi Eid, \textit{Lettre du calife Hārūn al-Raṣīd à l’empereur Constantin VI}, 71.
biblical passages. In the works of Ibn al-Layth and many subsequent polemicists, including Christian apostates, priests and rabbis were often understood as the concealers and deceivers described in Sūrat al-Baqara (2:109) and (2:145-146). Ibn al-Layth claims that Christians unfortunately mimic the interpretations of their fathers, a theme which appears in each of the subsequent Christian apostate’s works. Likewise, the alleged corruptive nature of the Jewish leadership abounds in the Qurʾān and other early Muslim literature as well. The famous qurʾānic exegete, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) was particularly critical of what he understood as deceitful Jewish leadership.

Nevertheless, accusations of taḥrīf were not monopolized by the Muslim community. Several Arabic- and Syriac-speaking Christian apologists and polemicists argued that the early followers of Muḥammad had corrupted the Qurʾān. Speaking of Theodore Abū Qurra’s assessment of the Islamic scripture, David Bertaina claims:

By commending Muhammad’s virtues but criticizing Islamic practice, an author could reverse the idea of Christian corruption through taḥrīf claim that the Muslim community was the reason for corruption in Islam. As we shall see in the following chapters on Theodore Abū Qurra’s debate, his goal was to commend Muhammad and the ‘authentic’ parts of the Qurʾan while arguing that later interpreters and the present Islamic community had perverted the pristine faith which Muḥammad had transmitted.

In a like manner, ʿAmmār al- Bsṣrī claimed in his Kūṭūb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwiba that the Imams (a ʾemma) of Islam corrupted the Qurʾān. ʿAmmār reiterates this claim on several

470 Ibid., 71, 74.

occasions, stating “No, it is you who corrupted your own book,” and “This is out of the actions of your religious leaders who carried out the falsification of their books.”

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī has demonstrated that he was willing to use the Bible extensively and in a variety of ways, both to critique trinitarian Christian doctrines as well as defend Muḥammad’s prophethood and the advances of the Muslim community. However, at times David Thomas argues that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was willing to “strain credulity” with his biblical exegesis. In addition to the previously mentioned instances of taḥrīf al-maʾrūh and taḥrīf al-naṣṣ, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī clearly believed that the Jewish and Christian communities had either extirpated Muḥammad’s name from the Bible or simply failed to recognize it. For example, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī cites Psalms 45:2-5, 48:1-2; 50: 2-3, and 149:9 as what he believes to be direct references to Muḥammad. Essentially, wherever the Syriac root letters sh-b-h appear, he equates this Syriac root with the Arabic root letters of Muḥammad’s name h-m-d; both roots relate a meaning of praise. Later in his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī likens the Syriac Mshabha directly to Muḥammad. This is representative of the great lengths to which ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was willing to use the Bible in order to validate his prophet, even presenting an argument that in certain instances was completely nonsensical. Like many of his proof-texts and testimonia, this particular line of argumentation indicates that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was building upon a steadily growing polemical arsenal established in the generations before him. Camilla Adang states:

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474 Ibid., 130.
The principle of translating Syriac sh-b-h to Arabic h-m-d does not seem to have been invented by Ibn Rabban himself, already in Ibn al-Layth’s testimonies, the root h-m-d occurs too frequently to be coincidence. However, the possibility that Ibn Rabban expanded the list of such references to the name of the prophet is not to be excluded.475

Conclusions

Neither ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā nor his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla were overtly venomous. Amidst the refutations of the ninth century, this is one of the most distinguishing features of his works. In his Radd, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī confesses his altruistic intentions, “My goal, in bringing and establishing such a book, is not to refute Christ (peace be upon him) nor the people of his truth, but rather to refute he who from amongst the sects of Christians opposes Christ and the Gospels and has distorted the words.”476 Furthermore, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī considered his Radd to have been divinely commissioned when he stated, “God called me to compose such a book.” In his apologetic Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, he expressed an even more courteous and outwardly benevolent ambitions in writing such a work. In its opening pages, he states:

He who writes a book of this high, illuminating and enlightening subject which involves a general utility to adherents to all religions, has to make it comprehensible and easy; has to discuss and compete with adversary, and not to bully and offend him; he is to be intelligible, and not obscure; courteous, and not abusive; he is to use indulgence, to embellish [the tenor of his speech] by making it lucid, and to bring forth proofs and replies which, when addressed

475 Camilla Adang, Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm, 145.

[to the adversary] should cause him to abandon his religious claim and his faith.\textsuperscript{477}

Nonetheless, both his \textit{al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā} and his \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla} were written for specific purposes. David Thomas summarizes their differences:

The \textit{Dīn wa-Dawla} considerably differs in tone from the \textit{Radd}. Whereas that work attempts to show the lack of logic in Christian doctrine, and is aimed explicitly at Christians, this employs accounts from early Islamic history and from Muslim and Christian scripture, and is aimed at a less specific audience, probably both Muslim and Christian.\textsuperscript{478}

For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, polemical and apologetic mannerliness neither entailed over-indulgent pleasantries nor precluded candid criticism, and from his perspective, Islam and Christianity, specifically as a result of their divergent views of Christ, were mutually exclusive belief systems. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī states:

Further, between the description of the Christ in whom the Muslims believe and your Christ there is a great gap; the Christians say that He is eternal, but with us He is not eternal; they relate that He is Creator, but with us He is created; they pretend that He was killed, but with us He is living. These are contradictory and not synonymous terms.\textsuperscript{479}

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s arguments and style, specifically his usage of the Bible, influenced Muslim polemicists throughout the medieval period. For example, Sadīd al-Dīn al-Ḥimmaṣī al-Rāzī (d. after 1204) quoted over a dozen biblical passages which were directly

\textsuperscript{477}ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, \textit{The Book of Religion and Empire}, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{478}David Thomas, “Ali Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari: A Convert’s Assessment of His Former Faith,” 150

\textsuperscript{479}ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, \textit{The Book of Religion and Empire}, 75.
traceable to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s work. However, it would be upon later converts to Islam and Christian apostate literature that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī would leave a lasting mark. Many of the proof-texts and testimonia as well as dialectical techniques found in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā and his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla were recycled, repackaged, and appropriated into the works of al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda. Prominent Muslim authors had utilized the Bible prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who was writing in the middle of the ninth century, and authors like Ibn Ishāq, the Caliph al-Mahdī, Ibn al-Layth, and al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm each demonstrated a biblical knowledge that increased from generation to generation, specifically regarding the interpretation of biblical passages believed to lend credence to Muḥammad’s prophetic claims as well as de-deify Christ.

However, what separates ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works apart from most anti-Christian polemics is the frequent and diverse manner in which he employs and relies upon various passages of the Bible. Theodore Pulcini observes that nearly half of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla was dedicated to foretellings of Muḥammad. According to Martin Accad, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī references 89 passages from the Gospels alone in his al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā and an additional 22 in his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla. This does even take into

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482 Martin Accad, The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse, 479.
consideration the Old Testaments passages cited throughout both of his works as well. In his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla,ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī cites dozens of Old Testament proof-texts.\textsuperscript{483}

The use of scripture, both biblical and qurʾānic, should in no manner be surprising during the early period of Christian-Muslim encounter. As Mark Swanson states, “Christians and Muslims found the scriptures -- their own and that of the others -- to provide a basis for conversation and for easily-grasped commendation of what they held to be the truth.”\textsuperscript{484} In other words, both Christians and Muslims attempted to utilize one another’s scripture for their own apologetic and polemical purposes. Discussing the anonymous later-eighth century Christian work Fī Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhid, Thomas Ricks states:

In doing so, he lays down one of the principles that will become a basic and recurring aspect of the early Arabophone Christian response to Islam; namely, reaching into Islamic sources and theological discourse and making what would otherwise be challenges to Christian doctrine the raw materials of the Christian apologetical strategy.\textsuperscript{485}

It appears that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī wanted to accentuate biblical monotheism as well as biblical and qurʾānic congruence. For ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and later Christian apostates, the Bible served


\textsuperscript{485}Thomas W. Ricks, “Defending the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2012), 25; Speaking of Paul of Antioch’s (ca. 13th century) letter to a friend in Damascus, David Thomas notes some exceptional characteristics which Thomas calls the Christianization of the Qurʾān. Paul of Antioch uses the qurʾānic text itself to argue the exalted status of Jesus and Mary, the human and divine natures of Jesus, and even the Trinity.
three essential roles: (1) preaching absolute monotheism; (2) confirming that Christ was a human messenger who was sent by God; (3) predicting the coming of Muḥammad and the success of the Muslim community.

Still, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had a nuanced understanding of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Like various other Muslim scholars, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī fuses an intricate blend of taḥrīf al-maʾnā with taḥrīf al-naṣṣ. What is more, the simplistic categorization of taḥrīf must be expanded upon. Misinterpretation must be distinguished from eisegesis just as poor translation must be distinguished from deceptive translation. Martin Whittingham argues, “It is proposed that different classifications of Muslim views of the Bible would be more fruitful, distinguishing, for example between those that regard the Bible as deliberately corrupted and those that see it as accidentally affected by scribal errors.”

Although ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī may have accepted portions of the Bible as sound and authoritative, he did not, however, unquestionably consent to its textual integrity. In addition to claiming that translators and copyist had corrupted and altered the Bible, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī also notes textual differences between the translation of an unknown translator named Marqūs al-Turjumān and the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Torah. Nevertheless, various scholars, including David Thomas, argue that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī “accepts the integrity of the text, but subordinates its contents entirely to the islamic requirement of finding in it foretellings of Muḥammad and his community.”

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487 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, The Book of Religion and Empire, 77-78, 95, 98, 150.

suggests that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī lacked a well-conceptualized and systematized understanding and application of tahrīf. This may well have been the case for other ninth-century polemicists as well.

At any rate, like many anti-Christian polemicists, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s use of the Bible was more likely than not influenced by the earlier (Qurʾān and Sīra) identification of the Paraclete found in John 14:16 and 26, 15:26; and 16:7. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī states:

Concerning that [the prophethood of Muḥammad], Jesus said in the fifteenth chapter of John’s gospel, ‘The Paraclete, the spirit of truth whom my Father sends in my name, will teach you everything.’ Thus, the Paraclete whom God sends after Christ, confirming the name of Christ, is he who teaches people all the things which they previously had not known. But among the disciples of Christ up till the present time there has not been anyone who has taught people something other that that which Jesus had taught them. Thus, the Paraclete who has taught men what they did not know is the prophet [Muḥammad]. And the Qurʾān is that knowledge which Jesus called ‘all things.’

The disputed identity of the Johannine Paraclete is a contention between Christians and Muslims as old as the Qurʾān itself. In many ways, it can be considered one of the primary catalyst which galvanized the early Muslim community to mine the Bible for additional testimonia. Not only did the identification of the Paraclete gain considerable traction at an early stage in Muslim-Christian dialogue, it remained paramount for later Muslim polemicists as well.

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489 John 14:16 states, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper (Paraclete), to be with you forever;” John 15:26, “But when the Helper (Paraclete) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me;” John 16:7, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper (Paraclete) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s position vis-à-vis the Paraclete and Muḥammad was neither original nor generated in a vacuum. In fact, he as well as his predecessors were responding to Christian challenges. Like John of Damascus before him, in his famous debate with al-Mahdī, Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I demonstrated no diffidence concerning Muhammad’s absence from the Bible:

Therefore, these verses and a number of others revealingly bear witness to Jesus Christ; however, I have never seen even one solitary verse in the Gospel, in the (Books) of the Prophets or in others, bearing witness to Muḥammad, his works, or his name.⁴⁹¹

Furthermore, after making this claim, Timothy I proceeded to offer a systematic biblical presentation of the Paraclete along with identifying criteria whereby the Holy Spirit is determined to be the Paraclete. However, Timothy I does not end his discussion of the Paraclete there, rather he continues to recall a laundry list of specifications disqualifying Muḥammad as the Paraclete.

Although the Paraclete was of critical importance to many Muslim polemicists, it was not central to every Muslim discussion of the Bible. In his Taʾrikh, the famous Muslim exegete, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, notes no connection or relation with the Paraclete found in the Gospel of John and the messenger of Sūrat al-Baqara (2:127-129), Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7:157), Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:6).⁴⁹² Al-Ṭabarī’s Taʾrikh notwithstanding, biblical predictions and prefigurations pervade nearly the entire gamut of Muslim works concerning the Bible. However, it is worth noting that during the ninth


⁴⁹² Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muhammed,” 120.
century there was little reaction within the Arabic-speaking Christian community to this particular Muslim interpretation of the Bible. During the early ʿAbbāsīd period, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṣah, and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī largely disregard any alleged foretellings of Muḥammad in the Bible.

With respect to influence, many aspects of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s personal narrative and polemical techniques would become the bedrock upon which later Christian apostate literature was built. Perhaps the most influential feature of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works was the breadth of his typological approach toward the Bible. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh states:

The author, a Christian convert to Islam, was certainly instrumental in introducing Biblical typology to Islam. He quotes a long list of Biblical verses in Arabic, apparently translated from the Syriac (and following the Nestorian or East Syrian version), a small part of which later became the stock list of Biblical verses among Muslim authors.493

Unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who composed a separate polemic and apology, the works of al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, Anselm Turmeda are overtly polemical in nature. And although these later Christian apostate works analyze and safeguard Muḥammad’s prophetic claims, they are nevertheless primarily concerned with dismantling Christian claims and doctrines, particularly the Trinity and Incarnation. As a result, these works more closely reflect the style and structure of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣīr. Each subsequent convert builds upon, and in the case of Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, even plagiarizes the arguments and proof-texts of previous converts.

Nevertheless, in addition to similar methods and reasoning, each convert displayed a

pronounced sense of duty in their work. Concerning ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, David Thomas wonders:

as to whether he saw himself abandoning one faith when he accepted the other, or preserving the truth of the one faith as he entered the other. Had he become a Muslim and left his past behind, or did he remain a Christian and took his past into a fuller and final future? One rather suspects the latter.494

This question is equally applicable to the conversions of al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, Anselm Turmeda. At any rate, each of the above mentioned converts, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī included, considered themselves to be the legitimate heirs of Christ’s message and therefore the embodiment of “true” Christianity.

CHAPTER 3

AL-ḤASAN IBN AYYŪB

Introduction

Al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb (fl. ca. mid-tenth century) was a Muslim polemicist and Christian convert who was active during the mid-tenth century. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) mentioned al-Ḥasan in his Fihrist as one of, “the Muʿtazila about whom nothing is known (al-Muʿtazila mimman lā yuʿrafu min amrihi ghayra dhikrihi).” Al-Ḥasan’s sole surviving work, his Risāla ilā akhīhi ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb (A Letter to His Brother ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb), is only extant in the form of extensive quotations in Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) early fourteenth-century work titled al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Maṣīḥ (The Correct Answer to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of Christ). Additionally, extensive quotations can be found in Naṣr ibn Yahyā’s al-Nasīḥa l-īmāniyya fī fadaʾīh al-milla l-Nasrāniyya (The Faithful Advice Regarding the Dishonor of the Christian Religion) and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī’s Risāla fi l-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Letter Regarding the Refutation of the Christians). Al-Ḥasan’s absence from Islamic biographical literature (tabaqāt) notwithstanding, Ibn Taymiyya clearly considered him to be a rather remarkable author, particularly in the realm of Christian apostate literature. At the end of his presentation of al-Ḥasan’s Risāla, Ibn Taymiyya voices the importance of this


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convert’s work to medieval Muslim polemics, stating, “This is the last of that which I wrote concerning the kalām of al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb. He withdrew from the scholars of the Christians and informed the people of their beliefs. He related their doctrine more truly than any other.”

In his Jawāb, Ibn Taymiyya begins his discussion of al-Ḥasan with a concise summation of the contents and intentions of his Risāla. This introductory overview reads, “He (al-Ḥasan) recalls in it (Risāla) the reason for his conversion to Islam. He recalls proofs regarding the falsity of the Christian religion and the soundness of the religion of Islam.” Al-Ḥasan claimed that Trinitarianism and the doctrine of three hypostases (aqānim) had corrupted the oneness of God along with Christian custom (sharīʿa). As seen in the opening remarks by al-Ḥasan, his work revolved around the ever-controversial issue of the hypostatic union and Christ’s divinity. Like many polemicists before and after him, al-Ḥasan dedicates nearly his entire refutation of Christianity to explaining why and how Christians have wrongfully arrived at the biblically and logically unjustifiable doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. In many ways, as will be seen, al-Ḥasan’s refutation is reminiscent of the rationalist and logical language of his contemporary Muʿtazili controversialists. Al-Ḥasan represents a new type of Christian convert turned Muslim polemicist. His Risāla is neither entirely characteristic of the earlier work of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī nor does it precisely follow the arguments and polemical techniques of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, and Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī. Rather al-Ḥasan


497 Ibid., 88.

498 Ibid., 89.
implements a polemical discourse in which rationality and biblical proof-texts operate rather seamlessly in tandem with one another.

Expectedly, then, al-Ḥasan couched his conversion in reason and deliberative thought as well as scripture, stating that he “contemplated and scrutinized” all of God’s sacred texts and made a logical decision to abandon Christianity and pursue the truth in Islam. However, in addition to the rationality behind his decision to convert, al-Ḥasan also offers a genuine glimpse into the social and psychological pressures surrounding conversion as well. Al-Ḥasan claimed his sense of Christian camaraderie whereby “fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, and neighbors” had for many years suppressed his urge to convert to Islam. Nevertheless, curiosity and the perceived discovery of truth eventually outweighed all else.

In spite of what al-Ḥasan presents as an inoffensive, reasonable, and somewhat heartfelt conversion process, he was, nevertheless, well aware of the commonplace Christian accusations of immorally incentivized Christian conversion to Islam. During the ninth century, as previously demonstrated, many Christian Arabic tracts were teeming with condemnations of what Christian Arabs believed were spiritually disingenuous and unvirtuously motivated conversions to Islam. For example, in the late ninth century, several generation prior to al-Ḥasan, the Monophysite Jacobite Christian, Nonnus of Nisibis (d. ca. 870) criticized what he saw as a licentious and carnal Qurʾānic depiction of paradise. Nonnus states that the Qurʾān entices with, “Rivers of fattening foods, along

499 Ibid., 90-91.
500 Ibid., 90.
with time in bed, that do not satiate; a new creation of women whose birth is not from
Adam and Eve - things known and acknowledged to incite carnal people.”

The Christian apologists Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṭah, ‘Ammār al-
Baṣrī, and Hunayn ibn Iṣḥāq all include an attraction to the sexual depiction of the
Hereafter amongst their unworthy inducements for conversion. Sidney Griffith states:

Again, the contention that Islam teaches the sensual
gratification in the next world is an appropriate reward of
religious in this world, was a charge with which Christian
apologists and polemicists regularly upbraided the Muslims
in the ninth century. They pointed to the Qurʾān’s
seemingly license of hedonistic behaviour for Muslims even
in this world, and to it lush description of paradise, as a
garden of eternal earthly delights.

However, accusations of sexual impropriety were in no way limited to ninth-century
Christian apologetics, rather they persisted throughout the entire medieval period. In the
early thirteenth-century work, Majādalat Jirjī al-Rāḥib (The Disputation of Jirjī the Monk), a
monk from the monastery of St. Simeon juxtaposed Christian piety and spirituality with
Muslim carnality. Just as the Muslim community appears to have established a set list
of biblical testimonia during the late eighth and ninth century from which polemicists and
apologists could draw, the Christian community also appears to have stockpiled
arguments and material for their polemicists and apologists as well. With accusations of

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502 Sidney H. Griffith, “Faith and Reason In Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on
Discerning the True Religion,” in Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258), edited by
503 Sidney H. Griffith, The Monk in the Emir’s Majlis: Reflections on a Popular Genre of
Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period,” in The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in
Medieval Islam, Studies in Arabic Language and Literature Vol. 4, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (Wiesbaden: Otto
Harrassowitz, 1999), 53-55. See also, Mark N. Swanson, “The disputation of Jirjī the monk,” in CMR IV,
166-172.
this sort in mind, al-Hasan, like many Muslim polemists, particularly converts, was quick to appeal to both rationality and scripture to justify his conversion and defend his newfound religion.

**Procedural Polemics**

Therefore, after his initial and succinct rationalization for his conversion, al-Hasan, in a manner quite befitting of a tenth-century anti-Christian polemicist, begins his refutation with a formulaic and sectarian description and subsequent rebuttal of his contemporary Christian communities, i.e., the Jacobites, Melkites, and Nestorians. The tripartite division of Christianity was often understood as an indication of Christian error not simply linguistic or christological misunderstandings. Clare Wilde states:

> But, theory that attributes the ancient disagreements over Christological definitions among the oriental Christians to deep-seated linguistic misunderstandings and cultural differences is somewhat weakened by the post-Islamic history of these communities. One of the strongest anti-Christian polemics found in the Qurʾān is the division of Christianity into sects, and, as the polemics found in the later Islamic tradition attest, even when a mutual adoption of an Arabo-Islamic cultural veneer erased the linguistic divide and, arguably, the cultural one, the Christian communal divisions remained.

However, first, al-Hasan begins with a description of the Arians (Aryūsiyya). The Arians were a non-trinitarian sect of Christianity whose beliefs were formally condemned at the Council of Nicea. Rowan Williams claims, “‘Arianism’ has often been regarded as the

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504 A doctrinal overview of the Jacobites, Melkites, and Nestorians can be found in the works of many anti-Christian Muslim authors, including: al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿIsa al-Warrāq, Abū Yūṣuf al-Kindi, ʿAbd al-Jabār, al-Māturīdī, al-Bāqillānī and numerous others.

505 Clare E. Wilde, “Produce your proof if you are truthful (Q 2:111) The Qurʾān in Christian Arabic texts (750-1258 C.E.)” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2011), 47-48.
archetypal Christian deviation, something aimed at the very heart of Christian confession.” Moreover, the Arians were not unknown to Muslim polemicists, particularly during al-Ḥasan’s life.

The Mu’tazilīs al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar (d. 906) and ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) both demonstrate knowledge of the Arians. Al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar describes multiple non-trinitarian Christian sects in his Kitāb al-ausat fī l-maqālāt (The Middle Way Among the Teachings). Interestingly, al-Ḥasan discusses the Arians within an Islamic framework rather than the customary Christian conciliar configuration. According to al-Ḥasan, Arians adhered to the absolute oneness of God by acknowledging Christ’s prophethood, while making no reference to his lordship or sonship. What is more, al-Ḥasan claimed that Arians adhered to the Gospel of Christ which was established by the Messiah and transmitted by his disciples. Therefore, the Arians — according to al-Ḥasan — were in possession of an original uncorrupted Gospel. Throughout the medieval period numerous Muslim polemicists, including al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, referred to contemporary versions of the Bible as the Torah or Gospels “in the hands of the People of the Book,” (or variety of similarly worded phrases) insinuating the existence of textual variants. However, unlike earlier polemicists, al-Hasan not only identifies an unadulterated Gospel (Injīl), he contextualizes it with respect to both time and religious community.

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507 For an overview of the Arian controversy, see Leo Donald Davis, The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1990), 33-79.

508 For the Arabic text, see David Thomas, Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology, 19-34, 37-49, 59; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 12, 110.
However, the Arians fall short of finding the truth (al-ḥaqq) owing to the fact that they reject the prophethood of Muḥammad.\textsuperscript{509} As previously mentioned, for certain Muslim authors the recognition of Muḥammad’s prophetic office superseded the importance of the Trinity and Incarnation. Two near contemporaries of al-Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 934) penned works titled Tathbīt dala‘īl al-nubuwcwa (The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood) and A‘lām al-nubuwcwa (The Signs of Prophecy). Furthermore, another near contemporary of al-Ḥasan, Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī (d. 913) composed several works which included refutations of Christianity, including his Maqālāt ghayr al-Islāmiyyīn (The Doctrines of Non-Muslims), al-Fusūl (The Chapters), Bayān madhab al-Naṣārā (An Explanation of the Doctrine of the Christians), and Kītāb fīhi l-kalām ‘alā l-Naṣārā mimnā yuḥtaju bihi ‘alayhim min sā‘ir al-kutub allatī ya‘tarifūnā (A Book Containing Arguments Against the Christians from What Can Be Brought Against Them from All the Books They Acknowledge).\textsuperscript{510} Unfortunately, these works have not survived. According to al-Asha‘rī’s Risāla ilā ahl-thaghr bi-bāb al-abwāb (Epistle to the People of the Frontier at Bāb al-Abwāb), Hugh Goddard states that this particular work:

Suggests that the fundamental error of the Christians is not, as was suggested by most Muslims of the day, that they have developed erroneous ideas about Jesus, but simply that they have rejected the prophethood of Muḥammad. If they were to accept Muḥammad, in other words, they would then perceive the truth about Jesus.\textsuperscript{511}


\textsuperscript{510} David Thomas, “Al-Ash‘arī,” in CMR II, 210-216.

\textsuperscript{511} Hugh Goddard, A History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 61.
Although this may appear to be a rather reductive argument by al-Ashaʿrī, nevertheless, the importance of Muḥammad’s prophetic office within the sphere of anti-Christian polemics cannot be undervalued. Both ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan as well as later converts to Islam indicated that the recognition of Muḥammad as a prophet would filter out any trinitarian exegetical interference leading to pure monotheism. Whether a Muslim controversialist devoted his work to an apologetic defense of Muḥammad’s prophethood or an unbridled polemic against the Trinity and Incarnation, his contention always remained embroil in the complexities of tahrīf. Ignaz Goldziher claims that tahrīf was “the central point of Muslim polemic.” Goldziher’s position was reiterated by Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar as well. Goldziher is right in that nearly every theologically contentious issue separating Christians and Muslims can be traced in some form back to tahrīf.

After a rather sympathetic description of the Arians and establishing that a non-trinitarian brand of Christianity existed and flourished, al-Ḥasan returns to the most procedural and formulaic aspect of his polemic. Here, al-Ḥasan offers a doctrinal synopsis of the Jacobites (Yaʿqūbiyya), Melkites (Malkāniyya), and Nestorians (Nastūriyya). During his evaluation of the Jacobites, al-Ḥasan reserved some of the harshest critiques of his entire refutation for monophysite theology. This polemical vitriol is considerably more malicious than his attacks on the Melkites and Nestorians, and it is certainly more scathing than his review of the Arians. As an illustration, al-Ḥasan claims:

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514 David Thomas, Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology, 37-49.
They (the Jacobites) say that Mary bore God (He is exalted above that which they say), and that God died, suffered, was crucified in bodily form, was buried, rose from amongst the dead, and ascended to heaven. They came up with a doctrine, which, if presented to heaven, it would have split, or if presented to the earth, it would have cracked, or if presented to the mountains, they would have crumbled. Thus, there was no point in arguing with them since their disbelief, through that which they declared, was too apparent to doubt.515

Typically, Muslim polemicists reserved their sharpest and most grandiloquent condemnations for monophysite theology on account of what they perceived as an unabashed anthropomorphism and desanctification of God.516 Al-Ḥasan’s absolute remarks are indicative of an increasingly polemical rhetoric with regard to Christian doctrine. Further yet, al-Hasan not only suggested that Jacobite doctrine was so ludicrous that it did not even warrant extended discussion, he likewise claimed that the Christian community was united in their opposition against the Jacobites and that Christians nearly unanimously testify against the Jacobite doctrine that Mary bore God.”517

Yet, in the face of particularly harsh invective, the tenth-century Jacobite community produced two of the most prolific apologists in Yahyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974) and ‘Īsā ibn Zur’a (d. 1007). However, like al-Ḥasan’s assertion “there was no point in arguing with them,” Yahyā ibn ‘Adī was reluctant to engage Muslim mutakallimūn (scholastic theologians) because he believed that their ideas did not originate from a point of mutual understanding and that dialogue was essentially a frivolous endeavor. Nevertheless, both


516 For an overview of three prominent monophysite theologians, see Roberta C. Bondi, Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarag (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

517 Ibid., 94-96.
al-Ḥasan and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, despite their projected reluctance, exerted considerable efforts in apologetics and polemics. Moreover, both Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Ibn Zurʿa wrote extensively on the Jacobite articulation and understanding of the Trinity. In doing so, they demonstrated exceptional originality in their works, notably in the form of innovative analogies. These Jacobite authors attempted to gain the intellectual respect of anti-Christian polemicists by abstracting (philosophically and grammatically) the doctrine of the Trinity. As will be seen, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī’s use of grammatical categories in his discussion of the Trinity had a lasting influence upon Christian and Muslim authors, including al-Ḥasan and later converts turned polemicists.

Next, al-Ḥasan discusses the Melkite community also known as the Rūm (Byzantine-rite), which he claimed was the predominant sect of Christianity when and where he encountered Christians. This would place al-Ḥasan in Greater Syria (modern-day Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and parts of southeastern Turkey). Ibn Hazm claimed in his Kitāb al-Fiṣal that Melkites comprised the majority of the Christian populations of North Africa, Sicily, Andalus, and Greater Syria (Shām). After attempting to describe and distinguish Melkite doctrine from the Jacobite doctrine, al-Ḥasan asked, “Is there a difference between the two creeds except that which they disagree about concerning the natures?” After a brief description of Nestorian doctrine, al-Ḥasan returns to a notion championed a century earlier by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, i.e., that all trinitarian theology — regardless of Christology — is prevaricating balderdash.

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518 Ibid., 92.
Al-Ḥasan essentially equates Nestorian dyophysitism with Jacobite monophysitism, claiming “The meaning of Nestorian doctrine returns to the doctrine of the Jacobites except that they chose such embellished words to be able to distract the listener with them.”

As previously mentioned, the severity of anti-trinitarian polemic grew over the centuries. Like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, many notable medieval Muslim thinkers reiterated their dissatisfaction with what they saw as ambiguous and mind-numbing trinitarian theology. However, the level of anti-Christian vitriol increased incrementally in the works of al-Jāḥiz, Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfi, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Qarāfī, all of whom described the Trinity as deceptive and cryptic nonsense. For example, in the century prior to al-Ḥasan, al-Jāḥiz claimed that Christian doctrine was confounding to the point that common people simply cannot comprehend it, leading him to state that Christians are “the causes of perplexity and confusion” in society. Again, this perplexity and confusion is created through an inconsistent presentation of doctrine. Al-Jāḥiz claims:

Even if one were to exert all his zeal and summon all his intellectual resources with a view to learn the Christians’ teachings about Jesus, he would still fail to comprehend the nature of Christianity, especially its doctrine concerning the Divinity. How in the world can one succeed in grasping this doctrine, for were you to question concerning it two Nestorians, individually, sons of the same father and mother, the answer of one brother would be the reverse of that of the other.

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521 Ibid.

522 David S. Margoliouth, The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Saʿīd Al-Sīrāfi, Arabic text 95, English trans. 114.


524 Ibid., 76.
A contemporary of al-Ḥasan, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, recasts al-Jāḥiẓ’s claim when he states, “No one has heard of a people more ignorant, insolent, and perplexed than the Christians.”525 The polemical positions of al-Ḥasan, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, and other tenth-century Muslim polemicists cannot be considered in any sense a sharp polemical redirection or reorientation of the attitudes of earlier ninth century authors. More accurately, the works of these authors are representative of general trends in the Muslim community with respect toward Christianity.

Moreover, al-Ḥasan voiced an equally frustrated polemic concerning Christian sectarianism. For al-Ḥasan, intra-sectarian doctrinal squabbling amongst Christians was doubly frivolous. First, al-Ḥasan argued that Nestorians condemned Jacobites for claiming that Mary bore God; however, he claims that the Nicene Creed, which Nestorians, Jacobites, and Melkites mutually agree upon, states, “the Messiah is true God and that he was born of Mary.” Much like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan collapsed the various trinitarian and christological doctrines into one category: Eutychianism or another rather extreme form of monophysitism. To this, al-Ḥasan asked, “so what is the contention and what is the difference?” He also criticized the Nestorians for disagreeing with the Melkites, whereby he asked a similar question, “what is the meaning of such a discrepancy?”526 ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, and each subsequent Christian apostate exerts a concerted polemical effort around the Nicene phrase “true God from true God (Gr. θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ).” For many Muslim disputationalists, this phrase alone

nullifies any protracted discussion of hypostases, substance, essence, property, or being. Likewise, this expression dissolves any distinction between the various christological positions.

Writing in the eleventh century, the Imāmī Shīʿī thinker, Sadīd al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥasan al-Ḥimmaṣī al-Rāzī (d. after 1204), like many Muslim polemicists, offered the conventional Muslim tripartite classification of Christianity. Similar to al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥimmaṣī came to a simple conclusion with respect to Trinitarianism. After displaying no discernible predilection for either monophysitism or dyophysitism, al-Ḥimmaṣī concluded that theological doctrines of the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites were simply khunāfīt (superstitions or fairy-tales), none being more or less true than the other.527 In many ways, it appears that for the majority of medieval Muslim intellectuals (converts turned apologists and polemicists included) describing God in terms of essence, substance, hypostases, or any other variation of trinitarian terminology was unacceptable.

As mentioned previously, these terms, for the overwhelming majority of Muslim polemicists, imparted plurality to God and were therefore considered a form of unbelief. For example, regarding perhaps the most ubiquitous of Arabic trinitarian terms, jawhar (essence or substance), Emilio Platti has stated, “We know from other sources that Muslim theologians were extremely reluctant to apply the term jawhar, substance, to God, because they always considered a substance or a ‘thing’, ʿayn, to be part of the material world.”528 At a time when Arabic-speaking Christians were striving to find their theological voice


and idiom in Arabic, Muslims were active in philosophical and linguistic endeavors of their own as well. According to Gerhard Endress, since the time of al-Manṣūr (r. 754 - 775) the upper échelons of ‘Abbāsid society, particularly intellectuals, had been competing to form what he calls “a coherent terminology and a style of technical presentation.” 529 From ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī to Anselm Turmeda, Christian converts to Islam habitually scrutinized and decried what they saw as the failures of trinitarian terminology.

Al-Ḥasan continues, “if they (Christians) persist in incorrectness and defend this vile doctrine and are inclined to dressing it up it with questionable deceptions for those whose knowledge is inadequate, then we will establish for them a refutation which they themselves cannot refute.” 530 In a way, this smacks of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s argument. Here, al-Ḥasan envisions and frames his refutation of Christian doctrine as a duty-bound obligation. Much in line with the contemporary Muslim anti-Christian polemical party line, al-Ḥasan continues to characterize Christians as theological deceivers. Case in point, al-Ḥasan stated that Christians employed embellished language and preyed upon “those whose knowledge is inadequate;” likewise, Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī (d. 979), most likely a contemporary of al-Ḥasan, voiced an almost identical argument, claiming that Christians purposefully utilized arcane philosophical terminology in order to inveigle their audience, particularly those whom he called the “simple-minded” of society. Regarding what he perceived as a duplicitous Christian apologetic stratagem, in his debate with Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus, al-Sīrāfī claimed:


Surely you (Christians) want to distract the ignorant and degrade the elite. Your goal is to intimidate (with talk of) genus, species, property, classification, accident, and person; you speak of (nummity), ubiety, quiddity, quality, quantity, essentiality, accidentality, substantiality, materiality, form(ality), humanity, acquisitionality, and vitality...all of this is purposelessness, triviality, and obscure talk.\(^{531}\)

Although writing several generations after al-Ḥasan and al-Sīrāfī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, likewise, complained of underhanded Christian descriptions of their beliefs, claiming:

> These are their essential teachings, but they barely express them clearly. Instead they resist the essence of them as much as possible, so that their principal authors and their writers who are devoted to this barely summarize their teachings.\(^{532}\)

This specific line of argumentation, i.e., the topos of a withholding and wily Christian leadership, is found not only in the works of many Muslim polemicists, but it is also a salient features of Christian apostate literature as well. Interestingly, in the century prior to al-Ḥasan and al-Sīrāfī, the Nestorian apologist, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, actually maintained that the terminological complexities and theological nuances of Christianity that Muslim polemicists ridiculed were to be understood as divine guidance. ‘Ammār claimed that the intricacies of trinitarian doctrine should have stymied the success and spread of Christianity, however, counterintuitively, Christians successfully evangelized a large portion of the world.\(^{533}\)

To a certain extent, al-Sīrāfī is justified in his complaints about the various expressions of Christian doctrine. Without question, Arabic-speaking Christians made

\(^{531}\) David S. Margoliouth, “The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Sa‘id Al-Sīrāfī,” Arabic text, 105.


\(^{533}\) Wageeh Mikhail, “Ammār al-Baṣrī’s Kitāb al-Burhān,” 82-84.
little attempt to establish a definitive and standard trinitarian and christological lexicon. For example, the Jacobite, ʿĪsa ibn Zurʿa claimed that God was three in aspects (jihāt), conditions (alwāl), accidents (aʿrāḍ), properties (khawāṣṣ), perspectives (wujūh), and hypostases (aqānim). Furthermore, Ibn Zurʿa stated that God was one in essence (dhāt), substance (jawhar), quiddity (māhiyya), individuality (anīyya), and identity (huwiyya).534 Similarly, the Coptic Christian Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 987) used a comparable set of terms; Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ claimed: “If someone expresses it (the Trinity) by using the words persons, characteristics, ideas, or attributes, as the ancients did, and they mean by this its everlastingness, the meaning of their expressions is the same, although the terminology is different.”535

In sharp contrast to al-Sīrāfī, was Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944). Rather than mockingly cataloguing the extensive list of trinitarian terminology, in certain instances, al-Māturīdī streamlined the typical trinitarian lexicon in his Kitāb al-Ṭawḥīd (The Book of the Oneness). David Thomas notes that al-Māturīdī replaces lāḥūt (divinity) and nāṣūt (humanity) with rūḥ (spirit). Additionally, al-Māturīdī uses juzʿ min Allāh (a part of God), šāra fī l-badan (came into the body), and yaṣīlu ilayhi (combined with it) in order to simplify the technical terms used in describing the incarnation and the hypostatic union.536 However, al-Māturīdī also utilized more standard trinitarian terms in his work as well,

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534 Herbert Fergus Thomson, “Four Treatises by ʿĪsa ibn Zurʿa,” 142.


536 David Thomas, Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology, 84.
including al-qunūmāt (hypostases) and tajassama (became incarnate). Nevertheless, al-Māturīdi’s terminology is somewhat unique in anti-Christian works. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Ľūbnānī, and Anselm Turmeda all avoided intricate and convoluted discussion of christological terminology often (and most likely deliberately) never moving beyond the terms jawhar (substance or essence) and aqānīm (hypostases).

Moreover, a mainstay of Muslim anti-Christian polemic, particularly those of the Muḥtazilī persuasion of which al-Ḥasan partook, was the repetitious association between Christian doctrine and irrationality. Consider al-Ḥasan’s question: “How can it be that a person of rational thought can worship one born of a flesh-and-blood woman, who died, and who was susceptible to illnesses and diseases?” Later, when speaking of Christian doctrine, he states, “Is such considered true by people of speculation?” One is reminded here of the prefatory remarks offered by the Caliph al-Mahdī to the Patriarch Timothy I in their eighth-century dialogue in which he states, “Oh Catholicos, it is not befitting for a man like you, knowledgeable and possessing experience, to say about God Most High that he took a woman and begat from her a son.” In response to this doctrinal indictment, Timothy, in addition to offering age-old apologetic and explanatory analogies, offered a simple and often reiterated Christian argument, i.e., the Trinity and Incarnation transcend rationality (fāʾiqa ‘an al-ʿaql), an apologetic maneuver often given by

537 Ibid., 97.
538 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sahih li-man baddala dīn al-Masih, 95
539 Ibid., 96
Christian apologists and regularly rejected by Muslim polemicists. More often than not, Arabic-speaking Christian apologists and Muslim polemicists were at irreconcilable loggerheads with the relationship between their respective theological positions and rationality.

Generally speaking, during the tenth century, Muslim polemicists at times appear to have been stupefied and flabbergasted at the idea of arguing Christian doctrine and, as a result, inter-religious dialogue began to stagnate. Of course, there were significant exceptions. The tenth century produced several instances of Christian-Muslim terminological and possibly even theological congruence. To illustrate, the Muʿtazilī-inclined Shiʿī, al-Nawbakhtī (d. 923-24) recalls the following account:

It was related that Abū Mujālid, who was one of the masters of divine justice (min shuyūkh al-ʿadl), met with Ibn Kullāb one day and said to him, ‘What do you say about a man who said to you in Persian, ‘Tu mardī’ and another who said ‘Anta rajulun’; did the two differ in describing you except in respect to their expression? He said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Your relationship to the Christians is like this for they say that the Exalted is one substance, three hypostases. They mean by it pre-eternal life and speaking with pre-eternal speech. Between you [and them] there is no difference except in respect to expression.’

By the same token, the Muʿtazilī Abū Hāshim al-Jubbārī (d. 933) considered the divine attributes to be aḥwāl (conditions, states, or modes). As previously demonstrated, Ibn Zur'a equated aḥwāl and aqānim. As Thomas Michel argued, the Baghdādī philosopher, Abū Sulaymān Ṭāhir al-Sijistānī (d. 985), described the divine nature of God along with His

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541 Thomas F. Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ,” 57-58. The translation has been slightly altered.
attributes in a manner bearing a striking resemblance to his Christian contemporaries’ understanding of the hypostatic union. Michel states:

Al-Sijistānī held that the divine nature can be described by eternal attributes which are neither superadded to the divine essence, not external to it, nor identical with it or with each other; if this is what the Christians mean by the divine hypostases, then their formulations can be accepted by Muslims.542

In fact, al-Sijistānī’s own words are more telling. He states:

There are people who describe that [divine] nature (al-dhāt) by attributes which are particular to it in itself, not according to its relationship to things or the relation of things to it. These are a group of Christians who pursue the truth (firqa min al-Naṣārā al-muḥaqiqīn). Thus, for them the essence of God results in pure oneness in substantiality and multiplicity in personality (uqūmiyya). It does not necessitate that one thing be both one and many, since that is only under one or another aspect. This is not absurd, and this is what we have wanted to make clear.543

Writing during the twelfth century, al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) considered this type of discussion of the divine attributes to be essentially identical to Christian lines of argumentation.

The Formation of Trinitarian Theology: Criticizing Nicaea

Due to the fact that al-Ḥasan devoted so much of his polemic against trinitarian theology and Christology, in many ways, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, he equated Christianity with the Nicene Creed. Each of the later converts to Islam who wrote anti-Christian polemics,

542 Ibid., 64.

al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda cite the Nicene Creed nearly in the exact form given in the ninth century by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. It is worth noting that one of the most common Arabic phrases used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Muslims alike for the Nicene Creed is sharīʿat al-īmān (The Law or Rule of Faith). To a lesser extent, al-tasbīha (The Praise) is used as well. The Nicene Creed figures predominantly in anti-trinitarian works for obvious reasons. Muslim polemicists overwhelmingly concerted their polemical efforts in attacking the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation which the Nicene Creed succinctly and conveniently summarizes. However, and perhaps more importantly, this polemical preoccupation was not endemic to any particular time, region, or sect.

In fact, during the ninth century, apart from ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, the most influential Muslim polemicists, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī, and Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, concentrated all of their polemical energy against the Trinity and Incarnation. Those Muslim polemicists who were interested in refuting the Trinity were also well acquainted with the important ramifications the various councils (or at the very least the Council Of Nicaea) had on the different Christian communities of the Arabic-speaking world.

Consider al-Ḥasan’s remarks on the decisions made at Nicaea:

This creed of faith they agree upon. They exert their lifeblood (muhaj) for it. The souls of multitudes of Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians would be lost without it. They confess in it completely that the Lord Christ, who this (creed) described, is he who we have precisely defined as ‘true God from true God.’ He descended from the heavens, was incarnated by the Holy Spirit, became man, was carried, was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, and was crucified.

544 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sahīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ, 98
For al-Ḥasan, the matter is simple: without Nicaea, there is no Christianity, or more accurately, without Nicaea there would be no trinitarian Christianity. That being the case, Muslim polemicists saw in the Council of Nicaea and subsequent ecumenical councils — along with their concomitant trinitarian language and theology — the culmination of a gradual degradation of non-trinitarian Christianity under the influence of Greco-Roman influences. This notion is evident in the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who explicitly claimed that trinitarian Christianity was invented to placate Roman philosophical proclivities, a stance reiterated by Muslim polemicists in subsequent generations, including two of al-Ḥasan’s contemporaries, Abū Saʿīd al-Sirāfī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār.

Regarding the Nicene Creed, al-Ḥasan appears to be dissatisfied with the decisions of the council on two fronts. First, the Nicene Creed endorses trinitarianism, and therefore, multiplicity in God. However, al-Ḥasan also condemned Nicaea due to its perceived lack of biblical corroboration, much in line with the argument presented by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. For al-Ḥasan, the participants in the Nicene Council chose obscure passages and extrapolated extravagant doctrines — all the while ignoring the clear verses that had been uttered by Christ himself and his disciples, which according to al-Ḥasan depicted Christ’s absolute humanity.\footnote{Ibn Taymiyya, \textit{al-Jawāb al-sāḥīh li-mān baddala dīn al-Masīh}, 116.} Here, al-Ḥasan refrained from the rather hyperbolic claims of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who claimed that 20,000 New Testament verses reinforce Christ’s humanity rather than his divinity.\footnote{David Thomas, “Christian Theologians and New Questions,” in \textit{The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam}, eds. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden, Brill: 2006), 265.}
At this point in his *Risāla*, before his extended analysis of the Bible, al-Ḥasan addresses one of the cornerstones of Christian Arabic apologetics, i.e., trinitarian analogies, particularly the ever-popular analogy of the sun, its heat, and its rays. In fact, we see a likening of the Trinity to the sun as early as the second and third centuries as well as during the fourth century in the Syriac writings of Saint Ephraem (d. 373). Quite expectedly, then, this analogy appeared in the first Christian Arabic texts as well, notably the debate between Timothy I and al-Mahdī. After describing the eternal and created substances of Christ, al-Ḥasan segues into his personal rendition of this hypostatic metaphor. Al-Ḥasan states, “the one subsists in three realities (*maʿānī*), and the three have one reality (*maʾhā*) like the sun, which is one thing with three realities: the sun disc, the heat, and the light.”

However, for al-Ḥasan, this is a specious analogy. When al-Ḥasan compares and contrasts the sun with its light and heat with the creedal phrase “true God from true God,” he identifies an unmistakable false equivalency. The light and heat of the sun are not uniquely unified with the physical sun as are the Son and Holy Spirit to God the Father; therefore, al-Ḥasan concludes, “its light and heat are not true sun from true sun from the substance of the sun.” For anti-Christian polemicists, this particular analogy is no more or no less tenable than the countless analogies Christian apologists utilized. Rather, it simply happens to be the most popular, and as a result, it was often individually singled out and deconstructed by Muslim polemicists. Although trinitarian analogies

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547 In the later work by Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, this paragraph is essentially repeated verbatim with only slight variations.

routinely fell on deaf Muslim ears, Arabic-speaking Christians, nevertheless, remained reliant upon figurative and analogical language when discussing the Trinity. However, throughout the medieval period, Arabic-speaking Christians often presented their analogies with certain caveats which voiced the mysterious inexpressibility and incomprehensibility of the Trinity, an argument that was doubly condemned by Muslim polemicists.

Building upon a precedent established by Timothy I, the Nestorian ʿAmmār al- Başrī argued that, “[Christ’s] eternal birth is not from the body of a woman, but he is the Word of God who is not to be defined or comprehended. His generation is far more excellent than the [generation] of light from the sun, and the word from the soul.”549 For al-Ḥasan, Christians must categorically abandon Nicene beliefs and all of its accompanying enigmatic language. The Christian notion that the Trinity should somehow be placed beyond reproach predates Timothy I by several centuries. Centuries earlier Ephraem forewarned in Syriac of the dangers of trinitarian ruminations, believing that scrutinizing the complexities of the Trinity would only lead to insuperable consternation. More specifically, Ephraem stated:

Take life from the greatness (of God)  
And leave aside investigation into the greatness.  
Love the grace of the father  
And do not probe into his being.  
Take delight in and love the goodness of the son  
And do not probe into his birth.  
Love the descent of the holy spirit  
And do not apply yourself to investigating it.  
Father and Son and Holy Spirit  
By their names they are understood.  
Do not ponder their hypostases.

549 ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et controverses, 192-3.
Meditate on their names.
If you inquire into their being you are brought to naught

After his discussion of the various Christian trinitarian formulations, al-Ḥasan begins the most conspicuous aspect of Christian apostate polemics, i.e., a programmatic and protractedbiblically-based refutation of Christ’s divinity. In many ways, al-Ḥasan based his critique of trinitarian Christianity upon \textit{Sūrat al-Nīsā’}\textsuperscript{4:171} which states:

\begin{quotation}
People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, ‘Three.’ Refrain; better is it for you. God is only One God. Glory be to Him -- That He should have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God suffices for a guardian.
\end{quotation}

This particular qur’ānic verse in many ways encompasses the totality al-Ḥasan’s arguments. Like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī before him, al-Ḥasan was not a vigorous proponent of a textually corrupted Bible (\textit{tahrīf al-naṣṣ}). Rather, al-Ḥasan, for the most part, believed that Christians were guilty of immoderate and careless exegesis, a claim emphasized by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāhiẓ. Nevertheless, both ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan found Christians just as culpable regarding calculated eisegesis, which can be classified as a type of \textit{tahrīf al-ma‘nā}, which — according to al-Ḥasan — resulting in fallacious and innovative doctrines. Repeatedly throughout his work, al-Ḥasan argued that Christians had misinterpreted numerous verses and in other cases taken far too many liberties with the biblical text. But,
like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan periodically incorporated scathing attacks against the textual integrity of the Bible amidst his lengthy employment of biblical proof-texts.

When implementing the Bible in his polemic, al-Ḥasan would often analyze and deconstruct a biblical scene in hopes of presenting a corrective reinterpretation imbued with Islamic doctrines and beliefs. Ironically, for Christians, many of his proofs were considered definitive evidence depicting Christ’s divinity rather than his humanity. For example, al-Ḥasan presents a slightly altered rendition of the Annunciation found in the Gospel of Luke 1:28-35 rendered by al-Ḥasan as:

‘Peace be upon you, Oh one who is full of blessings. Our Lord is with you Oh blessed of women.’ When Mary saw him she was terrified. Therefore, he said to her ‘Do not fear me Mary, for you have found grace with your Lord, thus you will become pregnant and bear a son. You will name him Jesus, and he will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High God and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will be a king of the house of Jacob forever.’ Mary said, ‘How can that be? A man has not touched me.” The angel said, ‘The Holy Spirit will come to you and he will dwell in you, and by the power of the Most High you will become pregnant. He who will be born of you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.’

To a Christian audience, the Annunciation found in the Book of Luke is often cited as unequivocal evidence supporting Christ’s divinity. However, just as ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had cited Luke 1:28-35 as an anti-trinitarian proof-text him, al-Ḥasan too believed that these verses have been corrupted through misinterpretation. Mimicking ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-

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Hasan claimed that when speaking to Mary, Gabriel did not say, “He whom you will bear is your creator and lord as you (Christians) call him.”

Furthermore, al-Ḥasan elaborates on what he sees as Christian exegetical excesses in his discussion of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ as described in Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22. Al-Ḥasan states:

Thus, Matthew said in his Gospel: ‘Surely Christ (Peace be upon him), when he came out of the Jordan heaven opened up to him, then John saw the Holy Spirit descend upon him in the form of a dove, and he heard a voice from heaven, “This is my beloved son (ibn al-ḥabīb) whom I have chosen (istafaytu).”

Someone who is “beloved” and “chosen” cannot be God. Here, al-Ḥasan reiterates ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s earlier argument, which will be taken up by later converts as well. Al-Ḥasan states that Christ is called “chosen” (mustafā); “Chosen” is passive (mafūl); if something is mafūl, then it is “created” (makhlūq). If something is “chosen” or “created,” then naturally they cannot be the chooser or creator. Al-Ḥasan continues, “He (Christ) constantly said: “My God and your God, my father and your father.” For al-Ḥasan, Christ’s various titles and miracles are intimately connected. The fact that the Bible presents Christ as a passive recipient disqualifies the possibility of Christ’s active agency in the performance of his miracles.

Al-Ḥasan states that Christ is a “sent servant (ʿabd mursal), lorded over (marbūb), sent (mabūth), and commanded (maʾmūr). He performs that which he hears and he does that

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552 Ibid., 103
553 Ibid., 104
554 John 20:17. Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāḥ al-sahih li-man baddala dīn al-Masih, 105. This verse is one of the most often quoted proof-texts in anti-Christian polemic.
which is set before him.” During the tenth century, several Christians used similar grammatically based arguments in defense of the Trinity. Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī offered the analogy of God the Father as the “rationality” (ʿaql), the Son as the “rationalizing or rationalizer” (ʿāqil), and the Holy Spirit as the “rationalized” (maʿqūl). In fact, in the early twentieth century, Augustin Périer contended that Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī was the first to present this grammatically based analogy of the Trinity. It is worth noting that a near contemporary of al-Ḥasan and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, the Muʿtazilī ‘Abd al-Jabbār claimed that the analogy of the ʿaql, ʿāqil, and maʿqūl was borrowed from Roman philosophy. This analogy was continued by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s pupil ʿĪṣā ibn Zur’a (d. 1008). Moreover, a similar analogy was expressed by the Nestorian, Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043); however, Ibn al-Ṭayyib chose “knowledge” (ʿilm), “knower” (ʿālim), and “known” (maʿlūm). In any case, the grammaticalized analogies of the Trinity were no more acceptable for Muslim polemicists than other metaphors.

Al-Ḥasan also makes an effort to bring to light disparities in the biblical narrative. In this case, al-Ḥasan describes Luke 7:18-19 in which John the Baptist, after having baptized Christ, remains unsure of who Christ actually was. Al-Ḥasan writes, “The disciple Luke said in his Gospel that John the Baptist sent (a message) to Christ after he had baptized him and he asked him: ‘Are you that one who will come or should we expect

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555 Ibid., 105.
556 For more information on this line of argumentation, see Herbert Fergus Thomson, “Four Treatises by ʿĪṣa ibn Zurʾa Tenth Century Jacobite Christian of Baghdad,” 124.
557 ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 118.
someone else?" Here, al-Ḥasan insinuates that the illogical confusion or ignorance demonstrated by John the Baptist in Luke 7:18-19 confirms the corrupted nature of the Bible. This position is maintained by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, and Yūṣuf al-Lubnānī. For al-Ḥasan this is not a matter of textual corruption, it is an issue of exegetical overindulgence. Al-Ḥasan summarizes Christ’s answer in Luke 7:20-23, which reads:

20 And when the men had come to him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”’ 21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. 22 And he answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’

On many occasions, Luke 7:20-23 included, Christ was given center stage to unequivocally declare himself God, but he did not. Instead, in al-Ḥasan’s words, “He (Christ) did not say that I am your creator nor the creator of everything,” as stated in the Nicene Creed (sharīʿat al-Īmān). Al-Ḥasan offers a similar argument based upon his understanding of Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16, and John 1:27 in which John the Baptist claims that Christ is mightier than him. However, al-Ḥasan argues that an

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559 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sāḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Maṣīḥ, 105
560 Ibid., 105.
561 Ibid., 106. Matthew 3:11: I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Mark 1:7: And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.’ Luke 3:16: John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ John 1:27: even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.
individual who is mightier than John the Baptist is still nothing more than a prophet. This was a central component of many proof-texts offered by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī as well.

Continuing this line of argumentation, al-Ḥasan continues his attack of Nicene theology with his interpretation of the temptation of Christ found in Matthew 4:3-10 and Luke 4:3-12. Al-Ḥasan’s rendition reads:

‘If you are the Son of God then order these stones to become bread.’ Jesus said to him: ‘It is written that the life of mankind will not be by bread but by every word spoken from God.’ Then Satan led him to the Holy House in the city and he stood him on the corner of the temple and said to him: ‘If you are the Son of God then throw yourself from here, for it is written that you are entrusted to angels in order that you not hit your foot on a stone.’ Jesus said, ‘It is written also: do not test the Lord your God.’ Then he led him to a high mountain and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and its wonders. He said to him: ‘If you fall on you face and worship me, I will make all of that which you see yours.’ Christ said to him: ‘Leave Satan, it is written worship the Lord your God and do not worship anything apart from him.’

For al-Ḥasan, and each of the converts turned polemicists, the temptation of Christ is quintessential proof that Christ is in fact not divine. Al-Ḥasan concludes that Christ’s ambiguous responses actually implore recognition of his humanity not his divinity. Again, al-Ḥasan is reiterating ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s argument almost verbatim. In al-Ḥasan’s view, Satan gave Christ ample opportunities not only to declare but also display his divinity. However, according to al-Ḥasan, Christ purposefully refrained from declaring his divinity because, unlike Christians, Christ understood that he was simply a prophet and nothing more. Again, much like the Annunciation, Christians and Muslims utilized the same scriptural verses to argue diametrically opposed positions.

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562 Ibid., 108.
After his analysis of the several aforementioned biblical verses, al-Ḥasan returns to Christian sectarianism and Christology. Earlier in his Risāla, al-Ḥasan demonstrated that he was conventionally-versed in the christological nuances of the Jacobites, Melkites, and Nestorians. He accurately states that the Jacobites claim that “Mary birthed God,” in the sense that Jacobites (as well as Melkites) have given Mary the epithet “God-bearer” (Θεοτόκος) as opposed to the Nestorian title of “Christ-bearer” (Χριστόκος). Nevertheless, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan believed that these christological discrepancies were essentially pointless. Likewise, Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī claimed that the trinitarian precision that Christians bickered so fervently over was “purposelessness, triviality, and obscure talk.”\(^{563}\) Still, for al-Ḥasan, the genesis of trinitarian Christianity was quite clear. He argued that Christians constructed their entire theological system on the premises of a few obscure biblical passages which suggest that Christ was divine. In his own words, al-Ḥasan states, “they (Christians) abandon the clear and evident speech in the Gospel which testifies to the servanthood of Christ, his own testimony about himself, and the testimony of his disciples about him.”\(^{564}\) Therefore, all in all, trinitarian theology is the direct result of improper exegesis or eisegesis as opposed to textual corruption. In this regard, al-Ḥasan is in agreement with ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī.

Al-Ḥasan is building upon several centuries of accumulated polemic, notably the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Jāhīz. As previously mentioned, al-Jāhīz routinely called into question the linguistic and exegetical capabilities of both Christian and Jewish


exegetes throughout his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (*Refutation of the Christians*). More specifically, he claimed that the Muslim *mufassirūn* were much more adept and exact in their understanding of language, stating, “It is known that the exegetes of our book and our practitioners of interpretation are more knowledgeable and more scientific in the modes of kalām than the Jews and the interpreters of books.” These ninth- and tenth-century criticisms (more likely than not) invigorated the Jewish and Christian communities to demonstrate their Arabic prowess. One way in which this reaction manifested itself was in the form of newly employed translation techniques. Speaking of the medieval Jewish translator par excellence Saʿīd (Saʿadya) ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (d. 942) and his translation methods, Miriam Goldstein states:

> It is likely that as a broadly educated Arabic reader and as a Muʿtazili thinker, Saʿadya was familiar with al-Jāhiz’s polemic, with quotations of it, or with polemics like it. Such familiarity would have added to Saʿadya’s motivation to modify aspects of existing Arabic Bible translations used by Jews.

It is safe to assume that Christian biblical scholars and translators, who had a more active role in translation during the tenth century than any of their contemporaries, would have also been engaged in activities similar to those of Saʿadyah.

For a multitude of reasons, faulty translation included, al-Ḥasan believes that trinitarian theology has illogically and unjustifiably conflated crucial aspects of God’s unique and indivisible nature. On the one hand, as has been demonstrated, Muslims

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believed Islamic monotheism to be a “pure” (*mujarrad*) monotheism, completely tenable with respect to logic and rationality and unquestionably defensible through scripture (biblical and Qurʾānic). On the other hand, the Christian conception of a triune God and accompanying notions of a pre-eternal birth and hypostatic union are seen as anything but absolute monotheism. For instance, the ninth-century philosopher, Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī, asserted that Christian doctrine oversteps the quintessential oneness of God.\(^567\)

Likewise, Ibn Ḥazm claimed that Christian “do not accept simple pure monotheism.”\(^568\)

If the three hypostases of the Trinity are all eternal, al-Ḥasan concludes that fatherness (*ubuwwa*) must, therefore, be ascribed to the Father and Son alike.\(^569\) This is related to ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan’s contention with the Nicene phrase “true God from true God.”

For al-Ḥasan, a distinctive property cannot be attributed to one person of the Trinity.

Likewise, in Naṣr ibn Yahyā’s highly derivative twelfth-century work, he maintains the same argument, but, he slightly alters his terminology. He states that the Father is the Creator, so the Son, therefore, must also be the Creator. Regardless, each convert in question, from ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī to Anselm Turmeda, depicts this type of thinking as polluting true monotheism. With this in mind, al-Ḥasan claims that Christians have rendered the meaning of fatherness and sonship (*bunuwwa*) indistinguishable, and for him, this is not simply a flagrant logical fallacy; it is a categorical demonstration of disbelief.

More than ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Nāṣārā*, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī attempt to unpack the Christian rationalization of the Trinity. Still, like


ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, these three later converts attack what they perceived as thinly veiled Christian attempts to harmonize preposterous incompatibilities. However, their criticisms were not limited to the matter of fatherness and sonship.

Much along the same lines, al-Ḥasan questions the concept of the pre-eternal birth of Christ, which he words as “born before all ages” (mawlūd qabla l-duhūr) or (wulida min abīhi qabla al-ʿawālim). For al-Ḥasan, just as ubuwwa (fatherness) and bunuwwa (sonship) cannot be equated, neither can any notion of eternality and birth due to the fact that they are contradictory by the very nature of their meanings. Reiterating ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s argument, al-Ḥasan contends, “If he (Christ) was born, then he is not eternal.” If Jesus was eternally born of the father, then, in al-Ḥasan’s mind, the father has not begotten anything. A century prior to al-Ḥasan, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī insisted that the Christian conception of the Trinity was incompatible with respect to time. He stated that the trinitarian hypostases are composed of a unifying substance, a premise which essentially all Christian apologists and Muslim polemicists would agree upon; however, al-Kindī argued that “everything which is composite must be caused, and nothing that is caused can be eternal.” Al-Ḥasan agrees with his predecessors ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Kindī, an eternal or pre-eternal birth is oxymoronic. Therefore, one of the principle elements of the Nicene Creed is nothing more than theological drivel according to al-Ḥasan. This argument is advanced by al-Ḥasan through his understanding and presentation of Matthew 1:1 which begins with “The book of the genealogy of Jesus

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571 Ibid., 175.
572 Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam, 35.
Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” In other words, God does not have a genealogy.

Al-Ḥasan is quick to note that Matthew’s rendition of Jesus’ genealogy does not claim that Jesus is the “Son of God, nor that he is god from god.” Al-Ḥasan continues with a discussion of the phrase “first-born of creation” (bikr al-khalāʾiq), which al-Ḥasan claims is taken from the Nicene Creed (sharīʿat al-Īmān); however this phrase actually appears in Colossians 1:15. Al-Ḥasan proceeds to define the meaning of first-born (bikr). Al-Ḥasan affirms that bikr is synonymous with oldest (akbar) and first (awwal) and does not signify, in any language, the meaning of eternal (qadīm). Earlier, al-Ḥasan had attacked the word “son” in Exodus 4:22 (Oh my first-born son), however, at this point in his work, al-Ḥasan challenges the word “first-born.”573 In doing so, al-Ḥasan is asserting that Israel cannot be understood as the eternal son of God and therefore neither can Christ.

Furthermore, al-Ḥasan quotes Genesis 6:2, “Surely the sons of God saw the daughters of mankind and they were infatuated with them.”574 Al-Ḥasan wonders why Christians do not consider the offspring of this heavenly and earthy mingling to be divine.

As has been mentioned prior, the first generation of Arabic-speaking Christian apologists fervently defended the eternally begotten nature of Christ. To demonstrate, the ninth-century Jacobite, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṭah is worth quoting at length. He stated:

> As for the relationship of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, it is a substantial, unceasing relationship, because the Father is the eternal cause of the Son and the Spirit, for they are from Him (in spite of the difference of their

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573 Al-Nāshiʿ al-Akbar puts forth the same argument in his refutation of Christianity. See David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 61.

properties), He is not from them, without being earlier or later [in time], two perfects from a perfect, two eternals, from an eternal, because of the identity of each one of them with the others in every way with their ousia and their quiddity. [This is] like the relationship of Abel and Eve to Adam, who were from him: two perfects from a perfect, one ousia, three hypostaseis, each one of them differentiated by its particular inherent properties and related through them, that is, fatherhood, sonship and proceeding, completely together in harmony and their unity in the ousia.575

As previously stated, al-Ḥasan fundamentally rejected the notion that individual properties could distinguish the threefold eternality of the hypostases. However, it was al-Kindī a century prior who unleashed some of the harshest vitriol against the distinguishing properties of the hypostases as presented by Abū Raʾīṭah and other Arabic-speaking Christians. Al-Kindī states:

Therefore the reality (maʾnā) of the substance exists in each one of the hypostases, and they, through it, are harmonious; and each one of them has an eternal property differentiating between it and between its possessor. Therefore, it is necessary that each one of them is composed of the substance generally and of the property which specifies. Each composition is an effect, and each effect is not eternal; so, therefore, the Father is not eternal, the Son is not eternal, and the Holy Spirit is not eternal; they are eternal and not eternal. This is the most reprehensible absurdity.576

Again, concerning the issue of eternal birth and hypostatic properties, there appears to be a willful indifference expressed by both Christian apologists and Muslim polemicists toward one another. In other words, certain arguments appear to have become entrenched in their respective communities regardless of their efficacy within the

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575 Sandra Toenies Keating, Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period, 115.

opposing community. Martin Accad argues that around the turn of the millennium (only several generation after al-Hasan was writing) Christian-Muslim discourse had become a monologue rather than a dialogue. Using a thirteenth-century Muslim polemicist to illustrate his point, Accad claims that “Al-Qarāfī was no longer challenging Christians and allowing them to reply and defend themselves, but was merely engaging in an intellectual exercise within and for his own Muslim community.” This polemical style will become evident in the works of Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī and even more so in the work of Anselm Turmeda. However, this movement was not endemic to the Muslim community. Arabic-speaking Christians continually produced and reproduced apologetic arguments that were convincing and compelling almost exclusively in the eyes of the Christian community.

*The Bible in al-Ḥasan’s Risāla*

After voicing his displeasure with what he understood as logical fallacies within certain core trinitarian doctrines, specifically the coupling of timelessness and birth, al-Ḥasan recommences his discussion concerning the integrity of the biblical text. Like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan takes a middle-of-the-road position concerning *tahrīf* whereby he merges accusations of *tahrīf al-maʿnā* with limited charges of *tahrīf al-nass*. For al-Ḥasan, the Bible is not irredeemably compromised and, therefore, it remains to be a profitable

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578 These two phrases, *tahrīf al-maʿnā* and *tahrīf al-nass*, are not used by the Christian apostates in their works. Rather this classification was popularized by Ignaz Goldziher. Generally speaking, Muslim polemicists often describe the corruption of the Bible simply as *tahrīf* or a variety of synonymous terms.
tool for spiritual guidance as well as a source of anti-Christian polemic. In other words, al-Ḥasan suggests that Christian misinterpretation of scripture and its resultant innovative theology have led many Muslims to call into question the soundness of the biblical text.

Al-Ḥasan illustrates this with a discussion of Christian salvation as a result of Christ’s atonement for mankind. Al-Ḥasan notes that Christians believe that Christ’s epiphany has destroyed death and sin. However, he maintains that the undeniable existence of sin invalidates the Christian concept of mankind’s deliverance from evil and mortality. Therefore, God’s salvific grace as presented in the New Testament is untrue.

What is more, in order to emphasize his disapproval, al-Ḥasan rather mockingly states:

Therefore, those who killed him (Christ) are neither sinners nor transgressors because there is neither sinner nor sin after his (Christ) coming. Likewise, those who killed his disciples and burned his books are not sinners. Moreover, those whom we have seen in your community — from that time until this time — killing, stealing, committing adultery, engaging in homosexuality, getting intoxicated, lying, and committing all sorts of crimes which he (Christ) has prohibited are neither sinner nor transgressor.

Owing to the fact that Muslims reject the concept of original sin and Christ’s redemptive nature, ascribing Christ’s sinlessness upon humanity is completely fatuous and shamelessly illogical. In al-Ḥasan’s eyes, the Christian notion of redemption deliberately turns a blind eye to the reality of the world.

Moreover, al-Ḥasan claims that Christ’s books (asfār), by which he means the Gospels, were burned. By claiming that the original Gospel of Christ (or at least portions

\[579\] 1 John 3:8 clarifies, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” 2 Timothy 1:10, “…and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel…”

of it) was destroyed, al-Ḥasan affords himself the opportunity to insinuate that the Gospel had been corrupted without making any overt accusations. Al-Ḥasan appears to be intentionally interpreting certain biblical passages in the strictest sense. This allows him to dismantle more easily certain core Christian beliefs. In his final remarks on the atonement of sin in Christianity, al-Ḥasan makes his accusations of tahrīf more explicit by asking:

Do the books of the prophets speak of that? Did he (Christ) speak such of himself or did one of his disciples? Was it the transmitters who are the pillar and base of your religion? From whom did you take your laws and sunna? Who wrote the Gospel, and who explained it?"  

As previously stated, many instances of Christian-Muslim distrust and disagreement can be redirected back to the issue of tahrīf. In all reality, the issue of tahrīf, whether discussed by a traditionalist, rationalist, philosopher, or convert was, and remained, paramount to the Muslim understanding of Islam’s relation to Christianity.

After discussing several New Testament verses and the topic of tahrīf, al-Ḥasan turns his attention toward another principle features of Christian apostate literature, i.e., comparative miracles. Al-Ḥasan continued to build upon a precedent established in early Islamic literature and elaborated upon greatly by Ḥāfiz al-Ṭabarī. In so doing, he concludes his letter to his brother with an extended Islamic interpretation of the various miracles performed in the Gospel by Jesus Christ. Al-Ḥasan begins this section of his Risāla with a succinct thesis in which he states:

If you (Christians) say that you have inferred his divinity through his reviving the dead, healing the blind and the leprous, walking on water, ascending to heaven, turning water into wine, multiplying that which is few, then now you

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581 Ibid., 119
must look to all who have performed such things and you must make them lord and god.\textsuperscript{582}

Many Muslim polemicists expressed similar arguments using strikingly comparable language. Compare al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) who expressed an almost identical statement and subsequent argument, stating:

If they say: Because of the signs performed and miracles made through Jesus the like of which humans are not capable of, such as raising the dead, healing the blind and the leper, making what is little a lot, turning water into wine, walking on the water, his ascension into heaven, healing the sick, making the crippled walk, and other miraculous signs...Why do you claim that Jesus was the performer and originator of the signs you describe?\textsuperscript{583}

As ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī articulated in his \textit{al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā} and even more so in his \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla}, biblical knowledge was considered a prized commodity in anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics. As a result, converts to Islam believed that they were uniquely capable of dismantling Christian arguments and Christian proof-texts. For example, Gordon Nickel states that the famous Muslim exegete and historian, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), in his discussion of \textit{Sūrat al-Baqara} (2:40-41) claimed that Jews were “privy to a special knowledge because of their familiarity with the Torah,” and as a result, “This knowledge should have inclined Jews to accept the authenticity of the prophet of Islam.”\textsuperscript{584} This is precisely the position ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, and later converts put forth in their works. Camilla Adang claims “The rabbis of Muḥammad’s days were better qualified than anyone to inform the people about the

\textsuperscript{582} Ibid., 120.

\textsuperscript{583} David Thomas, \textit{Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology}, 193.

descriptions of the Prophet as found in the Torah.” Likewise, Christian converts to Islam were convinced that they had been entrusted with the task and responsibility to engage in a corrective and typological exegesis whereby Muḥammad’s presence and prefiguration in the Bible was to be made apparent. This was, of course, in addition to de-divinizing Christ by way of systematically dismantling Christian doctrine.

With this in mind, comparing Christ’s miracles with those of the other biblical prophets affords al-Ḥasan the opportunity to display his extensive biblical knowledge and exegetical prowess while refuting Christian trinitarian theology and promoting Muḥammad’s prophetic office. Both ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan were quite cognizant of what they were able to contribute to anti-Christian polemics, that is to say, a bifocal approach to Christianity and Islam that many Muslim-born polemicists simply could not offer. During the early centuries of Islam, Christian and Muslim intellectuals — regardless of their backgrounds and disciplines — were particularly susceptible to the almost unavoidable magnetism of inter-religious debate. As Gabriel Reynolds has argued, during the medieval period, criticizing rival religious factions was in a way an intellectual and spiritual rite of passage. At times this tendency appears to have been an annoyance to certain intellectuals. As previously mentioned, the tenth-century Jacobite intellectual, Yahyā ibn ‘Adī, preferred to abstain from religious disputes with his Muslim contemporaries. Augustin Périer claimed that Yahyā ibn ‘Adī was not a theologian, but that he was, nevertheless, intellectually coerced into Christian-Muslim polemics. Nevertheless, polemics were in part generated in order to regulate the manner in which

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different groups interacted with each other. For instance, consider the arguments of Alexandra Cuffel and Lucy Pick, which Charles L. Tieszen summarizes accordingly:

Cuffel’s clarification also suggests that just as polemic might be used to distinguish between two groups by driving them apart, so might it be a resource for controlling the ways in which the same two groups might interact. In this way, polemic could function, as Lucy Pick argues, as a strategy for stabilizing relationships by defining the lines of interaction.\footnote{Charles Lowell Tieszen, *Christian Identity Amid Islam in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 9.}

To be sure, comparing Christ’s miracles with those of the Old Testament prophets and, on occasion, the miracles of Muḥammad, was in no manner exclusive to the works of converts to Islam. In the tenth century alone, this polemical approach was adopted by several notable controversialists. For instance, the Muʿtazilī, al-Māturīdī, and the systematic theologian, al-Bāqillānī not only argue using the same comparative miracle approach, they also use many of the same biblical proof-texts. In fact, David Thomas claims that the method of argumentation used by al-Māturīdī, al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAyyūb, and al-Bāqillānī are “so close that they could all have derived from the same source.”\footnote{David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 87.}

Whatever that source may have been, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* and his *Kūṭāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* (or an unknown derivative work) more likely than not would have been consulted. In the case of al-Ḥasan’s *Risāla*, the miraculous acts which he has chosen for comparison correspond almost identically with those miracles described by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in his *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* and *Kūṭāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*.

In an attempt to normalize (from a Muslim perspective) the miraculous acts of Christ’s life, al-Ḥasan elaborates upon those examples presented a century earlier by

\footnote{Charles Lowell Tieszen, *Christian Identity Amid Islam in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 9.}

\footnote{David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 87.}
‘Alī al-Ṭabarī. That being the case, al-Ḥasan offers his commentary on a variety of supernatural acts performed in both the Old and New Testaments. Al-Ḥasan and many Muslim polemicists’ understanding of Christ’s miracles was straightforward, twofold, and often predictable. Building upon the example of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, polemicists would first attempt to parallel Christ’s miracles with those of other prophets either with direct equivalents or with thematically similar approximates. Once parallels had been established, Muslim polemicists proceeded to the matter of performance and volition. Therefore, the second objective was to establish that Christ was not the active agent in the performance of his various miracles, but rather, that his wonders were performed by God through Christ as was the case with all biblical marvels as well as miracles attributed to Muḥammad.

Like his predecessor, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, albeit with more detail, al-Ḥasan recalls from the Book of Kings (Sifr al-Mulāk) Elijah’s quickening of the widow’s son589 and Elisha’s reviving of a woman’s son.590 Additionally, al-Ḥasan states that Ezekiel “revived many men” in reference to his enlivening the field of bones.591 The revivification of the dead is in fact cited by both al-Māturīdī and al-Bāqillānī as well. Moreover, in an alleged debate between the caliph al-Ma’mūm, the Shīʿī Imam ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 818), and a Christian patriarch, a work which David Thomas suggests was actually penned by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991-92), the Christian patriarch claims that reviving the dead was tantamount to

589 1 Kings 17:24 as written in Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-saḥīḥ li-man baddala din al-Masīḥ, 120.
declaring oneself Lord. In response to this assertion, ‘Alī al-Riḍā attributes the ability to raise the dead to Abraham, Moses, Elisha, and Ezekiel, in addition to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.\(^{592}\) Finally, ‘Abd al-Jabbār presented many of the same arguments, specifically those regarding God’s active role in the production of prophetic miracles, claiming that:

> If Christians claim the miracles were brought about by Jesus’ nature, they should say the same about Abraham, Moses and other prophets, through whom were made manifest miraculous acts of which humans are incapable. But Christians are too blind to see that in reality the miracles came from God who manifest them as signs of the prophets’ sincerity.\(^{593}\)

The examples of Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel are presented in the works of Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī with almost identical language and phrasing as al-Ḥasan.\(^{594}\) After likening Christ’s healing of lepers with Elisha’s healing of Naaman,\(^{595}\) al-Ḥasan juxtaposes various miraculous acts involving the manipulation of water.\(^{596}\) From a Christian perspective, few miracles immediately come to the forefront of a believer’s mind more than Moses’ parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21-29 and Christ’s walking on water in Matthew 14:22-36, Mark 6:45-56, and John 6:16-24. However, al-Ḥasan contrasts Christ’s walking on water with Elisha’s stopping of the Jordan river with Elijah’s

\(^{592}\) David Thomas, The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic, 233. Neither Abraham nor Moses raise the dead in the Old Testament.

\(^{593}\) Ibid., 235.


\(^{595}\) Jesus’ healing of lepers can be found in Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-16, while Elisha’s healing of leprosy can be found in 1 Kings 5:1-19. For more information on this miracle as it appears in al-Ḥasan’s work, see Ibn Taymiyya, \textit{al-jawāb al-sāḥīh}, 122. Again, each of these miracles are referenced in the arguments by Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī.

\(^{596}\) See Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:16-21.
turban (ʿimāma), which al-Ḥasan clearly insinuates is more impressive. Interestingly, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī chose to compare Christ’s walking on water with Elijah’s and Elisha’s stopping of the Jordan rather than the more conspicuous and likely comparison of Moses’ parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21. In addition to many instances of direct plagiarism, this is another clear indication that the later converts Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī were directly borrowing from al-Ḥasan given the fact that they replicated the idiosyncrasies of al-Ḥasan’s Risāla as well. A century prior, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī preferred to compare Christ’s water related miracles with the water related miracles of Moses.

Like many of Christ’s miracles, Christ’s crucifixion is intimately tied up with the matter of volition. For many Muslim polemicists, the Passion of Christ exemplifies Jesus’ humanity. Moreover, the entire chain of events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus was used by Muslim polemicists to place Christians in a seemingly inescapable predicament.

In the late eighth-century encounter between al-Mahdī and Timothy I, the caliph asked:

Which of these two things do you say? Did Christ want to be crucified or not? If he wanted (to be crucified) then the Jews are not guilty, because they have done his will; so, therefore, why would they be cursed and rejected? And if he had been crucified against his will, the Jews were stronger than him; so, how is it possible that he be called God, he who was not able to save himself from the hands of his crucifiers, for their will was much stronger than his will?  

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597 Al-Ḥasan’s rendition of 2 Kings 2:11–14 can be found in Ibn Taymiyya, al-jawāb al-sabīth li-man baddala din al-Masih, 123. Al-Ḥasan’s use of turban is rather unique considering that the Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek use the word cloak. The dependence upon al-Ḥasan text in the works of Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī can be seen in the fact that even reproduce al-Ḥasan’s lexical peculiarities.

Here, al-Mahdī is attempting to use Christ’s suffering as an opportunity to both condemn the Jews and relegate Jesus to his appropriate mortal standing. Al-Mahdī and other polemicists, including ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, presented a Gospel that was replete with opportunities, many of which were on the grandest of scales, for Christ to display or declare his divinity – none more so than during his crucifixion. For example, in Matthew 27:40-42 Caiaphas states:

40“You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 41So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42“He saved others; he cannot save himself.’

Alongside Christ’s crucifixion, al-Ḥasan also saw the temptation of Christ by Satan as a near perfect opportunity for Christ to declare his true divine identity. For al-Ḥasan, Christians have not only fundamentally misunderstood Christ’s volition concerning his miraculous acts, but they have also created a conundrum within their own depiction of the crucifixion. According to al-Ḥasan, Christ’s will and determination are compromised.

Next, Christ’s first miracle, the turning of water into wine at the wedding in Cana, is likened to Elisha’s multiplying the widow’s oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7. Interestingly, al-Ḥasan has Elisha change the widow’s water, not her oil, into copious amounts of new oil. This simple alteration could be an example of al-Ḥasan quoting the Bible from memory or possibly a deliberate alteration in order to liken Elisha’s miracle more so to Christ’s. Likewise, al-Ḥasan cites the story from of the widow of Zarephath from 1 Kings

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599 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sahīh li-man baddala din al-Masīh, 123. This miracle is not compared in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works.

600 This particular verse, 2 Kings 4:1-7, is presented verbatim in the work of Naṣr ibn Yahyā. Yūsuf al-Lubnānī claims that the widows vessels were filled with “something” (ṣhayʿ).
17:8-16 in which Elijah multiplies and sustains a widow’s oil and bread likening it to Christ’s feeding of the 4000 and 5000. In the earlier works of Ibn al-Layth and ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, both authors compare Christ’s feeding of the multitudes with Muḥammad’s miraculous feeding of his armies. Sensing that he had sufficiently illustrated his initial objective of humanizing Christ, al-Ḥasan again rhetorically asks why Elijah, Elisha, Joseph, and Moses are not considered divine. In the realm of biblical proof-texting, al-Ḥasan’s refutation closely corresponds with al-Māturīdī’s and al-Bāqillānī’s biblical citations on multiple occasions. However, not all tenth-century apologists and polemicists, whether Muslim or Christian, made extensive use of miracles in their works. Al-Ḥasan’s contemporary, the Christian logician and philosopher Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, rarely relied upon miracles in his apologetic work. Speaking of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, Robert DeValve states:

Yet in the defense of Christianity in the midst of the Muslim world of the tenth century, Yaḥyā does not make any specific appeal to miracles. He takes the pen to compile an intellectual, rational system to explain the Trinity of the Godhead and the Incarnation of Christ.

After comparing various miracles performed throughout the Bible, al-Ḥasan returns to the issue of Christ’s personal agency within the Godhead. For most Muslim

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polemicists, the words “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” found in John 20:17 had definitively removed any semblance of tri-unity between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. As a result, Christ could be seen as nothing more than an mortal prophet who exerted no active or divine agency in the performance of his miracles. Al-Ḥasan states:

If you (Christians) say that these prophets did not have agency in these actions and that they were performed by the power of God (He is Mighty and Majestic), since it was He who performed them through their hands which you have confirmed. We say to you: likewise, Christ did not have agency in that which was manifested through his hands regarding these miracles, since it was God who manifested them through his hands. Therefore, what is the difference between Christ and all of the prophets? 

Nevertheless, many Christians ceaselessly argued that Christ willed his miracles without the involvement of an external or separate divine power. This can be considered another instance in which Christians and Muslims were discussing a particular issue, i.e, Christ’s miracles, from two perspectives that were essentially mutually unintelligible.

The different Christian and Muslim perspectives of Christ are perhaps no more apparent than in al-Ḥasan’s discussion of the forgiveness of sins. In Luke 5:23, Christ asks a paralytic man, “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’” Of course, the common Christian contention, of which al-Ḥasan was clearly aware, is that neither a man nor a prophet was able or permitted to forgive mankind of their sins. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, this right is reserved for God alone.

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as seen in Isaiah 43:25, Daniel 9:9, Micah 7:18, Mark 2:7, and Acts 8:22. Al-Hasan viewed Christ’s actions in Luke 5:23 as nothing more than another miracle. In an attempt to clarify his stance, al-Hasan recalls 1 Kings 18:45 in which Elijah causes the heavens to rain and 2 Kings chapter 5 in which Elisha cures Naaman. At first glance these citations appear to have little or nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins, a point which al-Hasan appears to understand. Therefore he suggests that forgiving sins, conjuring rain, and curing blindness are miraculous events which do not warrant any distinction.

However, a close reading of al-Hasan’s next biblical citation betrays the fact that he maintained a rather peculiar polemical understanding of sins and forgiveness. At this point in his Risāla, al-Hasan appears to deliberately and inaccurately supplement his rendition of Exodus 33:11. Up until this point in his work, al-Hasan has systematically attempted to humanize Christ by likening his miracles and titles with the miracles and titles of various Old Testament prophets. Yet, when it comes to the matter of forgiveness of sins, al-Hasan takes some fairly flagrant liberties with the biblical text in order to substantiate his refutation. In his rendition of Exodus 33:1, al-Hasan writes, “God said to Moses: ‘Leave, you and your people, whom you have taken out of Egypt and I will make for you a king, who will forgive your sins.’” A standard version of the text reads:

\[\text{The Lord said to Moses, ‘Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land}\]

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606 Isaiah 43:25: I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Daniel 9:9: To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him. Micah 7:18: Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. Mark 2:7: “Why does this man speak like that? He is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Acts 8:22: Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your offspring I will give it.” 2I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

First, it appears that al-Ḥasan may have misread the word “angel” (malāk) for “king” (malik). Al-Ḥasan includes the phrase “I will make for you a king,” which resembles the phrase “I will send an angel before you” found in most renditions this passage. Nevertheless, al-Ḥasan’s addition of “who will forgive your sins” is not found in the standard Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, or Arabic versions of the Bible.

It is not surprising that al-Ḥasan claimed that Moses was able to forgive sins. Throughout Christian apostate literature and early Islamic literature, Moses is clearly depicted as the prophet par excellence of the Old Testament whose miracles often outshone Christ’s various wonders. Moreover, for a Christian or a Muslim unfamiliar with the finer details of the Bible, al-Ḥasan’s rendition of Exodus 33:11 would appear remarkably illustrative of Christ’s semblance to other biblical prophets despite the fact that the text had been altered for polemical purposes. Taking into account al-Ḥasan’s rendering of malāk as malik coupled with his rather conspicuous addition to the text, this particular citation suggests that al-Ḥasan — at least in this particular instance — was working with a physical text as opposed to recalling this passage from memory.

After recounting several of Christ’s miracles, and with the question “what is the difference between Christ and all of the prophets” in mind, al-Ḥasan attempts to refute potential Christian counterarguments that Christ had personal agency in the performance of his miracles. Al-Ḥasan provides an extensive list of biblical verses which
he believed depicted Christ as a sharply defined prophet who was clearly distinguished from God the Father. By emphasizing this distinction, al-Ḥasan believes that the words of the Gospel speak for themselves and confirm that Christ’s miracles were performed through Christ, not by Christ. Therefore, in this regard, al-Ḥasan considers any reference, and certainly any invocation, of the Father by Christ to be representative of his servanthood (ʿubādiyya). Moreover, al-Ḥasan considers any verse in which Christ implies or states that he is a prophet or a messenger immediately voids any Christian claims of consubstantiality or divinity within Christ. Regarding this, al-Ḥasan quotes, paraphrases, or alludes to an extended series of biblical verses from each of the four Gospels. Many of these verses were referenced by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī for the same polemical purpose in his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā.

Amidst this stream of biblical verses, several peculiarities are worth noting. First, al-Ḥasan claims that the Gospel of Matthew states: “Surely God has not begotten nor has he been begotten; He has not eaten nor has He drunk; He has not slept nor has any of his creation seen Him. No one sees Him except he who has died.” This is actually a conflation of segments of Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (112:3) and Exodus 33:20. By combining these verses, al-Ḥasan presents Christ as an opponent of Christian anthropomorphism. On the

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609 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sabīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ, 126. This particular combination of verses is presented by ʿAbd al-Jabbār almost verbatim. His rendition reads, “God–Mighty and Majestic–did not eat and does not eat. He did not drink and does not drink. He did not sleep and does not sleep. He did not beget and does not beget, and is not begotten. No one has seen Him. No one sees Him except he who has died.” See ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 35.

610 Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (112:3) “…who has not begotten, and has not been begotten…” Exodus 33:20: But, he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”
one hand, al-Ḥasan may simply have been misremembering a biblical passage. However, on the other hand, al-Ḥasan may have been attempting to present the Bible in what he believed to be a corrected and more original form. This can be considered an example of al-Ḥasan’s rectifying what he saw as an instance of textual corruption. This is a striking display of the interplay between al-Ḥasan’s residual Christian identity and his newly found Muslim identity. In this regard, al-Ḥasan follows in the footsteps of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, who on several occasions blended biblical and Qurʾānic passages. Both ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan casually interweave Qurʾānic and biblical language almost seamlessly.

Additionally, al-Ḥasan injects conspicuous technical trinitarian terminology into his rendition of John 5:26. This stands in contrast to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī who often avoided using specialized theological language in his polemic. John 5:26 reads, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” In al-Ḥasan’s rendition, this verse reads, “As the Father has life in his substance (jawhar), so he granted the Son to have life in his hypostasis (qaynūm).” This verse does not require the use of such expressions. As previously stated, Muslims — generally speaking — often balked at applying the term jawhar to God. Nevertheless, this verse as well as the laundry list of consecutive proof-texts have the direct intention of demonstrating any perceived ontological distinction between Christ and God the Father.

Stylistically al-Ḥasan’s rendition of nearly two dozen biblical passages is very much in line with the various other anti-Christian polemicists of the ninth and tenth centuries, including ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. In his Risāla, al-Ḥasan presents each of the aforementioned verses with an expected combination of accuracy and idiosyncrasies, a

feature common throughout his refutation. Some of al-Ḥasan’s renditions exhibit significant alterations and abridgment in the form of deliberate modifications and noticeable rewordings; however, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarî, al-Ḥasan, more likely than not, would have been recalling at least some of his proof-texts from memory. This could account for some of his more peculiar biblical citations, which all in all were sporadic and infrequent. This is rather typical of Muslim citations from the Bible. Take, for instance, al-Bāqillānī who claimed that the Gospel stated: “I am the servant of God, I have been sent to teach.” 612 David Thomas accurately confirms that this biblical verse does not correspond to any passage in the canonical Gospels. Therefore, it appears that al-Bāqillānī is either rather carelessly summarizing Christ’s role in the Bible or he is misquoting or fabricating a biblical verse in order to complement and bolster his subsequent references to John 20:21 and Matthew 28:19.

**Between Taḥrīf al-Maʿnā and Taḥrīf al-Naṣṣ**

After analyzing an array of biblical verses in which God the Father is distinguished from Christ, al-Ḥasan further attempts to emphasize the corporality and humanity of Christ by discussing the various titles conferred upon Christ. In this regard, al-Ḥasan is following the polemical pattern of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarî’s Al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā. As he had emphasized previously in his Risāla, al-Ḥasan reassures his audience that his reasoning and arguments are neither of his own unfounded logic nor they aimed at denigrating Christ and his immediate followers. Rather, he states, “Thus, this is his (Christ’s) word and the words of his disciples which you have abandoned. You confess the

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innovation which your ancestors innovated for you which has led you to error and disbelief in God.”

A century prior, like al-Ḥasan, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī emphatically pledged to his readers that he was simply refuting the claims of Christians, by which he meant trinitarian Christians, not Christ.

Most Muslim polemicists had a clear belief about the point of origin of Trinitarianism. As a result, “You confess the innovation which your ancestors innovated,” is one of the most common indictments which can be found in virtually all anti-Christian rhetoric, i.e., that influential early church leaders under the influence of Rome, particularly clergy involved in the various councils, specifically Nicaea, had corrupted Christ’s pure monotheistic message. Like al-Ḥasan, in his critique of Christianity, ‘Abd al-Jabbār scrutinizes many of the most commonly used biblical verses that Christians use in order to divinize Christ. And yet he still returns to what he understands as the root of the problem: exegesis. ‘Abd al-Jabbār states, “They say, ‘Our Fathers and exemplars say, ‘The Son of God is called the Son of Man, and the Son of Man is called the Son of God. The new Adam is the suffering god who was killed and died.’”

Again, as is often the case in anti-Christian polemic, Christians are presented as blind followers of dishonest church leaders. Moreover, this misguidance is not simply limited to biblical exegesis; in fact, it carries over into Qur’ānic interpretation as well. Take for instance al-Jāḥiẓ who stated:

You report that they [the Christians] allege that the proof that our book is false and our instruction is corrupt is that we hold things they have never heard and have never known from their forefathers. [They allege such] because we claim that God (the exalted and powerful) said in his

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book through his prophet Muḥammad (God bless and grant him salvation): ‘O Jesus son of Mary did you say to the people “Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?” The Christians claimed they never believed in the divinity of Mary neither secretly nor publicly.615

Moreover, al-Jāḥiẓ continues and implies that Christians are unaware of Christ speaking in the cradle apparently because their Christian forefathers and elders withheld precious information. This leads al-Jāḥiẓ to claim, “Therefore, the Christians agree on the rejection of [this story] with their love for simple-minded piety.”616 Many additional anti-Christian polemicists argued that any Christian consensus stemmed from a sense of wonderment and intellectual intimidation felt in the hearts of the unordained.

Arguing along similar lines as ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī before him, and in many ways like Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda after him, al-Ḥasan communicates to his audience that he is not advancing the idea of an unprofitable and valueless Bible which has been textually corrupted (tahrīf al-naṣṣ) to irredeemable measures. This argument is essentially put forth in the following centuries by Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qarāfī. However, this is not to say that al-Ḥasan rejected tahrīf al-naṣṣ outright. A categorical rejection of either the Old or New Testament was a problematic position for Muslim polemicists given that they were well aware of their community’s polemical, apologetical, and beneficial use of the Bible. What is more, the scriptures of the Jews and Christians contained information concerning God’s prophets and messengers that were not found in the Qurʾān or hadīth collections.


616 Ibid., 63.
From a very early stage in Christian-Muslim dialogue, prominent Muslim scholars of various stripes have claimed that qur’ānic verses were extant in the Bible. For example, the former Jewish Rabbi and convert to Islam, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (d. 652), claimed that the “true Torah” contained qur’ānic verses. The famous Muslim general, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. 664) — according to a hadith found in al-Bukhārī’s collection — claimed that Sūrat al-Fāṭḥ (48:8) could be found in the Torah as well. Al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) claimed that the words “bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour” found in Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3:110) originated in the Torah.617 These claims complement the stance of certain preeminent Muslim scholars who argued in favor of tahrīf al-ma’ānah as opposed to an outright or severe position of tahrīf al-nāṣṣ. This included the views of two early exegetes Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 757) and Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923).618

With claims of this sort originating at such an early period and being sustained by an assorted lineup of celebrated scholars, Muslims polemicists during the first several centuries of Islam were often forced to walk a polemical and exegetical tightrope when discussing the Bible. An outright condemnation of the Bible could have run the risk of unintentional blasphemy, given the fact that, according to certain Muslim scholars, the Bible not only contained divinely inspired material but even qur’ānic verses as well. However, this did not prevent Ibn Ḥazm from writing a rigid and programmatic repudiation of the Bible in which he cites chronological and geographical inaccuracies, theological impossibilities, sexual impropriety (not only in the form of licentiousness, but

617 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, 24.

618 For an overview of the tahrīf in the Muslim community during the classical period, see Gordon D. Nickel, Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur’ān (Leiden: Brill, 2011). For the specific references on Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and al-Ṭabarī, see pages 116 and 159.
also incest), naskh (abrogation), and absence of tawātūr (sound transmission). For Ibn Ḥazm, the Bible was not simply riddled with inconsistencies and blasphemies, it was also an “an accursed book.”

Like the other converts to Islam, al-Hasan is unequivocal in declaring that Christians have physically altered the text of the Bible in certain instances. However, imitating ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan advances the idea that poor Christian exegesis has resulted in a false presentation of the biblical text more than physical corruption. Most Muslim polemicists during the first three centuries of Islam accused the Christians of a mixture of both tahrīf al-nass and tahrīf al-ma‘nā. This mixture of tahrīf is perhaps no more evident than in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s refutation of Christianity and Christian practices. Speaking of the compilation and deliberate corruption of the Gospel, ‘Abd al-Jabbār claims:

We will construct a Gospel accordingly. Let each one of us mention that which he has memorized from the formulations of the Injīl and from what the Christians would say about Christ. Thus one group wrote a Gospel. Then another group came after them and wrote a Gospel. They wrote a number of Gospels, yet much of what was in the original was left out. There were a number of them who knew many matters that were in the correct Injīl, but which they concealed in order to establish their leadership. In [the true Injīl] there was no mention of the crucifixion or crucifixes. They claim that there were eighty Gospels. These were continuously abridged until only four Gospels by four individuals remained.620

Even with his claim that the Gospels had been completely overhauled and reassembled with a more comfortably Roman character, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, nevertheless, refrains from

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619 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, 28-42.

620 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 94.
labeling the Gospel valueless. This then allows him to quote from it liberally for his own polemical and apologetic purposes having neither fully endorsed or fully condemned the text.

This position is furthered by al-Bāqillānī as well. After discussing several instances of perceived Christian eisegesis, often using the same examples and similar argumentation as al-Ḥasan. Al-Bāqillānī restates ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan’s position that with proper biblical hermeneutics an Islamic and Qur’ānic monotheism, along with prefigurations of Muḥammad can, and, in fact, should become evident in the biblical text. Al-Bāqillānī states, “Furthermore, these scriptures are not the source of the doctrines of the denominations, but rather they derive these from their leaders without understanding”621 With these particular stances toward Christian exegesis, it appears that certain segments of the Muslim community — specifically those Muslims polemists who actively engaged the Bible — believed that Christian tahrīf al-ma’nā was rooted in a dissembling Christian leadership. This can be considered a universal feature of Christian apostate literature as well.

Returning to the subject of Christ’s titles, throughout the New Testament Jesus is called by a variety of honorifics, some of which declare his divinity, others which imply divinity, and some of which proclaim his humanity. Al-Ḥasan, building upon the work of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, contends that these titles have been unjustly elaborated upon by Christians in order to sustain their claims of Christ’s divinity. Al-Ḥasan offers many of the examples put forth by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī; however, he provides additional proof-texts not found in


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ʿAlī al-Ṭabarî’s works as well. First, al-Ḥasan begins with a rendition of Psalms 110:1-4. Al-Ḥasan’s rendition of verse four is his primary concern, which he renders as, “The Lord has sworn, and He does not lie, that you will be the confirming priest, who resembles Melchizedek.” Here, al-Ḥasan’s argument revolves around the simple concept that if Christ resembles a priest, then Christ is created (makhlūq) and therefore not the creator. The Qurʾān states in Sūrat al-Shūrā (42:11) that nothing resembles God. Therefore, this particular proof-text would only be polemically persuasive for a Muslim audience given that both Jews and Christians believe that mankind was created in God’s image.

Next, al-Ḥasan discusses Acts 2:22-24, which he presents as an encapsulation of Christ’s biblically mandated humanity:

22 Children of Israel, hear my message: Surely Jesus of Nazareth is a man who appeared to you by God with power, signs, and wonders which He (God) performed through his (Christ) hands. 23 You delivered him and killed him, so God raised this Jesus up from amongst the dead.

In al-Ḥasan’s eyes, these words in the Book of Acts present a quartet of evidence nullifying Christ’s divinity. First, Jesus is called “a man” (rajul). Second, Jesus appeared

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622 1 The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” 2 The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. 4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”


624 Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Sūrat al-Shūrā (42:11): The Originator of the heavens and the earth; He has appointed for you, of yourselves, pairs, and pairs also of the cattle, therein multiplying you. Like Him there is naught; He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.

“from God” or “by God.” Third, Jesus’ miracles were performed through him by God. Fourth, Jesus was raised from the dead by God. Therefore, Jesus is a man, ontologically distinct from God, who like the biblical prophets before him as well as Muḥammad after him, performed miracles only by the power of God. Al-Ḥasan also cites Luke 24:13-20 in order to supplement his quotation from Acts. The final portion of his rendition reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, a man, a mighty prophet in word and deed with God and the people, was taken and killed.” For al-Ḥasan the words recalled from Acts 2:22 and Luke 24:13-20 as well as numerous other passages were irrefutable proof that Christ cannot be God. Moreover, it is worth noting that al-Ḥasan uses the language of these verses to exemplify Christ’s prophetic role and human nature, however, he does not take this opportunity to criticize the fact that both of his biblical citations reference Christ’s crucifixion, which, according to Sūrat al-Ḥisāʾ (4:157), did not happen.

Next, al-Ḥasan proceeds to Acts 2:36 which he renders as, “Know that God made Jesus, whom you have killed, Lord and Messiah.” Here, al-Ḥasan is not only concerned with the terms “Lord” and “Messiah,” which he understands as somewhat inconsequential titles of respect, rather than indications of divinity, but he also elaborates on the verb “make” (jaʿala). If one is made, as Christ is declared to be, then one is not divine. Al-Ḥasan uses Acts 2:36 to reiterate that Christ is fashioned (majʿūl), created (makhlūq), and made (mashā), none of which are characteristics attributable to God. Continuing with Christ’s titles, al-Ḥasan explores the possible meanings of “Messiah.” In Psalm 45:7 God anoints (masaha) David, which of course the root meaning of Messiah.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{626}}\text{Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sāhih li-man baddala din al-Masih, 134.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{627}}\text{Ibid., 133.}\]
Next, al-Ḥasan discusses the term “Messiah” as it appears in Matthew 16:15 and Luke 9:20. In Matthew 16:15 Peter says to Jesus, “You are the Messiah, Son of the true God.” However, in Luke 9:20 Peter states, “You are the Messiah of God.” If Christ’s divinity and complex trinitarian theology are hinged upon the concepts of the Son of God and the Messiah, why the inconsistency? Why is Peter made to say varying statements? Again, Son of God and Messiah are somewhat interchangeable titles of reverence with a meaning not unlike “chosen” (muṣṭafā).

Additionally, in Psalm 110:21 al-Ḥasan notes that Joseph is made “Lord (rabb) over his sons.” Christians do not consider Joseph God, therefore Christ cannot be God on account of being called “lord.” Moreover, al-Ḥasan quotes Matthew 12:8 and Luke 6:5, “The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath” which al-Ḥasan counters by referencing Genesis 19:1 in which Lot refers to the two angels at the gates of Sodom as lords. Like his interpretation of the Trinity as well as his use of biblical proof-texts, al-Ḥasan’s arguments surrounding Christ’s titles are presented in the strictest “this or that” manner. Either Joseph and Christ along with the angels at Sodom are all gods or none of them are. For al-Ḥasan, the matter is clear, the title “lord” is not tantamount to divinity.

Al-Ḥasan concludes this portion of his refutation with two citations from the Book of Psalms. Here, al-Ḥasan explains how Christians have extrapolated unjustifiable doctrines from the titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man.” First, al-Ḥasan quotes from Psalms 8:4-5 in which the phrase “son of man” is placed below the ranks of angels.\footnote{Psalms 8:4-5: 4What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? 5Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.} Next, al-Ḥasan cites Psalms 2:7 in which God says to David, “You are my Son; today I
have begotten you.” Additionally, al-Ḥasan references Exodus 4:22 in which God calls Israel “my first-born son.”629 With these passages in mind, al-Ḥasan reaffirms several points. The title “Son of God” is an appellation of esteem reserved for a select group of individuals. Nevertheless, “Son of God” still carries with it concomitant attributes of transience and death. Al-Ḥasan contends that the title “Son of Man” is synonymous with humanity and mortality and therefore antithetical to any association with divinity. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarî rejected any sense of synonymity between first, createdness, and eternality, a position that was restated by al-Ḥasan with respect to the title “Son of God.” For al-Ḥasan, a son requires begetting and begetting necessitates creation. Therefore, if something is begotten, it is created. Anything that is created cannot be eternal. Of course, if something is not eternal, it cannot be God.

Al-Ḥasan continues his discussion of Christ’s honorific titles and the manners in which he believed Christians manipulated them. Moreover, al-Ḥasan maintained that Christians exploited these appellations in order to fortify dishonest theological agendas. For example, al-Ḥasan quotes Isaiah 7:14, “The virgin will conceive and bear a son and his name will be called Immanuel meaning ‘our God is with us.’”630 This particular verse has a long history in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Timothy I ranks Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6 alongside Christ’s miracles as definitive proof corroborating his divinity. Likewise, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raʾīṭah, and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī each cite Isaiah 7:14 as

630 Ibid., 139.
631 Isaiah 9:6: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
one of the most quintessentially typological and probative verses of the Old Testament with respect to Christ. All the same, al-Ḥasan maintains that the name “Immanuel,” like Christ’s various other titles, in no way signifies or even suggests divinity; rather he understands it as a title of nobility, which he argues should be understood as meaning “a noble lord of the people” (al-sayyid al-sharīf min al-nās). For al-Ḥasan, and many other Muslim polemicists, this is typical Christian misinterpretation whereby trinitarian theology is extrapolated from ambivalent verses, or in the case of Isaiah 7:14 one particular word, Immanuel.

Subsequently, al-Hasan offers a partial rendition of Exodus 7:1 which reads, “I made you, Oh Moses, as a god to Pharaoh.” Here, al-Ḥasan claims that “god” in Exodus 7:1 is intended to imply a meaning of riyās (leadership). What is more, al-Ḥasan cites Psalms 82:6 in which God says to the Children of Israel, “You are called gods of the Most High.” Interestingly, al-Ḥasan has chosen to exclude the words of Psalms 82:7 “all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die.” The metaphoric meaning of “gods” in Psalm 82:6 is actually more pronounced when read alongside Psalms 82:7. At any rate, like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan often offers limited explanation of his proof-texts even when slight explanations or additional citations could enhance his polemic. All in all, al-Ḥasan concludes that Christians have invented unjustifiable doctrines through a misuse and misunderstanding of figurative language. Whether or not this mishap was intentional or accidental varied throughout Muslim polemics. However, for ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan alike, the lion’s share of guilt undoubtedly lies on the shoulders of a duplicitous church

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632 Ibid., 140. Exodus 7:1: And the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.”
leadership. Moreover, for al-Ḥasan the improper usage of Christ’s titles is quite indicative of *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (4:171), “People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion…” Therefore, regardless of the title bestowed upon any earthy creature, that honorific is to be understood as a designation of respect.

At this point in his *Risāla*, al-Ḥasan concludes his lengthy discussion of the Bible with several final proof-texts and a short summation of critical biblical verses which he believed divided the Christian and Muslim communities. First, al-Ḥasan begins by citing John 14:9-11, “Whoever sees me sees my father; I and my father are one” As previously argued, al-Ḥasan contends that the Trinity is nowhere to be found in this passage, and to claim so is to misconstrue the true meaning of the biblical text. For al-Ḥasan, “I and my father are one,” cannot convey or even imply any ontological equivalence between Christ and the Father. Again, al-Ḥasan maintains that Christians have simply misunderstood basic allegorical language.

Consequently, al-Ḥasan offers his corrective interpretation claiming that Christ intended to communicate that his commands and God’s commands were one in the same. In other words, John 14:9-11 indicates a uniformity of intention not a correspondence in person. Further yet, al-Ḥasan argues that the words of John 14:9-11 clarify Christ’s words in John 12:44, which al-Ḥasan renders as “I and the one who sent me are one.”

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633 For al-Ḥasan’s discussion of Isaiah 7:14, Exodus 7:1, and Psalm 82:6, see Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 139-140.


635 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala din al-Masīḥ*, 140. See John 12:44-45, “And Jesus cried out and said, ‘Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.’”
al-Ḥasan claims that John 12:44 implies, “I and he who empowered me are one.” Al-Ḥasan goes on to clarify that these words do not express that Christ and God are one being. Rather the actions (implying the performance of miracles) of Christ reflect the actions of the Father. Al-Ḥasan states, “He who sees these deeds which have been performed has seen the deeds of my father.” 636 Essentially, for every verse suggesting Christ’s divinity, al-Ḥasan sees a multitude of verses much more clearly declaring his humanity. For al-Ḥasan, passages like John 14:9-11 and John 12:44 are figurative expressions depicting a unique relationship between God and his messenger. It was al-Jāḥiẓ a century earlier who claimed that Christians misconstrued (eisegesis or tahrīf al-ma’nā) scripture in order to “seduce the common and vulgar” in society. 637 Likewise, just as Christians allegedly took advantage of ambiguous biblical verses to produce unfounded trinitarian claims, al-Jāḥiẓ also claimed that Christians chose contradictory and equivocal qur’ānic verses and hadīths in order to discredit Islam. 638

Subsequently, al-Ḥasan once more addresses the matter of Christ’s timelessness. Here, al-Ḥasan uses this opportunity to discuss John 8:58, which he simplifies as “I was before Abraham.” 639 As might be expected, rather than ascribing eternality and divinity to Christ, al-Ḥasan attempts to elucidate this verse in light of a different but similar biblical claim. Therefore, in order to counter Christian apologists’ use of John 8:58, al-Ḥasan quotes Solomon in Proverbs 8:27, “I was before the world; I was with God when


638 Ibid., 73.

639 Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-sahīh li-man baddala dīn al-Masih, 141. John 8:58: Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”
he fashioned the earth.”640 This line of argumentation is not unlike his presentation of 
Christ’s miracles. Al-Ḥasan hopes to accentuate inconsistencies in the trinitarian 
foundations of Christian exegesis. Al-Ḥasan understands that with John 8:58 Christians 
once again have created a false impression of allegorical language. As a result, the 
Christians have discredited themselves on multiple fronts. First, Christians are either poor 
or deceitful exegetes. And second, Christians have selectively applied their fallacious 
trinitarian exegesis to Christ alone when — according to al-Ḥasan — it could be applied 
to other prophets as well.

Interestingly, ʿAbd al-Jabbār mentions the Gospel’s claim that Christ was before 
Abraham, however, he does not juxtapose John 8:58 with Proverbs 8:27. Rather, after 
quoting John 8:58, ʿAbd al-Jabbār states, “This is not the first time Christ has been lied 
about.”641 Therefore, whereas al-Ḥasan viewed John 8:58 as an issue of ʿtahrīf al-maʿnā, 
ʿAbd al-Jabbār appears to consider this passage a matter of ʿtahrīf al-maʿnā. Nonetheless, 
al-Ḥasan may have been aware of an early prophetic ḥadīth that had been popularized in 
the works of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), Ibn Saʿd (d. 845), and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), whose chain of 
transmission (ʿisnād) can be traced to ʿIrbaḍ ibn Sāriyya al-Sulāmī (d. 694), which states

I heard the Messenger of God say, ‘I was with God in the 
mother of the Book as the seal of the prophets when Adam 
was still imbedded/inearthed in his clay [la-munjadilun fi 
tīnatīhi]. [Furthermore] I will inform you of the 
interpretation [taʾwil] of that: I am [the answer to] the 
prayer of my father Abraham, the good news [bīshārā] of 
Jesus to his people, and the dream of my mother.”642

Perhaps this particular hadith can be seen as one of the earliest attempts by the Muslim community to equate Muhammad with earlier biblical figures and to mirror certain hadith after important biblical passages.

And just as Christ is wrongfully granted eternality — according to al-Ḥasan — Christ is, likewise, illogically granted divinity on account of amateurish or dubious exegesis. Previously, al-Ḥasan had systematically compared Christ’s miracles with those of other biblical prophets, most noticeably Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. At this point in his Risāla, al-Ḥasan challenges the power of the cross, or more precisely, the True Cross, which Christians claim has the capacity to quicken the dead. However, like Christ’s previously mentioned miracles, which despite the degree of their magnificence and stupendousness, had clear equivalents in the wondrous actions of other prophets.

Therefore, in order to refute the supernatural power of the cross, al-Ḥasan references 2 Kings 13:20-22 in which the bones of Elijah’s tomb enliven a dead man. The power of relics, which in the case of Christ and Elijah even included the power to resurrect, was simply a miraculous manifestation that God willed. The matter is uncomplicated for al-Ḥasan and most Muslim polemicists: Christ’s birth, life, miracles, and ascension to heaven were nothing out of the prophetic ordinary. With this in mind, al-Ḥasan asserts that he has achieved the primary objective of his polemic when he states:

> We have revealed to you the errancy of that which you fabricated (tentaḥil) and the corruption of that which you have interpreted (tataʿawwal) in the books which are in your hands: the Torah, Psalms, (the Books of) the Prophets, and Gospel. Therefore, after that, what can establish the truth for you (Christians)?

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In this particular passage in al-Ḥasan’s Risāla, it appears that he is juxtaposing *tantahil* and *tataʾawwal* for a specific polemic purpose. On the one hand, *tantahil* can convey a variety of meanings including, adopt, presume, plagiarize, borrow, and claim; whereas, on the other hand, *tataʾawwal* communicates a more specified definition of interpretation. Therefore, al-Ḥasan may be acknowledging the existence of *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* as well as *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ* in the Bible. Otherwise, why make the distinction between these two words? Furthermore, al-Ḥasan uses the polemical phrase “the books which are in your hands,” implying that they are not the original untainted version of the texts.

In the latter part of al-Ḥasan’s work, he returns to the issue of the hypostases and the Trinity. Similar to the earlier portions of his Risāla, al-Ḥasan criticizes the non-biblical origins of Christian trinitarian theology. When speaking about the trinitarian terms “hypostases” (*aqānīm*) and “substance” (*jawhar*), al-Ḥasan asks:

> What is it? From where did you (Christians) take it? Who commanded it of you? In which scripture was it revealed? Which prophet prophesied it? Which statement of Christ do you claim it is in?\(^{644}\)

For al-Ḥasan and each of the converts turned polemicists in question, the Trinity has absolutely no biblical grounding. Taking this stance on the Trinity, al-Ḥasan even assaults the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19 which he renders as “Go and baptize the people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”\(^{645}\) Al-Ḥasan wonders how these simple three names have resulted in an elaborate theological system that is contingent upon technical terminology that does not exist in the biblical text. Al-Ḥasan marvels at

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\(^{644}\) Ibid., 159.

\(^{645}\) Ibid., 160.
how hypostases, essence (ʿayn and dhāt), and persons (ashkhāṣ) have been unjustifiably extrapolated from these three names and turned into three gods.

Moreover, al-Ḥasan sees the hypostatic union and its description by Christians as a violation of the standard Muʿtazīlī theological position regarding the divine attributes. In al-Ḥasan’s eyes, Christians have conflated the concepts of attributes (ṣifāt) and hypostases (aqānim). Slightly earlier in the tenth century the Muʿtazīlī, al-Nāshī’ al-Akbar (d. 906), argued along very similar lines regarding Matthew 28:19. For example, speaking about Christians who rely solely on the literal word of the Bible for their doctrinal justification, al-Nāshī’ states:

As for those who take refuge in the literal meaning of the Gospel, they hold only to the teachings narrated in the Gospel from Christ, who said: ‘Consecrate people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’. Here there is no clear indication that they are eternal or temporal or that they are one substance or otherwise, nor in the Gospel is there any utterance which suggests substance or hypostases. Such utterances are philosophical, Greek; they passed down to the people, and they employed them in their discussions.646

Taking into account al-Nāshī’ al-Akbar’s words as well as the arguments of al-Ḥasan and ʿAbd al-Jabbār, the technical and philosophical terminology employed to explain the Trinity was a tell-tale sign of the Hellenization of Christ’s original message. For many Muslim polemicists, Greek terminology implied a Greek religion. Therefore Christianity was imbued with Roman and Greek paganism and polytheism. This position is found in

646 David Thomas, Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology, 59.
the ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā, and it is he who may have helped popularize the sentiment amongst Muslims. 647

The problematic definition of hypostasis and attribute was elaborated upon not only by al-Ḥasan but by his near contemporary al-Bāqillānī, who asked, “Why did you claim that God Most High was three hypostases (without claiming) that He was four, ten, or more than that?” Certain Arabic-speaking Christian apologists injudiciously likened the hypostases to the ṣifāt Allāh (attributes of God). Diego Cucarella is correct when he states, “Christian treatments of the Trinity in particular were complexly related to Muslim debates on the divine attributes.” In many ways, Arabic-speaking Christian apologists struggled to find a common religious idiom with their Muslims neighbors. When they did, however, in certain instances, specifically regarding their use of ṣifāt, Christians became particularly vulnerable to Muslim critiques given that Muslims had defined the parameters and definitions of the term. Lejla Demiri claims that:

> Christians within the Muslim milieu utilized Muslim discourse on the ṣifāt Allāh (attributes of God) in their defense of the Trinity. Their efforts had two ends in mind: (1) to convince Muslims opponents of the truthfulness of the Trinity; and (2) to offer satisfying answers to their Christian co-religionists in order to protect them from the risk of conversion when challenged by a Muslim critique. 650

However, when a Christian conceded that “hypostases” and “attributes” were interchangeable, Muslim polemicists were more than ready to reveal what they saw as an


648 Ibid., 153.

649 Diego R Sarrió Cucarella, Muslim-Christian Polemics Across the Mediterranean, 131.

additional indication that Christians were faulty in their logic and tenuous in their understanding of the Arabic language.

On the one hand, al-Hasan argues that Christians have inescapably depicted the hypostases as individual gods. On the other hand Muslims — according to al-Hasan — assert that God’s attributes are comprehensible representations of God’s eminence, omnipotence, majesty, and exaltedness. And due to his absolute transcendence, these attributes are not equal to him. In simpler terms, God is omnipotent (an Islamic attribute of God) but God’s omnipotence is not God. By contrast, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each hypostases and each are considered to be God. More precisely, the Christian concept of the *khawāṣṣ* (properties) which is often a translation of the Greek ἴδιότης falls closer to the Muslim concept of God’s divine attributes. The *khawāṣṣ* can be considered properties which allowed a unique way for the substance (*jawhar*) to manifest itself in each of the hypostases (*aqānim*). In this regard, the Fatherhood, Sonship, and Emanation are properties of God, but they are not considered God. Moreover, for a Muslim audience, by likening the hypostases to the divine attributes, Christians run the immediate risk of creating not only a triad of gods, but worse yet, a multitude of gods, as al-Baqillānī argued. This is precisely al-Hasan’s contention with this Christian defense of the hypostases. Much like his analysis of the Christ’s pre-eternal birth, al-Hasan’s understanding of the hypostases can be reduced to a simple issue of incommensurability. If the doctrine of the hypostatic union asserts that Christ is the unification of both God and man, how can Christians logically interpret Mark 16:19, which states that Christ will sit at the right hand of God? Al-Hasan asserts that two things cannot be united (*muttaḥid*)
and separated (munfazil) simultaneously. All in all, al-Hasan presents the hypostatic union as an absurd blur of irrationality and extra-biblical theology.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, al-Hasan’s Risāla can be understood as a tenth-century Muʿtazili elaboration of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s Al-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and to a much lesser degree his Kīāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla as well. Al-Hasan’s Risāla does not make any staunch attempts to defend the prophetic position of Muḥammad. Rather, al-Ḥasan concentrates on dismantling the various trinitarian stances of the three prominent Christian communities in the Arabic-speaking world: the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians. This included the use of many proof-texts from both the Old and New Testament which al-Ḥasan believed irrefutably stymied Christian trinitarian claims. Additionally, al-Ḥasan frequently utilized logic and rationality in order to criticize the Christian divinization of Christ.

Al-Ḥasan presents Christianity as a transparently false religion whose once pure monotheism had been obfuscated into a tapestry of doctrinal absurdities anchored in cryptic terminology. What is more, like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and various other Muslim polemics, al-Ḥasan maintained that Christ’s original message had been corrupted by the whims of deceitful and incompetent exegetes operating under the influence or direct command of Roman (pagan) authorities. When Christians speak of the “blessing of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,” al-Ḥasan states, “This is a declaration of polytheism (shirk) and a reduction of the majesty and glory of God.”651 On more than one occasion, al-Hasan declares Christian beliefs to be disbelief.

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(kufr) and polytheism (shirk). Trinitarian Christians of the tenth century have no
association with the paradise-bound Christians sporadically described in the Qurʾān.

In the closing pages of al-Ḥasan’s Risāla, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, he cites what is, in his
opinion, a definitive biblical rebuttal of Christ’s divinity, Matthew 24:36, in which it is
declared that “Only the father knows the hour of judgement.”\textsuperscript{652} For al-Ḥasan, this is a
quintessential acknowledgment by Jesus himself that he is not consubstantial with God
the Father. As previously stated, for ʿAli al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, and later converts turned
polemicists, Christian doctrine is an inconsistent hodgepodge of imprudent exegesis,
specious rationality, and clerical misguidance. As an illustration of Christian self-
contradicting falsity, al-Ḥasan stated,

Among them (Christians) is he who says that he (Jesus) is a
servant, among them is he who says that he is a god, among
them is he who says that he is a son, among them is he who
says that he is a hypostasis and nature, and among them is
he who says that he is two hypostases and and two
natures.\textsuperscript{653}

Therefore, to exacerbate matters even further, not only are Christians guilty of
transgression on multiple levels, but they also lack any semblance of unanimity.

Therefore, Christians are, in addition to being misled, deluded and fractured as well. This
is a direct transgression of the sunna of Christ and his disciples and a direct disavowal of
Christ’s Gospel.

One of the most noticeable features of al-Ḥasan’s refutation of Christianity is
that, unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla a century prior,

\textsuperscript{652} Ibid., 144-145.

\textsuperscript{653} Ibid., 179.
its wide-ranging proof-texts are coupled with pervasive rationalistic arguments. This confirms that it was written by a Mu'tazili, which of course Ibn al-Nadīm declares al-Ḥasan to be in Fīhrīṣt. However, al-Ḥasan’s work still carries the polemical trademark of Christian apostate literature, i.e., a reliance upon biblical proof-texts and scripture. What makes this feature all the more salient, is that al-Ḥasan was writing during an age in which polemics were typified by rationalistic thinking as opposed to scriptural lines of argumentation which predominated earlier. As previously stated, the most prominent Christian intellectual of the tenth century, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, was reluctant to employ scriptural proof, particularly miracles, in favor of reason. What is more, writing approximately a century after al-Ḥasan, the renowned Nestorian exegete, who penned one of the lengthiest and most comprehensive commentaries on the entire Bible, Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043) claimed:

Miracles take place in a certain place, at a certain time, among a certain people; and when that place, that time and that nation cease, the miracles cease as they cease. But argument is present in every place, at every time and with every people; therefore knowledge and argument are nobler than miracles.654

Despite intellectual trends within the Arabic-speaking Muslim and Christian communities, Christian converts to Islam, who were undoubtedly influenced by these trends, always preserved a dependence on and confidence in biblical proof-texts in order to substantiate many of their arguments.

As a final point, al-Ḥasan, although a Mu'tazili, penned his Risāla, which resembled ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā as much, if not more, than the works of his

contemporaries. Naturally, his work incorporates a fusion of the most common characteristics of Christian apostate literature and Muʿtazilī rationalism. For al-Ḥasan, in many ways Christianity is the antithesis of Islam. While Muslims have painstakingly safeguarded and protected the Qurʾānic text, Christians have not only lost the original Gospel, they have rendered it into countless forms and languages. Al-Ḥasan juxtaposes a splintered and sectarian Christianity with not only a unified Islam but also a unified Judaism. On the one hand, al-Ḥasan claims that Christians alone differ from sect to sect on matters doctrine, faith, and law; whereas, on the other hand, Jews diverge on matters, which according to al-Ḥasan, are inconsequential, such as festivals and practice. Likewise, Muslims may disagree on inessential doctrines, such as pre-destination. Here, al-Ḥasan appears quite cavalier in assuming that varying opinions with respect to practice, festivals, and predestinations do not lead to rather formidable doctrinal divisions within a religious community.

In contrast to al-Ḥasan and many additional Muslim polemicists, a rather unknown Christian, ʿAlī ibn Dāwud al-Arfādī (d. ca. eleventh century), in his Kitāb ijtīmāʿ al-amāna wa ʿunṣur al-diyyāna wa fakhr al-urthudhuksiyya al-majīda (The Book of the Consensus of Faith and the Element of Faith and Honor of the Glorious Orthodoxy) claims “Furthermore, I found them unanimous in faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, three hypostases equal in aspect, one substance, one nature, one will, one authority.”655 Additionally, al-Arfādī claims that Christianity originates from one source and they return to one faith, claiming that Christians are in agreement concerning:

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Faith in God (May He be Mighty and Majestic), agreement in the Gospel (the Book of God), the Book of Paul, the Book of Acts (Ar. *al-abraksīs* Gr. πράξεις), the ancient books, by which I mean, the Torah and the prophets, unanimous regarding prayer, faithfulness, the Eucharist, baptism, festivals, fasting, priesthood, the cross, permissibility, prohibition, and certainty in the Day of Resurrection, the awakening and resurrection from the graves, paradise, and hellfire.

This rather anonymous author is not unique in his approach. In the tenth century, the Melkite Abū ‘Alī NaẓĪf ibn Yumm (d. after 983), like many other apologists, argued that Christians confessed one faith. Likewise, al-Muṭaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. between 1270 and 1286), a Copt, in his *Majmūʿ ʿusūl al-dīn* (*Compendium of the Sources of Religion*) built upon Ibn Yumm’s earlier work and claimed that Christian’s maintained distinct Christologies, but that their faith in Christ was one. In modern parlance, ‘Alī ibn Dāwud al-Arfādī, Abū ‘Alī Naẓīf ibn Yumm, and al-Muṭaman ibn al-ʿAssāl would be considered proponents of Christian ecumenism.

Nevertheless, al-Ḥasan goes on to conclude that Muslims are the most esteemed community. Unlike Christians, the followers of Muhammad are unified and in agreement concerning their God and Creator, their worship, and the Qurʾān. Moreover, after having cited dozens of proof-texts, which al-Ḥasan believed attested to Christ’s certain humanity, he reiterates one of the most salient motifs of Christian apostate literature when he concludes, rather reassuringly, that Christians have abandoned Christ’s message. In other words, a trinitarian Christian is not a Christian. The difference between Christianity and

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656 Ibid., 217.
657 Sidney H. Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 141.
Islam is quite simple: God is the God of all creation, He is one, and He has neither partner nor son.\textsuperscript{658}

\textsuperscript{658} See \textit{Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ} (112:1-4).
CHAPTER 4

THE LATER CONVERTS

Naṣr ibn Yahyā ibn ʿĪsā ibn Saʿīd al-Mutaṭṭabbīb al-Muhtadī

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two works of Christian apostate literature were written by two otherwise unknown Christian converts to Islam: Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā (d. 1163 or 1193) and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (d. ca mid-thirteenth century). These two authors and their works are important to the development of Christian apostate literature not so much for their originality, but rather for their unoriginality. Both of their works are highly derivative of earlier refutations, specifically al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb’s Risāla. Floris Sepmeijer has demonstrated that Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā incorporated al-Ḥasan’s entire Risāla into his polemic, and in doing so, Naṣr appropriated al-Ḥasan’s contents, structure, and even chapter titles.⁶⁵⁹ The modern editor of Naṣr’s work, al-Sharqāwī, noted that Naṣr benefited from ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla as well.⁶⁶⁰ On account of the imitative quality of Naṣr’s work, many of his arguments will not be dealt with in great detail given that the majority of his reasoning and proofs have been discussed in the

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previous sections concerning the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan. Therefore, only the original contributions of Naṣr’s work will be examined and considered.

Still, on three counts, Naṣr’s work is of critical importance to the development of Christian apostate literature. First, Naṣr does (although on limited occasions) offer new arguments and positions distinct from those made by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, particularly regarding his increasingly critical attitude toward the textual integrity of the Bible. Second, the plagiaristic nature of Naṣr’s work suggests that by the twelfth century Christian apostate literature was becoming an imagined or artificial genre of anti-Christian polemic replete with recycled literary topos and fixed narratives. The original works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan were used by later Muslim authors as foundational material used to supplement what were either genuine works produced by Christian converts to Islam or fabricated by Muslim polemicists. Third, Naṣr’s critique of Christianity exists in numerous manuscripts, many of which appear to have Ottoman origins, including a personal copy of Suleiman I (d. 1566). This confirms that, regardless of the authenticity of certain works, the popularity of Christian apostate literature continued well into the Ottoman period.

In the twelfth century, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā composed his refutation of Christianity titled al-Naṣīḥa l-ʾīmāniyya fī ḥadīth al-milla l-Naṣrāniyya (The Faithful Advice Concerning the Shame of the Christian Religion). Naṣr’s refutation is divided into four sections: (1) The beliefs of the Christian sects (madhāhib); (2) The contradictions of their kalām and arguments as well as the discrepancies in their doctrines; (3) Christ’s miracles, his divinity, and the other prophets; (4) Testimonia of Muḥammad in the Bible. Although the details and framework of Naṣr’s work are straightforward and organized, few biographical particulars are known
about him. In fact, even his name and identity are problematic. Lejla Demiri hesitantly identifies Naṣr as the Baṣran or Baghdādi intellectual Yahyā ibn Yahyā ibn Saʿīd known as Ibn Mārī al-Masīḥī.661 In addition to being a Christian physician and convert to Islam, Naṣr may have been an author, poet, linguist, grammarian, and scientist.662 Although Naṣr is an essentially unknown author, his writing style and language do suggest some important possibilities concerning his background and location. Unfortunately, like many of his biographical details found in the various works of other authors, the information found in Naṣr’s al-Naṣīḥa offers limited and tentative particulars with respect to his personal life.

To begin with, in his summary of Christian sects, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, much like nearly all Muslim polemicists before and after him, begins his al-Naṣīḥa by outlining the christological views of the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. Naṣr states,

They say that God (may He be glorified and exalted) is one substance (jawhar) and three hypostases (aqānīm), that is to say a hypostasis of the Father, a hypostasis of the Son, and a hypostasis of the Holy Spirit; and they are one in substance and distinct in hypostases. Some of them say that they (the hypostases) are individuals (ashkhāṣ) and entities (dhawāt). Some of them say that they are properties (khawāss). Some of them say that they are attributes (ṣifāt). Some of them say that the hypostasis of the Father is the essence (dhaṭ), and the hypostasis of the Son is the word (kalima), i.e., the knowledge which is eternally generated from the Father, not by way of procreation, rather as light of the sun is generated by the sun. The hypostasis of the

661 Lejla Demiri, “Naṣr ibn Yahyā,” CMR III, 750. In the al-Naṣīḥa l-īmānīya, the author of the work identifies himself as Naṣr ibn Yahyā, therefore, he will be referred to as Naṣr ibn Yahyā throughout this work.

662 Lejla Demiri, “Naṣr ibn Yahyā,” CMR III, 750.
Holy Spirit is the life which eternally flows between the Father and the Son.⁶⁶³

In the introductory preamble above, Naṣr voiced a fairly standard dissatisfaction with the imprecise language of the Trinity.

For Naṣr, and many other Muslim polemicists, the number of somewhat interchangeable and inconsistent trinitarian terms was indicative of a reprehensible and illogical theology. Naṣr is correct in claiming that some Christians had rendered the terms essence and substance indistinguishable as well as hypostasis, person, property, and attribute. Regarding the Trinity and its terminology, Naṣr states “You (Christians) express that the Creator (He is mighty and majestic) is three hypostases; and you say that He is one substance…” Nevertheless, Naṣr accuses the Christians of tritheism when he claims that the three hypostases are three gods (ālika). Almost recreating al-Ḥasan’s exact words in his Risāla, Naṣr continues, “From where did you take this belief? Who commanded it of you? In which scripture was it revealed? Which prophet prophesied it?”⁶⁶⁴ In order to bolster these questions, Naṣr summarizes the genealogy of Christ as it is found in the opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew which leads him declare that “It did not say that he is the Son of God, nor that he is God from God as you say in your creed (shari‘at īmānikum).”⁶⁶⁵

Moreover, much like the arguments of his predecessors ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, Naṣr contends, first, that Nicene theology as well as trinitarian terminology originated independently of the Bible. Second, Naṣr maintains that not only are Christian

⁶⁶³ Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, al-Nasīḥa l-īmānikya, 56.
⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 125.
⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 133.
beliefs completely biblically unfounded, but they operate well outside the realms of reason and logic. After summarizing and systematically refuting the Nicene Creed, Naṣr ask,

How can a rational person approve of remaining in a belief of such absurdities, superstitions, and contradictions. Praise be to God who saved me from a religion of this sort of rationality as well as its masters.⁶⁶⁶

Yet, Naṣr asserts that every Christian agrees with Nicene principles. He even appropriates al-Ḥasan’s claim that Nicaea is the lifeblood (muhaj) of the Christian community.

According to Naṣr, all Christians understand the word “Christ” (masīḥ) as the realization or the embodiment of God’s divinity (lāhūt) and mankind’s humanity (nāsūt); and with this dichotomy in mind, he claims that no Christians say that the divine aspect of Christ died.

However, this does not make Trinitarianism any less absurd in the eyes of Naṣr ibn Yahyā who, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, calls attention to any distinction between Christ’s divinity and his humanity. Naṣr concentrates on the phrase “true God from true God” found in the Nicene Creed. In other words, Naṣr attempts to demonstrate that the Christian belief in the consubstantiality of Christ and God has been irrefutably compromised by certain biblical passages. Therefore, although Naṣr acknowledges that Christians do not believe that God died, he nevertheless claims that the hypostatic union is balderdash. When speaking of Christ, he asks, “How can he be dead and not have died,” which he likens to simultaneously sitting and standing.⁶⁶⁷ This argument is recurrent in Muslim anti-Christian polemical works. For Christian apostates, as well as most Muslim polemicists, the hypostatic union is the embodiment of Christian theological

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 70.
⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 62.
contradiction and blasphemous innovation. Christ is born but eternal, created but not made, man and God, dead and alive.

Naṣr, like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, argues that these contradictory characteristics cannot be harmonized within one entity, regardless of how arcane, esoteric, and mysterious the reasoning. However, Naṣr presents Christianity not only as theologically blasphemous, but sacramentally sacrilegious as well. Therefore, the Eucharist exacerbates matters even further, which Naṣr accurately describes in such a manner, “They claim that the bread is the flesh of Christ and the wine is His blood.”

Along with the veneration of icons and burning of incense, Naṣr categorizes the Holy Communion as disbelief. Still, perhaps the most vitriolic of Naṣr’s critiques were his opinions concerning the Incarnation, which leads him to state, “As for their belief in the Incarnation (al-ittiḥād), it is amongst the most hideous and obscene of doctrines.”

Although Naṣr discusses a variety of contentious issues in his al-Naṣīḥa, his work incorporates lengthy discussions of the Bible, specifically concerning the issue of tahrīf. It is important to realize that Naṣr ibn Yahyā, like previous converts, asserted that he was in no way attempting to diminish the status of Christ. In contrast, he was attacking the integrity of the Bible. For example, Naṣr cites John 3:13 “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” In response to this verse, Naṣr harks back to the stories of Enoch and Elijah as blatant refutations of this

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668 Ibid., 76.
669 Ibid., 65.
verse. The falsification or corruption, for Naṣr, has occurred in one of three places: the actual text (khabar), the transmission (naql), or the interpretation (ta'wil).

Building upon this line of argumentation, Naṣr launches into an attack on the lack of uniformity in the Gospels. In doing so, Naṣr mentions John 2:6-11 in which Christ transforms water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Naṣr wonders why this miracle as well as certain other miracles are not mentioned by the other three evangelists in the synoptic Gospels. This inconsistency leads Naṣr to claim that the evangelists simply “added and deleted” as they wished. He goes on to cite an additional biblical contradiction found in John 13:1-17 and John 1:6-36 (specifically John 1:27 and 30).

In John 13:1-17, Naṣr notes a discrepancy: Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, however, Naṣr correctly notes that this story is absent from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Naṣr identifies John 1:27 and 1:30 as clear biblical testimonia of Muḥammad, claiming that Christ did not come after John the Baptist; he appeared contemporaneously with John. Therefore, the one who is to come after John described in Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16, and John 1:27 and 30 is Muḥammad. Al-Ḥasan cited this interaction between Christ and John the Baptist as well. However, al-Ḥasan and Naṣr used this proof-text for different purposes. On the one hand, Naṣr attempted to accentuate the prophetic nature of the verse. As a result, the “one who is to come” is Muḥammad. On the other

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670 Ibid., 81.
671 Ibid.
672 Ibid., 83.
673 Ibid., 84.
hand, al-Hasan underscored what he interpreted to be a corruption of the text. If John had previously baptized Christ, why would he later ask “are you the one who is to come?”

Moreover, Naṣr claimed that Christians contend that Christ reported that “There would be no prophet after him.” However, in response to this claim, Naṣr cites either a summary or conflation of John 14:16, John 15:26-27, and John 16:7-15 in which the Paraclete (bāraqīṭ) is clearly identified as the Holy Spirit, which these verses call the “Spirit of Truth” (rūḥ al-haqq). Naṣr argues that none of Christ’s disciples or followers taught the world “everything” as the above biblical passages claim the Paraclete would. Therefore, Muḥammad must be considered the Paraclete described in the Book of John. Almost four hundred years before Naṣr was writing his al-Naṣīḥa, Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I argued that if Muḥammad was in fact the Paraclete described in John, then Muḥammad must be considered an incorporeal being, given that he must also be considered the “Spirit of Truth.” Muslim polemicists often disregarded the words in the Book of John that identified the Paraclete as the Holy Spirit. In this regard, polemicists could have been simply following an earlier precedent established by Ibn Ishāq in his Sīra. Additionally, Naṣr offers some of the oldest biblical testimonia of Muḥammad, specifically Deuteronomy 33:2-3 and 18:15, both of which are found in Ibn al-Layth’s Risāla and Timothy I’s debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī.

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674 Ibid., 138.
675 Ibid., 139.
676 Deuteronomy 33:2-3, 2He said, “The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand. 3Yes, he loved his people, call his holy ones were in his hand; so they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you…” Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers…”
Naṣr also defends Muḥammad from Christian accusations of violence. Like ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who argued that the use of violence was acceptable if mandated by God, Naṣr presents Muḥammad as a prophet who obeys the commands of God. First, Naṣr states that Muḥammad was a poor orphan who preached God’s oneness (tawḥīd) for 13 years. Muḥammad only brought the sword against his enemies after years of warnings and resistance, and only then did God finally command Muḥammad to use force. Nevertheless, most Christian allegations against Muḥammad — according to Naṣr — were based on faulty reports and false narratives.

Next, Naṣr calls into question the varying genealogies found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, calling the discrepancies a “blatant corruption.” Again, al-Ḥasan and Naṣr utilize a particular set of biblical verses for different polemical purposes. For al-Ḥasan, Christ’s lineage was a telling attestation of his mortality, and therefore, in his opinion, a definitive proof-text discrediting the Christian divinization of Christ. Naṣr, on the other hand, is more concerned with accenting what he understood as a clear sign of a textually tainted and compromised Bible. Whereas ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan maintained that the Bible had been primarily misinterpreted (tahrīf al-maʿnā) accompanied by limited instances of textual corruption (tahrīf al-nāṣṣ), Naṣr can be considered a proponent of the reverse, where tahrīf al-nāṣṣ was in the ascendancy. As previously stated, this position was championed by the Andalusian polemicist Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064). In this regard, Naṣr’s attitude — with respect to the integrity of the Bible — is reflective of a new approach toward the Bible in which Muslim polemicists’ viewpoints had steadily hardened. During this transition tahrīf al-nāṣṣ began to rather pervasively overshadow

677 Naṣr ibn Yahyā, al-Naṣīḥa l-imānīyya, 86.
tahrīf al-maʿnā in the works of many Muslim polemicists. Christian apostate literature was no exception.

Concerning the various biblical inconsistencies referenced above, Naṣr states that these are examples confirming that Christians have “distorted (harrafa) their books, corrupted (afsada) their meanings, and removed (asqaṭa) the proofs of God.” Naṣr speaks of the historical processes by which the “original” Gospel of Christ was corrupted. In terms very reminiscent of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Naṣr states,

You (Christians) say that the Gospels that you have in your hands have not been modified (tabaddala) or altered (tahrrafa) and nothing has been changed from them; neither has anything been added to them, nor has anything been removed from them.679

Many Muslim polemicists use the phrase “the Gospels that you have in your hands,” or a phrase similar to it in order to insist to their audience that Christians are not in possession of a genuine Bible. Upon realizing that the 12 disciples and 72 apostles had generated variant Gospels, the Emperor Constantine (d. 337), according to Naṣr, attempted to rectify the situation. Naṣr claims:

This king, when he saw the discordance of the Christians and the variance of their Gospels, i.e., that each one of the disciples and apostles had brought in his gospel something not brought in the other, dissension arose between the Christians and each sect slandered the other sect and blasphemed their belief. As a result, Constantine ordered the patriarchs, catholicoi, clergy, and priests of all the Christian nations to come together and gather their Gospels. The king, Constantine, commanded them to circumscribe these Gospels (anājīl) into one Gospel (imjīl). They obeyed the command of the king and they

678 Ibid., 87.
679 Ibid., 135.
circumscribed these Gospels into the four which are in their hands now and discarded the rest.\footnote{Ibid. For ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s rendering see ʿAbd al-Jabbār, \textit{Critique of Christian Origins}, 94.}

For Naṣr, the Council of Nicaea was not only responsible for the misguided fabrication of trinitarian theology, but it was also responsible for the loss of precious uncorrupted biblical material. Naṣr is depicting a Nicene scenario in which the Gospels were redacted and edited to a radical degree. There is no question that Naṣr is presenting this as quintessential proof confirming the large-scale textual corruption of the Gospels.

Prior to the twelfth century when Naṣr was writing his \textit{al-Naṣīḥa}, the alleged Romanization of Christianity or Roman corruption of Christianity had become an inseparable part of Islam’s narrative of the past. This point of view was first put forth by the ninth-century polemicists, including ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. Moreover, it was reiterated by ʿAbd al-Jabbār during the tenth and eleventh centuries, who stated:

\begin{quote}
Know that the Romans did not become Christians and did not accept Christ, but the Christians became Romans and apostatized from the religion of Christ, annulled its doctrine and practice, and adopted the religions of his enemies.\footnote{ʿAbd al-Jabbār, \textit{Critique of Christian Origins}, 117.}
\end{quote}

The idea that Greco-Roman ideas had corrupted the original message of Christ along with his untainted Bible is early, pervasive, and persistent in Muslim polemics. Likewise, for various Muslim authors, there is a nearly indissoluble and negative association between the Greco-Roman world, philosophy, and Christianity. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) wrote in his \textit{Tafsīr al-Qurān al-ʿazīm} that Constantine changed and perverted Christianity. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr claimed that the decisions at Nicaea, which
he called a “perfidious betrayal,” were superimposed upon Christianity.\footnote{Jane D. McAuliffe, Qur’anic Christians, 150.} The Imāmī Shīṭ al-Ḥimmaṣī (d. 1204) claimed that the school \( \text{madhhab} \) of the philosophers “are the source of the doctrines of these Christians.”\footnote{Sadid al-Dīn al-Ḥimmaṣī, \textit{al-Munqidh min al-Taqālīd}, 145.} When speaking of “doctrines,” al-Ḥimmaṣī of course means Trinitarianism. Moreover, varying terminology cannot exonerate Christians from their blasphemous doctrines. Whether speaking of hypostases \( \text{aqānīm} \), attributes \( \text{sifāt} \), properties \( \text{khawāṣṣ} \), or persons \( \text{ashkhās} \), al-Ḥimmaṣī contended, much like Naṣr and the overwhelming majority of Muslim polemicists, that Christians, regardless of terminology, still endowed God with multiplicity.

According to Thomas Ricks, Muslims would appear justified in their incessant association of Christianity with philosophy. Ricks states that:

because a great deal of Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotelian dialectic and metaphysics, had already been assimilated by the Syria-speaking Christian communities, the materials translated into Arabic formed a significant portion of the intellectual apparatus with which Christians would begin their Arabic response to Islam.\footnote{Thomas W. Ricks, “Defending the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu,” 13.}

Christian converts to Islam like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yahyā as well as Muslim-born intellectuals like ʿAbd al-Jabbār and Ibn Kathīr clearly asserted that Greek thought had undone Christ’s original message. However, not all Muslim thinkers argued that philosophy had debased Christianity. The historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 956) in many ways argued the inverse of many Muslim polemicists. He believed that Christians had abandoned philosophy and, in doing so, they had undermined centuries of accumulated ancient wisdom. Al-Masʿūdī claimed:
Sciences continued to be in real demand and intensely cultivated until the religion of Christianity appeared among the Byzantines; they effaced the signs of philosophy, eliminated its traces, destroyed its paths, and they changed and corrupted what the ancient Greeks had set forth in clear expositions.\textsuperscript{685}

With these arguments in mind, Christians occupied a difficult position with respect to the religio-intellectual life of the Islamic world. In the eyes of the Muslim community as a whole, Christians were neither the true inheritors of ancient wisdom, nor were they the rightful successors of Christ. Rather, they were seen as the corruptors of both.

Naṣr reiterates many of the proof-texts as well as the extensive list of comparative miracles found in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and al-Ḥasan’s Risāla. Additionally, like his predecessors, Naṣr discusses the ontological distinctions between Christ and God, the various non-divine titles of Christ, the baseless and illogical beliefs surrounding the Atonement, and the puzzling events and doctrines entangled in the baptism of Christ. Naṣr even appropriated al-Ḥasan’s refutation of the commonly utilized Christian analogy of the sun. After analyzing numerous verses allegedly humanizing Christ and comparing his miracles to other prophets, Naṣr concludes that all the interpretations indicate that he (Christ) is a prophet: sent, created, chosen, and lorded over. God supported Christ through His spirit as He supported all of the prophets. Naṣr states, “You abandoned these true interpretations of Christ. You defined them and rationalized your religion upon innovation fabricated by your forefathers.”\textsuperscript{686}

\textsuperscript{685} Dimitri Gutas, \textit{Greek Thought, Arabic Culture}, 89.

\textsuperscript{686} Naṣr ibn Yahyā, \textit{al-Naṣīḥa l-imānīyya}, 112.
One of the most recurring polemical themes put forth by Muslims is the unremarkable daily human activities, behaviors, and emotions Jesus engaged in and displayed during his lifetime. For example, Naṣr describes the biblical scenario in the Garden of Gethsemane in which Christ trembles in fear.\textsuperscript{687} After describing a frightened Christ, Naṣr states, “Therefore, how can you attribute divinity to Christ when you speak such stories about him?”\textsuperscript{688} This argument is intimately connected with the polemical evidence presented by both ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan. God cannot be endowed with any semblance of passivity. Naṣr states of Christ, “He prayed, was subjugated, humiliated, tested, he was tortured in every possible way, he suffered, pain and injury afflicted him, and he experienced change. All these are attributes of man and not attributes of he who is called divine.”\textsuperscript{689} Furthermore, Naṣr asks, “How can you believe in the divinity of a man who is neither able to save himself from his enemies nor deliver himself from tribulation?\textsuperscript{690}

Like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, Naṣr was primarily concerned with refuting the various trinitarian claims of his Christian neighbors by clarifying Christ’s miracles as well as spelling out a number of biblical prophecies concerning Muḥammad. However, like early Christian figures found in Islamic literature, notably Waraqa ibn Nawfal and Sergius Bahīrā as well as later converts like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, Naṣr viewed himself as a true Christian and true heir and interpreter of Christ’s message to humanity. For


\textsuperscript{689} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{690} Ibid., 146.
example, Naṣr cites Matthew 7:23, which says, “Oh Lord, did we not cast out demons in
your name? I will say to you: ‘Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I never knew
you.” Likewise, Naṣr cites a summary of Matthew 25:34-44 in which Christ declares
that certain Christians were destined for doom on account of their behavior. For Naṣr,
those destined for hellfire in Matthew 7:23 and Matthew 25:34-44 are none other than
the trinitarian Jacobite, Nestorian, and Melkite Christians living amongst him.

Neither was Naṣr withholding when it came to presenting condemnation of
Christianity and its doctrines, nor did he shy away from discussing the destination that
awaited his former coreligionists. For instance, Naṣr relegates Christians to the worst
qur’ānic punishment, stating:

Surely you in your tyranny were misled, you strayed from
guidance, you followed the path of resistance, you
disbelieved in the Merciful One, you followed the ways of
Satan, so surely they are those with whom God is angry, he
cursed them, and he prepared for them a great
punishment.

Naṣr maintains that Christians are obstinate and nearly irredeemable opponents of God.

Moreover, he identifies trinitarian Christians as the intended recipients of God’s wrath

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691 Ibid., 101.

692 Ibid., 102. Matthew 25:34-44: 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, 37 I was in prison and you came to me.’ 38 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 39 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 40 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 41 Then the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ 42 Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 43 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 44 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 45 Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick in prison, and did not minister to you?’

693 Naṣr ibn Yahyā, al-Naṣīḥa al-imānīyya, 146-147.

Finally, just as ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb considered their refutations of their former faith to be a personal responsibility, Naṣr also believed disproving trinitarian doctrine to be a religious obligation of sorts. Naṣr states, particularly referencing the Trinity and the Incarnation, “It is required of rational people to rebuke them and their justification for worshipping God as born of a flesh and blood woman.”

Given the confusion regarding the author of al-Nasīḥa l-īmāniyya fī fadīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyya along with its heavy borrowings from al-Ḥasan’s Risāla, this work is not of critical importance on account of the originality of its arguments or the repute of its author. Rather as Lejla Demiri states, “its significance lies in the fact that it represents another contribution to the genre of polemical writing by religious converts, intended to offer justification for their conversion and to refute their former beliefs.” Additionally, this confirms that the popularity of Christian apostate literature as a genre outweighed the importance of authorship and authenticity for the Muslim community. Moreover, like the later works of Yūsuf al-Lūbnānī and Anselm Turmeda, one should consider that the work titled al-Nasīḥa l-īmāniyya fī fadīḥat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyya attributed to Naṣr ibn Yahyā may have been significantly reworked by later editors and copyists.

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694 Ibid., 147-148.
695 Ibid., 70-73.
696 Lejla Demiri, “Naṣr ibn Yahyā,” CMR III, 753.
Yūsuf al-Lubnānī al-Muhtadī

According to a unique manuscript housed in the Austrian National Library, during the thirteenth century an unknown priest turned Muslim, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (wr. 1226), penned a rather substantial refutation of his former faith titled Risāla fi l-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā (The Letter Regarding the Refutation of the Christians).697 Like the work of Naṣr ibn Yahya, Yūsuf borrows large portions of his polemic from al-Ḥasan’s Risāla. Nico Tilmans states:

Large parts of Yūsuf’s Risāla are taken without acknowledgement from the 10th-century Risāla ilā akhīhi ʿAlī ibn ʿAyyūb (‘Letter to his brother ʿAlī ibn ʿAyyūb’) by the convert to Islam al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAyyūb (q.v.). Yūsuf sometimes quotes from this in full, and sometimes paraphrases or summarizes it, adding his own comments and objections about Christianity. This work gives his Risāla its three-part structure, and nothing in his own additions reveals any inside knowledge about his former faith.698

Certain elements of Yūsuf’s Risāla are even more artificial than those found in Naṣr’s al-Naṣiḥa. According to the texts, both Naṣr and Yūsuf were physicians, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. Furthermore, Yūsuf, again like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, claims to have converted to Islam late in life bi-shaybatī (in my old age).699

Additionally, Yūsuf’s work appears to have appropriated certain details found in Abū ʿAlī Yahyā ibn ʿĪsā ibn Jazla’s (d. 1100) refutation of Christianity. Ibn Jazla was a Nestorian medical doctor who converted to Islam in 1074 while studying under the Muʿtazilī Abū ʿAlī ibn al-Walīd. As a physician he was trained at the ʿAḍudī hospital

697 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek - 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), 27 fols (1226).
699 Ibid., 234.
under physician Ṣāʿid ibn Hibat Allāh. Ibn Jazla, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, was primarily known for his medical works, most notably his Taqwīn al-abdān fī tadbīr al-insān (The Almanac of Bodily Parts for the Treatment of People). Moreover, Ibn Jazla was closely connected to the caliphate court. However, a particular detail of Yūsuf’s Risāla conspicuously corresponds to the narrative found in Ibn Jazla’s conversion. On the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUsaybī’a and Ibn Khallikān, Ibn Jazla composed a letter to a priest named Elias (Iliyyā) in order to justify his conversion to Islam. This exact feature is recreated in Yūsuf’s Risāla leading Nico Tilmans to claim, “Such correspondences raise the possibility that Yūsuf was employing a standard literary form well known from converts, or even that this treatise (and its author) was a complete invention.” Therefore, Yūsuf’s Risāla is representative of a genre of literature that was becoming less and less reliant on former Christians for its production and more dependent upon polemical motifs. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the framework of Christian apostate literature had firmly settled, and as a result, the proof-texts employed, structure of the polemic, and the biographical details of the converts had largely stabilized. As a result, Christian apostate literature became quite formulaic in its later manifestations.

The author of Yūsuf’s Risāla was also acutely aware of the common Christian accusations leveled against Christian converts to Islam. As previously mentioned, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq claimed that converts are won over to falsehood for six reasons, the third of which Ḥunayn states, “is that a person favors great might over humiliation, honor over


in inferiority, and power over weakness, so that he leaves his religion and converts to another.”

 Hunayn was not unique in his incriminations of Christian converts to Islam and similar allegations must have persisted throughout the medieval period. It may have been on account of similar charges that Yusuf was quick in his attempt to dispel the typical arguments directed against Christians converting to Islam. In the opening lines of his Risāla, which he addressed to the Metropolitan Elias, Yusuf claims that his motivations for converting to Islam “were not reasons of the world (umūr al-dunyā).” Regardless of its veracity, Yusuf claims that the cause of his conversion to Islam was purely theological. He claimed that he could no longer accept “the pure disbelief that all of the Christians declared” and that his religious reorientation from Christianity to Islam was a journey from kufr (disbelief) and buhtān (defamation) to tawḥīd (oneness) and, in so doing, he would serve the Beneficent (al-Raḥmān) and the Merciful (al-Raḥīm) and obtain bliss.

 Like the previous converts ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, and Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yusuf interweaves the historical theological developments within Christianity with certain aspects of the traditional Islamic narrative regarding Christianity and the corruption of the Bible. Sūrat al-Baqara (2:79) states, “So woe to those who write the Book with their hands, then say, ‘This is from God,’ that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.” Just as Sūrat al-Baqara (2:79) should be understood as an accusation of taḥrīf al-naṣṣ, so too should

\[702\] See note 364.

\[703\] MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F . 397), fol. 2r.

\[704\] Ibid., fol. 3v.
the words the “the Gospel which is in your hands,” a phrase scattered throughout Christian apostate literature.\textsuperscript{705}

Unreservedly, Yūsuf asserted that trinitarian Christianity was a fabricated innovation. Nevertheless, the question then remains, did Muslims recognize any Christian community as the true uncorrupted heirs of Christ’s message? Like al-Ḥasan, Yūsuf claims that the true Christians were the non-trinitarian Arians led by Arius. For Yūsuf, this community believed in the oneness of God and the servanthood of Christ, however, they were overwhelmed by the various trinitarian Christian sects, and as a result, Christ’s original message of monotheism was permanently corrupted or lost. Yūsuf claims that conciliar Christianity, which he equated with innovated, fabricated, and derived Christianity, resulted in the concept of the hypostases (\textit{aqānīm}), which he maintained “eroded” and “corrupted” the concept of God’s oneness (\textit{tawḥīd}).\textsuperscript{706} And later, when speaking of Melkite Christology, Yūsuf states, “Christ is one person and two natures and each one of the natures has its own will. The divinity has the will of the Father and Spirit, and the humanity has the will of Abraham.”\textsuperscript{707} Yūsuf describe this as a corrupt innovation (\textit{ikhtirāʾ ʃāsid}). Yūsuf offers equally scathing remarks against the Jacobites and Nestorians.

\textsuperscript{703} Ignazio di Matteo argues that in the Qur’ān there exist a number a verses in which the scripture “in the hands of the Jews and Christians” are considered genuine. See, Ignazio di Matteo, “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani,” \textit{Bessarione} 38 (1922): 64-111, 223-260.

\textsuperscript{706} MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.E 397), fol. 3r.

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., fol. 5r.
In order to juxtapose perfidious trinitarian Christianity with Islam, Yūsuf, like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, makes a Nicene-like declaration in which he elucidates what he considers to be orthodox Muslim belief. Yūsuf states:

We believe in Muḥammad (Peace and blessing be upon him) and his servanthood and apostleship. (God) sent him forth with guidance and the religion of truth in order to cleanse all the religions and combat polytheist. We believe in Moses, Jesus, and all of the prophets and we do not differentiate between one of them. Thus, we believe in the Torah which was sent down to Moses (Peace be upon him), not Ezra’s Torah, and the Gospel which was sent down to Christ (Peace be upon him) not the four Gospels compiled by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and in all the scriptures which have been revealed, and in the Qurʾān, and in the coming hour in which there is no doubt, and that God will resurrect the righteous from the graves to be in bliss, and the licentious will be in hell.\(^{708}\)

‘Alī al-Ṭabarī offered a similar declaration of faith in his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā.\(^{709}\) However, these two Islamic credos put forth two distinct statements of faith. Moreover, Yūsuf’s creed is indicative of a Christian convert who was deeply concerned with matters of \(\text{tahrīf}\) and the textual integrity of the Bible — so much so, that he included it amongst his personalized articles of Islamic faith. By stating “Ezra’s Torah” and “the four Gospels compiled by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,” Yūsuf is proclaiming that the Bible in the hands of the Jews and Christians is textually distinct from the “original” Torah of Moses and the “original” Gospel of Christ. Furthermore, by the time Yūsuf was composing his Rīsāla in the thirteenth century, \(\text{tahrīf al-naṣṣ}\) had largely superseded \(\text{tahrīf al-maʿnā}\) as the dominant position of the Muslim community vis-à-vis the Bible.

\(^{708}\) Ibid., fol. 3r.

\(^{709}\) See note 179.
Much like ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, Yusuf attacks and condemns what he considers failed attempts by Christians to harmonize incompatibilities. As previously stated, many Muslim theologians of which converts turned polemicists were no exception, fervently maintained that opposite characteristics cannot exist coevally within one entity simultaneously. Therefore, a symbiosis between divine and human natures within Christ represents an unreality. Again, this is incessantly presented by Muslim polemicists of every stripe with respect to the hypostatic union. For many, the argument need not go beyond the simple statement: three cannot be one. Nevertheless, Yusuf continues to pinpoint what he sees as additional theological inconsistencies in the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Yusuf contends that the emanation of the Holy Spirit fractures the Godhead. He states, “The Holy Spirit proceeds (yakhruj) from the Father and does not proceed from the Son. How can someone possessing rational thought (ʿaql) endorse a doctrine wherein that which the Spirit proceeds from and that which the Spirit does not proceed from are one?”

Yusuf argues that the Trinity — approached from any angle — implodes upon itself and its own faulty reasoning. According to Yusuf, Christians adhere to Trinitarianism on account of poor leadership and age-old inherited doctrines, not theological soundness.

Yusuf discusses the phrase “the Son of Man” which is used over 75 times throughout the New Testament. This phrase is a rendering of the Greek ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἄνθρωπος and the Syriac ܐܒܗܪ ܐܒܗܪ which Yusuf accurately translates as ibn al-bashar. In fact, later in his work, Yusuf claims that Christ solely referred to himself as the “Son

\[\text{710 Ibid., fol. 6v.}\]
of Man.” Yūsuf alleged, “He (Jesus) called himself ‘prophet,’ he did not say ‘God’ because God is the Creator and the son is the created. Thus he did not, in all four of the Gospels, call himself other than ‘the Son of Man.’” How can Christ be the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God” concurrently? This discussion is actually rooted in the Old Testament in Daniel 7:13-14 which states:

13 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Generally speaking, there was some ambiguity amongst the early Christians concerning the meaning of “the Son of Man;” however, this phrase was not interpreted by the writers of the Gospels as a simple declaration of the humanity of Christ.

Next, Yūsuf attacks the Christian understanding of salvation, claiming that Christians believe Jesus, whom they consider God, descended from heaven in order to save mankind, yet he was unable to save himself from the Jews. This point is actually discussed at considerable length in the debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī.

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711 Ibid., fol. 14v. In John 5:25 Jesus refers to himself as the Son of God, “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. Additionally, in John 11:4, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of God: But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Finally, in Mark 14:60-62, Jesus accents to being the “Son of the Blessed,” by which the high priests questioning him meant God.


713 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 6r.
Timothy I states:

As for Jesus, we say: ‘Surely, the Jews truly crucified him, not because he was feeble and not because he lacked power over them, but because he endured that of his own free will, as he said in the Gospel of John: “Verily, I lay down my life in order that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again.”’

So, therefore, Christ showed, by this, that he will suffer of his own will and not due to the fact that he was weak and the Jews strong.

Al-Mahdī responds: “So, therefore, the Jews are not guilty for the crucifixion of Christ and his death, because they accomplished his will.”

Similarly, al-Ḥasan argued that if Christ’s crucifixion and death destroyed sin, then those who killed Christ are absolved as well. For the Muslim polemicists who examine the crucifixion and salvation, many offered straightforward arguments not unlike those presented by al-Mahdī, al-Ḥasan, and Yūsuf. Simply put, Muslim polemicists often found the Christian notions of salvation and the atonement not only to be at odds with reason and scripture but also with reality.

At any rate, in a manner strongly resembling earlier Muslim polemicists, particularly al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī, and ʿAbd al-Jabbār, as well as the converts al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb and Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf presents precise definitions of specific christological positions. This particular portion of Yūsuf’s Risāla sheds some light upon the possible geographical provenance of the work. Unlike the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, and even the fourteenth-century

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714 John 10:17-18


716 Ibid.
Anselm Turmeda, Yūsuf’s Risāla includes a discussion of the Arians, Franks, Hungarians, Armenians, and Georgians in addition to the conventional summary of the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. The demonym “al-Lubnānī” suggests that Yūsuf hails from southern Syria or Lebanon. However, his mentioning of various non-Arabic-speaking and non-Aramaic-speaking Christians confirms that he was writing from an area within, or at in proximity to the Crusader States, which during the first half of the thirteenth century would have been limited to the immediate environs surrounding Acre, Tripoli, and Antioch.

Like many christological disputes, Yūsuf offers a glimpse into the Muslim indifference toward certain particularities of the christological debates that divided the Christian community. Christians were divided regarding which epithet, God-bearer (Θεοτόκος) or Christ-bearer (Χριστόκος), should be applied to Mary. In Yūsuf’s description of Nestorian Christology, he states, “They say that Mary bore the Christ in his humanity and that the divinity never separated from him from the time of the unification with his humanity.” Therefore, Yūsuf accurately conveys the “Nestorian” position that Mary bore Christ, not God. Nevertheless, Yūsuf sees no significant distinction between God-bearer or Christ-bearer. In fact, Yūsuf equates the two epithets, both of which he declares to be disbelief (kufr). Likewise, Yūsuf pays no heed to the monophysite and dyophysite descriptions of Christ as expressed by the Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites. Like earlier converts, if the Nicene Creed is taken to be true, then Jesus is “true God from

717 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fols. 3r-6r.
718 Ibid., fol. 4v.
719 Ibid., fol. 4v.
true God,” and, as a result, Yūsuf concludes that according to Christian doctrine, God was crucified.720

After describing Nestorian, Jacobite, and Melkite Christology, Yūsuf begins his protracted rebuttal of Nicaea which he describes as a meeting of 318 patriarchs, priests, metropolitans, scholars, and bishops. However, he claims that the council was held in Constantinople and that the objective of the council was to discuss the doctrinal position of the Holy Spirit. It appears that Yūsuf was conflating the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Constantinople (381). Yūsuf declares that the 318 individuals attending this council, “did not agree upon one thing.”721 He claims that there were dissenters who held that the divinity (lāḥūt) could not unify with the humanity (nāsūt), much like the spiritual could not unite with the worldly or the pure with the impure. All in all, Yūsuf spills considerable ink on the topic of Christian denominationalism and sectarianism. Nevertheless, he demonstrates considerable hostility toward all available christological positions and indicates no sympathies whatsoever for any particular brand of Christology. To put it simply, Yūsuf described the different trinitarian positions of the Melkites, Jacobites, and the Nestorians as nothing more than nonsense. At one point when attempting to describe the subtle differences between Nestorian and Jacobite doctrine, Yūsuf states of the Nestorians, “the meaning returns to the doctrine of the Jacobites except that they embellished the words for the audience.”722 Therefore, Yūsuf, was reiterating an argument that was championed by Abū Saīd al-Ṣirāfī during the tenth

720 Ibid., fols. 4v-4r.
721 Ibid., fol. 5v.
722 Ibid., fol. 5r.
century. Both scholars believed that the different sects of Christianity were essentially speaking theological gibberish masked in obscure language.

Like many Muslim polemicists, Yusuf offered a short explanation of key trinitarian words, including essence (dhāt), substance (jawhar), hypostases (aqānīm), and realities (maʿānī).

Amidst his discussion of these terms, Yusuf expounds possibly the most commonly utilized and discussed trinitarian analogy, the sun. The analogy of the Trinity and the sun is as old as Christian-Muslim dialogue itself. In fact, we have examples of this analogy long before the advent of Islam. Both Justin Martyr (d. 165) and Tertullian (d. 220) employed sun analogies in their descriptions of the Trinity. Approximately 1000 years later, Yusuf describes the Christians’ use of this comparison, stating that the Trinity is “like the sun, which is one while having three realities, the sun-disc (qurṣ), the heat (harāra), and the light (mūr).” Like al-Ḥasan and Naṣr, Yusuf considers this to be a false equivalency. The sun with its heat and rays does not exhibit any hypostatic-like relationship. Simply put, Yusuf states that the heat and rays of the sun are not “true sun from true sun.”

After a rather limited and conventional attack on Trinitarianism with respect to logic and rationality, subsequently, Yusuf embarks on a protracted evaluation of Christian scripture for the remainder of his work. First, Yusuf begins with an evaluation of a proof-text that is found universally throughout Christian apostate literature: the temptation of

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723 Ibid., fol. 9v.
724 Ibid., fol. 9v.
Christ found in the fourth chapter of the Book of Matthew. Yūsu’f sees this instance as an unequivocal example of Christ’s humanity. Yūsu’f replies to these biblical verses by stating, “You (Christians) worship he who worshipped and prostrated to God.”

Moreover, Jesus claims that he is observant of that which is written. This leads Yūsu’f to assert that Jesus followed the law (sharīʿa) of Moses like all the children of Israel. If Christ followed the law of the Torah, then Christian law should reflect Mosaic law, which of course, according to Yūsu’f, it does not.

Following in the footsteps of previous converts, Yūsu’f does not simply utilize the biblical text to illustrate Christ’s humanity, Yūsu’f also cites biblical passages in order to accentuate accusations of taḥrīf. Returning to his earlier approach in which he criticizes Christian attempts to harmonizing incompatibilities, Yūsu’f states, “Matthew said in his Gospel: Surely Christ (Peace be upon him) when he came out of the Jordan heaven opened up to him, then he saw the Holy Spirit descend upon him in the form of a dove. He heard a call from heaven: Surely this is my beloved son (ībnī al-ḥabīb) whom I have chosen (iṣṭafaytu).” This is a rather accurate rendition of the descent of the Holy Spirit as described in Matthew 3:16 (as well as Luke 3:22 and John 1:32). However, Yūsu’f

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725 Matthew 4:3-10: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, a Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

726 Ibid., fol. 7v.

727 Ibid., fol. 7v.
explains that there is an incongruence between this verse and the Trinity with respect to the language used. Yūsuf explains how “chosen” (muṣṭafā) and “beloved” (maḥbūb / al-ḥabīb) are passive. Beginning with the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and elaborated upon by al-Ḥasan, Christian converts continued to accumulate and explicate the various passive attributes of Christ found in the New Testament. As Yūsuf previously argued, one entity cannot be both eternal and mortal, God and man, or standing and sitting. Therefore, the lover (muḥibb) and the beloved (ḥabīb) can be neither coeval nor consubstantial with one another. Yūsuf maintains that no one possessing rationality (ʿaql) can believe in such a doctrine (qawl).

In a similar vein, Yūsuf makes note of what he sees as an epistemological disparity with the persons of the Trinity. In Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, Jesus is asked when the hour of judgement will come. Jesus answered them saying, “He did not know the hour, nor did the nearest angels, nor did the son, only the Father knew.” Yūsuf cannot accept that the Son and the Father maintain a rigidly separated and compartmentalized knowledge within the Godhead. Again, Yūsuf cannot couple contradictory components within one entity, or as Yūsuf himself states, it is impossible that “part of one thing knows something and its other part not know.” Yūsuf also draws attention to an apparent breakdown of God’s omnipotence. For example, Yūsuf offers a summarized rendition of Matthew 20:20-23, which reads “A woman came and Jesus said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said, ‘Oh teacher will my one son be at your

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728 Ibid., fol. 8v.
729 Ibid., fol. 8r.
730 Ibid.
right and the other at your left in your kingdom?’ He said to her, ‘This is not for me to
give, but rather for He who sustains, my Father who is in heaven.’”731 Similar to his
argument concerning Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, Yūsuf insists that if Jesus is “true
God from true God,” then he must know the hour of judgement just as he must be able
to declare that the sons of Zebedee in Matthew 20:20-23 will enter the kingdom of
heaven. Muslim polemicists throughout the medieval period spotlighted biblical verses in
which Jesus drew any distinction between himself and God the Father.

Like many polemicists before him, Yūsuf attacks what he perceives as a poor use
and understanding of language on the part of Christians. For example, Yūsuf claims that
the apostle Matthew and the evangelist Luke call Christ the “Son of David.” Yūsuf
makes the accurate and obvious observation that Christ cannot be David’s son in reality
or in a literal sense and that therefore this phrase is meant metaphorically. Consequently,
Yūsuf avers that the phrase “Son of God” should in turn be understood metaphorically.
This line of argumentation can be found in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works as well as al-Ḥasan’s
Risāla. Both authors argued that Christians had fundamentally misinterpreted Christ’s
various titles.

Although Yusuf offers several unambiguous cases of tahrīf al-ma’rūnah found in the
Bible, he also highlights notable instances of tahrīf al-nass, about which he does not mince
his words. For example, in a passage featured in ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā, al-
Ḥasan’s Risāla, and Naṣr in Yahyā’s al-Nasīḥa, Yusuf recalls the story found in Matthew

731 Ibid. Matthew 20:20-23. Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her
sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. 21And he said to her, “What do you want?” She
said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your
kingdom.” 22Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am
to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” 23He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right
hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”
11:2-3 and Luke 7:18-19\textsuperscript{732} in which John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to verify that Jesus is indeed the awaited Christ. However, previously in Matthew 3:16, John the Baptist personally baptized Jesus and saw the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. Like his predecessors, Yūsuf claims that the narrative of the Gospel is not consistent from its beginning to its end.\textsuperscript{733} How could John doubt whether or not Jesus, the very man he baptized, was the Christ? Yūsuf claims that this reading of the Gospel is nonsense or drivel (ghamghama). Yūsuf leaves hesitation aside and forthrightly claims that the compilers of the Gospel sought to deceive and trick its readers.\textsuperscript{734} Previous converts often cautiously walked the line between accusations of tahrīf al-maḥrūm and tahrīf al-nāṣṣ, as did many other Muslim controversialists. These polemicists did not want to run the risk of undermining their own polemical use of the Bible nor invalidate any biblical testimonia of Muḥammad. However, Yūsuf propounds the idea that Christians intentionally manipulated the text for their own deceitful purposes, whereas ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Jāhiz, and various other Muslim polemicists considered tahrīf al-nāṣṣ to be an unfortunate byproduct of faulty translation and transmission. In this regard, Yūsuf is much more in line with the works of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qarāfī.

A large portion of Yūsuf’s work is also dedicated to comparing Christ’s miracles with those of other prophets. This line of argumentation was established in the Sīra of Muḥammad and later extensively elaborated upon by ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī during the ninth

\textsuperscript{732} Matthew 11:2-3 \textsuperscript{24}Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples \textsuperscript{3}and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Luke 7:18-19 \textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{9}The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, \textsuperscript{10}calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

\textsuperscript{733} MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 8v.

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 8v.
century. It is a commonly presented belief of many Muslim polemicists, particularly converts turned polemicists, that the paramount justification for the divinization of Christ — as presented by Christians — were his many attested miracles described throughout the Gospels. And, as has been demonstrated, most prominent Arabic-speaking Christian theologians confirmed this belief. Yūsuf’s discussion of miracles is the most sustained portion of his Risāla fī radd ʿalā al-Nāṣārā. Christians and Muslims alike believe that Jesus performed numerous miracles, most notably: turning water to wine, quickening the dead, healing the blind, curing leprosy, walking on water, feeding the multitudes, and ascending to heaven. However, Yūsuf, as many Muslim polemicists argue, claimed that several notable biblical prophets performed equivalent as well as superior miracles. Therefore, Yūsuf declares that Christians, according to their own logic, must divinize several additional prophets.

First, Yūsuf begins with the miracle of raising the dead. Yūsuf refers to the Book of Kings (Sifr al-Mulūk) in which Elijah and Elisha quicken the dead. In 1 Kings 17:17-22 Elijah revives a widow’s son and in 2 Kings 4:32-35 Elisha raises a Shunammite woman’s son. Likewise, Yūsuf relates the story found in Ezekiel 37:1-14 in which Ezekiel “enlivens

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many nations.” With these stories in mind, Yusuf disqualifies reviving the dead as a sign of divinity. The story of Jesus and Lazarus found in chapter eleven of the Book of John is an event indicative of Jesus’ prophetic office, not his divinity.

Next, Yusuf discusses the miracle of walking on water in Matthew 14:22-33. He quotes verse 24, “He (Jesus) said to them while walking on the water.” However, he is quick to reference verse 29 in which Peter subsequently walks on water as well. Furthermore, according to Yusuf, in the Book of Kings, Elijah and Elisha part the Jordan River. Again, Christians cannot use the miracle of walking on water or apparently any miraculous manipulation of water in order to justify their divinization of Christ. Next, he quickly mentions 2 Kings 2:11 in which Elijah “ascends to the heavens on a horse of fire.” Here, Yusuf insinuates that Elijah’s fire-driven ascension is all the more astonishing when compared to Jesus’ rather unassuming ascension described in Luke 24:50-53, Mark 16:19, and Acts 1:9-11.

Yusuf also makes note of Jesus’ alleged first miracle at the wedding Cana where he transformed water into wine. Interestingly, he does not invalidate the miracle on grounds of Islamic permissibility. To the contrary, Yusuf maintains his agenda of invalidating Christian trinitarian doctrines. He rightfully observes that the story of the

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742 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 11v.

743 Ibid., fol. 12v.

744 Ibid., fol. 12v. Interestingly, Yusuf does not cite Moses’ parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21 which reads, “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.”
wedding at Cana and the miracle of water to wine is related solely in John 2:1-11.\(^745\)

However, earlier in his work, Yūsuf refers to 2 Corinthians 13:1 which states that every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.\(^746\) On this account, he maintains that the miracle of water to wine is an unsubstantiated miracle. Again, Yūsuf uses 2 Corinthians 13:1 in order to refute the Christian trinitarian proof-text par excellence, Matthew 28:19 in which Jesus commands his disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Regarding Matthew 28:19, he states, “No one other than Matthew said this.”\(^747\)

Therefore, one of the most habitually cited Christian trinitarian proof-texts is invalid according to its own biblical criterion.

Yūsuf cites many additional proof-texts, however, like Naṣr ibn Yahyā’s al-Nasiḥa, al-Lubnānī’s Risāla fi l-radd ‘alā l-Nasīrā is so heavily reliant upon al-Ḥasan’s Risāla ilā akhīhi ‘Alī ibn Ayyūb that it is not necessary to restate all his arguments. Needless to say, Yūsuf continues by offering numerous previously discussed miracles and biblical passages, including: 2 Kings 4:-1-7 in which Elisha multiplies a widow’s oil many times over, 1 Kings 17:8-16 wherein Elijah multiplies and sustains a widow’s oil and bread. In both

\(^745\) John 2:1-11: ‘On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

\(^746\) MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 11v.

\(^747\) Ibid., fol. 20r.
examples Yusuf concludes with the short statements, “Elisha, with that, was not God” and “Elijah, with that, was not God.” Yusuf demonstrates that other biblical prophets performed commensurate miracles, therefore either these prophets should be considered gods alongside Jesus or Christians should conclude that Jesus is not God. With this in mind, Yusuf is quick to discuss the Christian counterargument of personal agency. With John 5:19 and 5:30 in mind (although not specifically referenced) Yusuf states, “Christ testified in his own words in the Gospel that he was not able to do anything by himself rather only by the order of God Most High.” Therefore, Yusuf claims that Christians unjustifiably remove personal agency from the miracles performed by all the prophets. In Yusuf’s eyes, Jesus is not only declared to be a man, therefore, disqualifying his divinity, he also claims “the miracles which appeared through him were from God.”

With respect to Christ’s titles, Yusuf again restates and quotes many previously discussed examples. Like ‘Ali al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, Yusuf believes that the Christian deification of Christ — at least in part — was the result of misconstrued biblical exegesis, specifically the interpretation of particular words and phrases. For example, Yusuf refers to Exodus 7:1 in which Moses is made to be “like a god to Pharaoh.”

Yusuf also mentions Psalm 2:7 in which God says to David, “You are my Son; today I have begotten

748 Ibid., 13r.

749 John 5:19: So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

750 John 5:30: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me

751 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 13v.

752 Ibid., fol. 15v.

753 Ibid., fol. 16v.

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you.” Likewise, Yūsuf references Genesis 19:1 in which Lot says to the two angels at the gate of Sodom, “Oh my two lords.” In these three instances Moses is “made like a God,” David is called the “Son of God,” and the two angels are called “lords.” However, Christians do not consider Moses, David, or angels to be God or gods. Furthermore, Yūsuf critiques the Christian understanding of John 8:58 which he translates as “I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” In contrast to this passage, Yūsuf cites Proverbs 8:22-23 “I was before the world; I was with God when he laid the Earth.” In direct line with his predecessors, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, and Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā, Yūsuf portrays the Christian understanding and use of Christ’s titles as a definitive example of tahrīf al-maʿnā. For these converts, Christ’s various biblical appellations have not been mistranslated or lost, rather they have simply been misinterpreted.

Yūsuf continues to build upon his previous arguments and proof-texts by questioning the exceptional nature of Jesus’ birth. First, Yūsuf counters this claim by stating, “Adam was created from soil (turāb), and creating a man from soil is more marvelous and more amazing.” Here, Yūsuf is either referring to Genesis 2:7 or Sūrat Maryam (3:59). A comparison of Christ’s birth and Adam’s is not only found in the Qur’ān, but in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq as well. Next, Yūsuf states that in the Torah God relates to Moses that the Children of Israel are his first-born as it is found in Exodus 4:22. Also, Yūsuf claims that in the Psalms God calls David “my son” (Psalms 2:7 and Psalms 89:27) and “my beloved.” Interestingly, Yūsuf may be hinting at the etymological

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754 Ibid., fol. 18v.
755 Ibid.
756 Ibid., fol. 19r.
derivation of David’s name, which in Hebrew means “beloved.” Therefore, Jesus’ divine appellations, miraculous birth, and even alleged eternality are all used to describe various Old Testament figures.

Having anchored his anti-Trinitarian arguments in an assortment of biblical proof-texts (both Old and New Testament), Yūsuf now begins the closing aspect of this section of his polemic which centers around Christology and his belief that Christ declared himself to be a human messenger. He begins with one of the most often quoted biblical texts of Muslim anti-Christian polemics, John 20:17, which Yūsuf paraphrases as, “In the Gospel, Christ said to his disciples, ‘I want to go to my father and your father, my God and your God.’” Likewise, Yūsuf alludes to Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19 when he states, “When a Jewish scholar asked and said to him, ‘Oh Good Teacher.’ Then Jesus answered and said, ‘Why do you call me good?’ Is not “good” for God alone?”

Yūsuf portrays Christian theology along with its christological niceties as not only biblically unfounded, but also logically untenable. Here, Yūsuf’s discussion of Christian theology and the hypostastic union become embroiled in the Islamic doctrinal dispute of proper attribution and predication of God.

For Yūsuf, his understanding of the Christian concept of the hypostases attracts significant interference from the Muslim theological debate over the ontological status of the divine attributes. In his discussion, Yūsuf equates hypostasis (uqnūm) and hypostases (aqānim) with attribute (ṣīfa) and attributes (ṣifāt). In fact, the conflating of trinitarian terminology is quite commonplace in Muslim anti-Christian polemics as well as Christian apologetics. Nevertheless, for Yūsuf the concept of the hypostastic union returns to the

757 Ibid., fol. 19v.
issue of incommensurability. According to Yusuf, if Christians combine divine and human adjectives within the Messiah, then attributes such as creator (al-khaliq), provider (al-rāziq),758 ever-wise (al-ḥakīm), omniscient (al-ʿalīm), all-hearing (as-samīʿ), all-seeing (al-baṣīr), eternal (al-qadīm),739 and living (al-ḥayy) are applicable to Christ. Furthermore, each attribute would require its own distinct hypostasis, therefore, the Christian conception of three hypostases is absurd. Yusuf continues by saying that three hypostases, irrespective of essence or substance, are tantamount to three gods in view of the fact that hypostases (aqānim) are synonymous, according to Yusuf, with persons (ashkhāṣ). During the ninth century, the Nestorian Christian apologist, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, warned the Christian community by condemning those Christians who would equate aqānim with ashkhāṣ. He correctly anticipated that ashkhāṣ, even more so than aqānim, would welcome accusations of polytheism.

We have seen that Yusuf understands the Christian description of Jesus as a perpetual contradiction and disintegration of both tawḥīd and logic. Yusuf claims that Christians believe that there is no separation or division within the Godhead. However, he notes that, according to the biblical text, Jesus will sit at the right hand of the Father.760 For Yusuf, Christianity is replete with not only doctrinal incompatibilities but also simple logical fallacies and disagreements. For example, Christians claims that Jesus is “born of his father eternally.”761 The terms born (mawlūd) and eternal (azālī) are opposites. The

758 The term al-rāziq is not a divine attribute of God; however, the closely related word al-razzaq is.

739 Interestingly, al-qadīm is not one of the divine attributes of God in Islamic thought.


761 MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek – 1669 (Cod. A.F. 397), fol. 33r.
word “born” implies, at the very least, a beginning, while “eternal” by definition is having
no beginning or end. Yūsuf claims that in the Nicene Creed, Christ is called “first-born
of creation” (bikr al-khalāʾiq). In reality this is a phrase taken from Colossians 1:15 and can
be found in the Creed of Caesarea; however, it is not found in the Apostles Creed, the
Nicene Creed, or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Nevertheless, Yūsuf’s intentions
are clear. He is attacking Christ’s eternal birth, described in the Nicene phrase “begotten,
not made” (γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα). Yūsuf renders this phrase into Arabic as
“firstborn of creation, not created” (bikr al-makhluqat laysa makhluq).

Trinitarian Christianity, Yūsuf contends, at its very core is based upon a theological contradiction.

Generally speaking, Muslims maintained that the ecumenical councils corrupted
the pristine monotheistic message preached by Jesus. As Yūsuf vociferously states, “Those
318 gathered and they made and fabricated (the concept) of the humanity and the
divinity.” Trinitarian theology, which Yūsuf calls “innovative” theology is a Roman
invention. Yūsuf’s overall stance in unambiguous. In his words, “The disciples, Christ,
the Gospel, Christ’s sunna, and Christ’s law” all oppose Trinitarian Christianity.

Yūsuf’s Rṣāla is quite distinct from the original works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-
Hasan ibn Ayyūb. Although portions of this refutation of Christianity may have been
written by a Christian convert to Islam, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī — as depicted in the text —
should be considered an idealized Christian who, in all likelihood, never existed. His

762 Ibid.
763 Ibid., 25r.
764 Ibid., 16r.
765 Ibid., 25r.
Risāla exhibits an assortment of motifs that should lead its modern-day reader to believe that this work is a literary fiction created by the Muslim community for the Muslim community. First, Yūsuf is an unknown thirteenth-century convert to Islam. Second, this work incorporates various topoi from earlier Christian apostate literature, including features borrowed directly from other works. For example, Yūsuf allegedly addressed his Risāla to Elias a famous Metropolitan bishop. This exact scenario is found in Ibn Jazla’s conversion story. Moreover, Yūsuf is a physician who is advanced in years much like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. Finally, like Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf without acknowledgment summarizes, paraphrases, and overtly plagiarizes large portions of al-Ḥasan’s Risāla ilā akhīhī ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb.

Moreover throughout this work the author uses increasingly inflammatory language. In the colophon of this refutation, which appears to be written in another hand, another indication that the text has been reworked or edited, the author refers to Christian disbelief, intractability, and misguidance. Additionally, Nico Tilmans notes that parts of the introduction of Yūsuf’s Risāla are written “in different handwriting from the main text.”766 By the time Yūsuf’s Risāla fī l-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā was being composed and edited, Muslims across the Islamic world would have been well acquainted with centuries of conversion stories, narratives, and literature all of which circulated both orally and in writing throughout the Muslim community. Therefore, the refutations of Naṣr ibn Yahyā and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī indicate that at least by the twelfth century, Muslims had a clear vision of what a Christian convert to Islam was or should be. Therefore, Muslim intellectuals who were familiar with Christian apostate works would have been able to edit

existing conversion works as they saw fit, or perhaps even create new works from scratch. In the latter case, this would effectively render the Christian convert to Islam obsolete in the production of Christian apostate literature.

**Anselm Turmeda / ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān**

Anselm Turmeda (d. ca. 1424-1430), who later took the name ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān, was a ordained Mallorcan Franciscan priest who converted to Islam and spent the latter half of his life under Ḥafṣid (1229-1574) rule in Tunisia. Anselm was a medieval man of letters. In addition to receiving a primary education in grammar, logic, and rhetoric, Anselm also mastered the Bible and its languages: Latin, Greek, and possibly Hebrew. Later, Anselm attended the University of Lérida in the Kingdom of Aragon where he studied arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Moreover, there is the possibility that Anselm continued his education and studied theology at the University of Paris and Bologna as well. According to the introduction of his autobiographical anti-Christian refutation, *Tuhfat al-adīb fī l-radd ʿalā ahl al-ṣalīb* (*The Gift of the Learned Man in Refuting the People of the Cross*), it was at the University of Bologna where Anselm had a Pauline-style conversion. In many ways, this transformation stands in stark contrast to the conversions of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, both of whom emphasized the time and

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contemplation committed to the conversion process. In the case of al-Ḥasan, the opening
lines of his Risāla describe a festering sickness toward Christianity which eventually
reached a tipping point after twenty years.

At any rate, while studying at the University Bologna, Anselm and his colleagues
discussed and deliberated over John 14:16, an indispensable verse in Christian-Muslim
dialogue. After this verse apparently confounded the students, Anselm sought out his long
time mentor, a priest named Nicolao Martello, who stated:

‘Oh my lord.’ I swear by Almighty God and by the truth of the Gospels and by Him who inspired them that I will not divulge to anyone, except with your express permission, what you confide to me’ ‘My son, I questioned you, the first time we met, about your country, wishing to find out if it was located near the territory of the Muslims, and if you or your compatriots warred against them, in order to learn your sentiments on the subject of Islam. You must know, my son, that the Paraclete is one of the names of their prophet, Muhammad (may God bless and keep him) to whom was revealed the fourth book wherein the prophet Daniel (peace be on him) announces that the religion of him to whom will be revealed this book is the true religion and that his community is the immaculate community which the evangelist mentions.’

Subsequently, in a rather predictable fashion replete with centuries-old topoi, the priest
secretly discloses to Anselm that he recognizes the truth of Islam but that he is unable to
convert out of fear of retribution from his peers. In this regard, Father Nicolao resembles
the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, who (according to Islamic lore) on account of his
position as a Christian emperor and pressure from his Christian subjects, was reluctantly
unable to convert to Islam, at least publicly. Moreover, Nicolao could not relocate to
Muslim controlled lands due to his advanced age and lack of Arabic. However, this priest

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not only encouraged Anselm to convert to Islam, he also persuaded him to migrate to North Africa by any means necessary. Additionally, Anselm’s description of his mentor echoes of Ibn Taymiyya’s final remarks concerning al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb whom he describes as “one of the most honorable of the Christian scholars and one of the most informed people concerning their doctrines.” Anselm says of his teacher:

His rank among them in knowledge and religion and asceticism was very high. He was unparalleled in his age in these things among all the peoples of Christendom. Indeed, questions in their religion were brought to him from all distant places on behalf of kings and others...With this priest I studied the foundations and principles of the Christian religion.

This particular portion of Anselm’s Tuhfa is quite revealing when placed within its proper context. First, the description of the idealized priest (who in actuality was a crypto-Muslim) in Anselm’s story bears a striking resemblance to the stories of Bahīra and Waraqa ibn Nawfal during the lifetime of Muḥammad. Father Nicolao, like Bahīra and Waraqa ibn Nawfal, was privy to information unbeknownst to most Christians. Moreover, the priest in Anselm’s account corresponds to the medieval understanding of Sūrat al-Māʿīda (5:82) “and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say ‘We are Christians’; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud.” By the fourteenth century, Muslim polemicists, generally speaking, understood “Christians” in the aforementioned verse to mean Christians who had recognized the truth of Islam as opposed to Trinitarian Christians. Nevertheless, there is


of course always the possibility that this was a genuine recollection and that these events, no matter how improbable, transpired as described by Anselm. However, what does this account reveal if it is considered to be a fabrication composed either by the hand of Anselm himself or revised by a later Muslim interpolator? This demonstrates that the authors of Christian apostate literature writing during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries — whether Christian converts to Islam or Muslim editors — found it useful or necessary to insert an early Islamic motif into the conversion narrative. The intention was to add simultaneously a sense of intrigue and familiarity in hopes to increase the story’s polemical and apologetic potency within the Muslim community.

Historically, since the inception of Islam, the identity of the Paraclete in John 14:16772 or the prophet who is to come in Sūrat al-Ṣaḥfa’(61:6)773 has always occupied an important place in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Therefore, like the Qurʾān and the Sīra, the works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, and Anselm Turmeda all placed a special emphasis on the coming Paraclete described in the Book of John. Likewise, in the eighth century, Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) and ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775-785) engaged in a significant polemical, albeit cordial, debate over Muḥammad’s alleged correspondence to the Paraclete in which Timothy attempted to systematically refute the claim that Muḥammad was the Paraclete.

772 John 14:15-17: ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.’

773 Sūrat al-Ṣaḥfa’(61:6): ‘And when Jesus son of Mary said, ‘Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.’ Then, when he brought them the clear signs, they said, ‘This is a manifest sorcery.’
First, Timothy claims that the Paraclete is the Spirit of God endowed with the intrinsic property of emanation. Moreover, the Spirit of God is unseen, limitless, and transcendental. After Jesus’ death, the Spirit of God manifested itself to the apostles. Therefore, Timothy argues that Muḥammad does not emanate from the Father and that he is bound in a bodily form in addition to appearing six hundred years after the death of Christ. Therefore, Muḥammad cannot be the Paraclete of John 14:16. In his *Refutation of the Saracens*, a near Christian contemporary of Timothy I, Theodore Abū Qurra, unlike Timothy, is quite dismissive regarding the connection between Muḥammad and the Paraclete. Rather, in his work, the Muslim interlocutor states: “In the gospel, Christ wrote: ‘I shall send to you a prophet named Muḥammad.’” Theodore simply responds, “The gospel has no such prediction.” The terseness of Abū Qurra’s response suggests that already by the first half of the ninth century any interpretation of John 14:16 as a *testimonium* of Muḥammad was seen as something rather ridiculous. Later Christians apologists, seldom make any concerted effort to refute it.

Ibn Isḥāq’s rendition of John 14:16 presents two importance pieces of information. First, unlike some later Muslim polemists, Ibn Isḥāq includes the final section of John 14:16 in which the Paraclete is identified, at least from a Christian

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774 For more details on Timothy’s understanding of Muḥammad’s relationship to the Paraclete, see Clint Hackenburg, “An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī,” 79-84.


776 But when the Comforter has come whom God will send to you from the Lord’s presence, and the spirit of truth which will have gone forth from the Lord’s presence he (shall bear) witness of me and ye also, because ye have been with me from the beginning. I have spoken unto you about this that ye should not be in doubt. The Munahhemana (God bless and preserve him!) in Syriac is Muḥammad; in Greek he is the paraclete. See ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām and Muhammad Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Isḥāq’s Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 103-104.
perspective, as the Holy Spirit. The majority of later Muslim polemicists demonstrate an awareness of the Paraclete or Comforter to come. However, this understanding was often removed from its Johannine context. Second, Munahhemana is followed by a standard Islamic phrase, “God bless and preserve him.” This suggests that Ibn Ishāq understood Munahhemana and Paraclete to be the proper name of a future prophet and not the Spirit of Truth or the Spirit of God. This particular understanding of John 14:16 gained significant traction throughout the Muslim community.

Of all the typologically discussed biblical verses analyzed throughout the medieval period, John 14:16 remained a hallmark of most Christian-Muslim apologetics and polemics. In fact, Anselm reveals that the unveiling of the true identity of the Paraclete almost immediately precipitated his conversion. Anselm states:

> Jesus (Peace be upon him) said to the disciples when he was ascending to heaven: ‘Verily I go to my father and your father, my God and your God; I announced to you that a prophet will come after me whose name is Paraclete.’ This name is in the Greek language and its interpretation in Arabic is Āḥmād…It is in the Gospel in Latin as Parācletes. This noble and blessed name is that which caused my conversion to Islam.\(^{777}\)

The above passage all but confirms that Anselm’s conversion narrative is a literary topos. It would be difficult to envision a highly educated priest describing the Paraclete in John as a prophet. This passage may have been tailored by Anselm to suit the sensibilities of a Muslim audience or reworked and interpolated by a later Muslim author. Regardless of whether or not a modern reader accepts Anselm’s conversion story at face value or not,

the medieval Muslim community most certainly would have. In a sense, the imagined conversion of a Christian priest is embodied by Anselm Turmeda.

Like the issues of the Trinity and Incarnation, the identity of the Paraclete is inextricably bound to the issue of *tahrīf*, specifically *tahrīf* al-*maʿnā* as opposed to *tahrīf* al-*naṣṣ*. As Ignaz Goldziher contended, *tahrīf*, whether textual or interpretive, was the most vital source of Christian-Muslim disagreement, for two reasons. First, *tahrīf* resulted in the divinization of Christ and the concoction of Trinitarian Christianity. This aspect of *tahrīf* is touched upon by nearly every anti-Christian work produced during the medieval period. Second, and of equal importance, *tahrīf* has obscured the coming of Muḥammad. While many Muslim polemicists considered the Trinity to be the worst of Christian beliefs, this was not a universal opinion amongst the Muslim community. In the tenth century, al-ʿAshʿarī believed Christians gravest error was rejecting the prophethood of Muḥammad. Likewise, the Andalusian Mālikī jurist, al-Qurṭubī (d. 1258) also stated that he believed the Christian rejection and or failure to recognize the signs of Muḥammad’s prophetic office to be the most critical of their errors. Moreover, al-Qurṭubī echoes of al-Jāhiẓ by claiming that the Toledan author of the Christian Arabic text, *Tathliṯ al-Waḥdāniyya* (The Trebling of the Divine Oneness), “demonstrated a poor mastery of Arabic and weakness of intellect, incapable of following the rules of logic and sound discourse.”

Muslim polemicists routinely challenged Arabic-speaking Christians’ grasp of the Arabic language. It is not surprising then, that in his *Tuhfa*, Anselm proclaims that while working as a medieval customs agent for the Ḥaṣids he mastered Arabic in one year.

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Returning to the matter of the Paraclete, in the case of Anselm Turmeda, conversion was not a process; rather, it was an event. On two separate occasions in his refutation, Anselm definitively declared that John 14:16, when read through the proper Qur’anic lens of Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61:6), triggered his conversion to Islam. However, just as each of the previous converts and their works brought with them many challenges, the details of Anselm’s life are quite perplexing to say the least. One of the most paradoxical aspects of Anselm’s literary career are his Catalan works: the Llibre de bons amonestaments (The Book of Good Admonitions) (ca. 1396-8), the Cobles de la divisió del regne de Mallorques (The Songs of the Division of the Majorcan Kingdom) (1398), the Profecies (Prophecies) (ca. 1405 and after), and his Disputa de l’ase (The Dispute of the Ass) (ca. 1417-18). As Ryan Szpiech states:

Even more significantly, his Catalan works seem at times to reflect a decidedly Christian perspective, citing the Gospels approvingly and even advising belief in the Trinity and the Catholic Church…Because all of Anselm/ʿAbdallāh’s apparently Christian statements come from works finished after his conversion to Islam, critics have sought to attribute his conversion to opportunism, philosophical indifference, or material desires rather than sincere faith.

To complicate matters even further, the earliest surviving manuscript of Anselm’s Tuhfā dates to 1603 over 180 years after its composition; however, the Tuhfā was cited by the Algerian ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad al-Taʿālibī (1388-1468).

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780 Ibid., 27.
Although the manner in which Anselm converted to Islam was quite remarkable in that it significantly deviated from the conversions of earlier converts, his refutation was quite representative of the growing trends in Christian apostate literature and anti-Christian polemics. In the introduction to his work, Anselm Turmeda quickly outlines the objectives of his polemic as did ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī in his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kūtāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla and al-Ḥasan in his Risāla ilā akhīhi ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb. Anselm separates his work into three parts, the first two of which conveniently allow his reader to place him in a particular time and context.

Anselm describes the first part of his work as a description of his new life as a convert to Islam, a life in which charities and good deeds abound under the rule of the Ḥafṣid ruler, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad II (r. 1370–1394). Equally telling is his synopsis of the second part of his refutation, in which Anselm claims to have written his *Tuhfā* in 1420 during the reign of Abū al-ʿAbbās’ son, Abū Fāris ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz II (r. 1394–1434). However, the third part of his *Tuhfā* is his polemical analysis of Christianity as well as his apologetic defense of Islam, which is summarized by Anselm himself as:

> Part three: the objective of this book is a refutation of Christians concerning their religion and the confirmation of our lord and master Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) by means of the text of the Torah, the Gospel, and all the books of the prophets (God’s prayers be upon them all).^782

Much like the earlier refutations, the *Tuhfā* is replete with a multitude of proof-texts which function to sustain Anselm’s polemical and typological reading of the of the Bible. In other words, as Ryan Szpiech claims, “Anselm/ʿAbdallāh’s polemic rests on the thorough

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^782 Anselm Turmeda, *Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Tarīqīn)*, 200-201.
knowledge of sources authoritative among his enemies, and his conversionary narrative serves to establish his authority in the very sources he sets out to refute.”\textsuperscript{783} Again, this reliance upon biblical material in many ways sets Christian apostate literature apart from the conventional anti-Christian refutations of Muslim-born polemicists.

Although Anselm’s \textit{Tuhfa} resembles the refutations of earlier converts, nevertheless, Anselm Turmeda was influenced by the distinct polemical positions presented by his fellow Andalusian predecessor Ibn Ḥazm. Martin Accad succinctly summarizes a distinct shift in the polemical approach of Ibn Ḥazm, stating:

According to this last writer, the Bible was ‘an anti-scripture, “an accursed book”, the product of satanic inspiration’. Although his extremist position was not adopted generally by subsequent writers, Ibn Ḥazm’s writings marked a definite change in the more optimistic mood of the earlier period.\textsuperscript{784}

Like Ibn Ḥazm’s \textit{Kitāb al-Fiṣal fi l-milal wa-l-ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal}, Anselm’s \textit{Tuhfa} adopted a much harsher tone toward Christianity than any previous work of Christian apostate literature. This is not to say that ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahya, and Yusūf al-Lubnānī refrained from offering scathing remarks of their own concerning Christians, Christianity, and the Bible, and yet, their words paled in comparison to the vitriol of Anselm. For example, regarding the integrity of the Gospels, Anslem states:

\begin{quote}
Know (God have mercy upon you) that those who wrote the four Gospels are Matthew, Luke, Mark and John. These (may God curse them) are those who have distorted the religion of Jesus, they have added and deleted, and they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{783} Ryan Szpiech, “The Original Is Unfaithful to the Translation,” 13.

have falsified (baddala) and modified (ghayara) God's word.785

Furthermore, Anselm asserts that the disciples Matthew, Mark, and Luke as well as the evangelist Luke were not the hawāriyyūn (disciples) described in the Qur'ān.

This position radically changes the entire approach of Anselm’s refutation. In the earlier works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan, the disciples are counted amongst the true followers and preservers of Christ’s original monotheistic message. It was only later under Roman pressure and influences that Christianity was corrupted, specifically on account of the ecumenical councils. However, Anselm presents a Christianity that was corrupted almost upon its inception. Therefore, quite expectedly, a large portion of Anselm’s arguments and polemic revolve around the issue of tahrīf and what he sees as pervasive discrepancies and alterations in the Gospels, or as he states, “Know (May God have mercy upon you) that those who wrote the Gospels differ on many things, and such is clear proof of their contradiction.”786

Nevertheless, the former Franciscan’s Tuhfā begins with a traditional classification and examination of the various sects of Christianity. As a result of Anselm’s Andalusian and North African background, the typical tripartite breakdown of the Christian sects (Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians) is presented in a manner more representative of his environment. For example, Anselm claims “A certain sect believes that Jesus is God, the Creator and Fashioner, who created the heavens and the earth.”787 Naturally, the Tuhfā describes this belief as blasphemous. In an attempt to refute this theological position,

785 Anselm Turmeda, Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʻAbdallāh al-Tarjumān), 276.
786 Ibid., 405.
787 Ibid., 297.
Anselm cites Jesus’ fear in the Garden of Gethsemane described in Matthew 26:37-42, a scene utilized by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Hasan as well. Additionally, Anselm refers to John 11:41-42, John 5:24, and 5:37 all of which reiterate that Jesus was sent by God the Father. Much like the converts before him, Anselm attempts to draw attention to particular biblical verses in which Christ and God the Father are presented as distinct personalities. This ontological separation results in what Muslim polemicists understood as a shameless effort by Christians to equate Christ and God.

Next, Anselm proceeds to discuss another sect which he describes in the following manner, “The second group believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is God and man. He is God from the perspective of his father and he is man from the perspective of his mother.”\(^788\) Much like monophysite belief, Anselm considers dyophysite doctrine to be “disbelief, stupidity, and corruption.”\(^789\) Historically, monophysites (Jacobites) received more condemning repudiations than did their dyophysite (Melkite and Nestorian) coreligionists. Nevertheless, dyophysites were consistently censured and reviled as well. For example, later in his work, Anselm states, “Nothing is more reprehensible than their belief in this doctrine that Jesus possesses two natures, one divine and the other human.”\(^790\) The christological nuances of Christian doctrine are presented as circuitous and specious theology which are, irrespective of their subtleties, disbelief. However, when discussing the various sects and beliefs of Christians, what separates Anselm’s work from other Christian apostate works is his reference to confession. Anselm lists five pillars or faith: baptism,
belief in the Trinity, belief in the Incarnation (ʾiltiḥām), belief in the Eucharist, and the confession of sins to a priest. These beliefs were not mentioned by the four previous converts and, therefore, are indicative of an author who comes from a predominantly Catholic environment.

Next, Anselm compares Matthew 27:38-44 with Luke 23:37-43. In the Gospels, Jesus is crucified alongside two unnamed thieves, sometimes referred to as the Impenitent Thief and the Penitent Thief. Offering his own version of this biblical scene, Anselm presents a scenario quite askew from the canonical version. According to Anselm, in Matthew 27:38-44, both criminals ridicule Jesus while he is hanging on the cross. However, in Luke 23:37-43 only one of the thieves mocks Jesus. Furthermore, Anselm notes that neither the Gospel of Mark nor the Gospel of John mentions this scene. It appears that Anselm has created a false instance of tahrīf al-nāṣṣ in order to support his arguments. As a result, a rather famous biblical scene is quite conspicuously misrepresented here. The Penitent Thief is considered a saint by many churches. In the Tuhfa he is inaccurately depicted as one of Jesus’ mockers in Matthew 27:38-44. This appears to be one of several noticeable interpolations in the text — more likely than not

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791 Ibid., 309.
792 Ibid., 412-413. Matthew 27:38-44: 38Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 41So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. Luke 23:37-43: 37and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” 39One of the criminals who were hanged reviled him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” 40But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”
added by a later Muslim redactor who may have been unfamiliar with the text. This suggests that by the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries when Anselm’s *Tuḥfa* was being written and edited, *tahrīf al-nās* had become so vital to Muslim polemicists’ understanding of Christianity that certain authors were willing to fabricate instances of textual corruption in order to reinforce their arguments.

This is not to say that Anselm does not cite legitimate textual variations found in the Gospel. For example, Anselm contrasts the various renditions of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. According to Anselm, in the Book of Matthew and Luke, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a mule or donkey (*dābba*). However, in the Book of Mark, Jesus is riding a small donkey (*jaḥš*, and in the Book of John, Jesus is riding a *jaḥš ibn dābba*.

Likewise, Anselm cites the variant readings in the story of the sons of Zebedee. In Matthew 20:21, Zebedee’s wife asks Jesus if her two sons, John and James, will sit with Jesus, one on the left and the other on the right, in the Kingdom of Heaven. In Mark 10:37, the sons John and James petitioned Jesus, not their mother. However, neither Luke or John make mention of this story. These differences may appear to be inconsequential, but for Anselm, variations in the Bible — whether minute or glaring — are representative of a Bible that has not been flawlessly preserved and has undergone varying degrees of *tahrīf al-nās*.

However, along with believing that the Bible has been corrupted (both textually and interpretively), Anselm, nevertheless, utilized the Old and New Testaments for his

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793 In the Book of Matthew 21:5 Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey (Greek ὄνον / *onon*, Syriac *ḥmārā*), in Mark 11:5 a colt (Greek πῶλον / *pōlon*, Syriac *ʿīlā*), in Luke 19:33 a colt (Greek πῶλον, Syriac *ʿīlā*), and in John 12:14 a little donkey or donkey (Greek ὀνάριον / *onarion*, Syriac *ḥmārā*).

794 Anselm Turmeda, *Fray Anselm Turmeda (Abdallāh al-Ṭarīqīn)*, 413-419.
own polemical purposes. Even Ibn Ḥazm, who argued that the Bible was satanically inspired, maintained that the Bible preserved certain unadulterated testimonia of Muhammad. For Anselm, the Bible was of particular worth in demonstrating Jesus’ humanity. In order to refute Christian claims of Jesus’ divinity, Anselm cites Matthew 24:36 (Jesus reveals that he does not know the hour of judgement), Matthew 26:37-42 and Mark 13:32 (a distraught Jesus implores the Father to let this cup pass from him), John 5:24 and 31-43 (Jesus is described as being sent by the Father). Additionally, Anselm references Matthew 10:40, John 5:30, John 5:19, and Mark 15:34. In these biblical verses Jesus states that he can do nothing of his own will and that he is sent from the Father. Moreover, much in line with his predecessors, Anselm purports that any self-reference in which Jesus refers to himself as a prophet invalidates any possibility of divinity. Therefore, Anselm references Matthew 13:57, Mark 6:4, and Luke 4:24 in which Jesus declares that no prophet is welcomed in his hometown. In a like manner, in Acts 2:22 and Luke 24:19 Christ is described as a man. On account of these verses and several others, Anselm stresses that Christ cannot be divine.

Moreover, Anselm argues that Jesus’ proverbial words in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, “My God, why have you forsaken me,” are undeniable proof that Jesus was nothing more than a mortal prophet. This particular proof-text, which was used in abundance throughout the medieval period by Muslim polemicists, is somewhat perplexing. Generally speaking, on account of Sūrat al-Nisā’ (4:157), Muslims deny the

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795 Ibid., 434-435.
796 Ibid., 329.
797 Ibid., 346.
Therefore, this verse, which, according to Sunnī Muslims, has been falsified in some fashion, can still be utilized when polemically beneficial. In order to bolster this argument further, Anselm cites the temptation of Christ found in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13. According to Anselm, Satan would never have dared to speak to God in such a manner. Moreover, Jesus was given ample opportunities to reveal his divinity on the grandest of scales. The temptation of Christ was a critical proof-text in Christian apostate literature and, moreover, this biblical scene appears in many polemical works, including the refutations of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and Ibn Ḥazm.  

What is more, Anselm cites numerous verses in which Jesus and God the Father are differentiated. In this section of his text, Anselm begins by combining portions of John 20:17 and John 14:16, which he renders as, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God, and I will announce to you a prophet who is to come after me whose name is Paraclete.” Many Muslim polemicists, the author of the Ṭuḥfā included, disregard the Christian conception of the hypostatic union. As a result, the Father is both the Son and the Holy Spirit on account of the Nicene phrase “true God from true God.” For Muslim polemicists, the Father cannot ascend to the Father, nor can

798 Qurʾān 4:157: “and for their saying, ‘We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God’ -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed.” However, Ismāʿīlī Shiʿa defend the physical crucifixion of Jesus. For in in depth discussion of the crucifixion in Islam, see Todd Lawson, The Crucifixion and the Qurʾān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).


800 Anselm Turmeda, Fray Anselm Turmeda (Abdallāh al-Tarṣūmān), 481.
God ascend to God. Furthermore, this citation in the *Tuḥfa* confirms that its author believed the Paraclete to be a prophet. Therefore, one can conclude that the author of this passage either misunderstood the Paraclete passage in the Book of John or that he was attempting to harmonize *Sūrat al-Ṣaff* (61:6) and John 14:16. It is also worth noting that the Greek word παράκλητος (*paraklētos*) should be translated as “helper” or “comforter” as opposed to “praised one,” a translation often offered by Muslim polemicists.

To a certain degree, Anselm presents Christianity as an anti-Islam, and much like Ibn Ḥazm, he also presents the Bible as an anti-scripture or anti-Qurʾān. As previously mentioned, Anselm describes Christianity as a quintet belief system resembling the Five Pillars of Islam.\(^{901}\) Anselm claims that Christians have five beliefs (*qawāḍ*: “They are baptism, faith in the Trinity, belief in the incarnation of the hypostasis of the Son in the belly of Mary, faith in the Eucharist, and confessing all of their sins to a priest.”\(^{902}\) Like many of his predecessors, both converts to Islam and Muslim-born polemicists alike, Anselm presents the Nicene Creed, which he follows with a subsequent point by point refutation. In doing so, Anselm offers a series of biblical verses with which he attempts to systematically refute each pillar of Christian faith. First, Anselm quotes a rendition of Mark 16:16\(^{903}\) in which baptism is presented as a prerequisite for salvation. In response,

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\(^{901}\) The pillars include the declaration of faith (*shahāda*), five daily prayers (*salāt*), alms-giving of 2.5% of a Muslim’s wealth (*zakāt*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage during the month of Dhī al-Ḥijjah (*hajj*).


\(^{903}\) Mark 16:16: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”
Anselm asks if Abraham, Moses, Isaac, and Jacob have gone to hell due to their lack of baptism.

Next, Anselm reiterates a position established by previous converts, which is that the leaders (literally Imams) and forefathers of the Christianity community concocted trinitarian theology from their own whims and desires. Therefore, according to Anselm, Trinitarianism contradicts both reason and scripture. However, amidst a discussion of the Trinity, the author of the Ṭuhfa describes the Trinity in a very telling manner, claiming, “Some of them (Christians) say that the three (hypostases) are God Most High, Jesus, and Mary.”\footnote{Anselm Turmeda, Fray Anselm Turmeda (‘Abdallāh al-Tarīqān), 388. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Critique of Christian Origins, 321.} This is a clear indication that the text has been reworked by a later Muslim author and appears to be an instance of polemical wishful thinking. Given his background and training as a Franciscan, Anselm simply would have known that this particular trinitarian formula presented in Sūrat al-Māʾīda (5:116) was not ascribed to by any fourteenth-century Christian communities. However, the author of the Ṭuhfa may have been speaking in a historical sense. Still, five centuries prior, al-Jāhiz claimed that contemporary Christians of his day denied that they ever claimed Mary to be a goddess alongside God and Jesus.

Subsequently, Anselm takes aim at the third pillar of faith, the hypostatic union. For Anselm, Christians defend their belief in a hypostatic and divine Christ on five accounts: (1) These beliefs were spoken of by Christ himself; (2) Christ’s disciples transmitted these beliefs to his followers; (3) Christ performed miracles of his own volition; (4) Christ ascended to heaven; (5) Christ was miraculously born without a
father.\textsuperscript{805} Approximately five centuries prior, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī offered the same five reasons using nearly identical language in his \textit{al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā}.\textsuperscript{806} A direct borrowing is almost undeniable.

Next, Anselm quickly outlines the rite of the Eucharist, which he simply calls disbelief (\textit{kufi}). Again, this particular passage is indicative of an author writing in an environment in which the Christian population was predominantly Catholic. The \textit{Tuhfa} reads, “They (Christians) believe if a priest reads some words over a piece of bread, then it transforms at that moment into the body of Jesus. And if he reads some words over a cup of wine, then it becomes at that moment the blood of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{807} This passage accurately describes the Catholic Church’s teaching of transubstantiation. The author claims to be summarizing Matthew 20, however, in reality, his description of the Last Supper can be found in Matthew 26:27-28, Mark 24:22-24, Luke 22:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Moreover, the author of the \textit{Tuhfa} draws attention to the fact that this sacrament is not recounted in the Gospel of John.

For this reason, the author of the \textit{Tuhfa} describes the transmission of the Gospels as deceitful, absurd, and slanderous. To a certain extent, Anselm understands the Eucharist as a quintessential representation of Christian disbelief. Anselm maintains that the Eucharist goes beyond the common forms of Christian anthropomorphism. God is reified as bread. To make matters worse, this bread is broken into multiple pieces by multiple congregations around the world. Finally, the author of the \textit{Tuhfa} concludes his

\textsuperscript{805} Anselm Turmeda, \textit{Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭarāṭūnā)}, 339.

\textsuperscript{806} ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, \textit{ar-Radd ʿalā-nd-Naṣārā}, 143-144.

\textsuperscript{807} Anselm Turmeda, \textit{Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭarāṭūnā)}, 349.
refutation of the five pillars of Christianity with a discussion of the confession of sins whereby the author insists that priests are simply fleecing their overdependent and ignorant congregation. Furthermore, the confession of sins to a priest, is likened to “the blind leading the blind” an act which he also deems to be a form of disbelief (kufr) and polytheism (shirk).\footnote{808

Following his methodical presentation of Christianity’s core beliefs and practices, at least according to his own criteria, the author of the Tuhfa launches into an ineluctable aspect of anti-Christian polemic, i.e., a critical analysis and subsequent debunking of ecumenical conciliar theology. Like many Muslim polemicists, the author of the Tuhfa includes a rendition of the Nicene Creed.\footnote{809

In what had been standard polemical procedure for nearly six centuries, the author argues that the Nicene Creed has no biblical basis. In fact, he argues that each and every aspect of this creed actually contradicts that which is written in the Gospels. He states, “Know (may God have mercy on you) that in the texts of their books is that which invalidates this creed and all of their creeds which blaspheme Christ.”\footnote{810

Just as both ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan argued, Anselm restates that being born (mawlūd) or sent (mabūth) precludes the potentiality of being eternal (qādim or ʿażalī). Therefore, in order to corroborate his accusation, Anselm attacks what he sees as logical inconsistencies and searing contradictions in the Nicene Creed by quoting a series of proof-texts. Naturally, Anselm begins with Christ’s genealogy in Matthew 1:1. However, he continues by alluding to, quoting, and paraphrasing: Matthew 2:1, Matthew 4:8-10,\footnote{808 Ibid., 365.
\footnote{809 Ibid., 368-371.
\footnote{810 Ibid., 377.}}
Historically, Muslim polemicists have maintained a stern criticism concerning the transmission of the Gospels. Ibn Ḥazm disparaged what he saw as a lack in Christian \textit{tawātur} (multiple corroborating chains of transmission). What is more, he considered this to be one of the primary factors undermining the integrity of the Bible. Similarly, Naṣr ibn Yaḥyā states that biblical inconsistencies betray what he called “a falsification of transmission.” Likewise, the author of the \textit{Tuhfa} was a strong critic of what he believed to be a faulty transmission of the Gospels. An accusation of \textit{tahrīf al-tawātur} can be considered tantamount to an accusation of \textit{tahrīf al-nass}. However, in the earlier works of many ninth and tenth century authors, Christians had inadvertently falsified the transmission of their scripture. In the later centuries, falsification of both text and transmission was considered to have been a deliberate act.

In order to substantiate his claims, again, Anselm juxtaposes discrepancies found throughout the Gospels. First, Anselm contrasts Matthew 26:21-23 (He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.) with Mark 14:18-21 (It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.) and John 13:21-26 (It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.).\textsuperscript{812} In each of these verses, Jesus identifies Judas in three slightly distinct manners, which for Anselm betrays the falsity of some or all of these accounts.

\textsuperscript{811} Ibid., 382-403. It is worth noting that many of the verses cited in the \textit{Tuhfa} are often attributed to the wrong chapter or verse, and on occasion the wrong book entirely.

\textsuperscript{812} Anselm Turmeda, \textit{Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʻAbdallāh al-Tarŷumān)}, 407.

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In a like manner, Anselm compares Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52. In the Book of Matthew, Jesus restores sight to two anonymous blind men whereas in the Book of Mark he restores sight to only one. For Anselm, tahrif has no nuance, either Matthew or Mark is a liar. Anselm even cites the fine distinction between Matthew 9:14 and Mark 2:18, both of which discuss the issue of fasting. However, in the Book of Matthew, John the Baptist’s disciples ask Jesus about fasting whereas a group of people (not specified as John’s disciples) question Jesus about fasting in the Book of Mark. Anselm also specifies contradictions within the same Gospel. In the Book of Matthew 3:4, John the Baptist is described as eating locusts and honey. However, in Matthew 11:18, the text claims that John was neither eating nor drinking.

Anselm continues to exert a considerable amount of polemical energy against the inconsistent narratives and accounts of the four evangelists. Anselm spills a considerable amount of splenetic speech on the disciple John. For example, Anselm is particularly critical of John 15:24, in which Jesus states, “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did.” However, Anselm lists several examples seemingly negating this passage: (1) Jesus’ miraculous birth is compared to Adam’s equally supernatural birth; (2) Jesus’s ability to quicken the dead is likened to Elias’ and Elijah’s enlivening abilities; (3) Jesus’s feeding of thousands is actually denigrated below the ability of Moses to feed 600,000 Israelites for 40 years; (4) While Jesus walked on water, Moses equally or more impressively split the sea; (5) Jesus’ ascension to heaven in no more impressive than Elias

\[813\] Ibid., 409-411.

\[814\] Ibid., 421

\[815\] Anselm also compares textual variants in Matthew 17:1-5, Mark 9:1-12, John 5:37, and John 14:7-9. See AnselmTurmeda, Fray Anselm Turmeda (Abdallâh al-Turjuma‘), 429.

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and Enoch who both ascended to heaven as well. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, Naṣr ibn Yahyā, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, and Anselm Turmeda all discuss Christ’s miracles at great lengths. For these converts, Christ’s miraculous deeds paralleled at best, and fell short at worst, the wonders of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. Anselm, notes that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not include any passage similar to John 15:24. Therefore, according to Anselm, Christ never uttered these words, rather this verse was unique to the “lying” and “accursed” John. Anselm’s position vis-à-vis the Bible and Christ’s followers stands in sharp contrast to the perspectives of the earlier converts ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan. The Bible has been composed by liars and deceivers, upon whom Anselm routinely invokes God’s punishment and malediction. For Anselm, charges of calculated and malevolent textual manipulation (tahřīf al-nass) had supplanted the earlier accusations of inadvertent translations and unintentional tahřīf al-maʾnā and tahřīf al-nass.

Anselm on occasion presents rather contrived and nonsensical arguments in a desperate attempt to denigrate the integrity of the Bible. This is most apparent in his analysis of Matthew 19:29 and Luke 18:29-30 in which Jesus promises manifold blessings for those who abandon their property and family for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. However, Anselm argues that many people left far more behind than they gained. It appears that Anselm is purposefully and polemically reading these passages in an overly literal manner. In the verses preceding these passages, Jesus is discussing and distinguishing between material and spiritual wealth. This strict form of proof-texting would be impactful for a community unfamiliar with the biblical text. In this sense, the

816 A similar passage can be found in Matthew 9:33.

817 Anselm Turmeda, *Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭarẓūnī)*, 441.
superficial credibility of his argument is irrelevant. Again, Anselm’s position toward the integrity of the Bible is unequivocal, the evangelists lied (kadhaba). Moreover, Christ never spoke such words and may God curse those who say that he did.

In the end, Anselm Turmeda, who took the name ʿAbd Allāh al-Turjumān or ʿAbd Allāh the Translator, was the embodiment of the ideal Christian convert to Islam, and moreover, his Tuhfa can be seen as the culmination of Christian apostate literature. Not only does Anselm’s Tuhfa draw important inspiration from the Qurʾān and Sīra, but one can also find numerous motifs, arguments, and biblical proof-texts borrowed from approximately five centuries of previous Christian apostate literature as well as a vast body of anti-Christian polemics. Throughout the medieval period, many Muslim polemicists placed a special emphasis on the importance of language and its proper usage. In this regard, Christians, according to Muslim polemicists, had undeniably failed. This failure had manifested itself in the form of tahrīf al-mānā and tahrīf al-nāṣṣ.

Therefore, Christian converts to Islam understood themselves as having transcended the linguistic shortcomings of their former coreligionists. For this reason, Ryan Szpiech describes Anselm Turmeda as “‘the interpreter’—al-Turjumān—in both a literal and a spiritual sense…”818 Furthermore, Szpiech claims that Anselm had the ability to “translate” old tradition and his old self into something new, and as a result, translation and conversion collapse into a “single act of faith whose ultimate goal is polemical supersession.”819

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819 Ibid., 20.
Although there exists an abundance of textual peculiarities and problems with the *Tuhfat al-adib fī l-radd ʿalā ahl as-salib* attributed to Anselm Turmeda, the historical developments behind these literary features become much clearer when properly placed within the larger framework of Christian apostate literature. Already by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries one can identify earmarks of plagiarism, editing, and later interpolations in the *Nasiha l-imaniyya fī faḍiḥat al-milla l-Nasrāniyya* attributed to Naṣr ibn Yahyā and in the *Risāla fī l-radd ʿalā l-Nasrārā* attributed to Yūsuf al-Lubnānī. Certainly, the degree of textual manipulation appears to be much greater in Anselm’s *Tuhfa*.

Nevertheless, for several centuries, building upon early Islamic folktales of idealized Christians and the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb, Christian conversion literature had been gravitating toward an established narrative of which Anselm’s *Tuhfa* is most representative. Therefore, the *Tuhfa* should not be seen as a suspicious or perplexing work, rather it should be understood — given the literary trajectories of Christian apostate literature — as a fairly predictable fourteenth-century conversion text. By the time of the appearance of the *Tuhfa* in the fourteenth century and its later translations, editions, and interpolations, the popularity of the narrative with respect to Christian apostate literature had supplanted the historicity of the convert as well as the authenticity of the actual work.
CONCLUSION

“Conversion autobiographies have a very intimate engagement both with convincing the reader that the story told is true and with persuading the reader that the path taken is the path of truth.”

— Dwight F. Reynolds

In the mid-ninth century the Nestorian Christian physician ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī converted to Islam and subsequently penned two refutations (al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla) of his former faith. These works inaugurated a distinct genre of anti-Christian polemic referred to throughout as Christian apostate literature. The genesis of Christian apostate literature did not simply begin with one individual. On the contrary, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's work were firmly rooted in ninth-century ʿAbbāsid culture and politics. The first half of the ninth century witnessed the appearance and flowering of Arabic Christian apologetics. And certainly, the works of Timothy I, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabīb Abū Raʿīṣah, ʿAmmār al-Ǧaṣrī, and Hunayn ibn Ishāq did not go unnoticed by their Muslim neighbors. Therefore, Muslims would have been exposed to new Christian apologies previously unavailable due to linguistics limitations, some of which could have been viewed as alarming or at the very least a newfound nuisance.

However, as David Bertaina states, “Christian Arabic literature arose only gradually in response to shifting socio-political, cultural, and religious challenges in the Middle East due to the advent of the Arab empire.” Christian apostate literature gradually appeared under very similar circumstances. By the ninth century, Islam already had a well-established history of Christian validation written into its historical narrative as seen in the Islamic depictions of Waraqa ibn Nawfal, Sergius Bahīrā, Salmān Fārisī, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. Still, the stories of these idealized Christians were recorded by Muslims for Muslims. On the other hand, Christian apostate literature represents the logical next step. The “true” Christians portrayed in Islamic historiography were no longer being spoken for. Rather, during the ninth century, Christian converts to Islam now had a voice of their own. What is more, during this time, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was writing his al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā and Kītāb al-dīn wa-l-dawlā in what was still predominantly, demographically speaking, a Christian world. Therefore, not only would there have been an impetus for Christian apostate literature due to the novelty of the genre, but the polemical and apologetic efficacy would have had an acute impact on both the Christian and Muslim communities.

If the common Muslim polemical point of departure was a disregard for perceived Christian dogmatic intractability and irrationality toward Islamic truth, then a Christian apostate like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī could skirt theological subtleties of Christian doctrine, or even further yet — ignore them entirely. Therefore, reason- and logic-based repudiations rooted in esoteric trinitarian terminology and complex reasoning, which

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often spotlighted the perceived illogical foundations of Trinitarianism, were simply replaced by a less complicated and less technical use of biblical proof-texts. In this sense, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī was following a precedent established in the Qurʾān and Sīra literature, both of which suggest that the Bible is a legitimate source of divine knowledge. For example, Sūrat Yūnus 10:94, states, “So if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book [revealed] before you…” In Sūrat al-Ṣaff 61:6, Christ declares that a messenger named Aḥmad will come after him, whom Ibn Ishāq identifies as the Paraclete described in John 14:16.

Nevertheless, for Christian converts to Islam, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation remained paramount and superseded nearly every other practice, custom, and belief of the Christian communities. Although he is speaking of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and Abū Ḥasan al-Warrāq, two ninth-century Muslim polemicists, David Thomas’ statement is applicable to most anti-Christian works throughout the medieval period.

Thomas states:

What is striking about these two refutations of Christianity—and it seems from the more plentiful surviving works from the next century that they followed a convention in this—is that they do not actually focus on Christianity as a set of beliefs and practices, but on the two doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation or Uniting of the divine and human natures in Christ. It is these that interest the authors, and they have detached them from the related doctrines of the atonement, for example, for examination alone.822

As previously stated, for many Muslim polemicists of which converts were no exception, Christianity and the Nicene Creed were essentially interchangeable. In the case of

822 David Thomas, Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology, 7.
Christian apostate literature, the primary goal was to utilize biblical proof-texts in order to refute the decisions made at Nicaea.

Converts attacked the creedal phrase “true God from true God,” which they believed contradicted a wide variety of passages found scattered throughout the New Testament. In these verses, Christ is often depicted as separated from God the Father with respect to time, space, and being. This, for Christians, forms the basis of the concept of the hypostatic union; however, for Muslims, any perceived distinction between Christ and God displayed in the New Testament invalidates any notion of Trinitarianism.

Additionally, Christian converts to Islam made a concerted effort to liken Christ to previous prophets and messengers. This was often done by comparing the miracles of Christ with those of other biblical characters. Therefore, reviving the dead, manipulating the elements, ascending to heaven, and healing the sick were rejected as viable reasons for the deification of Christ.

However, not simply passages pertaining to Jesus, but the Bible as a whole, occupies a very complicated place within Islam. Sidney Griffith states:

The Bible is both in the Qurʾān and not in the Qurʾān. That is to say, it has virtually no textual presence, but the selective presence of an ‘interpreted Bible’ in Islamic scripture is undeniable. And the selection process involved in the inclusion of biblical reminiscences in the Qurʾān, according to the hypothesis advanced here, is one determined by the Qurʾān’s own distinctive prophetology. That is to say, recollections of biblical patriarchs and prophets, and references to the earlier scriptures that tell their stories, appear as integral components of the Qurʾān’s advancement of its own prophetic message.\(^\text{823}\)

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\(^\text{823}\) Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 95.
Any discussion of Muslim polemics and the Bible is inextricably bound to the complicated Islamic doctrine of *tahrīf* (corruption). Many scholars have meticulously attempted to differentiate between two general forms of *tahrīf*: *tahrīf al-maʾnā* (corruption of meaning) and *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* (corruption of the text), or in simpler terms, misinterpretation versus an actual manipulation of the words of the Bible. David Thomas argues:

> It may well be that among the early scholars who wrote works against Christian doctrines there was an attitude that these were the outcome of wrong-headed misinterpretations of scripture, either because the original scripture was contaminated, or because extraneous concepts and methods had been introduced into Christian thinking, or a combination of these.¹

Rather unmistakably, Christian converts to Islam, beginning with ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and ending with Anselm Turmeda, leveled accusations of both *tahrīf al-maʾnā* and *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* upon the Christian community. Moreover, it is often erroneous to claim that a Muslim polemicist argued in favor of either *tahrīf al-maʾnā* or *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* rather than *tahrīf al-maʾnā* and *tahrīf al-naṣṣ*. However, as the centuries progressed, charges of *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* gradually superseded charges *tahrīf al-maʾnā*.

Why did ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb write their refutations? During the ninth and tenth centuries, Christian were still perceived as a polemically, theologically, and intellectually productive and formidable presence in the Arabic-speaking world. Therefore, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s texts were written not only for a Muslim audience, but for Christians as well. The potential attractiveness of his refutations were twofold. First, these works were produced by a former Christian who relied heavily upon Christian source...

material. As a result, these refutations would have been very accessible to the wavering Christians of the ninth and tenth centuries, the overwhelming majority of whom would have been more familiar with the Bible than the Qurʾān and other Islamic-based arguments. Consequently, the works of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī would have been comprehensible and approachable sources utilized not only to allure future potential converts, but also to soothingly entrench the newly converted within the Muslim population.

Second, these works presented a newfound avenue of religious validation, mainly in the form of extensive polemical proof-texts. This is not to argue that Muslims prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī did not utilize the Bible for argumentative and polemical purposes, but as ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī explains in the introduction to his Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, Muslims had not been effective in their usage of the Bible. Moreover, few anti-Christian polemicists prior to ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had implemented such as extensive and sustained usage of the Bible for both apologetic and polemical purposes. Certainly, Medieval Muslim-born polemicists and apologists were well conversant with the various lines of argumentation being put forth by Christians of all denominations. ʿAbd al-Jabbār references the following Christians as an inspiration or provocation for his refutation of Christianity: Qūṣṭā b. Lūqā (d. 912-13), Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 873), Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910-911), Quwāyrā or Qūyurā (d. late 9th century), Ābū Bishr b. Yūnus (d. 940), and Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (d. 972).825

However, all in all, Christian converts to Islam would have been more knowledgeable with respect to the Bible than many of the Muslim-born polemicists and apologists. Gabriel Reynolds claims that Ābū Ṣāḥ al-Warrāq, a contemporary of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, wrote his anti-Christian tract “almost entirely ignoring Christian history,

scripture, and practice.” And yet, even with the shortcomings of many of these earlier authors, they still helped established the parameters for later Christian-Muslim interaction. Sidney Griffith states:

While many of the more renowned Christian religious thinkers who wrote in Arabic came from later times, e.g., writers such as Yahya ibn ‘Adi (d. 974), Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940), Ibn at-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), Elias of Nisibis (d. c. 1049), or Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’ (d. c. 1000), it was the achievement of the controversialists, both Christian and Muslim of the first Abbasid century to determine the manner in which the standard topics of Christian/Muslim dialectic were to be proposed in Arabic, and to choose the style in which they would be discussed.

Pursuing the issue of audience further, the accessibility and comprehensibility of these Christian apostate texts should not be underestimated. During the medieval period, it should not be assumed that the majority of the Christian or Muslim population maintained a precise or even mediocre understanding of the intricacies and technicalities of trinitarian terminology and theology. Accordingly, in certain instances the meticulous and specialized polemical techniques with which al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq, Abū Yūṣuf al-Kindī, al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar, Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, and ‘Abd al-Jabbār refuted the Trinity and Incarnation would have required not only an understanding of Islamic doctrine, but also a demonstrable expertise in logic, philosophy, and kalām (speculative theology). For these reasons, certain anti-Christian polemical works would have been rather confounding and therefore not intended for

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826 Ibid., xxvi.
popular consumption by the various Arabic-speaking populations. In contrast to these
authors and their works, even ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* which in large part is
dedicated to refuting trinitarian theology, specifically the Nicene Creed, avoids overly
specialized language and complex methods of argumentation, rather, he is satisfied with
simple proof-texting. Still, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s works would have not only have attracted
potential converts and helped integrate recent converts, but they also would have fortified
Islamic principles as well as Muḥammad’s prophethood as being both a qur’ānically and
biblically based. In this respect, ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī stands in rather sharp contrast to other
ninth century polemicists. Furthermore, the influence of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī on later Christian
apostate literature and anti-Christian polemics as well as the widespread dissemination of
his works in all likelihood would have helped palliate Muslim insecurities regarding the
sincerity of converts’ newly adopted Islamic beliefs.

What is more, during the ninth and tenth centuries ‘Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī laid
the groundwork for what would become the paradigmatic image of the Christian convert
to Islam. In many ways, al-Ṭabarī’s *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* and *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*
established what would essentially become the nearly obligatory scriptural proof-texts as
well as definitive dialectical methodology utilized in Christian apostate literature
throughout the medieval period. Building upon ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī’s unique approach to his
anti-Christian polemic, Christian apostates’ refutations of Christianity offered a bifocal
approach that, although not entirely dissimilar from other Arabic anti-Christian
polemical works, did exhibit distinctive characteristics, particularly in their usage of the
Bible and the Qurʾān.
Following ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī is the rather unknown Muʿtazili, al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, who authored a refutation of Christianity titled the *Risāla ilā akhihi ʿAlī ibn Ayyūb* in the second half of the tenth century. Just a century after ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan was writing in a very different polemical atmosphere. Consequently, al-Ḥasan’s *Risāla* diverged from ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī’s works in several respects. First, al-Ḥasan was clearly more engrossed in the christological controversies surrounding the Christian communities. Accordingly, al-Ḥasan first, in procedural polemical fashion, delineates and dismantles each of the major Christian sects predominating in the Arabic-speaking world. And although a considerable portion of al-Ḥasan’s polemic is couched in anti-trinitarian rationalism, he never became exclusively reliant upon rationalistic lines of argumentation. Rather, al-Ḥasan, like ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, consistently bolsters his refutation with copious amounts of biblical proof-texts. Quite expectedly, then, al-Ḥasan, as both a convert and Muʿtazili, fused the polemical utility of proof-texts with the argumentative rationality of the Muʿtazila and other speculative theologians. Again, many non-converts of al-Ḥasan’s day utilized the Bible extensively, notably al-Ashʿarī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār. David Thomas rightfully states, “It points to the possibility that there was a vigorous tradition of such arguments through the 9th and early 10th centuries, and that many more Muslims than other evidence suggests knew about anti-Christian proof texts from the Bible.”

By the end of the tenth century, Christian-Muslim relations had reached a series of milestones. Throughout large portions of the Arabic-speaking world, Muslims had become the majority of the population, particularly in the urban areas. Moreover, Christians were no longer perceived as a serious threat. Therefore, around the turn of the

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828 David Thomas, “Al Ashʿarī,” *CMR* II, 216.
millennium, there appears to have been a sense of accomplishment throughout the Muslim polemical enterprise. Definitive arguments had been made against Christianity for almost three centuries. Moreover, the Christian community continued to precipitously decline. It is argued that between 791-888 C.E. approximately thirty percent of the Christian populations of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt converted to Islam.\textsuperscript{829} David Thomas affirms:

\begin{quote}
The net result is that increasingly through the fourth/tenth century there appears to have been disengagement between this strand of Muslim intellectual discourse and Christian theology. From the Muslim side, at least, there is a sense of an encounter having been won and an opponent overcome. Christianity was marginalised, and undeserving of serious intellectual attention.\textsuperscript{830}
\end{quote}

As a result, many anti-Christian texts had become formulaic and predictable and did not reflect the level of innovation and originality which in large part was due to the radical demographic reorientation of the Arabic-speaking world.

What is more, Christian-Muslim dialogue, which monotonously presented age-old theological incompatibilities, had progressed very little since the middle of the ninth century. As previously mentioned, Martin Accad argues that around the turn of the millennium, Christian-Muslim understanding gradually shifted from a relationship of dialogue to monologue. Already in the eleventh century, certain Muslim scholars were openly discouraging dialogue. In al-Andalus, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 1070) in his \textit{Jāmiʿ Bayan al-ʿIlm} advised Muslims against conversing with Jews and Christians, maintaining that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{829} Richard Bulliet, \textit{Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period.}
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{830} David Thomas, \textit{Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology} (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17.
\end{flushright}
they had intentionally altered their scriptures. In many ways, the Muslim approach toward the Bible paralleled these developments. Sidney Griffith states:

The biblical interests of Muslim religious writers underwent a certain evolution over the centuries. In the earlier period, when the primary concern was to ‘Biblicize’ Islamic prophethology, some writers, as we shall see, showed a keen interest in the Biblical text familiar to Jews and Christians. By the tenth century however, the interests of many Muslim scholars seem to have shifted away from quotations as such from the earlier scriptures, however attentively they once ‘corrected’ the wording of these texts, and to have turned their focus more toward the ‘Islamicization’ of whole biblical narratives.

Many of the same tendencies can be traced in Christian apostate literature. What was once a vibrant and unique genre of polemical literature that reflected genuine conversion stories had become contrived and artificial literary forgeries.

Writing in the wake of these developments, were the converts Naṣr ibn Yahyā (d. 1163 or 1193) and Yūsuf al-Lubnānī (d. ca mid-thirteenth century). In terms of original and creative contributions to Christian apostate literature, Naṣr and Yūsuf’s input is rather negligible. However, the content and history of their works reveal much more, particularly concerning the genre of Christian apostate literature and its significance in Muslim society. First, the fact that Naṣr’s al-Naṣīḥa l-īmāniyya fī fadilat al-milla l-Naṣrāniyya was largely derived from al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb’s Risāla reveals that an urban twelfth-century Mesopotamian environment, which would have been overwhelmingly Muslim in population, still recognized the utility in producing Christian apostate literature. Moreover, the fact that Naṣr, a relatively unknown and unimportant scholar, was able to

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plagiarize the work of another relatively unknown Muʿtazīli written almost two centuries prior speaks of the continuity, popularity, and availability of this particular genre. Furthermore, the extensive manuscript tradition of Naṣr’s work, which included a personal copy to the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (d. 1566), as Lejla Demiri states, “all attest to the repute this work has enjoyed among its Muslim readership, both the commonality and the elite.”832 Authorship and originality do not appear to have been an issue and the popularity of this particular work approximately four centuries after it was written reflects more upon the verifiable fashionability and prevalence of Christian apostate literature well into the Ottoman period.

Writing less than a century after Naṣr was Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, an even lesser known Christian convert to Islam. And much like Naṣr,’s al-Nasiḥa, Yūsuf’s Risāla fī l-radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā is highly derivative and reliant upon al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb. In addition to the largely imitative nature of Yūsuf’s work, Nico Tilmans fittingly asserts that “nothing in his own additions reveals any inside knowledge about his former faith.”833 However, other aspects of his work are quite revealing. More specifically, Yūsuf’s Risāla provides a series of literary topoi found throughout Christian apostate literature. For instance, Yūsuf writes that he converted at an advanced age, not unlike ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī. Yūsuf mentioned an epistolary exchange with a metropolitan named Elias, who had criticized his conversion to Islam. This detail strongly resembles the account of Ibn Jazla (d. 1100), likewise a convert to Islam. According to both Ibn Abī Ḫayyā and Ibn Khallikān, Ibn Jazla converted and subsequently composed a letter justifying his conversion which he sent to a

832 Lejla Demiri, “Naṣr ibn Yahyā,” CMR III, 753.
priest named Elias. Additionally, both Yūsuf’s and Ibn Jazla’s refutations bear the title *Risāla fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā*. Ibn Jazla’s work, according to David Thomas, “…presented evidence for the truth of Islam, and predictions from the Torah and Gospel for the sending of Muḥammad, which Jews and Christians hid and refused to bring to light.”834 Moreover, Yūsuf expresses his desire to persuade Elias to convert to Islam similar to al-Ḥasan’s clear hope to win over his brother, ‘Alī ibn Ayyūb, to Islam. Stylistically, the contents of Yūsuf’s *Risāla* represents a trend which will be exploited even further in the *Tuhfat al-adīb fī l-radd ‘alā ahl al-ṣalīb* attributed to Anselm Turmeda. Concerning Yūsuf’s polemical methodology, Nico Tilmans states, “Yūsuf appears to prefer popular wit to lengthy theological reasoning, sometimes cutting short an extensive argument based on al-Ḥasan with a humorous proverb (*mathal,*).”835 In many ways, Yūsuf’s work represents the collapsing of a genre, which originally included the inventive works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī and al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, into a contrived conversion narrative supplied with predictable proof-texts which had been repeated for centuries.

By the year 1420, when Anselm Turmeda wrote his *Tuhfā*, the Muslim community had thoroughly assimilated the works of several notably prolific polemicists known for their severely critical and comprehensive appraisals of Christians, Christianity, and the Bible, notably Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 1064) *Kitāb al-fisal fī l-milāl wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-nihāl* (*The Book of Judgement Regarding the Confessions, Inclinations and Sects*), Shihab al-Dīn al-Qarafi (d. 684/1285) *al-Ajwiba al-fākhirah ‘an al-as’īla al-fājira* (*Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions*), and finally Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) *al-Jawab al-ṣahīh li man baddala din al-Masīḥ* (*The Correct

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834 David Thomas, “Ibn Jazla” *CMR* III, 153.

835 Nico Tilmans, Yūsuf al-Lubnānī, “*CMR* IV, 236.
Response to Those Who Altered the Religion of Christ. Each of these works takes a markedly harsh position toward Christians and the Bible, specifically Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qarafi. Additionally, Anselm’s *Tuhfa* was written in a post-crusader period amidst the Spanish reconquest. Many of these factors significantly contributed to the eventual absorption of Christian apostate literature into the more formulaic anti-Christian polemics found in the Muslim community.

For example, Anselm describes himself as an illustrious scholar known throughout Christendom. He is convinced by his mentor — a crypto-Muslim the likes of the idealized Christians, Waraqa ibn Nawfal and Sergius Bahira — to convert to Islam and leave Christian lands, relying only upon John 14:16 as evidence. In addition to reiterating many arguments and proof-texts of earlier converts, Anselm contributes certain details not found in earlier works. Specifically, the *Tuhfa* describes the Trinity as God, Jesus, and Mary as described in *Sūrat al-Māʾṣara* (5:116). Additionally, Anselm also offers a bizarre description of the Eucharist. This has led some modern scholars to believe that later editors (possibly Muslim exiles from Spain), working with the text approximately 180 years after it was written, significantly reworked the text.836 Nevertheless, Anselm’s *Tuhfa* as it has come down to us represents a final transition in Christian apostate literature. Later Christian apostate literature produced in Arabic and Turkish represented a blend of genuine conversion narratives, idealized literary motifs, and conventional anti-Christian polemics which, regardless of authenticity, remained influential and fashionable across the Muslim world.

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836 Ryan Szpiech, “The Original Is Unfaithful to the Translation.”


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